HEALTHY NORTH COAST

Beacon Strategies



Resilient Kids

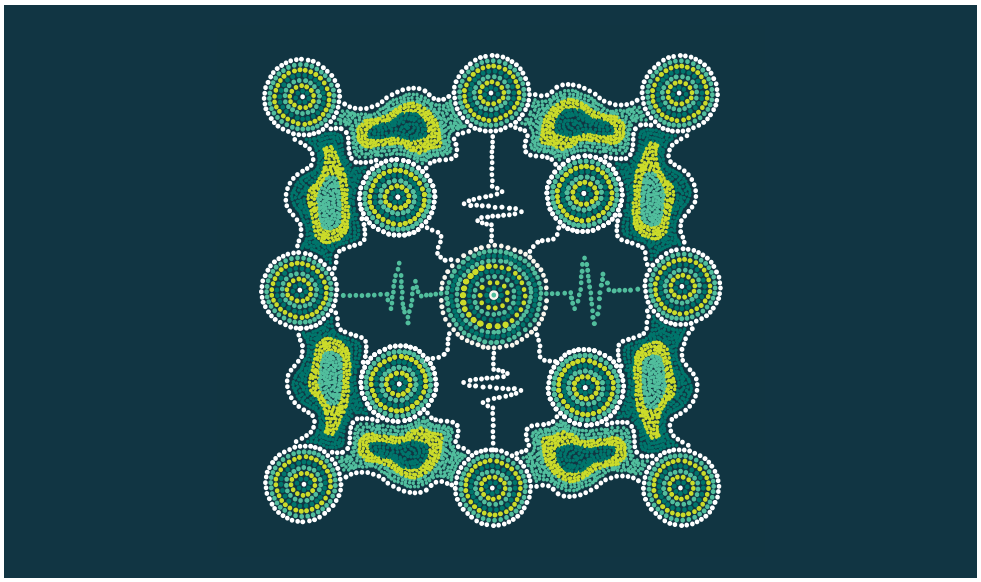
Impact evaluation summary report

June 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

Healthy North Coast acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands across our region, and pays 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 honours the rich diversity of the oldest living cultures.

In this document, the term 'Aboriginal peoples' is used inclusively to refer to individuals who identify as either Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.



About this report

This document is a summary of the full technical evaluation report prepared as part of an independent evaluation of the Resilient Kids program undertaken by Beacon Strategies on behalf of Healthy North Coast (HNC). All data, figures, case examples and reflections presented here are sourced from that report's findings and implications.

This summary has been prepared jointly by Healthy North Coast (HNC) and Beacon Strategies to share findings, learnings and future considerations with the wider sector.

We trust that the valuable insights captured here can be used to inform future programs and policy development that contribute to increased resilience and positive mental health and wellbeing of children and young people impacted by disasters in Australia.

Ethical oversight

To ensure appropriate ethical oversight of the evaluation, ethics approval was obtained for Streams 1 and 2 of Resilient Kids from the North Coast New South Wales (NCNSW) Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) [HREA399 2024/ETH00449: Resilient Kids Program Evaluation].

Resilient Kids was a collaboration involving a range of partners.

Healthy North Coast is an independent, not-for-profit organisation committed to improving the health of North Coast communities. Healthy North Coast proudly delivers the Australian Government's Primary Health Network (PHN) Program on the North Coast, which covers the combined geographical regions of the Northern NSW and Mid North Coast Local Health Districts (LHDs). Healthy North Coast has led the co-design, commissioning and oversight of Resilient Kids.

Social Futures is a leading not-for-profit community service organisation working in the Northern Rivers and across New South Wales. Social Futures was the lead agency delivering Stream 1 and 2 of Resilient Kids, and led the consortium arrangement with The Family Centre and Human Nature.

The Family Centre is a community-owned, social purpose organisation based on the North Coast of NSW creating opportunities for children, young people and families. The Family Centre delivered activities under Stream 1.

Human Nature delivers innovative, nature-based mental health support for vulnerable young people, focusing on youth empowerment through outdoor therapy. Human Nature delivered specialist adventure therapy services in Stream 2.

Lives Lived Well is a not-for-profit organisation supporting people with concerns related to alcohol and other drugs, mental health and other experiences. Lives Lived Well was the provider of Stream 3 (Aboriginal Resilient Kids), a tailored model for First Nations young people.

Beacon Strategies is a health and social services consultancy supporting organisations to plan, design, implement and evaluate their work. Beacon Strategies was the external monitoring, evaluation and learning partner for Resilient Kids, which involved data collection, analysis and the development of this evaluation report.

Thank you.

Healthy North Coast acknowledges and thanks the following people and organisations who contributed their efforts, experiences and expertise towards Resilient Kids. In particular:

- children, young people and their families who participated in designing the program, sharing their experiences and demonstrating the program's impact
- program staff, youth workers and mental health professionals who worked within or alongside Resilient Kids activities
- trusted local providers, school communities, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and partners across the Northern Rivers
- the Australian Government, who contributed funding for Resilient Kids through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)



Contents

Executive summary 05

Why Resilient Kids? 07

What was Resilient Kids? 10

What did we learn? 12

- Appropriateness 12
- Effectiveness 17
- Implementation 26
- Impact 28
- Sustainability 31

Recommendations 33

Closing reflections 35

Executive summary

Resilient Kids was an initiative to support the mental health, wellbeing and resilience of children and young people in flood-affected communities across the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales.

Commissioned by Healthy North Coast and funded by the Australian Government, the program responded to the severe flooding events of 2022 and was delivered between October 2023 and December 2025.

Resilient Kids was delivered through three integrated streams, including school-based workshops focused on disaster resilience and social and emotional wellbeing, provision of early intervention and family-inclusive therapeutic support for children and young people, and culturally tailored, Aboriginal-led supports for Aboriginal children and young peoples. A Youth Participation Fund provided grant funding for local initiatives to meet the needs of priority cohorts of young people.

A mixed-methods, developmental evaluation was undertaken alongside the delivery of Resilient Kids activities. This involved gathering insight from children and young people, their parents and caregivers, program providers and other local stakeholders through conversations, surveys, program data and reporting.

A community-level disaster resilience assessment specific to children and young people's needs in the context of disaster-affected communities was also undertaken to look beyond the provision of services and support to disaster preparedness and recovery arrangements more broadly.

The evaluation found that Resilient Kids made an important contribution to supporting children and young people in flood-affected communities. This was seen in increased access to support services, improvements in knowledge, protective strategies and social and emotional wellbeing, and the program's ability to reach priority groups — including young Aboriginal peoples, young people who identify as LGBTQ+, neurodiverse young people, those living with a disability, and those who had previously disengaged from health and other support services.

Since the completion of Resilient Kids in 2025, the underlying need for support has not gone away. Children and young people in the region continue to experience ongoing, delayed and cumulative effects of disaster — needs that Resilient Kids was helping to address for three years following the 2022 floods.

Resilient Kids identified a range of important principles and approaches for designing, commissioning and delivering programs that effectively engage and support children and young people in a disaster resilience context, such as youth participation, flexibility, equity, workforce development and collaborative evaluation and learning.

Above all, the evaluation demonstrates that disaster-affected communities need a more systemic risk-reduction focus to improve disaster resilience for children and young people. This cannot be reduced to the availability of support services post-event; it requires locally led, regionally coordinated action and the meaningful participation of young people across the spectrum of disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

A snapshot of impact from Resilient Kids.

Reaching children and young people with support

4,352 children and young people engaged in **education and skill-building workshops** across 73 local schools in Stream 1

802 children and young people received **individual or group support** via six local hubs in Stream 2

~40 young people were engaged in **Adventure Therapy**, specialist nature-based therapeutic support for children disengaged from mainstream services

173 Aboriginal young people engaged in **Aboriginal Resilient Kids**, which offered culturally-led counselling, mentoring and group programs

643 children and young people participated in nine **Youth Participation Fund programs** designed for priority cohorts

Improving wellbeing and resilience outcomes

>82% participants in Stream 1 workshops agreed they **know about services** that can help, can **make good decisions** about their wellbeing, and feel better about **preparing for disasters** as a result of participating in a disaster education workshop.

9.2% more young people reported a **normal level of social and emotional wellbeing** after receiving Stream 2 individual therapeutic support

4.3 times the rate of young people had **social and emotional wellbeing concerns** when commencing Stream 2 therapeutic support compared to a normative sample of Australian youth, showing the program reached those who needed support *(comparison to 2015 Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing)*

24.8% fewer Aboriginal young people had **high or very high psychological distress** in their last assessment than their first

Learning about resilience in disaster-affected communities

- ✓ Developmental evaluation approach with quarterly learning loops and annual evaluation reports helped to learn and refine the approach
- ✓ Adaptations included refining activities to be more fun and engaging, increasing parent/caregiver support, expanding Adventure Therapy and broadening eligibility to reflect delayed and indirect disaster impacts.
- ✓ Community Disaster Resilience Assessment findings highlighted the need for more systemic change to involve young people in disaster planning arrangements and address their vulnerabilities and risks, beyond just the availability of support services

Why Resilient Kids?

The impact of disasters on children and young people

Natural disasters can have profound and sustained impacts on the mental health, wellbeing and development of children and young people.

Exposure to events such as flooding, bushfires and cyclones disrupts routines, education, housing stability and social connections, and can increase experiences of fear, loss and uncertainty. These disruptions can affect emotional regulation, learning, behaviour and relationships — with effects often emerging or re-emerging over time rather than immediately following an event.

Children and young people can be particularly vulnerable in disaster contexts due to their developmental stage and reliance on adults, systems and stable environments for safety and support. Without timely and appropriate supports, disaster exposure can contribute to increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, trauma-related stress and disengagement from school and community life.

These impacts are not evenly distributed. They are shaped by the severity and cumulative nature of exposure, as well as by existing social, economic and structural inequities. Children and young people who experience existing mental health challenges, disability, neurodivergence, disadvantage, housing instability, or who face systemic barriers — including young Aboriginal peoples — may experience heightened risk and reduced access to early support.

Understanding disaster resilience

Contemporary disaster resilience policy and evidence emphasise that resilience is not just an individual attribute, but a dynamic community-level process shaped by relationships, circumstances and systems.

For children and young people, resilience can be understood as the capacity to adapt and recover following adversity, supported by protective factors such as safe and predictable routines, trusted relationships with adults, peer connection, emotional coping skills, and access to appropriate supports when needed.

Resilience also relates to the ability of communities, schools and service systems to respond to children's needs during and after a disaster, and to mitigate the impacts of future disasters. This includes the availability of professional services, coordinated pathways to identify and connect young people with help, and a workforce able to deliver trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate care.

The 2022 Northern Rivers floods

In early 2022, communities across the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales experienced catastrophic flooding, resulting in widespread damage to homes, schools, community infrastructure and essential services.

Thousands of residents were displaced, with some communities experiencing repeated flooding over a short period. The scale, severity and cumulative nature of these events created significant and ongoing challenges for recovery.

Children and young people in the region were exposed to sudden displacement, disruption to schooling and social networks, prolonged housing instability, and heightened stress within families already managing significant loss.

Several years on from the 2022 floods, many communities have continued to experience the combined effects of disaster recovery, cost-of-living pressures, workforce shortages and constrained service availability.

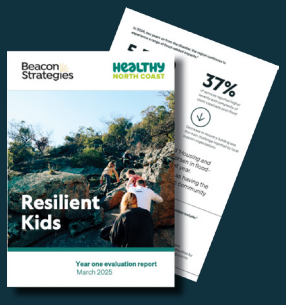
Importantly, community feedback and emerging data indicated that the effects of the floods extended well beyond those directly impacted at the time of the event — to children and young people experiencing delayed, indirect or cumulative stress over time.

"These kids had floods in 2017, they had fires in 2019, two years of COVID, and the floods in 2022. Even if they're not talking about it, it's part of their shared experience."

Local service provider



More information about the significant impact of the 2022 floods on communities across the Northern Rivers region is provided in the Resilient Kids Year 1 Evaluation Report.



Developing a coordinated response

In response to the 2022 floods, Healthy North Coast received a $10 million grant from the Australian Government's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to design, deliver and evaluate Resilient Kids. The program aimed to support the mental health, wellbeing and resilience of children and young people aged 8 to 18 years living in flood-affected communities.

Critically, the model was shaped through extensive consultation and co-design with young people and other local stakeholders. In late 2022, HNC led the Resilience Youth Survey, capturing responses from more than 6,600 children and young people across 75 schools in the region. Survey findings were supplemented by student and community workshops.

Findings highlighted that young people generally had protective factors to support their resilience and wellbeing, but a considerable proportion of young people also experienced issues such as trauma-related stress, disengagement from learning, anxiety, and safety and risk factors.

Co-design workshops with mental health and education professionals, children and young people, families, and community members highlighted the need for trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive approaches, as well as flexibility to adapt to local community contexts. Further service design work with Northern Rivers Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) guided culturally relevant initiatives for Aboriginal young peoples.

The key needs that children and young people identified through this process were:

- counselling and mental health support
- opportunities for social connection
- development of problem solving and life skills
- access to safe recreational activities
- opportunities to have a voice in decisions that affect young people

From these inputs, the Resilient Kids program model was developed, which aimed to provide different types and levels of support across a continuum of need. A Reference Group with representation from key local stakeholders met regularly throughout the program's implementation to support a coordinated response, offer advice and reflect on learnings throughout program delivery.

Commissioning local partner organisations

In June 2023, following the comprehensive design process of Resilient Kids, Healthy North Coast sought suitable providers to respond to a request for tender to deliver Stream 1 and 2 of the Resilient Kids Program. Due to the multi-stream approach of the co-designed service delivery model, Healthy North Coast encouraged local service providers to apply through consortia models.

Through a comprehensive procurement and commissioning process, Healthy North North Coast identified, evaluated and contracted providers who were most suited to effectively and efficiently deliver services outlined in the tender documentation. Commissioning decision-making for Resilient Kids Stream 3 was undertaken in partnership with Northern Rivers Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.

What was Resilient Kids?

A multi-stream model across a continuum of need

Resilient Kids was a program delivered through a multi-stream model intended to provide different types and levels of support across a continuum of need. Each stream had distinct approaches, which together aimed to improve access to early intervention supports, strengthen coping skills and social connection, and build the capacity of communities and service systems to respond to the needs of children and young people in disaster recovery contexts.

Stream 1: Education and skill-building — delivered primarily through schools, focusing on disaster resilience education, social and emotional wellbeing, and related skill development for children and young people.

Stream 2: Community resilience-building supports — delivered through community hubs and outreach, providing a mix of early intervention, individual and group-based therapeutic support, youth activities and specialist adventure-based therapy for children and young people with varying levels of need. A Youth Participation Fund also provided targeted grant funding for local initiatives to engage young people who may experience barriers to inclusion.

Stream 3: Aboriginal Resilient Kids — providing culturally tailored, Aboriginal-led supports for Aboriginal children and young peoples. This included a combination of individual support, group activities, drop-in spaces and capacity-building initiatives for Aboriginal youth workers and local stakeholders.

Program logic model outlining the activities and intended outcomes of Resilient Kids:

Impact goal	A more resilient population of young people who have improved mental health and social and emotional wellbeing and are willing and able to seek and receive help when required.

Activities

- Commission Resilient Kids activities and service providers
- Undertake developmental evaluation with regular reporting and learning
- Deliver education and skill-building activities predominantly in schools
- Deliver individual and group-based therapeutic and wellbeing support via community hubs and outreach
- Establish a Youth Participation Fund to support locally led initiatives
- Deliver Aboriginal Resilient Kids program involving culturally safe mental health support, recreation and education

Short-term outcomes

Psychological support
- Young people receive effective counselling and support that meets their needs when they seek it out
- Less stigma around seeking counselling support

Capacity building
- Young people are better able to manage their wellbeing and support their peers
- Young people feel more confident to prepare for and recover from disasters, and take climate change action
- Parents, caregivers and educators have the capacity to provide emotional and social support to children

Community connection
- Young people have opportunities to participate in age-appropriate community activities and programs
- Community members and leaders provide support to and connect with young people

Awareness and access
- Supports are easy to find and access
- Collaboration between support systems is improved

Long-term outcomes

- Children and young people have improved resilience, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing
- Children and young people have increased health literacy and help-seeking behaviours
- Children and young people feel more prepared for disasters and a greater sense of agency to take action on climate change
- Increased social connection within communities
- Communities and systems are more disaster resilient and better able to support children and young people before, during and after disasters

Evaluating Resilient Kids

The evaluation covered all Resilient Kids activities delivered up to June 2025 and examined both the implementation and outcomes of Resilient Kids — how the program was delivered in practice, who it reached, and the changes observed for children, young people, families and communities over time.

The evaluation followed a developmental approach, which focused on how emerging insights and evidence could be used to learn and strengthen Resilient Kids over time.

The evaluation was guided by a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework developed collaboratively with representatives from HNC and Resilient Kids providers.

Evaluation questions were developed and agreed across five domains to guide the evaluation in understanding the program from different perspectives, as shown below.



Data collection

The evaluation involved collecting and analysing data from a range of sources including:

- client and activity data supplied by providers under an agreed data specification
- participant-reported experience and outcome measures collected at intake and case closure
- quarterly performance reports submitted by providers to HNC
- online evaluation survey administered to Reference Group members, Youth Participation Fund participants and other local stakeholders
- two waves of semi-structured interviews and focus groups in mid-2024 and again in mid-2025 to hear directly from children and young people, parents and caregivers, and program staff
- facilitating a Community Disaster Resilience Assessment (CDRA) with a sample of local stakeholders to explore four domains (i.e. community connectedness, risk and vulnerability, planning and procedures, available resources) focusing on children and young people
- targeted desktop review of policy, strategy and other relevant evidence to triangulate findings within the wider context

Limitations of the evaluation

Variation in data quality and completeness was observed across streams, providers and measures. Common limitations included incomplete baseline or follow-up outcome data, variability in how certain client data was recorded (particularly LGBTQ+ status, cultural diversity and disability), and disengagement rates reasonably typical of voluntary or time-limited services. To manage these limitations, the evaluation emphasised triangulation across multiple data sources and methods, and acknowledged where data was insufficient to support conclusions.

What did we learn?

Evaluation domain 1: Appropriateness

Resilient Kids was widely perceived as appropriate, age-relevant and accessible, with informal and non-clinical service settings supporting engagement and reducing stigma associated with help-seeking. At the same time, the model was less suitable for children and young people not ready to engage in professional support or experiencing more acute distress, and access varied by location, transport and based on influences of adults.

A continuum of service approaches

Resilient Kids involved a mix of service approaches ranging from universal, skills-based activities delivered to large cohorts through to targeted, ongoing therapeutic supports for young people with more complex needs.

Across the program, approaches included community-based events and activities, education and skill-building workshops, individual and group-based psychological and wellbeing support, parent and caregiver education and support, structured recreational and therapeutic activities, and initiatives that connected schools, services and community organisations.

Stream 1 centred on interactive, school-based workshops focused on social and emotional wellbeing, disaster resilience and related skills. Workshop content and facilitation approaches were adapted over time in response to feedback from students and schools, including adjustments to session structure and delivery methods to make them more hands on and fun for participating young people.

Stream 2 incorporated a broader mix of approaches delivered through a 'hub-and-spoke model' with a presence in local communities and outreach into smaller towns and villages. Approaches included:

- brief early-intervention support to address mild mental health concerns
- longer term counselling support for children and young people to respond to moderate mental health challenges
- care coordination to support connection to external services where required
- social and emotional wellbeing groups
- therapeutic group programs
- specialist adventure therapy
- local youth events and workshops

The Youth Participation Fund supported nine discrete, place-based programs delivered by local organisations for priority cohorts, including young people disengaged from education, neurodiverse young people, LGBTQ+ young people, and young Aboriginal peoples. Approaches varied across programs and included creative arts, outdoor adventure, leadership development, cultural activities and structured group programs. Each program was locally led and delivered over approximately 12 months. A full list of Youth Participation Fund programs is provided at **Appendix A**.

Stream 3 involved culturally tailored approaches for Aboriginal children and young peoples. Activities included individual clinical interventions, mentoring support, drop-in spaces and group activities in communities, with an emphasis on culturally responsive practice such as yarning.



Service settings that felt safe and welcoming

Resilient Kids activities were delivered across a diverse range of settings — schools, service hubs, community venues, youth-friendly spaces and where young people lived (including temporary housing villages).

Overall, service settings were reported as accessible, informal and non-clinical, which supported engagement and reduced stigma associated with help-seeking.

School settings provided a practical and familiar environment to reach children at scale for delivering education workshops in Stream 1, particularly for younger age groups.

The 'hub and spoke' model of Stream 2 was described by stakeholders as neutral, welcoming spaces that enabled local adaptation and reduced barriers associated with more formal clinical environments. Locations were selected based on the extent of flood impacts and identified community need, including:

- Lismore Hub [Social Futures site]
- Murwillumbah Hub [Murwillumbah Community Centre]
- Ballina Hub [Social Futures site]
- Mullumbimby Hub [Byron Community College]
- Casino Hub [CASPA House]
- Kyogle Hub [Laneway Community Space / Kyogle Family Support Services]

Stream 3 activities were delivered by reaching into community-based settings, schools and where young people lived, particularly youth justice centres, PCYCs, schools and local community spaces. Regularly scheduled activities created an ongoing presence within communities and enabled trust and relationships to form that supported engagement with young people and their families.

What young people and their communities valued most

Children and young people across all streams reported high levels of satisfaction with Resilient Kids activities and with their interactions with program staff. Participants consistently described feeling listened to, supported and respected, and parents and caregivers reported that Resilient Kids aligned with their expectations for accessible, non-judgemental support following the 2022 floods.

Key strengths of the Resilient Kids model identified by participants and stakeholders included:

- free access, particularly for families navigating financial pressures from flood impacts and cost-of-living challenges
- opportunities for healthy peer connection for young people who were socially isolated
- inclusion of climate-related themes, reflecting the concerns of young people about future climate-related disasters
- flexibility to tailor where and how services were delivered for the diverse preferences, developmental needs and wellbeing needs of young people
- co-designing the overall program and local activities with young people's voices to ensure the program understood and responded to their concerns
- including support for children from 8 to 18 years of age, recognising that many existing services are only available for children aged 12 years and over
- offering activities that were fun, practical and created social connection, which helped overcome any negative perceptions of clinical settings or talking therapies
- outreach delivery, which reduced geographic barriers for those living in rural or isolated areas who often lack access to local youth services
- family-inclusive approaches through joint child-parent sessions, direct support for parents/caregivers, and offering both in-home and hub-based support
- prioritising access and engagement of neurodivergent young people and those disengaged from mainstream school settings, who were seen as being significantly impacted by the 2022 floods
- a tailored Aboriginal-led stream designed to offer culturally safe services and develop the Aboriginal youth workforce
- establishment of mechanisms for learning about and strengthening 'what works' through governance groups and communities of practice

Most importantly, Resilient Kids was widely seen as meeting a genuine need within the region, with many children and young people living in the region experiencing often complex mental health challenges but with limited accessibility of existing support services.

Without Resilient Kids, these existing services generally have limited capacity to meet demand. Resilient Kids provided an important investment of resourcing to enable program components that were otherwise not possible within the constraints of existing services, such as more intensive therapeutic work, longer-term case support, working with the wider family, brokerage for access to external specialist interventions and dedicated community engagement activities.

Participant satisfaction and experiences

Stream 1

84% reported facilitators were helpful

85% reported facilitators listened well

81% reported they were happy with the content of the program

92% of Aboriginal participants reported feeling culturally safe

Stream 2

94% reported the team listened well

97% reported satisfaction with service received

92% reported their situation improved

96% of Aboriginal participants reported feeling culturally safe

Youth Participation Fund

92% reported satisfaction with participation in YPF programs

Stream 3

100% reported satisfaction with service received

100% reported feeling culturally safe

Limitations of Resilient Kids

The evaluation also surfaced limitations that affected suitability for some children and young people:

- short-term funding limited continuity of support for children and young people experiencing ongoing psychological, trauma-related and social-related impacts from the 2022 floods, particularly with capacity constraints of existing youth support services
- disaster recovery responses are one aspect of building disaster resilience, particularly in a vulnerable geographic region like the Northern Rivers where future climate-related disasters are likely
- Resilient Kids was most suitable for children and young people who showed some readiness or willingness to engage with support, whereas those experiencing more acute distress, complex behaviours and/or unwilling to engage with services remained harder to reach
- some young people with complex circumstances required more frequent and intensive support than what was originally planned
- availability varied by location and was dependent on transport, distribution of activities, and other factors within local communities
- the resource-intensive nature of outreach delivery supported reach but required significant workforce capacity
- eligibility criteria excluded younger children under eight years and initially restricted access to only those young people who were directly impacted by the 2022 floods
- limited ability to provide the level of parent/caregiver support to meet the level of demand from adults — particularly prior to the eventual establishment of a dedicated family-inclusive practitioner in Stream 2

Stakeholders also identified broader system-level constraints that affected suitability, including housing insecurity, cost-of-living pressures, domestic and family violence, and limited access to some external services. While these factors were outside the scope of Resilient Kids, they were recognised as important contextual conditions that influenced what was possible.

Adapting to emerging local needs

Ongoing learning, reflection and adapting program activities in response to unmet or emerging needs was an important feature of Resilient Kids.

These adaptations were informed by ongoing feedback from children and young people, parents and caregivers and program staff through local co-design activities, quarterly learning loops with the Evaluation Working Group and annual formative evaluation reporting.

Program delivery was refined over time to better respond to young people's needs and preferences, participation trends and changes in local context. Examples included:

- **Disaster education workshops** — session structure, facilitation style and activity design was refined to deliver important program content while responding to different school policies, time constraints and feedback from students and educators about wanting more practical and hands-on activities.
- **Youth Participation Fund** — children and young people were involved in determining which programs were funded, and their ongoing input resulted in some different programs being delivered from those originally proposed that were more reflective of young people's interests and needs (e.g. leadership programs; spaces for peer connection).
- **More support for parents and caregivers** — a dedicated Family-Inclusive Practitioner was established in Stream 2 alongside delivery of a Resilient Parenting Program in response to an identified need for and willingness of parents/caregivers to be actively engaged in support alongside children.
- **More adventure therapy support** — increased resourcing was provided for adventure therapy as part of Stream 2 in response to the identified need and desire for more responsive models of therapeutic support for young people who experience difficulties with traditional service environments.
- **Outcome measures** — the items and wording included in assessment tools was refined (e.g. post-workshop survey for Stream 1), and tailored approaches to appropriately engage young people in outcome assessments (Stream 2) were used to gather valuable assessment data while also building rapport and trust.
- **Eligibility/suitability criteria** — understanding of the program's intended audience evolved over time, with a broader and more nuanced definition of what it means to be impacted by a disaster. This incorporated young people who may have experienced more indirect, delayed or cumulative effects of the 2022 floods, rather than narrowly those whose house was damaged during the event.

What did we learn?

Evaluation domain 2: Effectiveness

Increased availability, awareness and access to support for children and young people living in communities impacted by disasters

Resilient Kids was effective at providing multiple entry points into support through school-based activities, local youth-friendly hubs, community outreach and events, and referrals from local services. Local stakeholders reported that availability and awareness of support had significantly increased due to Resilient Kids, although there were some pockets of limited awareness of the program.

Awareness and reach of activities increased over time but remained uneven in some local communities, with access shaped by factors including visibility of the program, relationships within local communities, parental influences and help-seeking, transport and service capacity relative to demand. Some young people felt the name 'Resilient Kids' did not resonate with them, as it was patronising or implied they needed to 'toughen up'.

Stream 1: Education and skill-building delivered 105 educational workshops with 73 schools participating across approximately seven school terms during the implementation period. Most activities consisted of half-day information and education sessions, with fewer full-day workshops delivered. Two out-of-school workshops were also held, including one session with TAFE and another school holiday program for young people disengaged from school.

Expressions of interest to participate were sought from 196 schools across the region, with 38% confirming interest and 37% following through with at least one program delivered. Schools that reported cumulative exposure to disasters or limited access to other supports were more likely to engage, while some schools expressed reluctance due to concerns about re-traumatisation, competing priorities or perceptions that students did not need additional support.

At a local level, engagement with schools was highest in Kyogle and Tweed local government areas (LGAs) with 57% and 51% of schools participating respectively, with lower levels of engagement amongst schools in Richmond Valley (21%) and Lismore (26%).

Stream 2: Community resilience-building supports offered access to direct psychological and wellbeing support through individual and group cases. Referrals were sourced from across community services, schools and self-referral, and service reach increased over time as these pathways developed through relationships.

A total of 802 unique children and young people were engaged through 785 cases of individual or group support delivered by Social Futures. A quarter of children and young people were engaged in multiple cases — either repeated cases of individual support, group programs, or a combination.

Stream 2 delivered over 4,500 service contacts for individual and group cases, with the majority involving direct participation from a child or young person. The remaining portion involved parents and caregivers as supporters, or case coordination with other providers. Support activities mainly involved counselling, assessment, provision of information/advice and referrals, and some family capacity-building.

Stream 2 also delivered a mix of 'high reach' community events that aimed to engage with children and young people in local communities, and promote awareness and access to other types of therapeutic support available through Resilient Kids. A total of 3,138 children and young people participated in ~50 activities, including community events (26), capacity-building workshops (18), and co-design workshops (6).

In addition to the services delivered by Social Futures described above, Adventure Therapy support was delivered by Human Nature as a specialist approach to engage young people who were disengaged from mainstream services. Analysis of data for a subset of 28 young people participating in adventure therapy showed support was intensive, including an average of almost 22 face-to-face therapeutic sessions and an additional 20 case management appointments per client.

The **Youth Participation Fund** extended access through nine locally led, place-based programs, reaching an estimated 643 unique participants across 1,697 activities. Participation was reasonably steady over time following initial establishment, and YPF-funded activities continued to reach new participants each quarter.

There was variability in the number of unique participants by YPF program, reflecting differing delivery models and intensity. Some YPF activities were high-reach with lower intensity (e.g. weekly sporting activities, social events) while others were more intensive and sustained with smaller cohorts (e.g. outdoor camps, leadership programs, cultural immersion).

Stream 3: Aboriginal Resilient Kids supported access to culturally tailored supports for Aboriginal children and young peoples through both enrolment-based support and group activities attended by enrolled and non-enrolled participants.

Overall, 173 Aboriginal children and young peoples were enrolled in the program. The total reach of activities was much wider, with an estimated 1,674 participants when including non-enrolled attendees at group activities, reflecting an average of 10.8 participants per group activity. Group activities took place in community 'safe spaces' such as BBQs in local parks, fitness sessions at youth centres in Tweed Heads and Lismore, pottery groups, and wellbeing programs delivered within the Acmena Youth Justice Centre in Grafton.

Improving young people's wellbeing, disaster knowledge and self-management skills

Stream 1 activities led to high levels of self-reported knowledge gains across key aspects of wellbeing and resilience. More than 4,200 Stream 1 participants completed a short post-session outcome measure. Combining 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree' responses, agreement was highest for *Knowing What Services Can Help* (87%) and *Being Able to Make Good Decisions About Wellbeing* (85%), with strong results also for *Feeling Better About Getting Ready for Natural Disasters* (83%) and *Knowing I Have Strengths To Get Through Tough Times* (81%).

Agreement was lower for the item relating to *I Know Some Things I Can Do To Slow Down Climate Change* (68%), signalling both the importance and challenge of shifting young people's sense of agency and control about tackling climate change.

In **Stream 2,** for young people aged 13-18 years who were engaged in individual therapeutic support and completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) at baseline and follow-up, with statistically significant improvements observed in wellbeing, though changes were relatively small to moderate. Relative improvements were seen in the areas of *Hyperactivity, Conduct Problems, Emotional Problems* and *Prosocial* items.

Importantly, Stream 2 participants reported baseline levels of social and emotional wellbeing categorised as *Of Concern* at a rate 4.3 times higher than the wider Australian youth population, which highlights the program reached those young people who require therapeutic support.

For younger children aged 8–12, the Circumstances SCORE showed improvements between first and last assessment, including *Mental Health* (+0.50) and *Education and Skills Training* (+0.35) across the 5-point rating scale. However, baseline scores were generally already at 'Moderate' or 'Good' so there was limited capacity for positive change in scores for many participants.

Adventure Therapy showed relatively strong quantitative outcomes. The mean Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) score for 26 matched participants increased from 23.0 (below the clinical cut-point of 25) to 29.7 (above), which was a statistically significant improvement of 6.7 points with a large effect size. The Outcomes Star, which measured functioning across seven life domains (on a 5-point scale), showed improvement in every domain between first and last assessment, with the largest gains in *Feelings and Emotions* (+1.22) and *School, Training and Work* (+0.94).

Stream 3 used the Kessler 5 (K5) Psychological Distress Scale and a brief Quality of Life (QoL) measure to measure outcomes for enrolled participants. For 26 matched first/last K5 assessments, the mean total score reduced from 11.3 to 10.1. While this difference was not statistically significant, the proportion of participants scoring at or above the clinical threshold for High or Very High psychological distress reduced from 58.1% at baseline to 33.3% at follow-up — a substantial shift away from clinical-level distress over their engagement in the program. The Quality of Life scale showed small positive shifts across all three domains (i.e. Physical, Psychological, Overall) between baseline and follow-up.

Taken together, Stream 3 outcome data suggest modest average improvements in distress and quality of life, alongside a meaningful reduction in the proportion of participants experiencing clinically significant distress.

Mechanisms of change

Analysis of qualitative insights gathered through participant feedback, interviews, focus groups and other stakeholder contributions highlighted several key mechanisms of change that were reported as contributing to positive wellbeing and resilience outcomes for children and young people, including:

1. **Supportive relationships and therapeutic alliances:** Trusted relationships with skilled youth mental health workers enabled young people to feel safe enough to engage, particularly those who had previous difficult experiences with mental health services.
2. **Emotional regulation and self-management:** Young people's capacity to recognise, understand and manage their emotions improved, with parents reporting reductions in emotional escalation and disengagement due to using practical strategies.
3. **Confidence and decision-making**: Approaches that emphasised young people's values, choices and strengths helped to build confidence, self-esteem and agency.
4. **Social connection:** Group-based activities and non-clinical settings helped to normalise help-seeking and reduce stigma. For many young people, this was the first opportunity to learn and talk openly about emotions, relationships, worries, identity and self-care.
5. **Improvements across daily contexts:** Parents and educators observed improvements in school attendance, focus and behaviour, with young people applying program-learned skills across multiple environments.
6. **Navigation of services:** Families were supported to navigate complex systems, advocate for their children and access specialist services they had previously not had access to.

Stream 1 snapshot

School-based educational programs focused on resilience, social and emotional wellbeing, and disaster preparedness, plus parent and carer support.

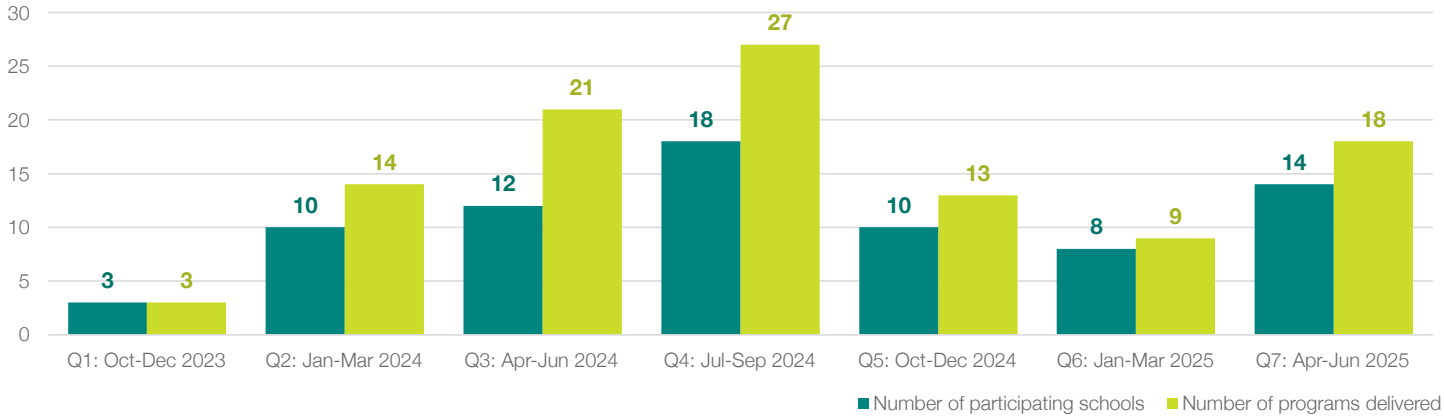


Figure 1 Participation of schools in Stream 1 activities by quarter

105 total education programs delivered

73 local schools engaged

37% proportion of local schools who received a program

41 average participants per program *(range of 3 to 103)*

4,352 children and young people participated

16% identified as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person

16% reported having autism or cognitive disability

81% of participants who were primary school-aged (8-12 years)

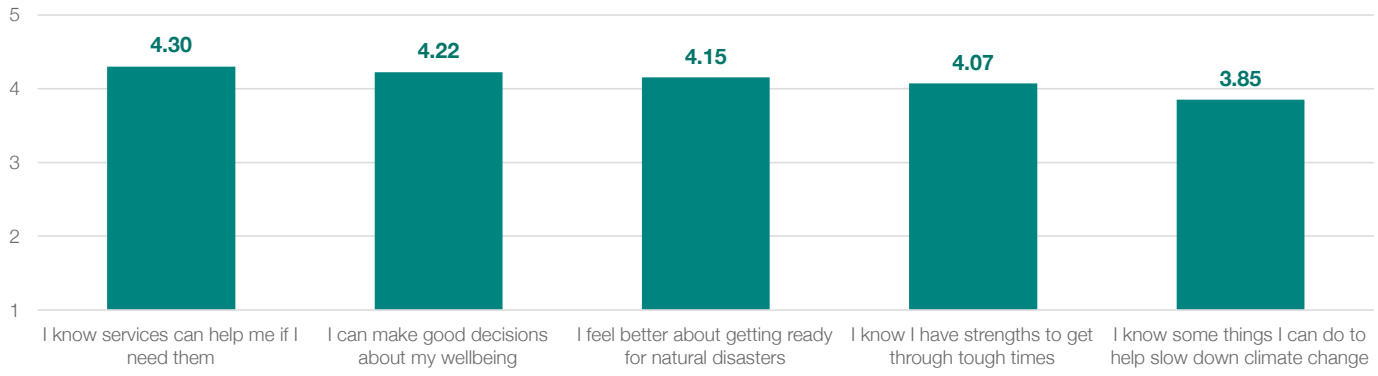


Figure 2 Participant-rated outcomes from Stream 1 activities

Stream 2 snapshot

Counselling, social and emotional wellbeing activities and other therapeutic supports for young people and their families.

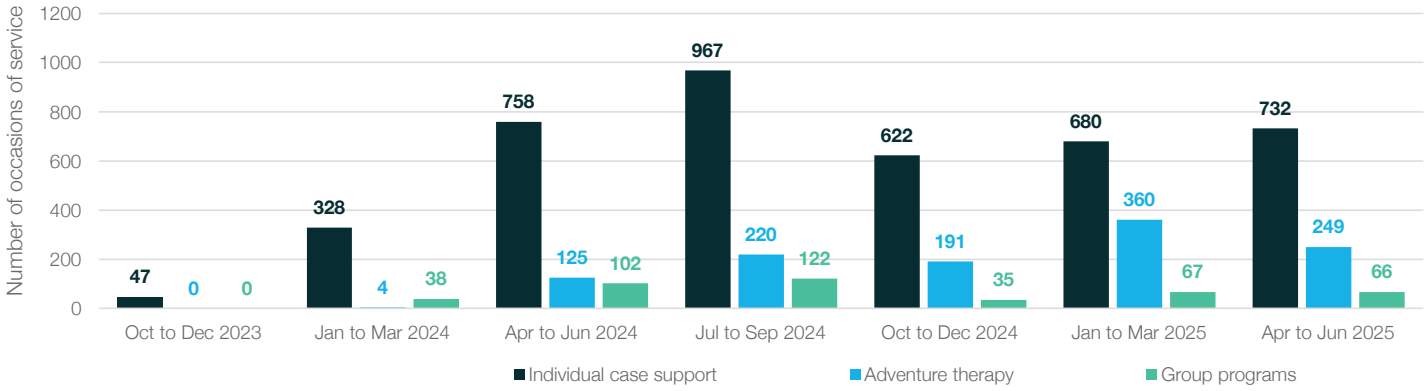


Figure 3 **Number of Stream 2 occasions of service delivered by quarter and activity type**

Individual cases

592 children and young people received 1:1 therapeutic support

115 parents or caregivers participated within a case

4,134 total sessions delivered

8.2 avg. sessions per case, ranging from a min of 1 to a max of 58

66% of sessions delivered face-to-face in one of six community Wellbeing Hubs

55% of cases completed as planned *(where goals were achieved, person no longer needed support or person was connected to another service)*

Brokerage-funded activities

30 community events, capacity-building and co-design workshops held

3,138 total attendees at brokerage-funded activities

Adventure therapy

37+ young people engaged in long-term intensive support

1,149 face-to-face therapeutic sessions completed

~48% proportion of contacts for face-to-face therapeutic support

78% were assessed as 'Moderate Intensity' level of need at intake

Group cases

42 social and emotional wellbeing group programs completed

20 therapeutic group programs completed

10 parent/carer group programs completed

430 total sessions delivered

Stream 2 snapshot (continued)

Characteristics of young people engaged in individual or group support

56% of participants were female, 41% male and 0.8% intersex or non-binary

52% were aged 13-18 years, with 46% aged 8-12 years

15% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

4% reported speaking a language other than English as their main language

6% identified as LGBTQ+

19% reported having autism or a cognitive or other disability

Measurement of outcomes for young people

A range of outcome measures were used in Stream 2 — the Circumstances SCORE for children aged 8-12 and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for young people aged 13-18 receiving individual case support, and the Outcomes Star for young people engaged in Adventure Therapy.

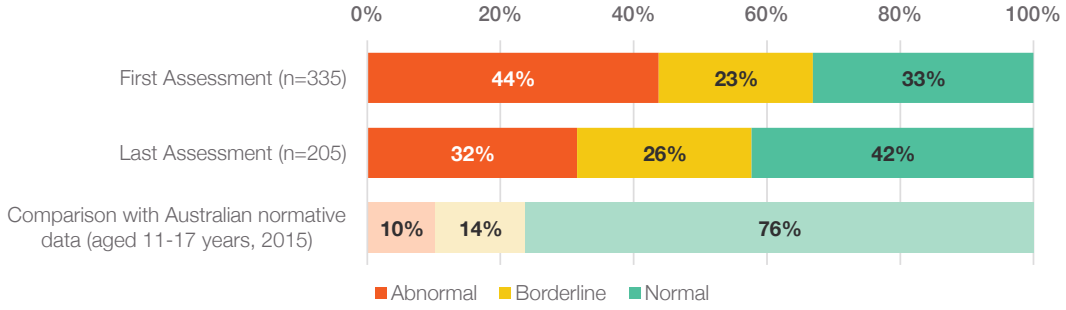


Figure 4 Participant-rated outcomes using SDQ Total Difficulties

***Interpretation note**: SDQ Total Difficulties score is categorised as 'Normal', 'Borderline' or 'Abnormal' based on recognised scoring guidance, and shown with normative data for the Australian population aged 11-17 years (2015) for comparison.*

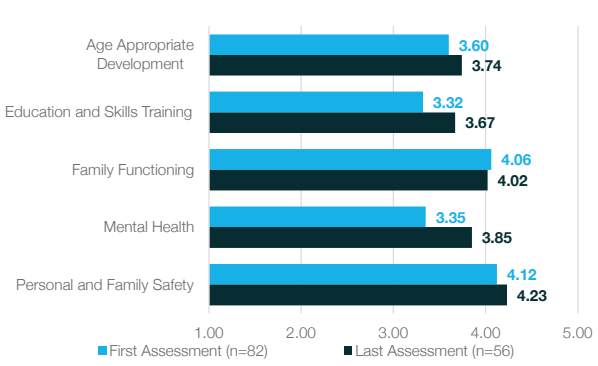


Figure 5 Participant-rated outcomes using Circumstances SCORE

***Interpretation note**: For Circumstances SCORE, a higher score represents a more positive result, with results shown as a weighted average along a scale of 1 to 5.*

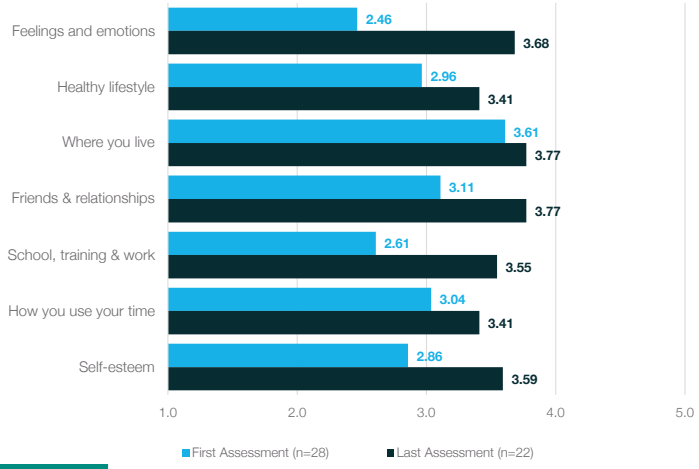


Figure 6 Participant-rated outcomes using Outcomes Star

***Interpretation note**: For Outcomes Star, a higher score represents a more positive result, with results shown as a weighted average along a scale of 1 to 5.*

Youth Participation Fund snapshot

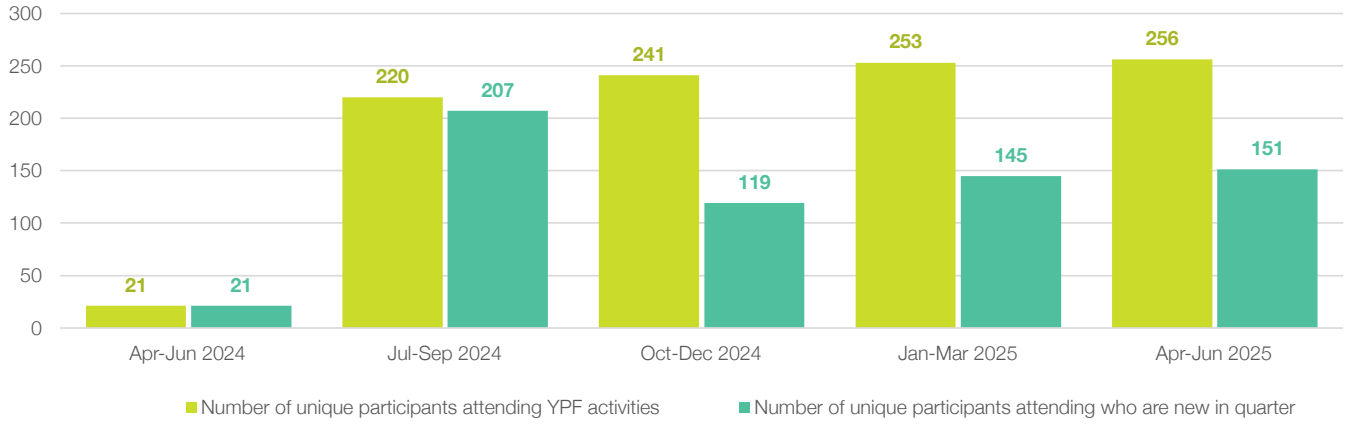


Figure 7 **Engagement in Youth Participation Fund activities by quarter**

9 YPF-funded programs delivered by eight local organisations

$900k+ total amount of funding provided

1,697 funded activities completed

643 young people participated in activities

15% of participating young people were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

12% of participating young people were neurodivergent

9% of participating young people identified as LGBTQ+

2% of participating young people identified as culturally and linguistically diverse

25% of participating young people were disengaged from school or education

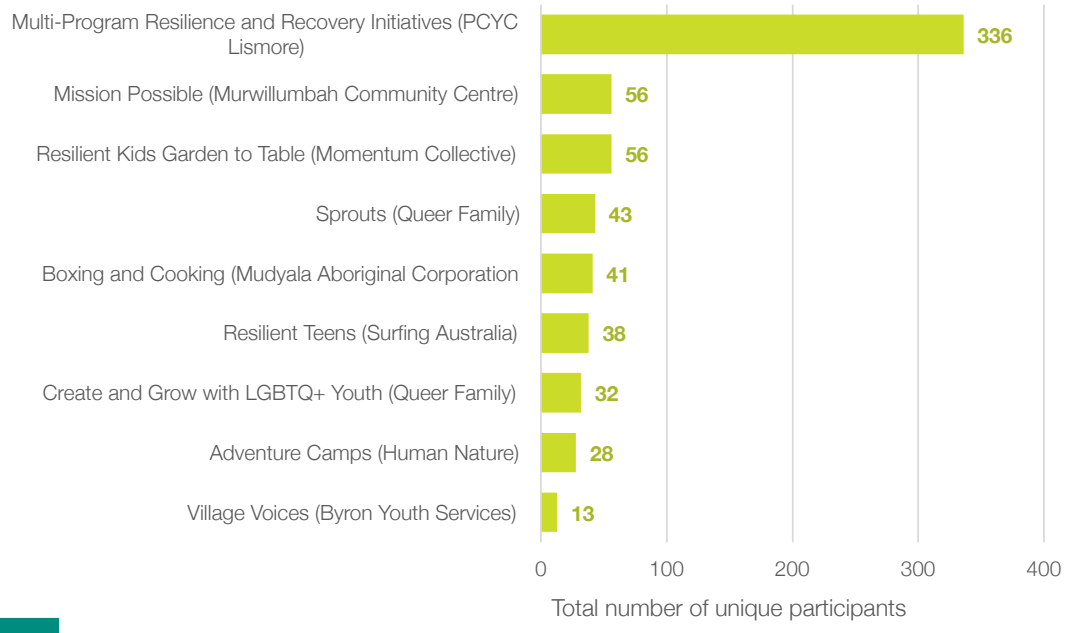


Figure 8 **Breakdown of total participants by individual YPF program**

Stream 3 snapshot

Addressing the fundamental emotional, cultural, social and recreational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

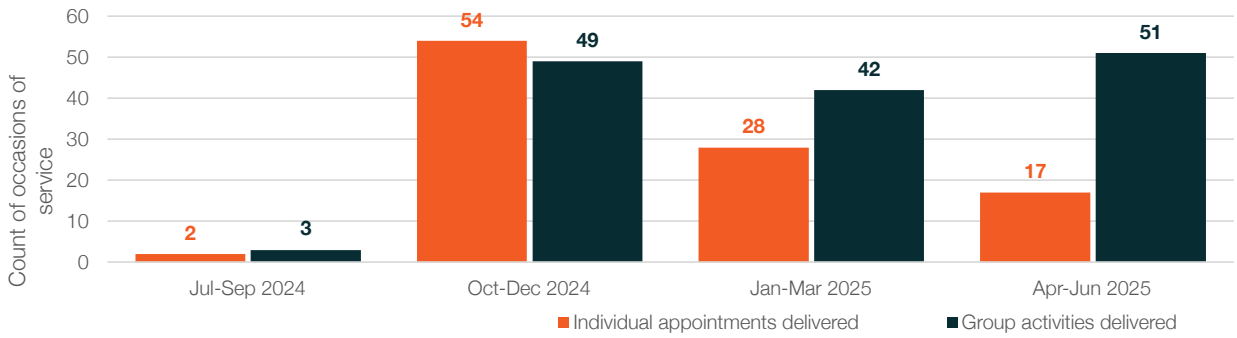


Figure 9 Number of Stream 3 activities delivered by type and quarter

246 total individual or group activities completed

1,674 total reach of Aboriginal Resilient Kids program, based on count of each instance of participation in an activity

173 Aboriginal young people enrolled in the program

69% participants were aged 13-18 years

60% participants were male, with 36% female

9% participants identified as LGBTQ+

12% participants were living with autism or a cognitive disability

23% referrals to Stream 3 enrolments came from schools/education

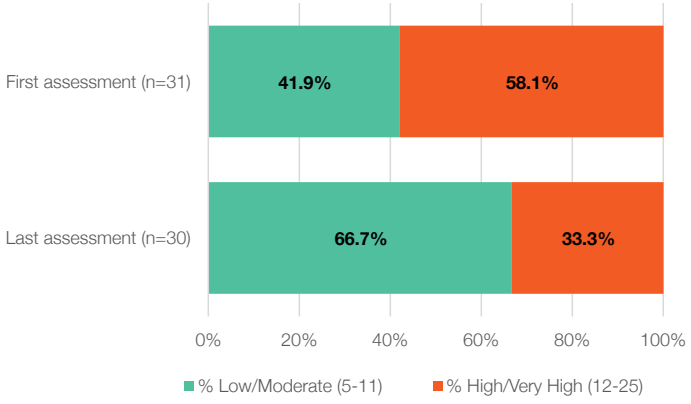


Figure 10 Participant-rated outcomes using K5 Distress Scale

***Interpretation note**: Total K5 score is categorised as Low/Moderate or High/Very High based on recognised scoring guidance and shown here as proportion of all scores within each category.*

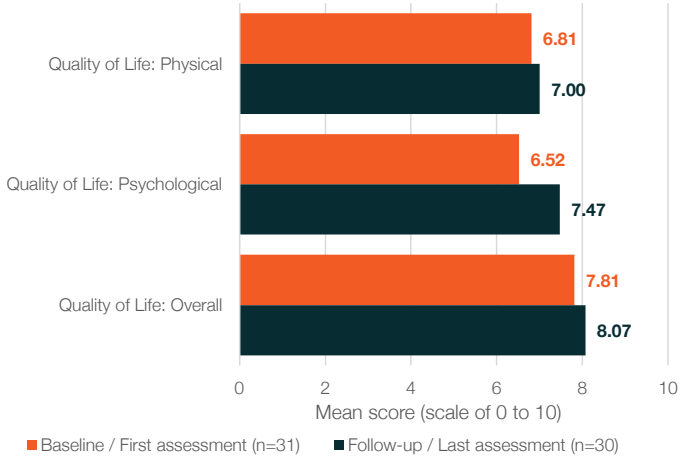


Figure 11 Participant-rated outcomes using Quality of Life (QoL) scale

***Interpretation note**: For QoL Scale, a higher score represents a more positive result, with results shown as a weighted average along a scale of 0 to 10.*

Improving capacity of adult caregivers to support young people

Stream 1 activities supported parents and caregivers to increase their knowledge and awareness about children's wellbeing, disaster recovery and available supports. This occurred through face-to-face information sessions delivered in school settings and through resource kits distributed to children to take home to discuss and share with their families.

A total of 25 information sessions were delivered to parents and caregivers across just 8 of the 73 participating schools (11.0%), highlighting difficulties in schools' willingness and/or ability to coordinate parent-specific sessions. An estimated 2,392 resource kits were distributed to participating children to extend conversations about wellbeing and resilience at home.

In **Stream 2,** capacity-building for parents and caregivers occurred primarily through dedicated parent/caregiver sessions, joint child-parent work with a family-inclusive counsellor, parent-specific group programs and opportunistic guidance alongside support for children and young people.

A total of 148 parents and caregivers participated in at least one service contact as part of Stream 2. Engagement increased notably in the latter quarters of 2025, coinciding with the establishment of a dedicated Family-Inclusive Practitioner within the Stream 2 workforce model. Nine parenting-specific group programs were facilitated, with a total of 50 sessions delivered to 35 parents and caregivers.

Feedback from parents and caregivers identified strengthening across six interrelated areas:

- emotional regulation and co-regulation skills
- increased knowledge, tools and confidence to support children
- enhanced communication and stronger family relationships
- greater capacity to navigate services and advocate for children
- reduced parental stress and emotional load
- whole-of-family engagement, leading to more stable routines and consistent household functioning.

Stream 3 engaged with families in local communities and built trusted relationships with parents and caregivers, which was highlighted as integral to engaging Aboriginal young people and overcoming common barriers and resistance to engaging in support services. Parents and caregivers weren't provided with dedicated support independently of their children, but regularly participated in community events.

A strong finding from program staff was the deep disappointment expressed by families of children engaged in Stream 3 about the program's closure. This was observed by program staff in a reluctance to accept referrals to alternative services, and anticipated non-engagement with services in future, contributing to isolation and lack of access to valuable support for young people.

"While they do good work in therapy, it's really hard for a young person to generalise that to their external world. So if the parents aren't getting some education around supporting young people to emotionally regulate or creating safe spaces or effective communication, then you limit the benefit for the young person."

Resilient Kids program staff

What did we learn?

Evaluation domain 3: Implementation

Implementation was enabled by established providers, strong local partnerships and a consortium delivery model, which supported rapid establishment, trust-building and the ability to deliver a broad range of activities across the region. A suitably capable and multidisciplinary workforce helped uplift the capacity of the local system to respond to need. Implementation was constrained by time-limited funding, compressed timeframes and a set of operational and contextual pressures including workforce demands, geography, infrastructure and demand consistently exceeding capacity.

Partnerships and local relationships

Resilient Kids was delivered through a consortium of local organisations with established community presence and relationships. Stakeholders reported that this enabled the program to be established quickly, build trust and draw on local knowledge about the needs and preferences of children and young people.

The Youth Participation Fund extended program reach by engaging smaller, locally embedded youth organisations that would otherwise have been unlikely to be part of a program of this size and scale. Across all streams, partnerships with community organisations, schools and health services enabled referral pathways and supported coordinated delivery — critical given the constrained capacity of existing supports in the region.

Workforce development

The program developed a capable, professional and multidisciplinary workforce that considerably uplifted the size of the region's youth-supporting workforce. A key feature was flexibility in professional background and discipline: rather than recruiting only mental health clinicians, the workforce included youth workers (including Aboriginal Identified roles), counsellors and specialist roles to deliver a mix of community development, therapeutic support, group activities and education workshops.

As the program evolved, additional roles were added to the workforce model — including a dedicated Family-Inclusive Practitioner, specialist counsellors and on-demand telepsychiatry — strengthening the breadth of support delivered within Resilient Kids rather than relying on external referrals.

Collaborative oversight and learning

Resilient Kids benefited from structured governance and evaluation processes that supported ongoing oversight and adaptive decision-making — including a Reference Group involving key partners across the system, and an Evaluation Working Group involving representatives from each provider, HNC and the evaluation team to guide evaluation activities and learn from data in 'real time'.

Involving children, young people and stakeholders

Children and young people were not formally represented within the core governance structures of Resilient Kids, although the Youth Participation Fund Evaluation Panel provided a meaningful opportunity for young people to contribute to decisions about funding allocation. At a practical level, informal involvement of children and young people occurred throughout delivery: program staff sought feedback, adapted activities and used co-design principles to ensure activities were engaging, relevant, age-appropriate and culturally responsive.

Resilient Kids was widely perceived by stakeholders as being grounded in the voices of children and young people, due to the extensive consultation work undertaken during the program's development — but this early engagement did not translate into ongoing involvement of young people in program governance during implementation.

Implementation challenges and constraints

Several implementation-related challenges or constraints emerged through the program that impacted establishment and delivery, particularly:

- The constraints of both time-limited funding and rapid mobilisation timeframes between design and establishment can create challenges or trade-offs in providers' ability to embed the model.
- Frontline staff reported some concerns around capacity and risks relating to caseloads, demands, administrative processes and the emotional load associated with the work.
- Due to the geography of the region, distribution of service settings and common transport barriers for participants, this placed significant travel demands on staff to reach communities.
- Variability of school engagement was an ongoing constraint, with practical challenges around finding the right contact, navigating school demands, competing programs and hesitations linked to retraumatising students or perceived overuse of the term 'resilience'.
- Given the need for support in the region, it was difficult to respond to the breadth of demand within local communities, particularly in areas without well-developed service systems where hidden demand continued to emerge over time and as trust was built.



"It's that need for individualised service models.

For some young people, a group conversation in a school is what they need.

For others, its case management around aspects of their lives; others it's long-term therapy with qualified mental health professionals."

Resilient Kids program staff

What did we learn?

Evaluation domain 4: Impact

Assessing community disaster resilience for children and young people

An important part of the evaluation was better understanding the resilience of local communities to support children and young people in future disaster events, and identifying opportunities to strengthen this resilience beyond Resilient Kids.

To examine this, a Community Disaster Resilience Assessment (CDRA) was undertaken involving facilitated discussions together with a scoring tool focused on four domains — community connectedness, risk and vulnerability, planning and procedures, and available resources. A total of 18 stakeholders participated in the assessment, representing a diverse range of community perspectives including local youth agencies, health and community service providers, local disaster recovery organisations and community groups, councils and community advocates.

Results of the community disaster resilience assessment

A qualitative summary of key themes identified by participants for each of the four assessment domains is described below, which were used to support their rated assessment. Quantitative ratings of each CDRA item are shown on the following page.

Community connectedness

Children and young people's connectedness to community was seen as being shaped by the availability of social activities and the role of parents and caregivers as primary pathways to community life. Stakeholders reported fewer community events, reduced school engagement and inconsistent communication about available activities as a result of disrupted community connection following disasters. Parents were reported to have limited capacity to facilitate community connection due to competing pressures. Stakeholders also pointed to local community groups and grassroots organisations operating in silos with limited resources.

Risk and vulnerability

Children were seen as carrying 'cumulative stress' arising from repeated disaster events, the impacts of COVID-19, domestic and family violence, and ongoing instability related to housing and cost-of-living pressures. Disaster-related information is largely seen as targeted at adults, leaving younger children highly reliant on parents and caregivers to interpret and explain risks. At the same time, parents and caregivers themselves often felt uncertain about how best to support children, particularly when managing their own stress and trauma. Children's emotional and psychological vulnerability was perceived to have received less attention than physical vulnerability.

Planning and procedures

Children and young people were considered but not consistently prioritised within community-level disaster preparedness and response. Most formal planning activity was reported to occur within school settings; teachers were described as feeling underprepared to engage with disaster-related topics, particularly those related to climate change and emotional wellbeing. Planning and decision-making processes were seen as predominantly adult-driven, with few opportunities for children to participate meaningfully in planning or designing solutions.

Available resources

Stakeholders described a range of resources intended to support children, young people and families, but access, suitability and consistency were identified as significant ongoing challenges. Many initiatives were described as short-term, fragmented, difficult to navigate or not specifically tailored to the needs of children and young people. While investment in wellbeing and mental health supports had increased in recent years, it was perceived as still insufficient to support long-term recovery. Where psychological support was available, pathways were described as unclear and confusing for families to navigate. There was also a perception that disaster and climate education is limited and in some cases perceived as alarmist, with insufficient support available for teachers and caregivers to deliver this content effectively.



Figure 12 **Results of Community Disaster Resilience Assessment (CDRA) (n=19)**

Scores represent an average along a five-point scale (where 1=strongly disagree; 3=neutral; 5=strongly agree) from a total of 19 responses.

Opportunities for a more disaster resilient community.

CDRA participants identified practical, system-level opportunities to strengthen how children and young people are supported before, during and after disasters.

Community connectedness

- strengthening communication networks between services, schools and families so events and activities are easy to find
- developing a clear community vision for child and youth wellbeing to guide more consistent approaches
- supporting grassroots and locally led initiatives to foster relationships and a sense of belonging
- increasing accessible, child-friendly spaces and opportunities for play and connection

Risk and vulnerability

- embedding co-design with children and young people to contribute to supports and resources
- addressing the broader factors (housing instability, cost of living, family stressors) that underpin vulnerability
- providing climate change information that reduces fear but helps young people feel climate capable and in control
- strengthening community-based supports
- building resilience through outdoor, nature-based and creative activities
- developing peer support opportunities
- integrating climate change education within the existing curriculum

Planning and procedures

- adopting a coordinated, multi-agency approach to child-centred planning
- strengthening support for caregivers as a critical source of communication and modelling about disaster preparedness
- tailoring communication to children's language, developmental stage and information needs
- mobilising early intervention support within the first week after a disaster event, rather than months later

Available resources

- improving cross-sector coordination to deliver more integrated supports
- prioritising preparedness over reaction
- recognising community connection and social cohesion as protective factors
- establishing clear and accessible pathways
- addressing systemic needs that undermine recovery (e.g. housing shortages)
- enabling flexible, responsive funding to direct resources where they're needed

What did we learn?

Evaluation domain 5: Sustainability

Continuing the partnerships and activities initiated through Resilient Kids

Most Resilient Kids activities came to their planned end upon completion of the funding period in June 2025, with some services continuing to be delivered in high-need areas until December 2025. The time-limited nature of funding was identified as a key constraint on sustaining the benefits of the program.

Many staff and stakeholders expressed concerns about the loss of trust among communities and the risk of increased vulnerability for young people and families in the face of future disasters. At the same time, the program leaves behind valuable partnership relationships, workforce capability, evaluation evidence and informal community continuity.

Resilient Kids contributed to the establishment and strengthening of a range of partnerships, activities and community-based resources during the funded period. These included cross-sector relationships between HNC, service providers, schools, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, youth services and smaller grassroots organisations. Another durable outcome of Resilient Kids is the investment in knowledge and capability within the local youth mental health workforce.

Most importantly, stakeholders consistently reported that the underlying need for support was still present at program closure, particularly given the cumulative exposure to disaster events in the region, exacerbated by increasing housing instability, cost-of-living pressures and climate change anxiety. Rather than supporting young people to simply recover from a one-off event, Resilient Kids was described as having addressed a persistent under-resourcing of support for young people in the region for the period of time that the diverse mix of services and activities were available.

Local stakeholders identified the conditions needed to adequately support children and young people living in disaster-affected communities into the future. This particularly emphasised the need to anticipate, prepare for and build capacity to respond to likely future disasters. This includes:

- adequate, longer term funding for youth mental health and other support services across the region that is reflective of the level of need
- refining existing youth services to reflect ‘what works’ in engaging and supporting diverse young people such as therapeutic support, emotional regulation, peer and family relationships, community participation, disaster preparedness, addressing the wider determinants of vulnerability and taking action on climate change
- embedding youth mental health supports within existing disaster management systems, so that supports for children and young people can be rapidly mobilised during future events
- establishing more formalised and collective regional structures to define roles and responsibilities, support information sharing, and enable collaboration and coordination across multiple agencies and providers

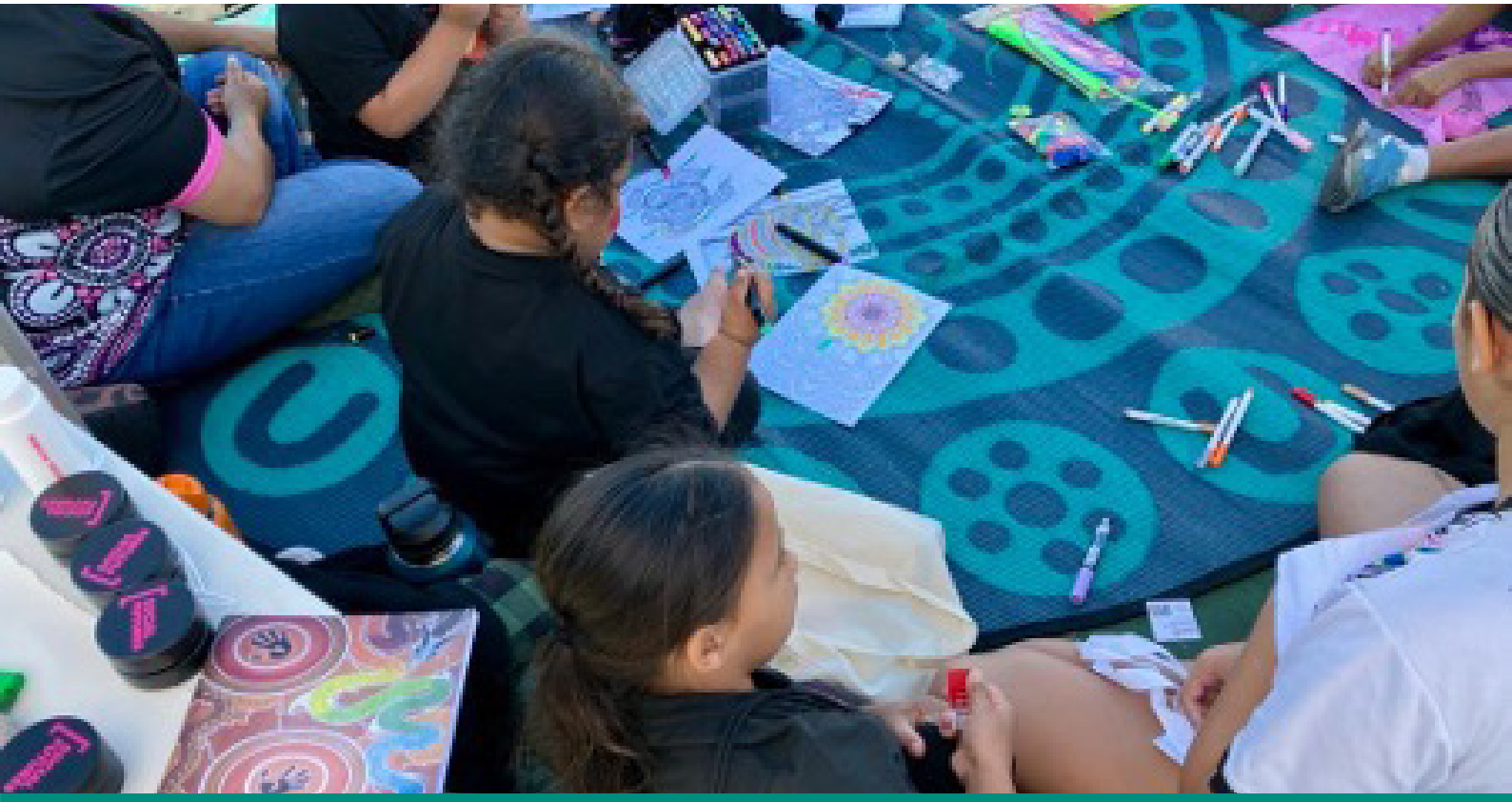
Identifying learnings and practice reflections for the wider sector

Across the evaluation, a consistent set of strategic learnings emerged for building the resilience of children and young people in a disaster context:

- Resilience extends beyond individual mental health or emotional wellbeing, emphasising the need to address both individual-level protective factors (e.g. social connection, safety, stability, access to support) as well as the presence of community-level factors.
- Children and young people are impacted by disasters in diverse and indirect ways, which can look like delayed distress emerging months or years after an event, disruption to schooling, routines and peer relationships, heightened anxiety linked to future disasters and uncertainty, and increased life stressors associated with housing or family circumstances.
- Local collaboration and place-based approaches are critical, by building on existing resources and relationships, involving organisations and spaces already trusted within communities, and complementing without duplicating existing services.
- Leading regional approaches requires clear, early and ongoing communication with partner organisations and the wider community to raise awareness while managing expectations
- Supporting adult caregivers and involving families is integral to building children's resilience and supporting their wellbeing, as these outcomes are closely linked to the capacity of the adults around them to provide emotional, relational and practical support.
- Involving young people in the design and delivery of programs contributes to a deeper understanding of vulnerabilities and strengths, which helps make programs more responsive.

These learnings broadly align with priorities articulated in Australia's disaster recovery and mental health policy frameworks — in particular, the recognition that disaster recovery extends beyond immediate response and reconstruction to include social and psychological wellbeing, and that prevention and early intervention are critical components of recovery for children and young people.

The evaluation also surfaces a tension where policy frameworks emphasise long-term capability and readiness, but short-term funding and program cycles make this difficult to realise in practice.



Recommendations to inform future programs and policy.

The learnings from Resilient Kids point to practical considerations for government policy-makers, funders, commissioners, service providers, schools and communities seeking to strengthen the resilience and wellbeing of children and young people in disaster-affected communities.

1 Plan for sustained support that reflects the long-term impacts of disasters

Availability of resources to support the wellbeing and resilience of children and young people should be considered part of ongoing risk reduction planning for local communities. This requires moving beyond post-disaster responses to building protective factors before, during and after disasters, and connecting young people experiencing mental health challenges earlier with the support they need. It also requires consideration of the wider conditions that shape children's capacity to withstand and recover from traumatic events, such as family stability, housing security and community inclusion.

2 Design flexible, accessible and youth-centred models of support

Recognising the current constraints of the youth mental health system, future programs should provide multiple pathways into support without duplicating existing services. This involves broad-reach activities with more targeted responses for children and young people with higher or more complex needs. Approaches should be flexible in where, when and how they are delivered, including outreach, community settings, group activities and other age-appropriate models. Particular attention should be given to children aged 8–12 years, who are often not eligible for many youth services.

3 Meaningfully involve children, young people and families

Children and young people should have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the design, delivery, oversight and evaluation of programs and policies that affect them. Their participation can improve the relevance, accessibility and acceptability of programs and help identify risks and solutions that may otherwise be overlooked. Parents, caregivers and other adult supporters should also be included as partners and equipped with the knowledge, skills and support they need to reinforce children's wellbeing and resilience.

4 Prioritise equity and cultural safety from the outset

Program design should anticipate that disaster impacts and barriers to support are not evenly distributed. Culturally responsive and inclusive approaches should be prioritised, with targeted strategies for Aboriginal young people, neurodivergent young people, young people with a disability, LGBTQ+ young people and others who experience barriers to mainstream services.

Recommendations (continued)

5

Partner with schools as an important access point

Schools are a valuable asset in local communities for reaching children and young people with wellbeing, resilience and disaster preparedness education. Relevant content should be integrated into the established curriculum and student wellbeing mechanisms where appropriate, supported by workforce development for educators. School-based approaches should be complemented by community and outreach models to reach young people who are disengaged from education or require more targeted support.

6

Embed children's and young people's perspectives within local disaster planning and coordination arrangements

Children and young people should be explicitly recognised as a priority population within disaster preparedness, response and recovery arrangements. Regional coordination mechanisms should involve health, education, community services, youth organisations and young people themselves to identify emerging needs, build preparedness and coordinate recovery responses.

7

Embed monitoring, evaluation and learning in program design

Programs should establish coordinated approaches to monitoring outcomes for children and young people from the outset, including a shared minimum dataset, suitable outcome measures and accessible opportunities for children and young people to share their experiences and stories of change.

8

Share and use emerging evidence across regions and sectors

Evaluation findings, practical resources and implementation learnings should be proactively shared through reporting products, professional networks, policy forums and research publications. Building a stronger collective evidence base can help communities and decision-makers adapt proven approaches to different contexts and advocate for future investment in the wellbeing and resilience of children and young people affected by disasters.

Closing reflections

Resilient Kids was a critical investment in the recovery and ongoing resilience of children and young people in communities impacted by several recent and compounding disasters.

The findings of this evaluation demonstrate that Resilient Kids achieved its central aims of increasing access to support, improving the knowledge, resilience and wellbeing of young people, and building the capacity of adult caregivers to support them. This was achieved through a program that was designed in response to local needs, including the voices of children and young people, and then continually refined over time.

The underlying story the evaluation tells is also a sobering one. There are considerable levels of unmet need for mental health support amongst young people that was already present in these communities and was only worsened by the 2022 floods. This level of need did not cease with the completion of Resilient Kids, and is likely to be persistent as the region faces further climate-related disaster risks in future.

Resilient Kids highlights the impact of a regional response co-designed with communities, delivered through trusted local providers, supported by funding and a capable workforce, and committed to learning and adapting. Programs like this are vital for building resilience within children and young people, supported by their parents and other adult caregivers.

What it has also shown is the systemic change that is required to build community-level resilience that adequately considers and involves children and young people. This goes beyond the availability of services to creating more connected communities, addressing risks and vulnerabilities and developing disaster planning and procedures that are appropriate for young people of diverse backgrounds and circumstances.

These learnings are shared in the spirit of contributing to that broader conversation and the ongoing work required to build more resilient communities, especially for our children and young people.

"It's a big learning for the social service landscape. We have to have a shared spirit of working together."

Resilient Kids program staff

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