

Case Study

Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) in action

Rockhampton's Inclusive Risk Assessment

Rockhampton is the heart of the Fitzroy Basin, Australia's largest river system flowing to the Great Barrier Reef. Surrounded by bushland, Rockhampton boasts the Berserker Ranges that provides a scenic backdrop and spectacular views. With all this opportunity to explore the outdoors in Rockhampton, residents and visitors should know about the risks they face from natural hazards such as floods, storms and bushfires.

Rockhampton Regional Council has been working with the community to increase awareness of and preparedness for disasters. Council's Coordinator Disaster Management, Liz Drumm said, "a big part of my role is making sure we have a [Local Disaster Management Plan](#) and risk management strategies in place that address the risks we face." Recently, Rockhampton Regional Council undertook a comprehensive emergency management assessment to help with that planning process. Their aim was to apply the [Queensland Emergency Risk Management Framework \(QERMF\)](#) to a comprehensive risk assessment of their community.

The QERMF is tool that supports the development and review of Local Disaster Management Plans. It works by identifying and understanding hazards, exposure, and community vulnerability. Under the doctrine provided by Disaster Management Queensland, the QERMF process also helps to

identify what assets a community has to protect them from disaster or contribute to more effective response and recovery when disasters happen. Liz explained that "a risk assessment helps us to navigate most likely, and worse case scenarios and plan for it."

In 2020, Rockhampton Regional Council received funding that helped them to implement the QERMF. The funding support enabled Council to enlist [C3 Resilience](#) to support the QERMF Risk Assessment process.

Liz said one of the really important things she learned from engaging in the Risk Assessment was that Rockhampton has a number of strengths that could be used to support disaster management planning." Liz pointed to flood management as a core strength of Rockhampton's existing risk management practices, which was highlighted during the QERMF process. Another strength lies in the networked links that Rockhampton Council has forged since establishing their Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) Working Group in early 2020.

The DIDRR Working Group was formed when Rockhampton Regional Council got involved with the [Disability Inclusive and Disaster Resilient Communities project](#).



In 2019, Rockhampton participants:

- learned directly from people with disability about the challenges they face before, during and after disasters;
- shared stories of risks they experienced during recent bushfires in the areas surrounding Rockhampton; and
- learned about local community organisations that have been developing their Business Continuity Plans to support for people with disability in times of disaster.

Reports were shared back to participating Councils and findings from seven forums held in four Local Government Areas were used to build the [Queensland DIDRR Framework and Toolkit](#).

Later that year, The Rockhampton DIDRR Working Group was formed. The working group brought people together who wanted to continue the conversation about DIDRR. The Working Group is a resource to support mutual learning about disaster risks and preparedness planning with people with disability; [a group that has traditionally been excluded from emergency management planning](#). Afterall, Liz said, “risks aren’t just about the geography, hazards, and infrastructure, it’s also about the people: their understanding of risks and their preparedness.” It was recognised that collaborative action would be key to mobilising the community to learn about and respond to the risks faced by people with disability.

Taking Action Toward DIDRR

An early action that Council took was to make sure that the DIDRR Working Group was consulted as part of the QERMF Risk Assessment. In July 2020, Mark Ryan, Consultant, C3 Resilience held a workshop with the DIDRR Working Group. Working group members had the opportunity inform the review, based on their local knowledge and hear back about what the C3 Resilience research had shown about historical emergency risk to the region. Mark explained to the group what was involved in the QERMF process and structured a number of interactive discussion-based activities. The group was asked:

- What’s happening in regard to DIDRR?
- What is working well?
- What can be done better?
- What are the challenges?

The group were invited to think more broadly about community engagement and opportunities for emergency management risk education with people with disability and the services that support them. The results of these discussions were fed into Rockhampton’s risk assessment. The DIDRR working group saw the benefits of being included in this formal emergency management activity. Members of the group were recognised and valued for their lived experience expertise, which contributed to a formal emergency management process aimed at building community resilience of everyone, including people with disability.

Mark reflected on the experience stating, “Working with the DIDRR Working Group during the implementation of the QERMF was critical. To understand the planning they have done across their community for [Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness](#) and [Business Continuity Plans](#) was outstanding. This work speaks to a level of resilience in those groups across the Rockhampton community. This is a local community asset that, combined with a sound mitigation plan, could mature into the future and be operationalised during disaster events.”

When asked for her perspective, Liz Drumm said, “we need to move beyond census data on our community to include the experiences of people with disability as part of our risk assessment and planning practices.” She continued, “hearing from others has informed my way of thinking about disability. It made me realise that if the DIDRR Working Group can inform our risk assessment, then that is the best understanding of Rockhampton’s risk context.”

Collaborative actions of the DIDRR working group gained momentum in 2021. In February, they led a workshop on Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) that brought new people from Rockhampton and surrounding communities into the conversation about disability and disaster. It also strengthened collaboration between members

of the working group. Over the past year and a half, the DIDRR Working Group has matured. They have developed from their shared interest in planning for change to engaging in the change process together with their community. Over numerous community and neighbourhood events, the Working Group has taken the P-CEP message out to communities. By learning and working together, the group is strengthening their bonds and building links between people with disability and emergency personnel. The Working Group has shown how grassroots initiatives formed through shared interest can strengthen collaborative action toward DIDRR.

Lessons Learned

- One way to include people with disability in emergency planning is to form a working group or community of practice that brings together people with different talents who have a shared interest in disability inclusion.
- There are parallels between personal emergency preparedness planning and community-level emergency management. Both require the identification of capabilities and extra supports needed in an emergency.
- Mutual learning happens when emergency personnel invite the participation of people with disability and the services that support into risk assessment and emergency management planning activities.

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For more information: www.collaborating4inclusion.org

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