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About the authors

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Ravenshoe Café explosion: Tuesday 9 June 2015

By Sarah Dean, Senior Advisor Disaster Management, Tablelands Regional Council

On 9 June 2015, an out-of-control four-wheel-drive vehicle hit and punctured a 450 kg gas cylinder outside the Serves You Right Café in the main street of the small town of Ravenshoe in Far North Queensland. A release of gas caused an explosion and fire. The accident occurred at lunchtime and 20 people were injured, some critically. Two local women later died from their injuries.

The emergency services were alerted and, although Ravenshoe has a limited emergency services presence, the local Fire, Ambulance and Police responded within minutes of the 000 call. It took another 40 minutes for the closest back-up units to arrive from surrounding towns, which were later augmented with units from Cairns, approximately two hours away. In the interim, at least 100 community members converged on the scene and became the first responders to this major incident.

At a community-led meeting held three days after this event, Queensland Ambulance Service Clinical Support Officer, Paul Sweeney, paid tribute to the support provided by local residents during the ordeal.

'The assistance provided by the community of Ravenshoe in light of this tragic event was unprecedented. From the cooling and wrapping of burns and the provision of emotional support, to assisting with the manual handling of patients and equipment; all of this enabled the attending paramedics to provide advanced life support measures and transport the injured to receiving hospitals at the earliest opportunity,' he said.

The following week at the Ravenshoe Café Explosion Recovery Group meeting, formal tribute was paid to Tablelands Regional Council for the work undertaken on community resilience over the past few years. Special mention was made of the Community All-Hazard Disaster Plans project and the free first aid training



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provided to community members. This was identified as having a significant impact on the confidence of community members to respond to this incident and to provide assistance to others.

The Ravenshoe community was severely impacted by *Cyclone Larry* in 2006. This experience led them to actively work together to prepare for the next emergency. Following *Cyclone Yasi* in 2011, this community-led approach was recognised by Tablelands Regional Council and the Community All-Hazard Disaster Plan project was initiated and rolled out across the region. The work undertaken on community resilience over the last few years with small communities has helped provide residents with relevant skills and training to build community competence and capacity.

The existing social support networks in Ravenshoe, together with a strong sense of community, has enabled residents to respond cohesively in the face of disaster and to come together to lead their own recovery.