



The Creative, Community, Wellbeing and Resilience Hub

Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre

**Final report
August 2023**



© Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre 2023
All rights reserved

Report authors: Francesca Sidoti and Johanna Davies

Cover image: Don Ricardo on Unsplash

BANC acknowledges that they are located on and work in the never-ceded lands of the Darug and Gundungurra Nations.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and thank the Commonwealth and NSW Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements via the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund.

We also acknowledge and thank all those who gave so generously of their time, energy, and trust in participating in this research.

Disclaimer

The details provided in this report are based on information available at the time of preparation and terms of reference of the project. All statements made are given in good faith and in the belief that such statements are not false or misleading. All sources of information are detailed in the report. Readers are recommended to make appropriate enquiries and/or take appropriate advice before acting on information supplied in this report. BANC, the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund, and Francesca Sidoti are not liable to any person for loss or damage incurred or suffered as a result of acting on or accepting any offer contained in this report.

Table of Contents

List of figures	1
List of tables.....	1
1.0 Introduction	2
<i>About Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>The project</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>The research project and this report.....</i>	<i>3</i>
2.0 Key Findings	4
<i>There is a need for disaster preparation, resilience and recovery support for communities, including increased support for and inclusion of CSOs in this work</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The Hub is a successful project.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The Hub is a successful model of community-led disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>The Hub is a model for disaster preparation, recovery and resilience hubs.....</i>	<i>7</i>
3.0 Project details	8
<i>Location</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Project context</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>The Hub project</i>	<i>10</i>
4.0 Background.....	12
<i>CSOs in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>“Shared responsibility” in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>The role of CSOs in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Arts, health, environment and wellbeing in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Recovery and resilience hubs.....</i>	<i>16</i>

5.0 METHODOLOGY	17
<i>Our aims</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Who was involved</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>What we did</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Limitations</i>	<i>18</i>
6.0 Results	19
<i>Key outcomes</i>	<i>19</i>
Connection, belonging and participation	19
Resilience	21
<i>The experience of attending the Hub</i>	<i>22</i>
Enjoyment	22
The Hub activities as useful or helpful	23
Learning as a result of the Hub activities	24
Would you recommend this activity to other people?	24
<i>The impact of attending the Hub: a closer examination</i>	<i>24</i>
Connection	25
Resilience	26
Learning	27
Affective dimensions: enjoyment, comfort, and love	28
<i>What worked and what didn't?</i>	<i>29</i>
What worked?	29
What didn't work?	30
7.0 Future directions.....	32
<i>Ongoing funding of the Hub</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Funding of Hub-based projects for other CSOs.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Further investigation of the effectiveness of integrating psychosocial activities with practical supports.....</i>	<i>32</i>
8.0 References.....	33

List of figures

Figure 1 Blue Mountains Local Government Area (Blue Mountains City Council 2022a, p. 20)	8
Figure 2 The policy, research, and practice areas informing the Hub.....	12
Figure 3 Benefits of community and CSO-led disaster preparation, recovery and resilience	14
Figure 4 Survey question - I feel connected to my community	19
Figure 5 Survey question - I feel I belong in my community	19
Figure 6 Survey question - I actively participate in community events	20
Figure 7 Survey question - I feel I can cope when there are emergencies.....	21
Figure 8 Survey question - I feel I can adjust and adapt to changing circumstances.....	21
Figure 9 Survey question - was the activity helpful or useful?	23
Figure 10 Survey question - I learnt or developed a skill as part of the activity	24
Figure 11 Survey question - Would you recommend this activity to other people?	24

List of tables

Table 1 Demographic data for the Upper Mountains, Blue Mountains LGA, Greater Sydney, and NSW (ABS 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f, 2021g)	8
Table 2 Reasons for enjoying Hub activities.....	23

1.0 Introduction

This report presents the findings from the ‘Creative, Community, Wellbeing and Resilience Hub’ (“The Hub”) project, a disaster preparation, recovery and resilience initiative.

The Hub project delivered a program of events, workshops, and activities focused on social connectedness, practical support, education (including property preparation before bushfire seasons), and psychosocial and physical wellbeing between January 2022 and June 2023.

This program was developed in response to recent adverse events, particularly the cumulative toll of numerous natural disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic, and to prepare for future ones. The report finds that participants in Hub program overwhelmingly benefitted from participating in the Hub with demonstrable improvements in community connectedness, experiences of belonging, participation in community events, and resilience.

The Hub demonstrates the effectiveness of community sector organisations (CSOs) as practitioners in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work. It also provides a model for effective CSO disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work. The Hub was developed and implemented by Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre (BANC). The Hub was jointly funded by Commonwealth and NSW Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements through the ‘Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund’.

About Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre

BANC is a multipurpose not-for-profit community-based organisation servicing the Upper Blue Mountains in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales (NSW). BANC’s vision is for a diverse, inclusive, and connected community, which works together to build its resilience and its social, environmental, and economic sustainability. BANC’s role in achieving this vision is to be the heart of creative, inclusive services that support the sustained wellbeing and resilience of its Upper Blue Mountains community. BANC has demonstrated its capacity to successfully deliver funded programs for activities across the Upper Blue Mountains for nearly thirty years.

The project

The Hub project was developed in response to the ‘2019-2020 disaster season’ (Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements 2020, p. 19) of extreme bushfires and rain and storm events, which were closely followed by the onset of the COVID-19

pandemic. These are ‘compound events’ (Climate Council 2023, p. 32), where multiple events occur simultaneously or in quick succession and their ‘impacts are compounded, resulting in greater cumulative stress on communities and the environment and less time to recover between disasters’ (Climate Council 2023, p. 32). The Hub project consisted of 217 workshops and events run over 18 months between January 2022 and June 2023. These workshops and events were attended by 2,586 people.

The Hub model expanded dominant approaches to disaster preparation, recovery and resilience hubs’ focus on practical supports by combining practical support with a focus on psychosocial support through four “streams” of activities: creative activities, community activities, wellbeing activities, and resilience activities.

The research project and this report

The Hub research project aimed to:

- inform BANC about participant experiences of attending the Hub;
- inform other disaster resilience stakeholders, such as CSOs and government, about the Hub model and its potential in community-based disaster response and preparation;
- engage with the effectiveness of CSOs as the frontline and most appropriate practitioners in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work.

Data were collected throughout the Hub program using a mixed methods methodology of surveys (n= 432) and interviews (n=15) with Hub participants. The research project received ethics approval from the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District Ethics Committee.

This report presents the findings from the research project. It is a companion to the summary report.

2.0 Key Findings

There is a need for disaster preparation, resilience and recovery support for communities, including increased support for and inclusion of CSOs in this work

The project's data clearly indicate the need for support for communities affected by natural disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants describe experiences of disconnection from the community and others, isolation, and decreased wellbeing due to the cumulative disasters and Covid-19 pandemic. As Gordon (2004) identifies, emergencies cause 'widespread social disruption' (p. 16), and the 'social fabric can be seen as the more important recovery resource' (p. 19). Urgent foci in supporting community recovery include redressing recent emergencies' negative impacts on participants' lives, wellbeing, health, experiences of connectedness and feelings of belonging.

It is also widely acknowledged that there will be increased disaster events as the result of a variable and changing climate (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience n.d., Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) 2020). There is an increasing need for disaster preparation as a result. The disaster preparation, recovery and resilience literature identifies place-based community organisations that undertake disaster preparation work in an ongoing capacity and pivot to recovery and resilience work to disaster preparation, resilience, and recovery as an effective approach to these challenges (Coles & Buckle 2004; CSIRO 2020; Ingham & Redshaw 2017; Massola et al. 2022; Pascoe 2022). This approach utilises the organisations long-term connections with and knowledge of the community (Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2011; Department of Home Affairs 2019) and 'can increase efficiencies through greater cross-learning, less duplication of effort through common solutions, shared platforms and tools, lower transaction costs, and better alignment of policies and plans' (CSIRO 2020, p. 25, see also Pascoe 2022).

The Hub is a successful project

There were demonstrable positive impacts in every evaluative category. Data reveal significant improvements in participants' experiences of community connectedness, belonging, community participation, preparation, and resilience. Some significant changes in participants' experience included:

- 22.2% increase in participants who answered that they ‘strongly agreed’ that they felt connected to their community after undertaking a Hub activity.
- 16.7% increase in participants who answered that they ‘strongly agreed’ that they felt they belonged to their community after undertaking a Hub activity.
- 11.3% increase in participants who answered that they ‘somewhat agreed’ they were more prepared in case of emergencies after undertaking a Hub activity, and a 4.8% increase in those who ‘strongly agreed’.
- 11.5% increase in participants who answered that they ‘strongly agreed’ they could adapt to changing circumstances after undertaking a Hub activity.

There were commensurate decreases in participants’ answering that they “strongly disagreed” or “somewhat disagreed” to the above questions in all categories.

The Hub was also demonstrably an experience that an overwhelming majority of participants found enjoyable, meaningful, helpful, and useful. A vast majority learnt a skill, and several mentioned improvements in their wellbeing as a result of attending the Hub. These positive impacts were long-lasting and ongoing. Many participants mentioned the ongoing positive effects of participating in the Hub on other aspects of their lives.

- 98.9% of participants answered “yes” when asked if they had enjoyed the Hub activity.
- 65.6% of participants answered that the Hub activity was “extremely useful” and 31.6% answered it was “very useful”. Only 0.4% (one respondent) answered the activity was “not at all useful”.
- 89% of participants answered that they either “somewhat” or “strongly” agreed that they had learnt or developed a skill through their participation in the Hub.
- 97.5% of participants stated they would recommend the Hub activity they attended to other people.

Qualitative responses also demonstrated the effectiveness of the Hub in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work across all dimensions of the Hub project, including improving community connectedness, belonging, preparation for future adverse events, resilience, wellbeing, enjoyment, skill development.

Some examples of qualitative responses in interviews include:

It's made a huge difference. I don't feel so isolated. I feel connected to people in the community in Blackheath, in Katoomba.

It has boosted my self-confidence; helped me to connect with others, helped manage stress levels, encouraged me to continue with creative activities.

[The Hub has] definitely helped me to recover more. I mean, I use that word rather than bounce back, but recover more from the difficulties I was experiencing. I felt closer to, not necessarily being healed, but I felt more well.

I mean I also enjoyed myself, too. And I took away a lot from it. And I think it's all added something to our lives that's really valuable.

The Hub is a successful model of community-led disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work

The success of the Hub revealed in the data shows the effectiveness of CSOs as practitioners in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work. The measurable increases in community connection, belonging, preparation, and resilience show the positive outcomes of a model that stems from a place-based, consultative, strengths-based framework and is delivered by a CSO. The Hub model is applicable to other communities as it can be developed to address specific community needs and specific place-based strengths.

The Climate Council's 2023 report on climate change and the mental health of Australian made several recommendations for a framework for climate change adaptation and resilience that 'puts communities first' (2023, p. 42) in light of their findings of significant and severe negative effects on wellbeing. Several are of particular relevance for the Hub:

- Recommendation 5: Prioritise investment in resilience-building programs. The Climate Council cite evidence that 'every dollar spent on disaster preparedness saves many dollars through reducing future losses' (p. 43), arguing for a need to increase public investment in resilience programs and resource resilience efforts.
- Recommendation 6: Put communities first. This includes 'support for community-led resilience building programs, ensuring these receive adequate funding' (2023, p. 43)

- Resilience 9: Ensure accessible, adequate and appropriate mental health services for disaster-affected communities (2023, p. 45), including priority to non-metropolitan communities and support measures ‘in place for up to five years following a disaster’ (2023, p. 45).

The data in this report reveal that the Hub clearly fulfils the above recommendations and is a cost-effective model for achieving these aims.

The Hub is a model for disaster preparation, recovery and resilience hubs

The success of the Hub offers an insight into the effectiveness of an integrated approach to disaster preparation, recovery and resilience. The Hub brought together psychosocial approaches with practical supports, a model that proved effective in producing positive outcomes for participants. Specifically, the Hub combined approaches from three intersecting areas: disaster preparation, resilience, and recovery; arts, health, environment, and wellbeing; and creativity hubs. The Hub was framed around the four pillars of creativity, community, wellbeing, and resilience and understanding these pillars as interrelated and interdependent. In doing so, the Hub extends the “everyday” mode of resilience hubs (Urban Sustainability Directors Network n.d., Ciriaco & Wong 2022), which primarily focus on practical supports, to encompass the complexity of the experiences of communities in preparing for and recovering from disasters.

3.0 Project details

Location

Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre serves the Upper Blue Mountains within the local government area of the Blue Mountains. This area encompasses the towns of Blackheath, Mount Victoria, Medlow Bath, Megalong Valley, Bell, Mount Wilson, Mount Irvine, and Mount Tomah. There are approximately 5,918 residents across these towns. All of these towns are categorised as Inner Regional. The location is geographically challenging, with towns spread across relatively removed locations, limited public transport in some areas and non-existent public transport in others, and limited road access to some villages.



Figure 1 Blue Mountains Local Government Area (Blue Mountains City Council 2022a, p. 20)

Demographic category	Upper Mountains	Blue Mountains	Greater Sydney	NSW
Median age	54.5	45	37.1	39
Median weekly household income	\$1,574	\$1,756	\$2,077	\$1,829
Those with a bachelor degree and above	45.8%	32.7%	33.3%	27.8%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	3.1%	2.7%	1.7%	3.4%
Top 3 ancestry	English, Australian, Irish	English, Australian, Irish	English, Australian,	English, Australian, Irish
% who only speak English at home	83.2%	90.1%	57.3%	67.6%
Unemployment rate	4.9%	3.9%	5.1%	4.9%
SEIFA (disadvantage index)	989	1,045	1,018	1,001

Table 1 Demographic data for the Upper Mountains, Blue Mountains LGA, Greater Sydney, and NSW (ABS 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f, 2021g)

Project context

The Hub was initially developed in response to the '2019-2020 disaster season' (Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements 2020, p. 19), including bushfires and storm and rain events, which followed a severe fire season in 2013 with significant property loss in Mount Victoria, within the Upper Mountains region, and Winmalee, another Blue Mountains suburb. The bushfire season from July 2019 to March 2020 was the worst bushfire season New South Wales has recorded, and the 'impact on NSW communities, farmers, local businesses, wildlife and bushland was unprecedented' (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience n.d.) The Upper Blue Mountains experienced significant bushfires, particularly from the mega-blaze that encompassed the Gospers Mountain and Grose Valley fires. The Upper Blue Mountains was declared a natural disaster area and suffered loss of properties, loss of wildlife, infrastructural damage, extreme environmental destruction, and physical and mental health effects. The danger to towns and lives peaked in December 2019 and January 2020. The mega-blaze was eventually extinguished by a storm and rain event in February 2020, which caused significant damage and meant the Blue Mountains was, once more, declared a Natural Disaster Area (NSW Government 2023).

In the course of developing and implementing the Hub, the initiative also increasingly responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. Stay-at-home orders were implemented in the Blue Mountains LGA between the 23rd of March-1st May 2020 and the 26th of June-11th October 2021, with significant restrictions on activities and requirements for social distancing continuing outside of these periods. As such, the Upper Blue Mountains community, like so many in New South Wales, experienced 'cascading disasters' (Massola et al. 2022, p. 2) in close succession: bushfires, rain and storms, and an ongoing pandemic. There were also ongoing significant rain events, with the Blue Mountains being declared a Natural Disaster area due to rain events in March 2021, November 2021, February/March 2022, and June/July 2022 (NSW Government 2023). Overall, since August 2019, the Blue Mountains has been declared a Natural Disaster Area six times, been subject to the highest level of stay-at-home orders for a total of 146 days (almost 21 weeks), and navigated the ongoing implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the most significant effects of the cascading disasters experienced in the Upper Mountains was the community response to the 2019-2020 disaster season, which brought people together, was almost immediately interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which isolated people from one another and support systems at a time of great need.

These experiences significantly affected on the Upper Blue Mountains community's connection and wellbeing. This reflects the national trend, where a national survey (Climate

Council 2023) found 80% of respondents had experienced a natural disaster since 2019 and, of those affected, more than 51% stated that their mental health had been somewhat impacted, with one-fifth of that group stating there had been a 'major or moderate impact (Climate Council 2023, p. 6).

The Hub project

The development of the 'Hub' was a response to these experiences and a way of assisting these communities in developing, maintaining, and strengthening forms of resilience for future challenges. The project stemmed from BANC's long-term involvement in supporting community connectedness, including a focus on disaster preparation, recovery and resilience. Much was learned from the experiences during and after the 2013 bushfires in the Blue Mountains. The Hub model combined practical and psychosocial supports to develop an integrated, place-based, whole-of-community disaster recovery and preparation model.

The project was grounded in a commitment to a consultative program that delivered community-driven events as requested by the local community to meet their specific needs. The Hub was developed using a strengths-based and consultative framework to engage the community, maximising their experiences, knowledge, and capacities in order to strengthen and support the existing networks and resources. Of particular importance was a responsiveness to the specific needs of the Upper Mountains community. This responsiveness includes responding to the barriers to community connectedness and resilience due to vulnerabilities associated with age, challenging economic circumstances and/or mental health issues and understanding entrenched disadvantage, geographical isolation, and vulnerability. As such, the project was developed in consultation with the community to ensure the Hub was fit-for-purpose and accessible. A survey was distributed to community members to ascertain the preferred content, delivery model, location, times, and days, what barriers potential participants may be experiencing and how the Hub could support people to mitigate those barriers.

The Hub project consisted of four "streams" of activities: creative activities, community activities, wellbeing activities, and resilience activities. 2,586 people attended 217 Hub events, constituting over 514.50 hours, over the course of 18 months. Hub activities were both delivered by BANC and delivered by BANC in partnership with other individuals, organisations and volunteers.

Hub activities included:

- One-off and ongoing workshops and events for adults. These included art therapy, art play, the Inkblots Writing group, community resilience psychoeducation sessions, “Learn More about Local Aboriginal Culture” workshop, bee workshops, permaculture workshops, “Rekindling Connection” workshop, senior’s art workshops, eco-dying, First Nations weaving workshop, “Bright Ideas to Save on Household Energy Bills”, “The Art of Dying” workshop, shared reading (BANC and in partnership), post-traumatic growth workshop (in partnership), bushfire preparation (in partnership), “Forest Voices – learning about the ecosystem of The Mounts area” workshop (in partnership).
- One-off and ongoing workshops and events for families and children. These included “Art, Fun and Feelings” creative psychoeducation groups, bee workshops, family art play, animation workshops, “Learn More about Local Aboriginal Culture” workshop (with a local school), Reconciliation week activity, and “Waste to Art” (in partnership).
- One-off and ongoing workshops and events for young people. These included a film-making workshop, graffiti workshop (in partnership), drawing for a mural workshop (in partnership), and a youth event (in partnership).
- Community projects. These included the Blackheath Mural, a Community Art Exhibition, the Blue Shorts Short Film Festival, the Colombiana Festival (in partnership), the Megalong Valley information sharing event (in partnership), the Mt Victoria Family Fun Night (in partnership), the Blue Mountains Creative Arts Network Arts exhibition (in partnership), a Community Choir performance (in partnership), and the Headspace Mural (in partnership).
- The Hub also made financial contributions to volunteer-led community projects. These included “The Thin Yellow Line”, a community fabric banner sewing project to celebrate the local RFS units, World AIDS day – Medlow Bath Memorial Event, Blue Gum song-writing project, “Climate Action Superheroes”, and the “Dancing Wombats” book creation workshop for people living with a disability and community volunteers.

The role of community partnerships in the development and delivery of Hub activities was viewed as particularly important. Benefits of a partnership approach include:

- Building on and extending existing relationships
- Creating new partnerships with the longer potential for ongoing collaboration
- Preventing the duplication of programs that may incur reduced participant attendance and/ or competition by providers
- Ensuring that funding is utilised to the utmost extent
- Providing an opportunity for more dynamic program creation
- Connecting people to other services and networks in the community.

4.0 Background

The Hub project is situated at the intersection of three areas of policy, research, and practice: the role of CSOs in disaster preparedness, recovery and resilience; examples of recovery and resilience hubs; and the interrelation of arts, health, environment, and wellbeing.

CSOs in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience

“Shared responsibility” in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience

It is widely acknowledged that there will be increased disaster events as the result of a variable and changing climate (AIDR n.d., CSIRO 2020). In response to these challenges, there is an increasing focus on disaster preparation, recovery and resilience. The need for community engagement and utilisation in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience is increasingly acknowledged (McCaffrey 2015; Paton & Johnson 2001; Coles and Buckle 2004). As Gordon identifies, ‘the unique characteristics of disasters is that they damage the community fabric’ (2004, p. 19), causing what the author describes as ‘debonding’, a social disconnection that ‘accompanies a profound disruption of the pre-existing continuity of physical, emotional, and social life’ (Gordon 2004, p. 16). Disasters, Gordon writes, ‘emphasise that communities function as wholes or systems in which the elements affect each other’ (2004, p. 19) where ‘emergencies, even those directly affecting only part of a community, initiate a series of functions activating the whole community to their consequences’ (2004, p. 16). This requires a community-led approach to disaster preparation, recovery and resilience, including ‘reorienting emergency management towards the reconstruction of the fabric of social life’ (Gordon 2004, p. 21). Strategies can include rebonding, facilitating and resourcing groups who have had similar experiences, promoting community-based cultural events of post-disaster life, and integrating services (Gordon 2004, p. 21).

In a policy context, the increasing need for and role of CSOs has been acknowledged and incorporated by governments: there has been a ‘fundamental shift’ (Chapple et al. 2017) in

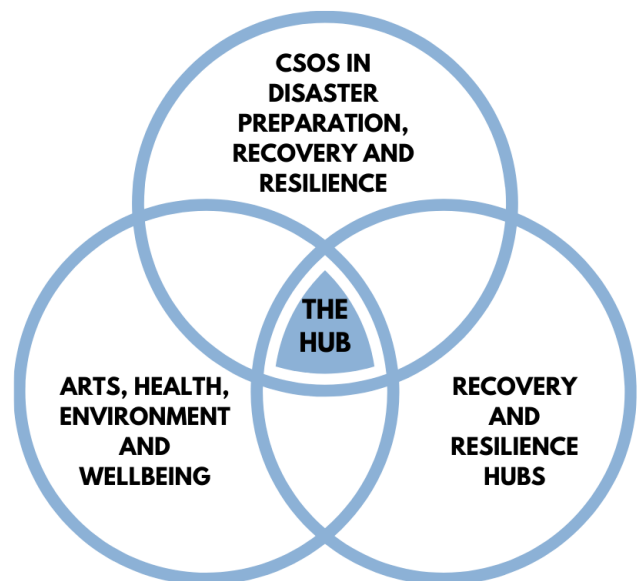


Figure 2 The policy, research, and practice areas informing the Hub

government policy at all levels towards “shared responsibility” across all sectors. This includes the community sector. As Massola et al. (2022) describe, ‘shared responsibility in disasters requires governments, at all levels, and emergency management services to work in genuine partnership with local communities, including place-based CSOs (p. 4).

The concept of “shared responsibility” in disaster response, recovery, and resilience stems from the international agreement of the Sendai Framework (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015). In the Australian context, this approach is reflected in the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2011), which states,

Many not-for-profit organisations have experience and expertise in areas including community engagement and education, and various facets of service provision. Importantly, their existing networks and structures reach far into communities, and can effect real change.

The National Strategy (2011) identifies several priority outcomes in relation to communities and CSOs which include a focus on utilising existing networks and structures and the need for cross-sector partnerships. The Strategy also reflects the ongoing and long-term needs of communities, including for future disasters, and recognises the role CSOs are likely to play in the immediate recovery phase of a disaster. The National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (2019) also includes the community sector as part of the framework.

The role of CSOs in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience

The policy context described above recognises the increasing need and role for community sector organisations (CSOs) as frontline workers in disaster response, recovery, preparation, and resilience. Massola et al. (2022) identify ‘an emerging recognition and acceptance that disaster work is becoming core business for CSOs in communities at high risk of climate related disasters ’(p. 36), though the authors note participants in their study of CSO workers and residents in a disaster area did not universally agree on the role of CSOs in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience.

The concept of “shared responsibility” recognises what is increasingly evident in experiences of disaster: that CSOs are doing extensive work in that area *and* that CSOs are uniquely placed to contribute to disaster preparation, recovery and resilience. Pascoe (2022) argues that community-led recovery is the most ‘optimally efficient’ in terms of needs, costs, and timeframes and that support agencies should be reframed as “helpers”, not drivers, of recovery. A 2020 report from CSIRO argued for the recognition and accommodation of ‘fit-

for-purpose regional and location-based responses’ which ‘can increase efficiencies through greater cross-learning, less duplication of effort through common solutions, shared platforms and tools, lower transaction costs, and better alignment of policies and plans’ (p. 25).

The literature identifies several benefits to a community- and CSO-led approach to disaster preparation, recovery and resilience:



Figure 3 Benefits of community and CSO-led disaster preparation, recovery and resilience

Massola et al. (2022) identify two often undocumented aspects of CSOs’ work in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience: longer-term community building and ‘whole of community’ approach, as well as acting as advocates for communities in the formal processes of emergency management (p. 26). In undertaking disaster preparation and resilience work, CSOs are uniquely placed to pivot to immediate disaster recovery work in the wake of emergencies. Such a model allows for place-specific—and, therefore, more effective—responses as well as mitigates the risk of short-term engagements immediately in the wake of disasters without addressing the long-term needs that disasters inevitably create or exacerbate.

While the benefits of utilising CSOs in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience is widely acknowledged, there is also a need for additional support to CSOs in undertaking disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work. Ingham et al. (2022) found high levels of ‘disaster fatigue’ in community leaders and identified, especially, the need for surge funding to be put in place so additional resources are easily available to communities and CSOs in times of disaster (p. 14). While surge capacity is most commonly associated with healthcare responses to disasters and emergencies, there is a need to identify ways to maximise community service organisations surge capacity as an aspect of disaster resilience and preparedness (Emergency Management Victoria 2023).

The literature suggests central challenges for CSOs in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience work include: a lack of resources and funding; the need for ongoing support

between disasters; and difficulties in coordinating with other disaster preparation, recovery and resilience efforts and agencies.

Arts, health, environment and wellbeing in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience

As well as the potential for loss of life or injury, disasters cause ongoing and significant negative effects on physical and mental health and, therefore, significantly and negatively affect wellbeing. The effects can include ‘climate distress’ (Koder et al. 2023), the cumulative mental health impact that comes from experiencing multiple disasters’ (Climate Council 2023, p. 37) and the ‘debonding’ within a community that Gordon (2004) analyses. Disasters can also exacerbate or create loneliness resulting from social isolation, which can have severe effects on mental and physical health (Heinrich & Gullone 2006; Cacioppo & Cacioppo 2014).

Koder et al. (2023) identify strategies for resilience, including daily activities such as mindfulness, exercise, creative expression, or cooking, as well as taking action, engaging in community participation and—crucially—engaging with the natural environment (Koder et al. 2023, p. 10). Other research points in the same direction: connection to nature is a powerful intervention. As Townsend and Weerasuriya (2010) found, ‘research evidence shows that close proximity to green spaces is clearly associated with reduced prevalence of depression, anxiety and other health problems’ (p. 3), and this relationship was most evident in children and people with low incomes. Finally, Capaldi et al. (2015) found that ‘evidence suggests that connecting with nature is a promising path to flourishing in life’ (p. 9).

Likewise, there is an increasingly acknowledged role of art in disaster preparation, recovery and resilience (Chapple et al. 2017; Ortiz 2017; Waddell 2020). In the wake of two extreme flood events in the Northern Rivers, NSW, two arts organisations—Lismore Regional Gallery and Arts Northern River—undertook significant fundraising to assist local artists with immediate flood recovery (Story 2022). This fundraising responded to an immediate need for assistance that residents said was not forthcoming from government funding. Artists outside of the region organised the ‘Art for Floods’ fundraiser the funds of which were donated to local Northern Rivers arts organisations.

Central to this intervention is the importance of art and creativity in mitigating many of the effects of disasters and extreme weather events: As Harms et al. note, ‘the skill development and expressions of creativity [in a disaster recovery program] were not typically solitary acts but involved other people’ (p. 425). McManamey (2009) found in their study of the Regener8

project in East Coast Tasmania that 'creative responses to difficulties and disaster within communities that rise to show and promote resilience further strengthens not only the health and wellbeing of the geographic or health related community affected, but impacts significantly on the fabric of the Australian ethos' (McManamey 2009, p.1).

Recovery and resilience hubs

"Hubs" are central points for organising, connecting, and/or providing activities or entities. The hubs model has been gaining traction in recent decades across many sectors, including transport, knowledge production, technology, healthcare, business, education, the creative arts, and social and community services. As Romeril points out, hubs can range from the co-location of separate activities through to fully integrated models (2014). A hub can equally denote a physical location, a 'mechanism to facilitate service collaboration and integration', and a 'place-making opportunity' (Hellmundt 2022, p. 2)

The use of "recovery hubs" or "resilience hubs" is an increasing practice of disaster preparation and response. "Community recovery hubs" have been used in the Australian context, including in response to bushfires (Victorian Government 2022) and floods (Service NSW n.d., Queensland Government 2022). "Resilience hubs" encompass a more ongoing model, with modes including the everyday, response or disruption (short or long-term), and recovery (Urban Sustainability Directors Network n.d., Ciriaco & Wong 2022). Common to these models is a focus on practical supports: including but not limited to resources such as food and water, financial support, legal advice, assistance with applications, information, advice, mental health, and emotional support, such as counselling, access to technology and the internet, safe spaces to study or work, emergency response training (Victorian Government 2022; Queensland Government 2022; Ciriaco & Wong 2022). A 'decent number of resilience hubs' reviewed in the international context offer 'everyday services and programming' (Ciriaco & Wong 2022) such as childcare, older adult services, and community arts and culture programs. Resilience hubs, therefore, reflect the ongoing and permanent work of disaster preparation and resilience in communities, as well as the utility of such hubs for immediate disaster recovery work.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

Our aims

This research project aimed to

- inform BANC about participant experiences of attending the Hub, including any feedback;
- inform other disaster resilience stakeholders, such as other CSOs and government, about the Hub model and its potential in community-based disaster response and preparedness;
- engage with the effectiveness of CSOs as the frontline and most appropriate practitioners in disaster recovery work.

Who was involved

Participants in this research were people who attended Hub activities. 113 people filled out the Hub pre-activity survey, 279 filled out the post-activity survey. 13 Hub attendees participated in follow-up interviews, as well as 2 Hub facilitators to capture the experience from different perspectives and engage with what facilitators noted throughout their sessions.

Participants were offered the opportunity to fill out a survey before and after Hub activities, although the research team decided that there was enough baseline data from pre-activity surveys at an earlier stage so post-activity survey collection continued beyond that point. Participants could indicate their interest in interview participation on their surveys and were approached by the research team. Some of these participants may have participated on several occasions: 55% of the post-activity survey participants had attended the Hub before. While the research team attempted to engage with as diverse a sample as possible, the sample was skewed towards those over 44.

What we did

The research was a mixed-methods study using surveys and interviews. The aim of using mixed methods was to engage with both broad trends and the nuance of lived experience.

The research project received ethics approval from the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District Ethics Committee.

Participants undertook surveys before and after Hub activities. Pre-activity surveys were undertaken to establish a baseline of participants' levels of community connection, belonging, wellbeing, and resilience. Post-activity surveys engaged with participants' levels of community connection, belonging, wellbeing, and resilience to compare to the pre-survey levels. Post-activity surveys also included open-ended questions about activity enjoyment/lack of enjoyment, whether the activity was helpful or not, feedback about the activity, and other activities the participant would like to see at the Hub both as ongoing feedback to the Hub organisers and to develop a sense of participants' experience of being involved at the Hub and whether they perceived the program as useful. 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted, 13 with Hub participants and 2 with Hub facilitators. Interviews provided more in-depth insights into participating at the Hub: how participation felt, learning experiences, what it felt like participating with others at the activity, whether participants had noticed any changes in their selves since the activity. All interviews were conducted over the phone except for one interview that was conducted face-to-face at the respondent's request.

The research team undertook basic analysis of quantitative trends and thematic data analysis of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79) through nVivo software. Analysis included establishing overall trends, what common experiences and feelings emerged, what outlier experiences emerged, and what the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods revealed about the key outcomes of connectedness and resilience. Open-ended questions in the survey were coded and analysed through SPSS software.

Limitations

The research project was successful in achieving its research aims, described above. Despite attempts to engage as diverse a sample as possible, the sample was skewed towards those over 44. Those under 16 were also excluded from participating in the research project. These are limitations of the study, and it would an exciting area of further research to more equally engage with all age groups and include the perspectives of those under 16.

6.0 Results

Key outcomes

Connection, belonging and participation

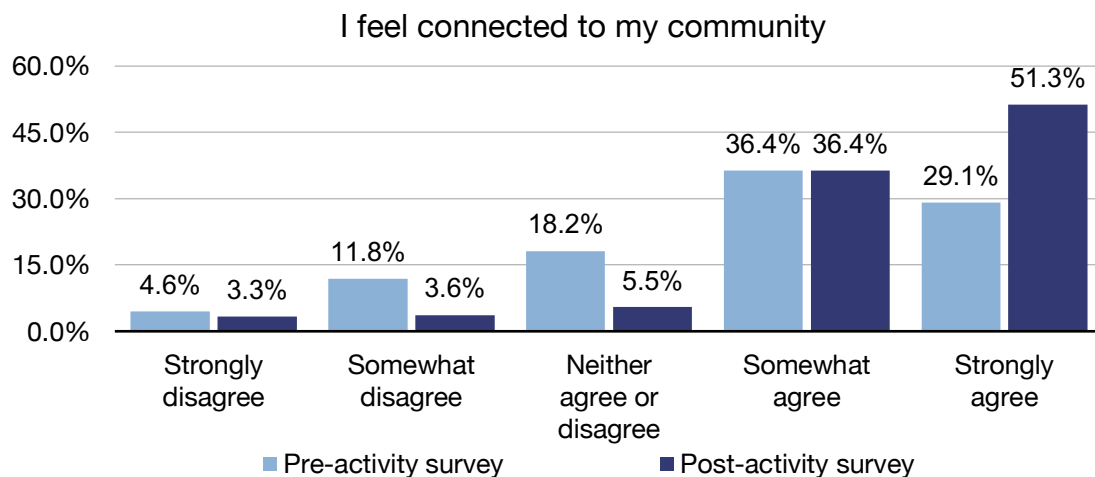


Figure 4 Survey question - I feel connected to my community

Hub participation had a significant effect on participants' feelings of connection. People answering that they strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement above dropped from 16.4% of all participants to 69% (-9.5%), those who felt neutral about the statement dropped from 18.2% to 5.5% (-12.7%) and those who somewhat or strongly agreed increased from 65.5% to 87.7% (+22.2%). The increase was all in the "strongly agree" column.

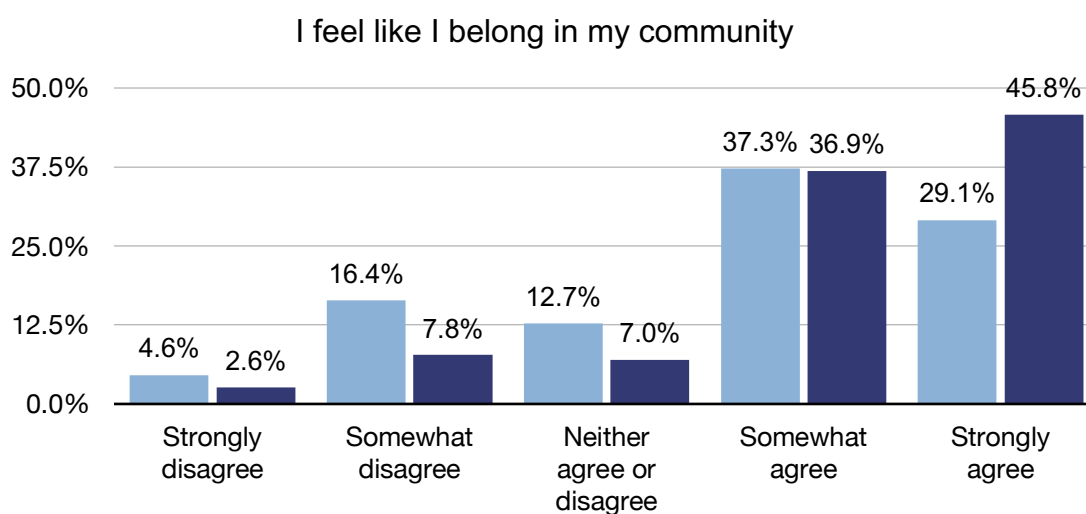


Figure 5 Survey question - I feel I belong in my community

Hub participation had a significant effect on participants' feelings of belonging. People answering that they strongly or somewhat disagreed that they felt like they belonged dropped from 21% of all participants to 10.4% (-10.6%), those who felt neutral about the statement dropped from 12.7% to 7% (-5.7%) and those who somewhat or strongly agreed increased from 66.4% to 82.4% (+16%). Again, the increase in "affirmative" statements was overwhelmingly in the "strongly agree" column.

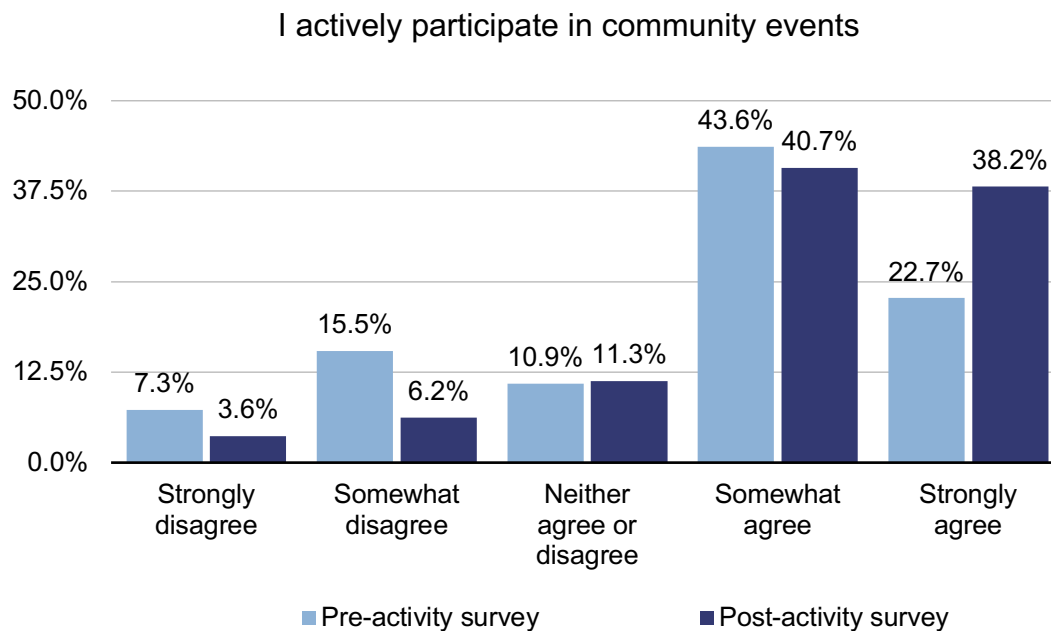


Figure 6 Survey question - I actively participate in community events

Hub participation had a significant effect on respondents' experience of active participation in the community. People answering that they strongly or somewhat disagreed that they actively participated dropped from 22.8% of all participants to 9.8% (-13%). Contrary to the previous answers, those who felt neutral about the statement increased from 10.9% to 11.3% (+0.4%) and those who somewhat or strongly agreed increased from 66.3% to 78.9% (+12.6%). As with the other responses, the increase in "affirmative" statements was overwhelmingly in the "strongly agree" column.

Resilience

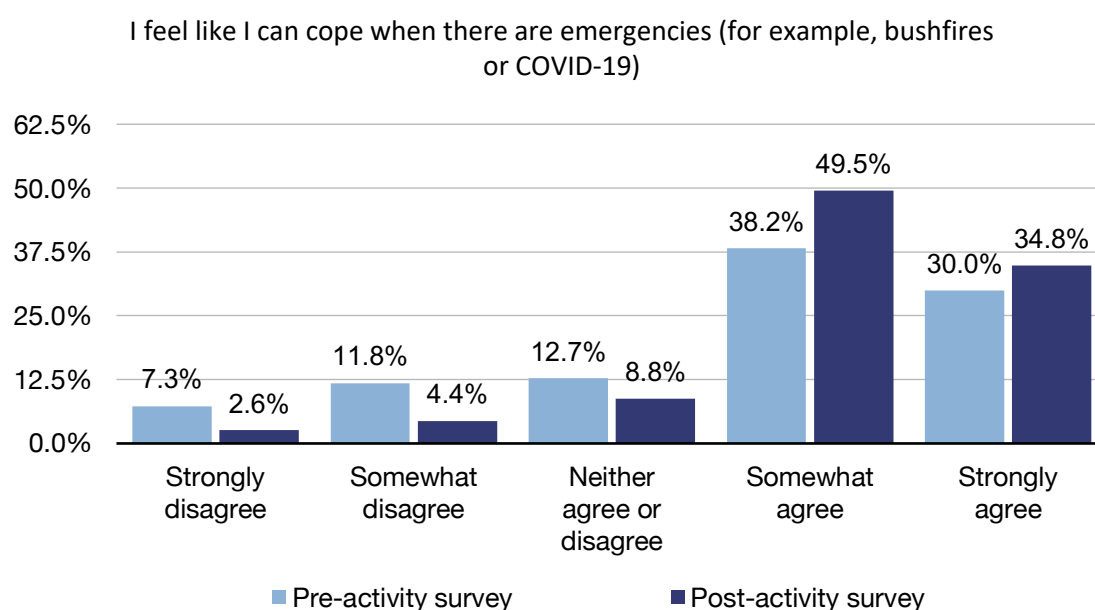


Figure 7 Survey question - I feel I can cope when there are emergencies

Hub participation had a significant effect on participants' feelings that they could cope with emergencies. People answering that they strongly or somewhat disagreed that they could cope dropped from 19.1% of all participants to 7% (-11.1%). Those who responded neutrally dropped from 12.7% to 8.8% (-3.9%) and those who somewhat or strongly agreed increased from 68.2% to 84.3% (+16.1%). The most significant increase was in the "somewhat agree" response.

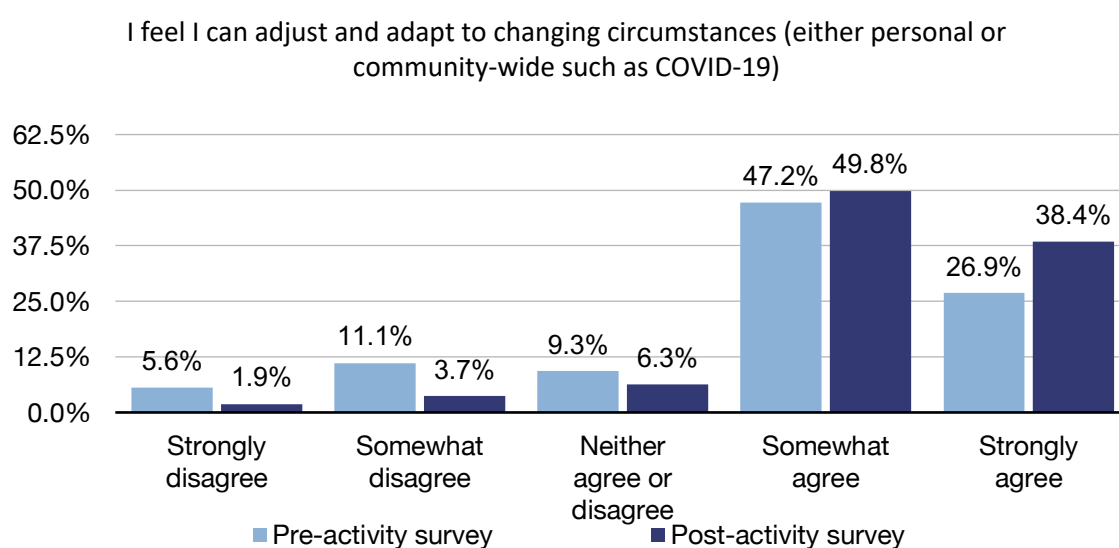


Figure 8 Survey question - I feel I can adjust and adapt to changing circumstances

Hub participation had a significant effect on participants' feelings that they could adjust to changing circumstances. People answering that they strongly or somewhat disagreed that they could cope dropped from 16.7% of all participants to 5.5% (-11.2%). Those who responded neutrally dropped from 9.3% to 6.3% (-3%) and those who somewhat or strongly agreed increased from 74.1% to 88.2% (+14.1%). There were increases in both the "somewhat" and "strongly" agree columns.

The experience of attending the Hub

Enjoyment

Participants overwhelmingly enjoyed attending their Hub activity. 98.9% answered a positive "yes" that they had enjoyed the Hub. 2 participants (0.7%) agreed less strongly: one stated that they 'mildly' enjoyed the activity as there was 'not much structure' and another answered 'somewhat, good info'. A final respondent (0.4%) did not agree that the activity was enjoyable *but* that it had been beneficial, stating, 'Enjoy? No. Beneficial? Yes'. Overall, 99.6% of respondents either strongly or somewhat enjoyed their activity and the only exception was someone who benefitted from the activity but did not "enjoy" it.

Reasons for enjoying Hub activities	% of respondents
The respondent learnt from the activity	26.8
There was connection with others	25.4
The facilitator	19.5
No additional details	18.8
The structure and/or resources of the activity	14.3
The activity improved wellbeing, especially as an experience of support, safety and/or warmth	12.5
The activity was fun	9.2
The activity was creative	8.8

Table 2 Reasons for enjoying Hub activities

As evident above, respondents who enjoyed the workshop cited many reasons for their enjoyment. The following comments are indicative of responses.

Absolutely loved the time spent in these pursuits

Very much enjoyed it. Something very engaging for my kids

Would be lost without this Monday group. The social aspect is so good for my mental health and the art helps with my self esteem

Yes, it was just wonderful. I forgot all my problems and look forward to Mondays so much.

I loved being creative and spontaneous in a supportive environment

Yes, I enjoyed it a lot - the workshop facilitator was genuinely kind and supportive, and it was nice to be with others and not be too alone which has been happening a lot for me this past couple of years.

Love all of it. Love learning new techniques. It has inspired me to start doing art at home. I am also making some new friends.

The Hub activities as useful or helpful

Respondents overwhelmingly found Hub activities useful or helpful as well as enjoyable.

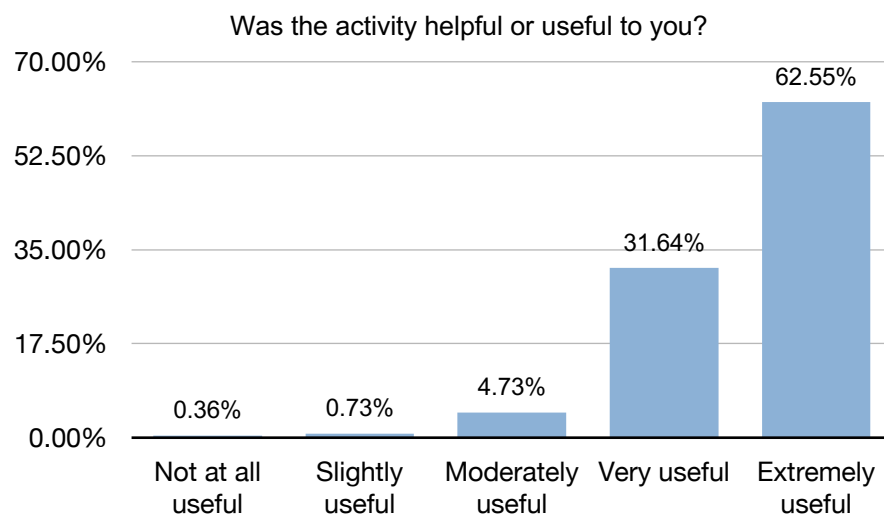


Figure 9 Survey question - was the activity helpful or useful?

As indicated above, 94.1% of respondents found Hub activities either 'very' or 'extremely' useful.

Learning as a result of the Hub activities

Respondents also overwhelmingly found they learnt through activities at the Hub.

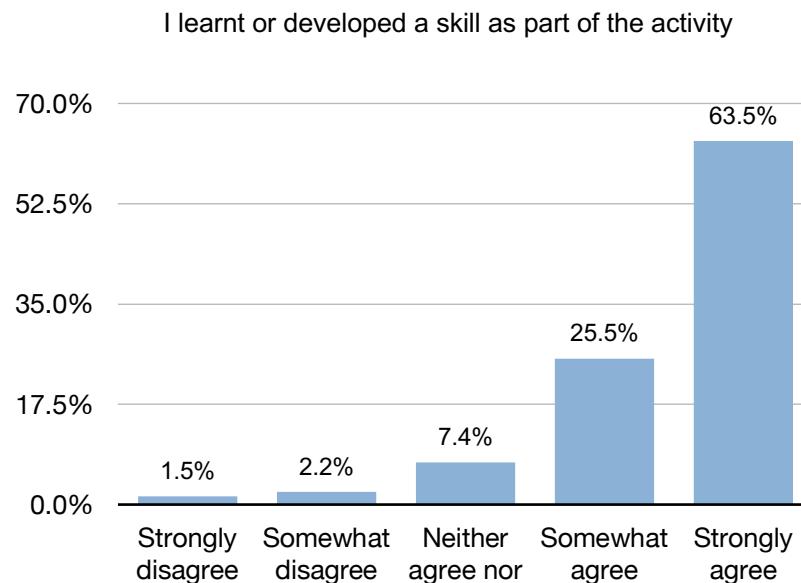


Figure 10 Survey question - I learnt or developed a skill as part of the activity

As indicated above, 89% of respondents either 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agreed they had learnt or developed a skill as a result on their involvement in a Hub activity.

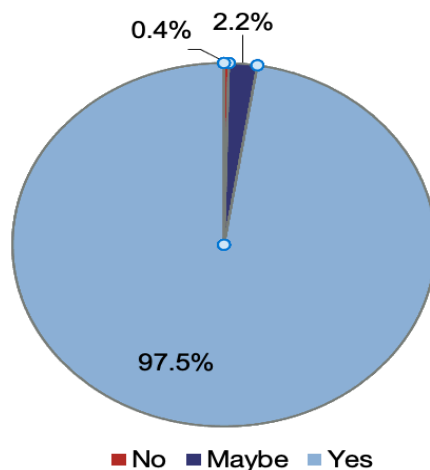


Figure 11 Survey question - Would you recommend this activity to other people?

Would you recommend this activity to other people?

A vast majority of respondents (97.5%) stated they would recommend the Hub activity they attended to another person. Only one person (0.4%) said they would not recommend the activity to another person.

The impact of attending the Hub: a closer examination

The following section examines the above findings in greater depth, exploring how respondents' described their experience of the Hub. The section focuses on 4 themes: connection, resilience, learning, and the affective and emotional dimensions of participating

in the Hub. It draws mostly on data collected through semi-structured interviews. Unless indicated otherwise, respondents discussed here are interview participants.

Connection

The quantitative increase in respondent's experience of connection as indicated above was reflected in qualitative data.

Respondents described feeling more connected to the Upper Mountains and wider Blue Mountains communities.

People work together, which is what community is about, basically, and supporting each other. I definitely feel a more connected... as a, as a member of the community

It's made a huge difference. I don't feel so isolated. I feel connected to people in the community in Blackheath, in Katoomba. Yeah, I didn't really know anyone before that.

I definitely felt like, it was definitely a community building thing. 100%.

It's creating relationships between people in the community. And, you know, it's just really good.

For some, this connection extended beyond the Hub activities.

I've developed friends throughout [art] therapy that I now spend time with outside about [art] therapy. And I don't know, it's just, it's made a huge difference. I don't feel so isolated.

It seemed as though people sort of, there was some relationships that formed friendships and that sort of thing. I actually bumped into someone that I used to teach with a long time ago.

This increased connection took on new meaning in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and stay-at-home orders.

I guess it made me feel connected with a broader community, really. Definitely Mountains community, but just like people again, just generally,

I came during COVID times, and everything was sort of closed down. So it's given me an outlet to meet people, which is the most important thing to me. So that was really good.

Several participants linked their increased community connection to improved wellbeing.

Being part of a community is vital to my well-being and creativity is a fun way to express oneself and get to know one another.

I am still not well-connected to my community and still recovering from illness and in the process of becoming more healthy, connected. [x's] workshop is vital to this process.

it has boosted my self-confidence; helped me to connect with others, helped manage stress levels, encouraged me to continue with creative activities.

There were a couple of exceptions. One participant stated that they didn't 'get that feeling' that the workshop had increased community connection. Another stated that they wished the connections could have developed further outside of the activity: 'it's been good to get to know people a little bit more, like I said, but because I haven't kind of got to see them much outside of the group'.

Resilience

Participants also felt that their participation in the Hub had increased their individual resilience.

I was very isolated... And it made a huge difference just to my, my recovery with complex PTSD and panic attacks.

They taught like my kids how to, you know, how to solve some problems, as well. When you're, when you're a kid and you, you're frustrated, by, you know, your seeming lack of ability to do a particular task, you can always find ways around it. And that teaches them resilience.

Oh, yeah. Especially achieving resilience or bouncing back. I mean, I wouldn't say I'm bouncing a lot, but no, that's definitely helped me to recover more. I mean, I use that word rather than bounce back, but recover more from the difficulties I was experiencing. I felt closer to, not necessarily being healed, but I felt more well.

I have been using [creative writing] for myself just to sort through things and using writing as a medium to sift through, sort of process... so yeah, like increase your resilience.

Participants also felt the Hub had increased community resilience, especially through developing increased community connectedness.

It goes back to there's other people like me, in community. Other people have the same interests of me. So I think that helped build resilience for people.

[When asked about resilience]. I think anything like that, that the community can put on, and invite people that are interested. I think, you know, people need that sort of thing. People need places to communicate or to meet, or to talk. And I guess that provides a way of maybe meeting other people, I think, especially for the younger crowd, with small children. Yeah. I think that's quite good.

Look, I think [the electricity savings workshop] was really informative around a subject that's giving a lot of us you know, a level of stress and anxiety. Yeah. And I think certainly the information I got assisted me to just rethink that. Now is that resilience? Good point. Good point. I guess? That's a hard question, isn't it?

Learning

Participants overwhelmingly felt like they had learned something from attending the Hub. Reflecting the variety of activities, people learnt a variety of things from creative development to practical skills to learning about others.

[Talking about learning in a First Nations workshop] And the possum skin was so important in that, and I felt I learned so much.

I did learn a lot about writing for sure.

Yes, yes, I did. I learnt that I had to turn off my solar heating if there was a fire. I hadn't, I'd never had solar heating before. So I learned that.

[When asked "what was your favourite part?"] Well, the learning, you know, the learning of new skill. And I think that's always easier when it's in a kind of friendly, fun, safe environment.

Several participants noted the ongoing skills they learnt at the Hub and now use in their everyday lives.

My son is so fascinated with [stop motion animation], he's still doing it now. He's still doing stop motion animation every few days. And it must be at least six or eight months ago [since the activity]. And I've had to download the software to a couple of new devices as well.

Oh, yeah, I think I've definitely getting much more into art in general. And so that's kind of opened up an avenue of expression. So now I've started doing TAFE, TAFE stuff.

I took a lot of that almost all of it home and put into practice.

Affective dimensions: enjoyment, comfort, and love

As with the survey responses, interview participants also experienced the Hub activity as a positive experience that brought enjoyment, comfort, warmth and describe themselves as “loving” participating.

I mean I also enjoyed myself, too. And I took away a lot from it. And I think it's all added something to our lives that's really valuable.

I was just enjoying bringing back memories and bringing back knowledge that I, that I had before.

It was extraordinary. [The children participants in an art activity] just sat for the whole time, same place. Every now and then would wander and get a bit of extra stuff. Little extra paper, but kept them very, very, very heavily amused.

I would go if you ran it 10 times, I would go again.

I just raved on about it. To so many different friends and family.

I think it was a pretty special group, though. It's a pretty special group.

I remember it with a sort of nice, warm feeling

I love it [Art play]. Really love it

What worked and what didn't?

An aspect of this research project was to ascertain feedback from participants as to what they felt worked in the Hub model and what didn't to reflect the importance of iterative feedback and community consultation.

What worked?

Respondents identified several reasons why they thought the Hub activities were so successful. The first was the quality of the activities and the resources that were provided, what one participant described as “the good stuff”.

Even though I have been an artist. I've always been hesitant to use anything of good quality. Like, you know, because it's not I'm not worth it or something. So she's always pushing me to use the good stuff and letting me know that I, you know, deserve to use the good stuff.

I think they came into it the same ideas that I had, that it was just going to be sort of a little community group and known to be taking it very seriously. And we probably wouldn't be getting a lot of constructive feedback. And then they were really, really pleasantly surprised

I was impressed by the ideas that they bought, and the materials they bought. There was a lot more craft, I mean, that they had available to them.

Participants were also overwhelmingly positive about the facilitators of the activities, with only one interview participant raising some negative feedback.

The three presenters were wonderful. They were professional. They were fun. And everything was provided.

To be honest, probably the favourite part is probably [facilitator]. I mean, she's really encouraged me, because I'm really hesitant.

The teacher who taught the kids was fantastic. They just did they really, they really cared about the topic of stop motion animation.

I think some of the ideas that the [facilitators] had put forth was, was terrific. And well-supervised.

Yeah, he was superb. I've got to tell you.

The respondents also noted the accessibility of the Hub as critical to its success. Accessibility, here, included the inclusivity of the groups and feelings of safety in participating.

It's a very supportive group, basically. Yeah, and inclusive.

Yeah, it's a diverse group. So there's different types of people, different age groups

It's made me listen to other people's memories and ideas. So hopefully, I'm a better listener.

Several participants mentioned the accessibility of the Hub activities due to the free entry to all activities.

The thing about these groups, that it's accessible, because it's free, it's been accessible to anyone and everyone

I would imagine would be beneficial for people to tap into, without the pressure of, you know, was free was everything was supplied. So there was no stress about anything like that

What didn't work?

Overwhelmingly, participants didn't have any constructive feedback when asked. One participant felt that the workshop on emergency preparedness they had attended had not provided the information they needed as a new resident to the area.

Two other participants felt that there could be more promotion of the Hub.

If I want to give one bit of advice to the Hub - keep promoting yourself but in different ways

It needs to have more publicity or something

One participant felt that the booking system could be easier, especially considering how quickly some activities booked out.

It is really hard to book in. And when I say that, it's because you have to call BANC and book in.

Otherwise, constructive feedback centred on wanting “more of the same” activities, including more time allocated to workshops.

I think I think three hours was would have been like, I think we went for almost three hours anyway, by the time we did the clean-up.

Actually, I think the only thing I was thinking was it maybe could have stood to have been about half an hour longer.

I thought it could have been longer. I could have listened to him for half a day. Easy. Easy peasy.

The other significant theme was a desire for the Hub as an ongoing project and concern about the ending of funding. Indeed, some facilitators and participants of recurring activities, such as the writing group, were working to find ways to maintain their activity after the cessation of funding.

Some of the most impassioned responses came from participants who attend a regular group that meets weekly, such as the writing group or the ArtPlay. Several participants describe their regular group as ‘the highlight of my week’.

It just so important to keep these classes going

So I think, to me, when you're trying to, you can help plant the seeds for resilience. But actually keeping connections in the community is kind of, you know, the fostering of it, but how you do that, I think is difficult. It's not one way. it's really about the ongoing connectedness, really.

7.0 Future directions

Ongoing funding of the Hub

The effectiveness of the Hub is demonstrated in the data. There was significant investment from a majority of research participants that the Hub continue. Investigating the possibility of further funding is a productive avenue to pursue. This reflects the success of the Hub and the ongoing and urgent need for disaster preparation, recovery and resilience in the Upper Mountains.

Funding of Hub-based projects for other CSOs

The data demonstrates that the Hub is an effective disaster preparation, recovery and resilience model with wide applicability to other communities. In particular, the Hub draws on the strengths of a place-based CSO to build capacity and address needs during ‘business-as-usual’ times and quickly move into “surge capacity” when disasters occur. Further funding of Hub projects for other CSOs would enable a faster and more effective response to disasters and ensure that CSOs have the required financial and other assets available at short notice.

Further investigation of the effectiveness of integrating psychosocial activities with practical supports

The Hub model is an innovative integration of psychosocial activities and practical supports to address disaster preparation, recovery and resilience. The effectiveness of this approach is evident in the simultaneous change in participants’ experiences of connection *and* learning of enjoyment *and* preparedness, of recovery *and* skill development. The data reveal that an integrated model has a positive effect across a range of aims, and it is worthy of further investigation as to whether an integrated model that includes a focus on psychosocial dimensions is *more* effective in addressing practical supports than practical support provision alone, as is the usual model of resilience hubs.

8.0 References

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, *2033.0.55.001 - Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia, 2016*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 1 April 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2033.0.55.0012016?OpenDocument>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021a, *Blackheath - Megalong Valley*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 1 April 2023, <<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/124011449>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021b, *Mount Victoria*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 1 April 2023, <<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL12808>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021c, *Mount Wilson*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 1 April 2023, <<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL12815>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021c, *Blue Mountains LGA*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 1 April 2023, <<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA10900>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021d, *Mount Tomah*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 1 April 2023, <<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL12806>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021e, *Mount Irvine*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 1 April 2023, <<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL12778>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021g, *Greater Sydney*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, viewed 1 April 2023, <<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/1GSYD>>.

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience n.d. *Natural hazards and climate change*, viewed 15 March 2023, <<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/natural-hazards-and-climate-change>>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2022, *The Blue Mountains declared a Natural Disaster Area following record-breaking rains*, Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 15 March 2023, <<https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/media-centre/blue-mountains-declared-a-natural-disaster-area-following-record-breaking-rains>>.

Blue Mountains City Council 2022a, *Annual report 2021-2022*, Blue Mountains City Council, viewed 10 April 2023, <<https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/documents/annual-report-2021-2022>>.

Braun, V & Clarke, V 2006, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 77-101.

Cacioppo, JT & Cacioppo, S 2014, 'Social relationships and health: The toxic effects of perceived social isolation', *Social and personality psychology compass*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 58-72.

Capaldi, CA, Passmore, H-A, Nisbet, EK, Zelenski, JM & Dopko, RL 2015, 'Flourishing in nature: A review of the benefits of connecting with nature and its application as a wellbeing intervention', *International Journal of Wellbeing*, vol. 5, no. 4.

Chapple, R, Blignault, I & Fitzgerald, A 2017, 'Communicating bushfire risk in the Blue Mountains: a case study of the "fire stories" film', *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 58-66.

Ciriaco, TGM & Wong, SD 2022, 'Review of resilience hubs and associated transportation needs', *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, vol. 16, p. 100697.

Climate Council 2023, *Climate trauma: the growing toll of climate change on the mental health of Australians*, Climate Council viewed 6 August 2023, <<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/climate-trauma/>>.

Coles, E & Buckle, P 2004, 'Developing community resilience as a foundation for effective disaster recovery', *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 6-15.

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation 2020, *Climate and disaster resilience*, viewed 1 February 2023, <<https://www.csiro.au/en/research/natural-disasters/bushfires/report-climate-disaster-resilience>>.

Council of Australian Governments 2011, *National strategy for disaster resilience: building the resilience of our nation to disasters*, Commonwealth of Australia, viewed 19 June 2022, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-strategy-disaster-resilience.pdf>>.

Department of Home Affairs 2019, *National disaster risk reduction framework*, viewed 1 February 2023, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-disaster-risk-reduction-framework.pdf>>.

Emergency Management Victoria 2023, *Outcomes*, viewed 15 June 2023, , <<https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/strategic-priorities/sector-outcomes-framework/outcomes>>.

Gordon, R 2004, 'The social system as site of disaster impact and resource for recovery', *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 16-22, viewed 2023/06/08, Informit, <<https://search.informit-org.ezproxy.uws.edu.au/doi/10.3316/ielapa.375491044008412>>.

Harms, L, Abotomey, R, Rose, D, Woodward Kron, R, Bolt, B, Waycott, J et al. 2018, 'Postdisaster posttraumatic growth: Positive transformations following the Black Saturday bushfires', *Australian Social Work*, vol. 71, no. 4, pp. 417-29.

Heinrich, LM & Gullone, E 2006, 'The clinical significance of loneliness: a literature review', *Clinical Psychology Review*, vol. 26, no. 6, pp. 695-718.

Hellmundt, C 2022, *Process review: community hub model*, City of Ryde, viewed 15 March 2023, <<https://www.ryde.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/community/community-hubs/community-hubs-model-the-seven-stages-of-creating-community-hubs.pdf>>.

Ingham, V & Redshaw, S 2017, 'Connecting community organisations for disaster preparedness', *International Journal of Safety and Security Engineering*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 52-64.

Ingham, V, Redshaw, S, Hardgrove, P, Quigley, T & Harrison, K 2015, *Community connections: vulnerability and resilience in the Blue Mountains*, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, <<http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/yourcommunity/communityservices/agedservices/communityconnectionsproject/>>.

Koder, J, Dunk, J & Rhodes, P 2023, 'Climate distress: a review of current psychological research and practice', *Sustainability*, vol. 15, no. 10, p. 8115.

Massola, C, Geronimi, R, Rawsthorne, M & Ingham, V 2022, *Fire & flood: community experiences of disasters*, University of Sydney, Charles Sturt University, Sydney.

McCaffrey, S 2015, 'Community wildfire preparedness: a global state of the knowledge summary of social science research', *Current Forestry Reports*, vol. 1, pp. 81-90.

McManamey, RM 2009, 'Arts, health, community resilience and healing: the importance of the story', vol. 17, p. 20.

NSW Government 2023, *Natural disaster declarations*, NSW Government, viewed 16 March 2023, <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/disaster-recovery/natural-disaster-declarations>>.

Ortiz, J 2017, *Culture, creativity and the arts: building resilience in Northern Ontario*, PhD thesis, University of the West of England, <<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/883155/culture-creativity-and-the-arts-building-resilience-in-northern-ontario>>.

Pascoe, S 2022, 'Observations and learnings on community led disaster recovery', Webinar.

Paton, D & Johnson, D 2001, 'Disasters and communities: vulnerabilities, resilience and preparedness', *Disaster Prevention and Management*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 270-7.

Queensland Government 2022, *Find a support services location (Southeast Queensland rainfall and flooding February 2022)*, viewed 23 March 2023, <<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/disasters-emergencies/disasters/resources-translations/find-hub>>.

Romeril, B, *Multi-agency community services hubs: selecting a model to meet expectations*, viewed 23 March 2023, <<http://romeril.org/docs/SelectingAModel.pdf>>.

Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements 2020, *Royal Commission into national natural disaster arrangements: report* Commonwealth of Australia, viewed 15 February 2023, <<https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-11/Royal%20Commission%20into%20National%20Natural%20Disaster%20Arrangements%20-%20Report%20%20%5Baccessible%5D.pdf>>.

Service NSW n.d., *Recovery services*, NSW Government, viewed 23 March 2023, <<https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/floods/recovery-centres?map=Balranald>>.

Story, H 2022, *Arts organisations in the Northern Rivers are taking on a pivotal role in rebuilding a community devastated by floods*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, viewed 23 January 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-02/lismore-floods-rebuilding-support-for-artists-arts-organisations/100992162?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=mail&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_news_web>.

Townsend, M & Weerasuriya, R 2010, *Beyond blue to green: the benefits of contact with nature for mental health and wellbeing: executive summary*, Deakin University, viewed 1 August 2023, <https://www.deakin.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/310747/Beyond-Blue-To-Green-Literature-Review.pdf>.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, viewed 25 September 2021, <https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf>.

Urban Sustainability Directors Network n.d., *Resilience Hubs*, viewed 1 April 2023, <<http://resilience-hub.org/what-are-hubs/>>.

Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010, *Fire preparation, response and recovery: final report, volume II*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne.

Victorian Government 2022, *Community Recovery Hubs*, viewed 23 March 2023, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/community-recovery-hubs>>.

Waddell, T 2021, 'The relationship between creativity, identity, place, and community resilience: the renaissance of Clarksdale, Mississippi, United States', *Creativity studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 175-86.