COMMUNITY MAPPING

AFTER THE FLOOD

Centenary Village, Darra

By Marjorie Cross

Darra Community Group
Centenary Village
Development and Resilience Building Project
June 2013
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Introduction

The purpose of this Development and Resilience Building Project is to carry out Community Mapping Research in Centenary Village, Darra. This proposal was approved by Brisbane City Council. This is a variation from other community development flood related projects that were implemented in the area through community cultural arts practitioner, Donna Toussaint, such as “Home is Where the Hall Is”.

The mapping proposes to provide up-to-date information on the people in Centenary Village with reference to the January 2011 Brisbane flood. It is not intended to be a full literature review but an informal snap-shot report to inform readers of the impact of the flood events on a sample of community members.

The information is hoped to:

- Help Darra Community Group plan more targeted community services for people in Centenary Village.
- Promote Darra Community Hall.
- Promote ongoing neighbourhood connections.

Interior of Darra Community Hall after make-over by “The Renovators” in 2011
Methodology

The information in this report has been developed from the following sources:

- Literature review
- Door knock of flood affected properties (excluding homes with dogs)
- Mapping of flood area (55 houses)
- Photos
- In-depth interviews with selected residents (8)
- Informal discussions within the community

The research has taken place over three months and all information was collected personally by a resident of the community. Some locals were more than happy to share their experiences with interviews of up to four hours; others were reluctant to speak at all; and some would only talk “off the record”.

**Houses which were flooded in Centenary Village above floorboards level:**

- Wau Road: 48, 50, 52, 54, 37, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 53, 55, 57, 59, 78, 80
- Ramu Street: No. 12
- Kokoda Street: Nos. 49, 59, 44, 42, 32
- Markham Road: Nos. 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 37, 39, 41
- Sanananda Street: Nos. 52, 54
- Popondetta Close: Nos. 3, 5, 7, 19, 12, 10, 3, 4, 2, 1
- Owen Stanley Place: Nos. 17, 15, 13, 11, 9

**Questions for Interviews:**

1. Your story: What happened?
2. How did you cope?
3. Who was there to help you?
4. Who was not there to help you?
5. Did the “Be Prepared” information help?
6. Do you have any recommendations?
7. If you have left the community, where are you now?
Centenary Village

A Brief History of the Village

Centenary Village was built in the 1950s and 1960s to house Australian Defence Forces personnel and their families (such as the Colonel and his wife Nan at 10 Ramu Street and soldier Catton and his wife Dawn at 35 Wau Road). The homes were designed and acquired as a temporary measure to house married staff. Not so temporary as it has turned out, as they are still housing families sixty years later – a testament to their durability. They were imported from Sweden as “prefabricated, knock down” and were nicknamed “meccano set homes”.¹

There was an Army Canteen in Kokoda Street next to a Butcher and a Library. Army families shopped at the Canteen (which was considered expensive by the residents) or walked to Darra. Darra Station was used by those wanting to go to town and for local soldiers to travel to Enoggera Barracks. There was a Kindergarten which was donated and moved from the Wacol Army Barracks, but older children went to schools in Darra by bus.

When the army sold the village to a developer in 1989, it created an opportunity for low income families to purchase a home, some for the first time. The village then became a real community for many families. Many of those original purchasers are still home owners in the village.

The Darra Community Group was established to give locals a voice. It was a reformation of the Better Centenary Village Association.

¹Mynott, V. Darra by Decade 1820-2010

Darra Community Group Hall prior to 2011
A Brief History of the Hall

The Darra Community Hall, situated at 37 Kokoda Street in Centenary Village, is a unique historical facility. The hall was originally built in the mid-1960s, when the area was part of the Wacol Army Village. It was later used as a community centre for the Wacol Migrant Village.

The Community Centre, including the hall, had been provided by developers for community use. When the hall was badly damaged in the flood, the Darra Community Group worked tirelessly to mobilise volunteers to clean the hall and establish it as the Flood Recovery Centre for the area. Support, information and donations were distributed from the hall and Community Flood Information days were held there. The hall was later featured on the TV programme “The Renovators” where competing teams gave the hall and its grounds a make-over.

“The rebuilt hall has provided residents with a sense of hope and healing, as well as supporting community identity and pride. The hall allows community groups to reconvene and provides space for community activities for not just the Centenary Village area but all of Darra. It also provides a venue for community development activities that further support flood recovery for residents in the village.”

“The ripple effect of this little but mighty Hall reaches far into the Darra Community and beyond. Just the name of the street that it sits in is symbolic in itself… Kokoda”.

“I feel this place bears all the signposts of a healthy community with a view to a positive future. This is rare in a relatively low income area. Most contemporary community planning strives to achieve precisely what already exists in the Centenary Village precinct… Such places hold a unique place in our society, that every successful place maker, community development person, developer and architect aspires to. Darra already has this.”

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2 Darra community Group Inc, Proposal for consideration by Brisbane City Council
3 Pastor Paul Sheehan and the Congregation, Jesus the Christ Ministries Mission
4 Julia Bell, community artist
Geography

Centenary Village is not a suburb in its own right but a “location” within Darra and shares its postcode: 4076. It comprises only seven streets: Kokoda Street, Markham Street, Owen Stanley Place, Popondetta Close, Ramu Street, Sanananda Street and Wau Road (mostly named after World War II battles in New Guinea). There are approximately 170 households. The Village is physically isolated from Darra proper, as it is bounded by the Ipswich Motorway, Centenary Motorway, the Ipswich-City rail line and Wacol Bushland (a significant wildlife corridor) through to the Wacol Remand Centre. Its geographical isolation makes it attractive to indigenous fauna, including kangaroos, possums, bats, dozens of species of birds and there have even been reports of platypus and koalas being sighted. And the locals think it is a special place too! It has been called one of Brisbane’s best kept secrets. One of the recent community projects was exploring ways to put “Centenary Village on the map”.

Darra Community Group hall during the 2011 flood
Demographic Profile of Darra

Darra is considered to have affordable housing for low socio-economic groups and has traditionally been a suburb that welcomes immigrants. Approximately half the local population were born outside Australia, mostly in the UK, followed by Vietnam and New Zealand.

The size of Darra is approximately five square kilometres. It has eight parks covering nearly 9% of the total area. The population of Darra in 2006 was 3,814 people. By 2011, the population was 3,838 – showing a stable population in the area during that time. The median age was 32. Some 20% of the population was under 14 and 9.5% over 65.

Households in Darra were primarily families with an average 2 children and were likely to be paying $1699 per month on mortgage repayments or $290 per week rent. In general, people in Darra work in non-specific occupations in various industries. In 2006 they were mainly labourers and tradesmen; in 2011 there were more professionals and technical workers. The median household income was $1,119 per week, which is below the Australian average of $1,234. Unemployment was 8.1% compared with the Australian average of 5.6%.

There are 1419 private dwellings (approximately 170 of them in Centenary Village), mainly separate houses. Since 2001, homes in Darra have been mainly owner occupied. In April 2013 the median sales price of houses in the area had dropped to $266,000, compared with Brisbane’s $510,375. Of the nine houses for sale in the Village in June 2013, five had been flooded. Prices ranged from $239,000 to $359,000. The average price of those that were flooded was $258,000 as opposed to $314,000 for those not affected by the 2011 flood.

Darra Community Hall after renovations in 2011

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5 NB: There is no official data specifically for Centenary Village.
6 Australian Bureau of Statistics: 2011 Census
Community Projects

In 2012, after the initial recovery from the flood, I went along with my lovely neighbours to what I thought was a one-off morning tea in the Village Hall. Little did I know that it was going to be the start of a beautiful friendship (or six)! It snowballed from a few of us sipping coffee and having a nice chat to a larger active group of locals. Facilitated by flamboyant artist Donna Toussaint, we have unearthed some hidden talents and found new interests and friends.

We spent several weeks hand-making soap – enough for a delicious smelling cake to be given to each household in the Village, symbolic of the cleansing the villagers had to go through. We went on to learn the beautiful art of silk painting – with an aquatic theme reminiscent of the flood waters and the creek. We also tie-dyed tablecloths – messy but very satisfying. The result was a sea of aqua and turquoise material drying on the Village Green and looking a picture. All wonderful past-times separately but there was a purpose to it all. We hosted a dinner party for the village residents to bring the community together where we showcased our art work on the tables. The theme of the feast was “Don’t wait for a flood to say G’day”.

I have had such fun and met other people in the village as members kept bringing more neighbours to join us. A group of us went to the State Library to see the “Floodlines” exhibition. It was cathartic for those of us who had been directly affected by the flood, and was educational and moving for all. A few more “field trips” were planned such as the bus tour organised by Oz Care to see Toowoomba’s spectacular floral displays; and a visit to the Oxley Men’s Shed to network with others. They were interesting because we could share experiences and we are constantly making connections.

We held the “Something Fishy in Darra” event under the brilliant organisation of community artist Julia Bell. She also held weekly beginner classes in mosaic making and then Master Classes where pavers and a seat for the hall were made by the locals. The sculptural seat and flood marker was designed by a local woman Kylie Fry, and was contributed to by over 30 people, including children. This lasting memorial of the flood was unveiled at the “PicKnit” event where the hall and retro cars were “yarn bombed”. All good, memorable experiences, and we still find time for coffee and a chat!
As at June 2013 there was no updated BCC map of the Darra area available on the Council’s website showing the 2011 flood.

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7 As at June 2013 there was no updated BCC map of the Darra area available on the Council’s website showing the 2011 flood.
Interviews

Residents A & B

These residents in Markham Street were aware that they were in a “low lying area” only when the power went out. They kindly alerted close neighbours then self-evacuated and went to stay with friends, along with their pets (who later had to be boarded as they could not be taken home). They have no family in Brisbane that they could call upon. They report that initially there was a lack of information and later that there was misinformation given.

They lost “most of everything”. They cleaned the Granny Flat to the rear of their property first, with the aid of local volunteers (who provided food, water and gurneys), and lived there for five months until they were able to rebuild their home. The trees falling in the subsequent big winds were a problem and needed to be cut and felled safely. They report that mould was the “silent menace”. Two microbiologist helpers alerted them to the dangers of bacteria and toxic plastics but they suspect that thousands of other victims were unaware of these hazards.

Friends and volunteers (firstly locals then organised groups of volunteers) helped for about ten days in the house and garden but after that they coped on their own for the next six months before some semblance of normality reappeared. They were very grateful to the “mud army”, rugby teams, Christians, Habitat for Humanity, random acts of kindness and the Council clean-ups. However, they felt they needed more help as they were tired and depressed and could not always cope. They, like many others, told of disrupted sleep, nightmares, particularly when it rained, and the haunting smell.

Their main concern was lack of fore-warning prior to the flood then a lack of information afterwards. They did not know where the refuges were (if any). They suggested that after the flood, inspectors could have visited houses which were deluged to assess hazards and needs such as lack of electricity, asbestos, mould, damp and other health issues.

Perhaps there could be an independent advocate service which could draw in other organisations to aid where necessary. The rebuilding phase was overwhelming and there needs to be a checklist so that victims would know
what they had to do (including things like legal aid and class action if appropriate). They also would have liked “grief counselling” to help deal with the loss of their home and most of their possessions.

Markham Street during the 2011 flood
Residents C&D

These residents in Kokoda Street were totally unaware of the flood danger until concerned neighbours evacuated them early on Wednesday morning. They were relatively fortunate that the water came only just over their carpet, with about 45cm through their garden shed/work shop. They lost books and tools. They applauded local Bart Lucas who cleaned the debris from the streets of the village with his bob cat and truck.

They were helped by Sergeant Raymond Murray of Inala PCYC and neighbours who provided a machine to dry the carpet. In turn, they were very helpful towards other neighbours further down the hill who were not so lucky. They provided power via an electric cable to their own domestic supply to power gurneys and other tools, for those whose electricity was affected. They also provided food and drinks to volunteers and took in soiled clothes and linen to be washed and return to their neighbours.

They were not aware of the “Be Prepared” message. They were not prepared at all prior to the flood but think that they are now more aware. During the 2013 floods they lost power for five days, along with two other streets. They had candles and used the facilities at the hall which still had power.
**Resident E**

“The Village Hall is important to me because it represents the very community it serves. It is a focal point, a gathering place, a place of education, a place for fun and a symbol of what a community can be even in these times of individuality and social isolation. I have no doubt that many have stated the wonderful amenity that the hall has been and still is today, I agree with those sentiments, but I have something to add.

As I look out from my home, I see the hall and the people coming and going from various functions and festivities and it delights me to see this activity. What I have come to recognise is that the Hall is a thing of marvellous potential. It has been and still is a great place, but it is what it is still to be that is most important to me. I have visions of the many people yet to come there, people from the immediate and wider community, people who want to come together for family reasons, business reasons and spiritual reasons, to learn or just to have fun. These and the as yet unknown purposes are what such a place is for.

As an immigrant, I have been on the receiving end of Australian character. During the 2011 floods, I didn’t simply experience the generosity of spirit that the local and wider community offered, I felt it, palpably and that Hall was the epicentre of it.”

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*Ramu Street when the flood began to subside*
**Resident F**

This lone tenant in Popondetta Close had water knee-height through her home. She reports that the Real Estate property manager did not care about her plight and nor did the owner of the property (and later the Rental Bond Authority was not supportive either). She managed to clean the house with assistance from neighbours and volunteers from the “mud army”. Unfortunately, she has no family who were able to help her. She was pleased to see politicians visit the village.

To add insult to injury, a tree fell on her home in the big storm in the aftermath of the flood when many trees were uprooted and several houses in the village were damaged (including one destroyed in Wau Road where a woman was also injured). Again, she reports that the Real Estate Agent and landlord were not helpful, but that Brisbane City Council removed the tree by crane.

The house was uninhabitable but there were a lack of rental properties available in Brisbane so she stayed there for several months more, despite the cold and poor conditions. She was later assisted by Micah Projects (Flood Recovery Team), the lead agency at the Brisbane Homelessness Service Centre (BHSC), who left a calling card at her house. She was rehoused in emergency accommodation in Goodna and remains there despite it being substandard.

She would like to return to the village but her former home is being sold and there is nothing else suitable at the moment. Her former immediate neighbour and friend who also was flooded has not returned to the village and she does not know his whereabouts. She has not made new friends in her new area and does not have a sense of belonging as the move was only meant to be “temporary”.

She is aware of the “Be Prepared” message although she is no longer in a flood prone area. She has a torch and candles and bags packed in case of future emergency.

She would have liked to have received professional counselling and laments that people were not more understanding of her predicament. As she was on her own, she feels she did not get enough emotional and physical support to help her deal with things.
**Resident G**

This tenant of 20 years duration in Wau Road, along with family and pets, self-evacuated when the water lapped their floor boards. They stayed with family friends, in cramped conditions for over a month. Most of their furniture and personal effects, such as photos, were destroyed.

At first, they did not know who to contact for assistance but Cathy Easte, president of the Darra Community Group, was praised for her help. She gave them information on what help was available and volunteers to assist in the clean-up. For example, their washing was taken away and done by volunteers (strangers). The “mud army”, friends, family, and the landlord all came to their assistance. They also wanted to thank the Police, the Good News Lutheran School and the Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation for their support. Counselling was gratefully accepted.

On the negative side, misinformation was given regarding entitlements. The owner of the property was no help. The Rental Bond Authority was criticised for its lack of caring and help.

It was suggested that residents should have been given free vaccinations against hepatitis. There was lack of information about the danger of germs, sewerage, chemicals and asbestos. They questioned why closed local schools in Inala and Richlands were not used to house displaced families. Rents have risen in the village since houses were repaired and it is now too expensive for this family to return.

This person was highly prepared prior to the flood event and had a plan in place because of living previously in bushfire and cyclone prone areas of Queensland. Power was switched off, pets and pet supplies were taken when they evacuated along with survival supplies such as food, water, bedding, computer, and so on.
Resident H

This tenant from Markham Street lost everything in the flood, including photos and much treasured memorabilia. She only managed to save her pets and car when a neighbour woke her (and other nearby households) and alerted her to the rising water. She then stayed with a work colleague.

She was offered so much help she was overwhelmed. She expressed gratitude to the “mud army”, the fantastic people in the neighbourhood and her landlord who all came to her assistance.

She went through various stages of disbelief, inability to cope, being unsettled and feels she may never recover from the devastation. She would have liked to have been offered counselling.

She found herself alternative accommodation and has relocated out of the area. She may come back to the village but is scared of future floods.

She has never heard of the “Be Prepared” message.

Her plea to Council is to do everything in their power to prevent it from happening again.
My Story

By Marjorie Cross

Prior to the flood in January 2011, I had attended various community functions held at the Centenary Village Hall such as barbeques, film nights and Christmas parties. However, it was in the immediate aftermath of the flood that the hall and the local Village residents had the greatest impact on my life. Unfortunately, my home, along with many of my neighbours, was inundated with over one metre of water. Those neighbours who were not directly flooded rallied around to help in the clean-up from as early as Thursday after the waters had subsided from the creek.

Although the hall was also flooded, locals flocked to clean it up then established it as an emergency relief centre. Food miraculously appeared for the affected residents and voluntary workers, followed by clothes, bedding, toys, furniture and other basic necessities which were donated to anyone who needed them. This was all done for several days with no Council or Government help. It was a case of people in the Village and Darra helping neighbours in need. That explains what sort of a community Centenary Village is, and the hall is the meeting place for us all.

It took exactly one year for my home to be rebuilt, and so I had to leave the area and reside firstly with my boss for a few months then in a rented house in Middle Park (which was burgled of my few remaining possessions – but that’s another story). During that time, the locals continued to support me and others in need. Whenever I was asked why I didn’t just sell up and move out of the area, my answer was always the same: “I have terrific neighbours who care about one another; why would I want to leave them?”

Last year I attended the hall on many occasions including weekly coffee mornings and a Pamper Day organised by the wonderful OZ Care women, which brought the community back together. These were followed by art and craft classes where I learnt the skills of soap making, silk painting, Shibori (Japanese tie-dying), floral arranging and mosaics. All these activities and the friendships I made contributed to my mental well-being and happiness. I have no doubt that I would be still traumatised by the loss of my house and all my possessions if it wasn’t for the caring people around me.
During the recent floods in January 2012, the local creek again flowed over the bridges in both Kokoda Street and Wau Road (a now a common occurrence since the Ipswich Motorway road-works diverted extra water into the little creek). Fortunately no homes were flooded this time. However, half of the Villagers, myself included, lost electricity supply from Sunday afternoon until Thursday morning. During that time, the village hall was again opened up by locals for locals. It enabled us to recharge our mobile phones and lap tops, and watch the news on TV to keep updated on the weather and threats of the swelling rivers. We were also able to take hot showers, have a hot meal or just a cuppa and sit in the air-conditioned comfort with friends. I know my elderly neighbours especially appreciated this. Again, food appeared in the hall donated by those neighbours who were thinking of others. We have a wonderful spirit of community and the hall is an important resource for us all.
Anecdotal Evidence

From my informal discussions I have learnt much about the community including that marriages have broken up and several people have had mental health issues (including suicide attempts) because of the flood and its devastation.

English is not the first language of several families in the village. There were a few reports of Asian locals who had no idea of what was going on in the media and the imminent danger leading up to the flood and they needed to be alerted by neighbours who knocked on their doors to tell them to evacuate. One woman only awoke during the flood when her bed became wet!

Since the flood, three damaged houses have been raised above flood level at the owners’ own expense i.e. at 10 Ramu Street (owner occupied), 66 Wau Road (landlord) and 55 Wau Road (owner builder).

Two houses which had water on the property but under the floor boards are currently on the market (at 7 Owen Stanley Place and 30 Kokoda Street). Both owners deny that they are selling them because of the flood.

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8 23% of Darra are Vietnamese speakers.
A family in Ramu Street rebuilt their house and sold it after it was flooded one metre inside as they felt too unsafe living across from the creek. They have since moved to Seventeen Mile Rocks. The new owner is aware of the possibility of another flood but is not prepared for the eventuality.

At least two houses have not been repaired since the flood damage and are still empty. Many of the rented houses have new tenants since the flood. There is little known of most tenants who left the village after their rental properties were flooded and did not return, except that individual families went to Corinda, Goodna, Richlands and also North Ipswich. Whether they will ever return is doubtful.

Flood marker sculpture at Darra Community Hall in May 2013
Actions and Recommendations

- It is strongly recommended that the Centenary Village Hall be retained for community use because of the pivotal role it played in the flood recovery and its aftermath.
- Community Development Officers (such as the much lauded Donna Bowe) who are familiar with the area should be funded to further support the under-privileged in Centenary Village.
- Rate relief, or similar, for victims of disasters such as floods, bushfires and cyclones.
- Volunteers be given the recognition for their contributions that they deserve and some form of reward such as tax deductions.
- Volunteers should not have been charged the flood levy, as their generosity of time and spirit should have been considered and compensated.
- “Personal Care Packs” (or “Shoebox” relief) be collected from the general public and distributed after disasters.
- Financial and planning assistance be given to help home owners to raise existing houses to safety above the registered 2011 flood levels.
- That official flood recovery centres (unlike the Centenary Village Hall which was managed by only locals without government support) be set up as distribution and information “one-stop shops” for any affected area.
- There was great resentment and puzzlement when Council “Food Inspectors” declared that food donated by Sunnybank RSL for volunteers and victims should be destroyed as it was not individually wrapped! This could have been handled much more sensitively by these officials.
- Trauma counselling be made more readily available and accessible, particularly for the already vulnerable and those with mental health problems. This is important not just immediately after a crisis but ongoing.
- Better information regarding health hazards such as asbestos, bacteria, sewerage, chemicals, mould, toxins and so on.
• That development and resilience projects be continued in this village as they have shown to have a positive effect on mental well-being of the locals and foster a spirit of community.

• “Be Prepared” messages, manuals and resources are a good idea, but may become lost during a flood or bushfire. Therefore, there needs to be a central, well manned point of Council contact who can keep resources updated and distributed after disasters.

• Easy access to information regarding the clean-up, such as how to preserve damaged photographs, how to best clean furniture and what can be salvaged and what really needs to be disposed of.

• Many locals complained how slow Council was to react after the flood – several days in fact. Council’s communication chains and phone lines were poorly manned during this time. These response processes need to be re-evaluated for possible future events.

• There has been an unreasonable expectation by some politicians that the Darra Community Group Committee be on call whenever anything goes wrong locally. It is recommended that a paid position be created to run the Darra Community Centre so that it can be manned and developed.

• Immediately after the flood, the Village Hall was open “24/7” (albeit unmanned overnight) with donations of food and supplies available to not only the local community but out-with Darra. For example, people came from as far away as Yeronga, Jindalee, Oxley and the West End to take advantage of what this small group had to offer. These connections within the community and links extending to other communities should be maintained and fostered.
References

Australian Bureau of Statistics: 2006 and 2011 Census

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Internet search of many and varied sites for background material.
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And to the Mud Army – it was a pleasure to serve beside you.