

Case Study Report



Enabling Resilience with Hamilton Community House

An output of the Rural
People; Resilient
Futures Project



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Images

Courtesy of Hamilton Community House Inc. 2014

Disclaimer

The views expressed herein do not represent those of the Victorian Government. They are the views of the report authors.

This case study report is a co-developed research output of the Rural People; Resilient Futures project, funded through the Victorian Adaptation and Sustainability Partnership Grant Scheme, through the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries. This report was co-written by Hamilton Community House Inc., the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership, as well as researchers from RMIT University. Chapter 4 of this report outlines information gathered through consultations undertaken throughout the project and the report captures the views of the project partners and the researchers involved.

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1. About us

Hamilton Community House Incorporated is a not for profit organisation providing a broad range of social support services to community members within the Shire of Southern Grampians.

“We aim to provide:

A safe, friendly environment for community members to meet within

A range of adult educational opportunities

A range of recreational and leisure activities

Appropriate support services to users in need and/or distress

Up-to-date information on local services

Regular review and evaluation of our services”.

There are over 370 neighbourhood houses across Victoria funded by the Victorian Government through the 'Neighbourhood House Coordination Program'.



Figure 1: Hamilton Community House, Sedgewick Street, Hamilton, Victoria

2. The Rural People; Resilient Futures Project

Our organisation is a member agency of the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership (PCP in the following), who have been involved in a project funded by the Victorian government through the Victorian Adaptation and Sustainability Partnership Grant Scheme. The project entitled '*Rural People; Resilient Futures*' (RPRF in the following) has been conducted to investigate the nature of vulnerability in a rural Shire, understand how this will vary under the impacts of climate change, how the capacity of these groups can be increased and who can help.

The project is a collaborative endeavour between the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Shire (the Shire in the following), the PCP and researchers from RMIT University. Eight member agencies of the PCP, and various other stakeholders were involved in all phases of the project, and facilitated engagement with community members throughout the Shire.

2.2 The process

The RPRF project involved four phases, over a 12 month period. Key member agency engagement was facilitated through one-on-one consultations with the PCP and researchers, as well as workshops throughout all phases of the project. The project phases are outlined below:

Phase 1:

Baseline Understanding
What does vulnerability look like in SGSC.

Phase 2:

How does climate change complicate this vulnerability?

Phase 3:

What can we do locally?
Focus on integration into plans and policies

Phase 4:

Information sharing to inform community and stakeholders

3. Getting started

3.1 Why we wanted to participate

Our organisation was interested in learning more about how we can plan and educate our participants, volunteers and the wider community on extreme weather and climate change, and how to better support those who access our services.

At the time of expressing an interest in the project, previous work in this area had already commenced through past PCP initiatives. Our community members and staff were beginning to build an understanding of changing weather patterns and how we can adapt the building accordingly – *"this project allowed us to think more broadly and see what others were doing"*.

"It was important for us to be involved in this project to consider the longer term implications of changing climate - what it means for people who use our service, the organisation and people who work here. It's more the longer term view I think."

As a result of our project involvement, we have discovered the ripple effect climate change can bring to our organisation and ultimately the entire Neighbourhood House Sector. Conversations have begun on how we can work together to minimize the risk to our community members and staff.

We considered sources such as Department of Health, Country Fire Authority, Local council and other local organisations to gain valuable knowledge on how to better promote education and ideas to promote building resilience to the wider community.

4. Engagement in the Process

4.1 Initial consultations – Phase 1

We initially engaged with the PCP for this project in April 2014 through a Phase 1 Consultation Interview. During this meeting, PCP representatives engaged with us on the following questions:

- Who do you work with?
- What makes life tough for community members?
- What are community members doing to make life easier?
- What happened during the last heatwave?
- How can we make life easier?

Our key response to these questions outlined:

- Our participants and volunteers are from all abilities, ages and backgrounds;
- Some areas which make life tough for our community members include; unemployment, financial stresses, health difficulties, extreme weather conditions (hot/cold), access to transport;
- During the last heatwave outdoor programs were postponed. Members of the community were made aware of changes to transport services (town bus) during extreme heat and code red days (verbally and information displayed on bulletin board);
- Access to clearer information and policies for staff and community members would make life easier during extreme weather conditions; and
- Family supports and social networks increase the community's health and wellbeing.

During this phase, an informal community consultation workshop was undertaken at Hamilton Community House as well as a Stakeholder Workshop where we were invited to discuss means to manage the complexity of vulnerability in rural Victoria. These workshops were purposed to understand what vulnerability really means in the Shire from the perspective of the community.

Simultaneously, the researchers from RMIT University undertook a literature review to understand what the academic and grey literature outlined about vulnerability. This was presented to our team through a workshop in Phase 2.

We worked with the PCP to complete a climate and vulnerability workbook produced by the research team, to help understand what our organisation, service delivery and clients may be vulnerable to already.

From this process, we understood that currently we are most vulnerable to the following:

- Extreme weather conditions and code red days.
- Knowing associated procedures on code red days for other organisations that directly affect our services (changes to town bus)
- Clear understanding of what can be done to reduce heat wave symptoms for both community members and staff
- Ensuring that all information is easy for all community members to understand and access.

pcp
Victorian Adaptation & Sustainability Partnership
Victoria
Southern Grampians RUPP COUNCIL
RMIT UNIVERSITY

What does climate change mean for your community service organisation?

Activity Book

Rural People; Resilient Futures Project
Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership
Southern Grampians Shire Council
RMIT University

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Purpose: to determine the impacts of climate change on your service delivery and clients' vulnerability, and what can be done to manage this.¹

The Adaptation Process²

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graph TD; 1[1 Getting started] --> 2[2 Current climate vulnerability]; 2 --> 3[3 Future climate vulnerability]; 3 --> 4[4 Adaptation options]; 4 --> 5[5 Monitor & review]; 5 --> 1;
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¹ Workbook adapted from:
NHS – Adaptation to Climate Change for Health and Social Care Organisation
UKCIP – Local Climate Impacts Profile: how to do an LCIP
UKCIP – Adaptation Wizard Notepad

² UKCIP Adaptation Wizard, <http://www.ukcip.org.uk/wizard/>

Figure 2. The Climate and Vulnerability workbook¹

- Understanding that the Hamilton Community House becomes an information resource during extreme weather events (Community Hub).

4.2 The impact of climate change - Phase 2

During this phase, the RMIT Researchers and PCP ran a workshop to understand how climate impacts may affect our organisation, service delivery and clients. We were taken through a climate impacts table¹, which PCP representatives later met with us to complete.

The table demonstrated which impacts are likely to occur to 2070, highlighting specific events and how they might increase in intensity or frequency. The table then investigated the 'Receptor: thing being affected', the 'Consequences', the 'Threats: negative impacts' and 'Opportunities: positive impacts' that may occur as a result of each climate impact.

At the end of the workshop, we ran through two possible scenarios that could affect our organisation and the Shire; heatwave combined with bushfire, and an extreme rainfall and flood event, illustrating a critical disaster point. We then worked back through time, over six months, two years, and five years to brainstorm adaptation actions that would have helped us to avoid the disaster in the first place.

These formed the basis of our adaptation action planning and



Figure 3. Filming phase two workshop

¹ Adapted from: UKCIP – Local Climate Impacts Profile

highlighted things that we are already doing to increase resilience. During this workshop, we participated in the production of a film on the project.

4.3 Current adaptation actions

Through the project process, we understood that we were already undertaking actions to ease the effects of changing weather conditions. Some additions we have already made to the Hamilton Community House include; solar panels, outside blinds, outside rain water tank, energy saving light globes and outside shade porch.

We now have a list of suitable locations to hold activities during extreme weather (hot /cold) with appropriate heating and cooling facilities.

We have posters to display educational messages and information that is easy to read and relevant to our organisation and community members.

"It's all about smart planning; we only run activities and outings during the months of cooler weather which reduces risks and trip cancellations. Trip cancellations can have negative health impacts for our participants as they miss the opportunity to socialise".

Hamilton Community House understands the benefits of living and growing in a small community – *"it's all about knowing your neighbours and knowing who may need extra assistance in difficult circumstances"*.

4.4 New adaptation actions – Phase 3

In October, the project team ran a workshop to demonstrate some adaptation action case studies that were relevant to our organisation. We then participated in a facilitated brainstorming session to decide on what actions we would commit to including in our existing practices.

We committed to:

- Further promote and educate actions to increase resilience amongst the community through the Community House;

- We will educate those who access our service about climate adaptation through newsletters, articles, posters and flyers;
- We will continue to research up-to-date information about the health impacts of climate change and the ways to reduce any impacts on those we support and our staff into the future; and
- We will take an advocacy role in bringing the level of risk Neighbourhood Houses may be subject to during extreme weather patterns to the attention of the Department of Human Services.

5. Outcomes of the process

5.1 What did we learn?

- You see from a networking perspective how other stakeholders are dealing with adaptation issues and how we can learn from them / or adapt our own.
- The Rural People; Resilient Futures is a small project now, but is transferrable to most organisations and businesses.

"Climate change is relevant to our organisation, it's relevant to our community and it's relevant to what I do in the community. We are facing these challenges already and they will only continue to get worse."

- We learnt that we were already taking steps towards adaptation in the workplace, and that it was simply a case of documenting actions and clarifying policies
- Realising the central role Neighbourhood Houses play in education and recovery for communities during extreme weather and events.

5.2 What was challenging?

- Time commitment can be difficult as the key contact from the Hamilton Community House is the sole part-time worker, however

6. What next? Moving forward.

- We will support and liaise with local and state services and organisations to share relevant information. We will review relevant policies and procedures regularly to ensure they are up to date.
- Climate change implications effect a broad range of cross sections areas within our Neighbourhood House Organisation, we will continue to bring up these topics in discussion at every opportunity to increase awareness and 'plant the seeds of thought' for adaptation planning at a higher level.



Figure 5. Community Feedback Session – Hamilton Community House