



# NEIGHBOURHOOD CARE NETWORK

COVID-19 Bellingden Shire

## NEIGHBOURHOOD CARE NETWORK CONSULTATION REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was written by Charles Sturt University student Lauren English. Lauren is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Social Science (psychology)/Business (management) at the Bathurst campus, and is currently completing her final placement.

The overall consensus is that the Neighbourhood Care Network (NCN) has the potential to be a valuable ongoing support system, particularly for vulnerable people across the Bellingden Shire. Looking at feedback from participants to responding coordinators, it appears that people were grateful to have a support system in place, however, there was not a strong need for the system to be activated as the Bellingden Shire remained protected from COVID-19.

### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Of the 99 Neighbourhood Care Network coordinators, the survey had 43 respondents with a good spread of people from right across the Shire. A survey created on the SurveyMonkey platform was distributed to all the participants of the Neighbourhood Care Network via an internet link and was completed between the 25/05/20 and the 27/07/20.

All participants were invited to participate in the consultation and a survey was open for the 22 participants who wanted to be involved between the 18/07/20 and the 28/07/20. Of the 22 participants that indicated they wanted to be involved in the consultation, there was a total of 10 responses, however the average response per question was four. With such a low response rate, it has been decided that the participants responses will not be included consistently throughout the report. Although any interesting comments from participants will be included.

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NETWORK

In the entire network, there are 557 participants registered in the networks database however more people are in touch directly with their Coordinator. There are currently 54 local neighbourhood groups, most with more than one Coordinator.

More requests for help were received from people in local networks, rather than referrals from the NCN hub. There was a total of 59 requests for help made to the responding coordinators, 42 of these from someone in the Local Networks, and 17 referrals from the NCN Hub.

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## REASONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN THE NETWORK

Primary reasons for coordinators initially volunteering was all community based. For instance, respondents provided the following statements:

*"I am keen to help those in the community who need assistance and to generate a sense of community in my area".*

*"I thought that if we were headed the way Europe and the US were with regards to covid that there would be a lot of people stuck at home and in need of access to goods and services which they wouldn't be able to access were they in lockdown. I thought that I could be helpful in connecting people to one another. Those who needed help and those who could offer it."*

*"I felt I could make a real contribution and support people who had a genuine need for support. I also wanted to become more aware of what was happening in my local community."*

*"Because I felt I had the skills and time to support more vulnerable people in our community, and was worried people may need support, but not be comfortable asking for help."*

*"I thought it was a great initiative and would be of great value if things really went pear shaped."*

*"To help my community and remain connected during the COVID 19 lockdown restrictions"*

*"I was asked to and stepped up thinking it would provide a central role in bringing people together & disseminating info and support where needed."*

Why coordinators volunteered as a Local Network Coordinator

local community way wanted good people felt help  
contribute **community** connecting support asked need nurse  
thought time

One participant reason they joined their local network was that:

*“The pandemic affects us all, I want to be involved in something that assists people and keeps us connected at a time more people may be feeling isolated.”*

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## LOOKING BACK

The aims of the Neighbourhood Care Network were accurate and accessible information, providing help when needed, a sense of belonging and connection, and useful tools and resources. The majority of coordinator respondents (59.52%) believed the network performed ‘very well’ against these goals, while 38% rated performance as ‘ok’. One respondent was impressed how promptly the strategies were put into place, with the excellence in communication and information provided to coordinators and the sense of caring and community created.

How coordinators felt the network performed with regards to the set aims

think<sub>help needed</sub> people<sub>assistance</sub> Good lot  
community<sub>network</sub> needed<sub>help</sub> information  
communication

The network was primarily praised by coordinators for their responsiveness to people’s needs, advertising through flyers, sharp and targeted focus, clear and professional communication, distribution of accurate information, clarity of instructions, practicality, and simplicity.

*“The focus of the network was sharp and targeted. Dedicated centralised admin and management staff meant it was consistent and thus able to mobilise assistance when needed by the community”.*

*“Strategies put into place promptly. Communication excellent, informing coordinators of their role. Inviting all together for discussion, a sense of caring community”*

*“Very hands on with assistance and communication. Had lots of phone calls from Newry Island aged for assistance. Easter egg drop was amazing. Definitely hands on and practical work was MOST appreciated”*

*“Because all the human interactions that occurred for me around the NCN, contained authenticity and positivity. I think people are tired of being marketed to and self serving contact ,I found people responded well to the flyers as genuine support, as they were written with this authenticity.....not for example Council or anyone else trying to self promote.”*

There were some coordinators however, that had hesitations.

*“The structure to network and disseminate information was setup quickly. I'm not sure information was sent out regularly enough but this is probably because by the time the Newsletter was established the urgency around Covid-19 seemed to have passed.”*

*“Accurate, accessible information was available as were useful tools and resources. Help when needed was available. I don’t feel that a sense of belonging and connection was created amongst this community. It’s difficult when most of the people in an area are self sufficient and don’t seek assistance or wish to participate.”*

Other respondents seemed unclear on what ‘gaps’ the network was trying to fill in the community and felt that due to confusing advertising key messages were lost. One coordinator also indicated that due to the timelines of information, tools and resources were not always beneficial.

*“It took a while to get everything up and running at the start so there was a lag between the time when people volunteered and when they could get going. And, because the acute phase of COVID isolation/fear only lasted a few weeks, by the time the systems were in place, some people didn’t see the on-going role as clearly.”*

*“One of the challenges was creating documents and processes on the spot. Also, the dynamic changes made it difficult to ensure clients were getting the most update information. For example, opening hours of the COVID clinic restrictions and best practices in hygiene were dynamic.”*

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## COORDINATORS ROLE

Overall coordinators felt underutilised in their roles and had hoped that there was more they could do to support their community. This is seemingly due to a lack of response from the community, and for some a lack of guidelines from the network.

*“I don’t feel like I did much. I could have taken it on myself to do more but I only did what felt necessary - which in the circumstances turned out to be less than expected”*

*“Was not called on to do anything very much so do not feel like the capacity or limitations of the role was tested. The anticipated requirements for assistance did not materialise in the volume anticipated due probably to the speed of adaptation of business in providing delivery services.”*

*“Ineffectual. I probably wasn’t the right person for the job. I needed clearer guidelines as to the role ie specific tasks rather than up to me to do. It’s a difficult non community street as well”*

*“Don’t feel that I coordinated much of anything. I was able to assist one client with my Vinnies hat on. Another was known to me through Vinnies. No-one else sought assistance.”*

*“I found it a little tricky in a rural area, my area covered 15km plus, it was too much. And as the lock down did not last long there was not much need in our area. I felt a bit ‘pushy’ or invasive putting flyers in people’s letter boxes.”*

Others felt proud of themselves for volunteering and can see the role having great potential in the future.

*“It was very flexible, overwhelming at one stage (I think if we got COVID here) but also a rewarding position. Opportunity to make it what you wanted”*

*"I feel that it was potentially a great role to have but it did not eventuate as I had thought it would. I am still of the mind that it's important to have people within a community that are connectors and are able to connect people. This is still a role I feel I could fulfil as a community member."*

*"Pleased to join network, and open to an ongoing involvement. With social distancing in place was hard to meet in person, but felt good efforts were still made to connect. Less opportunity to practically support in that little needs were identified given less 'crisis' in local context to date."*

*"Really positive, it gave me purpose and a helped me channel my fear and anxiety into something productive. I was able to use my skills to help others and that was great for my self esteem."*

*"I really enjoyed it and walking around the streets with good intentions, and an interest in community resilience led to some rich, significant encounters."*

*"My role involved gathering and informing people. The gathered people were also concerned for their community and came up with ideas of caring and sharing."*

Coordinators also provided feedback on what they learnt during their experience.

What coordinators learned from their experience as a Local Network Coordinator

lot Helping need happy connected will local social know really  
community network people time lived think area  
way already even good feel support us many

Most coordinators seemed to learn a lot about their local community, and the importance of connectedness and people knowing that there is somebody there to help, particularly in times of crisis such as the pandemic.

*"That I would take on a smaller area next time. That I didn't like doing leaflet drops!! That we are really quite isolated from one another on these long windy roads. I have lived here for 17 years & knew all my neighbours when I first lived here - that is a very different scenario now with some houses not lived in at all - either vacant or Air bnbs - so many airbnbs... too many airbnbs.. Folk less friendly and tolerant these days perhaps. I would do it again and think it would be really worthwhile in other crisis situations."*

*"That companionship is so very important for people living alone and that just knowing someone is looking out for them is often enough."*

*"That it can be challenging to connect with people despite our "connectedness". Everyone has their preferred modes of communication and they aren't always the same - phone, email, face to face, newsletters etc... It can be hard to convince people of what you're doing if they aren't open to it."*

*"Many Dorrigo farming people already have their local supports through the work that they do on the land. They have a strong helping approach when someone is in need - but they keep to their known small group"*

*“that sometimes just being there is enough to make people feel safer”*

*“People seem happy to look after themselves?? Although we did have our first neighborhood gathering last Dec - pre-COVID- which was well attended & a great fun evening so we will have another in due course. Maybe an informal social gathering like that a couple of times per year is the best way to connect people.”*

*“Learnt more about my community and their inter connectivity. The local community feels more connected and able to support each other going forward”*

*“Sometimes it is worth going beyond your comfort zone as there are so many people who'd like to be part of a response. I also learned about how many networks and informal groups there are, even in my local area.”*

*“Learnt more about my community and their inter connectivity. The local community feels more connected and able to support each other going forward”*

Others felt underutilised and that the role wasn't what they had hoped for, or that they potentially were not fit for the position.

*“I really didn't do anything other than let people know I was there if they needed. I think the structure of the network was sound with accessible information and good coverage of the area.”*

*“I felt very disappointed by the experience and basically do not feel it is something I will continue with.”*

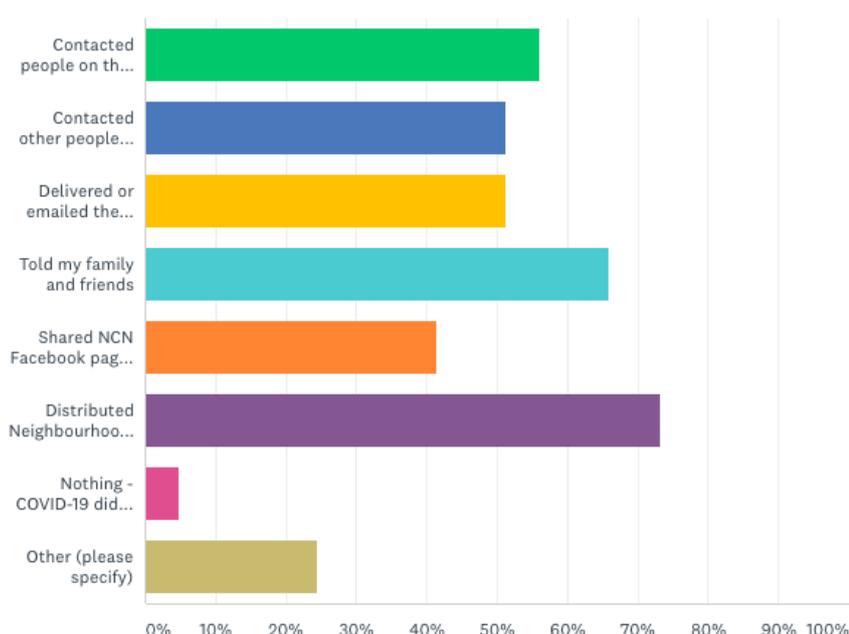
*“How scary it felt to put my hand up. Perhaps that I'm not a great person for this job given that I'm not a naturally very social person”*

*“I wonder if I should have reached out more.”*

## WHAT HAPPENED

In terms of building their network most (73.13%) respondents distributed leaflets around their area. Although, one respondent did indicate that delivering flyers was time consuming and weather dependant.

### How coordinators built their network



Other responses were as follows:

- Sewed masks for vulnerable people in my area. Set up a lady to meet with an elderly resident and keep in touch (they still do)
- Organised Easter Egg drop. Did local home delivery. Daily phone calls to elderly
- Neighbourhood driveway drinks
- we held a series of three neighbourhood drinks in different parts of the street. About 10 people attended each.
- Delivered the joining request and newsletter
- Set up a funky food collection spot to collect donated food for the Open Cupboard. This worked and also set up a lovely visual of support in Hill St, which has a lot of walkers going up to the lookout.
- Promoted it through the store too all the community
- Dropped hard copy of Newsletter to everyone
- Left leaflets at the library and asked businesses to display them in their windows and on notice boards. Had the post office distribute into post boxes at no charge.
- COVID 19 wasn't such a big deal for us, but it has provided an opportunity to reach out to those who may have felt a little isolated

Coordinators were encouraged mostly by the work and support of the NCN team, the appreciation of the community and the potential to help those in need.

*"I was encouraged by being given the choice to share in a multitude of ways. I still felt like I was playing my part and spreading the word by sharing often on Facebook, particularly on days where letterbox dropping wasn't an option."*

*"Hearing about the community strengthening that happened for some during the bushfires (and how helpless I felt to help at that time) encouraged me to step up this time"*

*"The efforts made by Kerry and her team encouraged and inspired me."*

*"I sent an initial text out to the 10 people registered on the NCN database. I received some encouraging responses and then used this to break through the fear of interfering barrier. As a team, we worked to host the drinks parties/deliver the newsletter."*

However, others did not feel there was much demand in their neighbourhood and lacked responsiveness from community members. Additionally, others felt underwhelmed by the impact COVID-19 ended up having on the community.

*"After having delivered the NCN leaflets and not receiving a response (except from someone who had offered to be a coordinator) I felt that most of those on my list did not want direct contact."*

*"There was no real need, there was a lot of information from other sources"*

*"lack of responsiveness from neighbours didn't give much encouragement to follow up. Otherwise just did normal neighbourly things with immediate neighbours."*

*"The outlying Dorrigo area which I targeted seems to have their own networks already in place - unlike town areas"*

*"I didn't feel there was a need to do so. People ended up not being isolated like we had anticipated and I felt that individuals were in control of their own situations."*

*"I think a lot of people felt they had everything under control so no need to join so not so many names on my list. I have a family and found it difficult to get around to people but personal contact was often what lonely people needed."*

*"I was deterred by the fact that we weren't impacted...I joined just at the end of the restrictions so things were starting to get back to "normal". If things pick up again then i will be motivated to do more"*

Others felt out of their depth, or intrusive for recruiting neighbourhood participants

*"Encouraged by it being a great on the ground community resource that could continue into the future. Discouraged by some neighbours being suspicious of it and not wanting council to have their details - concerns regarding what would be done with their personal information.."*

*"I had only moved to the area 2 wks earlier, honestly felt there would be others in the st who would be better informed of the neighbourhood. I didn't stop working so i didn't have much spare time to focus on 'building'."*

*"I only had my street of 5 houses. People are already engaged in the community and resourceful. Felt patronising to provide/insist on assistance. Just let them know it was available."*

*"Delivering flyers was really time consuming and weather dependent. Not enough volunteers in my area so the area was too big to traverse more often."*

Alternative deterrents included social distancing restrictions, technology gaps and efforts made by other coordinators and a lack of information.

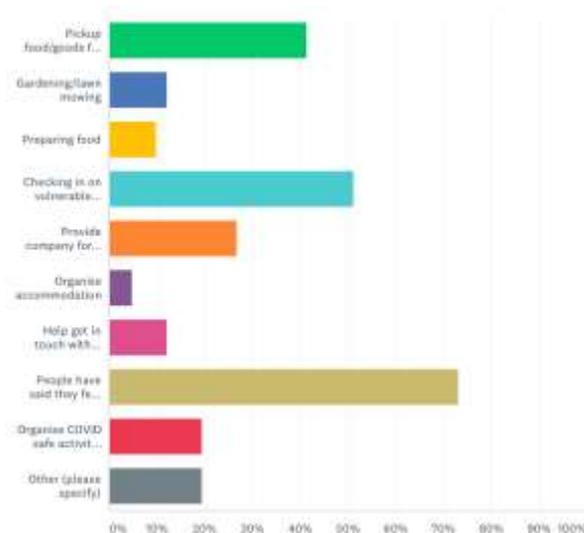
*"Main barrier was social distancing. Would be good to build face to face networks prior for future emergencies"*

*"I don't use Facebook - and I think perhaps Dorrigo people use this form of communication. Also most rural properties don't have letterboxes - they probably use a post office box."*

*"There was another coordinator in a close by micro community that also was happy to do my street. That said, I knew we had two really vulnerable people in our street who needed extra support."*

*"Lack of information and I got sick so withdrew"*

#### Assistance Local Networks provided to Participants



Other forms of assistance include:

- We didn't need to anything even though all of the above were things I thought we could have offered was there the need.
- I have no real idea, that is part of my concern about the initiative at a local level
- We didn't have any specific requests for assistance

- Promoted feel good activities for community - Anzac Day celebrations and social gathering with neighbours
- Put one household in touch with another (next door neighbours) for food deliveries.
- Contacted one Re assisting with work but they didn't need my help
- Deliver library books -only service called on to provide. The above services could have been provided if demand warranted
- Cutting kindling and bringing in firewood. Transport to appointments.

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## FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS TO COORDINATORS

*"Good on you for volunteering but I don't think we need it"*

*"You are doing a great job."*

*"All positive - great idea, good to know it was there if needed & a reluctance to sign up and give details."*

*"I think people were reassured that the service was there should they require it. One man was very happy with connecting with others in our street and felt very grateful to have people who could pick up letters to be posted, keep him company etc"*

*"1 person was interested in the idea of get together/ chats. Encouraged them to make contact with the network hub."*

*"2 people made contact and said they appreciated what we were doing."*

*"They liked knowing help was there if they needed it"*

*"They liked knowing that there was a group offering support"*

*"a few email responses. glad we were there"*

*"Very happy to know it existed and a good opportunity to meet and get to know better their neighbours."*

*"a useful connecting tool - handy to keep it going into the future for other scenarios eg fires etc"*

*"People really enjoyed the get togethers and appreciated the initiative but didn't really think they needed specifics."*

*"They were reassured to know there was someone who cared and was there for them if they needed it. From one gentleman who was not in need of help he comment how good it was to live in a town who was so organised."*

*"That they were grateful for the flyers.....no one acted like I was giving out junk mail, that they enjoyed a yarn and sense of connection by having a real encounter about the actual issue.....many people came out to letterbox when I delivered."*

*"Neighbours said the newsletter was very useful. Everyone in the street thought the network is a good idea."*

*“The only person who reached out was an elderly woman who lives directly across the road from me. She was grateful that I could give her all the latest local updates as she doesn't have Facebook and relies on local news.”*

*“one email from someone who was happy to know there was help. One conversation with someone who received my leaflet and said she had checked on people in her street and everyone was being looked after (Baker Street, Fernmount)”*

*“All the feedback was very very positive. Grateful for the help and appreciative of the time volunteers gave to assist. Thankful for the service being available”*

*“Because our area is relatively isolated anyway people mostly have systems in place to cope in times of uncertainty”*

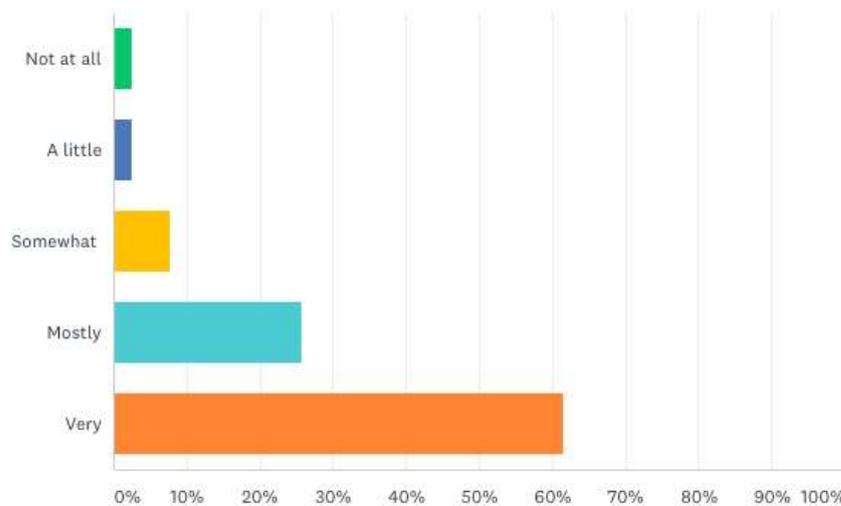
*“Happy there was a support network if it was needed.”*

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## SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATION

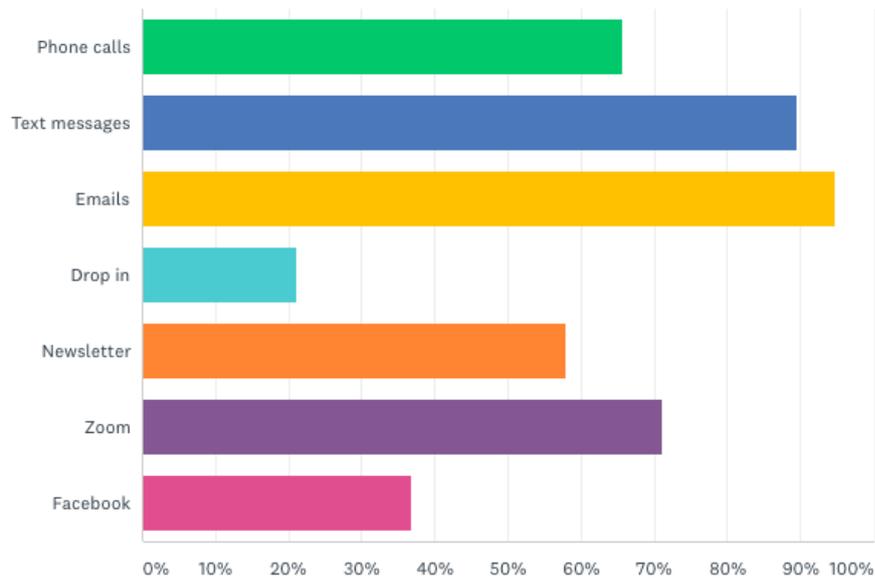
### How supported coordinators felt in their role

Answered: 39 Skipped: 4



## Types of communications coordinators had with the NCN hub

Answered: 38 Skipped: 5



Two of the respondents also indicated that they were volunteering at the hub.

Most of coordinators were satisfied with the level and modes of communication set up by the NCN hub, however multiple respondents indicated that face to face meetings and clearer team updates would improve communications.

*“Probably rely less on social media/internet as in our area it was difficult to get good internet connection, especially when you have adults working from home and students using it from home to complete their schoolwork as well”*

*“A regular monthly email update would be useful”*

*“hmmm meet in person, I think Kerry mentioned a picnic..... could we zoom in pairs?”*

*“More specifics and less details”*

*“Regular meetings and clearer outline of goals”*

Others provided suggestions regarding the communication systems and future coordinating roles.

*“All co-ordinators use a platform that allows group chats with organised data sharing threads for ease of looking back. I recommend Slack & am happy to set one up and show how to use, it's actually really simple. This would allow coordinators to keep in touch with each other too, and share what they have found that is working better for them, or discuss areas they see assistance is lacking in etc.”*

*“I don't think that the VOIP service was very user friendly. People were discouraged by the opening hours and formal Connection Centre response.”*

*“Not really sure probably needed more people who were coordinating the project to support the coordinators on the ground towards developing the strategies and networks. I am hindered by very limited access to Internet as well”*

General feedback primarily indicates that coordinators thought the network was a great idea and are appreciative for the efforts made. There were also some recommendations left for the network by coordinators.

*“keep it going. Maybe good to brainstorm roles it could play in the future with local coordinators”*

*“I think its a great initiative, can see how these roles would be well suited to folk who don't have a full time job. I think its healthy to recognize that the zones are all very different to each other. Some streets are a lot more social.”*

*“It was a great reflection of the level of kindness that exists in this community”*

*“I was extremely impressed by the NCN run from Bellingden, my disappointment sits with the local network. “*

*“Thank you”*

*“initiative is fabulous and should continue to grow and develop”*

*“I felt supported if the situation should change for the worst, some sort of backup system has to be in place, I think it was a good initiative”*

*“Even though the pandemic didn't have a massive impact clinically on the town, it certainly had economic and social impacts. I think it has brought the town closer together, and made us aware of where our vulnerable people are. It also highlighted what a giving and amazing shire we live in- I was able to support and felt supported and safe. This experience also shone the light on our gaps in resilience as a community. It was overall a really positive experience.”*

*“I really enjoyed Kerry and Clare leading the project, I liked their motivation. I think you do need mature 'heart people' or 'people people' you don't just want efficient, busy, well trained people or you end up with the limitations that come with being an institution/business model and lose your grassroots authenticity.”*

*“I would like it to continue so we are prepared for future situations.”*

*“I think it's a great idea.”*

*“It's a great idea, but probably under utilised because the COVID19 crisis was mostly over by the time we were sorted out also people in our area have already systems in place to cope.”*

*“A long rural road is not quite the same as having neighbours next door. You don't see or hear your neighbours in the same way as when you walk down a suburban street. It has made me think that maybe more effort needs to be put in to developing a closer community.”*

*“Sometimes the processes seemed a little clunky and the IT a little difficult to use.”*

*"I think it was and is a fantastic network with great potential. I think we must recognise that there are so many people that do this work within their own social groups already and that it can be extremely difficult to connect with people who are genuinely in need. I felt that those who are truly isolated would not have zoom, phones or the internet. Some part of me felt that we were "preaching to the converted" and offering a service to those that already had quite well established networks. I felt that had we truly been in a crisis that a lot of people would have missed out despite having the NCN. For me the most useful mode of communication were the signs up around town - but if you dont have internet you miss out!! There is still such a real divide that is so prevalent in regional Australia!"*

*"Although it was not evident that there was a strong need, this in part was perhaps that as a community and country we managed the COVID19 very well and people felt well informed and fairly safe"*

*"I think it was an expression of the kindness of many people living in this community. But it also taught me that farming communities around Dorriggo have in place some strong networks already honed through their people connections through their work on the land etc., Perhaps one of the main things is getting the message out there - and letterbox dropping is not a good way to do it. I think posting letters via names and addresses on the electoral rolls and adverts in the weekly Don Dorriggo Gazette would have reached more people. Also a regular table at the fortnightly Dorriggo cattle sales."*

*"I wonder whether you need "area" coordinators as well as the neighbourhood coordinators? The more channels a message goes through, the more the probability of the message being scrambled."*

*"I think it would be good to pair up with another coordinator"*

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## FUTURE OF THE NETWORK

### Coordinators views of the NCN's role in the future

building neighbourhoods disasters available future already way place  
local network think great need groups community  
services people use support happening emergency  
local networks good fires etc continue structure events

There is an overwhelming response that the NCN should continue with its framework and strengthen to facilitate continued support amongst the community.

*"The needs across the region are so varied a spectrum of help should be available and the Networks role should be in identifying and co-ordinating the differences"*

*"Connecting people with similar interests. Encouraging resilience"*

*“Mainly being a resource for those who might need support in practical ways and to communicate timely & accurate information.”*

*“Active and independent at the local community level, but systems remaining dormant and able to be quickly put in place should the need arise.”*

*“There are always isolated People in any community who are struggling to find support and connection. This initiative could be of great use even when there is no crisis. Networks built during non-crisis period strength in the community’s capacity to respond when things get bad.”*

*“I think some role in emergencies, fires, floods etc, it could coordinate food supplies, shelter and follow up, which is often forgotten.”*

*“The network should continue. Where local networks have formed, these should be nurtured by Coordinators. Local networks should continue to be associated and effort made to link them together with a light touch. I think that the Network should think through its life cycle through the different phases of emergencies, identifying when to crank up, slow down, consolidate, educate, innovate, etc. I think that there are opportunities for engaged local networks to be involved in innovating local approaches to resilience - be it DRR, social cohesion, etc.”*

*“Proactive building of relationships & preparation - within local neighbourhoods, and between coordinators to support resilience. Structure could then be used in future. Perhaps there are also other relevant networks could link to in region, or relevant learning opportunities for group for future.”*

*“We have won the battle- but not the war. There will be other threats to the shire, natural disasters, economic struggles and just the day to day ever present threat of disconnectedness from the community due to illness, age and injury. I think it would be good to have standing processes for the next event.”*

*“Aiming to continue to build community ties. Floods, bushfires and other disasters are likely to keep happening and having a strong sense of community will lead to a more resilient community.”*

*“I think it’s a fabulous concept. Probably didn’t get up and running in a big way as it wasn’t such a problem in the end. When and if there are real local issues like with fires it would be amazing. Great idea and a n excellent building block for futures disasters”*

*“You know how you see photos of staff at Bunnings or IGA it would be good to have community people contactable. And a sense of intentional, supportive social fabric woven back into local community. Research for example on Health shows that the Health System cannot cope with the demands and is collapsing even before Covid19. The mental Health stats and suicide etc are increasing.....so the picture is asking for new creative ways to support community. And the research around Connection for Wellness is very powerful, so good if we could find some new, contemporary, creative responses.”*

*“A presence in the community via social media perhaps and linked in with BSC and the Neighbourhood centre for access as needed. A regular newsletter to keep in touch and check in on members.”*

*“It should be there to respond to community need. This might include fires, floods, economic downturn and more pandemics.”*

*“I think the NCN should work on building up a strong volunteer database and be a place that can provide assistance between events as well as during events. This way, with it already being set up and actively engaging with the community outside major events, we are creating resiliency for the future”*

*“It could be a great way to connect and support people where that becomes necessary or where people show an interest in that. If we still had a local newspaper it could have been a good way of reaching more people to be part of the network.”*

*“I feel that we need to be available for older and vulnerable people in our community if we want to be successful during emergency situations. If they don't know about us or who we are or what we do, they won't contact us when they are in need.”*

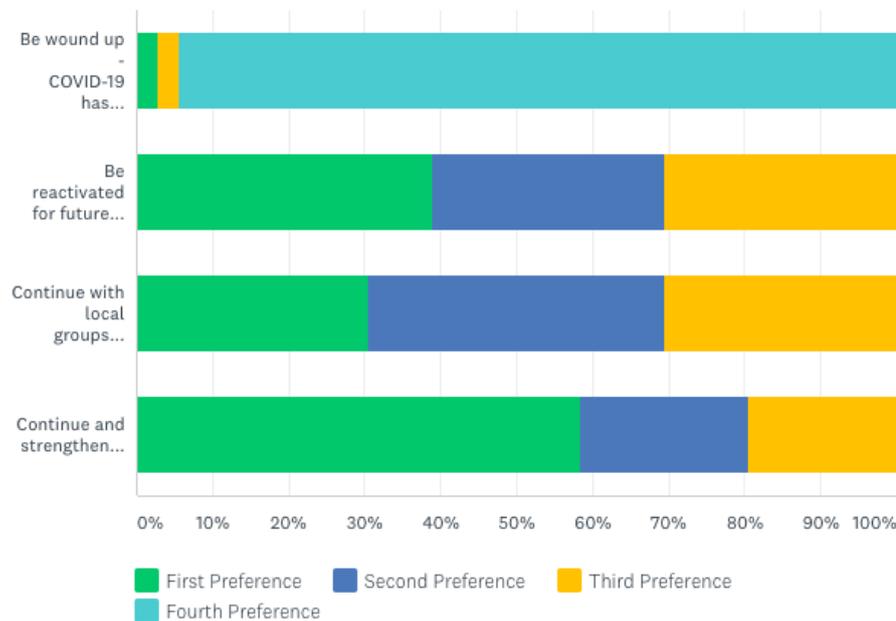
*“Now established, the NCN is a valuable support group on the ground for any disaster. Whereas disaster recovery teams usually come into a neighbourhood from 'outside', the NCN is operating 'within' neighbourhoods, and can therefore be a good support for recovery teams.”*

Insight from the participant survey results for how participants in the network see the network evolving include:

- Providing support in any context that supports community members, such as natural disasters and pandemics
- To continue to help community members feel connected
- Phone tree: encourage individuals to check in with other network members weekly. Involves every member making and receiving a weekly call
- A centre of information that can direct those in need to relevant support services

Teaming up single person homes with family homes, so more support can be offered

What coordinators believe should happen to the network



Preferences – full text

1. Be wound up as COVID hasn't hit us
2. Be reactivated for future emergencies
3. Continue with local groups being active if they choose
4. Continue and strengthen support for vulnerable people between and during emergencies.

What coordinators think their role should be in the future

perhaps offered groups Depends coordinators support needs  
 local network community know people now local much  
 help together information called require area

Majority of respondents suggest that their role should continue in a similar fashion, being a point of contact and source of information that coordinates care and activities in the community. Most of these responses were regarding being provided with current information and more collaboration between coordinators and other organisations.

*“Pretty much the same as now. Some guidelines on what might happen in different phases of the emergency cycle. Some training opportunities. An annual get together.”*

*“To be aware of those who are vulnerable in their micro community and who can help in their micro community and match the two.”*

*“Building or improving community connections. Aiming for a caring, sharing, resilient community.”*

*“People that continue to provide information on available support at different times to their local network. This will allow people to keep up-to-date with where the NCN is at, and make themselves known to the people in their area so that people can establish a singular point of contact if they require any info on local events”*

*“Coordinators should continue to organise volunteers to help those who request assistance, provide feedback to the NCN committee about needs and wants and help facilitate support for those in the community.”*

While most think that the support provided was sufficient, coordinators also identified what support they think necessary for their role to continue and strengthen.

*“To have communication with other groups to share ideas and know what they are doing.”*

*“Timely information about the current situation ( COVID, fires etc)”*

*“Volunteer training program for people who want to be coordinated so everyone is well informed, well resourced, and on the same page knowing what the channels of support are and the parameters of the role”*

*“Access to other social service providers and charities”*

*“Building a sense of identity for coordinators, building collegiality between coordinators, learning opportunities shared”*

*“In person meeting of NCNs as starting point. Further clarity regarding how fits into other future resilience activities in shire”*

*“Training on professional boundaries and what to do if things escalate beyond what is reasonable expected of a good neighbour. Confidentiality.”*

*“Sharing what other Coordinators are doing. Building links between Coordinators to enable sharing. Written resources are of value but just reading something isn’t the best way for many people to learn.”*

*“Central communication system like you had before”*

*“A sense of being in a team of Coordinators and educating myself who has what streets etc Eg on zoom I met Tyler and then delivering flyers I met his mum who told me Tyler was doing Crown St etc”*

*“A solid platform, as mentioned previously to allow collaboration between coordinators and sharing of ideas, as well as a singular platform, to post fliers etc.”*

*“Easy to use technology, so we can access databases, information, forms etc to effectively connect with the volunteers and the residents.”*

Other organisations the NCN should collaborate with

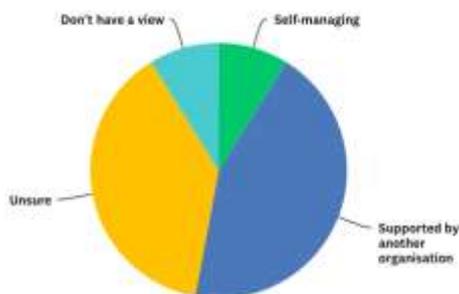
neighbourhood centre youth <sub>clubs</sub> youth hub <sub>CWA</sub>  
centre youth hub <sub>Bellinghen</sub> community organisations  
local <sub>Lions Rotary</sub> groups <sub>Dorrigo</sub>  
Neighbourhood Centre <sub>etc</sub> Council <sub>hub</sub>  
Chamber Commerce <sub>fire</sub> service

Suggestions for other organisations that the network should partner with include:, Neighbourhood Centre, Food Pantry, Youth Hub, legal professionals, Chamber of Commerce, doctor surgeries, and other health professionals, Lions, Rotary, Quota, SES, Red Cross, Bellinghen Neighbourhood Centre, CWA, Senior Citizens, Dorrigo Support Centre, Youth Hub, and the InterChurch Council.

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## LEGAL STATUS OF THE NETWORK

Do coordinators think the NCN should be a separately incorporated, self-managing organisation or picked up and supported by an existing organisation



As you can see above, majority (47.06%) are either unsure, or do not have a view. However, of those who selected an option, most respondents believe the network should be supported by another organisation.

*“Infrastructure, incorporation, funding, everything takes too long bureaucratically if you have to start from scratch. Much better for the project to be authorised by an existing peak body”*

*“Self-managing takes people and time. Do we have enough people willing to take it on and run it?”*

*“Hmmm hard question, I think 'self-managing' is too small a pool of energy in small town, however finding a good supportive organisation can be very fraught. I am thinking very laterally here but I wonder if for example the Red Cross or Country Women’s Association, Lions or ????? some organisation could have a renaissance over these new needs.....”*

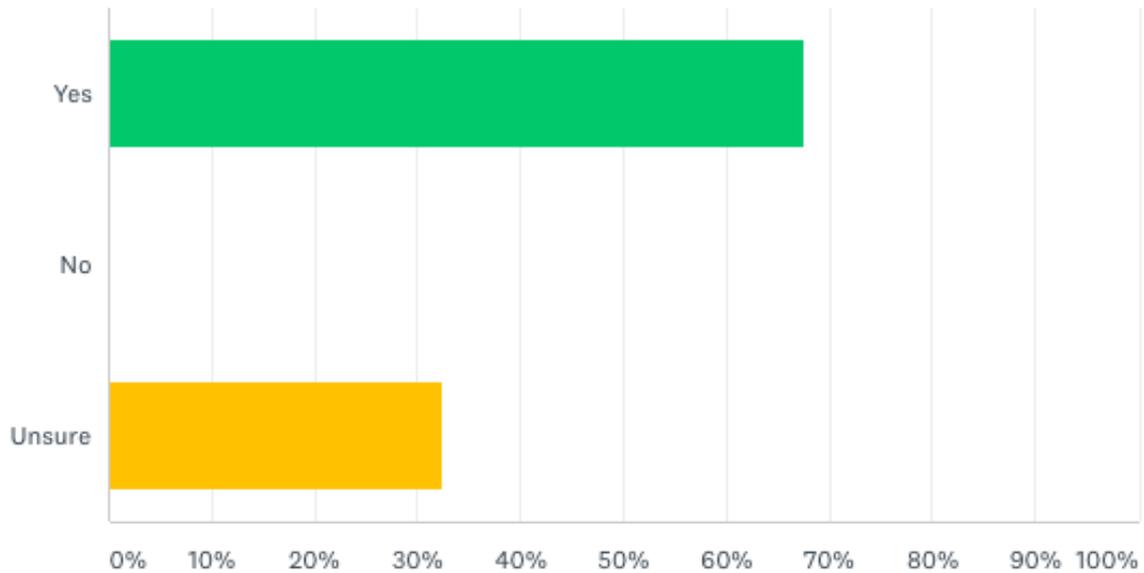
*“I can see benefits either way. Self-managing is more work for volunteers but allows for more autonomy, however supported by another organisation will reduce costs and volunteer commitments but reduce autonomy.”*

*“There are so many individual incorporated identities within the shire already each one has to pay their own insurances etc which just increases costs, if it were to be self-managing perhaps there is an opportunity to allow the incorporated status be used by smaller local groups to allow them to access funding”*

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## FUTURE INVOLVEMENT

Would respondents like to continue their role as a coordinator if the network continues



*“I would love to.”*

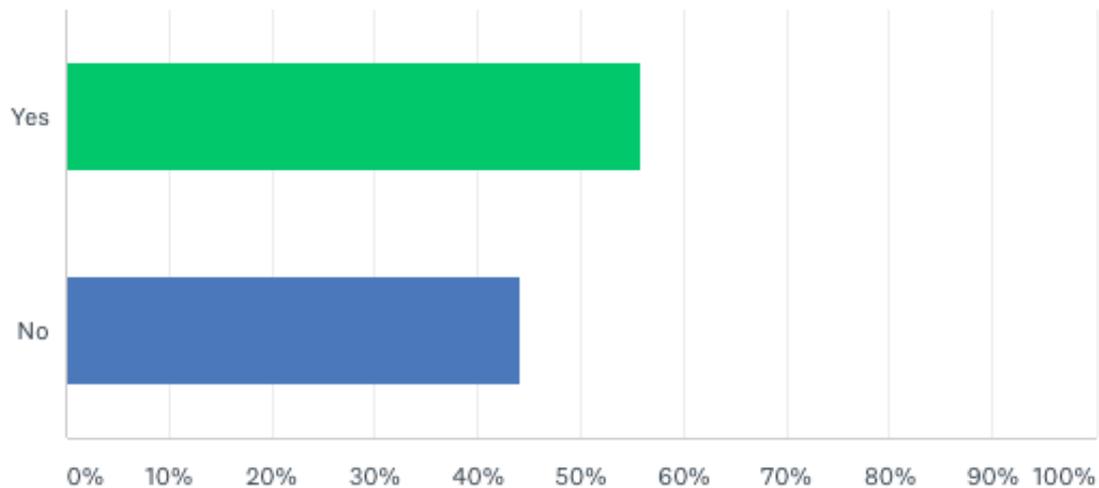
*“If there is a need to inform community members in my zone I'm happy to do this.”*

*“I think so - but haven't really done much so far”*

While no respondents selected 'no', one did express a dissatisfaction with their role

*As expressed previously, I'm very disappointed at the local level actions.*

## Respondents interest in contributing to the network as an active volunteer member of the NCN hub



Comments suggested that the reason coordinators are not willing to contribute as volunteers of the network hub is due to other commitments and being time poor.

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### ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, there were some comments that suggested areas for improvement. These were largely regarding distribution of information and clarity of coordinator roles.

*"Felt it was a "closed shop" with very or little liaison from local organisers"*

*"I think finding one point of reliable information was very difficult. There seemed to be a number of access points to find info and it wasn't obvious what services you were offering."*

*"Delivering flyers was really time consuming and weather dependent. Not enough volunteers in my area so the area was too big to traverse more often."*

*"I felt very disappointed by the experience and basically do not feel it is something I will continue with"*

*"I felt that those who are truly isolated would not have zoom, phones or the internet. Some part of me felt that we were "preaching to the converted" and offering a service to those that already had quite well-established networks. I felt that had we truly been in a crisis that a lot of people would have missed out despite having the NCN. For me the most useful mode of communication were the signs up around town - but if you don't have internet you miss out!! There is still such a real divide that is so prevalent in regional Australia!"*

*"There was no attempt to bring the local network together, we were kept in our own area e.g. Newry Island with no liaison with others in our coastal network. Not really sure what we achieved if anything."*

*"I'm afraid the initiative tended to be rather disjointed for my area Urunga. The first newsletter advising the community about NCN was not delivered to my address; so, I am not sure whether others also missed out. I personally volunteered to do the 2nd Newsletter drop, so felt confident all of the community had been covered."*

*"I was rather disappointed. A neighbourhood initiative for support to make face masks was virtually ignored when I had identified someone who was extremely keen to provide this support. Also, not completely sure about where the local data collected regarding households sits and how is privacy guaranteed."*

Responses from the participant survey, while also mostly positive have provided areas for the NCN to improve.

*"I didn't feel very connected - there was a flurry of contact early, then not much at all. I was however aware that I could call on them if needed."*

*"My neighbour has been friendly and offered to help me which I did call on them to do - this was independent of the network. I would like to see some research and feedback specifically on people who live on their own - maybe they would like more connection, and maybe those Homes with More than one person might consider how they can support a single person - maybe team a family up with a single person?"*

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## OTHER FEEDBACK FROM COORDINATORS

*"Thanks for all the hard work, thought and dedication you all put into the NCN"*

*"I stepped up for my zone/area as no one else did. If someone else appeared I'd be happy to step back. I feel my community service cup is full to overflow. If there is a need for me to assist with future co-ordination due to an emergency, I'm at this stage happy to step in."*

*"I would love to be part of this and be able to help people"*

*"The Network was a great idea. Thanks to all those who worked their bums off."*

*"If we continue into the future I think we should have an information table at markets etc to allow the community to ask questions and get to know about us and what we can and can't provide in the form of assistance."*

*"I think we could all do it better next time round because we would be prepared and have a lot of things already in place"*

*"Was a great initiative set up in an emergency situation and thankfully was not needed to the extent that could have arisen."*

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## STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Feedback from key stakeholders was also invited, in addition to the online survey. Phone interviews were conducted with representatives from the Bellingen Shire Council, the Neighbourhood Centres of the Bellingen Shire, Bellingen SES, Bellingen Branch Red Cross, NSW Resilience and the Rural Fire Service. The purpose of these interviews was to seek the stakeholder's views about the future of the Network and any opportunities and risks that should be considered.

All stakeholders indicated strong support for the network to continue, and for the network to establish clear relationships and collaborate with these organisations. All of the stakeholders saw the network being an important communication channel during emergencies. They all valued the capacity for the Network to know where older and vulnerable residents are across the Shire.

Various activities were suggested, including the SES suggesting that the NCN could be a source of what the SES calls Spontaneous Volunteers. The RFS were very supportive of the Network's role in disseminating information from trusted sources during emergencies. The potential for local groups to be looking out for vulnerable people and passing information on to people who can't/don't access the internet was seen very positively.