

Creative Recovery

Training Programme Evaluation Report



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Emma Gentle, Arts Mid North Coast and the Creative Recovery Network pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, to their Elders past, present, and emerging. This evaluation took place on Biripi, Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr lands.

The Creative Recovery training programme was a collaboration between Arts Mid-North Coast and the Creative Recovery Network. The evaluation was funded by Arts Mid-North Coast

The training took place on the Mid North Coast of NSW in March and June 2022, after being postponed in 2021 due to Covid 19 outbreaks. The training was then impacted by floods in each of the areas it took place. The report was completed in May 2023.

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List of Abbreviations

CR	Creative Recovery
CRN	Creative Recovery Network
AMNC	Arts Mid-North Coast
NRRA	National Recovery and Resilience Agency
PS	Psycho-social Support
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PO	Project Officer
CoP	Community of Practice

Executive Summary

...[art] plays a critical, but hugely undervalued role, in this process (disaster recovery)... it is the participation, the involvement in the creative process that makes the difference (Fisher & Talvé, 2011).

Creative recovery initiatives have received improved support in Australia since the Victorian 2009 Black Saturday fires. 173 people died in fires that destroyed 2029 houses, scorched over 4500 hectares of land, and affected 78 communities. These numbers were unprecedented, thus recovery processes needed to be swiftly initiated to support the communities to process, heal and rebuild. An initiative by Arts Victoria led to a creative recovery project in Country Victoria that contributed to healing, self-confidence, creating structure, living memorials and importantly, also allowed people to give to each other (Fisher & Talvé, 2011, p. 50). The evaluation of the project provided first-hand information on how to best fund and support communities using creative processes after a disaster. Since that time disasters have increased exponentially. The Australia-wide 2019/2020 fires scorched 17 million hectares and destroyed 3094 homes, with 34 lives directly lost. The arts are playing a pivotal role in disaster-recovery in Australia. This evaluation aims to capture how training in creative recovery can mobilise artists and services to support their communities after a disaster.

Arts Mid North Coast (AMNC), is situated in one of the many areas that were severely impacted by both the 2019/20 fires and 2021/22 floods. They utilised their networks to assess how they could learn from these disasters and best assist:

- the arts to meaningfully support communities to recover and rebuild
- the arts to be integrated into and valued as part of broader community recovery efforts
- local artists and arts workers to gain increased knowledge, skills and confidence to respond to communities in recovery
- arts and cultural organisations to enhance their capacity to work with communities in recovery and respond in a coordinated way

Respectively, Arts Mid-North Coast (AMNC) reached out to and then partnered with the Creative Recovery Network (CRN) to provide training to individuals and organisations interested in offering support to affected communities on the Mid-North Coast of NSW. The CRN describes their training as:

“an introductory programme designed to establish best practices in trauma informed care to work with disaster impacted communities in safe and productive ways. Based on the recognition that disaster planning is a whole of community responsibility that requires specialised knowledge and experience, the programme supports the identification and development of creative facilitators to work in community-centred disaster planning” (CRN, 2017).

The two organisations' collaborative approach provided a unique platform to train community members in using the arts in disaster recovery. The two and a half day training programme was devised, developed and facilitated by CRN, and funded and coordinated by AMNC.

The programme was designed to be delivered to community members interested in supporting local recovery with creative tools and trauma informed practice. As participants were from disaster-impacted communities, the training workshops supported them to process some of their own experiences, as well as developing their facilitation skills to help others. Furthermore, the training provided multiple opportunities for inter-agency and inter-community networking, as well as disseminating information on available community grants, many of which were taken up to create local creative recovery (CR) projects.

The training drew interest from a variety of stakeholders including: Biripi, Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr Elders, and communities beyond the areas of focus; Taree, Kempsey and Bellingen Councils; communities impacted by recent disasters; local, state and national service providers; the host organisations, Arts Mid-North Coast and the Creative Recovery Network and many more. This list grew as the programme was disseminated and creative recovery projects developed.

Method

The evaluation of the training program used a participatory action research (PAR) approach (Kendon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007), with mixed method design. Data collection methods incorporated surveys, observations, focus groups and interviews. Project surveys and interviews

were then also utilized to evaluate the creative recovery (CR) projects that had been initiated by the participants of the training. Multiple data sources included the participants, the organisers and the facilitators, contributing to the robustness of the evaluation. Analysis tools comprised of SurveyMonkey for survey data and Nvivo software for thematic analysis. The action research approach ensured that relevant data gathered over the year was shared with participating stakeholders in real time to enrich and guide projects as they were being developed. This approach also helped the evaluation expand to incorporate the CR projects as outcomes to the training programme.

Process

The creative recovery three-day training provided individuals and organisations with a range of tools to develop further with their communities in the aftermath of a disaster. A best practice, trauma informed framework was purposefully dispersed using theoretical and experiential pedagogy with a range of user-friendly and relevant resources. The Creative Recovery Network's chief facilitator, Scotia Monkivitch, ensured that the training was located within a First Nations frame of reference by inviting local Elders to open and share knowledge at the beginning of each of the three trainings. This gave the participants a deeper awareness of the importance of local knowledge and culture in supporting disaster-impacted communities. The facilitation modelled trauma-informed care techniques, underpinned with relevant research and experience in the field. The training explained how to use active listening, collaborate with care, use creative tools, and have a compassionate response when working with often traumatised local communities. At the

culmination of the training, small community grants were made available to participants by AMNC. The project facilitators used the skills they had learnt at the training to develop the projects.

Outcomes

The Creative Recovery training was attended by 41 artists, arts workers, council and national emergency service providers, all of whom found value in the training. Overall, they gave the training 4.8 out of 5 stars. A robust starting point had been provided for utilizing the arts as a mental health and recovery tool in disaster-affected communities, offering a nuanced approach to processing the trauma associated with extreme, often unexpected, events. The high attendance numbers, deep levels of engagement and positive feedback demonstrated how well the training programme was received by participants. Increased understanding and use of empathetic response, listening to community, connecting with people, and using creativity as a tool, were reported to be some of the most relevant skills learnt. Furthermore, the range of projects generated through subsequent creative recovery (CR) grant applications ensured on-the-ground impact was felt beyond the training days. The consequent creative recovery projects used diverse art materials and techniques in a range of geographically disparate communities. Of the 41 participants, 16 applied for and received grants to run 14 CR projects. Collectively those projects reached 745 people from local disaster-impacted communities, exceeding the aims of the training.

Partnership (is) working

The training achieved the Creative Recovery Network's objectives of experientially and theoretically disseminating a facilitation model that

strengthens community relationships, fosters community collaboration, and builds trust and cooperation. Additionally, Arts Mid North Coast (AMNC) achieved their goal of meaningfully supporting local communities to recover and rebuild after a disaster. AMNC ensured that the training was attended by a range of community members and gave particular consideration to local artists and arts workers. This increased both their skills and their confidence in responding to the needs of communities in recovery. The CRN and AMNC have collectively enhanced the capacity of many of the region's community arts workers, emergency services, local governments, and cultural organisations to respond to disasters using creative tools.

As resilience will be important in maintaining flexibility and strength in the face of future catastrophic events, supporting people's ability to cope, to form connection, and build on their resilience is imperative (NSW Government, 2016). The Creative Recovery Network's training programme is well placed to increase individual and community resilience during a time of increased disaster risk as it emphasises how to work collaboratively. Collaboration increases both individual and community resilience.

Connection

The training and the resulting CR projects helped participating community members recover and build resilience through engagement in creative processes. The data were clear on how important the networking and building connections were to the participants engagement during the training. However, maintaining the group connections after the training required the coordination of a Project Officer, as was also found in the

Victoria Bushfire Evaluation *The Role of Arts in Rebuilding Community* (Fisher & Talvé, 2011). Developing smaller CR networks, that are essentially communities of practice (CoP), is integral to building the capacity of communities to support themselves and each other in the aftermath of a disaster. The Project Officer role was shown to be the lynch-pin for coordinating training, sign-posting, supporting available grants, mobilising and peer-supporting artists (and their projects), and sourcing the spaces required to facilitate CR projects. Some communities were able to continue gathering and using arts as a vehicle for connection, through alternative sources of funding. Facilitators, armed with skills and experience gained through the training, have since been requested to facilitate workshops through other organisations. The training continues to offer benefits beyond the attendees original training remit for their respective communities.

Recommendations

The evaluation has shown that a creative recovery response can support communities to rebuild and heal from extreme events in both the short and longer term. The following key recommendations would ensure the training remains at a high standard, continues to offer support holistically, is disseminated to a scope of communities, and is well attended.

Evaluation of CR projects need to be emic to the workshops, either arts-based throughout the training, during reflection at the end, or as a focus group soon after. The focus group could be a way to initiate a CoP.

Facilitation of CR training programs is crucial to their success, having an experienced, knowledgeable and skilled facilitator is imperative.

Project Officer (PO) role is essential for supporting the projects and organising a CoP and should be integral to the program.

Community of Practice (CoP) needs be available to all CR facilitators to support, learn and share with other practitioners. This will help to maintain momentum, collaboratively respond to local disasters, and support future projects.

Grants need to be identified and made available for the PO to offer to trained facilitators.

Time allowed for the training could be residential, or run over three full days to help participants absorb, collaborate and be ready to begin a project by completion.

Accreditation of the training will be essential for CR responses to be imbedded in emergency response management. The training is methodical and comprehensive so could clearly be restructured to build a module of formal learning.

Dissemination Disseminating the CR training programme throughout regional Australia is optimal. It would be beneficial for local council emergency preparedness and response teams, for creative recovery units at a state level, and for national disaster response agencies.

Hubs based in Regional Development Organisations (RADOs) to spearhead the devolution of disaster recovery. Local, trusted organisations are best placed to act in recovery spaces, as they have already formed the necessary connections and have structures in place to respond to community needs.

Introduction

The 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires in Victoria were at the time unparalleled. To help the affected communities mend after such a catastrophic event, an arts recovery fund was set up as an immediate recovery response from the Victoria Arts Council. The fund offered small grants to artists to work with communities to assist with their recovery. The initiatives were successful in unifying and supporting the rejuvenation of impacted communities, along with offering much needed personal healing (Fisher & Talvé, 2011). The project evaluation found that utilising the arts in recovery had a meaningful impact on the participants, at both an individual and community level (Fisher & Talvé, 2011). This evaluation builds on the work by the Victoria Arts Council in better understanding the effect of creative recovery on disaster-impacted communities.

The evaluation of the Black Saturday Bushfire projects recommended more government support for creative recovery (Fisher & Talvé, 2011). Not long after that time, the NSW Government developed Resilience NSW, creating a recovery plan and tool kit to strengthen community recovery capabilities (NSW Government, 2016). More recently the NSW Reconstruction Authority took its place, and aims to utilise the tool kit, encouraging services to be flexible and responsive to the needs of communities whilst giving those communities agency in their recovery (NSW Dept. Planning and Environment, 2022).

Recovery should centre on the community to enable those affected by a disaster to actively participate in their own recovery (NSW Government, 2016).

However, there was some concern that coordinated and strategic responses were left aside. Further work was completed at a national level after the 2019/20 bushfires, when a Royal Commission into national natural disaster arrangements was established. From that commission, the *Preparing Australia* program was developed to manage and reduce disaster risk, and to minimise devastating impacts (National Recovery and Resilience Agency, 2022). The commission found preparation, mitigation and response to be central to recovery.

The findings are progressively relevant as the increase in extreme events and emergency situations throughout Australia continues to have a profound impact on individuals and whole communities (Australian Red Cross, 2023). In 2022 alone, 46 disasters were declared in Australia, impacting 316 local government areas (National Emergency Management Agency, 2022). A recent survey by the Climate Council and Beyond Blue, has revealed that 51% of Australians who experienced climate-disasters since 2019 reported adverse impacts on their mental health, with 21% reporting a major or moderate impact (Climate Council, 2022). Stressful events cause both interim and long-term physiological and psychological stress (Green et al., 2003), thus finding appropriate support for people is crucial. The effects on physical and mental health have become more concerning as the regularity and severity of disasters increase. The adaptation window to deal with extreme weather and other events is becoming narrower. Therefore, implementing and evaluating tools that can support people to build resilience in the face of escalating extreme events is essential.

The impacts of disasters on individuals and communities can be long-term and complicated, involving loss of life and injury, damage to health and wellbeing, housing, financial and material losses, family separation, education and employment prospects, changes in community dynamics, and the environment (Australian Red Cross, 2023).

The Australian Red Cross emergency services staff and volunteers have recently reported a pressing need for more mental health support of people in disaster impacted communities, particularly in regional towns (2023). Helping people build their resilience is key to supporting and strengthening communities. Resilience has been described as:

Various processes, ways of thinking and acting through which individuals adapt and cope well with adversity, without suffering from long term harmful consequences due to stress (Robertson, 2012).

The Australian government's National Recovery and Resilience Agency's (NRRRA) current main objectives are:

- 1) to improve the long term resilience of Australian communities and households to natural hazards including bushfires, floods and tropical cyclones.
- 2): to deliver disaster risk reduction projects that reduce hazard exposure or vulnerability and are aligned with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework. (<https://recovery.gov.au/disaster-risk-reduction/preparing-australia-program>, 2022).

In chapter 21 of *Coordinating Relief and Recovery 2022* it states:

A natural disaster can profoundly change a person's life. Natural disasters can destroy homes and livelihoods, which may have taken a lifetime to build. They can be source of significant financial stress and can leave an individual with long-term health impacts. Economic disruption and social issues are common and can lead to significant trauma, stress and anxiety in the aftermath of a disaster.

The impacts are serious and often long-lasting, thus identifying different ways to support people is a priority. The arts are well placed to assist, as they can be integral to individual and community wellbeing, and can help people process events (Bennet, Boydell, Davidson, & Hooker, 2022). Offering creative disaster response tools in children and young people's educational settings has been shown to help the trauma related to such events. Udwin, Boyle, Yule, Bolton, and O'Ryan (2000) advocated post-disaster support in schools to help minimise the likelihood of PTSD developing in children and young people. The creative recovery approach in schools recently helped young people to process their experiences of disasters in NSW, and were effective in helping children directly and indirectly. The video showing the art processes and outcomes is seen here: <https://www.facebook.com/CoffsHarbourRegionalGallery/videos/644071652938626/>. Arts Mid North Coast (AMNC), the peak body for arts and cultural development in the region, emphasise the role the arts and community engagement can play to build resilience. They state:

Creative Recovery is a particular approach to supporting individuals and communities after a disaster. It involves introducing art and creativity as tools to work through feelings of grief, pain, foster connection and build stronger, resilient communities.

AMNC have supported a range of initiatives that foster a collaborative approach to utilising the arts to support recovery after disasters. Correspondingly, the CRN collaborate with the creative sector through a network of arts and cultural practitioners to build Australia's recovery capabilities. The training they offer specifically targets artists, arts workers and arts organisations as well as community leaders and organisations alongside disaster recovery and response services. CRN emphasise local disaster management strategies that incorporate whole community approach to disaster resilience. They train facilitators to carry out this work and build capacity within the creative recovery sector (CRN). Both the CRN and AMNC understand the value of creative processes to build stronger

communities and process challenging events through their work with populations impacted by disasters in Australia. The organisations each use their unique positions creatively and collaboratively.

This evaluation focused on the training delivered to local communities impacted by the 2019/20 bushfires. However, the 2020/21 Covid 19 pandemic put back the training to 2022. In that time, many of these same local communities were severely flooded, whilst dealing with the aftermath of the fires and the restrictions brought about by changing Covid 19 legislations. Thus, the training provided an opportunity to process three major disasters. Participants said they felt it was well-timed, even though the postponed training days were again directly impacted by flooding events. During the recruitment drive and the actual workshops, the East Coast of Australia was continuing to feel the impacts of previous floods whilst more floods inundated the workshops during the training. During this evaluation, the window for preparing and strengthening communities was shown to be tightening.

Creative Recovery Training

Arts Mid North Coast partnered with the Creative Recovery Network (CRN) in 2020 to facilitate CR training workshops in local areas on the Mid-North Coast that had been severely impacted by the Black Summer Bushfires of 2019/20. The CRN was engaged to deliver the training because of their knowledge and expertise in the area. The CRN training aimed to:

establish the basis for sustainable community building and resilience. This includes recognition of participants as a creative and social resource with the skills and understanding to identify important community stories and aspirations, and produce meaningful and transformative work.

The Australian Government, through the arts funding and advisory body, The Australia Council, supports the work of the Creative Recovery Network (CRN). Arts Mid North Coast (AMNC), the peak body for arts and cultural development on the Mid North Coast, is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW and Local Government partners (City of Coffs Harbour, Bellingen Shire Council, Nambucca Valley Council, Kempsey Shire Council and Port-Macquarie Hastings Council). Arts Mid North Coast (AMNC), a peak body for the arts and cultural development on the Mid-north Coast subsidiary, collaborated with CRN to provide the training to individuals and organisations interested in offering creative recovery support to disaster-impacted communities on the Mid-North Coast. The frame CRN used is in Figure 1.

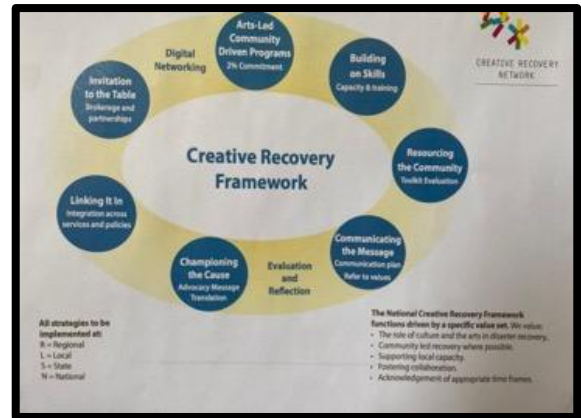


Figure 1 The CRN framework (CRN) used for training

Measures of Achievement

The success of the Creative Recovery Training Project was measured against the criteria defined by Arts Mid North Coast, the Resilience NSW Bushfire Community Resilience and Recovery (BCRF) grant application, and Creative Recovery Network standards. Benchmark questions are outlined in appendix 2. Report 2 (pg. 49) shows the creative recovery projects initiated from the training.

Risk management

Many of the risks were mitigated by the professional experience of the facilitator, Scotia Monkivitch, who could envisage where participants may struggle. The floods that occurred during the training had not been expected, and added another layer of risk for people attending. This was managed collaboratively and overseen by AMNC. Appendix 2 shows the predicted risk and risk management.



Figure 2 The floods in Gladstone first day of the training

Stakeholders/ Engagement

The training program was built from community need and disseminated collaboratively through the community by a range of organisations and individuals.

- Biripi, Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr Elders and communities
- AMNC Council Partners - City of Coffs Harbour, Bellingen Shire, Nambucca Valley, Kempsey Shire, Port Macquarie-Hastings and Mid Coast
- Communities impacted by recent disasters
- Service providers (emergency services and NGO's)
- Local artists
- State and Federal Government
- Creative Recovery Network
- Arts Mid-North Coast

Recruitment

The training programme was directed at councils, artists, mental health, and front-line workers, to help them support local communities to build back strength and resilience through creativity. The Councils on the Mid-North Coast of NSW were each offered the training programme. After the changes in dates, 45 participants signed up, and 41 participated in one of three programmes scheduled in the Kempsey, Taree and Bellingen Shires.

Evaluation

Evaluation Design

The evaluation used a mixed method design. Quantitative data were gathered from the survey responses that were administered after each of the training sessions. See Appendix . The qualitative data were gathered through observation of the training sessions, the open-ended questions in the survey at completion of training, and six weeks later through focus groups with the same participants from the training sessions. See Appendix 1 & 2 for further information on the method and analysis for the evaluation.

Collecting data

The evaluation used a range of data collection methods including surveys, observations, focus groups and interviews within an action research design. This allowed the data to be shared in real time to enhance the program, and implement relevant changes where lessons were learnt during rollout . Appendix 3 shows the survey questions and Appendix 4, the focus group probes. Appendix 5 shows the CR project survey questions.

The methods and sources for the data collection during the trainings and the following CR projects are organised in Table 1.

Methods and sources

Groups	Method	Source
Kempsey	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey 2. Observation 3. Focus Group 4. Interview 	Training group participants Training groups Participants and stakeholders Participants, organisers & facilitators
Taree	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey 2. Observation 3. Focus Group 4. Interview 	Training group participants Training groups Participants and stakeholders Participants, organisers & facilitators
Bellingen	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey 2. Observation 3. Focus Group 4. Interview 	Training group participants Training groups Participants & stakeholders Participants, organisers & facilitators
CR Projects	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey 2. Interview & video 	Project participants & facilitators Project participants & facilitators & PO

Table 1 Data collection methods and sources

Dose/intensity:

The evaluation focused on three creative recovery training sessions in three separate local council areas on the Mid-North Coast of NSW. They included Taree, Kempsey and Bellingen. Each training programme ran over 2.5 days and was followed up with a zoom focus group. The focus group was organised so that the training participants could openly discuss the effectiveness of the training in upskilling them for designing and facilitating a community-based creative recovery (CR) project. The focus groups coincided with the roll out of a creative recovery grant from Arts Mid-North Coast (AMNC). Case studies of these CR projects can be found in section 2 of this report (pg. 49)

Outcomes

The outcomes of the training were gathered from the observational and survey data collected throughout the CR training sessions, and from the follow-up interviews and focus groups. Soon after, some of the training's participants gained funding to facilitate local CR projects where they used the skills they had acquired from the training sessions. Additional interview and survey data were collected from the facilitators and participants of the creative recovery projects to verify the already collected data on the training session's capacity to inform their projects. Appendix 2 shows the evaluation objectives, methods, and if objectives were met (Y).

A welcome ceremony took place at the start of each of the trainings. Biripi,

Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr Elders and artists welcomed participants to country. They offered all attendees local cultural knowledge with examples of creative practice that grounded and validated the

training by raising awareness of how creative recovery is woven through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and embedded in creative practice.



Figure 3 Elder, Uncle Martin Ballangarry sharing Gumbaynggirr knowledge

Raising awareness of the role the arts can play in disaster recovery

The training was designed by the Creative Recovery Network (CRN) to support participants to utilise their creative skills with specific facilitation techniques backed with current theories. The CRN planned the training using their direct experience of applying a creative frame to emergency response. Scotia Monkavitch, the Executive Officer of CRN, disseminated her knowledge and experience in the field of arts and recovery. She offered concrete examples of other organisation's art and disaster projects, allowing for discussion that brought in further examples from participants. She modelled techniques that helped build and maintain a safe creative environment for all attendees. Scotia was acknowledged by all

participants as highly adept in offering trauma-informed practice through artistic process. One participant said the most valuable part of the workshop was "listening and understanding the creative process in disaster recovery whilst another stated that it was "the thoughtfulness, demonstration of how to set up the encounter, opportunity to contribute and all voices to be heard". The feedback on the facilitation as well as the pedagogy offered, showed that people had gained increased understanding of positioning the arts within disaster recovery services.

The creative techniques Scotia used to support and strengthen community resilience by emphasising connection were appreciated by attendees. One participant said the facilitator was "open, person-centred, connected and held the

space” another valued “the creative practices, circles, strings...stories of recovery projects”. The importance of the training programmes facilitation cannot be underestimated, as the experiential learning models ensured all participants learnt how to creatively work with communities through example. This made the theoretical knowledge that was disseminated using a variety of PowerPoint slides throughout the training, easier to absorb.

All participants gained a better understanding of the role arts can play in disaster recovery. Though some practicing artists already assumed this, they reported that the training had helped them clearly identify how they could use their skills. One said: “It helped give me confidence in what I was already doing but was unsure about”. Other participants who did not identify as artists, learnt a great deal about how the arts offer a platform that goes beyond the usual disaster recovery frame. The nuanced expression and consequent discussions that art can generate was illuminated throughout the training using both theoretical and practical examples. The participants gave the training 4.8 out of 5 stars.



Figure 4 Increasing understanding of the role arts can play



Figure 5 Sharing culture, creating community networks

The follow-up focus group conducted on the Zoom platform, brought about a discussion on how collaborating during the training had helped participant’s creative connection within their communities. An example of this is in Figure 6, showing participants exchanging cultural art and knowledge on the third day of training after trust had been built.

Participants felt supported and inspired to use what they learnt during the three-day programme, and many went on to create arts projects and raise the necessary funds to roll them out in their communities. Within six months, 16 participants applied for and received 14 small grants of \$2500 each, to facilitate creative recovery workshops with their communities. These CR projects had a total of 745 participants showing how many experienced first-hand how the arts can play a significant role in disaster recovery. The project case study and videos produced were uploaded to the AMNC website, extending their reach.

[Increasing understanding of the disaster context and improving confidence](#)

The hands-on facilitation included considerable information for the participants on the disaster context and was assisted by visual prompts around the room. These easily digestible infographics gave the participants a good

understanding of working within a disaster context. The data showed participants had an increased understanding of how disasters impact community wellbeing, and coping strategies. Using CR projects from around the world, examples of community arts recovery projects were given. Additionally, the group shared inherent understanding due to their own experience of disasters. The training contributed to improved confidence working with communities impacted by disaster.

There were numerous enquiries made by attendees into funding and grant opportunities. However, there was a gap of time between completing the training and the availability of AMNC and other grants for CR projects. Covid 19 restrictions had also disrupted the original training timetable, consequently it had to be delayed. This made lining up the training to coincide with the opening of grants very challenging. One participant reported the training offered a chance to build relationships with their community.

Figure 15 below shows at a glance how well the programme met many of its objectives.

Another that it had provided an effective way of looking at longer term art opportunities. Others had highlighted the richness of the process and how the tools and techniques they learnt could be utilised to ensure connection, positive regard and safety into their own workshops, all of which are critical to recovery. One participant said it was *“such a supportive, inspiring and educational space for us”*. They learnt the need for agency in people who have survived disaster which meant they needed to understand the importance of group decision making. This had been a new concept for many of the participants.



Figure 6 Increased understanding of disaster context

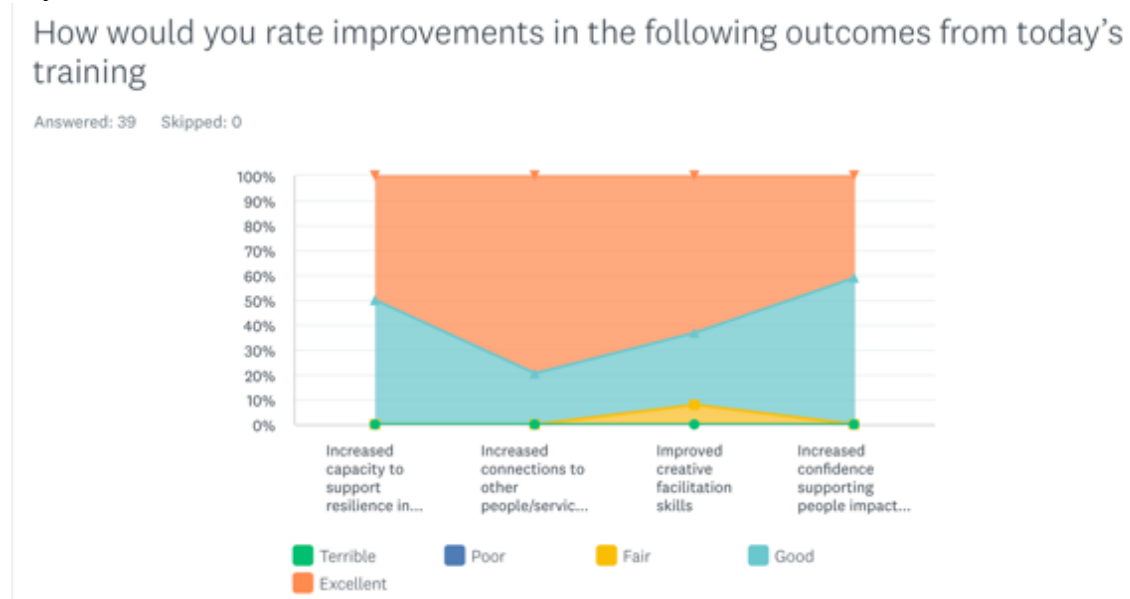


Figure 7 Survey outcomes

When participants were asked how much the training workshops had increased confidence in supporting people impacted by disaster, 59% reported a good increase in confidence, and the remaining 41% reported it was excellent.

Increased awareness of the risks of future disasters, and built capacity in mitigating these risks

Most participants at the training had been through three major disasters, so had an insider's knowledge of their community's needs. Poignantly, major floods had again disrupted participant's lives during the training, forcing some to leave to attend to their family and homes. They indicated their understanding of how disasters might occur in the future and the impact on communities through the surveys. During the training, participants had shown a deep understanding of the risk caused by disasters, and how they could respond thoughtfully and creatively. Some reported they had engaged in the training with some hesitation, but had been pleased it had been a safe and informative space. They developed enough confidence to apply the skills they had learnt to future disasters they will likely face.

*A really excellent workshop.
Connected people with community services*

Some attendees, particularly emergency workers and arts therapists, felt they could offer their skills further afield as they were used to going into unfamiliar communities to work. The networking within the training had helped people know, as one participant put it, "who's who in the zoo". Many had not known how or with whom to connect with to get projects and supports off the ground. The survey results and post-training interviews with

attendees backed up these observations, with one participant saying:

I got so much out of my time and feel better equipped to facilitate workshops in this and other areas involving vulnerable people.

Many participants increased their capabilities in grant writing and in facilitating art workshops on top of their usual work. Applying for funding can be onerous, and many creative people feel they need support with this. This is where the Project Officer was shown to be particularly helpful in ensuring the faculty that had been built during the training days was not lost during the grant application process afterwards. Consequently, the training led to real world outcomes through successful grant applications for a variety of CR projects.

Increasing skills, knowledge, and networks

Most participants had reported that their skills base in facilitation had increased, though some who did not have an artist background asked for more training in this area. The training had been open to a broad range of artists and professionals therefore the facilitation skills in the group varied. All had said that knowledge and networks had increased. The grants system, as well as the unpredictable nature of disasters, make having people ready to act difficult.

While we received a HEAP of info-most valuable were the connections made and feeling of hope reignited.

Many of the survey responses highlighted connection and networking opportunities as one of the most important outcomes for them, both personally and

professionally. The First Nations welcome and introduction had been an eye-opener and had given many a better understanding of using the arts authentically:

Loved having the Aunties there too! I must admit, my association with First Nations people has been extremely limited. Growing up in Holland and then the Northern Beaches, we were only told of all the atrocities inflicted, not any of the positives and beautiful nuances of their cultures. It was lovely to be able to make a personal connection.

The training inspired artists to re-engage with their practice using a CR lens. Thus, the training benefitted participants, which in turn benefitted their communities because they re-established art practices as individual artists, and community artists. The reidentification with creativity using a CR lens inspired many of the training participants in their artistry. Most agreed with a participant that said the training was: *“Fantastic, so beneficial for social connection and emergency preparedness...so good to connect again”*.



Figure 8 Forming connection between participants

The survey and observation results showed that all participants had enjoyed the connecting and networking opportunities provided by the training. One said the most valuable part was

“Networking, upskilling, understanding creative recovery process” Many of the artists specifically valued this as they were used to working in isolation. The survey feedback also showed that they felt they had learnt many new skills and increased their knowledge base as one participant said they most valued:



Figure 9 learning through the connection

Connecting with others in community interested in this field and building a network a supportive network. Scotia sharing and imparting her wealth of knowledge with the group.

Supporting community needs

The overall feedback from participants was very positive. The facilitation technique supported an openness and emphasised the need for Dadirri, the art of listening (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2022). This method of engagement ensures the people impacted are given a voice and are heard. This act alone can give people agency when their agency has been taken away. Scotia showed that listening to people’s stories and providing a space to create and

connect ensured the needs of vulnerable people were heard by the people offering support. This is essential in disaster management and helps understand where there are areas for improvement. The survey results showed that the training facilitation modelled how to learn about and then support community needs:

the preparedness to embrace and convey complexity in a learner-friendly way. [The] facilitator is exceptional and brought out the best in the participants.

Working with key stakeholders to show the benefits of arts-led recovery

The facilitation gave the participants many examples of engaging key stakeholders. This was particularly valuable to the CR project facilitators who used that knowledge to engage local services and councils. One responded they were:

Provided with good knowledge and understanding on how to press all levels of government to start looking at creative recovery as an avenue to support trauma-affected people and communities



Figure 10 Dunghutti cultural creative practice



Figure 11 sharing knowledge and creative skill

Collaboration at every stage

Having two organisations collaborate on disseminating the CRN training programme enhanced the outcomes. The expertise of the Creative Recovery Network on delivering projects as well as advocating for impacted communities blended with the knowledge and experience the Arts Mid North Coast team had in local communities, arts projects and grant availability. This combination allowed for further reach of the programme, and supported the progression of community spaces as arts recovery spaces. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples were able to contribute to the training provided another deeper level of connection. This also helped to cement collaborative approaches, modelled in the training, as genuine attempts to collectively work to find the best ways to support individuals and their communities. Partnership working ensued during the CR projects, which helped form creative networks in participant's communities and beyond. The training showed the importance of this collaborative approach. Partnerships extended to Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, Local council, SES, Lifeline, Red Cross, Artists, art therapists, community workers

The Process of collaborative practice between CRN and AMNC

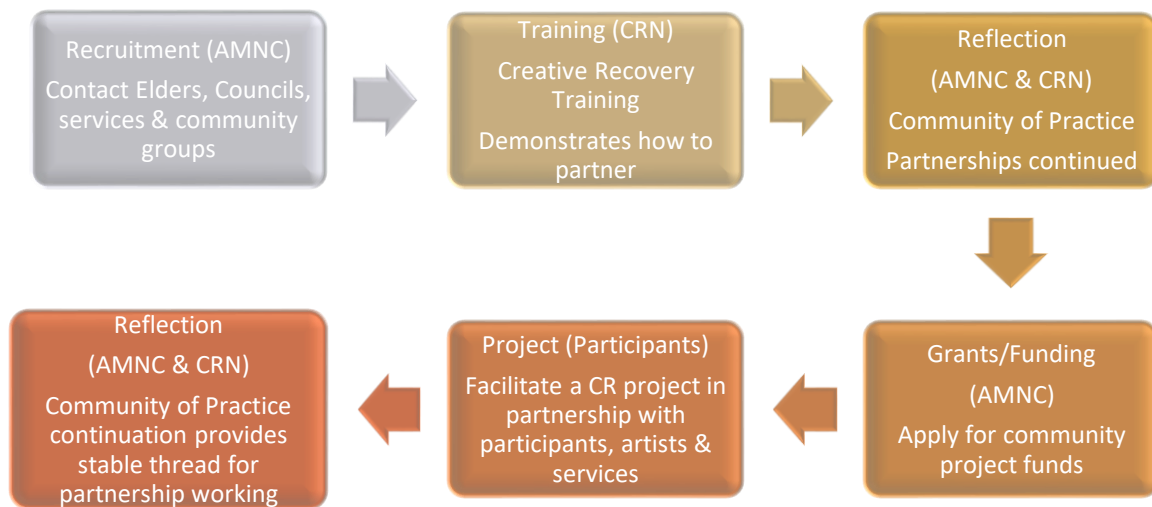


Figure 12 How organisational collaboration can work.

The above diagram shows the process of the collaboration of the CR training programme. It was necessary to lead and facilitate the programme until the culmination of the community projects, as the networks were only just forming. The space needed to be held safely to provide the trauma informed frame needed for the programme to be successful in meeting its aims and objectives.

All participants said the training was worthwhile as indicated in Figure 14.

How would you rate the event overall?

Answered: 38 Skipped: 1



Figure 13 Overall experience of the 41 respondents

communities. The surveys showed that all participants had built a good understanding of the risks and observations showed most felt they could respond. There was an innate and learnt understanding due to the enormity of recent disasters that continued through the training. The participants gained capacity and capability to respond to future disasters with government, private sector, civil society and organisations engaged in plans for mitigation and management of the recovery. The participants reported a significant gain in their capability to respond to future disasters and capacity that was dependant

on collaborative working. Without a systemised creative recovery response to disaster included in federal, state and local emergency preparedness policies and protocols it will be difficult to ensure capacity is maintained. See Appendix 1 for measures with method outcomes.

The diagram below shows how the training can spread beyond the training workshops through the employment of a project officer (PO) and the formation of a community of practice (CoP). This approach could increase the success of the training programme.

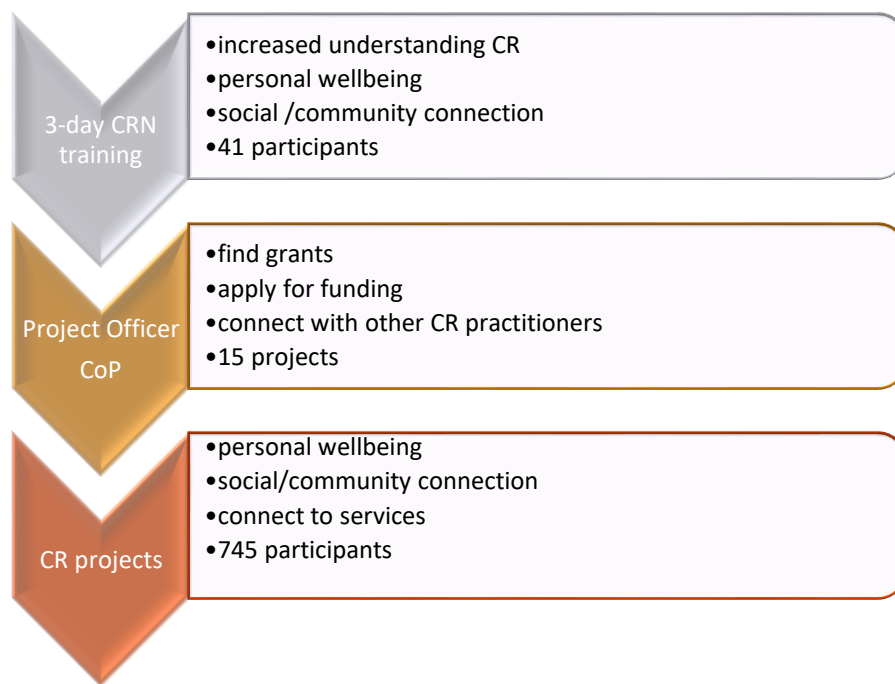


Figure 15 How the training directly impacts community

Conclusion

The CRN three-day training programme was directly beneficial to participants because it provided a safe space for them to process some of the closely felt impacts of recent disasters. The training disseminated an array of

theories with accompanying tools using experiential learning techniques accompanied by info-graphics and examples of creative recovery projects from around the world that all enhanced the programme's pedagogy. A variety of learning styles were noticeably accommodated. This showed the thought and consideration that was woven into the training package to make it accessible.

The training built a stronger network of creative responders, provided inter-service networking opportunities, and advocated forming stronger connections between services. Those connections were formed during the training, though keeping them going has thus far proved a challenge. The evaluation has shown that communication between agencies cannot be solely left to the community groups, but rather there should be someone in place to connect services, support grant writing, and facilitate a community of practice (CoP). This role can help strategize with other umbrella organisations involved in disaster response e.g. local council and state disaster response teams.

The training was designed to help individuals and communities build strength and resilience, which can mitigate some of the devastating impacts of these increasing adverse events. The Australian government's National Recovery and Resilience Agency's (NRRRA) main objectives of improving the long-term resilience of Australian communities and delivering disaster risk reduction projects was met. Thus, the training programme aligned with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (2022). It achieved its goals by sensitively establishing a protocol for working creatively with people after a disaster. It also showed the necessity of minimising the possibility of retraumatising communities through unwanted support.

The facilitation began by ensuring that the First Peoples of Australia were acknowledged, listened to and learnt from. By engaging community leaders

from the start of the programme, authenticity was ensured. When community leaders support such a programme, communities have less doubt about a project. This is particularly important for communities who have been through the trauma that many disasters cause.

The CRN training placed emphasis on "strengthening community relationships, fostering community collaboration, and building trust and cooperation", all of which have the hallmarks for enhancing community cohesion and resilience. It is this community cohesion that is needed to help people through what can be deeply traumatising events. However, collaboration with governing bodies is essential in bringing this forward. The CRN and AMNC are in talks with local councils on how to embed the arts in recovery responses. The arts in recovery initiative is gaining traction as more communities find themselves in recovery from disasters. They need a variety of tools to process the grief and trauma caused by these events on an individual and community level. The participants of the training reported how they had been able to heal their own trauma at the training and many had then gone on to help their communities do the same. The last NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet implored: "We need to make sure communities across NSW are equipped to respond to natural disasters and that they have the support to get back on their feet".(NSW Dept. Planning and Environment, 2022). The CRN training package does just this. Furthermore, there has been a push from universities, peak arts, recovery and mental health organisations for specialist training for applying the arts to develop individual and community wellbeing because they understand its importance (Bennet et al.,

2022). Again, the CRN training package is suitable for this purpose.

Awadhalla and Qarooni (2018) found that communities who received psychosocial support experienced a sense of hope, feeling safe, calm, self-confident and socially connected. One participant from the CR projects that eventuated from the training echoed this when they said:

I felt connected in a way I haven't done for a long, long time ...it's the connections with people- it's what I needed, without that I don't know if we can truly heal- I cannot do it alone, I do it with people.

Like the evaluation of arts programmes for covid hit communities by Hancox, Gattenhof, Mackay, and Klaebe (2022), this evaluation also shows that participant-led projects that are responsive to the unique needs of community, serve that community well.

We have had incredible situations here, it's been wonderful absolutely fantastic. Their ability to bring community together is amazing... connected with members of community that I don't often see. Lovely to do things with likeminded people, can talk if you want to or do in silence.

The Creative Recovery Network's training sessions provided a thorough and detailed manifesto for working with people impacted by disasters. A range of tools were explored and utilised within the training, which made the learning process experiential, theoretical and practical. This was evidenced by the success of the participants in facilitating programs and gaining funding. This evaluation shows

how valuable the arts are in disaster recovery. The impacts of disasters are complex, thus require a grounded, flexible and empathetic response that creativity champions.

In line with the *Preparing Australia* program, the CRN training package equipped communities to manage and minimise devastating impacts (National Recovery and Resilience Agency, 2022). The CRN training programme showed the CR facilitators how to prepare, mitigate and respond to the impact of disasters using tools from the CRN training programme. Including the training in emergency response programmes would ensure the healing from catastrophic events includes accessible, connected and creative support.

The Project Officer role was vital to developing the training initiatives as the substantial connections formed during the training needed supporting so they could be carried through to form a network. The levels of connection were integral to the success of the programme. The strength of the network would be a factor in building resilient communities after disasters in the future. The projects created demonstrates how art has the capacity to help communities through disasters and that the facilitators of the art need to be sensitive to that community's needs, ideally they would be local to the area. The trust and acceptance of a community member in helping with the immensity of the after-math of a disaster offers connection from the start.

Recommendations:

The goals and outcomes from the evaluation have been used to guide the recommendations outlined below. The input from participants, facilitators and

organisers through surveys, observations, focus groups and interviews, as well as arts-based enquiry, informed this section.

Accessing the training

The training imparted relevant information, disseminated through theoretical and experiential learning frames. The depth and quantity of information was vast, thus difficult to condense into a shorter time frame. To increase the reach of the training, it may be useful to offer the training over a weekend and/or as a residential. Some participants suggested car-pooling and accommodation support as well as more breaks to absorb the information.

Evaluation

Arts-based, observation and focus groups were the methods that worked best for this evaluation, as they did not interrupt the process of the CR training or the resulting CR projects. To understand further how CR projects can help communities, it would be pertinent to ensure evaluation is included within the workshops. The surveys given out to participants of the CR projects, were not always welcomed at the culmination of the workshop, as the atmosphere was often one of deep reflection. Surveys sent out after the event were often overlooked. Minimising this type of data collection in favour of using arts-based approaches that could tie in with the training's reflections toward the end of the workshop could help the evaluative process. Conversely, the focus groups provided a way to reconnect after the training, and reflect on any CR projects that were taking place. They could be used to reflectively evaluate a CR project and double up as a starting point for a community of practice and be led by the PO.

Ensure facilitation remains at a high standard

The facilitation of the training requires someone with practical disaster response experience as well as a theoretical understanding of the frames used in CR. Additionally, the facilitator needs to have the skills and capacity to disseminate that information in a way that helps attendees understand the depth of emotional intelligence required for emergency response situations. It was clear from the feedback from the participants that it was the facilitator's techniques that helped them to feel safe and connected during the powerful CR training. These techniques were modelled to provide an experiential learning of the importance of safety and connection for people displaced by disaster, as well as being essential for building community resilience. By demonstrating the power of an open, safe and connected space, the participants were given a deeper understanding of the material being taught. This theoretical approach combined with creative activities made the training holistic. The programme's facilitation had an authenticity that is essential for working with people who have experienced complex adversity.



Figure 16 Interactive training day

The role of the Project Officer

the space was so supportive and connected but what happens now? How do we reconnect and share ideas? (Participant)

The training programme integrated the recommendations of the Black Saturday Bushfire CR evaluation (Fisher & Talvé, 2011), where they found the role of the Project Officer to be essential in providing consistent support for CR projects. Respectively, this evaluation also found that “the combination of the small grant funding and the support role of the Arts Recovery Project Officer was a successful post-disaster model of support” (Fisher & Talvé, 2011, p. 3). Ensuring a PO is involved from the start would provide participants with a reliable connection with someone to coordinate the evaluation of the project whilst developing a CoP. The PO role helps participants to feel able to reach out for the support most of the community members require when facing what can feel like a daunting task. As recommended

by Fisher and Talvé (2011), AMNC ensured the application for the quick grants was as clear and unencumbered as possible, but even then some community members did not feel competent in this area, and many waited for the follow-up zoom support before applying. There was feedback from participants about wanting to find ways to connect after the training. The Project Officer took on this role and found that she was needed as a conduit between the participants and then the networks. It is recommended that trained CR facilitators are supported by a project officer when offering any training or running projects.

Community of Practice

The overall feedback from training participants was a need to stay connected at the culmination of the training. Though a project officer was employed, this did not occur until after the training. A community of practice could be the body that connects with local emergency response teams, but would require the formal employment of a project officer to facilitate and connect.

Maintaining connection

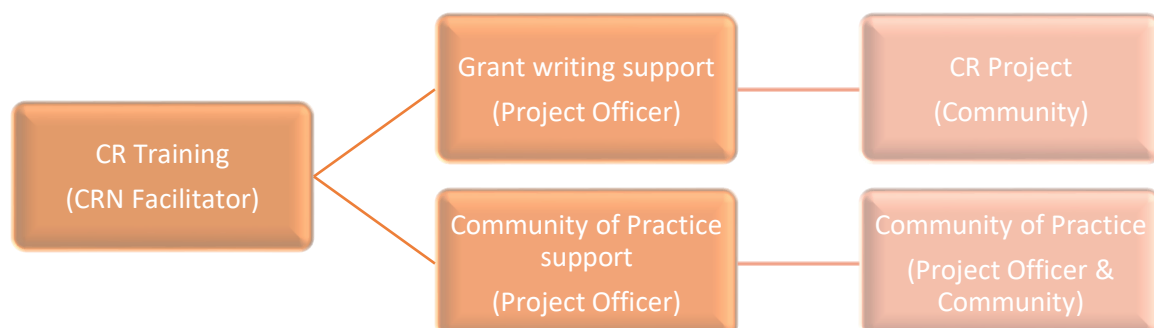


Figure 17 Model for maintaining connection

Ensure grants are available to training participants

The grants that were available after the training in this instance, may not always be available. It is recommended that within the National and State disaster recovery budget, space is given so CR projects sit alongside the practical needs of impacted communities. The case studies show how cost-effective CR small grants can be in supporting communities.



Figure 18 Weave to Heal CR Project

Access

The 2021/2022 disasters affected signing-up and participation rates, thus the numbers were lower than anticipated. Councils were working on repair and emergency response, as were many services and individuals. In the future, planning should accommodate the possibility of difficulties accessing the training, this is particularly true for rural and regional communities. Some participants had recommended that future training include accommodation so people could fully immerse themselves, and/or so that travel between the venue and home did not take up so much time. This would have allowed more time to network and collaborate and process. It could lead to a more organically built CoP.

More time

Some participants fed back that they would have liked more breaks to absorb the learning but often these comments were then countered with an understanding that the amount of information and what was included could not be paired down. Three full days would allow for processing time as well as more networking and arts-based evaluation. Others had said they wanted to have some experience in how to develop a project and apply for a grant. If three full days were used, the last afternoon could focus on ensuring the participants were ready to design projects and apply for grants before the training finished. Again this could feed into evaluation as the learning that had occurred would be applied to project development. Many participants felt that they needed more time to be allocated to breaks for absorbing the wealth of information conveyed by the facilitator. Others had wanted a tea break and time to talk with others in the group to form closer networks. Breaking up the training days with more breaks and space to reflect and connect would be helpful but many understood that there was much to get through. Formalising the training with accreditation would also support lengthening the programme



Figure 19 Word cloud: recommendations



Figure 20 Taking a break during the training

Accreditation

Formalising the training so that attendants receive an accredited certificate or credit/PD points and it becomes part of emergency response training/curriculums is also recommended. Formalisation of the training will be essential for CR responses to be imbedded in emergency response management. The emergency response field is growing, and the arts are recognised as being integral to supporting disaster impacted communities. The training could gain accreditation status, become a module delivered through emergency preparedness and response curriculums, through mental health, community arts and art therapy curriculums.

Embedding CR into existing local organisations

Regional Arts Development Organisations (RADOs) such as Art Mid North Coast (AMNC) are uniquely positioned to spearhead the devolution of disaster recovery funding for creative recovery programs to communities in the

region.

As RADOs are funded across regional NSW through Create NSW and Local Government partners, they have an established presence. They also have the needed experience in facilitating artistic initiatives and cultural programs that bolster community resilience. Their existing network of local artists, community organizations, and government bodies enables seamless communication and coordination, making them a direct conduit between local government and artists in the community. This connectivity fosters a deep understanding of the specific needs and aspirations of the affected areas, ensuring that recovery efforts are tailored to the unique characteristics of each community.

By leveraging their structure and purpose, RADOs could be effectively utilised to channel disaster recovery funding to grassroots artistic projects that not only foster healing and expression but also contribute to the overall social and economic revival of the region. This decentralisation approach practical and effective. The evaluation has shown such RADOs can empowers communities to actively participate in their own recovery, fostering a sense of ownership that is vital for long-term resilience.

Implications for Practice

The evaluation has given some insight into how creative recovery can be utilised to enhance practice in the aftermath of disaster. Arts workers are well placed to be orchestrators of social interaction through creative process. They are fundamental to healing communities looking for support to process ruinous

events and situations (Cameron, 2009). Their creative abilities can help build connection, and thus, the resilience required by communities to heal and prepare for the future.

Art can help us to emotionally navigate the journey of battling an illness or injury, to process difficult emotions in times of emergency and challenging events. The creation and enjoyment of the arts helps promote holistic wellness and can be a motivating factor in recovery (Daisy & Saoirse, 2019).

First Nations Knowledge

Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Peoples should be prioritised when developing CR training and projects to ensure knowledge and wisdom are at the heart of the programmes. This leads the whole community approach, and

encourages inclusiveness. By taking the time to acknowledge and deeply reflect on the Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of disaster-impacted communities can enrich participant experience through connection with a deeper story of the land and its peoples. This provides a rich form of connection to the space. It grounds the project in something beyond that time and place, thus has the potential to allow for the grieving of what has past because of a disaster, using the perspective of the long history the area has already experienced.

The wisdom of Dadirri (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2022), and other cultural approaches not only teach ways of being that supports an appropriate recovery response, but also acknowledge cultural connection to the natural environment as a protective factor that can be harnessed during and after stressful events.



Figure 21 The simplicity and healing nature of Dadirri

Holding the space safely

Facilitation of a group with experience of the trauma associated with disasters requires considerable skill. The training gave participants an understanding of how important the facilitation of a CR project is, whilst also providing an array of tools to ensure safety. People exposed to the kind of disasters the world is currently experiencing require individualised and community support. Art straddles both with ease and has a range of therapeutic benefits that can be utilised within the CR space.

Upskilling artists

CRN training informed participants through experiential and theoretical pedagogy. It was aimed at professionals working in the areas of arts, health, and community. Preparing communities to use creativity to process what they have encountered can help build strength and resilience. Collective work, shared language and CoP would help to develop a formalised practice framework that could become an emergency response module for art workers. This would help to share the weight of the projects and provide a core capacity building platform within the arts. Artists are well placed to collaborate and use their skills and tools to a training based on creative recovery and then feel able to facilitate their own projects with the community.

Connections

The connections that were formed during the training and the following CR projects are what is required for building resilient communities. Therefore, focusing

on the inter-relational aspect of the Creative Recovery frame will support a community, and an individual's ability to 'bounce back' after experiencing a disaster. These connections also contributed to the confidence of participants, again an essential component to resilience. The connections need to extend to councils and other bodies so that people understand what needs to happen and by whom.

Creative Recovery process

Preparing local artists and arts workers using the Creative Recovery Network (CRN) training will give participants a thorough understanding of how to work with disaster impacted communities as well as build their local networks. This would ensure they are ready to coordinate responses with local councils and emergency services. Both coordinators from CRN and AMNC foresaw this as the best possible outcome. They envisaged that the participants would have the same set of tools, but would utilise their individual creative talents to work with their disaster-impacted communities. The CR facilitators would be part of a community of practice (CoP) that connects them, and offers peer support. Ideally the Project Officer position would be formalised, as research demonstrates both here and in the 2009 Victoria bushfire response (2011), how important their position is. The CR projects developed after the training days worked in this manner, however the project officer was a temporary role, so making the continuation of a community of practice challenging. Below is the Creative Recovery process model that can guide councils and relevant organisations.

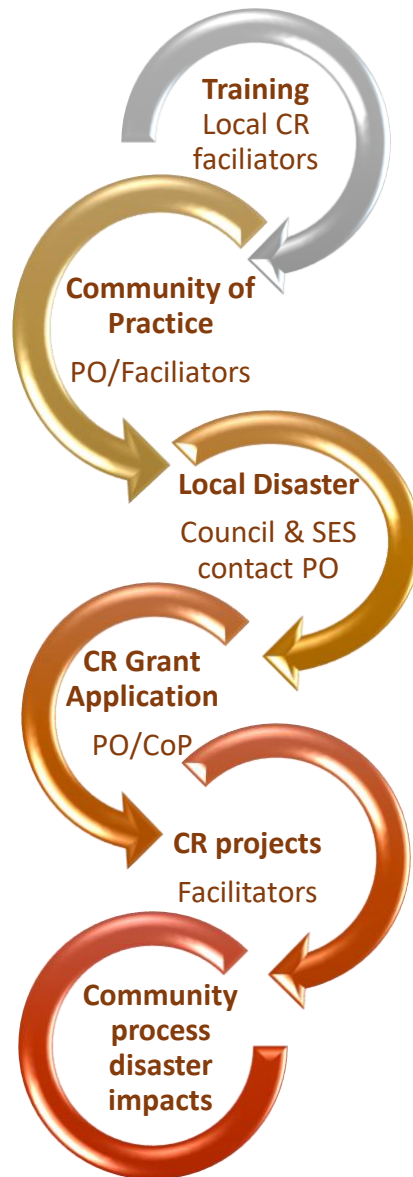


Figure 22 Creative Recovery model for practice

Limitations

Though the evaluation has shown how useful creativity can be in processing the difficulties that such events present, it was a small evaluation that took place in one area of Australia. Thus, the outcomes may not be found in other regional areas. However, the evaluation of bushfire recovery in Victoria by Fisher and Talvé

(2011), showed many similar outcomes specifying the arts as a viable, cost effective tool for engaging people to help them through some of the impacts of a disaster. The evaluation can be used to steer future evaluation and research in the field. Furthermore, it can be used as a guide to coordinating creative community collaboration, an important protective factor for communities processing extreme events. See the model in Figure 18 above.

Declaration

Dr Emma Gentle is a member of the Creative Recovery Network (CRN) and has facilitated Creative Recovery workshops funded by Arts Mid-North Coast (AMNC), with primary schools in the Orara Valley in NSW after the black summer bushfires of 2019/2020. She was employed by AMNC to evaluate the impact of the CRN three-day training sessions because of her experience in the field. At the culmination of the training, the participants were encouraged to apply for small creative recovery grants from AMNC that specified facilitating a local creative recovery project. Many of those projects were also assessed and are included in this evaluation.

Appendices

Appendix 1

AMNC and CRN Measurements of Achievement with data collection method

AMNC Measures	Obs.	Survey	Focus Group	Int.
Strengthened social capital in the region through cooperative partnerships, cohesive networks and capacity building activities that have a creative focus.	Y	Y	Y	Y
Empowered communities to be able to control, lead and facilitate their own pathways to recovery and express their own experiences and their different and changing needs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Establishment of a local Creative Responders leadership team	N	N	N	N
A networked community of cultural leaders in the region trained to work in disaster management and recovery	Y	Y	Y	Y
An ongoing community of practice to support reflection, problem-solving and strengthening of an effective collaborative workforce	N	N	N	N
Increased knowledge, skills and capacity for artists, cultural organisations and community groups to work with communities and to lead and manage creative recovery projects	Y	Y	Y	Y
Contribution to body of knowledge and research in fields of emergency management and disaster recovery and the role of arts and community cultural development	Y	Y	Y	Y
Stronger partnerships, collaborations and relationships between sectors working in the recovery process, with formal connections made between individuals, groups and organisations	Y	Y	Y	Y
Provide good practice case studies that can contribute to the development of new, projects, models and frameworks for the delivery of Creative Recovery programs by artists and communities	Y	Y	Y	Y
Better understanding of the role the arts can play in the disaster preparedness and recovery of communities	Y	Y	Y	Y
Establish working relationships between the arts and broader sectors i.e Local & State Government, Emergency Management, Health & Education, for continued partnerships and future collaborations	Y	Y	Y	Y
Create and leave a legacy of tools and resources to inform and contribute towards the development and delivery of creative recovery programs/projects.	Y	Y	Y	Y

CRN Measures	Obs.	Surveys	Focus Groups	Int.
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Is there an increased awareness of the role the arts can play in the disaster recovery process and supporting and sustaining community resilience.	Y	Y	Y	Y
Was there an increase in the participants understanding of the disaster context in Creative Recovery	Y	-	Y	Y
Were participants more confident in working with communities impacted by disaster	Y	-	Y	Y
Has an increased awareness of the risks of future disasters been established? Do participants feel confident in mitigating these risks?	Y	Y	Y	-
Was there an increased skills, knowledge and networks & capacity to respond to future disasters?	Y	Y	Y	Y
How well did the program support the needs of community? Are there areas for improvement?	Y	Y	Y	Y
How well did the program work with key stakeholders (e.g. Local Councils, community organisations, emergency management, health services)	Y	-	Y	Y
Did the training lead to an increased understanding and recognition for embedding arts-led recovery programs in disaster management plans	Y	-	Y	Y

Appendix 2

Evaluation Method

Criteria

Participants from the Mid-North Coast council areas were invited to attend the training taking place in the area. Due to many changes from Covid and then the floods, people changed bookings and some went to other trainings instead. Participants needed to have an arts background and have experience in working with communities.

Data Gathering

The evaluation collected data from questionnaires designed in Survey Monkey, observations of the training and focus groups held after the training when participants had utilised the learning to create a Creative Recovery project. CRN and AMNC coordinators were interviewed at completion to learn if their expectations and goals had eventuated.

Groups	Method	Source
Kempsey	Survey Observation Focus Groups Interviews	Training group participants Training groups Participants and stakeholders Programme co-ordinators CRN and AMNC
Taree	Survey Observation Focus Groups Interviews	Training group participants Training groups Participants and stakeholders Programme co-ordinators CRN and AMNC
Bellingen	Survey Observation Focus Groups Interviews	Training group participants Training groups Participants and stakeholders Programme co-ordinators CRN and AMNC

Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using Survey Monkey analysis tools. The qualitative data was analysed with NVivo software thematic analysis tools using codes and themes that related to the goals of the programme.

Risk management

Risk:	Risk Management:
a) Triggering content	Support for attendees from trainer. Many participants work within the mental health/recovery sector. A psychotherapist available to support people if needed.
b) COVID 19	Use current covid guidelines, zoom option
c) Low attendance	Booking system and follow up contact before the training

Analysis- coding and questions

CRN Goals	Nvivo Code	Survey questions
Awareness of the role the arts can play in the disaster recovery process and supporting and sustaining community resilience.	resilience, arts in recovery, enhanced creativity, empowerment	
Increase in the participants understanding of the disaster context in the Creative Recovery?	arts in recovery, knowledge	
Were participants more confident in working with communities impacted by disaster?	confidence, empowerment	
Awareness of the risks of future disasters and feel confident in mitigating these risks?	disaster awareness, confidence, empowerment	
Increased skills, knowledge and networks & capacity to respond to future disasters?	skills, knowledge, connections	
How well the program supported the needs of community and whether there are areas for improvement	Barriers, connections	
How well the program worked with key stakeholders (e.g. Local Councils, community organisations, emergency management, health services)	ext. collaboration, connection	
If the training led to an increased understanding and recognition for embedding arts-led recovery programs in disaster management plans	disaster management planning	

Appendix 3

CRN Three-day training survey

1. What is your age range? * Mark only one oval. Under 18

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - 64

65 +

Prefer not to say

2. What town/area/suburb do you live in?

3. What is your postcode?

4. Do you identify as? Check all that apply.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Australian South Sea Islander?

As a person living with disability?

As someone from a Language Background Other Than English Prefer not to say

None of the above

5. Were there any issues or barriers for you in attending this workshop?

6. What was the most valuable part of the workshop?

7. How would you rate the following outcomes from today's training?

Terrible

Poor Fair Good

Excellent

Capacity to support individuals and communities resilience

Connections to other people or services (networking)

Improved creative skills

Confidence in supporting people impacted by disasters

8. Tick the psychological, social and physiological risks that disasters pose to individuals and groups:

PTSD symptoms, anxiety, depression, and stress-related physiological changes

Anxiety

Depression

Health complaints with increased need of medical services Stress-related physiological changes

Social disconnection

Family disconnection

Community disconnection

Prolonged grief

9. What kind of disasters could affect your community in the future?

10. How could you or your service respond to those disasters using a creative recovery approach?

11. How would you rate the event overall?

Terrible Poor Fair Good Excellent

12. How could this training be improved

Appendix 4

Focus group probes (post training)

- 1) How did the CR training help you prepare for the risk of local disasters?
- 2) Have you connected with individuals or other organisations to prepare for future disasters?
- 3) Have you been able to use creative recovery tools since the training? Please elaborate.
- 4) What local creative skills and services have you thought of that could help in disaster recovery?
- 5) Are you confident in your ability to support and sustain people who have experienced a recent disaster?
- 6) Looking back at how you can practically use creative recovery tools, how could the training be improved?
- 7) Do you feel you can reach out to other networks (councils, AMNC, others in the training, CoP) when a disaster impact your community?

Appendix 5

CR projects Survey (post-training)

1. What is your age range? * Mark only one oval. Under 18

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - 64

65 +

Prefer not to say

2. What LGA do you live in? Mid Coast

Hastings

Port Macquarie Kempsey

Nambucca Valley Bellingen

Coffs Harbour

Other (please specify)

3. Do you identify as? Check all that apply. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? Australian South Sea Islander?
As a person living with disability?

As someone from a Language Background Other Than English Prefer not to say

None of the above

4. Please rate the programme in relation to the following:

Very poor

Below average

Average

Above average

Excellent

Connection to services

Social connection Personal wellbeing

Better understanding of using creativity in recovery

Understanding of disaster risks and preparedness

Comment:

5. How would you rate the programme overall?

Very poor Below average, Average, Above Average , Excellent

Comments:

6. On a scale of 1-5, how useful do think this programme would be for others in your community?

Not at all Slightly Moderately Very Extremely

Comments:

7. In your experience of the program, how did the facilitators provide the following:

Not good OK

Very good

Excellent

I felt safe in the space and with the group

I felt included in the group

I was provided with the all the information needed for my participation

The Venue was suitable for my needs

The hospitality and catering provided for my needs

8. How could this programme be improved?

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Creative Recovery Project Case Studies

Part 2



Part 2: Creative Recovery Projects

The evaluation of these creative recovery (CR) projects occurred to help Arts Mid North Coast (ANC) understand how the CR projects they fund, impact people and their communities. Regular and significant environmental disasters have had damaging effects on these small communities. They work hard to recover with often limited resources and aging populations. Often the recovery focus is placed on the practical aspects of recovery, such as food, shelter, and other resources, while emotional recovery is usually secondary. The CR projects illustrated in this report were developed to support community emotional recovery.

The CR projects were developed at the culmination of the Creative Recovery Network (CRN) training programme. This second evaluation report shows how the CRN training programme supplied participants with tools that were then utilised to help them apply for Creative Recovery project funding when grants became available. This process was streamlined through the partnership between AMNC and CRN.

AMNC received a grant that enabled them to offer \$2500 grants to local community/arts workers who had attended the training (described in Report 1). The CR project facilitators used the skills and tools they learnt during the CRN training, combined with their wealth of experience in the field, to run a variety of workshops. Each of their communities had been directly affected by the Covid 19 pandemic regulations in addition to 2019/20 bushfires and the 2021/22 floods. The data gathered during the training evaluation showed that nearly all participants had not yet found the time, nor the tools, to process these significant events. The workshops that received grants included art-making, weaving, film, drumming, zine/cartoon creations, dance and movement. In all, the workshops reached 475 participants across the Mid North Coast region of NSW.

To evaluate the CR projects, interviews and surveys were conducted with seven facilitators. The participants of eight of the workshops also completed surveys. Some of this data is discussed in Report 1 of this evaluation. The CR projects with completed surveys had similar results: The participants enjoyed the experience, found the workshops valuable to connect and heal, and complimented the facilitator's skills. Some suggestions for improvement were to increase the number of participants attending and have them continue as an ongoing support. Not all participants felt that everyone in their communities would engage with a CR workshop but stated that many would likely gain from participating in the process. Below is the overall rating for CR projects from completed survey data (8 out of 14 projects).



Figure 23 Creative Recovery projects score

1. Fabulous!

Location: Moorool Creek

Facilitator: Ann McDermott

Participants: 68

Star rating: 4.8

Partners:

- ◆ Bushfire Community Recovery and Resilience Fund
- ◆ Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal
- ◆ Healthy North Coast
- ◆ Primary health Network
- ◆ Lifetime Connect

Background

Moorool Creek is a small rural and isolated community located in Biripi country on the Mid-North Coast of NSW. Since 2019 this community has experienced years of drought, followed by bushfires, serious flooding and years of COVID 19. These compounding disasters left this community feeling fractured and disconnected.

Facilitated by local artist and art teacher, Ann McDermott, Fabulous! encouraged her community to delve into an intuitive and instinctive creative process. Ann partnered with Moorool Creek Hall & Progress Association to complete this project. Fabulous! aimed to encourage individual expression and creative approaches, whilst developing skills and working collaboratively.

The project was created to enhance the social environment by strengthening connections and psychosocial well-being, thereby building resilience. Ann aimed to enrich traditional whole community get-togethers of sharing a meal, whilst celebrating through the arts.

Outcomes

"After the fires, my husband and I suffered quite a lot with our mental health.... To be able to do something away from the property and be able to do some creative things has been really therapeutic for me". Workshop Participant

Held at the Moorool Creek Hall over three Saturdays. Participants explored the phoenix fable, symbolic of new beginnings and took part in diverse art forms of storytelling, poetry, origami, paper/bamboo lantern-making and drumming, providing expressive means to recount and reframe the experiences of the Black Summer bushfire disaster. The program allowed participants to explore the regenerative capacity of nature using themes of regrowth, return of the birds, and new life in their environment.

The workshops culminated in a community event including an exhibition of their works and a lantern parade. Residents contributed a shared meal and the men of the community cooked with camp ovens in the fire pit. A regular event that had not taken place for three years, in the wake of drought, bushfire and Covid restrictions, the Winter Feast was an evening that brought the whole community together again to reflect and celebrate. They were able to express themselves, develop a range of new skills and contribute in their individual ways.

The creative activities at the Moorool Creek community hall have continued, cementing the importance of the facility and the role of the arts in providing ongoing opportunities for the community to reconnect and strengthen bonds and friendships. Participants wanted more workshops, saying: "could be improved by having more of them...continuity"



Figure 24 Collaboration at Moorall Creek



Figure 25 Working on a lantern for the lantern parade



Figure 26 Origami Phoenix's made by workshop participants



Figure 27 Poetry and artwork by one participant

Evaluation Survey Results

Overall participants gave the workshop 4.8 stars out of 5. They rated the social connection and personal wellbeing excellent. For the measures of Connection to services, Better understanding of using creativity in recovery and understanding of disaster risks and preparedness participants rated them average, above average and excellent. Quotes from participants showed their hope to have more workshops of a similar nature in their area.

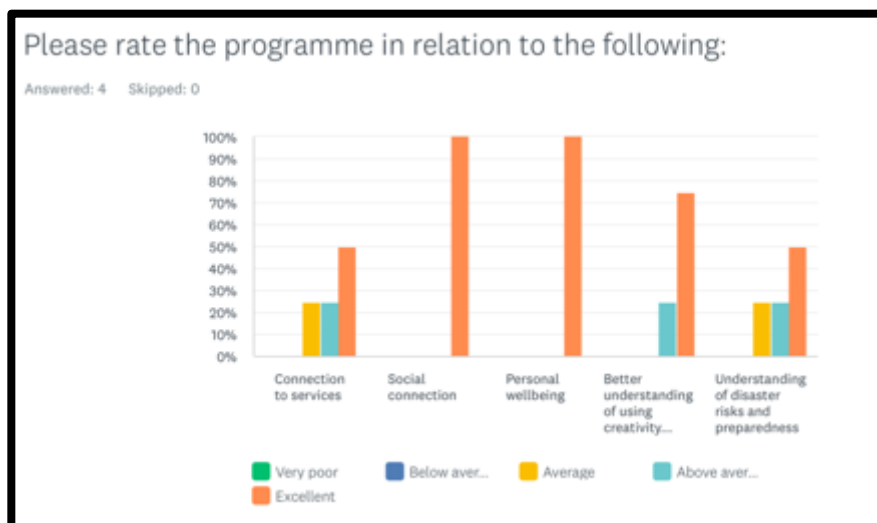


Figure 28 Survey data Fabulous!

2. Slippry Sirkus

Location: Stuart's Point

Facilitator: Denni Scott Davis

Participants: 15

Star rating: N/A

Partners:

- ◆ Stuart's Point Fire Brigade
- ◆ SES

Background

Mid North Coast arts organisation, SmartArts in the Kempsey Shire is on the border of Gumbaynggirr and Dunghutti land. Denni Scott Davis created a project that would help local emergency service responders process the 2019/20 bushfires, and the disasters they had responded to since. She worked with 15 members of the Yarrahapinni Stuarts Point Rural Fire Service and broader community to support their recovery after the intense 2019/20 bushfires.

The photography workshops took place in 2022 and provided an opportunity to share their experiences and record their stories utilising photovoice techniques. Several of the members who responded to the 2019 catastrophic bush fires in the regions have also supported other communities across Australia, including the Black Saturday communities. There has been little opportunity to collaboratively reflect and process their experiences.

The process focused on the history of the brigade, its members and community and their resilience and determination. The workshops provided an opportunity for the fire brigade and community to discuss challenges they have overcome, and what they still face. They explored their capacity to respond to emergencies, fight bushfires and maintain the RFS capacity in regard to funding, equipment and personnel.

Outcomes

The images that were created during the project are shown below and mixed with quotes from the participants.

"Like Nemo – you keep on swimming, just keep on swimming" "You get back up, there is no choice"

"Staying strong – no matter what life throws at you"

"When it is out of your control, it makes you feel helpless"

"We have the local knowledge, yet they won't listen to us"

"Sometimes it seems we only come together as a community for a funeral or fire or flood"

"You have to heal yourself, before you can help others and the community"

"Support each other, that's what you do"

3. Black Bird Creative Recovery Project

Location: Kempsey

Facilitator: Marg Coutts & Nancy Spasoto

Participants: 15

Star rating: 4.9

Partners:

- ◆ Bushfire Community Recovery and Resilience Fund
- ◆ Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal
- ◆ Healthy North Coast
- ◆ Primary health Network
- ◆ Lifetime Connect

Background

The Black Bird Creative Recovery Project was undertaken on Gumbaynggirr land in the Nambucca Valley. Like much of the East Coast of Australia, the area experienced the 2019/20 bushfires, 2021/22 floods, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Marg Coutts, a local art therapist and Nancy Spasoto, a local artist, brought a series of workshops together to support local communities.

The programme aimed to help participants connect with and make meaning of their experience of recent disasters and recovery using creative expression. Marg used artmaking and writing techniques informed by an art therapy frame. The participants used self-expression and reflection within group processes that supported participants to connect through the process. A series of three Creative Recovery workshops delivered in three separate locations in the Nambucca Valley in 2022. The workshops included movement, creative writing, drawing and collaborative painting processes to support individual healing and community connections.

Outcomes

15 participants attended the workshops. Nearly all said they wanted this to be a regular workshop so they and possibly other community members could continue to check in using art-based recovery methods. It was thought the whole community would benefit from attending.

*"people loved it!. They felt safe to talk about their problems and open up and talk about stuff"
"It allowed you to give your body and mind what it needs" "I enjoyed every minute. Art is good for everyone" Workshop Participants*

By participating in these workshops, people were able to tell their stories through creative expression and storytelling in a safely held and reflective space. Other community members were present to bear witness to the story, connect with each other over their experiences, and reflect. All of these contribute to integrating their experience individually and collectively and supporting pathways to move forward from a traumatic experience.

A video of this project can be found here:

<https://artsmidnorthcoast.com/smart-art-item/blackbird-bushfire-recovery-project/>

Evaluation Survey Results

All participants reported that they had enjoyed the chance to create together. They gave the workshop 4.9 /5 stars. Some had suggested it be better advertised so that all places

could be filled. Having more people would have enhanced their experience though all reported they had felt it to be helpful for their disaster recovery. See the chart below.

"I found the programme was well organized and well guided. My only disappointment was that more people did not take the opportunity to participate".

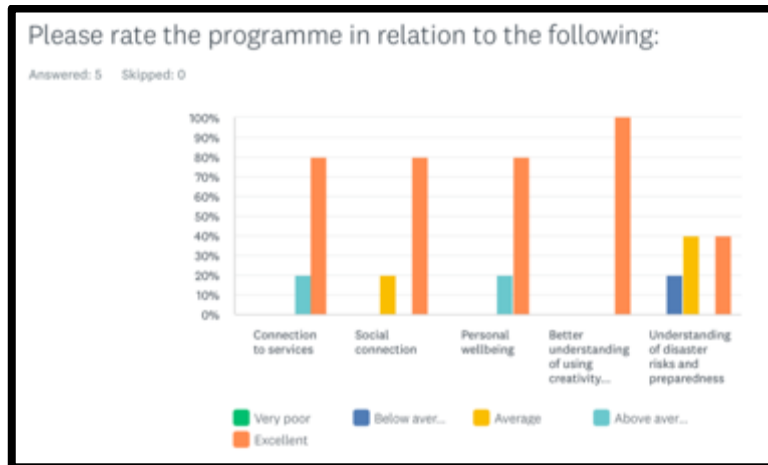


Figure 29 Survey data Blackbird workshop



Figure 30 Painting during the Black Bird Recovery Workshop

4. Power of Song Workshops

Location: Kempsey

Facilitator: Ruth Nolan

Participants: 300

Partners: St Joseph's Primary School

Background

Kempsey is a small town located on the Mid North Coast in Dunghutti country. The town has experienced disasters of drought, the 2019 bushfires, the 2021 and 2022 flooding events, followed by COVID 19. This has been a challenge for the community but also for the children who have been impacted in several ways, for example directly impacted in their homes and families, disruption to normal life routines and reduction in connection with friends. Singing in groups, movement and other community related activities were limited in schools at the height of the COVID 19 pandemic. Two full day Power of Song workshops were offered at St Joseph's Primary School Kempsey during Term 3, 2022. Workshops were delivered by year group over a series of sessions. The workshops used world music songs to introduce acapella harmony singing in an age-appropriate manner. Body percussion and rhythmic movement was employed to enhance the therapeutic benefits offered by group harmony singing. The children enjoyed the singing and body movement and engaged enthusiastically in the sessions. Power of Song workshops were designed and delivered by Ruth Nolan, a fully qualified Creative Arts Therapist and experienced choir leader, known to the students through her role at St Joseph's as part time School Counsellor.

Recovery and resilience were gained through this choir as access and inclusion was provided to all ages and capabilities. Singing used the body as an instrument making it a low-cost musical activity available to everyone with hearing. The rhythmic, repetitive movement and breathing during singing, switched off trauma brain response and developed new neural pathways. A felt sense of community was strengthened through the unity of breath and heartbeat coherence. Singing united the whole school community, strengthening belonging and connection.

Outcomes

The kids were enthusiastic and enjoyed the singing and clapping and hand movements. The kids haven't been able to do singing for a few years due to COVID so they were enthusiastic and enjoyed the experience of learning to sing together. Teachers reported that the children have been more focused and alert and improved listening skills in class. The kids have reported that the singing group makes them feel good and confident.

"Singing together builds a group identity and community benefits. The kids love being on stage".

"Sometimes it makes me feel relaxed, it calms me down when I am stressed, if you sing you can be confident."

"Singing together we can be in time, we work together, if we mess up we have our friends to help us"



Figure 31 Students singing



Figure 32 Students using body percussion

5. Drumming

Location: Bellbrook and Willawarrin

Facilitator: Elke Wooderson

Participants: 64

Star Rating: 5

Partners: Vinnies Bushfire Recovery

Background

Willawarrin and Bellbrook are small towns located west of Kempsey in Dunghutti country on the NSW Mid-North Coast. The towns have experienced compounding disasters of drought, the 2019 bushfires, the 2021 and 2022 flooding events, and COVID 19. This has been destructive to the community, with many people experiencing loss, fear, isolation, and disconnection.

The Drumming workshop series was brought together and facilitated by local facilitators Elke Wooderson, Kerrienne Mcnamarra, Dee Bell and Kay Bridge using the Rhythm 2 Recovery program. Elke partnered with Community volunteers, Vinnies Bushfire recovery and community development to bring the workshops together and promote them to the community.

The workshop aimed to create connection and bonding after the isolation of the pandemic, several flooding events, and major bushfires. There was support offered to volunteers who were interested in being involved to co-facilitate and share responsibilities within the group in a space that fostered creative expression through music.

Outcomes

"Arts reaches a different part of the community. Community has been something that I have been reaching for since I moved here and I have been able to meet people during the small groups that have helped me form new friendships." Workshop Participant

Participants used the drum to enable communication and connection with other members of their community. They developed skills of deep listening, sharing stories, holding space for other's as they process the emotional impact of the disasters. The drumming project provided a way for participants to connect with their local community in fun ways as previous connection opportunities have been to support others in need and suffering. For many participants they had no experience with drumming and so were happy to learn new skills and overall really enjoyed the experience. Local community members are not able to connect through the internet and so face-to-face events are a great way for people to meet. Isolation was a big challenge through the COVID pandemic and slowed the process of recovering from previous environmental disasters. During the workshop facilitators led a listening and sharing activity which allowed participants to open up and share their experiences during the disasters. Participants shared that following on from this workshop they would be able to connect with their local community in the event of future disasters.



Figure 33 participants joining a group meditation



Figure 34 Participants enjoying drumming together

6. Dare to Dance

Location: Forster

Facilitator: Karen Kerkhoven

Participants: 49

Star Rating: 4.6

Partners:

- ◆ Forster Rural Fire Service
- ◆ Forster Neighbourhood Centre

Background

Foster is a rapidly growing coastal community located south east of Taree in the Worimi region of the Biripi nation to the north and Awabakal nation to the south. This region was impacted by flooding as it is located on a land spit between Wallis lake and the Pacific Ocean. This workshop was brought together by Karen Kerkhoven who is an artist, dancer, and choreographer. The workshops were facilitated by Karen to work with children and youth in the Forster area including the Forster Rural Fire Service to process information and experiences from the natural disasters that the community experienced.

Outcomes

Four workshops were run in total, with two in foster and two in Coomba Park. During the workshops the children developed their comfort levels with moving, especially after COVID where it was more common to watch things and be entertained rather than being the entertainment themselves. During COVID it was common for the imagination to come from the outside in, rather than from the inside out. The workshop focused on encouraging the children to express themselves through movement. The children were able to make new friends, there was intergenerational opportunities to connect with all ages. The people you dance with or make art with creates a special bond.

The participant shared their experience of being in the fires, they turned that into a dance of rescuing the wildlife. Through the process of creating art and movement there is time and space created to work through these challenging life experiences.

“ They [the children] thoroughly enjoyed the variety of activities provided for them, especially the creative movement and pottery session. We were very pleased with how the classes were conducted by Karen.”



Figure 35 Children play with a parachute



Figure 36 Creatin shapes with the parachute

Evaluation Survey Results

Overall participants gave the workshop 4.6 stars out of 5. Many rated the better understanding and personal wellbeing excellent and social connection as above average. For the measures of Connection to services, of using creativity in recovery and understanding of disaster risks and preparedness participants rated them below average, average, above average and excellent. Participants requested more workshops of a similar nature and for them to be offered regularly.

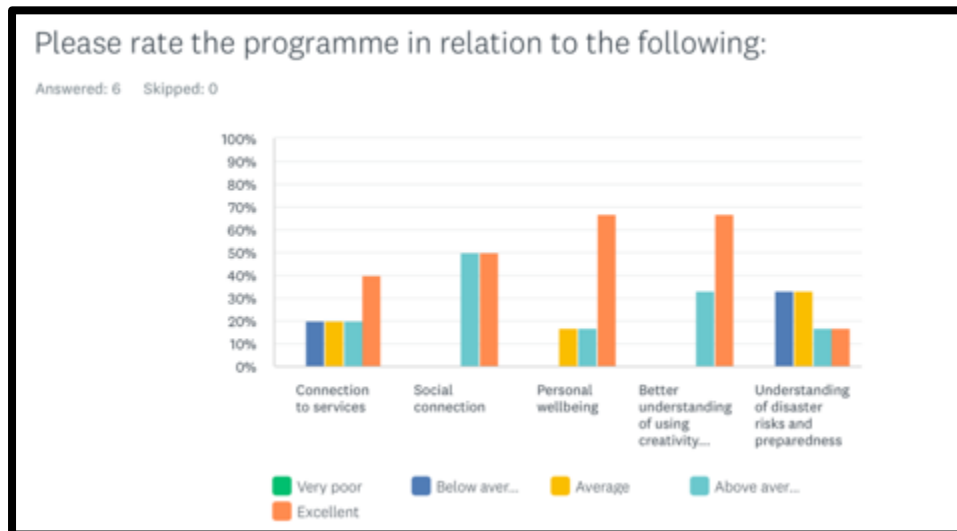


Figure 37 Survey data Dare to Dance

7. Dawaandi

Location: Sawtell

Facilitator: Bernard Kelly-Edwards

Star Rating: 5

Participants: 36

Background

The small town of Sawtell on the Coffs Coast is located on Gumbaynggirr land. The word Dawaandi is a Gumbaynggirr word meaning shadow of a person, or reflection, and this is was the focus of the series of cultural workshops and evening event.

Bernard Kelly Edwards is a multimedia artist and local Gumbaynggirr man who drew on his cultural heritage and ancestral teachings to facilitate this workshop which brought together storytelling, art, and modern challenges to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect, express and share in a safe space. Participants used poetry, art, photography and music to express their experiences of Dawaandi (their shadow) and Patience, Awareness, Balance, and Integration (PABI). When participants can see themselves through Dawaandi and understand PABI, it will create greater resilience and allow them to continue to see these parts of themselves in all environments. This awareness provides clear measures that can keep themselves, and their families safe in the event of future disasters.

"When people share authentically it reminds you that everyone is going through this, and takes off the pressure that is going on inside you." Workshop Participant

Art allows something deep within yourself to come through. There is something in the creator within ourselves that has plenty of fuel to allow ourselves to be healed. It's a place to go regularly. A canvas might have a greater way of sharing a part of you that you haven't expressed before. It's the happy place, its comfortable it feels right, you are not under any pressure.

Outcomes

Participants took a sharing piece that they had made at the workshop home to reflect on and remind them of their inner strength to move through triggers from the past. They did this by connecting with their shadow in their everyday life on country, both on the land and in the water. The tools of PABI supported participants in their journey through life's challenges. It assisted them to be balanced and patient, as well as providing them with a greater awareness on how to integrate the principles of PABI in their everyday life.

"The program was amazing on so many levels. Some thoughts; to potentially make available subsidised or Billeted accommodation especially for out of Towners on the first night. Some extra discussion around taking and organising bookings, free vs paid tickets and how much to go into actual Disasters during the workshop. I found Lisa Hort attending my workshop and talking about the fires was a great addition. I really wanted the event centred around positivity and hope but think that having her there helped participants to open up. A good mix and when it was time to get creative again they could go back to that happy place".



Figure 38 Dawaandi storyteller and facilitator Bernard Edward-Kelly



Figure 39 Group work exploring connection

Evaluation Survey Results

Overall participants gave the workshop 5 stars out of 5. They rated the social connection, better understanding of using creativity in recovery and personal wellbeing as excellent. For the measures of connection to services, and understanding of disaster risks and preparedness participants rated them below average, average, above average and excellent. Quotes from participants showed their hope to have more workshops to continue with connections formed and create new ones.

“Please do more of them, great connections formed”

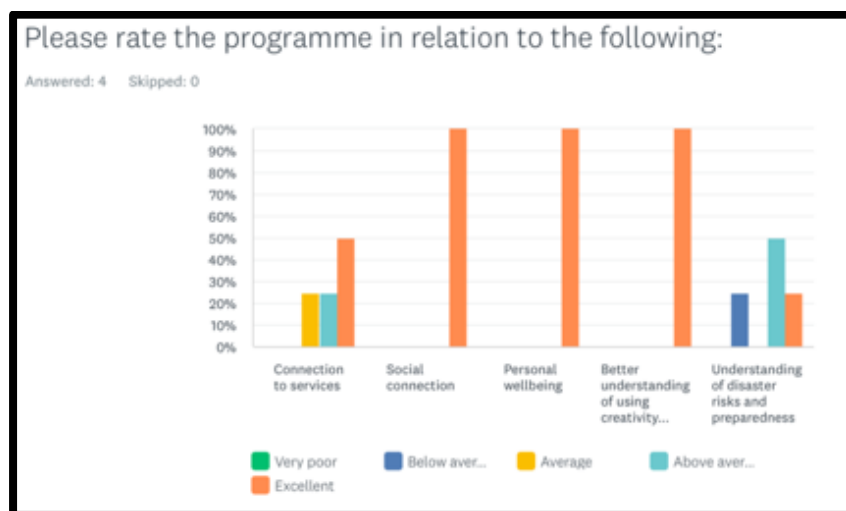


Figure 40 Survey data Dwaandi

8. eZine

Location: Bowraville/Nambucca

Facilitators: Jack Hodges and Alejandra Ramirez

Participants: 12

Star Rating: 4.9

Partners: Nambucca Valley Phoenix Ltd.

Background

Bowraville is a small inland community from Macksville in Northern NSW located within the lands of the Gumbaynggirr and Ngaku people. The Nambucca Valley Experienced the drought, bush fires, floods and COVID during 2019 and 2020.

These workshops were brought together by visual artists Jack Hodges and Alejandra Ramirez for youth aged between 18 and 25 in Bowraville. Textiles, writing, drawing and storytelling were used as mediums to share their lived experiences in response the bushfires and Covid-19 pandemic. A community-based approach was used to build community resilience through reflecting on experiences and learning from those challenging experiences, to honour their impact and not to pretend like nothing happened. Collecting stories, recipes, poems and visuals and putting them in a collaborative zine to enable creative expression and empower the participants.

Outcomes

The CR Zine project experienced difficulty in terms of connecting with the right people, so one strategy used was to increase the age range of participants. During the workshop participants expressed themselves through artworks, words and interactions particularly focused on the bushfires and COVID 19. Many of these highlighted the trauma and emotion that remains with people even a number of years on from the disasters. While a Zine has not been finalised the experience was found to be valuable to those that attended.



Figure 41 Starting the creation of the ezine



Figure 42 word cloud to express recent local disasters

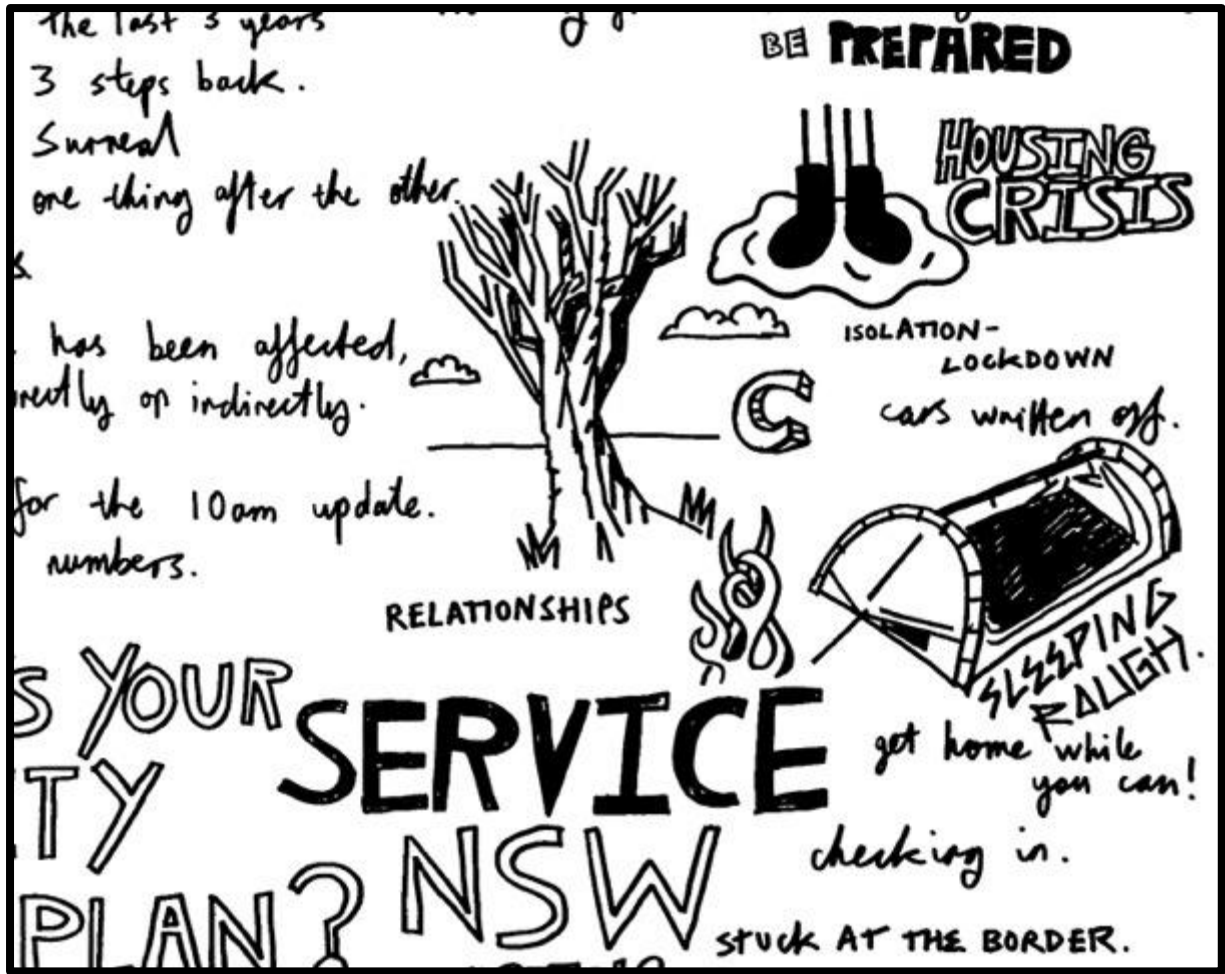


Figure 43 word art for the eZine

9. Creative Connection

Location: Wauchope

Facilitators: Vivienne Hazenveld

Participants:

Star Rating: 4.9

Partners: Wauchope Art Gallery & Wauchope Chamber of Commerce

Background

Wauchope is a small town located west of Port Macquarie in Biripi country on the NSW Mid-North Coast. The town has experienced compounding disasters of drought, the 2019 bushfires, the 2021 and 2022 flooding events, and COVID 19. This has had an effect on the community, and for many created feelings of loss, fear, isolation, and/ or disconnection. The Creative Connections Mixed Media workshop was brought together and facilitated by local artist Vivienne Hazenveld. Vivienne partnered with Wauchope Art Gallery and the Wauchope Chamber of Commerce for this project. The workshop aimed to: Create a sense of play and being in the moment, guided by music and movement. Build community connection and a sense of belonging through shared time in a joyful activity and shared lunch. Create a safe place for participants to create and express themselves freely.

"You get into a part of your brain where you don't have to really think. You are not worrying, you are just getting into a creative flow, in the creative process. And in that creative flow - you get spaces to rest and reset your nervous system."

Outcomes

Postcards were created during the workshops to help participants connect with loved ones or others, helping them build a sense of connection as well as strengthening their support network. They used charcoal, ink, and plant materials to create art such as gum nuts, leaves, pods, etc to explore their relationship to the natural environment. Workshop participants said that the day allowed them to forget about all their problems and get into the 'zone' of creating art and expressing themselves. They felt very welcomed and supported by the facilitator and others in the group, helping them to feel comfortable engaging with the day's activities. There was lots of fun and laughter throughout the day as participants supported one another, learned new skills, and shared their stories and inspiration.

They enjoyed the opportunity to build their community networks. Following the workshop, the participants planned to attend one another's art exhibitions and to continue engaging with art and creativity. One participant reflected on her experience during the disasters. As a community worker, she felt it was important for her to be available for the children and families she worked with and found herself going above and beyond her normal duties to support those in her care. It was a very busy and stressful time helping the children process what was happening in their lives. She reported that participating in the workshop was beneficial for her own well-being and enjoyment, and helped her develop new skills that she could use for her own work and community roles.

"Keep doing it! Great for the mind"

"I can't think of any way this programme could be further improved. I gained so much from participating in it. Thank you."



Figure 44 Participants connecting and creating



Figure 45 Participants creating art from natural materials



Figure 46 an example of the artwork

Evaluation Survey Results

The majority of participants rated connection to services, social connection, personal wellbeing and using creativity in recovery as excellent.

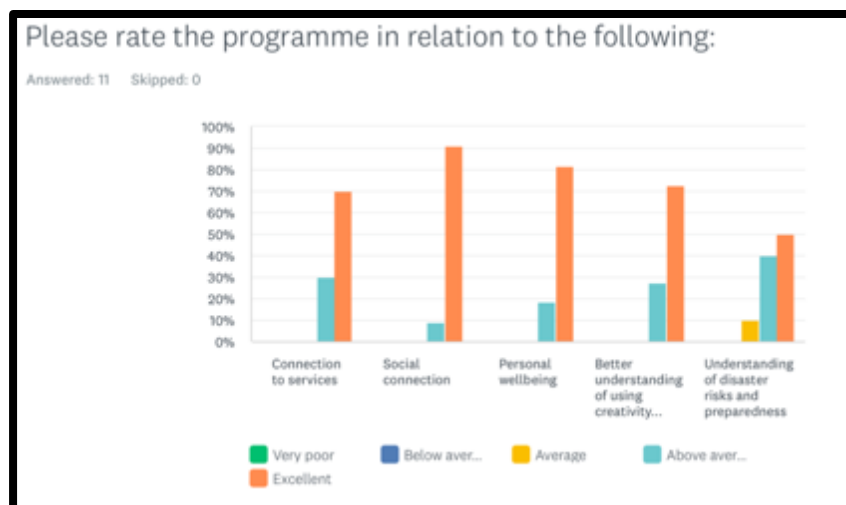


Figure 47 Survey data Creative Connection

10. Grace and Hugh, Up Armidale Road

Location: Upper Lansdowne

Facilitators: Lisa Hort

Participants: 80

Star Rating: 4.9

Partners:

- Lifeline Northern NSW
- Government NSW (Resilience NSW)
- Community Recovery Officer Mid Coast Council -
- Hunter Local Lands
- Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service

Background

Upper Lansdowne is a small rural community located on the lands of the Biripi people. The Rumba Dump bushfire impacted this community and surrounding communities in November 2019. 'Up Armidale Road' and Other Tales' community event coordinated by Lisa Hort was held at Upper Lansdowne Community Hall on Sunday the 20th of November 2022. The event was a collaboration of funding bodies to deliver a mental health, creative recovery, and musical event for the community of Upper Lansdowne and its surrounds.

The event started at 4 pm with Lifeline Mind Your Mates 45-minute presentation ("Toolbox tool" about recognising the signs of depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide) followed by the screening of three 'Women's Recovery Stories from 19/20 Black Summer Bushfires', followed by afternoon tea. During and following the Lifeline presentation there was a creative recovery art activity for kids and young at heart located on the hall's side deck. The location of the activity allowed parents to attend the MYM's inside the hall knowing their children were safe and engaged in a creative, fun activity close by. The Lansdowne RFB cooked a BBQ before the screening of 'Up Armidale Road' Into the evening the community enjoyed live music with Grace and Hugh and the band with the evening finishing at 9 -9.30 pm.

The workshop aimed to: Bring the community together at the local hall and provide an opportunity to share stories about the recent disasters and build community connections. Build connections between the region's community services and acknowledge their role during the bushfires Provide support to the community through mental health education and tools along with stories of recovery, film and music which created an opportunity to engage with the challenging experience through the creativity lens.

"RFS members said watching the film validates their experience of what happened with the fires on a local level." "Both the Up Armidale Rd film and the women's recovery film told the story of what happens to people, and communities impacted by disaster and how important it is to share these stories at a community level but also to the government body".

Outcomes

The event opened up a conversation about the impact that the fires had on individuals and the local community and their mental health. Both during and following the event people reached out to the Midcoast Lifeline community advocate for support. The film highlighted to some people that they hadn't got over the fires and the trauma of the disaster is still sitting within them. The film also reflected some of what the Lansdowne RFS went through in the 19/20 Black Summer bushfires and validated their experiences. The Upper Lansdowne event has been spoken about by neighbouring communities months later, and they voice their keenness to have the event at their local hall.



Figure 48 Grace performing in Upper Lansdowne

11. Biripi Students and Elders Mural Project

Location: Taree High School

Facilitator: Lisa Hort

Participants: 46

Star rating: 4.9

Partners:

- Lisa Hort Creative Recovery Facilitator
- Aunty Isabel Bungie,
- Biripi women Elder's arts and craft group
- Biripi Aboriginal Corporation Medical Centre
- Aboriginal Art Students from Taree High School Aims of Project

Background

This Mural project brought together respected Biripi Elder, Aunty Isabel as the consultant, the Biripi women Elder's arts and craft group, art students from Taree High School and the Biripi Aboriginal Corporation Medical Centre to create a mural at Taree High School. The theme for the mural is about the fires and the floods, with each panel representing before, during and after the disasters. The aim was to create 6 panels, three panels about the bushfires and three on the floods. The panels are displayed together on a free standing (not attach to a wall) mounted on timber post and rail. The mural's panels are placed outside the centre on the edge of the carpark, in clear view when people arrive to the centre. The manager of the Biripi Aboriginal Corporation Medical Centre arranged for the construction of the frame and the mounting of the mural.

Outcomes

This project provided a safe space for open conversation around the subject of the bushfires and flood between both the women elders and the High School students. It also creates an opportunity for support worker's, teachers, and volunteers who have also experienced the Bushfires, to be part of the shared conversation.

Through the art process, often unheard stories come to the surfaces and highlighting hidden traumas. People can share their stories in a supportive group setting. The coming together of elders and teenagers provides an opportunity for the groups to connect and share knowledge, skills and build on their cross generational interpersonal skills.

The sharing of knowledge and experiences around the disasters will strengthens their relationships and build capacity that can support recovery and future preparedness.

*"Please do more of them. Excellent day, everyone enjoyed themselves and lots of connections were formed and everyone inspired by those around us"
More people being involved was again seen as a way to enhance the workshop experience.*

Evaluation Survey Results

The results showed that participants rated the workshop well and found connection, personal wellbeing and understanding of creativity was excellent.

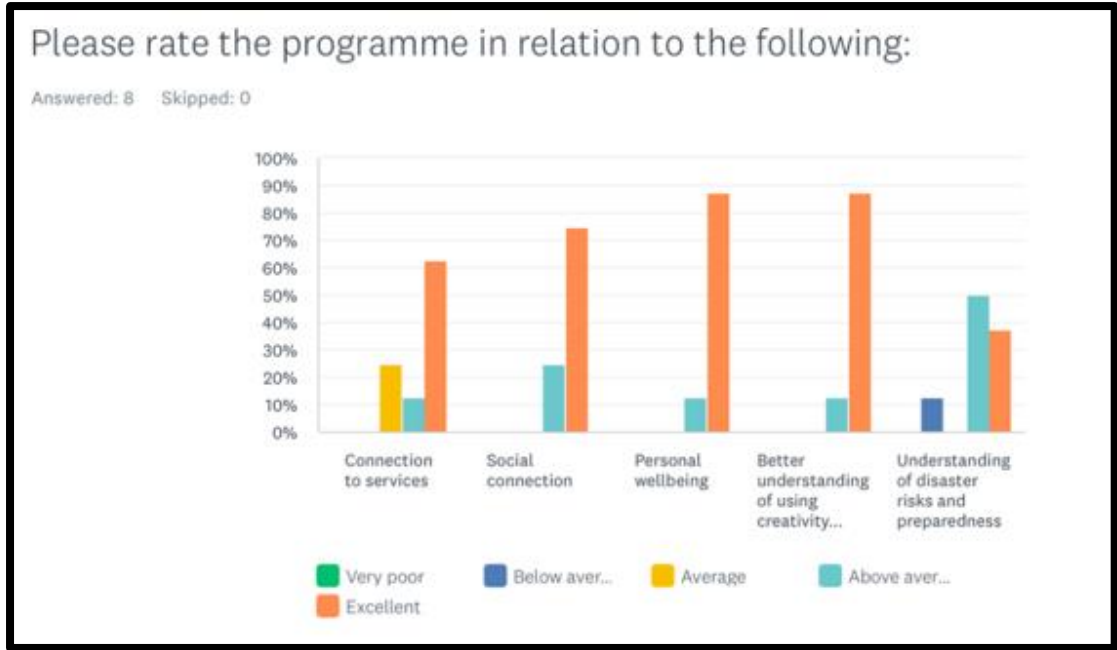


Figure 49 Survey data for 11. Biripi Students and Elders Mural Project

12. Ties that Bind – A community weaving project

Location: Ulong and Lowanna

Facilitator: Jasmine Avery

Participants: 55

Star rating: 4.9

Partners:

- ◆ Eastern Dorrigo Community Hall Committee
- ◆ Ulong and Lowanna RFS
- ◆ Mountain Permaculture Network
- ◆ Ulong First Responders
- ◆ Ulong and Lowanna Public Schools and Mountain Preschool

Background

Lowanna and Ulong are small rural, isolated communities located in Gumbaynggir country on the Mid-North Coast of NSW. Since 2019 this community has experienced years of drought, followed by bushfires threatening both townships, floods of 2022 that caused landslides that restricted access to vital services, and then COVID-19.

A series of workshops were offered to members of the Lowanna and Ulong communities and within the local schools to enable a broad collection of the community to be involved in creating a community art installation. The intention behind the weaving workshops was to strengthen connections between individuals and neighbouring communities of Lowanna and Ulong resulting in artwork for installation at the Eastern Dorrigo Community Hall (Ulong). During the weaving sessions, gentle conversations about experiences over the last few years were encouraged together with ideas about how the community might plan and prepare for future disasters that may occur

"I really enjoyed the afternoon; the delivery was excellent and ample materials provided with great choices to be had."

This project was a means of reconnecting threads of the community that were broken during times of isolation due to COVID, while also providing an opportunity for members to share experiences of bushfires and floods over the last few years. It brought together people of different ages and backgrounds, who may not usually interact, in a safe space with a common goal. By joining together the individual weavings into one big community artwork, the final piece is representative of the way each person plays a part in creating community and how diversity can create beauty and connection.



Figure 50 Outcome of community weaving projects with facilitator Jasmine Avery

Evaluation Survey Results

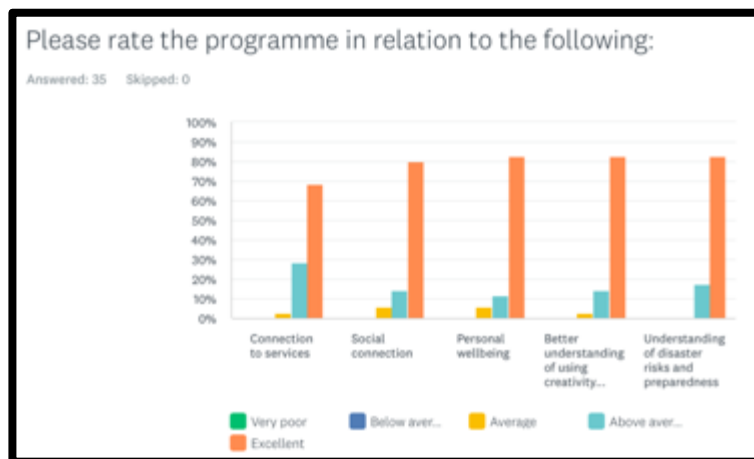


Figure 51 Survey data for 12. Ties that Bind – A community weaving project

13. Weave to Heal

Location: Mid Coast

Facilitator: Jill Watkins

Participants: 24

Star Rating: 5

Partners:

- ◆ Mid Coast Council
- ◆ Manning Regional Gallery
- ◆ Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service “Women’s Kind Collective”
- ◆ Wingham High School
- ◆ Wingham Brush Primary School

Background

The Saori weaving project aimed to provide the community an opportunity to engage with a creative process to express and tell stories. The Mid Coast of NSW was severely impacted by years of disasters including drought, fires, floods and COVID 19. A series of workshops were brought together and facilitated by Jill Watkins director of Circartus Inc. which runs regular circus classes in the community and is engaged in many local festivals and events. The workshop series aimed to build community connection and boost cohesion. Saori is hand weaving that emphasises and prioritises creativity and free expression. Jill described the workshops as having no rules and no fear, just pure absorption and immersion into weaving and working with yarn and threads. This ‘non-technique’ is meditative in nature and aims to build a clearer expression of your human self from the process itself and the resulting handwoven cloth.

Outcomes

These workshops brought together participants from the black summer fire affected communities. Women who lost everything, women who stayed to fight the fires to save their home and women who were traumatised by the “watching” and “witnessing” the impact on their community and its members. The woven works from all participants were joined together to create a community artwork.

The beauty of working in the round facilitated inclusion and sharing. During the workshops new friendships were created and new networks made and stories were shared. Each person’s weaving was unique, Which was an incredible thing to observe as each person is given the same tools, same palette of materials, and we end up with very different artworks. The 3 days created amazing works.

*I’m alive today because of it [creativity]...the facilitators talked about making, no rules just explore. I felt connected in a way I haven’t done for a long long time
Processing disasters show me again and again if I surrender to my creativity it really helps-
Like I was sitting there and a way offered to combine words, drawing. I need to express my trauma- found a place for that. unutterable gold- my experience with the workshop
To feel supported like that is just gold- it’s just gold*



Figure 52 Examples of weaving created by the group Figure 53 Using the loom

Evaluation Survey Results

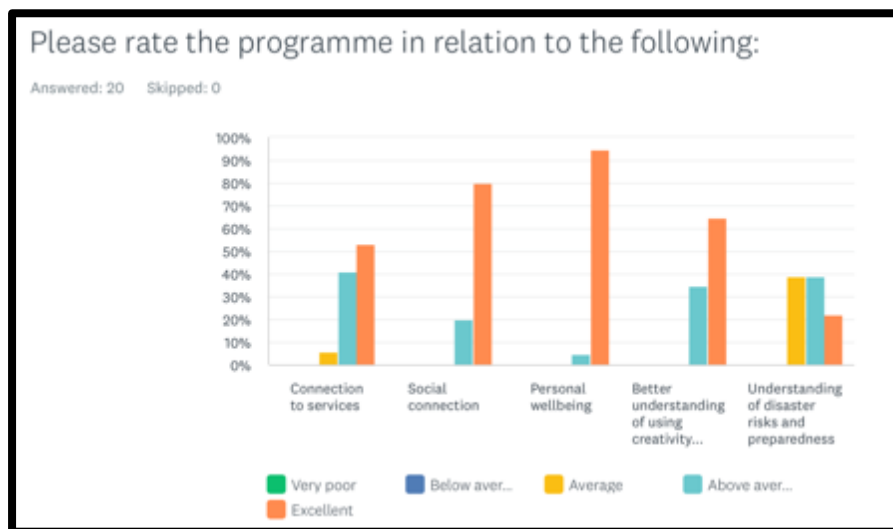


Figure 54 Survey data for Weave to Heal project

Creative Recovery Projects Summary

The creative recovery training and the creative recovery projects were both funded by AMNC. The funding gave rise to a broad range of CR projects spanning the geographical area of the Mid North Coast region. Throughout the workshops participants experienced greater connection to their feelings about what they had been through using a variety of creative tools. The participants had opportunity to share their experiences through their art and through discussions with other workshop participants. They connected with them on their shared but individual experiences through the disasters that occurred over the last four years. They created artworks that they reflected on and were often displayed to their community an opportunity to express themselves and increased access to support and services. These connections are essential for building resilient communities, and for encouraging reflection and continued discussion through the creative process and the showing of the artworks.

The mediums of singing, dancing, weaving, drumming, painting and sculpting created a rich and nuanced range of ways for people to connect. Many had felt the projects had given them the tools to reconnect with themselves and process the trauma that so many had experienced following a series of unprecedented disasters. The participants also had the opportunity to connect with others in their community, to share stories, to be heard, and to honour the magnitude of suffering experienced. Grassroots creative recovery projects are a valuable method for supporting individuals and communities to deal with effects of disasters in their regions.