

# Impacts of Creative Recovery

Summary report with key learnings & applications



**FRRR**

Foundation for Rural  
Regional Renewal



**Creative  
Recovery  
Network**

# Acknowledgements

Creative Recovery Network acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies and waters upon which live, create and collaborate. We pay respects to the First Peoples of Australia, their ancestors and Elders past, present and into the future.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been caring for Country since time immemorial. We are committed to working with First Peoples to foster greater Care for Country and the prioritising of First Peoples' knowledge throughout the arts and disaster management.

We acknowledge people and the environment are interconnected which is why we continue to listen to First Nations knowledge and advocate for the importance of that voice within the ecosystem of arts and disaster management.

We acknowledge that Australian Aboriginal sovereignty was never ceded. Always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

Commissioning Partners:  
Creative Recovery Network  
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## 1. Concise Executive Summary

This study was conducted by Creative Recovery Network (CRN) and Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) to assess the value of five creative projects with communities recovering from natural disasters and other significant climate impacts. It sought to (1) determine their legacy impacts, (2) assess how they were effective in creating these outcomes, and (3) investigate if Creative Recovery projects make a particular contribution to long-term disaster and emergency management processes.

The research found that the Creative Recovery projects had a marked impact on long lasting social capital and connection, leaving a legacy of enriched community social connection, closeness and affection. They significantly strengthened complex and comprehensive partnerships and enhanced the processes of both creative practice and disaster management. Without exception, they had a striking influence on local placemaking and revitalisation. Projects gave communities continuing influence over how they are seen by others, involving residents in ongoing environmental improvements, providing them with diverse mentorship as well as educational and economic opportunities that improved quality of life.

The study concludes that Creative Recovery is central to how disaster-affected communities experience, understand and shape their world. It is an irreplaceable means for the positive (re)interpretation of perspectives on their lives, the lives of others, and the environment around them. Projects leave lasting understandings of mental health and wellbeing practices and resources, providing significant impact on an individual's enduring confidence and sense of self-worth, and develop lasting pride in local tradition and culture.

Successful Creative Recovery projects forge an impact legacy when the programmatic design has the following features: utilises community-led processes; builds upon existing local strengths, networks and resources; is planned and delivered through expert coordination; is inclusive, participatory and collaborative; provides mentorship and education opportunities; and leaves a lasting and tangible cultural output. Successful projects also tend to have ongoing support from funding bodies and government and are led by dedicated, passionate and well-connected community members.

The recommendations for supporting Creative Recovery into the future are detailed under three domains: (1) ongoing financial support for creative recovery programs, (2) integration into disaster management policy, and (3) investment in the local creative economy.

## 2. Case studies in brief

### **Case Study One: The Fire Danger Rating Claymation Project**

This was a child-centered education program focusing on bushfire risk and preparedness. Established in 2016 by the Arthur's Creek & Strathewen Country Fire Authority and Strathewen Primary School in partnership with Anglesea Primary School and Gozer Production, it aimed at helping children "love where they live" again in the wake of the 2009 Victorian Black Saturday bushfires. Grade 5 and 6 students and community volunteers used claymation to create a video educating students and the wider community on the risks of living in a high fire danger area. The bushfire awareness program has run every year since with different arts-based activities, becoming an attraction for prospective parents.

### **Case Study Two: The Cyclone Lam Recovery Concert**

This project was a cultural event held in the East Arnhem LGA of the Galiwin'ku/Elcho Island township in 2015. The collaboration was between the Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation, the Galiwin'ku Healthy Lifestyle Committee, the Red Cross, and local performing arts and music groups. The purpose was to help rebuild and strengthen community belonging. It staged two concerts with 10 local bands, a kids' disco, and small-scale festival activities, providing a safe space for the Elcho community and key health and cultural messages. A mentorship program supported 11 young people to organize the festival, fostering intergenerational and intercultural connections. The Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation still provides education and training opportunities in arts, health, and cultural sectors today.

### **Case Study Three: The Channel Country Ladies**

This project brings together 150 women from 24 drought-affected communities in rural and regional Queensland, providing opportunities to build skills and knowledge in areas of business, leisure, health, and emotional wellbeing. It aims to improve the lives of women in isolated areas affected by drought. The event includes workshops on various artistic and creative practices, as well as motivational speakers and clinical/health services. The project has been running annually since 2010 with strong governance and sustainable funding, making it a life-changing experience for many participants.

## **Case study Four: The Dress the Central West Collaborative**

This project aimed at healing and coping with the effects of the 2019 drought in Queensland. A collaboration between regional health service providers and First Nations communities, it used art activities to bring the community together and reduce the risk of isolation. It included workshops in different regions on wearable art, respect, leadership, cultural stories, and makeup artistry. It transformed understanding of the arts and cultural industries, providing opportunities for mentored participation and professional development. It resulted in the creation of 33 garments presented at 3 public showcases, and established a First Nations-led commercial fashion label, Red Ridge The Label.

## **Case Study Five: The Tumbarumba Artists on Parade Co-Operative Limited**

This project connected the community through hands-on workshops after the Black Summer 2019/2020 Bushfire. 115 participants of different ages participated in 16 workshops including pyrography, canvas work, cardmaking, sketching, bike maintenance, and pastel portrait painting. The workshops aimed to create a safe and inclusive space for community enjoyment, support, and connection. Participants took home their completed art works and made new friendships, reducing the isolation of individual community members. The gallery now feels equipped to strategize and market community arts programs for more male involvement and to benefit wider corners of the community.

## **3. Key research questions & answers**

### **1) What is the impact legacy of Creative Recovery programs and processes for disaster-affected communities?**

- Long lasting social capital and connection
- A strengthening of complex and comprehensive partnerships
- Enhanced creative practice and disaster management processes
- Positive influence on local placemaking and revitalisation, including economic
- Better mental, physical and environmental health when disaster-affected communities experience, understand and shape their world
- Stronger individuals with enduring confidence, a sense of self-worth, and pride in local tradition and culture

## **2) How are Creative Recovery projects effective in building an impact legacy in a post-disaster environment?**

Projects create an impact legacy when the design and delivery builds on or provides:

Community-led processes

- Local strengths, networks and resources
- Expert coordination
- Inclusive, participatory and collaborative practices
- Mentorship and education opportunities
- A lasting and tangible cultural output

## **3) How do Creative Recovery projects contribute to a community's long-lasting resilience, wellbeing, and disaster preparedness, response and/or recovery?**

Creative recovery projects build resilience skills that can also be applied to other areas of life and in longer term recovery processes. All impacts and outcomes in the study led to a combination of feeling good, functioning effectively and overcoming the forms of adversity experienced when living in a disaster environment.

To measure resilience, a new framework was developed by CRN to evaluate creative recovery projects. It captures the level and nature of:

- Social Capital & Connection - Social Legacy, Network Legacy
- Revitalisation & Placemaking – Placemaking, Education, Economic Legacy, Community Wellbeing
- Acceptance & Growth - Positive Perceptions & Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Identity and Belonging - Confidence & Local Pride

The Creative Recovery projects allowed communities to mitigate the risk of future disaster events and moderate their likely effects when they do occur. This was achieved through forging deeper social connection to local people and place-based networks, increased awareness of support available, broader inclusion of diverse community members, skills to access formal and informal resources, increased capacity to self-organise, increased access and confidence to participate in decision making, strengthened positive attitudes, hope for the future, and deeper perspectives of the formal disaster management system.

Overall, the Creative Recovery programs helped people and communities re-establish a life they value, albeit often different to pre-disaster. They were able to assemble and validate the contributions of a whole community in defining and activating their own meaningful recovery process.

#### **4) What are the challenges and barriers for ongoing Creative Recovery projects?**

The cost-impact of resourcing large-scale and good quality arts projects is often a point of anxiety that limits the realisation of projects and inhibits additional legacy impacts. Emotive relationships around access and in/equality of funding can have negative or limiting repercussions for the choices made and opportunities inherent in Creative Recovery projects. High turnover of staff, volunteers and/or organisations is potentially disruptive and destabilising. As well as losing knowledge and experience, a loss of belief in a new team's competence can weaken impact legacy.

#### **5) What can we do to support Creative Recovery programs into the future?**

Investment in building social-cohesion and the capacity of communities to lead their own resilience programs supports the long-term mitigation of disaster impacts. For this to occur, there is a need to 1) find new funding approaches that support viable Creative Recovery programs longer term, 2) embed Creative Recovery approaches within wider disaster management policy and practice and, 3) invest in the creative economy of local communities so that ongoing participation and employment is supported. The following recommendations provide more detail.

## **4. Recommendations**

### **For Governments and Funding Bodies**

- Fund and support immediate and ongoing Creative Recovery processes and programs in partnership with well-established and trusted local organisations and networks let communities define their own concerns, needs, goals and sense of culture throughout the process.
- Use the newly developed Creative Recovery Impact framework and case study template to highlight the impact of funding for communities and recipients in the mid to long term.
- Build a collective impact data tool across funding organisation to be able to gather and present data outcomes on a national level
- Promote the inclusion of appropriate evaluation strategies and project documentation within funding program guidelines.
- Promote findings from this evaluation to build the case for the vital role of culture and the arts in disaster management.

## **For Local Government and Disaster Management organisations**

- Embed and resource Creative Recovery into emergency management and community cultural planning as vital support for disaster preparedness, response and recovery.
- Employ creative projects as tools for engagement, education, wellbeing and mental health support to better enable the work of disaster management plans in action.
- Build the local capacity of creatives and cultural leaders to be ready and able to implement Creative Recovery programs that are trauma-informed and integrated into the broader local disaster management system.
- Promote the positive impact Creative Recovery processes have within communities to mitigate the shocks and strains of disaster preparedness, response and recovery.
- Grow longer term investment in the local creative and culture industry, understanding their unique and vital role in the evolution of connected, accessible, sustainable and economically stable communities.
- Work collaboratively with local people, local community based organisations and the wider community to activate community recovery initiatives, projects or events.

## **For Local Communities**

- Advocate to local formalised decision-making mechanisms the important role of Creative Recovery programs and processes.
- Promote the value of Creative Recovery in building ongoing strength and sustainability of community leadership and wellbeing.
- Ensure the inclusion of a creative leadership voice in the establishment of Community Recovery Committees
- Support local cultural and creative leaders and their efforts to generate and deliver Creative Recovery programs.
- Encouraging local people to participate and grow these initiatives.

## **For Creative Recovery Practitioners**

- Build Creative Recovery programs on clear communication and collaboration across the diverse and complex environment of disaster management, ensuring support and inclusion in broader preparedness and recovery efforts.
- Ensure a broad engagement across the different demographics of the community to build accessible, responsive and relevant participation strategies.
- Recognise that understanding and developing trust with your community is key to successful engagement and project outcomes.
- Invest in relevant professional development to ensure process and practice is safe, responsive and aligned with good disaster recovery practice.
- Connect in with local and regional networks to build effective communities of practice, providing peer to peer support, guidance and access to resources.
- Invest in documentation and evaluation to highlight project impacts which demonstrate the value of the Creative Recovery processes and build future funding opportunities.



## 5. The last word – participants voices


*“They’re all stepping up as leaders, you know, the majority of these kids and [...] it could have been very different if not for them being lucky enough to have gone through the program and embraced it. And they love it.”* - Lisal O’Brien, Arthurs Creek & Strathewen Country Fire Authority

*“The whole community got involved and really participated beyond the most hopeful expectations... The value for me is the rebuilding of human infrastructure. Of confidence, of a positive outlook, of strengthening relationships. [...] And that’s as important as building a house or building a tank or putting in a power grid or all or that physical infrastructure. Human infrastructure’s just as important.”* - Mark Grose, Chair of Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation

*“To see the 200 women come and have the most wonderful time. They learn so much and they all go home on a high and they are ready to start again. [...] It’s about the recharging of the energies that happens through these events and the inspiration that comes out of it all. That’s really significant”* - Louise Campbell, Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Limited

*“Everybody [...] put down their tools and they talked for another two hours [...] and it was like a pressure release valve [...] and they all went away feeling that it was good, and they took their wooden spoons with them”* - MaryAnn Marshall, Tumbarumba Artists on Parade Co-operative Limited

*“To see our aboriginal community shine the way they did. They took centre stage and they believed in it, and they just drove it. They were so committed. They wanted to make it work and they did.”* - Louise Campbell, Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Limited



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