State and federal government emergency services reviews and reforms (2011/2012) point to the need for increased capability amongst local communities to participate in the shared responsibility of preparing for and recovering from disasters. A crucial factor in building community capability is to listen to and strengthen local knowledge and successes by actively highlighting and endorsing good practice initiatives within local communities. The 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor identified the Alpine Shire Council Community Resilience Committee (ASC CRC) as an example of good practice.

Welcome to the Alpine Shire Council Community Resilience Committee Case Study

The National Disaster Resilience Grants Scheme funded the development of a case study to provide information about the ASC CRC success factors and support the development of local government and community structures to increase disaster resilience.

The ASC CRC understands that ‘one size does not fit all’ in addressing disaster resilience, and offers this case study in the spirit of sharing useful insights with interested communities, agencies and governments seeking to collaborate and share responsibility for community resilience.

The Alpine Shire is situated in the north east of Victoria approximately 300km from Melbourne. In recent times the shire has experienced a prolonged drought, major bushfires (4) and flood events (3) and the loss of agricultural industries.

The Community Resilience Committee is central to the Alpine Shire Council’s long-term commitment to working together to build individual and community resilience, thus enabling all residents and visitors to look to the future with hope. For further details about Alpine Shire’s resilience planning please see the Resilience Plan 2012-2015 at www.alpineshire.vic.gov.au Emergency – Being Prepared – Community Resilience.

Evidence of Success

Data for the case study has been collected by reviewing ASC CRC documents (2007-2014 Minutes, reports), an ASC CRC Focus Group (19 participants) and semi-structured interviews (9) with key stakeholders. A review of the key themes and quotes from the interviews was subsequently undertaken by eight CRC members to prioritise the case study contents.

THE FACTS - Alpine Shire Community Resilience Committee

- Sustainability = 8 years of successful action since 2007 following the 2006/7 bushfires
- Meetings = 51 bimonthly meetings during the case study period (January 2007 - December 2014)
- Attendance = 840 attendees at CRC meetings came from 55 different agencies/groups, average of 19 participants at each meeting, with the minimum number of people at any one meeting being 9 and the maximum being 26
- Participants are from emergency management agencies, local government, state and federal government departments, local community groups, primary industries, volunteer emergency service organisations, employer groups, environmental organisations, community service agencies, infrastructure providers, academic researchers and local community representatives

1 COAG 2011
2 Comrie Flood Review 2011
3 Victorian Government 2012
4 Victorian Government 2012: 5
5 Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor Report, 2012:216
ASC CRC Significant Resilience Issues, Activities and Achievements (2007-2014)

**Resilience Challenges:** Bushfires – including Black Saturday and Harrietville fire, Bogong power station development, flooding and storms, loss of tobacco industry, changing agricultural conditions, chestnut blight, drought, climate change, black spot communications.

**Relief and Recovery activities:** Black Saturday bushfire relief centre & coordination of recovery services to fire affected people - accommodation, food, counselling, financial assistance, volunteer support, fencing, grants, potable water, feed stations, information & newsletters, ‘No Bull’ workshops, Men's Health nights, Pamper Days, Mental Health First Aid courses, advocacy letters

**Projects looking beyond the immediate:** Coordinating Victorian bushfire recovery funding applications and projects, communication black spots lobbying, disaster anniversary events, recognising volunteers, Neighbourhood Safer Places vulnerable person's register, Victorian bushfire recovery funding applications and projects volunteer training, Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund Into Our Hands development, safety DVD, information kits and fridge magnets.


**Research, planning and policy:** Bushfire research, Murray Darling Basin plan submission, ASC Community Resilience Plan, Through Women's Eyes project, heatwave planning, input to Department of Justice Bushfire planning report, Monash Uni Disaster Resilience Initiative presentations, ASC Liveability Plan, ‘Just Ask’ conference, Victorian state gender & disaster taskforce, heatwave planning, ASC CRC case study

**Success and Sustainability Factors – What has worked?**

The *Relationship building* between community/agencies + agencies/agencies that happens at the ASC CRC was clearly identified as being at the heart of all the success factors because it improves *Networking*, *Communication*, avoids duplication and ‘adds value’, adds *new knowledge* and enables the agencies and communities to *Build on existing community resilience* and use resilience activities to enhance response and recovery capacity

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**Quotes**

"It is easier to pick up the phone and ask someone about a different area to the one you’re in if you’ve chatted over a CRC lunch and met around the table and heard their story, it does help those networks work better"

**Key Factors**

- **Relationship building:** “you can only do it by talking” + “everyone together from different sectors”
- **Networking:** “we know who to speak to”
- **Communicating:** “more communication avenues” + “get an ear to the ground”
- **Avoid duplication and value-add:** “it is the community’s resilience plan” + “one and one equals three”
- **Building on community resilience:** “supporting the community to look after themselves through leadership” + “identify and work with the community leaders”
- **Resilience work enhances response and recovery capacity:** “networking & relationship building pre-emergency - it pays off” + “CRC has wonderful networks, available to a response phase”
- **New knowledge:** “increased awareness” + “professional knowledge sharing at the CRC like we did today is invaluable”
Starter recipe for a successful and sustainable CRC... Make it your own

This CRC recipe has proven to be successful and sustainable in the Alpine Shire and is shared in a spirit of collaborative development. Each community will have its own special flavour to make this recipe its own.

Ingredients -
*CRC operational success and sustainability factors*
- Bringing a broad range of agencies, community representatives and sectors to the table
- Providing paid facilitator role and local government support
- Creating a safe and trusted meeting space
- Nurturing and valuing members
- Supporting local knowledge
- Nothing is off limits
- Very professional, very timely, very routine
- Taking on ‘change’
- Amazing cooperation
- Keep moving forward
- Staying focused on resilience and involving community
- Building relationships and partnerships
- Being responsive to new members
- Bringing community development approach into what has traditionally been an emergency response culture
- Aligning with and contributing to state and federal resilience strategies and emerging research

“you just come together at the CRC and all the lunch ingredients are there and you just put your salad roll together - it puts everyone on that same level”

Instructions
1. Take a local community or local government area with a paid facilitator role
2. Place all ingredients on the table on a regular basis (bi-monthly)
3. Invite people to make their own and joint resilience activities whilst talking to each other and passing each other various ingredients
4. Create a ‘safe and trusted’ meeting i.e. respectful information sharing, inclusive processes and mutual commitments to community wellbeing
5. Ensure everyone knows what they have said they would do and follow up actions
6. Develop an agreed resilience plan pointing everyone in the same direction
7. Adapt as circumstances change

Improving the recipe – *adding more flavour and complexity*
- Ongoing membership balance between agencies and communities
- Work with more communities by either focusing on a new community each 12 months; or with existing local groups and bring their resilience issues/activities/learnings/initiatives back to the CRC
- Undertake more short and long term planning, including a ‘heat map’ of resilience needs and where CRC activities have been happening
- Strengthen agency information sharing section of CRC meeting by focusing on resilience impact and outcomes
- build more connections between CRC and Council disaster response, relief and recovery planning and processes
- Measure and evaluate more as a basis for identifying and improving CRC success and sustainability

“The CRC is a three hour meeting... lunch is provided as a note of appreciation. Initially lunch was ordered in and it was obviously expensive, there wasn’t much of a budget, so the CRC facilitator started to order bread rolls, bread and make up platters of salads, meats, and fruit - no cake or sweet stuff. And, as a result, people then pass platters to each other, and pass the butter, stand around the table shoulder to shoulder rather than just grab a sandwich and walk out the door with them. The networking really improved significantly. So, it’s not difficult, it’s not rocket science, but people appreciate the freshness of it, the fact that they can have what they want to have, and just the camaraderie of it has been an unbelievable bonus.”
Building on success - What can be improved?

“We’re talking about resilience in community, and one of the roles the CRC could look at is how it gets other communities involved and encourage people at the grassroots that have got a project and are going to motivate within the community”

Key Factors

Membership: “ongoing challenge is community membership” + “when there is an emergency communities want their own people involved” + “Review membership balance re: agencies, government, communities, industry, agri-business, tourism”

Working with communities: “findings ways to extend the CRC’s work into all at risk communities” + “strengthen local knowledge in planning and decision making” + “undertake a ‘heat map’ or use Community Emergency Risk Assessment to decide which other communities to prioritise”

Measuring impact and outcomes: “fly the flag when successful to ensure CRC is supported and keeps developing” + “communicate benefits and demonstrate effectiveness - reviews, examples, attendance/participation data”

Meetings: “technology to connect more people” + “maybe once a year CRC meets with youth council or disability access groups” + “agency reports and information sharing to focus on resilience e.g. ‘what activities, projects, or programs do you have underway that are building resilience and how can the CRC help?’”

Activities: “keep building resilience information and focus onto existing community activities e.g. Rotary/Apex raffle/BBQ/markets” + “resilience focus includes agricultural and other risks too”

Resourcing: “facilitator role makes it all possible” + “externally funded projects have contributed a lot” + “keep finding and supporting local champions” + “guest speakers, conferences with report back to CRC” + “combine efforts with other councils and disaster affected communities” + “there’s only so much part-time and volunteer resourcing can do - achievable targets”


Quotes

Conclusion

“We are now at the point where communities, agencies and researchers are coming to us ... to be part of resilience month or talk about a community resilience issue or project or ask emerging research questions”

Further Information

A project report containing additional details is available from: Jan Mock - Community Development Officer
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