

Countering Drought

*Manual of Creative Community
Solutions*

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1 Overview

1.1 About this manual

This manual is a guide to assist organisations, communities and individuals to plan and organise effective local activities that can strengthen communities during periods of continuous drought. It could also be a valuable resource for communities that are experiencing other types of prolonged distress.

The idea of producing this manual came from a desire to capture the lessons learnt from the many successful community projects and events that were held in the Department of Human Services (DHS) Loddon Mallee Region from 2003 to 2006. During these four years, a number of drought-affected municipalities in Victoria received funds from the State Government's Drought Social Recovery Strategy (DSRS) to develop creative approaches that could assist their communities to recover from drought.

The information that is presented in this manual has been collected from two sources.

- The Health Impact Assessment of the DSRS in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region, which is available from the DHS Loddon Mallee Regional Office (www.dhs.vic.gov.au/regional/loddon); and
- The recollections and opinions of people from the DHS Loddon Mallee Region, who either planned or organised local activities for their drought-affected communities.

1.2 How to use this manual

The manual is presented in five sections.

- Section One describes the origin of this manual and its possible uses.
- Section Two provides background information about the impacts of continuous drought on the health and wellbeing of communities, and effective methods to counter these effects.
- Section Three highlights some important points to remember when organising community activities. It also lists the steps required to form a Community Recovery Committee and the key components of a Community Grants Program.
- Section Four presents a wide range of community activities that have been categorised according to their intended purpose, namely:
 1. promoting social connectedness;
 2. providing information;
 3. keeping individuals healthy;
 4. supporting local business owners (including farmers); and
 5. training the community.
- Section Five is a list of other useful resources.

This manual could be used in several ways. The reader who is searching for general information about planning or organising activities for a drought-affected community will find assistance in Sections Two and Three. If a reader is not sure about the value of community activities in countering the effects of drought, Section Two provides some reasons for undertaking such activities. If funding is available for a community activity that has a specific aim, then Section Four offers some ideas for innovative activities to ensure that those funds are used effectively. If additional information is required when planning a specific community activity, Section Five directs the reader to other useful resources.

2 Countering the Effects of Drought

2.1 The effects of drought

The many negative effects of drought on the natural environment and the rural economy have been well publicized in recent years. Of equal importance, but less publicized, is the fact that continuous drought is known to reduce the physical and mental health of individuals, as well as the health and wellbeing of families and rural communities.

Although the importance of physical health is well understood, the way that mental health is intricately connected to physical health is only beginning to be explored. Mental health has been defined as the emotional and spiritual resilience which enables individuals to survive pain, disappointment and sadness: a fundamental belief in one's own dignity and worth¹. Similarly, wellbeing is described as a state of being emotionally healthy and feeling able to cope with normal stresses and live a fulfilled life².

Living with continuous drought can reduce a person's mental health and wellbeing by causing constant anxiety about money, work, home, family and friends, and the surrounding environment. This chronic stress has been found to result in higher

1 Cooke, A. 2004, Mental Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment Indicators: A Two part Screening Toolkit. April 2004. Lewisham & Lambeth Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

2 Cooke, A., Coggins, T. et al, 2004, Neighbourhood Wellbeing in Lewisham: Final Report, March 2003 – March 2004. South London and Maudsley NHS.

rates of infection, slower rates of physical recovery and an increased risk of having a heart attack or a stroke³. It can also lead to the development of diabetes, high blood pressure or depression. 'Perceived' health problems are also more likely to develop into 'actual' health problems if a person is continually stressed.

Interestingly, researchers have discovered that a person's physical health and the health of the community where they live, are both affected by whether or not that person feels anxious, isolated or in control of their life, and whether he or she feels involved with other people and with their wider community⁴.

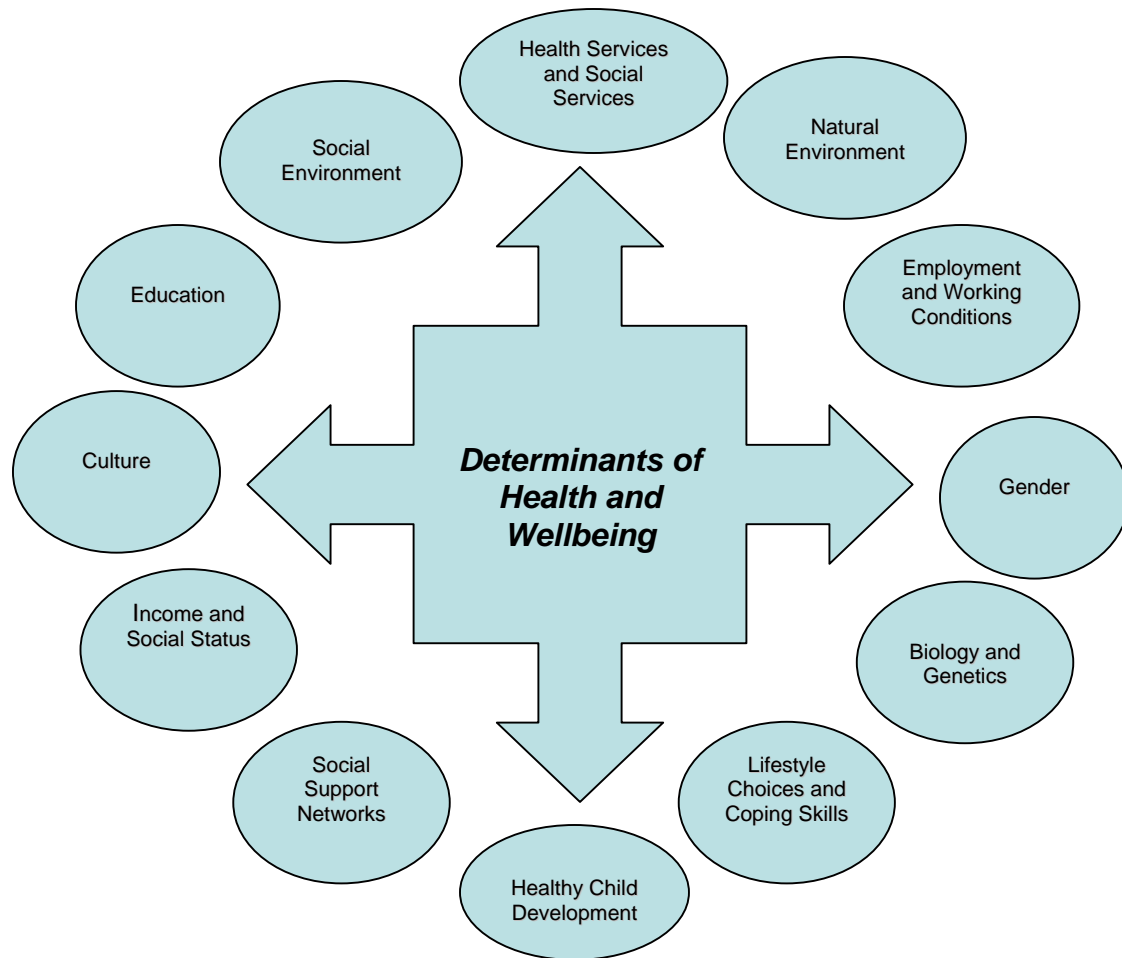
The ongoing distress caused by drought can also indirectly affect health and wellbeing by changing one or more of the factors that determine health and wellbeing. These factors are known as the determinants of health (see diagram on next page). It is becoming increasingly clear that lifestyle choices and genetics are only two of many factors that determine a person's health and wellbeing⁵.

If one considers income as an important determinant of health and wellbeing, then the reduced income that many farming families have experienced as a result of continuous drought, can reduce the health of that family and its individual members. This happens because the change in income results in less money being available to purchase enough nutritious food for the family which, in turn, affects the health of each member of that family. A reduced income can also lead to fewer visits to the dentist or the doctor, which can also contribute to poorer health for that family.

3 Adler, R., Fleten, D.L., Cohen, N. 1996, *Psycho-Neuroimmunology*, Academic Press, San Diego.

4 Hill, T., Ross, C. et Angel, R. 2005, Neighbourhood Disorder, Psychophysiological Distress and Health, *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, no. 46, issue 2, pp.170-186.

5 Marmot, M. & Wilkinson, R. 1999, *Social Determinants of Health*, OUP, Oxford.



Other important indirect effects of continuous drought on health and wellbeing are the changes that happen in people's lives because their community is stressed.

Social networks in rural communities are often disrupted because people in drought-affected communities are either forced to, or choose to, withdraw from the world. This change in the social environment in turn reduces a person's mental health and wellbeing because he or she no longer connects with their neighbours or their community.

Low levels of social connectedness are known to be linked to higher rates of coronary heart disease, malignant cancers, strokes, unintended injuries and infant

mortality⁶. A high level of participation in social activities is associated with better mental and physical health, and strong social ties are linked to lower mortality rates. Research has also found that high levels of social connectedness are linked to lower suicide rates and lower rates of family violence⁷.

Another indirect effect of continuous drought on rural communities is a reduced level of resilience, which is the capacity of communities and individuals to consider their future. At an individual level, a high level of resilience is known to be associated with a high level of personal confidence and a sense of control⁸. Resilience and good health are both strongly associated with communities who work together and have high levels of social support and solidarity⁹.

2.2 Community development

It is widely accepted that providing local activities which are based on community development principles (see box on next page) is an effective method of helping communities to recover after an emergency or a long period of distress, such as continuous drought¹⁰. The employment of Community Development Officers (CDOs) has assisted community recovery after a broad range of disasters in Victoria, including the North East Floods in 1993, the Dandenong Ranges Bushfires in 1997, and the East Gippsland Floods in 1998. On each of these occasions, the CDO played a crucial role by identifying gaps in local services, advocating on behalf of the

6 Kawachi, I & Berkman, L. 2000, *Social Epidemiology*, OUP, New York.

7 Ziersch, A. Baum, F. Macdougall, C. et Putland, C. 2005, Neighbourhood Life and social capital: the implications for health, *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 60, pp. 71-80.

8 Stehlik, D. 2003, Australian Drought as a lived Experience: Social and community impacts. In *Beyond Drought: People, Policy and Perspectives*. Edited by Botterill, L. C. & Fisher, M. CSIRO, Collingwood.

9 Benight, C. C. 2004, Collective efficacy following a series of natural disasters. *Anxiety, Stress and Coping*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 401-420

10 National Rural Health Alliance, 2004, *Rural Communities and Disaster Recovery*. National Rural Health Alliance Inc.

Community development principles

Social justice
Self-determination
Working and learning together
Sustainable communities
Participation

Source: Federation for Community Development Learning, UK.

<http://www.fcpl.org.uk/publications/documents/nos/Standards%20040703.pdf>

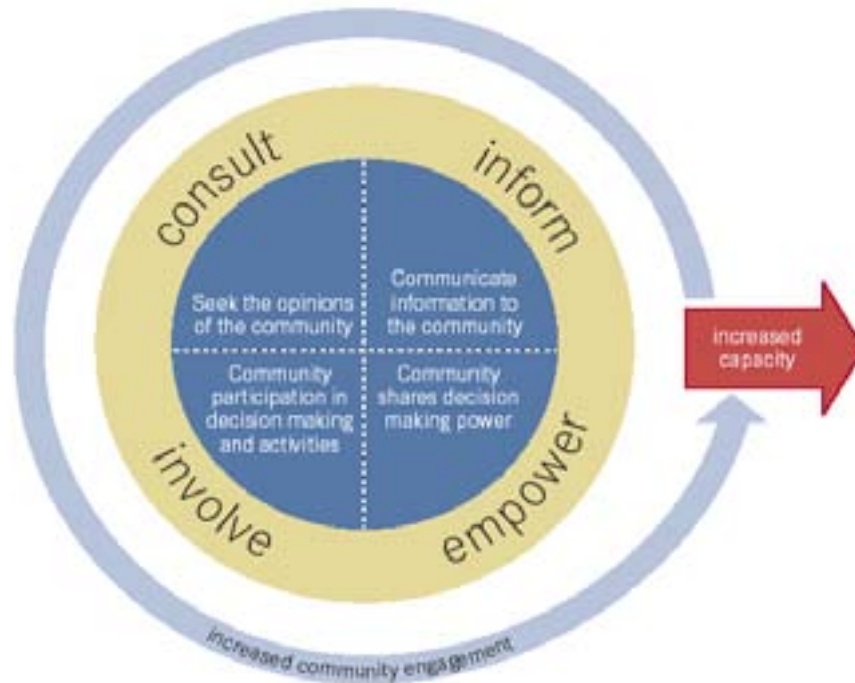
affected community and promoting longer term sustainable community support strategies. In the DHS Loddon Mallee Region, the CDOs needed to show that they understood the plight of their farming communities and could empathize with them, before they could build the strong sense of trust that was essential in their work with drought-affected families.

Communities and governments agree that recovery from drought is a complex and lengthy process. It includes supporting individuals and their families, repairing the damaged buildings and natural environment, strengthening the entire community and encouraging local economic activity. Recovery has been found to be most effective when affected individuals and communities work as partners with the staff of local agencies and government authorities, whose role it is to provide assistance, programs, advice, support and information¹¹.

This approach to recovery fits in well with the Victorian Government's community building program which is based on listening to local experience, supporting local connections, providing responsive services and investing in the infrastructure which makes communities good places to live and work. The process of community building begins with community engagement, which can vary from involving, consulting,

¹¹ Alston, M. & Kent, J. 2004, Coping with a Crisis: Human Services in Times of Drought. Rural Society, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 214-227

informing or empowering communities. Each of these methods of working with communities can develop the ability of community members to take charge of their own future (see the diagram below).



Source: Drought Social Recovery Strategy, 2003.
http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency/em_events/drought_communities.htm

2.3 Activities that counter the effects of drought

People who are experiencing ongoing drought have psychological, social and material needs, all of which can be sources of anxiety and insecurity. Research studies have shown that local activities which encourage social interaction in the community actually help people feel valued and supported, and will contribute to their mental health and wellbeing¹². These social activities are as important as the financial drought assistance packages that are provided to drought-affected communities.

¹² Stehlik, D. 2003, Australian Drought as a lived Experience: Social and community impacts. In Beyond Drought: People, Policy and Perspectives. Edited by Botterill, L. C. & Fisher, M. CSIRO, Collingwood

As one CDO from the DHS Loddon Mallee Region stated: *"If government funds are spent solely on activities that aim to repair buildings and restore the natural environment, there is a risk that these communities will gain a lot of buildings, equipment and parks, but there will be no people to use them or enjoy them."*

The community activities which were held in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region were funded and organised in one of two ways.

- A discretionary pool of funds was allocated by the State Government to each drought-affected municipality to form and sustain a local Community Recovery Committee. With the assistance of a CDO, who was employed to solely address drought-related issues, this Committee identified the needs of each community, then funded and organised a range of local activities to meet these needs.
- Another pool of funds, which was also provided by the State Government, was allocated to each local Community Recovery Committees for the specific purpose of establishing a Community Grants Program in each drought-affected municipality. All community groups, large and small, were encouraged to submit proposals for activities or projects or events that aimed to improve social interaction or to create a sense of people pulling together against a common enemy.

3 General Hints

3.1 Different times - different needs

Rural communities that are experiencing ongoing drought need different forms of assistance at different times during this experience. Although some people in rural communities may think that social activities are a waste of government funds, these activities meet the needs of communities at certain stages of their drought experience. In the Loddon Mallee Region of Victoria, it was noted that the needs of drought-affected communities changed significantly over a period of four years; what was a successful community activity in the early years of the drought would be inappropriate today. When planning community activities it is crucial to be aware of the community's needs at the present time.

3.2 Notice who is NOT attending

When organising any government-funded community activity, it is good practice to evaluate the activity by recording who attended and how many people attended. However, when planning and organising community activities for drought-affected communities, it is crucial to note who is NOT attending, as these are often the people in most need.

CDOs in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region were often faced with the dilemma of needing to respect people's privacy whilst actively seeking information about people who were known to be in need of assistance but who were always absent. 'Dobbing in

a mate' became a positive behaviour as people were encouraged to look out for their neighbours, particularly those who were isolating themselves from the community.

It is also important during periods of drought that economic hardship does not impede participation in community activities. All funded community activities should be available at no cost or at a very low cost to the participant, and should promote participation by the whole community, not just particular groups.

3.3 Combine your efforts

Over a period of several years the CDOs in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region established new links between the many welfare agencies across their respective municipalities and worked collaboratively with a wide range of other agencies, such as Centrelink, the State Department of Primary Industries, Primary Care Partnerships, community health services, and both primary and secondary schools. These relationships were vital to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that all resources were used efficiently.

Another strategy that was extremely effective in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region was the organisation of social events that included an element of information sharing. Representatives from a wide range of local agencies were invited to participate in as many community activities as possible, thus transforming these activities into vital communication channels which also provided a welcome respite from the day to day pressures of ongoing drought.

3.4 Caring for the carers

As most CDOs in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region were themselves members of the drought-affected communities, they too needed to be supported as they cared for

their communities. A CDO Network was quickly established in the region and its meetings created opportunities for sharing experiences and learning from others. CDOs were also strongly encouraged to keep in regular contact with each other, either by telephone or by email.

Similarly, many people who were providing essential services such as education, welfare and health care, for their drought-affected communities were themselves farmers or small business owners. They were personally experiencing the devastating impacts of the drought whilst providing professional services to assist their neighbours. It was crucial that forums and workshops were provided to train, support and nurture these people, before their health deteriorated.

An important observation in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region was the fact that many stressed farmers would not leave their farms, and only had contact with people employed in the various industries that support the farming sector, such as stock agents and milk suppliers. These people were listening to the personal stories of the isolated farmer, but so often they felt unprepared to deal with what they were hearing. It was crucial that these members of rural communities could recognise the signs of mental illness and had some basic counselling skills that would assist them to support struggling farmers.

3.5 Forming a Community Recovery Committee

An important first step in the journey towards community recovery in each of the drought-affected municipalities was the formation of a Community Recovery Committee, which represented all sectors of the community, particularly the different farming groups. These Committees varied in size from ten to fifty people, according to the size and composition of the municipality. The larger Committees were usually divided into several smaller Working Groups to ensure more effective

and efficient meetings, and to allow members in the Working Groups to focus on specific issues.

Making it happen

Each local government authority organised a community meeting and invited key community representatives and local service providers, who were either affected by the drought or who were providing services to assist drought-affected families. At the conclusion of this meeting, the members of the Community Recovery Committee had identified themselves and the first meeting date was set. The continued functioning of these Committees required financial support from the State Government, the commitment of the local government authority, a CDO employed to focus specifically on drought issues, and local groups and agencies that were willing to share information and work collaboratively.

What was done

At the first Committee meeting a schedule of meetings was developed and members agreed on the Committee's broad roles and responsibilities, which generally included the following:

- To identify local drought issues and community needs;
- To develop a local Drought Social Recovery Plan;
- To implement a range of local solutions that would support communities during the drought and recovery phases; and
- To evaluate all activities initiated by the Committee.¹³

The local government authority distributed the minutes of meetings and any other information from these meetings to all Committee members, who in turn

¹³ Undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of the activities supported by the Committee required further funding from either the local government or the State Government.

communicated these to their respective groups or agencies. One of the initial tasks for the Committee was the development of a Community Grants Program (see Section 3.4) which was widely promoted across the municipality.

What was achieved

These Committees were able to utilise State Government funds to support over one hundred community activities in each funded municipality. For many of these activities, the Committee also sought funding from other sources, thus enhancing the quality of the activity and promoting local partnerships. The Community Grants Programs attracted many submissions from different types of community groups and many smaller community activities were funded by these Programs. A substantial number of these community activities evolved into annual events that provided valuable ongoing support to drought-affected communities.

Challenges faced

The biggest and most immediate challenge facing the Community Recovery Committees was collecting and collating up-to-date information about every available form of drought assistance. It was difficult to obtain concise and consistent information regarding eligibility criteria due to the fact that many government and non-government organisations had developed different assistance programs. Patience and perseverance were rewarded by the creation of comprehensive information packages that were distributed throughout the community.

It was also difficult to ensure that information about forthcoming activities, workshops and other community events was disseminated in a timely fashion across the whole community. The development of a comprehensive communication strategy was found to be an effective method to overcome this difficulty. This strategy,

which required input from the local government authority, key community groups and local agencies, clearly articulated each organisation's roles and responsibilities to ensure effective communication. Communication methods included:

- the use of display spaces in local resource centres, shire offices, businesses and other agencies;
- the expansion of existing websites to include the State-wide DSRS, information about drought and recovery from the DHS, outcomes of the local Committee meetings, and details of the Community Grants Program; and
- the production of a drought information flyer which included contact details for the CDO, the members of the Committee, and a range of local services and government assistance programs.

Lessons learnt

The main lesson learnt from establishing and maintaining an effective Community Recovery Committee was the importance of having wide representation from the community on this Committee. This ensured that community members were able to identify both the major drought issues affecting the community and the community's current needs. Equally as important was supporting the community to develop and implement its own solutions to best meet these needs. Underpinning the work of the Committee was the active participation of a range of local service providers, organisations and agencies on the Committee, and an effective means of communicating information both to and from the community.

3.6 Organising a Community Grants Program

Community Grants Programs brought a range of benefits to drought-affected communities, the most important of which was an equitable allocation of funds at the local level. Each community activity that was funded by a grant had its own specific beneficial outcomes for those who participated. In addition, some of these

community activities seeded further community activities, and many became regular community events that provided ongoing support for the community.

Making it happen

A full time coordinator for the Community Grants Program was essential. This person was usually the CDO who worked very closely with the local Community Recovery Committee. The Committee's assessment of submissions was effective and efficient because all members of the Committee were able to relate to and understand the needs of all sectors of their community.

What was done

Guidelines for applicants were developed and information about the Community Grants Program was disseminated widely across the community. All types of community groups were encouraged to be proactive and to think creatively as they developed their proposals. The Committee also provided assistance to those groups whose members were not experienced in applying for grants.

What was achieved

Each community group that received a grant was required to provide feedback to the Committee about numbers of people attending and the outcome of the funded activity. Although applications from most community groups were successful, even the unsuccessful few did benefit from the experience as they were then able to use these applications when seeking funding from other sources.

Challenges faced

A significant challenge was ignoring the voices of the 'doom-sayers' in the community who believed that the Community Grants Program was a waste of money. They could not see the benefit of keeping people involved in social activities that

took them off their farms. However, these people were in the minority and most of them later apologised when they observed what the Program had achieved.

Lessons learnt

For a relatively small amount of money, a lot can be achieved to support a drought-affected community. By directly supporting local activities, government funds do not provide charity, but rather, they contribute to an improvement in health and wellbeing across the entire community by encouraging personal pride and local ownership. The Community Grants Programs were a means to distribute funds fairly as they did not target individuals and they kept people's integrity intact.

Community Grants Program - Guidelines for applicants

Comprehensive but user friendly guidelines should include the following information:

1. What is the purpose of the funding
2. Who is eligible
3. What criteria must the application meet
 - Lodged with the Committee on Application Form provided
 - Applicants must be residents of the municipality
 - Members of Community Recovery Committee who are members of a community group applying for funding must declare a conflict of interest
 - Maximum of \$500¹⁴ available per activity
 - Preference for activities that will give sustainable value to social infrastructure and become self-funding in future
 - Clearly state identified need or reasons for activity
 - Describe benefits of activity

¹⁴ Or other amount as determined by the Committee.

- Demonstrate that activity is feasible (provide detailed budget)
 - Ensure that activity does not duplicate an existing service and is not the responsibility of another agency or program
 - Highlight value for money to local community by describing in-kind contributions from other organisations, other funding sources and extensive cooperation with other community groups
 - Clearly indicate how success of activity will be measured
 - Identify target groups and reason for prioritising this group
 - Requirement for applicant to report success or otherwise of activity
4. What the selection process entails
- Deadline dates
 - The assessment process
 - Notification of application outcome
 - Forwarding of funding cheques

An Application Form should be included in the guidelines and should require the applicant to provide the following details

1. Organisation details
2. Applicant's declaration
3. Description of proposed project /activity
 - contact details
 - description
 - aims, objectives and outcomes
 - stakeholders
 - evaluation criteria
 - timelines
 - cost breakdown
 - income sources

4 Activities

Community activities that were undertaken in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region are listed in this section. Information about each activity was provided by the respective organiser of that activity and may include all or some of the following:

- the reason for proposing this activity;
 - a description of the activity and the cost;
 - any specific achievements; and
 - any important lessons learnt.
-

4.1 Promoting Social Connectedness

Trivia Night (\$50)

Why we started

Local Red Cross group did not have enough funds to sustain the group.

Making it happen

Funds were provided to purchase an item that was raffled at a trivia night.

What we achieved

Sufficient funds were raised from the raffle to empower this community group.

Community Working Bee (\$60)

Why we started

The local facilities needed repairs and a general clean-up.

What we did

Local residents brought their tools and trailers, and gave of their time and expertise. Catering was provided for the shared meal that followed the work activities.

What we achieved

Encouraged men, women and children to come together and socialise after a productive working bee.

Water Worries Workshop (\$80)

Why we started

The need to bring people from the local horticulture industry together and provide information about drought and support for each other.

What we did

A guest speaker from State Department of Primary industries was engaged and information show bags were distributed.



What we achieved

Encouraged people from the horticultural industry to come and talk about their industry, and support each other. Provided an opportunity to discuss the work of the Community Recovery Committee and the counselling services available locally.

Meat Pack Get Together (\$100-\$300)

Why we started

The local Community Recovery Committee suggested a get together for farmers and their families. The dairy farmers were a group that was particularly affected by the drought, so any supportive activities were very important for them.

What we did

Meat was provided by the Community Recovery Committee to assist with the catering costs for a community meal and packs of information were distributed.

What we achieved

A social event was held that also raised awareness of the activities of the Community Recovery Committee, how to look after your health and where people can get help when they need it.

Spinners and Weavers (\$120 - \$350)

Why we started

To support local women with an interest in these ancient crafts.

Making it happen

Funds provided for a meat pack to assist with catering.

What we achieved

A social gathering of women from the land with a shared interest.

Community Bike Ride & BBQ (\$150)

Why we started

The local Presbyterian Church noted that there was a lack of community activities for its congregation.

What we achieved

A community bike ride provided farming families with an opportunity to engage in some physical activity and socialise with their neighbours at a fun BBQ.

A Day Out in the Region (\$150)

Why we started

The local art community needed to be inspired to continue their creative works.

Making it happen

A bus trip was organised to support local artists as they created artworks based on the region's forests, land and natural environment.

What we did

A bus was provided to transport the artist-in-residence at the local Art Gallery, interested community members and artists to specific spots of natural beauty.

What we achieved

The local art community was supported.

Japanese Exchange Students (\$150)

Why we started

Funds were required to support the visit of several exchange students from Japan.

Making it happen

Funds were made available to the host families who were predominantly farming families.

What we achieved

A memorable and enjoyable exchange visit for the students and the host families.

Launch of the Boat Ramp (\$150)

Why we started

Request from the local Progress Association that had worked hard to have a boat ramp constructed.

Making it happen

Funds were provided to cater for the event.

What we achieved

A community 'get together' was held that would not have occurred without the funding from the Community Grants Program.

Father's Day Lunch for the family (\$150)

Why we started

Some farming families had limited funds to celebrate Father's Day.

What we did

The Pre-School provided a lunch for the families of its pre-schoolers to share.

What we achieved

Fifty farming families came together to celebrate Father's Day.

Welcome Party for New Residents (\$160)

Why we started

New residents in a small town wanted to meet their neighbours and learn about the area.

Making it happen

Funds were provided for a meat pack and an information pack for new residents.

What we did

A new residents' welcome pack was collated and distributed at a community BBQ.

What we achieved

New and old residents in a small town mingled and shared information about the area.

Bowls Social Night (\$180)

Why we started

A need to support the local bowls club.

Making it happen

Catering was funded for an evening of night bowls.

What we achieved

A small community was able to come together for a BBQ and a social game of bowls.

Country Music and Dance (\$200)

Why we started

The newly formed country music club was struggling for funds to stay in existence.

What we achieved

A dance was attended by forty people who came together to socialise, participate in some enjoyable physical activity and raise funds for their club.

Create a Bright Mural (\$200)

Why we started

The Progress Association identified that the local youth did not feel that they belonged in the community.

What we did

Engaged a professional mural painter to work with local youth.

What we achieved

Fifty local young people designed a community mural and developed a sense of ownership and belonging.

Spring Garden Festival (\$200)

Why we started

The local primary school had been hit hard by the drought and had little funding available for extra-curricula activities such as school camps.

What we did

A festival for the whole community was organised to view spring gardens and raise funds for the school camp.

What we achieved

Sufficient funds were raised to allow the school camp to be held.

Community 'Melbourne Cup' Celebration (\$240)

Why we started

The local Hall Committee and Progress Association suggested an imaginative way to strengthen their small community.

What we achieved

A community activity where people had some fun and celebrated a national event was attended by eighty people, including itinerant workers.

Youth of the Year (\$250)

Why we started

The local Lions Club was seeking assistance to engage a speaker for the Youth of the Year awards evening.

What we did

Funded a suitable guest speaker so this important social event could occur.

What we achieved

The Youth of the Year award created a sense of achievement in a depressed, drought-affected community.

Youth and Community Expo (\$300)

Why we started

The community was not aware of the many and varied services available to them.

What we did

Many resources from local service providers and community groups were displayed, and we provided an opportunity for the community to participate in an outdoor picture theatre.

What we achieved

Over 300 men, women and children from many ethnic backgrounds attended and learnt about the many and varied services available to them, while also enjoying a community activity.

Anniversary Celebrations (\$380 - \$1380)

Why we started

Several local groups could not raise sufficient funds to celebrate their special anniversaries, due to the pressures that the drought was placing on their members.

Making it happen

Funding provided for catering and facility hire.

What we achieved

CWA 70th Birthday - Sixty-four people came together in celebration and the event developed much enthusiasm amongst association members.

Robinvale 80th Anniversary - Six hundred people attended to celebrate this milestone in the history of this small town.

Christmas in June (\$450)

Why we started

An opportunity for a community 'get together' during the colder months.

Making it happen

Catering costs were covered by the Community Recovery Committee.

What we achieved

A social event to support a small community.

Playwright Workshop (\$470)

Why we started

Rural communities have limited opportunities to express themselves and tell their stories.

What we did

The local Adult Centre of Education was engaged to guide local communities to use writing as an avenue to express themselves and to record the local history.

What we achieved

Twenty people learnt a new strategy to assist them in difficult times.

Community Christmas BBQ & Christmas Lights Award Ceremony (\$500)

Why we started

Suggestion made by the local community.

What we achieved

One hundred people came together at a BBQ and celebrated the festive season by enjoying a display of Christmas lights.



A Mustering of Shearers and Shedhands (\$500)

Why we started

After viewing a photographic exhibition, "*The Shearers: Scenes around the Shed*", in the Regional Art Gallery, several Committee members noted that very few opportunities existed for shearers, shedhands and farmers to come together.

Making it happen

The Committee formed a partnership with the Regional Art Gallery and Committee members personally invited local contract shearers and shedhands to a free barbeque lunch.

What we did

Held a special viewing of the photographic exhibition and provided a free meal and complimentary drinks for shearers, shedhands and farmers, where they were encouraged to share their own stories.

What we achieved

One hundred people attended the barbeque and there was a fantastic exchange of local stories. A group of contract shearers organised a bus to transport them to the event. The Regional Art Gallery was made aware of this large sector of the community who did not traditionally attend photographic exhibitions. The shearers, shedhands and farmers were exposed to a new leisure activity and several have since visited the Art Gallery to view other exhibitions.

Challenges we faced

It was difficult to encourage shearers, shedhands and farmers to attend an exhibition at the Art Gallery, as many had never been to an art gallery.. Personal invitations to local shearers and the provision of free food and refreshments overcame this difficulty.

Lessons learnt

Events should be organised with input from key participants.

Assisting the local New Year's Day celebration (\$550)

Why we started

A small local community's increased need for support after experiencing both ongoing drought and severe storm devastation.

What we did

Encouraged participation in the New Years' Day celebration and supported the event by organising appropriate shade facilities in the form of marquees and umbrellas.

What we achieved

Support for a community experiencing severe hardship.

Children's Camps / Weekends Away (\$660)

Why we started

Many families could not afford to pay for their children to attend school camps or weekend outings.

Making it happen

The Community Recovery Committee contacted local schools and made funds available to allow disadvantaged students to attend.

What we did

Financial resources were provided to a number of local schools to fund the attendance of children from struggling families to attend camps or weekend outings.

What we achieved

School children were able to attend the Portsea Camp, the Adventure Park Children's Holiday and other camps during the holidays.

Performing Arts Theatre (\$690)

Why we started

Farming families could not pay for their children to attend a performance at the local performing arts theatre.

Making it happen

Tickets to the performance were subsidised and free buses provided to transport all students.

What we achieved

Rural primary school students were able to participate in a cultural event and their families' finances were not further strained.

Community Melodrama and Games Night (\$700)

Why we started

The representative from a small community on the Community Recovery Committee identified that their community members wanted to have a night out together, but could not afford this.

What we did

Local groups, such as the Progress Association, the Hall Committee, the Lions Club, the golf club, the football club, the primary school and the local government authority, collaborated to organise a community event that utilized local talent and other local resources.

What we achieved

The community came together to share an evening meal and listen to the children participating in a melodrama with adults providing the talk over. They played games, laughed and enjoyed themselves while also raising funds.

Lessons learnt

Without the initial funds provided by the Community Recovery Committee, this event would not have been attempted.

Rain Dancers Ball (\$800)

Why we started

Many farmers are concerned that local young people are moving away from the rural areas for work opportunities and social activities.

Making it happen

A Young Farmers Group partnered with a Young Professionals Group, the local cropping Group, the Farmers Federation and the local hospital to organise a social event for young people.

What we did

A ball for one hundred young people was held and free transport was organised for anyone living in isolated areas.

What we achieved

New networks were created between local young people.

CWA Rally in the Murray Valley (\$810)

Why we started

Country women have been struggling through the worst drought in their lives.

What we did

A luncheon was held for farming women where they socialised and revitalised.

What we achieved

One hundred and thirty women supported each other.

Welcome To The Paddle Steamer (\$900)

Why we started

The Progress Association wanted to celebrate the first visit of this paddle steamer to this town.

What we achieved

A very successful community welcome was given to the steamer as two hundred people watched its arrival and shared a BBQ.

Scout and Guide Gang Show (\$900)

Why we started

The cost of transport often results in children from rural communities not being able to attend entertainment that is held in larger regional centres.

Making it happen

Funds were provided to hire a bus.

What we achieved

Substantial pressure was taken off rural families who could not afford to take their children to see this show.

Derek Guilles and the Ugly Uncles (\$1000 - \$1500)

Why we started

There are very few opportunities to laugh and have fun during prolonged drought.

Making it happen

Free transport was organised to ensure that all residents, including those from outlying farms, could attend.

What we achieved

Engaged well known comedians to provide a night of fun, laughter and dancing, away from the day to day pressures of the farm, for several small communities in the region.

Splash in Lake Boga (\$1300)

Why we started

The local lake was to be filled with water and the community wanted to celebrate.

Making it happen

The local lions Club engaged a jazz band, a plane aerobatics group and a guest speaker to enrich this celebration.

What we achieved

The community actively came together and shared a BBQ, whilst being entertained.

Children's Life be In It Activities - Harness Racing (\$1325 - \$1500)

Why we started

Families needed time away from the pressures of day to day life.

What we did

A night for the whole family to enjoy was held at the local harness racing club.

What we achieved

Three to five hundred people of all ages relaxed for an evening.

Air Time: Stories from the Land (\$1500)

Why we started

A new community radio station needed support.

Making it happen

Rural people were encouraged to tell their stories about their experiences on the land.

What we did

Community radio announcers asked people to call with their stories which were shared with the entire community.

What we achieved

The rural community was brought together to celebrate their personal stories.

Art and Craft Activities (\$1500)

Why we started

Funds were required to support a social event for the elderly.

Making it happen

The Community Recovery Committee provided the funds and approached the local primary school to allow their students to work with the elderly. .

What we achieved

A range of art and craft activities, including pottery, mosaics, painting and card-making, were undertaken by elderly residents with the assistance of local primary school children.

Cultural Festival (\$1500 - \$1800)

Why we started

The local Network House wanted to repeat the successful Cultural Festival that had been held in previous years, but could not afford it this year.

What we did

Local talented people contributed to a social event.

What we achieved

A celebration of the diverse cultures represented in the community.

Promotional Flyers for Breast Cancer Support Group

Why we started

The local breast cancer support group could not produce flyers to promote their educational events for women who were suffering with breast cancer.

Making it happen

The Community Recovery Committee provided sufficient funds to print the promotional materials.

What we did

Flyers were distributed by the local Division of General Practice.

What we achieved

Many women diagnosed with breast cancer who live in isolated rural communities became aware of a local support group and could participate in its programs.

Community Pipeline Celebration

Why we started

To mark the occasion of the tenth anniversary of this pipeline being laid.

Making it happen

The local Landcare group, Pipeline group and Country Fire Authority organised a social event for all ages.

What we achieved

The three organisations brought the community together to celebrate something positive during a time of hardship.

Drought Relief Concert

Why we started

The local Lions Club suggested that the arrival of the recent rains was a good reason for a celebration.

What we did

Local talent groups, facilities groups and other organisations were approached to organise a community event.

What we achieved

One hundred and eighty-five people of all ages came together to build community spirit and welcome the rains that had started to fill the local lake.

4.2 *Providing Information*

Information Show Bags (No cost involved!)

Why we started

Rural communities needed up-to-date information about drought that would help them survive during times of hardship.

Making it happen

Local service providers were asked to contribute pamphlets and other forms of relevant information about health, education and worksafe.

What we achieved

Information show bags were distributed free of charge to arrange of local agencies and outlets.

Farmbis: Succession and Estate Planning (\$45)



Why we started

All farming families needed to develop a succession plan but very few had had the opportunity to gain the knowledge or skills to do so.

Making it happen

Fuel vouchers were provided for farming families to attend an educational workshop.

What we achieved

Vital information was learnt by farming families who would not have otherwise been able to attend this workshop.

Clearing the Fog (\$85)

Why we started

Dairy farmers were confused with the information being provided by different government agencies.

What we achieved

Dairy farmers were invited to a forum where they could ask questions and receive up-to-date information relevant to their industry.

Growers Meeting (\$300)

Why we started

Local growers had little opportunity to meet and discuss issues regarding the coming harvest.

Making it happen

Funds were provided to cater for a social activity for growers.

What we achieved

One hundred growers from the entire region meet in a social environment and

discussed the options available to them as they planned the harvest.



Ladies Agricultural Experience (\$320)

Why we started

Ladies were interested to learn about the regional agricultural industries, but were keen to participate in an educational experience rather than just a walk in the local paddocks.

Making it happen

The Department of Primary Industries was engaged to discuss the wide range of local produce, and to describe its journey beyond the farm gate.

What we achieved

Sixty women attend an enjoyable social event where they also learnt about their local industries.

Conservation and Koori Cultural Day (\$820)

Why we started

To support small schools in the municipality whose students are predominantly

indigenous young people.

Making it happen

Engaged local Natural Resources agencies and the National Heritage Trust.

What we did

Organised a day of activities to raise students' awareness of local fauna, including reptiles and frogs.

What we achieved

Students from two rural schools participated in an enjoyable social event whilst learning about their natural environment.

Environment Festival (\$1030)

Why we started

School children needed social interaction as well as education.

What we did

Funds provided to bring school children together from several schools in a 50Km radius. The range of educational displays about the natural environment included snakes alive, water saving, recycle and reuse, and biodiversity.

What we achieved

School children enjoyed a fun day mixing with other students in the region and learnt about nature.

Farm Safety Expo (\$6,000)

Why we started

A need to reduce the incidence of accidental deaths and farm injuries.

Making it happen

This activity required work with local community groups over many months.

What we did

A three-day expo was held.

What we achieved

The provision of an ongoing activity to reduce the number of accidental deaths and farm injuries.

Money for your future and a future for you (\$10,000)

Why we started

The older age groups of the population in rural communities need to prepare for their retirement to ensure the community remains sustainable.

Making it happen

The Community Recovery Committee partnered with local accountants, financial planners, solicitors, health service providers and representatives of all levels of government to showcase the options available to those approaching the end of their working lives. Extensive promotion of this event included media releases and advertisements in all local newspapers, a flyer distributed widely via local networks and at Field Days, announcements on local radio and word of mouth.

What we did

Catering was funded by the Community Recovery Committee, who also paid for a magician to be Master of Ceremonies.

What we achieved

Three hundred people attended a one day retirement seminar and were able to ask questions of experts in this field.

Lessons learnt

- Plan well ahead of the event date.
- Involve the target groups in planning the event.

- Develop a strong collaborative planning group with representation from both the public and private sectors.
 - Participants to register prior to the event.
 - Offer rewards for those who register early.
 - Target workplaces to encourage workers to attend.
 - Encourage promotion through the finance and planning related industries.
 - Avoid holding this event on Sundays, during school holidays or when other local events are scheduled.
-

4.3 Keeping individuals healthy

Communicating and Connecting Seminar (\$90)

Why we started

Many in the community had noted that the drought had caused much stress and grief across the community, and people needed new coping strategies.

What we did

The Progress Association and the Family Care agency were engaged and provided guest speakers to discuss subjects such as loss, grief, suicide prevention and parenting.

What we achieved

The women who attended had an increased awareness of parenting, living with teenagers and suicide prevention.

Mental Health Day (\$90)

Why we started

Local youth identified the need for young people to learn about mental illness.

Making it happen

Engaged Beyond Blue and local mental health services to provide an educational day for young people.

What we achieved

Local youth ran a mental health day for their peers, where they all learnt new coping skills as well as how to recognise mental health problems in young people.

A Day For Me (\$140)

Why we started

Farming women had expressed an interest in developing new coping skills that would assist in creating better balance in their lives.

Making it happen

Farmbis was engaged to deliver a one day program to meet these requests.

What we achieved

Speakers presented information about stress management, conflict management, time management and work/life balance.

Falls and Balance Program (\$200)

Why we started

Older people in rural communities need to avoid falls.

What we achieved

Health providers from the local health service were engaged to teach older adults how to gain strength and keep their hearts healthy.

Seasonal Workers Information Pack (\$200)

Why we started

Many itinerant workers do not have the opportunity to attend educational events to learn about health matters.

Making it happen

The Community Recovery Committee partnered with the local health service, the local Development and Information Centre, local caravan parks and the Division of General Practice to compile a pack of printed information.

What we achieved

Distributed packs of information to accommodation sites and work places that

seasonal workers were known to frequent.

Active Girls Breakfast (\$300)

Why we started

The local Sports Assembly identified the need to encourage girls to be more active during their teenage years.

What we achieved

Breakfast was provided for year 7 to 12 students and a motivational speaker addressed them during the meal.

Cardio-Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program (\$300)

Why we started

Many people with coronary health problems, who required rehabilitation, could not afford the costs of travelling to a local rehabilitation program.

What we achieved

Free transport was provided to those interested in attending the six week program.

Women on the Move (\$400)

Why we started

As a result of the Women's Health Expo (see above), health service providers noted that many women wanted to learn more about being physically active.

What we achieved

Funds were provided to engage expert speakers to run a six week program that provided the theory of exercise as well as practical sessions to show women how to be more physically active.

Swimming for Women from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds (\$400)

Why we started

Newly arrived women from the Horn of Africa identified a need to have a culturally appropriate meeting place for them to undertake physical activity.

Making it happen

The local hospital approached the owners of a private heated swimming pool.

What we achieved

A social activity for newly arrived women from different cultures that also encompassed some physical activity in a non-threatening environment.

Men's Health Information Breakfast (\$500)

Why we started

Men in rural communities do not access health information that is provided by traditional communication methods.

Making it happen

The local health service attended Field Days where farmers met regularly.

What we achieved

Written information about issues of relevance to men's health was distributed and health service providers were available to answer any questions.

Women's Participation Program (\$570)

Why we started

The Committee identified that isolated women needed an opportunity to learn ways of staying healthy.

Making it happen

Fuel vouchers were made available to assist women to attend a six week program.

What we achieved

Fifteen women from isolated areas in the municipality were able to learn about a range of health matters, including how to keep active.

Women's Health Expo (\$570)

Why we started

A survey of local women identified the need for this event.

Making it happen

The Community Recovery Committee partnered with the local health service, Division of General Practice, the local Improvement Group and the Progress Association to organise an expo that was held on three consecutive evenings.

What we did

A free bus was provided and fuel vouchers were available for anyone who wanted one.

What we achieved

One hundred and eighty women attended the Expo and gained an additional benefit from socialising with other women during the bus trips on each of the three evenings. A range of topics were discussed at the Expo and individual questions were addressed.

Menopause Information Night (\$580)

Why we started

A need for accurate information about menopause was identified by local women.

Making it happen

The regional health service and the local Division of General Practice collaborated to deliver an evening of relevant information.

What we achieved

Sixty women aged 35 years and over learnt up-to-date information about an issue that concerned them.

Men's Health Information Night (\$600)

Why we started

A local survey amongst men had identified the need for such an event.

Making it happen

A free bus was made available for men living in remote areas and fuel vouchers were also distributed to anyone who wanted one.

What we did

Guest speakers were invited to present up-to-date information about a range of health matters of importance to men, and free printed materials were available for participants to collect.

What we achieved

Sixty men aged 30 to 70 years attended an evening where they were encouraged to socialize and were taught how to adopt a healthy lifestyle. As a result, many men registered for further health programs and medical checkups.

Yoga Retreat (\$600)

Why we started

Rural women needed some time away from the pressures created by living with continuous drought.

Making it happen

A local yoga teacher was engaged and a local venue was hired for half a day.

What we achieved

Thirteen women were provided with an opportunity to participate in a relaxing yoga session.

Tissues: Teen Issues (\$1990)

Why we started

Static information displayed at the National Week Against Violence prompted the local Sexual Assault Unit to engage professionals to provide education for secondary school students.

Making it happen

Actors were funded to present plays with an educational message to students in several local secondary colleges.

What we achieved

Empowered local students by raising their awareness that violence is never an acceptable behaviour.

Depression Awareness Audio Tapes & CDs (\$2000)

Why we started

The prevalence of depression is very high in rural communities, but members of these communities often have limited understanding of this mental illness.

What we did

Audio tapes and CDs were purchased from a nearby resource centre which had developed the recording, *Open Your Eyes To Depression*.

What we achieved

One thousand tapes and CDs were distributed free of charge throughout the municipality, particularly to farmers and other community members who could not attend health education events.

Yeah festival (\$2000)

Why we started

Local youth groups identified a need amongst secondary school students to learn about keeping healthy.

What we achieved

An expo for year 9 and 10 students was organised and provided hands-on activities and displays that delivered health information messages in a novel way.



Blokes Night Out - Health Promotion Night

Why we started

Men affected by drought tend to isolate themselves from services. This activity aimed to provide information about health issues and community resources in a non-threatening environment, and to promote social interaction and networking amongst men. We also aimed to raise the community's awareness of these men and their situation by involving key local sponsors.

Making it happen

A counsellor from local Community Health Service and the CDO visited farms and decided to hold a night of entertainment for men which would get them together and talking.

What we did

We applied for funds then booked a health care professional and an entertainer (Rod Quantock). The event was advertised widely and we sought a range of local sponsors. After the event, its success was widely reported in the local media.

What we achieved

One hundred and thirty men and two women enjoyed a three course meal for \$5 at the local golf club and interacted with each other. They listened to a men's health nurse discussing men's health issues (eg depression, prostate checks) and enjoyed an entertaining show. Written evaluation sheets were distributed to all who attended and 110 sheets were completed. Almost all were very happy with the event and would like it to be held annually. Key messages that were taken away from the event included the need for men to look after themselves, have regular medical checks and tell the doctor if they are worried about things.

Challenges we faced

Men did not want to come to the night, as they thought it would be a 'pep talk'. To overcome this, we emphasized that this event was a night of quality entertainment rather than a health event, and provided lots of give-aways and raffles.

Lessons learnt

- Find out what your target group really want, rather than what you think they want.
- Make the activity fun and don't skimp – have one really good event rather than lots of 'ho hum' little ones.
- Get a few 'difficult customers' on side, and let them promote your event.

Why we started

This activity aimed:

1. to provide opportunities for personal development;
2. to encourage creativity in communities; and
3. to assist participants to use writing as a therapeutic tool to record their personal stories / local history.

Making it happen

Contacted Writer's Learning Centre in Melbourne to facilitate two training days.

What we did

Two-day weekend workshops covering local history and story-telling aspects of writing were repeated in three locations in the municipality.

What we achieved

Developed stronger, more positive communities by guiding participants to enrich the local history by capturing their own local stories. The local newspaper published all these stories and some stories were read aloud at a celebratory lunch.

Strength Building Program for Women

Why we started

Stresses currently being experienced by rural and remote communities have led to a reduced level of mental health for many people. Research evidence shows that women are twice as likely as men to experience depression and anxiety in their lives, and that strength training may improve mental health by giving these women a greater sense of control in their lives.

What we did

A ten week strength building program for women was held to complement the medical support that these women received from their doctor or case worker.

What we achieved

The activity provided an opportunity for women to join a small group and meet weekly to learn about stress, depression and anxiety, as well as effective strategies to help them cope. It was a model for creating change within communities by enhancing relationships within families and communities.

Community Forum

Why we started

The community is experiencing a crisis due to a number of stressors (i.e. ongoing drought and recent government decisions about a proposed waste facility) and require professional assistance to support them emotionally.

What we did

Provided a community forum facilitated by a clinical psychologist, to address health-related issues that occur in communities in crisis.

What we achieved

A small community has been supported in a time of crisis.

Anger management program

Why we started

To support a small drought-affected community, particularly farming families and small business owners, who was experiencing a crisis due to the impact of recent government decisions.

What we did

A series of workshops was held for the community.

What we achieved

Community members who were more aware of anxiety disorders, trauma and pain management.

Women's Contribution During Harvest / Festive Season

Why we started

To support local women as they prepare for the harvest and the festive season.

Making it happen

The Committee formed a partnership with the local health service, the Community Network House, Centrelink and other relevant local agencies, to develop a 'drought information' pack comprising information about stress and depression, and a list of local service providers who can assist people with mental health problems.

What we did

A special day was organised for women to have some time off, to laugh, to have some fun, to share thoughts and to get ready for the busy harvest / festive season. The event was publicised widely and morning tea, afternoon tea and a 'harvest' lunch treat were ordered for the day. A social support worker discussed how to create a stress-free harvest, a health promotion worker led a physical activity session, various relaxation techniques were demonstrated and a 'harvest' massage was provided for all participants.

What we achieved

Twelve women participated in a day that provided positive support for farming women and vital information about maintaining mental health.

Challenges we faced

It was difficult to get farming women together as they are very busy people. Engaging local people to promote the event and local groups/businesses to cater for the event, ensured its success.

Lessons learnt

Women play an important role in farming families; they are the glue that keeps the family together during difficult times. But these women need some time out and support to continue this vital role.

4.4 Supporting Local Business Owners (including Farmers)

Planning for Success – Achieving Your Business and Personal Goals (\$3,000)

Why we started

As the drought was having a negative impact on many local businesses, we provided this training to support these businesses owners.

Making it happen

The Committee facilitated the formation of a partnership between the local government authority, local Small Business Association, and the State Government Department of Primary Industries, which organised and promoted a workshop. A suitable professional facilitator was identified and engaged, and the State Government agreed to subsidise the cost for all participants.

What we did

Workshops were held in two major towns in the municipality, and provided an opportunity for participants to learn new ideas about how to enhance their business or farming enterprise. A skilful facilitator guided them in the creation of individual action plans for the future.

What we achieved

Fifty local business owners attended and participants' feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Two of these businesses have reported a growth in their business as a direct result of this workshop. The facilitator focused on what people could do today to make a positive difference on their business. A simple process comprising twelve steps was presented as the 'take home' message to assist participants reach their business goal.

Challenges we faced

It was vital to form strong partnerships with key local organisations to ensure that a sufficient number of participants from a wide range of businesses attended the

workshop.

Lessons learnt

The workshop encouraged participants to focus on the things that they had control over and could change, rather than the things they had no control over and couldn't change.



Supporting local emergency services

Why we started

To provide an opportunity for the community to show appreciation for and support the local hospital and local branch of Country Fire Authority, Rural Ambulance, State Emergency Service and Victoria Police.

What we did

With the assistance of many local sponsors, organised a formal cabaret with quality entertainment where participants learnt about their local emergency services and raised funds for them.

What we achieved

This activity established a local emergency fund which would assist local emergency services in the future.

Why we started

To encourage viable farms for the future by providing an opportunity for farming businesses, agribusinesses, financial companies, training providers and government agencies to get together and:

- showcase products and websites available;
- showcase new and emerging technology;
- demonstrate the benefits of marketing via website technology; and
- discuss concerns of farmers and agribusiness owners attempting to utilise new products and new technology.

What we did

Provision of a one-day expo about the use of the internet and other electronic technology for farmers.

What we achieved

Skilled farmers who have a more positive attitude about the future.

4.5 *Training the Community*

Strength Building Program: Train the Trainer (\$120 per person)

Why we started

Building physical strength is a valuable tool to reduce stress, depression and anxiety, and may assist women to cope and experience greater sense of control in their lives.

What we did

Organised a three-day program for staff from local services, where they were trained to teach strength building for women.

What we achieved

Skilled trainers who can deliver a strength building program for women.

Kids Help Line (\$400)

Why we started

Local statistics revealed that youth suicide and depression were prevalent in rural areas.

Making it happen

The local hospital was engaged and provided professional staff who delivered peer skill training for secondary school students.

What we achieved

Students in rural schools were better equipped to support their peers during the difficult transition period of adolescence.

Student leadership program (\$500)

Why we started

This activity aimed:

1. to promote youth leadership by encouraging involvement and provision of input from youth on community issues and factors of rural life relating to youth; and
2. to involve local youth in the Reach Foundation Program in Melbourne.

Making it happen

A meeting was held with local student leaders and program partners to determine a strategy and outcomes for the activity. A facilitated session was held with youth to determine what they would like to do in relation to a leadership camp. A working group was formed to plan and implement the activity.

What we did

The activity provided two bursaries of \$250 each to be awarded to eligible students from years 9 or 10 at the local secondary college, who would report on youth matters to a community forum.

What we achieved

It was expected that these bursaries would increase the confidence and leadership skills of the two young people, who would then liaise with regional youth groups and other relevant organisations and agencies, in the development of a local leadership program.

Got An Idea? – Make it Happen in your Community (\$500)

Why we started

Members of the Committee identified that the local youth were not actively involved in their community, and suggested that they could be included in community decision-making via Community Improvement / Progress and Development Groups.

Making it happen

The Committee facilitated the formation of a partnership between key local agencies, Regional Arts Victoria and Lead On. A workshop for youth was organised and young people were invited to participate in a range of local planning activities.

What we did

Workshops were held in three major towns in the municipality and participants set their own community goals and developed appropriate action plans. Local youth undertook a number of fund raising activities as the first step towards achieving these goals, and will be supported by the Community Improvement / Progress and Development Groups in the future.

What we achieved

The goals and actions that were the outcomes of the three respective workshops are listed below:

TOWN ONE

Goal	To raise funds for their skate park
Actions	Held a Junior Disco Participated in community activities via the Progress Association Organised working bees at the skate park.

TOWN TWO

Goals	To be represented on the Progress Association To raise funds to improve the infrastructure of the Community Hall
Actions	Community working bees organised at the Community Hall Organised and held a community movie night Organised and held a casserole night Youth representative elected onto the Progress Association

TOWN THREE

Goal	To raise funds for a skate park and pony club jumps
Actions	A youth group was formed and met regularly

A youth representative attended meetings of local Progress Association

Community Fun Day held and funds raised.

Challenges we faced

Getting youth and other community members to work together was difficult at times, but was assisted by mediation.

Lessons learnt

By providing the opportunity for local youth to be involved in their community decisions-making processes, young people will enthusiastically contribute to these communities in the future.

Lifeline Training (\$550)

Why we started

Knowledge to understand and skills to assist people who may be suffering from mental illness are particularly important for both professionals who work in rural areas and residents who live there.

What we achieved

A guest speaker was engaged to discuss strategies that professionals and non-professionals alike can use when dealing with someone who may be suffering from depression or who may be at risk of suicide.

Our Community (\$600)

Why we started

A need to improve submission writing skills of community groups was identified by the Community Recovery Committee.

Making it happen

Catering was provided and a venue was hired to facilitate this training session.

What we achieved

Staff from several local government authorities and from the State Department of Human Services were engaged to deliver a training session to assist community groups and organisations to write successful submissions.



Creative Volunteering (\$1080)

Why we started

Several community groups identified that they wanted to learn how to ensure their groups remained viable.

Making it happen

Engaged Regional Arts Victoria to facilitate six workshops.

What we achieved

Representatives of several community groups were equipped with skills and knowledge to assist in attracting and keeping volunteers.

Developing Our Community (\$8,000)

Why we started

The future sustainability of rural communities relies on their ability to develop and progress together towards a common goal.

What we did

The Community Recovery Committee partnered with the local Progress Associations and Improvement Groups to facilitate community meetings in eight towns in the municipality.



What we achieved

Each community group was guided to envisage a goal for that community and to develop an appropriate action plan.

Future Leaders' Course

Why we started

This activity aimed to encourage youth involvement in local communities by encouraging youth networking across the municipality and providing young people with tools and strategies to make a difference in their own life and in their community.

What we did

Applications for attendance in this course were sought from students at year 9 level in local secondary colleges. Each student was required to write a brief submission explaining why they want to become a youth leader.

What we achieved

This course broke down barriers to youth involvement in local communities, encouraged personal motivation of young people, developed trust, and improved communication, negotiation and leadership skills of young people.

Conflict resolution

Why we started

To encourage better communication skills amongst community members.

What we did

A one-day workshop covering conflict resolution and negotiation skills was held.

What we achieved

This activity reduced tension and stress in participants.

Creative Volunteering program

Why we started

The need to develop more active communities by improving skills in planning, finding funds, marketing and presentation amongst volunteer community groups.

What we did

The provision of a 4 week program held on two days each week, to increase the skills of volunteers.

What we achieved

More skilled volunteers.

Working effectively with distressed clients

Why we started

To provide skills training for service providers who deal with distressed clients from a community in crisis.

What we did

Provided a one-day skills development session for local service providers

What we achieved

Skilled service providers who can assist communities who are recovering from drought and individuals who are having difficulty coping with government decisions.

Depression awareness training

Why we started

To provide skills training for service providers and community members about the signs of depression.

What we did

Provided a training session for service providers and interested community

members.

What we achieved

Service providers and residents of small communities who are skilled in the recognition of depression.

5 Other Useful Resources

People from the DHS Loddon Mallee Region who have been intimately involved with drought recovery activities and who are willing to provide further assistance are:

- Alana Brennan
 - Campaspe Shire Council, PO Box 35, Echuca, VIC 3564
 - Telephone (03) 5851 3432
 - a.brennan@campaspe.vic.gov.au
- Fiona Gormann
 - Swan Hill Rural City Council, PO Box 488, Swan Hill, VIC 3585
 - Telephone (03) 5036 2376 (BH)
 - Mobile 0429 138 309
 - fgormann@swanhill.vic.gov.au
- Peter Halsall
 - Telephone (03) 5452 2550
 - phalsall@malleenet.net.au
- Carmel Williams, Counsellor
 - Rochester and Elmore District Health Service
 - Telephone (03) 5484 4465 (BH)

The State Emergency Recovery Unit and the Health Promotion Division, both in the DHS (www.dhs.vic.gov.au) can provide information and printed resources.

The national depression initiative, *beyondblue* (www.beyondblue.org.au), provides extensive information about depression and has also produced several valuable resources, such as CDs for children, parents and school teachers.