



FRRR Insights Report - Disaster Resilient: Future Ready Victoria Program



FRRR

Foundation for Rural
Regional Renewal



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

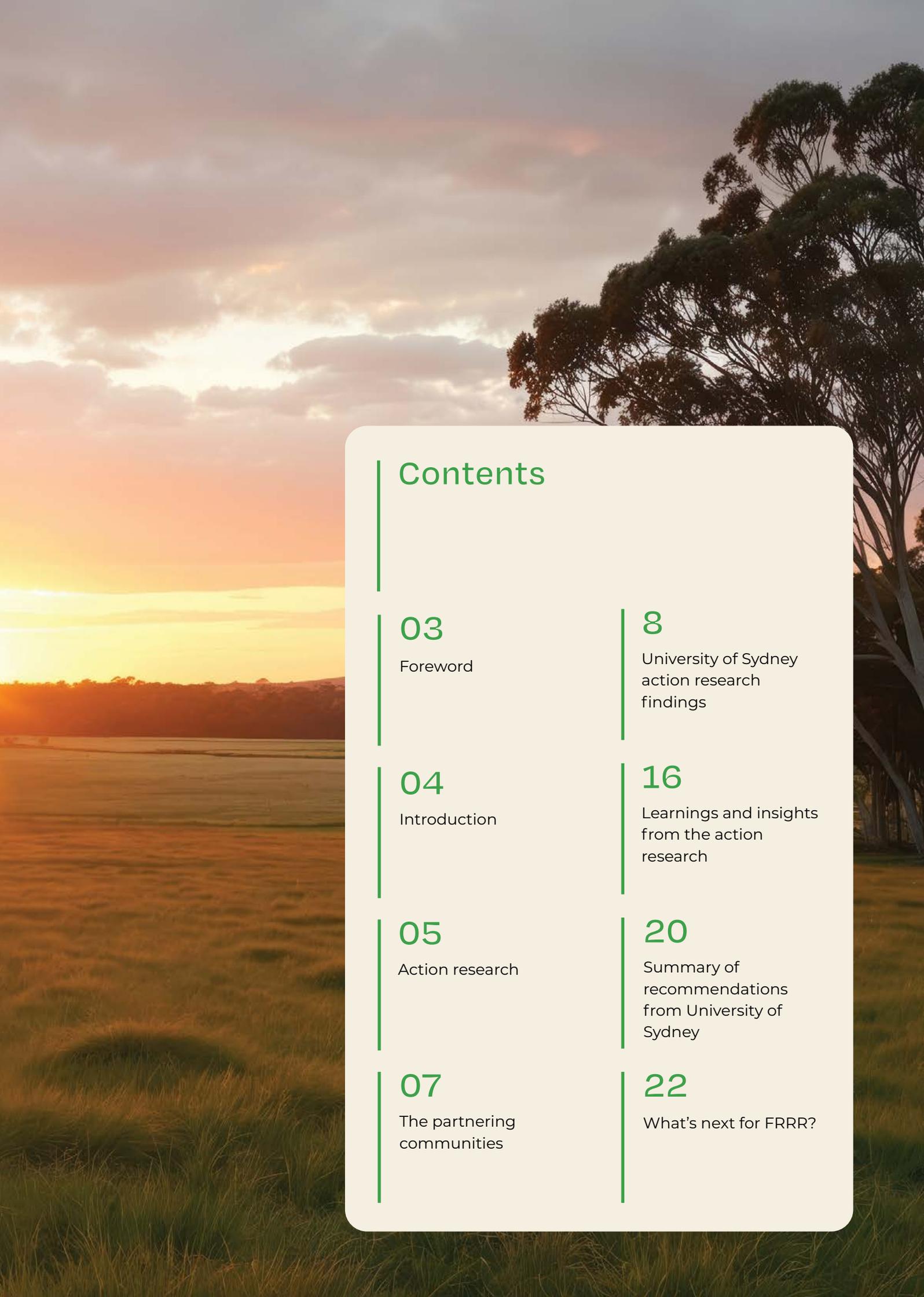
Acknowledgement of Country

FRRR acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of Jaara country (Bendigo) where we are based, and extends our acknowledgement to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations where we fund organisations and activities. We pay our respect to Elders past and present and to the continuation of the custodial, cultural and educational practices of Australia's First People.

The University of Sydney recognises and pays respect to the Elders and communities – past, present and emerging – of the lands that the University of Sydney's campuses stand on. For thousands of years, they have shared and exchanged knowledges across innumerable generations for the benefit of all.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this report may contain images, audio or names of people who have passed away.





Contents

03

Foreword

8

University of Sydney
action research
findings

04

Introduction

16

Learnings and insights
from the action
research

05

Action research

20

Summary of
recommendations
from University of
Sydney

07

The partnering
communities

22

What's next for FRRR?

Foreword

The increasing frequency and intensity of disaster events is leading to extensive social, economic and environmental impacts, especially in remote, rural and regional communities. That's why, since 2012, FRRR has been actively investing in community capacity to enhance disaster preparedness and resilience.

This focus came from our experiences of supporting communities in their recovery from disaster events. We noticed that those able to recover most quickly had strong social capital, high levels of inclusion, diverse leadership and broad engagement across community and with the emergency management system. We wanted to better understand what it took to create these conditions and so the Disaster Resilient: Future Ready (DR:FR) initiative was born.

Following a pilot in three communities in New South Wales (NSW), we took the program to Victoria, again partnering with three diverse communities. Our focus in both States was on exploring what it would take to enable community-led approaches that responded to each community's unique context.

To assess the effectiveness of the approach, in both cases we partnered with researchers from the University of Sydney. This report summarises their key findings from the Victorian DR:FR program. Pleasingly, it confirms the learnings from the NSW program – especially the relevance and applicability of the seven dimensions of community resilience building both in stimulating the thinking and actions of community groups, and in making sense of their experiences, as projects progress. However, it also highlights the complexity of community resilience-building and the time required to activate, as community groups respond to challenges and opportunities, both within and beyond their immediate environment.

This document expands on these key points, as well as sharing some other findings and recommendations made by the researchers to enhance the ongoing impact of the DR:FR program. We appreciate the insights that this experienced team has brought.

We also extend our deep appreciation to members of the three community project groups whose work forms the basis of the Disaster Resilient: Future Ready (DR:FR) program in Victoria. Your willingness to explore, create and learn, together with a strong commitment to your communities, inspired us throughout this research. We especially appreciate your participation, given the impacts of COVID and ongoing recovery from disaster events.

FRRR is also grateful to our funding partners in this initiative, including Sidney Myer Fund, Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, Maple-Brown Family Foundation, Simon Kucher and Partners, Ronald Geoffrey Arnott Foundation, H & L Hecht Trust, Suncorp, Pinnacle Charitable Foundation and the Doc Ross Family Foundation.

This program has confirmed the validity of a deep, place-based approach that responds to the unique situation of each community and acknowledges the ability and willingness of local community groups to play a leading, active role in building resilience, working closely with authorities and agencies to strengthen their community for the future. We welcome the opportunity to partner with more communities and more funders and intermediaries to bring this initiative to life in other regions.

If you'd like to discuss how we can work together in future, please email info@frrr.org.au or call 03 5430 2399.

Natalie Egleton
CEO

On Dja Dja Wurrung country

Introduction

Disaster Resilient: Future Ready (DR:FR) is a national, multi-year, place-based initiative of the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR). It aims to support and strengthen the capacity and capability of remote, rural and regional communities to thrive and be resilient to the impacts of climate change, disasters and other disruptions. The approach is to bring together grassroots organisations and community representatives who are interested in collaborating to collectively design and lead approaches that increase preparedness and strengthen resilience capacity. FRRR's role is to broker resources, relationships, practices and tools to create opportunities for community-led approaches to strengthening resilience.

The DR:FR Victoria program began in 2021, working with three communities across Victoria for four years. The project concluded in 2025.

The program involved a series of workshops with community groups, with ongoing support and guidance from FRRR staff and initially from coaches, with grants available to support the activation of their resilience-building ideas.



What makes our community wonderful to be part of?

How can we strengthen our community's capacity to cope with change and continue to evolve in positive ways into the future?

Join the conversation!
Strengthening resilience for a thriving community

Thursday, 15 July, 2021 | 11am - 12.30pm | online

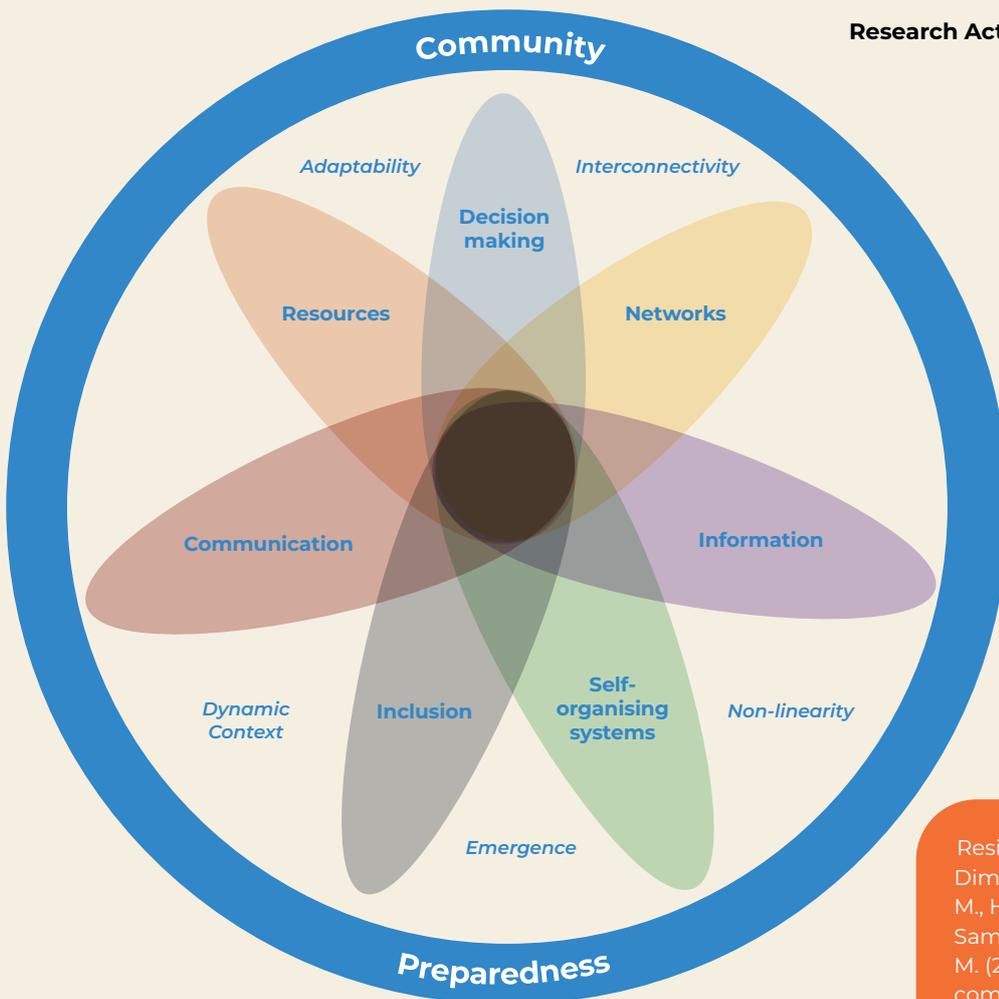
Community members were encouraged to get involved in the conversations.

Action research

FRRR continued its partnership with University of Sydney, using action research approaches to investigate, understand and measure activities, processes and structures that enable or hinder individuals and communities in disaster resilience building. The aim was to document and share ongoing learning from the program and its local projects. By checking in at six points over the four years, data was fed back into the program to further refine activities and improve outcomes.

Action research data were produced using a wide range of methods, as outlined in the graphic.

In addition, researchers also mapped the seven dimensions of community-led resilience-building (pictured below) at multiple points throughout the project.



Resilience-building Dimensions (Rawsthorne, M., Howard, A., Joseph, P., Sampson, D., and Katrak Harris, M. (2023). Understanding community-led disaster preparedness. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*. 38(2), 49-54)

The aim was to respond to the following questions:

- 1 What supports or hinders community resilience building and preparedness for disasters and disruptions in local communities?
- 2 What kind of frameworks and approaches can be adapted and applied in different communities and contexts to effectively support disaster resilience building at a local level?
- 3 How do participating communities understand, act on and plan for disasters effectively at a local level?
- 4 What elements and processes in DR:FR were most effective in supporting communities to build resilience together?
- 5 What elements and processes in DR:FR were less effective in supporting communities to build resilience together?
- 6 What are key learning insights at a program level which FRRR can incorporate into future programs to support community resilience building?



An early Korumburra community workshop

The partnering communities

In Victoria, FRRR selected three communities through an Expression of Interest process. The participating communities varied in their demographics, needs and capacities, and also in their experiences of past and anticipated future disaster events. However, they were all assessed as having 'moderate disaster resilience'. Interestingly too, in each place, general population health was poorer than the Victorian average. Each community developed resilience-building approaches that reflected their diversity and their activity followed different trajectories over the course of the program.

Korumburra

- **Population:** 4,749
- **Median age:** 47
- **Funded Org:** Milpara Community House Inc.
- **Granted:** \$47,201
- **In-kind:** \$7,000
- **Project/s:** Creation of The Korumburra Helping Hub to enhance volunteering and developing a Community Resilience Plan (for times of emergency) and a broader Community Plan to strengthen preparedness and build resilience.
- **Outcomes:** New entity Korumburra Staying Strong (KSS) is well-positioned to play a significant role in building community resilience into the future, with increased levels of community connection, trust and collaboration with local government and other local organisations.

Whittlesea Township & surrounds

- **Population:** 9,735
- **Median age:** 41
- **Funded Org:** Whittlesea Community House Inc.
- **Granted:** \$49,950
- **In-kind:** \$27,746
- **Project/s:** Project worker and development of resources for Whittlesea Prepared - strengthening plans and networks ahead of future disaster events
- **Outcomes:** Significant progress toward the goal of being formally recognised within the Emergency Management system.

Myrtleford

- **Population:** 3,285
- **Median age:** 50
- Significant Italian heritage
- **Funded Org:** Myrtleford Neighbourhood Centre
- **Granted:** \$ 37,850
- **In-kind:** \$5,725
- **Project/s:** Paid role - Community Connector - The First 72 Hours project - mapping processes and networks in the immediate aftermath of an emergency
- **Outcomes:** A dedicated focus on ongoing resilience building through an advisory group, which is maintaining momentum by tapping into new arrivals and offering ongoing programming at the Neighbourhood Centre.

University of Sydney action research findings

The following pages (8-21) draw from Action Research Report for Community Partners into FRRR's Disaster Resilient: Future Ready Victoria Program, written by Dr Pam Joseph, Associate Professor Margot Rawsthorne and Professor Amanda Howard, University of Sydney, in May 2025.

In this section, The University of Sydney outlines the actions each partner community undertook against the Dimensions discussed earlier. While the Dimensions are not intended as a 'to do' list, they provide a framework to support and guide action towards community resilience. Readers will note the diversity of approach in each community, as well as how paying attention to each dimension supports collective action that allows communities to be better prepared for future disasters.

Korumburra

Initially a working group comprising representatives from business, services and residents supported the DR:FR process. In year two of the program, the group evolved into Korumburra Staying Strong (KSS). KSS was less focused on seeking to participate in decision-making forums (such as emergency management). This reflected a growing sense of trust in the existing forums and the expertise of those involved in those bodies. KSS identified their best contribution to resilience building being developing inclusive networks that could support emergency management agencies.

From the beginning, inclusion was a strong focus for Korumburra. Attention was paid to building opportunities for community input and consistently asking questions about the usefulness of their work to the broader community.

INSIGHT



What supports or hinders community resilience building?

There was a noted period of uncertainty among the Korumburra group that led to an early emphasis on information-gathering. "We don't know what we don't know."

Sitting with discomfort created time and space for relationships to be developed in Korumburra DR:FR participants, which was particularly important for a group that did not have a strong history of working together. While this period can be (and to some extent was) frustrating for some community members, it was pivotal in the longer-term success of the entity that developed (Korumburra Staying Strong (KSS)).

Creating and increasing opportunities for participation remained a strong focus and a participatory community priority process was designed and executed throughout the program. This process clarified, gave direction and endorsed activities. As KSS evolved, greater clarity about how the group could build resilience developed. A new focus emerged, highlighting communication and information (a new dimension) to support greater inclusion.

With FRRR funding, the group was able to establish a website and create a stronger social media presence, hold a second community wide participatory networking and planning event, and establish the infrastructure required for the Helping Hands initiative, which matched volunteers with those needing assistance to remain resilient and connect.

Impacts

At the conclusion of the program, the action research data identified success and readiness of the KSS group to play a significant role in building community resilience into the future.

Early attention to inclusion and network-building established a positive feedback loop in Korumburra, which gained momentum over time, supporting self-sustaining and expanding local relationships. These were drawn on in a subsequent storm event. With an existing relationship to significant local infrastructure (the Korumburra Community Hub) and community connections and networks well established, KSS was able to act as a conduit for information, communication and community support via social media and local self-organising, as well as acting in concert with Council and other agencies in responding to local needs. This process both enhanced community knowledge and communication during a crisis and revealed a number of areas for improvement and additional resources required at the Hub and across the community to be ready for future extreme weather events.

KSS adapted to the changing context over time, recognising their strengths and redirecting efforts from infrastructure projects better co-ordinated by Council to network building, self-organising and inclusion work connecting and expanding local knowledge and capacities.

A focus over the next year will be maintaining the momentum built through participation in DR:FR Victoria. The creative use of local resources and networks is likely to assist, as will avoiding the drive to formalisation. Staying consistent to their values of inclusion and place will ensure the activities of the group remain genuinely community-led.

FRRR resourcing and community activations*

Through resourcing and support accessed via FRRR, and positive in-kind contributions, the community was able to activate a range of events and initiatives.

Project 1: **The Korumburra Helping Hub**

Grant: **\$30,200**

Korumburra Helping Hub matched volunteers, community groups and local projects using social media, a website, local media, multiple Meet and Greet days involving volunteers and community groups. It encouraged all members of the community to provide a voluntary contribution and created a network of community help and gift-giving adding strength in times of community crisis.

Grant funding paid for wages of a Coordinator / volunteer mentor, volunteer training days, advertising, communications, bookkeeping, website hosting, catering, venue hire, legal advice and report distribution costs.

Additional In-kind support: \$16,780

Website design; steering committee and working group (meetings, surveys, interviews and consultations); steering group member (central point for the request of budget payments and completion of acquittal); and steering group member (printing of the community resources booklet).**

Project 2: **Helping Hands - Strengthening Community Co-ordination & Collaboration**

Grant: **\$17,001**

Support for the Korumburra community to be more prepared for, and resilient to, the impacts of disasters through collaboratively developing a Community Resilience Plan (for times of emergency) and a Community Plan.

Grant funding supported Project Coordinator wages, venue hire, facilitation, advertising/promotion, auspicing fees and website costs.

Additional In-kind support: \$7,000*

South Gippsland Shire Council EM Manager; KSS volunteers: and Community Groups volunteer time.

*Value of in-kind support noted in grant application. It is highly likely that these values exceeded original estimates.



Whittlesea Township and surrounds

The pre-partnership conversations in Whittlesea Township and surrounds took place with the Community Resilience Committee (CRC, previously the Whittlesea Bushfire Recovery Committee), which was formed in 2009 following the Black Saturday bushfires. The CRC had worked previously with FRRR in the development of a Community Emergency Plan in 2015.

An early focus in Whittlesea Township and surrounds was on resources (an endorsed Community Emergency Plan) and networks (the renewal of the Community Resilience Committee). The group's interest in partnering with FRRR in relation to disaster resilience was driven by their desire to re-imagine and re-invigorate the Community Emergency Plan, which would be recognised and endorsed by the Municipal Emergency Management Plan. Other related Dimensions identified were communication and information, both of which would be enabled by greater clarity about roles of individuals, groups and networks through the Community Emergency Plan.

INSIGHT



What helps or hinders resilience building and preparedness?

How do participating communities understand, act on and plan for disasters effectively at a local level?

Resources played an important role in the task of producing a plan suitable for endorsement, although this proved to be more complex than anticipated. The group spent considerable time on recruiting and orienting casual staff to the tasks required, only to have them find other more sustainable employment.

Developing a strong ally within Council allowed for a significant shift in progress, although the fragility of this approach was evident when that ally left. The issue of institutional instability is one highlighted in Whittlesea. A more networked approach may have overcome the reliance on an individual.

In the second year of the program the activities of the Whittlesea group had shrunk or withdrawn to some extent from those envisioned at the Expression of Interest stage. This may reflect the impact of COVID on individuals and the broader community, although it may also illuminate the 'natural' cycle of community action.

Resources, communication and information continue to be a focus of the group's work, with the specific goal of endorsement of a Community Emergency Plan. At the final research cycle, new attention was being turned to building networks and inclusion to support the eventual endorsement and implementation of the Plan.

FRRR support for paid resources to write key documents relating to the plan allowed group members to focus on building the infrastructure that would be required to support the Community Emergency Response Network (CERN). While there was evidence of more external engagement, the process continued to be driven by a small, tightly networked, group of people - although the issue of succession planning was gaining momentum.

Throughout 2023 and into 2024, the Whittlesea community group focused on drafting the documents required to enact the in-principle support for a Community Emergency Management Plan by the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC). Considerable energy was placed in communicating with those outside the working group about the CERN, broadening inclusion and networks.

Impacts

At the final action research visit in May 2024, a more balanced array of activities was being undertaken by the Whittlesea working group. Over the life of the DR:FR Victoria program, the group had been able to use resources well to make progress on their clear goal. Despite formal support, advocacy was still required to ensure genuine participation in decision-making. The need for a robust and active network of agencies to support the CERN was recognised. Communicating both 'up' (to institutions) and 'across' (to the broader community) remained an ongoing priority. Having a community voice at the decision-making table illustrated the importance of community action to ensure that voice was inclusive and sustainable.

INSIGHT



How do participating communities understand, act on and plan for disasters effectively at a local level?

Recognition of community knowledge, skills and decisions required multi-directional and adaptive negotiation, information gathering, communication and network building. This process was far from linear and required long-term, responsive and creative work by the community group.

Support from allies in the system created momentum for change and connected community efforts with formal emergency management in new ways.

New strategies for change emerged and were taken up by the community group through the project.



Whittlesea Community Resilience Committee with DR:FR Community Coach and City of Whittlesea staff.

FRRR resourcing and community activations*

Through resourcing and support via FRRR and positive in-kind contributions by the community group and its supporters, the community was able to activate a range of events and initiatives including:

- Update of the 2015 Community Emergency Plan and create a physical Handbook;
- Set up a website for the CRC to communicate with the community;
- Establish and develop the Community Emergency Response Network (CERN) with local organisations and groups, to incorporate into the Municipal and State emergency structure;
- Run Community Resilience workshops and Emergency Exercises with relevant Emergency bodies; and
- Employ a worker to assist with these activities.

Whittlesea Prepared - Community Led

Grant: **\$49,941**

Strengthen community plans and networks to support Whittlesea to prepare for emergencies and natural disasters by employing a project worker and developing resources and tools.

FRRR funding supported Project worker wages and superannuation, website development and branding; software and licensing; Community Emergency handbook / CERN Ops manual; auspice fee; venue; stationery; catering; and memberships.

Additional In-kind support: \$27,746**

Volunteer services; committee travel; City of Whittlesea staff time; Facility / meeting room / workshop venue hire; printing; office space; and loan of laptop.

The Myrtleford Neighbourhood Centre (MNC) took on a leadership role in DR:FR Victoria partnership, following careful consultation and negotiation by FRRR. Similar to other communities, the period from the EOI to August 2022 was impacted by COVID and staff leave. Accessing the resources required to support community action on resilience was a high priority in Myrtleford. These resources were not only financial but also human, including networks, relationships and motivation. Over time, it became apparent that existing infrastructure was not well placed to act as a catalyst for community action in the absence of additional resources. Communications, both with formal systems (such as Council and Emergency Management) and through informal systems (the broader community) about disasters was a focus throughout the Myrtleford DR:FR partnership. Despite an already strong relationship with Council, there was a sense of frustration about lack of information and consideration in communication strategies through formal systems.

At the program EOI stage, the envisaged focus of the community working group in Myrtleford was on building network capacities such as connected, better communication and strong networks; formal and informal systems working together; and nurturing the already strong relationship with Council.

A dedicated Community Connector was funded through DR:FR Victoria and was based with the Myrtleford Neighbourhood Centre (MNC) from January-June 2023. During the six month engagement, the Community Connector focused on engaging community networks about the possibilities of DR:FR; driving greater involvement in decision making (through the establishment of a 12-member community project advisory group); the collection of information; and building communication pathways to the broader community.

From this work, interest emerged in focussing on the immediate days following a disaster and identifying suitable place/s of “last resort” in case of a future emergency.

INSIGHT



What helps or hinders resilience building?

Ongoing financial resourcing of the project continued to be a primary concern expressed by both the MNC and the community leaders who participated in DR:FR Victoria activities. The momentum built by the Community Connector was hard to maintain. This is understandable, given the very high level of active community involvement that the community leaders demonstrate; comments about being committed to the community but tired and time-poor were expressed freely in meetings. As Resources continued to be an area receiving the majority of the group’s energy, this was possibly at the expense of the other domains.

Impacts

At the final research cycle, significant progress had been made in the community project advisory group, which was shaping action on community resilience in Myrtleford. The group appeared to be tapping into newer arrivals to the community, many of whom brought significant skills. The efforts of the Community Connector in developing interconnectivity between groups was a catalyst for supporting community disaster resilience building.

Although the issue of resourcing had not been resolved, the group seemed more willing to move ahead despite this uncertainty. Positively, other Dimensions were now being acted upon, including inclusion, decision making and self-organising. Longer term allocation of resources and support for Community Connector role would have enabled consolidation and further momentum to continue in communication, networks building and self-organising.

FRRR resourcing and community activations*

Through resourcing and support accessed via FRRR, and positive in-kind contributions, the community was able to activate a range of events and initiatives including:

- Project co-design and further development workshops;
- Marketing;
- Recruitment and appointment of a Community Connector role, which led the establishment of the project and engagement with key stakeholder; and
- General project management.

DR: FR Community Connector and Coordinator - The First 72 Hours project

Grant: **\$37,850**

This funding engaged a DR:FR Community Connector role, under the auspice of MNC. The role explored and documented the processes and networks that the Myrtleford community follows in the immediate aftermath of an emergency and what they draw on to support each other through these times.

The grant went toward wages, catering, marketing, design, fuel, materials and co-design workshops.

Additional In-kind Support: **\$5,725****

Steering committee / volunteers; Into our Hands Executive Officer time; and MNC Manager time.



FRRR and USyd staff meeting with representatives from Myrtleford community

Learnings and insights from the action learning

While much was learned about both the commonalities and differences in implementing the DR:FR program throughout the course of this research project, two key learnings emerged. One reinforced the value of the Resilience Dimensions approach both in stimulating the project group's thinking and action and in making sense of their experiences as their project progressed. The Resilience Dimensions approach enables communities to develop and act in ways that responded to where they are at. It also offers time poor volunteers a way to make sense of their experiences within a complex system.

However, within each dimension, a range of local and systemic factors can act to support or hinder community resilience-building and preparedness. Mapping the Dimensions over time clearly illustrated the complexity of the context in which community action was taking place and demonstrated the limitations of traditional, linear project management approaches in supporting community action on resilience. This led to the other key learning - community resilience-building is complex, as community groups need to respond to challenges and opportunities, both within and beyond their immediate environment. Groups need to understand 'complexity thinking' (concepts like non-linearity, emergence, adaption, dynamic context and interconnectivity) and how to overlay that with the Dimensions to guide decision making.

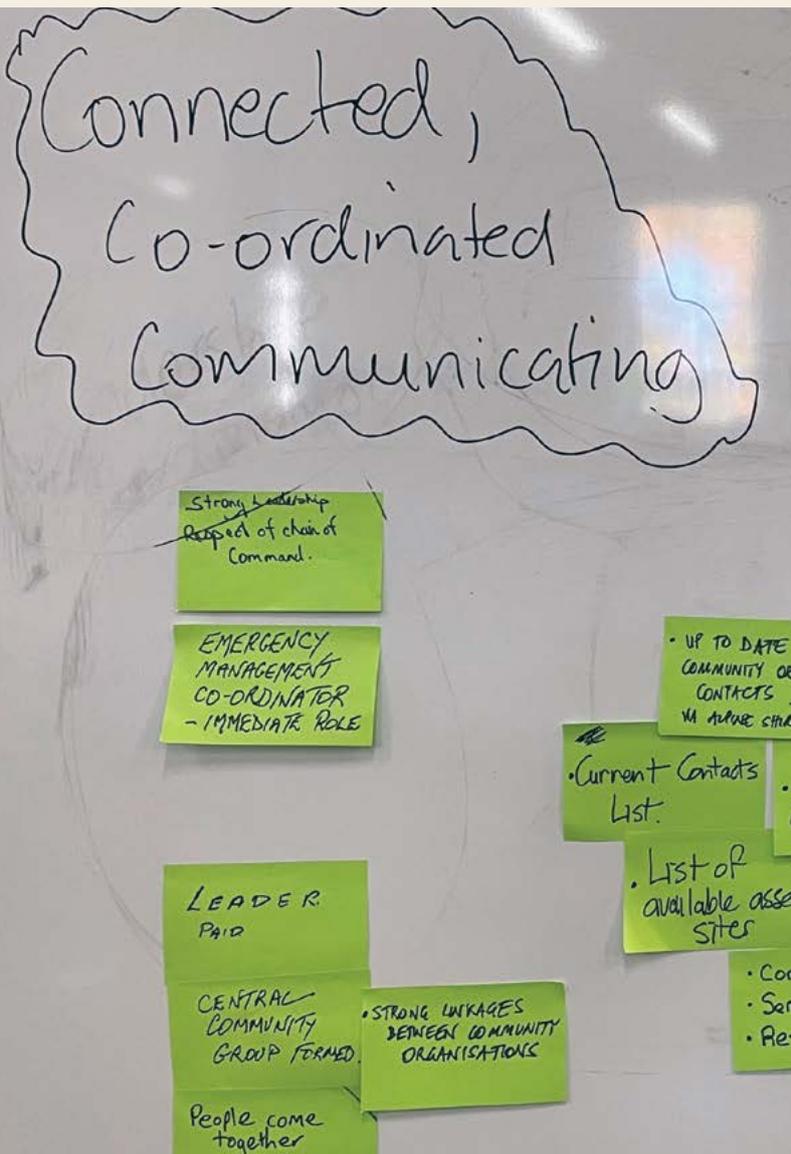
The University of Sydney's research report also reinforces a number of observations from the NSW pilot, and highlighted a number of other practical lessons for communities, funders, policy-makers, Government and intermediaries, which we've summarised below.

The DR:FR approach is effective

- The longer-term, three-year placed-based DR:FR approach allows communities to develop unique solutions and a collectively agreed action plan. While starting points are different for each community, this is not a problem for building resilience locally over time.
- Through workshops that build over time, DR:FR introduces key concepts; explores roles and responsibilities in disaster planning, response, recovery and preparedness; maps local community demographics, assets and initiatives; and dives deeply into the Dimensions of Resilience on a local level to inform action for resilience building efforts.
- A particular focus on networks and inclusion recognises that people most impacted by disasters will have variable capability to respond.
- Flexibility on FRRR's part allowed for projects to be contextualised, shaping actions to very different local circumstances and priorities and to respond to changing timelines and evolving community life .
- Allowing communities to determine qualitative and quantitative measures of success and to determine where to focus their efforts meant that resilience building efforts were accountable to local community needs and responsive to the specific context.

Relationships and connections

- Organisations activating programs such as DR:FR (including funders, partners and intermediaries) need to support communities in building understanding that this work is not straightforward, nor linear.
- Longer-term place based initiatives need to allow sufficient time to engender this understanding in communities, as this will result in stronger outcomes.
- The consequences of the actions and decisions of funders, policy-makers, government and intermediaries significantly impact a community's momentum at a grassroots level. So too does the level of support provided.
- A focus on formalised planning (a common approach) can drain community energy for minimal gains and slow momentum for change.
- Investment in inclusion and network-building creates feedback loops, which can support momentum and over time, encourage self-sustaining and expanding local relationships.
- Community groups need to form relationships and develop multiple allies in the system, so they don't have to start from scratch if someone moves on from a position of authority.
- Focusing resources and effort on developing interconnectivity between groups is often a catalyst for community disaster resilience building, creating momentum to work on communication, network-building and self-organising.
- By recognising respective strengths and being able to leverage strong connections, community groups can adapt to a changing context over time and direct their efforts in line with their strengths and capacity.



Workshop outputs from Myrtleford

Resourcing and support

- Placed-based capacity building programs require a significant and sustained level of resourcing, with optimum outcomes where there is consistency of staffing for the duration of the program.
- As with any community development activity, the 'fit' of staff for the program is important. The program flexibility (identified as a strength) makes different demands on staff and requires a mix of experience, skills and attitude.
- Early involvement of coaches and other supports will reap long-term benefits through community development, enhancing long-term disaster management capability.
- Flexibility and the practical support of local knowledge, inclusivity and creativity are key to effective resilience-building. Changemakers often wear many hats and there is value in ensuring there are sufficient grant funds to support local leaders going above and beyond, so they avoid burnout and can build sustainable capacity.
- As the level of volunteer time invested by communities in programs such as DR:FR is significant, providing additional support eases the load for volunteers, especially through things like infrastructure, additional resourcing and policies.
- Community understanding of local disaster risk and resilience is as diverse as the communities themselves. That said, most places have a wealth of experience, knowledge and skills with which to drive change to improve their communities and achieve the shared responsibility desired. Tapping into and respecting this wealth is vital if shared responsibility in disasters is to be realised.



Myrtleford community group meeting.

Expect the unexpected



Korumburra volunteers

“Whatever network you set up, it’s got to be something that’s in the community all the time. Those that are set up as a reaction don’t necessarily last long.”

Community project group member

- Building resilience and disaster preparedness is a complex and busy space. Resilience building rarely proceeds in a straight line through predictable stages.
- In reality, there is gradual consensus building, deep relationship building, stop-start momentum, roundabouts of discussions, collaboration and trust building over time - all of which takes time but the effort is worth it, given the eventual interconnectedness.
- When funding, governance and support recognise and engage with the fluid dynamics of community life and make space for adaptation and the emergence of new ideas and directions over the life of a project, community resilience-building is more sustainable and able to thrive and grow over time.
- Building awareness and understanding of complex thinking among intermediaries will enable them to offer context and better support to communities undertaking this work.
- Over-simplifying project processes risks poor outcomes and community frustration as the complex negotiations required of community members are not recognised and accounted for.

Summary of recommendations from University of Sydney

The key learnings from the Victorian iteration of DR:FR led to a number of recommendations, which are summarised below.

Program Design

Expression of Interest Process

- Simplify the process through the use of a two-page template that can be easily completed by community members.
- Clearly articulate roles and responsibilities to establish realistic levels of participation and contribution, from staff and other delivery partners, and by the community
- Indicate the staffing resources that are available from FRRR to support the partnership.
- Clarify and simplify the process for accessing resources, including funds, and accountability requirements.

Community coaches and supports

- Provide community coaches during the initial three months of the partnership, with a minimum employment of one day per week.
- Prioritise community coaches who have local relationships and community development skills.
- Provide three to five facilitated workshops (with consistent curricula and processes), including at least one workshop aimed at engaging others outside the EOI group.
- Provide resources on other communities taking action on disasters.

Learning through doing – action research

- Consider inclusion of action research methodology in the initial workshops (alongside).
- If appropriate and sufficient budget, provide support and mentoring on action research methods.
- Build research capacity through partnerships with local education institutions.
- Provide access to 'how to' resources and tools.



Program Implementation

Design and management

- Allow for flexible project design, including context specific project milestones and priorities.
- Allow for adaptation over time as new opportunities emerge and initial focus areas change in response to community life, actions and learnings.
- Include resources and opportunities for cross community connections and ideas sharing, as local projects develop (resource at least two opportunities for community-to-community conversations and peer-to-peer communications).
- Sharing previous community experiences and how the program might work in that location is highly useful in learning what 'resilience' looks like in diverse locations across Australia.
- Ensure greater clarity on the process of program completion and exit.
- Work in collaboration with community partners to disseminate and share learning from the program more widely.

Financial matters

- Further streamline processes for communities to access funds and provide clear guidelines at the beginning of projects regarding this process.
- The experiences of the DR:FR Victoria communities highlighted the importance of in-kind contributions and of adaptive and responsive administrative support. Therefore, we recommend that funders and enablers of future community resilience-building initiatives:
 - ensure full recognition of community in-kind contributions as part of budgeting and planning processes, to provide accurate costing of projects and valuing of volunteer hours and contributions; and
 - pay close attention to adaptive and responsive administrative support for volunteer community organisations that undertake community resilience building.
- Similarly, we recommend that community groups that are starting out in community resilience-building draw from the data and experiences of the DR:FR Victoria communities presented in this report in shaping responses based on their own local contexts.

“(The community) started to develop its own identity. I think that’s still a journey to continue, but there’s so much more of a positive feel about town and about community. It’s really good to see things moving ahead.”

Community project group member

What's next for FRRR?

Building community capability in resilience and preparedness will continue to be an area of focus for FRRR, particularly as disasters increase in frequency and severity and have such disproportionate impacts on remote, rural and regional communities. It is widely accepted that investing in preparedness, including building community resilience, strengthens capacity to move through recovery following a disaster event – and mitigates the impact of future disasters and disruptions.

The DR:FR model is a proven place-based approach that enhances the resilience and disaster-readiness of communities. FRRR is currently working in the Burnett Inland region of Queensland alongside Red Earth Community Foundation, thanks to the support of the Australian Government and Minderoo Foundation, to implement the DR:FR initiative in six communities and at a regional level. We welcome the opportunity to implement this program in other places.

Learn more about the Disaster Resilient: Future Ready program at: www.frrr.org.au/DRFR.

To discuss the program or partner with us, please email info@frrr.org.au or call 03 5430 2399.



Whittlesea Township and surrounds bushfire scenario workshop is an example of proactive things that are now occurring in these communities



Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal

Dja Dja Wurrung Country

PO Box 41
Bendigo VIC 3552
ABN: 27 091 810 589
info@frrr.org.au
Ph: 03 5430 2399
www.frrr.org.au

Report written by FRRR and JAW Communications, drawing from Action Research Report for Community Partners into FRRR's Disaster Resilient: Future Ready Victoria Program, written by Dr Pam Joseph, Associate Professor Margot Rawsthorne and Professor Amanda Howard, University of Sydney, May 2025.

Designed by Twenty20 Graphics

August 2025