

# The Impacts of Libraries of Things Upon Individual Wellbeing: A Case Study on the Mullumbimby Library of STUFF

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Australia: Sustainability and  
Environmental Action, SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2024

## **Abstract**

This research is a case study on the Mullumbimby Library of STUFF and explores the intersection between sustainability and wellbeing to determine the effects that a library of things has upon an individual. Previous literature has discussed the relevance of libraries of things within the context of sustainable economies, but there is limited information on how these libraries function as social institutions, with emphasis on individual benefits. This research aims to fill that gap by asking members and non-members of the Library of STUFF how the presence of the library within their community has impacted their wellbeing, if at all.

The Mullumbimby Library of STUFF was chosen for case study due to the high level of interest and enthusiasm for collaboration from its founder Sasha Mainsbridge. Additionally, the location of the library in Northern Rivers made for an interesting study, given the recent devastation of floods from 2022.

This study was conducted through interviews and surveys. All interviews proceeded once written, informed consent was received. Survey participation was anonymous. Interviews were conducted with nine individuals (mostly by phone with only one in-person conversation) and the survey was conducted online with a total of 62 participants.

The data showed that the Library of STUFF affects individual wellbeing in five key ways: providing financial flexibility, decreasing financial and climate-related stress, allowing opportunities for skill building, creating space to connect with community, aiding in immediate flood relief and long-term resilience, and allowing individuals to participate in a sustainable lifestyle. Participants of the study hope for a long and successful future for the Library of STUFF, emphasizing the importance of the government in funding the future operations of the library. Libraries of things can therefore be viewed as beneficial institutions for the promotion of sustainability and, from a social perspective, in facilitating a happier and healthier community.

**Key words: Libraries of Things, Mullumbimby, Sustainability, Wellbeing,**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the following individuals who helped me on this research journey.

First and foremost, I express my deep appreciation to Sasha Mainsbridge of Mullum Cares and the Mullumbimby Library of STUFF. Thank you for our conversations regarding the foundation of the LoS and Mullum Cares, the culture of non-profits in the Northern Rivers region, and for sharing your experience with sustainability in both work and life. My initial fascination with libraries of things evolved into a project that I am immensely interested in and proud of, and this would not have happened without your enthusiasm and partnership. Thank you for welcoming me into your community and your work. I am so inspired by all that you do, and I hope that one day in the future I can help lead my community in sustainability in the ways that you do yours. You will always have my gratitude.

To Ruth Rosenhek, my wonderful advisor. You have assisted me and my project from the very beginning and helped give this research its shape. You kept me in check when I began to overwhelm myself – no easy task! Thank you for helping me craft a study question, giving me ideas and disciplines to explore for my literature review, advising my data collection methods, and answering my many paper-writing questions. Your words of advice will linger to help guide the rest of my academic future.

To Dr. Samuel Alexander, academic advisor and leader in voluntary simplicity. You have inspired myself and my peers through every day we have been in Australia. Your leadership and humor have made this semester what it was – the most magical adventure of a lifetime. Thank you for everything.

To Dr. Eshana Bragg, assistant academic director and ecopsychology mentor. Thank you for your assistance and advice on our academic writing. You helped transform me and my peers from undergraduate students into researchers and academics in sustainability. I will forever remember the peace and serenity of Foresthaven with fondness and love.

To Dave and Gina, thank you for keeping us safe and organized. Dave – your laughter, jokes, and food are foundational for this program. Us SIT kids love you. Gina – you’ve kept us grounded. Thank you for your consistent support and encouragement.

To the volunteers of the Library of STUFF. Thank you for welcoming me, teaching me, and speaking with me. I enjoyed my time with you in the shed!

To my interview participants: Catherine (LoS member), Eden (LoS member), Neil (LoS member), Gina (LoS member and Supervisor of Mullumbimby Community Garden), Bec Talbot (LoS member and Sustainability & Resilience Consultant), Sarah Child (LoS member and Strategy and Engagement Officer for Resource Recovery at Byron Shire Council), David Paynter (founder of the Gold Coast Tool Library), Dominique Quirke (LoS member), and Hope (LoS member). Our conversations helped guide the most important part of my paper – supporting and highlighting the memories, experiences, and hopes of those that the Library of STUFF serves. Thank you for your words and for sharing your stories. I am grateful for our lovely conversations.

To all survey participants. Thank you for opening the email and taking the time to indicate your thoughts, feelings, and opinions. You gave me important information to work from and your participation is much appreciated.

And lastly, but not at all least, to my roommates at the Salty Crab Bungalow: Sarah, Iris, Cate, Sydney, Sophie, Sofia, & Ethan. Thank you for your advice when I became frustrated or overwhelmed with my work. A family away from home. Thank you for the laughs, the hugs, the most wonderful time of my life. I love you all.

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Study question*

Our globalized economy has become increasingly detached from local, community consumption as items produced on one side of the globe are consumed on another. Within this system, the capitalist society has become reliant upon a collection of “stuff,” as cost of production decreases and ease of distribution increases, bringing disastrous consequences upon the natural world (Wiedmann et al., 2020, para. 7). This current lifestyle of accumulation is unsustainable, dependent upon extreme resource depletion and a continuous cycle of waste. Within this movement of resources and goods, the connection between producer and consumer blurs and becomes tangled in indirect lines of distribution. This has constituted a considerable loss of focus upon the wellbeing of the individual, as those in charge of the means of production and the means of waste have no direct relation to the health and happiness of the consumer (Labonté, et al., 2010, para. 1). In this way, globalization may ultimately have a negative effect upon both the environment and human wellbeing.

This research attempts to explore the interdependence of sustainability, community, and wellbeing through the concept of a library of things, a space in which the principles of a traditional book lending library are extended to other items (such as cooking appliances, construction tools, musical instruments, toys, outdoor items, etc.) (Claudelin et al., 2022, para 12). These libraries become hubs for a more localized and consumer reductionist economy, based on principles of sharing as items become re-distributed for short-term use among local members. In theory, these hubs offer a sustainable solution: decreasing both production and consumption while fortifying community interdependence. The following research is based on the study question: what are the effects of libraries of things upon individual wellbeing? This research paper takes place in the context of the Northern Rivers region of NSW, Australia.

### *1.2 Relation to sustainability*

Within the context of waste and consumption, a “sustainable” future would require a re-imagination of society to be one in which there is a “focus on [our] societal activities and interactions with nature and internal societal resource use” (Azar et al., 1996, p. 90). In other words, sustainability would look like an intentional emphasis upon our community’s relationship with nature through resource use and community activities. Within this sustainable future, we would re-frame our culture of “stuff” to be focused upon both self-sufficiency and community



sharing for the purpose of resilience (Komatsu et al., 2019). The premise of a library of things provides communities and individuals a forum through which they can begin to accomplish this – through the reduction of consumption and waste, the grounding of community connection through the premise of sharing, and the centralization of resources, all in the name of a sustainable community.

Within a sustainable future, it is also vital to promote wellbeing. Academic research has so far drawn strong connections between the two. It is understood that perhaps our pursuit of wellbeing and the demonstration of sustainability through “ecologically responsible behavior,” may be one in the same, or at least two paths that constitute a similar goal (Brown & Kassner, 2005, p. 350). Our physical wellbeing is directly dependent upon the “resources and services provided by ecosystems,” and similarly, the wellbeing of ecosystems is dependent upon our societal treatment and preservation of them (Helne & Hirvilammi, 2015, p. 171). Furthermore, the entire pursuit for a transformation to a more sustainable society and way of living “requires healthy, thriving individuals who are more likely to actively care for the environment” (Helne & Hirvilammi, 2015, p. 173). Thus, our societal pursuits for individual and community wellbeing are directly grounded in the wellbeing of our planet and sustainability.

## **2. Background Information**

### *2.1 Global consumption*

Climate change is well understood to be a result of greenhouse gas emissions and an ever-increasing industrialized world (Wang et al., 2018, para. 1). It can be expected that an increase in consumption demand will precipitate a further increase in production, and therefore a more intense climate change result. When addressing the effects of the global economy upon the natural world, production becomes a systemic problem, hitting every level of our societal structure. The consequences of production and the related issues of resource depletion, pollution, and global carbon emissions lie largely in the hands of the producer, though encouraged by consumption (Wiedmann et al., 2020, para. 7). In order to change the ways in which production and consumption stimulate environmental destruction, it is necessary to re-think the way that we use and exchange goods, and we must begin to directly address such problems as resource extraction and waste.

It is not solely the responsibility of production entities to alter their practices; our models of consumption need to change as well. This will require the active choice on the part of the consumer to limit their habits, specifically restraining the quantity of their purchasing. By decreasing our purchasing, the need for production is ultimately reduced. This may present itself as experimenting with “different provisioning systems” to be more local and less resource-intensive, thus avoiding the historically destructive habit of transnational shipping (Wiedmann et al., 2020, para. 17). The act of consumption itself has been explored within academic literature and authors have noted that purchasing abstinence – “the adoption of less affluent, simpler and sufficiency-oriented lifestyles to address overconsumption” – will also be required to transform our economy to one that is more compatible with the natural restraints and limitations imposed upon us by the earth (Wiedmann et al., 2020, para. 20). Making this transition successful will involve “community visioning and planning of alternative forms for practices that are less environmentally intrusive and, in some cases, aim at no growth or low growth microeconomics” (Guillen-Royo & Wilhite, 2014, para. 40).

### *2.2 Libraries of things*

Libraries of things (LoTs) offer a community a centralized location to borrow, share, and utilize objects that may be needed for almost every facet of one’s life –from kitchenware to carpentry. For many households, LoTs increase accessibility, as the membership costs to join a

library typically (and substantially) mitigate the financial hurdles of purchasing (Jones et al., 2023, para. 41). In this way, LoTs offer a socially systemic solution within a community, providing people with a bridge that encourages both access and community through the principles of sharing.

The current literature regarding LoTs is sparse, with most articles referencing the implementation of LoTs and the potential problems associated with them such as scale, stakeholders, and item quality, to name a few. LoTs are also referenced as a feature of both a sharing economy and a circular economy, thus promoting solutions of alternative and more sustainable theories of economy (Claudelin et al., 2022, para. 12). Additional literature has referenced the need for future studies on the relevance of LoTs to these alternative economies and the addition of “makerspaces” to compliment the work of LoTs and further instill experiential learning and skill building in members for the sake of individual empowerment (Lax, 2020, p. 60). However, previous literature does not fully represent the effects of LoTs upon wellbeing, either on an individual level or its effects within the larger community. In order to fully understand how LoTs may be a sustainable solution, the literature must represent the experiences of those who have seen the implementation of LoTs into their community and the influence of the LoT on their wellbeing.

### *2.3 Wellbeing*

The concepts of wellbeing and sustainability are interconnected. This study aims to also look into additional considerations of wellbeing, largely through the lenses of community, mindfulness, and self-sufficiency.

#### *2.3.1 Sense of community*

To support mental and emotional wellbeing, a sense of belonging within one’s community may be necessary. In a study published in 2023, it was found that a “higher sense of belonging and [a] higher level of meaningful participation were congruent with [a] higher level of well-being,” thus insinuating that for most individuals, participation and belonging in one’s environment is a key component of their wellbeing (Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023, para. 22). Vice versa, to have one’s feeling of belonging “threatened” in any way, can result in “serious health, social, and psychological consequences,” such that the removal of community may result in a decline in individual wellbeing (Wilczyńska et al., 2015, p. 72). It is through a found community

that individuals can begin to combat the sense of disconnectedness that ensues from globalization and re-strengthen our local networks (Twells et al., 2018, para. 1).

### *2.3.2 Minimalism*

The practice of minimalism, in which individuals are characterized by “anti-consumerist attitudes,” has been linked to wellbeing benefits, including themes of autonomy, competence, mental space, awareness, and positive emotions (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020, para. 1, 19). These themes assist the findings of other studies on “low consumption lifestyles” that offer evidence supporting how reducing one's accumulation of “stuff” may ultimately increase or benefit personal wellbeing (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020, para. 63).

### *2.3.3 Skill building*

This research hopes to explore the relevance of skill building as a method for personal resilience and its contribution to individual wellbeing. In other words, whether the inventory of a LoT allows for the acquisition of new skills and the potential positive impacts of this on an individual's wellbeing. Current academic literature is limited in supporting this hypothesis and there are knowledge gaps in this subject. However, there is research supporting self-sufficiency in some contexts. In this case, self-sufficiency is related to skill building, as individuals must have tangible abilities to provide for themselves using both tools and knowledge.

Through the acquired skills of textile repairs and clothing creation, there is an outlet for individuals to express sustainability as well as modern creativity by constructing clothes that are “personal [and] meaningful” (McLaren & McLauchlan, 2015, p. 226). A series of secondhand workshops conducted in 2022 emphasized that “learning new skills or completing repair work on an individual basis boost[ed] wellbeing and feelings of empowerment” among their participants (Broadhead et al., 2022, para. 2). Another study on skill building through self-sufficiency explored the sentiments and capabilities of homesteaders and preppers in the United States of America. The abilities of these groups of individuals and the inherent environmental understandings embedded in their practices of consumption tethered them directly to their resource use and their waste, as they were personally responsible for the life cycles of their used resources (Ford, 2019, p. 1). Their skills in homesteading and prepping allowed them to visualize and change “the way individuals organize the material flow of their home production and consumption to move away from the status quo of consumption, wage labor, and outsourcing production of basic needs” (Ford, 2019, p. 9). A different study looked at a zero-waste

community in China, in which zero waste was understood by the author to be a set of sustainable practices that changed sustainability and consumption understandings around material use, waste infrastructure, alternative places for consumption, skills and competencies, and skill sharing (Zhan, 2022, para. 13). Through this research, the author determined that the practice of zero waste for these individuals “is about empowerment, self-actualization, and participation” (Zhan, 2022, para. 42). The importance of this skillset was placed upon the ways that self-sufficiency promoted emotional and mental benefits. The culmination of these studies speaks to the ability of self-sufficiency, and skill building, in a variety of contexts to give an individual nuanced abilities and understandings that may alter the way in which they live their lives and perhaps benefit their individual wellbeing.

#### *2.3.4 Personal stress*

Studies have shown that there is an association between stress and wellbeing (Pérez & Matud, 2023, para. 29). This correlation is negative – as stress increases, our wellbeing decreases (Pérez & Matud, 2023, para. 29). While stress can stem as a reaction from myriad causes, it is relevant for the purposes of this study to look at stress in terms of financial security and climate change.

##### *2.3.4.1 Financial security in Northern Rivers, NSW, Australia*

Academia has helped make explicit the “relationship between poverty, social stress and mental health problems,” so that we now understand that access to resources is an indicator of our wellbeing, both physical and mental (Knifton & Inglis, 2020, para. 2). A lack of accessibility due to limitations in one’s financial status can “cause poor mental health through social stresses, stigma and trauma” (Knifton & Inglis, 2020, para. 2). It is relevant to discuss intersectionality in any context, and this paper does so with the overlap of financial security, sustainability, and wellbeing.

The cost of living is a topic relevant for discussion in many sectors of the world, and Australia is no exemption. Financial burdens are prevalent in the Northern Rivers region, exacerbated by recent flooding in 2022 (see section 2.4.1). It is estimated that at least 1 in 5 residents of this region are living in poverty (Tondorf, 2023, para. 2). The loss of stable housing from floods has caused rent prices to soar, rates of food insecurity to rise, and an increase in the population of unhoused people (Tondorf, 2023, para. 3). This has had negative impacts on physical wellbeing from a lack of housing, but also on mental wellbeing, as stress “is proposed to

be directly and indirectly associated with short- and long-term life outcomes, such as physical, psychological, and social well-being” (Ryu, 2023, para. 31). Again, in the context of Northern Rivers, the ill effects of stress are more pronounced in those at low-income levels and those who do not own a home (Ryu, 2023, para. 32). Studies have shown that the “experience of poor housing affordability appears to influence mental health directly, over and above general financial hardship” (Bentley et al., 2011, para. 2). Thus, the region is predisposed to a lower general wellbeing due to the financial risks associated with the region.

#### *2.3.4.2 The climate crisis in Australia*

The presence of climate change and the knowledge of its existence and potential consequences may manifest in ill mental health among individuals. Literature refers to common reactions such as “worry, anxiety, hopelessness, and grief in relation to environmental problems, particularly climate change” (Ojala et al., 2021, p. 37). Climate anxiety may manifest itself as “general anxiety, depression, stress, and insomnia symptoms” and can inhibit a decline in general mental stability (Ojala et al., 2021, p. 37). Anxiety towards climate change on a global scale is therefore a relevant concern when exploring impacts to wellbeing.

These mental health effects become even more poignant when climate change presents itself directly to the individual on a local scale. Climate change-related disasters and environmental hardships in Australia take many forms, from floods and drought to cyclones and bushfires (McCulloch, n.d., para. 24). With any sort of climate disaster such as these, lies a long list of consequences for communities and individuals, impacting physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. These may include such things as “loss of belongings including medication, damaged transport routes, reduced health services, disrupted telecommunications, loss of power, and evacuations, often compounded by disrupted sleep, stress and reduced access to healthy food and safe water,” all of which complicates security and safety (Vardoulakis et al., 2022, p. 342). Floods have been especially prevalent in the Northern Rivers region, with “long-lasting mental health effects, such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder” (Vardoulakis et al., 2022, p. 342).

It is expected that these disasters will continue to increase in the coming years in Australia, particularly flooding as rainfall becomes heavier and sea levels continue to rise (Lawrence et al., 2023). To combat this, many experts suggest that it is necessary to begin “long term planning of more resilient urban and rural infrastructure, housing, digital communications,

and health and social services,” orienting recovery practices to be intentionally focused upon future resiliency (Vardoulakis et al., 2022, p. 344). The presence of social services allows for a resiliency network to aid in easing the burden of individual stress.

#### *2.4 Mullumbimby, NSW*

##### *2.4.1 The floods of 2022*

In February of 2022, intense flooding devastated the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, including the town of Mullumbimby. 17.4% of homes were said to have been inundated in Mullumbimby and median house prices dropped by at least \$400,000 (Power, 2022, para. 7). Citizens of the area are still recovering from the event. These floods are recorded as the “second-costliest event in the world for insurers in 2022, and the most expensive disaster in Australian history” (Chenery, 2023, para. 7). Mullumbimby council and residents are still working to rebuild parts of their town.

Floods have lasting, negative impacts upon the wellbeing of victims. A cross-sectional study surveyed Northern River residents following a previous flood in 2017. Two years after the flooding occurred, residents were still exhibiting mental health impacts and the survey demonstrated that those with increased exposure to the flood (through displacement or increased volume of water on their properties) experienced worse mental health impacts (Matthews et al., 2017). The flood itself was also not the sole cause of issues in wellbeing and “secondary stressors like insurance disputes, persistent damage in their home or business, mould, and relationship problems or illness strongly predicted mental health and wellbeing outcomes” among surveyed residents (Matthews et al., 2017, para. 12). It can be expected that similar results would be found in Northern Rivers residents in relation to the flooding of 2022.

##### *2.4.2 The Library of STUFF*

The Mullumbimby Library of STUFF (henceforth referred to as LoS) is a library of things within the Northern Rivers region in New South Wales, Australia that has been in operation since 2019. The library is a project of Mullum Cares, a non-profit that focuses on aligning community resources with sustainability through the promotion of alternative behaviors of consumption (Mullum Cares, n.d.). Both Mullum Cares and the LoS were founded by Sasha Mainsbridge. Since its inception, the LoS has been operating through volunteer assistance, with the intention of balancing those that they call “active” members versus “supported” members – those that can donate their time to assist the LoS operationally and those without the capacity to

do so (Library of STUFF, n.d., para. 2). However, the library has recently struggled to maintain this limited operational capacity in balance with their high number of members.

The Australian Library of Things Network has published new data within the last year. This research has shown that, out of the 13 surveyed libraries, the LoS has the highest item loan rate of libraries of things in the country (The Australian Library of Things Network, 2023, p. 16). Despite having only 200 members, the LoS operated 4,934 loans within a 12-month period (The Australian Library of Things Network, 2023, p. 16). This is in comparison to the Brunswick Tool Library, having 771 members but only 3,228 loans within that same time frame (The Australian Library of Things Network, 2023, p. 16). This data proves that the use of the Mullumbimby LoS by the Northern Rivers community is very intensive, especially when compared to its peer organizations. Unfortunately, this has put a lot of stress upon the operations of the facility. Sasha recently sent out an email to the members of the LoS with a call to action for members to step up and fulfill more active roles (S. Mainsbridge, 8 April 2024). The hope is that following this email, members will take time to rethink the importance of the LoS in their lives and to their community and re-engage with the LoS by helping it transform into a more cooperative structure, thus ensuring its longevity. If active membership does not increase to fulfill a minimum split of 20/80 active members to supported members, then there is the potential for the Library of STUFF to close (Library of STUFF, n.d.).



### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Collaborating with Mullum Cares*

Through my preliminary review of literature on the subject, I understand that a core part of one's mental and emotional wellbeing is one's attachment to community. While there are many strong and important aspects of community to be found in urban environments, the period of time that I had already spent within the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales, Australia had given me some experience connecting with and understanding the culture of community within the area. Thus, I decided to continue my stay and conduct my work within this region given my prior experience with it. Additionally, my advisor, Ruth Rosenhek, is well-connected within Northern Rivers, so it was to my advantage to stay within the Byron Shire for additional networking purposes.

To conduct my research, I contacted multiple libraries of things in the region, one of which was the Mullumbimby Library of STUFF. Founder and strategic lead Sasha Mainsbridge responded to my research inquiries with enthusiasm. I had originally intended to survey multiple organizations as separate data points for my work but based upon the limited availability of time among the other non-profit organizations in comparison with Sasha's high level of interest, I chose to focus my research project as a case study within Mullumbimby.

During my initial conversation with Sasha, we discussed how the LoS plans to design a series of workshops (alongside the design of a new workshop space in partnership with Byron Community College in Mullumbimby) that will engage participants on how to use a variety of objects and tools within the LoS inventory. These workshops would be available to members of the library, as well as non-members within the larger Byron Shire community. Sasha and I were interested to see if skill building in this type of forum would have any bearing on community perceptions of wellbeing and the importance of the LoS in the lives of members. Thus, we decided that our collaboration would have two components in which I would assist Sasha in surveying member interest in workshops alongside conducting my primary and personal research interests of the overall effects of the LoS on member wellbeing.

#### *3.2 Literature review process*

I spent the first week of my research period collecting background information around concepts relevant to my project, mainly academic literature regarding wellbeing and libraries of

things, and working with Sasha to understand the operations of the LoS. This gave me the necessary foundation to create my surveys and interview guides.

Later on, based on the responses of my participants, I conducted further background research to provide this report with the context necessary to understand the results and my analysis of them.

### *3.3 Survey process*

Surveying was chosen as the method to determine the sentiments of the larger Byron Shire community regarding the effects of the LoS upon individual and community wellbeing, as well as to determine member opinions regarding potential workshops. All surveys were anonymous.

#### *3.3.1 Workshop survey*

The workshop survey was designed by Sasha and myself using a list of inventory items. The entire library inventory was exported into a spreadsheet. Sasha and I brainstormed a couple of potential workshop themes that would be feasible within the constraints of the workshop space and that may be of interest to the community. They were as follows: textiles, cooking, outdoor activities, and gardening. I went through every item in the inventory spreadsheet and color coded them based upon whether they would be applicable to one or more of these key themes.

Following this independent work, Sasha and I came together to take these initial ideas and flesh out some more substantial and creative workshop themes and promotional statements. These themes were incorporated into a survey format where participants could rate their interest on a scale of 1-10. Additionally, accessibility questions were included, asking participants to rate their preferences in terms of workshop time and cost. The survey was created through Google Form sent out to all email subscribers of the LoS (both members and non-members) using Mail Chimp. Responses were stored in a Google sheet. This survey was not well-advertised in the email and responses were limited (see section 3.5).

#### *3.3.2 Wellbeing survey*

The goal of the wellbeing survey was to ask the larger Byron Shire community their sentiments regarding the present and potential influence of the LoS upon an individual's wellbeing. The survey would be circulated among members of the LoS and non-members that reside within the Byron Shire. This meant that the survey would need to have two tracks that

would fit the identity of potential participants (members vs non-members). The survey was created using Google forms and responses were stored in a Google sheet.

The survey for members asked their reasons for joining the LoS and the benefits, if any, that they have received by being a member. Additionally, the survey asked member participants to rate the impact that involvement with the LoS has had on their lives in the contexts of sustainability, community belonging, and personal wellbeing (see Appendix A).

The survey for non-members asked individuals to think about any barriers they have come across that may have prevented them from accessing membership with the LoS (see Appendix A). Additionally, this survey asked participants to note any aspects of the LoS that appeals to them and to brainstorm potential ways that the LoS could benefit their wellbeing.

The survey was sent out to all email subscribers of the LoS (including members and non-members) using Mail Chimp. The response rate for this method of distribution was 5%, as only 41 individuals of the 804 email subscribers opened the link. Additionally, the survey link was printed in the form of a QR code which I circulated among visitors and vendors of the Mullumbimby Flea Market at the Byron Community College on 13 April 2024. The response rate for this random distribution method is unknown, as the QR code was circulated without my presence. Additionally, the survey was distributed by Sasha through a snowball method to her network of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances within the Mullumbimby community.

The survey received 62 responses. 51 responses were through the membership track while the remaining 11 answered the survey through the non-member track. Survey respondents indicated that they live throughout the Northern Rivers region – not just within Mullumbimby.

### *3.3.3 Survey analysis*

Survey responses were exported from Google forms into a spreadsheet. Responses were categorized by theme. The themes were chosen based upon interview responses, and survey data was sorted into them. Responses from closed questions were used as numerical data to help support the sentiments and opinions found from the survey's open questions.

### *3.4 Interview process*

Interviews were chosen as the main method of analysis. In order to accurately understand how an individual had, or had not, been affected by the presence of the LoS within Mullumbimby, an in-depth conversation was helpful to 1) hear their personal definition of wellbeing and 2) discuss the nuanced ways that the LoS fit into that definition.

### *3.4.1 Finding participants*

In total, I interviewed nine individuals. I interviewed Catherine (LoS member) by phone on 15 April 2024. I interviewed Eden (LoS member) and Neil (LoS member) by phone at separate times on 17 April 2024. Gina (LoS member and Supervisor of Mullumbimby Community Garden) was interviewed in-person at the Mullumbimby Community Garden on 18 April 2024 and Bec (LoS member and Sustainability & Resilience Consultant) was interviewed by phone on the same day. Sarah (LoS member and Strategy and Engagement Officer for Resource Recovery at Byron Shire Council) was interviewed by phone on 19 April 2024 and David (founder of the Gold Coast Tool Library) was interviewed by phone on 21 April 2024. Lastly, Dominique (LoS member) and Hope (LoS member) were both interviewed by phone on 22 April 2024 at separate times.

Interview participants were found in a few ways. Catherine volunteered with me on behalf of the LoS at the Flea Market and agreed to be interviewed at a later date. Three of the interviewees (David, Neil, and Eden) filled out the anonymous wellbeing survey and included their emails as a note at the end to indicate that they were willing to be contacted about the interview process. I visited the Mullumbimby Community Garden on 19 April 2024 where I met lead supervisor Gina and she agreed to be interviewed. The final four interviewees (Sarah, Bec, Dominique, and Hope) were contacts given to me by Sasha.

### *3.4.2 Interview guides*

Similar to the wellbeing survey, I created a two-track interview guide to be used depending on if I was interviewing members or non-members (see Appendix B). Interview questions were curated with the intention of exploring similar themes from the survey, but in greater detail and with greater emphasis on individual experiences. Member interviewees were asked to define wellbeing and then compare the effects of the LoS on their personal lives based upon the definition that they provided. David was the only non-member interviewed, and similar questions were asked of him due to his affiliation with the Gold Coast library. Additionally, the interviews further asked participants to discuss the sustainability components of the LoS. The interview guides helped to structure the conversation, but I allowed the interviewee to lead the direction of our conversation and, at times, I asked impromptu follow-up questions based on the answers that they provided.

### *3.4.3 Interview recording and analysis*

All but one interview was conducted over the phone. Gina and I had our interview in person at the Mullumbimby Community Garden. All interviewees gave consent to have the interviews recorded. Following our conversation, I transcribed the dialogue of all interviews. I read through all transcriptions and highlighted quotes that addressed the research goal of the library's effects upon wellbeing. I then organized quotes by theme to categorize all data.

### *3.5 Limitations and shortcomings*

The results section of this report does not include any data from the workshop survey. Interaction with the workshop survey was very low (only 2 respondents out of the 804 individuals emailed), largely due to the placement of the survey in the email – it was very difficult to tell that there was a survey attached to the email. As the workshop survey was not a primary goal of my research and holds little to no bearing on the library's previous effects on wellbeing, it is not relevant to include further discussion on the survey in this report.

The data from the wellbeing survey is heavily skewed in favor of the library due to the population of survey and interview applicants. Those who enjoy the library and use it frequently can be assumed more likely to check and read emails from the organization, as opposed to non-users or those who dislike the library, who may be less interested to read an email from Sasha in full. The same goes for interviewees. Perhaps only the most avid users of the library would be willing to put their contact information on the survey for further interview contact. This also excludes more time-poor individuals who were perhaps interested in an interview but didn't have the time to commit to one. Additionally, some of the interviewees were contacts given to me by Sasha, further skewing the data as they are close colleagues and friends of the library. Additionally, some of the identities of the participants may have skewed the data due to their unique perspectives (council member, library board member, Gold Coast Tool Library founder), all of whom are perhaps more likely to praise the work of the library.

Additionally, the wellbeing data is lacking the perspectives of non-members. I did not do enough outreach with the larger Northern Rivers community to find participants who have never had direct contact with the LoS. Therefore, this research does not provide an accurate description of how the LoS affects the wellbeing of the entire Northern Rivers region, as I had originally intended. Instead, it focuses almost entirely on the experiences of members.

### *3.6 Ethical implications*

Before beginning research, this project received ethics approval from the SARB with no imposed conditions. During the first few weeks of research, an ethical issue did arise. In my initial ethics proposal that was approved, I had no mention of interaction with flood victims, nor did I anticipate conversations regarding flood recovery. Once beginning my research, individuals that I conversed with brought up the importance of the LoS in Mullumbimby flood recovery and disaster relief work. I brought this issue to SARB Chair, Samuel Alexander, to discuss how to best ensure that flood victims would not be exposed to mental or emotional harm or discomfort by participating in my interviews and survey. It was decided that I could follow through with my research as planned as long as I wasn't targeting flood victims or directly asking about their flood experiences. If participants brought up the floods and their experience with recovery on their own and wished to discuss this topic, then that would be appropriate. Neither my interview questions nor my survey questions made reference to the floods. The data presented in this report regarding flood recovery was brought up entirely by the survey or interview participants on their own, with no influence from me.

For all interviews, I made sure to retrieve informed consent. Before participating in interviews, all subjects signed a consent form that clearly outlined the intentions of my project and their rights to withdraw from the conversation or abstain from answering a question at any time. This information was repeated to participants at the beginning of all interviews. Additionally, I asked for consent in recording interviews and participants were asked if and how they would like to be referred to in my final report.

It is important to recognize my own positionality in this work. I am a white woman from another country who has not experienced a direct climate disaster of my own, nor the financial stressors experienced by many of my research participants. While I attempted to navigate this work delicately, I have not experienced the trauma or troubles experienced by the people who I worked with, and therefore I was at a deficit in understanding the nuance of impacts that the flood disaster had on individuals and the larger Mullumbimby community. Additionally, this may have influenced what data I regard to be important and guided the conclusions that I have made. I recognize my positionality and I realize that there may be resulting limitations in my work.

#### **4. Results and discussion**

The responses of interviewees and survey participants were categorized into themes. The results show that libraries of things affect an individual's wellbeing by providing financial security, reduced stress, opportunities for skill building, an outlet for community engagement, flood resiliency, and a method for participating in a sustainable lifestyle.

#### *4.1 Definitions of wellbeing*

All interview participants were asked to define, in their own terms, their personal definition of "wellbeing." Eight out of the nine participants pointed to the importance of mental health. Eden said that, to him, wellbeing is "living in a way that aligns with [his] values and is having a positive impact on both [his] physical and mental health" (personal communication, 17th April 2024). Catherine extended the importance of good mental health to align with one's community, saying that to her, wellbeing is the "community supporting each other" (personal communication, 15th April 2024). David added onto this with the addition of a stress-free environment, stating that wellbeing is "having a life that's free of as much of that type of [financial] stress and anxiety as possible as well as the ability to ... remain calm and centered and present" (personal communication, 21st April 2024).

These statements provide evidence on what is important to individuals when thinking about their wellbeing. These interviewed participants rely on the reduction of stress, the support of a community, and the freedom to align their morals with the way in which they pursue their lifestyle in order to remain stable in their mental health. These definitions of wellbeing guided our conversations. When thinking about the impacts of libraries of things upon an individual in these interviews, it is with these concepts of wellbeing in mind.

#### *4.2 Financial security*

14 survey participants (27.5% of member survey respondents) reported affordability as a reason for joining the library (see Figure 1). When asked about the benefits they have received through their membership, 44 member survey participants (86.3%) reported having access to a range of quality items/tools at a cheaper price as a benefit (see Figure 2). From the non-member survey, nine respondents (81.8%) reported that access to a range of quality items/tools at a cheaper price appealed to them (see Figure 3). An anonymous survey participant noted that "[they] can take [their] daughter on enriching camping trips without having to invest money/store all the gear. It wouldn't be possible without the LoS!"



Figure 1. Survey respondents' motivations for purchasing a membership with the LoS

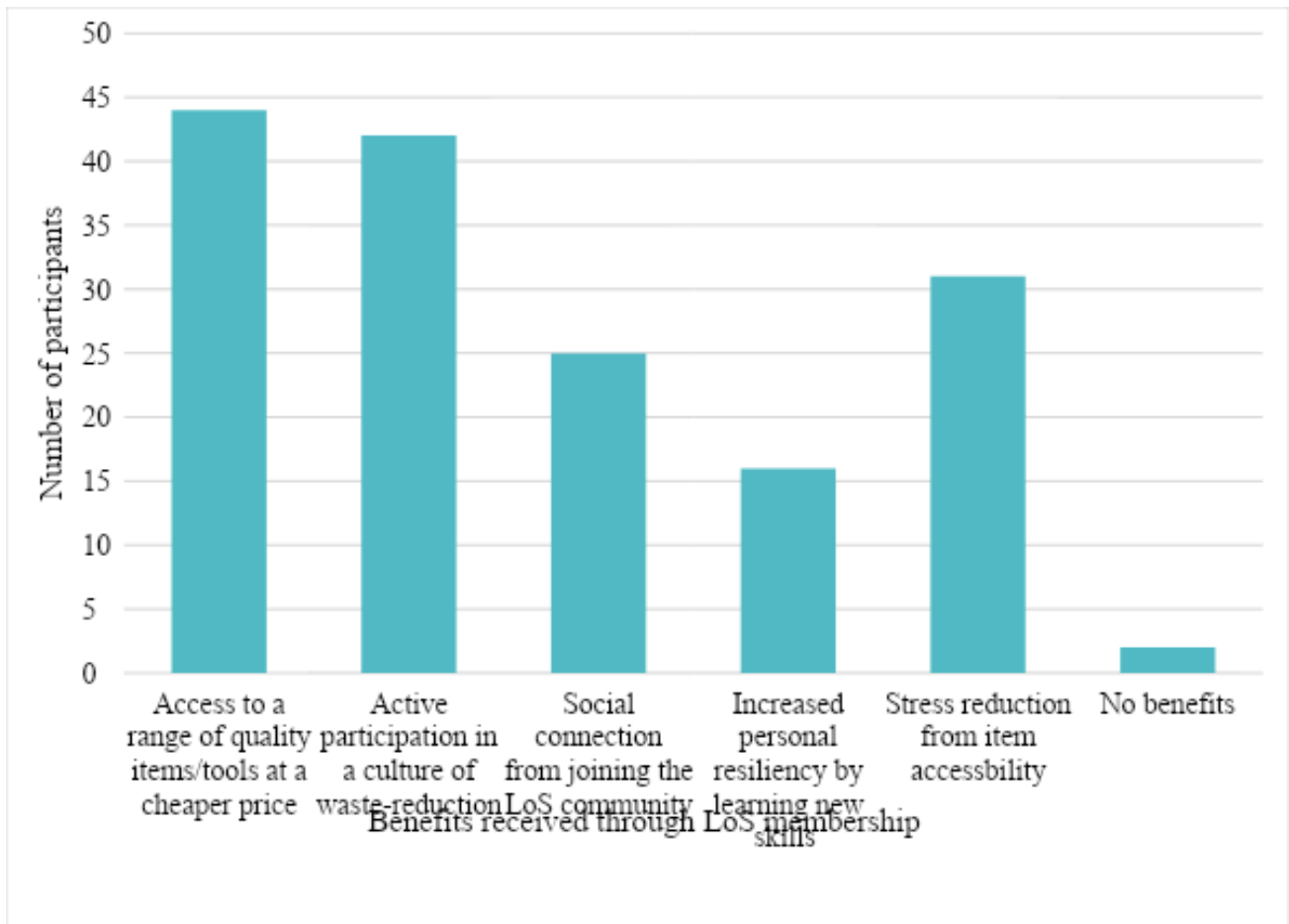




Figure 2. Benefits of LoS membership as experienced by survey participants

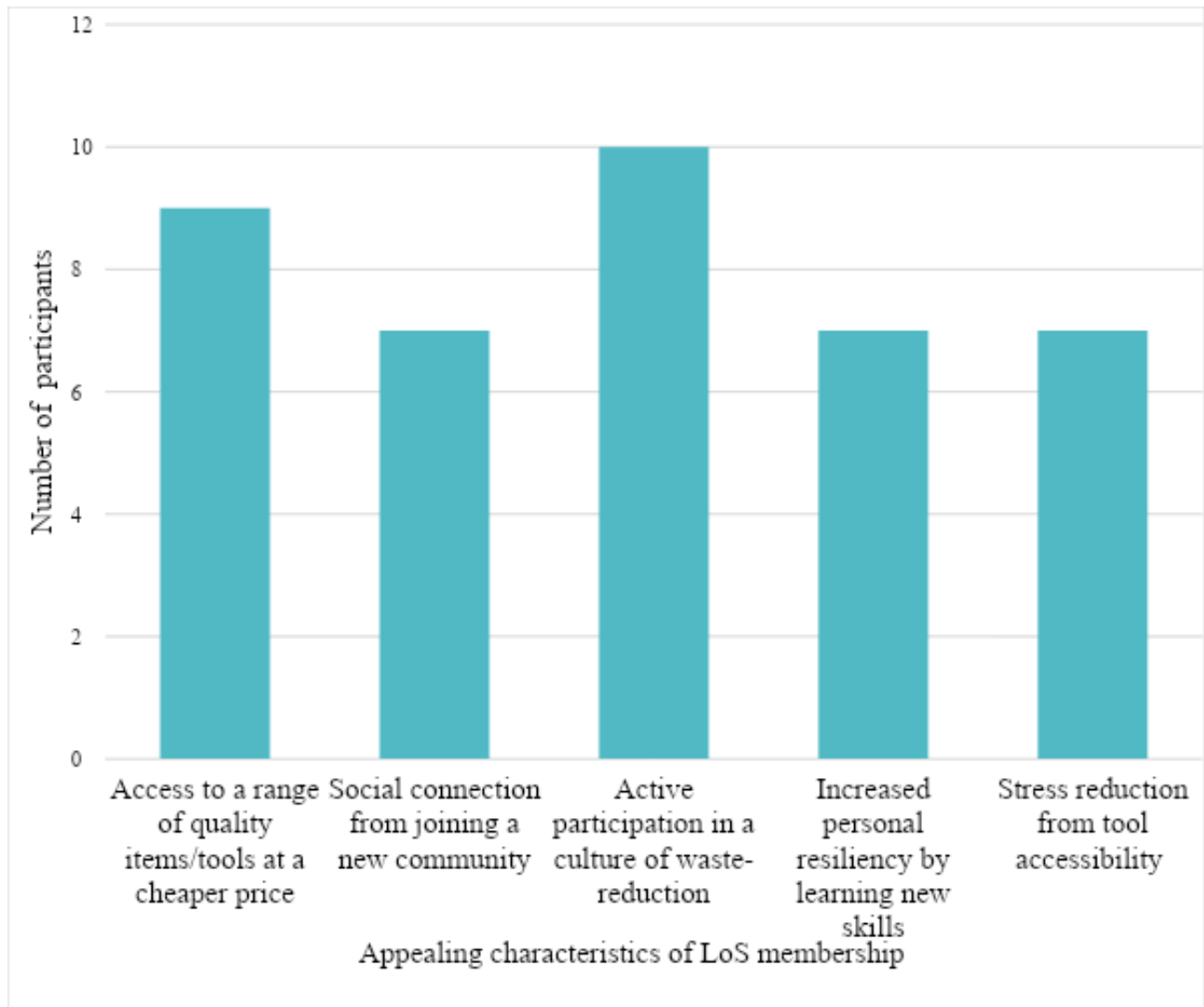


Figure 3. Non-member survey responses regarding the appeal of LoS membership

Interview results displayed similar sentiments. Five of the nine interview participants noted financial reasons as a motivation for purchasing a membership. Additionally, seven of the nine interview participants discussed how the LoS contributes to the financial security of themselves or others in some way. Catherine noted that it is “more economical to borrow things, to buy a membership and to borrow things from the library, rather than rent them or purchase them in any other way” (personal communication, 15 April 2024). David agreed, adding on that “there are also those who join the library because it's a very very cost-effective way for people who are struggling under the cost-of-living pressure to have access rather than ownership”

(personal communication, 21 April 2024). According to Dominique, the LoS allows families to save “a lot of money over the years” (personal communication, 22 April 2024).

Financial security was a reason for many people to join membership with the LoS. Even if money was not the initial push, it presented itself as an important effect of membership for individuals. With access to items, the LoS helps to bridge issues of wealth disparity within the region. David noted that within Australia, there are “a lot of people who are locked out from hav[ing] experiences because they don’t have the money to buy [things]” (personal communication, 21 April 2024). The LoS presents itself as an opportunity for people of all social classes to have access to the same items, thus decreasing the burden upon individuals to purchase items on their own with money that may already be stretched thin. It is significant and relevant that the LoS can provide some financial security to members through item accessibility, given that “financial worries are positively and significantly associated with psychological distress” (Ryu & Fan, 2023, para. 31). The LoS benefits wellbeing in this manner.

#### *4.3 Reduced stress*

46 member survey participants (88.2%) reported that access to inventory items was a factor that motivated them towards membership purchase (see Figure 1). 31 member survey participants (60.8%) reported that they have experienced stress reduction from item accessibility as a benefit of their membership (see Figure 2). Within the non-member survey, seven survey participants (63.6%) saw stress reduction from item accessibility as an appealing offering of the LoS (see Figure 3). One anonymous survey member cited that the LoS has elicited feelings of “reduced stress knowing I can easily utilize the resources the library has. Reduced financial stress as well as the need to go shopping for items. [I] have got things done I wouldn’t have been able to otherwise.”

Of the interview participants, four out of nine people mentioned stress reduction in some capacity. Sarah said,

Watching what has happened with the library in the past few years in the way it’s been used, you can see how it can create some peace of mind for some people who can’t afford certain things. They have access to a service that will provide them with something that they may or may not need in the future even if they don’t know that they need it now. So, I think it gives some peace of mind to people (personal communication, 19 April 2024).

Gina discusses stress reduction in terms of the easement of financial pressures. She said,

[the LoS] definitely ... releases you from an anxiety that you may not be able to afford [something]. Like I couldn't have afforded to buy that tent. And so suddenly I don't have to go through that anxiety. And so, in that way, it allows you to relax into the idea that your community is looking after you (personal communication, 18 April 2024).

Catherine held similar sentiments, saying that the LoS does “reduce [her] financial stress ... [it] makes a huge difference to [her]. Just knowing it's there, even though [she] might not [use] it for another two months, just knowing it's there is very reassuring” (personal communication, 15 April 2024). According to David, the LoS not only relieves financial burdens, but membership can also help relieve other causes of stress, such as climate anxiety. He said,

There's a lot of stress and anxiety that exists for the people who know just how bad we are from a sustainability perspective in this world. So, the feeling of being able to at least do something, I believe, helps people feel more comfortable and secure that we're trying to do the right thing (personal communication, 21 April 2024).

David sees that,

There's a lot of connection [with] the anxiety and stress of what's coming down the road for us with climate change, but there's also that feeling of 'I'm doing something good to help the world by being involved in a sharing platform.' So, I'm reducing my consumption of resources, I'm lowering my individual carbon footprint and I'm helping the world be a better place by being involved in a tool library from the environmental, sustainability point of view but also by helping and being [part of] that community (personal communication, 21 April 2024).

Given these testimonies, the LoS contributes to stress reduction in terms of financial and sustainability anxieties. The LoS allows members to align their sustainability morals with their actions, a task which can at times be difficult given certain financial or geographic constraints that are attached to some methods of sustainability. The LoS targets both financial stressors and moral stressors at once, being an arena for affordable and sustainable action. This directly benefits individual wellbeing, giving financial flexibility for needed household items and allowing people to release their climate concerns through daily action. The LoS provides an outlet for individuals to relieve themselves of their climate worries, actively contributing to the solution of sustainability by reducing their personal consumption and their waste. In this way,

members can feel as though they are reducing their environmental impact, thus acting as changemakers, which contributes to a positive personal outlook.

#### *4.4 Skill building*

26 member survey participants (52.9%) cited that increased opportunities for personal home repair/maintenance projects were a reason that they joined the LoS (see Figure 1). 16 member participants (29.4%) found a benefit of the LoS to be an increase in personal resiliency from learning new skills (see Figure 2). 7 non-member survey participants (63.6%) indicated that an increased resiliency from skill building through the LoS appealed to them (see Figure 3).

In interviews, four participants mentioned an increase in tool use and competency through their membership. Neil said that,

[He] had never really used tools before. [He] was never going to go out and buy a new tool because [he] never knew how to use it. But because [he] borrowed it [from the library], and someone [from the library] showed [him] how to use it, [he] learned loads of new skills, loads of tools through osmosis with the other people [at the LoS] showing [him] how to use it (personal communication, 17 April 2024).

When asked if learning new skills had any mental or emotional impacts on him, Neil said, “sure, there’s some pride – satisfaction’s probably a better word. I’m more capable for sure” (personal communication, 17 April 2024). Catherine had a similar response to this prompt, saying that she felt “a great sense of achievement and self-resilience, self-reliance” upon learning how to use a chainsaw that she had borrowed from the LoS (personal communication, 15 April 2024). Eden discussed the connection between the LoS and skill building in the context of community organizing. He explained that following the floods in 2022, the LoS helped set up some workshops for individuals working within flood recovery on how to use tools for maintenance and repair projects. Eden felt that the LoS has great potential for helping many identities,

If you are, say, a single woman with no kind of history of DIY or whatever, here is a really safe and inclusive space where you can go and learn from like-minded people how to do these little things. [These skills] can really take back our power when it comes to that recovery process too and not feel like you're helpless or hopeless – that you can just go down the road [to the LoS] and someone’s going to walk you through a really compassionate, inclusive way on how to do these things (personal communication, 17 April 2024).

Interview participant Dominique made note of how her children built a treehouse on their own with tools from the library, something that she said would not have happened without their library membership. She emphasized that she was grateful that her children are learning how to create things on their own in this way.

Skill building through the LoS has provided individuals with pride, as exhibited through the participants' feelings of satisfaction and achievement. The process of learning skills facilitates a feeling of empowerment, especially among individuals for whom the floods in 2022 swept away both property and feelings of personal security. In this way, by providing access to an arena where they can learn how to use items and participate in creation, the LoS contributes to individual wellbeing. Additionally, when paired with the sustainability motivations behind the creation of the LoS, the skill building outlet of the organization gives individuals the practical abilities to “forgo convenience” and actively contribute to a culture of waste reduction and personal self-sufficiency (Library of STUFF, n.d., para. 8).

#### *4.5 Community engagement*

15 member survey participants (27.5%) chose involvement with the Library of STUFF community as a reason for their membership purchase, with one member stating that they wanted “to be an active part of [the] local community ... [and] support a great initiative” and another individual stating they wanted to “support this incredibly valuable community asset” as reasons for membership (see Figure 1). 84% of member survey participants stated that membership with the LoS impacted their ability to find community to some degree (see Figure 4). No participants said that membership with the LoS has decreased their ability to find community. 25 member participants (47.1%) stated social connection from joining the LoS community as a benefit of their membership and an additional member stated that “networking with amazing people” at the LoS has been a benefit (see Figure 2). Another member survey participant said that membership with the LoS has impacted their personal wellbeing “by feeling part of a community-led impactful project that aligns with the human value of sharing resources.” An additional survey participant said that,

Joining a lending library allows you to connect with a like-minded community which allows you to feel part of a tribe that [is] actively helping to reduce the damage that we are doing to planet earth. It gives you feelings of hope that the future is not totally doomed, you feel supported by other like-minded people and experience the feel-good

feelings of offering support to the community and ultimately planet earth by giving to others in return. You make new friends, reduce the feelings of being out there on your own [while] trying to make a difference, and generally feel happier about what the future may bring.

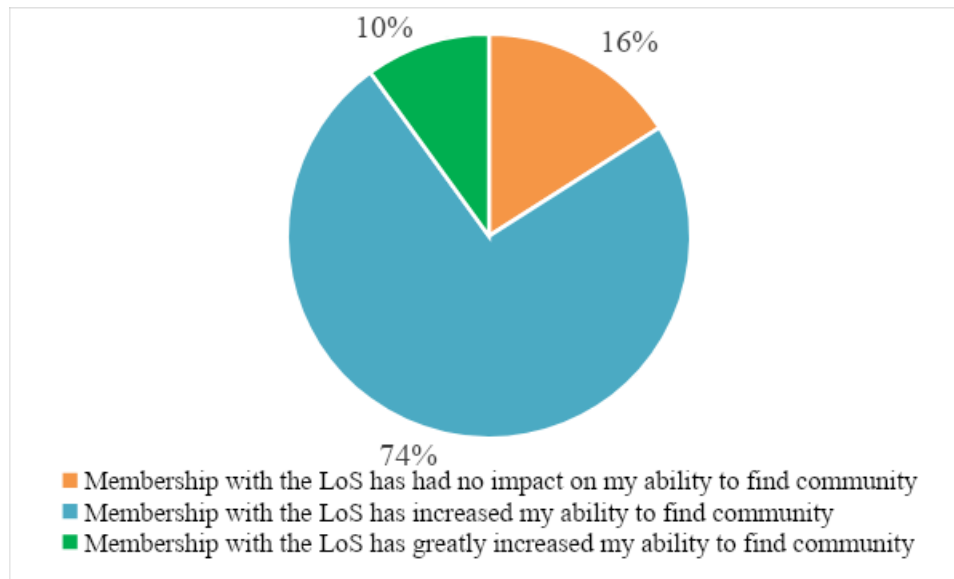


Figure 4. Impact of the LoS upon member ability to find community

Within the non-member survey, seven participants (63.6%) cited social connection from joining a new community as an attractive component of the LoS (see Figure 3). One anonymous survey participant stated that the facilitation of a “healthy community” would be a way in which membership with the LoS would affect their personal wellbeing.

All nine interview participants referenced that the LoS has impacted their sense of community in some way. Catherine mentioned how,

Because [the LoS] was started by Sasha for the community, the initial ethos and reasoning behind the library existing is that it is for the community. And going there, seeing people volunteering, who are part of the community and knowing that other people value it enough to give up their time, that increases the sense of community (personal communication, 15 April 2024).

Bec referenced the importance of having community-based organizations like the LoS in one’s social environment. She said that,

Those different organizations [in my community], they're all part of why I live where I live and why I want to live where I live and why I do the work that I do. Like I couldn't do the work that I do if there weren't a network of peers around me (personal communication, 18 April 2024).

David felt similarly, that “the whole idea is that we're building a community hub. Yes, we share and lend tools and equipment ...but we built this wonderful community of people.” (personal communication, 21 April 2024).

The LoS has provided individuals with both a seen and unseen community. Participants reference a found community through volunteering. But even those who do not consider themselves “active” members (i.e. donate their time to the organization and running of the library), still found themselves able to experience a sense of community in some way. From this, we can see that community is embedded in the structure of the network itself – the sharing of goods from one anonymous hand to another gives LoS members an invisible, but still ever-present, tether to one another and to their community in the name of sustainability.

#### *4.6 Flood resilience*

Due to the ethical considerations of the research, no survey or interview participants were asked about flood impacts or the library's involvement in flood resiliency. Despite this, eight out of the 62 survey participants mentioned the Mullumbimby floods in some capacity in their survey responses. One survey participant described a “feeling of gratitude for the support of the library, relieving the financial burden of replacing things [they] lost in the flood.” Another participant described how “after the floods, [they] used [LoS items] to put on some fundraiser events to rebuild [their] local school.” Someone else explained how through the LoS, “flood victims got free access to a large trailer” with tools that provided assistance for “cleaning up and ... rubbish removal.”

Additionally, five out of the nine interview participants brought up the Mullumbimby floods. Sarah described how she thought at the beginning of flood recovery, the LoS “was there to just help people clean, providing whatever people needed ... And then from there, people don't have a home to go to or they don't have their stuff, so it's given them some sort of interim access” to items (personal communication 19 April 2024). Dominique further explained the role of the LoS during flood recovery. She talked about how the LoS set up a table in the Mullumbimby recovery center with tools like pressure washers, mops, and vinegar for people to

take and use to clean their homes (personal communication, 22 April 2024). Eden spoke from personal experience, describing how he lost a lot of personal items (specifically tools) during the flood. Every week, he had to balance what he could afford and “still at this point in time, decisions around food security and power tools is a pretty easy one to make and if [he] can access items somewhere else at a nominal charge [through the LoS], then [he’s] going with that” (personal communication, 17 April 2024).

It is important to remember that those who volunteered on behalf of the LoS were likely doing so while dealing with their own personal flood trauma. As Eden pointed out, the volunteers who run the library felt the personal burden of clearing out the inventory prior to the flood and to “take all those items to somewhere where they weren’t going to be in harm's way, while simultaneously worrying about the impact on their own properties” (personal communication, 17 April 2024). The same goes for the post-flood recovery work – volunteers worked the LoS support table in the community center while also trying to deal with the harm caused at their personal homes.

Flood recovery was a theme brought up by many research participants, despite not having any direct reason to from survey or interview questions. This shows that their experiences with the LoS are heavily tied to the floods. The LoS has been important to their recovery. Dealing with the aftermath of a disaster requires community fortitude and the presence of adequate resources. The LoS was able to do this for Mullumbimby, and provided the community a sense of stability during a time that was anything but stable, despite the personal hardships experienced by volunteers. Federal government was lacking in support for the Northern Rivers region, reducing the number of individuals eligible for financial assistance and spending “less than half of the recovery funding it committed to the region” (McLeod & Ittimani, 2024, para. 1). Thus, the organization and assistance provided by the LoS was perhaps foundational in the immediate disaster aid experienced by Mullumbimby. Furthermore, the LoS assisted those who were dramatically affected by the floods and experienced direct loss of property and items, providing financial flexibility through membership and including more individuals into the sharing network of the library.

#### *4.7 Sustainable lifestyle*

38 surveyed members (74.5%) noted sustainability as a reason for their membership purchase with 42 members (82.4%) claiming that a benefit they have received through their



membership has been active participation in a culture of waste reduction (see Figure 1 & Figure 2). 90% of surveyed members reported that membership has increased their ability to live sustainably to some degree (see Figure 5). One member wrote that “it’s important to [them] that [they] live [their] values of sustainability. The Library of Stuff helps [them] be able to achieve this outcome through access to shared resources.”

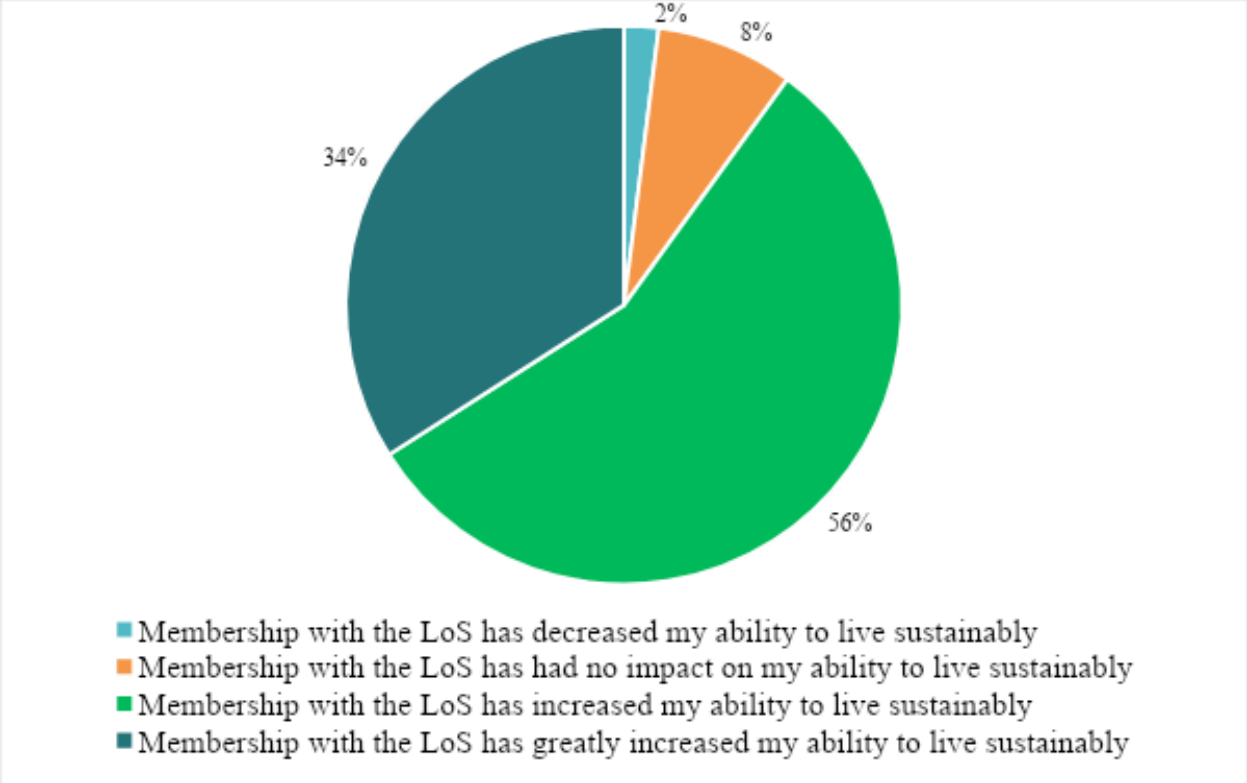


Figure 5. Impact of the LoS upon member sustainability

Of the non-member survey participants, 100% of them indicated that they participate in a waste-reduced lifestyle in some capacity (examples included composting, upcycling, buying second-hand, eliminating single-use plastics, founding a library of things, and mending and repairing items). Seven of the ten surveyed non-members indicated that a membership with the LoS would increase their transition to a sustainable lifestyle in some capacity (see Figure 6). Nine surveyed non-members selected active participation in a culture of waste-reduction as an appealing part of the LoS and one participant further indicated interest in reducing their carbon footprint (see Figure 3).

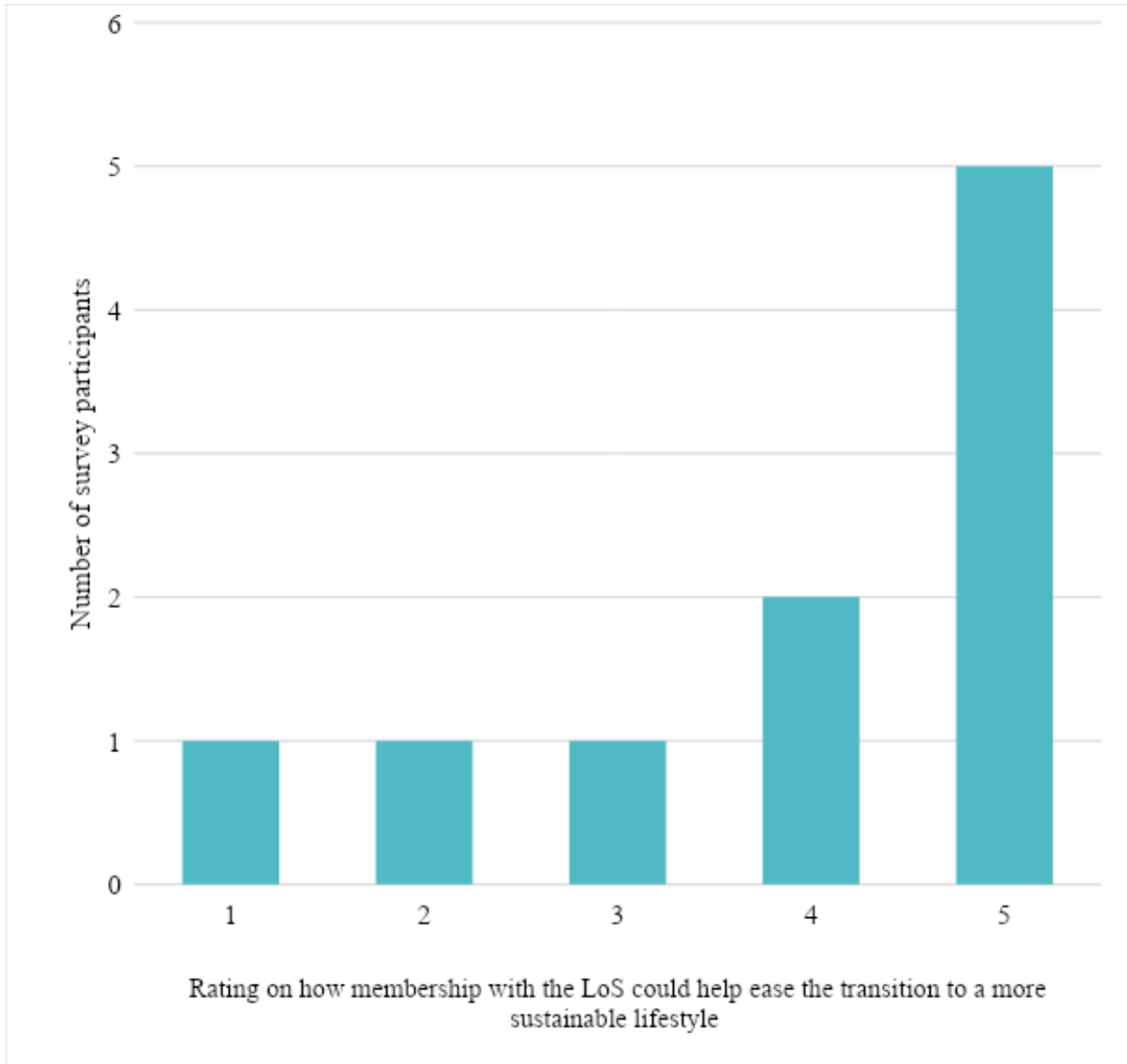


Figure 6. Non-membership perception on the impact of the LoS to facilitate a sustainable lifestyle using a rating scale. A rating of one means “No, the Library of STUFF would have no bearing upon my ability to reduce personal waste” and a rating of five means “Yes, the Library of STUFF would be integral in helping me manage a waste-reduced lifestyle!”

Among interview participants, six of the nine interviewees talked about the sustainability influence of the LoS on their lives. Sarah noted the consequences of our current globalized society, stating that,

We're disconnected from the resources that we're using and the people that are creating these things. We're disconnected from what happens at the end of life of these items and where they go and the impact that they might have through emissions and pollution. And when we're disconnected from that, we're also disconnected from other people (personal communication, 19 April 2024).

When asked if there is a connection between sustainability and wellbeing, Hope said, "100% because ... having a clean environment is all part of sustainability" and that we need to live "with nature, rather than against it" (personal communication, 22 April 2024). The LoS allows us "not go into that incredibly disposable culture that is, you know, so degrading for our planet," said Gina and she continued to say that, "we're living on a planet that has finite resources and so if we want to feel good about our part in that ecosystem... we want to feel like we're not overconsuming" (personal communication, 18 April 2024). Further, Neil explained how the LoS offers an outlet for participation, and that membership is an "easy way to sign up for [sustainability] without an individual having to go to too much effort except pay the membership and don't mind using second-hand and pre-loved stuff" (personal communication, 17 April 2024). Bec explained that, from her point of view, the LoS is "a piece of the [Mullumbimby sustainability] puzzle. Which leads to connectedness and belonging and yes, sustainability. A part of my sustainability ethic is to use less, share more" (personal communication, 18 April 2024).

The sharing network of the LoS allows individuals to be more sustainable in their personal lives. This mode of sustainability, the reduction of consumption and waste, increases the wellbeing of library users, as this method of sustainable lifestyle has been linked to a more positive and healthier individual (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020). While this is a direct link between sustainability and wellbeing, the data shows an additional correlation through empowerment. There are pressures in understanding the severity of the environmental and social destruction brought by globalization. In joining the LoS, some of this individual pressure and the burden of knowledge becomes released as individuals are actively able to remove themselves from these patterns of destruction and join a network that does both environmental and social good. The reduction of climate anxiety in this manner is an attribute of the LoS's contribution to wellbeing through means of stress reduction as well as the promotion of a sustainable lifestyle.

#### *4.8 Hopes for the future*

In the final questions, all survey participants (both members and non-members) were reminded of Sasha's recent email statement about the potential closure of the LoS and her hope to transition to a co-op model. Survey participants were offered the chance to give any final comments for consideration and of 62 participants, 40 disclosed feelings of sadness at the thought of the library's closure. One individual described the LoS as "one of the best projects in Mullumbimby. It would be immensely disappointing if it can't continue. Sasha and the team are knowledgeable and help teach the community about impact and practical ways to live sustainably." Another participant added that it "would be super sad for the library to not be able to function. [The LoS] offers so much more than the physical 'stuff.'" A separate participant offered their opinion that "it is extremely disappointing that the Government and Council do not recognize the significant contribution that sharing libraries offer to their communities and that they don't support the ventures financially."

Among interview participants, Hope held similar opinions, saying "[she'd] just love to see it funded by [Byron Shire] Council in the way that book libraries are. Because the actual economic and social benefits would fire away the cost" (personal communication, 22 April 2024). Sarah agreed and she thinks,

It's something for [the] government to be investing in and looking at and ... that's where we need to head in terms of any sort of waste reduction, emissions reduction, community reduction. These are the types of things that we should be looking at as a local council but also at the state level and national level (personal communication, 19 April 2024).

But participants also recognized some flaws in the current structure of the library. Neil agreed with Sasha that the LoS needs to transition to an "era where it's taken over by a group of people in a managing committee where everybody shares a little bit of the load," a decision that is "absolutely essential for any community organization to build and grow" (personal communication, 17 April 2024). Eden agreed, having insight from working as a wellbeing coordinator with the organization Resilient Lismore, and noted that,

All cogs need to spin together, be complete circles, otherwise it risks impacting on the organization as a whole ... you have to fill those gaps or you risk the operation either needing to slow down and restructure or really risk losing it which would be pretty sad if that occurred (personal communication, 17 April 2024).

Hope noted that with the current plan to transition the library's structural model to support the high number of members, now is the ideal time for the LoS to be "funded by Council in the way that book libraries are" (personal communication, 22 April 2024).

This data emphasizes the importance of the presence of the LoS to the individuals who partook in this research. They recognize the personal benefits that they have received from the LoS but they are also cognizant of how the LoS has impacted others in the community besides themselves. Thus, the potential absence of the LoS would make an impact on Mullumbimby and perhaps negatively affect people's wellbeing, by removing their access to this once reliable resource. Opinions from interview and survey participants indicate that the government, both local and federal, needs to understand the impact of the LoS on the people of the Northern Rivers region and provide financial assistance and funding to keep its doors open.

## 5. Conclusion

Through a case study on the Mullumbimby Library of STUFF in Mullumbimby, NSW, this research found that libraries of things impact an individual's wellbeing by providing financial flexibility, reducing financial and climate-related stress, allowing opportunities for skill building, creating opportunities to connect with community, aiding in immediate flood relief and long-term resilience, and allowing individuals to participate in a sustainable lifestyle. The data and analysis provided here in this report directly address the original intentions of the study. The personal experiences and opinions of the interview and survey participants outline the importance and relevance of the LoS within Mullumbimby and the Northern Rivers region and how the library affects their individual wellbeing.

The personal communication that I had through interviews indicated a strong attachment to the LoS. The LoS addresses sustainability through its reduction of consumption and waste but, more than that, it facilitates a sustainable community by addressing accessibility and resiliency. The LoS provides access to items for those who may otherwise be unable to attain it, especially following the flood. In responding to the aftermath of climate disasters, communities need to rebuild with resiliency in mind. As indicated by experts in the field, it is vital that communities view the re-construction of an area post-disaster as an “opportunity for more fundamental structural changes in our health system, society and economy that will strengthen community cohesion and resilience” (Vardoulakis et al., 2022, p. 342). With the evidence provided through this research on how the LoS contributes to multiple facets of wellbeing, especially in regard to flood resilience and the facilitation of community networks, it is apparent that libraries of things may prove to be a valuable resource as we move into the future. The LoS is a mechanism for sustainability and social support and should be recognized and funded as such.

Further studies would do well to examine the wellbeing aspects of other, similar organizations and resources. If current community resources increase the wellbeing of individuals in more than one way, then it is to the benefit of regional councils to support them as such, directing funds towards people and groups that are already doing important and favorable work. It is with hope that this research, paired alongside similar studies, will support those who support their communities and re-build resiliency through the outlets of standing community organizations.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Wellbeing survey questions**

### Demographic questions

- 1.) Where do you live?
  - a.) Mullumbimby
  - b.) Byron Bay
  - c.) Bangalow
  - d.) New Brighton
  - e.) Brunswick Heads
  - f.) Ocean Shores
  - g.) Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.) What is your gender identity?
  - a.) Female
  - b.) Male
  - c.) Non-binary
  - d.) Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3.) How old are you?
  - a.) 18-25
  - b.) 25-35
  - c.) 35-45
  - d.) 45-55
  - e.) 55-65
  - f.) 65 +
- 4.) How large is your household?
  - a.) 1
  - b.) 2
  - c.) 3
  - d.) 4
  - e.) 5
  - f.) 6+
- 5.) Are you a current member of the Library of STUFF?
  - a.) Yes
  - b.) No
- 6.) Have you ever been a member of the Library of STUFF?
  - a.) Yes
  - b.) No

### Membership Track

- 1.) How long have you been a member?
  - a.) Less than a year
  - b.) 1-2 years

- c.) 2-3 years
  - d.) 3+ years
- 2.) Have you ever been an "Active Member" who gives time as well as money to contribute to the share initiative? (ex. volunteering during open hours)
    - a.) Yes
    - b.) No
  - 3.) How were you first introduced to the Library of STUFF?
  - 4.) What factors ultimately motivated you to purchase a membership? Please check all that apply.
    - a.) Access to inventory items
    - b.) Financial flexibility of membership cost and benefits
    - c.) Involvement with the Library of STUFF community
    - d.) Opportunities for waste reduction
    - e.) Increased opportunities for personal home repair/maintenance projects
    - f.) Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5.) How has involvement with the Library of STUFF (LoS) impacted your life in terms of sustainability? In this context, sustainability refers to the community culture and individual practice of waste-reduction. Sustainability may also refer to climate resiliency.
    - a.) Membership with the LoS has greatly decreased my ability to live sustainably
    - b.) Membership with the LoS has decreased my ability to live sustainably
    - c.) Membership with the LoS has had no impact on my ability to live sustainably
    - d.) Membership with the LoS has increased my ability to live sustainably
    - e.) Membership with the LoS has greatly increased my ability to live sustainably
  - 6.) How has involvement with the Library of STUFF (LoS) impacted your life in terms of community belonging?
    - a.) Membership with the LoS has greatly decreased my ability to find community
    - b.) Membership with the LoS has decreased my ability to find community
    - c.) Membership with the LoS has had no impact on my ability to find community
    - d.) Membership with the LoS has increased my ability to find community
    - e.) Membership with the LoS has greatly increased my ability to find community
  - 7.) How has involvement with the Library of STUFF (LoS) impacted your personal wellbeing? In this context, wellbeing refers both to physical health and mental/emotional health.
    - a.) Membership with the LoS has greatly decreased my personal wellbeing
    - b.) Membership with the LoS has decreased my personal wellbeing
    - c.) Membership with the LoS has had no impact on my personal wellbeing
    - d.) Membership with the LoS has increased my personal wellbeing
    - e.) Membership with the LoS has greatly increased my personal wellbeing
  - 8.) If comfortable, please expand on how the LoS has impacted your personal wellbeing.

- 9.) Which of the following benefits, if any, have you received from being part of a communal goods exchange network, such as the Library of STUFF (LoS)? Please check all that apply.
- a.) Access to a range of quality items/tools at a cheaper price
  - b.) Social connection from joining the LoS community
  - c.) Social connection from joining the LoS community
  - d.) Increased personal resiliency by learning new skills (ex. cooking opportunities, construction tools, gardening methods, home repair opportunities, etc.)
  - e.) Stress reduction from item accessibility
  - f.) I have received no benefits
  - g.) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Non-member Track

1. How were you first introduced to the Library of STUFF?
2. Have you ever been an "Active Member" who gives time as well as money to contribute to the share initiative? (ex. volunteering during open hours)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. Please describe any barriers you have come across that have prevented you from becoming a full member of the Library of STUFF. Please check all that apply.
  - a. Cost of membership
  - b. Library location
  - c. Time commitment
  - d. Access to inventory isn't needed
  - e. I have not come across any barriers
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. As a non-member of the LoS, do you find yourself still able to participate in a waste-reduced lifestyle? If so, how? Please check all that apply.
  - a. No, I do not participate in a waste-reduced lifestyle
  - b. Yes, I compost
  - c. Yes, I have eliminated single-use plastics from my personal life
  - d. Yes, I participate in upcycling (ex. creating clothes out of old fabrics)
  - e. Yes, I mend and repair broken or old items instead of throwing them away
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you think a membership with the LoS could help to ease your transition to a waste-reduced lifestyle? Please rate on a scale of 1-5 with 1 meaning "No, the Library of STUFF would have no bearing upon my ability to reduce personal waste" and 5 meaning "Yes, the Library of STUFF would be integral in helping me manage a waste-reduced lifestyle!"



6. Which of the following, if any, appeals to you about being part of a communal goods exchange network, such as the Library of STUFF? Please check all that apply.
  - a. Access to a range of quality items/tools at a cheaper price
  - b. Social connection from joining a new community
  - c. Active participation in a culture of waste-reduction
  - d. Increased personal resiliency by learning new skills (ex. cooking opportunities, construction tools, gardening methods, home repair opportunities, etc.)
  - e. Stress reduction from tool accessibility
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Please share any ways in which you foresee a membership with the Library of STUFF affecting your personal wellbeing.

### Final Thoughts for Members and Non-members

1. Last week, Sasha Mainsbridge communicated through email that the Library of STUFF (LoS) may need to close. Has this announcement influenced the way you reflect upon your experiences with the library and your connection to the LoS community? If so, how?
2. Is there anything else you would like to add?

### **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview session with me today! I'll give a little bit of background about this project. I am an American university student studying abroad here in Australia. I am spending the month of April conducting a research project looking into the effects of libraries of things upon individual and community wellbeing. I have partnered with the Mullumbimby Library of STUFF, through Sasha Mainsbridge and Mullum Cares, to explore this research question in the form of a case study.

You may have already read this in your consent form that you signed, but I will remind you that if at any time during your conversation you would like to stop this interview, you are absolutely free to do so. You also have the option to refrain from answering any question that I ask you.

Additionally, if you are comfortable I would like to record this interview purely for reference when I write up my report. Do I have your consent for that?

- 1) Again, my final report will be shared with my study abroad institution the School for International Training, my home institution of Skidmore College, the board of Mullum

Cares, and may be published online. Knowing that, how would you like me to refer to you in my final report? Name founder

- 2) Introduction: Please state your name, pronouns, and the town or city that you live in.
  - a) Are you a member of the library? If not, how did you hear about the library, and what is your current connection to it?
  - b) If yes, how many years have you been a member? How did you first become introduced to it?

#### Membership track:

- 1) What factors influenced you to purchase a membership (examples may include financial flexibility of membership cost and benefits, access to the inventory, opportunities for waste reduction, involvement with the LoS community, increased opportunities for home repair/maintenance projects)?
- 2) Do you feel as though these initial motivators have remained actually present through your membership?
- 3) What is your personal definition of wellbeing? *What does well-being mean to you?*
- 4) Has the Library of STUFF influenced your life in regards to your perception of wellbeing? If so, how?
- 5) Wellbeing can be thought of as a hierarchy, beginning with basic subsistence and protection for physical wellbeing. Has the Library of STUFF affected your physical wellbeing in any way? How so?
- 6) I would love to know more about your participation with the library in terms of the feeling of community. Has membership with the library impacted your sense of community? In other words, do you feel a stronger sense of connection to your town and its people?
  - a) Can you give some examples of how community in your personal life (w/in LoS)?
- 7) Sharing items and involving yourself in this kind of goods-exchange opportunity is somewhat unique. How does this feel – knowing that the items you are using were used by others before you and will be used by others again after you?
- 8) Libraries of things allow us to reduce our consumption and reduce our waste. How has it felt to participate in this method of sustainable action?
  - a) Why do you say that?
- 9) Do you see a connection between sustainability and wellbeing?
- 10) Has membership with the LoS provided you with the opportunity to learn new skills? What skills?
  - a) If yes, what has been the mental/emotional impact on you in this regard? For example, have you felt pride, independence, decreased stress, a sense of self-reliance or self-sufficiency?
- 11) Has this conversation in any way influenced your perspectives on libraries of things, sustainability, or wellbeing? If so, how?

- 12) Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your experience with the library and its influence upon your wellbeing?

Non-member track

- 1) Do you know what a library of things does?
  - a) If yes: Based on your knowledge of this concept, how do you think an individual could benefit from a membership with this type of organization? Do you think there could be any disadvantages of membership?
    - i) What has prevented you from joining as a member?
    - ii) Based on
  - b) If no: A library of things is like your typical lending library... but with anything but books! The library of STUFF in Mullumbimby has over 1000 items in its inventory, ranging from camping gear to cooking appliances to games and puzzles to construction and gardening tools! Your membership provides you with access to all of these items. And allows you to take advantage of items without having to personally buy or get rid of them! Knowing this, how do you feel about this concept?
    - i) Do you think this concept could benefit an individual? How so?
    - ii) Could there be disadvantages of membership to an individual?
- 2) Are you aware of the presence of a library of things near your place of residence?
  - a) Have you ever interacted with one in any way? If so, how?
  - b) What would you like to see in your library of things?
- 3) What is your personal definition of wellbeing? *What does well-being mean to you?*
- 4) Based on this definition, do you see ways in which a library of things could impact an individual's wellbeing? Do you think a membership would have an impact on your life? In what ways?
- 5) Do you think that sustainability and wellbeing are related? How so?
- 6) Do you think that a library of things is sustainable in any way?
- 7) If applicable: what were the most memorable or important parts of your experience with the library?
- 8) If you were to join a library of things, what would be most exciting to you?
- 9) Has this conversation in any way influenced your perspectives on libraries of things, sustainability, or wellbeing? If so, how?
- 10) Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your experience with the library and its influence upon your wellbeing?