



YOUNG CHAMPIONS

ISSUE 49

APRIL 2025

Celebrating 25 Years





CEO MESSAGE

**STEPHANIE
HARVEY, CEO**

COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT

This year marks the 25th Anniversary of Community First Development. Since our organisation began, it's been a deep honour to have so many First Nations' communities invite us to be part of their story. Thank you for your generosity to make our community projects possible!

Looking to the next 25 years and beyond, your support will enable us to continue connecting communities with the skilled volunteer assistance they seek. Each community leads their chosen project, drawing on their own knowledge and understandings. Every project emerges from the vision and priorities of the communities themselves.

In this edition of Stepping Stones, you will find community success stories, such as:

- In Lismore, New South Wales, Community First Development has been walking alongside the Bundjalung Tribal Society on several exciting projects, including the building of a Cultural Hub and Elders Village (page 6).

Readers should be aware that this newsletter may contain images and names of deceased people.

Cover photo: The inspiring Blakdoll Sports & Fitness Mob with Ti Tree Primary Students

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- Read about our work in the Queensland Tablelands region where many communities are taking charge of decisions that affect them (page 8).
 - See how Blakdoll Sports & Fitness Mob in Alice Springs uses sports as a foundation to teach life skills to First Nations' women and children (page 10).
 - Finally, we share an update following our check-in with Adelaide volunteers about community projects in the works (page 12).

Your support is behind incredible projects like these. Thank you for being a vital part of our work with inspiring communities who invite our partnership.

WILL YOU COMPLETE YOUR ENCLOSED 2025 SUPPORTER SURVEY?

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey. Your feedback provides valuable insight that helps us refine our operational processes, ensuring a smooth experience for you as a donor. It also strengthens our ability to clearly communicate the impact of your support. We truly appreciate your ongoing generosity—it's what makes our work in First Nations' communities possible.

**Thank you again for being a vital part
of our vision!**

OUT AND ABOUT

THE KUNGARAKAN WAY FORWARD NORTHERN TERRITORY



Community First Development was honoured to be invited to the homelands of the Kungarakan people, also known as the “Paperbark People,” in Batchelor Community near Litchfield National Park. Senior Community Development Officer Kiteesha met with Nicole and Adam, Traditional Owners and board directors of the newly formed Tjudah Aboriginal Corporation. Nicole and Adam proudly shared their inspiring story, vision and goals. Skilled volunteer Paul has been working with the community to provide business mentoring and submission writing support. Together, they have achieved remarkable milestones. The Kungarakan

people have established their corporation, developed a capability statement, and crafted clear vision and mission statements. We look forward to more opportunities to walk alongside this strong community as they continue their journey towards self-determination.



**Meet Adam and Nicole, board directors
of the newly formed Tjudah Aboriginal
Corporation**

OUR INITIATIVE TO CLOSING THE GAP

For 25 years, Community First Development has supported First Nations’ communities, in self-determination and leadership to create lasting change. You’ve likely seen the alarming statistics around Closing the Gap and the urgent need for action. The National Agreement emphasises

strengthening First Nations' community-controlled organisations. We are already contributing to the Closing the Gap outcome areas, including supporting the establishment of new community-led organisations,, providing business mentoring and funding pathways and strengthening leadership. Real progress happens when communities lead. Our approach is built on partnership, ensuring solutions are culturally grounded, community-driven and sustainable. With your support, we'll continue backing community-led solutions and creating opportunities for the next 25 years and beyond. Together, let's keep moving forward – every step matters.

LEADERSHIP FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

This February, we were fortunate to have our Board Members gather on Ngunnawal/Ngambri Country to celebrate key milestones for Community First Development. We reflected on and honoured former Director Anne Martin for her contributions to community-led decision making, following her retirement. We also celebrated our Chair, Karen Milward, on her anniversary with us. Like you, our leaders are deeply committed to a future where First Nations' communities set their own priorities and build sustainable pathways on their own terms.



**A gathering of Community First Development
Board Directors and Staff**

A DETERMINED COMMUNITY'S *THREE BIG GOALS*



WE CONTINUE TO BE PART OF THE BUNDJALUNG TRIBAL SOCIETY'S INSPIRING STORY.

Community First Development has been walking alongside the Bundjalung Tribal Society (BTS) in Lismore, NSW on several exciting projects. Our Senior Community Development Officer Gwen caught up with Tracey and Mel from BTS earlier this year, joining volunteers David, Paul, and Dr Tiley in a one-day workshop discussing three key community priorities:

1. Gaining approval from Ballina Shire Council to commence building BTS's Cultural Hub.
2. Securing building approval for the BTS Elders Village.
3. Developing a BTS Business Prospectus to support grant funding applications, political lobbying, and future philanthropic conversations.

From their combined efforts, the community is already seeing remarkable results!

Great progress has been made with the BTS Local Government project, where Dr Tiley and fellow volunteer David are supporting BTS to navigate the regulatory challenges. These same volunteers are also helping secure building approval for the BTS Elders Village, with 75% of funding already attained through NSW Community Housing.

The recent workshop provided an opportunity for skilled volunteer Paul to meet up with the other volunteers, while collaborating with Tracey and Mel to develop the BTS Business Prospectus.



**From left to right:
Tracey (Chairperson)
Volunteer Paul, Melissa (Mel) Manager,
and Senior Community Development
Officer Gwen meet to talk about the
community's exciting plans**

We were thrilled to receive such positive feedback from Tracey and Mel about their experience since inviting Community First Development to join their journey.

“ This is truly a stepping stone moment that allows us to walk constructively together to achieve positive outcome for the future with the emphasis on incorporating Cultural Values and Community Health and Wellbeing. **”**

THE BUNDJALUNG TRIBAL SOCIETY

**THANK YOU FOR BEING PART
OF INCREDIBLE FIRST NATIONS'
COMMUNITY STORIES LIKE
THESE!**

MANY LOCAL GATHERINGS, *ONE COMMUNITY VISION*



A VITAL PROJECT WITH NORTHERN AND
SOUTHERN TABLELANDS COMMUNITY.

We were delighted when local communities from the Tablelands region of Far North Queensland reached out to Community First Development for assistance.

The Southern Tablelands Local Decision-Making Body (LDMB) invited our skilled volunteers Anna and Glenn to run community meetings across the five areas of Atherton, Herberton, Malanda, Mount Garnet, and Ravenshoe. These gatherings were an incredible opportunity for community members to meet, yarn, and decide what matters most to them as they plan for their future.

This work is part of the Local Thriving Communities (LTC) reform led by the Department of Disability Service, Seniors and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Partnerships. This important reform, which began in September 2020, puts communities in charge of decisions that impact them.



**Volunteers Anna and Glenn
are all smiles after spending time
with inspiring community members**



The ideas were flowing as the community sat down together with Volunteer Anna

Together with the community, we've embraced a "learn by doing" approach to this important work. The insights we've learned from the progress so far have helped shape the next 12-18 months of work in the region.

We're honoured to be part of these vital steps towards community-led decision-making in the Queensland Tablelands. Thank you for your support that connects us with uplifting projects like these!



Volunteer Anna and a community Elder share a yarn at Ravenshoe

YOUNG CHAMPIONS ON AND OFF THE FIELD

BLAKDOLL SPORTS & FITNESS MOB INVITES
COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT
TO SUPPORT THEIR GROWTH.



Blakdoll Sports & Fitness Mob in Alice Springs uses sports as a foundation to teach life skills to First Nations' women and children. The inspiring organisation offers free mentorship and multi-sport activities, nutritious meals, wellness education, and cultural learning. The Deadly Kids Program, in particular, is a key initiative to equip First Nations' children and youth across Central Australia to become community role models.

Vanessa Stokes is the founder and a proud Luritja, Waramunga, and Narrunga woman. Vanessa invited Senior Community Development Officer Nikkeeta to work alongside Blakdoll to enhance their strategic growth.

“Having Community First Development work with Blakdoll, we’ve progressed a lot in our short time together. I haven’t got that from anywhere else.”
says Vanessa.



As a former Australian softball athlete who competed professionally in the US and Japan, Vanessa uses her experience as a sportswoman and



**The inspiring Blakdoll
Sports & Fitness Mob with Ti
Tree Primary Students**



**Blakdoll Sports & Fitness Mob Founder
Vanessa and a young participant
of Yuendumu Community Softball**

certified personal trainer to engage participants. To support language and culture, she ensures all Blakdoll mentors are First Nations' people.

“Nikkeeta works tirelessly with me to discuss solutions and finds the right professionals to assist me in the growth of my business.”

Vanessa explains.

“She gives me different ideas that I can implement to my business strategies and helps me to reframe my thinking of the negative challenges in a positive way. Focusing on solutions instead of the problem.”

Community First Development is honoured to be part of Blakdoll's exciting growth—providing assistance to develop a comprehensive business plan, secure funding, refine their strategy, provide business mentoring, and strengthen marketing efforts.

“If I didn't have Nikkeeta, it would be very hard to get the assistance I have so far and am grateful to be working with Community First Development, as they are doing an outstanding job. They have definitely provided me with opportunities and possibilities to improve my business and be a game changer into making a difference in the lives of Indigenous young peoples.”

CONNECTING WITH VOLUNTEERS IN ADELAIDE

THE CHANCE TO CHECK IN WITH VOLUNTEERS ABOUT COMMUNITY PROJECTS IN THE WORKS.

In February, Senior Community Development Officers Alex and Tania travelled to Adelaide for a Community Engagement visit to meet with dedicated volunteers. The visit gave us the opportunity to see firsthand how some of the community-driven initiatives were unfolding and offer volunteers any support they need.

With a number of communities identifying digital needs as priorities, Community First Development was invited to assist through skilled volunteer support. Volunteer Julie has been coordinating several website development projects with communities, working alongside fellow Volunteers Noel and Cielo. With additional support from Lou at The Circle (First Nations' Entrepreneur Hub), this team is helping

create digital platforms that will strengthen First Nations' business visibility and community connections.



Senior Community Development Officer Alex and Volunteer Julie



**Senior Community
Development Officer Alex
and Volunteer Noel**

It was wonderful to sit down and share a yarn in person. It meant we could hear about how projects are coming along and see for ourselves how these digital tools are being shaped to reflect each community's own vision.

Face-to-face meetings like these go beyond a simple check-in with volunteers. They're about deepening relationships, sharing ideas, and understanding how we can better support both volunteers and communities in their collaboration.

THANK YOU for supporting our work to connect committed volunteers like Julie, Noel and Cielo with inspiring communities who seek the skills and tools to bring their ideas to life!



MEET SKILLED VOLUNTEER DAVID

David has volunteered with Community First Development for over five years, contributing his valuable infrastructure and construction expertise. Working closely with three organisations, including the Bundjalung Tribal Society (BTS), his significant assistance helped BTS complete their Cultural Hub Major Construction Plan and secure important funding. This exceptional project earned recognition when BTS received the prestigious “Project of the Year” award at the 2024 Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association awards.

David shared:

“Volunteering with Community First Development has been a truly soul-fulfilling experience. I’ve learnt that listening closely to the needs of the communities we work with, ensuring that every project is co-designed in partnership with those we serve is a good recipe for success. More than just collaborating on projects, I’ve formed lifelong friendships with incredible people who share the same passion for making a difference.



One of the standout moments for me was seeing the Bundjalung Tribal Society win Project of the Year. It was a well-deserved acknowledgement of their unwavering commitment, tenacity, and diligence in challenging the notion that certain things can’t be done.”

Volunteer David with Mel from the Bundjalung Tribal Society

David has been a vital asset to BTS and their journey — which is why we proudly nominated him for the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards. **THANK YOU DAVID** for your outstanding work alongside our community partners!

MEET SENIOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER GWEN

As part of our celebration of 25 years walking alongside communities, we asked dedicated long-term staff member Gwen to reflect on her time as Senior Community Development Officer. Gwen was happy to share:



**Senior Community
Development Officer
Gwen (left) with Bec,
CEO at Taribelang**

“Communities know what they want to achieve. It is our role as Community Development Officers to listen, assist, provide guidance and structure on how this can be achieved. Our mob has grown to seek ambitious goals. We are now undertaking business plans, major construction plans, disaster management plans, grant applications, tenders, and more.

When I reflect on community achievements I'm most proud of, I think of how Taribelang have evolved so much in the last 6 years. They have gone from a small organisation with big ideas, to a community who has developed major initiatives in the areas of Tourism, NDIS and cultural competency.

I am also proud of Bundjalung Tribal Society. I have received feedback from them saying, 'I have learnt so much from Community First Development volunteers and these skills have helped our community projects advance and become much more complicated and ambitious. This gives our mob confidence to reach for the stars and believe that anything is possible.

It is a wonderful feeling to see communities grow in confidence and skills! ”

PLEASE GIVE WHAT YOU CAN. **THANK YOU**

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