

East Gippsland Building Community Resilience

It is within communities that the complexity of an issue can be best understood.



Community hubs: Buchan, Benambra, Orbost, Tubbut/Goongerah, Nowa Nowa and Bruthen

Key points

- Community resilience – requires conversations between local people and agencies.
- Community members and agencies appreciated an inclusive and democratic approach.
- Employing local facilitators invested in local knowledge and supported local economies
- Despite differences co-operation between communities was a major source of inspiration.
- The steering committee enabled community concerns and knowledge to be present in public planning.
 - Community ownership has grown and agencies are formalising partnerships.
- Outcomes are manageable and offer an interface between communities and agencies.
- Neighbourhood Houses have supported all communities even those without a 'house'.



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the need

Despite the national strategy for resilience (2011) stating 'that the application of a resilience approach is not solely the domain of emergency management agencies: rather it is the shared responsibility between governments, communities, businesses and individuals' the 2013-2014 fires in East Gippsland exposed a situation that lacked mechanisms for communities to respond to the emergencies, share knowledge and involve community members in working with emergency services. Living in a fire prone area the outcome was traumatic on multiple levels for individuals, communities and government agencies. This project briefly refers to some of these situations. For greater detail check Bairnsdale Advertiser and other resources listed at the conclusion.

the dream

In the most optimistic of outcomes the project aimed to improve partnerships with agencies through active community engagement leading to a collaborative approach of benefit to this and future initiatives. This 'new normal' would enable individuals, communities and agencies to work towards prevention and mitigation of the circumstances that led to devastation. The goal is a changing awareness of the interdependence of rural communities and resilient regions.

the reality

The Centre for Rural Communities and the East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses provided a structure along with contacts, knowledge and resources to support community hubs and neighbourhood houses taking a more active planning role. It is a sound beginning and relevant agencies have responded positively to this approach which shares knowledge and resources. The tight time-lines for the development of resources, training and implementation put high demands on this resourceful and willing team.

steering committee

Regular Steering Committee meetings held (11 with average 10 – 12 people) enabling interaction with East Gippsland Shire Emergency Management team staff and Regional Arts Victoria at Buchan, Orbost, Goongerah, Tubbut, Bonang, Bendoc, SNAP (mental health service) at Goongerah and monthly meetings, involving Regional Development Victoria, Department of Human Services, Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning. These regular meetings contributed to open discussion between communities and agencies. It is a sound beginning and we welcome future opportunities to continue the work. This was one of 8 short term bushfire recovery projects funded in the region and Neighbourhood Houses and community groups provide an active interface in this work.

Facilitators held information sessions in Benambra, Nowa Nowa, Orbost, Bruthen, Goongerah, Buchan, W-Tree, Gelantipy and Tubbut - 170 people attended.

Facilitators x 5 - attended 3 training workshops (average - 3 per session).

Study circles:

A study circle kit *Building community futures through co-operation (2015)* is now available in print and on-line - www.ruralcommunities.com.au

Across 5 communities 38 people invested time, energy, creativity and resources into 42 gatherings. (see table).

partnerships

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2011) states that:

Application of a resilience-based approach is not solely the domain of emergency management agencies;

rather, it is a shared responsibility between governments, communities, businesses and individuals.

In 2014 Regional Development Victoria's Resilient Community Program (round 2) invited applications in line with national disaster policies that advocated prevention at a community level to improve community resilience. The Centre for Rural Communities had developed resources for use within communities to invest in bringing to a shared table the complexity of views that exist within communities through a study circle approach organised regionally through the East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses (EGNNH). Neighbourhood Houses have a trusted relationship with residents and are the home of community learning and action. Some have a history of playing a role in Emergency Management in their communities. A partnership between the two groups was negotiated and funding from Regional Development Victoria led to the East Gippsland Building Community Resilience project.

the centre for rural communities

For 20 years the Centre for Rural Communities (CRC) has developed resources and supported projects that resource rural communities being active in determining their futures. The shift by government to include community as an active contributor for preparation, management and recovery in the aftermath of so many major bushfires over the last decade is welcome.

The Centre has been a pioneer in developing, delivering and evaluating approaches that facilitate the inclusion of local knowledge into policy and planning. This work was accredited by a major university and three TAFE institutes (2000-2006). Access to institutional resources, skills, knowledge and legitimacy enhances the capacity and competency of those involved in this often challenging and complex work and puts the need for professional training back on the tertiary education agenda. Federation University received State Government funding to fill this gap. For further information contact the Faculty of Arts and Education at Federation University. The availability of the study circle 'Building Community Futures through Co-operation' now on-line this will extend the scope of this approach beyond East Gippsland.

The CRC is committed to:

- skilling a network of local facilitators across East Gippsland providing a key link for regional agencies,
- providing access to a trialled and tested framework of theory and practice, able to embrace new projects incorporating local ownership,
- working with community organisations to be inclusive of diverse views and experiences to increase community resilience,
- enhancing community credibility with regional institutions such as local government, emergency services and government agencies,
- creating employment in rural communities,
- working to locate decision making within communities as they develop community plans and ventures,
- communication networks with and between communities and agencies,
- supporting steering committees that enable rural communities to be an active part of planning conversations prior to, during emergencies and in recovery situations,
- working with tertiary educational institutions to accredit and deliver relevant skills and professional pathways for facilitating community engagement. The new Learn Local networks may provide an additional pathway for community members linking to Registered Training Organisations

CRC experience indicates that communities that invest time in learning to work and plan together and are resourced to do so develop more sustainable and long term plans for their communities and are actively engaged in their implementation.

east gippsland network of neighbourhood houses

The EG Network of Neighbourhood Houses supports and advocates for 18 Neighbourhood Houses and Community centres in Wellington and East Gippsland. They provide a community meeting place and access to skills, knowledge and resources. They offer an interface between diverse community views and departmental responsibilities and programs.

Most of the neighbourhood houses in the network are in fire or flood-prone areas. While not set up as emergency services they provide a key link to community resilience in emergencies to work in whatever ways are needed. Neighbourhood house staff and community members provide a constant source of local information of relevance to Incident management teams and local, state government organisations dealing with diversity across communities. Documentation of previous experiences in the area and an understanding of the way communities work would assist this process. A lack of documentation about previous experiences in the area and a poor understanding of the way local communities work results in this having to be re-learnt each time there is an emergency..

Fortunately neighbourhood houses have this knowledge and can provide valuable communication links preventing the reinvention of the wheel with each new crisis, the lessons learned, contacts made and other useful information will be made available, through this project, to other communities.

For example: The Buchan Neighbourhood House's involvement when surrounding communities were beset by fire gave us a 'good news story' to share with our communities and agencies. It shows that neighbourhood houses do much more than provide the fire services with information (www.egnnh.net.au see: appendix 3). Members of this community generously shared their experiences with other neighbourhood houses and community groups interested in taking steps to improve their preparedness and communication strategies for emergency situations. Neighbourhood houses have the capacity to communicate with the community, support individuals, provide information and conduct recovery activities.

the brief

- to invest in engaging with communities and agencies to map the current situation in each locality.
- to increase resilience using a study circle approach, undertaking an activity and evaluating the impact.
- to develop an on-line resource sharing experiences, resources and strategies for engagement. This active format will be available for communities to access, input new materials and showcase current situations through the Centre for Rural Communities. www.ruralcommunities.com.au

our approach

- Establish a regional steering committee to engage with relevant stakeholders and communities enabling a sharing of resources and information. The multi-layered project supported the establishment of community hubs in 6 communities: Buchan, Tubbut, Nowa Nowa, Bruthen, Orbost, Goongerah/Tubbut and Benambra under the East Gippsland Building Community Resilience umbrella.
- Local facilitators were employed in each of these communities to facilitate study circles with interested community members. Compared to Shire and State government recovery projects this was minimally funded to resource 6 communities across distance. It is however a delivery model that could be added to by multiple agencies.
- Study circles invite people with different life experiences as well as relevant regional agencies to the same table on a regular basis over 10 to 12 weeks.
- Development of a study circle kit – Building Community Futures through Co-operation available as a work in progress to facilitators during the project is now available as on-line resource through the East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses and the Centre for Rural Communities websites.

Why study circles:

Developing ideas beyond 'us and them' takes time and requires skilled facilitation. Moving from being provided for (at best) or living with the impact of poor decision making (at worst) to taking ownership of local initiatives and leading change is a significant step and one that benefits from support. The evaluator noted that facilitators welcomed the 'ethical' framework for conversations about community and community preparedness for natural disasters.

Collaborative engagement

- research of successful projects identified nine crucial steps in collaborative engagement that leads to long-term change
- without all the steps, outcomes fail to fulfil expectations
- the experience, skill and confidence of facilitators has an effect on the quality of the process and thus the outcome of the project.
- issues are challenging and complex – benefiting skilled facilitation.
- It is a new approach and facilitators benefit from support from neighbouring communities and agencies. Networking and travel are key elements.



Skilled facilitators:

- create a climate of co-operation and support
- allow new insights and an understanding of other perspectives e.g. asset protection around towns may be a common goal of a group while ways to achieve this can vary from burning, improving habitat for native birds, animals and insects, fire wood collection etc.
- spark new ideas, or discover a new forum for existing ideas
- attract 'new blood' to the table – beyond the usual suspects by establishing gatherings that are open, using the study circle guidelines to respect diversity.
- celebrate the old ways, local knowledge, local resources and local traditions – and open the way for new energy
- aspire to real solutions without duplication and bureaucratic overheads.
- foster local ownership

Participants meet willingly with emergency services and other communities with mutual benefits. – sharing experiences

- opportunity for personal growth
- gives an intellectual rigour and validity to discuss long held views and find common ground. e.g. listening to apiarists speak of the devastation caused by badly managed burning practices gives insight into the importance of skilled workers undertaking this task or seeking other ways to reduce fuel loads.
- empowers individuals to take more control of their own lives
- allows us to challenge myths and stereotypes
- provides a new platform for group to meet on welcoming territory
- makes us realise what is possible through action – the importance of first steps
- reminds us of the value of regular reflection – what worked and how we can do things better in the future.

Standout positives

- local professional jobs for facilitators:

- personal and professional development in rural context – immediate relevance.
- local knowledge is valued
- local people + training= new skills= building blocks for the future.
- local employment invests in community resilience. See table of activities and outcomes.

Value of local facilitators

From a regional perspective, CRC and Neighbourhood Houses support the employment of local facilitators able to create a learning environment leading to partnerships between groups, between communities, between communities and organisations – not dependency.

- study circles are accessible across the region
- small groups meeting, talking and working through the *Building community futures through co-operation* study circle kit over 10 – 12 weeks led by a skilled facilitator.
- The study circles are supported by a regional co-ordinator.

Project presence

- Regular Steering committee meetings invited agency staff from Regional Development Victoria, East Gippsland Shire Emergency team, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Department of Human Service regional staff, Regional Arts Victoria, SNAP mental health workers, Relationships Australia Victoria and other interested agencies. This provided a welcome and inclusive forum where community members could have conversations and strengthen relationships. This compliments capacity of regional workers able to direct resources and convey ‘bigger picture’ experiences. See table of activities and outcomes.
- While some hubs have a long history of active engagement with emergency management agencies in planning, crisis management and recovery others are less well organised. However, communities are very supportive of each other. Past positive experiences from community groups and Neighbourhood Houses provide inspiration and insight into more constructive ways of working together.
- The creation of this steering committee has provided an effective way for small communities to participate in planning: for themselves, households and the wider community.
- This provides an interface with agencies and departments and is proving to be a mutually beneficial arrangement for all. Both are initiating constructive steps.

at a project level

Our strategy facilitates community members and relevant organisations working together to enhance community resilience by increasing conversations amongst community members regarding local issues and community preparedness for disasters.

- Increasing skills, knowledge and confidence in communities to develop dynamic community plans that consider economic, social and environmental resilience.
- Establishing local hubs under a regional steering committee to facilitate a two way flow of conversation between communities and public decision makers.
- Taking steps to enhance social, economic and environmental aspects of disaster planning, management and recovery. Study circles led to increasing ownership of actions and outcomes.
- Facilitating communication and sharing of information, resources and events between communities and agencies.

connections at a project level

- Country Fire Authority (CFA) – funding for 6 people to attend *Living with bushfires* conference at Federation University, Gippsland campus
- CFA – Fireguard and Peer support - regional presentation
- Department of Land Water Environment and Protection (DELWP) – attending study circles
- DELWP– Peter West at DELWP - support for accredited training and supply of maps to communities.
- DELWP Regional Strategic communication - formalising communication through inclusion in Local Incident Management Plans trial.
- Neighbourhood Houses: Kinglake, Callignee, Emerald, Airey's Inlet and Morwell,
- Federation University: Faculty of Arts and Education
- Relationships Australia Victoria
- Regional Arts Victoria: Bushfire recovery project complimented bridging work of study circles.
- East Gippsland Shire – Adaptive Recovery Project. Collaborative approach to employ worker across multiple projects.
- East Gippsland Shire – Municipal Emergency Management Plan – invitation to participate.
- East Gippsland Shire – Emergency Management Services team – capacity planning.

- Outcomes include greater visibility and inclusion in regional planning forums, committees and conversations.

east gippsland

- 44,000 (approx.) people across 20,000 sq. kilometres.
- Regional centres, regional towns and large numbers of small isolated communities with populations between 50 to 2000 people.
- The East Gippsland profile map <http://profile.id.com.au/east-gippsland/about/?WebID=170> gives some insight into the invisibility of some small communities that fail to register on planning profiles and departmental maps.

Putting communities on the map: uniquely and collectively. See locality maps, contacts and documented histories.

snapshot of hubs

Buchan buchan.vic.au/buchan-neighbourhood-house/

The Buchan Neighbourhood House has a strong foundation of working with neighbouring communities and a credible presence in being a key point of contact in past fire emergencies. The Neighbourhood House was a key resource of local knowledge for residents and Incident Control Centre staff – in the 2003, 2007 and 2014 fires for regional and visiting emergency service staff. They played a key role in the communication flow of weather conditions, house occupancy, road access and other key information on a daily basis by establishing a phone tree for over 6 weeks and provided ‘time out’ relief for community members. They have been prepared to share these experiences with interested communities and take on board communication changes that have come with social media.

The study circle facilitator is a graduate of the Grad. Certificate in Regional Community Development previously offered by Monash University and is familiar with this approach.

The current project affirmed the importance of this role to all concerned particularly communicating Bush Nursing Centre, Police and Parks in immediate community. They were a major resource for the administration of the project and inspiration to other communities as well as initiating discussion to ensure local knowledge of capacity to participate in provision of food, accommodation and machinery operation. This will be on record for future events.



Buchan study circle:

Emergency Services Meeting - Buchan

Beginning in September 2014 attention was primarily on updating and distributing the Local Incident Management Plans (LIMP) and support steps to protect community assets through communication with EG Shire and DELWP on land clearing and clarification of roles. These steps have led to stronger relations and regular communication between the Neighbourhood

House and the agencies.

Formalising communication with agencies includes:

- Phone tree provides important personal contact.
- Processes to activate this are clarified.
- Understanding and clarification of Neighbourhood House Safer Places to pass onto the community.

- Warnings and Updates. Assembly point: along with understanding of evacuation destinations, facilities available (children/domestic animals/stock), Community Alert Sirens.
- Distribution of Fire Ready Kits from the CFA with how to prepare your properties/farms and a guide form to filling in your personal fire plans.
- Looking at what has changed and adjusting our plans accordingly.
- Updating contact lists for East Gippsland Shire, DELWP.
- The roles and responsibilities of emergency services, Police, CFA, SES, Red Cross, Parks Vic, DELWP, both local and regional.
- The roles and responsibilities of EG Shire, Bush Nursing Associations, Neighbourhood Houses, Catering and Community.

Activities and outcomes:

- Annual Fire Ready Planning Meeting – 2015 – Commissioner Lapsley. Other communities welcome.
- Participate in a pilot with Emergency Management Services to formalise communication with departments and agencies – potentially through inclusion in LIMP. Pilot with Bruthen, Nowa Nowa and Buchan.
- Continue meeting bi-monthly to maintain network between communities and communicate with representatives on MEMP and DELWP Round table, the EG Network of Neighbourhood Houses and Centre for Rural Communities, Regional Arts Victoria, Mental health and other interested agencies.
- Creation of new residents welcome pack.
- Auspice project initiated by Bruthen study circle - titled Bolder Bush Beats using theatre to engage with children and families on emergencies. Funded by CFA.
- **The visioning session** resulted in an extensive list of initiatives: some new and some expanding existing activities: these relate to including young people: skate park, playground, Young Farmers, youth club, supporting the re-building of a Community Pub, Bike trail, planting and picnic tails along the Buchan River, Bird Watchers club, cleaning up blackberries, improving phone coverage and internet and local transport, extend operating hours for food and fuel and delivery of gas bottles, bakery needed, promote tourism options and establish interpretation centre. In line with 5 year plan – swing bridge across Buchan River to connect township ad caves reserve, town street lighting from Red Knob way and Flynn Park, JP in town. Theme for Buchan, festival, affordable family campsites (old mill?) and affordable caving. Rodeo amphitheatre. Representation on shire.
- The community plan is due for renewal in 2016. The ideas can feed into the existing process.

Bruthen

The Bruthen and District Citizen's Association (BDCA) is a strong and inclusive umbrella organisation that supports arts, emergencies, information, events, the hall committee, and public land management. This group has invested considerable time (2 years) in their Local Incident Management Plan and community plan. The East Gippsland Shire Council were the primary planning agency that assisted the BDCA and invited representation and input from: the Country Fire Authority, State Emergency Service and local police. Bruthen is in a high fire and flood prone area. Bruthen does not have a Neighbourhood House and Gippsland Lakes Community Health focus has focused on clinical services in recent years.

The BDCA welcomed the opportunity to be part of the project seeing it as a way to involve and educate newcomers to the community. Bruthen has become a busy hub with young families living in affordable housing, attracted by safe lifestyle for children, clean environment and a welcoming community.



EAST GIPPSLAND BUILDING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Bruthen study circle:

The Bruthen study circle began in 2015 with 2 people but grew to a regular 8 people who participated for 11 sessions. This was a new role for the facilitator.

Each session began with affirming the value of the guidelines especially if there were newcomers. Participants were not in existing community groups and included people from Mossiface and Wiseleigh. They shared experiences of previous fire seasons and stresses of being home alone indicating an interest in being better prepared.

Activities and outcomes:

- The group networked with the Buchan Neighbourhood House and learnt about their activities. The Buchan Neighbourhood House has become the auspice agency for a successful grant application to the CFA for Bruthen community. The Bolder Bush Beats local musicians and theatre to engage with families, schools. The CFA educational team supports this initiative with mutual benefit for communities and agency. Bruthen will work with schools in Bruthen, Buchan and Tamboo Upper. Orbost, Tubbut/Goongerah. They have been successful in gaining funding from the CFA and EG Shire community grants.
- The facilitator has become a member of the BDCA.
- Communication through Tambo Rambler a key link with wider community, also school newsletters.
- Contact is planned with Fireguard group to prepare for this summer in high risk communities of Mossiface and Wiseleigh.
- There is a desire to run relaxation sessions during emergencies for those impacted. Previous experiences left people extremely stressed.
- They would welcome opportunity to formalise communication with community through LIMP.
- All participants' are newcomers to community involvement at this level.
- The projects are manageable and reflect local skills and interests.

Nowa Nowa



The landscape and population of Nowa Nowa has changed in recent years. A confusing intersection in the heart of the community plus an ageing and declining population has led to an awareness to re-think past arrangements for the Local Incident Management Plan.

Motivation stemmed from experiences in the 2013/2014 Tostaree fires led to a group of concerned residents calling a meeting with relevant Emergency Management Agencies, residents and guests from Bruthen and District Community Association and Buchan Neighbourhood House to share

their experiences of contributing to preparation for emergencies.

Activities and outcomes:

Support from these communities led to residents taking steps to improve local communication and an approach was made in April 2014 to EG Shire to install a flat screen in a prominent locality to convey Emergency information – East Gippsland shire has approved the installation in the General Store - it is anticipated this will be available prior to the 2015 summer.

A survey of local residents generated interest from 28 households in being actively involved with a phone tree similar to that used by the Buchan community.

The study circles built on this existing work.

Meetings have been held at Nowa Nowa Community Room (x 6) and Lake Tyers Hall (x 3). Lake Tyers CFA and community members have attended sessions at Nowa Nowa. Wairewa residents and CFA members have attended Nowa Nowa meetings.

Participants of the study circle will approach the Wairewa CFA, which now has active membership in Nowa Nowa and has invested significant time and resources into fund raising. A new CFA vehicle has been purchased etc. New CFA members from both Nowa Nowa and Wairewa very active in fund raising in both Bairnsdale and locally. \$10.00 firewood packs at general store and hot breakfasts on public holidays. Successful in purchasing vehicle now located at Nowa Nowa DELWP office with equipment in new container at pony club. Training begun to use this equipment. More training wanted.

The LIMP plan is well out of date – with the transfer of ownership of the Community Health Centre from Nowa Nowa community management to Gippsland Lakes Community Health the centre is no longer staffed on identified high risk days and access is currently limited.

However, the Steering committee for the Nowa Nowa Community Health Centre have raised the issue of access to health centre facilities in times of emergencies and gained in principle agreement from the CEO. Details are to be worked out. The General Store and Nowa Nowa Hotel Motel have both offered to provide what support they can.

East Gippsland Shire's approach is that LIMP are a community responsibility. However, this community would benefit from community engagement strategies to unite groups that despite different agendas do share a common goal of community resilience e.g. Pony club, Angling club, Nowa Nowa Community Development Group, Wairewa CFA and Lake Tyers CFA, Save the Children Fund Kindergarten, the Hall committee, the Primary school, Pool and dart clubs at hall, new film society. Wairewa Hall Committee and Wairewa Landcare are both active groups. This fragmentation is in contrast to the Bruthen and District Community Association which encompasses Arts, Information, Blues Festival, Recreation committee, Landcare, Hall Committee, Street scape, Emergencies, other events.

The Lake Tyers Aboriginal community is taking steps to reclaim community management after being under administration for approximately 10 years. While physical infrastructure has improved social, cultural, economic and personal well-being is low. Young children attend primary school but continuation to secondary school has declined significantly. The Lake Tyers all women's CFA has existed for 10 years. The cultural officer Charmaine Selling's attended our meetings and spoke at Orbest Women's Awareness Group. This was well received and of mutual benefit.

Tubbut included to provide community perspective and key role in project.



The communities of Goongerah, Bonang, Cabanandra and Tubbut were strongly impacted by the 2014 Deddick-Goongerah fires. They were threatened for over a month and they swept over several properties on February 9th and 11 houses/dwellings were burned, many kilometres of fencing were damaged and animals lost.

Over a year later, some of the people who lost their houses are still struggling with the issue of shelter. Many fences await repair.

We learned:

- that the houses that survived had all been actively defended until the point when residents left. Residences where a person remained to defend all survived.
- there are many lone households in our community where help – mechanical and human – is needed to assist people to prepare their properties for fire.

Sadly, while there were funds for projects available from RDV, such practical measures were not covered by the guidelines.

Tubbut Neighbourhood House (www.tubbutnh.com)

Tubbut Neighbourhood House played a key role in the recovery process – working behind the scenes. Steps to move beyond the enmity expressed at fire services (DELWP and CFA) meetings, included Tubbut Neighbourhood house, organised a meeting with an independent facilitator and no officers present which

began what I now see as our process of empowerment.

Key issues were:

- the lack of meaningful consultation and failure to heed local knowledge
- the failure to attack the fires when they were small and able to be extinguished
- the lack of maintenance of tracks and other key infrastructure necessary for fighting fires
- the refusal to allow people to return after voluntary evacuation, compounding losses

Our request for an independent review resulted in an internal inquiry by the Commissioner for Emergency Services. In other words, the fox was put in charge of safety conditions in the henhouse.

Changes did result:

- Community now involved in discussions on fuel reduction burns – DELWP
- Evidence of early extinguishing of fires – National Parks Service instructed by Victorian IGEM.
- Invitation to represent TNH at Participation in DELWP Roundtable, initially as representative for TNH now East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses (EGNNH) to provide a community/social perspective to the forum.

East Gippsland Shire Council's Management team has better appreciation of role and capacity of Neighbourhood Houses. Funded a printer capable of producing the Tubbut Tatler our monthly newsletter.

EGNNH was a partner with Centre for Rural Communities in applying for funds from RDV to conduct a community resilience project where the lessons Tubbut and Buchan learned through their experience with fires could be shared with other NHs and the instrumentalities related to fire fighting and management. Our communication is generally through monthly meetings which have been invaluable for information sharing, networking and relationship building. I believe those relationships will endure beyond the life of the project.

2015 – local facilitator employed in Adaptive Recovery project (Vic. Gov't \$'s through EG Shire) to assist the communities to develop mechanisms for resilience in the face of the next fires.

Streetscape Funding has brought communities together for positive discussions as compared to the mainly negative and unhappy meetings in the wake of the fires. As conducted this has been a community-building exercise.

Regional Arts Victoria have also funded a facilitator to work with bushfire impacted communities.

By July 2015, there are 14 services attempting to assist our area and we can participate by Skype. A positive step and hopefully it will lead to appropriate service delivery to our isolated area.

Anecdotally, I observe better relationships between our communities who have not always worked together, a residue of earlier days when there were more people and a greater sense of localised identity. Now we understand that we need to work together to overcome common problems in the face of dwindling and aging populations and reduced government services. We hope that we do not always have to be in a state of emergency and recovery for future cooperation. (Foskey 2015)

Benambra

Benambra is an open plains landscape quite distinct from forested communities of the other hubs in this project. They have an experienced committee and well organised CFA with experience of previous fire activity.

Benambra Neighbourhood House (<https://members.tip.net.au/~phooper/benambra/neighbou.htm>)



The Benambra Neighbourhood House supported the application to RDV acknowledging the importance of communities working together. They attended the first 3 monthly meetings and the project manager travelled to Benambra to discuss the project with the committee.

Benambra chose not to run a study circle but have been kept in the communication loop with the other communities. Paths overlap at regional functions such as CFA events and East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood House networking days. We watch their events with interest.

Orbost orbostneighbourhoodhouse.org.au/

Orbost is the largest of the hubs and while being home to a DELWP regional office with considerable expertise in fire management, and an active CFA and SES there exist significant gaps in community preparedness for emergencies –particularly fire.



Orbost Neighbourhood House

The breadth of the chasm of what agency staff assumed communities knew and the reality has been a significant reality check for this group.

Historically – Orbost and district communities assumed they were not a high risk area – recent fire events have challenged this thinking.

Active engagement in fire preparation and knowledge of good practice is a concern of the Neighbourhood House

and motivated their involvement.

Activities and outcomes:

A focus of updating the Local Incident Management Plan has now led to attention from EG Shire who outlined the steps involved. The Shire see this as a community responsibility involving participation from a diversity of community groups. Skilled facilitation would be needed to achieve this and relevant resources.

The group is considering undertaking more manageable initiatives to increase local involvement in a practical way.

Regular information sessions, a stall at the Orbost Show and conversations with residents of outlying communities: Bete Belong, Jarramond, Marlo and Cabbage Tree have affirmed interest in taking steps to improve this situation.

Agency staff have now approached the Neighbourhood House offering their support to continue working together towards practical application of household and community preparedness.

The study circle process has not yet been undertaken but there is potential to implement this in the future. Participants are encouraged with positive response and involvement from agencies to work with them.



Goongerah

The Tubbut/Bonang/Goongerah communities all suffered high impact from the 2013/2014 fires. The EG Building Community Resilience Project is one of 8 funded projects to support involvement and recovery with these communities. A delay of 12 months prior to any programs commencing has been stressful for residents who at time of beginning the project had been repeatedly consulted about their needs with fragmented if any follow up.

The EG Building Community Resilience project and EG Adaptive Recovery Project collaborated to employ a local facilitator for both projects.

While the time lines of the two projects beginning differed and a delay of 5 months (of a one year program) resulted. A local facilitator is now employed and a study circle commenced in Goongerah.

Past initiatives that have put this community on the map include:

- Goongerah is a small hamlet situated 70km from Orbost. It is nestled between the Errinundra and Snowy River National Parks and is dissected by two rivers, the Goongerah Creek and the Brodrigg River. There is a population of about 40 people, with another 30 or so absentee landholders. There is a P-8 school with 17 children and 12 staff employed (2 F/T & 3 P/T teachers plus 2 aides). There is also a community hall, CFA shed, food co-operative, and a long history of community-run enterprises in the town, including a community bank, two environment groups, and numerous other community groups. There are no shops, no TV reception and intermittent radio reception (2013).
- 2015 – While the community bank is now less active the other organisations are a credit to a very small and resourceful community.
- A major challenge has been to find points of connection with existing landholders and the timber industry.

Goongerah study circle

This is a new role for the facilitator so a small group provides a manageable first step. 5 core people x 5 meetings to date.

Familiarity with each other led to skipping session on guidelines.

Goongerah residents indicate a high level of resilience despite the recent traumatic fire event surrounding their valley over an extensive 6 to 7 weeks.

Socially – high to med. Environmentally – high Politically – high

Economically – low Personally and spiritually – high Culturally – high.

A downside is the low economic activity in the area resulting in a high turnover of residents working away.



Activities and outcomes:

Members shared experiences of verbal abuse based on attitudinal prejudices if they chose to participate in local groups such as the CFA in a neighbouring logging community. This has been a long difficult haul.

Members appreciation of clean/green environment is accompanied by challenges associated with remoteness and minimal income leading to thriftiness and safe environment for children. Education and learning are on-going themes.

Visioning. Profiling local skills of interest: e.g. fencing, firewood collection, cheese making, wool spinning, tanning, basketry, music etc. Passing on skills from older population to younger folk.

Lack of accommodation – possibility to work with shire to rezone.

Tourist mapping - the group began with discussing ways people, localities and items such as produce could be included in local maps of use to community and visitors plus in times of emergencies.

Themes:

- Goongerah History: pictorial, art and information to adorn bare walls of hall.
- Skills audit – support ageing, pass skills to young tourist mapping of services.
- Tourist Map – route of services – interest, support future economy. Historic sites, points of interest.
- Emergency info: not for public display, include dwellings, water points, historic sites & be located in the hall along with the phone tree, skills register, community bank equipt, Landcare equipt list etc
- Community games – group networking with neighbouring communities to start an ongoing social competitive games event.
- Community groups in Goongerah. Past groups that fail are generally due to no integrity, personality, main driver left, personal issues, own agendas and the group “mother figures” can get burnt out. Suggestion to have deputy to avoid group failing/lost when ‘mother figure’ not around.

Reflection on why this community that often inspired other rural communities has become less active.

Ironically, children keep the town and school going but they are often the reason for residents moving away due to secondary schooling needs. This results in a lot of empty houses, part-time residents and limited or no accommodation options for the never ending list of people wanting to move to the community.

- All discussed in kit taking the time to pay attention to these issues can reduce dependency on one person and share roles in a realistic way.

The group is continuing and the facilitator reports the bridging role this has played with other projects.

Focusing in:

Buchan

Hub: Buchan Neighbourhood House

Coordinator: Evelyn Schmidt
Facilitator: Suzanne Davies

3 interested communities

Buchan - Public sessions – 24 (with agencies). Study circle of 5 regular members.

W-Tree - 34 attended public meeting to introduce study circle and emergency planning for 2014/2015. 24 attended second meeting. Group decided not to use study circle. Information on emergency planning was disseminated through W Tree Progress Association.

Gelantipy – 15. Public meeting held to introduce study circle and emergency planning for 2014/2015. No further meetings held.

Information on emergency planning disseminated through the Gelantipy Bush Nursing service.

5 communities identified.
Buchan, Buchan south, Timbarra, Gelantipy and W-Tree (see maps)

Study circle 5 regulars x 9 sessions.

Public meetings held:

Buchan and District Emergency Services.

Phone tree leaders

Catering information.

Fire Ready Planning meeting planned Sept. 2015.

Community agencies: Police, CFA, SES, Red Cross, Parks Vic, DELWP, Bush Nursing Ass'n, Regional Arts Victoria, EG Shire, Neighbourhood House.

Location: The Buchan Neighbourhood House

Bruthen

Hub: Bruthen & District Citizens Association

President: James Nichols.
Facilitator: Annie Pearce

Communities:

Bruthen, Mossiface and Wiseleigh
Began with 2 and grew to 8 x 11 sessions.

Sound foundations and good outcomes.

Community Agencies:

Regional Arts Vic.

BDCA, CFA, SES – Melb and regional.

The Bruthen and District Citizens Association supported the study circle, provided a sounding board and welcoming attitude to this initiative which attracted new people.

Location: Held at Bruthen Mechanics Hall supper room.

Nowa Nowa

Hub: interested community residents

Initiator: Helen Sheil
Facilitator : Marjorie Thorpe

Nowa Nowa, Wairewa and Lake Tyers (postcode 3887).

Information sessions at Nowa Nowa 15 and Lake Tyers 8.

Working groups x 7

6 to 12 people

3 sessions to complete.

Community Agencies:

DELWP, CFA – Lake Tyers and Wairewa. EG Shire Emergency Management Team.

Held at Nowa Nowa Community Room – open to interested residents.

Location: Held at Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust training centre.

Lake Tyers residents also attended 3 sessions in Nowa Nowa.

Key themes

- Building on sound foundations.
- Accessing good resources: maps and agency material.
- Supporting other communities in fire preparation.
- Administrative support through the Neighbourhood House.

Key themes:

- Involving new people
- Connecting with young families (newcomers)
- Complimented work of Bruthen & District Citizens Association LIMP
- Moving from planning to connection and interface with community members taking their own steps in being informed and prepared.
- Taking time – affirming involvement.

Key themes:

- No local contact point for information.
- Changed landscape (roads)
- Older population
- New CFA resources/members
- Need for community information point.
- Community health Centre – often closed. Negotiating access with Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre CEO
- Updating the LIMP to reflect changes is proving a challenge.
- 3 distinct communities – with distributed services and an older population who once provided care now needing services.

Activities completed

- Updating LIMP –Local Incident Management Plan and distributing to all households prior to 2014 fire season. (A4 Quick Reference)
- Updating LIMP Booklet Clarifying roles of agencies and community resources and town planning during emergencies.
- Prepared PowerPoint Presentation and presented at Ass'n of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres conference
- Development of the New Residents Welcome Pack
- Updating Shire MEMPlan resource and contacts
- Presentation at the end of project get together

Activities completed

- Establishing a point of information – one morning a week Oct – March (fire season) invite all agencies to send people to meet local people at hall. CFA, SES, East Gippsland Shire.

Activities completed

- Working with East Gippsland Shire re installation of flat screen at local shop for emergency information.
- Survey of residents re interest in phone tree.
- 28 households interested.
- Updating map – to reflect new roads/intersection
- Working with Lake Tyers residents and Wairewa as well as DELWP to improve knowledge.

Continued Outcomes:

- Active presence in preparation for emergencies Annual Community Emergency planning meetings
- Continued updating of the Community Phone Trees

Continued Outcomes:

- Proposal to create a community contact point at the Bruthen Hall for the summer months.
- Successful in gaining funding from CFA and EG Shire community grants to create theatre with schools:

Continued Outcomes:

- Approaching Wairewa CFA to work in partnership with them to establish local communication processes and location.
- Set up phone tree.

- Continued updating of the MEMPlan Resources and Contact material
- Continued updating and publishing of the community phone book
- Participation in the Community Plan steering Committee
- Active participation in the Buchan Business and Tourism Association and business resilience projects
- Continued dissemination of Emergency information and planned burns through the distribution of printed material, community emails, community website buchan.vic.au and Facebook
- Auspice the Bolder Bush Beats Project
- Boulder Bush Beats at Tambo Upper, Bruthen and Goongerah Schools \$'s from CFA head office.
- Education officers supporting development.
- Establish relaxation sessions for times of emergencies.
- Facilitator presented at ANHLC conference for first time
- Presented at Trentham Neighbourhood House on the project.
- Participating in joint presentation at Living with Bushfires conference in 2015.
- Supported Goongerah facilitator at information sessions.
- Group positive about their experiences and outcomes.
- Participate in pilot with DELWP to formalise communication with community through the Local Incident Management Plan.
- Negotiate with Gippsland Lakes Community Health to have access to facilities in Nowa Nowa.
- Develop local maps with DELWP.
- Update LIMP with this new information.

Future:

- Presenting : Living with Bushfires Conference – Oct
- Participating in DELWP Fire Operations Communication Plan Pilot project formalising communication in emergencies.
- Complete an application for the Fire Awareness Awards in collaboration with other project members
- Continued meetings with East Gippsland Hub for emergency planning
- Investigate further project opportunities and funding

Orbost

Hub – Orbost Neighbourhood House

Co-ordinator: Liz Falkiner
Facilitator: Jen Tuck

Communities:

Orbost, Orbost North, Cabbage Tree, Marlo, Jarramond and Bete Belong.

Agencies:

East Gippsland Shire, DELWP, CFA, SES

Key themes:

Orbost communities are at risk.
Discrepancy between agency expectation of knowledge/preparedness and reality for residents.

Activities:

Showcase at Orbost Show - new people involved
Creating interface between agencies/departments and community members
Reciprocal interest evident from DEPLW and CFA – welcome connection.

Goongerah

Hub – interested community members

Lorelee Cockerill

Location:

Goongerah Community Hall, Goongerah, Martin's Creek

Agencies:

Goongerah CFA, Regional Arts Victoria, SNAP, East Gippsland Shire Adaptive recovery program

Key themes:

High impact areas
Initial consultation
Long delay in support
Communication major issue.
Radio/internet/mobile – all blackspot areas. Historical discrimination by fire agencies – valley can burn.

Activities:

Taking stock of current situation.
Mapping population, skills audit: teaching sustainability skills: cheese and bread making, opportunities for tourist interaction.
Extending economic opportunities.
Supporting local organisations :CFA, Shire, Regional Arts.
Attention to mental health after fire season: group activities and involvement of mental health worker.
Tubbut Neighbourhood House running combined classes: Aboriginal basket making.
Tubbut/Goongerah/Orbost supporting each other.

Tubbut

Tubbut Neighbourhood House

Co-ordinators: Deb Foskey/Lisa

Communities:

Tubbut, Cabanandra, Bonang, Delegate and Bendoc, Tubbut Neighbourhood House

Agencies:

DEPWL, NSW Fire Service, East Gippsland Shire, Regional Arts Victoria, Orbost Regional Health EG Shire, Business and Tourism

Activities:

Improved communication and connection with decision makers through combined recovery committee.
Support for Tubbut Tatler
Hosting of safer meetings.
Fire wood collection
CFA training providing new opportunities to work together.

Common themes across communities positive and negatives

- + Preparation pays off
- Discrepancy - expectations and reality – community and agencies.
- Long delays in assistance - poor targeting – Fencing/shelter remain priorities
- Poor access to electronic information major concern
- Local knowledge absent in planning/management/recovery
- Previous good practice remains ad hoc or absent under changing staff
- + EGBCR – gave communities a voice/presence
- + Employing local facilitators invested in local knowledge and economies
Flexible access
- + Agencies at same table as facilitators/co-ordinators/community
- + Informed access to resources.
Interface between agencies/communities.
- + Improved relationships between community members and agency staff
- Open and respectful.
- + Building Community Resilience kit
On-line – for other communities.
- + Strengthened connections multiple agencies – knew who to talk to
- + Neighbourhood houses/hubs provide interface with agencies
- + Community newspapers - a key link in communication.
- + Communities initiated action
- + Showcasing our approach – regionally/state conferences
- + Networking with other communities
- + Updating – Local Incident Management Plans (LIMP)
Formalising local contacts
- + Using local arts
- 40 week program
Timing of commencement
- + Future projects - known network
- Skills gap in accredited training. Skilled local facilitator critical
- + Project gave hope and presence
- Time and demands challenging.
- Insurance – debilitating not safety net. New model needed

what we learnt

We achieve more when we work together.

Outcomes of this increased presence includes:

- Greater visibility of small communities through participation at the EG Building Community Resilience Advisory Committee meetings attended by communities and agencies (and dogs).
- Participation in combined Recovery Project meetings: East Gippsland Shire, Regional Development Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
- Invitation to represent Neighbourhood Houses and CRC on the Municipal Emergency management Planning committee.
- Sponsorship by CFA to attend the Living with Bushfires Conference (2014) and present at the 2015 Conference.
- Presentation at Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres Conference in Geelong as a case study of Neighbourhood Houses involvement in Bushfire recovery with Commissioner Craig Lapsley.
- Invitation from DELWP to formalise communication arrangement with community groups and Neighbourhood Houses.
- Recognition that inclusion of Neighbourhood Houses and community groups in identifying manageable levels of responsibility for local catering and contracting (machinery operation) is a welcome shift for communities and organisations. The EG Shire has circulated forms to gain and update this information.

final thoughts

The policy shift acknowledging the critical role of communities in reducing social, economic and environmental trauma in disasters through increased resilience and ownership is a welcome one. It does however require a multi-level approach in attitude, skills and knowledge by all concerned. This will be an on-going process beyond the one year funding of this project.

Organised communities are better prepared for disasters, clear about their roles and capacities in a disaster and are active in recovery. Community hubs give communities a voice with the support of neighbouring communities, neighbourhood houses and an active Neighbourhood House network to transform their relationship with relevant agencies. The project puts communities on the planning map as an active partner with critical local knowledge.

Working together takes effort. Neighbourhood Houses, communities and individuals juggle multiple short term responsibilities and funding cycles while having primary long-term accountability to their own community.

The strengthening of networks through the study circles and other encounters is improving relationships between bureaucracy, volunteers and local people. When communities are organised, agencies welcome the opportunity to engage with this level of local knowledge.

Limitations

Vacuum in accredited training. Federation University took steps to introduce a one year part-time program but this is currently not on offer (has potential for 2016). Access to training and professional recognition would enhance the status and capacity of this challenging role.

Timing: difficult to run program over summer months due to family and work commitments of those involved – earning an income, farm and food production are priorities at this time.

Short funding cycle. While the project provided a long awaited opportunity to update the study circle kit on local resilience – the one year funding meant this was a work in progress and not an ideal process for either the co-ordinator of the facilitators.

With experience of recent traumatic fire season some participants were quite vulnerable.

Recommendations

1. That the development of any future community development projects incorporate structured, accredited or pre-accredited training for facilitators and participants, maximising the opportunity for formal recognition of any skills acquired in the course of the project. This may not necessarily be a full qualification but may deliver recognised skill sets that would enhance employment opportunities.
2. That funding bodies/agencies considering the provision of support to community development projects in East Gippsland give serious consideration to a two-year funding cycle; recognising the challenges to be faced when working with diverse and highly dispersed communities.
3. That future resilience-building projects include in their structure, opportunities for addressing mental health issues related to coping with and surviving natural disaster.
4. That the Study Circle Kit is promoted as a valuable and flexible resource for community building through collaborative engagement.
5. That the strengthened links achieved among the community Hubs is maintained through resourced quarterly forums and that funding is sought to support this activity. The forums would showcase research, policy and practice in aspects of rural community development and collaborative engagement and provide opportunities for information sharing and networking.

Resources

Education plays a key role in this change. Two new resources will be made available as a result of the project – an on-line *Building Community Futures through Co-operation* study circle kit available through the East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses www.egnnh.net.au and the Centre for Rural Communities www.ruralcommunities.com.au and a post-graduate qualification the Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development through Federation University This professional program would also be available to departmental and agency staff who have regional responsibility.

Driving Innovation in Crisis Management for European Resilience - Community Resilience Model. - (Karikas, D., & Davis, S.,) 2015. <http://driver-project.eu/deliverables>

Draft Preliminary report - *Review of the 2014 Goongerah-Deddick Fires*, May 2014.
Fire Services Commissioner Victoria

2013 -2014 *Fire Season Compliance report - Inspector-General for Emergency Management.* - (Dep't of Justice)

Tubbut Tattler - 2014 -2015.

Davies. S., (Summer 2010) *The Buchan Neighbourhood House response during the 2003 fire emergency*, *New Community Quarterly*, Vol. 8. No. 4. pp 39-41.