

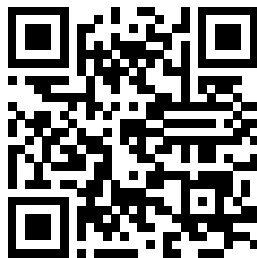


*Reflections*  
FOR THE FUTURE  
SHARING STORIES OF SURVIVAL

A creative arts recovery project supported  
by the City of Coffs Harbour  
Resilience and Recovery Service in 2024

SHARING STORIES *Reflections* OF SURVIVAL  
FOR THE FUTURE

View the original work  
at our website below:



A City of Coffs Harbour Service  
**RESILIENCE  
& RECOVERY**  
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## Acknowledgement of Country

“The City of Coffs Harbour acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, the Gumbaynggirr people, who have cared for this land since time immemorial. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging, and commit ourselves to a future with reconciliation and renewal at its heart.”

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## Introducing the REFLECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE PROJECT

The Reflections for the Future project was a creative arts-based recovery initiative developed in the City of Coffs Harbour, following more than 4 years of floods, fires, hailstorms, pandemic and drought. The community live with the memory of these traumatic events, and a maintain a fine balance of resilience and hope, alongside anxiety and concern about what the future holds.

Their reflections on their experiences of disaster are invitation to consider our collective future, in which the increasing frequency and severity of natural hazard disasters will continue to impact our communities.

This project was conceived as a piece of verbatim theatre, which could be presented in multiple formats. To develop the work, we interviewed disaster impacted community members to hear their reflections on their disaster experiences and perspectives on personal and community resilience.

The interviews with 11 community members from the Orara Valley and Northern Beaches of the Coffs Harbour LGA were conducted in December of 2023, during which time fires were once again impacting the forests west of the Orara Valley. In January of 2024, and then again in February, flooding, albeit minor, once again reached these communities. These events added extra weight to their stories of resilience.

We warmly call these interviewee's our "Contributing Storytellers", and with their permission, we worked with local playwright Amy Bradney-George to develop 7 verbatim monologues from the interviews with our Contributing Storytellers. The monologues navigate themes of hope, loss, resilience, and showcase the deep wisdom, strength and character of not only the Storytellers, but their communities more broadly.

To preserve some anonymity for our Contributing Storytellers, each monologue was created using excerpts from several interviews. The monologues avoid reference to specific local geography, age, ethnicity or gender, allowing for diverse audiences to see themselves mirrored in these stories.

Our ongoing desire is for this project to be accessible to diverse audiences and to evoke empathy with the stories shared. To further this goal, the first performance of this work has sought to focus on diversity and accessibility.

Our Contributing Storytellers were all adults over the age of 35, and their reflections and stories bore the wisdom and resilience of people with broad life experiences. We decided to identify and work with 7 young actors, aged 13-21, to perform the monologues. The intent was to hear the wisdom of years, reflecting on disaster, through the voices of young people whose future is certain to include severe disasters.

We decided to make their performances of the monologues were audio recordings. This is because we wanted to highlight an often-forgotten community during disasters; people with disability. This community is diverse, and a person's experiences of disability are not universal. Sometimes they are also not visible. However, what is consistent is a sense of 'being left behind' before, during and after a natural hazard disaster.

*The increasing frequency and severity of natural hazard disasters will continue to impact our communities.*

To explore this theme further, the monologues were performed on film, in Auslan, by members of the Deaf community on the Coffs Coast. These performers also have their own experiences of disaster, but experiences which are starkly different from that of hearing people.

The two performances, of our young actors on audio, and our Deaf performers, were combined to create our final performance format. The work is available online, but was premiered in <insert month> 2024 with a live audience. As part of the premier, audience members were invited to experience the monologues through full and partial sensory states. The audience were provided with their own over-ear headphones and eye masks and invited to choose between three options:

1. Watch the performances in silence with subtitles, without their headphones.
2. To listen and watch the performances simultaneously
3. To listen only, using the eye mask

The purpose of this invitation to experience the work in varying ways was to provoke reflection and empathy in the audience, and to consider those in their families, friends and community networks who may need additional support to navigate a disaster.

It is our hope that this work, which showcases the intangible value of community bonds and cohesion, prompts audiences to reflect with the future in mind; how can my yesterdays prepare me for an uncertain climate future?

## Acknowledgement of Contributing Storytellers

This work would not have been possible without the participation, honesty, vulnerability and permission of our Contributing Storytellers. On behalf of the team, we extend our deepest gratitude to them for trusting us to share their stories.

Endless thanks go to:

Judith Jackson	Anne Webster
Janelle Robb	Lisa Ellem
Ian Watson	Glenn Locke
Deb Mason	Dane Armstrong
Kath Armstrong	Feona Pavlich
Joh Kok	

In the first screening of this project, an interview with Andrew Parry was included. Andrew is a Deaf person, who moved from Lismore to the Coffs Coast. He survived the 2017 and 2022 floods. He agreed to share his story on camera, in his first language, Auslan. The interview is subtitled in English.

## Acknowledgement of Performers

This work was performed by talented locals from the Coffs Coast, and without their commitment and talent, this project would not have been able to be realised.

A heartfelt thank you goes to our Young Performers, and our wonderful Deaf Performers.

### AUDIO PERFORMERS:

1. Hope is about being prepared, Nevada Clarke
2. You get over something while you're going under, Laura McNeil
3. It's always going to be a part of you,  
Josh Upsall
4. Community, Emily Forester
5. The way people step up, Eve Guy
6. We're often the first ones there,  
Levi Stengert
7. I don't know what the future will bring, Imogen Parker

### FILM PERFORMERS:

The monologues were interpreted and performed in Auslan by Terri-Anne Richardson.

## Acknowledgement of Project Partners

Special thanks goes to Amy Bradney-George, of Et Tu Theatre, who was our playwright and vocal director, without whom this project would have been near impossible to achieve.

Miranda Baldwin, an Art Therapist local to the Coffs Coast, who conducted the interviews with our contributing Storytellers, supporting them as they shared deeply personal stories. Her kindness, empathy and openness was gratefully acknowledged by our Storytellers.

Mark Taylor, City of Coffs Harbour Digital Programs Officer, who aided the audio recording and production.

Matt Evans of Naturally Creative provided excellent film and editing services to help produce our final product.

Belinda Lemair and the Young Actors Studio connected us with local, young performers for the audio recordings.

Terri-Anne Richardson acted as a key connector and supporter of this project within the Deaf community in her role as a NAATI certified Auslan interpreter. Without her, we would not have been able to complete our vision.

## Playwright's Comments

Verbatim theatre connects us in a unique way by literally using the words of people who have shared their experiences, feelings and reflections. It's a platform for telling important stories within a community, for processing significant events and for sharing insights with people everywhere.

I have a deep respect for the words people choose and the ways we express ourselves. It was a privilege to be able to hear the interviews and reflections shared by each Contributing Storyteller, and I took great care in connecting parts of their stories to create these monologues.

Disasters and other significant events affect us all differently. But this project is a reminder that they can also bring us together, at the time, in recovery and afterwards in reflection. The words in these monologues are the words of people in this community, brought together in a way that allows us to all get something from them.

Thank you,  
Amy Bradney-George

# Reflections for the Future

## MONOLOGUES

### *1. Hope is about being prepared*

“ We had to evacuate. So it was left up to us how well we had prepared beforehand. Which was a huge thing, you know?

But the other thing is that I always knew this would happen one day. I'd heard from some of the old locals about things that had happened before, you know, these catastrophic disasters a long, long time ago. So I knew. It's inevitable that there will be fire, there will be these ridiculously huge floods and things.

And that's where the planning and preparedness comes in.

But even being prepared for a disaster, recovery is very difficult to come to terms with afterwards. There's a lot of fear, and even just the smell, the clean-up... The initial horror of it all. With the animals and the vegetation and what else was impacted beyond your home and things.

Because I'm really into land, you know, and that was what was impacted too. So it's just having empathy with the local life, all the sentient life around us. And the emotional impact of that. It was hard.

I think I'm still having trouble coping with stuff. I can sense that I've still got trauma there, from it. I'm a bit fearful, just before we get rain.

Even though I know that the place is even better now than it was before. We're even more prepared now. You keep on doing that stuff, you sit and you realise what your weaknesses are in your surroundings, so you make sure that you get on top of all of that. And that's fantastic.

But yeah, I get pretty teary when I see or hear about other floods that are happening.

Because it's also now about being aware of what can actually happen in a community when a fire or a flood does come through. I was prepared but not everyone was. And one of the things that concerns me is that there are still people in Lismore and other areas that are not housed. They're still not sure of their future. They haven't been able to really settle back into a home.

That's what really concerns me, for them first of all, but also what if it happens here? What will happen to our community? People will disperse. Businesses won't be able to be supported. And we need them, we need those places that are hubs for the community.

I think it would be really terrible, it would be just such a loss for everybody, if something like that happened. It would have such a huge impact.

**PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:** *These monologues have been created from interviews with community members affected by natural disasters, with a focus on floods. I have used what they said verbatim, weaving sections of interviews together to create the story of each monologue and to make them anonymous.*

*Each monologue is written from the perspective of one character. They can be read by anyone. Maybe even more than one person. The parts with parentheses () indicate text that the performer can choose to say or not say. The phrasing and words used are important because they are part of real peoples' stories.*

And also, just not having a path that is clear for people to look forward to. Or to know that they can rebuild within a certain time frame. And if it doesn't happen speedily, the recovery, I don't think it would ever be the same again.

So hope, I think in the sense of disasters, is about preparedness. But it's also that we've got to change our ways. We can't just be how we used to be. What we do affects everybody around us. So if we're set in our ways and only look after ourselves, what happens?

Especially in areas that are isolated or when services get cut. If we can't check the disaster apps or make a call, how can we connect to get the support when we need it? Or give support? You know, even something as basic as making sure everyone has clean water when we're cut off. Or, if we're off-grid and can boil our water, checking if our neighbours also need water.

Some people do this already, and I get emotional thinking about how much we all supported each other last time, but I worry about those that are isolated. Or new people who just don't know. Who maybe don't even know how to prepare.

That's why what I've found so good is all the wonderful people that have spent time in the emergency services, coming to talk about how to prepare. And how it's been done before and how people have been able to recover.

We need to talk about it. Because even once it's over and you've recovered a bit, it can still take years. It changes you. I don't think you can go through that and not have it change you.

And I've still got my lovely little go bag right beside the back door with all of the stuff I might need. Not my personal things, you know, but a safety blanket and emergency stuff, torches. If I ever need it again. And maybe I never will, I hope I never will, but at least I know it's there. ”

## 2. You get over something while you're going under

“ I think you never quite get over the first disaster and then the second and third ones just compound it, you know? It's just more disruption in your life.

So the drought ended in a major flood and we had two or three major floods every year for about two and a half years. We'd get water coming right up to our house, so that was just stressful. Having that much water come through your property.

We lived there for 35 years. So the kids grew up, from young kids to adults. And, you know, even though they say there were things wrong with it, for me, the memories of it is (what matters). It's what you know.

One day the kids will understand what the old place meant to me. I just hope they don't have to lose it all like we nearly did (to understand).

I can honestly say that the first 12 months afterwards, I probably ran on adrenaline. You take time to process stuff. And it hits you later. You never get over it. You know, it changes your life. The course of your life.

This is what I was talking about yesterday with my kids: how the burden was lifted. And what was the burden? You store up all this clutter in your life. And the burden of materialism is, well you don't think you're materialistic until it's taken away.

And now that's all gone with the flood waters, it's no longer a burden. So, you get over something while you're going under.

You've just got to put things in perspective that it's not your fault. And just realising that things could be a lot worse, you know?

But I've seen people who honestly had lost everything – livestock, houses, everything – and were basically living in something tied to a tree. And the neighbours barely survived but they were still there too. All cut off by the rain. And days later, they were still pretty much inaccessible, as were their stock, and it was hard even getting fodder to their animals. And even they were like: 'Oh, there's people worse off than me'.

And to be honest, some of these people, there was no one worse off than they were. They were worse off.

But people do have this optimism. Especially people with families, they have to bring people along with them. I think that they step up and don't perhaps show their true emotions. You know, times are tough, but we don't throw up our hands. What we do is dig in and go hard. Because the biggest plus is that you're alive and you can go on. ”

### 3. *It's always going to be a part of you*

“ There’s a lot of history up here on this mountain. It makes you tough, you know? You do what you can with what little you’ve got and you try and make the most of it. And sometimes you succeed, sometimes you don’t. It’s a learning curve.

The thing is, recovery is a hard one to figure out. Because what are you recovering (if you’ve lost it all)? It’s more what’s internal. That’s the only place that you can work that out or put recovery into context.

And, you know, it’s always going to be a part of you. Sometimes it’s very hard to control. You get emotional, triggered.

If I hear too much rain, I’ve got to plug my ears, because it takes me back to the floods. Memories of roof leaks, water damage and not having enough money to be able to fix all of it.

It got to the point where I had to leave. I sold up and bought a house on a hill where (I thought) it wouldn’t flood. Then I was having nightmares that the house was going to collapse, and even that it was going to start sliding off the hill. Or I’d think “all this water’s going under the house, it’s going to wash away my piers and I’m going to have no money to be able to afford to fix it’.

So then I asked myself, ‘What can I do personally to fix this’? I got on my hands and knees and was digging under the house making trenches right around the house. I got those little bags of quick dry cement and piped it all in so the water would go into the pipe and pass away from the house.

But still, in the torrential rain that we get up here, sometimes it still runs under the house. So there I go again. On my hands and

knees. Digging. But still I’ll get damp rising in the house and mould causing health problems.

So, yeah, I’m a worrywart. But, you know, these are all my triggers and I’ve learnt my triggers now.

But that’s the point. That’s what I keep saying. Don’t hold onto it without doing anything. It’s bad for your health. Bad for your body. Bad for your brain, and bad for everyone else.

You know, some people find it hard to let go. It’s like a death, close relative, parent, child. They dwell in their own misery, but they make everyone else feel miserable too, and it’s a very heavy burden to put on other people.

So don’t try and be the iceberg, because eventually you will melt. No matter how big you are. Reach out. That’s what I’ve learned to do since the floods. I help myself and I get help. I talk about it when I need to.

You never want to forget, but you never want to dwell in, you know, bad thoughts.

It’s easy to say, and I know from what depression can do to people. It can be as strong as flood waters, pulling you under. Or waves that dump you in rough surf. You fight to swim out of it but the force of the water, rocks, debris – that’s where hope is dashed and diminished. But you’ve got to find a way to swim through that, to reach the shore.

Even if you’re mountain tough, sometimes you need help to get back on your feet. And that makes you resilient.

”

## 4. Community

“ If I didn’t have the community around me, it would have been a lot (to deal with). It’s a huge struggle, we lost everything we owned. That’s a massive change.

It made me feel very insecure because of our kids, and we were like ‘What do we do now?’ We didn’t know where to even start.

Before that, we were just like most people. Just going along in life, looking after our kids, sending them to school. Not jumping right into the community, not volunteering and trying to be part of the community so much.

But then this happened and suddenly we had support from the school, support from the pub, support from people to give us a chance to get back on our feet. You know, people said ‘you can come and live here for now’ and went out and found us a house that we could move into.

And I’ve never been in a position where I needed that sort of help. I’ve always been one to say ‘nah, nah, I’ll be fine’, you know?

So I felt a little bit anxious when we were given a house and so much support. And then I didn’t want to ask for any more support because I could see the distress of other people and I didn’t want to pull everyone into our journey. But then everyone said ‘But you guys deserve it, you have a family’ and everyone was helping.

Just letting that process happen... It was a funny feeling. I just had to learn to accept it. That’s probably the biggest lesson out of it: if people want to help you, just let them help you.

Because if we didn’t have all that support, it would have been devastating. We wouldn’t have been able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We needed help, and the community was there for us.

So now I’m back in a position where I can just pick myself up again and I’m grateful, you know? And now I really want to step in and start to volunteer a little bit and put in an effort to say thank you. And also to encourage more support from the community, so if something like this ever happens again, there’s more people than what there was and it’s easier.

Because I could see how hard it was for certain people in the community (who gave so much). They were there for everyone, but who was there for them?

And maybe before all this, I thought I was doing enough, that I gave enough in other ways.

But now I understand we always need to try and do a little bit for our community. Because each little bit means something. It’s like a little grain of sand. Every little grain of sand creates a beach.

So I don’t know exactly what’s in store for the future but I can see myself just trying to give back to the community after I’ve had so much given to me. They helped rebuild our family’s little world. Giving back is a way of showing what that means to us all. ”

## 5. The way people step up

My role has always been in local emergency management committees. So I've been involved in floods, you know, just afterwards – dealing with dead stock and what's happened to their land. It's not personal as much, but it impacts (on me).

So I don't deal with emergencies or disasters at the front line as much, but my partner does. He's a first responder. And this time he was going out during floods, and I remember we had the discussion about whether I should stay on the farm, which is just across the river, or leave. And he thought I should stay, but then I think he saw how nervous I was about that, and we decided I should go.

So that was a big process, packing up two cars and two horse floats with everything we valued. Knowing that he wouldn't be back, you know, there's no guarantee he could go back to save things from our house or anything if he was on the other side of the river, helping people. So myself and my neighbours, we were like, 'Well, that's it. We're getting our horses and we're getting out'. I only have horses, they are the only stock I have.

It took me two trips to get my horses in. I went to the showgrounds and it hadn't been declared an evacuation centre or an animal safe place yet because those things have to wait for a disaster to be announced. You know, the churning (machinery) of the local council and the government and all the other response agencies and the police. All the people who need to agree to officially declare such things even if they're already happening.

But people took it upon themselves to get their animals to a safe place. In fact, the lady from the ag(riculture) shop across the road came over and started helping people and organising stables for the horses and stuff. It was the way people step up, it's amazing.

Then I could see on social media that other people needed help getting their stuff off their properties. You know, they're in that flood zone, not knowing what the next 24 hours could bring. So I picked up a few other horses and took them in.

And then I found myself and another lady pretty much managing the evacuation centre until the government caught up with us, if you know what I mean? So eventually we got it staffed officially. But effectively, all the day to day management of that evacuation centre – of which there was probably, I don't know, a hundred plus horses – that fell to me and this lady. Even though officially we weren't doing that role, we were just doing it, you know?

So, that was a really interesting experience and if I never see a storm warning like that again, I'll be happy because it really scared people. It really scared me, seeing that weather map before it all happened. And perhaps we needed that frightener, to make us act.

You know, they all say you should be prepared and have a plan and all that? People didn't have a plan. Because we're not in a high-risk area for that kind of weather, and if we are it's not normally at that time of year. So there was a fair bit of complacency before this.

# 5...

And the other thing is, now there's a lot of new people out here who haven't seen (what happened in those floods)... they're probably a bit unaware of how impacted we can be here.

But I think the new residents would reach out if it happens again. I don't know about the older ones though. The ones that have been there forever, I think they'd probably be like they are with everything else and they'd stick to themselves and try and sort it out themselves. Sort of, whether that's a good thing or not. That's how they are but I worry about it sometimes.

So, there's a couple out there that, well they're getting on, you know? But they'll still try and do it all themselves. Whereas the newer people will reach out, and if people like the Red Cross and stuff like that turn up, they'll be happy to take their help.

But I guess, everyone lives in hope, and I believe that if a disaster struck again the community would pull together. But you need people to drive that, and I think you naturally have people that stand out (as leaders) in your community and some people who might not have thought about it before.

We need to find these people before something happens though. So if we look at volunteering, we need to see who's that made up of, and are there enough young people coming through? We need those people because if we don't have people willing to volunteer and help, then we don't have the community.

That's something I learned from the flood. You know, you put that hat on – and it's not something that comes naturally to me – but you do it. And I don't know that it's changed me a lot other than to say: 'Well, I've done that once. I could do that again', you know? I don't want to, but I could. And I realise that, again, it's the community, it's the people who are there on the spot that can provide help first. ”

## 6. We're often the first ones there

“ I've seen a lot in response to disasters. That's kind of how I'm involved. I haven't been directly affected, as in not my property or anything. I've had a couple of scary situations – emergencies, but not disasters.

But I've been involved with floods, fires, massive hailstorms, even a flash flood event that was like a tsunami. We went out immediately after that one to help people and see how they were going. Even before we were told to go, because we knew people needed help.

And we have a lot of support too. We talk to each other, we debrief after every event and if we need further assistance we've got people to call.

Sometimes it's not the disaster event or the response that affects you the most, either. It can be what happens after.

So a big thing for me was I lost my friends. They didn't get killed, but it was so bad for some of them that they couldn't go back after the floods. One friend, she found it hard even to drive through the area. Because she remembers that night, her and her husband were huddled together, cut off on the roof of their house, thinking: 'This is it, we're gonna die here'.

Luckily they ended up getting out of there. The SES came and got them and they were able to stay with friends for a while. But in the end she just went 'nah, that's it'. You know, they'd been through

too much. And he'd had a car accident, she'd lost her father, then this flood happened.

So she lives in the city now and I haven't seen her since. That was a big thing for me.

Another time, I mean we weren't affected, but we had to leave our property and my son was actually a bit, I don't know if the word's traumatised? It probably is trauma.

But he was pretty upset because we left. And we went up the mountain and we stayed up there for a week because it was a really weird situation. You know, just leaving your home, not knowing what to take and not knowing what you were coming back to.

We were OK, but then both me and his dad, we're volunteers and responders, so he was worried about us getting killed. He didn't want us out there without him.

It's hard to understand or have it explained to you when you're young and dealing with this strange situation. But these response organisations, they really make sure you're safe before you go out or even get started as a volunteer.

You know, a lot of people want to be heroes, a lot of volunteers. But they run you through interviews to make you think about that and the situations you'll go into. They train you. ”

And then it's different depending on where the disaster is

## 6...

that you're responding to. You know, if there's Townsville floods, for example, it's not your local area so it's a different community and other factors might stand out for you. So if it's stinking hot with mosquitoes, high humidity, mud, before you go you might be asked 'have you got a health condition? Do you want to go?'

Then with local emergency service volunteers, they live there. They live it, breathe it and they're in the community they know. And that really, really affects them personally, more so than someone that's flying in, then flying out, so to speak.

But there's a lot you need to understand. Sometimes there's also friction with locals. And it can even be in your own community. I remember that happened one time, after one disaster and when we were planning for more. We'd had training and been told that the community had been giving some people a hard time. Because sometimes they blame you. And we thought about going out there for some community engagement events but then it didn't come about. Everyone's busy, all that sort of stuff.

So I basically said to them: 'Look, if you think it's too big for you to handle out there because of the friction, I really think that you need to get people in from Sydney or somewhere'. And then the next time there was an emergency, they had people come in who were high up in community engagement roles and had more training to deal with that friction and support those people. They didn't send us local volunteers and in that situation it was good.

But most of the time, I think the local community appreciates us. Because we're often the first ones there. You're very much reliant on just the locals coming together and helping people, you know? It's just the way it works out here.

It can take longer for the local state or federal government to turn up here, so we just pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, you know. It comes eventually but it can take a long time. Probably the quickest people out here are the volunteer services, the RFS, SES, the police and the ambos and all those sorts of people.

And of course, people want power back on after a disaster and the energy company's out really quickly fixing power poles and that sort of stuff. But yeah, that broader scale government thing, it takes a long time to get up and running, you know?

So through all the dramas we've had out here – flood, fire, COVID and even Varroa mite and stuff like that – it's certainly pulled this community together a lot. And we'll always turn up for each other. ”

## 7. *I don't know what the future will bring*

“ I packed up, ready to leave. I had a bag and a plan, you know, just, for one very long night. And I was alone, too. The girls had gone and it was just me and my dog. And I guess that was really quite frightening as well.

Having said that, it's not necessarily a bad thing. Maybe it's opened up opportunities to sort of say, 'What's this life about?' I'm not doing this thing I don't want to do anymore. I'm going to go and do what I want to do when I want to. And what's really important (to you)? If you like traveling, go and travel, you know?

I've just come back from 12 months overseas and I wonder whether I would've been brave enough to do that – to sort of say, 'I'll rent my house out and go and live for 12 months and write overseas – if I wasn't confronted with, you know, how life can be lost. Very quickly.

Relationships can be destroyed very quickly. And that the world will keep spinning even if you're not here anymore. And that your time is limited here, so go and do what you want to do.

I think we are going into a brand new world. The whole world is changing. Floods, storms, fires, all the impacts of climate change. Technology too, it's all changing so quickly.

And the way we live, we play a part in it. You know, our share is too big in the West(ern world). And so we've got to just lower our consumption.

And I've kind of lived that all my life. We've got all second-hand windows in the house. Second-hand timbers. Second-hand furniture. Second hand clothes. And proud of it. I mean, not going 'Oh poor me (I have to do this)', it's more that this is what we should be doing. It's recycling and reusing and composting and doing all that stuff. So that we have a smaller footprint on the earth. Because you can build all this stuff up and lose it like that in a flash.

And, I mean, I'm not a scientist but we need to stop the debate about climate change. Because something is changing and I think my parents and grandparents if they were alive would say 'Yeah, this is different'.

This is definitely different, because I've got history, I can see the history in my family. It's all been written down and this is nothing like... what we're going through isn't the same. The creek out the back, my father said that in sixty-five years it had only dried out once. It's dried out twice in the last five years. And then had flooding that's eroded the banks, then dried out in parts again. You see what I'm saying? Something's changed.

So we need to look at that ecology and look after our waterways. And that includes things like riparian zones, you know, keeping cattle off the riparian zone is a huge thing, and (more diverse) plantations and (making sure there are) fire breaks and all that sort of stuff. You know, protecting the bush. Trying to make it all as resilient as possible.

## 7...

Because I don't know what the future will bring. But I think the reflection I've been doing, the experiences, from that I see we need community. We need to manage change, you know, and to find a sense of ourselves. And the community.

I think (from all of this) I've learnt that I do make good decisions. I don't think I get upset about stuff as much as I used to these days. I think I manage adversity maybe a little bit better, you know? I'm a little bit braver to talk to people about how they're feeling and support them.

But within my boundaries as well, because I know more when I need support too. I'm grateful for that. And I think gratitude and letting go of judgement are a key to developing that resilience and building that community (around you).

”



# Invitation to use/perform these Monologues or REPLICATE THE PROJECT

## How to adapt and expand the work

*Our intention behind removing geographic, gender, age or ethnicity identifying language was to create monologues that could be performed and interpreted by anyone. In the few instances where there are references to other towns or cities that have experienced disasters (Lismore, Townsville), it's because the events were widely reported in the Australian media and can be easily researched for reference. The monologues are verbatim stories shared by real people, so we ask that the words in monologues are not changed.*

*This work has been produced initially in an audiovisual format, but we encourage interested communities to consider performing the work on stage, or to create their own mixed media performances of the work.*

*If you would like to collaborate further with the team, you can contact them on [reflections4thefuture@gmail.com](mailto:reflections4thefuture@gmail.com)*

## PROJECT GUIDE

Here we've outlined some of the steps that were taken to produce the Reflections for the Future Project, which we hope can support other communities, artists and recovery practitioners to produce similar pieces of verbatim theatre and/or storytelling. This is not a detailed project plan, but instead is more of a narrative of the broad steps we took to deliver this work. If you'd like to learn more about our journey with this work, please contact us.

### Step one – Identify the need

This project was conceived after 18 months of work with impacted communities in the rural villages and mountains of the Orara Valley, where there was a sense within the broader community that the area was often the 'forgotten' sibling to the larger, urban population in Coffs Harbour. Their voices, stories, experiences led to an insight: they felt unheard. The goal of this project was to bring their stories to a broader audience, in a new way that showcased their resilience and strength, while satisfying a deep human desire that we all share: to be heard.

## Step two – Scope the project & interview focus

Our community has suffered from recurring and simultaneous disasters, including drought, fire, flood, storm, Covid and bio-security (Varroa Mite). The frequency of these disasters over the past 6 years has been incredibly fatiguing, but impacted communities were still future oriented, displaying huge stores of resilience.

We asked ourselves: what questions will help people share their stories in a way that their resilience, patience and courage is highlighted? The questions we used were:

1. In what ways have you been impacted by a disaster?
2. Is there anything have you learned about yourself through this experience that you would like to share?
3. Is there any advice that you would give your younger self, because of what you've learnt through this experience?
4. What has been your experience of 'recovery'?
5. Has this experience changed your perspective on the future? What does hope mean to you?

The interviews all followed the same format: each of these questions was asked by the interviewer, with some clarifying follow up questions.

## Step three – Find your Interviewer & Contributing Storytellers

Given that these questions may bring to the surface difficult memories and emotions, it is important to consider the psychological safety of your Contributing Storytellers. In our project, we partnered with a psychologist and Art Therapist, who conducted the interviews. This person was not known to the Contributing Storytellers, and was not local to the area, providing a sense of anonymity and privacy, and creating safe conditions for people to share openly.

To find our Contributing Storytellers, we used a variety of mediums, including emailing previously impacted residents, posters in key local businesses and notice boards, word-of-mouth through community networks and social media. However, what was essential to finding our Contributing Storytellers was their understanding of what they were contributing to.

Our Contributing Storytellers new that their stories would be developed into a piece of verbatim theatre, performed in multimedia format, and had the whole project explained to them as part of an informed consent process. The Contributing Storytellers were aware that the purpose of our verbatim theatre approach was to provide a level of anonymity to each storyteller, and this helped them to feel safe and comfortable sharing their stories in full.

## **Step four – Record the interviews, transcribe and combine**

The value of verbatim theatre is that the real stories of real people are reproduced in their own words. Our decision to build ‘new’ stories as monologues built from several interviews was about protecting the privacy of our Contributing Storytellers. However, it also gave us flexibility for each monologue to focus on one or more themes that came up in each story.

All of our recording and transcription software and equipment was borrowed or open source, showing that this work can be done with limited costs beyond the time of the creative team.

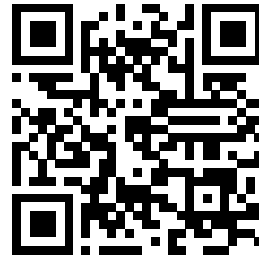
Our playwright initially listened to each interview several times, before developing 7 new narratives using the interviews. This was one of the most technical creative elements of the project, and we were so lucky to have Amy Bradney-George in our team as a creative professional in scriptwriting and audio performance.

## **Step 5 – Perform!**

Bring your community together to perform and engage with your work!

SHARING STORIES *Reflections* OF SURVIVAL  
FOR THE FUTURE


View the original work  
at our website below:



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☞ ...RECOVERY IS A HARD ONE TO FIGURE OUT.  
BECAUSE WHAT ARE YOU RECOVERING IF YOU'VE LOST IT ALL? IT'S MORE WHAT'S INTERNAL.  
THAT'S THE ONLY PLACE THAT YOU CAN WORK THAT OUT OR PUT RECOVERY INTO CONTEXT.  
AND, YOU KNOW, IT'S ALWAYS GOING TO BE A PART OF YOU. ”

View the original work  
at our website below:

