Connecting communities: Improving Digital Inclusion in Disaster-Prone Communities

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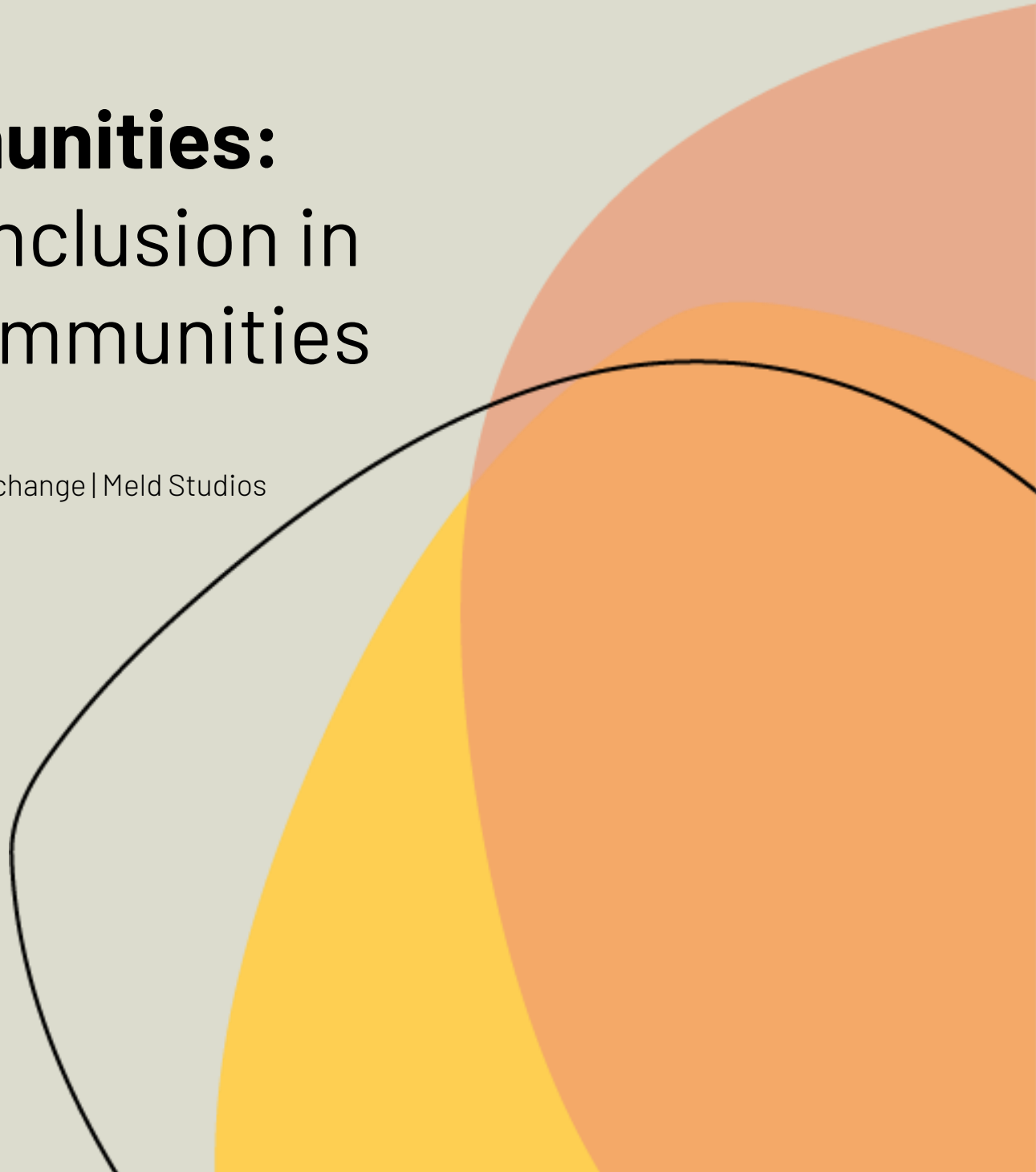


Meld Studios

Executive summary

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index estimates that there are still more than 2.5 million people in this country who are not online, restricting their access to essential social, health, community and financial resources. Recent catastrophic climate events have heavily underscored the fact people and communities who aren't digitally connected face significantly increased challenges and risks in preparing for and responding to disasters.

In that context, the Australian Red Cross, Great Southern Bank and Infoxchange embarked on a shared value partnership to investigate how improving digital inclusion might support better disaster preparedness and community resilience.

What we did
A wide array of digital inclusion resources are available in our communities today. Our challenge in this project was to understand why these resources are often not utilised in the communities that might benefit from them most. Taking a human-centered design approach, we worked with members of the community in interviews and workshops to understand how they saw these issues, and to develop a set of tools that could:

1. Meet specific community needs, and
2. Foster a transition to a wider tool set for the participants to access.

What we learned
We went into workshops with diverse community groups with the understanding that digitally connected communities are more disaster resilient, and; the hypothesis that a desire to be better prepared for disasters will motivate people to find ways to increase their digital literacy.

It became clear through working with these communities that, although they understood the concept and had a desire for both resilience and connectedness, these issues were not strongly correlated or front of mind in most people's daily lives.

Without a way of connecting both digital inclusion and disaster resilience to people's day to day needs, no app, resource, or training course was likely to be able to make a significant impact.

Where we ended up
Through subsequent iterations of our ideas and workshops, we built upon the factors that were most likely to result in successful outcomes. This meant a focus on driving interest, engagement and participation, by addressing participants' desire to connect with others, and their other genuine needs, interests and aspirations.

When these needs were incorporated into a response, conversations around disaster preparedness and digital technology emerged organically, and participants were motivated to proactively engage in learning.

From this we have designed a solution that is desirable to communities, feasible to deliver, and likely to have a lasting impact on digital inclusion and community resilience. By sharing our insights with communities and sector experts, we hope to generate opportunities to further develop tools and processes, and to implement and scale this solution with communities.

Project overview

November - December 2020 Section 1	January - June 2021 Section 2	July - August 2021 Section 3

Where we started

The link between disaster preparedness and digital inclusion

Both Infoxchange and Australian Red Cross have been working with people who experience digital exclusion since the term was coined. We know that people experience digital exclusion for various and complex reasons (see Section 1.2) and that these people are more vulnerable when disaster strikes

We also understand that increasing digital inclusion relies on both *opportunity* to access the right support, and *motivation* to do so.

Our initial hypothesis was that by developing a program that paired the somewhat nebulous concept of 'digital skills' with the practical necessity of disaster preparedness, we might be able to find that motivation. Talking with community confirmed for us that disaster preparedness and digital inclusion needed to be *outcomes of* rather than *ways into* the conversation.

The idea of the Buddy System emerged as the most initially promising from the range of ideas we explored with participants.

Where we moved to

A buddy system to build community resilience

The buddy system was built around the notion of connecting at a personal level and facilitated access to digital inclusion.

Volunteers would buddy up with individuals to understand their particular needs in developing their preparedness for potential disasters and increasing their digital capability.

Though initially received positively by participants, as we explored the feasibility of this system further, we uncovered a number of potential problems.. "Resourcing these sorts of things is a nightmare" we were told, there were numerous privacy and safety concerns to address, and some volunteers felt anxious about the pressure it put them under.

We also realised that people were enjoying participating in our workshops more than they were the idea of the buddy system. They were leaning into these conversations with us about their community and their needs, and wanted more of that. This is where the next development came from.

Where we ended up

Facilitated conversations to build community resilience

Though the core idea of facilitated access in the buddy system was sound, we were able to develop this further into a facilitated conversation where the group determines what they need, and how they can get it. This model tailors the program to the specific needs of participants, and leverages the existing strengths in the community.

In the trial workshop in Maryborough the topics of disaster planning and technology both came up unprompted, and the conversation was more productive than any previous attempt at raising those topics.

There's more work to do, but we're confident this is a workable model that will add significant value to communities.

Where we started
Understanding disaster preparedness and digital inclusion

Where we moved to
A buddy system to build community resilience

Where we ended up
Facilitated conversations to build community resilience

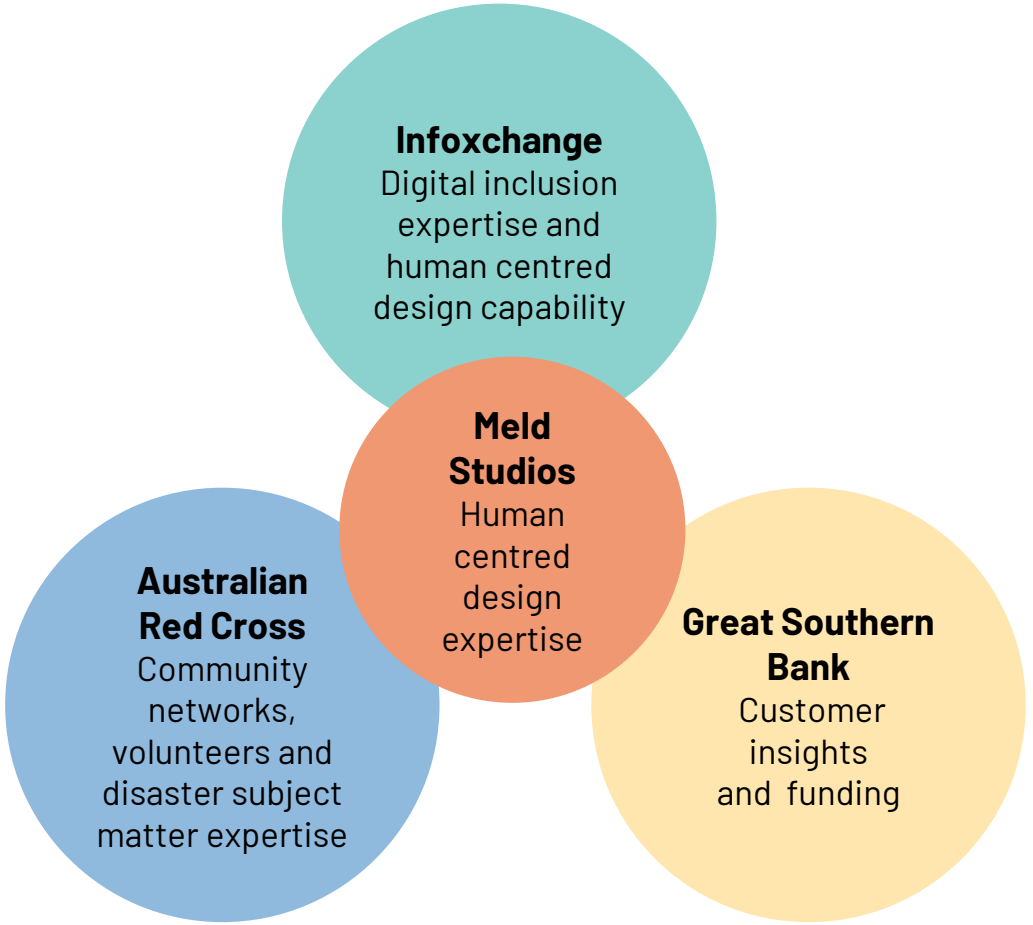
Contents

Project context

Connected Future is a shared value partnership between Australian Red Cross, Great Southern Bank and Infoxchange, established to advance digital inclusion in communities experiencing vulnerability in Australia.

This element of the partnership, a design research and solution prototyping project, was motivated by the bushfires that ravaged much of Australia in 2019/20. Recognising that people with low levels of digital inclusion are often worse-off in disasters, the goal was to understand how the sector can better support people living in disaster-prone areas to improve their digital confidence and capability - before, during and after disasters. Working with communities across Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, the project identified and developed innovative solutions to help reach digitally excluded Australians.

Shared value partnerships recognise the different strengths and expertise that exist in the private and not-for-profit sectors, and bring these together to create positive impacts in our society.



Australian Red Cross

Great Southern Bank

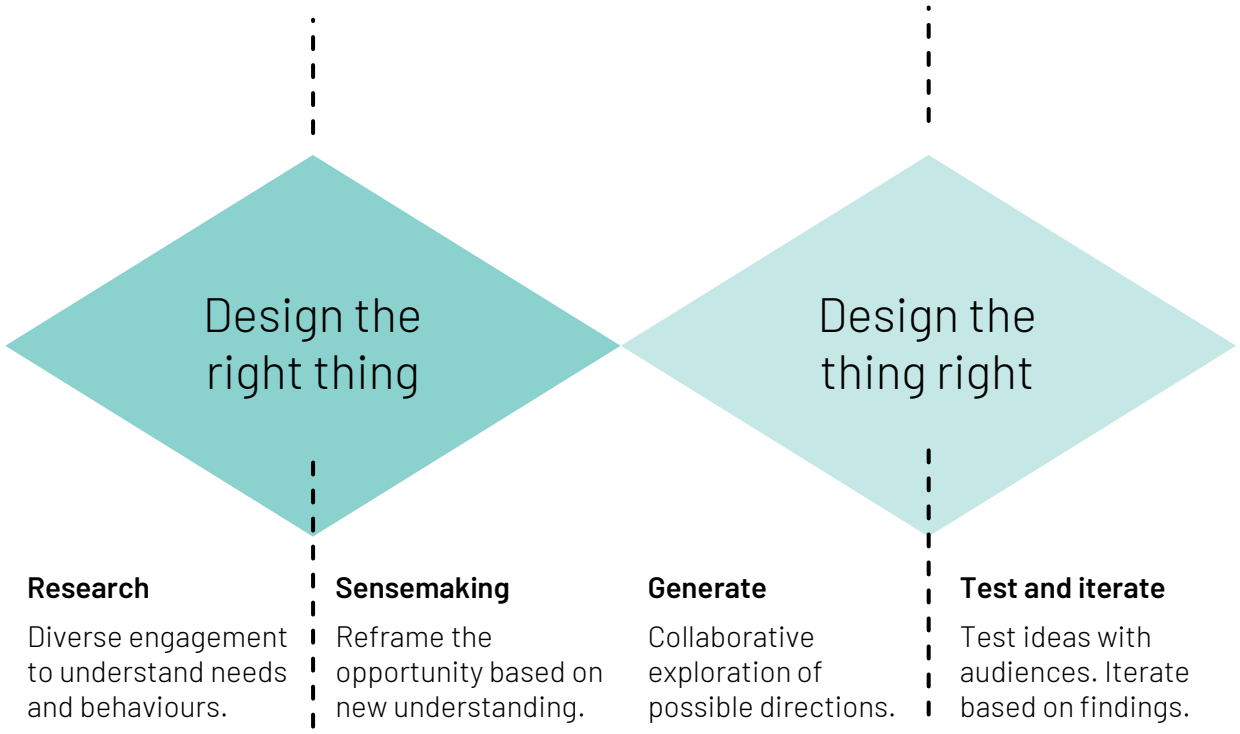
Infoxchange

The design process

This project followed a human-centred design process.

The non-linear process aims to deeply understand the problem space and identify opportunities that can be used to create solutions. It is important that we understand the needs, behaviours, challenges and aspirations of those impacted by the design before we attempt to find solutions so that we know we are 'designing the right thing'.

With prioritised opportunities, we can then work with those impacted to design solutions that are desirable. The process is iterative where we create artefacts to get feedback on, test them and learn what worked well and what didn't, and then refine. While we build confidence that a solution is meeting the needs of those impacted, we also consider and shape how the solution might be feasible and viable to deliver.



Original diagram: Design Council UK

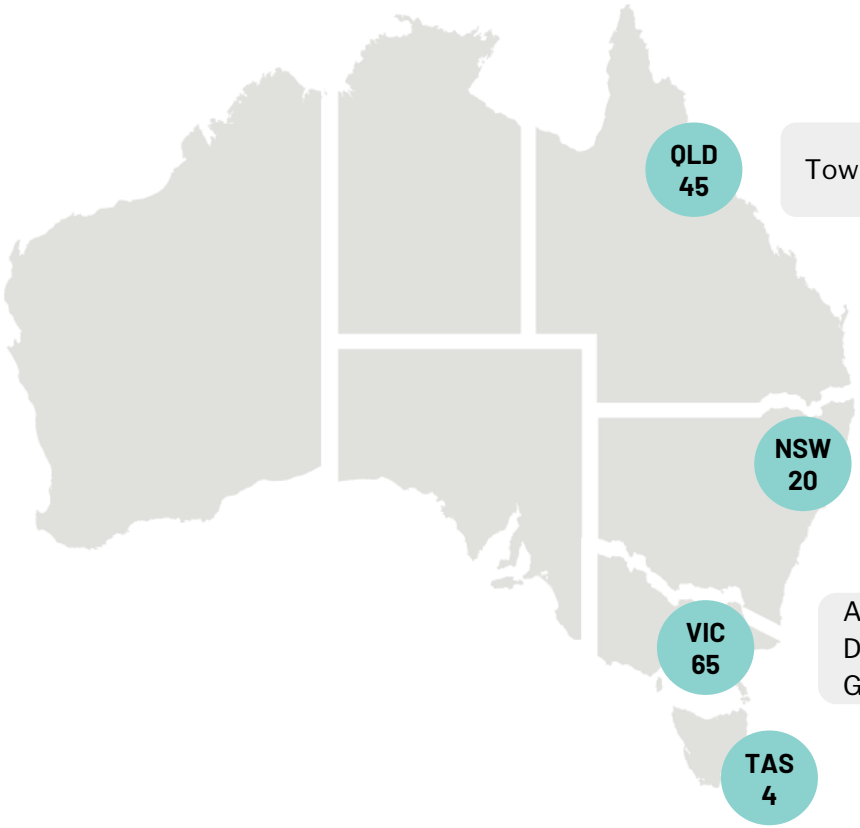
Who we spoke to

134

People in total

We focused on people living in disaster prone areas in regional Australia. Within that cohort we aimed for as much diversity as possible. Participants identified themselves with the following:

- 60+
- No to low digital literacy
- Living with cognitive impairment
- Digitally isolated by choice
- Carer of person with disability
- Culturally and linguistically diverse
- Living in rural to remote areas
- Low income



33 Research documents analysed

20 1:1 interviews via phone & zoom

15 Idea generation workshops

96 Testing and feedback sessions

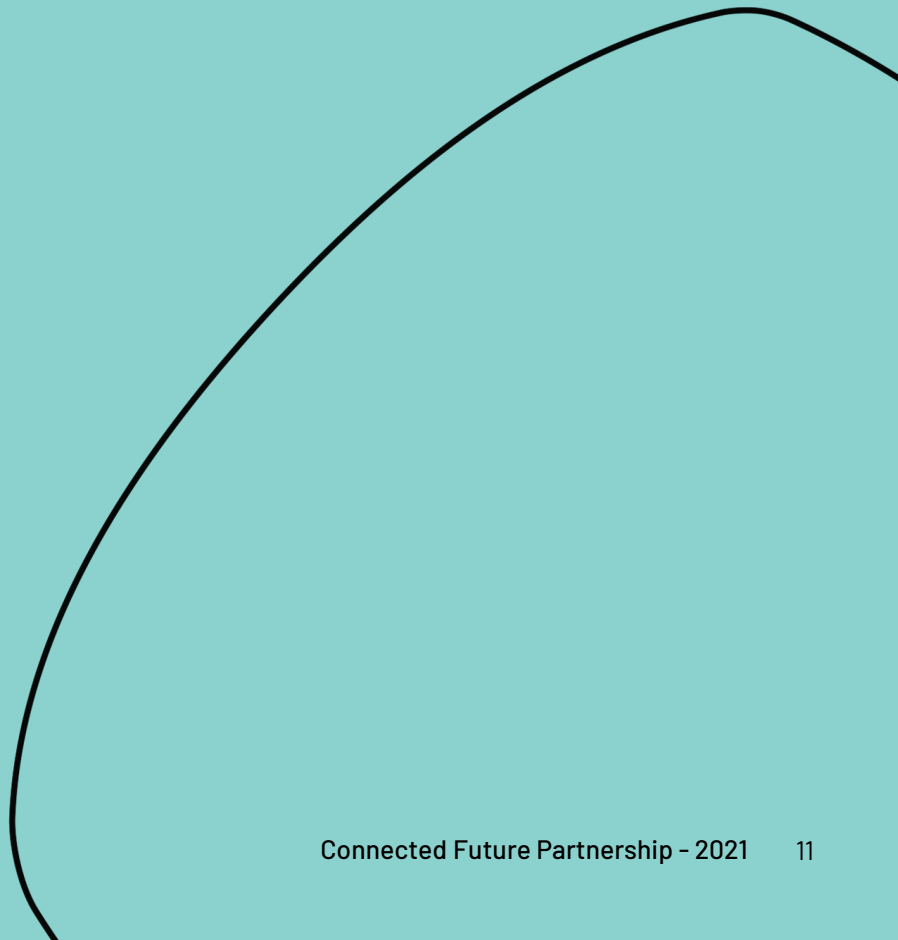
SECTION

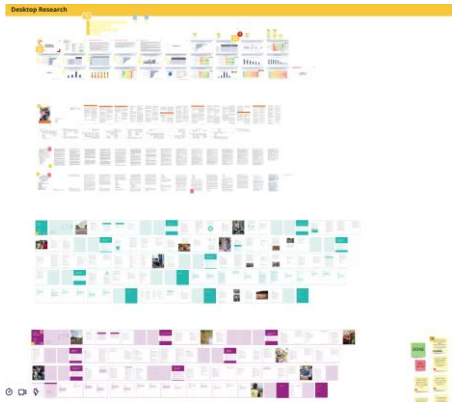
01

Where we started: **Disaster preparedness and digital inclusion**

Section 1.1

Approach

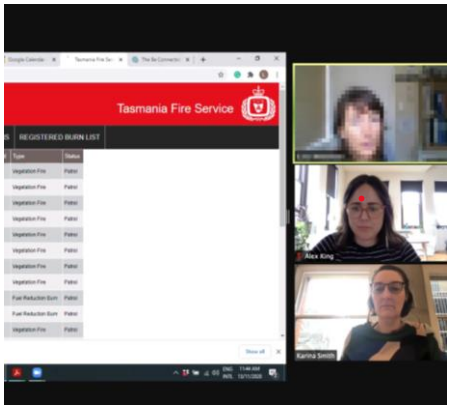




1. Understand context

We worked with the project team to get up to speed with the current status of disaster preparedness and digital inclusion. Our approach involved:

- Reviewing over 30 reports and documents of existing research
- Subject matter expert (SME) workshops to understand and identify key opportunity areas to explore what already exists and is being done well and what could be done better.
- Identifying the key cohorts we're designing with.



2. Community and SME engagement

We conducted 1:1 conversations with the community and SMEs via phone and zoom due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

These conversations helped us understand individual needs, barriers, motivators and mindsets towards using technology and preparing for disasters. We sense checked what we found from our review of the documentation and SME workshops.

Through synthesis of the data collected, we identified core opportunity areas to explore further.

3. Idea generation

We ran idea generation workshops with community members as well as 1:1 phone conversations to create solutions relating to the key opportunity areas.

39 ideas were developed into concept cards to gather feedback.

We ran a workshop with Australian Red Cross, Great Southern Bank and Infoxchange stakeholders to identify which concepts to prioritise in testing sessions.

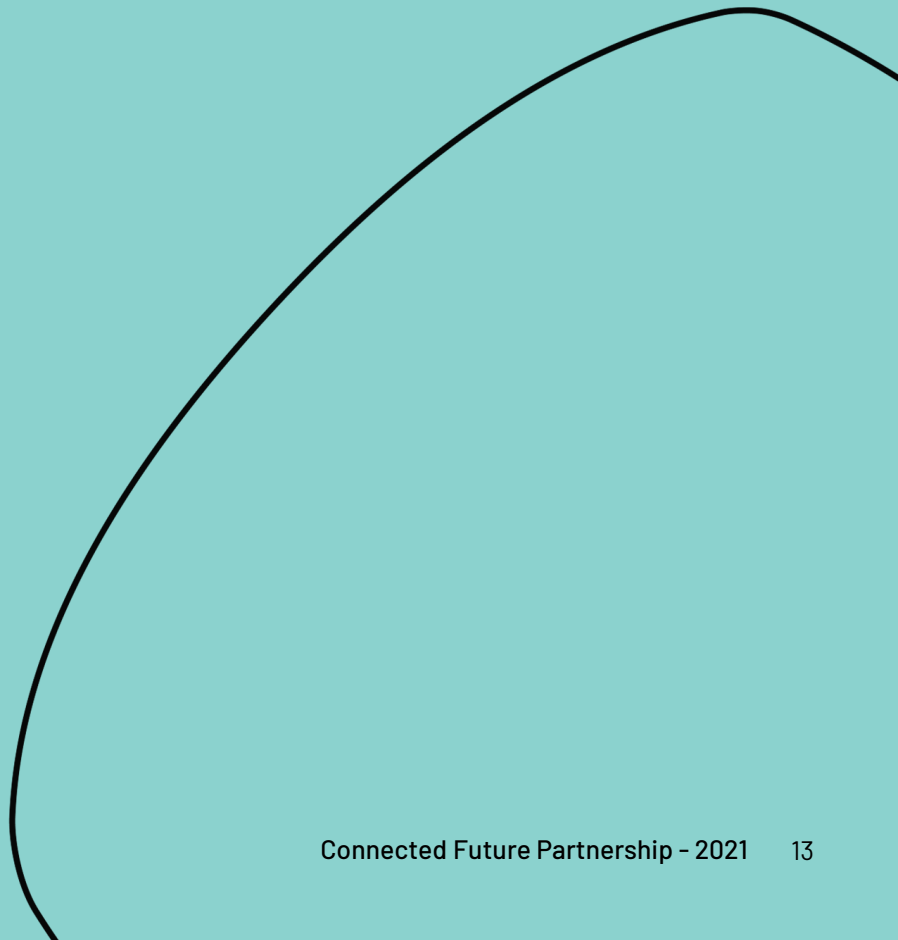
4. Testing, feedback & documentation

We ran workshops to get feedback on the concepts. This was synthesised to identify the concepts which resonated the most. These concepts were then prioritised by the project team to be further developed in the next project phase in 2021.

We agreed the nature of the final deliverables with the team, and documented the findings and recommendations.

Section 1.2

Findings



Section 1.2: Findings

Key barriers to disaster preparedness and digital technology

These are the key barriers to disaster preparedness and digital technology that have been identified through desk research and community engagement.

Mindsets and behaviours towards disaster preparedness

Some people lack the motivation to prepare as they feel preparation is futile or a lack of disaster experience means it's hard to comprehend the risks.

Other people, such as family, friends and neighbours can influence and discourage preparation unknowingly. Those who lack connection to their community or who believe they will be looked after by emergency services and others are less likely to be prepared.

Poor and chronic health issues can impact people's ability to cope with preparing for disasters. Some feel overwhelmed by engaging in disaster preparedness, particularly those who have to revisit traumatic past experiences.

Many of the people we spoke with felt a collective responsibility to their community. However, some did not have any motivation to extend their preparedness activities or support beyond the perimeter of their property.

Process to prepare

There are many sources of information available when it comes to disaster preparedness. Misinformation and a lack of clarity around what is actually required to be prepared complicates the process.

Information is not always inclusive. For example, it is not available in other languages or in a way that can be easily understood. Knowing when to prepare by and what urgency is needed is problematic.

For those who are aware of what needs to be done, sometimes they face the issue of not having resources to support them to prepare. For example, farmers with extensive land to clear. This means preparedness awareness, understanding and/or activities can be avoided altogether.

Mindsets and behaviours towards digital technology

For some the benefit and value of using digital technology and accessing the internet is not clear.

There is a preference for face to face interaction and getting by without needing to access digital technology does not encourage use.

There is a perception that using digital technology takes time and effort, and people's over-reliance on technology is a deterrent, for example observing younger generations 'glued to their phones'.

There is a lack of trust of digital technology due to the perception that data will be misused, particularly by non-government bodies. Scams and the belief that there is too much misinformation online are deterrents.

Some lack confidence in their ability to learn basic digital skills and fear 'doing something wrong'.

Access to digital resources

For some, particularly those in rural locations, a lack of connectivity to the internet and infrastructure makes the use of digital devices and reliance on it to prepare for disasters much harder.

While connectivity challenges were prevalent for a number of the people we engaged with and the cohort we're designing with, addressing access connectivity issues was not in scope for this project.

Affordability and cost

The associated cost to prepare can be a barrier, including time and effort.

For those who lack access to digital resources due to affordability issues and data allowance limitations, the risk of being unprepared and disconnected from critical information (real time local updates) before, during after is heightened.

Section 1.2: Findings

Key motivators to disaster preparedness and digital technology

These are the key motivators and drivers for disaster preparedness and use of digital technology that have been identified through desk research and community engagement.

Motivators for using digital technology

For many, whether they were living alone or with others, digital technology was a way to connect with family, friends and society in general.

Some of the people we spoke with over 60 years of age were provided with mobile phones by family members. They were often taken with them as a safety measure and connection to others when outside the home, even if that meant leaving it in the car.

Convenience, speed of communication and access to information and others is a driver for many.

There is a need to increase digital capability in order to access a greater breadth of employment opportunities advertised online as opposed to word of mouth or in person.

Personal motivators for disaster preparedness

Identifying with having responsibilities is a motivator to prepare. For example, a parent with dependents or responsibility for others within the community.

Individual resilience, such as valuing safety and security, wellbeing and connection are drivers to prepare.

Those who identify as man, woman, educated, healthy and older are more likely to prepare for disasters.

Knowledge and experience of disasters and the impact on individuals and the community varied from person to person. People who had lived in a disaster prone area or experienced one previously are much more likely to be aware of the risk and want to be prepared.

Those who feel something can be done about it, and that they have the capacity and resources to cope can be more driven to prepare.

Collective motivators for disaster preparedness

For some there is an inbuilt behaviour of ‘doing the right thing’ and participating to help others.

Others influence, particularly those who are respected and trusted can motivate people to get more prepared.

A psychological sense of community, a belief in the community’s ability and resilience, and having people that can be drawn upon to help before, during and after a disaster were strong motivators to prepare.

Connections to a place and/or property were also key motivators. A number of people we spoke to had lived and owned property and land that had been passed on from generation to generation.

Section 1.2: Findings
Key opportunities to solve for disaster preparedness

These are the opportunity areas that have been prioritised and explored in idea generation sessions.

Through this project, we have identified that there are many variables in the people and communities we're designing with including:

- Past experience of disasters and the impact this has on their desire to prepare for potential disasters.
- Level of commitment in preparing for disasters.
- Level of commitment, ability and access in using digital technology to support disaster preparation.

It is clear there is no single solution to solve for all the variable needs of this cohort. However, there are a number of opportunity areas to explore a multi-pronged approach and solution that could support many to become more prepared and build digital capability.

Opportunity areas

How might we help everyone in the community be *aware* of what support is available to help them get prepared for a disasters?

How might we make the *process* to prepare simple and effortless?

How might we enable people to know how best to *help others* get prepared?

How might we l*ook out for people* who might fall through the cracks to be prepared for a disaster?

How might we use the *power of community* to enable everyone *connected to a place* to be prepared for a disaster?

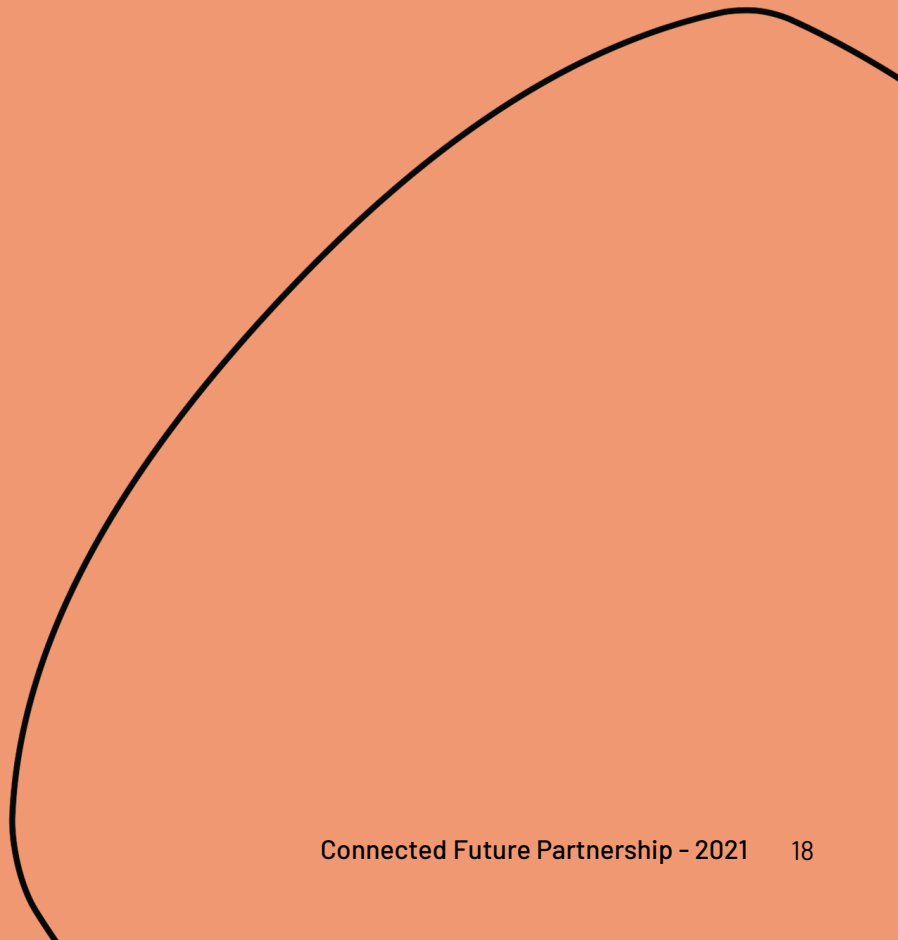
SECTION

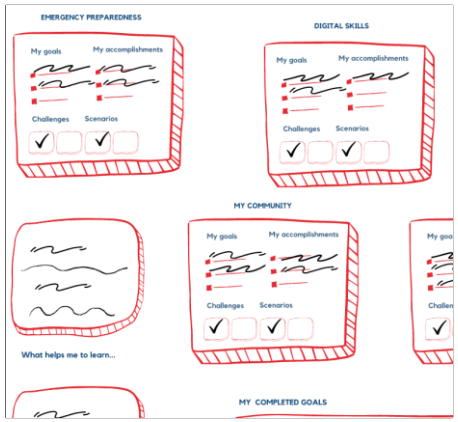
02

Where we got to: **Buddy System**

Section 2.1

Approach





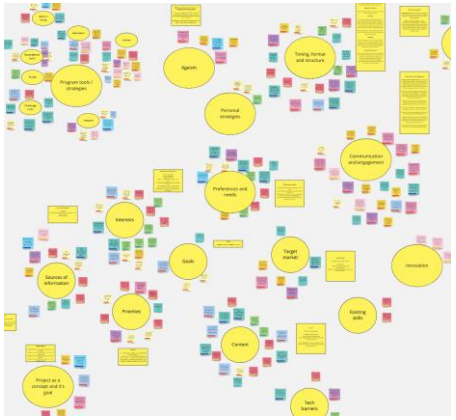
1. Develop prototype materials

We created a number of prototypes of experiential learning tools. These intended to detail how the Buddy System might work in practice so that we could further explore the desirability and feasibility of this concept.

2. Testing workshops

We tested the Buddy System concept and learning tools with community members experiencing vulnerability with low digital literacy living in disaster prone areas; volunteers; Neighbourhood houses, local government and NFP organisations based in disaster prone areas.

After a few rounds of testing the focus area was broadened to include topics around 1) stress reduction and managing wellbeing, 2) connection with the community and, 3) disaster preparedness, 4) digital skills



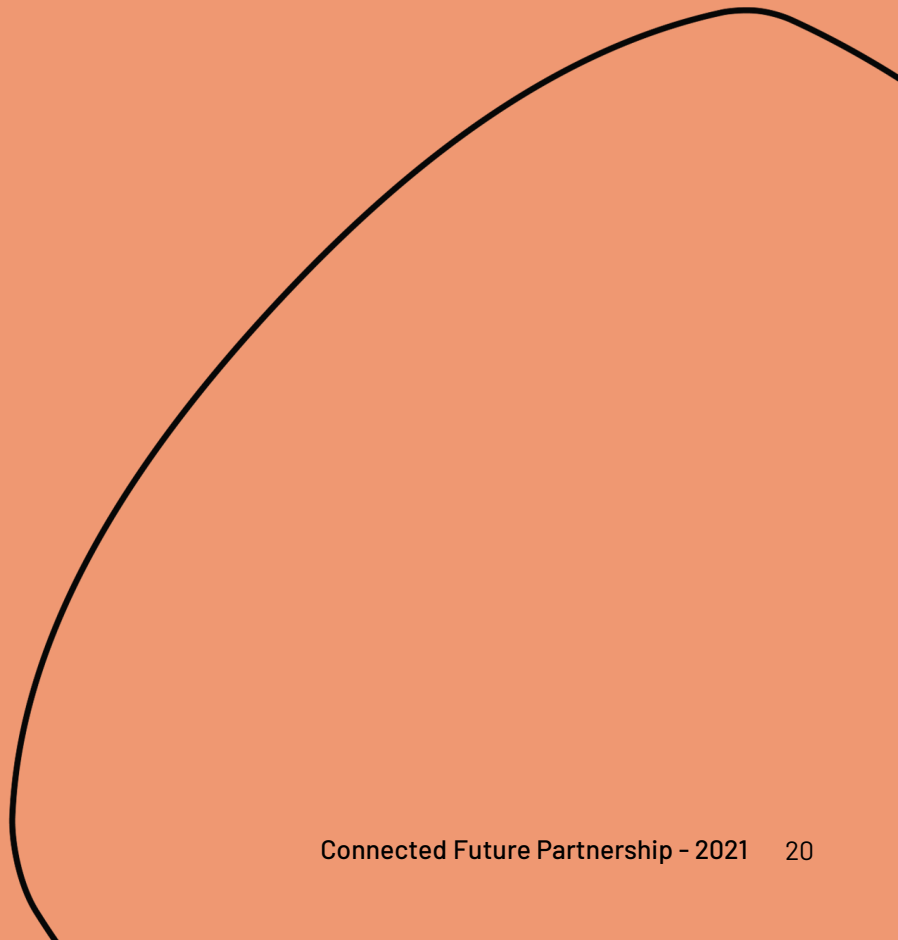
3. Sensemake and refine

We made sense of the feedback from the testing sessions and refined the learning tools.

This process involved identifying patterns in the things that we heard.

Section 2.2

Findings



1. Buddy System

Of the 39 ideas generated from our research and tested, the team agreed in close consultation with community members, that a Buddy System was the best concept to prototype.

The team then set to work exploring how the Buddy System might improve digital inclusion and capability to support better disaster preparedness and community resilience.

The Buddy System concept intends to **provide hands on support for those who are most vulnerable.** It is a service that encourages volunteers to buddy up with individuals and ensure they are prepared for potential disasters. Volunteers can provide support to increase individuals' digital capability.

The Buddy System was prioritised over other concepts because

- it was ranked most popular by community members,
- aligned with the goals and aspirations of the Connected Future Partnership and
- Has the potential to be supported by the extensive network of Australian Red Cross volunteers and expertise.

1. Buddy System

What we heard

There are a number of people who are isolated or have limited interactions with their community by choice or circumstance.

While adhoc and informal buddy systems exist in some communities, there is an opportunity to more formally connect with community members and provide support to ensure no one is left behind when it comes to preparing for disasters.

Key features:

A digital system (website/app) and service to volunteer and identify those who may need a buddy to make sure they're prepared, safe, know what could happen in a disaster and how to respond effectively.

What it aims to achieve:

- Build relationships and rapport to support those who are most vulnerable.
- Develop awareness and understanding of how to prepare for potential disasters.
- Increase digital capability with guidance.

Intended audience:

- Low (digital) literacy
- Socially isolated
- 60+ years of age
- Low socioeconomic status
- Lack of access due to infrastructure
- People living with temporary or permanent disabilities
- Informal support and carers
- Culturally and linguistically diverse

Benefits:

- A scalable service offering that is uniquely focused on disaster preparedness with the opportunity to build digital capability.
- Intends to support those most underserviced.
- Drives awareness and advocacy for disaster preparedness.
- Partnership opportunities with existing services.
- May help people feel a sense of accountability in following through with disaster preparedness.
- Could be complementary and support emergency services to prioritise those who are most vulnerable in an emergency or disaster.
- Could be used as a means and incentive to increase volunteer capabilities in preparation and digital literacy.
- Guidance and information on disaster preparedness can be accessed via a Buddy System app or website.
- Solves for a desire to gain support from local community and offer support where it’s needed.

1. Buddy System

Considerations:

How it might work

- Would need to be voluntary / driven by people within community.
- Need to explore what time frames the Buddy System would occur in i.e.. months in advance of a disaster vs 2 weeks ahead of a disaster.

Partnership opportunities

- Opportunity for Red Cross volunteers to support this initiative more formally. Red Cross are currently exploring building digital capability for volunteers.
- Opportunity to partner with existing volunteers e.g. Country Fire Associations' Community Fireguard program and Emergency VIC.
- Opportunity to provide additional support or identify intended audience via NDIS, Meals on wheels etc.
- Need to ensure we're not duplicating existing services.

Risks and safety

- Assessment and clarity is required to understand the boundaries, risks and responsibilities of volunteers in the event of a disaster.
- Would need to explore how to establish trust between strangers.
- Safeguards required to protect people's privacy.

Promotion and marketing

- Requires promotion and marketing to community members and volunteers.

Existing analogous solutions:

- Mental wellbeing support service
- "R U OK" day (https://www.ruok.org.au/)
- Know your neighbour campaign (https://neighbourday.org/)
- Community fireguards (https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/community-fireguard)

Next steps for this prototype

- Bringing the prototype to the next stage of fidelity and detail, so that we can work with community and volunteers to further explore the desirability and feasibility of this model. (See section 3).

Section 2.2: Findings
Community resilience

If community members were to take steps to strengthen their knowledge of community and access to information this could serve to reduce the risks they face during a disaster.

It was found that community members understood these topics independently but could not always see the natural connection between these two themes when combined in daily life.

In particular, community members:

- Had a broad range of interests and their drive to learn more about technology was in relation to their personal interests and needs as this was more meaningful for them
- Did not feel at risk or a motivation to develop digital skills in order to prepare for disasters.

Community members were interested in:

- strengthening their knowledge of their community (people, services and activities)
- increasing their access to information overall, and
- improving their digital skills
- learning at their own pace

It was found that volunteers found the one-on-one model challenging and the experts in the community also identified various problems with the 'buddy' approach.

In particular, volunteers:

- Were concerned with safety and managing boundaries with community members especially the isolated nature of one-on-one volunteerism
- Felt they would need substantial training to support people with mental health issues and those experiencing isolation
- Felt they would need moderate to high level support or supervision
- Were interested in connecting with other volunteers to share resources, ideas and access peer support
- Felt they may have been better suited to a less hands-on role such as connecting people and checking in to make sure things are on track.

It was found that subject matter experts (SMEs) felt the one-on-one model would be too resource intensive, based on past experiences.

In particular, SMEs:

- Believed the concept did not address the biggest challenge of engaging with highly isolated community members
- Had a preference for funding existing strategies that address these issues separately
- Had a desire to focus on addressing local issues e.g. create program targeting temporary residents with low awareness of local disaster planning and processes
- thought the topics do not seem to naturally converge or make sense in daily life.

Concept testing of the Buddy system prototype in Geelong, VIC.

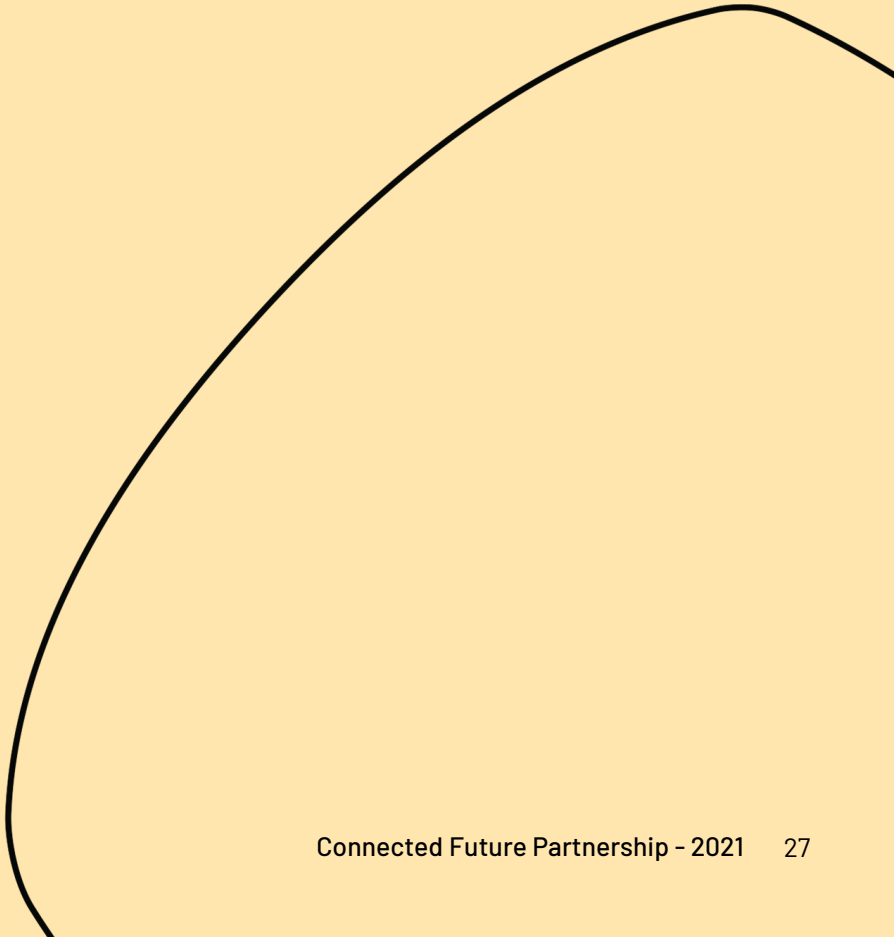
SECTION

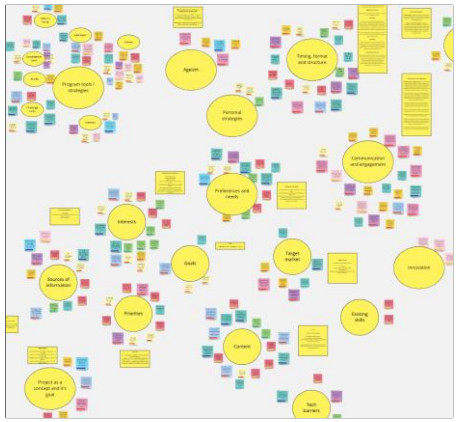
03

Where we ended up: **Connecting community**

Section 3.1

Approach



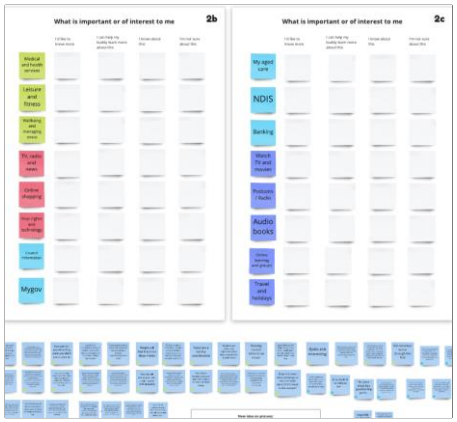


Getting up to speed with testing undertaken by the Partnership

Meld Studios reconnected with the Connected Future Partnership to get up to speed with what had progressed since handing over the previous Buddy System concept report.

We all aligned on what we aimed to achieve in this next phase of work and the approach we would take.

It is worth noting that the project timeline was spread over many months due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions that impacted face to face community engagement.



Developing the framework

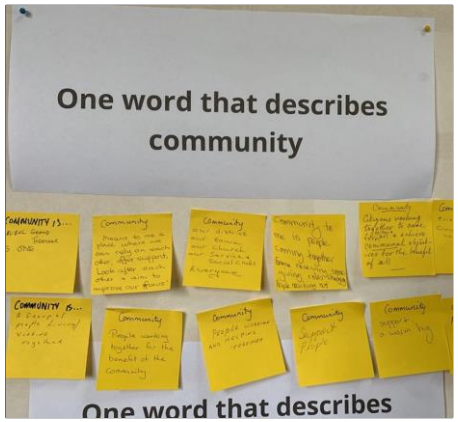
Our next step was to create an opportunity that resembled our research workshops.

We created an opportunity for people to come together to connect, share their expertise and define what support or information would be most helpful.

To focus the conversation, we developed tools and activities aimed at helping people to reflect on their own situation and identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

Putting it into practice (in a controlled fashion)

We held workshops in Anglesea and Maryborough, VIC to get feedback on the framework. The first round of testing in Anglesea tested different tools that could be used between a volunteer and community member one on one. The next round of testing in Maryborough got feedback on the framework itself and facilitation in action.

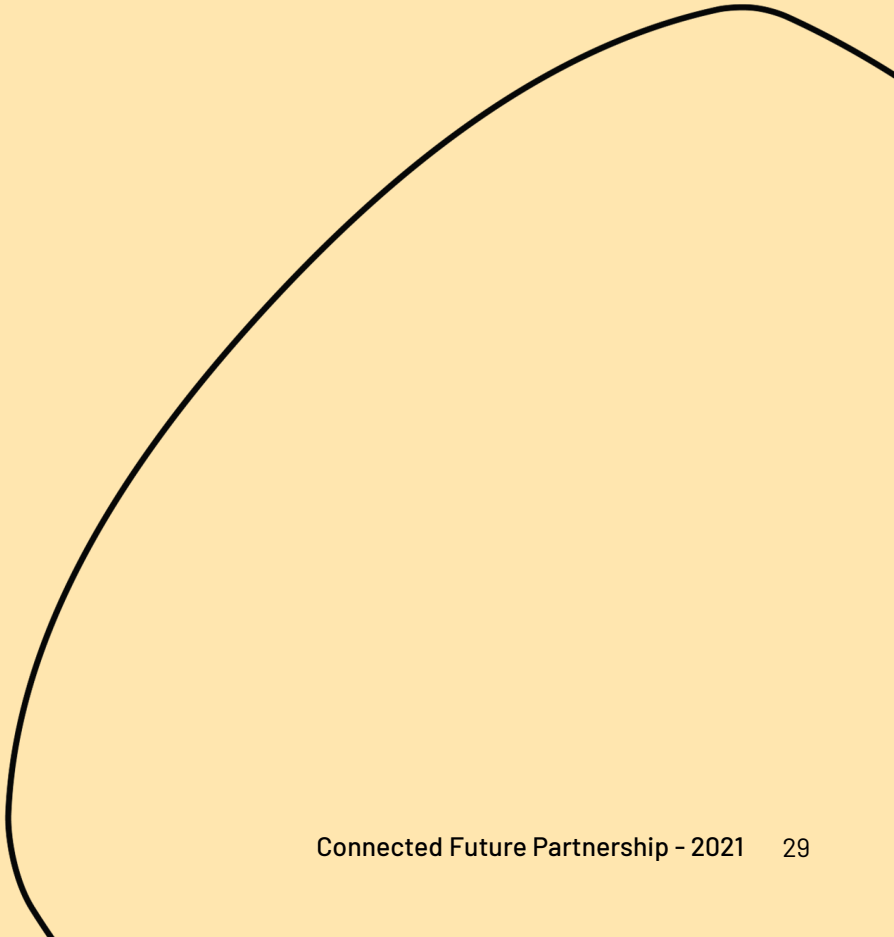


Sensemaking and refining and documentation

We made sense of feedback from workshops and agreed the nature of the final deliverables with the team, and documented the process, workshop summaries and where we got to.

Section 3.2

Findings



Section 3.2: Findings

What we agreed as the way forward

We shifted the approach to focus more on community connection in a group format.

We realised that people were enjoying our research more than they were the buddy system concept.

They were leaning into these conversations with us about their community and their needs and wanted more of that. This is where the next shift came from.

It was important to create opportunities for people to have conversation about things that mattered most to them. This meant they felt more comfortable and open to talking about new topics, such as disaster preparedness.

We created an opportunity for people to come together to connect, share their expertise and define what support or information would be most helpful.

To focus the conversation, we developed tools and activities aimed at helping people to reflect on their own situation and identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

We realised that we might have issues resourcing the buddy system concept

The volunteers we spoke to recognised the skills required for this role may be varied and complex. Volunteers expressed concern as to whether they would be appropriately equipped to navigate contexts where psycho-social issues are present. They also expressed a concern around managing boundaries and felt that this approach could feel isolating.

Those that we spoke to in the community sector identified that one-on-one approaches can be challenging. Recruitment of volunteers and participants, training volunteers and managing relationships/conflict are resource intensive activities.

Each community had its own specific set of issues and these experts were interested to understand how this model might address these location specific issues.

We recognised that if we were to create a successful and sustainable approach to addressing the issues of digital inclusion and disaster preparedness, we would need to adopt an adaptable, cost effective and place based initiative.

We recognised that the community had skills, knowledge and resources but lacked opportunities to connect and exchange these assets

The facilitated conversation model provides a framework in which to surface these community strengths, and in which to propose (where appropriate, and led by the group) digital solutions to support these strengths.

Importantly this isn't the group "figuring it out for themselves" but inviting in expertise from the facilitator or other members of the community.

Through this model, the increase in digital inclusion and disaster preparedness is measurable, but almost incidental – participants leave the sessions with an increased connection to their community, and increased desire to collaborate on things like disaster preparedness, and knowledge of an access to the tools that will help them to do this.

Validating the Connecting Community Workshop idea by running a Connecting Community Workshop

Not just researching, but practicing

Drawing on our insight that participants were enjoying the participation in our research more than the particular *content* of those workshops, we decided the best way to test this concept was to put it into action.

We designed a framework for the initial workshop (see section 4) along with the necessary activities and educational tools to ensure the workshop had a clear focus and could help participants to identify strength and opportunities for growth in the areas of community connection, wellbeing, disaster preparedness and digital skills.

We then took participants through this in the same way that we would if we were doing it "for real".

Often in a more typical research or design activity, the benefit to participants is longer term or less tangible, based on the promise of the future thing – in this instance we were able to not only learn more about what does and doesn't work, but participants walked away with a tangible sense of having gained something in connecting to their community.

Key characteristics of the approach

Through our collective experience in working with communities, we know that people often needed time, safety and an opportunity to reflect and contextualise new ideas and information. People value learning new things in conversation with others in the community but often lack an avenue to do so. Creating the space and opportunity for this was the foundation of everything else that took place.

The Connecting Community facilitation model included practices arising from *Asset Based Community Development;* a methodology focused on identifying and developing individual capabilities, relationships, engagement within communities.

The intention of this model is to create an environment that will help people feel safe to ask questions, reflect on their needs, learn new things and find an avenue to share their strengths, skills and knowledge with the broader community.

What we heard, and what people wanted to happen next

All workshop participants in Maryborough, Victoria signed up for future sessions.

As hypothesised, this model of engagement established an environment where conversations and activities that involve technology and disaster resilience could take place. The workshop helped people feel safe to ask questions, gave them tools to reflect on their needs, validated their strengths and provided an opportunity for them to contextualise new information in conversation with others.

People asked us for:

- More 'getting to know you' activities to better connect with people in the room and make connections to others not physically present.
- Opportunities to learn about the NDIS, My Aged Care and community activities to support their everyday lives.
- Support with technology to better connect with others.

Feedback from workshop participants

Workshop participants in Maryborough, VIC.

"I really enjoyed myself.
It felt like being with family."

"I thought that this would be all about computers. This was so much better – I really enjoyed myself."

"Are you coming back [to facilitate more sessions]? I hope so..."

"If I'd have known that it would be like this I would have brought other people along..."

"We need to do this again, and give ourselves a name!"

SECTION

04

Our vision for a Connecting Community Framework and Model of Engagement

Bringing together disaster preparedness and digital inclusion can be challenging.

The people we spoke to could not always see a clear connection between these two topics.

People were apprehensive but more open to talking about technology, but they wanted to explore this topic in ways that was meaningful to them.

So we needed to open other doors for people to engage.

The Connecting Community Framework

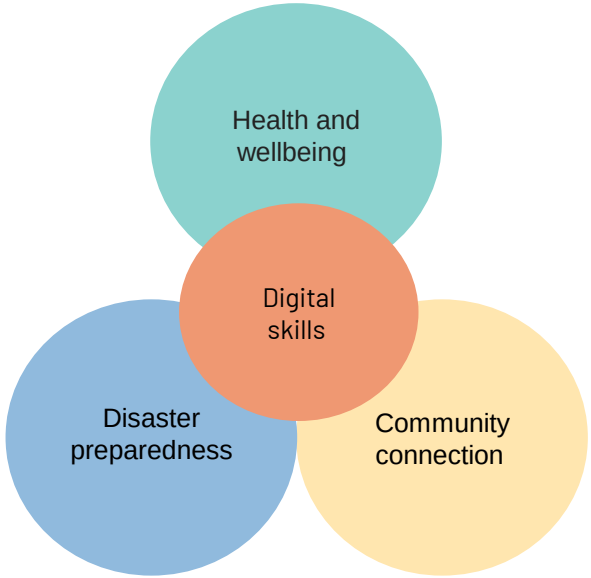
The people we spoke with ranked community connection and health/wellbeing as the topics they most wanted to learn more about.

We recognised that by supporting people to improve their knowledge around these topics i.e. how to better manage stress and improve their relationship with the local community, they would be more resilient overall.

Also, by creating opportunities for people to have conversations around the topics that mattered most, they felt more comfortable and open to talking about new topics, such as disaster preparedness and digital technology.

Introducing these two themes into our approach links back to our original goal of investigating how to improve digital inclusion and capability to support better disaster preparedness and community resilience.

The Connecting Community Framework



Ensuring digital skills and disaster preparedness are focus areas of a larger conversation around community resilience, rather than the ultimate goal of the engagement, has proved to encourage community interest and participation.

Importantly, the framework has the potential to scale across communities and be tailored to individual needs.

The Connecting Community Model of Engagement

The Connecting Community Model of Engagement derives from 'asset based community development'. The model identifies that community members have skills to leverage and a facilitator helps find opportunities for the group of community members to identify their unique skills.

In practice, the model functions as a flexible and modular series of interactive workshops focused on the topics identified in the *Connecting Community Framework.*

This model equips facilitators with a field guide, a resource that includes experiential learning tools, facilitation practice ideas and community engagement activities. This provides facilitators with a roadmap to plan, facilitate discussion and deliver skill development activities with diverse members of the community.

This responsive approach to engagement allows facilitators to customise and prioritise the workshop activities in partnership with participants to ensure that the sessions meet their specific interests, needs and learning aspirations.

If workshop participants require a high levels of support with technology related tasks, volunteers will provide this assistance at the end of the group activities.

Key elements this model

- community workshops series
- engagement of services providers (e.g. CFA, council, NDIS)
- practical support through volunteers (e.g. support with technology specific tasks)

Other details:

Anticipated frequency/duration of the model: 7-10 weeks
Delivery options: In person and online

Key steps of the introductory workshop

1. Introduction and icebreaker to establish relationship and connection	The activities here will vary, but it's about getting everyone comfortable in the room, and learning a bit about each other.
2. Defining community resilience collectively	The group establishes their own understanding of community resilience, and why it's important to their community.
3. Identifying skills, expertise, experience and opportunities for growth	Get a shared understanding of the skills and experience in the room, and in the community.
4. Opportunities for skills exchange	Identify where there is value in sharing skills they already have, and also identifying the gaps and looking at how they could fill those.
5. Facilitate sustained connection by sharing skills in the community	Agree how this group could engage a broader cross section of the community and support each other through sharing skills and information.
6. Determine the next steps of learning	Identify activities and topics to explore that will best support group members to improve their individual and collective resilience.

What happens next?

Phase 1

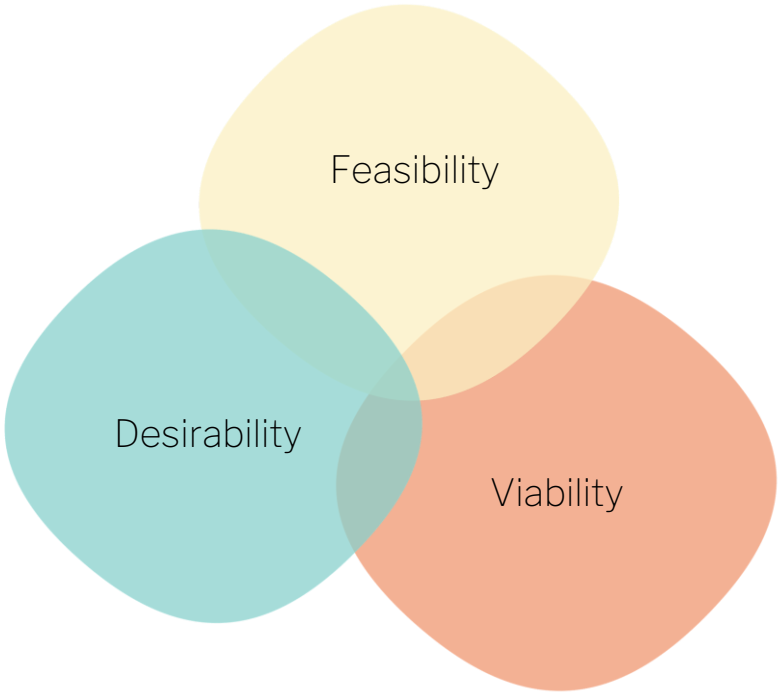
- Test the single sessions model in an online environment
- Test the single session model in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community context
- Seek community partnerships to facilitate place-based implementation
- Seek funding partners to scale impact
- Determine a monitoring and evaluation framework

Phase 2

- Gather further input from stakeholders
- Engage participation from local organisation/s
- Develop and test further experiential learning tools
- Develop a facilitator's guide and offer widely to the sector

Phase 3

- Expand the model to a multi-session workshop through co-design with community members and local organisations
- Test the multi-session model as a pilot



Getting involved

This research was never intended to only benefit us. We hope it is a starting point for further collaborations to build community resilience while improving digital inclusion and disaster preparedness.

We are actively seeking funding partners to help us scale the impact of this work and community partners to collaborate on this opportunity to support their community.

To learn more please contact Anna Morgan, Social Innovation Lead at Infoxchange
amorgan@infoxchange.org

Community stories

Community member

Dependent on family and Council, 82 years old

This community member has been living in Australia for 54 years. Recently widowed, she relies on the radio and her children to tell her what to do in a disaster. She lived through the latest flood in Townsville by moving in with her daughter and her husband.

She's not sure how she would prepare, now that she's widowed. She doesn't have a mobile phone but does get some help through the Council, and Home and Community Care providers help with cleaning and home maintenance.

She's sure Council will let her know where to go and what to do. Perhaps they will send a letter to let her know.

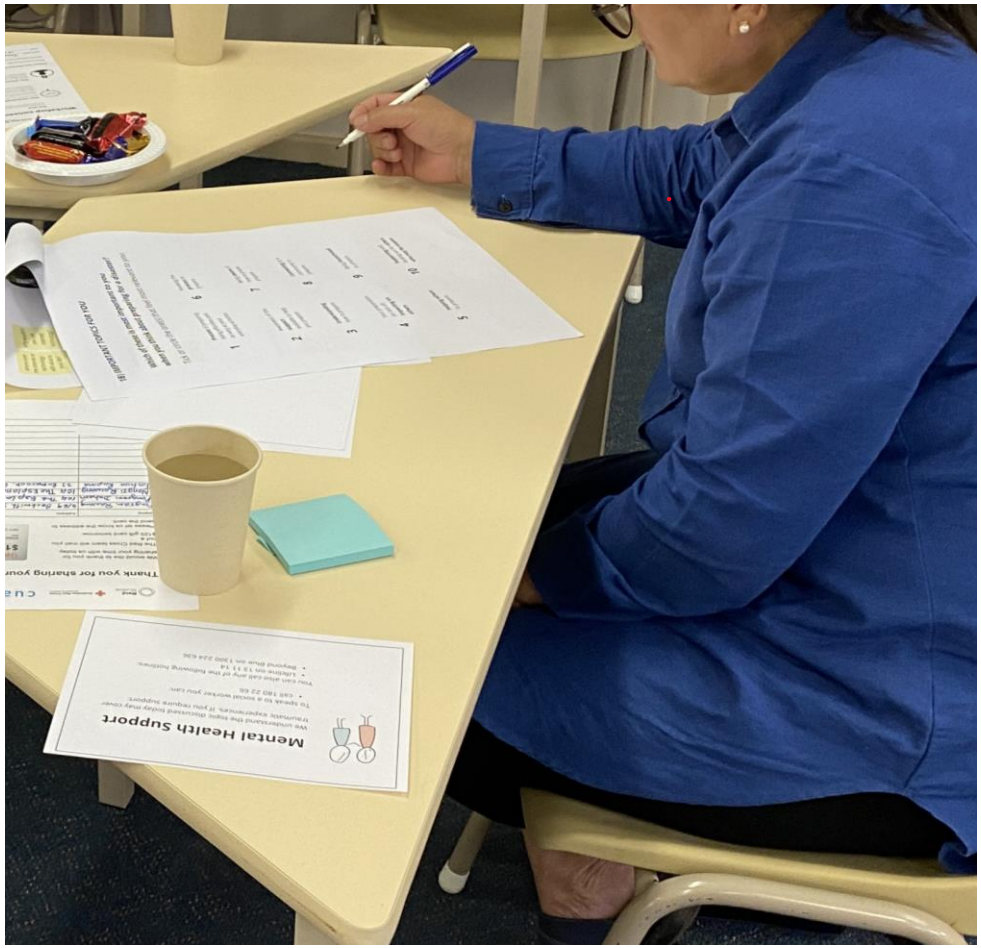
Community member

Unsure what to do in a disaster, CALD, 29 years old

This community member is very internet savvy but felt unprepared for the floods in Townsville. A mum of three young kids, she does not read or speak English and relies on her husband and her community to tell her what is happening.

Never having lived through a flood before she was not aware that there would be no water or electricity for weeks, and that there would be shortages of food in a rich country such as Australia.

She thinks that if a flood was to come again she would be prepared now by buying food and water, about two weeks in advance. She would also talk to her community and ask about their plans. But she admits it's not easy knowing what the right thing is to do as she just doesn't know where to find the information she can trust.



Community member

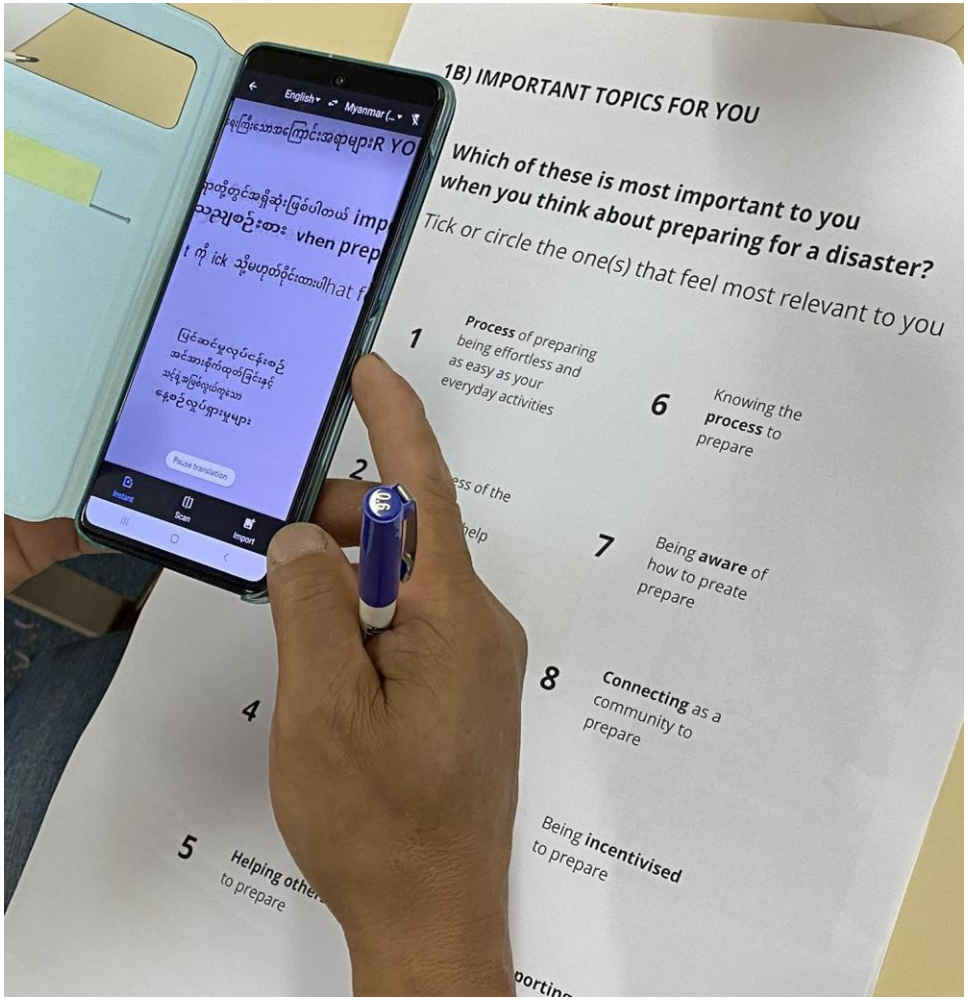
Reliant on translated and contextualised information, CALD, age unknown

This community member is originally from Burma and is a new resident in Australia as of March 2020. He is part of a small, close-knit community of family and friends who have migrated together.

He hadn't owned a mobile phone previously and has learnt how to use it since being in Australia—utilising Google translate to understand documents and information.

He hasn't experienced a natural disaster previously and isn't sure what would happen if one were to occur.

He has learnt English since being in Australia and is very reliant on the English speakers in the community to share what comes out in mainstream news, as translated information is not available or very difficult to find.



Farmer and Lead Rural Fire Service Volunteer

No to low digital literacy, age unknown

This community member and lead rural fire service volunteer has over 30 years experience in fighting fires locally in the Riverina. He is very involved with his community and trains volunteer firefighters.

He identified as having no to low digital literacy and knowledge of technology. He has a mobile phone and has taught himself basic skills for business purposes e.g. checking the weather app and selling cattle. He is very reliant on younger members of the brigade to use digital technology. If physically travelling to fight fires, he has to bring a younger digitally savvy person with him to stay connected and keep other updated with information.

He believes he has no reason not to use digital technology but feels it has to be reliable. In disaster situations over reliance on phone service and digital technology makes it frustrating when it isn't available.

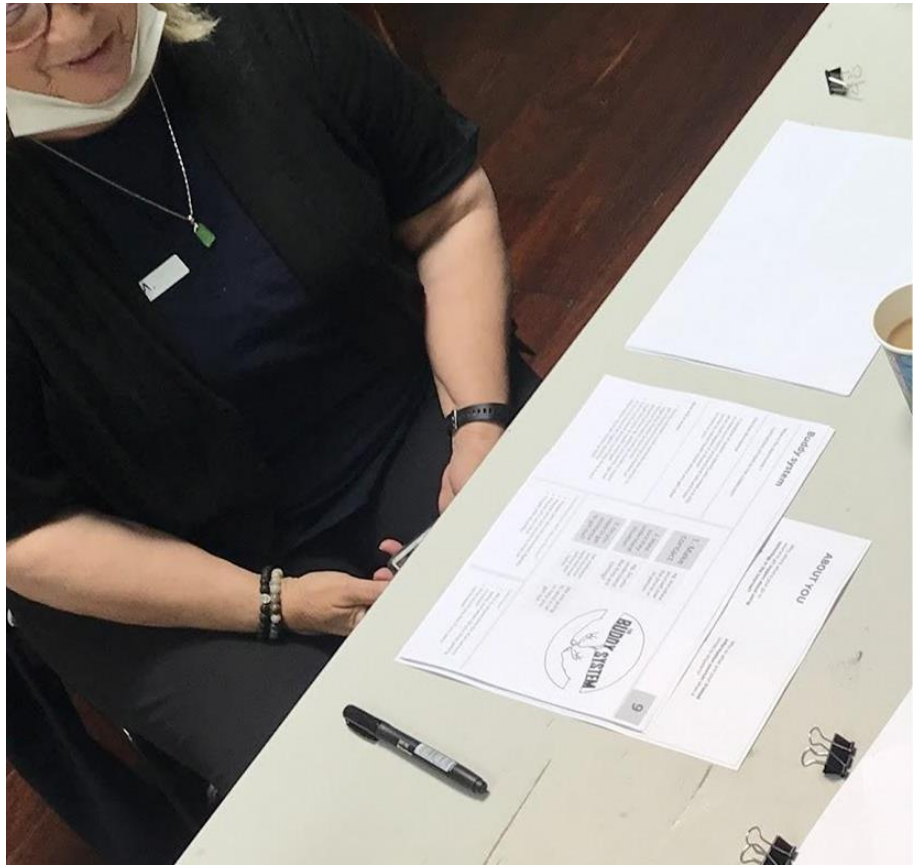
Community member

Motivated to prepare, information sources are unclear, 63 years old

This community member has lived most of her life in South Australia but moved with her husband to Queensland for their retirement.

During the floods in Townsville she watched the news, listened to the radio and also read the text messages from her local Council to evacuate. However, her suburb was never listed in those messages and when the flood came to her house she was unprepared to evacuate.

This time she will prepare by listening to the news and moving in with friends who live high up on a hill. She does use her mobile phone to go on Facebook but never thought about Googling preparedness. She relies on her Council to share appropriate information.



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