

Community Development within fire recovery – opportunities

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Recovery for individuals and communities has not meant returning to their pre-disaster state, rather a process of community evolution towards a new and changed state. The recovery process is complex, protracted and dynamic, and has the potential to shape a community, both in a negative and a positive sense.

Community development models continue to evolve as a way to address individual's and communities' needs, whilst supporting growth and opportunities throughout the immediate, medium and longer term recovery process.

Community development was first used in Victoria after the Ash Wednesday fires, and has been used with good effect after a number of wildfire events, including the Dandenong ranges bushfires in 1997, the Alpine Fires in 2003, the Canberra Fires in 2003, the Grampians Fires in Victoria (2006), and the Alpine fires in 2006/7 and the east Coast Fires in Tasmania in 2006. Community development has also been utilised in other post emergency settings, including flood, windstorms and drought.

Individuals and communities feel a sense of dis-equilibrium as a result of their experiences from a disaster and experience a strong reflective stage whilst processing their experiences. These sensations can actually enhance a community's ability to address change.

Community development processes ensure that the issues and goals are identified by the recovering communities, and through gaining support from the communities to address these issues they can continue to be addressed into the future.

This process will identify groups, who are already engaged in formulating community responses to the disaster and its effects on the broader community, and who are willing to take on the role of leadership.

This paper will use case studies from the recent wildfire events to highlight the benefits of applying community development in the post emergency or recovery setting.

Key Words

Community development, community engagement, bushfire recovery