

Resilient Australia Awards celebrate inclusivity and innovation

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The winners of the Resilient Australia Awards were announced in Perth on 22 November, recognising recent efforts and new ideas that build community resilience to disasters.

The Resilient Australia National Award Ceremony celebrated winning and highly commended initiatives over 6 award categories – National, Community, School, Local Government, Mental Health and Wellbeing and Photography.

Making emergency planning and risk information accessible and inclusive was a strong theme among the winning initiatives, with projects focused on increasing resilience and preparedness for people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and young people. Community-led projects were also prominent, empowering a sense of ownership and agency for people as they prepared for and recovered from disaster events.

AIDR Executive Director Margaret Moreton said, ‘We are inspired by the commitment and consideration of this year’s entries across all

categories in the Resilient Australia Awards, and the show of support for and within communities, often amid times of uncertainty and change.

‘As we advance our efforts to increase disaster resilience across Australia, this year’s entries show we are now working to bring more people along the journey with us. This inclusive approach brings us closer to our goal to support safer communities before, during and after disaster’, she said.

Now in its 24th year, the Resilient Australia Awards honour initiatives by communities, organisations and individuals that are taking action to reduce disaster risk and build resilience. AIDR acknowledges the Minderoo Foundation for their sponsorship which supported community members to attend the National Award Ceremony.



AIDR Executive Director Dr Margaret Moreton addresses attendees at the 2023 Resilient Australia Awards National Ceremony in Perth.

Image: AIDR

Resilient Australia National Award

Winner - Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness Certificate Course, University of Sydney

This is a world-first program providing actionable guidance on person-centred and capability focused inclusive disaster risk reduction. This co-designed, nationally consistent course has bridged the gap on how to enable responsibility sharing between emergency services, people with disability and the services that support them; demonstrated by significant evaluation results.

Michelle Villeneuve of the Centre for Disability Research and Policy at the University of Sydney said, 'For government and emergency services, disability has been sitting in the too-hard box for a very long time. They have been hungry for the information and a course that allows them to invite people with disability into the conversation'.



AIDR Executive Director Dr Margaret Moreton and NEMA Deputy Coordinator-General Dr Jill Charker present the Resilient Australia National Award to representatives of the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness Certificate Course.

Image: AIDR

Highly Commended - Delivering community focused messaging in Gurindji language during major NT floods, Bureau of Meteorology and Northern Territory Emergency Services

Interpreters joined emergency services and the Bureau of Meteorology at press conferences for weather events in the Northern Territory to deliver real-time, in-language emergency messaging to remote communities impacted by major flooding. This collaborative approach had success in March 2023 during a major flood event southwest of Katherine.

Darren Johnson from Territory Regional Growth said, 'I'm proud of the fact that we were able to help and assist. We received a lot of feedback from the people who were involved in the event, and that made me feel quite proud that we were able to bridge that language barrier'.

Highly Commended - Flood Resilience in Action: 2022 and Beyond, JDA Co.

JDA Co.'s decade long work in flood resilient design began as a pro-bono grassroots action after the 2011 Queensland floods. The events of February 2022 tested the design, with 50 homes impacted and 45 reporting that the resilience works were successful. This work has become the catalyst for the Queensland and New South Wales governments Resilient Homes Fund programs.

James Davidson of JDA Co said, 'The weekend of the floods in 2022 I was a bit nervous, but within a few hours I started getting texts from home owners saying, "thank you so much" and "this is working". Quite a lot of people were back in their homes within a matter of days'.

Resilient Australia Community Award

Winner – EMBER, The Flagstaff Group

The EMBER (Emergency Management Backpack Evacuation Resource) program addresses the gap surrounding individuals living with disability and emergency preparedness. It contains free emergency planning resources and emergency 'Go' bags that cater for a range of disabilities. Initially designed for residents in the Shoalhaven local government area of New South Wales, it continues to grow throughout New South Wales.

Belinda Franklin from The Flagstaff Group said, 'Things that I've witnessed is people taking pride and really being empowered about the fact they have a plan, they're using EMBER checklists and the backpacks are a real catalyst for conversations'.



Belinda Franklin of the Flagstaff Group accepts the Resilient Australia National Community Award in recognition of the EMBER project.

Image: AIDR

Highly Commended - CALD Community-Locally Led Risk Reduction Project, Australian Red Cross

This project engaged established, as well as new and emerging, CALD communities to ideate, design and implement locally led and culturally appropriate actions to empower CALD communities to identify their gap in knowledge about emergencies and to co-design localised initiatives to strengthen emergency resilience.

Shanti Ramasundram from Australian Red Cross said, 'The imperative was to consider CALD community voices before, during and after emergencies and place them at the centre of the decision-making around existing emergency management arrangements involving their communities'.

Resilient Australia School Award

Winner - Harkaway Primary Manifesto and Bushfire Safety Committee, Harkaway Primary School

Harkaway Primary School has rewritten the teachers manual. Harkaway students have collaborated with fire agencies, educators and experts to help design, develop and test new approaches to Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction, and educated university students, presented at conferences and assisted in the development of a research-informed approach to bushfire education.



AIDR Education and Engagement Senior Project Officer Ella Wilkinson presents the Resilient Australia National School Award to Harkaway Primary School Principal Leigh Johnson for the school's project, The Harkaway Primary Manifesto and Bushfire Safety Committee.

Image: AIDR

Leigh Johnson, Principal from Harkaway Primary School said, 'Bushfire awareness has always been a thing here at Harkaway. It's really important for our kids not to simply have some knowledge or facts about bushfire and bushfire safety - but for them to actually be safe'.

Resilient Australia Local Government Award

Winner - Towards Community Led Emergency Resilience, Adelaide Hills Council

A new Community Resilience Team is building strong relationships with the community to become better prepared for future emergencies. As the council's understanding of the community's bushfire experience deepens, it is developing new strategies, processes and operations. This includes staff training and new community programs, events and a dedicated community network.

Miranda Hampton, Senior Community Resilience Officer, Adelaide Hills Council said, 'It's about working with our community so that we can support them as they develop their own initiatives for what they think will actually work best for them, for their disaster preparedness and their recovery'.



AFAC CEO Rob Web presents the Resilient Australia National Local Government Award to the Adelaide Hill Council team for their winning project, Towards Community Led Emergency Resilience.

Image: AIDR

Resilient Australia Mental Health and Wellbeing Award

Winner - Post-Flood Repair and Recovery Initiative, Shedding Community Workshop Inc

Following the February 2022 New South Wales flood event, this small-scale workshop transformed to support hundreds of volunteers to salvage, assess, clean, repair, donate and deliver

flood-damaged items to flood-affected communities. Thousands of items were repaired, saving over 20 tonnes of waste from landfill', and the workshop offered a safe and trauma-informed space for all people to recover.

Sophie Wilksch, Director, Shedding Community Workshop Inc. said, 'It became quite evident to us that at the same time as supporting them with repairs we were also needing to support their wellbeing. There was something that clicked in me where I realised it's not about the repairs, it's about people coming together'.



Joanna Quilty of the NSW Reconstruction Authority accepts the Resilient Australia National Mental Health and Wellbeing Award on behalf of Shedding Community Workshop for the Post-Flood Repair and Recovery Initiative project.

Image: AIDR

Resilient Australia Photography Award

Winner - Unconventional Firefighting, Stephanie Rouse

Armed with only a leaf blower and dropped in the middle of Arnhem Land by helicopter, these Indigenous rangers respond to wildfire like nobody else. These rangers don't receive recognition through service medals, news stories or awards. Seeing their country healthy is why they are there, and why they continue even when times get tough.

Stephanie Rouse from ALFA NT said, 'This photo isn't just about how resilient the workers are working in extreme conditions, it also demonstrates the development of a resilient landscape that is being shaped through long term fire management practices to prevent large-scale bushfires'.

Stephanie Rouse's photograph features on the front cover of this edition of the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*.

Highly Commended - SA SES Swiftwater Technicians, Jayme Moreland

South Australian State Emergency Service Swiftwater Rescue Technicians preparing to undertake a rescue in freezing cold water, in the dark early hours of the morning. Resilience is the selfless act of volunteers breaking through their body's natural self-preservation response to not want to be in the bone-chilling water, in order to save a stranger's life.

The Resilient Australia Awards are sponsored by the Australian Government in partnership with the states and territories. More information at: www.aidr.org.au/raa.



Jamie Yibarbuk (left) of Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation is the subject of the winning image in the Resilient Australia National Photography Award, 'Unconventional Firefighting', captured by Stephanie Rouse (right) of Arnhem Land Fire Abatement NT Ltd.

Image: AIDR