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WentWest Limited

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MEDIA RELEASE

Remarkable Success of Place-based Organisation Delivering Care for Local Community

Following the major flooding events in 2022, Western Sydney Primary Health Network opened applications for our Wellbeing and Resilience Grant Program, designed to support flood affected communities in Western Sydney. Grant recipient, North West Community Services Inc (NWCS), has played a pivotal role in supporting community through disasters, as highlighted by the Wellbeing Project report conducted by WESTIR Ltd.

Michelle Quinn, Executive Director at the Western Sydney Primary Health Network, shared, *“Looking forward, we know we need to prepare more proactively for the natural disasters that will continue to occur in our region, with more focus on long-term planning that accounts for the unique needs of different communities before, during, and after those challenging times. The success of the Wellbeing Project reinforces the importance of place-based community organisations in understanding the health and social needs of a local community before, during, and after those untoward events, so the most appropriate supports are made available. Organisations like North West Community Services, who have a strong history and established roots within some of our fastest growing communities, are well placed to understand, advocate for, and address local needs. We are delighted to announce the continuation of funding for the Wellbeing Project for a further year.”*

The North-West Sydney corridor has been a rapidly growing region, home to a population of over one million people. Parts of Blacktown and The Hills Shire Local Government Areas form part of the Hawkesbury-Nepean flood plan and have been hit with repeated floods over the last few years. Angela Van Dyke, CEO of North West Community Services Inc, stated *“As a local neighbourhood centre, we are on the ground every day, we see emerging issues quickly, and we have strong and trusted connections with diverse stakeholders in our community. This opportunity has highlighted the value of services like ours in the disaster planning and response processes.”*

The approach taken as part of the Wellbeing Project demonstrated that a local, place-based approach engaging with local leaders and community strengths results in better outcomes for all agencies involved in the disaster response, significant “value add” to resources, sharing of information and ultimately, better outcomes for residents that are flood affected.

Reinforcing the value of the Wellbeing Project, Warren Kirby MP, Member for Riverstone, stated, *“I was involved in the recovery effort alongside NWCS during flooding events that*

occurred in Riverstone that contributed to this report. Based on my experiences I completely agree with the findings that trauma-informed place-based recovery centres are essential for both immediate disaster response and long-term resilience building in regions susceptible to natural disasters."

Part of the Wellbeing Program allowed additional therapy sessions to be provided at Cattai Public School. Principal Robert Hawkes reported that 25 out of 60 students engaged in the sessions with notable improvements in emotional regulation and behaviour noted across cohorts and across the school more generally.

Robyn Preston MP, Member for Hawkesbury, commented, *"Natural disasters such as floods, bushfires and drought can cause serious mental health issues to those people who are impacted, that's why it is important to be able to connect and get support at a local level. The Wellbeing Report unpacks the importance of community aid and highlights the need for continued assistance well after the devastation is gone."*

With the support of WESTIR Ltd, the analysis and findings in Wellbeing Project report demonstrate the missing pieces for building community resilience and disaster response and recovery. The work has resulted in a report, providing insight on the value of focusing on local relationships as an effective way to build resilience in our communities. It also shows the ongoing value of the investment in building trust and social connections in local neighbourhoods. Strong and connected communities are often the first line of defense in a disaster so trust in services and public institutions can have significant positive impacts on how communities engage and recover from these events.

Moving forward, the program will focus on providing mental health and wellbeing support services for community. In addition, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Program will offer counselling and expressive therapies for children and young people.

To learn more about the Wellbeing Project run by North West Community Services Inc, contact the team on (02) 9627 3622 or visit the team in person at North West Community Services Inc, 9 Park Street, Riverstone NSW 2765.

To read the full report, please visit the [Importance of Place-based Community Organisations in Disasters webpage](#).

