



Relationships Australia
TASMANIA

**Local Voices:
Enquiry into Community Assets
in Circular Head, Tasmania**

Report on project findings

November 2011



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Acknowledgements

This project was a partnership between Relationships Australia Tasmania and RDS Partners Pty Ltd.

Relationships Tasmania Australia would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of project consultant and researcher, Maree Fudge.

The goal was to document a snapshot of what people living in Circular Head think and believe about their region, as a way of:

- supporting the region's local economic regeneration; and,
- understanding from local people what additional social and community support services might be needed.

Relationships Australia Tasmania acknowledges the funding provided by the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, which has enabled this research project to be undertaken.

The researcher particularly acknowledges the members of the advisory network for their comments and feedback on this report: Stuart Auckland (UTAS), Roger Jaensch (Cradle Coast Authority) and Yvonne Stone (Circular Head Council).

Circular Head Council has a strong commitment to the health and well-being of residents of the region, and is proactive in working in community development.

The researcher would also like to thank Circular Head Council for its support of this project, and in particular to Yvonne Stone and Deb Mainwaring (Community Development Unit) for their welcoming approach, good humour and seemingly endless contacts.



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Executive Summary

“A vibrant place? Well, it’s also about our landscape and atmosphere – it’s beautiful here and it changes the way you feel and the way you are.”

Respondent, November 2010

The Circular Head region has faced a range of challenges and changes in recent years including a high incidence of road related fatalities and trauma, industry closures, climate related emergencies, and economic downturn that have impacted heavily on the region.

Relationships Australia Tasmania’s Rural Support Team as well as local service providers have identified significant increases in family and individual stress, largely related to financial pressure on households. Literature and research into community recovery is increasingly supporting the views from health and human services providers that these pressures will continue to impact negatively on families and households for some time yet.

Literature on community resilience points to the importance of building and maintaining community assets and strengths, and building protective factors across a community in each of the key spheres: individual, family and community. Community assets are capacities existing within a community, and a community strength is the degree to which those assets are active.

This project engaged over fifty people who live and work in the region, primarily in Smithton, in order to support the process of local people having a say in the economic regeneration of their place.

This report identifies community assets and strengths that currently support the region’s resilience and capacity to recover and recreate in the face of economic challenges.

This information is offered to the local community for its purposes of social, economic and cultural development. This information is also of use for social services committed to providing support to local people through building protective factors for community resilience.

The demographic profile of the region indicates

high numbers of young people (under eighteen) and people aged thirty to fifty-five. Additionally, the region is home to a high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (higher than the Australian average) but a lower than average percentage of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The responses from local people in the Circular Head region indicate strengths in community assets across three key levels:

- Gifts, skills and capacities of individuals
- Active participation and formal and informal structures through which people work together to pursue common goals (organisations, groups and networks)
- Public institutions and public infrastructure that support and foster participation.

The key assets that emerged from the interview data included:

- Strong social connections and relationships
- Capacity and willingness to work together to support each other in practical ways as well as emotional support
- Faith and belief in the region’s potential and positive future
- Strong commitment to education and training
- Strong commitment to building and communicating a positive future for young people
- Active local government with a strong focus on community development processes and projects.

The key challenges local people feel the region faces appeared to be:

- Growing jobs by ensuring the potential for industry diversity and growth is realised through private investment
- Skills retraining and transition for local people into the ‘new’ economy
- Addressing increasing alcohol and other drug abuse
- Building the range of activities available in the region for young people.

High levels of confidence and belief in the region

and its future potential, and maintaining positive attitude emerged strongly from the interviews.

Local views on key opportunities for the region included:

- Investment in new and expanding industries
- Developing new skills and creating new jobs
- Preventing road accidents
- Improving and maintaining community confidence, mental health and well-being.

This project focused on assets and strengths; however, feedback on challenges, issues and needs was also sought. In this report, local perceptions and views were complemented by service provider information and research into resilience and recovery in rural areas. In combination this indicated some challenges that confront the region:

- Supporting people from previously stable long term employment to transition to new jobs and industries
- Longer term impacts of recent changes and economic downturn, including job and income losses and increasing costs of living, on family stress, individual stress and coping capacities
- Young people and families leaving the region for employment.

Recommendations

This project and report have been framed around a community assets-based perspective. As such, a review of this report and its findings should be undertaken by the project partners in collaboration with local people. This will create the opportunity to identify locally-based actions that can be undertaken to support any number of factors that contribute to community resilience.

Notwithstanding this, the following recommendations, grouped under relevant themes, are offered for consideration.

1. Community ownership and responsibility for fostering community strengths and assets

- The Circular Head Council and the Circular Head Progress Group review the report findings and convene an appropriate community forum to

develop a community action plan, driven by local people.

Such a process should include all levels of government as well as community support providers and development focused groups such as the North West Rural Strategy Group.

- Circular Head Council, in partnership with groups such as the Circular Head Progress Association, continue to monitor, foster and support the community strengths and assets identified in this report.

2. Mental health as a key to future proofing and community resilience

- Investment in a region-wide mental health strategy is needed to rebuild and support the community assets already present in the region.
- Increase available community family support services. This should include a balance between out of region visiting and locally based services.
- Additional investment in trauma support services, including road related trauma is needed.
- Investment is required to improve access to clinical health and community mental health services.
- Investment in genuinely affordable and accessible community transport is also required to assist with access to health and community services.

3. Foster participation through community development activities

- Government, private and not-for-profit organizations utilise, build and extend the community strengths that characterise the region, through:
 - Local area plans to pool effort on a place basis focussing on community assets
 - mitigating risk and building protective factors
 - Projects, activities and services that specifically maintain and foster positive attitude and belief (e.g. Circular Head Council's recent Health and Wellbeing

Strategy, re-opening 7-Up Youth Centre);

- Projects, activities and services that draw out and draw on skills and capabilities of a range of demographic cohorts, (e.g. community-based projects that assist semi-skilled factory workers transition to new careers through retraining and (re)learning skills in innovation and new technical skills; the On-Line Access Centre's approach to flexible alternative pathways to skill-building and intergenerational skill sharing; extending existing positive collaboration with the Aboriginal community).

These should ensure that potentially excluded and disadvantaged groups are included in community activities, networks and projects:

- older people;
 - people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
 - people living with a disability;
 - people who have been recently retrenched from long term employment;
 - people who have been out of work for long periods.
- Activities and projects that maintain and build residents' engagement in social and economic planning and design (e.g. a Council 'summit' for those recently retrenched, the long term unemployed or those living with physical disability, which that mirrors the successful youth summit. This summit was successful at the time and, importantly, continues to influence community development attitude and sense of the possible).

4. Cost of living: locally based projects enhancing access to the basics

- Increased promotion of services and assistance available through new technologies and a broad based mental health strategy (see Recommendation 2 above).
- Residents and producers explore locally-

based strategies to assist access to affordable nutritious fresh food (e.g. accessing the resources and opportunities for the Tasmanian Food Security Council)

5. Build economic participation and the diversity of the local economy

- A community planning process should be convened to develop locally based economic development strategies:
 - develop a regionally focused skills development strategy
 - identify locally focused employment and skills development projects to assist young people to stay in the region and assist people transitioning across industries
 - share learnings across industries and create opportunities for new enterprises to be mentored within the region.

Such an approach could be led by local active groups including the Circular Head Progress Association, and could be based on the successful community driven models such as that facilitated by Dorset Council in the state's north-east.

Introduction

Supporting local economic regeneration: The aspirations of local people

Throughout 2009 and 2010 the Circular Head region, as with Tasmania's broader north-west coast region, experienced significant industry downturn and change. Occurring on the back of drought, these exposed a potential social and economic vulnerability, common to rural and remote communities, to the rapid changes brought about by large commercial employers' decisions in the region. In addition, the region experienced a withdrawal of federal social service investment as a result of the change in "Exceptional Circumstances" status for Tasmania.

In seeking to respond, the Circular Head Progress Group (CHPG) and the Circular Head Council identified a need for the CHPG to formally develop an economic development plan for the municipality. In early 2010, RDS Partners (RDS), a Tasmanian extension and community development firm, approached the CHPG and Council to develop a project that would assist the community, through the CHPG, to achieve its goals.

RDS's interest in this project is to support positive adaptation to changes in industry and the environment in rural communities in line with the company's goals and mission. RDS committed in-kind resources to this project in addition to its role in managing and delivering the project.

RDS identified Relationships Australia Tasmania (RA Tas) as a potential partner in this project. RA Tas shares in common with the CHPG, RDS and Council an interest in understanding and supporting the Circular Head community through the provision of social support and community development services. RA Tas committed resources to support this project and engaged the interest of the Tasmanian Social Inclusion Unit in the place-based approach to community assets and development. Resources from each of these partners, RA Tas and the SIU enabled this project to proceed.

Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the project was to understand more about how people living in the region see the future and potential opportunities for the region's economic regeneration and social and community development. In addition, the project partners sought to foster local dialogue and reflection on the future to assist the local community engage in a proactive approach to the changes and challenges it is facing. In the experience of the project partners, this process of fostering dialogue is of particular importance as Tasmanian communities come to terms with climate change, the shift to sustainability, the changes in industry composition in rural areas and expected increases to costs of living in Tasmania.

The formal objectives of the project were to:

- Provide RA Tas with community-driven data on regional needs and interests to assist in planning the provision and development of social support in the Circular Head region, which builds on its current investment in social infrastructure.
- Provide the community, through the CHPG and other key local associations, with an initial map of community assets and locally identified priorities for locally-led social, cultural and economic development.
- Identify community assets that assist the community in managing cost of living pressures associated with recent drought and industry downturns.

The project partners

The local community of Smithton was the key partner in this project as well as the subject for enquiry. **Circular Head Council** was a key active partner and acted as conduit to engaging with the local community as well as a sounding board for the project manager. Circular Head Council has developed a holistic approach to caring for the community, evidenced by the recent launch of the *balance your life* initiative. This project aligned well with the goals and commitments of the Circular Head Council, and contributed valuable in-kind support to the project.

Relationships Australia Tasmania (RA Tas) is regarded as a leading provider of relationship support services in the state. Its key aim is to support all Tasmanians to achieve positive and respectful relationships.

“We are committed to enhancing the lives of communities, families and individuals and supporting positive and respectful relationships.”

With more than 60 years experience, Relationships Australia Tasmania has been helping Tasmanians to build positive relationships through the provision of confidential relationship support services by our professionally-trained and highly-skilled staff.”
Relationships Australia Tasmania 2011

RA Tas is a community-based not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations and is the Tasmanian member of a federated structure comprising large autonomous member organisations in every state and territory and a national office based in Canberra.

Services are offered to all members of the community, regardless of religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

RA Tas delivered support to families in the Circular Head region throughout the declared, drought-related period of “extreme circumstances”. This work was funded by the federal Department of Families, Community Housing Services and Indigenous Affairs, until December 2010.

RA Tas remains highly committed to the well-being of people and families in the region, and understands that the effects of drought and significant change can remain for some years. Based on its work in the Circular Head region, RA Tas was deeply concerned about the continued well-being of people with whom it has developed relationships of trust.

The literature, practice evidence and experience of RA Tas counsellors all confirm the importance for small communities of having trusted “outsiders” available to support people and families with some

of the very difficult and often very private impacts experienced by families and people.

On this basis RA Tas funded this project to understand how best to continue to contribute as the Circular Head community develops and “gets on with life” after the period of drought and in the midst of significant economic and industry change.

The Tasmania Social Inclusion Unit, Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet (SIU) was established in March 2008 to progress the Tasmanian Government’s social inclusion agenda. The unit’s main objectives are to develop practical solutions to the causes of social exclusion, and to contribute to the development of a fairer Tasmania.

The unit’s main priorities are to facilitate the Government’s decision to implement the Social Inclusion Commissioner’s *A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania* and assist the Commissioner develop a cost of living strategy for Tasmania.

The SIU provided a research grant to RA Tas to assist this project. The unit’s interest in the project was to:

- investigate cost of living pressures, and the existing and required support that will ameliorate the pressures, for the Circular Head community and for the development of a cost of living strategy
- develop and manage information on community strengths and opportunities to increase community involvement in community development and leadership.

RDS Partners Pty Ltd (RDS) is a Tasmanian-based industry and community development firm that focuses on building sustainable and resilient rural communities.

The company brings a multi-disciplinary team approach to projects drawing on community services and development, social science and primary production skills and an understanding of business, industry, not-for-profit organisations and stakeholder engagement. The company partners with community organisations, industry associations and primary industry in community

engagement, research, development, facilitation and evaluation.

RDS specialises in sustainable business and organisational development, community engagement, strategic planning, rural social research, people development and industry development.

RDS's principals, Maree Fudge and Tom Lewis, both grew up on the north west coast of Tasmania and care professionally and personally about the region. RDS is increasingly working in community and local economic development with an emphasis on community engagement and community driven priorities. In this context RDS was committed to facilitating a process that assisted in identifying community-generated information to support the Circular Head community in its work of developing its preferred positive future.

1. Summary social and economic profile of the Circular Head region

1.1 Demography

The Circular Head Council region has a population of around 8 000 people, of whom about 3 500 live in Smithton and around 500 in Stanley:

- Over 85% were born in Tasmania (2.7% in New Zealand, 2.4% in England or Scotland);
- Over 95% only speak English at home;
- 9.3% of the population identifies as Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander. This is noticeably higher than state and national averages (3.8% and 2.5%).

When compared to the overall Tasmanian population, Circular Head has relatively more young people and relatively fewer older people:

- Aged 14 years or younger: 23.5% (19.4% for Tasmania);
- Aged 50 years or older: 30.8% (35.3% for Tasmania);
- Aged 65 years or older: 12.5% (15.3% for Tasmania).

The ratio of males to females (106.7) is much higher than the national (99.2) and Tasmanian averages (97.4) for 2009 data.

Compared to state and national data, there are relatively more married people, and fewer were separated, divorced or never married. The numbers of widowed persons were equivalent to the Tasmanian average, but higher than the national average.

- 71.6% “family” households;
- 23.5% lone person households;
- 1.5% group household.

Of the 2128 families identified in the 2006 ABS census data:

- 45.8% couple families with children;
- 40.2% couple families without children;
- 12.8% one parent families.

1.2 Employment and income

The average wage in the region in 2006 was approximately \$35,000. This was approximately \$2,000 less than the Tasmanian average and \$9,000 less than the Australian average. Income from investments and superannuation are

both less in the region. However, income from “own unincorporated business” is much higher than either the state or national average:

- \$23,500 compared to \$16,500 (state) and \$19,000 (national).

This may indicate that while wages may be less, incomes from businesses are better in the Circular Head region, potentially reflecting the strength of the farming enterprises at 2006.

The median income for individual, household and family are all much closer to the Tasmanian figures than the Australian data – most noticeable is the discrepancy in median family and household income for north west Tasmania compared to that for Australia-wide (approximately \$150/week and \$200/week lower respectively).

There are relatively more “non-employing businesses” within the region and relatively fewer larger employers, reflecting the centrality of primary industry and micro-business operations in the region.

Compared to Tasmania and Australia there are fewer aged pensioners and fewer receiving youth allowances or Newstart allowance.

Percentages of other income support recipients are comparable with the state and/or national averages (i.e. for carers payment, disability support pension, single parenting payment and being on Newstart allowance for more than a year).

The proportions of people in full time and part time work and those not in the labour force reflect the Australian averages rather than the Tasmanian averages. (Tasmania has a lower proportion of full time workers and higher proportions for the other two parameters.) So Circular Head is slightly out of step with Tasmanian norms for employment, but not Australian averages.

The unemployment rate for the years 2005 to 2009 was consistently lower than both the state and national averages. For the quarters September 2009 to 2010, Circular Head demonstrated increasing unemployment across the quarters (3.1%, 3.2%, 3.7%, 4.1% and 4.4%). (Tasmania as a whole

recorded similar increases (5.0%, 5.3%, 5.8%, 6.2%, 6.5%) across the quarters. (ref - Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Small Area Labour Markets Australia, September Quarter 2010.)

1.3 Educational attainment (post secondary)

Circular Head has a very low proportion of working age persons who completed Year 12 (18%, compared with the Australian average of 47%).

According to 2006 data, of all certificates attained in the region (1113):

- 25% are held by technicians and tradespeople;
- 15% by managers;
- 12% by labourers.

Of all diplomas and advanced diplomas attained in the region (231):

- 21% are held by managers;
- 20% by professionals;
- 11% by community and personal service workers.

Of all bachelor degrees or greater (300):

- 51% are held by professionals;
- 18% by managers.

When considered by industry sector, of the total graduate and postgraduate qualifications:

- 33% are held by those in the education and training sector;
- 10% are held by those in the health and social care sector;
- 10% are held by those in the agriculture, forestry and fishing.

These three sectors also dominate the diploma and associate diploma attainment numbers (7%, 20% and 10% respectively).

Approximately 16% of manufacturing and 15% agriculture, forestry and fishing employees hold certificate level qualification.

1.4 Economic snapshot

Circular Head is characterised by a range of natural resources and a moderate climate, allowing for a variety of businesses and industries. This includes one of Australia's largest wind farms (Woolnorth) and the nation's only Baseline Air Pollution Station (Cape Grim).

With less than 2% of Tasmania's population, Circular Head accounts for more than 12% of the state's total annual agricultural production, representing almost \$100 million per annum to the economy. Circular Head businesses export to more than 20 countries, predominantly in the Asia-Pacific region.

- 14.1% of Tasmania's total value of agricultural commodities (\$139.4m);
- 40.9% of Tasmania's total value of milk produced (\$85.5m);
- Median house price 2007 (\$180,500).

For those not self-employed, the most common occupations were:

- Labourers (27.8%);
- Production and transport workers (12.6%).

These were higher than in other parts of Tasmania and Australia.

Particularly noticeable is the low numbers of professionals in the area (proportionately half that of out-of-region areas). Also relatively low are the numbers of clerical, sales and service workers.

The proportions of tradespeople, managers and administrators and more qualified clerical and service workers are comparable to the rest of Tasmania.

The industry sectors employing the largest number of people (aged 15 years and over) are:

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing (904 people or 24% of total people employed aged 15 years and over);
- Manufacturing (775 people or 21% of total people as above).

Other industry sectors employing more than 100 people in 2006 included:

Industry sectors	Numbers of people employed (aged 15 years and over)	% of total employed (aged 15 years and over)
Dairy Farming	452	12%
Retail trade	315	8%
Fruit and vegetable processing	228	6%
Education and training	218	6%
Construction	199	5%
Accommodation and food services	191	5%
Health care and social assistance	190	5%
Administration and support services	178	5%
Sheep, beef cattle and grain farming	173	5%
Meat and meat products	150	4%
Other	1445	39%

Sources: Circular Head Council and Australian Bureau of Statistics

2. Theoretical framework and project methodology

2.1 Theoretical framework

This project was designed as an “inquiry” as opposed to academic level social research, due primarily to the pragmatic issues of available budget. In design and orientation the project drew on the methodologies and assumptions of:

- participatory research;
- identification of the issues and questions with the people involved in the issues under investigation;
- generation of results and meaning in partnership with those engaged in the investigation;

and,

- assets based community development (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993)
- identifying strengths and assets as viewed by people themselves;
- three levels of community assets that underpin effective community development (individual skills and capacities; civic engagement and participation; and public institutions);
- community development as integral to local economic regeneration.

The project was an “entry” project with respect to community engagement (Ochocka 2010) in that one of the objectives was to *initiate* a community dialogue on community and economic development by providing information on community assets and strengths. As such, the project sought to:

- start a process of, and provide a foundation for, facilitated enquiry;
- add useful information into the local community’s dialogue regarding community economic and cultural development;
- assist both the local community and the partners to understand more about the questions, issues and opportunities that the community wishes to pursue.

(Chaskin 2006; Cuthill 2010; Ochocka et al. 2010). The definition of community strengths that underpins this project is:

Community strength is seen in the extent to which people provide personal support for

one another through bonds of family or friendship. It is seen, too, in the extent to which people engage in wider networks, ideally crossing boundaries of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, social class and education. Further, community strength is seen in links that people have with organisations and in the ability of individuals to negotiate and obtain access to the resources and services of organisations and expert systems.

(Black and Hughes, 2001)

The information contained in this report is that which the partners wanted to contribute to a community-level dialogue and focuses on the opportunities and strengths that lie within the community:

- working directly with community members to identify the issues, opportunities, aspirations and assets;
- analysis of the information to establish potential community values for further discussion;
- understanding the social infrastructure that underwrites the community’s capacity to adapt to rapid and significant change.

The guiding question for this project was:

What assets and opportunities do local people identify that will assist the region in promoting local social, cultural and local economic regeneration in the context of key economic and environmental changes?

The analytical framework for this report draws on specific components of three closely related fields:

- resilience theory: adaptive capacity, assets and capabilities and vulnerability (e.g. Maguire and Cartwright 2008);
- assets based community development: strengths based approach, engagement of the community in the process, and ensuring the action is driven by and owned by the community (primarily Kretzmann and McKnight 1993);
- social inclusion/exclusion theory: access to the basics; accessing services; social connection; skills and capacity; community resilience (for summary please see Hayes et al. 2008).

These components were selected to provide useful analysis with respect to the guiding question and the project objectives.

2.2 Methodology

The project took place in two key phases: design and data collection (October – December 2010) and analysis and report writing (January – March 2011).

The project drew on an advisory network comprising the Circular Head Council, the University of Tasmania's Department of Rural Health and the Cradle Coast Authority. This was an email-based network and provided feedback on the enquiry framework and initial comments on this report. The terms of reference for this group can be found at Attachment A.

2.2.1 Desk-top review

A short review of community development and participatory research literature was conducted to inform the analysis and guide the project delivery.

A desk-top review of key documents was conducted to provide an overview of the region's social and economic context. It included the following sources:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics;
- Circular Head Council;
- Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet.

2.2.2 Data collection

Data were gathered directly from local people through a mix of face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with individuals and three focus groups.

One interview and one focus group were conducted by phone due to timing practicalities. This mix was selected to allow some level of analytical counterpoint between the individual and group perspectives on assets and aspirations.

The interviews were divided into two sections to draw out perceptions of impact of change on (1) the individual and (2) community level.

Interviewees were also asked to consider the recent past ("your living memory" for young people and

3-5 years for others) and the "preferred future", or "imagined positive future" (interview pro forma can be found at Attachment B).

Interviewee selection was based on the demographic profile of the region and related networks to primary contacts or the "snowball" technique (Goodman 1961). Advice and recommendations were taken from locally-based service providers, particularly the Circular Head Council, and drawing on local knowledge from RA Tasmania's Rural Support Team.

Given the constraints of the project, and its position as an "entry" project, the sample was then narrowed to focus on people living and working in Smithton and within the geographic area, and to those with the following characteristics:

- active community members engaged in formal associations and organisations;
- active community members engaged in informal community activities;
- community leaders (formal and informal);
- professionals (including service and primary industries);
- not currently in employment;
- Aboriginal background and culture;
- young people (1. engaged in school and 2. not engaged in school).

Additionally, it was decided to engage with service providers for input regarding some of the issues for potentially marginalised groups (e.g. Erikson 1979). Three focus groups and one interview with a service provider were conducted with this in mind and covered the following potentially marginalised social groupings:

- people living with a disability;
- people experiencing financial hardship;
- people who have been unemployed for significant periods of time;
- people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.

Five focus groups were conducted and engaged the following groups:

- high school aged people (in school)
- professionals

- education professionals and community leaders
- social and community health service providers (2 groups).

As the process unfolded it became apparent that using the snowball technique in the context of a short project and interview timeframe resulted in these two key gaps in the data:

- The timing of the interview period (November - December 2010) meant that interviewing business operators in the services industries and people on family farms became difficult.
- Identifying and connecting with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds occurred too late in the interview period to allow adequate engagement with this social grouping.

In addition to directly collected information, the project accessed qualitative, non-identifiable service delivery data from RA Tasmania's rural support service. This information provided insight into private and sensitive issues within the region's community that interviews would not have been able to elicit, nor would have been reasonable to seek given the scope of this project.

2.2.3 Data analysis

The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis techniques (see Mayring 2000 for an overview). Interviews were recorded as sentence fragments into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and coded manually.

The framework for coding the data was developed from the components of community assets developed by the Tasmanian Social Inclusion Unit (please see Attachment F) and key assets, or protective factors identified in resilience theory. Coding utilised key words and intention as expressed within the sentence.

This coding was extended where directed or suggested within the data and aligned with the analytical framework discussed above. The coding framework enabled multiple codings for each response (up to seven). For example:

Sentence Fragment	The Youth Forum (key word) was awesome (intention), everyone went (intention), and now we have a clean public toilet in the park.				
Code	Community asset	Participation (involvement in decision making)	Relationships formalised	Projects	<i>Community spaces</i>
Source of code from framework	Sub Objective	Sub Objective	Category	Category	<i>Category</i>

3. Findings from discussions with local people

Interviews were conducted with 10 individuals and 4 discussion groups. The number of participants in discussion groups totalled 41, and the total number of participants was 51.

Interview responses were recorded as sets of comments and categorised based on the key themes of this project (see Attachment F for detail). A total of 410 comments were recorded from the interviews.

All respondents (including group “respondents”) provided answers to each question. The findings below are based on the frequency with which the key themes arose from the number of comments. Frequency of comments was used rather than the number of respondents in order to address the impact of group “respondents”.

The following sections presents:

- results of codifying the comments (as discussed in the previous section);
- comments based on textual analysis;
- case studies or illustrative stories provided by respondents that emerged from the interviews.

3.1 Changes in the region

In question 1, respondents were asked to talk about their view of significant changes in the region over the previous 3–5 years. This included positive and negative changes. This question was designed to try to understand how people locally perceive the recent changes and to get an indication of the extent to which positive attitudes and belief in capacity, a core component of resilience, might exist.

Of the 410 total comments recorded, 81 discussed positive change, far outnumbering the comments regarding negative change (48 of the total comments).

Distinct themes emerged from comments provided in response to this question.

Positive changes

- Public infrastructure:

This included investment in a mix of roads, recreational spaces and organisations.

Key projects included upgrades to aged care facility and the hospital, new educational infrastructures, and two key community centres: 7Up Youth Centre and the community/sports centre.

Over 70% of the comments on positive change linked improvements in infrastructure with increased participation (employment, recreation and health and well-being).

- Participation: Over 55% of comments on positive change were related to increased participation and opportunities to participate in community processes. These included formal events, decision-making (for example through Council forums and networks), educational, health promotion and recreational activities.
- 7Up Youth Centre and the multi-purpose community recreation centre figured prominently in the comments. This comments regarding 7Up noted its closure in 2010 due to lack of ongoing funding and appeared to be a corollary to a strongly identified need in services and activities for young people (see “Case study: 7-Up” below) whereas the multi-purpose centre was described in terms of ‘opportunity’ for local participation and as an asset for drawing activities to the region.
- Industry diversity and opportunity: Approximately 30% of comments on positive change regarded the economic potential of the region as a positive change.

In particular comments identified natural assets¹ as economic assets as a basis for industries including dairy, aquaculture and vegetable production and processing. A high degree of confidence was expressed regarding the capacity or preparedness of locally based companies to invest, grow and employ people.

Negative changes

Comments regarding negative changes represented only 9% of overall responses. Nevertheless, there was a high level of consistency in the responses and the issues were significant with widespread community impact:

¹ In this project, natural assets refers to productive soil, availability of water and temperate climate

- Large employer closures and the number of jobs lost in the region;
- Road death and other trauma: a significant number of road accidents resulting in death have continued to affect the community. A number of people noted the widespread and continuing impact on people and the community;
- Rising costs of living at the same time as incomes reduced as a result of job lay-offs and poor prices for primary industry SMEs.

A number of comments also identified alcohol and other drug abuse as an increasing issue, particularly amongst young people, and a relationship between alcohol abuse and driving.

3.2 Perceptions of Community Assets

Understanding community assets as identified by local people was a key sub-objective of the project. Questions 2 and 3 invited people to reflect on what had worked to get through recent “tough times”.

People were asked to consider this at two levels (1) as individuals and (2) the community level.

Within the sub-objective category “community assets” the analytical focus was on identifying:

- networks: formal and informal;
- community spaces: as sites for social participation and social connection;
- local institutions: including formal and incorporated associations and in- or less- formal groups;
- individual skills: in particular leadership, facilitation (community action) advocacy (in addition, with respect to economic assets, individual skills was used to identify work-related skills);
- participation: in particular involvement in decision-making, engagement in social activity including recreation and change/action.

Over 40% of the total comments collected were concerned with describing ways in which individuals and the community coped with “tough times”.

From the comments referring to community assets, four assets were very consistently identified:

- strong positive attitude and confidence in the region;
- high levels of formal and informal social participation and the willingness to participate;
- community spaces;
- industry diversity based on natural assets.

Confidence and attitude

“Our greatest problem, if you want to talk about risks, is people giving up hope.

We’re a great place and we know it. If we stop remembering that, well, then we are in trouble.”

Positive belief and attitude regarding the region was raised frequently in the comments on community assets as a critical factor in “getting through” as well as an asset for a positive future. This was expressed variously through references directly to attitude, as well as indirect references - for example:

“We’ll always be here.”

“We know how to get things done here.”

“We might downsize for a while, but we’re more resilient than that!”

A number of respondents noted that the full impact of the recent changes including retrenchments was still to be felt and impact on confidence was something they were concerned about.

Participation

Participation in a range of social processes was identified in over 50% of the comments regarding community assets as a strength within the community. References to participation included:

- educational activity
- recreation;
- family .

Many noted that sports teams and clubs and exercise groups (e.g. walking groups) play a major role in community connectedness and positive aspect. Many respondents, however, expressed concern about the lack of activity organised or emerging for people with an interest in arts or cultural activity and young people.

The local Council plays a strong role in supporting participation in decision-making and this was reflected in the responses by a high number of

comments identifying networks, groups and projects in which the Council has had some role (either through auspicing or facilitating a number of key consultative committees). These include:

- Circular Head Progress Group (CHPG);
- Circular Head Education and Training Consultative Committee (CHETCC);
- Circular Head Young Leaders (CHYL);
- Circular Head Council Community and Recreational Development Officers;
- Community recovery forum;
- Youth Forum;
- Public meetings on the occurrence of significant events;
- 7-Up Youth Centre.

Networks

Formal networks such as organised groups and associations as having been significant in “getting through” tough times were raised in nearly half the comments related to community assets. This category included cross sector or industry networks working together for specific outcomes (e.g. Trade Centre) and active groups such as the Retailers Group and the Circular Head Progress Group utilising personal and professional networks towards common goals or projects. The strong role of the churches in people’s connectedness was also raised as a significant feature of the region.

In addition to interview responses, high levels of service collaboration – both formal and informal – were observed through the course of this project for example Circular Head Education and Training Consultative Committee, Service Providers Access Network, Circular Head Progress Association, On-Line Access Centre, Circular Head Young Leaders. The role of interpersonal relationships and specific investment and commitment from the Circular Head Council were reported anecdotally (outside of formal interview) to be key elements in this high level of effective collaboration.

Projects

39% of comments on community assets referred to specific projects that have taken place for example Tech Buddies, 7-Up, fundraising for high school trip,

development of the skate park. Reference to “civil society”, “council” and not-for-profit organisations was frequent in comments regarding community projects indicating cross sector organising and action was valued as a significant community asset.

Relationships

23% of the total comments collected referred to relationships as significant assets within the community. This ranged from family and friends through to personal community relationships. A number of comments described this as “pulling together”. When asked to expand on this phrase, responses ranged from very informal aspects such as taking extra time to stop in the street to ask and listen, the strong role of the church, through to helping in practical ways (minding children), and increased engagement in projects and networks (see above).

Case studies in participation

The following two case studies provide examples of the formal and informal participation that equally demonstrate the influence and centrality of networks and projects in the region.

Case study: Facebook

In mid-2009 two local women set up a facebook group for people to connect. Through this group the women designed and, “...just out of interest...” ran a survey to get a snapshot of how people were responding to the announcements and retrenchments.

Interestingly, the survey asked a question about “number of **people in your family** impacted by the closure”. The emphasis on family in this question as well as the pattern of responses (high numbers of response for over 5) also indicated that the concept of family and extended family is significant the region.

Over 300 people responded to the survey, which asked a range of questions about how many and in what ways people anticipated the impact would be felt. The key issues they found were financial advice and training or retraining.

Case study: CHETCC

A key local network, the Circular Head Education and Training Consultative Committee, has been working closely with the Circular Head Council to address the skills and development needs of the region. This Committee comprises people from the local educational institutions as well as the Mayor and community members from key industries. This Committee has been an important component in the emergence of the new Trades Centre, a collaborative venture between the local state government high school, a local private school and the Tasmanian Polytechnic.

Community spaces

'Community spaces' was raised frequently in the comments on community assets (23%). This category included formal community venues and informal sites that were significant as assets related to participation and confidence.

Many people commented on the developments in council recreational infrastructure such as the walking tracks, public toilets, the multi-purpose community centre and the 7-Up Youth Centre as key assets that assisted the community in expressing supportive community networks. These were regarded as highly important in maintaining positive attitudes and transforming the informal interpersonal connections into more focused supportive interpersonal connections.

The 7Up Youth Centre and the new Community Recreation Centre were identified repeatedly as specifically important community spaces. Similarly, the OnLine Access Centre was identified as an important site. Responses indicated that these sites are important not only for formal activities like adult education, but also as informal meeting places, often between generations. The Access Centre, a key café in the main street and "Facebook" were the top identified "community spaces" for coming together and sharing, ideas generation and action. The role and currency of Facebook was surprisingly prevalent across the responses.

Case studies in community spaces as community assets

Case study: On-line Access Centre

Co-located with the public library, the On-line Access Centre has recently extended its hours and increased its capacity to offer adult and flexible learning options. The Centre is a small hub of activity and is accessed by a range of people representing a good snapshot of the community, for example:

- older people working through computer skills modules;
- professionals accessing further education through flexible learning;
- young people accessing the web after school while waiting for buses;
- tourists, travellers and holiday makers accessing email and blogs;
- itinerant workers accessing email and core online services (e.g. Centrelink);
- people not employed and / or living with other disadvantage socialising and accessing employment information.

The coordinator's interpersonal skills, welcoming approach and enthusiasm appear to be core assets in expanding the Centre's growing effectiveness as an informal hub that can support the ideas and interests of people using the centre.

On the morning of interview the centre was a hive of activity with people coming and going. Amongst this activity a particular exchange was observed. An older woman had been quietly working at a computer, practicing computer and typing skills. A young family entered on their way to the library, on seeing each other the family and the woman exchanged warm greetings and then garden plants! They had identified common interests on previous occasions and talked over the possibility of swapping plants. "I brought them along in case I saw you today" was the sentiment attached to the swap as this was not a planned meeting.

This unplanned informal exchange illustrates the Centre's role as an important "community space" that extending beyond formally funded purposes and defines it as an important "community space".

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Finally, public infrastructure showed up strongly as assets also:

- Smith St upgrade
- public toilets
- road upgrades
- walking track (Boardwalk).

In addition to the practical benefits, a large number of respondents linked public infrastructure with maintaining community pride and positive attitude and as a key asset in the potential for positive health and well being outcomes.

Case study: 7-Up

“Kids like to come to the online access centre and do their emails but there’s not a lot of room. And the library – well look at it – it’s good but it’s tiny! 7-Up really made a difference. I know of a [young person] who had been really unwell and missed a lot of school. They’d lost confidence and stopped going to school.

Once 7-Up opened this kid was allowed to go there after school and it gave them the initial motivation to get back to school. They just seemed to get a real sense of confidence and became quite out-going through being able to be there and talk with Alysha [CH Council Youth Development Officer] there. It was SO good.

I just really hope it can get some funding and open up again.”

(some details changed to protect privacy)

Industry diversity and economic assets

Approximately 15% of total comments identified the following as key economic assets for the region:

- industry diversity: farming; aquaculture and fisheries; tourism; food processing; non-coal and non-hydro based energy generation;
- industry confidence and capacity to invest in growth;
- processing capacity that can complement natural assets and primary production;
- availability of labour.

Many respondents identified the potential for sustainable development and tourism based on ‘clean and green’:

“We have the freshest air in the world – everybody knows that!”

“We have all sorts of stuff – we could grow anything”

However, experience with the severe impact of tourism’s ‘off-season’ was identified as a particularly troubling issue. Key issues around this included adequate promotion of the region with respect to the range of tourist features and targeted promotion of specific traveller groups and Circular Head’s place in travel routes.

Natural assets as economic assets were identified in over 18% of total comments. The key features noted here were moderate climate and capacity to grow a diversity of crops, geological features of interest, Aboriginal history and eco-tourism assets (forests, rivers, beaches, wildlife including birdlife).

Education and training

A high level of interest in education and training also emerged strongly from the interviews.

Comments referred to education and training across two key categories: ‘opportunity’ and ‘issue for the future’. The type of comments offered indicated that education and training was valued for all ages and stages of life as key to participation in community as well as critical to local economic regeneration.

In addition to respondents identifying education and training as a significant issue, four specific infrastructure projects related to education that have already taken place were raised a number of times as important in the region and as examples of the region’s resilience and capacity to develop a positive future:

- the development of the high school infrastructure;
- community support for the high school international exchange project;
- the establishment of the collaborative trades training centre across the publicly funded and privately funded schools;
- the co-location of the Polytechnic with the local publicly funded high school.

3.3 Cost of living

“I never, ever thought I would see, in this rich farming community, a farming family with absolutely no food on the table. Ever. It broke my heart.”

In 2009, the Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania (2009) identified “access to the basics” as a key issue for Tasmania to address. In addition, it was reported that the cost of living and access to basic goods and services was raised repeatedly in community consultations throughout 2009 and 2010. As a result, the Tasmanian Government commenced development of a Cost of Living Strategy for the State by the middle of 2011.

This community assets project was identified as an opportunity to gather assets data in a specific region that may contribute to understanding cost of living impacts and resilience in Tasmania.

This project was able to provide some insight into community perceptions of cost of living impacts including ways a highly connected small community might cope with rising costs of living, and possible exclusions experienced due to cost of living impacts.

Cost of living was identified as a category for coding the responses. This enabled an indication of the extent to which cost of living registered in the perceptions of local people as a significant impact associated with changes in the region locally.

Given the scope limits of this project, including objectives (community assets), sample size and research ethics (sensitivity of information collected) it was not possible nor appropriate to drill down deeply, through interview, into experiences of exclusion related to cost of living.

As noted in Section 2.2 (Methodology), analysis focused on what emerged rather than a direct exploration of cost of living issues. Nevertheless, cost of living was raised through follow-up questioning within the interviews. Responses were coded according to mention of exclusions and impacts related to cost of living. In this context, access to emergency relief can be considered an indicator of exclusions experience in relation to increased cost of living.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the issue of cost of living did emerge through interview in a small number of responses, primarily by those respondents engaged in social support. The key issues identified were:

- rising costs of housing;
- food costs, although always higher for this region, had risen noticeably;
- rising energy costs;
- costs of transport, including community-based and subsidised transport as well as rising fuel costs.

With respect to food costs, a number of respondents raised questions about the apparent contradiction between living in a food producing region and being subject to higher than average costs of food.

Responses from social services providers indicated that the following exclusions have been experienced:

- foregoing heating, including in winter, due to power costs;
- deferring medical care, particularly dental care and specialist services, due to “gap” costs, and travel costs for many health-related services that are located outside the region;
- socialisation due to transport costs and lack of community or public transport - this is particularly important in the context of the high value placed on connection and social engagement in this region as identified above.

Emergency relief as an indicator of cost of living impacts and possible exclusions

Emergency relief flows through the community through two key pathways:

- cash payments, food hampers and fuel vouchers from Commonwealth Emergency Relief assistance, funded through the FaCHSIA Financial Management Program;
- food hampers and fuel vouchers distributed through local association and funded through locally based fundraising activity.

Through group discussion, locally based social services reported anecdotally a marked increase

in emergency relief activity over the previous two years (2009 and 2010). Increases in accessing Commonwealth emergency relief funds and essential services vouchers (for power and telephone costs) included:

- the number of households seeking assistance;
- the frequency of households seeking assistance;
- unexpected expansion in household types seeking assistance – in particular working families and farming households that had not sought assistance before.

Services reported they sought a significant amount of additional Commonwealth Emergency Relief Funds in 2009/10 and expected (at the time of interview, November 2010) to apply for additional funds for the 2010/11 financial year also.

Services also reported anecdotally that noticeable numbers of households did not receive financial and related support due, in their view, to technical definitions of low income and hardship in the Centrelink criteria.

Service providers' responses identified anecdotally that there was a lot of pressure on existing business and families and that the impact of this was yet to finish "playing out" in terms of family stress.

Similarly, services expressed concern that a large number of this new group of help-seeking households have little experience of managing financial hardship, and there is a layer of risk laying dormant (...*"until the retrenchment money runs out..."*). Future needs identified by services related to know-how and effective help-seeking behaviours. Relationships Australia Tasmania's Rural Support Team offered the same concerns based on their counselling work (see Attachment E for detail), and noted the potential impact on family stress levels. Just under 20% of total comments refer to employment and family/individual stress as a key 'issue for the future' supporting this this anecdotal claim to some degree. Further, these figures indicate there remains deep concern within the community about the continuing impact of the recent economic downturn.

3.4 Significant issues and opportunities for the future – A local perspective

When asked about the future for the region approximately 35% of total comments referred to challenges and opportunities. The following themes emerged distinctly from this collection of comments on opportunities for the future:

- Investment in new and expanding industries;
- Developing new skills and creating new jobs;
- Preventing road accidents;
- Improving and maintaining community confidence, mental health and well-being.

Investment in new and expanding industries.

As noted above, a high level of confidence was expressed regarding the potential for industry diversity.

In addition to the impact on households discussed above, a large portion of comments noted the challenges facing small business as the impact of primary industry downturn flows through the local economy. This was felt to be particularly the case for Smithton as the area's "service centre". Comments related to investing in promotion and development of the region as a tourist destination was split between belief in the potential and acknowledgement of the risks associated with over-investing in additional seasonal industries.

Developing new skills and creating new jobs

"There's a change in skills required for new technology in our industries..."

As noted above, availability of labour was identified as one of the regions key economic assets. Equally, there were strong indications that this asset presents some key challenges that were regarded as critical needs for the immediate and future economic prosperity in the region:

- Investment in training and skills development. Some respondents raised the question of the extent to which current skills are readily transferable to new industries;
- Long term factory jobs provided high levels of security and high pay that are not necessarily available in the future economic make-up.

Support for making the transition to quite a different local economy will be critical;

- Casualisation of the workforce and increasing mechanisation is leaving casual workers and those who have traditionally made a living from “bits and pieces” particularly vulnerable.

Preventing road accident deaths

“...We’ve just got to work out how to protect our young people on the roads...”

Both this project and the anecdotal report from Relationships Australia Tasmania identified trauma related to road accident death as an unexpected issue. Circular Head has faced a disproportionate number of road related fatalities over the past 3-5 years:

“We are 1.8% of the state’s population, yet we have 17% of the road fatalities...”

Other interviewees described the significant impact on the Circular Head community:

“ You need to understand we are like a big family up here. Lots of us are interrelated and we’re not a large community so we all feel this deeply.”

“Five from her friendship group have been killed over the past few years – they’re not [aged] twenty yet! And they all worry about it [road accidents]. It’s horrible.”

Improving community confidence, mental health and well-being

“We’re facing a lot, but you know, the community feels really upbeat.

We make our own opportunities here”

As noted in an earlier discussion, confidence in the region and a positive attitude regarding the region’s future were identified in a significant portion of the comments. With respect to future opportunities, a number of the comments noted that maintaining confidence and positive attitude seemed to be an important activity. These comments were frequently linked to comments about participation in social activities and community action – a “can do” way of going about life.

Alcohol and other drug abuse

A number of respondents noted the rise in alcohol and other drug abuse in the region, and tentatively expressed disquiet about the risk of driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Increases in alcohol and other drug abuse were particularly linked to men and young people. In a small community this was reported by respondents to have a significant effect on social relations, an effect that is amplified because of the high level of interconnectedness across the community:

“But it’s a really big problem – if two people have a falling out or something happens, then their families and friends are aware and affected by it – and that might mean up to 100 people – well, in a community our size that’s a lot!”

Mental health

Just over 12% of the total comments referred to individual or family stress, mental health challenges and suicide directly. Service providers confirmed the issues identified by Relationships Australia Tasmania reports that negative impact from the recent changes is likely to continue to be felt for some years (also see Tonna et al. 2009).

A number of respondents noted that health promotion projects and life skills activities, such as the “men’s night” at the club, have started to have a positive impact:

“I’ve noticed men are starting to talk about health!”

4. Discussion

The findings of this project strongly suggest that, with respect to resilience and future development, Circular Head is well served by a local people's focus on a positive future, belief in the region's capacity for industry diversity and high levels of trust, connectedness and collaboration.

4.1 Community Resilience

"Horrible accidents; McCains; dairy prices; it's brought us together"

The spirit of this comment was repeated regularly through the interviews (15 respondents) and is important for considering the interrelationship between resilience and significant individual and community events in the Circular Head region such as those noted above.

The RA Tasmania Rural Support Team has identified that rural communities have both protective and risk factors associated with 'rurality'. In its experience, the most common aspects of rural life that can contribute to poor physical and mental health are things such as the isolation that accompanies less opportunity and diversity of social contact (Please see Attachment E).

Recent Australian research conducted into the impact of drought on rural communities highlights the risks posed to well-being in rural communities and the influence of multiple factors in defining how communities respond (Tonna et al. 2009). Research through the Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University, found that the most recent drought experienced throughout country Victoria has led to:

"... chronic and pervasive (negative) impact on local communities depleting already stretched resources and exhausting the traditional support systems." (Young 2009).

Nevertheless strength-based models of community development and resilience provide insight into characteristics and qualities that, if integrated and identified purposefully, can result in high levels of recovery and resilience (e.g. Cavaye 2001; Chaskin 2006; Maybery et al. 2009). Maguire and Cartwright (2008) offer a definition of community

resilience that emphasises the willingness of a community to let go of actions, projects, structures (social and economic) and assumptions that no longer serve it positively:

A resilient community has the flexibility and creativity to develop and embrace new and alternative ways of doing things (Resilience Alliance 2007). It is through this flexibility and redundancy that a community can translate its resources and adaptive capacity into adaptation and thereby demonstrate resilience. (2008:14)

In their discussion of community risk and resilience, Cummins et al (2008) identified that the presence of two or more community risks act as predictors for community health and well-being. Although identifying 'community risk' was not directly addressed through the interview process in the current project, feedback on challenges, issues and needs complemented by service provider information and research into resilience and recovery in rural areas indicates some challenges remain:

- supporting people from previously stable long term employment to transition to new jobs and industries;
- longer term impacts of recent changes and economic downturn, including job and income losses and increasing costs of living, on family stress, individual stress and coping capacities;
- young people and families leaving the region for employment.

Table 1 summarises the issues raised through interview in terms of community risk. Assessed from this perspective, it is possible to argue that the region is faces some specific and identified community risks, including those associated with "rurality" (e.g. Tonna et al 2009; Young 2009). However, shifts in the literature on resilience towards strength-based models indicate important pathways to resilience through focusing on community assets and fostering community and individual strengths (e.g. Burchardt et al 2008; Davidson 2008; Mohaupt 2008; Pinkerton et al 2007; Howard 1999).

Table 1 and discussion throughout this report indicate that the Circular Head region is characterised by strong community assets across three key levels (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993):

- Gifts, skills and capacities of individuals: Numerous examples of action oriented positive leadership emerged from the stories shared through interview. The following identifies just a few of the very many, often quiet examples of gifts, skills and leadership of individuals within the community (with apologies to those not included here):
 - Redevelopment of the skate park initiated and facilitated by a local person with young children
 - Music festivals and similar activities for young people organised by a small group of local people;
 - The development of the collaborative educational facility Trades Training Centre, driven by the two Principals of the high schools;
 - Revitalisation of the On-Line Access Centre by a local professional with warmth and commitment;
 - Facilitation of collaborative networks of service providers by Council community development staff to improve access to services for local people;
 - Class of year 10s at the local high school organising fundraising for a school exchange trip to south east Asia – supported and inspired by a key teacher and a dynamic youth worker;
 - Local history association revitalised and kept vibrant and meaningful through the efforts of a volunteer coordinator who also doubles as a full-time professional.
- “Citizen’s associations” through which people work together to pursue common goals: Community integration – for example community ‘recovery’ forums; neighbours providing care at time of serious illness; high levels of Council investment in community development; well-regarded and established

local community organisations

Utilising community resources – for example young people and older people brought together in recreational and learning activities (highly popular and well-regarded according to comments provided in interview); high levels of formal and informal collaboration; Capabilities including community leadership: for example Circular Head Progress Group; Retail Group; Stanley Chamber of Commerce; CHETCC (see “Case study: CHETCC” above); Circular Head Young Leaders CHYL (Council supported policy and input structure); well established community organisations.

- Public institutions: Highly valued public infrastructure (as noted in previous sections): – examples include 7-Up Youth Centre, multi-purpose community centre; walking tracks; upgrade to public toilet, Smith Street ‘clean-up’; active local government; robust locally based community health service and social support services.

Cavaye (2001) argues, based on his work in Australian rural communities, that confidence / positive attitude and participation are two of the five key elements that are critical to community capacity to bounce back from multiple hardships. From a resilience perspective, the interviews in the current study indicated a strong belief in the capacity of the town to survive, to ‘get up’ and recreate, and to remain a great place to live and work.

Cavaye (2001) further argues that the extent to which, and the ways in which, a community identifies and negotiates conflicts and agreement on values is critical to the opportunities for success in community development. Indications from this project are that common values for this region as assets that support a positive future might include:

- problem solving and action based on local resources (e.g. high levels of connectedness, formal and informal leadership, experience, willingness to have a go);
- the importance and value of education;
- the importance of social connectedness

(caring for each other, helping out and “pulling together”).

Mowbray et al (2007) developed a model for understanding community resilience that breaks “community assets” down into three components: social, public and economic assets. The model enables interrelationships between assets and community risk to be mapped visually and is useful for considering the assets and issues identified by local people in the Circular Head region (See Table 1 below).

The picture emerging from Table 1 also indicates that *from the perspective of local people*, critical social assets are already in place in the Circular Head community. Indeed not only are these assets present but the interviews conducted for this project indicated strongly a high level awareness of these qualities and assets and that they are highly valued by local people.

Importantly from the perspective of building community resilience, if these community assets can be purposefully utilised, fostered and “exercised” through community development activities (that is realised further as community *strengths*) increased community *resilience* will result. This is foundational for enhancing local economic regeneration as well as “future proofing” for significant future events.

Table 1: Model of interrelationships: Summarised assets and community risks for Circular Head region.

<p>Social assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) high level of participation in social action and recreational activity; (2) public forums; (3) high levels of family and social connectedness; (4) strong active relationships and networks; (5) strong civil society of clubs and associations; (6) community organising for community support; (7) high levels of confidence and positive attitude. 	<p>Public assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) public recreational infrastructure; (2) educational infrastructure; (3) school upgrades; (4) recent upgrades to health and aged care services
<p>Community challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Industry downturn impacting on household income and employment opportunity; (2) continued high levels of family stress associated with the industry downturn impact; (3) transitions required in level of educational attainment and technical orientation; families leaving due to economic pressures. 	<p>Economic assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) potentially highly diverse industry make-up; (2) employment opportunity in new industries; (3) natural assets (climate); (4) labour force availability and potential employability

5. Recommendations

This project and report have been framed around a community assets-based perspective. As such, a review of this report and its findings should be undertaken by the project partners, in collaboration with local people. This will create the opportunity to identify locally-based actions that can be undertaken to support any number of factors that contribute to community resilience. Notwithstanding this, the following recommendations, grouped under relevant themes, are offered for consideration.

1. Community ownership and responsibility for fostering community strengths and assets

- The Circular Head Council and the Circular Head Progress Group review the report findings and convene an appropriate community forum to develop a community action plan, driven by local people.

Such a process should include all levels of government as well as community support providers and development focused groups such as the North West Rural Strategy Group.

- Circular Head Council, in partnership with groups such as the Circular Head Progress Association, continue to monitor, foster and support the community strengths and assets identified in this report.

2. Mental health as a key to future proofing and community resilience

If a region is to effectively utilise or activate economic assets and opportunities, it follows that social and community assets must be strong. The literature on community resilience, particularly in rural and regional communities points to the relevance of a community-wide mental health strategy in building on community assets, and assisting community in addressing hardship at the local level.

On this basis it is recommended that:

- Investment in a region-wide mental health strategy is needed to rebuild and support the community assets already present in the region.

- Increase available community family support services. This should include a balance between out of region visiting and locally based services.
- Additional investment in trauma support services, including road related trauma is needed.
- Investment is required to improve access to clinical health and community mental health services.
- Investment in genuinely affordable and accessible community transport is also required to assist with access to health and community services.

3. Fostering participation through community development activities

This project revealed that informal relationships and network became critical as exclusions and hardships began to impact on households. On this basis it is recommended that:

- Government, private and not-for-profit organizations utilise, build and extend the community strengths that characterise the region, through:
 - Projects, activities and services that specifically maintain and foster positive attitude and belief (e.g. Circular Head Council's recent Health and Wellbeing Strategy, re-opening 7-Up Youth Centre);
 - Projects, activities and services that draw out and draw on skills and capabilities of a range of demographic cohorts, (e.g. community-based projects that assist semi-skilled factory workers transition to new careers through retraining and (re)learning skills in innovation and new technical skills; the On-Line Access Centre's approach to flexible alternative pathways to skill-building and intergenerational skill sharing; extending existing positive collaboration with the Aboriginal community).
- These should ensure that potentially excluded and disadvantaged groups are included in community activities, networks and projects;
- older people;

- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- people living with a disability;
- people who have been recently retrenched from long term employment;
- people who have been out of work for long periods.
- Activities and projects that maintain and build residents' engagement in social and economic planning and design (e.g. a Council 'summit' for those recently retrenched, the long term unemployed or living with physical disability that mirrors the successful youth summit. This summit was successful at the time and, importantly, continues to influence community development attitude and sense of the possible).

4. Cost of living: locally based projects enhancing access to the basics

Exclusions experienced during the period of hardship emerged through the interviews. Surprise and concern was expressed that, in a food-producing region, food exclusions could still occur. Similarly, service providers noted that, as a result of the self-reliant culture of the region, many households found it difficult to access help.

On this basis it is recommended that:

- Increased promotion of services and assistance available through new technologies and a broad based mental health strategy (see Recommendation 2 above).
- Residents and producers explore locally-based strategies to assist access to affordable nutritious fresh food (e.g. accessing the resources and opportunities for the Tasmanian Food Security Council)

5. Building economic participation and the diversity of the local economy

Strong positive sentiments regarding the potential for a diversified local economy based on natural assets and the availability of people to work came through strongly in the findings. It was clear that there is a strong commitment to education

and training in the region. On this basis it is recommended that:

- A community planning process should be convened to develop locally based economic development strategies:
 - develop a regionally focused skills development strategy
 - identify locally focused employment and skills development projects to assist young people to stay in the region and assist people transitioning across industries
 - share learnings across industries and create opportunities for new enterprises to be mentored within the region.

Such an approach could be led by local active groups including the Circular Head Progress Association, and could be based on the successful community driven models such as that facilitated by Dorset Council in the State's north-east.

Potential support services for further consideration

Following is a list of potential support services that could further support the region's capacity to develop and realize community resilience. These were identified from the findings of this report in combination with RA Tasmania's understanding of the region from the perspective of a social support service provider. RA Tasmania has expressed its commitment to discuss these with locally based leaders and organizations.

1. Increased family and personal support services, including suicide prevention and awareness
2. Alcohol and other drug awareness campaign
3. Increased and targeted post-trauma support services
4. Building relationships with sporting clubs and general service providers to expand awareness of support services available
5. Increased financial counseling services
6. Expanded community transport to increase general access to support and health services
7. Increased support services available for men and young people
8. Exploration of technology related support services.

Attachment A: Scope of project advisory network

The following is from communication regarding scope and terms of reference for the advisory network.

Project overview

The project aims to draw local people in Circular Head into considering their community assets, needs and opportunities for renewal and development. This is in the context of the recent significant changes in the region associated with drought, economic downturn and industry withdrawal.

The project will use a relatively simple process of conducting focus groups and interviews with key people in the region. Due to budgetary constraints the geographical scope has been limited to Smithton and Marawah.

The project aims to identify potential areas for investment in social infrastructure as well as provide a report that the local community, particularly through the Circular Head Council and hopefully through the Circular Head Progress Group, can use to continue locally-led development and resilience building.

Advisory structure

An advisory network is sought to provide comment on the project at the key stages.

In addition guidance is sought on:

- the best way to make this project meaningful and useful for the local community, and
- ensuring I am reaching a sufficient diversity of participants.

Given the relatively small budget, and short time frame, the aim is to keep the impact on the members of the advisory structure to a minimum but in a way that will enable RDS Partners to draw on the network's expertise.

Therefore, the following is proposed:

How: Participation via email with no expectation for face to face meetings.

How often: One communication in November 2010, one in December 2010 and one in January 2011.

What: Comment to be sought on:

- * the inquiry framework developed as a guiding document to deliver the project. (mid November 2010)
- * the data analysis (mid December 2010)
- * the draft final report (mid January 2011)

Attachment B: Interview pro forma

Engaging Local Voices: Interview questions

Circular Head Community Assets Project
November/December 2010

Project summary

Output:

The output of the project will be a report providing an indicative map of Circular Head community social assets and aspirations, and social and development needs as identified by a representative sample of people who live in the region.

Objectives:

- Provide RA Tasmania with community-driven data on regional needs and interests to assist in planning the provision and development of social support in the Circular Head region that builds on its current investment in social infrastructure.
- Provide the community, through the CHPG and other key local associations, with an initial map of community assets and locally identified priorities for locally-led social, cultural and economic development

Project guiding question:

What are the Circular Head's key community social assets, aspirations and needs?

Name (optional):

Work/Responsibilities:

Gender:

Age range:

Where you live (postcode):

Section 1. What happened?

- 1.1 What do you think have been the biggest positive changes in your community over the past 5 years?
- 1.2 What do you think have been the biggest negative changes in your community over the past 5 years?
- 1.3 How would you describe the impact on your community that these changes have they had? (Both positive and negative).

Section 2. How did people get by?

- 2.1 In what ways have **individuals and families** got through recent tough times in your community? (e.g. resources; networks; relationships; projects; groups; organisations)
- 2.2 What resources have been particularly helpful or unhelpful? (e.g. networks, relationships, groups or organisations.
- 2.3 In what ways does your community as a whole gets through tough times? (e.g. resources; networks; relationships; projects; groups; organisations)
- 2.4 What resources have been particularly helpful or unhelpful? (e.g. networks, relationships, groups or organisations.

Section 3. Looking ahead

In your view:

- 3.1 What are the main **issues** that need to be addressed in this region over the next 5 years?
- 3.2 What will be the main **needs** in this region over the next 5 years?
- 3.3 What are the main **opportunities** for social and economic development in this region?
- 3.4 What are the main things that will help local people take advantages of new opportunities in this region?

Section 4. Other information

- 4.1 Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?

Attachment C: Profile of interviewees

Individual semi-structured interview

Total number interviewed:	12			
Gender	F	7	M	5
Culturally and linguistically diverse background	0			
Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander background	2			
Employed / Studying	12			
Not employed	0			
Age range	19-25	2		
	26-45	3		
	45-65	6		
	Over 65	1		

Group input

Total number of groups:	5			
Total number of participants:	54			
Gender:	F	36	M	18
Culturally and linguistically diverse background	Not collected in group setting			
Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander background	Not collected in group setting			
Group profile	Professional (2) Social service provider (2) Student – secondary school (1)			

Attachment D: Social and economic overview of the Circular Head region

Circular Head is located in the far north-west of Tasmania. It is often described as one of Tasmania's most beautiful locations.

"...featuring a dramatic coastline, scenic forests and rich, undulating farmlands."

(Circular Head website Nov 2010 www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm).

The region is named for the high solidified lava formation at Stanley known as "the Nut". The municipality has a cool temperate climate, regular rainfall, and some of the world's cleanest air. The region has approximately 8,000 residents with approximately 3,500 people residing in Smithton, the largest town and administrative centre of Circular Head.

The Circular Head Council promotes many reasons to live and work in Circular Head. They promote a friendly, welcoming and supportive community with many opportunities for involvement through community and general interest groups.

Circular Head provides its people with caring, close-knit and strong community and an opportunity to maintain family values and friendships. Community members state that Circular Head has the best of everything - that they live in paradise. They talk about the feeling of space, vitality and peacefulness, how it's quiet and clean, how there's plenty of work and that it's perfect for raising a family."

(Circular Head website Nov 2010 www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm - video 'Live in Circular Head').

Socio-economic statistics

- Disadvantage ranking of Tasmanian Local Government Areas
Rank 3 (quintiles: 1 most - 5 least) (Vinson 2007)
- Child Social Exclusion Index 2006
Rank 2 (quintiles: 1 most - 5 least) (NATSEM)
- SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD)
Decile 6 - within State (ABS)
- Projected Population Growth by LGA 2007-2032: 10.1-20.0%

- Employment in industries vulnerable to the global financial crisis 40.1-50.0%
- Employed persons with no post-school qualifications >65%
(Social Inclusion Strategy Report - Appendix 1 - Adams 2009)
- SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage
Decile 2 (Aust) Decile 4 (State)
- SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage
Decile 3 (Aust) Decile 6 (State)
- SEIFA Index of Economic Resources
Decile 5 (Aust) Decile 8 (State)
- SEIFA Index of Education and Occupation
Decile 2 (Aust) Decile 3 (State)

Demographic profile

- 7,952 population (4,063 males; 3,889 females)
- Median age 37
- 54.5% of persons over 15 yrs married; 28.9% never married; 10.0% separated or divorced; 6.6% widowed
- 87.5% reported born in Tasmania (next NZ 2.7%)
- 95.6% only spoke English at home (next Dutch 0.3%)
- Of employed persons over 15 with a (non-school - up to Yr12) qualification, most common is Cert III & IV - 756 persons (next Bachelor degree 218)
- 3,074 occupied dwellings
- 91.5% separate houses (next flat, unit or apartment 6.1%)
- Median weekly rent was \$95 (\$135 in Tas & \$190 in Aust)
- Median monthly housing loan repayment was \$758 (\$867 in Tas & \$1,300 in Aust)
- Average household size 2.5
- 34.4% of dwellings fully owned; 33.8% being purchased and 26.1% rented
- 71.6% family household; 23.5% lone person; 1.5% group household
- 2,128 families
- 45.8% couple families with children; 40.2% couple families without children; 12.8% one parent families

(Circular Head Council 2008)

Labour force

- 3,932 people over 15 in labour force
- 61.4% employed full-time; 26.9% part-time;
- Median weekly income \$426 (\$398 in Tas & \$466 in Aust)
- Median household income \$824 (\$801 in Tas & \$1027 in Aust)
- Median family income \$1020 (\$1032 in Tas & \$1171 in Aust)
- Most common occupations were Labourers (25.5%) and Managers (23.1%). These were significantly higher than in other parts of Tasmania and Australia. Relatively low percentage of Clerical and Administrative Workers; Professionals; and Community and Personal Service Workers.
- Most common industries of employment were Dairy Cattle Farming 12.0%; Fruit and Vegetable Processing 6.0%; School Education 4.9%; Sheep, Beef Cattle and Grain Farming 4.6% and Meat and Meat Product Manufacturing 4.0%.
- The industry sectors employing the largest number of people are Agriculture, forestry and fishing (904 people) and Manufacturing (775 people).

(Circular Head Council 2008)

Industry profile

- 924 businesses total
- 504 Agriculture forestry and fishing
- 81 construction
- 75 Property and business services
- 66 Retail trade
- 43 manufacturing
- 36 Accommodation cafes and restaurants
- 24 Wholesale trade
- 24 transport and storage
- 24 communication services
- 15 personal and other services

ABS (2010). Tasmanian State and Regional Indicators – Number of businesses. March 2010

Social profile

Locally based services

- 6 real estate agents (Elders, First National, Harcourts, Land Mark, Roberts, PRD)

- Banking [ANZ; Commonwealth; Elders Rural Bank; Rabobank; Bass & Equitable (agency); Westpac (agency/ATM)]
- Post office in Smithton & Stanley (limited postal services at Edith Creek, Forest, Irishtown, Marrawah and Rocky Cape).
- Child care provided by child-care centre, family day care, a play centre and after-school care
- Service Tasmania in Smithton
- Public library, Smithton
- On-Line Access Centre, Smithton
- Places of worship in Smithton (10); Stanley (4); Forest (2), Marrawah (2); Montagu (1) and Rocky Cape (1)
- Financial Service Advisors

Locally based health and social support services

- Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation Inc (CHAC)
- Emmerton Park Aged Care Facility
- Rural Health Tasmania Inc
- Wyndarra Centre Inc
- Circular Head Council employs a Community Programs Officer (CPO); Recreation and Community Officer (RCO); Youth and Community Officer (YCO) and a Council Community Recovery Coordinator
- Circular Head Council actively involved in a number of committees. SPAN (Service Providers Access Network); CRSP (Community Road Safety Partnerships) and CHETCC (Circular Head Education and Training Consultative Committee).

(Circular Head Council 2008)

Visiting health and social support services include:

- Centrelink – Rural Services
- Family Based Care North West
- Carers Tasmania
- Relationships Australia Tasmania
- Rural Alive and Well Inc
- Rural Financial Counselling Service Tasmania

Community groups and associations include:

- Circular Head Agricultural Society Inc
- Circular Head Arts Inc
- Circular Head Garden Club Inc
- Circular Head Historical Society Inc
- Circular Head Walking Club
- International Friendship Group
- Lions Club (Smithton & Rocky Cape)
- Rotary Club
- Rural Youth
- Soroptomist International

Youth support and recreation

Circular Head Council:

- Employs a Youth and Community Officer to facilitate youth and community programs;
- Convenes the Circular Head Youth Leaders (CHYL) youth advisory group.

The CHYL meet regularly to advise Council on youth issues and concerns and develop activities and projects for young people in Circular Head. Recent CHYL activities have included a coat and blanket drive during winter and fundraising through production and sale of a calendar.

Other youth organisations represented in Circular Head are:

- Rural Youth
- Guides
- Scouts (including Venturers)
- Naval Cadets
- Various Church Youth Groups

Major social and cultural events

- Melbourne to Stanley Yacht Race (November)
 - Circular Head Agricultural Show (December)
 - Christmas Parade (December)
 - Rip Curl West Coast Classic, Marrawah, (March)
- Circular Head website accessed November 2010 www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm*

Sport and recreation

Sport and recreation is a key component in the lives of many Circular Head residents. Many sports are played both competitively and non-competitively, the most popular sports in the region are:

- hockey (men's and women's),
- cricket
- football.

Leisure activities including bushwalking, fishing, gardening and bird-watching are popular pursuits. Recreation grounds are located at Irishtown, Trowutta, Redpa, Smithton and Stanley. The Circular Head War Memorial Swimming Pool is in Smithton. Regular skate jams are organised at the skate park in Smithton.

The Council has prepared a recreation plan and in early 2007 engaged an external Consultancy to undertake a Tracks and Trails Feasibility Study in the urban areas of Smithton and Stanley.

http://www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Recreation_Plan.pdf

Education and learning is provided at eight schools in Circular Head, with the municipality's two High Schools located in Smithton. A TAFE college in Smithton runs courses throughout the year including Adult Education courses each semester. The State Library of Tasmania is located in Smithton. Online Access Centres are provided in Smithton, Redpa-Marawah and Edith Creek.

Human and health services within Circular Head, including **aged care** and **disability services**, include the:

- Smithton District Hospital has 16 inpatient beds, an Accident and Emergency unit, an oncology day ward and visiting radiology, podiatry, audiometry, psychiatric and obstetrics services.
- Smithton Medical Centre is a permanently staffed medical practice with four Associate General Practitioners and one Registrar. The Centre's doctors have 24-hour access to an airstrip for fixed-wing aircraft for retrieval of major trauma cases and persons affected by serious injury.

- Emmerton Park Inc. delivers care to over 120 senior residents of Circular Head each week.
- Disability Respite Centre in Smithton provides short-term respite accommodation for persons with a disability and/or their carers.
- Rural Health Tasmania Inc. is a community centre funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, providing health education, parenting groups, psychological services, mental health support, suicide prevention training, community and youth development programs.
- The Wyndarra Centre offers counselling and activities for all people within Circular Head, Service delivery is dependent on the client's needs and may be centre-based or home visit.
- Riverbend Youth Centre is administered by the Christian Brethren Churches of Circular Head and is capable of accommodating around 120 people and caters for all types of camps and conferences.

Circular Head website Nov 2010 www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm

Overview of the regions' economic profile

Circular Head is characterised by a range of natural resources and a moderate climate, allowing for a variety of businesses and industries including:

- dairy (more than thirty per cent of Tasmania's dairy farms)
- prime beef production,
- commercial fishing and aquaculture,
- agriculture,
- forestry and timber production,
- iron ore pelletising,
- vegetable processing,
- manufacturing and
- tourism.

The region also contains one of Australia's largest wind farms, Woolnorth and the nation's only Baseline Air Pollution Station, Cape Grim

With less than 2% of Tasmania's population, Circular Head accounts for more than 12% of the State's total annual agricultural production, representing

almost \$100 million per annum to the economy.

Circular Head businesses export to more than 20 countries, predominantly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Circular Head website Nov 2010 www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm

- 14.1% of Tasmania's total value of agricultural commodities (\$139.4m)
- 40.9% of Tasmania's total value of milk produced (\$85.5m)
- Median house price 2007 (\$180,500)

Circular Head Council 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries & Aquaculture

- Murray Goulburn Co-Operative Co Limited - Edith Creek Site - a UHT dairy product packaging plant, is located at Edith Creek. The company packs 190 labels for 40 national and international customers, exporting to seven countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The plant operates 5 days per week and employs more than 150 staff.
- McCain Foods, a large multi-national company, has a French fries processing and freezing plant located in Smithton. In peak season the company employs approximately 150 people. The company has several potato storage sheds on the Smithton site.
- Greenham Tasmania Pty Ltd is a meat processing facility located in Smithton, employing more than 120 staff. The company provides beef to the domestic market as well as to Japan, Korea and the United States.
- Bolduans Bay Oysters Pty Ltd - have 79 hectares of marine farm sites at three locations in Circular Head. They employ 20 full-time and 4 casual staff.
- Tasmanian Seafoods Pty Ltd - is Australia's largest exporter of abalone. The company employs approximately 50 staff in Circular Head and a further 50 across Tasmania.
- Blue Hills Honey - a premium gourmet honey producer based in Circular Head. The company specialises in Leatherwood honey, along with Blackberry, Meadow and Wildflower honeys.

Forestry and timber production

- Britton Bros - trading as Britton Timbers, is based in Smithton. It is Tasmania's largest privately-owned hardwood sawmill and the biggest producer of specialty timbers. The company employs approximately 70 staff at its Smithton mill, with a further 28 staff employed in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.
- Gunns Ltd is Australia's largest fully integrated hardwood forest products company. Its Smithton Mill employs 90 people and, from a production perspective, is the largest of five hardwood green mills the company operates in Tasmania.
- Ta Ann Tasmania Pty Ltd operates two Rotary Peel Veneer mills in Tasmania, one in the Huon district and the other in Smithton. The Smithton mill employs 50 full-time staff and 10 casual staff, along with contractors, and there is capacity in the Smithton mill to install a third log cutting line and a second dryer in future years.

Mineral resources

- Grange Resources - owns the Savage River iron ore mine on the West Coast and the Port Latta pellet plant in Circular Head. The company employs almost 500 direct staff, plus contractors. The pellets are shipped to markets in Australia and Asia, in particular China.

Tourism sites

- Smithton
- Stanley
- Dismal Swamp
- Woolnorth and Cape Grim
- Dip Falls and the Big Tree
- Rocky Cape National Park
- South Arthur Forest Drive
- Arthur River
- Arthur Pieman Conservation Area

Circular Head website Nov 2010 www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm

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- Circular Head Council website (Nov 2010) www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm

Attachment E:

Report from Relationships Australia Tasmania Rural Support Program

The following anecdotal information and research was provided by the Rural Support Team to assist in further understanding the region in terms of impacts and potential risks to resilience.

RA Tasmania offers family support and counselling in the Circular Head region and in particular has worked very closely with people, supporting families at times of difficulty through the period of drought.

The Rural Support Team is an innovative outreach project aimed at providing social and emotional support to individuals and families in rural areas through personal counselling and community development activities that help strengthen support networks and build social capital. In collaboration with established social support services the Team facilitates events that help to reduce social isolation that is an increasing issue in rural areas.

Rural Support Team acknowledged that rural communities have both protective and risk factors associated with their 'rurality'. In their experience, the most common aspects of rural life that can contribute to poor physical and mental health are things such as the isolation that accompanies reduced opportunity and diversity of social contact. In addition, research conducted by The Bouverie Centre La Trobe University has found that the recent drought experienced throughout country Victoria has led to:

“..chronic and pervasive (negative) impact on local communities depleting already stretched resources and exhausting the traditional support systems.”

As a risk factor, the Rural Support Team has noted this reduction of some of the positive aspects of interconnectedness, for which rural communities are known.

Description of the program

The Rural Support Program is underpinned by community development principles, which assume that all communities have strengths and skills that when tapped, can lead to unique and effective solutions.

When the local community itself defines its issues and develops collaborative projects that are led and owned by local people, the solutions have greater potential to be more effective and sustainable.

An important role within the Rural Support Program has been to raise awareness about the myriad effects of stress and its relationship to anxiety and depression and the effect on physical and emotional health. We in turn have offered social and emotional support and ideas on ways to ameliorate these, and have identified helpful pathways to access much needed financial, psychological and other supports through local services and the Rural Support Network Tas (RSNT).

Workshops and Road shows

Rural Support Workshops and Road-shows were facilitated in order to provide an opportunity for people to share their visions of a connected community, and to potentially be a spring board to assist communities to access ideas, rural networks and resources that could develop the connections within their own communities.

As one farmer said: *“Information about signs and symptoms of stress and depression are helpful, but just the simple act of staying connected is the lifeline.”*

At many of the workshops participants shared their experiences of personal despair and of their survival, as well as expressing profound care for others around them. They related anecdotes of 'getting on with doing things' and the camaraderie of this. These stories beautifully highlighted the way that 'doing things together' has the potential to build relationships between people, and open the door for other communication. Many participants also showed appreciation and relief at attending a workshop that was specific to their needs and an opportunity to socialise and relax even though many of them were still thinking about what they 'should' be doing.

Workshop participants also talked about industry field days that the Rural Support Team took part in. They indicated that these have traditionally served a dual purpose: to keep abreast of current good

farming practices and as a social event – catching up with locals and others and an opportunity to meet rural support workers in their area. They are seen essentially as opportunities that meet both social and business needs. The participants acknowledged that when people feel overwhelmed with life, they are more likely to withdraw and less likely to put themselves out in public due to a number of factors including 'not feeling like it', feeling ashamed at not coping well, exhausted by the weight of the worry they are carrying.

Support from RSNT including the Centrelink Rural Outreach Worker was invaluable during workshops because they help participants to understand and fill out a myriad of forms. Prior to this people in the community had realised that many people were facing similar frustrations and embarrassments about knowing they needed to fill out the forms, yet were unable to proceed. The simple act of coming together for a common purpose enabled them to share issues without the usual shaming practices around asking for assistance.

We have brought people together to talk with each other about the broader effects of the stresses faced by their communities, and provided opportunities to explore ways in which they might come together to begin to counter some of these negative effects. By including leaders of community in providing community events, we have ignited interest for local action and community resilience is further bolstered. Communities in which these events have been held have clearly benefited from the opportunities to talk, laugh, and learn, and most importantly perhaps, have their own experience, knowledge and wisdom validated.

The workshops bring people together to examine these multi-layered effects, to have their own knowledge affirmed and extended, and to explore ways in which they can support family and/or community members individually.

The act of coming together to speak of these matters is, in itself, important. It serves to counter some of the isolation that so easily occurs as people begin to focus inward or withdraw from one an-

other, in response firstly to the increased workloads and desire to protect their privacy and dignity: and later, to the cumulative effects of grief, uncertainty and loss of hope, exacerbated by their individual circumstances.

Feedback was provided through discussion and as it happens, elicited a far richer descriptive picture of the challenges faced in rural communities than could have been achieved from a simple written feedback sheet. Common concerns were highlighted in reporting measures by DPIPW through Women in Agriculture and monthly RA Tas reports.

Current issues for the Circular Head area

Counsellors from the service reported that in their professional experience, at times of extreme circumstances and rapid change, the pressure on families can build, and the effects can take some time to work out and heal – often much longer than it takes for external crises to resolve.

As trust built in client/community relationships, counsellors noted increased disclosure of feelings of guilt, feeling overwhelmed and worry about difficult and sensitive issues, primarily regarding the ongoing effects of financial hardship and its impacts on family relationships.

The following themes and issues were identified as significant in the Circular Head region by the Rural Support Team. This information has been derived from counsellor field notes and formal organisational program reports.

Emerging Issues:

- Relationship breakdown is a common presenting issue and has been closely correlated with financial hardship (approximately 70% of referred or self-referred clients).
- Isolation by distance and time or cash poor to seek opportunities for social interaction. This applied to approximately 45% of rural and remote clients and families who have access to personal transport but who often cannot afford time/fuel costs.

- Unexpected culmination of both the timber and vegetable industries being severely impacted and resulting in reduction of farm employment opportunities. No statistics identified although the pervasive nature of an area losing so many employment opportunities has an impact on whole of community and adds to the sense of grief and loss.
- Concerns about young people displaying inappropriate behaviours both at home and at school as a result of increasing stress and anxiety experienced within families and the broader community.
- Farm accidents and fatalities involving children are openly mourned in community and remembrances are relived and can re-traumatise.

Cost of Living:

Electricity, fuel and food prices are constantly rising while farm profits are rapidly decreasing and adding to farm debt and leaving families with little hope of recovery.

Unexpected Issues:

- Road trauma with loss of life seems to have increased in incidence and impacts the community on many levels and compounds the effects of anxiety and depression when everyone knows each other. The issue of re-traumatisation has arisen in each workshop that we have presented along with a sense of helplessness of how to change these outcomes.
- Drink driving mentality of accepted practice justified as a need to get back to start work and there is no alternative transport available in remote areas. Opportunities to socialise are often combined with business over a few drinks and can lead to unawareness of blood alcohol levels.
- Inadequate child-care for working families while they perform manual work duties where it is not safe to have children in the work environment (e.g. around heavy plant and equipment). Key issues are lack of availability in remote areas and cost of child care.
- Difficulty in accessing maintenance technicians willing to travel distances to repair plant and equipment in large dairies. Breakdowns not only add to stress and anxiety but also are costly and often halt production and have serious repercussions with herd health and milk quality that result in being penalised by milk companies.

Attachment F: Table of Community Assets Categories

Sub-objective	Possible categories	Questions which address these categories
Cost of living pressures		Section 1
Possible exclusions due to cost of living pressures	Energy Food Transport Travel Medical Childcare Emergency relief (\$)	Section 2
Community resilience (SIU- ameliorating effects) (RA Tas- What works? Resources to build on)	Projects Networks Groups Organisations Relationships	Questions 2.3 2.4 2.5
Community assets (RA Tas- What works? Resources to build on)	Networks Community spaces Local institutions (assocs & groups) Individual skills (leadership; facilitation; advocacy) Involvement in decision making	Sections 1,2 & 3
Social support need	Mental health Family stress Individual stress Vulnerability to family violence (women; children)	Section 3

Selected reading list and references

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