

Detailed Project Plan

Resilient Villages – Pilot Project

Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN) has been the local peak body for the community sector in the Blue Mountains for more than 30 years. One of MCRN's main roles is to convene and support many interagencies (of community services, relevant government agencies and NGOs); and establish and support networks and cross-sectoral collaborations across the Mountains.

Since 2014, the Blue Mountains has operationalised a cross-sector, multi-agency Resilience & Preparedness (R&P) Group, convened and auspiced by MCRN. R&P Group won the NSW 'Community' category of the Resilient Australia Awards in 2015 for our collaborative *Get Ready! BM* program of preparedness activities for the local community, as well as the development of emergency planning tools for community sector organisations (www.mcrn.org.au/index.php/emergencies/emergency-resources-for-services/emergency-recovery-preparedness-resources-for-services).

Following both the 2013 and 2019-20 bushfires, the BM Health & Wellbeing sub-committee ('Wellbeing') was Chaired & convened by MCRN. The Wellbeing and R&P groups have now merged to create a new collective impact group: Recovery, Resilience & Preparedness (RR&P). The RR&P group - comprising representatives of local community sector organisations, Blue Mountains City Council, community services, government agencies (eg NSW Health, Department of Education), Emergency Services (RFS, SES, Fire & Rescue NSW), Disaster Welfare Services (Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc) - will form the Steering Committee for this project (see end of this document for full RR&P Membership).

There are currently underway, or planned, a variety of local initiatives in the Blue Mountains to increase local resilience - RR&P members have agreed that **liaison, communication and coordination** of all these initiatives is required for optimum benefit.

The proposed Pilot Project will support and liaise with existing and new community-led, grass-roots resilience initiatives in the following nominated communities/projects:

- ◆ Megalong Valley Community & Landowners Association (developed following the 2019-20 bushfires and floods);
- ◆ The Mounts (Mts Wilson, Irvine & Tomah) Community Association (developed following the 2019-20 bushfires);
- ◆ ABCD group (of Bell, Clarence & Dargan hamlets, also developed following the 2019-20 bushfires);
- ◆ Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre's new 'Hub' (Blackheath & Mt Victoria);
- ◆ Springwood Neighbourhood Centre's online 'Resilience Hub' (information 'one-stop-shop' & preparedness) Project;
- ◆ Gateway Family Service's 'Resilience Hub' in Blaxland East; and the proposed 'Green Shoots' program (awaiting outcome of grant application);
- ◆ School-based Hubs in the Lower Mountains (part of the BM Stronger Families Alliance - www.strongerfamilies.net.au);
- ◆ Nepean Blue Mountains PHN Community Development Officer for the BM, project managed by Gateway Family Services (currently being recruited);
- ◆ MCRN's existing Emergencies website (<http://mcrn.org.au/index.php/emergencies>); plus the new Blue Mountains City Council's Emergencies Portal (<https://emergency.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/>);

- ◆ the proposed roll-out of *HUFF* (a successful model of partnership between local RFS Brigade and community sector organisation serving that community – eg local Neighbourhood Centre) to other interested communities in the Mountains.

Project Outline/Timeframes:

1. Once notified of a successful grant application:

- Commence recruitment process: 1 x PT Project Lead; 2 x FT Community Development workers (1 x Resilience Coordinator, 1 x *Get Ready! BM* Coordinator); and 1 x PT Communications Officer
- Acquire infrastructure support (eg laptops, mobile phones, vehicle; website domain & relevant software; etc).

Estimated start date: May 2022 (depending on date Deed signed)

Estimated end date: end-June 2022

2. Briefing of on-boarded personnel:

- Brief new staff on roles, Project Partners, & participating communities;
- Build relationships with local Partners;
- Site visits with local Partner organisations.

Estimated start date: July 2022

3. Training for three outreach Community Development workers in:

- *Accidental Counsellor*
- *Mental Health First Aid*
- *RecoveryCapitals* (ReCap) tools and activities
- Red Cross *Recovery Basics* and *Communicating in Recovery* if staff have no previous experience of working in emergencies.

Estimated mid-September 2022

4. Three Community Development workers for this project and the newly-recruited CDW for the BM (funded by NBM PHN) undertake site visits and meet with local leaders – introduced by Project Partner organisations, which have been working closely with these communities since the 2019-20 bushfires. Discussion and needs assessment of support required by local communities to initiate community meetings to discuss proposed Resilience Action Plan & process.

Estimated end-October 2022

5. Recovery, Resilience & Preparedness (RR&P) Group to meet as Steering Committee for project, and:

- In partnership with Project Lead and proposed action research evaluation team (Amanda Howard & Margot Rawsthorne from Sydney University, and Val Ingham from Charles Sturt University) develop Evaluation Strategy for Project; and
- Work with Communications Officer and Project Lead to develop Communications Strategy.

Estimated start date: July 2022

5. Each participating village will then be supported with training and capacity-building, eg:

- in asset and network mapping, and in Recovery Capitals (ReCap) tools and methodology (<https://recoverycapitals.org.au>);

Estimated September 2022

- linking community groups to grant programs, and supporting capacity-building with grant-writing skills, so they have ownership of the projects and sustainability is ensured once the workers contract ends.

Ongoing over course of project

6. Community Development workers will then assist each community to identify and map local emerging leaders/influencers and networks (eg involved in newly-formed Recovery Committees or village Associations) in each village to undertake an extensive community asset/network mapping:
- If required, assist local community to develop a Community Association or Resilience/ Recovery Group or committee;
 - If required, undertake any additional capacity-building at local level (eg strengths-based community development; community engagement/consultation methodologies; facilitating community meetings, etc);
 - Assist local group to commence community meetings to discuss proposed Resilience Action Plan & process.

Estimated start date November 2022

7. Support & assist local groups to undertake thorough village consultation and community development process. This process will utilise a wide range of methodologies as relevant to each community, such as:
- ‘Town Hall’ meetings
 - ‘Community Conversations’
 - ‘Meet Your Street’ or *HUFF* events
 - focus groups
 - local working groups
 - surveys, etc.

Estimated start date: from January 2023

8. A major tangible outcome of this process will be the development of **community-designed and community-endorsed Resilience Action Plans (RAP)** for each of the participating communities. Each RAP will consider – in the context of each village’s unique characteristics - issues such as:
- *Developing a common vision for their village/location, strengthening community spirit:*
 - working together, supporting each other;
 - collectively prioritising values the community holds in common.
 - *Caring for the vulnerable:*
 - identifying and bringing together more at-risk or vulnerable neighbours (eg socially isolated, aged, with a disability/mobility issue) to be part of the planning, and part of the solutions.
 - *Connections:*
 - building relationships of trust amongst community members in each village/location (some historical, and some new, fractures are evident in several of these communities following consecutive disasters);
 - building the ‘social scaffolding’ necessary to promote community connections to enhance resilience;
 - providing regular opportunities for connection.
 - *Building awareness:*
 - building community awareness of local risks and hazards
 - eg principles of ‘Shared Responsibility’; Flame Zones, Asset Protection Zones; National Building Codes; one-way-in, one-way-out roads; service stations; transport infrastructure (GWS & rail line), etc;
 - collectively prioritising:
 - shared values;
 - infrastructure critical to local community;
 - what “Recovery” would look like to their community following the next ‘event’.

9. The Recovery, Resilience & Preparedness (RR&P) Group sees this initiative as a first critical step in rolling out this model of resilience-building across all villages/communities which wish to be involved, throughout the Blue Mountains LGA. Communicating the progress and outcomes of each of these initiatives will be crucial:
- for the villages participating in the Pilot 1 (to share learnings, celebrate victories and seek support for challenges);
 - and also to 'spread the word' across the Mountains to encourage participation in what we hope will be Phase 2 of the overall project.

RR&P plan the development of a dedicated website to share our experience and outcomes with the BM and communities beyond which may be interested in the journey – the development of collateral (eg video "stories") will be an ongoing undertaking parallel to the work of the outreach team. A dedicated PT Comms Officer will produce regular Newsletters, social media and web updates; (with permission) film participants at each step, for a 'time-lapse' recording of progress in each village, challenges and victories; and enable sharing the outcomes of the project as widely and accessibly as possible.

The Project Lead for the pilot, working closely with the FT Resilience Coordinator (and with PT support from the *Get Ready!* Coordinator for this project and an additional Community Development Worker for the BM funded by the Nepean Blue Mountains PHN,) will provide:

- coordination, support, and liaison with other BM villages engaged on the same journey;
- capacity-building for local groups;
- arrange regular get-togethers of all participating villages to discuss progress and challenges, etc.;
- 'time-lapse' videoing of village leadership, community consultations, residents' views on the Resilience Action Plan, etc. will be used to create local "stories" for each village – to assist other communities to get a "feel" for the journey, and the challenges and triumphs along the way.

The role of the Resilience Coordinator will also be to support communities with the latest research and case-studies of successful similar initiatives, and bring in experts in community-led recovery and resilience (eg Advisors from Red Cross' Disaster Advisors & Mentors Group such as Dr Rob Gordon, Anne Leadbeater, Steve Pascoe, Kate Brady, David Younger, Danielle O'Hara, Kris Newton or Sarah U'Brien) to coach and support community groups as required.

The Resilience Coordinator's role will also include supporting village groups with capacity-building required, so they have ownership of the projects and sustainability is ensured once the workers' contract ends; eg:

- succession-planning, to avoid burn-out and ensure sustainability of the project;
- grant-writing skills;
- association/CRC development and governance,
- project planning, evaluation and project acquittal skills to ensure ongoing regular 'refresh' of their Resilience Action Plan, and long-term sustainability of the project.

The three outreach community Development workers will have monthly clinical supervision for their role; additional sessions, or group de-briefing sessions, will be provided as needed.

A Part-time Comms Officer will provide communications support (eg website, regular Newsletters, social media, etc.).

10. Parallel to the work by the Resilience Coordinator on assisting villages to develop Resilience Action Plans, the *Get Ready!* Coordinator will coordinate the annual *Get Ready! BM* calendar of events. While bushfire remains our most significant threat, the prevalence of other extreme weather

events in the BM (severe thunder/hail/snow storms; heatwaves) mean that RR&P operates from an all-hazard approach.

Estimated start date: from June 2022 – March 2025

11. In addition to our modest annual program of *Get Ready! BM* events across the BM LGA (<http://mcrn.org.au/index.php/emergencies/preparedness/find-a-get-ready-bm-event>), the *Get Ready!* Coordinator will be responsible for a significant ‘ramping up’ of annual activities. For example:
 - Roll-out of Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) program:
 - liaising with local service providers and leaders in participating villages to assist with identifying more at-risk or vulnerable residents; eg via:
 - the Volunteer Home Visitor’s program operated by RR&P Partners Belong Blue Mountains and Springwood Neighbourhood Centre (weekly visits to aged, socially-isolated or people with a disability)
 - * Belong BM and SNCC are about to commence a roll-out of the P-CEP program across the Mountains;
 - BM Food Services (Meals on Wheels provider);
 - plus new RR&P Partner initiatives such as:
 - * *HUFF* roll-out in other BM villages/communities;
 - * Pilots of ‘Community Circles’ of friends & family, supporting the most vulnerable in our community;
 - * Habitat for Humanity’s Australia Local Bushfire Resilience program.
 - Roll-out of the very successful *HUFF* (Heads Up For Fire & other emergencies) model across the BM. The *HUFF* model is a partnership between the local RFS Brigade in a locality and the nearest community sector organisations for that ‘patch’ (eg Neighbourhood Centre) , and aims to raise awareness, build community connections (i.e. resilience), and support more at-risk or vulnerable residents around emergencies, on a micro-community/street-by-street level.
 - Explore possibilities of incorporating further partnerships into the *Get Ready!* program; eg:
 - between more local RFS Brigades & F&RNSW and local Public Schools or School-based Hubs for annual *Get Ready!* expos;
 - build on excellent relationship with local Deaf community for more *Get Ready!* events; explore expanding to include local Blind and low vision residents;
 - add more events utilising local expertise on Pets, Livestock and Wildlife in emergencies;
 - partner with Council and local small business representative organisations to build relationships with local micro-business owners – how can we support them to become more prepared? (eg emergency planning clinics with local emergency services; utilising resources either developed locally, or via one of the readily-available government templates, for business continuity).
12. COVID Contingency Plan:
 - As key providers deemed by the NSW/Federal governments as ‘essential services’ all community sector and emergency services (i.e. MCRN and Project Partners) are required to have strict risk-management protocols (eg for police or working with children checks; and for COVID):
 - all BM community sector meetings, and client-facing service delivery activities during lockdowns in 2020-21 were managed in COVID-safe or online forums such as Zoom; eg:
 - our 2021 *Get Ready! BM* calendar managed to move all events online or to COVID-safe delivery;
 - community sector service delivery/Recovery was undertaken in a wide range of innovative ways:

- * playgroups, choirs, peer support groups, creative classes, workshops, etc. were delivered via Zoom;
 - * food hampers and other essentials delivered to front verandahs;
 - * pick-up spots allocated for 'creativity packs' during lockdowns (rock-painting, Faerie Doors and 'Spoonvilles' were extremely popular, and turned up in large numbers in local parks);
- RR&P are confident that all the activities listed in this Project Plan can be undertaken, at need, in COVID-safe modalities - we have developed a COVID Risk Management plan for this project, both for staff and for community (supplied on request), including:
 - all RR&P meetings;
 - briefings and relationship-building meetings between staff, Project Partners and community leaders/influencers;
 - village/community meetings/consultations/forums etc;
 - Red Cross and *Recovery Capitals* training can be delivered in a modified format online if required
 - we also have hybrid (combination of Zoom and in-person) meeting capability, should indoor numbers again be restricted.

13. Support and assist villages/local groups to develop, refine & implement local Resilience Action Plan
Estimated start date: September 2023

14. Finalise Project Evaluation & Project Acquittal

- Updates to RR&P (minimum quarterly) on evaluation and lessons learned during the course of the project (2022-25);
- Refinements/adjustment to action research plan as needed.

Estimated start date for finalisation: Feb 2025

15. Celebrate & Communicate Achievements

- In each participating village
- Across the Mountains
- Further afield.

Estimated start date: Feb-March 2025

16. Application to next tranche of 'Preparing Australia' for roll-out of model across the Mountains (date unknown).

Project end date; 31 March 2025

*** Recovery, Resilience & Preparedness (RR&P) Group – Member Organisations:**

Convenor & Chair, MCRN Manager

Belong Blue Mountains (Belong BM)
Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre (BANC)
Blue ARC (BM Animal Ready Community)
Blue Mountains City Council (BM LEMO, Recovery Manager, Community Recovery Officer, & Resilience Officer)
BM Aboriginal Culture & Resource Centre (ACRC)
BM Women's Health & Resource Centre (BMWHRC)
CatholicCare Social Services
Charles Sturt University
Dianella Cottage, Lives Lived Well (AOD support)
DV West (Blue Mountains Domestic Violence service & Wimlah Women's Refuge)
Early Childhood Australia
Fire & Rescue NSW (BM District)
Gateway Family Services
Habitat for Humanity
Headspace, Katoomba
Lions (Winmalee)
Minister's Association, Upper Mountains
Mountains Outreach Community Services (MOCS)
Mountains Youth Services Team (MYST)
Nepean Blue Mountains PHN (Wentworth Healthcare)
NSW Department of Education (Senior Psychologist, BM District)
NSW Health (Nepean Blue Mountains LHD, Mental Health team)
NSW Rural Fire Service (BM District)
NSW SES (BM Division & Regional)
Red Cross (BM)
Resilience Hub, Springwood Neighbourhood Centre (SNCC)
Resilience NSW (Regional)
Rotary Club of Blackheath
Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP, NSW Health)
Rural Aid
Salvation Army (BM)
Springwood Baptist Church
St Vincent de Paul (BM)
StandBy Post-Suicide Support (BM)
Step by Step Recovery Support Service
Stride
The Big Fix
The Network (suicide support)
The Sunshine Project
Thrive Family Services
Uniting
Wesley Mission
Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre