

A photograph of several children climbing a large, mossy rock formation on a hillside. The children are seen from behind, moving up the rocks. The background shows more trees and a clear blue sky. The text 'Resilient Kids' is overlaid in large white letters on the left side of the image.

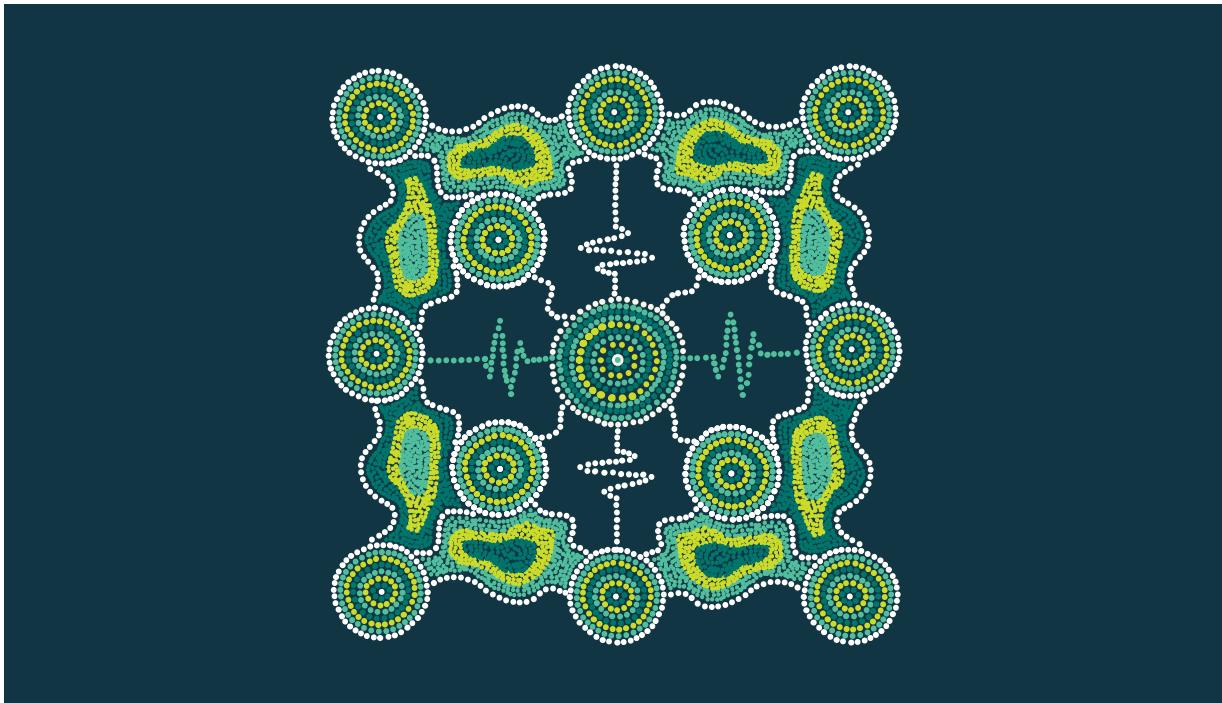
Resilient Kids

Year one evaluation report
March 2025

Acknowledgements

Healthy North Coast acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands across our region, and pay our respect to Elders past, present and on their journey. Healthy North Coast recognises these lands were never ceded and acknowledges the continuation of culture and connection to the land, sky and sea. Healthy North Coast acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Land's First Peoples and honour the rich diversity of the oldest living cultures.

Healthy North Coast acknowledges and thanks the individuals and communities across the Northern Rivers region who shared their time, perspective and experiences to inform this evaluation report. The Resilient Kids Program is funded by Healthy North Coast through a grant provided by the Australian Government.



Ethical oversight

To ensure appropriate ethical oversight of the evaluation of the Resilient Kids program, ethics approval has been obtained from the North Coast New South Wales (NCNSW) Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) [HREA399 2024/ETH00449: Resilient Kids Program Evaluation].

About Healthy North Coast

Healthy North Coast is an independent, not-for-profit organisation committed to improving the health of North Coast communities through quality primary health care.

Healthy North Coast proudly delivers the Australian Government's Primary Health Network (PHN) Program on the North Coast, as one of the 31 PHNs across Australia — working alongside local communities, primary health care professionals, hospitals, social services and others through:

- identifying health needs in the North Coast region
- commissioning services to address local needs and service gaps
- developing innovative local health care solutions
- supporting evidence-based health initiatives and programs
- building primary health care workforce skills and capability
- improving the integration of primary health care services with specialist and hospital care
- informing communities about health care resources and education around self-care.

About the region

The North Coast geographic region covers approximately 32,047 square kilometres.

Approximately 520,000 people live on the North Coast spread across the region in diverse locations.

Major population centres are located on the coast and the major river systems that divide the region, with more rural and remote townships located inland.

Healthy North Coast covers the combined geographical regions of Northern NSW Local Health District and Mid North Coast Local Health District.



Resilient Kids involves a range of partner organisations.



Social Futures

Social Futures is a leading not-for-profit community service organisation working in the Northern Rivers and across New South Wales. The key areas of their work include homelessness, housing, youth and family, mental health and wellbeing, disability inclusion, sector support and seniors in community. Social Futures has been the lead agency delivering Stream 1 and 2 of the Resilient Kids program, in partnership with the Family Centre and Human Nature Therapy.



The Family Centre

The Family Centre delivers services under Stream 1 of the Resilient Kids Program. They are a not-for-profit, community owned and social purpose organisation creating opportunities for children, young people and families to increase social value in communities.



Human Nature

Human Nature Therapy is a Northern Rivers based not-for-profit delivering nature-based mental health support for young people with a focus on youth empowerment through outdoor therapy. Human Nature deliver specialist services under Stream 2 of the Resilient Kids Program.



Lives Lived Well

Lives Lived Well are a not-for-profit health care provider delivering services across Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia. Lives Lived Well is commissioned to deliver Stream 3, a tailored service model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, co-designed with Northern Rivers Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) Rekindling the Spirit, Bulgarr Ngaru Medical Aboriginal Corporation and Bullinah Aboriginal Health Service.



Beacon Strategies

Beacon Strategies is a health and social services consultancy supporting organisations to plan, design, implement and evaluate their work, towards a vision for a more impactful social purpose sector. Beacon Strategies is the external monitoring and evaluation partner for the Resilient Kids program, and has developed this evaluation report, including data collection and analysis.



Contents

About Resilient Kids	07
About the evaluation	14
Emerging outcomes so far	17
Program learnings so far	29
Understanding community- level disaster resilience	36
Looking forward	41

About Resilient Kids

Resilient Kids responds to the needs of children affected by the 2022 weather event in Northern NSW.

A severe weather and flooding event in early 2022 caused catastrophic impacts across the North Coast region of New South Wales.

The severity and increasing frequency of weather-related disaster events like this due to climate change, and the greater vulnerability of children affected by disasters, means these events can have considerable negative consequences for young people's development.

This can lead to trauma-related responses, mental health challenges, problematic behaviours, relationship problems and disruption in supportive community connections.¹

As part of the recovery response to the 2022 flood events, Healthy North Coast is designing, delivering and evaluating the Resilient Kids program over four years from 2022-2025, supported by a \$10 million grant from the National Emergency Management Agency.

The flooding event in February and March 2022 significantly impacted communities in the Northern Rivers region.^{2,3}

7.3k

people used formal emergency accommodation



fuel, groceries, electricity and internet were not available for weeks in some communities

4.0k

properties were declared uninhabitable



gaps were exposed in preparedness and emergency response, followed by a slow and challenging recovery

10.8k

additional properties sustained damage

¹ Masters J (2020). *The Community Trauma Toolkit: helping adults and children before, during and after trauma*, Australian Journal of Emergency Management, 36(3)

² NSW Government (2023). *One year on from the February-March 2022 severe weather and floods*

³ Healthy North Coast (2024). *Northern Rivers Primary Care 2022 Flood Reflections*

In 2024, two years on from the disaster, the region continues to experience a range of flood-related impacts.⁴

5.5/10

stakeholders rated how well their community had recovered overall

37%

of services reported higher severity and complexity of client caseloads post-flood

49%

of local organisations report mental health of their staff and volunteers is still affected



Decrease in recovery funding was the main challenge reported by local support organisations

'Mental health and wellbeing' and *'Housing and homelessness'* are expected to worsen in flood-affected communities over the next year.

'More resilient communities' is seen as having the biggest positive impact on long-term community recovery.⁴

Other key issues impacting the wellbeing of flood-affected communities include:³



ongoing disruptions to healthcare systems and delivery



ongoing strain and fatigue experienced within communities by compounding challenging events

⁴ Northern Rivers Community Foundation (2024). *Research, Respond, Recover: A year on from disaster*, available at: <https://nrcf.org.au/our-impact/research/>

Elevating youth voices and participation in disaster recovery program design.

Healthy North Coast designed Resilient Kids through extensive consultation, data analysis, solutions design and commissioning that prioritised the experiences of young people, their families and communities.

This included:

- over 6,600 young people from 75 schools completing a survey to assess levels of resilience and mental wellbeing
- student workshops with young people sharing their experiences of the flooding event, the impact it had on their lives and the types of mental health and wellbeing supports they want in their schools and communities
- solutions design with young people and their families, community members, mental health professionals and educators, including identifying the specific needs of children and young people with a disability and First Nations young people.

The Resilience Survey completed in late-2022 found considerable levels of mental health challenges, trauma-related stress and disengagement from learning. Themes that emerged through consultation highlighted that resilient young people need:

- access to basic necessities
- fun activities and time in nature
- social connections and support from those closest to them
- consistent counselling support
- life skills and knowing how to tackle 'big issues'
- a voice in decisions that impact their lives.

The resulting place-based program model is designed to meet young peoples' needs in disaster recovery and resilience.

More information about the process of designing Resilient Kids, including reports that summarise the experiences and insights that helped to shape the program, can be found at:

www.hnc.org.au/resilient-kids

Delivering activities that help to build protective factors and address risk factors for resilience.

For both individuals and communities, resilience refers to the ability to withstand, recover and adapt well from adversity, trauma or other significant sources of stress — this includes during a disaster event and in the aftermath.⁵

Resilient Kids aims to improve the availability of early intervention mental health support, build the capacity of young people to support their own and others' social and emotional wellbeing capacity-building and facilitate connections in communities impacted by the 2022 floods — the program prioritises engaging with First Nations children and families, and children with autism or a cognitive disability.

Resilient Kids involves a range of activities delivered in three streams.

Streams 1 and 2 commenced in October 2023 — delivered as a consortium led by Social Futures in partnership with The Family Centre, Human Nature Adventure Therapy and other local organisations funded through the Youth Participation Fund.

Stream 3 activities were recently established in August 2024. After a review of Aboriginal-specific data from the Resilient Youth Survey and consultation with local Aboriginal Medical Services, it was agreed that Stream 3 would be delivered by Lives Lived Well as the Aboriginal Resilient Kids program.

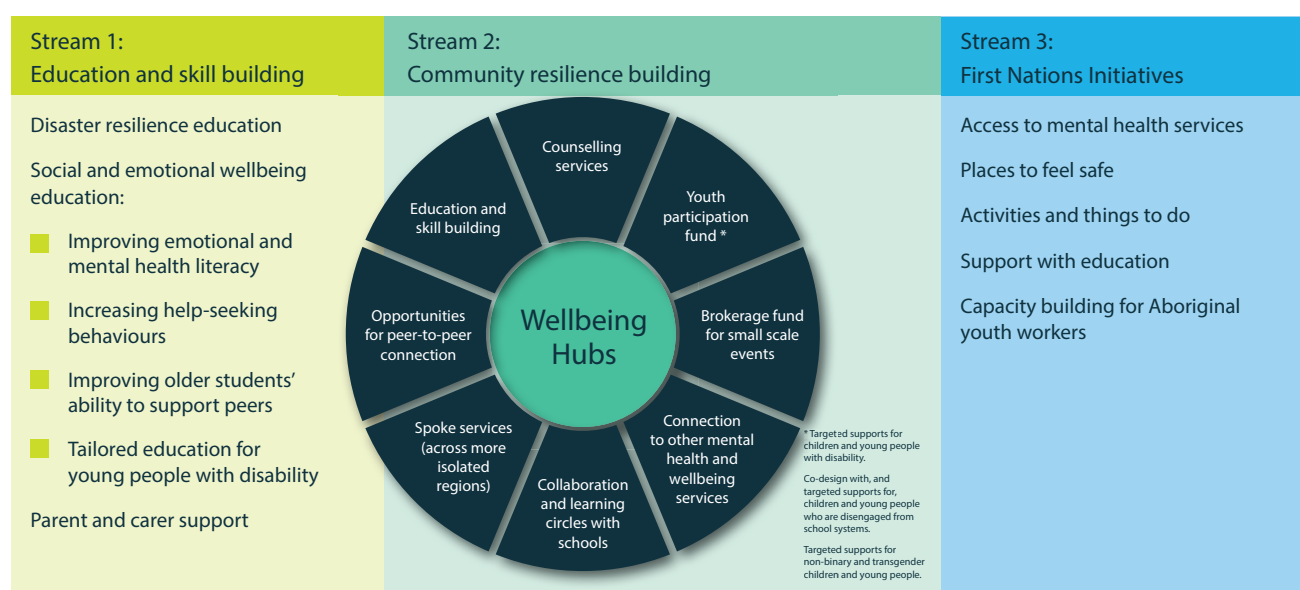


Figure 1 Overview of the Resilient Kids service model

⁵ National Mental Health Commission (2023). National Disaster Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra.

Making a positive impact with resilient young people and resilient communities.

The Resilient Kids theory of change below shows how improving awareness and access to psychological support, capacity-building and community connections contributes to more resilient young people and communities.

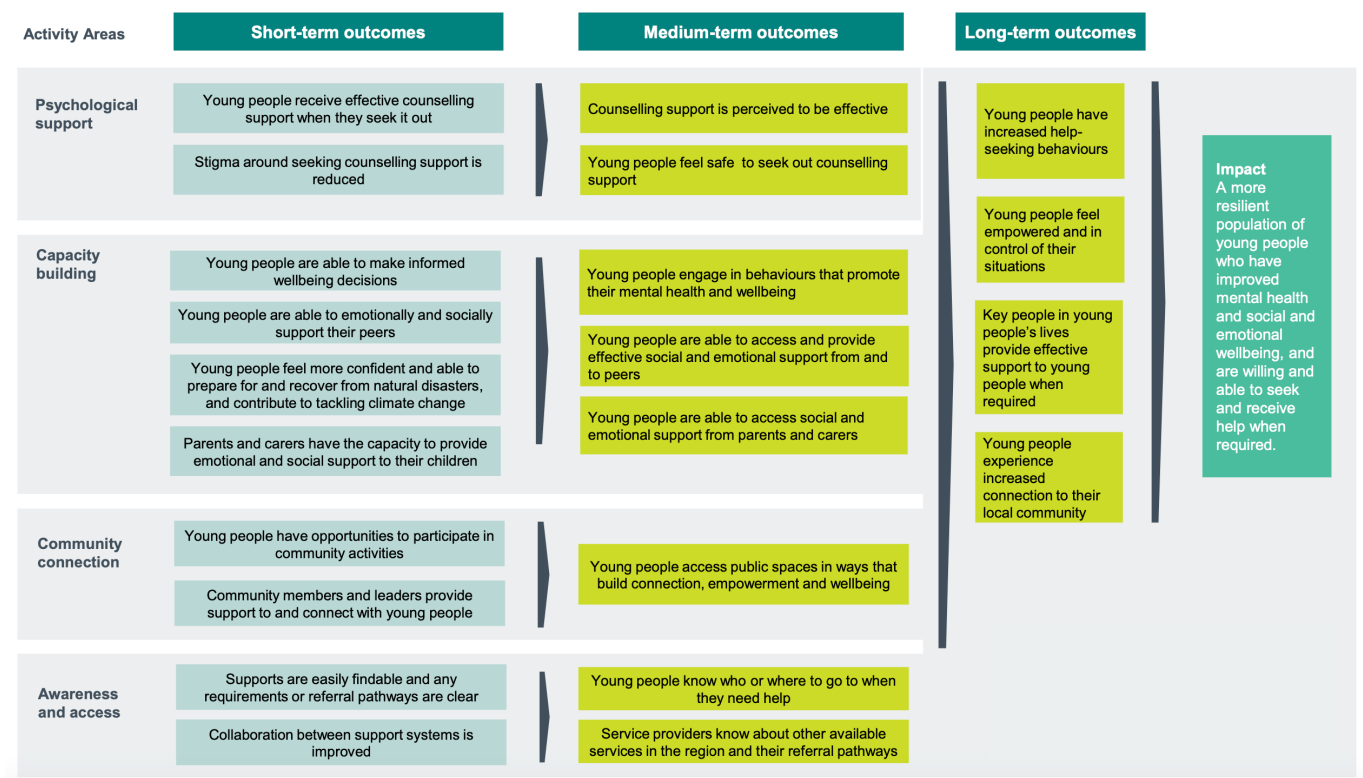


Figure 2 Resilient Kids theory of change

Designing the Aboriginal Resilient Kids program.

The Resilient Kids model includes a dedicated Stream 3 for Gumbaynggirr, Yaegl, Bundjalung, and Githabul young people.

The aim of Stream 3 activities is to:

- increase First Nations children and young people's sense of identity, cultural connection, self-esteem, and social-emotional wellbeing
- support access to holistic and culturally safe healing approaches.

It was originally planned that Stream 3 would be managed and delivered by First Nations service providers. However, due to the timeframe needed to establish and implement services and Aboriginal workforce capacity, an alternative approach was agreed.

In mid-2024, Lives Lived Well was endorsed by the three Northern Rivers Aboriginal Medical Services to deliver Stream 3 by adapting their Strong Community Program, focusing on:

- culturally sensitive youth mental health support and case management
- safe spaces for young people to socialise, study, and relax
- support and funding for community-led activities
- capacity building for Aboriginal Youth Workers
- collaborative community practice to connect and integrate local agencies.

Stream 3 services commenced in late 2024 and will be incorporated into the monitoring



About the evaluation

Evaluation approach

Demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement, a comprehensive evaluation of Resilient Kids is taking place alongside the delivery of the program.

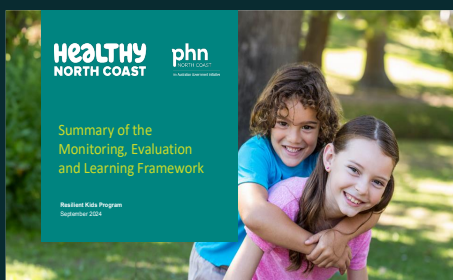
Healthy North Coast has commissioned an external evaluation of the Resilient Kids Program being led by Beacon Strategies. The evaluation approach consists of:

- developmental approach: ensuring new information is incorporated into the ongoing refinement of the Resilient Kids program design and delivery
- formative evaluation: analysing emerging findings and results, identifying barriers and enablers, and identifying lessons learnt so far to inform future program direction
- impact evaluation: assessing the program's outcomes and wider impact in communities to contribute to the evidence base around 'what works' in improving young people's resilience in a disaster recovery context.

The evaluation focuses on a range of aspects of Resilient Kids, including its suitability in meeting the needs and expectations of children, young people and their communities, improving access to support, implementation-related factors, involvement of young people in planning and governance, changes in and understanding of community-level resilience, and sustainability of partnerships and activities.

The evaluation approach was designed in collaboration with an Evaluation Working Group made up of members of the evaluation team, Healthy North Coast and Resilient Kids service providers. This group aims to guide the evaluation approach and reflect on evaluation findings as they emerge to inform refinements to the Resilient Kids program.

A mix of evaluative methods are collecting meaningful data that incorporates the perspectives and experiences of young people, their families and those who support them in local communities.



A summary of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework for the Resilient Kids Program can be found here:

<https://hnc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Resilient-Kids-Evaluation-Summary.pdf>

About this report

This formative evaluation report marks the initial step in sharing insights and outcomes from the Resilient Kids evaluation to date. Its purpose is to reflect on the first year of program delivery (October 2023 to September 2024) to identify key findings and learnings, and to guide service delivery moving forward.

The insights captured in this report are drawn from:

- analysis of program, client, experience and outcomes data routinely collected by program staff for Streams 1 and 2
- interviews, focus groups and surveys with participating young people and their parents/ caregivers, Resilient Kids program staff and management, school staff and other stakeholders working with young people in the region
- a community-level disaster resilience assessment focus group involving community leaders and professional stakeholders to understand what communities and service systems are currently doing and what is needed to support children and young people in the context of disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

The evaluation of Streams 1 and 2 of the Resilient Kids Program has been approved by the North Coast New South Wales Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Obtaining ethics approval ensures that evaluation activities are done in accordance with sound ethical principles, particularly when it comes to the collection and use of data relating to children and young people.



Emerging outcomes so far

Resilient Kids has **increased access to a range of wellbeing and resilience supports for many people in the Northern Rivers region.**

Resilient Kids has delivered a range of support and activities during its first year of implementation from September 2023 through to September 2024. This includes reaching young people in schools with skill-building workshops, providing structured psychological support and group sessions in community hubs, and holding activities in local communities to help build social connections.

More than 5,300 children and young people have accessed support through Resilient Kids over the past year, including:

- 2,551** young people participating in school-based workshops
- 568** young people engaged in structured individual or group cases of support (e.g. counselling, therapeutic groups, social & emotional wellbeing groups)
- 27** young people engaged in adventure therapy and specialist counselling
- 221** young people participating in Youth Participation Fund activities
- 2,030** young people attending funded community events.

More than 420 parents and caregivers have been directly involved in Resilient Kids, with 53 parents/caregivers participating in education sessions delivered within school communities, and 372 parents/caregivers involved in parenting groups or individual counselling/support sessions. Almost all families of young people involved in Stream 1 activities received information and education resources as part of take-home packs following a workshop delivered at their school.

This shows the mix of strategies within Resilient Kids, with 'high reach' activities like educational workshops and brokerage-funded community events being effective by achieving high levels of participation of young people while 'high touch' activities such as individual counselling, case management and structured group programs work more intensively with young people requiring additional support.

Stream 1 snapshot

Stream 1 activities offer children and young people education and skill-building through school-based support. Program engagement has increased over time, with highest levels of engagement in local primary schools with children aged 8 to 12 years.

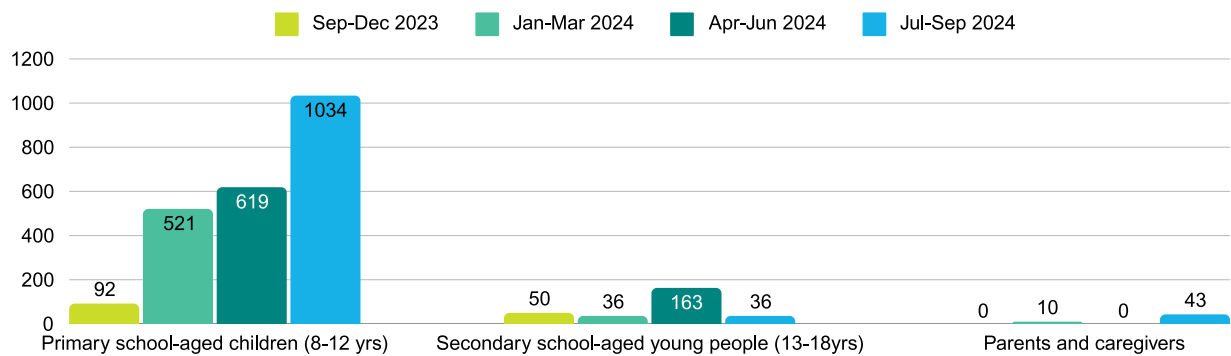


Figure 3 Number of participants in Stream 1 activities by quarter

Children and young people participated in workshops covering emotional wellbeing and resilience, seeking support and supporting others, disaster preparedness and climate change.

64 education packages delivered

44 schools engaged

2,551 young people participating

89.0% young people were primary school-aged (8-12 years)

10.6% of young people identified as First Nations

18.7% of young people identified having autism or cognitive disability

83.4% of young people reported being satisfied with the service they received



On average, children and young people felt more positive about aspects of resilience as a result of attending a workshop

Average rated level of agreement with statements following Stream 1 workshops

where 5 = strongly agree, 3 = neutral, 1 = strongly disagree

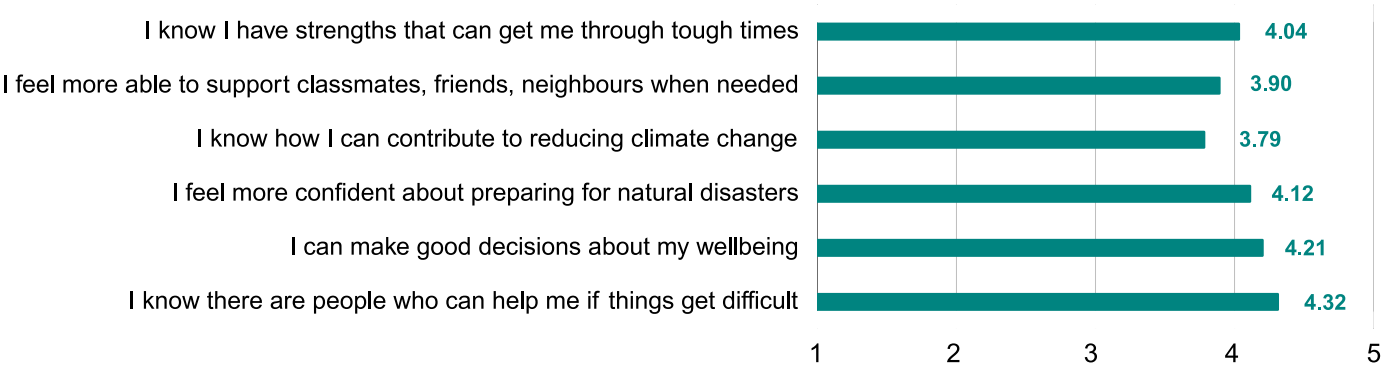


Figure 4 Participant-rated outcomes from Stream 1 activities

Stream 2 snapshot

Stream 2 activities offer holistic wellbeing and psychological supports to young people and their carers impacted by or requiring additional support following the 2022 floods.

This might involve supporting young people with concerns such as anxiety, depression and/or trauma-related stress around the 2022 flooding events, climate change and the environment; grief and loss relating to home, possessions and friends; and separation anxiety related to flooding events, including school avoidance.

Young people are offered support that best meets their needs, which can include:

- 1:1 support with up to six sessions with a family support worker
- counselling with regular and ongoing sessions for up to nine months
- therapeutic groups for young people managing mental health problems, often following on from receiving one on one support
- social and emotional wellbeing groups focusing on disaster resilience, interpersonal skills, healthy coping, life skills and self-care
- care coordination for young people with more severe mental health problems, connecting them with the right services.

Parents and caregivers of young people are also supported through family-inclusive sessions and parenting groups.

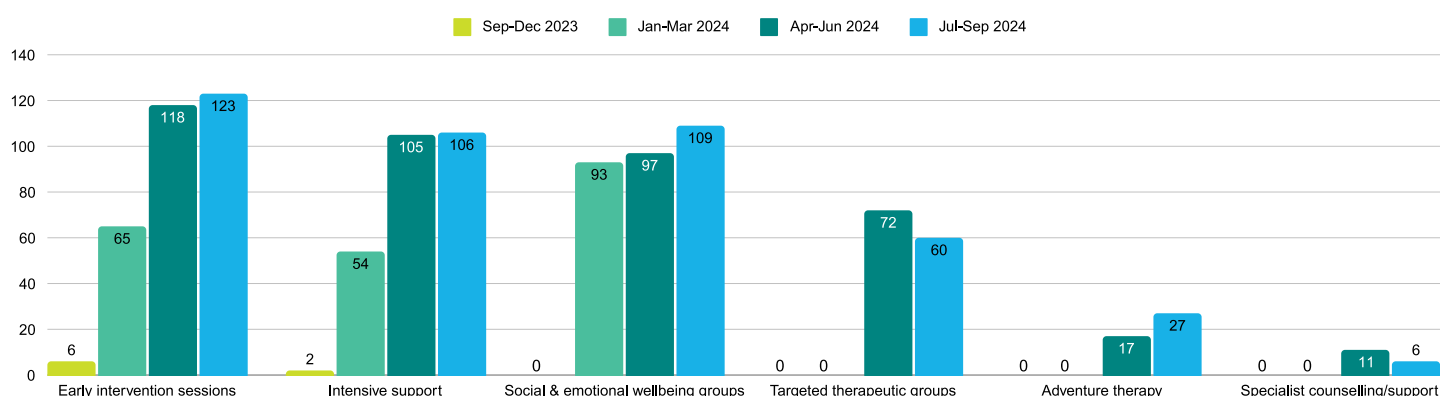


Figure 5 Number of participants in Stream 2 activities by quarter and activity type

Stream 2 snapshot (continued)

351	individual cases delivered, involving 368 children/young people and 250 parents/caregivers	55.6%	of young people who completed two outcome scores showed an improvement
7.3	sessions per individual case	1.0	average decrease in Total Difficulties score assessed by SDQ ⁶
46	group cases, involving 289 children/young people and 14 parents/caregivers	▲	Self-referrals, schools, community services organisations and health services were the most common sources of referrals for individual psychological support
7.4	sessions per group case	▲	Mental health challenges were the most common reason for referrals for individual and group support
6.2	members per group case		
21.9%	of young people in individual/group cases identified as First Nations		
26.3%	of young people in individual/group cases identified as having autism or cognitive disability		
96.3%	of young people reported being satisfied with the service they received	2,000+	young people have attended one of 28 brokerage-funded activities or events held in local communities.

Change in average Total Difficulties score between first and last assessment using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

**on a scale of 0 to 10, where lower scores indicate more positive outcomes for all scales except for prosocial scale, where a higher score indicates a more positive outcome*

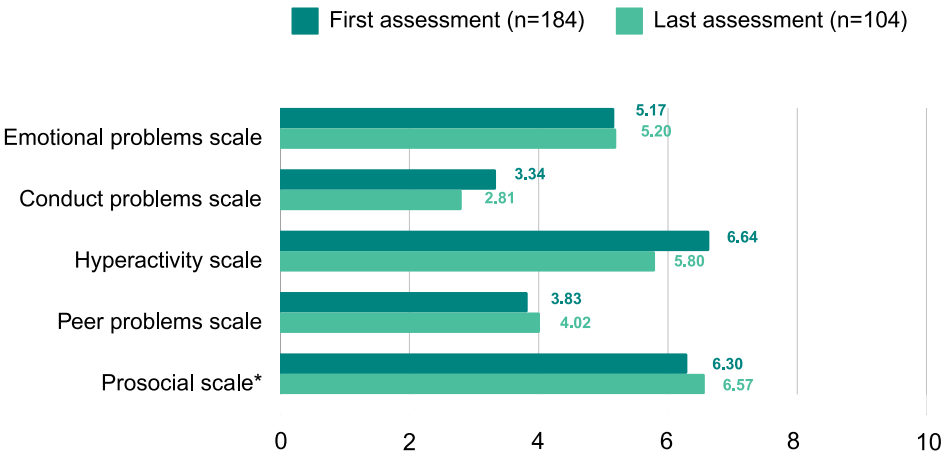


Figure 6 Participant-rated outcomes from Stream 2 activities

⁶ Total Difficulties is an aggregated score on a 40-point scale where a higher score indicates greater difficulties — it is based on selected items from the SDQ [Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire] self-rated by young people participating in individual support at first assessment (n=183) and last assessment (n=108).

Case study

Individual support

After the floods impacted Sid's schooling, Resilient Kids provided tailored support that helped to improve their school attendance.

Sid is in their early teens and has previously experienced physical abuse and witnessed family violence. Sid's school was significantly impacted by the floods, causing disruption to their school routine. When Sid first accessed Resilient Kids, they were experiencing intense anger and aggression and were at risk of school disengagement. They experienced symptoms of low mood, persistent anxiety and were experiencing flashbacks from the flooding event.

Sid has been supported by Resilient Kids through wrap around and trauma-informed support at their education campus. Over six sessions, Sid has engaged with a range of supports including safety planning and crisis support, family-inclusive practice through

regular counselling sessions with their parent, and connection to other therapeutic services that offer creative expression and work on emotional regulation.

Since accessing Resilient Kids, Sid has developed confidence to talk about what is happening in their world and is engaging openly with therapeutic sessions. Their anxiety and aggressive outbursts have decreased, and their overall mood has improved. Sid's relationship with their parent has also benefited and greater stability in their schooling has been achieved through a significant improvement in their attendance.

Resilient Kids has been able to tailor Sid's care based on their needs and work flexibly at their pace.

Jon has opened up about his difficult flood experience and encouraged others to access support.

Jon was referred to Resilient Kids and connected with a therapist for individual support. He initially shared his experiences of violence in personal relationships, family breakdown, and housing instability, though he didn't immediately discuss his experience of the flood. Building engagement with Jon took time. The therapist supported him through outreach and joining in shared activities like fishing and golf to slowly and gently build trust and engagement.

Over time, Jon began attending sessions regularly and gradually opened up, eventually sharing details of his flood experience. He described waking to

knee-deep water and waiting for hours in a boat with his family. Jon's therapist provided him with a disaster resilience kit containing emergency supplies. Jon was excited about the kit and eagerly explored what was inside.

Throughout several months of support, Jon has engaged with a cultural mentor and started to think about his future and what he would like to do. He has developed a sense of safety in discussing difficult experiences and awareness of when he is having a triggered response and how to respond. Jon has even connected loved ones to Resilient Kids, extending support to others in his life.

Youth Participation Fund snapshot

8 community organisations funded

78 YPF-funded activities completed

\$900k+ amount of Youth Participation Fund (YPF) funding provided

228 young people participating in YPF-funded activities

Funded organisations include:

- **Momentum Collective:** to deliver fortnightly workshops focused on life skills, relationship building and wellbeing for school students in Richmond Valley
- **Byron Youth Service:** to deliver the Village Young Men's Story Project, an empowering 36-week program aimed at supporting 15 flood-affected young men aged 12–17 years in Mullumbimby who are disengaged from school
- **Human Nature Adventure Therapy:** to deliver Empowered Future Camps for young people who are disengaged from education and affected by floods, involving four immersive two-night/ three-day experiences, for up to 12 participants each, in outdoor settings across Northern NSW
- **Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation:** to deliver a program of workshops in the Lower Clarence region for Aboriginal youth who have an intellectual or neurological disability, or who have experienced trauma and social isolation. Workshops focus on connection to culture, caring for country, and how country heals itself after flood, fire and natural disasters
- **PCYC Lismore:** to deliver programs focused on skill building, physical activity, driver education and community connection for disengaged, vulnerable, First Nations youth, and young people with a disability across Lismore, Ballina Shire and Richmond Valley
- **Surfing Australia:** to deliver the Resilient Teens Project, a 10-month program to equip young people aged 14–18 who are disengaged from education with life skills and resilience involving immersive camps and follow-up sessions
- **Murwillumbah Community Centre:** to deliver the Mission Possible project, which involves training 15 diverse young leaders from the Tweed Shire who will engage with peers and promote disaster readiness via social media and community enrichment activities
- **Queer Family:** to deliver Young Queerios: Sprouts in Mullumbimby, a unique program for children aged 8–12 creating an environment for them to socialise, form friendships, and engage in uplifting activities alongside their parents/carers

Resilient Kids is helping to **improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people** by equipping them with knowledge, skills and tools for resilience.

Young people, their parents and caregivers, and program staff reported the following positive outcomes were being achieved for participating children and young people:



Self-confidence

Building self-confidence and courage, opening up to their families and trying things they once thought they couldn't.



Social connection and development

A stronger sense of community and connection to peers who share similar experiences, and learning how to socialise and encourage each other.



Emotional regulation

Developing and applying ability to recognise, express and manage emotions, with improvements in mood, attitude and self-expression.



Engagement in therapeutic support

Those with previous negative experiences of services enjoy the program, are excited to engage, and likely to continue help-seeking in future.



Resilience

Responding better to setbacks and feeling stronger.



Connection to external support

Connecting young people to external services and clinical support, helping them to access the care they need.



Social participation

Willingness and enthusiasm to join in community activities and increased involvement with other young people outside of the school environment.



Disaster preparedness knowledge

Increased knowledge about climate change and how to prepare for a disaster, essential items to support themselves in a crisis, and where to go for support.

Experiences of young people engaged in therapeutic supports.

"It's really improved my confidence and I find school a lot easier."

Young person

" My worker has given me so much help. I don't think I'd be in the state that I am in if I hadn't of seen [them] ... wouldn't be as strong."

Young person

"[It] helps you connect to what you are feeling. Sometimes you wear a mask and fake what you are feeling ... your feelings are trapped in there. {Here} you can let them go."

Young person



Figure 7 Young person's artwork created during individual support

"It was a miracle to get her somewhere in a new group {that's} unfamiliar and get her to participate. Over the years we have taken her to different places and it hasn't happened because her disability won't let her."

Parent/caregiver

"A willingness to be vulnerable and to throw themselves in the deep end has blown me away, it speaks to the desire for support ... there's a lot of young people that didn't have the language to say 'I need help with this'. But being given the space to share and explore meant they were able to find that vocabulary."

Program staff

Case study

Group support

The Resilient Kids Program hosted a four-week therapeutic art group for students at a local school who were affected by the 2022 floods.

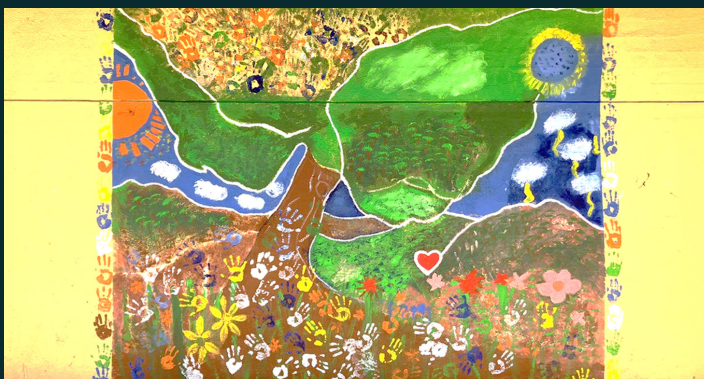


Figure 8 Mural created by group of young people

The goal was to provide a safe space for young people to share their collective experiences, explore personal strengths, and build resilience. Through creative arts, students were able to process complex emotions like grief and loss, expressing feelings that were difficult to articulate in words. Mindfulness and nature connection were integral to each session, fostering self-awareness and self-esteem as part of mental health recovery.

A key outcome of the project was the collective creation of a school mural, symbolising the strengths and resilience of the students, teachers, and the wider community. While some found it challenging to engage in the therapeutic process due to their personal experiences, they were able to navigate these discomforts and reflect these challenges through the mural. They turned their experiences into something beautiful and meaningful.

In total, 18 students participated in the therapeutic group sessions, with an additional 214 students and teachers contributing to the completion of the mural—a communal act of celebration and healing.

Individual support

Jack relocated with his family to a rural property in the Northern Rivers following the COVID-19 pandemic. Since moving into the area, Jack and his family experienced two natural disasters that affected their property.

Jack had recently commenced study at TAFE. He was experiencing social anxiety and some learning difficulties as he transitioned to study. Jack described his study experience as exciting but also challenging as he felt he had missed large parts of his required education. Jack was referred to Resilient Kids and supported by a Program Worker who provided outreach support at TAFE.

Despite Jack's struggles, he showed a keen interest in music. During counselling sessions, the Program Worker discussed Jack's interests and used his love of music to creatively explore his emotions. Jack and his Program Worker identified his strengths and discussed future goals, including his career ambitions, and how gaps in his education could be addressed. They practised for job interviews, brainstorming ideas and preparing for potential interview questions. This aimed to build his confidence and provide the support and tools he needed to achieve his employment goals.

As a result, Jack was successful in obtaining a full-time job in his chosen field. He was excited to share the good news with his Program Worker, stating that his family were very proud and he feels confident and ready to learn his new role.

Student and teacher feedback on disaster resilience and social and emotional wellbeing education delivered in schools.

"Hearing about climate change and the ways we can help."

Young person

"Drawing attention to all the facets of young people's lives where they can look for strengths develops a greater understanding of themselves, how they fit into the world around them and where to look for support during tough times."

School staff

"I felt more connected to my peers and family and teachers."

Young person

"The activities were very engaging for students and helped build their preparedness."

School staff

"It taught me how to get through tough times no matter the situation."

Young person

"This workshop helped us to think ahead and plan for any troubling situations in the future."

Young person

"Students learnt some very important lessons ... they were able to apply their existing knowledge to this as well."

School staff

Resilient Kids is **empowering adults as natural supporters of young people**, helping to strengthen their ability to engage with their kids and offer support.

Parents/caregivers, program staff and other local stakeholders reported the following positive outcomes for adults who support children and young people:



Communication and co-regulation

Improving communication between parent/caregivers and their child, and increased ability to talk with their child with more understanding.

"The talks I had with the Program Worker were very helpful. She gave me so many tools that improved our communication at home. Even the behaviours I found challenging improved with her guidance."

Parent/caregiver



Educating and empowering parents

Providing parents/caregivers with concepts, strategies and tools to support their child and set appropriate boundaries.

"I found the self-regulation, co-regulation, and dysregulation concepts really helpful. I had heard those terms but didn't know what they meant. Attending those sessions then doing some reading after... that put that together for me in a way that hadn't happened before."

Parent/caregiver



Practical skills and tools

Supporting the upskilling of other local service providers and school staff around trauma-informed practice and providing practical tools to implement with young people in the classroom.

Program learnings so far

Lessons learnt from implementing Resilient Kids in year one.

The program's flexibility and diverse streams have helped to expand access to much-needed support and address the diverse needs of children and young people in the region.

Strengths of the Resilient Kids model include:

Consortium approach

The consortium model effectively builds partnerships among service providers, facilitating the sharing of expertise and resources across program streams. Its success is driven by the lead organisation's commitment to achieving the program's desired outcomes and the positive attitudes of consortium partners.

Contract design

Allowing providers to use their own organisational processes and existing systems rather than adhering to a common approach has enabled involvement of smaller organisations in the delivery of Resilient Kids.

Hub and spoke model

This model enables staff to be embedded in communities across a large geographic footprint and enhances the availability and accessibility of support in rural areas which have limited services.

Assertive outreach

Flexible outreach enables staff to meet children and young people where they are, addressing the practical barriers families face in accessing services, such as cost, transportation, and time constraints.

Brokerage funding

Brokerage funds help to address the holistic needs of children and young people and overcome the financial constraints of accessing health and social support. Funds have supported referral and access to external services, including specialists and psychological support, and enabled participation in extracurricular activities.

Continuum of support

The co-design process has led to a model that provides a continuum of services, including school based education, group support, individual counselling, therapy and case management. Together, program streams flexibly respond to the diverse needs of children and young people in the region and allow support to be stepped up and down as required.

Priority groups

Focusing on priority groups allows providers to adapt and tailor their service offerings to meet the varying needs and preferences of children and young people.

Youth Participation Fund

Inclusion of the Youth Participation Fund and the establishment of the community of practice have helped smaller organisations build capacity through shared learning, collaborate more effectively in a competitive funding environment, and identify opportunities to collectively address gaps in the service system.

"It is a big learning for the social service landscape. {Local service providers} have to have a shared spirit of working together."

Program staff

"It's that need of individualised service models. For some young people, a group conversation in a school is what they need. For others, it's case management around aspects of their lives, [for] others it is longer term therapy with qualified mental health professionals."

Program staff



Resilient Kids is not able to address wider gaps in the health and social service system that exist, so more support is needed to fully address the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people, and families.

Limitations of the program model include:

Target age group:	The program targets children aged 8 to 18 years, but there's a gap in services for those under 8 years. Early intervention at a younger age could be more effective as older children often have established behavioural patterns that require more intensive support to address.
Addressing broader social needs:	Many families affected by the floods are experiencing other social and economic challenges such as housing instability and financial stress. The program's design may not address all of the needs that impact a young person's wellbeing.

Resilient Kids has been adapted to respond to the needs and preferences of children and young people in the region.

Some of these adaptations to the model have included:

Incorporating climate change education	Including an activity in the delivery of Stream 1 that provides information to help children and young people understand what climate change is, the impacts of climate change, and what young people can do to reduce their impact.
Interactive workshop activities	In educational workshops, responding to different learning needs and preferences of young people by including more interactive education that supports active participation. This includes play and hands-on learning experiences tailored to different ages.
Adapting Youth Participation Fund activities	Some providers have pivoted from the original design of their Youth Participation Fund activity based on consultation and co-design with young people. This has ensured that the focus of these activities address aspects of resilience that are important to young people, such as leadership, human rights and community-led action.

What has **worked well** in delivering Resilient Kids?

A range of factors that have helped to establish and deliver Resilient Kids in year one emerged through interviews and focus groups with children, parents, program staff and local stakeholders.

Engaging skilled and trusted provider	Providers with the skills, capacity, and infrastructure required to establish and deliver the program, with established community connections to enhance engagement.
Connected teams	A cohesive team with a positive culture that values individual expertise, shared learning, knowledge exchange, and professional development.
Capability and approaches of staff	Passionate and committed staff with ability to build trusted relationships with children, young people, and families. Program staff were described as caring, approachable, supportive, collaborative, and youth-focused.
Supporting the family system	Holistic and flexible support offered for the whole family, including parents and siblings. Parents feel informed and supported by the program staff.
Reflecting and learning	Local relationships built to tailor program to local needs, and regularly reflecting on data and feedback to identify opportunities for improvement.
Youth-friendly environments	Engaging children and young people through practical and interactive approaches in Stream 1; and creating home-like hub environments in Stream 2 to build comfort and connection.
Adapting and tailoring activities	Responding to the individual needs and preferences of young people, and adapting activities from what was originally designed based on their feedback or emerging issues.
Provider collaboration	Strong relationships between Resilient Kids providers to support appropriate referrals. This is enabled by proactive communication and identifying opportunities for working together.
Connection to other supports	Established pathways between providers to help young people and families connect with external supports that work towards their therapeutic goals. This includes partnerships and co-location of staff and activities.
Key worker roles	Assigning dedicated workers to children and young people to build rapport and continuity of support.
Equity and access	Developing safe therapeutic relationships, appropriate support environments, ongoing communication and practical assistance to ensure participation. The Youth Participation Fund has enabled additional access to supportive activities for young people who may not be engaged with or eligible for other services.

What has **been challenging** in delivering Resilient Kids?

Implementation lead time	Activities required time to set up, causing delays in delivery and the need to roll over funding.
Identifying and securing venues	Finding suitable hub locations for Stream 2, with some venues shared by other programs and services requiring coordination. The need for additional space has increased as demand for services has increased.
Key performance indicators (KPIs)	KPIs based on the number of children and schools supported don't reflect repeated engagement or coordination efforts required.
Competing programs in schools	Some schools report an 'oversaturation' of similar programs that have been delivered or are embedded in their curriculum.
Engagement from schools	Engaging schools, especially in communities without a local presence, due to the subject matter's sensitivity. School engagement can also be challenged by curriculum priorities and specific requests around delivery constraints such as length of workshops and dates/times.
Trauma sensitivity	Adults can be hesitant for children and young people to discuss past disaster experiences due to fears of re-traumatising them.
Building trust and connections	Establishing local trust and developing referral pathways takes time as communities may have experienced transient services in the past. Clearly communicating the program's length and scope has helped to manage expectations.
Capacity of external services	Providers may refer children and young people to external services for specialised support, but external services are often at capacity and have waitlists.
Administrative and reporting processes	Paper-based outcome tools can be less efficient than electronic systems, and uploading documents to meet contractual requirements is time-consuming.
Demonstrating impact	Current data capture and assessment tools may not convey the full value and profound impact of Resilient Kids for children and young people, which staff are observing through their direct engagement with participants.

What could be strengthened to further the impact of Resilient Kids?

A range of opportunities to improve the impact of Resilient Kids have been identified so far, including:



Involving teachers and school staff in Stream 1 workshops to help integrate learning into the classroom. This requires communication before workshops to set expectations.



Providing parents and caregivers with resources on what their child is learning to help reinforce learned concepts in the home.



Responding to the range of complex factors impacting on young people and their families, including floods, other disasters in recent years, and COVID-19.



Strengthening connections with General Practitioners and other clinicians through more partnerships, integrated services and/or streamlined referrals.



Allocating dedicated time in contracts for establishment, including securing locations, recruiting staff, engaging community and developing referral pathways.



Revising eligibility criteria for Stream 2 services to acknowledge the unique and complex nature of flood experiences for families, including those indirectly affected.



Increasing accessibility by offering activities on different days/timing, longer 1:1 appointments, transport assistance, and exploring online support for young people.



Leveraging insights and data collected over recent years to ensure faster access to support following a disaster, as trauma increases while waiting for services.

Understanding community disaster resilience

Understanding community-level disaster resilience.

*"A resilient community is better able to withstand a future disaster. A successful recovery process "promotes practices that minimise the community's risk to all hazards and strengthens its ability to withstand and recover from future disasters, which constitutes a community's resilience."*⁷

Assessing community-level disaster resilience:

Through a focus group with 10 local representatives, four evidence-based components of disaster resilience were explored:

- community connectedness
- risk and vulnerability
- planning and procedures
- available resources.

The group assessed disaster resilience in Northern Rivers communities, specifically as it relates to children and young people. The focus group aimed to:

- measure the level of disaster resilience within Northern Rivers communities
- better understand the concept of community disaster resilience in a way that is relevant and meaningful for Northern Rivers communities
- assess the perceptions of 'current state' and 'future needs' relating to community disaster resilience.

The tool was adapted from the Community Disaster Resilience Scorecard⁸. Amendments focused on factors relevant to children and young people and to capture a wider scope of resilience-building activities that span

preparedness, response and recovery.⁴

The group included representatives from local government, health and social services, and the education sector, bringing diverse perspectives informed by their experiences of living and/or working in the region.

Each participant provided subjective assessments of these resilience components based on their unique perspectives and professional backgrounds. Local representatives rated a series of four to five indicators relating to each domain on a five-point scale from 1: *strongly disagree* through to 5: *strongly agree*.

⁷ A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery Programs (2018). Australia and New Zealand School of Government

⁸ Ramsey, I.J., Steenkamp, M., Thompson, A.L., Anikeeva, O., Arbon, P.A. and Gebbie, K.M. (2016). Assessing Community Disaster Resilience using a balanced scorecard: lessons learnt from three Australian communities. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 31(2) pp. 44-49.

Mean group score for adapted community-level disaster resilience assessment by domain

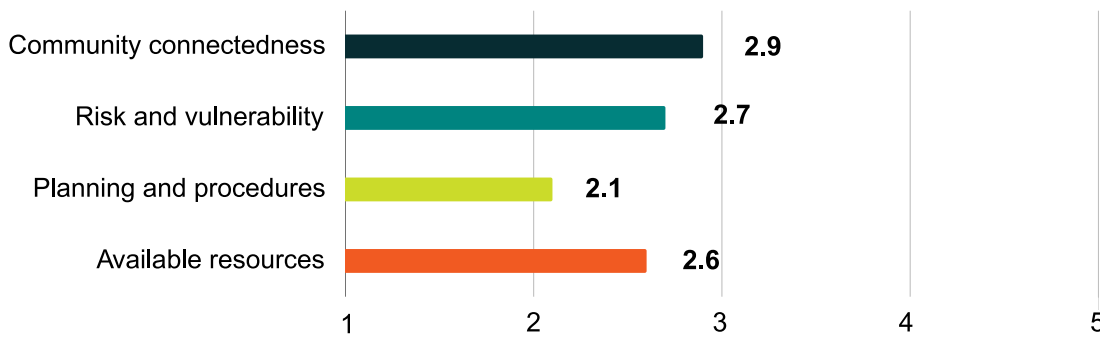


Figure 6 Average group ratings for community-level disaster resilience by domain

Perceptions of community-level disaster resilience

As seen in Figure 6, group-rated scores were less than three across all four domains, demonstrating a relatively low overall rating of community disaster resilience in the region.

The highest average score was recorded for *Community connectedness*. Aspects of this domain that scored highly included children and young people being engaged with peers and their community, and available activities that promote cohesion and community participation.

The lowest score was recorded for the *Planning and procedures* domain. Aspects of this domain that scored relatively low included prioritising children and young people in disaster preparedness, response/recovery planning and procedures, and involvement of children and young people in designing solutions to overcome disaster-related risks.

The group identified a range of important insights that determine the current levels of community-level disaster resilience in the region, such as:

- Climate change is a significant concern for young people, affecting their mental health and wellbeing.
- Schools play a critical role in connecting children and young people to their peers and communities, however rates of school disengagement and refusal remain high.
- There are limited opportunities for young people to have a voice on key issues that affect them, such as climate change and disaster planning, despite the importance of this for community connection.
- Barriers to social participation and community connection include limited availability of local activities, transport, COVID-19 safety measures, and increasing engagement with technology.
- Disaster responses are often localised, making it challenging for services and organisations to network effectively, especially during the response phase of a disaster.
- Children and young people may not be ready or able to engage in disaster preparedness conversations while still recovering from a previous disaster and other events such as COVID-19.
- Risk is influenced by a range of health and social issues impacting individuals, families and communities. People with pre-existing vulnerabilities faced the highest risk during the flood disaster.
- Disaster-related information and resources tailored to children and young people are lacking, and expertise is needed to develop these materials.
- Communities face 'disaster fatigue,' with limited capacity for future planning as they continue to recover from past disasters, with many businesses still closed and people displaced from their homes.

Supporting the resilience of young people for future disasters.

Communities and service systems can support children and young people across preparedness, immediate response and ongoing recovery.

Experiences of disasters are highly individualised. They are influenced by a young person and their family's experiences of trauma, their resources and overall wellbeing. They can also be influenced by broader social and economic issues, such as recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, housing instability, cost-of-living pressures and family violence.

Communities and service systems can support children and young people directly (i.e. specifically about climate-related disasters and those who are disaster-affected) and indirectly (i.e. building up protective factors and addressing risk factors more generally).

Key opportunities to build the resilience of young people at a community-level include:

Provide disaster education	Disaster education should be normalised, integrated into the school curriculum, and shared using youth-friendly platforms (e.g. social media).
Build capacity of adults	Parents, caregivers, and educators can confidently discuss disasters with children and young people without the fear of causing re-traumatisation.
Develop practical life skills	Practical skills are essential for building the skills, capacity and confidence to adapt to different environments.
Develop emotional regulation skills	Emotional regulation skills can help young people in many areas of their lives, giving them the tools and confidence to prepare for and respond to challenging situations, including disasters.
Support growth	Resilience and grit can be nurtured by encouraging young people to explore the edge of their comfort zone with trauma-informed support.
Involve children and young people	Young people are concerned about climate change and disasters. They want to have a voice, feel empowered, and take responsibility by being actively involved in shaping the response to future disasters.
Establish community connections	When children and young people have trusted connections with individuals and organisations locally, they can identify who to connect with and where to go for support during and after a disaster.

Focus group suggestions to further develop community-level disaster resilience for young people in the Northern Rivers:

1

Raise awareness of the value of engaging children and young people in disaster planning and recognise their capacity to contribute meaningfully.

2

Create local opportunities for children and young people to participate in disaster planning and define their role in being part of the solution.

3

Develop and/or source age appropriate disaster resources for children and young people and distribute through appropriate channels (e.g. teachers, parents and caregivers).

4

Strengthen the capacity and confidence of adults (e.g. teachers, parents and caregivers) to engage young people when they are ready in trauma-informed conversations about climate change and natural disasters, and how young people can make a difference.

5

Identify and coordinate local services to strengthen disaster preparedness and response. This includes assessing how existing services in the region can provide support during a disaster and efficiently managing incoming funding and resources for faster mobilisation.

Looking forward

Ongoing evaluation activities will continue to measure the impact of Resilient Kids, learn about what's working well and share what's learnt with others.

Continue program delivery

October 2024 to June 2025

Resilient Kids will continue to be delivered through to June 2025, with these formative insights helping to strengthen the program so that it continues to meet the needs of young people in the region.

Launch Stream 3 activities

from October 2024

Aboriginal Resilient Kids will commence delivery, which focuses on culturally safe services and support for First Nations children, young people, families, carers, and kinship groups.

Data collection

Ongoing through to June 2025

Program data, participant experiences and insights from stakeholders will continue to be collected alongside the delivery of Resilient Kids activities.

Learning loops

January 2025 and April 2025

The Evaluation Working Group will continue to host quarterly learning loops, taking a data-driven approach to reflecting on implementation and identify opportunities for improvement.

Year two formative report

July to September 2025

Interim findings and learnings drawn from year two of implementation will be compiled and presented in a similar formative report.

Impact evaluation

early 2026

A comprehensive evaluation report, collating all of the outputs, outcomes and learnings from the entire Resilient Kids program, will be developed alongside a suite of other evaluation reporting products to help contribute to building the evidence base around supporting young people's resilience in the context of disasters and climate change.



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