

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN ACTION

DRIVING BUSHFIRE RECOVERY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL



CASE STUDY | THE YINNAR AND DISTRICT MEMORIAL HALL COMMITTEE



Photo from Places of Pride: National register of War Memorials – Arthur Garland

Building Community and Confidence over Tai Chi and a Cuppa

The Yinnar & District Memorial Hall Committee has achieved significant outcomes in improving the lives of local mature people. Led by Hall President, Glenys Webster and supported by Kathleen Millett, Specialised Exercise Therapist, the health and wellness program has created a welcoming, special place designed specifically for the needs of older people.

“You get to a certain age and you realise there is a whole group missing out.” *Glenys Webster*

Funded by the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) Grants for Resilience and Wellness, this program commenced as a bushfire recovery activity from previous fires.

It continues to bring local people together in an accessible and supportive environment to look after themselves, build friendships and connect with others. It has also created a local gathering point in the community for other services to check

in and share information, e.g. the provision of meals through Covid 19.

The classes cater for seniors of various abilities, with the exercise specialist adapting and modifying the exercises designed for residents to remain independent and in their own homes. Tai Chi is practiced each week along with exercises involving strength, balance and mobility. Staying well and reducing injuries are amongst the varied topics covered through interactive sessions.

Time at the end of each class for participants to have a cup of tea and connect socially is an important component of the program.

“The recent floods and storms hit this area and mental health has become an even greater concern.... they are a positive and happy group of people, they accept everyone as they are and are there for each other when times get a bit tough.”

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

“It’s the connection that’s really important, enjoying each other’s company and the companionship they share with each other. For some people it’s the only thing they have if they live alone.... After the Covid lock down, we weren’t sure what was going to happen, but the first week back we had 31 people turn up!”

Glenys Webster

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
- Federation University
- Local community groups and volunteers
- Latrobe Advocate

Key Outcomes (Federation University, 2019)

- Increased social connection and sense of belonging amongst participants leading to increased mental health benefits. This program has significantly reduced isolation and loneliness, for many it's the one activity they look forward to going to each week.
- Improvements in confidence, fitness levels and overall physical health, function and movement. This may lead to fewer hospital admissions.
- Increase in vitality and vigour and the ability of participants to remain living independently and in their own home and community.
- The program also provides an opportunity for service providers to engage with mature aged community members living remotely, learn from them and share information and resources.

(Federation University, 2019, FRRR Health and Wellness Program 2019 Evaluation Report, Collaborative Evaluation Unit)

“We needed somewhere where people could come back from having a serious illness or having an operation and be able to walk into the hall and to feel comfortable. To sit down amongst other people that were being faced with many of these issues.”

Program participant

Key Learnings and Ingredients for Success

- Located in a local hall and free to attend - affordability and accessibility is key
- A regular and consistent schedule with skilled assistance
- A peer-led, welcoming, understanding and supportive environment
- The time and space to develop companionship
- Tapping into local skills and knowledge and getting it done ourselves
- Common issues and needs develop a sense of belonging and collective strength
- Recovery takes time. Being socially connected to the local community is important to the short, medium and longer term recovery process.
- Baked goods made with love
- Partnerships with FRRR and Federation University - local government or health services are located regionally and may not have resources
- Reaching out to other local groups for collective support and to develop networks
- Local passion, wisdom and experience to continue to drive the program

For more information contact websterglenys@gmail.com
[VCOSS Bushfire Recovery Resources](#)



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