WRF
Your Warrawong Community Centre

MAY NEWSLETTER

Warrawong Residents Forum Inc (WRF)

Based in the Warrawong Community Centre in the Illawarra Region, we support one of the area's most under resourced communities (SEIFA Index: 2%). With 1.5 staff and volunteers, we provide emergency relief interventions including information, referral services, and advocacy.
Our initiatives like community lunches, food hubs, and service hub address basic needs, fostering trust for deeper engagement and resource connections.

IN MAY WE RESCUED APPROX. **2,125KG'S OF FOOD**
AND SERVED / ENGAGED **1,316 PEOPLE**
866 ADULTS AND 450 CHILDRENCHILDREN

OUR FOOD INITIATIVES

Our food initiatives rely on donations, grants, and gifts. We extend gratitude to Oz Harvest for their weekly efforts in partnership with Woolworths and Aldi. Thanks to Green Connect, local community members, businesses, sponsors, and champions for their contributions that sustain our essential food services. For more information and/or if you would like to get involved please feel free to get in touch via our website or direct to us via contact details below.

KEEP THE HEART OF WARRAWONG BEATING

Wollongong Council has announced plans to demolish and redevelop the center, resulting in our relocation to a new location on King Street, Warrawong. While council will cover rent, we need community support to make the space safe and suitable for service. WRF serves one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Illawarra. Essential works include shelving, partitions, alarms, power, cooling, storage, meeting spaces, and compliant lighting. Despite the grant funding not materializing, local builders and trades have offered their time and skills, but we still need $180,000 for materials, compliance, and major works.

Since September 2022, we have sought a suitable relocation through local and federal departments and grants, and now we turn to the community for support.

For sponsorship and partnership opportunities, contact Ash Castro at 0466 508 485 or manager@wrf.org.au, or make a tax-deductible donation through our website www.wrf.org.au.

1/210-222 COWPER STREET, WARRAWONG

PLEASE NOTE THAT WE ARE OPERATING BUSINESS AS USUAL AT WARRAWONG COMMUNTY CENTRE IN GREENE STREET UNTIL A FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT OUR MOVE HAS BEEN MADE.

MEET STEPH

Steph has been our neighbor and friend for the past two years. We would exchange a few words each morning as she headed out for her walk and we set up the sign in front of the center. Our chats were usually about the weather or little snippets of her day.

This month, after almost 24months of small and safe encounters, Steph opened up to us in a different way. She revealed her struggle with substance use and shared that her morning walks were a strategy to avoid it. She said our brief conversations were often the only ones she had all day.

Steph confessed that historically, seeking support had been more traumatic than the substance use itself, but she was now willing to engage with our Drug and Alcohol Service Hub. She spoke about having newfound hope for recovery.

She also rekindled her love for photography and agreed to use her talent for some special projects we have planned. Steph became emotional, saying this opportunity gave her a sense of purpose and a chance to leave a positive legacy in the community.

UPDATES

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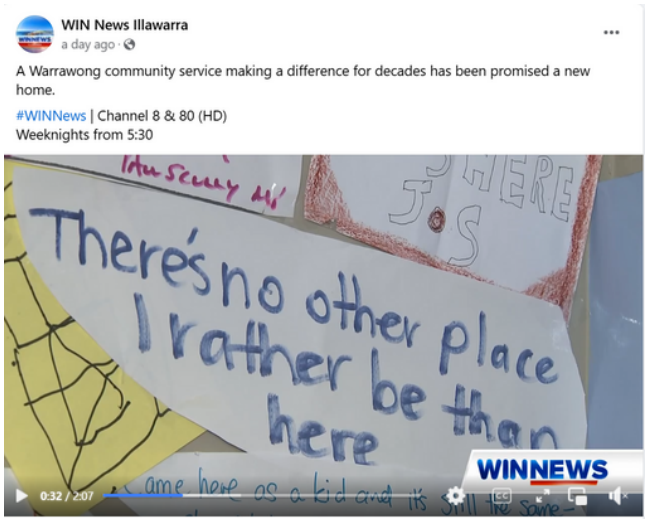
KEEP THE HEART OF WARRAWONG BEATING

Over the last few weeks, we have shared our story via media including radio, newspaper and TV. We truly appreciate our media friends for their understanding and commitment to Warrawong and our cause.

We have been overwhelmed with well wishes, feedback for and hope from the community as we navigate challenging road ahead.

We are extremely appreciative and touched to those that have made financial contributions to our cause, every little bit counts and helps us in reaching out goal. Whilst we still have a long way to go, we remain hopeful and patient that we will be able to continue our work in the community.

if you would like to know more, you can track down our story online, check out our website, otherwise please don't hesitate to make contact with us.



NEWS

Fears for future of community forum

Natalie Croxon

IF IT comes to it, Ash Castro is prepared to chain himself to the door of the Warrawong Community Centre to ensure his organisation can still deliver services to some of the region's most disadvantaged residents.

The manager of Warrawong Residents Forum has secured a temporary premises to occupy once the centre is demolished to make way for a new community centre and library, but does not have the money to fit out the site and make it suitable for the services his organisation provides.

WRF has to be out of the existing building by the end of June.

This month Mr Castro found out his application for an infrastructure grant through the Office of Responsible Gambling to fit out the new space - just around the corner from the existing centre - was unsuccessful.

WRF provides a range of services to some of the region's most vulnerable people, ranging from mental health services, drug and alcohol support and Centrelink assistance to emergency food relief, free meals and laundry services.

"To make the new premises suitable, we urgently need to fit out with partitioned rooms for confidential services, shelving for food, and seating for meals, as well as basic amenities such as air-conditioning, hand-washing facilities, and security systems," he said.

Mr Castro said this would cost $180,000, after the landlord of the temporary premises agreed to upgrade the bathroom and kitchenette.

Wollongong City Council will cover the rent of the temporary site.

Just to get to this point was a long road: Mr Castro said he had been trying to get government support for the organisation's relocation since at least September 2022.

He said being unable to fit out the temporary lodgings put another grant worth $20,000 from the federal government's Stronger Communities program at risk.

This grant was provided to buy such appliances as a freezer, a refrigerated display case and other items needed for the community lunch program, but Mr Castro said it had to be spent and operating within a certain time frame to meet the funding contract.

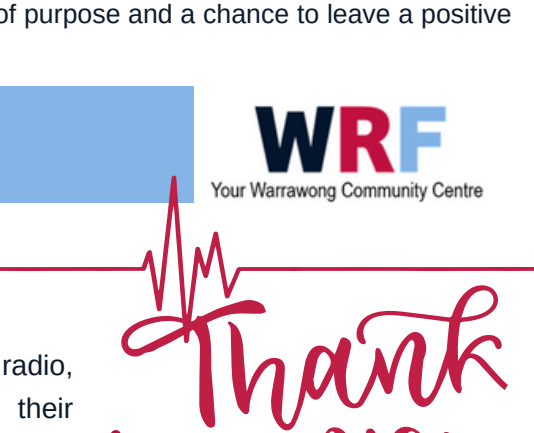
Already, that is on its fourth extension.

With the clock ticking, Mr Castro is turning to the community and local businesses in the hope that they can donate to bring the outstanding work needed to fruition, launching a campaign called 'Keep the Heart of Warrawong Beating'.

The suburb is one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged parts of the Illawarra and WRF, a tiny organisation in which Mr Castro is the only full-time paid staff member, punches above its weight in what it delivers, providing food services alone to more than 1000 people each month.

Mr Castro said the centre was a safety

Warrawong Residents Forum manager Ash Castro. Picture by Adam McLean



WANT TO KNOW MORE? OR TO GET INVOLVED.

admin@wrf.org.au
02 4275 1875

Donate
Help us to bring our vision to life.

Join Our Board
Be a part of our meaningful cause.

Volunteer
Help us to provide supportive services.

Sign our VOW
Voice of Warrawong Statement.

Community Champ
Give back to your local community.