



Australian Institute for  
**Disaster Resilience**

# New South Wales and ACT DRANZSEN Forum 2018

Key notes and outcomes

[aidr.org.au](http://aidr.org.au) | [knowledge.aidr.org.au](http://knowledge.aidr.org.au) | [schools.aidr.org.au](http://schools.aidr.org.au)



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## Education for Young People Program

The AIDR Education for Young People supports the implementation of effective and sustainable disaster resilience education initiatives which empower and give voice to young people throughout Australia.

The Disaster Resilience Australian-New Zealand School Education Network (DRANZSEN) seeks to:

- communicate a shared understanding of Disaster Resilience Education (DRE) connected to international frameworks and relevant to an Australian context
- build the capacity of teachers and other educators to deliver effective and sustainable DRE to young people, informed by contemporary research and aligned with the Australian Curriculum
- provide a forum for schools, emergency management agencies and community organisations in the network to share knowledge, good practice and strategic objectives related to DRE
- facilitate networking and collaboration between stakeholders in the design and delivery of new DRE initiatives.

## Forum program

9:30am	Registration, including morning tea
10:00am	Welcome, acknowledgement of country, and opening remarks <i>Anthony Bradstreet, NSW Rural Fire Service</i>
10:10am	Emergency Management in Schools: Keeping Kids Safe <i>Tony McArthur, Catholic Education NSW</i>
10:50am	Case Study: St Thomas Aquinas Primary School <i>Sergio Rosato, St Thomas Aquinas Primary School</i>
11:10am	Leg stretch and networking break
11:25am	NSW Rural Fire Service School Communities Engagement Strategy <i>Tony Jarrett, NSW Rural Fire Service</i>
11:55am	Young people and schools in community recovery <i>Lisa Gibbs, University of Melbourne</i>
1:00pm	Lunch and networking break
1:45pm	The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience: Education for Young People Program <i>Brigid Little, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR)</i>
2:00pm	Education for Risk-Reduction: The Flood Strategy
2:20pm	Community recovery in New South Wales <i>Rebecca Teale-Sinclair, The Australian Red Cross</i>
2:45pm	Networking and evaluation
3:00pm	Closing remarks, evaluation and feedback

## Organisations represented

Association of Independent Schools NSW (1)	Australian Red Cross (2)
Catholic Education NSW (1)	Fire and Rescue NSW (1)
Hurlstone Agricultural High School (2)	Infrastructure NSW (1)
Leva Consulting (1)	NSW Rural Fire Service (10)
NSW State Emergency Service (2)	St Thomas Aquinas Primary School (1)
Toongabbie Christian College (3)	University of Melbourne (1)
Xavier College (1)	AIDR (2)
Total: 29	

## Attendance profile

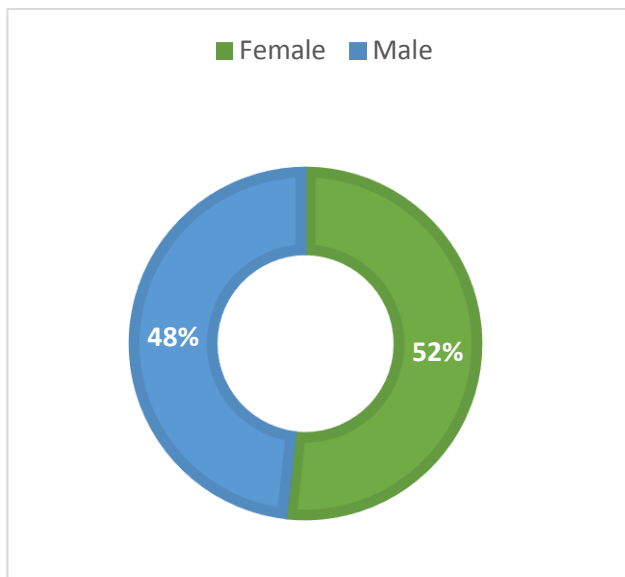


Figure 1: Audience profile by gender

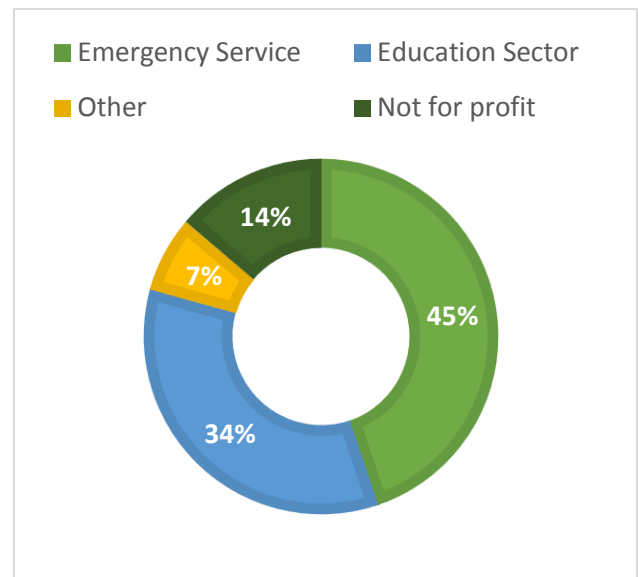


Figure 2: Audience profile by sector representation



## Emergency Management in Schools: Keeping Kids Safe

Tony McArthur from Catholic Education NSW discussed with the group how Catholic Education NSW works with schools to improve emergency management in schools and keep students safe.

Tony touched on the reasons why he supports DRANZSEN, and how resilience is a construct to explain behaviour in individuals and communities. Key points:

- schools concentrate the most vulnerable members of our communities
- disaster resilience in schools is promoted by effective emergency management
- schools are effective conduits for community preparation promoting disaster resilience.

Schools are expected to take responsibility for communication of emergency information and management of emergency planning and preparedness, however schools and their staff have no professional training in emergency management. Catholic Education NSW has been working with schools to review existing arrangements and promote:

- cross-sectional coordination and cooperation
- school emergency management plans based on accurate risk assessments
- links between state and local emergency services
- training for school executive staff
- testing of emergency plans through 'rehearsals' and desktop exercises

## Case Study: St Thomas Aquinas Primary School

St Thomas Aquinas Primary School Principal, Sergio Rosato, joined the forum to provide a first-hand account of school emergency response from his experiences in 2013, when the school lay in the direct path of a bushfire.

St Thomas Aquinas has approximately 600 students and 45 staff and is in the lower Blue Mountain region.

On 17 October 2013, the Blue Mountains region was covered in smoke from nearby bushfires burning in Lithgow, and those fires posed no immediate threat to the school or surrounding community. The school leadership continued to check on the risk throughout the morning and monitored air quality prior to allowing students to play outdoors.

Sergio explained that prior to lunch, he made the call to not allow students into the playground as the air quality was poor, and the winds were high. Students and staff were instructed that lunchtime activities were to occur indoors on this day.

During the lunch break, Sergio got a call from a colleague from St Columba's College, just 1km up the road and within the same bushfire site, with more than 1000 students and 120 staff. The call was to inform that flames from a fast-moving bushfire could be seen from the St Columba's College bell tower. The fire was caused by power lines falling onto trees in high winds.

Teachers were instructed to escort their classes to the school hall, where other staff and school visitors joined. Once all students, staff and visitors were accounted for, the school leadership began implementing the procedures practised during drills for this scenario. The school leadership was informed through calls to Triple Zero that due to the intensity of the bushfire situation in the region, there would be no firefighting resources to attend the school.

In consultation with a nearby police officer, the decision to evacuate the school was made. Due to the intensity of the fire, access by vehicle was not possible, and the school evacuation would have to occur on foot. St Columba's College was not able to evacuate in time and sheltered in place.

Grade by grade, teachers and school staff walked students out of a side entrance to the school and through side streets towards the local shopping centre. Coincidentally, the route taken was the same as the one taken during the school walkathon just two weeks prior. As the students and teachers were walking to their safe shelter, they could see, hear and smell the emergency unfolding around them. Emergency service lights and sirens could be heard in the distance, helicopters flew overhead, and strong smoke began to close in around them.

During the evacuations, students remained calm, and showed maturity beyond their years. Students were attentive, worked as a team and were cooperative throughout the evacuation. The staff went above and beyond expectations to ensure the safety of the students.

In the aftermath of the fire, the school community worked hard to re-establish a routine for the students. The focus for teachers was to support students and turn an awful experience into something through which the school community could build resilience and knowledge.

Twelve months after the fires, the school community organised a 'thanksgiving ceremony' to commemorate the fires. The aim of the thanksgiving ceremony was to bring the community together, make connections and strengthen relationships, and to provide an opportunity to have fun.

The school took part in the *Stormbird* Program during 2014, providing an opportunity for the students to share their experiences of change and loss in small group workshops facilitated by their teacher. The *Stormbird* Program was developed after the Canberra fires of 2003, the Victorian fires of 2009 and the floods up in the Lochinvar valley in 2011. More information about the Songbird Program can be found here:

<https://www.goodgrief.org.au/stormbirds>

## NSW Rural Fire Service School Communities Engagement Strategy

Tony Jarrett presented the NSW Rural Fire Service *School Communities Engagement Strategy* to the group. The strategy has been developed in consultation with teachers, students, education sector staff, professional associations and NSW Rural Fire Service members across New South Wales.

The strategy aims to deliver a program of activities and supporting resources that promote learning to reduce the risk of fire and other emergencies in communities.

NSW school communities at a glance:

- 3,136 schools in total
- 885 schools located within bushfire prone areas
- 4,000 teachers will be teaching 100,000 students about bushfire at Stage 3 in 2018  
(see NSW syllabus: <https://syllabus.nesa.nsw.edu.au/hsie/geography-k10/content/1183/>)

Information on the strategy is available by contacting the NSW Rural Fire Service Community Engagement Team  
E: [community.engagement@rfs.gov.au](mailto:community.engagement@rfs.gov.au) | T: 02 8741 5555

## Young people and schools in community recovery

Professor Lisa Gibbs from the University of Melbourne presented to the forum about the role of young people and schools in community recovery.

In the February 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, 35 children and young people lost their lives and 16 were orphaned. 78 primary schools were located within high impact areas.

In the aftermath of a disaster experience, trauma becomes the background for a 'new normal' for children and young people. They seek safety and stability in their school environments.

Some school level impacts after the fires included changes in student behaviour, concentration difficulties and developmental delays, as well as shared trauma between students and staff. School social and learning environments were changed for years after the event.

A review of recovery initiatives by age revealed the following:

- 57% targeted only secondary school students
- 13% targeted primary and secondary school students
- 3% targeted preschool students
- 2% targeted primary school only, or primary and preschool
- 19% targeted all age groups
- 6% targeted parents, teacher and service providers

Professor Gibbs also presented on the Victorian Country Fire Authority's (CFA) Survive and Thrive Program. The program was successful in developing children's understanding of the reality of living in a bushfire environment:

- children recognised the need for different safety behaviours in different contexts
- children came to view themselves as sharing in expert knowledge of bushfire safety
- children understood emotional impact of a danger situation and their capacity to manage their emotions
- children's reports of their actual responses to the threat of a real bushfire demonstrated they used their new knowledge and skills

Recommendations from Professor Gibbs' presentation on approaches to disaster resilience education in a recovery context:

- restore a sense of safety and stability
- implement school-based programs for social and emotional learning
- be aware that additional academic support may be needed
- focus on learning to live in a risk environment
- provide opportunities for students to contribute
- build the evidence-base for resilience programs



## Education for Risk-Reduction: The Flood Strategy

Kathy Driscoll from Infrastructure NSW outlined the Young People's Engagement strategy as part of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Risk Management Project.

Infrastructure NSW has:

- worked with researchers over a period of 2-3 years to develop professional learning activities and resources for educators
- engaged with schools, youth clubs and organisations, through community events, competitions, and emergency management planning in schools
- explored ways to engage through creative learning approaches such as arts and music programs
- engaged with curriculum advisory committees in the state

## Emergency planning for recovery

Rebecca Teale-Sinclair presented to the group on the role the Australian Red Cross plays in post-event recovery in New South Wales.

The Pillowcase Project is a disaster resilience education program designed to help children prepare psychologically and practically for an emergency. The 60-minute workshop is designed especially for school students aged eight to ten (Years 3 and 4). The aim of the program is to create a generation of children who are aware of the importance of personal preparedness, are empowered to act to prepare for emergencies, and who share what they have learnt with friends and loved ones.

American Red Cross developed the Pillowcase Project in 2013. Australia was one of six countries to participate in the international pilot of this program (United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Peru, Vietnam and Mexico).

Since December 2016, the Pillowcase Project has been delivered to 23165 students in 438 schools in all states and territories.

For more information about the Pillowcase Project, including the delivery and history, visit the [Australian Red Cross website](#)

# Forum evaluation

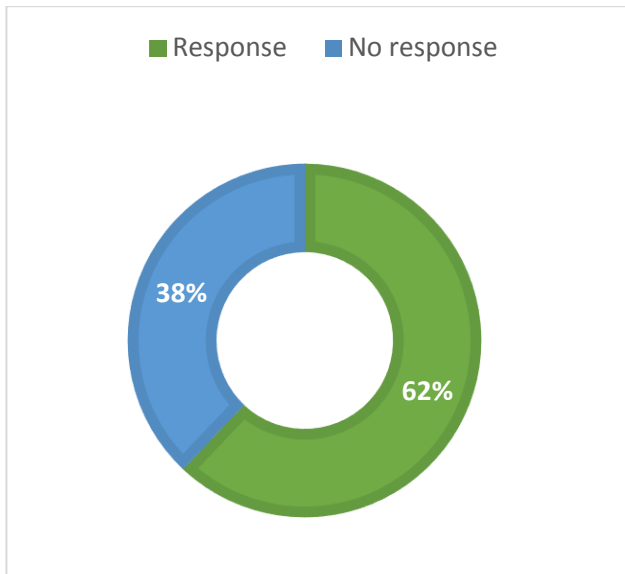


Figure 3: Response rate

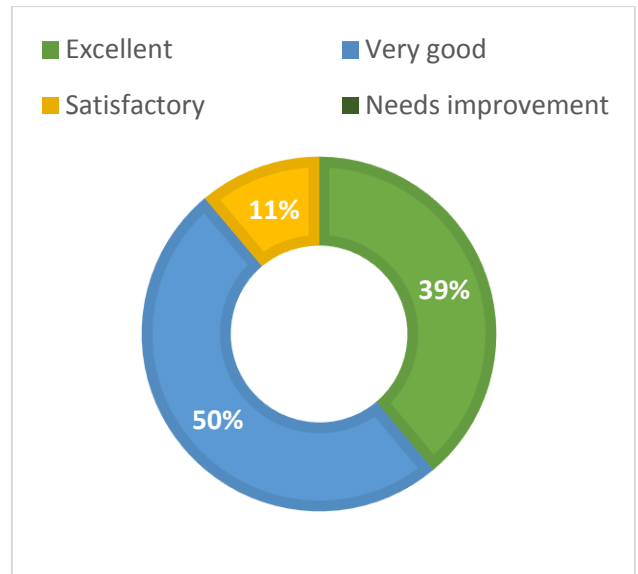


Figure 4: Value of NSW/ACT DRANZSEN forum

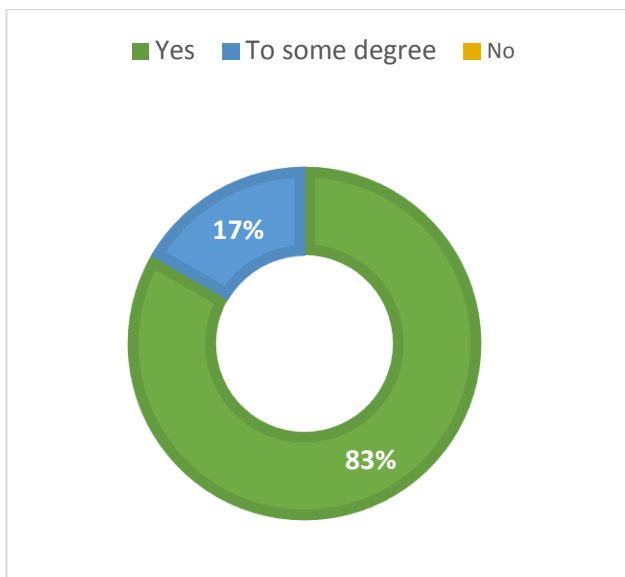


Figure 5: Increase of knowledge of EM in schools

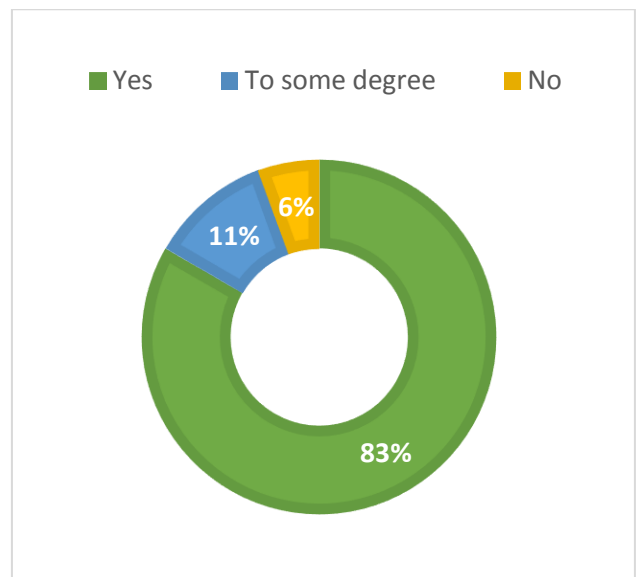


Figure 6: Provide opportunity to network with others

## Comments

The quality of speakers, their experience and presentation were very high

The guest speakers were fantastic. Really enjoyed listening to Lisa's knowledge into Black Saturday Bushfires

I really enjoyed the human element and storytelling. It was very powerful

Enjoyed the first-hand account from Sergio on the impact of fire on his school and personal life

Always a privilege to attend these forums

I will be able to take the information I gained to the schools in my area