Identifying Models of Community Resilience that Enhance Psychological Wellness: A Rural Study

Aim of the Study

Work collaboratively with key stakeholders from a rural community in SW Queensland to develop, implement, and evaluate a model that enhances psychological wellness in rural people and communities.
Community

• Medium sized rural town in SE Qld
• Known as multicultural community with strong business/farming heritage
• Population 10,600 – half living in surrounding areas
• Industries: fruit and vegetables, wine and tourism, sheep and cattle grazing
• Recent adversities:
  – Drought, ‘black ‘frost, hailstorms, bushfires
The Study

- 3 year, ARC Linkage Funding
  - Participatory Action Research
    - Phase 1
      - Develop an overall understanding of what the term ‘resilience’ means to people in the community
    - Phase 2
      - Surveys and and convergent face-to-face interviews with members of various groups to explore the community’s experience of drought and their understandings of resilience.
    - Phase 3
      - A program designed by the project team to enhance community resilience will be tested using an action research process.
Phase 1 Method

• Qualitative
  – 1 focus group; 10 individual interviews
    • What do you think the term ‘resilience’ means?
    • Your community has been through some hard times. What are some aspects of your community which have helped people get through?
    • What is your community ‘like’? Eg social, economic, access to services, climate
    • Can you identify people in your community who have managed the adversities they have faced extremely well?

Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health

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Resilient Community
Spirit
Hope
Support
Diversity
Innovation
Leadership
When I came here and saw in those first years farming, so many people just got hailed out three and four times in a year and immediately next day they’d ring up the seedling places and go and plant tomatoes. And they’d get wipes out and they’d go and plant zucchinis and no matter how late it was in the season they’d go on planting crops so the end of the season they were confident they would get through winter and they would be able to provide for their families and be ready to go next season.
People do kind of rally around. When we had the bushfires there were a lot of people that got involved. There were a lot of people that probably wouldn’t hear much from until something happens and they all seem to turn up.

The land itself is resilient. It’s burned out by bushfires, there’s nothing left, and within a matter of days, even weeks, there’s a green tinge and 12 months later you wouldn’t know it had happened. And I think … the inhabitants have developed the same resilience.
Most of the community are basically all Catholic families who took their faith seriously... so underlying everything else there was this bigger picture that God was in control that even when things went wrong this year that there was still the bigger picture that there was someone up there that cared about them and who ultimately would bring about justice and good results and things like that.

A couple of years ago when we had significant rains here, the day following that we had a 75% drop in clientele. Nothing else had changed, except that it had rained and there was hope again.
• I’m very positive about the services we have here. I think they’re brilliant.
• I actually do think we are quite well serviced really…I think we’d actually be better than a lot of urban situations.
• There’s this huge network and there are so many things available here to people if they want to be part of things
Diversity and Innovation - Farming

- There have always been people in this community prepared to have a go at something different, whether it’s growing a new crop or grazing a different sort of animal or opening some sort of shop…

- A lot of people in the district, they’re very innovative in the development of new types of machinery, methods of doing things…I think they’ve got a good mix of marrying the need for labour and the need for developing new types of equipment

- People are diversifying. They’re broadening their economic base.
There’s an old saying that those we hang around with we become like and it’s very evident in this community. This community is very special for that…their resilience in that respect because of its multi-culture and multi-language.

You’ve got new people coming into the district with new ideas and different demands and different ideas and people – and that fabric that was there, that very conservative fabric, is breaking down and started to develop into this new fabric which is a connected fabric, far more connected than the other one was.
The leadership plays a very important role because they are the ones that take the community economically to the next level and help overcome the next challenge or whatever is set before them.

People are prepared to risk putting themselves forward to lead in a circumstance to lead where they feel that they have something to offer in different circumstances and I think that’s the case in this community, is that people are prepared to step forward and risk losing face or risk making a mistake to take advantage of an opportunity that they see where they feel that they’ve got something to contribute.
In a nutshell

• This community
  – Has learnt from its pioneering heritage to never give up
  – Is supported by strong families and other networks, fostered in part by its multicultural nature and including a strong religious basis
  – Draws upon its diversity – old and new – to adapt to challenging circumstances
  – Has a vision for success fostered by a range of leaders who have emerged from the community
Phase 2 Results

Resilient Community

Less Resilient Community

- Unemployed
- Newcomers
- Young People
- Isolated
- People with disability
- Elderly
Phase 3

Resilient Community

Less Resilient Community

Unemployed

Newcomers

Young People

Isolated

People with disability

Elderly