

Mindful Margaret River

THRIVING REGIONS themes



Please note-The Mindful Margaret River case study contains potentially distressing material. If any concerns are raised for you by engaging in this case study please either contact call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit mindfulmargaretriver.org.au support service information.



data

In 2018, the Osmington Familicide prompted the Lishman Health Foundation to commission the [Augusta Margaret River Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) (2019). The Familicide and report provided the catalyst for the formation of Mindful Margaret River.

Since then, numerous other reports have supported the MMR place-based approach to community social and emotional wellbeing.

Notably:

- [Going the Distance: making mental health support work better for regional communities](#), commissioned by the WA Association for Mental Health (2023) which named MMR as a community-led initiative to strengthen (pg. 72).
- [Leaving no one behind: the economic imperative to invest in WA's community sector and its workforce](#) by Nous Group (2024) which stated:
 - “Community organisations can be better than government at responding to need in the community and building scalable services” (pg. 4)
- [Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System](#) (2021)– final report which reform design is of a mental health and wellbeing system that is based in the community and anchored in community supports and services.

The supporting academic research and reports can be viewed here: [Resources & Publications - Mindful Margaret River](#)

key actors

The inaugural Augusta Margaret River Mental Health Alliance (AMRMHA) volunteers, now known as Mindful Margaret River which involved:

- A steering group of 14 community members and various service provider representatives,
- Inaugural executive with Stuart Hicks as Chair, Miriam Avery - Deputy Chair, Brian Middleton - Treasurer and Mike Wood - Secretary.
- 40 community volunteers, divided into four distinct volunteer working groups,
- Four volunteer team leaders, liaising between the four working groups and the Steering Group (Erin Statz, Peter Durey, Dianne Ritson and Lydell Huntley).

The Shire of Augusta Margaret River was instrumental in providing early administrative, logistical, communications, and practical support to MMR supporting them in becoming incorporated and auspicing a grant for MMR from Lotterywest.

The South West Community Alcohol and Drugs Team, through St John of God Bunbury provided early support to MMR through facilitating workshops to develop their first *Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2021* which provided a framework based on the recommendations of the Lishman Report.

Mindful Margaret River

the systems innovation

Mindful Margaret River is a unique community-based approach to local action. As a community, MMR undertook to implement the recommendations of the Lishman Report rather than waiting for the government to respond. MMR took action to address local challenges.

The community advocated, created, and worked in partnership with governments of all levels and other services to address the gaps in support services.

Mindful Margaret River recognised that a collaborative approach was necessary to address social and emotional wellbeing. The challenges were beyond the siloed approach of government departments. The community took control of its own social and emotional wellbeing.

Service representatives readily acknowledge the difference in what they know is needed versus what they are able to deliver based on the scope of their departments limitations of funding.

This is a common barrier to addressing community wellbeing at a systems level. However, as a community group, MMR has been able to work across all sectors, bringing together not only government-funded services but other community-based organisations. In doing this, MMR has been able to address emerging issues and challenges with local solutions much more flexibly and responsively to local need.

The MMR approach is able to address the whole-of-person and the whole-of-life when providing services and education. MMR is able to ground their approach, understanding the role of social determinants of health and building their programs, resources and events to address this.

Mindful Margaret River has been able to promote mental health literacy and help seeking behaviour within their local context, with local services and local champions.

Mindful Margaret River has been successful in engaging local leaders, influencing service delivery focuses and funding to support community needs.



background

In May 2018, the community of Augusta Margaret River was left in shock after the Osmington familicide which saw the loss of seven community members, including four children. It was a community wide trauma that rocked the close-knit community.

As a result, the Lishman Health Foundation commissioned the Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health to undertake a study into the mental health and wellbeing in the Shire of Augusta Margaret River. They interviewed community members and brought together a local reference group which provided oversight and guidance. A number of these reference group members went on to form the inaugural board of Mindful Margaret River at the completion and release of this report.

The MMR project was established in September 2019 as a collaboration across government agencies, health services and community members. In 2021, MMR was successful in receiving a grant from Lotterywest, auspiced by the Shire of Augusta Margaret River which enabled MMR to employ a much needed Project Implementation Officer (0.8 FTE) and a small budget for implementation.

the change activators

- Mindful Margaret River Board
- Mindful Margaret River Staff
- Mindful Margaret River Professional Liaison Team
- Mindful Margaret River Volunteers
- The Shire of Augusta Margaret River
- The community of Augusta Margaret River

Mindful Margaret River.....

the place

Margaret River is located in the Southwest of Western Australia, 277 kilometres south of Perth, the state capital. Its local government area is the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River and has a population of 17,901.

Although for most, the perception is that Margaret River is a wealthy, vibrant and thriving place, a closer look reveals significant contradictions between perception and reality. There is a stark divide between the 'haves' and 'have nots' in the region. Extremes of data counteract each other and result in the Shire appearing in the middle range. This effectively hides the local challenges around mental health, under/unemployment, homelessness, domestic violence, self-harm and suicide.

Add in the increasing cost of living pressures and the housing crisis and we have a high pent-up need, vulnerability and mental health risk. The residents are often lower socio-economic groups with the median weekly income \$300 lower than the state average.

The population growth rate since 2019 has been 18%. Annual visitors to the region are 3 million with over 4.5 million visiting our National Parks. As of 2024, 150 people are homeless in the Shire with over 600 on the brink of homelessness. The suicide rate in the shire is 17.9 per 100,000 which is higher than the WA average, whilst WA is higher than the national average.

the challenge

Social determinants

Mental health is shaped to a great extent by the social, economic, and physical environments in which people live. The known social determinants of poor mental health outcomes include difficulties with housing, relationship and family problems, physical health issues, financial stress and unemployment.

Social care and self-care

Social connection to others has significant impacts on mental health. Our community can be tight-knit, with strong social networks and good access to informal support providing people with natural supports for their mental health when they are in need. On the other hand, there is a growing number of individuals that feel lonely or isolated. It sometimes takes considerable, sustained effort on the part of an individual to experience belonging in a small community. The rapidly growing population and changing demographics have had a significant impact on the social fabric of the AMR community.

Early help-seeking

Early help-seeking for mental health issues for individuals, and community-wide mental health promotion and awareness raising activities are critical support gaps identified in our community.

Symptom reduction and coping

Problems accessing clinical care or support for a particular mental health condition when needed (whether diagnosed or not) . Stigma, lack of transport, pressures of living and problems identifying if and when help is needed are common issues. By the time people seek help, they are already struggling, and therefore sometimes need more intensive intervention.

Support for people in acute distress

Individuals in acute distress are not adequately supported in regional areas, especially in smaller towns or remote areas. There is a need for better crisis support for mental health. People in acute stages of a mental health condition need high quality, timely treatment options. If needed, the nearest acute psychiatric service is over 100kms away and requires private transport to access it.

Healing and reintegrating

Services for people with experiences of mental ill-health to recover and heal are so few and far between, or difficult to access.



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the shift

The strength of the Mindful Margaret River model, is the use of existing community settings, community partners, community leaders and inclusion of those who work outside the mental health sector, creating positive environments for delivering non-stigmatising and holistic support across the entire community.

A wide range of needs emerge from discussions with our community members – e.g., housing, financial, and relationship supports – indicating that it is not necessarily specialist services that are most urgently required (and often specialist services are more difficult to access). Through providing services to our community that reflect the social determinant of health, Mindful Margaret River has been able to clearly identify the space in which they work. That is:

1. Education - Empowerment and resilience of community members

- 1.1 Carry out early intervention and prevention programs.
- 1.2 Develop responsive programs that meet emerging challenges and gaps in services.

2. Collaboration - Capacity building, resource coordination, engagement and access to support

- 2.1 Facilitate community, government agencies, not for profit services and local groups to work together on mental health challenges.
- 2.2 Working with partners, provide a coordinated information system and strategies to increase mental health literacy and access.

3. Promotion - Compassion, empathy, stigma reduction, and truth telling

- 3.1 Deliver promotion campaigns to reduce stigma with focus on local connection and context.
- 3.2 Develop and deliver targeted promotions to increase community awareness on local supports

4. Agency - Action to create change. Systems change and innovation for local impact

- 4.1 Develop a Long-Term Financial plan to attract investment and sponsors aligned with our aims.
- 4.2 Lead a collaborative community advocacy network to support our community.

Examples of initiatives include:

- Maintain and build an evidence-based website, that provides accurate local connection and support for the community mindfulmargaretriver.org.au
- Development of collaborative network of local schools, youth support services, community groups, mental health services to promote and support youth focused programs, peer support, outreach and events in the Shire of AMR.
- Ongoing collaboration with Margaret River Mail to de-stigmatise and humanise mental health issues through regular column with our volunteers as contributors.
- The delivery of accredited training programs locally a free or very low cost for community members, increasing local human capacity to support people in a mental health crisis.
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- ♦ The delivery of facilitated mental wellbeing discussions in workplaces, sporting clubs and other not for profit groups on when and how to seek mental health support and how to help others (colleagues, family, friends) if they are struggling.
- ♦ Since the inception of MMR, over 5,500 community members have been reached through our 31 accredited mental health training courses, 35 community based mental health workshops, 39 community talks and 13 youth focused events. Our communications through local media, website and social media reach over 10,000 readers both in our community and beyond each month.

“What do you do when there is no one you can talk to?”

Martin Ringer, Board member

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the future

Mindful Margaret River is projected to expand and build on their solid foundations of collaboration, agency, education and promotions.

Mindful Margaret River is working on a long term financial plan which does not solely rely on Government funding. This includes private donors, developing a social enterprise model and building on long term partnerships. MMR seeks to expand their workforce in order to be able to fully engage their volunteer base as well as deliver their services and events to more remote areas of the community.

The 5-year plan is to be a sustainable community organisation.

Mindful Margaret River strives to be an integral part of their community, with strong advocates, and working closely with the Shire, WACHS, MHC and other key services provide better services. The goal is for strong social and emotional wellbeing, across the whole community, across all areas of life. MMR is keen to share their model and learnings with other regional communities and individuals so others can benefit or take inspiration from MMR's experiences.



the critical success factors

- Local champions, such as Stuart Hicks, the inaugural Chair who helped establish MMR, he recruited the right volunteers and government supports to drive the project
- Developing a Community Mental Health and Wellbeing strategic plan early on with the community in order to approach the work in a structured measurable manner.
- Early and ongoing investment in partnerships and collaborations within the community.
- Motivated volunteers, in particular, the team leaders and Board members to build the organisation.
- Taking action at a time when the community was ready for it- key people in the community were attuned to community needs and were willing and able to act.
- Taking a helicopter view to coordinate services particularly when in crisis.
- Working across all sectors, not limiting to a particular focus area enabled them to work with a broader range of partners and gain a better perspective on the gaps in services and needs of the community.
- Skilled staff members and volunteers to undertake particular initiatives in a safe and impactful manner.



Mindful Margaret River.....

the impact

Community service organisations can be more reactive than government to emerging areas of need. As a frontline organisation, Mindful Margaret River is in constant contact with our clients, who are community members like us. We have the expertise and opportunity to identify emerging needs and design effective programs, coupled with the flexibility to respond and redirect effort when funding allows.

Investment in early intervention and prevention provides our community with the support they need to live an optimal life, decreasing the likelihood people will need to access government services such as healthcare, welfare, or justice. As a provider of early intervention and prevention programs, we reduce costs for government in the long term.

Mindful Margaret River has used both process and outcomes evaluation methods. From this we can demonstrate that our activities made a contribution to our mission which is:

Empowerment and resilience of community members— reports from individual participants are that as a result of MMR workshops, training or talks, they feel better equipped to support themselves and others to access early intervention supports and to start the conversation with others.

Capacity building, resource coordination, engagement and access to support - MMR is the driver of a number of local networks actively engaging in building a coordinated and impactful response to local needs. An example of this is the development of a local working group to support emergency department staff in skills development to respond to non-suicidal self-injury and suicidal ideation at our local hospitals. This is a coordinated approach building on a WACHS suicide prevention project in which MMR has taken the lead to bring all the services together to address the recommendations of the WACHS report.

Through working with partners, we provide a coordinated information system and strategies to increase mental health literacy and access. A recent MMR campaign of local support group RADIANCE, saw an increase in the numbers of community members reaching out for support as well as a local philanthropist providing much needed funding to continue to deliver this vital service to our community.

Promotion - Compassion, empathy, stigma reduction, and truth-telling. Through our social media campaigns and partnerships, we can see our help seeking and service promotions receive on average 6,500 monthly views. This has led to increased community support, more service users and additional funding for projects.

Agency - Action to create change. Systems change and innovation for local impact. MMR has been instrumental in advocating at the local, state and national level to raise awareness of the needs of our community. The impact of this advocacy has led to MMR receiving funding from the Mental Health Commission and from the WA Primary Health Alliance to build local capacity of both professional services but also in the delivery of early intervention programs.

Through both solicited and unsolicited feedback, the overall messages from our community are:

- Greater acceptance of discussions around social and emotional wellbeing in all areas of the community
- MMR has been instrumental in building local capacity, an example is that MMR has supported community members to start their own peer support groups, or create a local chapter of other existing peer support models such as Flow State – which supports youth and adults; Self-Seen – a men’s weekly walk and talk group; Radiance – perinatal mental health support group and Men’s Table – monthly men’s peer support mental health group.
- Mindful Margaret River has emerged as the go-to trusted source of information and support, with the Shire, WACOSS, and other not for profits seeking MMR involvement in order to enact local change.

Quick links

- <https://mindfulmargaretriver.org.au/>