

2015

It's Up To You For 72

PROJECT REPORT



WOMEN'S HEALTH
GOULBURN NORTH EAST

Challenging inequity, embracing diversity.

Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) was established in July 2000. Previously known as NEWomen, Women's Health Goulburn North East is the government funded, specialist women's health service for the Goulburn Valley and North East Victoria.

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Acknowledgements

Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Border Trust and the YWCA Albury Wodonga Young Women Leading Change Grant Program for their valuable contribution to the *It's Up To You For 72* project.

Project Rationale & Aims

Emergency management services have identified the need for communities and individuals to be self-sustaining for up to 72 hours following a disaster. Recent disasters have shown that emergency services are not able to assist everyone, despite the expectation from many that this will happen. The 72 hour survival message needs to be planned for and understood by individuals and communities. This vital information needs to be available and accessible before a disaster to allow for preparation.

The *It's Up To You For 72* project brought together women of different ages to explore what they know, and what they need to know to prepare for 72 hours following a disaster.

Facilitated workshops were conducted in Rosewhite and Mount Beauty in the Alpine Shire. Two workshops were held in each location and provided an exchange of knowledge and skills between younger women and older women, including sharing of social media skills and an understanding of what is required by a family or individual to be prepared and to manage without assistance for 72 hours. This knowledge was used to develop a relevant, locally based resource for use by the participants and their families.

The project aims were:

- to benefit the project participants through the process of information sharing and learning;
- to encourage active participation in planning for disaster at a personal and community level; and
- to benefit the wider community by providing locally developed information about preparedness, 72 hour survival, and communication options.

Project Background & Planning

In 2012, WHGNE delivered the *Through Women's Eyes* project, which aimed to increase the disaster resilience and community resilience skills of groups of women in the Alpine Shire. One of these groups was the Rosewhite Country Women's Association (CWA), which was established after the 2009 fires as a way for local women to connect and share. At the completion of the *Through Women's Eyes* project, Rosewhite CWA members indicated that they would be very interested in future follow up activities, and were therefore invited to participate in the *It's Up*

To You For 72 project. This opportunity was enthusiastically embraced by members, demonstrating the interest of local women in participating in meaningful and practical activities.

A comment from a participant during the *Through Women's Eyes* project:

"Local people's knowledge and experience is essential for more effective disaster planning, preparation and recovery to develop community resilience before, during and after a disaster. Engaging with local community groups in structured but informal focus groups is fundamental to source local knowledge and ideas, identify individual and group strengths and to working with the community to develop community resilience."

Planning for the *It's Up To You For 72* project included background research on similar initiatives in other locations, for example Queensland's *Harden Up* campaign, the National Rural Women's Network *Weather the Storm*, and Warrandyte Community Association's *Be Ready Warrandyte*.

Recommendations and information from a range of agencies was also reviewed, including the Country Fire Authority (CFA), State Emergency Service (SES), Red Cross, Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Australian Emergency Management Institute, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), and the newly established Emergency Management Victoria.

The rural communities selected for these workshops are still recovering from the effects of the serious 2009 bushfires and more recent smaller disasters, and have been offered a broad range of forums, programs and events in recent years. It was important to develop a level of trust and to respond to the needs of the relevant communities rather than imposing another 'event' upon them.

Careful consideration during the planning phase was given to building on previous local projects and activities, and prioritising 'local ownership' of the project. Consideration was also given to strengthening current disaster resilience, recovery and preparedness initiatives being delivered within the Alpine Shire. Liaison with representatives from CFA, SES and the Alpine Shire's Community Resilience Committee confirmed that the *It's Up To You For 72* project complemented existing initiatives and ensured that the project didn't repeat recent activities by other agencies.

Project Delivery

Workshop Structure

Workshops were held at the Happy Valley Hall, in July and October 2014, with members of the Rosewhite CWA. This group included women from a range of age groups, including a junior CWA member. Most of the participants had lived in the area for a long time and had directly experienced the devastating 2009 bushfires. Other participants were new to the area since the fires and therefore provided a new perspective to disaster preparedness.

The Mount Beauty Neighbourhood Centre was the venue for two workshops, in August and October, and included participants from the Mount Beauty Secondary College CFA Youth Crew, Tawonga Red Cross and Mount Beauty U3A.

All of the workshops were delivered by a professional facilitator, experienced in guiding and generating inclusive group discussion. The venues were specifically selected to create familiar, safe and comfortable learning environments.



Image: Workshop at the Happy Valley Hall with CWA members and facilitator Coral Love

Initial Workshops

The initial workshops in each location focused on:

- shared experiences of disasters, predominately the 2009 bushfires, and the ideas and knowledge gained from those experiences.
- exploration of different types of disasters.
- the availability and access to local resources.
- interactive discussions which included the compilation of preparation tasks required inside and outside of the home for family members, children, elderly people, isolated community members, and animals. Lists of items for emergency kits were developed by the participants, including shared tips and ideas gained from experiences during previous incidents.

Comments from workshop participants included:

“No electricity - no pump - no water”

“Keep an old style phone that can be plugged directly into phone line”

“If no electricity the garage roller door won't open”

“Traditional /usual thinking is impaired – unable to think clearly – normal process and procedures may not be remembered, need to rely on written plans and procedures, checklists, contact lists”

Follow-up Workshops

The follow up workshops incorporated practical, interactive activities including:

- Uploading and use of the Victorian Government's 'FireReady app', with participants sharing with each other their knowledge and technology skills.
- Scanning and photographing important documents for inclusion on USBs and CDs
- Presentations from CFA and SES guest speakers providing up to date information on disaster preparedness, practical demonstrations of emergency kit items, current technology options, provision of current local fire information, methods for sharing new knowledge and resources with family and friends, and positive role modelling of women in senior emergency management roles, in particular to the school students.
- Sue Sheldrick, Community Education Officer, SES, who presented at Mount Beauty was Victoria's first female fire captain. Maureen Piera, Community Education Officer, CFA, presented at the Rosewhite workshop. As a local land owner who protected her house and farm on her own during the 2009 fires, Maureen was able to acknowledge many of the specific experiences and queries from the group.



Image: It's Up To You For 72 workshop at Mount Beauty with Sue Sheldrick from SES and members of the Mount Beauty Secondary College CFA Youth Crew

- As all workshop attendees, facilitators and guest speakers were female, this provided a very safe, trusted setting which enabled a greater level of collaboration, storytelling and openness about fears associated with dealing with difficult situations, during and following disasters. Both guest speakers mentioned that issues of domestic violence often increase post disaster. Resources regarding 'Family Violence Awareness Training' in the Alpine Shire were made available to the workshop participants.
- The SES provided all the Mount Beauty participants with waterproof satchels for storage of important documents and heavy duty gloves to start off their emergency kits.
- Participants were provided with USBs that were pre-loaded with copies of the checklists they had compiled in Workshop 1 – Emergency Kit Checklist, Preparation Checklist for pre, during and post disaster, and an Emergency Contact List template. Also included on the USB were resources from CFA, SES and Red Cross. The *It's Up To You For 72* USBs had extra storage capacity available so that participants could also add their scanned and photographed personal documents and all this information could be stored in one place. The USB was designed to be added to a keyring or included in the emergency kit.
- The catering provided was based on a healthy, self-serve approach to enhance shared conversations during meal breaks, which strengthened the feelings of trust and further developed community connections.



Image: Lunch break at the Happy Valley Hall workshop with members of the Rosewhite CWA

Project Outcomes

Immediate Outcomes

- 29 rural women and girls increased their knowledge and skills, and gained confidence about being prepared for the 72 hours following a disaster. Their commitment to follow up actions will contribute to community wellbeing by increasing preparedness, connecting people across local communities and strengthening local resilience.
- Participants developed an Emergency Kit Checklist, Preparation Checklist with tips for people, property, animals and communication tools, and an Emergency Contact List template. These lists were based on real experiences and relevant local knowledge.



Image: Emergency Kit developed during It's Up To You For 72 workshops

- Quotes from participants, regarding preparation for the 72 hours post disaster, highlight some of the ideas generated during the workshops:

"List process for locking up and leaving house, turn off gas, leave access gates open for fire trucks."

"Battery operated clock and radio"

"Ladder close to house – removal of smoke alarm batteries when alarms are activated (to stop ear piercing noise)"

"When you get new reading glasses put the old ones in your emergency kit"

"Maintain fuel levels in cars, pumps and generators"

"Identify a main family contact person (someone outside the region)"

- The checklists prepared by the participants, and other CFA, SES and Red Cross resources were downloaded onto USB sticks and each participant was provided with two USBs - one for their own use and one to distribute to family and friends when sharing their new knowledge and information. Extra USB storage capacity was provided for the downloading of photos and important documents.

- The majority of workshop participants indicated that they intended to develop an emergency kit with, and for, their families. Participants also offered to go to each other's and neighbour's properties to help with testing the operation of pumps and radios. Actions women thought they were likely to take as a result of the project were to: put together family emergency kits, scan documents and photos onto the USB provided, test-run pumps and generators, update phones, talk with neighbours, inform family and friends about emergency strategies, and:

"Get family and friends to install the Fire Ready app"

"Go and start to prepare a kit and start to fill it up a little bit at a time"

"Buy some wind up equipment"

- The Project Officer's communication and involvement with the Alpine Shire Community Resilience Committee, throughout the duration of the project, increased the awareness of the activities and outcomes of the *It's Up To You For 72* project to representatives of over 20 different agencies. These included regional government departments, local government, health, welfare and emergency management agencies, environmental and church groups who regularly attend the Community Resilience Committee meetings to provide co-ordination for community preparedness, recovery and resilience for major incidents in the Alpine Shire.
 - WHGNE strengthened its partnerships with the community groups involved in the project and with Alpine Shire Council, CFA and SES. The women's experiences and questions about disaster preparedness were shared with Emergency Services, CFA and SES to assist them with their planning.
 - The *It's Up To You For 72* Project Officer was invited to contribute to a disaster preparation workshop at the Australian Women in Agriculture conference held in Melbourne in August 2014. This conference was attended by women from across Australia and Papua New Guinea.
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Medium & Long-Term Outcomes

- The Rosewhite CWA President indicated that disaster preparedness discussions will be included in future CWA meeting agendas and with members of other CWA groups (including Junior CWA members). This will ensure the sustainability of this initiative and the knowledge and learnings will be shared with a wider audience.
 - Rosewhite CWA and Tawonga Red Cross members expressed keen interest in being involved in future similar activities.
 - WHGNE is continuing to develop a suite of research projects, programs and toolkits regarding gender, disaster resilience and family violence, and will be receiving further funding from the Department of Health and Human Services Emergency Management Unit and the Emergency Services Commission Victoria to continue their work in a range of disaster and gender related initiatives. This funding will also provide ongoing executive support to the Victorian Gender and Disaster Taskforce, the first in Australia, which was established in 2014 and is co-chaired by WHGNE's Executive Officer, Susie Reid, along with Craig Lapsley, the Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner. The outcomes of the *It's Up To You For 72* project will be incorporated into these future initiatives.
 - Many partnerships were developed and strengthened during this project, in particular with Alpine Shire and their Community Resilience Committee. Regular updates and project outcomes of *It's Up To You For 72* were provided to the CRC meetings and were shared by all the representatives and their very extensive networks. Alpine Shire conducts Resilience Month in October each year and the *It's Up To You For 72* workshops were advertised as part of the Resilience Month Program of Events in the Alpine Observer.
 - The connection between WHGNE and Alpine Shire's Community Resilience Committee provides a strong, ongoing partnership for future work in the gender and disaster resilience sector. Jan Mock, convenor of the Alpine Shire CRC, is a member of the Victorian Gender and Disaster Taskforce.
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Project Learnings

Trust and Credibility

In small rural communities the delivery of projects such as *It's Up To You For 72* are enhanced when relationships with local community members are created and developed. Working with, and listening to, local community leaders about their needs helps to increase levels of trust and credibility. This was also enhanced by the delivery of two workshops with each group - rather than one-off sessions (which are often seen as fly in-fly out sessions).

Professional Facilitation

As workshop discussions were, at times, related to traumatic bushfire experiences, the careful selection of a professional workshop facilitator was required. A local facilitator was engaged, as she was able to share her personal experiences and was very empathetic, but was also able to provide professional facilitation techniques to guide the participants through the, sometimes emotional, discussions and ensure the delivery of practical ideas and outcomes.

Local Ownership

The final checklists developed by the two groups were quite similar to lists provided by SES, CFA and Red Cross, however, the 'ownership' of the process by the participants in developing their own checklists seemed to embed the information into their personal planning for future events. Participants discussed why certain items were needed, where they could be sourced locally, and the extra tips and ideas that were shared during the discussions were significant as they were relevant to local conditions and based on real life experiences of themselves, family and neighbours.

Storytelling

Sharing of stories and group discussion were identified as most valuable, including the opportunity to hear first-hand the real life experiences of women and girls impacted by the 2009 fires.

"Talking about past situations and what people did in those times to be prepared and fight the fires"

"Talking about it makes you think about it more and implement it in your life"

"Sharing experiences to give a range of inputs and perspectives"

Acknowledgement of Need for Preparation

Although it was over 5 years since the 2009 bushfires many of the participants had not really come to terms with the need for practical preparation. An observation was made that despite the availability of many high-quality, accessible resources on disaster preparation many of the women had not made any practical steps to prepare for future events. It was noted by some that *“if you start preparing then you are acknowledging that another disaster will occur”* – this seemed to be an issue of avoidance. Many of the women had not practically considered the likelihood of them being at home alone, or with children, elderly relatives or animals to support. Discussions in workshops highlighted that many still hadn't talked about their fears, their continuing grief and their sense of guilt - *“my place wasn't burnt; I was away and returned to the area after the fires – I felt I wasn't able to be part of the recovery process.”*

Gender

'Women only' groups provide a different dynamic in the workshop sessions. One student commented, *“it was great that it was only girls”*. It was noted that the women openly supported each other about their concerns and with the sharing of ideas regarding preparedness. The group discussions with other people from their own communities seemed to help highlight the need for preparation.

Long Term Recovery

The project highlighted the need for long term recovery initiatives. Many of the participants hadn't practically considered the need for preparation, as they were still in a recovery phase, despite the provision and availability of multiple resources from major organisations such as CFA, Red Cross and SES.

Community Development and Engagement

The project demonstrated community development processes by enabling people to come together to address issues, generate solutions and take action individually and collectively. It reinforced that genuine community engagement requires the provision of safe, comfortable environments, professional facilitation and a mindfulness of the needs and concerns of the prospective audiences.
