

# CHILDSPACE

Trauma informed child focused  
community building recovery project



FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

August 2020 - July 2021



## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters across Australia in which we share. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and to the children who are leaders of tomorrow. We acknowledge the histories and living cultures and the many thousands of years in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have raised their children to be safe and strong. We recognise and accept it is the oldest continuous living culture in the world and that their sovereignty has never been ceded.

## Acknowledgements

ChildSPACE draws together the expertise of Professor Lisa Gibbs (Director of the Child Health and Community Wellbeing Program in the Centre for Health Equity, University of Melbourne), Brett Ellis (Disaster Recovery expert with direct experience in rebuilding communities in the region and nationally) and the Australian Childhood Foundation.



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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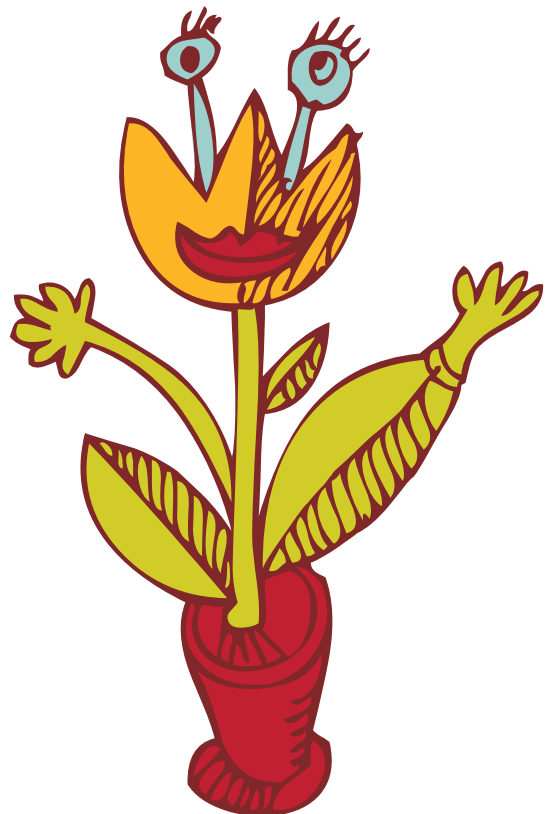


Australian  
Childhood  
Foundation

**Direct Relief** has generously provided an important funding investment over two years to implement the program.

## Suggested citation

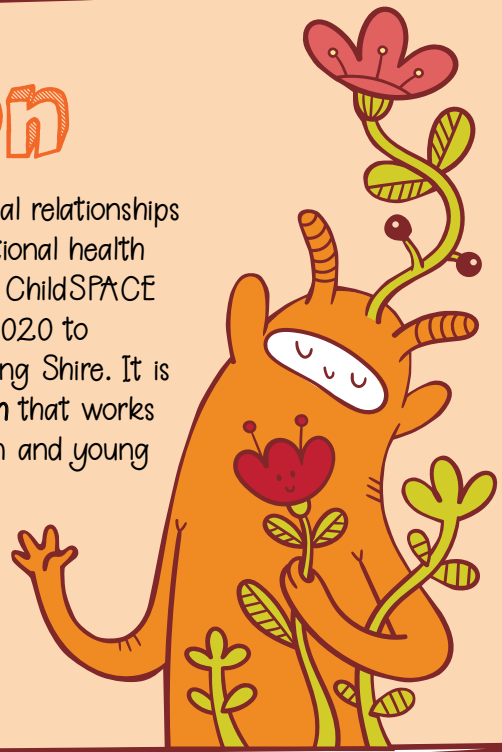
Noordam, K., Marinkovic, K., Dalfour, N., Gibbs, L., Wing, J. & Tucci, J. (2021). ChildSpace: Trauma informed child focused community building recovery project - First Annual Report. Australian Childhood Foundation and University of Melbourne.



# introduction

Children and families require a network of formal and informal relationships and supports around them to promote good social and emotional health and well-being following the devastating impacts of bushfires. ChildSPACE was created in response to the Eastern Victoria Fires 2019 - 2020 to support children, young people and families living in the Towong Shire. It is a **trauma informed child focused community building program** that works to resource the formal and informal networks around children and young people who have suffered bushfire related trauma.

With the COVID restrictions in place in Victoria in 2020, ChildSPACE has been operational in the community since January 2021. This report outlines the work undertaken to date, its emerging impact and the strategy moving forward.



## What is the ChildSPACE Program?



The damage and loss from the multiple bushfire events over the 2019/20 Australian summer season and the subsequent social disruptions during the recovery period will have far-reaching impacts on families and communities for years to come. The evidence from previous disasters highlights that a significant number of children and youth in high impact communities will have extended mental health, emotional, social and learning difficulties that will place them behind their peers in unaffected communities.

The ChildSPACE Program is a new initiative which aims to ensure that there is a sustained focus on supporting the social and emotional well-being needs of children and young people living in these areas. It draws together the expertise of Professor Lisa Gibbs (Director of the Child Health and Community Wellbeing Program in the Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne and Lead of Community Resilience in the Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety), Brett Ellis (Disaster Recovery expert with direct experience in rebuilding communities in the region and nationally) and the Australian Childhood Foundation.

It works alongside communities to resource the formal and informal networks around children and young people who have suffered bushfire related trauma. Its primary goal is to strengthen the knowledge, confidence and commitment of community members to notice, care and support children and young people and their families as they navigate the recovery process, paying particular attention to the consequences of trauma on children over time.

Direct Relief has generously provided a significant amount of funding over two years to implement the program, contingent on successful outcomes in its first year.

ChildSPACE is being implemented in the Towong Shire located in the Northeast of Victoria. It consists of several smaller communities collectively referred to as the 'Upper Murray,' inclusive of Corryong, Cudgewa, Tintaldra, Walwa and the Nariel Valley. The closest major town to Corryong is Albury/Wodonga which is 90 minutes away by car. The community is largely dedicated to farming.

During the Eastern Victoria Fires 2019 - 2020, the community was deeply affected by the Upper Murray Walwa Fire. Since then, children, young people and families in the Towong Shire have also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.



## The Upper Murray Walwa Fire

The Walwa Upper Murray Fire started on 29 December 2019 in New South Wales, and by 30 December the fires had spread to Victoria, arriving from Walwa to Tintaldra and Cudgewa, right to the very edges of and around Corryong, on to Nariel Valley and beyond. On 3 January 2020, the Victorian Government declared a State of Emergency. The fire was not contained until 25 January 2020 (Towong Shire, 2020).

In the lower area of the Towong Shire, Tallangatta, Mitta Mitta, Bellbridge, and Bethanga were all impacted by weeks of thick smoke, and the Upper Murray communities were evacuated into these communities for weeks following the fires. The fire came quickly and fiercely causing many families to be suddenly disconnected. Communication infrastructure was lost, resulting in individuals being unable to connect and know if their families, friends, neighbours, homes, and properties had survived.

Those who evacuated spent a significant period not being able to find out the extent of the impact of the fires. In the days after the fires, much of the farming stock that survived were severely burned and required to be put down. In some cases, this took days to occur leaving many animals suffering and making it an incredibly difficult experience for farmers. Boundary fences were also lost with remaining stock left without feed or water wandering on roads with farmers having no way to contain them.

## The impact of the bushfires in the Upper Murray

- 226,000 hectares of public and private land burned.
- 548 properties burned.
- 71 homes destroyed.
- 5,000+ livestock killed.
- 1,000+ kms of roads and tracks damaged.

(Towong Shire, 2021)

The impact of the bushfires was quickly amplified by the arrival of COVID19 pandemic, which saw the area experience the first national lockdown in March 2020 and then the impact of subsequent restrictions throughout 20-21. The experience of the pandemic added layers of uncertainty to an already stressed community. Business owners described the experience of losing their source of income and its impact on themselves and their families. Local professionals commented that they were required to continue to support the community while dealing with their personal losses and grief. Mothers of young children shared stories of feeling overwhelmed and isolated but also being resilient. Throughout it all, the community as a whole have continued to identify a collective concern about the impacts of these two major experiences on the wellbeing and development of children and young people.



The ChildSPACE program has a number of key elements that have as a primary focus sustained community capacity building, supporting the coordination of the range of differentiated supports and responses, tailored to the needs of children in the community and the development of an evidence-base about 'what works' in these contexts. The methodology that underpins the program is detailed in the diagram below.



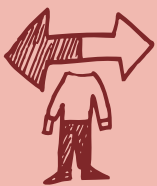
**Deciding next steps based on what the community wants**



Using a trauma informed approach in which relational strengths are at the core of community building, ChildSPACE spent the first six months of operations engaging respectfully with the individuals across formal and informal networks. It deliberately did not offer a specific program or service into the community, preferring to create opportunities for listening to the stories and experiences of individuals and families. These conversations generated good will and trust between the community and ChildSPACE practitioners. In effect, they facilitated exchanges through which the experiences of children and families were acknowledged and validated. The needs of the community and the hopes they held for the children and young people emerged from these discussions.



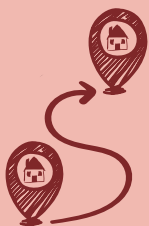
## Listening and validating is the first step in a human centred design approach to program formation



We have been listening everywhere: over cuppas, around lunch tables, informal chats in shops, cafes, and on the street! Almost every interaction with someone in the community has involved a sharing of conversation, stories and experiences.



We have been building relationships with key contacts in the community, as well as talking with community members who are more difficult to reach (e.g. who live further away from town).



In less than six months, we have travelled over 3,000 kms! The feedback we have received from the community shows that they find it helpful for someone to come from outside. Sometimes, people prefer to talk with someone from outside the community because it helps protect their privacy and confidentiality.

## A number of important themes were identified as priorities for the community.

### Theme 1. The bushfires were controlled, but the effects of the multiple traumas have continued.

The memories of the experience of the bushfires and their aftermath are palpable. It took weeks and, in some places, months to have power and communication infrastructure restored. Eighteen months on, some families report still smelling the smoke throughout parts of their home.

Many parents have reported that children find it difficult to be left at childcare, school or other activities, such as sport or visiting friends. This is particularly true for children who were separated from their families during the bushfire and spent time apart not knowing if their families were safe. Some children in pre-school engage regularly in thematic play that reflect fire and distress, including the use of a large vehicle as a fire engine, using ladders and equipment to prepare their homes by cleaning out the gutters.

The community has been saddened and shocked following the deaths of five young people who have died of illness, accidents, and, in three cases, suicide. These young men were well known to their communities, and their loss has deeply impacted everyone. Parents have reported feeling unsure about how to support their children, and fear for their children's mental health and wellbeing.

### Theme 2. There is a lack of identified space for children to participate in and feel a part of their community.

Repeated feedback suggests that the community is acutely aware of the lack of child friendly spaces in town where children can meet informally and have fun, share in activities that promote well-being and build opportunities for friendships. Some children have to spend time out on the farms, with babies and toddlers sleeping in cars and vans while their parents are involved in recovery work.

There is a parallel need for parents to engage with other parents informally, build connection and find easy opportunities to explore other forms of support. There are a high number of women who have or are due to give birth during 2021, and also a high number of twins expected. Many new mothers who are still breastfeeding their babies at night have reported having to wake early in the morning to milk their cows. The experience of isolation of these parents has been an important focus of consideration for many of the early childhood professionals working in Corryong.



## Theme 3, There is a need for hope to be referenced in day-to-day activities of the community.

Feedback from members of the community have highlighted that there are common experiences being shared over time in particular individuals feeling stretched beyond their limits, exhausted and decision fatigued. It has led to many relationships being described as being “on edge” and increasingly stressed. In addition, the community’s opportunity to find connection through social events has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Community members have identified that they feel as if many people are overwhelmed with their own recovery. Many of the key workers and helpers who provide services and support in the community have also been significantly impacted by traumatic events themselves.

Some families living further from the main towns have also become increasingly isolated, with women and children often staying home while partners work long hours on the farms. Often, families will make one trip into town a week for shopping. If they do not incidentally run into someone they know, they can return home without any genuine connection or interaction for the week.

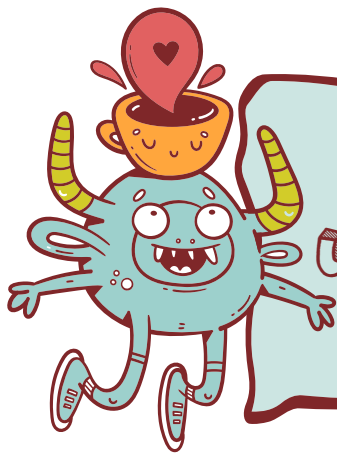
There is a real need for opportunities for hope of change and improvement to be referenced in the day-to-day interactions and activities of the community. This is a significant challenge. The community have reported over numerous occasions that progress towards change is not often tangible. They are concerned that they may never recover from the dual impact of the trauma of the bushfires and COVID19 pandemic. They are particularly concerned that the children and young people in their community find it difficult to hold onto hope that their daily experiences will improve.

For this very reason, the community does not identify with the need for specialist forms of counselling because it only served to confirm that the community is not “coping”. Instead, a number of individuals believe that there should be low-key opportunities for support through informal activity and social groups in a positive environment that is for and on behalf of the community. This approach better meets the needs of the community, uses the strengths of the relationships in the community and symbolises the collective intention to resource resilience for everyone, in particular its children and young people.

## Theme 4, Community experience reflects a sense of confusion and uncertainty about programs and services.

Repeated feedback appeared to reflect a common experience that immediately following the bushfires, the community experienced an overwhelming number of services and programs flooding the town. The short-term nature of the funding left the community feeling that these services came and quickly ended. At different times, the community refused certain programs from being implemented because they were not seen as relevant or important. The community have become more wary about the sort of activities it will support. There is significant confusion amongst everyone about who is currently offering services and where to access support. Many individuals have identified how challenging it is for them to even understand the nature of the services and supports that are being offered. This creates significant and unnecessary barriers for individuals to feel motivated and confident to find resources that they may need.





## Examples of activities undertaken by ChildSPACE in its first year

At the Community Welcome Baby Ceremony and Health and Wellbeing day, ChildSPACE ran its own stall, where we shared resources about children's wellbeing and safety. On the day, the ChildSPACE team held conversations about how to support children, health nutrition and farm safety with over 200 attendees. We liaised with Kidsafe Victoria to have one of their staff attend the day and provide free car fitting installations and checks for new parents. We sourced funding from the Rotary Bushfire Funds to purchase 30 wellbeing gift bags for all the new parents and babies attending the ceremony. The gift bags included items from local businesses in Corryong.

We helped develop a youth mentoring activity for young people in Corryong in collaboration with Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV), Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic), and the Upper Murray Youth Group, where a young mentor shared her story of recovering from bushfire and helped young people think of ideas to participate in their community's recovery.

In addition to helping organise activities in the community, we created two resources with examples of community-led recovery activities in Australia that we shared with Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) and the Community Recovery Committee (CRC) to help the community develop ideas they would like to carry out in the Towong Shire to promote a sense of connection and hope.

We have supported the community to advocate for slower speed signage outside the Maternal and Child Health Centre and Pre-school.



# Building an evidence base about what works - the partnership with Melbourne University

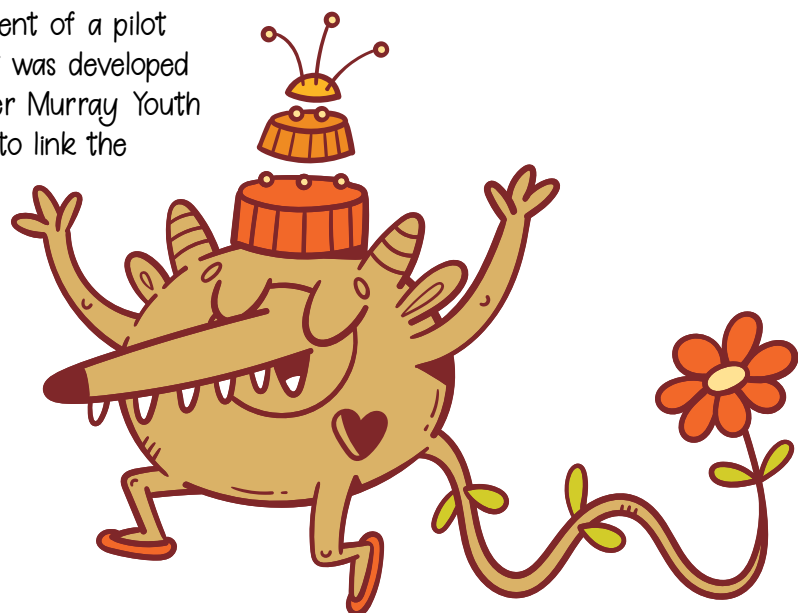


The collaboration with the Child and Community Wellbeing Unit, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, has provided important research support for the initial phase of implementation of ChildSPACE with the community.

## Activity Stream 1.

### Engaging with community stakeholders and supporting the development of activities for youth empowerment and wellbeing in the community

- Professor Lisa Gibbs and Dr Katitza Marinkovic have contributed to meetings with community stakeholders, including the Community Recovery Committee (CRC), Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV), Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic), Towong Shire Early Years Group, the Towong People and Wellbeing Recovery Working Group, the Upper Murray Youth Group, Red Cross, Monash University and the Bushfire Mental Health and Wellbeing Projects series.
- During these meetings, Professor Lisa Gibbs and Dr Katitza Marinkovic built collaborations with other organisations currently working in Towong Shire, listened to community members and practitioners, and contributed with current evidence to help identify the need for initiatives that promote a sense of hope and connection in the community.
- Dr Katitza Marinkovic supported the development of a pilot for a youth mentoring activity in Corryong that was developed in collaboration with BRV, YACVic and the Upper Murray Youth Group. The University of Melbourne's role was to link the project with a young mentor and provide a mental health resource that was created with and for young people who had been affected by a disaster, as well as systematising and reporting the process and outcomes of the pilot youth mentoring activity.



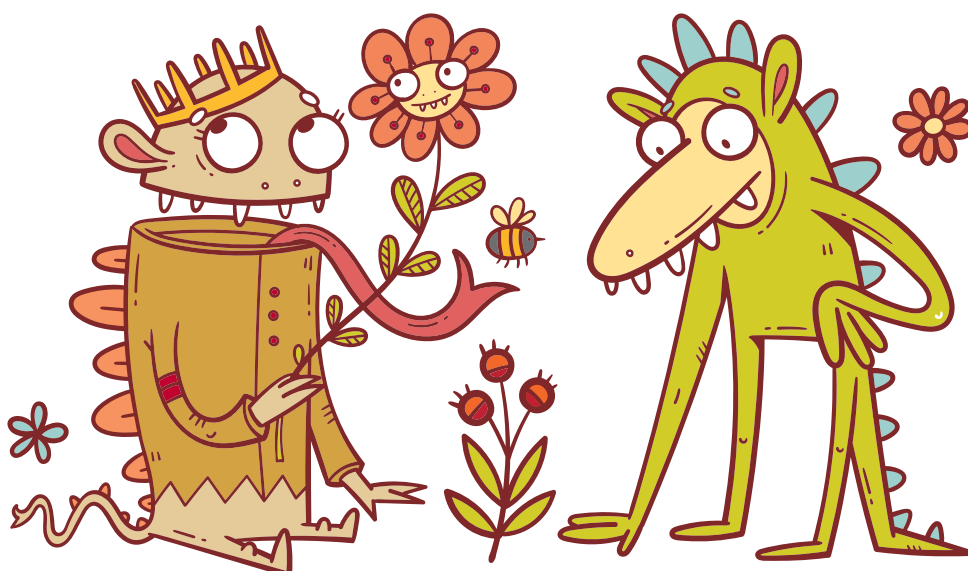
“...When we arrived at Corryong, our first impression was that community members and service providers were starting to manifest the fatigue caused by the first months of recovery and the repeated disruption of their everyday lives. Yet, many welcomed the arrival of ChildSPACE and welcomed us to different events and community activities that were being carried out as part of the recovery process...”

ChildSPACE Community Resilience Worker

## Activity Stream 2.

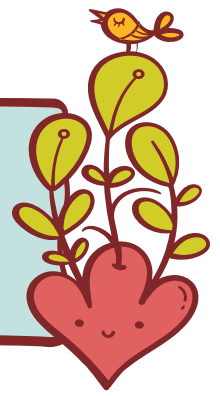
Supporting reflexivity, systematising and visualising evidence that is relevant for community recovery

- The ChildSPACE and Melbourne University teams have met regularly to exchange relevant information related to working with communities affected by disasters in a timely and evidence-informed way. Working online also allowed the team at the University of Melbourne to support the work that ChildSPACE carried out on the ground, through the development of project deliverables that systematised and visualised relevant information, and served to prompt dialogue and action for the promotion of positive mental health outcomes in the community - See the service mapping outcome.
- The University of Melbourne has also supported ChildSPACE through the Children and Disasters Advisory Committee, that gathers the expertise of representatives from over 20 academic, governmental and community organizations. The Committee, led by Professor Lisa Gibbs and coordinated by Dr Katitza Marinkovic, meets bi-monthly to discuss and provide support to different disaster recovery projects, including ChildSPACE.



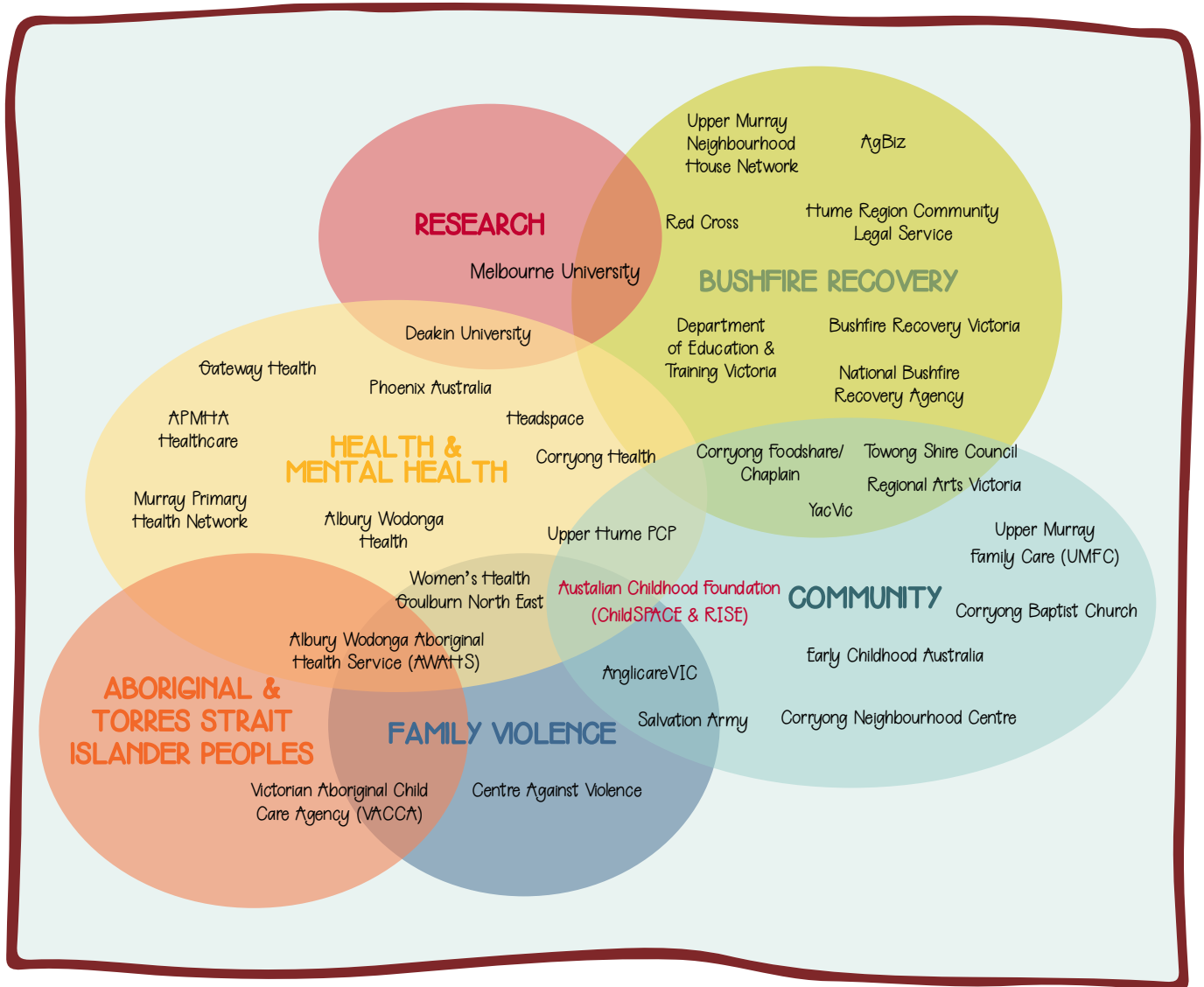


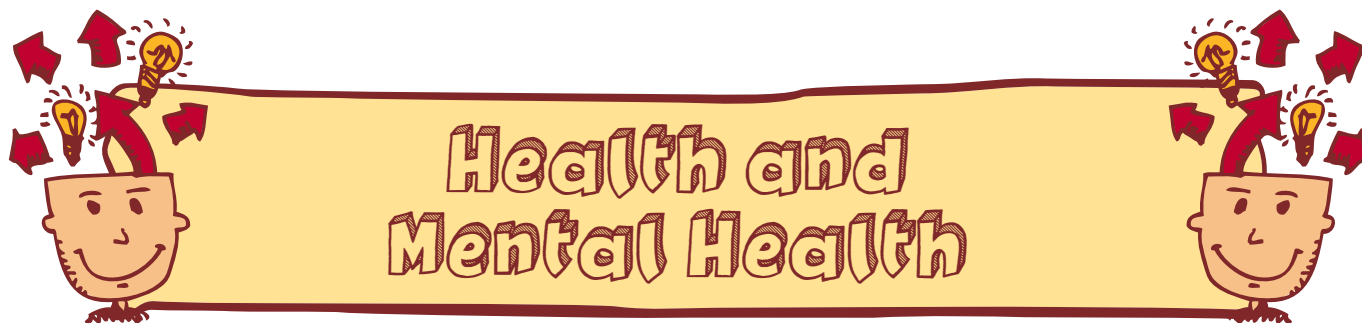
# Service Mapping in Towong Shire



The outcome of the mapping of services that are available in the Towong Shire area is presented in this section. As is evident, there are a large number of programs and services being provided into the community. Some are well established and other have emerged in response to the bushfires. It is evident that there is also considerable areas of over-lapping service delivery. It is not surprising that the experience of confusion by the community has emerged.

The service map is currently being developed into a directory for distribution to the community to help clarify the range of services available, how and when to access them and make it easier for individuals and families to engage with these supports as required.





**Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS):** non-profit organisation that was developed and set up to cater for the primary health care needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their families.

**Albury Wodonga Health:** cross-border health services: emergency presentations, inpatients, delivering babies, sub-acute beds, mental health beds, intensive care beds, operating theatres, general beds, community based residential facilities and community health centres.

**Australian Childhood Foundation (ChildSPACE and RISE):** provides specialized support to children who have experienced trauma; provides parents with education and support; advocates for children and policy change.

**APMHA Healthcare:** provides intake, triage, allocations and clinical mental health services

**Corryong Health:** provides a comprehensive range of healthcare services to all people, at all stages of life, contributing to a strong, viable community: Corryong Medical Clinic, Community Services, Acute & Residential Care.

**Gateway Health:** services include medical practices, allied health, alcohol and other drug services including home based withdrawal, counselling services, family violence, men's behaviour change, Gambler's Help, health promotion, chronic disease management, Indigenous programs, aged care services including assessment, disability Services - registered NIDS provider, mental health programs including headspace, youth services, young parenting and family support programs, refugee health and sexual health.

**Headspace:** National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds. headspace can help young people with mental health, physical health (including sexual health) alcohol and other drug services, and work and study support.

**Murray Primary Health Network:** Connecting health systems and primary health services across the region.

**Phoenix Australia:** Australian National Centre of Excellence in Posttraumatic Mental Health. Services include: setting standards for trauma management and treatment; expert reviews of policy and procedure against best practice; Policy development workshops, seminars and leadership think tanks; Trauma policy implementation and evaluation; Workforce capability assessment and professional development; Quality assurance and ongoing service delivery improvement; Self-care resources for people affected by trauma, including online tools and mobile applications.

**Women's Health Goulburn North East:** building capacity to support and advance women's economic security, agency and wellbeing in the face of climate change, sexual and reproductive health and to prevent violence against women.



**AgBiz:** support for rural and regional businesses, farmers and communities affected by bushfires.

**Australian Red Cross:** Community services (for older people, NDIS, mental health services, homelessness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people in the justice system); help in emergencies, resources for communities; helping migrants in transition.

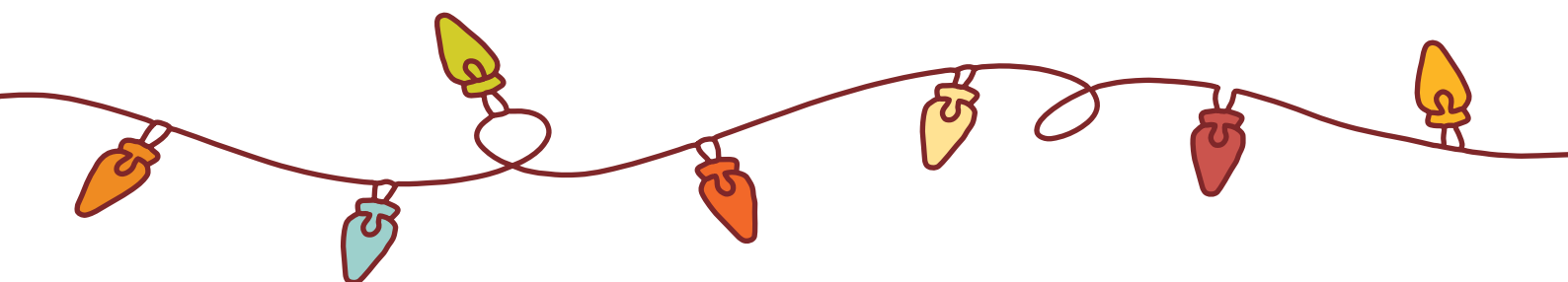
**Bushfire Recovery Victoria:** Victorian Government agency working directly with local communities to listen, help and deliver what they need. Services include: Community recovery committees, hubs and councils; financial support; financial counselling; Local Economic Recovery Programs; Rebuilding support (assistance for planning, rebuilding, housing and other matters about your property); factsheets and information on government programs and initiatives for Victoria's bushfire recovery; information about support, counselling and advice available; information on programs and initiatives supporting the environmental recovery of Victoria's bushfire affected areas.

**Department of Education and Training Victoria:** learning and development support and services for all Victorians.

**Hume Region Community Legal Service:** free legal advice to people affected by bushfires living in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW.

**National Bushfire Recovery Agency:** connecting affected people with the assistance they need (families and individuals, small businesses and primary producers, mental health).

**Upper Murray Neighbourhood House Network:** facilitating regional collaboration on issues, needs and projects, providing individual support and resourcing to houses, representing and advocating on regional issues and needs to Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, and local and state governments





**AnglicareVic:** works with children, young people and families to prevent harm and empower people to overcome challenges and achieve their full potential. Services include: foster care; family and parenting support; family violence; children and young people; education; financial counselling; emergency relief (immediate assistance including groceries, clothing, medication, financial assistance and counselling and other services); alcohol and drug support; community support programs.

**Corryong Baptist Church:** religious services, youth groups, missions, local ministries (women and men), Church family camp.

**Corryong Foodshare/ Chaplain:** a welfare ministry division of Ambassadors of Jesus providing food, groceries, furniture and home goods.

**Corryong Neighbourhood Centre/ Youth Space:** youth programs, event management, groups and activities, education and training support, social enterprise, linking with community services, office services.

**Early Childhood Australia:** advocates to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children aged birth to eight years. Provides opportunities for professional development and resources for parents.

**Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC):** Victorian Bushfires Case Support program in North East Victoria. Support coordinators provide links to support, such as information and advice, mental health support or financial counselling, as well as practical things (filling out paperwork, accessing grants and financial claims, and navigating services available through the local council, state and Commonwealth governments).

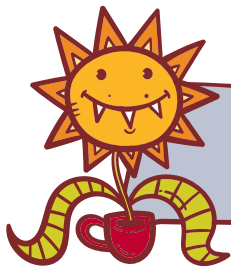
**Upper Hume Primary Care Partnership (PCP):** provides a platform to bring community and service providers together. Focuses on prevention and supporting the delivery of an integrated and responsive system enhancing wellbeing outcomes for communities. Member organizations range from education, health, justice, social services and employment.

**Regional Arts Victoria:** inspires art across the state. Through creative facilitation, touring, education, specialised resources, artistic projects and advocacy, we develop and sustain creative communities and artistic practice all over Victoria.

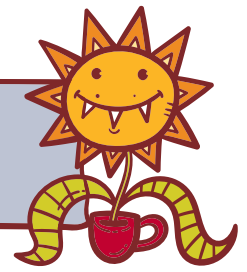
**Salvation Army:** provides diverse social services like disaster and emergency support services (financial assistance, emotional support and referrals), COVID19 assistance, support for family and domestic violence, alcohol/drug related services, aged care, prison support, financial assistance, housing, finding employment, funerals, homelessness support, legal services, learning to drive, positive lifestyle program, rural support, youth services.

**Towong Shire Council:** Community Recovery Grants Program and connection to other services and information.

**Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YacVic):** advocacy for young people on a range of issues, provides mentoring workshops for youth.



## Family Violence



**Centre Against Violence:** Crisis, short term, medium term and long term counselling; advocacy, information and support about family violence, sexual assault and harmful sexual behaviours; Sexual Assault services to victim survivors and children; crisis accommodation, support and recovery services to victim survivors and children; services to children under 10 with harmful sexual behaviours and young people aged 10 to 14 who have sexually abusive behaviours.

**Women's Health Goulburn North East:** building capacity to support and advance women's economic security, agency and wellbeing in the face of climate change, sexual and reproductive health and to prevent violence against women.



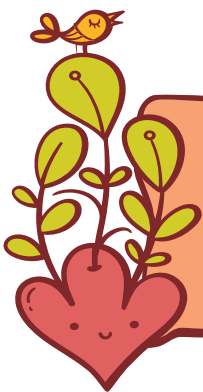
## Research



**Deakin University:** RESPOND project focused on childhood obesity.

**Melbourne University:**

- Research support for Child Space project, case study on how this project was developed and its impact.
- Red Cross evaluation program (separate from Child Space)

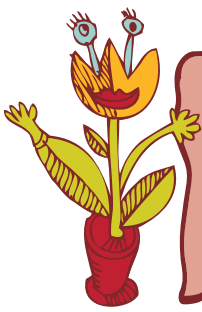


## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

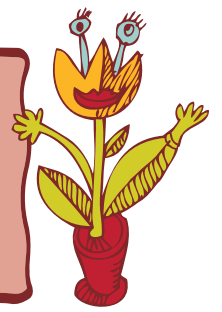


**Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA):** VACCA Bushfire Recovery Program provides state-wide case management to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members; COVID19 services; children and families; youth services and programs; cultural strengthening programs; community support; family violence; justice support; external training.

**Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS):** non-profit organisation that was developed and set up to cater for the primary health care needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their families.



# The key lessons from ChildSPACE to date



## Lesson 1.

Recovery requires respectfully approaching the community to gradually build rapport and trusting relationships.

Recovery work is a delicate process that involves navigating relationships and stressed systems. At the moment, many people in and around Corryong are experiencing high levels of stress and often do not feel they have the capacity to engage with informal and formal networks. Communications, relationships, and systems appear exhausted and sometimes dysregulated. The community does want help and feels that there are not enough services available. However, they also hold deep reservations about services not following through or just entering and disappearing quickly. This experience has added unnecessary barriers to individuals seeking out help when they need it, possibly leaving them isolated and more vulnerable. This is even more significant for children and young people who rely on adults to notice, reach out and support them.

It is critical then that ChildSPACE continues to work at a pace that is safe for the community with a focus on building trusting, predictable and attuned relationships.

## Lesson 2.

### Recovery requires ongoing support.

Recovery work is very slow. More than a year after the East Victoria Fires 2019 - 2020, the community is still in survival mode, and has experienced multiple crises. People in the community remain focussed on practical elements of disaster recovery. Many have reported having no internal resources left to draw from. Community members describe feeling consistently busy and overwhelmed.



## Lesson 3.

### Recovery needs to be built on the strengths of the community.

There are people in this community who are dedicated, passionate, protective and great advocates for their community. There is some great work occurring with services and community members to support recovery and engage the community in this process. This is the backbone of recovery effort. It is clear that ChildSPACE has become a valued part of these efforts with feedback suggesting that its respectful and validating approach has been critical to its acceptance.

## Lesson 4.

### Concerns about children and young people's wellbeing is increasing.

With adults focused so much on the reality of rebuilding, children and young people run the risk of being left unnoticed. This is not the case in the Corryong community. There are many individuals who are in positions where they have observed the ongoing needs of children and young people. The main concerns centre on isolation, repetitive trauma behaviour, and developmental delays arising from the amplified levels of stress caused by the bushfires and pandemic related restrictions.

## Lesson 5.

### Low key support is the basis of trauma informed child focused community building at the core of the ChildSPACE model.

The community have indicated their preference for opportunities for informal support that has a positive connotation to it. They would like to take part in activities that are fun, collective and purposeful such as morning coffee groups for young mothers, BBQ evenings for dads, playgroups for infants and their parents, games afternoons for young people. These activities reduce the stigma of participation by any individual whilst still allowing individuals to reach out for more intensive and formal supports if required. ChildSPACE has established itself as a resource for the community to realise its vision through active co-design and community engagement.



## The next 12 months For ChildSPACE

ChildSPACE has become a small part of the community fabric in the Towong area. So much so that it has been offered the use of a building that has been purchased by a local resident who wishes to turn it into a community hub that can be used by a range of groups with a focus on meeting the needs of local children, young people and families. This building is a former squash court with ample room to create different spaces for arts, social, and support groups.

The community have invited ChildSPACE to establish the first regional Toy Library in this building. The Toy Library provides exactly the sort of low key activity that the community has been seeking. It will enable families to share and swap toys, come together to have fun and build relationships between its members.

ChildSPACE is now developing a blueprint for how to activate this community space and engage different groups to use it. The next 12 months will further advance this project.

In addition, ChildSPACE will continue to pursue the following strategies as it evolves its presence and activities.

### Strategy 1.

ChildSPACE will actively listen to and build trusting relationships with the community.

- We will invest in building and maintaining relationships based on the community's timing and needs.
- We will be available and open to listen to people's stories in a way that validates their perspectives and supports their mental health.
- We will remain flexible enough to adapt and respond to emerging and unexpected needs in the community.





## Strategy 2.

ChildSPACE will support the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing in the whole community.

- We will gently increase awareness of the long-term impacts of bushfires and trauma for children, in a way that helps the community feel safe and comfortable.
- We will gradually contribute to shift commonly held views that children are less impacted by disasters than adults.
- We will help disseminate messages in the community about the importance of connection through fun and play.

## Strategy 3.

ChildSPACE will collaborate with other services in the community for the benefit of children and young people.

- We will provide ongoing support and resourcing to Maternal Child Health Nurses, Supported Playgroup Facilitators and Kindergarten Staff about trauma responsive practice for children in the early years.
- We will provide support for fatigued professionals working in the support service system in the area.
- We will help create and disseminate resources (e.g., posters, information sheets, story books, card sets) that help the community address children's needs for fun, connection and play.
- We will provide specialist consultation to families and professionals about the ongoing and long term needs of children who have experienced bushfire and other potentially traumatic events.
- We will attend (when invited) sporting and other events to raise awareness of the needs of children and young people in the area.

## Strategy 4.

ChildSPACE will directly support children and parents.

- We will connect children, young people and their families to more intensive support as they need it.
- We will provide specialist therapeutic support for children, young people and families as needed.
- We will support parents at playgroups and other children's activities to offer role modelling related to play, connection and attunement.



## Strategy 5.

ChildSPACE will continue its partnership with Melbourne University to define the program logic of its approach and determine its ongoing impact for children and young people in the community.

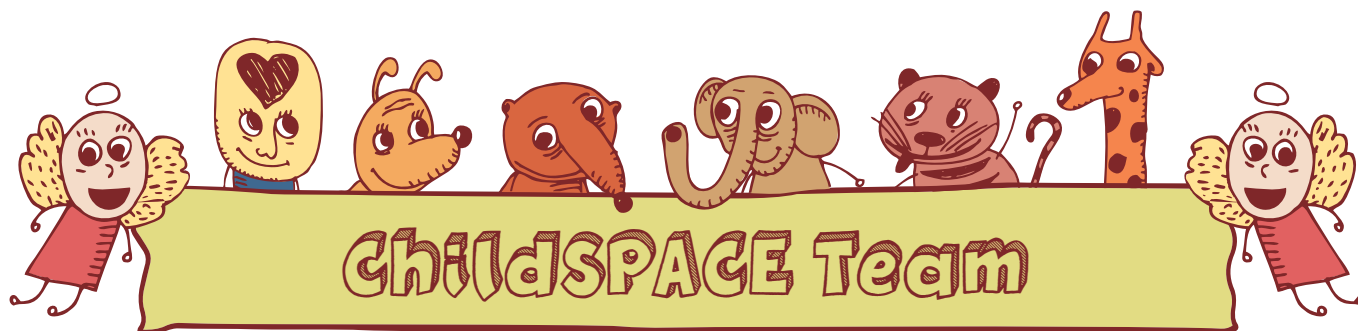
- We will collaborate to best describe the ChildSPACE model in conjunction with the community and key stakeholders.
- We will measure the impact of ChildSPACE in ways that are respectful to the community's needs and interests.
- We will write and publish content about what works to keep the needs of children in focus in the post disaster recovery processes of communities through the insights of the ChildSPACE model.



## References



Towong Shire (2021). Towong Municipal Recovery Plan 2019 - 2021. Upper Murray 26 Bushfires. <https://www.towong.vic.gov.au/about-council/plans-budgets-reports/plans/images/Towong-Municipal-Recovery-Plan---December-20201.pdf>



### Dr Joe Tucci

Joe is the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Childhood Foundation, a social worker and psychologist. Joe is interested in the impact of abuse-related trauma on brain development, and has extensive experience in research, counselling, training, consultancy, clinical supervision and program development and evaluation.

### Jenny Wing

Jenny is the General Manager of Therapeutic Services across Victoria and Tasmania for the Australian Childhood Foundation. She has extensive experience in therapeutic work with children and young people. She brings a passion for child protection and a depth of knowledge in her field.

### Nicole Balfour

Nicole is the Program Manager of the Ovens Murray-Goulburn Therapeutic Services in Victoria. Nicole has extensive experience leading programs and teams who provide direct therapeutic work with families, children and young people. Nicole is passionate about ensuring children and young people have a voice.

### Kellie Noordam

Kellie is the Senior Advisor for the ChildSPACE program in the Towong Shire. Kellie has experience in program and community development and supporting parents and children. She is passionate about supporting the Towong Shire following the black summer bushfires after being directly involved with emergency support in Corryong.

### Professor Lisa Gibbs

Lisa is Director of the Child and Community Wellbeing Unit, University of Melbourne, and Lead of Community Resilience in the Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety. She leads public health research relating to disaster recovery and community resilience and child health and wellbeing.

### Dr Katitza Marinkovic

Katitza is a Child Psychologist and Research Fellow in the Child and Community Wellbeing Unit in the Centre for Health Equity, University of Melbourne. Her work focuses on child and youth wellbeing and participation in communities affected by disasters and climate change.

