

‘Wellbeing Day’ for Shoalhaven families

Ulladulla Public School steps up to help its community



What?

During Australia’s ‘Black Summer’ of 2019-2020, the popular coastal town of Ulladulla in the Shoalhaven area became surrounded by major fires. Residents had an anxious several weeks as fire threatened lives and properties, power was lost, phone networks shut down and supplies dwindled. Many locals, as well as hundreds of stranded visitors, were forced to shelter in the town’s evacuation centres.

In the wake of the crisis, Ulladulla Public School organised a community Wellbeing Day with the aim of reconnecting with their students’ families and facilitating connections between the families and relevant support services.



Why?

The Shoalhaven area was particularly heavily impacted by the massive bushfires that tore through South Eastern NSW. Not only was the constant threat from fire traumatic, the summer tourist season that many people in the local area rely on for income did not go ahead, causing further stress.

‘We were keenly aware that our community had taken a huge emotional and financial hit,’ explains Melinda Croan, Assistant Principal of Ulladulla Public School. ‘After the fires, we wanted to reach out to our community and find out how we could help.’

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– Melinda Croan

How?

The Wellbeing Day was funded by COORDINARE through their Natural Disaster Community Grants Program. Part of a coordinated primary mental health care response in the South Eastern NSW region, the Grants Program is one of a range of support measures being offered to help communities impacted by the bushfires as well as extended drought.

Ulladulla Public School applied for the grant with the intention of holding an event that brought locals together with support service providers in a non-threatening environment.

‘There was a lot of misinformation and confusion about who was eligible for support after the fires,’ says Melinda. ‘A lot of families thought there was no support unless their home was burnt down. I went into the Bushfire Recovery Centre and invited all the service providers to come to the school’s Wellbeing Day, so they could talk to families in a stress-free environment.’

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– Melinda Croan



Outcomes

Close to 1000 people attended the Wellbeing Day which featured stalls from the local Council, Service NSW, several charities, and a myriad of other service providers.

Melinda describes the event as ‘very empowering’, adding that its significance is still unfolding. ‘Not only were we able to put people in touch with services that could help them, we were also able, as a school, to connect with organisations who could help us help our students.’

As a result of connections made on the Day, the school has been able to put in place a number of programs to support local families in need, including a free breakfast program and lunchtime program to feed students in need of a meal. The school has also been working with the Save the Children Fund to roll out a post-trauma recovery program for students suffering ongoing anxiety issues.

‘The Day connected our community at a time when we really needed it,’ says Melinda.

“Not only did it bring people together and strengthen relationships, it was also the beginning of the healing process.”

– Melinda Croan

