



Evacuation Centre exercise in Goulburn

# Disaster Recovery NEWSLETTER

## SUMMER EDITION 2025/26

### Recognition & Awards

In early November Helen Bennett visited the coast and presented service anniversary awards at a combined Batemans Bay and Moruya team meeting held at the Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens. Eleven volunteers and prospective volunteers attended the event. Margaret Browning (Batemans Bay), Ann Burt (Batemans Bay) in absentia, Anne McAsh (Moruya), and Wendy Humphries (Moruya) in absentia were recognised for their lengthy and dedicated service to Anglicare Disaster Recovery.



Helen Bennett (back left) with DR volunteers at the Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens

### Staff Updates

We are pleased to welcome back Laura Dawson as Senior Manager of Food, Emergency Relief, and Volunteers, following 12 months of parental leave. From February 2026 Disaster Recovery will fall within Laura's remit, alongside oversight of our Volunteers, Retail, and Emergency Relief programs. Some of you will already know Laura from her previous role as Anglicare's Volunteers Manager prior to taking leave.

Laura will report directly to Sandra Michie, ensuring strong alignment across these key areas of our work.

#### DR Administrative Support

Our ever-competent and patient Tshering Dema (TD) has moved to another Anglicare team and will soon start maternity leave. We wish TD well as she prepares for the birth of her third child.

We are pleased to introduce Georgia Bradshaw as the new administrative contact for Disaster Recovery.

Georgia currently serves as Administration Officer within Central Office, supporting the CEO and Executive team. In addition to her administrative expertise, she contributes to workplace wellbeing in her role as Health & Safety Representative for Level 8, 221 London Circuit.

Georgia will be assisted at times by Sarah Banning whose contract has been extended until mid-2026.

# Relevant Contacts Post-February 2026

Staff Member	Role & DR responsibilities	Contact
Sandra Michie	Executive Director Support Operations DR coordination and contact in activations	sandra.michie@anglicare.com.au 0408 270 839
Laura Dawson	Senior Manager Food, Emergency Relief and Volunteers Volunteer management	laura.dawson@anglicare.com.au 0475 681 421
Georgia Bradshaw	Administration Officer DR admin	georgia.bradshaw@anglicare.com.au 02 6245 7100
Sarah Banning	Volunteers Coordinator Probity checks	sarah.banning@anglicare.com.au 0484 271 093
Magnus Lindner	NSW/ACT Disaster Recovery Manager DR training and coordination	magnus.lindner@anglicare.org.au 0417 487 052
Kevin Cassanego	NSW Disaster Recovery Assistant Manager DR training and coordination	kevin.cassanego@anglicare.org.au 0448 994 937

## Team Updates

Each year, before the onset of the fire season Anglicare's DR Team Leaders gather to review the previous 12 months, receive their summer briefing, and plan for the future. Below is a summary of some of the key points shared by Team Leaders at November's online gathering. [View the BOM briefing.](#)

### Carol Bartlett, Merimbula

- Merimbula recruited new members in February, now forming a sizeable team.
- The team met earlier in the year and has another meeting scheduled prior to Christmas.

### Margaret Browning, Batemans Bay

- The team gathers on a quarterly basis.
- Two members are currently undergoing training, which is expected to be completed by December. With their inclusion, the team now comprises 12 members.

### Wendy Elliott, Bega

- The team is awaiting the completion date of Bega's Evacuation Centre Building, which is a year behind schedule. The facility will include air conditioning and is expected to be ready for use in January.
- The team comprises three members, all ready to assist over summer.

### Anne McAsh, Moruya

Current efforts are focused on resolving storage issues.

### Von Hutcheson, Narooma

- Two team meetings were held earlier in the year.
- Current team membership sits at around 14 members, all of whom remain well-connected.
- Team Leader Von attended the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference in Perth on 27-28 August.

### Anna Conyers, Wagga Wagga

The Wagga team hosted a meeting with the Women's Health Centre to discuss Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) and its impact during activations.

### Sue and Tony Jordan, Canberra North

- Team members participated in a well-attended training in February.
- The absence of a Canberra South Team Leader has seen Canberra South team members temporarily join the Canberra North team.

### Gail Commens, Junee

Team comprises five members. Although they don't currently hold regular formal meetings, they maintain consistent contact through church gatherings and various social and community events.

### Wendy Morrissey-Cowled, Cootamundra

- Accreditation current for all team members
- Several team members attended Evacuation Centre exercise in Wagga Wagga



Evacuation Centre exercise in Wagga Wagga

# Mid North Coast Activation

Mid-year, Anglicare teams from our region were called upon to supplement volunteers who had been working for months to support those impacted by flooding on the Mid North Coast. The NSW Reconstruction Authority established several Recovery Centres in Wauchope, Kempsey, Taree, and Port Macquarie, with Kevin Cassanego coordinating the deployment.

Thank you to all Anglicare SWACT volunteers who put their names forward to assist. As is often the case in the unpredictable period following a disaster, by the time our volunteers were called upon, several Centres had already closed. However, two of our DR volunteers were activated—Anna and Lola from the Wagga team. Thank you, Anna and Lola, for your efforts!



Cleaning supplies prepared at one of the Recovery Centres

## Eurobodalla Preparedness Guide Officially Launched in Moruya

On Tuesday, 7 October, the official launch of the Eurobodalla Preparedness Guide took place in Moruya, marking a significant milestone in community resilience and emergency readiness. The guide, the result of two years of dedicated work, was developed by a passionate team of volunteers, including Anglicare's Von Hutcheson and Moruya local Sandra Makdessi, whose commitment to keeping the community safe has been nothing short of inspirational.

The event drew a crowd of 80 attendees, including Federal Member for Gilmore Fiona Phillips and Eurobodalla Mayor Matthew Hatcher, who joined community members to celebrate the launch of this vital resource.



Sandra Makdessi, Dr Brett Henderson, Von Hutcheson and Fiona Phillips, Federal Member for Gilmore

Von and Sandra Makdessi shared heartfelt reflections on the journey behind the guide's creation, highlighting the extensive community consultation that shaped its content. The result is a clear, accessible, and highly practical tool designed to empower residents — complete with a handy fridge magnet for quick reference in times of need.

Dr Brett Henderson, a leading expert in emergency recovery research, delivered a powerful keynote on the

evolving nature of disasters. He spoke of the increasing prevalence of compounding, cascading, and concurrent events — such as bushfires followed by floods — and emphasised that traditional preparedness models are no longer sufficient. Dr Henderson also cited the Insurance Catastrophe Resilience Report 2024–25, which revealed that insured losses from extreme weather events over the past five years have reached \$22.5 billion — a staggering 67% increase compared to the previous five-year period.

His message was clear: a unified, transparent approach involving government agencies, emergency services (SES and RFS), and local volunteers is essential to meet the challenges ahead.

In a significant gesture of support, Eurobodalla Council began distributing the guide to 26,000 households across the region in mid-November.

Congratulations to Von for her pivotal role in bringing this invaluable guide to life. Her dedication and commitment to this project have not only created a lasting legacy for the Eurobodalla community, but also set a benchmark for resilience planning across the region.

With the guide now offered as a template for other LGAs, Von's work will continue to support communities well beyond Eurobodalla.

Anglicare contributed to the guide as part of the Supporting Spontaneous Volunteers project Von is working on.



Click to [download the Preparedness Guide](#) or scan the QR code.



# Reflections on a Valuable Disaster Recovery Exercise in Goulburn

*By Percita from Canberra North team*

I attended the November training exercise in Goulbourn with my husband Jim and we both found it a very useful activity. The experience has not only improved our disaster recovery capabilities but has also reinforced the value of ongoing training and meeting with our fellow volunteers. We look forward to applying what we've learned if circumstances require them, although of course we hope we won't be needed any time soon.

The day proved to be an incredibly valuable experience — one that offered not only practical insights but also a chance to strengthen our preparedness as well as meet fellow volunteers from a broad range of NSW teams. The day began with briefings from the other agencies involved in setting up an evacuation centre. It was good to be reminded of the roles and responsibilities of each of the services.

The rest of the day was devoted to two roleplay scenario sessions. Our Anglicare team split in half. One group became volunteers to role play the disaster victim scenarios provided and the other half of our team ran the Anglicare table, practising our role in a real event.

My group got to role play the scenarios first. Despite being a little apprehensive about doing this I really enjoyed it. Each scenario was based on real life people who have presented at evacuation centres in recent times. The organisers gave us clear written scenario for our role. We were provided with props like toy animals to represent pets, dolls to represent babies and crutches to indicate a person with a disability. Consequently, our roleplay scenarios had an authenticity that allowed the teams operating the mock evacuation centre to immerse themselves in a more realistic event that tested their knowledge, adaptability, and resourcefulness. I also found it helpful to be able to experience the evacuation centre from the perspective of a victim of a disaster.

After a great lunch provided by the Salvos, we swapped over and my group got to experience running the Anglicare table while the other half of the team got to do the roleplaying.

The hands-on nature of this exercise allowed us to put theory into practice. After each session we spent some valuable time debriefing.

Beyond the practical skills and lessons learnt, the day was thoroughly enjoyable. The friendly and supportive environment made it easy to ask questions, share ideas, and learn from one another. Jim and I returned home feeling both better prepared for the next emergency and more connected with the broader DR team.

Thanks to all the organisers for creating such a useful exercise.



# Supporting Spontaneous Volunteers

Managing spontaneous volunteers in times of disaster has always been a challenge. Recognising this, Anglicare and the NSW Reconstruction Authority launched a Supporting Spontaneous Volunteers (SSV) program in February this year. The program helps empower communities in the Eurobodalla and Bega Valley Shires to better prepare for emergencies *before* an event.

At the helm of the program is Von Hutcheson, our Anglicare Narooma DR Team Leader and a seasoned community engagement specialist whose leadership was instrumental in the recovery efforts following the devastating 2019/2020 bushfires. With a deep understanding of the challenges faced by remote and disaster-affected communities, Von brings a wealth of experience in stakeholder collaboration, trauma-informed engagement, and grassroots capacity-building. Her work has consistently focused on empowering communities to lead their own recovery and preparedness journeys.

The SSV program embraces a 'from community, for community' philosophy—working directly with residents and local stakeholders to identify strengths, needs, and knowledge gaps. These insights shape tailored initiatives that reflect local priorities and build on existing skills.

To date, Von has facilitated 52 consultation meetings, resulting in a diverse suite of community-led workshops, including:

- Parenting in Emergencies
- Fire-Retardant Landscaping
- Women's Chainsaw Usage
- One-Pot Emergency Cooking
- Be Ready Tech Training

These workshops mark a vital first step in upskilling local communities with practical, life-saving knowledge. By equipping residents with the tools and confidence to respond effectively during natural disasters, the SSV program is fostering a culture of preparedness, self-reliance and collective resilience. Each session not only strengthens individual know-how but also builds the foundations for a more coordinated and effective community-wide response in future emergencies.

Early evaluation and participant feedback have been overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing increased confidence and a renewed sense of connection and purpose. It's a clear signal that this kind of grassroots capacity-building is both needed and deeply valued.

Thank you, Von, for all your efforts in this area.

## Training Opportunities

Helen and Magnus provided two in-person training sessions earlier in the year, in Merimbula and Canberra. Participants attended from both local communities and surrounding regions. Magnus and Kevin continue to offer regular online training for new volunteers, conducted via Zoom, typically at the beginning of each month. Interested participants can register by submitting an expression of interest via the Anglicare Sydney website.

Our DR volunteers continue to enrol in the Australian Red Cross' Recovery Basics Webinar Series. Topics have included *The Impact of Disasters on Communities and Individuals*, *Your Emergency RediPlan*, and *Heatwave Preparedness*.

Team members from the Cootamundra and Canberra DR teams participated in an Evacuation Centre exercise organised by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) in Goulburn in November. Members from Wagga Wagga, Junee and surrounds attended.

Sue and Tony Jordan are coordinating Psychological First Aid Training for all Canberra, Queanbeyan and Bungendore DR volunteers on 17 December 2025 from 5.30pm. This one-

hour, in-person session will be conducted by Meg Taylor, Project Coordinator for Disaster Recovery Mental Health, Wellbeing, Resilience, and Preparedness with Canberra Health Services. The training will be held at Holy Cross Anglican Church in Hackett and will be followed by Christmas nibbles.

Please email Sue or Tony at [suetony.jordan@gmail.com](mailto:suetony.jordan@gmail.com) if you can attend. Minimum numbers are required so please contact the Jordans as soon as possible if you are interested.



## Future Plans for Disaster Recovery

Sandra Michie, Anglicare's Executive Director of Support Operations and Communications, recently addressed the ongoing challenges of resourcing Anglicare's Disaster Recovery program.

After 20+ years of dedicated service, Helen Bennett will be finishing with Anglicare in February, following her generous offer to remain through the summer bushfire season. Anglicare extends its deepest gratitude for Helen's

remarkable contributions to the Disaster Recovery space. Her tireless efforts, the strong relationships she has built, and the legacy she leaves behind will continue to shape our work for years to come.

Going forward, Anglicare will be integrating Disaster Recovery into the Volunteering program. This will occur in February 2026.

# Tribute to Helen Bennett

Helen's journey with Anglicare began in the aftermath of the devastating Canberra bushfires in 2003. Joining us as a qualified social worker, she brought with her not only professional expertise but also a deep compassion for those whose lives had been impacted by disaster. Over the past two decades, Helen has become a cornerstone of Anglicare's Disaster Recovery work, offering guidance, wisdom and strength.

One of the remarkable aspects of Helen's work has been her dedication to training and empowering Anglicare's Disaster Recovery volunteers. She has always understood that true community resilience is built through education, preparation, and awareness. Helen has worked hard to ensure that our volunteers are well-equipped and ready to assist during times of crisis. Through her tireless efforts, she has established enduring relationships with our volunteers, many of whom have come to us through our close partnership with Anglican parishes.

Helen's impact extends beyond our organisation. She has forged strong relationships with various stakeholders, including Anglicare Sydney, with whom we share a Memorandum of Understanding to provide Disaster Recovery volunteers for New South Wales. Additionally, Helen has cultivated connections with government contacts at the DCJ, NSW Reconstruction Authority and ACT Social Recovery Unit, allowing us to collaborate effectively in times of need.

Helen has selflessly given countless hours to support Anglicare and the communities we serve, and we are deeply grateful for her dedication, her contributions and her passion for helping others.

