

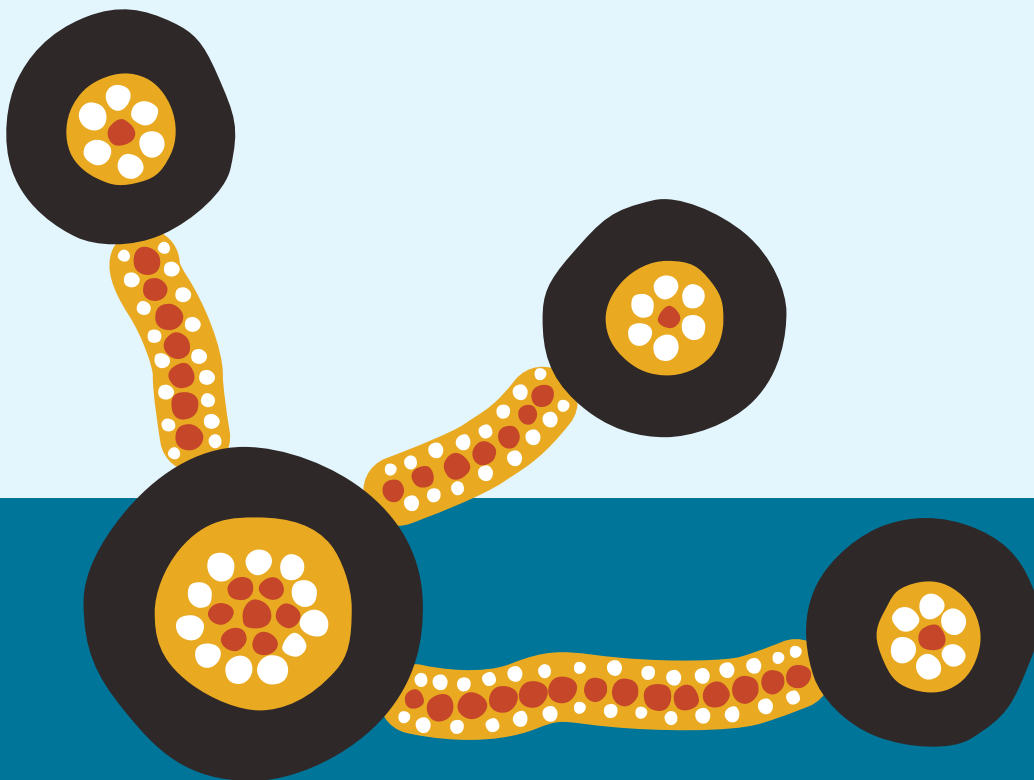
It Takes a Village



By Northern Rivers Housing

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

At Northern Rivers Housing we acknowledge the Widjabul Wia-bal people of the Bundjalung Nation (Lismore) and the Minjungbal people (Tweed), Nganduwal dialect tribal group and the Arakwal, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl people who are the traditional custodians of the land that comprises the Northern Rivers, where we operate.



Artwork: Three rivers by Gilbert Laurie

CONTENTS

CEO of NRH Address	5
Recap of the Events	6
Steven – Kingscliff Village	8
Margareta – Evans Head Village	11
Sonja & Emmett – Ballina Village	12
Naomi – Ballina Village	16
Sean – Pottsville Village	18
Ken – Lismore Village	21
Chris – Mullumbimby Village	22
Trish – Pottsville Village	24
Nick – Evans Head Village	26
Carol & Therese – Pottsville Village	28
Community Engagement – In the Villages	32
Community Engagement – Team	33
Village Staff – Quotes	34
Services – Quotes	35



Wollongbar Village under construction

CEO of NRH Address

In the aftermath of the devastating 2022 floods that swept through the Northern Rivers of New South Wales, our region was left reeling – not just from the physical destruction, but from the deep emotional and social impact it had on our communities. Homes were lost, lives were uprooted, and what many once took for granted – safety, stability, belonging – suddenly vanished beneath the waterline.

In the face of such immense loss, something extraordinary happened. Communities came together. Acts of kindness multiplied. And amid the mud and the chaos, the foundations of hope began to take shape.

Northern Rivers Housing was honoured to play a role in this recovery, tasked with managing seven Temporary Accommodation Villages established to house hundreds of people displaced by the floods. But these villages became much more than a roof over people's heads – they became communities. They became places of healing, resilience, and connection.

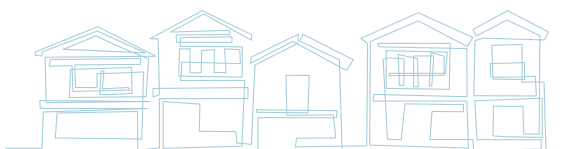
This book is a collection of the stories of those who lived through this unprecedented chapter. The words within these pages are generous, raw, and profoundly human. They are stories of heartbreak and survival, of strength and vulnerability, of people who, despite having every reason to give up, kept going.

To the residents who shared their journeys with us – thank you. Your courage in revisiting and recounting these experiences ensures that what happened here is not forgotten. Your voices help shape a better understanding of disaster recovery – not just in policy, but in heart.

This is more than a collection of stories. It is a tribute – to resilience, to community, and to the unbreakable spirit of the Northern Rivers.

Craig Brennan
CEO

"The words within these pages are generous, raw, and profoundly human."



RECAP OF THE EVENTS

In late February and then again in early March 2022, the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales experienced catastrophic flooding, among the worst in the state's recorded history. Torrential rainfall caused rivers to overflow, inundating homes, businesses, and entire communities.

Towns and communities most severely impacted included:

- Lismore – where the Wilsons River peaked at a record-breaking 14.4 meters, submerging much of the CBD and residential areas.
- Ballina and West Ballina – affected by flooding from the Richmond River.
- Casino, Coraki, Woodburn, Broadwater, and Wardell – all located along the Richmond and Wilsons River catchments, experienced severe flooding.
- Tweed Heads, Chinderah, and Murwillumbah – impacted by flooding from the Tweed River.
- Brunswick Heads, Mullumbimby, and Byron Bay – affected by flooding from the Brunswick River.
- Grafton – experienced significant flooding from the Clarence River.

Communities were deeply impacted – not only by the loss of housing and belongings, but also by the emotional and financial strain of starting over. The scale of displacement created a crisis of homelessness across the region, compounding an already dire shortage of affordable housing.



In response, the NSW Government established a series of temporary flood recovery villages, transforming identified sites into supportive communities made up of modular homes and caravans. These villages provided a safe and stable place for residents to begin rebuilding their lives. Northern Rivers Housing (NRH) was appointed to manage seven of these villages, including Kingscliff, Pottsville, Mullumbimby, Wollongbar, Lismore, Ballina and Evans Heads.

NRH oversaw management of the villages including, allocations and tenancy support to maintenance and community engagement. The villages were staffed 7 days a week and had dedicated Village Managers, Case Workers, and Support Workers, with added support from external services and security teams. The residents of the villages included families with children, elderly individuals, single people, grandparents, siblings, single parents, and others from all walks of life.

Together with key partners – including Red Cross, Social Futures, Interrelate, WORTH, Uniting, OzHarvest, Community Centres, and Healthy North Coast to name a few, NRH continues to walk alongside residents as they navigate recovery. The Community Engagement Team also offered workshops, events, and programs designed to support healing, wellbeing, and connection for residents in the villages.

This book is an acknowledgement of the strength and resilience that emerged from this difficult time – and of the residents, their stories, the dedicated staff, and the partnerships that made recovery possible.



STEVEN

KINGSLIFF VILLAGE

Steven now lives on the top of a hill.

It's not unusual, for people who've survived floods to move to higher ground. In 2022 I was living with my sister, a keen water-skier, opposite the Tweed River in Condong on the road that runs between Murwillumbah and Tumbulgum. On the night of 28 February, we were watching the floodwaters rising, and got the call to evacuate. As the water flooded in from the cane fields behind our house, (not from the river in front of them) we were picked up by the SES at 11pm and taken to the evacuation centre where we stayed for five days.

The floodwaters of the 2022 floods stayed around for three days. Enough time to destroy our beautiful and historic horse-hair plastered house. Coming back once the flood receded, the one bright moment was discovering all our chickens safely on their perch, the water having reached the top rung.

But sadly, as I found in the daily trips back to the house over the next few weeks, everything I owned was destroyed. What was special, were the people who 'just appeared' to help my sister and I clean up the mess. It cemented my already strong appreciation for living in a community.

My sense of community drives me to volunteer hundreds of hours at the Rural Fire Service. I have been deployed fighting local fires and helping out with other floods. Now that I am retired, I spend many hours each day writing grant submissions for my local unit.

Doing what I can to protect our community now extends to readily talking about my experience living in the Kingscliff pod, where I eventually settled following the 2022 floods.

While my sister moved in with a neighbour whose raised house survived the flood, I was housed in the resort in Kingscliff, and then a Gold Coast hotel room. A year later a place became available at the Kingscliff pod village. I am quick to admit that the hotel and resort were very pleasant places, and I appreciated being close enough to help my sister with the messy clean up.

However, one of the greatest joys of that first day in the village, was finding out I now had a kitchen to cook in. While the hotel accommodation was very nice, I had to eat take-away as there was nowhere to cook. Over the year I was living in hotels I put on 22 kilos!

I was also able to volunteer for the local RFS unit. That's where I first heard someone refer to our pod village as the ghetto. I hadn't thought about it in that way before, but as soon as it was said, I realised what the perceptions were.

My experience in the village couldn't have been further from those perceptions. I couldn't agree with what people were saying about residents in the village.

"The people you would find in the village are no different to who you would find in any other block of units in Kingscliff"

STEVEN



There were young families, some people had children with special needs, people had jobs who went to work, people who worked at the council, others who were retired. I'm a former public servant with a university education, a captain in the Rural Fire Service...that's not the picture that was painted about the people in the villages.

The people you would find in the village are no different to who you would find in any other block of units in Kingscliff. I remember the lack of tolerance for antisocial behaviour by the community housing provider which manages the Kingscliff pod village, and at the same time, how friendly the onsite security guards were.

I attended a community meeting held by the local ratepayers' association where the Kingscliff village was discussed. I noted that the local police told the meeting there had been no increase in local crime in Kingscliff. Actually, the security at the village should have been seen as a bonus to the whole area. After seeing residents of the village taking what was being said about them very personally, I addressed the meeting. I knew what they were saying about us was a load of nonsense.

I told the 300 to 400 people there; I must live in a different village to the one you're speaking about. Afterwards the mayor thanked me for telling my story. Although we are in a beautiful part of Australia, some of the residents felt afraid to leave the village because of the broader community's attitudes. After that meeting, I noticed an uptick in how the village residents came together. Everyone knew everyone, and friendships were made. Uniting the residents was the trauma of what they had been through. Being with others with similar experiences helped people feel safe.

STEVEN

In my role with the RFS, and my own experience being impacted by a natural disaster, I have observed the impact that trauma has on people. I noticed that disasters might also uncover people's traumas from the past. I saw how people could become very worried about small things that might remind them of the disaster they've lived through.

People don't realise how long it takes to recover, and how important it is to have people around you who make you feel safe. This includes those directly impacted and those who might have been part of the rescue and recovery. I see that people 'put on a brave face' only to burst into tears later on and know that in reality they were still very vulnerable.

The supportive environment of the village allowed people to decompress. A lot of people needed that, because they had been 'going, going, going'. You might think you'll be 'back to normal' in six months' time, but the insurance assessments might not even have been done by then.

Each village also has caseworkers to support the residents. I admit I am naturally an introvert. I also have complex PTSD issues from past trauma and was admitted to hospital at one stage. After I came home, my caseworker connected me to a psychologist, and for the first time I found the treatment I received made a big difference to my mental health. I found I was able to make friendships too.

In May 2024 I moved out of the Kingscliff village to a property granted to me after my divorce settled.

I am appreciative of what the government did, what the NGOs did, and what the broader community did. One of the reasons I volunteer is I would hope that should I need someone, someone will be there for me, and in this case they were. That's why we do what we do.

"People don't realise how long it takes to recover, and how important it is to have people around you who make you feel safe"

STEVEN

MARGARETA

EVANS HEAD VILLAGE

I was in the 2017 floods; my whole home went under water, and I became homeless. Afterwards I lived in my car and travelled around visiting friends, eventually I came back to Lismore and lived in a caravan park, in a tent for 3 months. After that period, I moved to South Lismore, thinking it was up high at 13.5 metres, we wouldn't get flooded again, however seven months later Lismore flooded. I stayed in the house when it flooded and was rescued, not before sending rescuers away to help a young girl first! I then stayed with friends for about 7 months, but I wasn't settled and wanted my own place to call home. I finally called and asked for some support, saying I was homeless, and I was moved to camp Koinonia temporarily. I was one of the first residents at Evans Head Pod Village.



I didn't realise I had trauma from the floods or that the second flood had retriggered the trauma from the first flood until I went and saw a counsellor. It took a long time for the village to settle down as many of the residents were experiencing poor mental health and drug and alcohol use was high. There was conflict amongst residents initially while they tried to navigate through their own trauma. I'm used to people with mental health so I was ok, but some other people were affected by others. I always tried to calm people down. Once it settled and the engagement activities started, particularly gardening people started coming out more and an atmosphere of community was created. Community awareness really helped some of the people. Strong ties were established amongst some resident and staff were part of the community. Other people though were still fearful, and their trauma unaddressed.

I believe there will be future villages as there will be more fires and more floods. The caravans should have been bought in the first place, this would have been better than renting them and then they could be used again somewhere else – like the recent floods.

I have been proactive in seeking my own supports and managing my mental health outside of the village, I have seen counsellors and have a good GP. I have heard though that for other people in the village the supports have been really good, for example financial counselling and Centrelink visit, people said that they got a lot out of the services visiting and that was beneficial. I think in future it would be good to get services out to the village earlier, particularly drug and alcohol and mental health.

Overall, my experience has been great and a positive one. I have made good friends and felt safe, it is important for me to feel safe and trust my neighbours.

I am moving to Lismore Village, so now I have to go to a new pod and start all the process over again.

SONJA & EMMETT

BALLINA VILLAGE

Sonja and 25-year-old son Emmett – Ballina Village

Sonja: We have come from having no worries at all in life financially or really any other way, apart from a bit of health trouble, to losing everything and moving 11 times in nine months.

It was really tough because having the four animals and not wanting to rehome them we just found ourselves being moved around because we also needed a kitchen because of our celiac disease. We had 11 moves from that time. It didn't look very hopeful for getting a pod because we had four animals so that was our stumbling block all along. We kept being told to rehome your animals and we will find you somewhere but we just couldn't do it.

Emmett: We'd been waiting on the list for months for villages. It was pretty stressful.

Sonja: In between that there had been two major surgeries between Emmett and me. We had a lot going on and moving. Not being settled, no support, no family support around, so that was really difficult because so many of my friends lost everything as well.

Emmett: A lot of friends moved away or had just moved away before the flood as well so they felt especially bad that they couldn't come and help. I think just moving place to place and not having that community for a long time as well.

Sonja: I think that that's probably the biggest thing, you can replace everything apart from sentimental things, but you can't replace that community that existed prior to the flood and that's regardless of whether they've moved away, it's just that our whole town changed so that community just doesn't exist anymore. So that's probably been the really difficult part. Emmett: Yeah, I think too having people constantly saying to you let someone else take your animals continuously so that we can have a place to live.

Sonja: We made a decision in the flood that we wouldn't leave the animals behind. They have got us through some very hard times. We almost drowned. They came to rescue our neighbour and said they would come back in a few hours. The water was up to our necks and then Emmett had a seizure, and I was holding him up so that he wasn't drowning in the water having a seizure. I don't want to go back. Thank God I got a buyback. Since being here in the village, it was such a relief, I remember just walking in and they just unlocked the door and I walked in and they said this will be your new home. I just remember the sense of relief I just burst into tears because it was such a relief to have somewhat permanent to know that we could start to rebuild life again.

" We made a decision in the flood that we wouldn't leave the animals behind. They have got us through some very hard times."

SONJA



A lot of the stuff that happens in the villages is also what really gives it a real sense of community, the gardening, the cooking and everything. It's been amazing, like the art project that Emmett and I worked on, the big metal panels with the acrylic pours, everything that we've done has really encapsulated the essence of what community means and shows that you can rebuild you can go from losing your community to finding a new community and it's been so good to engage in that for our mental health as well. It's been good not just to mix with people and make yourself get out and talk and start to live again but to do things that are really therapeutic. I know Emmett and I do a lot of art.

Emmett: Having a garden is nice, the community garden and our own garden.

Sonja: The only thing I wish that there were more musical things that happened, that would have being really good because music is such good therapy and music is our life, so that's probably the only thing that we really miss a lot but everything else is just great, like watching all the kids laughing and ride around the village and all the things that happen for them it's just so good that through so much horrific trauma that kids are out there laughing and it just makes you feel good.

SONJA & EMMETT

Emmett: Having the animals with us, that's been the one constant familiarity the whole time of moving and then moving here. Like just even some days, not necessarily a bad day, but you could feel a bit better, you usually wouldn't, but you just have to see them, and you have to look after them and get up and feed them and they always need something but they give you lots in return.

Sonja: When you are trapped in a flood area it is deadfly quiet, because obviously there's no traffic and all you can hear apart from that roaring water, because it was like a tsunami for us, is the shipping containers and the cars and caravan being just turned around in this turbulent water, my neighbour's house out the back came off of its stumps and took out my 6 foot colourbond fence and then smashed into the back of my house and so you can imagine the whole house shaking, the noise of it, so our cat is really terrible with noises and has really spent the best part since the flood hiding under beds and in pillowcases.

There is real funny little thing that happens in this village, if you're having a really bad day, we all really respect that. We just pull our blinds down and if someone's blinds down, we don't even knock, we know that's not a good time for you and it's just something we've all developed and it's this little thing we know because we've all been through a similar thing. Everyone's at a different stage of their trauma recovery as well and you just think you're getting ahead and then you'll fall back a little bit. It's great good stuff, good support.

Emmett: I am feeling a bit stressed about the next steps, not knowing where we are going to move. If we move away we will have to find another whole community again, rejoin groups, we are back to square one again like after the floods. It is just very exhausting as well and it's stressful with animals. Especially, I think for me as well, I've made some friends here in the village around my age and around in general. You go to your regular places downtown. Ideally I don't want to move and it's very stressful to think about. I have my NDIS supports here.

"A lot of the stuff that happens in the villages is also what really gives it a real sense of community; the gardening, the cooking and everything."

SONJA

"At the beginning I didn't want to talk about it, it was far too early right after the flood. Even after moving here I just wanted that time to settle and get it feeling like a home.."

EMMETT

Sonja: I'd have to say I'm feeling very stressed about the move and I feel really responsible as well. I can't afford to buy here obviously. I got a buyback, but it was about 70% of the value and so I've lost about \$200,000 so I can't afford to buy in this area. I can afford to buy in Goonellabah but for me I have really awful PTSD I've been diagnosed with that since the flood and it's the trauma of going back to the place where it happened and the fear that if I go back there that I'm never going to heal and this is reiterated time and time again through my therapy but knowing that I would like to stay somewhere close so that Emmett can access all these supports, so that I'm near my friends, so it's a really awful weighing up on the scales which is best and needing to be close to specialist because I've developed two awful auto-immune diseases from being submerged in the floodwater covered in bitumen and diesel for hours, so I have some pretty major ongoing health problems now and we need to be in an area where we can access those services.

Staying positive and knowing that I'm so grateful that I do have a buy back. We will make a new life wherever we go because we didn't think we could move here and so that shows that we could do it again, it'll just be a positive move this time. At first there were counselling services and now they have stopped and this is where it needs to kick in. There are no counselling services now. I think they withdraw services far too early.

Emmett: At the beginning I didn't want to talk about it, it was far too early right after the flood. Even after moving here I just wanted that time to settle and get it feeling like a home.

Sonja: That path is getting clearer for us. It's very much like looking through a stained glass window and some days there is no clarity and those colours all mesh into one. But now I can see through the clear glass and when I look through the coloured glass I can see some really beautiful things at the end.

Postscript: Sonja, Emmett and their pets were successful in purchasing a home in the region and will soon be moving in.



NAOMI

BALLINA VILLAGE

Before the floods we lived in a two-bedroom place in Lismore. We are a family of six, the four boys were all in one room and Beau and I were in the other. We were living across from the church at Trinity School in Lismore and we got out before the floods peaked. No one thought the water would rise as high as it did, so before we left the house, we moved all the electric tools and other belongings upstairs. The water nearly reached the ceiling on the second storey, we lost everything including the family pet fish. Its ok though we just had to start again from scratch, we were just glad we were all alive and safe.

After the flood we ended up spending a few months at a friend's house in Goonellabah, all six of us were living in the lounge room. That living arrangement became too much, so we had no other option but to move into mum's place where we stayed until we got the call on boxing day, ten months after the floods, that we could move into the Ballina pod village. This news was so exciting.

I love living in the village, the boys love it and I have felt very supported. The only negative aspect is not having no back yard for the four kids, but they still get out and play. I am very grateful to everyone and appreciate all the activities, Kids club and school holidays events put on for us. I don't know what I would do without you guys, to be honest, it kind of gives me a break.

One year ago, our family increased to seven and after four boys, we finally had a girl. Having a baby in the pods has been a good experience, we have a four-bedroom pod so there is plenty of room and having all the kids activities has been a huge help.

I really love living here, as its walking distance to everything, and I like taking bubba out for a walk to the shops. The boys also like walking home from school and its easy being one straight line, I feel this is great for them and its safe. I have tried to talk to the boys about leaving the village at some point, but they become upset, as they don't want to leave. The boys have had to change schools twice due to the floods and I am concerned that they may have to again in the future, this causes stress and worry to all of us. The boys really love living in the village.

"I love living in the village, the boys love it and I have felt very supported."

NAOMI

"I am very grateful to everyone and appreciate all the activities, Kids club and school holidays events put on for us."

NAOMI



I am unsure what the future looks like for me and the family. Me and Beau were both born and bred in the Northern Rivers, and we hope for a home in the region. I would like to stay at the village forever, if they were permanent, I would love too. If we became millionaires, we would like to buy the Pod Village and continue to rent the pods out to people in need. If the village was to be built again, I don't think anything should be done differently. I have loved my experience here, I am very thankful to everyone, you have done a brilliant job, you guys have actually felt like family to us, I am going to miss everyone.



SEAN

POTTSVILLE VILLAGE

Before the floods I was in the Lismore area and had a storage shed there, in regards to my business at the time, which was tree climbing, abseiling, and contracting out to different companies. I lost all that stuff including trucks. I lost a couple of mates who drowned during the floods and I didn't know what to do. I was in an evacuation centre in Casino. Just all of a sudden just having the clothes on my back. I went from going to work one day to having nothing the next day.

I lost everything including two friends. My dog as well, it went floating down the river and I thought it was gone like most other pets in the Lismore area that had drowned along with the farm animals. It turned up at a farm about 5 or 10 miles away. So it floated to a farm and ended up with a beautiful family and ended up with a better life than it had, surrounded by kids that love it and having a great time. Once I saw the children with the dog I thought I can't take it away. The fact it was alive I was so happy, otherwise it would have been stuck with me in a motel or car as I wouldn't have been able to get the accommodation that I did get through government agencies.

I went to the evac centre. There were only 4 of us in the evac centre. We had clothes donated, the army were there as well. We had some nice meals from the Casino RSM and it was lovely. We were doing alright, even though we weren't doing all right, if you know what I mean. We were homeless, but we were fed and new clothes, because people donated. We were warm and we were dry because it was still raining. We were expecting more from Coraki, but they couldn't get there.

I was in Ballina and they recommended Pottsville Village. When I was a kid it was just a camping spot. It turned out to be a beautiful spot. I met the staff on the very first day and the staff were really nice and welcomed me in. I met the locals and stayed in Pottsville.

I've been here a year and the people in town have been absolutely amazing. They have offered to help in any way, they have offered me work. I go to the club next door and I didn't tell them for a fair bit of time that I lived in the village because I was embarrassed, but eventually someone offered me a lift home and I laughed and said here I am – right next door. Then everyone found out I was here and everyone has been fine with it. People in Pottsville are the best people I have met so far, anywhere. I wished I'd moved here 20 years ago.

Living in the village has been good, the people have been pretty private and stayed to themselves. I haven't seen any problems in the year I have been here.

" I've been here a year and the people in town have been absolutely amazing."

SEAN



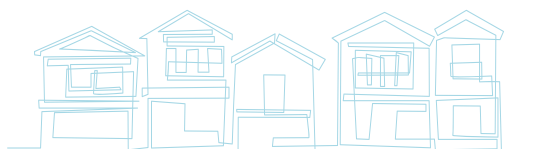
The accommodation here is just fine. It is all new and it is all clean and you can't really ask for anything more. You could really get your money organized, and that was the only problem was not knowing how long you were going to have. Not knowing if you were going to have one week or two weeks. If a lot of them had known they were going to have two years I reckon a lot of them would have saved and had enough money to buy houses. With all that time wasted, not knowing, they were all living week to week and not having a goal. The odd person saved, but a lot of them didn't know what was going on and that is the pity of it.

SEAN

The staffing support has been good, yeah, great. I've had no problems here with the staff. They have been firm, they have been stern, but they have had to be. You can leave stuff out and go to work and I know when I come back it is exactly where I left it. I know a lot of people were fearful in the beginning days.

I wanted to come into the village earlier on and I was in motels for a little while and then I got into one of the villages. I don't know why I can't get into a housing commission place. I understand that there are people with more needs, but I find because I'm working, because I'm doing the right thing. I'm doing what they said, you are supposed to take advantage of this to get ahead and now I have done that and now they are saying you can't because you are classified as able and you are not entitled to anything and I am still financially struggling even though I am mentally able to do things and most people are, but whether they choose to I don't know. I've got to go to work, I just can't survive on the dole and I don't know how anyone can. It's just not enough, paying cars and rego and tyres and you're not entitled to housing commission because you can afford that.

My next steps are to find cheap housing, stay with the company I am with, I am happy with them. I am going to the Mullumbimby village, I'm looking forward to that. I was born and raised there so I was hoping I would get Mullum. I'm going to get a tiny little home, pay rent, go to work and do what you're supposed to do. My health at the moment is coming back fine, stress free, I think the stress had a lot to do with it and physically and hopefully mentally I'm getting back on top of things. It will be nice to have a kitchen that I can walk around in, not like in the caravan where I have to duck – a few bruises on the head and to have a nice lounge and not have to sit on the bed. It's been great and people have looked after us and now I'm looking forward to Mullum.



"The accommodation here is just fine. It is all new and it is all clean and you can't really ask for anything more."

SEAN

KEN

LISMORE VILLAGE



I've worked since I was 14 when I was a stockman on about 7 cattle stations. I was the last Cowboy and the station I worked on covered 1000's of square kilometers. Later, I worked at Goonellabah Public School as an assistant for about 10 years, then Lismore High School. I used to know all of Lismore; I had a taxi when I was 21, I had a parcel run, and a landscaping business. I loved working at the schools, I loved working in security, I have loved every job I've had, except one. I have always loved my jobs and have always done over 100%.

After the flood, I lived in a hotel in Lismore where I had no power or hot water. They had a generator out the front, but it only did the front rooms, and I was in the side room so there was no power lead that could reach my room. I then moved into a house with a friend, and I was living in a cara-pod in their backyard. The next flood came, and the water was coming up the side and getting under the cara-pod. After the flood, there were still spider webs coming into the house, along with mud and dirt. I had a tumor on my neck and the dirt was falling on me. My friend then applied to have the house raised so I had to get out of there so they could raise the house.

I came to the Lismore pod around 12 months ago. At first, I was a bit worried – I didn't think I deserved it. I now feel safe, close to town and enjoy the free bus.

I used to like sitting on the hill behind the pod village, up where the trees are and looking out, but the grass has all grown now and I can't go up there at the moment.

I realise I can't stay forever, but I have no idea where I will go. I've got family here, and I've got my doctor here, so I've got to stay in Lismore, but there is nowhere to go, and it is pretty dear wherever you go.

CHRIS

MULLUMBIMBY VILLAGE

I've been living in the area for about 10-11 years. Most of that time get settled in a nice little area and then there's a big flood and you end up somewhere else and then there's another big flood. I was in Main Arm when the last big flood came. I was talking to the social workers and talked about my son's situation and I qualified to move into this village, it was probably my best bet given how things were and how things kind of also still are in a way. It is so difficult for poorer people to get a place to live.

I've been here in the village about two years. It's been good to not have to be concerned about rental security and have a place where there is not heavy traffic and close to amenities, that was a particular gift. All those factors have made this a place where I can heal from trauma's of the last couple of years. Having stability for my son and giving me time to sit down and think and plan out the future properly. I've been able to engage my son's NDIS plan and a whole lot of different people. Now this year he is at school and made massive leaps with all the extra effort and teamwork we have been able to have for his development plus the stability he has just gone a million miles in terms of his ability to show what he is capable of which is showing he is quite a cluey young fellow.

The activities I have been able to go to with my son have worked, because they have been adaptive and there has been a broad range of activities and the other kids seem to be into it as well. Sunday brunches have been cool, go up and chat to staff. I hope this place does stay, ramp it up, because it's a roof and if that is the case I say ramp it up, get even more activities. There were self improvement sessions, like mind body health improvement going on here, that was great, I went, a lot of other people went and I responded well to that. More of the same and a bit more outreach and maybe encourage people with movement base things, gentle movement based sessions, that might prolong their lives and quality of their lives. It would be great to have more wheelchair access and have a chat to the council about this place turned into a place where people could live long term.

The three trauma's coming up for me are, packing, finding a place and financial world that I haven't been used to. I'm a bit excited about that. I'm starting to think about where and when I move out. I'm just trying to deal with this problem and I would like to hook up with some Social Workers in the coming months. I'm on the priority Housing list, so that might help me. My son's in school locally, so there are all these things I've got to think about and I just need a little bit of assistance, probably a lot of additional assistance. My son's at a school with assisted support and NDIS supports. So when I'm appealing to people to stay in this area, there is a lot to think about.

"There were self improvement sessions, like mind body health improvement going on here, that was great, I went, a lot of other people went and I responded well to that."

CHRIS



I've thought about going back to doing Aged Care Assistance, but after everything I've gone through I just want to make music for now and keep people happy. I started writing music as a teenager. I play music around town, I play music from that period of the 70's and that works around here. Playing on the street corner it brings joy and I'm a shy person and you come here and everyone talks and it's a really personable place. One of the best things about living here is having the space to work on my music. I feel ready and want to make the right decision for me and my son. I could try and get a flat and get some paid gigs. I've enrolled into a small business course so I can get my ABN and insurance and play more gigs.



TRISH

POTTSVILLE VILLAGE

I lived in Murwillumbah for a number of years and then the owners sold it so I had to move on. It gets a bit rough then. I found a unit and I was with my partner and he decided to move on and I bought a caravan for \$11,000. I had to run away because he was a very abusive and he drank. So I was homeless for a very long time, sleeping in my car.

I was hit by the first flood and then the second flood. So I've got done by both, all my belongings went in the shed on the second one, so I was left with nothing and it's heartbreaking after everything.

My partner died and on my 80 birthday I went to his funeral and I came home and you (the village) had this marvellous party ready for me for my birthday. I went from the funeral and that's when the birthday was, so it was just huge. Ever since I have been here it has been like I am trying to collect my life and myself after being stripped of everything and being here has been absolutely wonderful. The support from everybody in the community, the services, everything is being given to me and they treasured me wonderfully they treated me as a child and looked after me, my bruises, counselled me and found me another home, a lovely little granny unit in South Tweed and I know I'll never have to move again. After such a rocky ride I don't know what to say, it's the most beautiful gift anyone could have ever had. I'm safe for the rest of my life. People have been so generous, so kind and so supportive. I feel sorry that I have to leave (the Village) and they said I can come back and visit. The friendships, a tremendous amount of friendships and support.

After battling it out going from place to place, I ended up in Murwillumbah and I absolutely loved it. I volunteered for community service and I made so many friends. Here in the village I've met so many people, like minded people who come from every walk of life and we've bonded so well. I'm going to miss this place. I've landed in a cradle and someone has allowed me to grow, bandage me up, I think God might be behind it.

I'm so grateful, I'm going to miss this place, I loved the craft, the painting, the drawing, I've got half a van full, I loved planting pots and plants. Creating paintings and drawings, I haven't missed one of those classes. My worm farm, I love that, I have trouble with the turkeys here, I have to keep them away, they like the worms, so I have to cover them up – they nearly got the last worms, but they are coming with me (to my new home)

You know Pottsville is an absolutely beautiful little town too for healing you know. This village is absolutely amazing, I would have been dead without it, there is no two ways about it, I crawled in on my hands and knees and I

"After battling it out going from place to place, I ended up in Murwillumbah and I absolutely loved it. I volunteered for community service and I made so many friends."

TRISH



couldn't go any further, there was no where to go. I sat for the for first two or three months I just never hardly got out of bed. Congratulations for all the commitment to all these volunteers come in and help with every single element.

They even supplied me with a fridge, washing machine, television for the new house, a bed and sheets. I'm right for the rest of my life. Thank God for all these super people, it's true, it's really true. You picked up a little wet kitten, it was drowned, emotionally, physically and mentally and restored me. I can't say enough. I'm just a battler from the old school and we didn't go buy things, we scrounged. I've got a comfortable bank account now because I've had a chance to save. I've always been a great saver because there was never anyone but me, I raised two boys on my own, an unfortunate marriage and an unfortunate relationship so it is it's been a battle.

My whole life I have worked very hard in every different job you can possibly imagine I trained to be a Potter. I did 3 years of TAFE and then I did one year at Tasmania School of Arts and then I had my own coffee shops. I built my own kiln and the teacher couldn't believe it and they came up to my house and it was so funny and he thought it was so exciting. He was so excited. I had collected all these bricks and we got the temperature up (on the Kiln) and he was just so excited. I left college with honours and all from 'baggy pants', but if you have a positive outlook you'll find a way around problems and that's how you survive in the world, finding your way around problems. You don't need a lot of money, just need to be careful with it, live as cheaply as you can and survive out of Op Shops. I have had very big and good life, can't say I haven't had fun cause I've tried everything and I love people.

I'm a survivor.

Postscript: Trish has found her forever home in Social Housing.



NICK

EVANS HEAD VILLAGE



Before the floods, I was in and out of share accommodation trying to find the right people to live with. I rented a caravan and moved into a caravan park. Then the flood came and picked up my caravan and the water put it on the roof of a building. I escaped up the hill towards the hospital, up near Trinity College. I was totally unaware of what a flash flood meant.

After the floods I was then booked into motels in Brisbane and then booked into a pain management clinic back in Lismore. The pain management clinic was super important as pain had been a big ongoing impact on my life and was preventing me from working long periods of time. So, it was really important for me to get back to the Lismore area. They then sent me to Nimbin, where I stayed for 11 months but I got to do the pain management clinic in Lismore and complete that.

That was a huge help and I had the help of a psychologist. Chronic pain and mental health it's almost like the same thing.

I was lucky enough one of the housing workers really went in to bat for me to stay in a housing. He spoke to me on a personal level and for my individual situation. I needed to be in housing, I needed to get on the pension and I need to get some support around me. So I stuck it out and at times I wanted to run and I listened to reason rather than fear and stayed within the supports of the agencies.

It's been really interesting living at Evans Head, it's paradise. It has been stressful at times, from 2022 to now is a long time and I would like to get my independence back and to take responsibility for myself more and the freedom that comes with that is really super important to me.

I can only speak from self-experience from chronic pain and mental health. I can't really fault things with the staffing and support services, because whenever I put up my hand and asked for help I have been pointed in the right direction.

10 to 15 years ago, I was working for 15 years straight, rotational shift work and then with the termination of that employment I ending up working in factories and going around and around in circles. I was getting the low-end jobs and I was working harder. Now in my late 40's I have some health issues and end up in hospital quite regularly and have chronic spinal compression and then my mental health is suffering.

I knew back then that I needed to be on the pension and that I needed help with my mental health and needed the pension as not being able to gain employment. I tried retraining and ended up homeless. At one time I was sleeping in the bushes in Melbourne. Retraining didn't work and manual labour didn't work, I ended up being back in hospital, and then ended up being homeless again.

Right now, I'm in a place that I wanted to be 10 years ago. I'm on the pension and I'm about to get into community housing. I've now been offered social housing and so the long haul is over, it is finally over. It goes back even further to childhood. It feels like it is finally over.

It's huge, I could tell you some real horror stories about my life. It is a huge relief that I don't have to live in fear anymore. I'm going with my beagle – big Buddy.

This might sound silly, but I had a mortgage, I had my own house, and I had stable employment, and it had colour bond fencing. I swear when I saw this (community housing) unit and it had colour bond fencing, I went yes, it was such a nice little moment, it was like getting some of that old life back. It was almost like a metaphor for stability for me.

Sometimes I 'google earth' my old house and I pine for that time and it's gut wrenching and it's grieving and now it's like a line in the sand. On a positive note, this unit is in the country and as I get older I want the quieter life. I'll be able to pursue my hobbies, my passion is science and go fishing and Buddy can have a back yard. I'll get an old recliner to sit in and have a healthy life cooking simple food.



CAROL & TERESE

KINGSLIFF VILLAGE

Carol & Therese, Two Friends at Kingscliff Village

Carol: Hi, I'm Carol from the Kingscliff village originally I came from Murwillumbah Southside. I came to the village 18 months after the flood. I was living in South Murwillumbah and the home which was my family home for 54 years for the first time ever got flooded,. I spent 18 months sleeping in my granddaughters bedroom sharing a bedroom with my beautiful granddaughter and a little bit of couch surfing, mainly at my daughters place. Spending time being nanna.

Terese: My name is Terese, I was living in Condong and came to live in the Kingscliff Pods. The flood came in knee height into the house I was renting. We got moved around as flood victims into motels and then I got into Pottsville village and then I needed to get knee construction surgery and so I got transferred up into these Pods.

Carol: I was lucky I had my daughter and my granddaughter, my poor grand daughter finally gave me her bed, because nanny was groaning so hard and trying to get up off the floor on the mattress. I kept saying no,no, no that's your bed and she said "no nanny you need it more than me". It was an absolute pleasure getting off the floor into that single bed, let me tell you. That was absolutely the height of luxury. We had all lived at mum's place for about a year before the flood. We had a great thing going on, like we all worked well together and we all looked after each other and then after the flood we just got separated and it was very hard because we went from this tight knit thing... and we became very splintered. I love living here and it's not because of the beach at Kingscliff as I very rarely go to the beach. I just love the safety and security that I have here. I love the friends that I meet here. I find it very together, we are like just a little community, us against the world.

Therese: When we were at Pottsville my family were in different caravans, but now we are here together at Kingscliff, I like to keep to myself. I have my verandah enclosed and I can just sit out there and have my privacy. A highlight living here would be doing the craft and some of the BBQ's. The activities I liked most the weaving and drawing and painting and the pottery where we then got the pottery mugs fired.

Carol: Regarding the activities, Photosynthesis was interesting too and Christmas Cards. The Christmas Wreaths were wonderful. Mine is still hanging on the door. The craft has been my mental saving. It got me out of the Pod. I found myself isolating, self-isolating and probably by choice. Depression is something we have all had to fight. Constantly worrying about what's going to happen, where we are going to be. When the rain comes and it is loud on the Pods, because it is all metal.

"I just love the safety and security that I have here. I love the friends that I meet here. I find it very together, we are like just a little community, us against the world."

CAROL



It makes me get out of the Pod and talk to people and I love arts and craft of any description and it makes me come out and socialize, and sometimes it might be the only time I come out of the pod for a week. For the rest of the time I'll hide in there and shut the blinds, shut the windows and unless the grandkids are here it's the craft that get's me out. It's also the connection, we all have similar stories, all our stories are different, but we all went through the same thing. We all know how everybody else feels and we may feel it differently at times, but we have this shared connection that we have all lived through something that has taken away our security. Our homes are our security and to a certain extent our security has been lost a little bit, where we belong, how we are going to get to where we belong. So sometimes it is a shared tragedy that we all have and we adjust our actions to each other because we all know if we are having a bad day or if someone reacts badly. Sometimes you realize that they are having a bad day, we all have bad days, where it is best not to go near people.

Therese: Yeah, I can just stay in my Pod or I go to work. I get up at 4 in the morning. I leave at half past 4 in the morning and I am back by half past 8. I've been doing this the whole time I have been here. My next steps are not as bad as some people because I've got a place where I can kind of go to, but I got to get it finished and then I've got a place I can live in. I just have to fix it up and I'm half way through getting it fixed. I work and save. I just stay in my Pod or I go out to a BBQ or whatever and I come down. I go out a little bit.

Therese: We had one support service in and then that had to stop. That helped my son a lot and then that had to stop for some reason and then staff tried to get another one in but that stopped that kind of support unless you want to go out of the Pods. He (my son) won't go out to their office or on the computer and he is not into that either.

Carol: It's not just the flood tragedy that affects us now it the moving on to the next step. That worries a lot of us. Trying to find a rental in your budget and that suits your needs, because a little granny flat with nowhere to park your car or no easy access and its out of my thinking. I'm on a Disability Support Pension and how do you live and pay rent, electricity and food. Counselling is something that is definitely still needed.

Carol: The Financial Counsellor is fabulous, I cannot express enough. She is absolutely fantastic. I tell people if you've got a chance to go and see her.

Therese: She will help you with anything else that she can. She's nice. She helped me get a No Interest Loan and I paid that one off and now I have another one.

Carol: We are going through a big emotional time. That home was our family home that we lost. The financial counsellor has just been invaluable. She says you are not in a bad situation, let's work on this. Here is a budget come back. This is where we can tweak it, then I come back again.

Therese: She has been saying to just keep doing what I have been doing. I have just been saving since I have been in here.

Carol: I don't have one stick of furniture to my name, and I lost all my kids baby photos, I've lost everything – things that are irreplaceable. When my nan died I got her rolling pin. To most people that's not important but to me, my grandmother baked and it was the one thing that I wanted when my grandmother died. You can't replace some things. Everything went. You know, unless it happens to you, you do not understand. I don't know what is going to happen in the next six months and I am terrified, because there are only so many public housing places available. I am dodgy (disability), so I can't just go into any place. I want to be near my mother and I also want to have room for when the grandkids come to visit, because they are the reason I get up everyday, because I love them to death. I would love the village to stay. I'm too scared about going. I'm worried about finding something. I don't want to go back to couch surfing. I want my own little place. Everybody has done their utmost to support us and when I have a bit of a worry I feel like I can go to someone.

Postscript: Both Carol and Therese are now rehoused.

Carol decided to move in with one of her children and grandchildren. After applying for 26 private rental properties the family was successfully rehoused.

“

"We're lucky to have a roof over our head. We love Kids Club and I love the people who are there and people who help us with our lives."

KIARA

“

"We're lucky to have so many things to do and activities to have fun at."

HARPER



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

IN THE VILLAGES

Over the past two years, the Community Engagement Team has worked alongside village staff and residents to create spaces for healing and recovery. Through regular events and workshops – no matter how big or small the turnout – each gathering was designed to support wellbeing, foster connection, and help residents identify and work through barriers to obtaining more permanent housing during a time of great uncertainty.

Community gardens gave residents access to green space – a chance to reconnect with nature and get their hands dirty. These gardens became places for conversation, connection, and collaboration, and even provided fresh ingredients for our Healthy Cooking Workshops, which encouraged residents to try new meals and cook together in community.

We established a regular Kids Club, where games, crafts, snacks – or simply kicking a ball around – gave children a chance to just be kids. These sessions offered a safe, fun space to play and connect, and often gave parents a break, even just for an hour or so.

Adults took part in art and craft workshops, qigong classes, and other creative and wellbeing activities. Each one was an opportunity to learn something new, build confidence, and meet neighbours. It was heartwarming to see friendships form and deepen through shared creativity and presence.

Understanding the ongoing emotional toll of the flood and displacement, we hosted “Calming the Nervous System” workshops – offering practical tools for managing anxiety, stress, and overwhelm in a gentle, trauma-aware way. We also celebrated culture and connection through community-led events, including yarnning circles, cultural workshops, and shared meals that honoured the diverse backgrounds of our residents.

As people began to focus on the next chapter of their lives, we held Jobs and Skills Expos to connect residents with local employers, training providers, and employment services. We also welcomed visiting services offering financial counselling, mental health support, and help with gambling or alcohol recovery. It was inspiring to witness people taking brave steps forward after all they had endured.

And always, food brought us together. Shared meals became some of the most meaningful moments in the villages – a BBQ lunch in the sunshine, a healthy cook up using food from the garden or a simple morning tea. These gatherings sparked casual conversations, new friendships, and the quiet kind of comfort that only community brings.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM

“ The best part of my job is seeing people healing from traumatic experiences, forming connections and building communities. Real resilience is created through empowering people to make positive change and that change has the potential to filter out to others, creating stronger communities. My role has been filled with food, kids and laughter – it doesn’t get better than that!

Fee, Community Engagement Co Ordinator

“ Over the years, I’ve been fortunate to be part of some truly wonderful programs—but none have touched my heart quite like the Village Program. There’s something deeply special about the sense of community that lives here. I’ve often found myself moved to tears, witnessing the kindness, laughter, and genuine care shared between residents. Creating a space each week where people feel safe, seen, and connected—over good food and even better conversations—has been one of the greatest privileges of my career. I’ll carry these memories, and the people behind them, with me always.

Mandi, Community Engagement Coordinator



“ I am so thankful for my time walking alongside residents, to witness the resilience of residents having come through the floods and then watch how the community grew, and how people reached out to support one another. There have been residents cooking meals for elderly, taking each other shopping or driving to appointments, families looking after each other’s children in the school holidays and helping out with the community gardens and community cook ups. This in turn has created safety and stability for many residents.

The saying “It takes a village to raise a child” speaks to the power of community in shaping lives. While not all our villages had children living there, they have provided connection, support, and belonging, where everyone matters— they have helped shape lives regardless of age, background, or ability.

Robyn, Community Engagement Manager



Community Engagement Team – Left to Right Fee, Ash, Mandi and Robyn

VILLAGE STAFF

“ QUOTES



Watching people explode with joy when they're offered social housing, its like telling them they've won the lotto. All of us crying tears of joy.

*Camille, Caseworker –
Kingscliff Village*

For me it is that the Village and staff allowed Mental Health to be validated, heard and supported. Creating a pathway into services, guided gently without judgement in a compassionate manner and seeing positive results and residents embracing their journey without hiding how they feel.

*Maria, Support Worker –
Evans Head Village*

The flood recovery village(s) have demonstrated the continuing resilience of Northern Rivers communities as they move beyond the 2022 floods. My work here has provided insight into complexities of natural disasters and ways in which individuals move beyond crisis, into recovery and grow towards transitioning into new opportunities within the context of housing. It has been a privilege to walk along side village residents as they met challenges and successes along the many pathways to their individual recoveries.

*Keane, Senior Caseworker –
Lismore Village*

'My focus for as long as I can remember, has been that every person deserves a place to call home. It was a privilege to be part of the program here at Kingscliff, and indeed witness so many people being able to call the village 'Home.' It was really apparent when I heard so many of the residents express their heartfelt feelings of losing a sense of community as the village comes to a close.

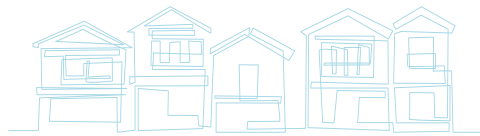
*Michelle –
Support Worker Kingscliff*

I have noticed that the stability we have provided, the safety and security of these villages has had extremely positive effects on the residents. Multiple residents have expressed their gratitude of the positive change they have felt. It has allowed them to overcome some of the trauma they experienced from the horrific 2022 flood through the many services we had attend the village. The constant amazing support from our own Support Workers, Case workers and Village managers can't be understated. As this program is coming to an end, I feel proud about how many positive outcomes I have seen come true for residents over Mullumbimby and Kingscliff Pod Villages!

Tim, Village Manager – Kingscliff & Mullumbimby Village

SERVICES

“ QUOTES



It was my absolute pleasure to engage with the various villages and their residents after the floods of 2022. Gardening is my passion and I got to share that passion with a wonderful variety of people from all walks of life. That's the beauty of growing. Anyone and everyone can do it from succulents to flourishing veggie patches out of pots and containers. We came together to learn about all aspects of gardening and growing but often we learned just as much about each other as we shared bits of ourselves and our experiences. Our workshops were filled with laughter, the sharing of stories & knowledge and a genuine caring compassion for one another – an understanding & appreciation for what each person was going through. I often felt that even though I came to teach about gardening, I came away with a deep sense of community and connection and I am so grateful for the time I got to spend within each village.

Lauren – Permaculture Pathways

Northern Rivers Community Gateway partnered with Northern Rivers Housing to work with residents of the pod villages to work collaboratively to build their financial resilience. It has been great to see residents prepared to work with our financial counsellors and show remarkable resilience in such an unprecedented disaster.

Renee – Senior Financial Counsellor



Weaving and yarning with community at the Pod Villages was a gentle way to nurture community connections and friendships among diverse residents and also staff in a non formal setting. The sessions also helped resource people with possible supportive social and creative activities within the wider community. Creating craft together with natural colourful materials was a relaxing, accessible process intended to bring some joy, validation and respite from anxiety around the past or future. As we chatted informally in a safe space, participants could reflect on where they were in life and also on the past and the future in a supportive space where everyone felt heard and seen. In this sense it felt like a healing process for people navigating out of traumatic stressful circumstances into a more empowered position in a very gentle way, building some trust and connection in the safe space helps by the community engagement session.

Debra, Jugan Dandii weaving

It Takes a Village



By Northern Rivers Housing