Northern Rivers Regional Social Priorities Project

Moving from consultation to action

A report on the status of key regional social priorities identified as a result of consultations held in 2002

This project was funded by the Department of Community Services through the Area Assistance Scheme

August 2006

Northern Rivers Social Development Council

Northern Rivers Social Priorities Project

- Moving from consultation to action -

This report was written by Jan Pearson as part of the Northern Rivers Social Priorities Project funded through the NSW Government's North Coast Area Assistance Scheme.

For more information about this report, contact:
Northern Rivers Social Development Council
22 Cathcart Street, Lismore NSW 2480
Phone: (02) 6622 3030
Fax: (02) 6622 3302
Email: info@nrsdc.org.au
Website: www.nrsdc.org.au

© Northern Rivers Social Development Council
Under the fair dealing provisions of copyright law, professional users are permitted to make copies of this document for their own purposes. Copyright in any and all reproductions of this document remains with Northern Rivers Social Development Council.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 4
Key findings and results 8
Project background 10
Report objectives and scope 11
Social Priority 1: Accommodation and Housing 13
Social Priority 2: Community Based Management 20
Social Priority 3: Transport 30
Social Priority 4: Youth issues 35
Social Priority 5: Inter-related issues of mental health, alcohol and other drugs & domestic violence 41
Social Priority 6: The Aged 47
Some local examples of how communities get their voices heard 54
Closing comments 60
Acknowledgements 62

Executive Summary

The community sector of the Northern Rivers is unique in having undertaken a process that identifies a regionally-agreed set of key social priorities. The Northern Rivers Social Priorities Project has provided the opportunity to bring together a broad range of material that addresses the diversity of these key issues for the first time.

The work undertaken to fulfill the objectives of this project adds to a long-term process of achieving social capital improvements in the Northern Rivers Region and the project work is based on the five key regional social priorities that emerged from Local Government Area (LGA)-based consultations held in 2002.

The processes used to identify social priorities was by no means perfect, resource, time restrictions and the fact that there isn't a user manual, all contribute to its deficiencies. Having said this, the fact that we have at least put the spotlight on 6 key regional social issues is, in itself, reaping rewards. The sad truth is, if the Northern Rivers Social Development Council doesn't continue to keep this light shining, who will?

Aim

The project sought to establish if there have been changes in the status of the key priorities between 2002- 2005. This project also had the brief to question if and how government and non-government agencies are responding to the issues raised.

Background: Five Key Regional Social Priorities

The five key regional social priorities identified as a result of previous consultations are;

- housing (including crisis accommodation and homelessness)
- community based management
- transport
- youth
- families affected by mental health, domestic violence and alcohol and other drug issues

Project Work Undertaken

Listed below is a summary of the major actions indicated by directions the project work has taken. Greater detail is provided in the body of the report.

Action/s	*Expected result*	*Achieved?*
Overarching strategy for all priorities Obtain permanent representation on the Human Services Committee	Provide opportunities to lobby on behalf of the Northern Rivers community sector to a	Yes

Action/s	*Expected result*	*Achieved?*
of the Premiers' Department's Regional Coordination Managers Group	'whole of government' group on a regular basis and in a consistent manner	
Key social priority no. 1: Housing Seek funding through Area Assistance Scheme for a Regional Housing Worker Maintain housing and accommodation as the number one regional social priority	Develop affordable housing partnerships and resource other housing development projects at LGA level. As no. 1 social priority, develop comprehensive affordable housing solutions (including crisis accommodation) across each LGA in the region as the major strategy to address homelessness and poverty	Funding application pending Yes
Key social priority no. 2: Community based management Government agencies to resource CBM management issues; • by funding a Management Support Unit for the region • providing wider access to training for NGOs; • with funding that recognises administrative needs of NGOs as a component of quality service delivery • planning that includes service provision as well as consumer needs	NGOs have adequate resources to meet management and governance obligations and volunteer management committee members are able to be more easily recruited than is presently the case in the Northern Rivers. Increased supports and recognition of complexities in management builds trust and encourages the sector to trial innovations in volunteer management such as sharing resources and back room support services Increase innovative and entrepreneurial capacity in community leadership as well as assist in attracting income	Although there has been an increase in training opportunities and MSU resources, the expected results for this issue have not been achieved.
Key social priority No. 4: Youth Redress the loss of young people from the region by providing education and employment opportunities that are accessible by affordable public transport	Young people have choices about remaining in the region rather than being pushed out due to lack of infrastructure that will provide them with a future in the area Stronger links with industry will	No

Action/s	*Expected result*	*Achieved?*
	see uptake of transport networks for learning and working young people in both public and private transport solutions	
Key social priority No. 5: Inter-related issues of mental health, domestic violence and alcohol and other drugs as they affect families		
• Recognition that families with multiple vulnerabilities are a target group in their own right	Families will have access to flexible and supportive services that will benefit the children of the family and enhance the family's opportunities to participate in their communities.	Yes
• Recognition from the formal sector and government that NGOs that encounter the target group informally require special supports	NGOs providing crisis and other non case-management services to the target group can supported by appropriate training and access to the 'formal' sector for referral and other supports	No

Monitoring progress

During the project period, it has become clear that where development positions are funded to support ongoing regional issues *(currently in Transport, with Housing being part of the Regional Community Services Development Officer's responsibility),* a chronology of events tracking progress in those issues has emerged since the 2002 consultations. With no development positions funded to resource the other three regional priorities at a regional level, this report demonstrates that tracking process in these areas since 2002 is a complex task and beyond the scope of this project.

This report also shows that many groups (in particular representatives of special needs groups) did not contribute to the 2002 consultations. Consequently there are many familiar issues omitted from this report, which uses the consultation papers from 2002 as source material. Future consultation-based project work should be as inclusive as possible of the full range of need experienced within the regional community service sector. NRSDC considered it important to add a 6th priority, the Aged. The Far North Coast displays a significant ageing population. Currently 23% of the population is over 60 years and this is expected to increase 10% by 2021.

A strategy of this project has been to influence planning and funding cycles within government agencies to adopt some/all of the key social priorities into their planning processes. The report shows that whilst that has not happened on an agency-by-

agency basis, it does demonstrate why NRSDC representation on the Regional Coordination Management Group will benefit the sector by regular participation on the Human Services Committee. This report shows that this representation is the key achievement for this project in terms of the potential to reflect community sector issues to an all of government body.

The committee advising the project officer has made some recommendations for future stages of this work at the end of this report.

Key findings and results

1. NRSDC membership of the Regional Coordination Management Group was achieved in May and will be a powerful driver for maintaining momentum in current and future work on the key regional social priorities.
2. As far as it has been possible to ascertain (via NCOSS regional forums), the Northern Rivers is the only region to have undergone a process of defining key regional social priorities.
3. Up to date information is now available on all of the five key regional priorities.
4. Chronologies of events and changes since the 2002 consultations in the areas of Accommodation, Transport and Community Based Management have been compiled during the project and key events are included in this report.
5. Housing remains no. 1 key regional social priority – no change since 2002
6. During the course of the project, program changes within the Department of Community Services have provided opportunities for the inter-related issues of mental health, domestic violence and alcohol and other drugs as affecting families to be recognized as a target group in the new Early Intervention Program. Future reports on this priority will have access to information not available to this project.
7. A link is suggested between the lack of affordable public transport and the migration of young people out of the region
8. A lack of regional networks means that ways of supporting intra-regional interagencies need to be investigated for means by which regional issues can be gleaned from local issues – e.g. small dollar project funding to interagency projects with regional linkages to other bodies.
9. This report includes a section on best or innovative practice in project establishment that has occurred since 2002 in target group areas other than the five currently identified key regional social priorities.
10. NRSDC is grateful for the assistance of Premiers Dept and Coffs Harbour TAFE for permission to adapt two workplace assessment tools that will be published on the NRSDC's website (www.nrsdc.org.au) to assist those involved in community based management and those involved in dealing with people with complex needs.

Changes in each key regional social priority since 2002

positive = 👍 negative= 👎

1. Housing

Affordable housing ..... 👍

Crisis accommodation..... 👎

Homelessness..... 👎

2. Community based management

Compliance..... 👍

Recruitment of volunteer management ..... 👎

Training..... 👍

3. Transport

Innovative projects ..... 👍

Youth transport ..... 👎

Infrastructure..... 👎

4. Youth

Regional initiatives ..... 👎

Regional retention ..... 👎

Intra-regional initiatives..... 👍

5. Complex issues

Program planning ..... 👍

Ability of non-case managing NGOs to meet needs of this group 👎

Project background

In 2001, a group of people with regional interests and comprising the now disbanded Northern Rivers Regional Interagency developed a pro forma consultation approach for all local, generalist and target-group specific interagencies to identify key social issues within their area of operation. The objective was to canvass issues experienced by service providers at a local level to see which, if any, came through as having regional significance.

In the first part of 2002, a consultant [i] was employed to oversee the consultations and to write up the findings. More than 45 organisations representing the views of 730 community workers participated in the consultation process. The consultant's report was presented to a Regional Social Issues Forum held in Ballina in July 2002. (This report, entitled "Social and Community Services Priorities as determined by the Northern Rivers Interagency Forums" can be found on the NRSDC website: www.nrsdc.org.au.) The Social Issues Forum held discussions and workshops to define relevant issues around each key social priority, which were confirmed as being;

1. Housing/Accommodation
2. Community based management
3. Transport
4. Young people
5. Inter-related issues that affect families, viz., mental health, domestic violence and alcohol and other drugs.

In February 2004, the NRSDC produced a report, "Responding to Social Priorities", that summarised work undertaken on the key social priorities since the 2002 Issues Forum. One of the initial and most important achievements was the development of the Regional Housing Action Plan (www.nrsdc.org.au/AffordableHousing.htm).

In December 2004, with funds made available through the Area Assistance Scheme, the Northern Rivers Social Development Council employed a project officer to progress work on and summarise the current status of the identified issues. Other NRSDC staff continued their work on Housing and Transport as part of their existing areas of responsibility and fed information into this report, finalised in September 2005.

In 2005, there is no longer a functioning regional interagency and intra-regional interagencies again tend to focus on local or LGA-level issues. This lack of a regional network makes it a difficult task to maintain any momentum that may be established by development work such as that undertaken during the course of this project. The NRSDC hopes that this report will encourage people who share this view to examine ways in which regional connections can be revitalised for the benefit of all service providers and service users in the region.

Report objectives and scope

Report objectives

This project was funded to test the current status of the five key regional social priorities and to present a report that suggests further actions that are achievable. All suggested actions have been examined against indicators, measurable events, and where possible, data[1].

Project scope

In addition to reporting on the current status of the five key regional priorities, the project also has the overall scope to;

- facilitate a forum to determine how regional priorities are, or will be addressed by Federal and NSW Human Service Agencies and Local Government in current and further planning
- update the status of the project to the human service sector through use of varied media and through interagencies

Status of the overall project scope

NRSDC has won representation on the Human Services Committee of the Regional Coordination Management Group and now contributes community sector issues to that group on a quarterly basis. In 2005, two presentations have been made to the RCMG on specific topics linked to the key regional social priorities

NRSDC has convened three conferences in 2005 to update and address regional issues surrounding;

- Transport
- Community based management
- Affordable housing

The project produced online and paper-based resources to augment face to face information provided at a wide range of intra-regional and regional interagency groups and two resources will be made available on the NRSDC website, namely

- a community based management 'health-check'
- a 'self-assessment' for frontline organisations dealing with people who have high and complex needs

The Social Priorities Project has also asked NSW Human Service Agencies and Local Government how regional priorities are, or will be addressed in the context of current and future planning and resource allocation.

[1] The report structure loosely follows the Friedman model of Results-Based Decision Making (Fiscal Policy Unit, Santa Fe Fiscal Institute)

NRSDC staff with responsibility for project

Project Officer
Jan Pearson

- Northern Rivers Regional Social Priorities Project Officer and responsible for overall project management and for preparation of the final report.

Considerable input into the project has been provided by;
Linda Lomman

- Regional Transport Development Officer for the Public Transport Development Project and convenor of the 2005 Transport Conference

Chris Wilson

- Regional Community Services Development Officer and convenor of the 2005 Affordable Housing Solutions event

Jenni Beetson-Mortimer

- Regional HACC Development Officer and convenor of the 2005 Community Care Conference and involved in addressing the social priority of Community Based Management since 2003.

Northern Rivers or Far North Coast?

The terms that describe the regional geographic catchment are interchangeable in this report - 'Northern Rivers' and 'Far North Coast'. The region extends from Grafton to the Tweed and west to Casino and Kyogle and includes the following Local Government Areas for the following Councils;

- Clarence Valley Council
- Richmond Valley Council
- Kyogle Shire Council
- Ballina Shire Council
- Lismore City Council
- Byron Shire Council
- Tweed Shire Council

Social Priority 1: Accommodation and Housing

Accommodation and housing is a whole of population issue and its status, at any time, is a view of the social fabric of a community. The costs to a community that does not have the capacity to provide the basic well-being blocks of housing, employment, education are costs that will eventually erode community resilience and limit opportunities for that community as a whole.

As a regional priority, housing issues have a well-documented background and the present work originates from a series of consultations carried out in the Northern Rivers in 1997. Since 2002, when further consultations with a broad range of community sector organisations identified accommodation and housing issues as the number 1 key regional social priority, there has been ongoing work in addressing the many factors that impact on the provision of accommodation of all types in the region.

What we said in 2002

"We are picking up Byron's overflow (demand for affordable housing) – but there's a 10-year wait for public housing, and very little else available. This provides a real strain on resources. Getting information circulating is sometimes difficult, between agencies, between districts, particularly in view of the latest changes socially. This places significant pressures on all services, and on the housing and transport infrastructure. We're unable to meet the needs of people who live here, and they're leaving, some to Casino for affordable housing, others leave the region. Assisted housing also is desperately needed, for Aboriginal, frail aged/disabled, children and youth". (Consultation conducted at Ballina.)

Where do we want to go?

We want to move away from a well-documented pattern of poor to zero choices in accommodation of all types for of all types for people who are socially and economically disadvantaged:

Shared regional outcome priorities are:

1. There is more affordable housing, including social, private, caravans
2. Tenancies are supported with adequate support services
3. There is adequate provision of crisis support services that are linked to affordable exit housing.

.

The Results of Our Actions

What is our recent experience?		*Result of these experiences:*
1997	Regional consultations identify Accommodation/housing as one of five major regional priorities	As a result the NSW Department of Community Services initiates an independent review of the provision of regional SAAP services
1999	SAAP Review finalised	One finding states "there has been no comprehensive strategy within the region to address exit problems, in particular little interaction on any policy basis with private rental sector, despite this sector being SAAP's main exit point".
2002	Further rounds of consultations finds that accommodation/ housing to be the number one key regional social priority	NRSDC takes up the housing issue in response to the magnitude of the problem within the Regional Community Development Program area
2003	Byron Shire Council/Tweed Shire Councils	Councils win funding for an Affordable Housing Officer for 3 years (share-time position). The complexity of issues that need to be taken into account in affordable housing start to emerge and begin to inform ongoing work in this area
2004	Northern Rivers Housing Action Plan workshops (July)	A partnership with NRSDC, Shelter NSW, Anglicare North Coast and the North Coast Community Housing Company hold workshops in the Clarence, Richmond and Tweed Valleys. The issues agreed form the basis of our outcomes box above. Campaign groups are formed to maintain awareness of issue
2004	Northern Rivers Social Development Council	NRSDC prepares the "Housing Action Plan" - a document that is updated from time to time and that seeks to; • Outline the main issues • Define current accommodation/ housing services • Identify service gaps • Propose housing initiatives • Describes a regional housing campaign
2004/5	Northern Rivers/Far North Coast community sector	Accommodation and housing issues continue to dominate discussions and are anecdotally reported through intra-regional interagencies to be getting

		worse; affordable housing starts to take off as an issue in its own right. Due to the many components of accommodation and housing including homelessness, it begins to be clear that the issue/s need to be addressed at a regional level in order to satisfy the needs of all associated with accommodation issues in the Northern Rivers community sector
2005	Department of Community Services	Initiates a review of all North Coast accommodation brokerage services. Workshops held in July seek to form the basis of recommendations for the future role of three brokerage services funded under SAAP in the Far North Coast.
2005	Lismore Interagency	Housing is made the annual priority of this interagency which sets about collecting evidence to support anecdotal claims about the housing crisis as it applies to Lismore LGA. Group supports regional initiatives including the Housing Solutions event.
2005	Clarence Valley Council	CVC wins funding to employ an Affordable Housing Worker; the tenure of the Affordable Housing Work with Byron Council concludes
2005	Northern Rivers Social Development Council	NRSDC obtains funding from the Sustainable Regions Program to convene an Affordable Housing Solutions event to be held on 20-21 September to look at potential partnerships and strategies to get affordable housing projects happening in the Northern Rivers Region.
2005	Northern Rivers Social Development Council	NRSDC applies for funding under the Area Assistance Scheme in order to fund a regional Housing Officer position for three years to start to bring disparate accommodation and housing initiatives and issues together into a cohesive regional plan to further accommodation issues across a range of fronts
2005	Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Resources	DIPNR initiates a new model of planning using the Northern Rivers as a launching ground and affordable housing is a major topic. The NRSDC Social Priorities Project lobbies for community sector involvement.

The table above is a brief summary of events around housing and accommodation issues where events can be traced and, if anything, shows the recent emergence of affordable housing as a major issue. 2005 is perhaps a landmark year in facing up to the complexities surrounding the issue of providing appropriate and affordable housing to a large number of people who experience social and financial disadvantage in our region, in no small part due to the work completed in the Tweed and Byron LGAs by a funded housing officer position.

However, it needs to be made clear that in that work, the issues surrounding social integration of people with high support needs into the end product – accommodation - has not been addressed. Integrating social factors with the bricks and mortar issues is a challenge for the future and one that will need the good will and co-operation of many people.

A dataset of Rental Bond Board figures[2] shows how current annual rents have moved in the Richmond and Tweed Valleys. The March 2005 quarter figures indicates that the rental in Tweed Heads for a 3 bedroom home is now $300; in Richmond/Tweed (excludes Tweed Heads) it is $250 per week and in Lismore $220 per week. With a median weekly income of $299 in Lismore, it is quite safe to assume that many people living in Lismore households experience marked housing stress.

What does the research say?

The Northern Rivers Social Development Council website (www.nrsdc.org.au) has a good resource list of information and research findings on accommodation and housing for the North Coast of New South Wales, for NSW and Australia as well as some international references. An excerpt from recent research follows but for a thorough overview of housing and accommodation issues, accessing the website is advisable. Some state and national research are presented as averages and can be applied to the region, e.g. average operational capacity of SAAP services in 2001-02.

Housing Affordability

2001 Census information reveals high levels of housing stress in the Northern Rivers, particularly in Tweed Heads. In 2001, there were 15,098 households in the Tweed/Richmond statistical district below the median (average) income of all households at $32,916 per annum. [3]11,470 of these households (70%) were recorded as suffering household stress an increase of 2,256 households (or 24%) compared to data collected in the 1996 ABS Census.

On average, households in the Tweed accommodate 2.3 people. By applying this occupancy rate, it can be estimated that the number of stressed households may be equal to around 8,484 people living in stressed housing conditions. This equates to 18% of the total population of the Tweed (47,489).

[2] Made available by Peter Lewis, Regional Manager, DOH Lismore office
[3] Household stress describes a household paying more than 30% of their income either on rental or mortgage repayments.

NRSDC is disturbed by these findings. With such a high proportion of income needed to meet housing costs, the impact on families is considerable. We know financial hardship is a major contributor to family breakdown, poor health, domestic violence, leaving school early and many other problems[4]

Review of SAAP funded crisis accommodation brokerage services on the Far North Coast in 2005

Many crisis and emergency accommodation services throughout the Northern Rivers are finding it increasingly difficult to provide appropriate long term accommodation options for the clients exiting their service. The "Counting the Cost of Homelessness" (*see over for full reference)* study clearly demonstrates, the lack of investment in providing suitable exit options will impact on our community in others ways and in the long run will cost more than investment in appropriate housing.

Such stresses on provision of brokerage based crisis accommodation services on the Far North Coast led to a review of the four DoCS funded regional services. The Brief for this evaluation, to be finalised towards the end of 2005, is:

- Assess the effectiveness of the model to address the needs of families, single men and women who are homeless, in crisis and in need of a crisis response to their circumstances in the Far North Coast Network. To make a relative assessment as to whether the current service arrangements are the best way of responding to the needs presenting.
- Identify the relationships between the Crisis Accommodation Brokerage services (CABS) and the other services in the network and to note their strengths and weaknesses.
- Compare the current models with other Services models in terms of cost effectiveness/benefit and to provide advice about the need to adapt or change the service mix.
- Examine the relationship of Crisis Accommodation Brokerage Service to the NSW Intoxicated Persons protocol.
- Examine the relationship between the Crisis Accommodation Brokerage Services and the practices and protocols of the Dept of Housing and Office of Community Housing around emergency accommodation and ongoing service delivery.

Private Rental Market

In the private market, there is not much control over security of tenure or rent levels. With no control over rent, and rental increases shown as above, the private rental market option becomes increasingly constrained. We are beginning to see changes in other cheap accommodation options (one backpackers closed down in Lismore and required three month leases upon re-opening to a more 'upmarket' clientele; the other permanently full; caravan operators not accepting high need crisis accommodation

[4] Source: ABS Table- Low and Moderate Income Private Renters and those in housing stress Regional NSW 1996-2001

clients) with some shutdowns of other cheap options like caravan parks rumoured in Ballina and LIsmore,

The Housing Action Plan includes the strategy of educating real estate agents about the issues but this is more in the spirit of including as many stakeholders in developing housing options as possible, than expecting to bridge a divide between landlords wishing to minimise risk to income and property and people who look as though they are a poor financial or social risk.

Homelessness

Too often when it comes to addressing social issues, the major barrier to a successful program is the cost of implementing the program. But what about the costs associated with not doing anything? A recent study entitled; *Counting the Cost of Homelessness* attempted to tackle this issue and in reviewing 39 Australian and International studies on homelessness, the researchers found that many studies have demonstrated significant social and financial gains in providing suitable accommodation for the homeless.

Some Australian studies showed:

1. that housing people in public housing (some of whom would have been or become homeless) generated an economic gain equivalent to between 7.7 and 12.1 per cent of tenant income. This gain offset about three-quarters of the cost of providing the public stock. Other unmeasured (and non-marketed) benefits of secure, affordable housing are likely to more than offset the residual (25 per cent) cost of public housing provision, in this case.
2. the total cost of youth homelessness in Australia (in net present value terms) to be $574 million and the net benefit of successfully intervening to be $474 million – a benefit/cost ratio in excess of 5.
3. Housing the homeless also significantly increases the likelihood of employment and, hence, increased income. Individual and society benefit through increased income (productive output) and reduced government expenditure on unemployment benefits) Further indirect benefits also arise – e.g. positive schooling effects for the children of the previously unemployed homeless people.

In concluding their review, the researchers stated that “the great gap,…is that most studies do not adequately address the range and scale of the benefits arising from successful policy interventions to reduce homelessness.”

(*Ref: Counting the Cost of Homelessness: A Systematic Review of Cost Effectiveness and Cost Benefit Studies of Homelessness by Mike Berry, Chris Chamberlain, Tony Dalton, Michael Horn and Gabrielle Berman Of the RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre Prepared for the Commonwealth National Homelessness Strategy Final Report. July 2003)*

What’s happened since 2002?

It is evident from the material set out in this section that housing and accommodation issues, like transport, clearly benefit from ongoing development work (in this case by the Northern Rivers Social Development Council, through the DoCS funded Regional Community Services Development Project). Whilst social factors surrounding demand and supply of housing and accommodation remain complex, there is a considerable

degree of accord that we need good data to work with to inform ongoing efforts across many housing sector interest areas and it is also evident that it is only with a regional approach to supporting development of accommodation options in the community sector that data collection will be translated into partnership and other social enterprised linked opportunities.

The number one key social priority for the region is certainly in the spotlight in 2005 and it is strongly recommended that people who wish to remain current on the issue;

4. consult the NRSDC website on www.nri.org.au for past and present reports and information
5. subscribe (free of charge) to the Infoxchange e-letter which publishes information about ongoing issues and can very easily – with your contribution - be used as a forum for debate and information exchange about accommodation and housing issues
6. support the work of intra-regional housing issues forums in building up a body of information about the ongoing status of housing in the Northern Rivers

Recommendations

1. With the emergence of affordable housing as a regional issue, it is recommended that a Regional Housing Development position be funded to continue partnership developments across the region and to resource other housing development projects in place at the LGA level. This project will act as a promoter of partnerships, link intra-regional opportunities and conduct appropriate research to support all opportunities to develop an affordable housing agenda in the Northern Rivers Region.
2. Maintain housing as the number one regional social priority and continue to address issues surrounding crisis accommodation and homelessness and support intra-regional data collection in order to build a regional picture of homelessness.
3. The NRSDC will continue to work to engage NSW peak organisations in housing and accommodation initiatives within the Northern Rivers Region.

Social Priority 2: Community Based Management

Community based management emerged as the second issue of importance for the Northern Rivers community sector in 2002, when it was reported as having become so complex that it was barrier to provision of efficient service. Community based management is a complex problem and one which can not be wholly solved by input from the sector alone.

What we said in 2002

"Management issues are becoming critical and prevent us working to our capacity". (Tweed Shire LGA Interagency Forum consultation, 2002).

Where do we want to go?

Non-government organisations in the Northern Rivers have appropriate management structures in place that meet the needs of service users and are understood by all stakeholders. Volunteer management and paid staff responsible for fulfilling organisational roles and responsibilities clearly understand and are able to manage those roles and are supported by appropriate training and resources. A stronger sector will result and management committee members are more easily recruited than in previous years.

Where we have been and where we are

The CBM experience – a story of fundamental and rapid change:	
1985	NGOs are managed by day to day volunteer decisions makers who are in control of paid and unpaid staff. Paid managers focus their activities on service delivery and related coordination issues. Little or no training is available.
1995	Government agencies initiate funder/provider splits and 'purchase' services from NGOs with sweeping changes required to program management. Other service issues such as a change to area planning and competitive tendering follow. Introduction of Program Standards result in more complex management requirements and new compliance mechanisms are introduced into service delivery agreements.
2000	Changes in legislation and reporting requirments become more complex and data-focused; services are funded on a specification basis. Volunteer management capacity is strained and many NGOs move towards governance versus day to day community management committee styles, negatively affecting many NGOs. Training is still inadequate or unavailable.
2005	Spiraling compliance costs and continuing change impacts on NGOs in workplaces dominated by part-time staff. Recruitment of committee members becomes increasingly difficult, particularly in regional/rural areas. Many are overwhelmed by management complexities and challenges – boards risk losing membership profile and can be dominated by service peers in order to

	make up numbers and "buy in" much-needed skills. Absence of clear planning a cycles in government and competitive tendering tensions tendering are both barriers to sector collaboration towards solving CBM issues.

In the not too distant future….

1. Recruitment of management committee members improves. Committee structures and membership mix reflects organisational values as well as management expertise – values and vision are reinforced and organisational capacity to manage change is enhanced and becomes a positive experience for organisations.

2. All tiers of government adopt a "whole of government approach" to community based management and provide appropriate resources that leads to the development of consistent organisational management.

3. Government agency commitment to CBM is visible in planning instruments used at local, regional, state and commonwealth planning tiers. Resources for providing infrastructural support are recognized as being of overall value to the organisation and not seen as a detrimental component in funding direct services.

4. Community based organisations respond to new management initiatives such as sharing back office support systems; trialing acceptably structured amalgamations; expanding their resource pool e.g. shared vehicle fleets.

What does the research say?

Many non-government organisations now have[5];

1. reduced ability to plan for future directions within organisations, due to an emphasis on compliance issues. An inability to plan is a precursor to reducing emphasis on why the organisation is important to members in the first instance and may indicate decreasing or disconnected membership.
2. difficulty in implementing change due to a number of factors including levels of IT skills, prevalence of part-time managers and the increasing amount of time required to overhaul and/or update policies and procedures; undertaken mandatory training e.g. OHS; meet compliance measures within funding agreements.
3. fewer opportunities to network, so that opportunities to share resources and avoid service are reduced and opportunities to establish relationships of trust are limited

[5] SNOW Report, Bradfield and Nyland

4. increased vulnerability to crises – management/financial - (increased costs of public liability, heavy responsibilities for Mgt Committees and other HR/ Industrial issues) including lack of time or resources to pursue training needs required to keep up with in a challenging service delivery environment
5. a sense of increasing disconnection between meeting client needs and meeting governance requirements.

The 2005 CBM Health-check survey:

A 'healthcheck-style' survey was adapted from material developed by Barbara Carroll during a consultancy carried out for DoCS in 1999.

Surveys were returned from 21 people compared to a maximum of 18 survey returns in 1999. (In 1999 each category was conducted as an individual survey and response rates varied considerably, therefore it was not possible to draw any direct comparisons between results from 99/05.) The results are derived from multiple self-assessment questions and all gradings are derived from that self-assessment. The questions in 2005 were based on an assessment of skills and attitudes to assess response ratings to more than 50 questions.

How the 2005 questions were rated::
(1= not satisfied; 2=satisfied with attitude but needs more skills; 3=satisfied criteria at minimum level of competence; 4=meets criteria at maximum level of competence)

	Response rating			
Questions fell into four categories:	1	2	3	4
Managing the organisation – roles and responsibilities; resource management; compliance management	9.5%	20%	30%	40.5%
Organisational development and practice (question not relevant to 5% of respondents)	7%	15%	30%	43%
Service development and delivery (question not relevant to 5% of respondents)	6%	11%	35%	40%
Training and support	6%	23%	34%	37%
Average across four categories (NB: questions were listed as 'not relevant' by 4% of respondents)	7%	17%	32%	40%

In the table below, response ratings 2 and 3 have been linked by the assumption that organisations at level 2 have a good attitude to governance but lack skills and in level 3 they are only conducting their roles at a minimum level of competence so the end result for both categories, in management terms, is much the same, i.e. under-performance. The assumption made is that voluntary management committee members do not deliberately join NGO boards in order to perform at a minimum competence level and therefore any lack of competence can reasonably be linked to a lack of skills:

	Response rating		
Combination of category 2 and 3, categories 1 & 2 unaltered	1	2&3	4
Managing the organisation – roles and responsibilities; resource management; compliance management	9.5%	50%	40.5%

Organisational development and practice (question not relevant to 5% of respondents)	7%	45%	43%
Service development and delivery (question not relevant to 5% of respondents)	6%	45%	40%
Training and support	6%	57%	37%
Average across four categories	7%	49%	40%

Using the assumptions made in the second table above, we can combine those results and say that 49% of organisations are operating with resources or capacities that do not encourage governance practice at maximum levels of competence. A further 7% of NGOs are operating at skills below minimum competence. If we look at the training and support category, the figures indicate that 37% of organisations consider they are receiving adequate levels of training and support. Is it reasonable to assume that if these response ratings could be upgraded into the highest category (4) the scores of other categories would be enhanced, that is, have a positive affect on other areas of community based management?

Paradoxically, training and support is an area that is quantifiably more available to the community sector in 2005 than in 2002 (with expansion of the DoCS/DADHC training programs and DADHC funded training calendars for HACC and related services). Training and support is a category that requires further investigation.

What NRSDC has done

In developing potential solutions that will assist in either addressing the issues around community based management or that will serve to keep the issue in the community sector spotlight, NRSDC in 2005 has

- Conducted literature searches to examine work carried out on CBM since 2002 consultations to see if it is possible to test the issue for regional currency
- Raised the issue in a number of community forums in order to ascertain changes in management-focused issues
- Reviewed internet resources currently available to NGOs that assist with governance and other management issues
- Re-introduced a health-check for community based organisation management committees to assess organisational well being at the following levels;
    - roles and responsibilities in managing the organisation – resource and compliance management
    - organisational development and practice
    - service development and delivery
    - training and support
- NRSDC has convened a conference with community based management as the central theme to keep the issue fresh and to revitalise awareness throughout government and the sector (funded by DADHC through the regional HACC Development Officer Project auspiced by NRSDC)[6]
- Actively pursued opportunities to establish a regional Management Support Unit for NGOs with state government agencies

[6] Contact the NRSDC for a CD of Conference Presentations

- Developed a submission to fund a regional management support program which is currently under review by relevant agencies
- Made a presentation to the Human Services Committee of the Regional Coordination Management Group

What's happened since 2002?

1. Statewide and beyond

There have been a number of positive changes that have been put in place to assist with some of the issues surrounding community based management, e.g., many internet sites now offer a range of resources that provide information and expertise on governance related issues for NGOs and sites that make sourcing funds easier than has previously been the case. Still others offer inspirational stories related to best and innovative practice.[7] In addition to a raft of websites that now can assist with governance issues, the New South Wales Council of Social Services (NCOSS) has been funded to set up a statewide Management Support Unit and this has some useful tools to help organisations address different governance issues. The NCOSS MSU[8] is responsive to comments and suggestions from the sector. NCOSS has also introduced a bulk buying insurance scheme which has had a moderately good response and is in the process of extending the menu of policies on offer. It is anticipated that these activities will lead to a decrease in insurance costs, which has been another pressure point for sector management during the past four years.

2. NRSDC HACC Regional Development Program – working with the sector after 2002

In 2003/4 the NRSDC-auspiced HACC Development position, with funding from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare, established a regional training program to address NGO need for governance-related training. In 2004, the training was offered to a broader section of the community care sector and not exclusively to HACC-funded services. This program also continues to facilitate service planning days, undertakes organisational service reviews, develops, organizes and evaluates governance and other training to support management committees and support management committees through problem solving.

Despite this and a further substantial addition of resources available through training and on line, a CBM conference convened by the NRSDC in May 2005 indicated, from the range of responses to topics on offer, that many fundamental problems remain the same. It was a common for people in attendance to comment that they had heard all of the subject material before. However, the fact that it was being presented again indicated that little or no progress in some of the fundamental problems facing community-based management has been achieved. When the conference summation took place, there were few audience-inspired suggestions for change and little response to a suggestion that perhaps the sector itself could start working on making the situation more manageable by trialling some new practices, e.g. sharing resources, bulk buying, combining management committee skills, conservative amalgamations.

[7] See report appendix 2 for some sources of reports and useful website addresses
[8] New South Wales Council of Social Services at info@ncoss.org.au

3. Additional regional research

In recent years there has been some substantial research into issues surrounding community based management, of especial note being two research briefs commissioned by the Department of Community Services that yield currently useful information on

a. the characteristics of community based management in the Region
b. a clear picture of what the community sector needs to better manage some of the issues surrounding CBM
c. community sector attitudes towards making changes for the better that raise issues of trust between the sector and funding agencies.

It is notable that an issues paper prepared by St Lawrence Consulting in 2002 and which made a series of recommendations around out-sourcing various NGO "back office" functions to private firms, received no visible support from the community sector. This issue complements 3c. (above) and indicates either a lack of willingness on the sector to meet change with some modest risk-taking or a lack of understanding on how such processes can work positively.

Anecdotal evidence collected from interagency discussions during 2005 further muddies the waters of the status of this issue in a regional context at the present time. Recruitment of volunteer management committee members has been the issue most raised and a recent paper published on the internet confirms that recruitment of volunteers for all types of activities is decreasing in rural and regional areas (Communitybuilders website.)

Other research provides data that quantifies management issues in relation to organisational size, culture and longevity. The SNOW Report (see footnote) has been able to produce firm data that shows an inverse relationship between organizational size and time spent in administration compared to service delivery, with larger organisations benefiting from multiple funding sources and programs that enable them to devote more funding dollars to service delivery compared to administration.

The SNOW Report puts the debate around 'big' versus 'small' NGOs into another perspective and makes it an important area for discussion, given the number of small organisations in the region and given the recent trend for very big players to compete for regional funding dollars.

Barriers to change

Is it possible to look at some external barriers that may prevent NGOs from solving the problems of management that confront most non-profits?

1. Funds available to assist in training staff and management in compliance and organisational development in a new environment of expectations and liability are sparse and inequitably spread across the funded community service sector.
2. When major changes are required, there is either little (extension to time, for example) or no practical assistance offered to help with major organisational

adjustments, including lack of opportunities for paid managers to improve their management skills.

3. Government agencies still do not factor increased management-based requirements into their service planning for the region (e.g. value of outputs for the funding dollar), nor do they offer any financial supports in program growth funds to support CBM beyond training programs.
4. A culture of acceptance of a high proportion of part-time management staff in the region has placed NGO managers and coordinators in a position of needing to channel more time into administration than service delivery, with potential to affect service quality. There is an inverse relationship[9] where smaller organisations put more time into administration and less into service delivery than do larger (>$500,000 budget p.a.) organisations.
5. People willing to volunteer their time to sit on management committees have become harder to recruit and the competition for skilled people (e.g. Treasurers) is keen.
6. Following from 4. above, there is clearly an increasing need for NGOs to have highly qualified community based managers who are able to manage in a complex service accountability environment. The sector has never advocated for its managers to be trained in management per se, as the emphasis has always been on leaving management issues to the volunteer managers, whilst paid managers receive training in areas that affect service delivery, e.g. complaints handling.
7. NGOs are increasingly encouraged to scout for funds in unfamiliar territory, e.g. through philanthropic or non-human service organisations which invariably want to fund something 'innovative' rather than put in infrastructural investment into the sector; or that spread funds so patchily that the work that is created by managing small additional portions of money are hardly worth the trouble of making a submission.

Added to these external barriers it is also clear that the sector is patchy in responding to needs-based training requests from providers and training sessions on offer are frequently poorly attended (this may also reflect disadvantages in having so many part-time employees in the sector).

What works?

With a range of external barriers identified that impede improvement in community based service management, what actions may result to reduce pressure on a system of management that is being leached of participation and expertise?

Partners	***Strategies/Actions***	***Roles/results***
NCOSS	The NCOSS Management Support Unit continues to work to issues around spiraling insurance costs and improves the bulk	In 2005 the scheme has expanded to include Professional Indemnity as well as Public Liability and NCOSS expects that costs

[9] "SNOW" Report by Nyland Bradfield Consultants

Partners	***Strategies/Actions***	***Roles/results***
	purchasing scheme The community sector uses bulk purchase of commodities such as insurance to enable further growth, diversification and risk sharing.	will fall in 2006. Effective reduction in costs will encourage increased use. Increased participation by the community sector gives NCOSS leverage to negotiate a broader menu of insurance options at more affordable prices
2. Government agencies	Wider and more inclusive planning consultations are held to assess all the needs that go into providing capacity to deliver quality services to clients	Effective NGO management is recognized as integral to efficient service delivery capacity and NGOs receive funding packages that recognise full program costs Broader consultations mean that the infrastructural needs of NGOs will not be overlooked.
4. NCOSS	Continues to lobby Ministers with shared program responsibility to recognize the need for NGOs to have support for management infrastructure and to share the costs as well as recognize the value of such expenditure as legitimate output expenditure.	A statewide response is required to engage Federal Government Agency interests
A "whole of government" approach to funding supports for NGOs is fundamental to addressing the issue at a regional level	1. The Human Services Committee of the Regional Coordination Manager's Group takes up the issue across the human services system and NRSDC informs of needs. 2. The Local Government Community Project Officers Group keeps this issue alive across the region and	Whole of government commitment reinforces the strategies and outcomes listed in this table. Local Government CPO Group can influence social planning. Well resourced NGOs are less of a drain

Partners	***Strategies/Actions***	***Roles/results***
	includes in social and other community-based planning and consultation processes 3. A regional group of service providers that deliver programs with Federal Government funding form a committee to lobby for CBM support.	on limited local government funds NRSDC will undertakes to do to initiate this group directly or indirectly
Northern Rivers Social Development Council	Northern Rivers Social Development Council continues development of initiatives that provide management support functions at a regional level, e.g. organisational self-assessment, audit framework, IT etc. to further define areas of training need. With funding, NRSDC is able to provide appropriate management support services to the regional NGO sector	The NGO sector has central monitoring of community based management issues and becomes increasingly informed about specific needs to remedy existing problems with CBM. By funding Management Support Unit functions at a regional level, service providers have greater opportunity to participate in programs and products that are specific to and tailored to the needs of services in the region.
Existing training providers e.g. DoCS Training Support Unit continue to offer training in management based issues	Service specifications require organisations to put training calendars in place in advance of each year's program development in order that staff and management committee representatives can plan training well in advance	Organisations have a training calendar prepared well in advance that meets organisational needs and can be used as a management committee/board recruitment tool
The community sector of the Far North Coast/Northern Rivers Region of NSW	The human service sector receives ongoing encouragement to find a way in which the sector can address, as well as own, the problems surrounding community based	1. Seminars that address capacity issues are held on a regular basis in order to build up relationships of trust across the sector. 2. Interagencies keep CBM on agenda and

Partners	***Strategies/Actions***	***Roles/results***
	management.	NRSDC links interagencies by updates via electronic newsletter.
State Government agencies and Local Government bodies	State and Local government social and funding-based plans recognise and support CBM as an issue requiring tangible Government assistance	Inclusion of CBM by a broad section of the human service sector in planning processes supports NGOs to address future management-based pressure

Social Priority 3: Transport

What we said in 2002

"Transport – public & community – was considered the connecting factor between 24 issues raised at the forum - for access to employment, education, health, and important social networks. Because of easier access to public housing in the area, people come in from across the region to Casino without adequate transport, support services, mens' services. This particularly affects the elderly and people with disabilities". Richmond Valley Interagency Consultation, 2002.

"Public Transport is pivotal to the social, economic, employment, educational, welfare and physical and mental health of the Northern Rivers community". Communique from the NRSDC Transport Conference held at Ballina in March 2005.

To improve transport services, there needs to be recognition that for this fundamentally vital component of community infrastructure, all transport-related decisions should be made in an informed way with a commitment from Local, State and Federal Governments to integrated planning mechanisms that will result in the best possible transport provision with available resources.

Transport infrastructure should be planned and designed to service the community, not impede the community's access to facilities and in doing so influence equity of access to community participation.

Where we have been and where we are

A story of good regional initiatives working in an environment of diminishing transport resources:	
1995	Modelled on Lismore City Council's Transport Working Group (TWG), the position of Public Transport Development Project (PTDP) was created and is managed by the Northern Rivers Social Development Council. Lismore TWG was the first Working Group and is still in place. The TWG's start a 10 year phase of developing a regional presence.
2001	After the Sydney Olympics (when Olympic buses were distributed to community groups on an EoI basis), lack of successful EoI's from ATSI organisations highlighted Aboriginal transport issues. The PTDP worked with Shared Vision and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care to examine development of a business plan for a taxi licence in Casino in order to develop an Aboriginal Taxi Cooperative. The proposal was not found to be feasible as the subsidy system would not allow it to be self-sustaining. However the initiative produced data that identified the need for Aboriginal transport workers and models for implementation were examined, particularly in regard to using the existing community transport system.
2002	The Ministry of Transport trialled a project in Dubbo based on the Northern

	Rivers PTDP and also utilized the TWG concept. This project worked closely with NRSDC's PTDP to develop and implement a successful transport pilot.
2002	Consultations with more than 700 community workers in the Northern Rivers identify transport as the third key social priority and an issues forum recommended that transport disadvantage have a higher regional profile than has previously been the case. Youth transport disadvantage is highlighted as the major issue for youth at a regional level.
2004	In 2004, the outcome of the Dubbo project was to employ eleven Regional Coordinators employed for transport system development using the PTDP model successfully developed in the Northern Rivers.
2004	A substantial part of the Northern Rivers Region was adversely affected with the loss of the train service. A group called Northern Rivers Trains for the Future emerged during wide public awareness generated around this issue and grew from an initial small group of people with specialist interests into an organisation with more than 100 members.
2004	As a further result of the tumult that arose over loss of the regional train service, a Rail Corridor Working Party was convened by the Ministry of Transport and this group also engages in many activities to keep the rail transport issue alive in the Northern Rivers.
2005	Seven Transport Working Groups are in place and working actively around the region, the majority either formal Council Committees or are resourced by Councils. All the TWGs are different and are set up differently in order to be locally appropriate – the PTDP is the linkage mechanism for the groups to share their work.
2005	In June, as a result of implementing one of the options from the Richmond Valley Aboriginal Transport study and after a two year pilot, Aboriginal Transport workers are placed with the three intra-regional community transport organisations. The positions were funded recurrently in June 2005 by DADHC. Their work is also linked to that of the NRSDC's PTDP worker. The PTDP and each worker have solid and collaborative working partnerships, either through the TWGs or other projects and mechanisms.
2005	Lobbying for a better deal for transport for Aboriginal communities, the PTDP and Aboriginal Transport Workers succeed in having a statewide Aboriginal Project and Liaison Officer position appointed by the Ministry of Transport and based in Lismore.
2005	NRSDC holds a Transport Conference and a series of recommendations are obtained after this two-day event convened by the PTDP. Transport issues continue to be highlighted at a regional level.
2005	The Ministry of Transport Regional Coordinator for the Northern Rivers has an increase in regional funds from $100,000 to $600,000 to fund solutions-based projects (and to compensate for the loss of the rail service). These projects will continue to address precise issues of transport disadvantage in the region.

Where we want to go - Integration

It is clear from the above tracing of major transport issues from 1995 to the present, starting with Lismore Council's Transport Working Group in 1995, that an impressive body of high quality work and coordinated effort has gone into progressing transport issues in the Northern Rivers.

The fundamental issue now to be addressed is that of integration. It is clear that there is ample expertise to take this next step, if all-of-government support can be won.

In the not too distant future…

1. Regional Transport Working Groups are able to report that transport providers and funding agencies are responding to a need for an integrated transport planning mechanism and steps are taken to st up appropriate processes.
2. People have better access to transport that is convenient and affordable, without those characteristics being a financial drain on operators
3. All tiers of government recognise that accessible and reliable transport is an integral component of a healthy community and adopt a whole of government approach, including Local, State and Federal Government, in the placement of future infrastructure, e.g. educational and medical institutions to ensure they are accessible by public, as well as private transport.
4. The Northern Rivers community lobbying efforts for the return of the rail system is recognised by the State Government and a system that is designed to meet commuter needs as well as serve as a broader set of transport linkages is designed.

Whilst good collaboration between Transport Working Groups, the Regional Transport Coordinator, Community Transport Organisations and the PTDP managed by the NRSDC has evolved, Local Government Social Plans completed in 2005 provide evidence that transport remains a major issue for each local government area and many problems and service gaps related to transport can be quantified.

Transport is similar to the regional housing and accommodation issue, in that it is a fundamental and whole of population issue. As an example, the tip of the iceberg is the inability of a part-time student to travel to Wollongbar TAFE from Byron Shire for less than $22 per day – the consequences for that young person can include leaving their home to live where they can afford to travel to work and to education, or, being forced to abandon education or employment on the basis of an inability to afford transport costs and time. For other cases documented in Murwillumbah, it may mean abandoning education altogether and in the process abandoning many life opportunities.

What does the research say?

The Northern Rivers is classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics[10] as one of a number of "Inner Regional Areas," which presently tend to have populations that are growing at a greater rate in proportion to those in major cities.

In this report we are concerned with the impact of the current levels of intra-regional transport infrastructure and how communities are affected by a lack of an efficient and soundly planned system and in this context ignores 'high end' transport provision that provides quite effective linkages both north and south of the Northern Rivers region.

Local Government agencies were required to complete a new round of social plans during 2004-05 and those interested in looking at transport in their own Local Government Areas can do no better than to access their Council's website and consult the Social Plan on transport issues. Byron Shire Social Plan 2004 sums up the social and demographic trends that are resulting in the following transport-linked issues for Byron LGA and the Northern Rivers as a whole:

"There are;

- long journeys to access essential services and facilities
- high transport costs due to longer journeys
- rationalization of transport services
- reduced access to affordable transport
- greater unmet need for off-peak transport".

Conclusion

The issue of tackling the regional transport issue has a substantial history of development and step-by-step achievement. Beyond the stories that document difficulties experienced by transport users, young and old, there remains clear intent by the Transport Working Groups and all other associated individuals and organisations to maintain a strong focus on solving many of the problems our regional population experiences in getting around by public transport.

The table in this chapter that describes where we have been and where we are heading is equivalent to an action plan in itself and this report intends only to summarise the level of work and awareness this issue continues to attract at a regional level.

The issue of how we get to the next step and engage all tiers of government in developing real planning mechanisms for intra-regional transport is the next big challenge to be tackled in this region. There may be a message for planners in the transport issue and that is, for a region with the highest proportion of children under the age of 14 in New South Wales, we lose half of this population when those young people reach 17-19.

[10] ABS Remoteness Structure, 2001

Something is wrong. Not all of our young people leave their homes and communities voluntarily but are pushed out by circumstances. In a country that laments the loss of its rural and regional youth population to major city centres, our planners should be pulling out all the stops to put in infrastructure that will encourage those young people to stay and help build the region's future.

Social Priority 4: Youth issues

"Pay attention to the young and make them as good as possible". (Socrates)

15.2% of the Northern Rivers population are young people aged between 12-24 years of age and Social Plans completed by Local Government Officers in the region during 2005 provide good reference material for an in-depth view of youth affairs at the intra-regional level.

Youth populations vary considerably from the mean intra-regionally, with the highest proportion (19.9%) located in Lismore and the lowest proportion (7.2%) in the Richmond Valley. Youth issues were ranked as the fourth regional priority as a result of consultations held in 2002, although some areas within the region were under-represented for their views on young people.

In 2002, the youth sector expressed dissatisfaction with the parade of pilot programs that come and go without being followed bv recurrent funding and there is no evidence that this situation has changed for the better in 2005[11]. The consequence of continual stop-start funding is that funds that could be a modest but reliable foundation stone to support long-term youth initiatives dissipate. Sustainability of programs only comes with long term commitment, and commitment to providing a worthwhile future for young people in this region is surely, without argument, worth the investment.

What did we say in 2002

"If you don't have a car in this region, then you're stuffed". (Consultation held in Byron Shire, 2002.)

Where do we want to go?

We want to find a way for young people to have a voice in this region so they become stronger and more confident members of the community

There are so many issues that either impact negatively on young people in the region or have clear potential to do so that we need a strong regional commitment to their well being and future welfare.

We need strong signals from government that the young are valued as future leaders of regional industry and communities.

We acknowledge that there is much work to do if young people in the region are to have full access to education, employment and training in order to attain this vision both in terms of physical infrastructure such as affordable housing and transport, and in achieving valued status within the regional community.

[11] Comments made at NCOSS consultations in July 2005

Our current experience

1. There is open racist behaviour towards young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Richmond and Clarence Valleys. (interviews with service providers and Local Council Officers during course of Regional Priorities Project, 2005).
2. Youth issues have been identified as top priority for the current social planning cycle. (Social Planner, Tweed Shire Council, 2005)
3. There are good youth initiatives funded or established from time to time but they don't translate into broader solutions – the demographics of the Far North Coast tends towards intra-regional solutions and these are limited by some of the perceptions that surround young people within those existing communities.
4. The Australian Rural Leadership Foundation would like to work with the Northern Rivers community sector and look forward to finding ways that a potential leader in the region can have their skills developed to become a role model for the region's young people (Dr Steve Clark, CEO, Australian Rural Leadership Fdn. 2005)
5. Most youth workers are so stretched for time that it is all they can do to come to a meeting occasionally. (Member of the Tweed Youth Services Network, February, 2005)
6. Whilst there has been some good initiatives undertaken intra-regionally during the past three years, the regional issue of affordable transport for youth remains a critical issue both in retaining young people in the region by providing them with access to education and employment opportunities
7. As well as relating to the many issues and influences that impact on young people during different development phases from adolescence to early adulthood, youth issues identified during consultations strongly intersect three of the other four key social priorities, namely; accommodation; transport and the complex matter of how mental health/alcohol and other drugs/domestic violence affect families.

What does the research say?

Stories

It is accepted as a rite of passage that rural/regional youth leave home after schooling is complete to pursue life in the city as a matter of free choice. In the Northern Rivers, the number of young people aged 17-19 who reside in the region is almost half that of those aged 12 to 16. Our anecdotal evidence gathered from consultations infers however, that rather than it being a 'rite of passage' to go to the city, many young people have no choice but to leave the region in order to gain equitable access to jobs, education and a range of career choices. It is a broad assumption, but one with possible merit, to state that there are also those can't leave to better their chances in life because they are caught up in a cycle of social and economic disadvantage. It is this group we most poorly serve as a region that looks to the future for growth sustainable expansion.

In 2002, consultations around youth issues identified lack of affordable public transport to get young people into education and employment opportunities. It is clear that the top

regional concern for young people identified in the 2002 consultations has not improved in 2005:

"Transport has long been identified as a critical issue for Byron Shire….." Byron Shire Social Plan, 2004.

"One of the main issues raised during the consultation was the lack of transport services in Kyogle……." Kyogle Council Social Plan 2005-2009.

Given the small income base many young people experience, the cost of public transport is relatively high…..e.g. a young person who travels from Ballina to Lismore by bus will be required to pay $22.50 per day or $111.00 per week." Ballina Shire Council Social Plan 2004.

Data

Some of the common themes evident in demographic profiles of the Northern Rivers Region tend to support the notion that solutions to some of the major problems facing young people are not about to go away;

- There is a strong 'strip' effect of coastal and hinterland with the perception that people who live on the coast have access to more resources
- Location of multiple small towns or villages isolates people geographically from centralised services and culturally from the broader north coast community.
- Poor intra-regional transport infrastructure has been further exacerbated by loss of the train service in 2004
- Lack of affordable housing and appropriate crisis accommodation
- Lack of a broad range of employment and training opportunities to provide impetus for young people to remain in the region
- Young Aboriginal people experience additional disadvantage in accessing services including issues within their own communities and the availability of appropriate services.
- the total indigenous population is 3.1% of the total regional population compared to 1.9% for the State
- The percentage of births to teenage mothers is 7.36 of all births compared to the NSW state average of 4.28

In the not too distant future…

1. Young people can access employment and education opportunities via a network of regular and affordable public transport.
2. Youth mental and physical health problems decline as youth services are able to engage with health services to enhance service access for their clients.
3. Programs that assist socially and economically disadvantaged youth are recurrently funded and not reliant on "pilot" funding for a short periods of time.
4. Young people living in remote areas of the region have access to resources such as drop-in/skills centres for support, assistance and mentoring.
5. The community mentors its young people to enable them to become fully participating community members
6. Youth racism is addressed openly in the communities in which it occurs and solutions are supported by all levels of government and the community sector of the Northern Rivers Region.
7. Regional youth interagencies are recognised for their contribution to planning and direction-setting and workers are resourced in order to achieve this goal.
8. Leadership for young people is recognised as a way of lifting barriers to their participation in community life and all levels of government support regional participation by a suitable candidate in a national leadership program.

What's happened since 2002?

Whilst there have been a number of excellent initiatives that have arisen in many parts of the Northern Rivers Region since 2002 the issues remain the same for disadvantaged young people. The following intra-regional initiatives are notable;

- There have been further consultations with young people in Grafton, Casino and Lismore LGAs
- A group of youth representatives and young people formed a partnership to initiate the Byron Youth Commitment based on the Dusseldorf Skills Forum
- Formation of an Indigenous Forum in Casino that examines issues having impact on the Aboriginal communities in the area is having a positive effect in many areas and has the potential to address the issue of youth racism in the Richmond Valley
- In 2005 the Tweed Shire has put youth issues as the number one social priority for the Tweed

- The Clarence Valley Council has a well developed consultation process in place with Aboriginal communities which will also be in a position to address youth issues
- Youth issues have been well described and researched in all new Local Government Social Plans and for excellent levels of detail, readers are referred to these documents.

Whilst commendable, these events are patchy. On the downside, most youth networks are struggling to maintain their vitality because workers (mostly in part-time employment) can not spare the time from the demands of direct service delivery to develop broader linkages; the loss of the train system has disadvantaged young people in terms of transport use even more than previously when transport was voted number one regional youth issue and other issues having impact on youth the teenage birth rate and youth homelessness show no sign of declining prevalence.

It is the work of this project to make informed suggestions about how an action plan can benefit all of the issues targeted as having regional priority. For youth that action plan is clear but because youth issues have little voice in the region and because the youth sector operates in such compartmentalized ways, it is believed that the best thing that can happen for young people in this region is to have some big plans – the crash or burn approach:

Moving to Action

Task or challenge	***Solutions or further problems***	***Comments***
What can be done to encourage youth to have a voice in this region?	Federal Government Community Partnerships program – encourage social and economic participation. DoCS Community Division has youth representation at a Ministerial roundtable.	The Australian Rural Leadership Foundation would like to confer a leadership scholarship on the community sector of the Northern Rivers but can not fund same. A two year part time scholarship costs $46K NRSDC has requested that the youth representative be linked to the organization in order that young people in the sector can make their views known at a ministerial level
How can organisations be encouraged to recognize that driving progress on youth priorities at the regional level is good for all young people?	By investing in meaningful activities such as planning with Interagencies on a sub-regional basis; adequately resourced and attracting full participation of all stakeholders	Premiers Department has a role to assist agencies in recognising cross-sectoral responsibilities
Can relationships of trust within the youth sector be developed at a regional level?	Insularity of the larger youth organisations has grown partly because of pressures on service provision, but also on the basis of 'youth culture'. The cost is poor communication on the part of organizational managers[12] and lack of trust across the sector in a competitive market	A regional exercise such as a Dusseldorf Youth Skills Forum process may be a way of building wider boundaries of trust.
We need a Youth Charter as an expression of faith in the future for our regional young people	There is a Local Government Youth Charter process that has been conducted in Victoria with apparent success	This is a project that could be initiated and developed by the Regional CPO Group.

[12] During the course of this project it was extremely difficult to obtain any input at all from senior managers of youth organisations in the region with the exception of Community Connections Inc. and the CLIC Network.

Social Priority 5: Inter-related issues of mental health, alcohol and other drugs & domestic violence

Combined/inter-related issues of mental health, alcohol and other drugs and domestic violence as they affect families is the fifth key social priority identified from consultations conducted in 2002. The issue was defined as a result of the many comments made by participants about their encounters with people with multiple vulnerabilities who are trapped in a family cycle of poverty, domestic violence and substance abuse:

What we said in 2002

"The cycle of poverty, unemployment, low income, drug & alcohol abuse, domestic violence……. and other big social issues are considered fundamental priorities with significant service gaps." (Clarence Valley Interagency Consultation Forum, 2002.)

Families affected by mental health, alcohol and other drugs and domestic violence are able to have access to services that acknowledge that one vulnerability can be part of a more complex set of problems which in itself constitutes a recognised target group.

In doing so, support and hope is provided to all members of the family and most especially to the children of that family so that they make escape the negative consequences of being caught up in a cycle of mental health issues, domestic violence and alcohol and other drugs misuse.

Non-case management NGOs that encounter families with complex needs, when seeking emergency or crisis care, are backed up and actively supported by professional assistance from the formal sectors and separate domains of mental health, alcohol and other drugs and domestic violence in providing appropriate care.

The recognition of families with complex needs as a target group in its own right encourages more integrated and flexible services that benefit the children of the family as well as parents in being able to look forward to fuller participation in community life.

Where we have been and where we are

Families with complex issues	
2002	*Lismore Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Abuse Project in Finding 9* stated that "mental health is an issue for victims of domestic abuse and currently clients exhibiting erratic behaviour can be too easily ignored, as it is no-one's responsibility to walk them through the issues and relevant services….."
2002	"Many socially disadvantaged people have mental health problems, having been displaced following the implementation of the Richmond Report two decades ago, which resulted in the shift of long-term care for the mentally ill from institutionalised to community care. These people find it even harder to access services because of their disability and are more likely to need

	assistance in a number of areas. Community mental health services were noted as particularly inadequate." (*Hase et al May 2002 – Social Disadvantage in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales.)*
2004	*From the Mental Health & AOD Working Party Recommendations for SAAP SAC from the report on Exclusion Practice in SAAP* – "investigate data collection mechanisms that accurately records the number of people presenting to SAAP services with high and complex needs, including people affected by mental health issues, behavioural issues and alcohol and other drug use".
2004	*"I'm not sure how much longer we can cope – the number of people with needs that no other organisations service increases all the time and we don't even have a welfare worker who can provide some basic case management for them. If we are lucky, we can provide a roof over their head for a couple of days if they are homeless - but this is barely bandaid level treatment compared to what is needed in order to get these families back on track."* (Neighbourhood Centre Coordinator, August 2004.)
2005 (report)	Domestic violence assaults in the Northern Region (DoCS service boundaries) are 435.2 per 100,000 of population compared to the state average of 378.6/100,000. *(Recorded Crime Statistics 2002 (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research)*
2005	Families with complex issues are recognised in a new target group within The NSW Department of Community Services' Early Intervention Program for Integrated Service Delivery. Funding for flexible service delivery will roll out across the Northern Rivers Region to a total of $6.882 million by the conclusion of the 2008-2009 financial year.
2005	Mental Illness Substance Abuse (MISA) - the first semi-regional pilot NGO-based dual diagnosis service is funded for a year and uptake of program places is immediate. The program receives extended funding after just six months operation. A training audit to provide specialist training to NGO service providers is undertaken and specialist training will take place in early 2006.

Where do we want to go?

Strategy/Partner	***Outcome sought or action required***
Department of Community Services – Enhanced Service Delivery Program – providing access to case management and a move away from crisis management	Families affected by complex issues can access appropriate and flexible services that meet diagnosed or assessed needs with clear service entry and exit points. Crisis and band-aid case management is recognised as being inadequate to address the complex requirements presented by this target group.
Regional Coordination Management Group NRSDC supports the establishment of partnerships between different groups of NGOs A short-term project is funded so that regional frontline	The service system realigns its service profile to deal with formal and accidental service access by people with complex needs by creating a nexus between; • Formal access – e.g. to mental health services, alcohol and other drug services, domestic violence services • Informal access – provision of assistance to frontline organisations that encounter the

organisations can trial a workplace assessment tool that identifies service strengths, weaknesses and training needs and a needs-based training calendar is developed A regionally funded position to create and support new service connections is funded by a "whole of government" agreement and the position works on developing partnerships and "buddy" agreements to enable wider coverage of target group needs with existing community resources.	target group on a day to day basis but who are not equipped to case manage or provide meaningful assistance • A coordinated service system recognises that people with complex issues may access services in a formal way and by accidental access to frontline NGOs. The 'formal' system provides support and assistance to frontline NGOs in their encounters with the target group and frontline organisations have tools that allow them to self-assess their capacity to deal with the complex issues experienced by the target group. Both formal and informal sectors can work together e.g. one providing mental health services for example will refer to the other for services such as material aid .
A range of NGO services including Family Support Services, Men's Services, Aboriginal Services, Services that have elder abuse protocols in place are funded to produce educational material to break down mythologies surrounding the issues of mental health,domestic violence and alcohol and substance abuse	Education is available to people living in abusive circumstances to help break the tendency towards cultural or inter-generational tolerance of behaviours that may occur in families where there are mental health, domestic violence and substance abuse issues More men's support services are made available especially in education of young men in issues surrounding domestic violence. Education is connected to training for NGOs Service systems that support the target group are promoted
Research into this complex combination of issues is conducted as more data becomes available through integrated service delivery, and the sector is more aware of which service models work and which do not.	The Regional Coordination Manager's Group has linkages into the community that supports research findings; special working groups; targeted regional resource workers and supports further integration of services throughout the health and community support systems

Statistics are not currently collected that can reveal meaningful evidence about this priority as an integrated issue. This project has avoided taking the issue apart and considering its components, as that clearly was not the intention of those consultation participants to whom the integrated issue was of such high order in 2002.

Clearly, there are statistics available about the prevalence of mental health, alcohol and other drugs misuse and domestic violence as individual collections kept by service providers within the health system. However, the 'informal' access system (where the client group may go for other help and in the process may present with multiple

problems evident) is not able to even enquire about, let alone keep statistics on mental health, alcohol and other drug misuse and domestic violence in their dealings with the client group. This part of the service system is not recognised as playing a valid role in client care and has difficulties in making referrals or even seeking assistance from players in the formal service system, e.g. calling on the Acute Care Team for assistance with a client presenting with a possible mental health condition. Anecdotally, it is the 'informal access system' that can provide the most stories about the life conditions experienced by many people presenting with this complex range of problems.

A glance at regional demographics show high levels of disadvantage including 17.% of people have an income of less than $300 per week; the region has the highest proportion of one-parent families with dependent children (13.9%) compared to the NSW average of 10.4%. The total Indigenous population is 3.1% compared to the NSW state average of 1.9% and there are high measures of unmet need in the Aboriginal communities[13]. 16.7% of the total population in the eligible age group receive unemployment benefits (in 2001 more than double the NSW average of 7.2%) and 49.7% receive family assistance payments compared to the NSW average of 30.7%. Whilst not causal affects, such high levels of social and economic disadvantage are generally recognised as having negative impacts on families.

An attempt to address the issue at a regional level

In October 2003, the Ballina Domestic Violence Committee Interagency held a forum to open up discussion around this regional priority issues and provide a mechanism by which to feed back further information into planning processes within the Northern Rivers Region. Whilst that forum generated extremely useful discussion around these complex issues, there was no follow-up development work achieved. As this is an issue requiring great sensitivity to be addressed equitably within existing networks, the positive discussions generated by this forum unfortunately diffused over time, whilst the problems associated with the issue remained.

It is obvious this key social issue can readily be broken down into stand-alone target groups, i.e. people with a mental health condition; people with alcohol and substance abuse issues; and people affected by domestic violence. However whilst the service system recognizes that people with a mental health condition, for example, will almost always have accompanying complex issues, there is no current framework of services that offer an equal focus on all components of the issues affecting that person, and in consequence, their family.

What does the research says?

"*What is becoming apparent, in both health and child protections fields, is that an increasing number of people with mental illness and substance abuse are also parents, which has pertinent implications for service delivery. There is little, if any, recognition of the complex needs of these families, and possible risks for their children. In fact, there is only recently emerging evidence in the mental health and drug and alcohol fields to indicate an awareness of children whose parents have either of these disorders, reinforcing the suggestion that these are 'the invisible children', because they are not*

[13] Data sources include Census of Population & Housing 2001 (ABS)

recognized in service delivery." Mind the Gap - The National Illicit Drug Strategy (NIDS) Project to Improve Support for Children from Families where there are Mental Illness and Substance Abuse (MISA) Issues, Literature Review prepared by Michelle Hegarty for the NIDS MISA Project: A Partnership Between The Mental Health Co-ordinating Council (NSW) and The Department of Community Services (NSW) sponsored by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services June 2004.

Whilst examining this issue as a regional priority, the Northern Rivers Social Development Council has endeavoured to source as much research into complex diagnoses as possible in order to ascertain if the perceived lack of cohesion around service provision is a regional characteristic or symptomatic of a wider gap in the service field. The research indicates clearly that;

- There are many research resources in each professional area that focuses on
    - Mental health
    - Domestic violence
    - Alcohol and other drugs misuse
- An internet search revealed few sites that treat the three areas as one issue (with the exception of some studies conducted in America. The Northern Territory Government acknowledges "the complex issues target group" as a community priority in areas of its human service delivery.
- Research into one condition will commonly acknowledge the presence and/or impacts of the other two conditions or states and the complexity this brings into treatment patterns, however the direction of the work, e.g. in researching domestic violence, does not seem to be much influenced by the presence of other component parts of the issue at the *solutions level.*
- North Coast Area Health Service's *Women's Referral and Access Project* conducted a wide ranging literature review into dual diagnosis in 2003 with a view to getting the issue recognised (and possibly funded) in the last cycle of the Area Health Action Plan – however other priority areas for this plan intervened and no funds were available for addressing dual diagnosis
- The project also looked at literature available in relation to dual diagnosis and found that research undertaken in the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing indicates that one in four people with a substance use disorder also have a mental health disorder and it was found that co-morbidity produces;
    - Poorer treatment outcomes
    - Greater impairment
    - Greater social dislocation
    - Generates greater social costs.
    - These outcomes were thought at least in part due to;
    - Lack of diagnosis and treatments
    - Difficulty in treating dual diagnosis with generally poorer outcomes.
- Consultations conducted by ACT Health in 2004 found that "significant professional and systemic differences affect services available to clients and their families….and reflect a genuine struggle within professional fields to come to terms with appropriate and responsive services".

Progress made

At an issues forum held in Ballina in July 2002, where the five key regional issues were prioritised, a very full range of plausible solutions to this problem were suggested. The realities of conducting a time-limited project with such a complex issue being one of five key priorities to be researched and developed disallowed the taking up of all of these suggestions. Here is what we were unable to address:

- Secure a coordinated response across all three, or at least two of the three issues – to help identify and choose where to focus
- Need to maximise services available – can this be done regionally? Participants felt it can be done sub-regionally
- Refine the role of case managers and make case management outcomes more accessible in terms of statistical collection and publication
- Link children who are not performing (ie a symptom of the problem) to a concentrated case management approach through schools
- Get Federal funding and programs to link with State initiatives
- Create best practice models and guidelines

During the course of the Northern Rivers Social Priorities Project, work on this key priority focused on;

- early intervention, with the reasoning at the commencement of the project being that focusing on children in families where there were complex needs was the most feasible way of getting assistance that would in turn benefit the present and future of entire families. This reasoning has been justified because the clearest progress for this issue since the 2002 consultations is the recognition of the fifth key social priority being included in a target group for new early intervention services by the Department of Community Services, as part of the new funds rollout for Enhance Service Delivery Programs in the Northern Area (includes all of Far North Coast/Northern Rivers Region).

- A workplace assessment tool adapted from a model developed in a partnership between Premier's Dept and Mid North Coast Institute of TAFE has been developed to assist frontline organisations self-assess their capacity to deal with a target group of people with complex needs.

Social Priority 6: The Aged

The Far North Coast has the fastest growing area outside of Sydney with an expected increase of 34% by 2031. The regions demographic profile displays a significant ageing population. Currently 23% of the population is over 60 years and this is expected to increase 10% by 2021.

The 2001 census showed the Far North Coast region below state and Australia on Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage Areas such as Pristine Waters, Richmond Valley was ranked in bottom 10 in state. 80% of those over 65years are on a pension and around half of households have a weekly household income of less than $500 (c.f. 30% for State)

Background

The Northern Rivers Social Development Council has auspiced the HACC Development project since 1985 which is funded by the Department of Ageing Disability and Homecare. The HACC Development projects role through a community development approach supports HACC planning and development, provides leadership within the Far North Coast Community care sector, promotes cross sector cooperation and participation; and supports services with continuous improvement processes.

What does the research say?

The Northern Rivers Regional Development Board Identified in its Working Paper No 1 on Ageing Research, April 2005;

"The region's many lifestyle attractions, including good quality natural Environments, a wide range of cultural events and attractions, active communities, lifelong learning and educational opportunities contribute towards high levels of population growth and the migration of retirees from metropolitan centres to the region. The increase in the region's aged population brings a set of specific needs for appropriate living, health, recreational, training and other support facilities." (Katrina Luckie, 2005)

This report also discusses the Impacts of an Ageing and Retiring Population on Regional Employment and Unemployment and the Impacts of an Ageing Population on Business Attraction.

The report identifies a number of Issues that will face the community;

- The ability of the region to continue to attract a skilled younger workforce
- Pressure on stretched services due to the impact of Retirement Migration and the existing significant ageing population.
- Regional impact of the demographic shift in population to an older base with predominantly a low socio economic capacity
- Retention of older people and experienced people in the workforce
- Planning for the future

- Residential Care Bed Numbers and Viability
- Implications of the dementia epidemic
- The ability for the region to offer affordable services in the home
- Planning and housing design factors to cater for an ageing population.
- Mobility of an older population
- Cultural travel requirements of an indigenous population
- Balancing volunteerism and paid work
- Regional strategies to minimise isolation of older people through provision of adequate services.(*The combined effect of increasing lack of family and support networks, increasing difficulty of organisations to attract volunteers and the Australian Governments ageing in place emphasis have a potentially significant impact on older people*

The Northern Rivers Regional Social Priorities project report, ''moving from consultation to action'' identifies 5 Priorities; Accommodation and housing, community based management, transport, youth issues and inter-related issues of mental health, alcohol and other drugs & domestic violence. Although not reported separately it is presumed in this report that these priorities affect or are in some way impacted by the regions increasing aged Population. Aged services formed part of the consultation process for the 5 regional priorities in 2002.

'The potential implications of the ageing population are going to require that the region develops a united proactive and innovative approach to how it manages the impacts associated with the shift in the demographic structure of the population. It will require the development of diverse teams of people to develop and implement plans for the region.' (NRRDB Ageing Research Paper 2005).

How do we consult?

The Northern Rivers Social Development Council in February 2005 undertook a regional consultation process with the aim of further complimenting the Regional Priorities process initiated by the Northern Rivers Social Development council through the community sector in 2002. Given the demographics for the Far North Coast and the increasing ageing population Ageing as an issue was something the region had to face.

This consultation process involved consultation with a range of stakeholders including Aged and Disability services from Clarence Valley to Tweed Heads. Three consultations were undertaken within the three valleys of Clarence, Richmond and Tweed. The Aged and Disability services involved in the consultations included government, non-government, not for profit, private operators, planners and policy makers. The consultations sought identification of the issues affecting people who are ageing and being cared for or living at home within our community on the Far North Coast.

A number of regional interagency also operate across the Far North Coast. The members of these interagency include a broad range of services who are involved in the provision of service to older people living in the community. They include state, local and commonwealth government representatives, managers and coordinators of community managed and private services. These meetings are a forum to identify and

address issues affecting services and their clients. Through this document some significant issues identified through the interagency process are discussed.

The consultations concluded with a number of issues affecting older people and those service providers who deliver service to older people.

Issues affecting the Aged Community on the North Coast are identified as Access to;

- Affordable housing
- Transport
- Information
- Appropriate and adequate services to minimise social isolation and lessen the impact of no family or support networks.
- Affordable service delivery
- Appropriate financial resources
- Appropriate service delivery for older people with complex diagnosis.
- A safe environment
- support for carers
- Culturally appropriate services

Issues affecting services delivering service to the aged were identified as:

- Community based management
- Networking
- Service restrictions
- Dual diagnosis

Demographic data show that the rapid growth particularly in the aged population is due to net inward migration. The main growth is happening in the Tweed, Ballina and Byron regions. The consultations identified that Older people where often moving to the region without family or support networks. This raised a number of issues in relation to access. Older people are often confused about what health and community services are available to suit their needs. There is limited access to services that offer advocacy or futures planning. The government's policies in relation to ageing in place pose significant issues for the Far North Coast where the aged population is significantly financially disadvantaged, there is minimal or no public transport and the increasing demand on community services to offer services to those with higher need. Department of planning predictions demonstrate that by 2031 the dependency ratio will be 84.9 for every 100 people working.
This can only impact negatively on the mobility of older people within the region and impact significantly on their social isolation.

Elder abuse and neglect is a serious and prevalent problem. Older people are abused when they are victims of any pattern of behaviour, which causes physical, psychological, sexual or financial harm or neglect. The Australian Society of Geriatric Medicine reported in September 2003 that 'Elder abuse is not a new problem; however, until recently it has gone largely unrecognised in Australia. It is one of the last forms of familial violence to come to public attention.

The Aged interagency on the Far North Coast identified that there aren't any coordinated and effective local responses to handling instances of elder abuse.

Moving from Consultation to Action

The Regional Priorities document, moving from Consultation to Action notes significant action by NRSDC and in region around the issues of Transport, Affordable Housing, Community Based management and dual diagnosis. It is assumed that those issues and actions addressed in the document affect the Ageing population and those organisations that provide a service to this aged population.

Partners	***Strategies Actions***	***Roles/Results***
Social and welfare sector on the North Coast/Northern Rivers Social Development Council	Elder Abuse Working Party - A regional group of Service Providers.	NRSDC undertakes to initiate this group directly or indirectly. Members from the Tweed, Richmond and Clarence interagency formed a working party to move forward on an interagency approach to Elder abuse
NRSDC/Social and Welfare Sector on the Far North Coast/ACSA	Elder Abuse Forum	The forums aimed to workshop the issues in relation to the identification and referral of abuse of older people and develop strategies for a local response.
NRSDC	The working party submitted a project Proposal to the Attorney Generals Department through the Crime Prevention Programme.	The Proposal titled 'The Elder Abuse Prevention Project' aims to develop a framework for identifying, responding and/or intervening in situations where older people are considered at risk of abuse, enhance the capacity of an existing crisis telephone service for identification and referral of abuse, through education build the capacity of service providers and the community to deal with situations of elder abuse and implement a community awareness campaign to raise awareness and support of Older people at risk of abuse.
State Government Agencies	State Government Agencies are currently working to review the 1995 Framework	NRSDC provides input into State-wide reviews and raises issues at State-wide forums.

Partners	***Strategies Actions***	***Roles/Results***
	for Elder Abuse	
NRSDC	Community Based Management Conference	Convened a conference 'Working at the Local Level' aimed at Challenging service provider views on community based management and to influence change and move toward addressing issues that were identified through NRSDC strategic directions. This conference through a survey of participants fed into the NRSDC social priorities report moving from consultation to action.
DADHC/NRSDC	Implement Training Calender including management committee training.	Funding received from DADHC to implement training aimed at continuous improvement of management and governance.
NRSDC/ATSI HACC Access Worker/Service Providers	Creation of Aboriginal Equity Working party – A group of service providers aimed at identifying the issues in relation access to mainstream services of aboriginal peoples and recommendations for a model of service provision.	NRSDC facilitates the group in collaboration with the ATSI HACC access worker. A cultural model was documented and provided to DADHC.
NRSDC/ATSI HACC Access Worker/Aboriginal Trainer	Aboriginal Cross Cultural Awareness Training Program delivered to social and welfare sector	Increase the awareness of mainstream service providers in providing culturally appropriate service to aboriginal people. Seek continued funding of this training from DADHC

Partners	***Strategies Actions***	***Roles/Results***
NRSDC	Facilitated an Education forum to identify issues and strategies for increasing younger people working in the aged care sector.	A working party has been convened to continue develop strategies
		NRRDB with support of NRSDC has submitted a proposal to the Commonwealth government to increase the aged care sector skills base within the region.
		TAFE now attend interagency meetings to identify and meet training needs of the sector.
NCOSS	NCOSS HACC Issues forum	NRSDC continue to work at a state level to advocate on regional issues.
NCOSS	Pre Budget Consultation	NRSDC continue to identify and document issues affecting the aged and disable population and the management issues of those servicing this sector through the interagency networks and through targeted regional consultation undertaken by NRSDC And in also in cooperation with DAHDC.
NRRRDB	NRRDB produced a report on the impacts of the Ageing Population	A REIP forum was convened by the NRRDB to discuss the impacts of the Ageing Population.
NRRDB/NRSDC/NOROC	Three key organisations agreed to work together to seek funding to develop an ageing strategy for the Far North Coast.	An ageing Strategy for the Far North Coast will be developed.
	NRSDC comment on Department of Planning Regional Strategy Document	NRSDC ensure social issues affecting the aged are incorporated in the planning processes.
	Membership of the Human Services Sub-committee	Membership of this group enables NRSDC to raise

Partners	***Strategies Actions***	***Roles/Results***
	of the Regional Coordination management Group.	issues affecting the aged sector and to provide input from the social and welfare services.
DADHC/NRSDC	Work in cooperation with DAHDC to undertake Regional Consultations	Issues affecting services and clients identified.
	DADHC HACC DO Planning Group	Regional input considered in DADHC Planning
NRSDC	HACC DO Network	Regional and State issues identified, discussed and addressed.
NRSDC	Ageing Managing Change Now Conference Working Party – A working party including Southern Cross University, NRRDB, DVA, DADHC, and Community Services to develop a conference aimed at viewing the impacts of an ageing population in a positive way.	NRSDC will convene a conference in Kingscliff.

.

Some local examples of how communities get their voices heard

During the consultations held in 2002, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues were not broadly represented by interagency groups present, most of which were inappropriate to reflect on particular issues affecting Aboriginal communities in the region. However during the course of this project work, evidence of several new approaches to dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people issues has emerged. As part of the brief to report conditions that have influenced the community sector during the three years since the consultations, these models of practice are presented to show how progress on addressing some long-standing issues are being addressed in the Richmond and Clarence Valleys.

Clarence Valley Consultative Committees

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultative model has been adopted in the Clarence Valley and can be accessed in Chapter 14 of Clarence Valley Council's current Social Plan.

In 2004 Clarence Valley Council engaged an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultancy for the purposes of writing up the ATSI section of the Social Plan and a key recommendation was for a better consultative mechanism to be developed that would address the key areas of visible unmet need, namely accommodation and transport. Community Working Parties were thought to be a way that the views of the major (five?) ATSI communities could be canvassed across the Clarence Valley to address global issues as well as focus on location-specific issues.

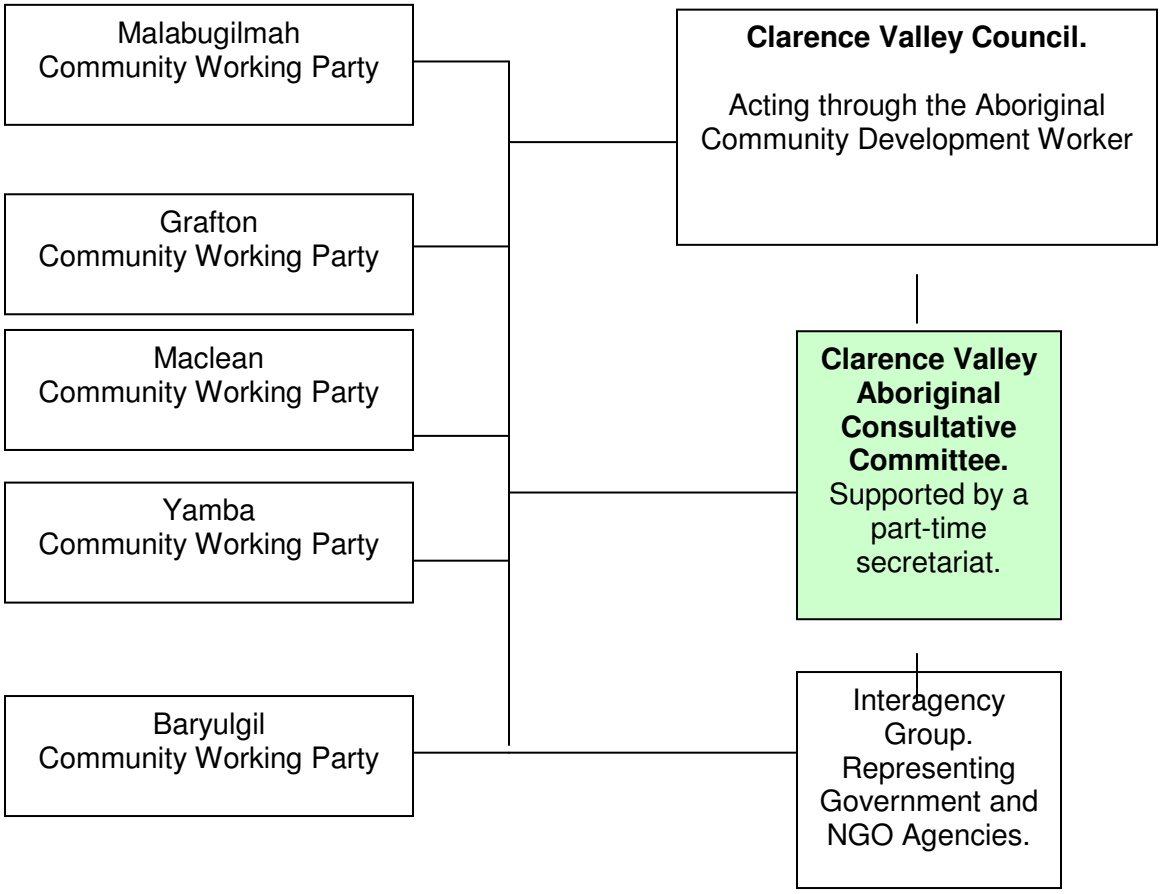
The convener of the working party prioritise issues coming from each group and ensures that other services are aware of problems being faced by Aboriginal communities in different parts of the Clarence Valley LGA. The Aboriginal Community Development Worker also has the role to take other service providers to each community to discuss particular issues directly with the people in each community.

So that the views of each community can be linked into other processes, a representative from each working party is a member of an overarching Clarence Valley Aboriginal Committee of Council (CVAC). This Committee of Council is a Section 355 Committee, holds effective powers of delegation and the Mayor, General Manager and two Directors of Council all have reporting responsibilities to the Committee. The Aboriginal Committee of Council meets on a bi-monthly basis and broadly undertakes the following ongoing tasks;

- issues that have been prioritized are reported upon and plans for implementation are made
- in depth workshops are held on a broad number of topics including how the Committee members fulfill roles and responsibilities

- the Committee has a strong monitoring role for social planning and other purposes linked to enhancing opportunities for the Aboriginal Communities in the Clarence Valley.

The strength of the CVAC includes holding considerable political power – Council is fully informed of issues affecting Aboriginal communities in the Clarence Valley and the Council Liaison Officer is empowered by the Committee to take back issues into the different communities.



Richmond Valley and beyond

Some new initiatives from a new Aboriginal service provider forum through the work of the regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Home and Community Care Access Project.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Home and Community Care Access Project has been active in developing a new networking process in the Richmond Valley that is giving Aboriginal communities a clearer voice in determining the directions for community based services in that that part of the Far North Coast Region.

Like all good ideas, it is simple and it is working: the community elders in each part of the Richmond Valley have empowered local Aboriginal service providers to take issues

to other service providers and seek information about what those services are providing or planning to provide for Aboriginal communities, or advocate to those services about issues not being addressed within the service system. Service providers who attend the forum can expect a thorough briefing on how the system works. The forum reports issues back to each community for the further advice of community elders. Richmond Valley Council supports this process through their Community Development Officer's role.

Richmond Valley Aboriginal Transport Project: new ways to have Aboriginal views heard

Transport problems faced by Aboriginal communities and individuals have been raised consistently with both government and non-government agencies in the Richmond Valley over a number of years. This is particularly true of the more isolated communities. In 1999 the Premier's Department Regional Coordination Project hosted a meeting that discussed options to improve access and mobility for isolated Aboriginal communities. Since that time the Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRSDC) has taken an active part in developing a proposal that would improve Aboriginal people's ability to get around and access the goods and services that other parts of the community take for granted.

In 2001 the NRSDC garnered resources from a number of funding agencies and government departments to commission a feasibility study of a proposed Aboriginal Transport Service in the Richmond Valley. Transport Planning and Management was engaged in September 2001 to undertake this task.

Discussions took place with people from six Aboriginal communities, five of which were visited by the consultants. People were contacted through the following Local Area Land Councils: Jubullum, Boolangle, Jali, Bogal, Gugin-Gudduba and Muli Muli.

Two of the communities, at Jubullum and Muli are located a long distance from regional services at Casino and Lismore. Three others at Cabbage Tree, Kyogle and Box Ridge are 20 – 30 kilometres from Lismore.

The outcome for the project was the examination of three options that would address in full the need for transport within Northern Rivers Aboriginal communities. In short, the options were;

1. Aboriginal owned taxi company
2. Aboriginal community transport group to be formed
3. Aboriginal Transport services to be contained within existing Community Transport Groups.

After taking into account a range of factors, option 3, the establishment of Aboriginal transport services within the existing Community Transport groups, was recommended to be further investigated. Other options could be reconsidered at a later date when a pool of Aboriginal people with the appropriate experience in operating transport services has developed.

Far North Coast Consortium of Neighbourhood Centres (CONC)

Neighbourhood Centres located on the Far North Coast have formed a strong regional network over a 15 year period, with coordinators meeting on a bi-monthly basis. All participants in the LCSA network are members of the Local Community Services Association, the peak NSW body for representing Neighbourhood and Community Centres interests to government. LCSA network meetings serve to share information, discuss issues, direct information to the peak body through the regional representative, and - as the years have passed and the linkages between centres have become strong – to provide peer support.

Neighbourhood Centres are catchments for the most disadvantaged people in a community and most centres on the Far North Coast provide some sort of funded or unfunded emergency supports to people on the socio-economic margins of our communities

The emerging picture for Neighbourhood Centres in 2003 was that most organisations were struggling to remain viable in the face of increasing demands for services by people with high and complex needs in the community such as homeless people, people unable to access refuges due to issues such as mental health and alcohol and other drugs use and people who because of social and economic disadvantage indicators are excluded from community participation.

As a result of the audit, the LCSA network group discussed ways by which their collaborative history could provide a solution to failing viability without altering their local commitments or personas. The solution provides an example of how partnerships can be thoughtfully and strategically developed to combine local assets into a strong regional profile – CONC was born.

Development of CONC took place during the following months in a step by step process during which the LCSA network either researched and/or developed the following partnership features loosely based around a consortium model developed by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare, which include;

- A common language for addressing member's expectations for the consortium without negatively impacting on the good relationships built up informally over a decade and a half
- A shared vision for how Neighbourhood and Community Centres could work together as a regional entity in securing funds to conduct regional projects
- A set of protocols that attempts to look at most situations that may face such a group and provide ways in which the existing good relationships developed over a long period of time could be maintained but also be turned to constructive problem solving at the same time
- Acknowledgement that centres could act competitively within their own funded catchments but would put competition aside if joining in a CONC venture
- Acknowledgement that not all centres could or would participate in each funding opportunity that arises and developing a language of acceptance of individual decisions.

There are more than 300 Neighbourhood Centres in New South Wales and many share the same problems experienced by those located in our region. It is not surprising therefore that interest in the CONC model has spread as a way that other networks can revitalize their shared interests and find ways of overcoming a resource-poor service stream.

Intra-regional youth projects.

"We need solutions to a lot of issues if young people on the Far North Coast are to have equitable access to all life opportunities"
an example of a collaborative partnership to support young people

Writing up the youth section for this plan has been the most difficult of all the issues that the NRSDC has addressed in progressing work on the key regional priorities during 2005. It appears that regional solutions to the regional problems facing Far North Coast youth are lacking even though young people overwhelmingly share the problem of having poor access to convenient and affordable public transport to take them to work and to educational activities. Youth transport is addressed in the section on Youth commencing on page 31 of this report.

Whilst a regional perspective on youth issues tends to be either missing or very insignificant at present, there is no shortfall of initiatives or focus on youth affairs at LGA or intra-regional levels - many such initiatives have been put into place addressing youth issues since the 2002 consultations.

The next and logical question has been to enquire if a service developed to address a problem surrounding young people in Nimbin is transportable to other parts of the region. Does a hinterland solution to youth transport translate to addressing the same issue for youth on the coast? Why do so many young people leave the Clarence Valley after school age compared to other parts of the region? Why is there no crisis accommodation for young people in one part of the Far North Coast whilst other parts of the region have a more equitable distribution of crisis care? Casino has the lowest number of young people in the region but the highest number of Aboriginal youth and that is where comments about youth racism have arisen. It is clear that intra-regional factors have a very strong influence on the nature of youth service supply and demand. These projects or initiatives shine out:

- The Byron Youth Commitment
- the Nimbin Street Beat Program;
- Lismore City Council's project 'Closing the Gaps' developed through partnerships between Council and Lismore Youth Services;
- the Youth forum held in Grafton in June 2004;
- the Casino & District Youth forum Evaluation Report (December 2004) a project of the Health Promotion Unit, Northern Area Health
- and another Area Health Service pilot project running in the Clarence Valley that helps support young people in accessing health services;
- the GP Voucher Project for young people,
- and finally the work of the Community Drug Action Team (CDAT) around the region.

It would be the work of another project to obtain details of further projects designed to address youth issues, put all the data together and try and obtain evidence to see if any initiatives or consultation practices are making a difference to how young people are viewed in their communities. We bring the Byron Youth Commitment to your attention as a way that the youth sector as a whole can be supported by a positive commitment using a process known as the 'Dusseldorf Skills Forum'. This project is based on the work of Byron Shire Council's "National Youth commitment" project that was convened in early 2003 using the Dusseldorf Skills Forum process where a large number of people came together to work through a set of processes that would create a cohesive network to encourage positive and visible opportunities for Byron Shire's young people.

NRSDC has looked at Youth Charter Commitments and recommend strongly that a regional commitment to looking for solutions that face young people on the Far North Coast is needed to highlight the issues that prevent many young people from being able to engage in their own communities. The key to building an effective Youth Commitment process is based on key features and principles that include;

- shared commitment by all key stakeholders to improving education and training arrangements through a regional or shire-wide youth commitment
- integration of existing local services for young people to add greater value to the existing service infrastructure – with emphasis on employment, education and training sectors
- active involvement of young people in design, delivery and evaluation of any Youth Commitment work undertaken in the region
- willingness to share resources developed through initiation of this Community Partnership

Closing comments

At the present time, most government agencies no longer conduct planning on a regular and/or cyclic basis and there is a tendency towards more 'planning' taking place within the context of consumer driven forums that do not canvass the views of service providers. This approach leaves little opportunity for the community sector to express what is needed in resource terms in order to provide services of the quality now demanded by more complex accountability processes. The magnitude of changes that has placed community based management as the No. 2 regional social priority is a clear example of how infrastructural needs of NGOs have been effectively ignored by government agencies. However, small gains are being made and one planning initiative has developed at the interagency level, notably by the Department of Community Services operating through their local and intra-regional Integrated Community Service Planning Forums. Whilst no (or few) funds are attached to this planning process, service providers are committed to contributing to the processes evolving through these forums. It is disappointing however that in a year when the Local Government was required to undertake a new social planning process, to date, only two Councils in the region were identified as having taken up the five key social priorities into their planning processes.

In terms of solutions that you will encounter in the body of this report, there is understandable hesitation on the part of the NRSDC to volunteer to progress work on all of the key issues at a regional level in a cost-neutral manner, or to expect "the sector" to take up regional issues, when it is clearly acknowledged by all levels of the community based sector, the capacity to resource extra work within existing timeframes and resources is no longer viable.

There is also clear evidence that the community sector has not flagged in addressing issues of importance and a key recommendation is for government agencies that require network interaction to take place as part of funded programs, should provide modest resources to the major intra-regional groups in order to maintain project-based momentum within the scope of the current regional priorities. This is an effective way for governments to ensure ongoing activity within those groups across the region and may stimulate or maintain effective linkages at an intra-regional level. With such structures, collaborative links can be formally established with NRSDC and thus provide ongoing and consistent input into regional issues.

Government needs to be aware that service providers can be overwhelmed by the magnitude of issues they face and this can lead to networks fracturing and occasionally folding. Regional supports informed by intra-regional processes is vital to the health of the sector.

It is not the task of this project to determine a future for the key social priorities but at an issues forum held in Ballina in 2002, it was recommended that the process of consultation be revisited every two years. In 2005, numbers attending general consultations are in a state of decline but other groups such as members of Aboriginal communities are asking to be consulted more and more – indicating that there needs to be very careful thought put into how, why and where consultations are held. The Northern Rivers has a plethora of disadvantage indicators and is experiencing rapid

population growth and this situation requires careful planning and infrastructural support from all tiers of government. Support for the community sector in being able to continue to address the needs of disadvantaged groups is vital and the outcomes of consultations will only be 'real' when they are reflected in decision-making processes.

During the course of this project it has also become clear that there are many other major social issues that were not included in the scope of the five priorities identified in 2002:

- issues affecting the aged and ageing communities, particularly in regard to ageing factors in remote rural areas of the region and associated problems in maintaining independent living, especially where the traditional "move to the coast" is no longer an affordable alternative for many people
- the "Best Practice HACC Service" Conference papers of 2003 are recommended reading and are available from the NRSDC.
- the issues facing people with disabilities and their opportunities for equitable community participation were not developed during the consultations and were largely omitted from inclusion in other concerns expressed about transport, accommodation, youth, and families affected by multiple vulnerabilities
- there are some excellent examples of projects that address issues facing the region's Aboriginal communities, but Aboriginal issues were markedly under-represented in the 2002 consultations. Aboriginal organisations and groups are leading the way in setting up consultation processes and there is clear encouragement from many service providers that consultations with Aboriginal communities throughout the region should be consistent and ongoing (see chapters on best practice).
- Issues surrounding cultural and linguistic diversity were also under-represented and whilst the CALD population of the region is under-represented by Statewide comparisons (1.3% cf. to 11.4% in NSW), the CALD population does not access community services very well and the increase in some CALD-specific funded projects in the region now suggest that more views need to be canvassed.

The NRSDC recommends that further consultations update the key social priorities but look at formats that will engage a much wider cross-section of the Northern Rivers NGO community. Such a process should be carefully planned and groups appropriately resourced to attend consultations in sufficient numbers to provide new levels of input into the range and scope of regional social priorities.

Projects like the Northern Rivers Social Priorities Project always build on other work and in this regard, the NRSDC is indebted to the skills of many people. As well as summarizing the current status of the key regional priorities, this report also includes some chapters on worthwhile initiatives that have arisen since the 2002 consultations. The NRSDC hope you will find this report to be of some use in your work as well as fulfilling the chief purpose of updating the current status of the five key regional social priorities.

Acknowledgements

This project builds on the expertise of many people who have contributed to a considerable body of work aimed at improving the delivery of human services in the Northern Rivers Region. The NR Social Priorities Project owes its present form to a series of consultations conducted in 1997, followed in 2001 by an initiative undertaken by members of the Northern Rivers Regional Interagency (NRRIA) to establish a collaborative framework to informed planning initiatives and service related processes. The NRRIA wanted to find out if consultations that engaged the concerns of many service providers at a local level would translate into issues of regional significance and to measure any shift in the outcomes of the 1997 consultations.

Despite some shortcomings acknowledged by the Consultant engaged to facilitate the consultations, the amount of information yielded by the 2001 consultations was comprehensive and has informed the content and material used in the present phase of this ongoing work. The NRSDC would like to acknowledge to those who have contributed to this project throughout its current three year phase. Our sincere thanks go to;

- those members of the now defunct Northern Rivers Regional Interagency who devised the 2002 regional consultation process and particularly to the Local Government Community Project Officers who facilitated the consultations
- the community workers who represented the views of their organisations in their areas of operation throughout the Northern Rivers, and in doing so brought to light a clear set of regional social priorities
- Katrina Luckie (now with the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board) for her work as Project Coordinator for the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy (and for her fine regional perspective)
- Jane Oliver, for her work in conducting the consultations in minimum time
- NCOSS, who supported the NRSDC in holding the 2002 Issues Forum that followed the consultation process and used the outcomes in pre-budget paper preparations.
- This forum was also supported by the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy, Tweed Shire Council, Byron Shire Council, Kyogle Council, Lismore Council, Ballina Council, Richmond Valley Council and (at that time) the Clarence Valley Councils
- The 2005 NR Regional Priorities Advisory Group who have participated in the further development of strategies undertaken through this project work.
- Barbara Carroll, Executive Officer of Tweed Valley Respite Service, for generously offering her work from a 1999 report to the Department of Community Services "Community Based Management of DoCS funded services in the Far North Coast of NSW - Stage 1", for further use, and to the Department of Community Services for supporting use of this valuable piece of consultation work
- Julie Byers, Regional Coordinator North coast Regional Coordination Program in the NSW Government Premier's Department for ongoing support and interest
- Ingrid Vet, Project Manager, Community Services, Institute of TAFE (Coffs Harbour Campus) for permission and support in adapting a frontline organisation self-assessment tool for NGO use in the Northern Rivers in regard to families affected by mental health, alcohol and other drug misuse and domestic violence

and to Jenny Grant, Premiers Department for her support in this partnership project initiated by Coffs Harbour Campus Institute of TAFE

- 2005 Community Care Conference Working Party - the Conference themed "Working at the Local Level" examined issues around community based management and raised awareness of many ongoing issues. Special thanks to Jenni Beetson-Mortimer, HACC Development Officer at the NRSDC and conference convenor and to Roberto Kenk, Social Planning and Community Program Officer, Ballina Council;
- All at NRSDC for their contribution to the smooth running of this conference especially Jenni Beetson-Mortimer and including Jenny Dowell, President, Tim Childs, Chief Executive Officer, Chris Wilson, Capacity Building Team Leader, Greig Dillon, A/g Manager, Reconnect, Linda Lomman, Public Transport Development Project Officer, Genevieve Raguse, Financial Coordinator and Sarah Brooker, Administrative Assistant.
- The NRSDC team who put the Affordable Housing Solutions conference together including convenor Chris Wilson and Mark Eather for his administrative assistance
- Interagencies throughout the Region – for their unerring focus on issues of importance to all services in the region; for striving to maintain vitality and commitment to the value of networking during good times and bad.

Special thanks go to an Advisory Group of active participants which has overseen the progress of work completed on the priorities for youth, community based management and the combined issues of mental health, domestic violence and alcohol and other drugs as they affect families. Work on the other two major priorities, namely housing and transport was carried out by an existing project team from the Northern Rivers Social Development Council. The project team liaised and communicated with all stakeholders and either facilitated forums or used other regional mechanisms to promote potential solutions to the issues arising from research and discussion.

This report is the result of collaborative input by many people and organisations within the Northern Rivers Region and has been assisted on its journey by an advisory group of diversely skilled professionals from different parts of the Northern Rivers who have shared in the process of examining the key social priorities in terms of offering workable solutions.

This report indicates areas of responsibility based on required input into the strategies where possible and practicable to do so. The project will be evaluated to determine how project targets, for examples, timeframes and budgets were met.

Any omissions are attributable to the project officer.

Membership of the Project Advisory Group

Tim Shearman:	Community Programs Officer, Grafton Council
Mary Willis:	Regional Violence Prevention Coordinator
Shauna McIntyre:	Community Development & Social Planning Officer, Lismore City Council
Dianne Creighton:	Aboriginal & Torres Straight Island Regional HACC Access Program Coordinator
Noeline Olive:	General Manager, Casino Neighbourhood Centre
Vicki St Lawrence:	St Lawrence Consulting
Jane Oliver:	Footprint Directions
Stewart Hase:	Southern Cross University
Tricia Shantz:	Lismore City Council Community Services Development Officer
Julie Hornibrook	NRAHS
Chris Wilson	NRSDC Capacity Building Team Manager

Advisory Group's key roles:

To oversee progress of work on social priorities that were identified on both a regional and an LGA-basis in the Norhtern Rivers Region through an extensive consultation process conducted in 2002.

To provide expert input and advice to project staff to achieve the key objectives of this project which are to;

- Determine the status of the 2002 consultative process and ascertain how government and non-government agencies are responding to the issues raised
- Ensure all stakeholders are informed about and have opportunities to participate in work undertaken during the life of the project
- Provide input and expert advice to inform the structure and content of public forums and to government
- Provide input into the final report for the project.