



newsletter

S E P T E M B E R 2 0 2 0

Welcome!

It is amazing how quickly the seasons come and go, making it hard to believe that Spring is already here. With the warmer weather comes many benefits, including the rejuvenation of plants and paddocks as well as the desire to get out and about more often.

Many locals have done just that by taking advantage of the Strength, Support & Community program through a range of activities such as yoga, tree planting, cooking classes, preparedness workshops and cooking classes. With the calendar of events continuing until the end of October, I encourage everyone to get some time out for yourself and get involved. Information and the full program can be found at our website at yoursay.macleay.nsw.gov.au/recovery.

The warmer months also reminds us that the bushfire season is upon us again. Given the devastation and fear we experienced last season it is only natural that people may be feeling increasingly anxious or nervous. Mental health clinicians advise this is a normal response and people should be aware of this when considering their own emotions or that of family or friends. However, if this anxiety begins to affect your ability to go about normal life, then it is time to seek assistance from a professional. Details of available support services can be found on page 8.

One thing that we can all do to help mentally prepare for the bushfire season is to make a Bushfire Survival Plan. Making a plan will help reduce the uncertainty and anxiety around what you and your family will do if a threat arises. If you take steps to get prepared, you will know what to do when you're at risk of fire.



And finally, Council has been very fortunate to receive additional funding from Resilience NSW to employ two part-time Community Recovery Project Officers for a period of twelve months. Chontelle Shore and Beth MacDonald, both of whom are already familiar faces within the community, have taken up these roles. You can read more about Chontelle and Beth, and the entire recovery team who work out of the Recovery Hub in this edition of our newsletter.

This multi-discipline team can assist you with advice and support on a range of recovery matters either at the Hub or when undertaking outreach services. The team continues to visit Willawarrin Hall each week between 9am – 11am and Bellbrook Park on the first Monday of each month between 1pm – 3pm.

Until next month, all the best

Jo McGoldrick
Coordinator Recovery



HELPING TO LEAD HER COMMUNITY

As the school principal of a small community Allison Mitchell wears many hats.

She is involved in church, helps with every community event including Anzac Day and is the first person to call when someone's cattle has got out onto the road.

"Being a principal you have to multitask," Allison said.

And when fire roared over the mountain towards the town of Bellbrook, Allison's first instinct was to help protect her community.

"It was a full on day, it started at 2.30pm when we got the first phone call

that students who live further up river had to go home as the fire was coming down to Bellbrook from Comara," Allison said.

"As I was leaving school I saw a few cars go around the corner and I asked them where they were going as there was a fire over that way and they told me they had to let cattle out.

"I said to them 'well give me your children, don't take them over there.'"

That's when Allison started collecting children while their

parents dealt with livestock and gathered their belongings.

Though her family was stuck in Kempsey she was not focused on her own property at Nulla creek but the safety of those in her community.

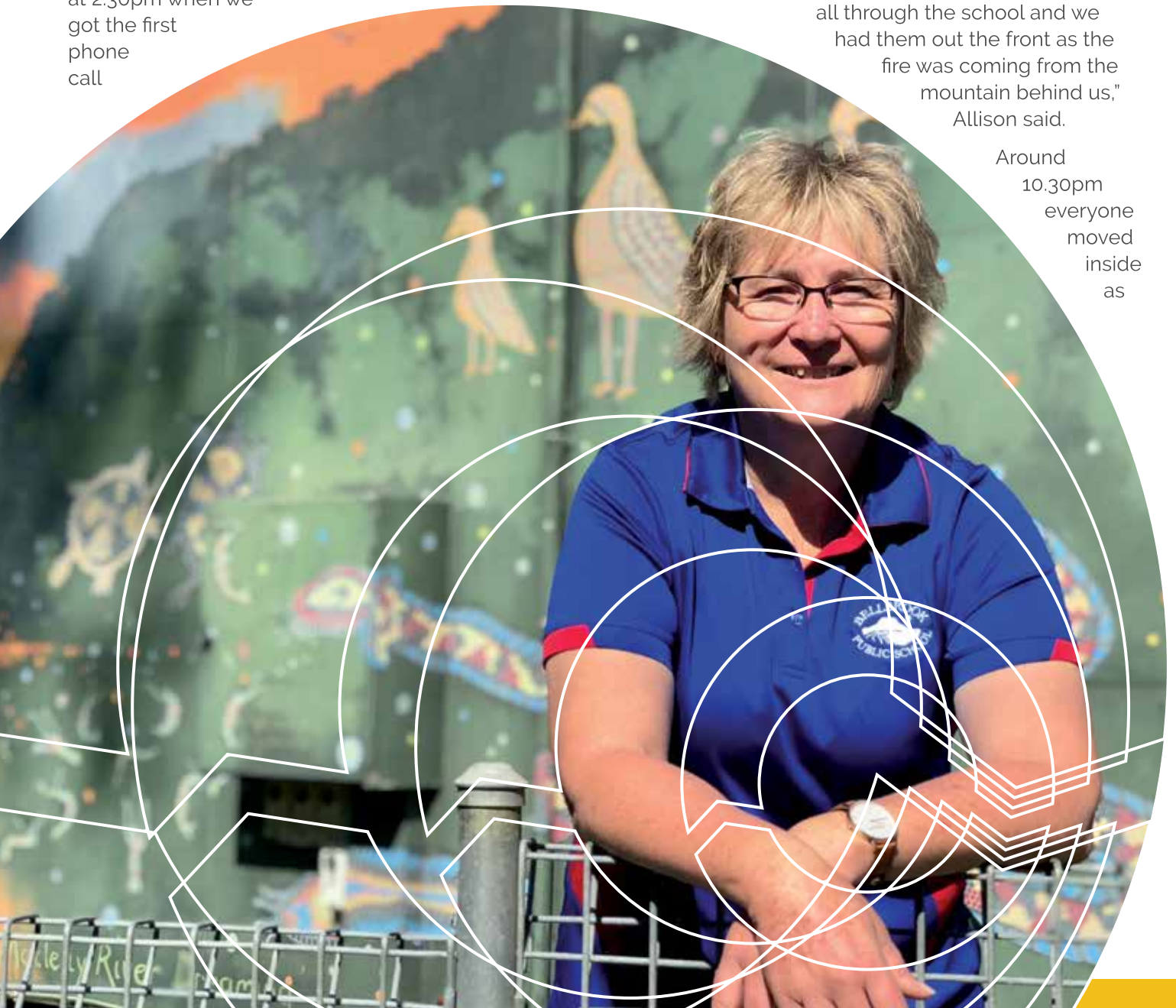
The weather then turned to the worse.

By 8pm, there were 70 people camped at the school - and at the peak of capacity there were 150.

They were on the front path, in the school buildings, on the other side of the road and in the spare paddock.

"We had people everywhere, all through the school and we had them out the front as the fire was coming from the mountain behind us," Allison said.

Around 10.30pm everyone moved inside as



the fire edged closer pushing the embers to fall within the school limits.

"We put as many people as we could inside, we had cats, dogs, birds, you name it," she said.

"We had some hairy moments."

Without power and telecommunications, they used word of mouth to get food to the school.

"We had no food, we are a small school of 28 with no canteen," she said.

"So we went through freezers to see what we could feed people for tea.

"Locals also went through their freezers and Shirley (Smart) from Bellbrook pub also brought up food."

At 11.30pm the fire had "cracked the hill" behind the school and roared down the mountain to the river flats on the opposite side of Bellbrook.

The river was so dry that there were fears it would jump across and head towards the town.

Just 30 minutes later the first fire brigade made it through the road from Willawarrin that was alight with fire.

And then the fire changed direction.

The next day everyone went to Bellbrook Pub for breakfast before they were eventually evacuated to Kempsey after a couple of attempts due to the road being blocked by fires.

"It was like a ghost town here for a couple of weeks," she said.

Meanwhile the fire burned around 80 per cent of her property at Nulla Creek.



Fortunately, their house was saved.

"There was a ring that stayed green around our place and a few neighbours," she said.

But Allison said that was just round one of the fires that burned for a couple of months in the region.

The school was returning back to town from swimming one Friday afternoon in December when they came down the mountain and saw a flame on the hill.

Jodi Wade called it in immediately.

"When we got to school the fire was coming over the mountain and I got a call that there were 20 odd head of cattle on the road," she said.

"Being a principal you multitask so I went to get them back in and when I looked back up the valley from where we came there was an absolute fireball heading towards us.

"I sent a video to my boss and said we were leaving.

"I have never evacuated the school in 30 years but we were going and we had everyone gone in 30 minutes."

She went home to Nulla to save their place but ended up at Slim Dusty's home and worked hard to battle the fire that surrounded it.

"That was the worse fire for us," she said.

"One whole end of Nulla burned and friends lost their houses."

Despite the loss and what they endured in those couple of months, she said the community had 'bounced back well' and the children were so resilient.

"It is a very different place, the ground is not as dry and we don't have the drought breaking us," she said.

"It will be different heading into this bushfire season as people are more aware and families are prepared having cleaned up their backyards."

MEET YOUR RECOVERY TEAM



Jo McGoldrick

Kempsey Shire Council Coordinator Recovery

How can we help? I'm responsible for coordinating Council's overall Recovery Action Plan, so I welcome any questions, on any topics local residents may have relating to recovery.

What inspires you in this recovery role? This role reinforces why I love to live and work in this fantastic community – passionate, friendly people and the beautiful landscapes.

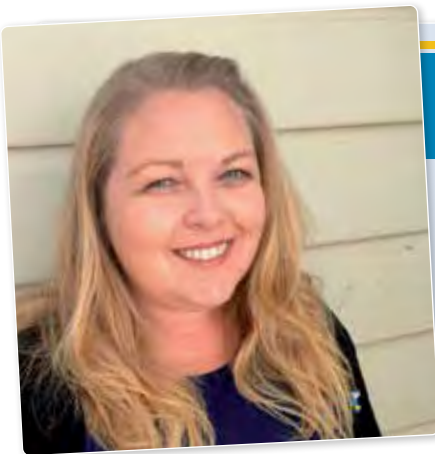


Beth MacDonald

Kempsey Shire Council Senior Project Officer

How can we help? Supporting people to build their resilience - individually and as a community is the main focus of my role.

What inspires you in this recovery role? I call the Macleay home so I feel fortunate to have a job working directly with my community, fostering relationships and encouraging us to be more connected.



Beck Box

Kempsey Shire Council Recovery Officer

How you can help? I am the friendly face here to help the best I can, putting people in touch with services and people to assist you.

What inspires you in this recovery role? Being able to hear the needs of residents and the community and finding ways to try and assist. Working with the Macleay Recovery Hub provides a unique opportunity to deliver multiple services in a private setting.



Chontelle Shore

Kempsey Shire Council Disaster Recovery Officer

Farewell! Sadly this is not a hello but a goodbye. After 9 months working with our Recovery Team, Chontelle has decided to move on to new projects. We wanted to take this chance to publicly thank her for her amazing efforts. Chontelle you have made an enormous difference to our community and we wish you all the best in the future.

Chontelle's inspiration has driven so much of her work with Recovery in the Macleay "I am inspired by the moments where grief and joy co-exist. Hearing people laugh when they haven't for a long while is rewarding."

BELLBROOK IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Bellbrook publican Shirley Smart has seen it all from drought to bushfires and now coronavirus.

But while she has seen the worst of Mother Nature, Shirley has also seen the "absolute best" from the community she has called home for three years.

"We had been through cyclones living in Western Australia but we had never been through fires," Shirley said.

"To see a fire come over the hill, we didn't know what to do at first. But everyone rallied and worked together to get through it and we couldn't have done it without the help of so many people."

When residents in the township of Bellbrook and its surrounds were evacuated to the local school as bushfires threatened homes and properties last year, Shirley knew they were going to be without power for some time.

So Shirley and her husband Daryl cleaned out the kitchen and took everything perishable up to Bellbrook Public School to feed the community.

"We fed everyone that night and the next morning for breakfast and didn't charge anyone anything, it's not something you do," Shirley said.

"But some weeks later people started walking into the pub handing us money.

"They were saying 'I don't know if you remember us but we were at the school when we evacuated and you fed us breakfast, we would like to give you something'.

"I told them 'no' and that I didn't want their money as we were just doing our bit to help out but they walked out and left the money on the counter.

"It was amazing, I had never seen anything like that before...I didn't know what to say."

The pub was without power for three weeks but during that time they set up generators with the help of Kempsey Shire Council and became a one-stop shop with information and donated food for people who had lost their homes or could not get to Kempsey due to road closures.

"Council staff arrived with truckloads of food, water and clothing

for people, the generosity was overwhelming," Shirley said.

Now as people recover, she said the bushfires had "actually brought the community together".

"The lay out of the place is that everyone is so far away from each other, I met people I didn't know existed," she said.

"Yes, there are still people suffering out there but it has also made people stronger."

Shirley also wanted to let the broader Macleay Valley know that the pub, general store and post office were open for business with COVID-19 restrictions in place.

"We came here three years ago in September from Broome," Shirley said.

"I always wanted to own a country pub and when we finished with trucks in Broome, my husband said 'go find that little country pub you have always wanted'.

"Our first year was great, then drought and bushfires hit us hard and now COVID-19 but with everything that has happened we want to keep the doors open of this old girl.

"We would love to have 200 people here and sit around the fire like old times but at the moment we have to adhere to health restrictions due to the pandemic.

"Just bear with us, we love it here, this is our community. We have fought for it in the fires so we want to fight for it now."



MEET YOUR LOCAL SUPPORT SERVICE PROVIDERS



Chris Farley

Senior Mental Health Clinician Bushfire Recovery

I can walk with you and your family or friends through the recovery journey, help you to understand how the bushfires may be affecting your mental health wellbeing, and link you with others who may also assist with your recovery.

What inspires me in this recovery role? In one sentence, I love my community.



Sarah Mason St Vincent de Paul Society Community Development Worker Bushfire Recovery

I work in collaboration with local community members and other organisations to address gaps from the initial response and help communities recover and rebuild over the long-term. My work here is about ensuring that anyone who has been overlooked or left behind is brought back into the fold and receive the support that they need.

The people inspire me. I am privileged to work in a space where I get to support individuals to have their needs met and empower our community members to develop locally-tailored recovery projects.

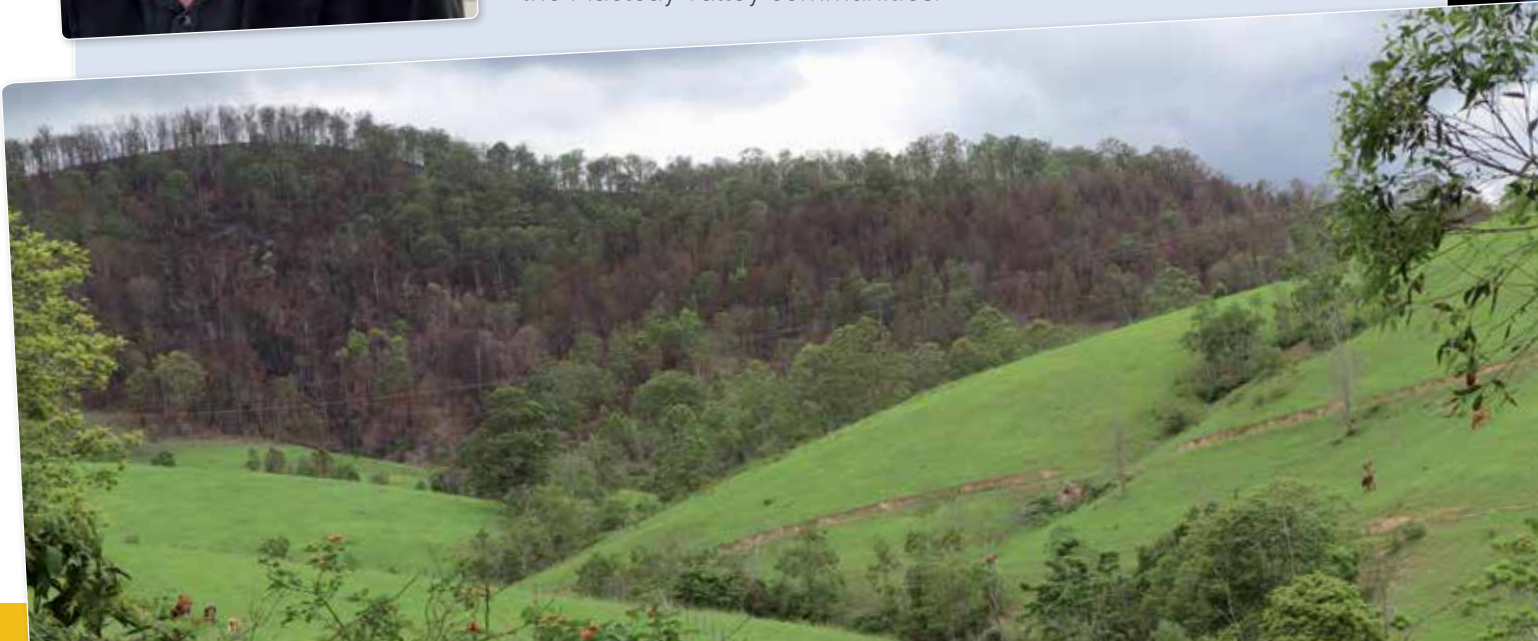


Rob Edwards

Recovery Officer Rural Recovery Support Service

I provide practical and personal support to help manage your recovery, link you with services and assist you in decision making and future planning.

I feel privileged to be able to support people who have experienced the trauma of natural disasters and I feel inspired to be part of a team that is making a positive difference in the recovery of the Macleay Valley communities.



BELLBROOK CABINS

Overlooking the idyllic banks of the Macleay River sit the Bellbrook Cabins.

From this position there is nothing but green lush mountains as far as the eye can see and crystal clear flowing waters below.

It's a far cry from the burnt landscape just 10 months ago.

"You could see the fire come across the ridge behind Bellbrook and head to Willawarrin," said David Wilcock who runs the cabins with his partner Michelle Armson.

That night they were told to gather at Bellbrook school as they were 'in real danger' where they were fed and looked after.

The next day they made the 'terrifying' journey down to Kempsey with police escort as the fire lapped the side of the road.

"All the scrub on the side of the road was on fire," he said.

They then spent 10 days at Kempsey Showground before they were allowed back home.

"We will never forget the kindness we were shown," he said.

"It was trying but everyone was so welcoming."

When they went home they were met with a resilient community where strangers and neighbours helped those in need.

They did everything from feeding animals to bringing fodder for cattle and there was even a band of helpers working around the block to cook meals for the Bellbrook Rural Fire Bridge.

"We really saw the best of the community, who rallied around each other," he said.



The couple want to send a message of thanks to the community they have been part of for seven years having owned the cabins for more than three and previously managed the general store.

They also want those in the region to know that they are open for business and have a COVID-19 safety plan in place.

"There is nothing better than sitting on the verandah of the cabins watching a sunset over the mighty Macleay," Mr Wilcock said.

"This is our backyard and we are so fortunate to be able to look at this every day of the week."



MACLEAY VALLEY RECOVERY HUB

The Macleay Valley Recovery Hub brings key support services together under one roof. Council's dedicated Recovery team as well as other support services such as the Department of Primary Industries, NSW Health services and St Vincent de Paul are all on site to assist the community with their recovery needs.

They can help you connect with the relevant government agencies and local support services. No appointment is necessary, simply drop in for a cuppa and a chat. The Hub is open Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 4pm and is located at 57 Elbow St, West Kempsey (next door to Service NSW).



TREE PLANTING FOR SUCCESS

In recent times our Shire has endured drought, bushfires and storms. Rejuvenating our local landscape remains a priority in the recovery process. Council has partnered with Macleay Landcare to deliver practical workshops to residents to help them improve the success rate of tree plantings on their properties. Each household who signs up is eligible for \$150 worth of FREE trees. Numbers are limited. Please register by going to yoursay.macleay.nsw.gov.au/RECOVERY



**'WARU' 132 KESBYS RD
HICKEYS CREEK**

Friday 25 September, 10-midday

**ADDRESS PROVIDED
ON REGISTRATION**

Saturday 17 October, 10-midday

FREE
trees valued
at \$150

P. 02 6566 3200 F. 02 6566 3205 E. ksc@kempsey.nsw.gov.au
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