Disaster Resilience
Through Women's Eyes

Communities working together: Hollie was a part of the recovery, always someone there - local telephone, info available, someone there to talk, donations, food; you can do a bit with just a few people. If I got involved with the community (lived alone) and it was much quicker (for me to recover) and it gave me a routine – you had to do it. And it was valuable – it was necessary and valued. Help ourselves and others offer, even just a shoulder to turn to makes a big difference in recovery.

Kancoura people just did what was needed – didn’t know we were in a ‘Kancoura group’ until an emergency event needed responding to get active – ascertain losses in. Need groups, with a chance to join e.g. CWA, cooking groups, red KN, Men’s sheds; took people away for 2 b/a.

Professional Information: outdoors can be useful in that they are not emotionally involved with the situation e.g. solicitors, gardeners, advisors; funding for these people to come & bring new perspectives.

Rob Gordon suddenly put words to the way you were feeling, made you feel like ‘OK so I’m normal, so I’m allowed to feel like this’ - this brain gels, it’s the way he explained it. There was a physiological stuff – just made sense – one of the best things that happened, created new understanding of what’s normal, putting things in the cupboard and not opening it again – shutting the door. All these ready at home, and the ‘three years on thing’

Some people didn’t go to hear Rob; they were all just working flat out & didn’t have a chance to go to any of those things.

CFA (Paul): young women ‘learning safest place at home during a bushfire has 2 exits’ is most useful.

Services offering help: Services called (Alpine Health, Gowns & Kings) and asked what help we needed, that was very helpful. I told to OAGHD: ‘I’ve got to do all this paperwork for the insurance company. Anyway they sent us, I think it was an accountant, or something, and he was really good. He just got all the losses and everything and he just added it all up for you, and it just made a real big difference.’

When insurance companies were proactive, it was reassuring. Having a case manager was really good for some; a bit hit & miss, have to match. Have to do the outreach - have to go to the people - it doesn’t work the other way around.

Good communication: Community meetings need; small focus groups e.g. Rural Land Use Strategy approach; follow ups & to be reported back to the community, signs left at the door. Community and bureaucracy - two-way meetings/negotiations with signs left at the door. Telephone trees and/or functional UN network are good & need privacy agreements + practice.

Resilience - What helps

Gather and share stories: Helps to know how people can get over things/disasters; educate next generation about disaster - getting away hop, school projects; learning about past disasters; talking around the dinner table; importance of simply taking time to listen & respect other people’s experiences; share preparation knowledge with newcomers; community meetings or media features; learning from refugee resilience.

Community fire plan: local learning helps, sharing of ideas + preparation + resources, if my place goes yours is next, small valleys more aware of each other - different times of the day/week.

Integrated Emergency Management:

The Community Resilience Committee includes lots of organisations, who in ‘normal’ times don’t have much to do with each other. The early meetings were a bit stiff, but we put lunch on the plate and everyone had to make their own sandwiches. This broke down barriers & new meetings are a conversation about traditional knowledge and ideas. Better working relationships made a huge difference when I was first asked to open a relief centre. I had never done this before & wondering how to be most effective. On my way to the centre, I had phone calls from DFD and CentraLink, asking “What could we do?” Within a very short time the relief centre was open and we were quickly able to help - all because we had good links between the Alpine Shire Council and the Community Resilience Committee.

Being prepared:

Just about to write plans, talked with family around table using CFA plan form, elderly mother needed to be more prepared to feel safe plans clear in 2 adults heads. but not shared with others, hadn’t included teenager daughter. After fire, her own fire blanket first aid helps.

People helping each other: relationships and connections between people mean if someone has a bad back someone else can help; swapping expertise, young people came and recycled – extreme makeover. You’re not alone in your experience of the fire; I never felt alone, everyone was helping.

During the fires, people gave each other a cuddle and said ‘see you later’ = positive message of getting through, just going out to do their usual, wherever they were needed.

Sense of humour: laughter and humour are absolutely crucial.

‘Disaster Resilience’ Insights and stories from 31 women, aged 16 - 90+ years, who met in small groups across the Alpine Shire to share their experiences. (January - May 2012)