

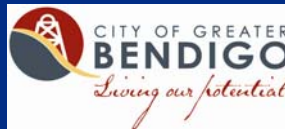
# AWOL Program

Activating Women of Leadership

## Evaluation Report



October 2008



*Prepared by Nancy Vaughan for Women's Health Loddon Mallee, on behalf of the Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership*

Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership  
www.blpcp.com.au Ph: 03 5448 1624

Women's Health Loddon Mallee  
www.whlm.org.au Ph: 03 5443 0233

City of Greater Bendigo Community & Cultural Development Unit  
www.bendigo.vic.gov.au Ph: 03 5434 6464

Nancy Vaughan, Research & Writing  
www.nancyvaughan.com Ph: 0408 001 710

## Contents

Introduction.....	3
Executive Summary .....	3
The events .....	6
Kamarooka/Drummartin Movie Night .....	6
Axe Creek/Eppalock Family Fun Day .....	7
Campbells Forest Trivia Night.....	8
Participant questionnaires .....	9
Economic benefits .....	11
AXLE follow up.....	13
Literature review .....	15
AWOL process evaluation.....	17

## Introduction



Across Australia, countless small rural communities face the ongoing challenges associated with drought, population change and changes to farming and trading practices.

The aim of this report is to provide a detailed evaluation and description of AWOL (Activating Women of Leadership), a drought recovery and community leadership program undertaken by City of Greater Bendigo in 2008. The program was funded by Regional Development Victoria and the City of Greater Bendigo.

This evaluation report was undertaken on behalf of the Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership (PCP) which is a voluntary alliance of thirty five health and community service organisations in the City of Greater Bendigo and the Loddon Shire. The purpose of the Bendigo Loddon PCP is to work towards the development of a stronger, more integrated community-based health and community service sector. Within the PCP, member organisations aim to reduce duplication, work together to improve service coordination and deliver integrated health promotion programs. Commissioning this report is part of the PCP's commitment to sustaining community wellbeing in communities affected by drought and was funded through the Department of Human Services' drought response program.

This report was prepared on behalf of the Bendigo Loddon PCP by Women's Health Loddon Mallee (WHLM), an agency that is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of women of the Loddon Mallee Region. WHLM also delivered one of the AWOL workshops, which focused on

enhancing the participants' capacity to undertake leadership roles in their community.

The AWOL project was recognised as being a significant model of Local Government initiated drought response, as it addressed the goals of increasing social participation within a clear framework of improving community capacity and connection.

## Executive Summary

This report is intended to provide a useful case study of the AWOL project as an innovative and effective community capacity building drought initiative. The evaluation of the AWOL project involved:

- Surveying participants before and after their involvement with the program
- Interviewing participants after their involvement in the program to gain information about program-related community connection, social interaction and enhanced community capacity
- Interviewing City of Greater Bendigo project officers regarding the process for the project
- Undertaking a brief review of similar Local Government drought response projects, and
- Interviewing participants of the AXLE program, one year on from their involvement, to explore flow on benefits to them and their community.

### About the AWOL project

In 2007, the City of Greater Bendigo's Community and Cultural Development Unit worked with a number of small rural communities in a community capacity building and drought recovery program called AXLE (Amplifying eXisting Leadership Expertise).

This program, funded by Regional Development Victoria and the City of Greater Bendigo, proved successful in building capacity, confidence and connection within communities and between the communities and the Council.

The 2008 AWOL project was undertaken to work with the very small communities that were missed in the 2007 AXLE project. Many of these communities have dispersed populations and only have a public hall to mark the location of the town. The aim of AWOL was to work with women living in these small communities, recognising the important role they often play and and potential enhanced role they may play in community leadership and social networks in small rural communities.

The AWOL project sought to work intensively with these women to develop leadership skills that will equip them to facilitate local action projects and social networking as a platform to provide information exchange and mutual support on drought, water and natural disaster assistance initiatives.

A focus of the project was to support the project participants in taking a collaborative approach in organising their events. As a result, important new connections were made between community groups, between residents and community groups, between residents and between communities and City of Greater Bendigo.



Enhanced enthusiasm, triggering ideas for new community activities and events, has been an outcome of both AXLE and AWOL projects and a stronger relationship between these communities and the City of Greater Bendigo has been a consistent result. These stronger relationships and increased knowledge of the City's resources and processes are sparking new community activity and confidence as they learn more about resources available for their community.

### Summary of AWOL process

A summary of the process undertaken by City of Greater Bendigo to deliver the AWOL project follows:

*Recruitment* - Council officers worked with a range of rural agencies, the established small town networks and community groups to identify potential suitable participants. The women were contacted and then visited by the project coordinator who explained the AXLE project further.

*Workshops* - Two workshops were provided. Their aim was to:

- Articulate and emphasise the purpose of the project and build relationships between participants and COGB
- Provide a networking forum for participants to share experiences, information and event ideas and build enthusiasm for the project
- Assist in developing skills and knowledge in event management and applying for grants, and
- Enhance the participants' capacity to undertake leadership roles in their community

*Event selection* - Participants consulted with their communities to select a suitable event. This choice was then reported back to City of Greater Bendigo for approval.

*Organising and holding the event* - Project participants formed working groups and community partnerships to organise their event. Where required, the project coordinator and other Council officers provided support and mentoring to participants during the event organising process.

*Celebration and Presentation* - At the end of the AWOL program, participants were invited to a celebration dinner and to present information about their event.

### Major outcomes

This report found that the major achievements and challenges related to the AWOL project were:

### *Achievements*

- Increased community capacity to apply for and source grants
- Increased community capacity and confidence to organise an event
- Increased community confidence to contact Council and increased knowledge about Council support and services
- Increased connection within communities and between community groups
- Provision of an event that provided for social interaction, fun and information sharing, and
- A range of direct and indirect flow on economic benefits (*see p. 10*)

### *Challenges*

- Recruiting suitable project participants from small, dispersed communities
- Providing regular communication to participants across a range of mediums
- Increasing workshop attendance and related understanding of project aims, and
- Providing a financial reimbursement process that is better suited to small rural communities and enhancing information provision about Council's financial and administrative processes.

## The events

### Kamarooka/Drummartin Movie Night

A Family Barbeque and Movie Night was held in Kamarooka on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May. The event, held at the Kamarooka Public Hall, attracted around 60 residents from the area. Event organisers; Bernice McKay, Robyn McKay, Janine Kerr and Sherryn Pederson worked closely with the Kamarooka Welfare League to organise the event.



A barbeque and movie night was selected as it suited people of all ages and offered something fun for the farming families, many of whom have had to cut back on entertainment due to financial pressures from drought.

The event was an important opportunity for residents to catch up and share information. *“The event really inspired a sense of community as we only have one event per year,”* said Robyn.



The event gave new residents a chance to meet people and outlying residents and neighbours to

catch up with each other. *“We saw people who we haven’t seen for years or who we didn’t even know lived in the district,”* said Bernice. *“Some people who move out here can find it hard to mix. It’s hard because we don’t have a shop or post office or anything.”*

With a focus on bringing the community together, the event involved working with a number of community organisations. The Kamarooka Welfare League played a key role in organising the event; Drummartin Primary School assisted with photocopying and distributing promotional flyers; the Kamarooka Fire Brigade assisted with setting and packing up and the Elmore netball team cooked the barbeque.

The event was also a chance for the organisers to share information about the different funding and projects in the area, particularly the role of the Kamarooka Welfare League.



Project participants found the AWOL workshops valuable, particularly the social networking and event management training aspects.

*“I’m fairly new to the area, so running the event gave me a chance to meet people and they got to meet me,”* said Robyn. *“I now feel more confident about accessing services and the details of event management.”*

## Axe Creek/Eppalock Family Fun Day



A Family Fun Day was held at the Eppalock Primary School on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> May.

The event attracted over 200 people and was coordinated by Debra Reade. The objective was to bring people together and promote the different community groups. *“We all live on little blocks and most of us work in town, so you don’t get much chance to catch up with your neighbours,”* Debra explained.

A working committee, made up of members of the Axe Creek Fire Brigade, Axe Creek Landcare Group and the Eppalock Primary School, worked together on the event. For some groups, the event offered a new opportunity to work together.

The event featured show bags with information about local community groups and practical information, name-tags, a focus on minimising waste on the day, lucky door prizes, and the involvement of community groups in the information sessions and stands.



*“We had far more people than we expected,”* said Debra. *“Lots of people said they’d only stay for an hour but ended up there all day.”*

The information presentations and stands were a central focus of the day, covering a range of topics including water-wise gardening, fire safety, pet care, and information for landholders. The information and presenters were often from, or connected to, local community groups.

The Fire Brigade had a running team demonstration and let the kids have a go with the hose and motors. The brigade also organised a smoke-house and assisted with the show bags.



The Primary School set up the venue and barbeque and organised many of the activities and children’s entertainment as well as some of the guest speakers and information stands.

The Landcare group organised purchasing fruit from the local fruit shop which was given away on the day and organised a number of the community information sessions and stands.

As well as their delegated tasks, each of the groups provided information for the show bags and helped promote the event to the region.

*“It worked really well and the groups said they got a lot out of the day’,* said Debra. *“The event also illustrated that it isn’t just school events that can be held at the primary school. If we were to run it again, the groups were all so enthused that I think they’d probably want to be involved again.”*

## Campbells Forest Trivia Night

A Community Dinner and Trivia Night was held in Campbells Forest on Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup> May. Located on the boundary of Loddon and Greater Bendigo Local Government areas ("In the crack" as locals call it), Campbells Forest has a widely dispersed community and currently holds one community event per year.

Event organisers, Toni Shea and Joy Keating, worked closely with the Campbells Forest Hall Committee, while the Campbells Forest Fire Brigade and the Campbells Forest and District Action Planning Group were also involved.



Other community members assisted with the event included Jodie Bajada and Cecily Thomas.

The objective was to bring the community together for an enjoyable night. The trivia, which included plenty of local knowledge questions,



went down very well and, with around 75 people attending from across the district, event organisers were very pleased with the numbers.

*"We had people calling up on the day to see if they could come," said Joy. "A lot were out on*

*tractors and were flat out putting crops in until the last minute."*

The night offered the district's residents a chance to get together.

*"There were a couple of people who hadn't been to a community event in 10 or 15 year," said Joy. "We talked about what different people are doing on different farms - whose sowing what paddock and whose tractor has broken down."*

The evening also provided new residents the chance to meet their neighbours.

*"One of the new families in the district came and they got to meet different people and the locals got to meet them', said Toni. "They're really interested in joining the fire brigade and our cards night."*



*"There was a lot of enthusiasm about doing it again," said Toni. "We're looking at making the Trivia Night an annual event and some people have suggested we make it a fundraiser to help renovate the hall. It was good for residents to recognise that there are different people in their community who can organise events"*

*"I learnt that there is support available from Council and now I have the confidence to call them up," said Toni. "I think it opened people's eyes. We realised that people are interested in us and that we are a community - not just somewhere you drive through."*

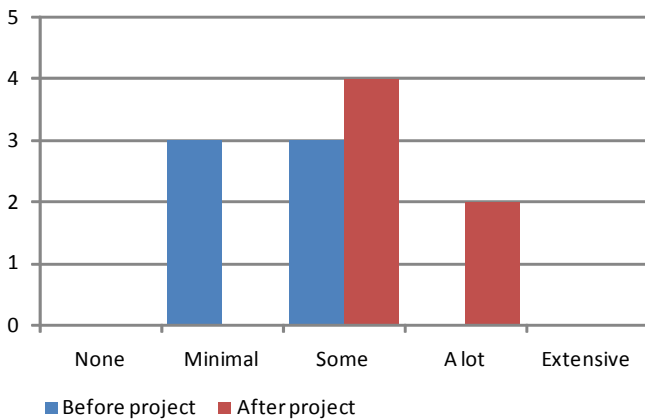
## Participant questionnaires

AWOL participants completed a questionnaire before and after involvement in the project.

Results are based on the six participants who completed the project and indicate they had increased knowledge, skills and confidence related to organising and participating in community activities and about Council resources available to their community.

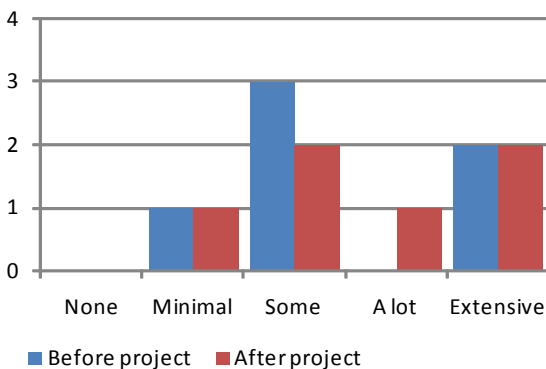
### 1. Rank your level of experience in organising community events

	Before project	After project
None		
Minimal	3	
Some	3	4
A lot		2
Extensive		



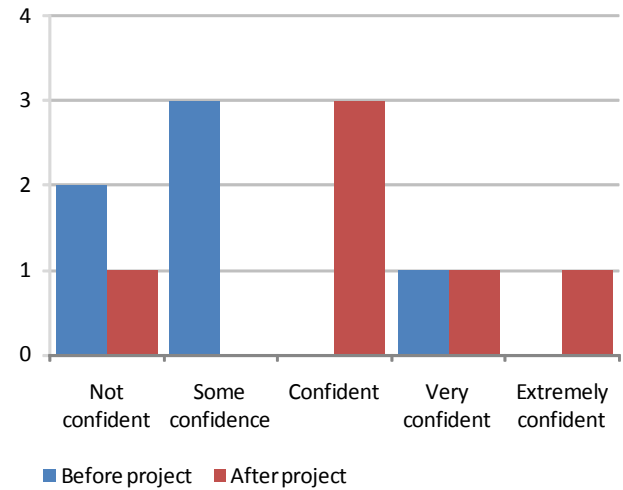
### 2. Rank your level of experience in community group committees

	Before project	After project
None		
Minimal	1	1
Some	3	2
A lot		1
Extensive	2	2



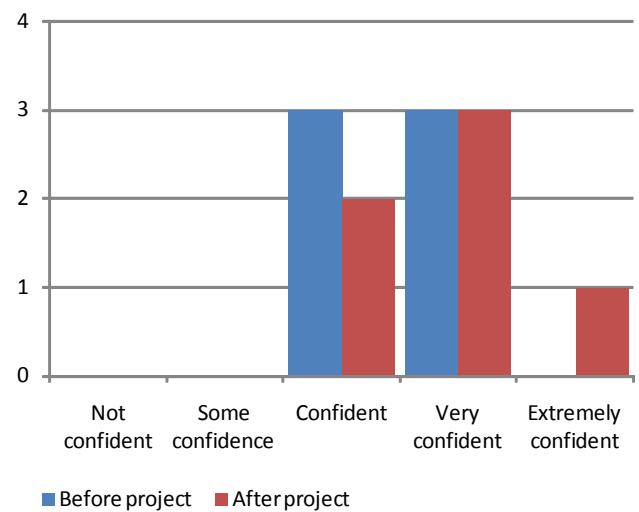
### 3. How confident would you feel to organise a community event?

	Before project	After project
Not confident	2	1
Some confidence	3	
Confident		3
Very confident	1	1
Extremely confident		1



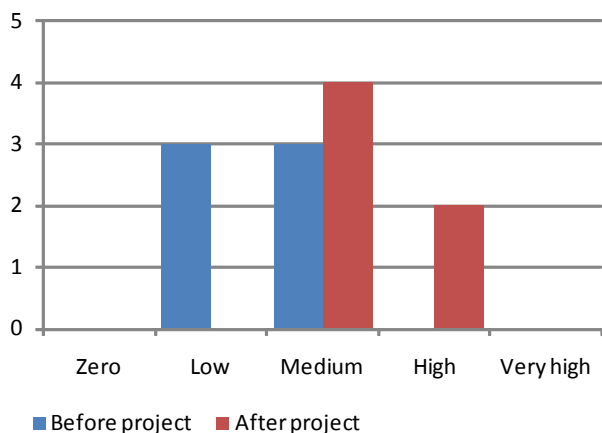
### 4. How confident would you feel to sit on a community group committee?

	Before project	After project
Not confident		
Some confidence		
Confident	3	2
Very confident	3	3
Extremely confident		1



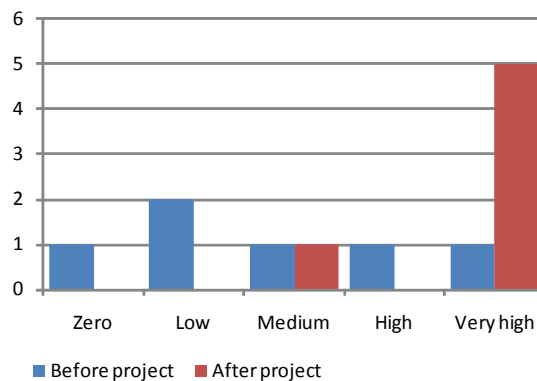
**5. Rank your level of knowledge about event management**

	Before project	After project
Zero		
Low	3	
Medium	3	4
High		2
Very high		



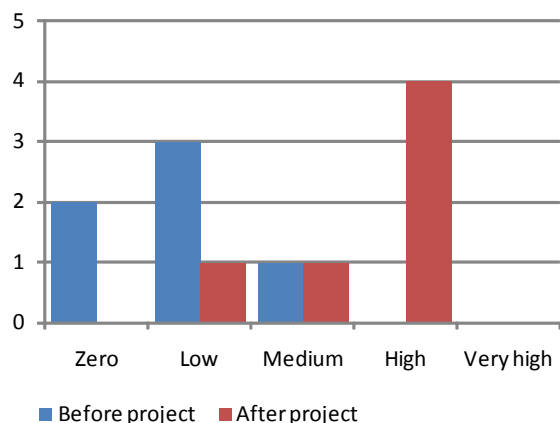
**7. How confident do you feel approaching City of Greater Bendigo Council for support, information or other resources?**

	Before project	After project
Zero	1	
Low	2	
Medium	1	1
High	1	
Very high	1	5



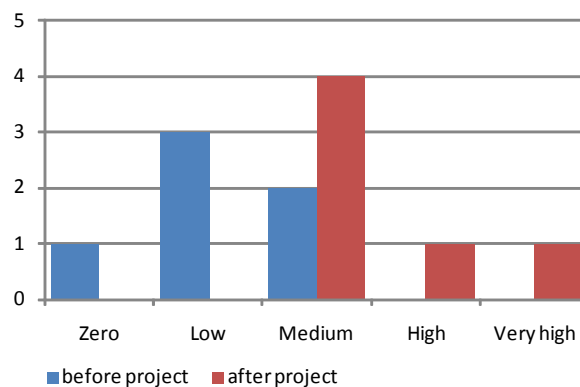
**6. Rank your level of knowledge about where to find support and resources for your community**

	Before project	After project
Zero	2	
Low	3	1
Medium	1	1
High		4
Very high		



**8. Rank your level of knowledge about City of Greater Bendigo council support and resources**

	Before project	After project
Zero	1	
Low	3	
Medium	2	4
High		1
Very high		1



## Economic benefits

The AWOL project targeted small communities located in the rural areas of the City of Greater Bendigo. Some areas have experienced economic and social impacts related to the ongoing drought as well as impacts related to changes to agricultural practices, increasing fuel prices and demographic change. The AWOL project was based upon the AXLE project, a City of Greater Bendigo leadership program run in 2007, which focussed on assisting leaders in small communities to help their district retain its social connectedness throughout the drought.



While the primary focus of the AWOL project was to develop the leadership skills of local women and strengthen neighbourhood social networks, the project also had a range of flow on economic benefits:

- **Direct benefits to local businesses**

Goods and services from local businesses were purchased for a number of AWOL events. The events also provided opportunities for local businesses to raise their profile by sponsoring prizes and offering in-kind sponsorship for components of the event. Building the profile of local businesses, through community events such as these, assists in building loyalty and expanding the knowledge of their goods and services.

- **Increased community skills and knowledge around locating, raising and securing funds**

These skills can assist communities to become more self sufficient and encourage communities to construct or enhance facilities that, in turn,



appeal to existing residents, potential residents and to visitors. Improving the range and quality of community facilities, clubs and programs also adds to the vibrancy of a community and plays an important role in retaining and attracting population in small rural communities.

- **Building vibrant and viable communities**

Developing community leadership skills assists in adding vibrancy and activity to a community and contributes to the viability of community groups and organisations. These skills can also be translated to businesses and can be shared with other community and family members. Active and empowered communities are generally better equipped to create their own events and activities and to shape their own future, rather than being dependent on government support.



- **Boosting fundraising capacity**

Some events, while also making a significant contribution to community wellbeing, have the potential to become self sustaining and, possibly, profit generators for community groups. The

Sebastian community has found this with the AXLE project (a drive in family night). The event raised enough funds in 2008 to become self-funding for 2009.



- **Attracting and retaining residents**

Adding to the sense of community activity and cohesiveness plays an important role in attracting and retaining residents. Attracting and retaining population is an important economic driver - directly and indirectly - for many small rural communities. Some events, such as the Axe Creek/Eppalock community fun day, raised the profile of local community groups and clubs and offered opportunities to recruit new members. Increasing the connections between residents and community groups is an important factor in attracting and retaining population and increasing the ongoing viability of community groups.

## AXLE follow up



In 2007, the City of Greater Bendigo ran the AXLE (Amplifying eXisting Leadership Expertise) project. The project was developed and managed by the City's Community and Cultural Development Unit and was funded by Regional Development Victoria and the City of Greater Bendigo.

The AXLE project was focused on assisting local community leaders to help their district retain its social connectedness throughout the drought. The project aimed to assist small communities to plan and organise local information and social events, develop projects and seek funding to support and develop their local community. Between April and July 2007 events were held in the rural communities of Sebastian, Raywood, Marong, Sedgwick, Lockwood/Lockwood South, Bagshot and Axedale.



The AXLE project participants were interviewed just over a year after these events, to identify and explore the flow on affects of the AXLE project. The following affects and activities were reported:

- Most individual participants reported that participating in the AXLE project provided them with more confidence to initiate and run community events. This was based on the successful experience, through AXLE, of working with community members and running a community event as well as knowing where to go at Council for support and information and feeling confident to do this.
- Two of the communities held their event again in 2008. Both communities had successfully applied for a City of Greater Bendigo community grant to assist with funding the event. Both events were reported to be successful and attracted equal or greater numbers than their first event. Participants reported that the reason for holding the second event were that:

- A strong community desire



- Increased confidence of event organisers to run the event again, based on: The success of the AXLE project, the increased experience in running events, the enthusiastic response from the community, the new community relationships that were built and the new skills that were learnt at the AXLE workshops, and
- Increased confidence of community and event organisers in approaching Council or other organisations for funding, support and information, and the new grant

writing skills and knowledge learnt in the AXLE project.



- Two communities reported that, while they did not hold the same event in 2008, they have already held or are planning other community events and that their involvement in the AXLE project has directly contributed to these events occurring - due to an overall increased interest of community in attending events, increased confidence of community committees and groups and a strong desire to see another community event take place.
- Many participants commented that having people to contact at Council was a significant benefit.
- One community is discussing ideas for a future event but this is still in early stages.



- A number of communities reported that there seemed to be an increase in community engagement and activity since the AXLE event. In the case of Axedale, Sebastian, Raywood and Lockwood South this was reported to have contributed to community interest and involvement in the development and implementation of their Bendigo +25

District Community Plans. Also, reportedly, some community group committees now have completely new members and new faces are showing up at community groups and activities. There is also more community enthusiasm for more community get togethers and activities (Sebastian, Sedgwick and Raywood and Axedale).

- The Bagshot and Sebastian communities have gone on to apply for, and receive, other community grants from non-Council sources. Participants reported that they would not have known where, how or when to apply prior to the AXLE workshops.



- Some of the AXLE participants have shared the skills and knowledge with other community members.
- One participant observed that other communities have seen what they did and are now taking it back to their community.

## Literature review

This review is largely focused on similar drought recovery programs led by Local Government. A brief review of this literature suggests that the AWOL project incorporated some aspects that were less common in other similar projects.

These included:

- A focus on strengthening community skills, confidence and knowledge through providing workshops and mentoring for project participants
- A deliberate emphasis on developing stronger intra and inter community connections through the process of organising the event and attending the workshops (participants were encouraged and required to work with other community groups and individuals in organising the event)
- A deliberate focus on developing stronger relationships with Council, and
- A leadership development component, underpinned by capacity building workshops and facilitating new relationships between participants and Local Government, that provided for the participation of potential community leaders as well as established community leaders.

A selection of similar Local Government community strengthening and drought recovery projects is outlined below:

### Campaspe Shire Community Drought Social Recovery Grants

The Department of Human Services, under the Victorian State Government Drought Social Recovery Strategy, provided funding to Campaspe Shire for Community Drought Social Recovery Grants. The grants are to support communities suffering as a result of drought and

are available to community groups to provide social, health and well being activities/programs.

Community groups and organisations submit grant applications to the Campaspe Shire Drought Social Recovery Committee.

Applications are required to demonstrate how the activity will involve community partnerships and are encouraged to use the resources and skills from within their community to organise their activity. A key requirement for all activities is that a counsellor attends - with the aim of providing support to communities in a non-threatening context - and that information or representation from Centrelink and other drought-related service agencies is provided.

Workshops to build event management and grant application skills are held across the Shire but are not directly linked to the individual projects. The program has been running since 2003 and instigated the successful District Planning Process in Campaspe Shire. The program has funding from the State Government until June 2009.

### Loddon Shire Building Resilient Communities Fund

The Loddon Shire Council Building Resilient Communities Fund has assisted over 100 community events over the last 2 years. The funding was provided by Loddon Shire through funding from the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) in order to strengthen communities and individuals during the drought.

The fund aimed to assist communities in running events that bring the community together and activities that provide opportunities for individuals to learn new things that they can share with their community.

Examples of the wide range of funded activities include: training for young shearers at the Wedderburn Shearing School, a Silent Movie night in East Loddon, four drought "Time Out"

events held in different townships, educational field trips for farmers, assisting with the supply of fruit and milk to kindergarten children, social excursions and a large number of community social activities.

A steering committee oversees the fund and calls for applications. After a community group applies for funding, there is minimal engagement with Shire officers. Community groups are expected to organise their own activities and most community groups need to contribute cash and in-kind support to hold their activities. The State Government will not be funding the program in 2008/09.

#### Shepparton Minor Community Drought Recovery Grants

The Department of Planning and Community Development provided Greater Shepparton City Council with funding to assist in the recovery of the community from the direct and indirect effects of the current drought. The funding rounds ran from December 2006 to May 2008.

The funding was intended to support a range of strategies and actions that lessen the social and health impacts of drought on drought affected communities. The strategies and actions were to support and encourage community self reliance and empowerment and, where possible, add to the sustainable social infrastructure of local communities. The funding was available for continuation of established regular community activities as well as for new activities. Between December 2006 and May 2008, funding support has been provided for around 55 projects for rural communities across the entire municipality.

A maximum of \$500 was available for each grant. Examples of the types of activities supported include: a budget recipe book, social excursions, movie nights, service medal presentations, community dinners and

barbeques and a wide range of other social activities.

Participating community groups and organisations were not required to demonstrate community partnerships. While workshops were not held as part of the program, the program and its activities has triggered a series of grant writing workshops for rural communities.

#### The Loddon Murray Community Leadership Program (LMCLP)

While not a drought recovery program, the LMCLP plays a major role in leadership development in the rural communities of the North Central Victoria region. The program covers a broad range of community leadership aspects and runs for 12 months with regular workshops and field trips.

## AWOL process evaluation

The purpose of the AWOL project was to work with women from City of Greater Bendigo’s rural isolated communities to enhance their leadership skills, equipping them to facilitate local action projects and social networking as a platform to provide information exchange and mutual support on drought, water and natural disaster assistance initiatives. As well as learning new skills, these leaders undertook to organise a community event or activity tailored to the needs of their community.

The funding and training for these community events was what enticed community members to participate but, despite the many positive outcomes of the events, the enhanced community strength, connection and activity that took place through the process of organising the event was the primary objective of the project.

The project was managed by City of Greater Bendigo’s Community and Cultural Development Unit. A project coordinator, Samantha Bell, was appointed and worked on the project during the recruitment and workshop stages. Sadly, in the middle of the project, Sam passed away suddenly. City of Greater Bendigo fellow colleagues and the AWOL participants were all affected by this sad and unexpected event and there were inevitable impacts upon the coordination of project. The table below sets out the key activities in the process and comments drawn from interviews with City of Greater Bendigo project officers and community participants:

Main activity	Comments	Key Learnings
<b>Recruitment of participants</b>	<p>COGB officers commented that it was very difficult and time consuming to recruit from small isolated communities that do not have typical community groups and networks to tap into, such as a CFA or Town Hall committee.</p> <p>In the end, the recruitment process relied on finding one local contact who could work with COGB to help identify potential participants.</p> <p>This process meant that the most appropriate participants were not always identified and the selection of participants was inevitably influenced by that person’s opinions and preferences. Participants also tended to already be very active in their communities.</p> <p>Some participants commented that they hadn’t fully understood what they were getting involved in, until they attended the workshops.</p>	<p>Use community groups where possible - as advocates for the project. This is easier than contacting people directly, but not always possible with small rural communities. Individuals tended to be suspicious of the project -without the advocacy of a community group behind it.</p> <p>Allow sufficient time for recruitment, allowing time to work with communities and identify the most appropriate participants.</p> <p>Be clear about the purpose and principles of the project at the very start.</p>

<p><b>Workshops</b> 2 workshop dates were offered, together with child care. The purpose of the workshops was to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Articulate and emphasise the purpose of the project</li> <li>-Build relationships between participants and COGB</li> <li>-Provide a networking forum for participants to share experiences, information and event ideas</li> <li>-Build enthusiasm for the project</li> </ul>	<p>Participants from one community did not attend the workshops. The City of Greater Bendigo found that there was an important connection between workshop attendance and success of the project in that community. Communities that did not attend the workshops - or only attended one workshop - did not, reportedly, have a deep understanding of the purpose of the project and were less likely to achieve the project's aims.</p> <p>It was observed that these communities saw the COGB as the 'banker' rather than a partner and saw the project as a (slightly unusual) community grant. The COGB officers believed that the enduring relationships were more likely with the communities who had attended the workshops and understood the project.</p> <p>Barriers to attending were considered to be related to short time-frames, fuel costs and timing of workshops.</p> <p>Some participants commented that, while they found the workshops valuable, they felt there could have been more practical information provided on organising events.</p> <p>City of Greater Bendigo project officers stated that, ideally, there would be more time to have more training and workshop opportunities for participants and more time to develop relationships between COGB and communities.</p> <p>Discussion with COGB officers and project participants indicated that there is an opportunity to provide more information about the financial processes/systems and administrative requirements at the workshops.</p>	<p>Participation in workshops, including learning about the project and its purpose, is critical.</p> <p>It is important to explore ways to ensure workshop attendance.</p> <p>Allowing longer time-frames for recruitment and workshops may assist in increasing attendance and in meeting the training needs of the participants.</p> <p>Workshop attendance is important for initiating enduring relationships with communities.</p> <p>Workshops offer an important opportunity to clarify the purpose of the project, administrative requirements and the financial processes.</p>
<p>Events designed &amp; sent to COGB for approval</p>	<p>During this stage, two communities dropped out of the project. One community, for a range of reasons, could not get the participants together for event meetings in time to organise the planned event in the required time-frame.</p> <p>Another community did not present an event that met the purposes of the project. This community had not attended the workshop.</p> <p>Feedback from City of Greater Bendigo officers and community participants suggest the following contributing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timing of the AWOL project/events can sometimes clash with other major community events as well as with farming commitments.</li> <li>• Attendance at the workshops is vital to ensuring participants understand the purpose of the project - so they may select an appropriate event and go about the organising</li> </ul>	<p>Provide a long enough time-frame that allows enough time for the community participants to meet and organise their event, particularly with regard to working around other events/activities in their community.</p> <p>See earlier comments on workshop attendance.</p>

	process in a way that meets the aims of the project.	
Events held	<p>Three successful community events were held and the various participants were all impressed and excited about their achievements.</p> <p>All participants commented on how important it was to have someone to talk to at COGB - for support and information.</p> <p>Some participants commented that they felt actions and responsibilities were not distributed evenly within their communities - however they were happy with the outcomes and successful event.</p> <p>Timing of the project and the events was an issue for some communities as it clashed with the Autumn Break when farmers are very busy. Also the nights were very cold for some activities and this restricted the types of events.</p>	<p>The role of the project in building relationships between small rural communities and City of Greater Bendigo was successful and an important outcome of the project.</p> <p>The initiation and support for such events plays an important flow on role in empowering and inspiring communities to take on new activities.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to use workshops to emphasise the importance of cross-community involvement, rather than one person taking on the entire project.</p> <p>The time of year may impact upon the types of events and attendance numbers due to the weather and farming calendars.</p>
Reimbursement for expenses	<p>Feedback from participants suggests that the information about the financial processes and administrative requirements could have been clearer. Some individual participants were covering costs out of their own pocket. Additionally, it would appear there is an opportunity for City of Greater Bendigo to provide for a faster and simpler financial reimbursement process for these kinds of projects that are working with small rural communities with limited financial resources.</p> <p>Those participants who had good relationships with individuals at COGB - seemed to be more prepared to telephone or email and chase up financial information.</p>	<p>Small rural communities may not be in a position to carry event costs. It is important to find ways to avoid project-related financial disadvantage to communities.</p> <p>Information about Council's financial systems and administrative requirements should be provided at the workshops and backed up with written information that can be taken back to the community.</p> <p>Relationships between communities and Council are important and appear to increase likelihood of communities seeking information and assistance.</p> <p>Good relationships can be jeopardised by poor communication and lengthy processes not geared towards small rural communities.</p>

## **Additional comments**

*The following additional comments are taken from interviews with City of Greater Bendigo officers and AWOL project participants:*

### Multiplier effect

Creating any kind of energy in a community has the potential to create new activities and events. It has a multi-faceted impact and enables communities to see their own power and potential - thus sparking new actions.

### Time frames

A longer time-frame would allow for more training opportunities/workshops and more relationship building. Both of these elements have proved vital to project success. It was commented that the process needed more time overall - particularly the recruitment phase - to allow enough time to identify the most appropriate participants.

### Communication

Participants, at different stages of the project, expressed frustration over poor communication. While most communication issues were related to the inevitable impact of the project coordinator's death on the project, there did appear to be opportunity to improve communication with participants in most stages of the project. Poor communication appeared to undermine the confidence of some participants in the City of Greater Bendigo's interest in or commitment to their community.