



# Wardell CORE

## Who are we

The work of the Wardell Community Organised Resilience Effort (CORE) is an example of how a small town can rally in the face of a natural disaster and be ready for disasters to come. Most days, Wardell is an idyllic spot to live. Lush, green and quiet on banks of the Richmond River in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. But in 2022, floods devastated the town and others nearby. Wardell had never flooded before, and no one was prepared. Wardell CORE was set up as a resource centre for emergency donations. Bedding, blankets, clothes, food, medical supplies and water. Even torches and batteries and tents. The need was immense. Two years on, our primary purpose is still helping affected people. Some are still homeless and many struggle with mental health issues, including PTSD. Our other main aim is to make sure our community is never impacted in the same way again.

## What we needed

After the flood receded, we immediately started planning for the next one. We knew what we needed – two-way radios for local use and towns upriver and relay stations to extend the signal as far as possible. We couldn't afford either of these things with the small donations that keep Wardell CORE going. The Telstra grant meant we could fund 2 base stations and 10 hand-held devices and support the community with the appropriate training. We will also be providing radios for local State Emergency Services and Rural Fire Services teams. Through additional fundraising we were able to install a relay station that give us radio reception throughout town and with Woodburn and Coraki up-river, and Ballina down-river.

## How Telstra helped

Without the Telstra Connected Communities Grant we would never have been able to put our disaster preparation plans into action. The lessons learnt from the 2022 floods meant we knew what backup technology we needed and where it should be located. But our reliance on small donations meant we could never have afforded it. Now we have the communications we need to feel confident about our ability protect our people, physically and mentally, from any flood events in future.



Photo credit : Lauren Phillips

## Why it worked

During the 2022 floods our mobile and internet telecommunications were impacted, meaning we had limited or no communication in many areas until power could be restored or services fixed. Having no communications during a disaster created all kinds of problems – our emergency services people couldn't share vital information, residents were cut off from family and friends, and there were any number of complexities around ongoing recovery. After this it was very clear that radios should be our fall-back option in the case of future disasters. Another resilience move we made was installing a Starlink service and installing an onsite battery storage so we will have internet if the mains electricity goes down again.

## Where to next

Our plan is to distribute more radios throughout the region to anticipate flood events as widely and comprehensively as possible. We would also like to develop a workshop to teach people how to use weather forecasting and disaster apps on their phone. People here have high levels of anxiety about weather events but the low level of digital literacy in the community is a real barrier to disaster preparedness. To resolve this, we want to establish a national program that teaches people how to access and interpret weather apps and other related platforms. It will be very simple, engaging and informal, a bit like Telstra's popular Tech Savvy Seniors program.

## The Telstra Connected Communities Grant Program

Applications for the 2024 Telstra Connected Communities grant program on Tuesday 27th of February and will close at 5pm on Wednesday 27th of March 2024. This round will make \$200,000 available for applications of up to \$10,000 each. Successful grants will be announced in June 2024 and successful applicants will have 12 months to complete funded projects.

Learn more about the 2024 Connected Communities grant round here

<https://frrr.org.au/funding/place/telstra-connected-communities-program/>