



HUFF STUFF

Newsletter

Issue 41

February 2020

Greetings everyone.

So where to begin? ... we can safely say that we 'dodged a bullet' when it comes to the recent fire event that became a major threat to our villages. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for our friends along Bells Line of Road and Chifley Road. It is only when you take a drive around and see what the intensity of the fires have done to our landscape that you realise how lucky we were not to lose any homes. We have all thanked our 'firies' in many ways but let me say that they well and truly deserve every accolade. How wonderful it was when the Blackheath Area Community Alliance invited us all to the Community Hall to thank everyone on that extremely hot day in January. Hundreds turned up, not only to recognise our local brigades, but also to reconnect with each other and let out a collective sigh of relief.



Devastated bushland along the Darling Causeway

We also need to acknowledge the proactive Bruce McKenzie who, on his own initiative, opened the hall to provide a place, albeit unofficial, for those who needed somewhere to go to get some respite. He also did the rounds of Blackheath and reported back each evening on what was happening. Margaret Gough did the same at Mount Victoria, opening up the St Peters Church Hall for people to have a cuppa and a chat.

Having said that, unless you were on Face Book or you found out through word of mouth you would have had no idea most of this was happening. Which leads me to the subject often dismissed by many. Facebook has proven to be the quickest way of getting information out there. Putting aside all the annoying things about social media (that you don't have to engage with), is it time for those of you who have resisted, to rethink your decision?

So how did HUFF go in this, our biggest test?

Many of you have provided feedback and we will continue to gather this in the weeks to come. All in all, I think it was very useful in those streets where HUFF Facilitators have been actively engaging with their So how did HUFF go in this, our biggest test? Many of you have provided feedback and we will continue to gather this in the weeks to come. All in all, I think it was very useful in those streets where HUFF Facilitators have been actively engaging with their neighbours.

Here are some comments from facilitators...

"I've shared some of the newsletters with the people who are house sitting at my mum and her hubby's, looking after the place and their dog. They're from out of this area so it's been great to have a good and helpful source of info to share with them."

"I know my neighbours have appreciated the updates and that this whole situation has shown us how we can pull together."

"Two things for me to report: once my neighbour knew I was the HUFF person, she was confident in asking my opinion on whether or not she should evacuate with her children. It was when the phone message came on the Saturday afternoon. She came to me to ask and I said "well I am and, yes, I think you should too." That night the fire roared up at the end of Bettington Rd so it was absolutely the right advice and she was very grateful."

"Having been to all of the houses, I was also able to save the fire security officer the task. I could report to him that I had alerted the residents who were there and they were enacting their plans."

"An important aspect of HUFF for me is the legitimacy it gave me to start the dialogue on fire safety and fire plan early, with neighbours. Safety of elderly neighbours became my main priority in our street."

"I believe HUFF is very valuable. Prior work in establishing contact and trust with neighbours meant we could act swiftly when a real emergency arrived. As it happened, fire did not come to Clarence Rd till Sunday morning. I for one was most relieved not to witness that first hand, and I felt relieved knowing those vulnerable neighbours had left."

"It was not unusual when the threat was greatest to see groups of three or four neighbours gathering in the street to share information and compare notes. There was a strong sense of community."

"Residents who had never been through a fire emergency say they have learnt so much about what they need to do in future."

Residents who had information I didn't have, shared it with me so that I could pass it to other residents. Several residents have stayed for this emergency which is the first time they have done so. Several have said they have done this because of the information they have received from HUFF. Residents were calm and wanted to be here"

Of course, there have been some issues raised as well and these will be worthy of discussion at our debrief.

"Residents have distributed my contact details to other residents without my knowledge. Do we need to set out privacy guidelines for residents and facilitators?"

"The amount of time spent collecting and collating information is considerable and social media posts can be unreliable. Could we organise a roster of facilitators to be at the RFS station or the Katoomba control centre to relay up-to-date information to other facilitators? Or is there a way we can get reliable information without relying on Mina to provide it?"

"Holiday homes and rental properties: These properties are not being prepared for the fire season thereby placing neighbouring properties at risk. Education, possibly reminders, before the start of each fire season may be required. I know the contact details of holiday home owners in my hub but permanent rental property landlords are only known to the real estate agent managing the property. Do we also need to work with real estate agents to get this done?"

"I have found that residents don't go looking for information for themselves even when they see activity around them, they just get anxious. Providing information that helps them understand what they are seeing, lessens that anxiety."

Lots of food for thought.

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback. We will have more opportunity to discuss and share at our planned debrief on Tuesday, March 3rd at Blackheath RSL from 7.00 pm. If you can't make it please send any thoughts via email.

Finally, as the HUFF Coordinator, I would like to thank you all for your amazing efforts throughout the whole prolonged event and of course for the work you did preparing for the inevitable. You can all be very proud of yourselves for the contribution you have all made to our communities.



For hundreds of firefighters Christmas Day was spent out in the field putting in backburns to protect the mountain villages. Above left: Tankers line up in Melrose Park ready for an early Christmas morning briefing.

Unfortunately, the ecco lodge, Jemby Rinjah, succumbed to the fires on News Years Eve. It is still not clear how this happened as backburning operations had ceased 5 days earlier in the vicinity. Pictured above right is smoke coming from the property.

Left: St Georges Parade, Mount Victoria came under threat again, 6 years after the devastating 2013 fire that destroyed 7 properties in that street. Thankfully none were impacted this time although several gardens were destroyed. The fire threatened surrounding streets in the days following but crews were quick to bring them under control.



Blackheath Rotary Club acquired 1,250 P2 masks. The masks were donated by a group in Santa Barbara, California. The club decided that the best way to distribute them would be via the HUFF Facilitators. The offer was taken up enthusiastically and very soon they were all gone.

Pictured left is President Barry Taylor and HUFF Facilitator Liz Windred.

Don't Forget
HUFF DEBRIEF
 Tuesday 3rd March
 at 7.00pm at Blackheath RSL
 Light Supper
 For catering purposes RSVP by 28 Feb
 or just drop in.