

WOOROLOO BUSHFIRE RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

MAY 2022



MESSAGE FROM THE STATE RECOVERY COORDINATOR, MELISSA PEXTON

Since commencing in the role of State Recovery Coordinator, I am regularly impressed by the hard work and dedication of the community recovery officers and the extensive collaboration that takes place behind the scenes to support the impacted communities.

The recovery teams on the ground continue to play a valuable role in assisting community members to create new connections and access the services they need to best navigate their recovery journey. With the Commonwealth-State funded programs well underway or complete, my focus is to ensure the recovery teams and stakeholders are

supported to enable this vital work to continue and to build resilience within the community.

The Gidgegannup and Wooroloo communities are tackling the recovery process head on. It is pleasing to see slow and steady reconstruction progress, with some residents very close to living in their new homes and other rebuilds at various stages of construction or planning and design, despite the challenges of COVID-19 and intense industry pressure.

Before signing off, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge my predecessor, Assistant Commissioner Graham Swift, and former State Recovery Controller, Dr Ron Edwards, and the amount of instrumental work that has taken place under their guidance to help the impacted residents get back on their feet. Importantly, the comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program that is already underway will ensure this work will help not just those impacted by the Wooroloo bushfire but all Western Australian communities who are faced with recovering from future destructive natural disasters.

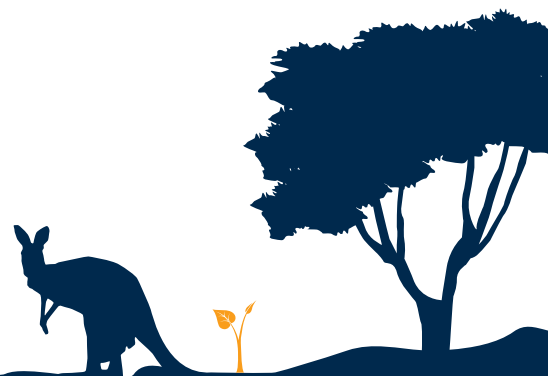
The State Recovery team will continue working in partnership with all levels of government, organisations, community groups and the communities to ensure individuals and groups receive the helping hand they need to find stability and strength in their recovery.

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If you have any feedback or content ideas please contact
wooroloo@dfes.wa.gov.au





David Uhe, Project Manager - Tool Libraries, at the Gidgegannup Tool Library.

ROTARY WA: FORGING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ONE TOOL LIBRARY AT A TIME

As a community service organisation, Rotary has a long history of providing practical help for communities in times of crisis.

WA Rotary Relief, a combined Rotary project, exists precisely for that purpose, and is ready to provide disaster relief in the aftermath of bushfire, flood, cyclone, earthquake and more.

The Wooroloo bushfire response was no different.

Rotary was able to contribute \$540,000 towards the relief effort, raised from Rotary clubs and individual Rotarians, Rotary Australia World Community Service, the Rotary Foundation disaster funding, and donations sourced from philanthropists, other community groups and individuals.

WA Rotary Relief chair, Peter Durrant, said the local team welcomed advice from Rotary teams in other States who have dealt with bushfire responses in recent years. This enabled them “to hit the ground running” and provide immediate support to people affected by the Wooroloo blaze.

“Advice is shared across the country and ideas for the impacted communities of Wooroloo and Gidgegannup came from Lions and Rotary collaborating in support of our communities in Victoria, South Australia and NSW, all of whom had been through similar situations,” he said.

Relief was provided in three main categories, with an emphasis on practical funding assistance – about \$210,00 for sea containers for secure on-site storage, \$161,000 to support volunteers rebuilding fencing and \$67,000 to establish tool libraries for ongoing use for the local communities.

Peter said 47 sea containers were supplied to households in the fire zone, to store items safely on their properties. This was a challenge at a time when quality containers were difficult to find, but appreciation from the recipients showed just how valuable this donation was to them at the time.

Rotary helped BlazeAid’s volunteer fencing teams by supporting their temporary campsite and providing additional fencing supplies to complement materials donated from other sources.

Rotary worked with the City of Swan and Shire of Mundaring on the tool libraries project, with facilities now established at Tilden Park in Gidgegannup and the Wooroloo General Store to provide access to tools for the longer-term rebuilding process.

“We think the tool libraries are more than the provision of tools for work – they are managed by Rotarians, both sympathetic and empathetic to those using the facility and part of the healing process, with a warm cuppa tea and chat on offer whenever the tool library is open for business,” Peter said.

In time, the Gidgegannup tool library will be handed to the Gidgegannup Men’s Shed and the Wooroloo tool library is being handed over to Parky Care. The facilities will stay in the community and will be assets for the Australian Resilience Corps of which Rotary is a partner.

Relief funding not spent on the three main projects has been earmarked to build a fencing trailer for the Gidgegannup Men’s Shed, additional tools for the tool library as identified by the local communities and other consumables and materials still needed in the rebuilding effort.

Peter said with about 100 clubs around WA and more than 2,000 well-connected members, Rotary was uniquely placed to respond quickly and practically to events such as bushfire.

“The beauty of our organisation is that Rotary clubs all over our State, Australia and internationally can quickly join and co-ordinate whatever assistance is needed as a cohesive group,” he said.

On behalf of the communities of Gidgegannup and Wooroloo, thank you Rotary WA!

DID YOU KNOW....?

The Construction Training Fund has introduced a Disaster Recovery Construction Training Grant which will provide additional support to building companies involved in the construction of properties for those impacted by the Wooroloo bushfire.

Also including communities affected by Cyclone Seroja, the grant offers incentives for employers, apprentices and trainees in the construction industry to assist the communities impacted by natural disasters to rebuild and get their lives back on track.

For more information go to: <https://ctf.wa.gov.au/disaster-recovery-grant>

TAX TIME IS APPROACHING

Getting your taxes done can be confusing at the best of times. If you have any concerns or queries about how to report your disaster payment on your tax return, visit www.ato.gov.au/General/Support-in-difficult-times/Support-from-other-agencies/Reporting-disaster-payments-and-grants-in-your-tax-return/ for advice from the ATO.

If you require more targeted advice in relation to your

individual circumstances, you should seek advice from a registered tax professional or the ATO.

If you need a helping hand with replacing important documents, Legal Aid WA can help you with free legal advice and assistance. To get in contact:

Call the Infoline on 1300 650 579

Chat online at www.legalaid.wa.gov.au

Email them at naturaldisasters@legalaid.wa.gov.au



Ioannis (centre) with fellow Recovery Officers, Andrew Maytom and Ian Robinson.



Ioannis with community member, Alison Archer.



Ioannis (centre) with more fellow Recovery Officers, Lauren Holmes and Karen Dore.

HELPING TO HEAL: IOANNIS' PASSION ENCOURAGES COMMUNITIES TO GROW

Supporting people who are dealing with some of life's biggest challenges is nothing new for Ioannis (pronounced Yanni) Dimopoulos, who brings more than 20 years' experience working with vulnerable people to his role in the Wooroloo bushfire recovery.

Ioannis is a Community Resilience Liaison Officer with the State Welfare Incident Coordination Centre (SWICC) and it is through that role that he was asked to join the Department of Communities (DoC) Wooroloo recovery team. He has provided a friendly and welcoming face in the small DoC team based in Giddegannup over the past year.

Before joining the Wooroloo recovery, Ioannis worked for Corrective Services for over 15 years. While local communities recovering from bushfire might not seem to have much in common with people in detention, Ioannis says the skillset is much the same for both settings.

"For me, working in human services fields is all about being a genuine person and having the ability to build relationships and rapport," he said.

"I have loved working in this role and having the opportunity to help people in the community who have been through so much is a privilege and something I take very seriously. I am also extremely fortunate to be working with the most amazing group of people in our recovery team."

"One of my highlights in recovery is chatting to these people at the morning teas and other events. Particularly satisfying for me is watching the person become stronger and heal over time. I feel very lucky that I was asked to perform this role. The gratitude of people in the community has been amazing."

Even as he relishes new challenges, Ioannis looks back fondly on his time in the justice system.

"I miss working with young people in custody. I did some amazing things with the kids particularly with sporting programs early in my career. I built rapport and relationships with young people, and this enabled me to be successful in negotiating in

incidents and counselling young people at risk."

Ioannis is quick to credit his mother for giving him the push to get into the justice system.

"I was studying teaching at Uni and Corrective Services advertised a recruitment pool - my Mum was (and still is) an officer and she convinced me to apply. Having the opportunity to work with her in youth custodial services was amazing and one of the highlights of my career," he said.

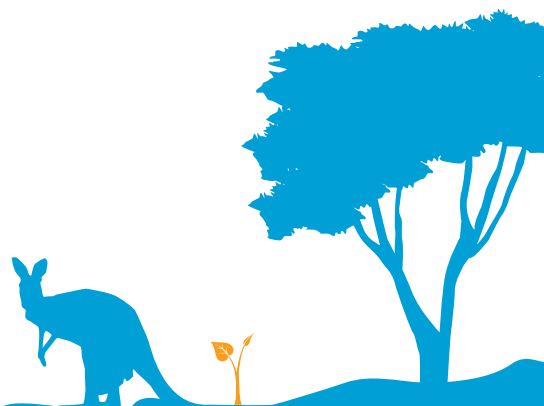
Family is very important to Ioannis - both his Greek heritage (although he was born in Kalgoorlie) and his own immediate family.

"I have two boys, 6 and 9, and a very supportive and amazing wife. I am very lucky, and I devote my life to them," he said.

Sport has also been a big part of his life; he has played cricket, soccer and Aussie rules, and stays involved as a junior coach of his son's soccer team. He is also an avid supporter of the Richmond AFL team but that hasn't hampered his ability to build strong relationships with parochial West Australian footy fans!

As a valued member of the Wooroloo bushfire recovery team, Ioannis makes a positive impact wherever he goes, and he sees that as his best possible way to be remembered.

"If people remember me as having had a positive impact in their life at a time when they really needed it then there is no better legacy to leave."



COMMUNITY RECOVERY SNAPSHOT

Social Connection



2 rounds of Red Cross Community Outreach completed, with **3070** properties visited



250+ Community events*

Environmental Care



2700+ plants donated



8,891 cubic metres of rubble and **1,113** tonnes of metal recycled as part of the Clean-up Program*



All impacted public reserves reopened

Rebuilding



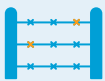
100% of completion certificates issued for **135** properties cleared *



47 sea containers donated for storage



2 community tool libraries operating



Over **\$160,000** of fencing donated

Economic Relief



All **\$16.9M** donated to the Lord Mayors Distress Relief Fund, distributed to **277** recipients



\$560,000 in State Government Bushfire Relief Grants distributed



17 businesses supported by BizRebuild

*Jointly funded through the Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements

Based on figures for February 2021 through to May 2022

