

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN ACTION

DRIVING BUSHFIRE RECOVERY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

CASE STUDY 3 | BAIRNSDALE NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE



Healing Rural Minds in Remote Communities of East Gippsland

After successive periods of drought and the impacts of recent bushfires, primary producers have had a challenging time. Add to this the isolation and stress of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is particularly felt in remote rural areas of East Gippsland.

Bairnsdale Neighbourhood House is responding to the need for mental health support by delivering Rural Minds mental health workshops to small communities.

Established trusting relationships, local knowledge and a practical approach has fuelled the success of these workshops.

“These communities are very isolated, with often no infrastructure besides a community hall. I often travel a 5 hour round trip to deliver the workshops”
Leanne Jennings, workshop facilitator.

Rural Minds mental health workshops are tailored for agricultural communities and delivered by facilitators working in the agricultural industry. Workshops follow an

agricultural delivery model, provide a toolbox of resources and build participant skills to support loved ones and community members through mental health challenges.

Recognising the opportunity to deliver other valued items, Bairnsdale Neighbourhood House brings with them hand knitted winter woollies, toiletries, treat hampers and nourishing food items. Many of these donated for bushfire recovery.

“We transport food purchased by Food Bank Victoria from funds supplied by the Government for bushfire areas. This includes staple items, potatoes, pumpkins, onions, apples, oranges etc. This food is given out on the day and host agencies can also use it for community events such as dinners and luncheons.”

As a part of Rural Minds, the Neighbourhood House also provides a cash payment to be used at a local or near local store to purchase some picnic items to take someone on an outing to “start the conversation”.

This case study series demonstrates the central role of community organisations as champions of place-based community led bushfire recovery.

“I’m a fifth generation single farmer and could really see the benefit of these workshops which are tailored for people on the land.”

Leanne Jennings Facilitator and Neighbourhood House Manager

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Bairnsdale Neighbourhood House
- Gippsland Primary Health Network
- Regional Development Victoria
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Rural Minds - Rural and Remote Mental Health

Suicide deaths by remoteness



Source: [Rural and Remote Mental Health](#)

Rural Minds workshops aim to destigmatise mental ill-health and provide information about mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention in a relaxed and familiar local setting. The program embeds skills and knowledge by educating natural helpers and community leaders.

“Bairnsdale Neighbourhood House ran a workshop at our House and it was so successful for all participants especially one elderly gentleman. The skills he was given actually saved his life..... He learned that he had to have a conversation with his doctor. The gentleman received care and is now a productive member of his community.”
Local community member

Key Emerging Outcomes

- Bringing people together to talk about mental health, connect socially and build trusting supportive relationships.
- An increased awareness of mental health issues, help and resources, and what to do to assist others, has built community confidence to look out for one another. We have a growing strong and informed community and aim to continue the program over the next 3-5 years.
- Collaboration with relief programs, other Neighbourhood Houses and community groups. This has extended the reach of the program and ensured vital supplies such as food, clothes and care packages reach remote areas and sustain local community activities.
- We are breaking down the stigma associated with mental health so people can read the signs and seek help if required.



Key Emerging Learnings

- The importance of tailoring programs specifically for people in the agricultural industry, therefore meeting their local needs.
- Rural Minds is delivered by those who are involved in the agricultural industry and who understand the challenges of farming in an ever changing environment.
- Local knowledge and awareness of local people, challenges and history is important preparation and enables rapport. An empathetic approach and friendly environment are also key to ensure participants feel comfortable.
- Rural Minds is an evidence-based program which offers comprehensive resources and training to facilitators. This training and support is key to ensure a quality program and supported facilitator.

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For further information and resources: [VCOSS Bushfire Recovery Webpage](#)

