

# Community Resilience Network

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## Overview

### **Community Resilience Network: Aims**

1. Increase knowledge of the social impacts of drought and the need to strengthen community resilience.
2. Increase knowledge of and access to support services.
3. Establish a community network across six shires to share resources, develop partnerships and inspire leadership.
4. Develop a framework to build community resilience.
5. Better utilise community facilities (CRCs).

- South West NRM has partnered with six Community Resource Centres in Boyup Brook, Bridgetown, Brunswick Junction, Donnybrook, Harvey and Manjimup to deliver this project.
- The Community Resilience Network is supported by FRRR, through funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.
- It is funded by a Community Impact Grant under the "Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative."
- The grants enable agriculture-dependent communities to identify and act on their drought preparedness priorities.
- It seeks to strengthen social and community networks, capabilities and facilities that support drought preparedness.

## Workshop schedule

Workshops consist of a presentation following by discussion and sharing:

- **February 23** – What are the social impacts of drought? – Dr Leanne Lester, Centre for Social Impact, UWA.
- **March 22** – Dealing with stress: Strengthening access to support. – Sam Burgess, #6Bs.
- **May 3** – How can we develop a framework for community resilience? – Renee Knapp, Think Effective.
- **June 14** – Financial Services. – Dean Bavich, Rural West; and Michael Monaghan, Farmanco.
- **August 2** – Community health and well-being services. Roger Hitchcock, Rural Aid; and Terry Melrose, Regional Men's Health.
- **September 13** – How can we support Aboriginal and Youth in times of drought? – Kerry Collard, Goomburrup Aboriginal Corporation; and Lisa Burgess, Blackwood Youth Action.

# Workshop #1 Summary:

Presentation: The Social Impacts of Drought – Dr Leanne Lester, Centre for Social Impact, UWA.



## Key Points:

- Social Impacts of drought include:
  - Employment and financial constraints.
  - Out migration, loss of friends and increased workload.
  - Withdrawal from or closure of education and training.
  - Family separation and conflict.
  - Closure and reduced availability of services.
  - Reduced health and wellbeing.
- Community resilience factors include:
  - Social cohesion.
  - Economic and social infrastructure.
  - Leadership.
  - Social support.
- Suggested programs:
  - Rural health services interventions.
  - Health promotion, education and advocacy.
  - Community garden interventions.



## South West NRM

Building Healthy and Productive Ecosystems

- Rural financial counsellors.
- Drought support workers.
- Health and wellbeing services jointed with trusted businesses.
- Mental health services in schools.
- Multicomponent collaboration community programs.
- Recommendations:
  - Availability and quality of infrastructure.
  - Good governance.
  - Population retention.
  - Increase local support service networks.
  - Early recognition and effective response to poor mental health.
  - Strengthening community social networks and social capital.
  - Mapping government funded programs against resiliency and vulnerability frameworks.

## Feedback from our community on their vulnerabilities to drought and how we can respond.

### Boyup Brook Group:

#### Vulnerabilities:

- A lot of our farmers have never experienced this level of drought before. Affecting mentally and financially.
- The lack of mental health services available in our community.
- Infrastructure is needed to capture more water for town and rural use.

#### How to respond:

- Set realistic expectations – Don't expect rain will come soon.
- Mapping services – what's in place.
- Engage with people who have been through dry times before so have knowledge and skills.
- Identify the trigger points to implement contingency plans such as offloading stock.

- Planning – better to implement plans for service provision earlier, rather than waiting until it's too late.
- Peer support – encourage social catch ups, formal and informal

### **Bridgetown Group:**

#### Vulnerabilities:

- Lack of rural background.
- Water tanks running out.
- People on scheme water are wasting water.
- Townies don't understand farms and stress factors.
- It's a battle to get people to prepare for a crisis.

#### How to respond:

- Engage services providers available and map them.
- Educate people on scheme water about water wise practices.

### **Brunswick Junction Group:**

#### Vulnerabilities:

- If our farmers shut up shop, our community will start to disappear.

#### How to respond:

- Learn from other areas who have survived and flourished.
- Identify plans for succession.
- Mental health support, we don't have the services.
- Waterwise practices, better awareness.
- increase awareness of food sources for the general population (where food comes from, how it's produced).

### Donnybrook Group:

#### Vulnerabilities:

- We don't have support for mental health.
- Reduced rainfall affects the food you can grow at home and production from farmers.
- Increased need for reticulation in community gardens
- Affects on health from extra pollen and dust in the air during drought.

#### How to respond:

- We need farmers and towns community to work together because it affects everyone and we need to work together.
- Possibly changing diets based on what we can now grow.

### Harvey Group:

#### Vulnerabilities:

- There's no public transport, so if people had to get out of town, how would they do that if they have nobody to take them.
- Too many larger organisations aren't funded to out-reach in the town.
- Communication – a lot of people's phones work through the internet. So when that's down, how do they communicate?
- Everything is focused on the businesses. The shire is not working with community to develop infrastructure for community resilience.

#### How to respond:

- More open dialogue and interest in what the community needs.
- Open conversation, it's the best way.

## Manjimup Group:

### Vulnerabilities:

- Mental health services not available.
- Politicians aren't investing in infrastructure and long-term planning.
- Lingering climate change denial amongst farmers.
- Low socio-economic base, a heavy reliance on agriculture and the need to diversify to other economic streams.
- Lack of financial literacy and farmers not planning for crises. Not having finances prepared for that.
- A lot of farmers don't ask for help until being at the point of foreclosure or their mental health has significantly deteriorated.
- The town is segregated.

### How to respond:

- Encourage early engagement with support services.
- Elevate local expertise.
- Encourage sustainable agriculture.
- Demystify climate change.

## Online group:

### How to respond:

- Need better infrastructure to support online connection/coverage.
- Roadshow services e.g. Centrelink go out into rural communities.
- Promote family violence services and need for anonymity and support.

- Social spaces e.g. pubs shutting down, reduced informal meeting spaces for relaxation.
- Support shop local- less money to travel with drought.
- Community asset mapping- look at social assets. What knowledge and experience does our community have, and how can we use that to build drought resilience instead of relying on outside in?
- Green spaces- What difference a green space makes to the amenity and feeling of a town when everything is dry.
- Physical and mental health and general wellness programs.
- Open lines of communication through community networks.
- Volunteer capacity-recruiting new volunteers/succession planning.

## Next Meeting:

### Speaker:

Dealing with Stress – Sam Burgess #6Bs.

Sam farms in Arthur River and has first-hand experience of being overwhelmed with stress and isolation. Fortunately, he also has an uplifting story of how he dealt with his situation. He believes that dealing with stress is normal, not unique, and it's good to talk about it. After all, it's pretty normal to de-stress by talking to someone. And if sometimes you need to talk to someone trained to help you find the best solution, then that's ok!

### Facilitation Questions:

1. What services have you referred people to and for what issues?
2. How do we reach people who don't engage with social networks?



# Service Providers

## Rural West

Rural West provide a **free**, confidential, mobile, independent financial counselling service to regional small businesses and all primary production enterprises in WA, who are navigating their way through difficult and turbulent times.



Dean Bavich

- Dean Bavich is a Small Business and Rural Financial Counsellor at Rural West.
- He attended the Manjimup CRC for Meeting 1 and will speak at Meeting #4 about how Rural West can help farmers and small businesses.
- While he is qualified in financial counselling, he is also trained to deal with situational distress (a term he uses in preference to mental health problems).
- The first step in dealing with situational distress is to accept that a situation needs to be dealt with.
- When under stress, rationality is often clouded. His role is typically to clarify the situation and work through it so his client can see the solution.
- Dean thinks early intervention is critical so counsellors have time to work through solutions.

- Dean works throughout the South West, except for Boyup Brook which Kerryn Mickle covers (see below).
- Many of Rural West's clients are referred by banks, accountants and the National Debt Helpline.
- Dean has 35 years experience within rural bank finance and the small business sector.
- He previously operated a small farming enterprise in the Lower South West.



Kerryn Mickle

- Kerryn Mickle is also a Small Business and Rural Financial Counsellor at Rural West.
- Kerryn lives in Kojonup and covers the Great South Region, including Boyup Brook and Bridgetown.
- Kerryn is a Kojonup Shire Councilor and has a corporate background prior to Rural West managing rural retail/service providers in the ag industry across the Great Southern.
- Kerryn attended the Boyup Brook CRC for Meeting #1.

## Rural Aid

Rural Aid provides critical support to farmers affected by natural disaster through financial, wellbeing and fodder assistance.

Rural Aid offers free, confidential counselling to Rural Aid registered farmers and their family. Rural Aid counsellors catch up with their farmers where they're most comfortable; whether it's on farm, in town, or over the phone.



Roger Hitchcock

- Roger Hitchcock is Rural Aid's Counsellor and Community Representative for Western Australia based in Narrogin.
- Roger attended Meeting #1 at Boyup Brook CRC and will speak at Meeting #5 about how Rural Aid can help farming families.
- Roger has written a few [blog articles](#) and has spoken on [radio](#) and to [ABC Rural](#) about his work and has helped to develop [Community Action Plans](#) for several WA towns.

## Links

- Understanding the Social Impacts of Drought – <https://www.csi.edu.au/research/understanding-the-social-impacts-of-drought/>
- Australian Counselling Association – Find a Counsellor – <https://www.theaca.net.au/find-registered-counsellor.php>

- Beyond Blue – Including check your mental health  
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>
- Mental Health Commission (WA) –  
<https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/getting-help/>
- National Debt Hotline – <https://ndh.org.au/> and 1800 007 007
- 24-Hour helplines for family and domestic violence  
<https://www.wa.gov.au/service/community-services/counselling-services/family-and-domestic-violence-support-and-advice>
- Surviving the Dry – other projects funded by FRRR’s Community Impact program in the South West –  
<https://southwestnrm.org.au/project/surviving-the-dry/>
- Green Spaces Counter the Blues –  
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61555557816628>
- South West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub –  
<https://hub.gga.org.au/>
- DPIRD Dry Season Resources –  
<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/climate-weather/dry-season-resources>

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