

Community Early Response Teams: Locals supporting locals

A community response to flood recovery

Project Overview

The 2022 floods were a devastating time for the families, businesses and the Ipswich community as a whole. As the event unfolded, Neighbourhood Centres across the region responded as best they could to the needs of the community. In the days afterwards, they observed and heard peoples' heartbreaking experiences. It was evident that gaps existed in peoples' levels of preparedness, access to information and support during the event and that in the future, there will be a need for a place-based community response. This led to the establishment of the Ipswich Community Early Response Teams. Several Neighbourhood Centres including Gailes Community House and Rosewood Community Centre were supported by Ipswich City Council to establish CERT locally.

Community Early Response Teams (CERT) are made up of local community volunteers who provide initial support during or after a disaster or emergency. The role of a CERT member is to provide care and comfort to the local community as well as enhance the services and support that already exist. Raising awareness of local CERTS provides a sense of reassurance and confidence in the community's ability to respond.

Recruitment of volunteers began with existing community relationships/networks including friends and family members. The search was expanded through further conversations as well as advertising through Volunteering Queensland and broader public communications.

CERT members participate in training and attend meetings as required, depending on what their role will be. They identified the type of training required and this was provided free of charge thanks to local government, lead agencies and NGOs. Topics included Queensland

Disaster Management Arrangements, Recovery Basics, Communicating in Recovery, Accredited First Aid and CPR, Psychological First Aid, Volunteer Management and Wellbeing and Self-care.

Providing Purpose and Support

The Neighbourhood Centres found it particularly important to provide a purpose and support structure for volunteer involvement, such as to:

- Identify roles that volunteers can take on that allow them to feel connected, appreciated and valued. This includes small tasks during the non-active times.
- Identify who within your organisation will be the contact person for each volunteer.
- Facilitate mentoring and support within the volunteer group.



Photo: Ron White, RADSc JP Signing Support Services Co-ordinator and CERT Member, helps a local community member with her disaster relief paperwork.

Key Outcomes

The establishment of CERT in local communities proved to be beneficial to individuals, the wider community, Neighbourhood Centres, local government and other local organisations and agencies. Key outcomes included:

- Established CERT, which increased opportunities for community connectedness
- Forming groups of volunteers who gained skills, confidence, and a sense of belonging and purpose to benefit the local community
- Built local community capacity including a response plan co-designed by community members
- Strengthened working with local government and other organisations
- Greater community awareness of the lines of communication that can include community members in decision-making and inclusion in network meetings
- Identified local resources (human and physical)

Key Learnings

The sustainability of CERT requires careful consideration, given the ad-hoc and unpredictable timing of when they may be required to activate. The following learnings are paramount for the longevity of the program:

- Locally based and connected CERT members were more likely to stay
- The need for organisational infrastructure and established volunteer support
- CERT create increased confidence and connections of volunteers
- Training together helps to develop relationships and a strong supportive group

SCAN TO DOWNLOAD



This case study supports the delivery of the *Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023-2026*. The full strategy is available for download from the NCQ website: ncq.org.au

Community-Led Considerations

The primary reason for the success of the CERT program is the underpinning community-led approach. Key aspects of this include:

The role of the organisation as an enabler, rather than doing for or to community members

To encourage **volunteers to be mentor and support people** for others in the group

The need for **involvement of community members in future planning and consultation**

As placed-based organisations with trusted local community relationships, **Neighbourhood Centres are well placed to host and/or coordinate CERT programs,** particularly given they are with community through all stages of disasters and emergencies.



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This case study was jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland governments under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.



Australian Government



Queensland Government



Neighbourhood Centres Queensland acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of Country; we pay our respects to their Elders, Ancestors, land and seas. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.