

# COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN ACTION

## DRIVING BUSHFIRE RECOVERY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

### CASE STUDY | COLLABORATION FOR CREATIVE RECOVERY



#### **My Place My Home – Albury Wodonga Health, Creative Recovery Network, Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health**

My Place My Home is a creative recovery project providing support and outreach to the communities of North East Victoria following the impact of the extensive 2019-2020 summer bushfires.

Cascading impacts of drought, fire and COVID 19, resulted in multiple and complex issues for many local people. Clear evidence of trauma and the ripple effect of suicide deeply affected communities, particularly their children and young people.

There was a strong belief among mental health workers that a highly creative, arts-based approach to psychological recovery could be of great benefit.

Four schools – **Corryong P-12 College, Sacred Heart Primary, Khancoban Primary and Walwa Primary**, expressed interest in developing a creative recovery program to support their school communities.

Phase one involved four days where the schools came together to share creative arts workshops.

These focused on visual arts, cartooning, drama, circus, music, sound scaping and shadow puppetry. Activities were designed to encourage children to express their emotions and stories through a range of meaningful art forms.

The coming together of four school communities to share space, time and creative programs, enabled a joyful exchange of ideas, stories and experiences.

*"I admired and respected the resilience of the students who have been through emotional and overwhelming experiences during the last 12 months (and) their openness to learning new techniques that brought with it a sense of magic towards the arts." Project artist*

Collaboration has been key to the project's success with many local organisations, health services, schools and artists all working together in partnership to offer unique skills and collective support.

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

#### **PROJECT PARTNERS**

##### **Support Agencies:**

- Bushfire Recovery Victoria
- Catholic Education Sandhurst
- Corryong Health
- Corryong Neighbourhood House
- Gateway Health
- Be You- Bushfire Recovery Program
- Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation
- Regional Arts Victoria
- Towong Shire
- VIC Department of Education & Training – Bushfire Recovery Ovens Murray

##### **Funding support:**

- Corryong Health
- Towong Shire
- Corryong P-12 College
- Catholic Education
- Albury Wodonga Health
- Headspace Albury Wodonga

“At the start of this I just saw it as time that I could've spent on school work but I soon discovered how much I would enjoy this and how (it helped with) stress.”

*Student feedback*

“It was a unique opportunity to be embedded in the community, to hear their stories and deliver workshops that allowed them to explore and tell their own stories - for their own benefit and for those who will follow them.”

*Artist feedback*

“What I felt was happiness. I loved all the activities and would love to do it again. I enjoyed the mixed groups as well. Think it is a good idea to mix.”

*Student feedback*

“The combination of artist, teacher and well-being angel (health worker) is a winning combo in all situations.”

*Artist feedback*



The workshops aimed:

- To provide a hands-on, encouraging experience of creative engagement.
- To gather a broad range of feedback from children and young people and what would interest them going forward.
- To enhance community connection and capacity to support emotional wellbeing.
- To forge relationships and collaboration between a range of stakeholders.
- To enhance awareness and rapport between local families and service providers.

Workshops were facilitated by professional creatives in collaboration with significant and vital support from teachers and health, youth and welfare professionals (dubbed the ‘wellbeing angels’). New ways to interact with students and young people were also explored to grow and improve professional practice.



“Good mental health enables an individual to contribute to his or her community, cope with the stresses of everyday life, work productively and realise their potential.

Population-based studies have found participation in arts activities increases perceptions of happiness, resilience, self-esteem, confidence, self-worth and quality of life”

*The Arts and Creative Industries in Health Promotion, Vic Health Sax Institute 2020*



**Creative Recovery Network is a national agency advocating for and supporting the role of culture and the arts in disaster management - preparedness, response and recovery.**

Our vision is for Australian communities to be self-determined in their preparedness, response and recovery from disasters, supported by community cultural development practices.

We believe culture and the arts are vital in this journey. Arts and culture can open doorways for a resilient and connected future.

This project has showcased vital and effective collaboration across multiple stakeholders working to support the health and wellbeing of young people and their community across the region.

The model of health, education and the arts coming together under a collaborative framework has increased engagement and energy, producing many positive outcomes. Collaboration across diverse skill sets has made available multiple resources to support the needs of young people and the broader community.

“Data gathering through engagement was a pathway to ensure we were hearing from the young people directly, as well as a range of health, education and arts people”. *Project leader*

The scoping of medium-long term potential programs is what phase one set out to support. The 4 days of school workshops is just the beginning of the many things the project working party is hoping to achieve.

*“Definitely felt happy!! .....It was AMAZING!”  
Student feedback*

**Key Emerging Outcomes**

- The expression of emotions, thoughts and stories towards a healing journey, through the magic of creative arts
- A clearer understanding of the interests and needs of the children and young people of the region to drive future planning
- Increased collaboration and engagement across the arts, education and health sectors and local government. This has led to support to develop a long-term arts and health strategy for the region in partnership with the local shire councils.
- Networking and capacity building of local creatives in engagement across the education and health sectors.

**Key Emerging Learnings**

- Cohesive and connected communication across the various services, activities and visions for recovery is deeply challenging and requires dedicated time and leadership.
- Whilst this deep conversation and listening is time consuming, we are able to ensure rich, responsive and invested support for our children and young people into the future. A commitment to continuation of this collective planning and implementation process will ensure an embedded process grounded in the collaborative model.

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For further resources visit [VCOSS Bushfire Recovery webpage](#)

