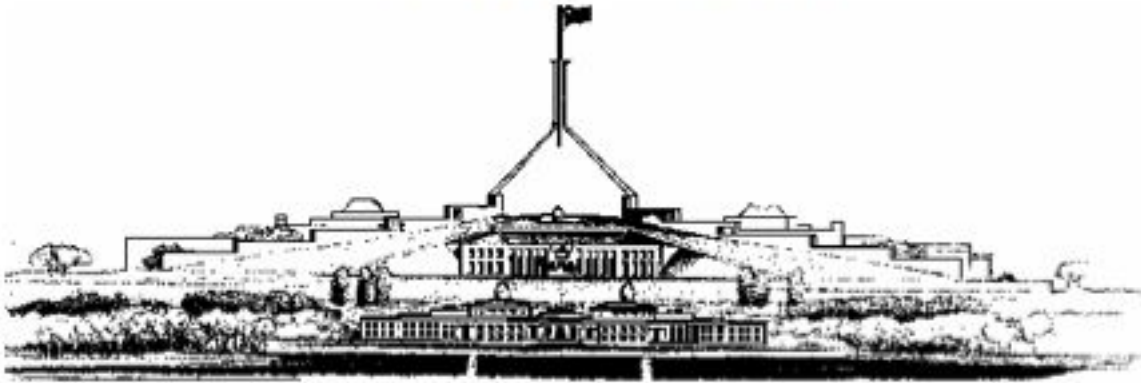




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Federation Chamber**

**GRIEVANCE DEBATE**

**Stronger Communities Program**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 27 February 2024**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Tuesday, 27 February 2024	<b>Source</b> House
<b>Page</b> 115	<b>Proof</b> Yes
<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Archer, Bridget MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mrs ARCHER** (Bass) (17:40): Last week I made one of my regular trips to the beautiful north-east of Tasmania to meet with local community groups. My first stop was the Bridport Men's Shed, where I met with Terry, Jack, Mick, George, Don and Gail to have a cuppa, a catch up and a delicious slice of coffee cake made by Terry's wife. Whilst the morning tea was lovely, the real purpose of the visit was to take a look at their latest drill press and bandsaw, purchased for \$5,000 and funded through the Stronger Communities Program.

Situated in a rural coastal town, the Bridport Men's Shed first opened in 2015, and was driven by several community members, including George who I met last week, who also saw a need for a place where locals could keep their bodies and their minds active at little or no cost. What rang true in meeting with some of the members last week was how important the place is for social connection, particularly for those who may struggle after losing a loved one. They pointed out the significance of the \$5,000 for the community shed. Whilst it may not seem like a lot of money to many, the organisation recognises it would've been extremely difficult for them to fundraise the money needed to buy essential new equipment.

This was exactly the goal of the Stronger Communities Program when it was first developed by the coalition government. It aimed to deliver social benefits in communities across Australia, providing grants between \$2,500 and \$20,000 to community organisations and local governments for small-scale projects. The program has helped fund over 15,000 such projects across Australia, across every single electorate, including in my electorate of Bass, where more than 70 projects have been supported. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the independent selection committee made up of members of Tasmania's upper house whose electorates cover the whole of Bass. To MLCs Rosemary Armitage, Jo Palmer, Tania Rattray and Nick Duigan: thank you for being fierce advocates for your regions.

As I highlight a number of these worthy projects in my speech this evening, I want the Labor government to sit up and take notice. These are the types of community organisations you risk leaving behind if you fail to commit to further Stronger Communities Program funding—projects like the community garden in Scottsdale, headed up by the Better Health 4 Dorset team and part of Health Consumers Tasmania, who were a worthy recipient of \$10,000 in funding from the last round of the Stronger Communities Program.

I left the Bridport Men's Shed to head to the official opening of the garden last week. The garden is one of the first health and wellbeing initiatives established by the Better Health 4 Dorset team—formed by a group of around 20 locals who were working on several key issues, including local transport, mental health, improving access to health care and establishing a health and wellbeing hub. The idea of the community garden was ignited by the community themselves. The better health team facilitated over 20 kitchen-conversation sessions involving more than 100 locals, who identified that a community garden was an important and missing piece of infrastructure in the area.

After securing funding through the Stronger Communities Program, more than 40 community members worked tirelessly on the project for many months, culminating in the official opening last week. It will be available to schools, the elderly and the community at large. Bec Smith from Health Consumers Tasmania said the aim of the garden is:

... to promote healthy eating, improve access to fresh, affordable produce and improve mental health by providing avenues for locals to connect and work together.

It's amazing what \$10,000 can do.

Ten thousand dollars can also purchase much-needed storage for an organisation like Dorset Community House. Located in the heart of Scottsdale, Dorset Community House provides several critical services and activities, not just in Scottsdale but right through to Gladstone, Bridport, Golconda and Alberton, covering more than 3,000 square kilometres. From community transport to school holiday programs, financial counselling, baby playtime

and playgroup, the organisation needs to maximise and utilise the space it has. With as much funding as possible diverted to essential programs, it's often the smaller but necessary infrastructure projects that fall by the wayside. Funding from programs like the Stronger Communities Program can help fill that gap.

These are just three examples of north-east Tasmanian organisations that have benefited from the last round of the Stronger Communities Program, but there are so many others to share. When you think about the number of volunteers and volunteer hours that go into keeping these organisations going, in a time when keeping volunteers on board is an increasing issue, ripping away essential funding will also make things more difficult.

In 2019, the value of volunteering in Tasmania was estimated to be around \$4 billion, with volunteers contributing an average of 229 hours a year, amounting to around 4.4 hours each week. In fact, volunteering is Tasmania's biggest sector, larger than both the private and public sectors. As elected representatives, we know that governments rely on volunteers to fill the many gaps that the government can't or won't.

For members of the Launceston & North East Railway organisation, funding from the Stronger Communities Program has meant they were finally able to build a shed and workshop to house their rail bugs. Over the past seven years, volunteers from the organisation have worked to preserve the railway history of the region, and, with tourism plans in the works, volunteer member Greg Stewart took on the task of designing and building rail bugs at the organisation's Turners Marsh location. The three bugs, painted red, blue and green, will eventually be used for tourists to travel along more than three kilometres of the currently disused rail line between Turners Marsh and Waddles Road in Karoola. Each bug has disc brakes and four seats—two at the front for peddlers and two at the back for passengers—and each has the ability to reach a top speed of 20 kilometres per hour. Mr Stewart said the shed would not have been possible without the support of the grant. 'We have a 100 per cent volunteer workforce, doing it all in our own time, at our own expense, and the only money we earn at the moment is from barbecues, raffles and a grant like this one,' he said.

In Launceston, a \$14,000 Stronger Communities Program grant provided the opportunity for the local tramway museum to purchase solar panels for their Inveresk building. Wholly run by a team of dedicated volunteers, the Launceston Tramway Museum is a community based organisation working to restore and revive old trams that once roamed the city. Andrew MacKenzie, president of the Launceston Tramway Museum Society, said the grant has made a significant impact on the sustainability of the organisation by reducing operational costs. 'Installing solar panels allows for the fiscally feasible operation of the tram by drawing on power generated by the solar panels,' he said.

Through the Stronger Communities Program, City Park Radio, which runs on the dedication of a passionate team of volunteers, was able to purchase essential podcasting equipment, providing an opportunity for anybody in our northern Tasmanian region to tell a story or learn a new technical skill. The grant program is also responsible for assisting with the set-up of Launceston's first tool library, providing a benefit to members of our local community who may not have the space or money to buy their own tools. On remote Flinders Island, the Furneaux Islands Community Shed has been able to purchase a new Lucas Mill to benefit its 60-plus members, thanks to the Stronger Communities Program.

For Girl Guides Tasmania, it has provided a kitchen upgrade at their local camp site in my electorate. In Beauty Point, it provided funds to renovate an underused church hall to create and grow a community club. The grant has provided funds to purchase gardening equipment, assisting Community Gardens Australia to grow a community garden, benefiting students from Ravenswood Heights Primary School and the local community. Karinya young women's shelter has been providing safe, confidential crisis accommodation for more than 40 years, and they were able to upgrade their IT services to ensure the organisation can continue its community outreach services.

The Elders Council of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation have finally been able to upgrade their driveway to ensure the safety of members and visitors. This project has been on their wish list for several years, and I know they were thrilled to receive funding through the Stronger Communities Program. The Stronger Communities Program has provided funds to improve a sensory space, assisting in setting up a therapeutic multisensory room for clients with disability. It's helped keep our community safe by assisting Tamar Sea Rescue to purchase a rescue vessel. The program provided the West Launceston Bowls and Community Club funds to continue their successful school bowls program by providing funding for equipment. The Lapidary Club, the Northern Tasmanian Netball Association and the Launceston Musical Society were all able to purchase equipment to ensure the sustainability and growth of their organisations.

The organisations I've listed tonight are just a few of the countless community organisations in Northern Tasmania that have benefited from Stronger Communities, and there are many more who would benefit from the funding this program provides. At a time when the cost of living is at an all-time high and it's becoming harder and harder to meet growing costs, keep volunteers and fundraise, the federal government cannot turn its backs on our communities in need. I urgently call on the government to commit to continuing the program in the upcoming budget.