



Byron Shire Action Group Mental Health and Kindness Plan

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Bruce Clarke

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Shire
Action
Group

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A kinder response in difficult times

Mental health is a major issue in the Byron Shire, which has been exacerbated by the ongoing toll of COVID-19 on our community.

The demands and challenges of modern life have, for many, increased levels of anxiety, stress and depression. The associated suffering and health issues need to be addressed, with community support, empathy and kindness.

Byron Shire Action Group's Mental Health Support and Kindness Policy aims to initiate a culture of kindness with a focus on the interactions between Council and residents.

When you can be anything in this world, be kind

Small acts of help, support and recognition are the building blocks that create and strengthen the connections upon which we rely. Kindness and caring for each other expand the priceless community resources of trust, generosity, and open communication.

Kindness:

- Is embodied in the things that we do for one another when we are driven by humanity and compassion. Whether emotional or practical, it is how we support one another in moments of perceived need.
- Is the background engine that drives our lives.
- Is a valuable commodity that benefits the wider society.
- Involves big, small, and barely visible practices of recognition, help and support, where individuals and organisations respond to the needs of others.
- Is its own reward.

A photograph of an elderly man with white hair, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt, sitting on a wooden bench. He is looking directly at the camera. In the background, there is a large, two-story house with a gabled roof and a chimney, surrounded by greenery and trees under a clear sky.

**A message on the need for kindness
from Mayoral Candidate Bruce Clarke**

“Over the past 20 years, there has been growing social division across Byron Shire with increasingly fractured communities reinforcing lines between the so-called ‘us and them’.

“Byron Shire Action Group is committed to working with our entire community, including local philanthropists who are already providing significant, unheralded support for the homeless and the disaffected, to ensure a better future for all.

“Kindness will underpin our work with, and for, our Shire’s residents to ensure an effective local government that truly addresses the needs and reflects the values of our community.”



Mental Health Support and Kindness Action Plan for Byron Shire

Action 1: Increase support for mental health services including non-government organisations and community groups.

Our mental health services have long been under-resourced and are facing increasing demand. It is vital to further build on community support for those who need it, and to ensure our mental health services have adequate resources and support from all levels of government. We will secure funds from State and Federal Governments to increase and optimise these essential resources.

Action 2: Work with the NSW Government, community groups and local philanthropists to establish an urgently needed women’s refuge in Byron Shire.

With an increasing number of vulnerable women and children, the lack of a local, accessible women's refuge is a real deficiency in our community. Establishing a women’s refuge is a top priority. We have already taken significant steps to ensure that this critical piece of social infrastructure is established as quickly as possible within the Byron Shire.

Action 3: Increase the number of men's shelters and support services, including counselling.

Too often, support for men's mental health and wellbeing slips under our societal radar. We are committed to increasing the number of support services and shelters, so that men in our Shire can find the help they need.

Action 4: Facilitate a one-stop support and referral shop for people suffering mental health and/or financial issues.

Struggling with financial hardships and mental health issues can be one of the most difficult, distressing times in people's lives. The isolating and overwhelming nature of these situations makes it hard to know what to do, and whether any support is available. This one-stop shop will be tailored to our community and aims to reduce the burden on individuals, providing readily accessible advice, resources. It will complement the wonderful services planned for users of Fletcher Street Cottage and other community-focused initiatives.

Action 5: Engage with the community to build and fit-out a sleep bus.

The 'sleep bus' would provide an emergency temporary safe haven for women, their children, and pets. Each pod will come with a mattress, linen, lockable door, and information on services in Byron Shire for pathways out of homelessness. Innovative short-term strategies like this can be implemented quickly to ensure that everyone has a safe place to sleep. It will be adjunctive supplement a women's refuge by providing an emergency and immediate solution, especially for those women and families who are located outside Byron CBD.

Action 6: Establish precinct committees to facilitate transparent, respectful, kind and inclusive communications between Council and residents.

Too many residents of Byron Shire feel unheard by Council, and their diverse needs are often not reflected in Council policy or practice. Establishing precinct committees in all areas will broaden and deepen communication and the process of community consultation established by Council. We believe a shared ethos of kindness and respect will ensure governance that reflects our values.



Action 7: Create careers, not just jobs, for our youth.

We will investigate the creation of an Innovation Hub as a central location to encourage creatives and mentors, foster business development and innovation, create knowledge and smart technology-based enterprises and support services for start-ups or existing businesses. Passion for, and connection to, place and work are crucial to ensuring that our youth has a future place to embark on fulfilling careers and positively contribute to our community.

Action 8: Engage with youth centres and groups to better understand and support their objectives.

We believe that community consultation should be at the forefront of governance. Listening to, and supporting those with experience in the issues, obstacles, needs, and desires of our Shire's youth is key to making local government work for our young people.

Action 9: Provide additional sustainable and engaging adventure playgrounds for children and adults to socialise.

The outdoor environment, and connecting with people from the neighbourhood, have proven benefits for mental and physical wellbeing. Byron Shire has wonderful interactive playgrounds in places such as Bangalow and Ocean Shores, but there is a need for more across our Shire, in communities such as Ewingsdale where a bucolic Council Park has only two seldom used benches and seats. We will facilitate more adventure playgrounds across our Shire with plant and water features as well as purpose-built swings and improved access for people with disabilities.

Action 10: Kindness is a Two-way Street

We are committed to close communication with our community from the outset. We would love to hear of your experiences with random and planned acts of kindness across our region.

If you'd like to share your stories please get in touch with us at: community@byronshireactiongroup.org.

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Please also see our press release regarding our Mental Health and Kindness Plan [available here.](#)

For further information or to have your say, please visit: byronshireactiongroup.org.

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