

The image shows the Northern Rivers Community Gateway Centre building. The building has a blue facade with large windows. On the left side, there is a vibrant, colorful mural featuring a rainbow, a butterfly, and a stylized face. The text "PURPOSE AND PRACTICE FRAMEWORK" is overlaid in large white letters on the left side of the image. The building's name "NORTHERN RIVERS Community Gateway Centre" is visible on the roofline. The sky is blue with some clouds, and there are power lines in the upper right corner. The foreground shows a grassy area and a concrete path.

# PURPOSE AND PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Northern Rivers  
Community  
Gateway

# About us

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The Northern Rivers Community Gateway (NRCG) is a not for profit, registered charity formed in 1976.

We provide welfare and community capacity building programs for disadvantaged individuals and communities. Our services and programs extend to the Far North Coast, New England, Mid North Coast and across NSW.

Our purpose is to:

- Strategically secure funds to deliver programs and services targeting socially and economically disadvantaged individuals and families
- Establish an evidence base to plan, develop and manage innovative programs that deliver a positive social impact and develop individual and community capacity
- Provide facilities that support community groups and services to promote community engagement and harmony
- Provide collaborative leadership to celebrate diversity and advocate for social justice
- Advocate for empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Provide opportunities for service users to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

We are governed by a Board of Management made up of individuals from a range of professional fields residing in NSW, and have a passionate and professional workforce of over 65 staff and 500 registered volunteers. Funding for our programs and services comes from a variety of agencies, sponsors, fundraising and social enterprise initiatives.

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# Introduction

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## About the framework

Bridging the gap between good theory and good practice is an ongoing challenge for organisations in the social services sector. Leading organisations are able to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to improving practice standards by documenting the principles that underpin how they work.

The development of the *Purpose and Practice Framework* is an important milestone for NRCG. The framework demonstrates our commitment to best practice for the clients and communities we serve, while recognising that the journey of continually improving and evolving never really ends.

The *Purpose and Practice Framework* aims to articulate how our practice approach is:



Evidence-based



Responsive to people's needs



Aligned to the bigger picture



Open to change



Impactful

Each of the elements has been identified and explored through consultation with staff and management to ensure the framework is a genuine reflection of what the organisation does well, what underpins this success, and future aspirational targets.

## Strategic alignment

The *Purpose and Practice Framework* sits within a broader strategic and operational planning system.

Our *Strategic Plan 2017-2020*, sets the overall purpose and direction for NRCG. While it outlines 'where' we are going, this practice framework helps to describe 'how' we will get there. Each element of the framework aligns with the priorities of *Strategic Investment, Innovation and Social Impact* identified in our Strategic Plan, as well as helping to bring to life our values.

# OUR VALUES

## VISION

## COMMITMENT

## RESPECT

## INTEGRITY

## INNOVATIVE

The practice framework sits above our operational planning processes allowing service-level design and evaluation to simply plug in. This means that outcomes can be measured and impact can be reported on at an organisational level in a clear and consistent way.

Our policies and procedures exist to support our practice framework by establishing standards that our organisation becomes accountable for. As an organisation, we will monitor our performance to ensure the programs and services we deliver are in line with standards, and based on the higher-level aspirations outlined in this framework.



# The framework

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In developing the framework, we asked ourselves a series of questions:

*What is it that we seek to achieve?*

*How do we plan and design our programs and services?*

*How do we remove barriers and reach those that need support?*

*How do we ensure the right support is provided to the right people?*

*How do we deliver our programs and services?*

*How do we measure the effectiveness of our practice?*

*What factors enable and support our practice?*

The response to these questions is captured in the elements of our *Purpose and Practice Framework*, which is structured to reflect the client journey.

It should be noted that the framework is not intended to be a linear process—it reflects components of our practice that occur at different points across the lifecycle of our services and throughout the many interactions with individuals seeking our assistance and support each and every day.



# PURPOSE AND PRACTICE FRAMEWORK



# 1 Creating social impact

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## We create impact across a number of areas.

Generating positive social impact within the communities we work is our ultimate goal. Broadly, we do this by supporting people from vulnerable or marginalised backgrounds to lead healthier, happier and safer lives, participate socially and economically in their community, be resilient in difficult times, and disrupt the cycle of disadvantage between generations.

To enable NRCG to more clearly identify, describe and quantify the social impact we create across all our programs and services, we have established a set of high-level organisational impact goals. These impact goals not only help to guide our organisation's practice, they also enable us to report on the social impact that we are creating through our programs and services.

### Our six impact goals are:



#### **SAFETY**

People, particularly children, are protected from violence, abuse or neglect



#### **HEALTH**

People live a life free from physical or mental illness



#### **ECONOMIC**

People have employment opportunities and financial security



#### **EDUCATION**

People learn and attain valuable skills



#### **HOUSING**

People have a safe and affordable place to live



#### **INCLUSION**


People feel culturally and socially connected with strong relationships

These impact goals intentionally align with the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework developed across several government agencies. All of our programs and services seek to achieve positive social impact across one or more of these goals.

## **We report on the impact we make.**

We recognise the importance of social impact reporting and are committed to engaging with our key stakeholders using relevant content and engaging mediums. This includes:

- Current and prospective funding partners—to demonstrate the social value we generate as a direct result of their investment
- Other service providers within the sector—to detail service models and programs that work (and those that don't), which helps to scale up our impact and builds the maturity of the sector as a whole.
- Wider community—to mobilise further community support for social causes through both traditional mechanisms such as volunteering, and more innovative mechanisms such as crowd-funding
- Our clients—inspiring peer-led support opportunities and eliminating stigma associated with help-seeking through sharing strengths-based stories



**Social impact can be defined as the net effect of an activity on a community and the wellbeing of individuals and families.**

*Centre for Social Impact*



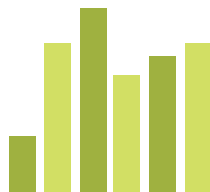
## 2 Designing our services

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### **We utilise the best available evidence to turn our ideas into robust service models.**

Effective programs and services are based on knowledge and evidence. These crucial inputs help to identify, shape and reinforce best practice. In planning and designing our programs and services, we actively seek out the best available evidence on what works and what doesn't, to enable us to effectively transfer 'theory' to practice. We do this by making use of contemporary research findings, clinical standards and global and domestic best practice publications.

We also value the professional knowledge that NRCG staff have accumulated over many years of practice. We capture the input of practitioners in the service design process.



Research and evaluation



Clinical standards



Staff knowledge and expertise

### **We understand and articulate the 'theory of change' for our programs and services.**

We undertake a structured service design process that explains the theory of change and is presented in a program logic model.

A theory of change is a series of steps that shows how a social program or service will lead to the desired outcomes. A program logic model enables us to clearly visualise how outputs and outcomes will be produced as a result of inputs and activities, and on what evidence these assumptions have been based.



# Developing a program logic model

**Impact goal:** What the program seeks to achieve

## Inputs

The resources that go into a program

## Activities

What the program does

## Outputs

The number of participants, activities or supports the program produces

## Outcomes

What changes have occurred (short and long-term)

Designing our services using program logic models helps our staff, prospective funders, service partners and the broader community understand how each of our programs and services contribute to creating social impact.

## We plan services and programs in partnership with end users and the wider community.

We value the knowledge and lived experience of service end users and our local communities. Our projects are developed, established and implemented through direct engagement with clients and community representatives, through methods such as community conversations and focus groups. We foster community connection and engagement through community-led or informed processes.

We also advocate on behalf of our clients with government agencies, other service providers and cross-sector networks and committees, to help ensure the broader service system is informed by and responsive to the needs of vulnerable and marginalised people.



# 3 Enhancing access

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## **We promote access to our programs and services through a range of entry points.**

One of the key challenges faced by any organisation in the social services sector is ensuring that services are reaching the most disadvantaged communities. NRCG employs a range of strategies to remove access barriers and better ensure that people who are in need of our services can use them.

We utilise a community hub model as a 'soft' entry point to our extensive wrap-around service offering. We recognise people seeking our assistance are often experiencing complex issues in their lives. This interaction presents a valuable opportunity to take an early intervention approach and build the individual's capacity and resilience.

Our assisted referral and intake process includes developing individual case plans to enhance client access to an integrated range of services and support. An individual in need of urgent assistance might present to the community hub to access emergency relief, food, shower and laundry access, a street swag or crisis support. We leverage these opportunities to create smooth referral pathways into other service pathways that focus on early intervention, help to improve that person's circumstances and reduce the need for future short-term relief.

We aim to provide simple and clear information about the programs and services we offer to the community physically at our community hub, at shop front locations or in other accessible community spaces, and through our online presence. We regularly perform outreach promotional activities in spaces where community members spend time such as shopping centres and at public events.

## **We provide safe and welcoming facilities at the point of service.**

As an organisation that's been operating for over 40 years, NRCG is a trusted and highly regarded source of support in our local community. Trained intake staff within our Lismore Community Hub, and offices and shop front locations in areas such as Grafton and Murwillumbah, ensure that a client's initial point of contact with NRCG is friendly and welcoming.

We provide a safe and non-threatening physical space for vulnerable community members, who we recognise may have past experiences of trauma, stigmatisation or discrimination from institutions.

Across all our programs and services, we focus on building trusted worker-client relationships to help foster client engagement, disclosure, participation and follow-up. Our organisation is committed to the protection of children, including ensuring our staff have clearance to work with children and understand their mandatory reporting obligations

## **We develop and maintain flexible referral pathways.**

Our programs and services are accessible via a number of formal and informal referral pathways including self-referral, referral from family and carers, and from a broad cross section of other professional organisations. We work proactively to connect with other organisations and groups within our region to help ensure a high visibility of our service offering and collaboratively design both inward and outward referral pathways. This helps ensure that the programs and services that people access remain within the scope of a provider's capabilities and are in the best interests of the client.

## **We proactively engage with vulnerable communities.**

In addition to developing and maintaining a welcoming and safe physical environment at the point of service, we proactively engage with vulnerable communities to provide timely and appropriate services. We are inclusive and responsive to the needs of people from all backgrounds.

We utilise assertive outreach as a means of coordinating and delivering support services that are flexible for individuals or families from a range of backgrounds. We also utilise co-located service provision as a way for wrap-around support services to be easily accessed in a physical location, in order to improve referral pathways, overcome transport barriers and promote coordination and communication between providers.



# 4 Responding to need

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**We ensure clients receive the right service, at the right time, in the right place.**

We provide responsive services by tailoring the type and intensity of our practice approach using a model of person-centred care. Person-centred care is a term used widely across the health, community services, disability and aged care sectors.

“ Person-centred care means providing services in a way that is respectful of, and responsive to, the preferences, needs and values of people and those who care for them. ”

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

We strive for early intervention in our programs and services to support individuals and families before a crisis or emergency situation occurs. By focusing on wrap-around support services that consider a person's whole situation in context, we act to address urgent concerns, identify vulnerabilities, and prevent future crises emerging. This recognises that acute services play a critical role in de-escalating a person's level of risk, but ongoing relationships with clients and structured follow-up is needed to prevent relapse and promote recovery.

**We seek to understand client needs through effective individual risk assessment processes.**

Through risk assessment and stratification, clients can be directed to services that are relevant to the complexity of their situation. Individuals or families experiencing complex or serious issues often require intensive support to overcome these issues. Clients with less complex issues can benefit from lighter touch service responses. By effectively stratifying for risk, we can deliver the right type of support at the right intensity.

We implement a consistent risk assessment approach to understand client needs, determine an appropriate service response and collect baseline and demographic data for reporting purposes. For most of our programs and services, a two-tiered pre-screening and assessment process commences at the point of contact. This provides for an efficient process of identifying immediate needs, followed by a deeper understanding of a client's situation upon commencement of a service.

Pre-screening involves an assessment of vulnerabilities to determine the relevant type of support intervention or referral pathway for a new client. It is typically conducted through a structured conversation. High-level needs assessed include:

- physical and mental illness
- suicide ideation or self-harm
- housing security
- financial security
- safety
- legal issues
- relational health
- self-care.

For particular programs and services, our trained staff may administer more in-depth or specialised assessment tools to identify the needs of the client with respect to an area of their life (e.g. VI-SPDAT for people experiencing homelessness). We adopt a model of informed consent, where we are transparent with clients about why we collect information, how it is stored, and how it is used by our staff to inform decisions about service options.

## **We ensure our clients receive coordinated service responses.**

We recognise that effective practice often relies on coordination and collaboration with other providers and agencies as part of an integrated service environment. This helps to prevent vulnerable client falling through the cracks.

As part of our approach to practice, we endeavour to provide a 'no wrong door' philosophy to people referred to us by adopting a care coordination and service navigation role. We facilitate warm referrals to other providers who may be better placed to provide specialised or higher levels of care based on the needs of the client.



We work closely with a range of other services and sectors to coordinate service responses, including:

- community service organisations
- general practitioners and health professionals
- specialist homelessness services
- employment agencies
- government agencies (e.g. Centrelink, DOCS)
- schools and training providers
- disability service providers
- advocacy groups.

As a values-based organisation, we are focused on collaboration, not competition, to achieve the best outcomes for vulnerable people within our community. We are proactive in engaging with other organisations to understand their service offering, create a shared sense of purpose and establish models of working collaboratively. We develop and contribute to client management plans that enable structured care coordination and support across multiple service providers.

We also participate in a number of networks and groups to help facilitate collaboration and partnership within the sector.



# 5 Delivering quality services

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## **We deliver trauma-informed services.**

Exposure to trauma in childhood and adolescence can have a profound impact on a person's social development and functioning. It is particularly common in children placed in institutional care, and across vulnerable groups such as low socioeconomic families, refugees and people with an experience of homelessness. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, trauma can be experienced across generations, where the ongoing negative impacts of Colonisation are still felt by descendant families and communities.

We deliver services that are trauma-specific, such as therapeutic counselling for victims of child and adolescent trauma and sexual assault. We also deliver many other programs and services that interact with clients who may experience the effects of complex trauma in their lives. We are committed to ensure all aspects of our practice are informed by an awareness and sensitivity to how complex trauma can shape an individual's perceptions and experiences with support services like ours.

Our trauma-informed practice is underpinned by:

- ensuring our staff have an understanding of the nature and effects of trauma
- providing access to therapeutic services that focus on recovery
- preventing re-traumatisation in how we develop our policies, procedures and facilities
- promoting a sense of safety and trust for all clients
- providing a person with choice and control in their life
- creating connections and support networks for people within their communities.

## **We focus on recovery and building the capacity of people.**

Clients will often interact with the sector at the point of crisis, and present with complex or multiple issues. Early intervention may be the ideal scenario for service providers but it is not always practical and realistic based on the nature of people's lives.



Services that only provide acute relief to people experiencing hardship may be well intended but not address the underlying causes of a person's vulnerabilities. These types of services can foster a sense of reliance or dependence on the continuing provision of aid or acute support.

Recovery-focused services recognise that a person's interaction with the social sector is a journey. They aim to establish a deeper understanding of a person's situation, identify their unique needs and provide support that results in an increased capacity of people to take control of their own situation to achieve positive social outcomes—capacity in this context can refer to knowledge, skills, attitudes, self-confidence, positive behaviours and support networks. Recovery is built upon a person's strengths. It promotes self-determination and resilience by providing opportunities that empower a person to take responsibility for leading a meaningful life.

Recovery is embedded within our programs and service models. We offer acute support as soft entry points to engage with people facing hardship. Using a relationship-based approach, we are able to connect people with a service pathway that builds their resources and confidence as part of their recovery journey

“ *It is important to remember that recovery is not synonymous with cure. Recovery refers to both internal conditions experienced by persons who describe themselves as being in recovery— hope, healing, empowerment and connection—and external conditions that facilitate recovery—implementation of human rights, a positive culture of healing, and recovery-oriented services.*

*Jacobson and Greenley, 2001*



## **We use a range of evidence-based approaches matched to client needs.**

We recognise the extensive skills that our staff and volunteers bring to the programs and services of NRCG, in the form of formal qualifications, professional experience, reflective practice and life experience. We empower staff to use professional judgement and discretion in decision making to achieve the best outcomes for their clients based on identified needs.

Our practitioners routinely adopt a broad range of approaches that are informed by sound evidence across different content areas including child and adolescent trauma, health, housing, gambling, financial inclusion and family support. We do this through diverse service modalities such as therapeutic counselling, case management and coordination, community development and awareness programs, emergency relief and social enterprise training and employment programs.

### **Service example: Connecting Families**

The program works with vulnerable families to support and develop skills regarding parenting, attachment, and emotional or behaviour management. It aims to produce positive short and long term developmental outcomes for children and young people through family support structures.

Connecting Families consists of ongoing intensive case management, coordination, service support, counselling and moderated peer support to help establish a secure and stable platform from which key relational and family functioning skills can be developed.

The program adopts the evidence-based *Parents Under Pressure* model developed by researchers at Griffith University and the University of Queensland. It is based on strong linkages with other sectors such as housing, domestic violence and mental health.



# 6 Measuring outcomes

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## We collect the data we need to monitor and evaluate our programs and services.

We recognise the importance of capturing meaningful data from a range of sources to help us monitor and evaluate the work that we do. To do this effectively and efficiently, we plan our monitoring and evaluation activities as part of the service design process.

Data collection enables us to ensure that the outcomes defined in the initial program model are being achieved and to what extent. If outcomes aren't being achieved, the service or project can be realigned to better serve the community through improved visibility of what isn't working. We routinely collect data from a range of sources such as:

- **Client data**—we observe changes in client outcomes from baseline to program completion to understand the extent of the effect of an intervention
- **People's stories**—we capture the perceptions, experiences and journeys from those people accessing our services, as well as their families and carers
- **Population trends**—we track indicators within population-level data sets to position our findings within the context of the wider community
- **Benchmarking**—we compare our programs and services with others to review our service delivery.

We work closely with our staff, our clients and experts to identify data collection tools that are relevant, practical to use and backed by the latest evidence. We utilise technology platforms that enable our staff to collect data in a streamlined way and monitor the progress of individual clients and overall services in real-time.

## We measure outcomes, not just outputs.

We recognise that there has been a shift in the expectations of funders placed on service providers to measure outcomes, rather than merely relying on counts of services and participation rates. When organisations only concentrate on measuring outputs, they are unable to understand how services affect change, justify the investment in their programs or determine whether they have created any social impact.

We value the insight that structured outcomes measurement provides our organisation. We invest a significant amount of time and resources across our organisation to ensure that we capture this insight which enables us to be transparent and accountable to our funders and the wider community.

## Effective outcomes measurement enables us to understand:



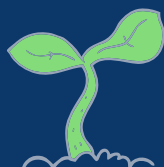
What changed as a result of a program, and why



Whether there is a better way of delivering a program or service



Whether we achieved what we said we would



How a service model could be scaled up or replicated in future

We consider outcomes measurement as part of the initial service design process, identifying outcomes over the short, medium and long term that are most meaningful for us, our clients and our partners and funders.

Outcomes measurement enables us to fully understand our progress towards organisational social impact goals and develop meaningful reporting pathways with funders and the wider community.



# 7 Supporting our work

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## **We continually develop a high performing and professional workforce.**

Our values, purpose and practice principles are brought to life by our people through the delivery of programs and services. We recognise that supporting and investing in our people is critical to ensure we are able to successfully deliver on our ambitious goals, and that we remain responsive to new challenges and emerging trends in the sector.

We strive to ensure that our staff have the requisite capabilities and credentials to perform their roles with experience in working with people from a range of backgrounds and who share in the culture and values of NRCG. We have an employment strategy with defined targets that aims to recruit, retain and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within our workforce, and ensure that non-Indigenous staff of NRCG contribute to a culturally safe and inclusive work environment.

The practice principles outlined in this framework, such as providing trauma-informed care, are embedded through education and training activities undertaken during the recruitment, orientation and ongoing employment of NRCG staff. We provide professional development opportunities for our staff and volunteers across relevant areas of practice, including:

- evidence-based practice methods (e.g. therapeutic counselling)
- guidance or counselling for people in crisis
- cultural competence and safety
- person-centred care
- understanding trauma
- program planning and design
- monitoring and evaluation
- cross-sector engagement
- leadership.

Our practice is underpinned by proactive organisational leadership, supervision and mentoring. We invest time in activities that enable our staff to reflect on their practice to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement, share valuable knowledge and learnings about their practice with their colleagues, refresh awareness of policies and procedures and obtain support from supervisors and peers in coping effectively with the emotional demands that comes with working with people experiencing trauma and crisis.

## We continually review and improve our practice.

The *Purpose and Practice Framework* aims to explain our high-level commitment to ensuring our programs and services are delivered at a high quality. Governance and management processes exist that describe the activities we undertake to ensure our practice standards are maintained, including:

- periodic reviews of service and program delivery
- internal working groups tasked with driving practice improvements
- complaint and incident response
- reporting to funders and regulators to ensure transparency and accountability
- accreditation processes
- 360 degree feedback processes, including staff surveys.

NRCG actively pursues relevant external accreditation programs to provide a level of quality assurance to our key stakeholders. We engage consultants and researchers to bring valuable expertise and direction into the organisation as required. Likewise, our staff and management are empowered to share their knowledge and expertise with other practitioners through presentations, committees and communities of practice, reflecting NRCG's role as a leader within the social services sector.

The social services sector is continually evolving as knowledge, experience and technology shape practice. It is vital for organisations to regularly scan the market for emerging examples of best practice in order to remain relevant and provide a return on investment in social impact. As part of our strategic planning process undertaken every 4-5 years, we undertake a comprehensive consultation process with NRCG management and frontline staff, clients, funders, regulators and other providers to inform our strategic direction. This helps to support our organisation in delivering programs and services that align with our purpose and values.



# Embedding the framework

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The *Purpose and Practice Framework* is a statement that reflects both how we practice now and what we will continue to strive for in the future.

NRCG is committed to ensuring the elements of the framework become embedded within our work across all levels of the organisation, recognising that this will take leadership, accountability and engagement with staff, clients and other partners. We intend for the framework to be a living document, subject to regular review and updates based on shifts in evidence, policy, people and technology.

Successfully embedding this framework and its elements within our approach to practice will help to create positive social impact by:

- providing high quality and culturally appropriate services for our community
- unlocking new funding opportunities
- supporting formal accreditation processes
- providing assurance to impact investment partners
- supporting staff capability development
- mobilising support within the wider community
- demonstrating our leadership within the sector

## **Acknowledgements:**

NRCG acknowledges Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the valuable contributions made by NRCG staff in the development of this framework, and for their tireless work everyday to support people in the community.

We also acknowledge Beacon Strategies who have supported NRCG to develop and implement this framework.



**BEACON STRATEGIES**



MANY TRACKS, ONE ROAD  
SUSTAINING COMMUNITY.

Northern Rivers  
Community Gateway





MANY TRACKS, ONE ROAD  
SUSTAINING COMMUNITY.

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