

# CSDC Project Evaluation – summary results Hawkesbury

This is a summary extract of findings from the evaluation of the Community Sector Disaster Capability Project, specific to the Hawkesbury region of the pilot project and for the ease of reference of the Hawkesbury teams.

Extracts contain section references relevant to the Final Evaluation Report.

## Key Evaluation Question 1

**Does the project deliver its intended short, medium or long-term outcomes?**

a. **Specifically, for ‘Education’ activities:**

- **Participating organisations and communities have increased understanding and capacity to reduce disaster risk impacting vulnerable groups**

### **NGO social services sector understanding and capacity**

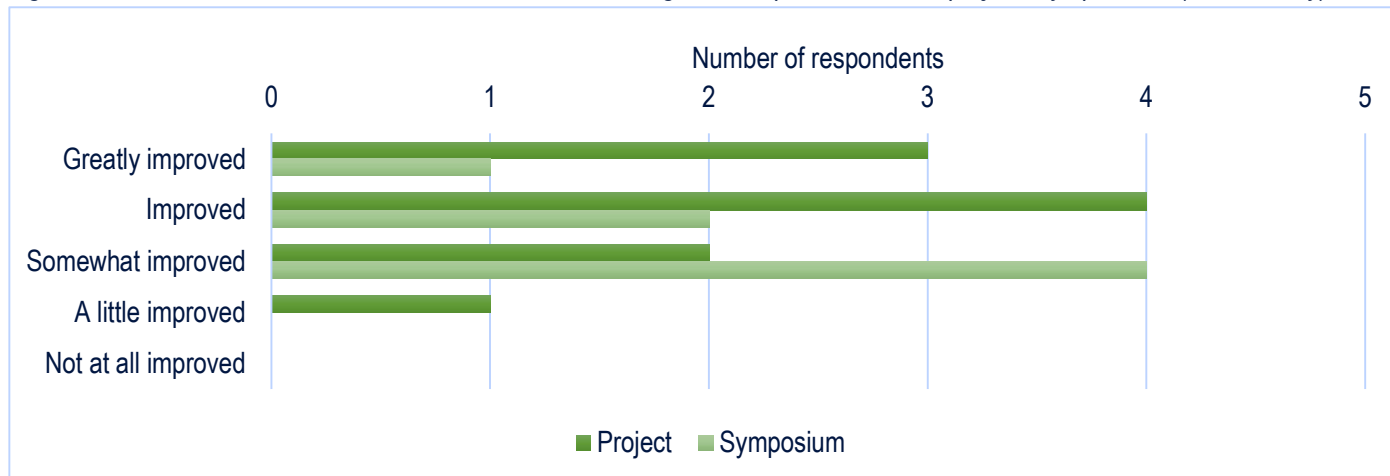
Peppercorn and Bligh Park Community Services delivered NGO social service sector capacity building through:

- Community Organisations Breakfast comprising disaster preparedness presentations and small-group workshops
- 30 qualitative interviews with local NGO social service organisations
- ‘Dismiss the Myths’ Disaster Knowledge Symposium event for emergency management agencies to respond to issues and questions raised through the engagement phase of the project
- final project event at Hawkesbury Connect Interagency to present project report, tools and resources and provide opportunities to explore collaborative action beyond the project.

A higher proportion of event and project evaluation survey respondents in the Hawkesbury reported improved awareness of disaster management (Figure 1). 70% of project participants (N=10) rated their awareness improvement as 4 or 5 out of 5 – ‘greatly improved’ or ‘improved’, compared to 40% of overall project participants (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Event feedback on the Disaster Knowledge Symposium was more in line with overall project results for culminating sector events, with 4 out of 7 respondents rating their awareness improvement as ‘somewhat improved’.

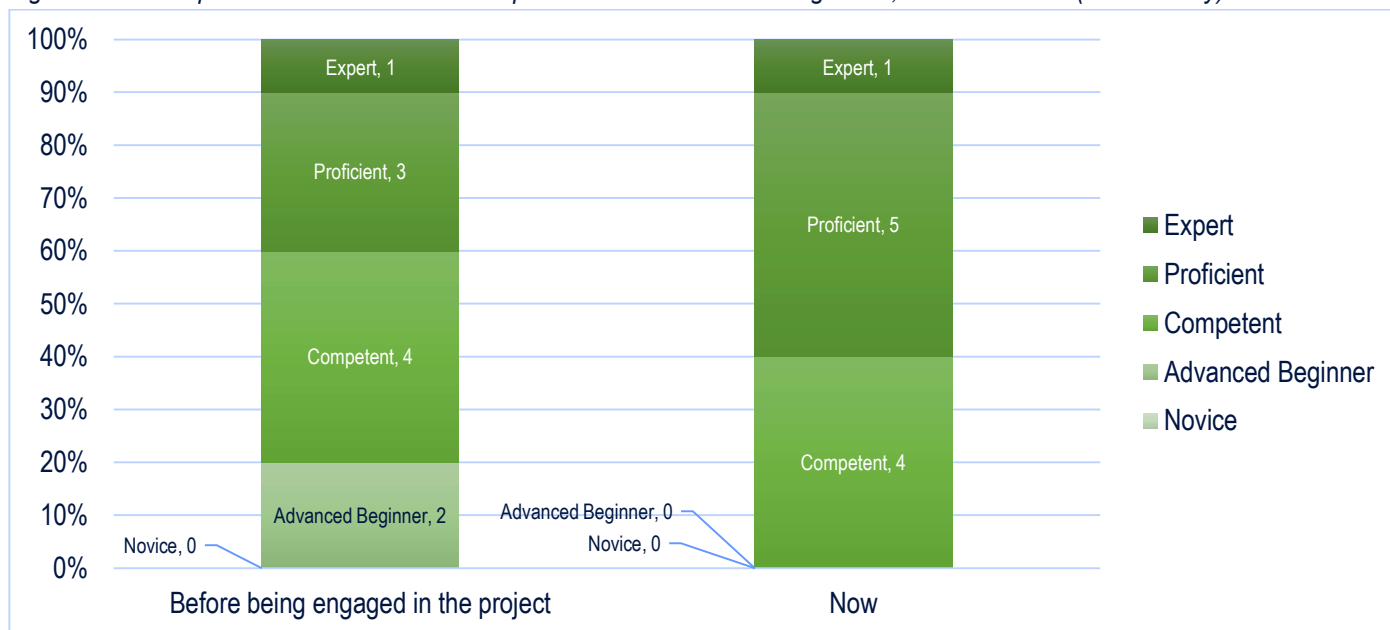
Figure 1: To what extent has awareness of disaster risk management improved from the project/ Symposium? (Hawkesbury)



When asked what about the event was valuable to their organisation, 2 of 7 respondents nominated 'knowledge about disaster risk reduction' and 3 nominated 'awareness of local risks'.

In line with overall project trends (**Error! Reference source not found.**), respondents' self-reported expertise increased from a median level of 'competent' to a median level of 'proficient'. The 2 stakeholders who identified an 'advanced beginner' level of expertise indicated an increase in expertise as a result of the project, meaning that no stakeholder rated their expertise below 'competent' after their project involvement. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: How respondents rate their level of expertise in disaster risk management, before and now (Hawkesbury)



The Hawkesbury project's qualitative interview process (part of the local project engagement phase and mapping of local disaster risks, vulnerabilities and strengths), was identified in project evaluation interviews as also improving NGO social service sector understanding and capability in disaster risk management. Internal and external project stakeholders said that it built the capacity of organisations

because communication channels were strengthened and needs were identified and met where possible.

What they have potentially formed now, through their research, they have strengthened relationships with those community groups and ways to pass up future issues.

For example, information from the Vision Support group went back to the SES. We also found some braille resources to take back to them.

An internal stakeholder described in interviews the challenge for Peppercorn staff of shifting to sector support in order to deliver education and capacity building project activities. The organisation observed through project activities a gap in the provision of sector development for disaster preparedness especially in aged care and in community services. In response, Peppercorn has assumed a local role as a sector support organisation, primarily through P-CEP train-the-trainer activities and by sharing information and resources in response to needs identified during interviews.

### **Community understanding and capacity**

To engage community members and build community capacity, Peppercorn and Bligh Park Community Services:

- engaged with isolated communities jointly with the Rural Fire Service (RFS), Council and other stakeholders to deliver disaster readiness information and planning advice using the P-CEP model, presentations by emergency management agencies and question and answer sessions
- had an active presence at community events with disaster readiness information and resources, e.g. at Get Ready Weekends, Hawkesbury Show, Windsor Preparedness Day
- published a resource card of Hawkesbury area emergency and community contacts.

While community stakeholders in the Hawkesbury were not interviewed for this evaluation, external organisational stakeholders who were interviewed and who delivered community activities jointly with Peppercorn and Bligh Park Community Services spoke positively about the high rate of community turn-out to project activities, in communities described as traditionally resistant to engagement with emergency management agencies as a result of their experiences during previous disaster events.

Sixty-five people turned up. I couldn't have done all of that on my own.

Some stakeholders highlighted in evaluation interviews that there is more work to do to improve local understanding and capacity to reduce disaster risk, especially for First Nations and CALD communities. The project is considered to have had good reach especially into remote and disadvantaged communities, elderly people living at home and people with disability.

- **Risk, strengths and capability information is shared and provides the basis for appropriate and coordinated DRR strategies and planning locally.**

Stakeholders in evaluation interviews raised the value of CSDC events in the Hawkesbury for professional networking and collective disaster readiness within the NGO social services sector.

Because of Peppercorn's events I've now become a familiar face in the community and started to be a lot more invited to events ... Whereas before I had a small voice going around to a lot of places, now I've been introduced to the interagency sort of connections, and that's allowed [NGO social sector organisation] to foster good business relationships.

Stakeholders also said the qualitative interview process undertaken by Peppercorn and Bligh Park Community Services helped build a collective understanding of the Hawkesbury communities' strengths, risks and capabilities. Strategic use of this new information is seen to be at its earliest stages. After interviews were completed, Peppercorn finalised the Leading Themes Analysis of these interviews.

Four of 7 respondents in the event feedback survey on the Symposium nominated 'collaboration' as something about the event they found valuable to their organisation.

Internal stakeholders said in evaluation interviews that there were issues to progress via strategic advocacy to government and emergency management agencies, not yet resolved within the CSDC project's timeframe. A broad range of stakeholders articulated in interviews the need for collective, coordinated action on one or two priority areas for change in the local area, such as evacuation of pets, early opening of evacuation centres for vulnerable people, and early and coordinated evacuation of geographically remote communities.

For internal CSDC project stakeholders, their ability to advocate to government agencies, via project lead agencies, to address needs identified in project activities including interviews and local community events, was a highlight of the CSDC Project. Specifically, an issue of how relief grants were administered, resulting in inequitable distribution, was taken up by NCOSS with Service NSW, and change was achieved.

It's usually, you look back in a couple of years and you see some changes but getting that feedback from [NCOSS project team] that action was taken, and there was actually a real outcome with the grants.

While Peppercorn has a highly collaborative working relationship with local emergency management agencies including Hawkesbury Council and the RFS and SES, local stakeholders echoed concerns raised in other locations that there is no clear pathway for community priorities to influence policy.

A stakeholder from an emergency management agency, while hesitant to say that community requests could change policy without being tested (e.g. in surveys to understand broader social relevance) described a place-based impact of sharing and using risk and capability information strategically. In the context of formal community consultations being conducted by their agency:

Instead of inviting thousands of people I might have met but don't remember, I can leverage Peppercorn networks and increase the chances that vulnerable groups are included and consulted.

- **Participating organisations and community groups factor disaster risk information into their work and trial new risk reduction actions.**

Four project evaluation survey respondents (50%) said there were new or different actions they might take to reduce risk for vulnerable groups, and 6 respondents (60%) said there were new or different actions they might take to reduce risk for themselves or their service users. Examples provided:

I understand better how to stay informed hence being able to identify vulnerable clients and keep them informed to make sure they are planning evacuation.

Be more aware and connected to notifications/warnings. Ensure this is also the case for people I work with.

Multiple survey respondents identified that they will use P-CEP in future to assist individual vulnerable service users prepare a disaster readiness plan.

Local organisations in Glossodia and surrounding villages – an area prone to having road access cut during flood events – have formed a Services West of the River Committee following CSDC activities, particularly the breakfast event, to collaborate on disaster readiness and relief planning.

Every single organisation needs to be respected for where they're at. Awareness and education needs to come before risk assessment and strategic planning.

**b. Specifically, for 'Risk assessment and strategic planning' activities:**

- **Hazards, vulnerabilities, needs and aspirations in communities are identified and prioritized.**

This outcome area was a key focus in the Hawkesbury region. Peppercorn and Bligh Park completed and analysed 30 qualitative interviews with representatives from social service organisations and community representative groups on their experiences of disaster management, recovery and readiness, and what could be done better. From the data analysis, a summary report was produced and stakeholder questions and requests for changes to disaster management were submitted to relevant government and emergency management agencies for their information and response. Stakeholder engagement on findings from the interview process is described at Section **Error! Reference source not found.** below.

Analysis of interview data identified “collaboration, connection and communication” as three main areas of work for the local NGO social service sector and emergency management agencies to improve disaster readiness in the Hawkesbury especially for vulnerable community members.

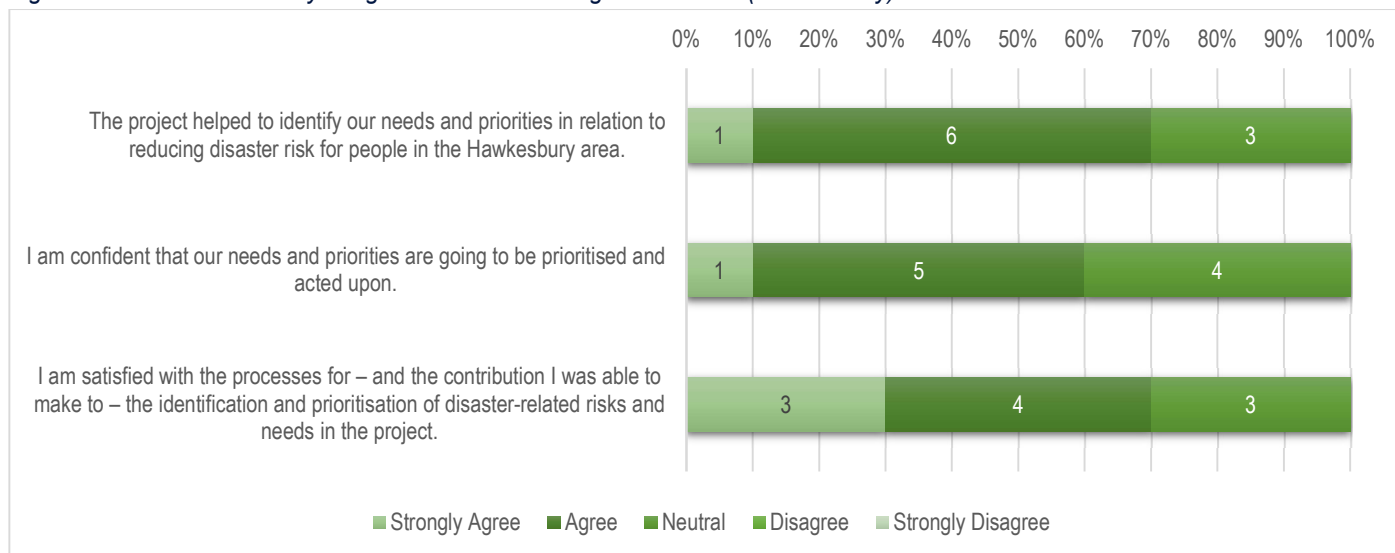
Small-group workshops at the Community Organisations Breakfast event also provided information on the sector’s disaster risks, needs and strengths.

There was a sense from internal and external stakeholder interviews (conducted in April/ early May) that the project “isn’t really complete”, in that there has not been time to prioritise or take action on the disaster risk-related hazards, vulnerabilities, strengths, needs and aspirations identified in the local interview process.

Of the 10 survey respondents from the target LGAs who answered questions about the CSDC project in the Hawkesbury:

- 6 (60%) agreed and 1 strongly agreed that the project “helped to identify our needs and priorities in relation to reducing disaster risk for people in the Hawkesbury area”, and no respondents disagreed (3 were neutral)
- 5 (50%) agreed and 1 strongly agreed that they were confident their “needs and priorities are going to be prioritised and acted upon”, and no respondents disagreed (4 were neutral).
- 4 (40%) agreed and 3 (30%) strongly agreed that they were “satisfied with the processes for – and the contribution I was able to make to – the identification and prioritisation of disaster-related risks and needs”, and no respondents disagreed (3 were neutral).

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Hawkesbury)



- **Risk reduction, resilience and adaptation activities are systematically embedded into business as usual practices**

A flood event that occurred in April 2024 demonstrated to some internal and external stakeholders that community members and also social service NGOs were more aware of where to go for accurate and up-to-date disaster information and were taking earlier action, for example to evacuate livestock in a coordinated way with individuals volunteering the use of their higher-ground paddocks. Social service NGOs were observed to more actively circulate disaster event updates from Council and the SES on social media and via email.

Other stakeholders saw this progress on embedded disaster readiness action as less directly attributable to the CSDC project. They pointed to more experience within the sector from frequent flood events in recent years and multiple disaster readiness initiatives active in the local area, including Hawkesbury Council's Disaster and Emergency Dashboard and its Recovery On Wheels network.

This context is also important because it points to a strength of Peppercorn and Bligh Park Community Services and their delivery of the CSDC project – these organisations have a strong working relationship with Council and are integral to emergency management agencies' efforts to embed disaster readiness in local communities, including some harder-to-reach groups.

When you say you're from [agency] people often go, "Oh, bloody [agency]." But then Peppercorn can come from a different angle and – they're Peppercorn. So where we can't get things across like preparedness, when it comes from Peppercorn those people that are negative will be receptive and they'll take it up... it allows you to make headway broader and faster in a community.

While the research says [emergency management agency] is a trusted voice, in reality if they hear something they're not going to ring [us] to validate it. They're going to ring family, neighbours and services like Peppercorn.

From a community development perspective an observed shift towards embedded risk reduction, resilience and adaptation activities among Hawkesbury social services and community members during the most recent flood event, is indicative that the CSDC project, as an integrated initiative, is on the right track.

The final project event at the Hawkesbury Connect Interagency, held after the project evaluation interview period, presented project report, tools and resources to attendees so that project findings and deliverables can continue to inform the work of social service NGOs in the Hawkesbury region.

- **Socially inclusive stakeholders and beneficiaries' engagement in risk identification and management.**

Peppercorn and Bligh Park Community Services engaged in multiple activities to strengthen socially inclusive stakeholders and beneficiaries' engagement in risk identification on management.

Peppercorn

- is an observer on Hawkesbury LEMC
  - attends and actively support activities of Hawkesbury Council's Recovery on Wheels disaster readiness interagency network
  - engages in joint planning and delivery of P-CEP and preparedness information events with agencies such as RFS, Council and Service NSW (My Aged Care).
  - consulted on local disaster management strategy including Heatwatch (WSROC) and Hawkesbury Nepean Valley Disaster Adaptation Plan.
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The 'Dismiss the Myths' Disaster Symposium was a critical point in the project to seek government and emergency management agencies' responses to community needs and priorities identified in project activities up to that point, but especially the prior sector workshop and the qualitative interview process. Agencies including the RFS, DCJ, NSWRA and Hawkesbury City Council were provided community questions and concerns before the Symposium and invited to attend in order to respond.

There were mixed perceptions among evaluation interview respondents of the extent to which community stakeholders' engagement with risk identification and management was recognised by emergency management at the Symposium. Not all stakeholders had a sense that they had been heard.

People didn't feel like they got transparency ... because a lot of the questions that they were asking, the panel sort-of said, "Oh look, I'd have to flick that upstairs to get that information. So all that's beyond my ability to answer," and then so people didn't feel that they came to the party, they didn't answer the question.

Hawkesbury stakeholders identified in interviews that Peppercorn's strategy to build community activities on the foundation of the P-CEP disaster planning service model was beneficial because it built community members' skills in recognising risks relevant to their own circumstances and vulnerabilities and planning for those risks.

## **Key Evaluation Question 2**

**What were the barriers in implementing the project? What are the future issues, uncertainties, interdependencies, and risks in upscaling and replicating the project?**

### **Service sector engagement**

Peppercorn has strong relationships with Hawkesbury community members and NGO social services, and has a positive local reputation for its long-standing work in disaster recovery support and P-CEP delivery and training.

However, their work to bring community groups, social service NGOs and emergency management agencies together to work on disaster preparedness for vulnerable groups, was completed in the context of ongoing trauma and recovery from consecutive flooding events. For some community representative groups in particular, previous disaster and ongoing recovery experiences have strained their relationships with emergency management agencies. The work of the CSDC project in initiating new ways of working together was complex.

### **Project structure**

Constraints related to the CSDC project's funding grant process and structure included: late commencement, following delayed NSWRA announcement of funded projects and the time taken to conduct the Expression of Interest process and contract local organisations; and the resource intensiveness of project meetings and reporting requirements, discussed further at Section **Error! Reference source not found.**, which Local Project staff saw as detracting from time available for delivery of project activities.



### **Key Evaluation Question 3**

**What lessons can we learn for future work in disaster risk reduction:**

- a. **for participating NGO social services?**
- b. **for Project Partners and funders?**
- c. **for Emergency Management and other local disaster management stakeholders?**

#### **Lessons for participating NGO social services**

NGO stakeholders reported that they made new connections and/or gained a broader understanding of their sector in the exercise of defining the social service ‘sector’ in their location that has service users who experience vulnerability in disaster events.

Some were reminded of the value of joining up and planning together – a practice impacted by COVID and funding shifts towards market-based service models and competitive tendering.

#### **Lessons for project partners and funders**

Learnings that project partners will take to any future iterations of this pilot primarily related to managing the dual timelines of place-based capacity building (best achieved gradually) and communicating program impacts to government bodies and funding agencies (best achieved promptly).

The scale of project ambitions across large geographical areas over short delivery timeframes was a salient lesson for project partners in the importance of robust project planning. Reporting and delivery pressures in within the project highlighted the need to ensure all activities are appropriately factored into project design and planning, including commissioning, contracting, relationship development and community development methods.

Project partners were interested in how the project might join up local action and state-wide advocacy in different ways in future. They acknowledged the level of government interest and were looking at ways to harness that while giving space for locations to actively listen to community stakeholders about disaster risk and risk reduction. At the local levels some stakeholders were more familiar with ways of working in this project area than others.

Some stakeholders have sought clarity on the project’s purpose and intended deliverables. Government agency representatives in particular were more likely to request in their survey and interview feedback the delivery of community-based plans or actions they could resource, support or otherwise join up with. This is another area where government processes mis-align with the project’s community development approach, but there was potential for these timelines to connect as sector events in the second half of the project built motivation, collective purpose and desire for community-wide planning and action.

#### **Lessons for emergency management and local disaster management stakeholders**

Most emergency management agency representatives who responded to evaluation surveys and interviews said that they connected with community members they had not been able to reach before, and that community engagement was much higher for them when partnering with NGOs. They saw the cost-effectiveness of joint disaster preparedness work with local social services and many sought better recognition of this from funding bodies and decision-makers in both sectors.

Some, on the other hand, sought better connection with project activities and goals, but this appeared also to be driven by their recognition of the value of joint work to influence community preparedness.

### **Broader lessons learned from the pilot**

Broader key messages, detailed below, were raised by diverse survey and interview participants in every location (and from central project stakeholders) – across government, emergency management, community and NGO social service sectors.

#### **Recognise the value of a community development approach to disaster readiness**

Stakeholders frequently expressed that the project activities in which they participated were highly valuable to them and to the work they did, and they wanted this value to be recognised. This encompassed the formal networking and joint planning and also the informal engagement that local host and partner organisations invested in as part of their community development approach. Stakeholders were positive that local community and NGO social service sector stakeholders could contribute more to disaster management, to mutual benefit of community and government.

It's going to cost a lot less money to fund someone already embedded in the community and already proactive in the emergency preparedness space.

There is currently a significant gap, with community development services and activities not funded for many communities, and community service organisations well placed to build local disaster preparedness capacity and capability closing down because of lack of funding.

#### **Invest time**

Stakeholders valued the CSDC project's investment in relationships and acknowledged that the establishment of trust can take more time than the pilot structure provided, particularly with vulnerable groups experiencing disaster-related trauma (see Section **Error! Reference source not found.**). The community development approach of the CSDC project requires investment of time, and stakeholders had positive experiences with this approach and want the time to do the work of networking and capacity building properly and – when it comes to vulnerable groups traumatised by disaster - ethically.

We can reduce time spent in recovery [after a disaster event] by doing this work properly, but it's a process. It doesn't happen overnight.

The CSDC project approach and activities challenged local host and partner organisations to build new ways of working between the emergency management and social services sectors. This has been slow and complex work, and stakeholders saw a lesson for government and funding agencies that time must be committed to this important area of work so that it can continue to be a local priority. The project has identified opportunities for social service organisations to collaborate with emergency management agencies to build their understanding of vulnerability in the context of disasters - with two-way learning and capacity building based on mutual respect and recognition of each other's expertise and skillset.

Related to time is consistency. Stakeholders want to see this work as ongoing in local communities, so that disaster planning and capacity building can account for the dynamic nature of disasters and for change in the NGO social services sector.

### **Resource disaster preparedness in everyone's work**

At every level of the project stakeholders have called for disaster preparedness to be resourced as part of core business for NGO social services managing risk for vulnerable groups, so that:

- organisations can afford to attend training (such as P-CEP), capacity-building (such as CSDC activities) and joint disaster planning
- organisations can document their lessons learned and plans for future events appropriately, so that working knowledge of disaster recovery is less likely to be lost after an event and more likely to inform future disaster planning
- there is more likely to be policy and practice development in the space.

There should be resources built into contracts for community wellbeing projects for disaster readiness. Then things can happen more quickly and easily when a disaster occurs.

We're in an environment where we are going to continue to be disaster affected, without a doubt. If you lose that knowledge and those skills and that information you then have to start again.

This work is long-term and it needs to be embedded in the community sector.

Part of value is recognition and measuring the contribution that community representative groups and agencies already make before, during and after a disaster.

The reality is we're not a 24/7 service. The preparedness infrastructure assumes that we are. Do not overestimate what NGO infrastructure offers to the community. They need to recognise the work we do and value and resource it properly.

### **Key Evaluation Question 4**

#### **What (if any) working relationships and/or networks are newly active or strengthened as a result of this project?**

In the Hawkesbury's project evaluation survey, 4 out of 9 respondents said the project had increased the number of people or organisations they worked with on disaster risk reduction. The examples they provided included:

- the Recovery on Wheels network run by Council
- NCOSS

- local working groups and reference groups.

One survey respondent who works in a government agency said:

The project has enabled me to connect with more local community stakeholders and raise awareness at regional and state forums of the needs of disaster affected people and communities. This may eventually lead to policy changes or protocols to improve services provided during and after disasters.

In response to the project evaluation question on whether their organisation works differently with other organisations as a result of the project, 30% of the 10 respondents who answered the question said yes. The examples they provided were: more connection with local community stakeholders; connection with Hawkesbury Council's Recovery on Wheels network; and connections with other community networks.

Of the 7 event feedback survey respondents from the Dismiss the Myths Disaster Knowledge Symposium:

- 5 agreed they had developed new connections for future action on disaster risk reduction, with examples spanning government, emergency management and social sector agencies
- 5 nominated 'networking' as something about the Symposium they found valuable to their organisation.

In interviews and surveys, Hawkesbury stakeholders reported that their involvement with CSDC project activities opened up new networks for them within the NGO social services sector, or with emergency management agencies.

Internal project stakeholders in the Hawkesbury sought more opportunity for cross-fertilisation between CSDC project locations and further opportunities for joint advocacy.

### **Key Evaluation Question 5**

**What (if any) local innovations and positive changes to disaster risk reduction can be described from this project?**

Peppercorn invested significant time and resources into conducting and analysing 30 qualitative interviews in order to have high quality local data on the disaster risk reduction needs of the local community. The subsequent summary report and key themes analysis provide a platform for future local and high-level advocacy and collaboration with local emergency management agencies.

During evaluation interviews for the Hawkesbury, an emergency management agency representative stated that their work is more likely to be guided by high-quality data on collective community needs and concerns, rather than questions from individuals, because it is difficult to dedicate resources to one-off issues. As a result of the CSDC project, the local community now has a data resource sufficiently trusted by community stakeholders and sufficiently reliable in quality for emergency management agencies, to potentially inform positive change in disaster risk reduction for vulnerable groups.

In this context, the Risks, Vulnerabilities and Assets (RIVA) mapping tool for each of the seven project LGAs commissioned by NCOSS, may be a useful resource for engaging emergency management agencies in CSDC project findings.