

# HIGHER PURPOSE

COMMUNITY WORK HAS BEEN AT THE HEART OF  
LYNDA DEAN'S LIFE FOR ALMOST HALF A CENTURY.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY JESSIE PRINCE

STARTING HER CAREER as a community worker almost 50 years ago, Lynda Dean, 75, has spent decades championing change in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, on the traditional lands of the Bundjalung people.

Along with her husband Christopher, 74, Lynda has supported, promoted and helped fund myriad grassroots organisations and community groups. "Our basic philosophy on life is that if you want to live in a certain kind of world, it's up to you to make that world for yourself," she says.

Self-professed hippies, Lynda and Christopher met in the mid-1970s when they were both working in the field of child and social welfare in Fairfield, Sydney. A shared sense of community brought them together and has remained a central feature of their lives, even when they moved north to the Northern Rivers to start their tea tree oil business, Thursday Plantation.

"We never stopped doing community work, even when we ran our business," says Lynda. "We had a sculpture park and sculpture competition on site. We also created the Kingsford Smith Festival in Ballina to bring some life into the community, and I was always involved in the local community centre wherever we lived."

Coming full circle after 30 years of helming Thursday Plantation, Lynda and Christopher sold the business in 2006 and now spend time doing what they love most – community work.

Today, Lynda is the deputy chair of the Northern Rivers Community Foundation (NRCF), a philanthropic organisation that supports communities across seven local government areas: Kyogle, Tweed, Byron, Lismore, Ballina, Richmond Valley and Clarence Valley. The NRCF prides itself on supplying financial support to uplift grassroots organisations that champion local issues.

Zero Emissions Byron (ZEB) is one such organisation. Established in 2015, ZEB aims to accelerate Byron Shire's transition to net-zero emissions. "We cannot overstate

our appreciation for the philanthropic work of the NRCF," says Dr Anne Stuart, chair and secretary of ZEB. "Thanks to NRCF funding, we've worked with local Indigenous knowledge holders and bush regenerators to learn more about cultural land management practices."

Combining contemporary science and traditional ecological practices has allowed ZEB to deliver effective training on ecosystem restoration and 'good fire' practices.

Another beneficiary of NRCF funding is Haus of Armour, a not-for-profit organisation that helps survivors of domestic violence raise their self-worth through fashion. "It's not just about clothes; it's about walking into daunting situations with your head held high," says founder Kate Jackson. "Choice is a powerful tool. For many survivors, simply deciding what to wear is an act of reclaiming control."

Funding from NRCF's Women's Giving Circle has allowed Haus of Armour to style 30 women across the region. "The testimonials we received consistently expressed that the women felt seen, valued, and reconnected to their sense of self. All acknowledged the positive impact the styling sessions had on their overall mental health and wellbeing," says Kate.

Buoyed by the success of NRCF's funding programs, and the meaningful change the organisation has already created for people across the Northern Rivers region, Lynda has no plans to slow down. On the contrary, she happily employs her wealth of experience every day, urging anyone interested in social or environmental issues to get involved.

"It really is feel-good work," she enthuses. "I would invite people to make themselves feel great by getting involved, to discover how rewarding it is to give. Every town has a neighbourhood centre, and those little groups always need volunteers. Every skill can be used; everyone has something to offer." *C&F*  
For more information, visit [nrcf.org.au](http://nrcf.org.au), [zerobyron.org](http://zerobyron.org), and [hausofarmour.org](http://hausofarmour.org)

In her role as deputy chair of the Northern Rivers Community Foundation, Lynda Dean (centre) supports the work of Dr Anne Stuart (left), chair of Zero Emissions Byron, and Kate Jackson (right), founder of Haus of Armour.