

# Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

## Working with and walking alongside - Protective factors to support communities recovering from adverse experiences

Presented by Rita Johnson and Sally Hodges

### Rita Johnson

Welcome everyone to this session of the Be You virtual conference, 2021 titled 'Walking with and working alongside: protective factors to support communities recovering from adverse experiences.' My name is Rita Johnson and a contact liaison officer with the Be You Bushfire Response Program. My colleague with me today is Sally Hodges, who is also a contact liaison officer, and we work with early learning communities. So today what we'll be doing is sharing some stories of the bushfire recovery journey and some practical examples of the community development principles that underpin all the work we do here at Be You.

So it does feel a bit funny talking about bushfire right now, because as most of you all know, we've had a huge rain event along the east coast of New South Wales, and many communities have been flooded out. These are also some of the communities that we've been working with bushfire recovery. So I just want to acknowledge that some of you might be in those areas that have really had a lot of rainfall and may be struggling and had some losses. So I just want to acknowledge that and know that our hearts are all with you, and that if your service or school does need well being support, you can always contact Be You.

So I'll begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the country on where we sit today and in Sydney, and that's the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. And I pay my respects to Elders past and present. You can do your own acknowledgement by putting the name of the country you are on into the chat. And if you don't know which country you're on, there's a link to the map of Indigenous Australia in the chat. For me, acknowledgement of country and acknowledgement of the wisdom of the Aboriginal Elders of Australia was actually a really important part of my own recovery from the trauma around the bushfires in 2020. I heard an Aboriginal Elder say that we need to turn to the wisdom of Elders past and present, and just hearing that statement reminded me that we do have a lot of wisdom about how to take care of our land, how to take care of our country and how to recover. And I really want to acknowledge that.

### Sally Hodges

For those of you who don't know about Be You, or haven't been to one of our virtual conferences before. Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators, and is the organiser of this conference. It's led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace. It's completely free, available to every educator, early learning service and school in Australia, Be You empowers educators to support

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children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing and educators own mental health. It offers resources to individual educators, including professional learning fact sheets, webinars, and more. Be You provides tools and processes to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing. Be You consultants can guide you through these Be You resources and connect you with educator networks.

## Rita Johnson

So in this two day, Be You virtual conference, we have been hearing and we'll continue to hear from a range of experts, including educators. And there's been two key themes, educator wellbeing, and inclusion, and we've had 10 sessions over the last two days. So yesterday we heard about educator wellbeing. And if you missed those sessions yesterday, the recordings will be up on the Be You website in the near future. The theme for the session today, the sessions today is inclusion in learning communities. Now, most of the sessions of the two day conference are aimed at an individual learning stage, either early learning, primary school or secondary school or out of school hours care. But this session is relevant to all of those sectors.

## Sally Hodges

We will be giving a brief overview of the program today, starting with the background of the bushfire response program and what we've learned about responding to climate emergencies. We will discuss community development principles, and we'll explain these principles a little bit more by sharing practical examples. We'll look at emergency management, how to prepare, respond, and recover. There will be polls and reflective questions throughout, and your questions and reflections are welcome in the chat throughout the session. Now, a reminder for today, when we talk about learning communities, we are referring to all early learning services out of hours school care services, primary and high schools. And by educators, we mean early childhood educators and primary and high school teachers.

Today, you will be hearing stories of inclusion and recovery from last summer's bushfires. I think that most Australians were affected or impacted in some way, right now whether you feel like you were not at all impacted or impacted a great deal, you might find these stories, bring up some difficult feelings and memories. If this is the case, take gentle care of these feelings, acknowledge them and talk to a trusted friend, colleague or family member or seek professional help. The federal government has funded 10 free counselling sessions on top of any mental health care plan that you may already have to anyone who feels that they were affected by last summer's bushfires. These free sessions are available until the end of the year. There's a link in the chat for more information about this, and please feel free to share with the rest of your learning community.

## Rita Johnson

So, let's pop that, a poll up. So, let's find out a little bit more about your experience, about the experience of the people who are watching this webinar. And so the poll says, to what extent do you think or feel your school or early learning community was impacted by bushfires last year? A great deal, quite a lot, a moderate amount, a little bit or not at all. And Sally's going to keep an eye on the responses.

One of the things that's interesting about this question is, it often depends on the time that it's asked. So you can think you were not impacted. And then you find out later that you were. And really that's... We've got a colleague that works with us who only just realised by doing this bushfire work, that they were actually impacted by the Black Saturday fires in Victoria. And that was a number of years ago. So, and then Sally, there also some stories about people who when they were offered support from the Be You bushfire program, they said, no, no, we're fine. You know, the fires didn't really come near us. And yet they had educators or families who maybe lost their homes, but they thought that some other people were more impacted. So yeah, so it's really hard to judge, but just for today, what's the result for our poll, Sally?

## Sally Hodges

Rita, it's quite reflective to what you were saying. A lot of people are saying a little bit or a moderate amount, and I'm sure a bit of that is saying, oh, but people were more affected than me and more impacted than me. And it's often reminders, seeing images or driving past fire affected areas, that make you, I think, remember the severity of the fires.

## Rita Johnson

Yeah, and certainly talking about bushfire was one of my triggers because as I said earlier yeah, I was in Sydney during the fires. But at the time I was very affected by the bushfires in the snowy mountains because that's where I grew up. And, you know, I see that's the place where I usually feel safe and calm and, and really, really good. And so that was really disturbing, but I didn't think about it too much. It was just too much information. And then along came COVID so then I could quite easily put it out of my mind. And so when I started this work and we had our first two training sessions, they were online training sessions. In both of them I had to turn off my camera and sound because I just literally burst into tears. Like not just a few tears running down my face, but, you know, there was a lot of crying and it was... And I was shocked by my response because I thought I was fine. So, it was a trigger of talking about the fires that brought up how I was really feeling.

## Sally Hodges

And like you mentioned, with Coronavirus, a lot of people felt like their recovery was kind of stopped at that point. And they were forgotten about in around March of last year, but a lot of people are saying a little bit or a moderate amount, and there's a few people, of course, who are up the more severe end of being impacted.

## Rita Johnson

Yeah, and those people, for those people who were, or are still feeling severely impacted, remember, you know, part of our message is, you know, to make sure you get the help that you need. And there are always, there are a lot of support services around. And we'll talk a little bit more of that about those. So, one of the other things is around how much you're impacted or affected. It's about preparation and mindset. And I have a colleague who lives up in the mountains and I asked her how she was in the Blue Mountains. And she said, "Oh, I'm fine. I've lived in the mountains for 20 years. We've been evacuated six times. And I've decided if the house burns down, it's fine, it's just stuff. And all the things that I don't want to lose in a fire are there down at my mother's place." So, you know, being prepared and having a mindset that works for you is a really important tool, a protective factor around any sort of natural disaster. And we're going to unpack that a little bit more as we go.

So what is the bushfire response program? Where did it come from? Why does it exist? So when we looked into this, we find that despite children making up 19% of the population, vulnerable people like children and people with disability receive only one paragraph in the Australian Attorney General's departments, disaster health handbook, one paragraph. So this is really concerning because vulnerable people and especially children are much more at risk of dying and injury, and they're especially vulnerable to short, medium, and long-term trauma responses.

The impact that trauma can have on wellbeing, learning and social development has now been widely documented. So the Be You Bushfire Response Program deliberately aims to promote the wellbeing of children and young people. And at the same time, acknowledges the vital role that educators play in that wellbeing. And it addresses educator wellbeing as well. So, in early 2020, the Australian government funded the Be You bushfire response program to provide targeted mental health support to all early learning services, out of school hours care, primary schools and high schools affected by the 2019/2020 bushfires.

And this was very specific funding that was for an 18-month period and ends in June this year. And the Be You Bushfire Response Program is part of the broader Be You initiative that is led by Beyond Blue with the delivery partners of Early Childhood Australia, Headspace. And in this particular program, Emerging Minds. And we'll say a little bit more about what Emerging Minds is a little later. So the communities targeted for support sit across 13 different regions through New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria, and we've popped the details of those regions into chat.

So, we've just talked about what is the Be You Bushfire Response Program. So what do we actually do? So you should be seeing a slide now with five circles. The first four circles equal the Bushfire Response Program. And so there's four key elements in the program. We've got contact liaison officers like Sally and myself. And what we do is we deliver trauma support and guidance to early learning services and schools.

We support them in that recovery planning, which I've mentioned earlier about being prepared and having a plan.

And we support them in community support, service mapping, and that last element is about helping services find out more about what's available to them in terms of supports, whether it's a psychologist, whether it's play therapy, or whatever. So they're the four things that the Bushfire Response Program does, offers and does. And this is actually the first time that this type of support has been made available in the educators sector. So it was a new experience for everyone on the team. And I think it's actually really wonderful that you know, Be You was able to deliver the Bushfire Response Program to so many early learning services and schools who were in such need throughout 2020. So for the rest of the webinar, our aim is to unpack the concepts and principles that we've been, we're talking about, but rather through stories, hopefully through some stories, rather than a lot of dry information. And there will be plenty of links in chat. So let's look at number one, the contact liaison officer and Sally, can you tell us a little bit about your experience of being a contact liaison officer and what your role entailed?

### Sally Hodges

Yeah, so I come from an education background. So it took some real getting used to the contact liaison officer role, I had to get my head around Community Development principles, a new role and a brand new project. It also involved a lot of travel. So I was very lucky to be able to go in and visit many of the Early Learning Services that I was working with. But of course, many of the other contact liaison officers were restricted by Coronavirus, and they offered their support online or over the phone.

### Rita Johnson

And so when you went and visited Early Learning Services, what did you actually do?

### Sally Hodges

So the first thing a lot of these services wanted, the principals and directors identified self care as a real priority. So we went and delivered educator self care and wellbeing sessions. And in these sessions, there was a lot of sharing of stories. And a lot of the contact liaison officers and I'm including myself in this we had to resist the urge to try and fix what was happening. But we were trained in understanding that it wasn't about fixing or doing. It was about compassionate listening. It was a real learning of mine that listening was enough that just holding that space was a big part of healing.

### Rita Johnson

Yeah, that was my learning curve as well, Sally, because when I started this work, I thought, well, how am I supposed to help these people? What will I do? And I heard that expression listening is healing. And you know, I saw that over and over again, just by listening to the stories by putting them down on paper so that people could see that they actually, their experiences existed because I had scribed you know, them and they existed in time and space and they were real. That that was the first step to actually letting them go and moving on.

So many of our colleagues call our roll that of a critical friend. And traditionally a critical friend is that professional or friend who gives you that positive critical feedback that when we were preparing for the webinar, and I thought about that term critical friend, I realised that in the Bushfire Response Program, we were also a friend at a critical time. And, you know, I think all of us probably have had situations where we've sat quietly and listened to people's stories and witnessed their tears and just breathed with them and open our hearts to them so that they can then start thinking about what is the next best step for their own healing and recovery. So Sally, the second part of the Bushfire Response Program is about that trauma support and guidance, and the educator wellbeing is a part of that. Can you say a little bit more about what else we did in that role?

### Sally Hodges

Yeah, so after the educator self care and well being sessions, we often revisited so either in person or online, the services and schools and offered trauma support and guidance, which was based on the emerging minds community trauma toolkit, and there's a link to that toolkit in chat. So in the lead up to the anniversary of the fires, we had a lot of discussions about preparing children through open age appropriate

dialogue and normalising their responses, especially to triggers. So some of the triggers for the fire were direct reminders of the event such as smoke, sirens, hot windy days, fire trucks. But Rita, I know you experienced some other triggers in the services that you were working with.

### Rita Johnson

Yeah, particularly up in the mountains. In the winter fog was a big trigger. You know, there are a number of stories of children, you know, coming in and saying, Is there a fire and what they were really seeing was fog. And so one of the strategies in that moment would be to really talk about the difference between you know smoke and fire and the difference in the smell, the difference in the heat in the air, the difference in the sensation of the moisture of the fog and the dryness of the smoke. So having these conversations with children or helping educators have these conversations with children was really a strong part of that trauma support and guidance, I know here in the Blue Mountains there was some fires also during this summer even though it was a wet summer and a lot of the children got quite distressed when they heard the helicopters coming over there again.

One of the key things that we talked about and tried to support educators with was to be a secure base. All the evidence shows that when there is a natural disaster, when the adult that is with the child be they a young child or a young person, when the adult is strong, calm and self regulated and has a plan and can say with confidence, we have a plan, I know how to keep you safe this is what we're going to do and particularly if they've practiced their plan then those children aren't going to have such strong emotional responses. Yes they might still feel frightened but they won't perhaps feel as terrified as they would if there's no secure adult, no one they can rely on. So a lot of the work that we do is about supporting the educators to be that strong, secure base.

### Sally Hodges

Rita, I've just seen a question in chat about practical supports, one practical support that I'd like to recommend is the BETLS observation tool. So BETLS stands for behaviour, emotions, thoughts, learning and social relationships and it's a template designed to help organise your observations about those areas. So organising observations about behaviour, emotions, thoughts, learning and social relationships and we'll put a link to that in the chat as well, the BETLS observation tool.

### Rita Johnson

So we've talked about what is Bushfire Response Program and now we're moving through what do we actually do and we've looked at the first two elements the contact liaison officer and the community, sorry the trauma support and guidance. And so the next part of what we do in the bushfire response program is to support recovery planning, what we call recovery planning. Now, planning for disaster is something that all of us have a tendency to put off. If we've been through a disaster, planning for recovery is possibly something we don't want to think about. I mean I certainly didn't wanna think about those bushfires after they were finished.

So I didn't plan for any recovery for myself I just thought I would just push it aside and then deal with COVID. So planning is something that we tend to put off so it reminds us of something that's just been and it's too hard or it's something that might happen in the future and we don't wanna think about the fact that we may be in the way of a natural disaster sometime in the future. The tendency, the human tendency is to think it won't happen to me. So recovery planning can actually be very uncomfortable and we've certainly, I've certainly seen that in the 12 months that we've been working this program.

We've been very lucky this summer because we had a wet summer so a lot of the stress and tension has dropped down and I'm finding that people are now more ready to think about that planning and certainly the initial emergency planning has been done. But the catastrophic fires of 2019/2020 has put planning in front of centre of all our awareness's. But one of the good things is that planning has become more common and it can be seen by the fact that given the number and the intensity of the fires they are actually far fewer deaths in 2020 than any at any time in the past. So people have started planning we just need to do more of it.

So as I said you know planning is really essential for good recovery and practical planning and psychological planning go hand in hand. It's no good having a really good practical plan if you don't know

how to regulate your emotions and how to be that calm adult and there is not much point at being a calm adult if you actually don't have a plan. So really they're two sides of the same coin. So what the Be You Bushfire Program does and Be You as a whole does is it supports us in the psychological planning that tools and strategies that we can practice before a natural disaster or any challenging event so that when that happens we've got the resilience to deal with it more effectively. And the practical planning, there are many places that you can find support for that practical planning. And two examples are The Red Cross, and also your State Fire Service. And there's links to those supports in the chat as well. So the last element of what we did was to support services to access the help that they need.

So often when there's a disaster, there are a whole lot of money flows in or people flow in. And sometimes they actually get in the way. And so one of the things that we've tried to do for services and schools is to help them get the support they need, and each community will need different sorts of support. Some of them already know what's out there. And some of them needed help to find out what was out there. And sometimes we actually had to go and find it for them. And these are things like I said, psychologists, play therapy. It could be some contacts in the local council to get some practical help done as well. And things like that.

### Sally Hodges

Now that you've heard Rita's wonderful explanation about the program, the four different elements of the Bushfire Response Program, we'd like to move on to poll number two. So if your learning community was impacted by a natural disaster, what supports do you think you would need initially? Would you like help with planning for first steps, supporting educators well being, some trauma support and guidance, community support service availability, recovery planning strategies? Or if there's something else, we'd love to hear it in the chat. Rita, we said earlier that most of the services and schools wanted to start with educator self care and well being, but that was often something that we suggested as well, because sometimes it was really hard to identify the first thing that you would need when you feel as though you would like to access a lot of support. Did you find that as well?

### Rita Johnson

You know what? I actually missed that whole question, Sally, because I was looking at the results on the iPad here from the survey. So what we've got here is 21% and then you can ask me the question again. 21% want help planning the first steps and 23% want help with educator wellbeing and 28% trauma support and guidance, and 20% want community support services availability, and 11%, recovery planning strategies. So there's a fairly even mix down there of all of those elements apart from the recovery planning. And really the recovery planning is probably something you already do with your EQIP, or whatever sorts of planning you have in schools. And a lot of the planning is about putting those other elements that are in that survey into a plan. The Bushfire Response Program, like Be You is not another whole add on. It's something that you integrate into what you already doing. So what was that question, Sally?

### Sally Hodges

I was saying that I found in my experience that directors tended to want community sorry, that wanted educator self care and well being first. Did you find the same thing?

### Rita Johnson

Absolutely, absolutely. That, and particularly as we saw last year, because it also still, the event was so close to everyone's hearts and minds, that the support and people were then trying to do with COVID, at the same time, that that support for educator well being was one of the key elements that came first. And what we're finding what I'm finding now is a little bit later, people are thinking more about this trauma support, and guidance. And look, I can't recommend the Emerging Minds community trauma toolkit enough, as Sally said earlier, the link is in the chat. So if you wanna find out more about the trauma support and guidance, please contact Be You or contact Emerging Minds. It's all there.

### Sally Hodges

A few people in the chat as well Rita say all of the above which I'm not surprised.

## Rita Johnson

Yeah, we did have examples of people starting with something different, like there was a high school that wanted to support service mapping straightaway. And one of the Early Learning Services I worked with. They had done all their planning last year. And when I rang them last year, they said, "No, we wanna do some trauma support and guidance this year in 2021." So let's move on to the next element of Be You Bushfire Response Program. Are there any questions Sally coming up or any comments so far?

## Sally Hodges

Mostly just that people would like all of the facets of support?

## Rita Johnson

Right, great. So we've looked at how Bushfire Response Program came into being we looked at what we actually do. And this next slide is about the national principles for disaster recovery. And this is really how we do those things. One of the key messages that we heard over and over again, in the early days is that we need to work with the community. And we need to offer a range of supports, but that approaches have to be community led.

So you can see there's six principles there in that slide. And we're not going to read through all those, we're just going to give you some examples of how they actually looked in practice. And these key principles have been evidence based, and they've been researched. And they are key for anyone supporting those who have been impacted by natural disaster. So I'm just gonna start by sharing a little bit about the recognising complexity. And if you think about just what we've been talking about, about the weather now, so when we got into services, it wasn't just bushfire. It was COVID. At least it was bushfire and COVID. For some services, it was drought, bushfire, flood, COVID, and one service even threw earthquake in there, there was a minor earthquake in the town down the road.

So, just in terms of natural disaster, that space can be very complex, and one natural disaster can follow another very quickly. And each community has its own levels of complexity as well. And you need we need to look at that. And, and also, there's a whole level of complexity around all the other support services that are available. So a lot of the network meetings I went to, you know, we're all sort of holding our heads really, because it's just such a complex space, trying to make sure the person whose fences have burned down gets what they need, and the child who's distressed and traumatised gets what they need. And then, you know, a family who doesn't have a house anymore gets what they need. So, yeah, it's a very complex space.

## Sally Hodges

Yeah, and another one of the principles is taking community led approaches. So we did mention earlier that we had to do so much listening. We had to listen about the community's communication preferences, we needed to work on their timeline and we were careful to meet at their point in recovery understanding that readiness to access support was really varied, some people wanted to access support straightaway other people weren't ready to access it until the beginning of this year and we know from other people's anecdotes that some communities won't be ready for many years to come.

## Rita Johnson

So those communities who in a way aren't ready to access support they're still having support but it's got to be very, very thoughtful and very well intentioned which it all is but I think yeah the word is really thoughtful and mindful so that those particular communities don't get overwhelmed. And having said that we also need to understand the context so the other context that schools and early learning services sit in is they're in different local government areas and different local government areas have got different histories and different capacities.

So one local government area that I was working in had had recent bushfires not that many years ago and they had a really strong network set up already of support services they had had their get ready program running throughout their community over the last few years get ready for bushfire and so that when these fires happened they already had an infrastructure of meetings and network connections in place already whereas other communities who maybe hadn't had fire for a long time or hadn't had a big natural disaster

for a long time maybe didn't have those sorts of supports available also in one of the regional towns in the upper Murray apparently they put together their bushfire hub literally within days of the fires whereas other areas maybe that were perhaps more impacted even than that area or the context was different might not have been able to do that and Sally you've got an example of this on a small scale the context.

### Sally Hodges

Yeah so I worked with a couple of early learning services who were less than five minute drive away very close but their contexts were so different. One of them had a lot of the parents that were part of that learning community had inexplicably lost a lot of jobs due to Coronavirus. So you know they were supporting those parents, they had fewer children coming in, there were concerned about their viability. So even though they were so close to each other they had very different contexts and you know wanted different support as well.

### Rita Johnson

OK, so we're going to pop a reflective question into chat. So just before we do that I'll just do a quick summary of what we've already done. So we've talked about how the Bushfire Response Program came into being. We've talked about what we do, we've talked about these principles of disaster recovery and some examples. So one of the first steps in any planning process is to look at what we already do and it's something we do with your EQIP and something to do with our high school planning as well that what do we already do in that space? And as I said the Be You as a whole and the Bushfire Response Program in particular wasn't about telling schools and early learning services to do something extra step one was to say what is it that you already do. So I'll get Sally to have a look at the chat. And yeah so what do you already do in your learning community to prepare for and or recover from the impact of natural disasters?

### Sally Hodges

While their responses come in Rita, it reminds me of one of the national principles for disaster recovery which is acknowledging build capacity. And that was a big part of it you know by an educator or teachers everyday business, they're maintaining you know, they've got routines in place. They know the kids, they know when there's a change in the kids behaviour, so, so much of what you already do as the wonderful educators and teachers that you are is what we encourage to continue doing after a natural disaster.

### Rita Johnson

Yeah and in the early learning setting for example we already have a social emotional skills program, we already read stories about feelings and emotions and challenging situations in daily life and we can do exactly the same sort of work but with bushfire or natural disaster lens and just having mentioned that are one of the really good resources I recommend that you look at is the Birdie's Tree resources and I think many of you will have seen the Birdie's Tree books you know Birdie and the Fire, Birdie and the Flood, Birdie and the Drought and there's a whole lot more resources and in fact we just did a little bit of training on Birdie, on Birdie's Tree yesterday. Yesterday or the day before? And what I saw was that it's actually your whole, it can be your whole natural disaster preparation curriculum, it's got so many resources. And even though the stories appear to be at an early learning stage, they can be used in primary school and even high school because they are just tools to start the discussion and tools to start the activities. So they're the triggers to get going with the exploration around that topic.

### Sally Hodges

Wonderful. We've got a couple of responses coming in Rita, thank you for everyone who's submitting responses. The first one is planning, discussion and feedback. And I think feedback is a really key one to mention. Because often after a natural disaster, or any kind of traumatic event, kids will recreate it through their stories through their play, through their artwork, and through scaffolding that you can support them to see that there's a resolution as well to the traumatic event or incident. We've also got build relationships with local community members, MPs, community centres, doctors, small businesses, which is such a strength based approach to support your community, and also to help kids to look for the helpers.

## Rita Johnson

Exactly and when you and this is part of the preparation is when you already have those relationships in times of safety and calmness, then it's easier to pick up the phone or make that phone call to someone you already know rather than, you know, the first time you're talking to this person is in the midst of a disaster.

## Sally Hodges

Another person says answer their questions, thoughts, ideas, listen to the children, which is so key because sometimes we think we wanna protect the children. But that's just leaving them to experience it by themselves. And that can lead to a feeling of isolation. And we'll keep an eye on the chat while we move on to the next section. So we mentioned earlier the importance of being prepared. When we acknowledge that children aren't just mini adults, we understand that they have a unique set of needs, and therefore require deliberate and explicit planning. If we want communities to move forward on the cycle on your screens, that is to move forward towards recovery. Everyone in the community must be included regardless of their age. So that means that children and young people must be included. When you look at the cycle on your screens, you should also bear in mind that people can be in two different points in the cycle at the same time, so it's possible to be in the long term recovery phase, for example of recovering from bushfires, while also being in the preparedness phase, for example of the next bushfires, or of a flooding event as well.

Be You aims to make sure every learning community is positive, inclusive and resilient. Supporting learning communities and preparing for a natural disaster is a great way to do this. And we'd love to hear how you do it in the chat, how you encourage your learning community to be positive, inclusive and resilient. So in being positive, we should remember that it's a misconception surrounding natural disasters that children are passive victims and shouldn't be involved in discussions about adverse experiences or trauma. However, we know that through age appropriate dialogue about climate emergencies, we can assist children to become psychologically and practically prepared.

We can model positive self talk and take a strength based approach in order to empower the children. And this is where Birdie's Tree comes in, again, some wonderful therapeutic storybooks, and Red Cross lesson plans and put a link to those in the chat as well. Be You aims to be inclusive, so you should ensure the above conversations are inclusive all children, young people and families involved in your learning community. You should consider whether the content may be triggering. Consider accessibility. Is it available in all appropriate languages? Does it cater to all the literacy levels in your learning community? And you should consider technology as well. Are emails accessible by everyone and are they being read?

Be You aims to make sure every learning community is resilient. Now, we should remember that most kids are resilient and will recover from a climate emergency with time. But in properly preparing, you can improve their chances. Educators and teachers are in a unique position to support children through preparedness, knowledge about disasters, self care strategies, and fire drills can be included in programming to hope to improve resilience.

## Rita Johnson

So we've just got another mention in chat about Birdie and the Tree. So it's Birdie, not Bernie, but that's OK. And this person said they'd like to know some more books on dealing with feelings, anxiety, and sadness. There are a lot of books out there now. If you're a part of the, if you're a Be You community, then you can also contact your Be You consultant to find out more about where to access those particular books. But the Birdie's Tree resource will also give you a lot of that information, and it will be in the context of a natural disaster. And so in that way you're sort of covering really a whole big wide area of your curriculum, and I can see that it can also link to your sustainability curriculum, your wrap and all other parts of curriculum. So fire preparedness or natural disaster preparedness isn't like in the same way as well being, shouldn't be something that's sitting outside of your whole curriculum, but it's something that's integrated.

So we're ready for our next poll. And so that now, given that what we've shared so far, to what extent do you now feel prepared to support your learning community through a bushfire or climate emergency? Do you feel like you're very prepared quite a lot prepared, a moderate amount, a little bit or not at all?

## Sally Hodges

While that poll fills Rita, we might talk a little bit more about Birdie's Tree, because it's a really wonderful resource. The beauty of storybooks is that children can revisit it as many times as they want. We know that after a traumatic event or incident children and young people do often wanna revisit it. But that can be really draining on the adults around them. So the book offers them the opportunity to revisit as many times as they want, they can revisit just certain parts as well. If it becomes too overwhelming, they can close the book and put it away and come back to it later. It also provides a narrative form to the traumatic incident as well, they can see that there is a resolution at the end of it. It provides examples of help as well. And it's written in a really wonderful way that children or people who don't have high literacy, or English literacy as well can still engage with the story, which is really important.

## Rita Johnson

Yeah. So the poll, we've got only 2% feel that they're a great deal prepared. We actually have a normal curve in this poll, which is really lovely. So 43% of people think they're prepared a moderate amount. So that's great news to hear. And I think that's one of the reasons we had so few deaths in these fires is that I think a lot more people are a lot more prepared than they used to be. We've got 4.7%, not at all. So there's some work to be done there. 18% a little bit and 30% quite a lot. So we've got 70% of our population here in our audience feel like they're at least prepared a moderate amount, or more, which is great. Being prepared for bushfire is not something or for a climate emergency is not something you do once, because things change. So it is something that you need to review and work through, over and over again.

## Sally Hodges

We've got some wonderful responses in the chat as well. Resilience is something that has shone through our children in the last 12 months, which is so wonderful to hear. And it's not unique. I've been blown away time and time again, with the resilience of the children, and also with the educators. And I know this is similar amongst all contact liaison officers. The teaching and educating is such a hard job at the best of times. And with 2021 and 2020, I really take my hat off to all educators who have carried on supporting their children and young people. Another participant said, we engaged a new messaging service as well, to keep families informed of sudden changes to care availability, which is so considerate and inclusive, really wonderful to hear.

## Rita Johnson

And one of the ways to find out more, is also to talk to other services and schools, go to your network meetings, go to your school meetings, of the schools that meet together, and find out what other people are doing. There are so many more tools now, online tools to contact people. And really this, you know, out of this terrible disaster in 2020, we've actually been able to build more resilience, and so that hopefully, when these natural disasters happen in the future, people will be more prepared, and therefore recover much more quickly, because as we've said a number of times, the evidence does show that the more prepared you are the quicker the recovery.

So before we just go to the last reflective question, there's three things three really takeaways that we want people to take. And the first one is yes, be prepared, be prepared on a practical level, be prepared on a psychological level. One of the things that we heard in the Birdie Tree session that we had was that the way in babies, infants and toddlers were being prepared for a natural disaster was by helping them build up their resilience to sensory stimuli by having a sensory trail like walking through mud, walking through leaves, walking on gravel.

And when the presenter first started sharing this, I thought, well, what's that got to do with bushfire but what I recognised is that natural disaster has a lot of sensory elements to it, there's sounds, there's taste, there's smells, there's sensations on your skin. And when children are used to overcoming uncomfortable physical sensations and starting to get used to them, they're going to be much more resilient. Those little babies and toddlers, you know, if they smell smoke, or if it gets too hot, or if it things get physically uncomfortable, they'll be much more able to manage that because they've had this practice with these really interesting sensory experiences, which were challenging for some of them.

So yeah, so find out more, talk to other schools, services, and make a plan and be prepared and it's gonna look different from every single age group, and in every single community. Find out more, talk to your managers and principals. And if you and contact Be You for more information about wellbeing support. So what are people saying about what might be their first next step in chat are people popping that in yet?

Sally Hodges

More wonderful reflections about what has been done, I wanted to celebrate this one. One community is freezing meals, to have them available for families, which is such a like inclusive and considerate way to support their families. And it shows that they're knowing what the needs are as well. They're real experts and what their learning community needs. So that's wonderful to see.

Rita Johnson

Great, that's fantastic.

Sally Hodges

We encourage you to continue to engage with Be You, learn more and keep up to date. If your learning community isn't yet implementing the Be You whole learning community approach, we encourage you to register online and get started with support from a Be You consultant. If you're looking for resources to support you with a specific need or concern, such as adapting to change visit [beyou.edu.au](http://beyou.edu.au). There's some links to this in the chat as well. Any more responses Rita?

Rita Johnson

Yeah there's a really interesting comment. We've got three minutes so we've got some time to look at this, this participant says they don't see the wisdom of seeing children, kids as miniature adults and they're not. If we gave the impression that they're somehow miniature adults then I apologise because that's really not what we're doing. What we've seen and what we've shared is that children are able to understand things, quite complex things if it's presented at their level. They're not miniature adults they need us to be the adult in any trauma situation in any natural disaster. They need to see us as strong, secure, those hands from the circle of security, bigger, stronger, wiser and kind and so that the pressure is off them. Because if we're not the strong ones then they will think they have to be the strong ones.

Sally Hodges

Yes that's right.

Rita Johnson

And this comment says I'd prefer seeing them as kids with developmental stages that they go through and be assisted with. Absolutely true and speaking of the developmental stages, one of the things that can happen when children have experienced community trauma like that is that they're actually their developmental stage it goes backwards a bit. So a child who was toilet trained may lose that, a child who was emotionally regulated may start being naughty in inverted commas. And so we need to then go back and see what developmental stage the child is at today rather than what we're expecting and then help them to move back through.

Sally Hodges

Yes.

Rita Johnson

Yeah, so this will help educators understand and help children when they see them that work yes that they're seeing, they're working through that trauma at their own developmental stage.

Sally Hodges

Yes.

Rita Johnson

Absolutely.

Sally Hodges

Please excuse us if we gave the impression the idea that kids are not just mini-adults children and young people are not mini-adults and they have their own needs and therefore require deliberate planning. Thank you for joining us to find out a little more about how to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters in a way that includes everyone, all children, all families and all educators. We look forward to seeing you online at another time. Goodbye.

Rita Johnson

Bye everyone.