

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN ACTION

DRIVING BUSHFIRE RECOVERY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

CASE STUDY 2 | NORTH EAST MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION



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

“Cultural Advocates are the heartbeat of our CALD communities. They provide practical support and real community connections for our local people”

“ The Highlight was the Emergency services attendance at Children’s Week where families were able to sound the sirens, play with the water hose, climb over the trucks, and wear SES and CFA hats.”

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: BUILDING TRUST AND CONNECTION IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Aiming to develop trusting relationships between CALD communities and emergency services, this project is keeping communities safe and feeling included and well supported. Volunteer Cultural Advocates play a key role in ensuring families receive the right information, in the right way and that their cultural needs are met.

The North East Multicultural Association (NEMA) has, for the last 16 years, been the voice of Multiculturalism in the shires of Indigo, Mansfield, Alpine and the Rural Cities of Wangaratta and Benalla. Many diverse cultural groups live here with 75 languages spoken across the region.

“In 2019 we made a concerted approach to acquaint CALD communities with bushfire flood and fire safety after emergency services reported they had met ‘uniform resistance’ in the area.... that people of CALD backgrounds were often afraid to engage with any of the services wearing a uniform.”

In 2019 emergency services were invited to join Harmony Day celebrations, engaging with parents and children to show that “We are your friends”. NEMA also combined with services to run an expo which provided exposure of services to CALD communities and built trust and rapport between groups.

PROJECT PARTNERS

- North East Multicultural Association
- State Emergency Services
- Country Fire Authority
- Ambulance Vic
- Vic Police
- DWELP
- Local Government

Each town in the region has a designated, trained, volunteer Cultural Advocate. Each Advocate has up to 25 families with whom they regularly interact. By the time of the fire emergency in January 2020 CALD communities were very familiar with the role and functions of the emergency services and were generally willing to trust their directions.

During the emergency Cultural Advocates used the phone tree system to connect, track and support families. A NEMA representative was also stationed at the Evacuation

Centre to assist families and ensure culturally appropriate food was available.

The willingness of Wangaratta and Benalla families of CALD origins to host evacuated families of similar linguistic background was also a significant and positive outcome.

Cultural Advocates continue to provide support to CALD communities through Covid and bushfire recovery. A referral process is also in place should families need further trained support on specific needs.

Establishing Cultural Advocates to lead from within:

In 2014 the North East Multicultural Aged Care project worked with dedicated CALD people to strengthen and support their roles within their communities. This was achieved through facilitated personal development training aiming to build leadership and communication skills. As a result over 30 Community Advocates were born, taking on active roles within their communities and providing a conduit for many local services.

OUTCOMES

- Increased collaboration between emergency services, local government and multicultural organisations and communities.
- Increased trust and two way communication and understanding.
- Increased awareness of CALD community needs and tailored support mechanisms before, during and after emergencies.
- Increased community engagement and ownership of emergency planning, preparedness, response and recovery.
- Increased sense of acceptance, community, belonging and social connection.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Better communication and translation is necessary, with less assumptions. Eg. what an evacuation kit should consist of.
- We need to better teach local information, such as what animals and conditions to expect in Australia. E.g. Alligators do not live in Victorian rivers.
- Many CALD people do not listen to local television or radio news but rather listen to news from their Country of Origin. An emergency broadcast - even in an appropriate language, is limited.
- We need to encourage a more 'advanced preparation' mindset within the CALD community.

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

