Experiences of community spirit in flood recovery: Exploring the opportunities for community development

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Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis.

Signed………………………………………………………………………...
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Ethics Approval

Ethics approval for this study was granted on 27 February 2015 by the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 2015/012).
Professional Editing Assistance

Paid editorial assistance was obtained from Kim Woodland Editing. Written permission was granted before obtaining the editorial assistance. Services provided were limited to formatting and editing for spelling, grammar and style (according to the Australian Standard for Editing Practice ASEP Standard D—Language and Illustrations and ASEP Standard E—Completeness and Consistency).
Abstract

This thesis explores the interpreted meanings of the term ‘community spirit’ within a specific flood context to determine whether community spirit can be used as an asset for disaster recovery. Community spirit is a term used within government, the media, and by politicians with regard to a flood recovery, generally in a positive manner but often without elucidation. The literature review highlights that research presents nuanced meanings of the term but no definitive meaning or discussion about how community spirit might be used as an asset.

Social work functions at the nexus between people and government, applying ethical assumptions around supporting vulnerable people and challenging oppression. As such, it is well placed to utilise community spirit as an asset within a community development framework to achieve social work’s goal of supporting vulnerable people in difficult circumstances.

This qualitative study applied interpretive phenomenological analysis and critical social work theory to address a three-part research question. Firstly, what does the term community spirit mean? Secondly, what is the lived experience of community spirit from a range of stakeholders with regard to a flood event? Finally, if community spirit is an asset, how can it be used by social workers within an asset based community development model to enhance the resilience of that community when future floods and disasters occur?

This research study found a range of nuanced meanings for community spirit from literature, the Australian government and the media. These broader meanings could be compared to the nuanced meanings that the participants with the lived flood experience. The findings from this study concluded that community spirit is, indeed, an asset that can be used by social workers within an asset based community development framework. However, the research also found some differences between the nuanced meanings of community spirit, and these differences are significant for critical social work wisdom. This has implications for social work when utilising community spirit to assist in disaster recovery, and thus some concluding recommendations and timeframes are made.
Chapter 1: Introduction

This research endeavoured to provide some answer to a three-part research question about the meaning of the term ‘community spirit’ within a flood recovery context. It examined how that meaning was interpreted by different stakeholders in a flood recovery experience, and also considered how community spirit can be applied as an asset to community development for social work in the disaster context. This chapter describes the development of the research question from within my own experience as a stakeholder in a flood, researching inside the community around that same flood event. The chapter also describes the significance of this insider research for my position as a social worker as I aim to contribute to the body of practice wisdom and knowledge both for the benefit of the social work profession, for the benefit of my community, and for the benefit of people generally, in a way that is ethically sound for a professional social worker.

Background and Significance

In March 2012, my personal interest in researching community recovery from floods was piqued by my involvement in a flood that impacted my local, geographical community and the wider Wagga Wagga community. During this flood, my home was inundated by floodwater to an inside height of approximately 80 centimetres. I was forced to evacuate my four children, our pets, livestock and all of our household belongings. We were given emergency accommodation in the central business district, across the river in Wagga Wagga, from which we later again had to evacuate in the middle of the night. We were, however, well insured and even though we were out of our home for 5 months, we eventually returned to a beautifully rebuilt home with much enthusiasm. Some salient points that I noted throughout my experience were:

- Despite my vulnerabilities, I survived, returned and recovered. I witnessed others in my community, and indeed the community as a whole, doing the same despite their own vulnerabilities. Going home, being at home, and actively participating in my community helped me recover.
• The most significant factor I experienced was the way people from both the North Wagga and broader communities contributed positively to a traumatic and extremely difficult life experience. During my recovery, people came to help and to offer support. They brought their own equipment and helped me clean up, fed and housed me, and spent downtime with me and with my children. We as a community were offered much assistance including free food and cash handouts; invitations to wider community events; help with clean-up, housing and furniture; and discounted building supplies. People chose to help; they sought out people in need and offered themselves and their resources. People arrived on the doorstep. We were offered help from those least able to give it. Some of those people we would never see again. There was a feeling of connection to each other and to the wider community that I have not before experienced and that I sincerely feel facilitated my recovery.
• I was enraged by ongoing criticism about our insistence on staying in North Wagga, annoyed by issues around levees, rising insurance costs and ongoing flood mitigation issues, but at the same time inspired that a community so damaged could pick itself back up and move forward. And this is what I felt deserved further inquiry.

As a social worker, I could see many ways that my profession could fit into the flood recovery process, as well as ways that it could not. I wanted to offer my experiential knowledge about the way that social work could be better equipped to work in disasters, because I believe that is what a social worker is—a reflective and reflexive person who uses their skills and wisdom to work with vulnerable people in a way that affords self-determination and empowerment, and recognises people’s inherent strengths and resilience to cope with life’s challenges. With my lived experience as a disaster impacted resident, coupled with my social work commitment and wisdom, I felt that I was in a unique place from which I could offer my profession the tangible asset of knowledge. I watched my community rebuild, I listened to individual stories and watched the ways people contributed to the community rebuild, and I actively participated in those processes alongside my fellow residents. I witnessed remarkable resilience.
from people who would be considered vulnerable but in reality were not. Likewise, I watched people become vulnerable and recover from that also.

Contextually, this research is focused on the North Wagga community, specifically around the flood event of March 2012. North Wagga is located in New South Wales, Australia. The North Wagga community is a small rural suburb with a varied demographic in regard to age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. It has a population of about 600 and consists of around 200 homes and some businesses within a ringed levee as well as another 25 properties outside the levee which are prone to flooding (State Emergency Service, 2006). During the period between 2010 and 2012, with successive La Niña events, the floodplains of the Murrumbidgee River experienced a number of flood events of varying intensities. A wet catchment area and full dams at Blowering and Burrenjeck, coupled with a significant rain event over the already sodden catchment, resulted in a major flood event which caused significant flooding and inundation along the entire length of the Murrumbidgee River in March 2012. The river peaked at 10.56 m at the Hampden Gauge. This meant that the North Wagga levee, with a final design height of 9.9 m, was overtopped significantly, inundating the majority of homes and businesses both within the ring levee and outside the levee.

In the two years since the flood, North Wagga has demonstrated what may be considered recovery. The majority of homes have been either renovated or in some cases rebuilt. A small number of homes have been lifted and/or otherwise flood proofed. The commercial enterprises have resumed trading, including, for example: two hotels, a corner shop and a mechanical workshop. Industrial enterprises have also resumed trading and numerous small home-based businesses have been re-established. The school has recommenced activity as has the preschool. The North Wagga Residents Association, in conjunction with Wagga Wagga City Council and funded by both council grants and private funding, has built a community park and community noticeboard, resumed management of the community hall, lobbied successfully for rates decreases and a new school crossing, and completed a community development art project. Visible signs of recovery also include the return of residents to their homes, visible reconstruction and
preparedness activities, the sale and purchase of real estate, the resumption of community activities such as the football/netball club, and the resumption of business activity.

This flood event is most commonly referred to when people discuss contemporary flood recovery in the local context. It had the widest impact with respect to inundation of homes and properties, and subsequently the greatest psychosocial, emotional and financial effects, and also the most significant community response. Indeed, upon hearing that one is a North Wagga resident when conversing with people from outside the suburb, this is the one event to which the majority of people refer, followed by a flood event which occurred in 1974. This particular event, then, is the most appropriate context in which to embed this research. Given that every flood is different, the impact varies and the response from the wider community differs, thus the experience of the disaster victims differs and the outcomes are varied. For this reason, it seemed pertinent to restrict the research to this one specific event and context so that each participant could provide data about the same experience.

There has been little opportunity for formal research to be conducted in the North Wagga community and there is a feeling among some residents that people outside “don’t understand what it’s like”. As such, there exists a reluctance to engage with external researchers. This was evidenced by the lack of interest in engaging with Queensland based researchers who contacted the Residents Association following the 2012 event, when I, as secretary, attempted to connect researchers with residents, to little effect. The fact that this community has demonstrated recovery and resilience, still remains at risk of flooding, and has the opportunity to share their stories with a researcher with whom there is established connection and trust, provides the rationale for researching this specific flood event.

I have chosen Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as the methodology for this study as it allows the sharing of narratives that arise from the interpreted lived experience of the people who were involved in the 2012 flood event in North Wagga. This methodology also allows for the lived experience of the insider researcher to inform and deepen the interpretive research process, providing an empathetic lens. This is coupled with a
critical social work frame which fosters both the reflective practice necessary for an insider researcher to ensure best practice as an ethical social worker and professional researcher, as well as the capacity for oppression to be illuminated. With a critical social work frame, the results of this research will be best able to inform social work practice in a way that core concepts such as empowerment and self-determination are maintained.

**The community leader perspective.** Shortly before the series of floods which began in 2010 and culminated in the inundation in 2012, the residents of North Wagga formed a residents’ association (North Wagga Residents Association) in response to a land rates rise. At the time of the 2012 inundation I held the position of secretary, which I had been voted into on formation of the association. In this position, I made many connections within the community, and these connections became relevant during my flood recovery. However, holding a position of leadership, even at this grassroots level, gave me a sense of duty. I felt that I was bound by a moral duty to do whatever I could to facilitate recovery and the redevelopment of my community for the benefit of all. Aside from a brief respite during 2016 whilst writing my thesis, I still hold that position today.

Together, we have built a park, created public art, constructed a skate park, taken on the tenancy at the community hall, created and shared events, created a community garden, sourced funding for the hall roof and repainting, built community noticeboards, acquired park equipment and lobbied for a new school crossing. We have effectively built what is considered to be a solid and positive working partnership between a grassroots community group and the local council, which has become increasingly relevant in conversations about levee upgrades and floodplain development.

For this reason, I felt that I could offer my community the benefit of documenting our journey in such a way that we could share it with others. Research seemed to be the best way to do this. I also felt that the rapport and trust I had with people in the community could facilitate this sharing because I expected that people would engage with me in a way that they would not with researchers from outside the community. In our community we share our stories with each other, almost daily and without reservation.
So it seemed to me that not only did I have the duty to act, but that effectively, I was the best person for the job.

**The social worker perspective.** At the time of the March 2012 flood, I was a social work student at the local university. As a resident in North Wagga at the time of the event, I gained firsthand, insider knowledge about flood recovery in a substantive way. Part of my desire to embark on this research was to add to the professional body of knowledge about social work during disaster recovery with information that may only be gleaned through the combination of personal experience and work with the people who also experienced the same event. I thought it pertinent to share, with great pride and appreciation, the story of my community’s resilience so that other communities may benefit. This project also provided the opportunity to address some of the issues I have with my profession and the ability of practitioners to deliver best practice within a disaster context.

Interestingly, throughout my social work education I had noted that some therapeutic modalities may not always be the best option for clients, dependent on context. Having professional experience with humanitarian entrants to Australia, I also have a strong personal and professional belief in the abilities and inherent strengths of people, as well as the resilience that some people are able to demonstrate in often extreme situations. I also strongly believe that people are able to make decisions about their own lives. I believe that people are the experts in their own life experiences, but that their ability to cope can be hindered by circumstances completely outside their locus of control, such as in a disaster. Life circumstances such as disaster are non-discriminatory in that they impact entire communities, albeit in different ways, with the most vulnerable generally bearing a greater burden.

The social work profession, which commits to working with individuals, families and communities at their most vulnerable, made little offering to me personally despite the fact that at the time of the flood I was a single parent of four children, displaced, socioeconomically disadvantaged and with no family support. I personally received more support from the people around me—from my own and the broader community. It was never more apparent to me how many people were connected to my North Wagga
community. Every person I met in the broader community had some connection to North Wagga and they wanted to help us because of that connectedness. And people were mostly kind. The place where I felt most supported was around my neighbours and fellow community members when we could share stories and information.

Throughout my flood recovery experience I was able to watch the way in which professional social workers delivered services within the community. Within my own experience of this event, I witnessed the following issues for social work in a flood recovery context:

- Social workers were located in spaces outside the community so people had to seek them out.
- Difficulties with engagement due to displacement and lack of interest from victims.
- Attempted delivery of services in the initial period after the disaster when people were busy with clean-up.
- Lack of services after the initial trauma period when people begin to face issues related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression, which often emerge later in the recovery process.
- Social work services not always congruent with needs. Often what people needed most were material goods and links to the means for acquiring, storing and moving those goods, or advocacy for the right to do so within desired timeframes.
- Lack of power for social work to influence strategic emergency legislation on behalf of the people.
- Social workers sometimes made assumptions about the impact of trauma in disaster and provided interventions when the trauma experience is vastly different for each person.
- Lack of privacy and consequential lack of confidentiality that may have been perpetuated by professional social workers who were aiming to deliver interventions and services in inadequate settings which may be further traumatising and devastating for clients. When attending the central point to access assistance, I was confronted
with having to share my story in a shared open space with no privacy.

- An assumption that people could not manage using their own coping mechanisms and access to existing community supports.
- Lack of awareness of community generated supports and assistance. Much of the support I received came from a community barbecue which was organised fully by local community members and thus was not available as a therapeutic space for professional social work.

I recall the biggest issue being that of engagement. After the event, people were scattered and when they returned to the community they were absorbed in clean-up. There was little time or opportunity to seek assistance for trauma. Indeed, when people are focused on cleaning up and making plans to rebuild, it may not be the best time to engage in counselling. There may also be no need for some people to engage with professional trauma counselling, crisis intervention and case management.

It also seemed apparent that some people did not want to engage with workers from outside the community where they felt there may be a lack of understanding or critique about their experience and their choice to live in a disaster prone area. People do recover without the assistance of social workers and there may be better ways for the professional social worker to engage with a disaster community. There may also be a better time for professional social workers to engage with a disaster community rather than in the midst of the crisis. Perhaps it is better if the social work initiates from or is embedded within the community.

In presenting my research, I look primarily at social work as located within a community development framework. For flood and wider disaster recovery it would seem the obvious locale for social work practice, particularly where legislation is aimed at community resilience. This broader context also alleviates some of the issues of engagement and appropriate intervention for more mainstream social work therapies. For this reason, critical social work makes an obvious choice for the theoretical framework in my study, with its discussion about structural oppression and oppressive practice, the appreciation of human rights which may be
impacted in a disaster community, the facilitation of grassroots based social work, and the appreciation of the impact of power upon people.

**The Flood and Community Spirit**

When I began to research the community recovery, I came across a common term which was being utilised in the media: that of ‘community spirit’. Politicians were using the term, including both the serving Governor-General at the time, Quentin Bryce, and the serving Premier of NSW, Barry O’Farrell, who were quoted in the local newspaper at the time of this flood event. Local community leaders, political representatives and residents were also using the term. More than four years on, the term was still used to comment on North Wagga and the flood recovery process, with the lead State Emergency Service (SES) controller commenting on the importance of remembering the community spirit demonstrated during this event and the positive impact it made (E. Smith, 2016).

In researching further, I discovered that community spirit is a term commonly linked to flood events and disasters in general. In fact, the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b), which is the overarching policy for disaster management in Australia, notes community spirit in its opening remarks as a concept for which Australians are known in times of disaster as the way they support people in need. Several studies on resilience, which is conceptually the focus of much contemporary disaster management research, note community spirit in responses by participants as pertinent, or indeed pivotal, in the flood recovery process. The term was frequently noted in the Hansard (which reports on proceedings of the Australian parliament and its committees) as being used by our elected representatives when they talk about disastrous events and individual and community response and recovery. Finally, the media was also peppered with use of the term community spirit with regard to floods and wider disaster response and recovery.
When I began to research the term community spirit in relation to flood recovery I found the following:

- The meaning of the term community spirit appeared to be subjective, interpreted by people in different ways and perhaps constructed from lived experience. There does not appear to be a definitive meaning.
- The ways in which people used the term community spirit differed between users and contexts and there may well be some dissonance in motivations for use.
- There appeared to be no significant study specifically focused on community spirit and flood recovery despite noted importance by governments, politicians, the media and individuals.
- There were links to resilience and social capital which are key themes in flood recovery literature, but community spirit itself was overlooked as a concept.

It therefore seemed pertinent to explore meanings of community spirit as constructed around flood recovery experience by people who had experienced it. It is in the understanding of meaning that the application of community spirit becomes viable.

**Purpose follows meanings: A community development perspective.** Following on from exploring meanings of community spirit in the North Wagga March 2012 flood recovery process, the next step for a social worker would be to take these meanings and explore the potential for using community spirit within a community development framework as an asset for not only recovery, but also for preparedness and disaster management as a whole.

Community development, as defined by Kenny (2011), refers to any process, task, practice or vision that empowers a community to take collective responsibility for its development, to identify its own needs and capacities, and to address the issues deemed necessary. Specifically, asset based approaches are essentially those which assume that the community already has resources which can be used for its development. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an empowering approach that works with asset maps of the community to identify individuals’ skills and
capacities, and community associations and formal institutions that are available to make an inventory for the community to use in its own development process.

Community led recovery is the endorsed strategy for disaster management in NSW (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a). There is also the expectation of shared responsibility between Australian governments, business, communities and individuals in the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). Examining the pertinence and application of community spirit as an asset for asset based community development (ABCD) that is aimed at fostering recovery and enhancing preparedness for future events is appropriate as ABCD is the recommended framework distributed to Australian state and territory emergency management stakeholders including local government (Emergency Management Australia, 2003). Such examination may also allow for the illumination of other issues such as the discontent and alienation experienced by residents who, despite a community led policy, are affected by an authoritarian-style evacuation process which may not allow enough space for grassroots assets such as community spirit at certain points in the flood event and recovery process.

An overarching critical social work frame was utilised in this study which allowed for examination of dissonance from the presentation of community spirit at the government level. A critical social work frame which aims to identify and alleviate sources of oppression of vulnerable populations and foster self-determination (Weiss-Gal, Levin, & Krummer-Nevo, 2014) allowed for identification of ways in which professional social work practice may be offered within a disaster context and utilising assets such as community spirit. This identification of best practice within a community development framework can add to the practice wisdom around disaster based social work to foster an enhanced knowledge base. Dissonance may be pertinent to government policy on where future flood recovery funding is channelled, as well as the way in which social work engages with disaster impacted people where social work sits between people and government. Again, a critical social work frame which aims to address oppression is well
placed here to ensure that vulnerable people are assisted based on need rather than as determined by funding protocols.

**Contribution to Knowledge**

This study aimed to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the role of the professional, contemporary social worker in community recovery from disaster. It sought to inform the professional social work practitioner of the potential for issues arising from dissonance in meaning between policies on disaster recovery and the application of those policies at the individual and community level, as well as the potential for contribution to oppression of people as a result. It does this by focusing on the gap in our knowledge about the meaning of community spirit, which is often noted as a resource in disaster response and recovery by a diverse array of participants, but with little explanation or definition, and is thus perhaps applied without wisdom and theoretical understanding. In addressing this gap in our knowledge, a new understanding of the broader role for social work within a community development framework, particularly from a community driven and asset based perspective, may emerge.

**Research Question**

From this position, the study’s research question was developed to provide knowledge to fill the identified knowledge gap. The three-part research question is as follows:

1) What does the term ‘community spirit’ mean? (RQ1)
   
   (a) How is community spirit presented in academic literature? (RQ1a)
   
   (b) How is community spirit presented in Australian government issued flood recovery/disaster management literature? (RQ1b)
   
   (c) How is community spirit presented in other literature which has a flood recovery focus, including Hansard and the media? (RQ1c)

2) What is the lived experience of community spirit with regard to a flood event for individuals and other stakeholders such as local government representatives, service providers and community leaders? (RQ2)
(a) How did stakeholders, including government representatives, community leaders and service providers, experience community spirit during the North Wagga 2012 flood recovery process? What meaning have these stakeholders constructed about community spirit as a result of their flood recovery experience? (RQ2a)

(b) What was the experience of community spirit for residents within the North Wagga community who have recovered from the 2012 flood event? What meaning have these people constructed about community spirit resulting from this recovery experience? (RQ2b)

(c) Is there congruence in the meaning of community spirit between communities, stakeholders and macro level disaster management policies and frameworks? (RQ2c)

3) If considered an asset, how can community spirit be contributory to community development frameworks which may be utilised to promote community led recovery as endorsed by the state? (RQ3)

(a) If community spirit can be considered an asset from an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, how may it best be utilised to identify capacity to promote community led recovery and disaster management from preparedness through prevention, response and recovery? (RQ3a)

Thesis Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter provides an introduction to the thesis topic, outlines the research question and thesis structure, and concludes with the contribution to knowledge that the thesis offers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Community Spirit and Flood Recovery. Providing an introduction to community spirit, this chapter answers part of the first research question (RQ1a) on the way that meaning for community spirit is presented in academic literature.

Chapter 3: Community Spirit in Australian Government Literature: The Link to Community Development. This chapter will address Part B of the first research question (RQ1b) on meaning for community spirit as presented in Australian government issued flood
recovery/disaster management literature, and also the link in community development literature, uncovering the role that social work can play.

**Chapter 4: The Flood Recovery Context (North Wagga Flood, March 2012).** Chapter 4 provides demographic detail of the context for the research, both locale and event.

**Chapter 5: Methodology.** Within this first methodology chapter is an introduction to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as the theoretical means to ethical and professional insider research as embedded within a critical social work frame.

**Chapter 6: Research Process.** Chapter 6 provides a detailed description of both the data collection and data analysis processes.

**Chapter 7: Results.** This chapter contains the study findings. The chapter begins by examining Hansard and the media (the secondary data), which answers Part C of the first section of the research question (RQ1c). The findings from the residents are then provided in answer to Section 2, Part A of the research question (RQ2a). Finally, findings from leadership and from the service providers are presented to provide answers to Section 2, Part B of the research question (RQ2b).

**Chapter 8: Discussion and Recommendations.** Chapter 8 offers discussion on the overarching question of what community spirit means, as well as considering whether meaning differs between stakeholders, and the implications of any dissonance. This chapter discusses whether community spirit fits with a community development frame and specifically an ABCD frame. Interwoven throughout the discussion are implications for professional social work practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for ABCD framed social work.

**Chapter 9: Conclusion.** This chapter provides concluding comments on the contribution to knowledge that the thesis offers.

**Appendices.** Included here are the interview schedules and participant biographies, provided as background information.
Chapter 2: Literature Review: Community Spirit and Flood Recovery

This chapter reviews the literature associated with the term ‘community spirit’ and the connection it has with a flood recovery process. As such, it answers part of the first research question on how community spirit is presented in the academic literature and the meaning that is derived from this presentation. It will explore the ways in which the term community spirit is used within the contemporary academic literature, around flood recovery, and more broadly, disaster recovery. It concludes by presenting common themes that arise from within the academic literature.

An Introduction to Community Spirit

This literature review chapter seeks to explore the meanings of community spirit around a common reference point of flood recovery, as presented in contemporary research literature. This chapter begins with a conceptualisation of community as a key concept of both this thesis and the flood recovery context itself, situating the thesis more firmly within this broader context. The chapter will then explore the subjective meanings of community spirit in a flood recovery context as presented within academic literature. It will identify and explore the early emergent themes that have been identified from the body of academic literature to date as pertinent to the meaning of community spirit. This literature review chapter will also illuminate the links between meanings of community spirit and the expected role that such meanings afford community spirit in the flood recovery and wider disaster recovery process.

Conceptualising Community

The need to conceptualise community for the purpose of research on community spirit and sited within the flood recovery and wider disaster management context, lies in the fact that much of the impact of disaster occurs at what most would define as the community level (Satterthwaite, 2011). Much of the contemporary disaster management literature is also situated conceptually within a community led framework (George, 2013) resulting from a paradigmatic shift from a ‘top down’ approach (Ireni-Saban, 2012). Following on from many years where disaster management
was seen as a governmental responsibility in relation to interventionist strategies such as dam and levee construction for the management of flood (W. Smith, Davies-Colley, Mackay, & Bankoff, 2011), movement towards a community resilience model is apparent where communities are required to adapt to or recover from a disaster (Ireni-Saban, 2012).

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) provides the national framework for contemporary disaster management in Australia. It outlines that there is a collective responsibility, inclusive of Australian federal, state and local governments, businesses, communities and individuals, in building sustainable and resilient communities that can withstand disaster (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). The concept of community is recognised also in the New South Wales Recovery Plan (NSW State Government, 2010), as it has a focus on the spontaneous and fundamental role that community plays in a flood and wider disaster recovery. Even at the local government level, community is a keyword for planning and development including that which is related to disaster management, with community partnerships and community conversations significant to local council policies (Wagga Wagga City Council, 2017).

Community, however, has long been a contested term with seemingly multitudinous definitions. Crowther and Cooper (2002) discussed the work of Hillary who reports 94 definitions of the term ‘community’ with only one commonality in that they all refer to dealings with people. Sociologically, community has been much explored and with no definitive outcomes. Rather, numerous interpretations remain along with argument about the validity of community as a concept in and of itself. Bell and Newby (1971) noted the work of Tonnies as being imperative in discussion on the theory of community and note his work *Community and Society* as a pertinent resource for contemporary study around community. Tonnies, in his concept of Gemeinschaft, described community as characterised by intimate, personal, stable relationships between friends and neighbours with clear understandings of both status and role (Bell & Newby, 1971). This is in contrast to Gesellschaft which considers relationships based on social ties such as those to organisations where there is a duty to participate (Bell & Newby, 1971). These elements are common to many understandings in
contemporary literature but were written by Tonnies at a time when rural living was common. As a result, contemporary authors noted the inadequacy of such definitions when applied to the globalised world where close intimate relationships with neighbours are often not the case and information technology may provide the linkages between people once afforded by neighbouring.

Taylor, Wilkinson, and Cheers (2008) discussed the subjectivity in conceptualising community and offered the following two understandings which they believe are present in most theoretical understandings of community. Firstly, they posited that community is geographic in nature, and secondly, that community involves relational concepts. From a geographic and relational perspective, community exists in commonly shared localities and where people interact with each other. Taylor et al. (2008) further defined ‘communities of place’, which include places of social interaction bounded by geography and in which there exists a process of locality oriented collectivism or sharing coupled with the capacity of the boundary to be conceptually fluid. Kenny (2011) further elucidated the concept of community which she terms ‘community as a site’ and notes the work of Wild (1981), who discusses community as a physical site with some specific demography and shared history. Kenny (2011), however, disputes the geographic aspect of conceptualisation with the notion that geographic boundaries are porous and unfixed and thus community as a site of collective interest may also be inclusive of the concept of community as a place where the relations of power are constructed and played out. In a power based conceptualisation, community becomes the place where power structures between bureaucratic processes, inter-community relations and familial relations are enacted.

Contextually, this research was located where Tonnies considered community to exist. North Wagga is a small rural community with numerous intergenerational linkages still evident, numerous families who have married and remained within the community, and for some, quite close and intimate relationships and active neighbouring evident. There have been new additions to the community from places where they had no previous ties to North Wagga. There have been some serious adverse reactions to
new arrivals of different cultural groups. Where these elements have resulted in an altering of the stability of role and status, the issues with a narrower conceptualisation such as Tonnies is evident. Therein lay the need to draw from other definitions to incorporate the notion of shared geography and interaction as well as the ability of geographic confines to be considered fluid.

The context for this research fostered inclusion of a broader conceptualisation with the idea that the community is both located within the protective flood levee as well as extending outside the levee and onto the wider floodplains, and yet still remaining distinct from the larger, adjoining city. The work of Kenny (2011) was also relevant contextually in that the community in which the research was undertaken had a collective interest in the threat from flood which united community members and in which distinct power relations exist, both within the community and with the wider bureaucratic process.

**The Australian Government’s conceptualisation of community.** It is also necessary to have some understanding of what community is, particularly the way in which the concept is presented by Australian governments: local, state and federal. With a working definition that incorporates conceptual aspects of location, interaction (Taylor et al., 2008) and shared values or sense of community that fosters people collectively acting for the good of the whole (Waddock, 1999), and then the broader construct of power relations (Kenny, 2011), it is possible to move towards identifying strengths and issues that may arise from within a community focus for disaster recovery.

Pupavac (2012) noted that community is seen, in the context of a number of sociological studies around disaster, as the central concept that allows for disasters to negate the anomie of modern society. She goes on to discuss the idea that it is the crises of disaster which fosters communities to commune together to create therapeutic interventions to cope with the stress, loss and grief of the disaster recovery process. Pupavac (2012) further stated that a community response occurs irrespective of the interaction of mental health professionals.
Despite the common view that community conceptually has beneficial and positive connotations, there are many arguments that consider community to be a difficult concept and perhaps even one which should be abandoned entirely. Community from a socialist perspective sees use of the term by the state as an act of control, effectively as a propagandist tool aimed at facilitating compliance with state policies and power (Kenny, 2011). Similarly, Satterthwaite (2011) noted that the focus on community by government with respect to disaster management is perhaps the means by which one’s eye is drawn away from both the inability of the state to cope with disaster as well as concealing changes that governments might need to make in order to cope with increasing impacts from disaster such as cutting funding for individual events to ensure there is adequate funding for more serious events.

When community is viewed as the best strategic focus for disaster recovery it is often because local knowledge and resources are available and utilisable. Where psychosocial and emotional wellbeing is disadvantaged over economic recovery, there needs to be critique. George (2013) argued that these positive attributes must be tempered with discussion of a number of flaws identifiable in this conceptualisation of community. Barriers to participation from factors such as disability, gender, ill health, ethnicity and socioeconomic status must be considered with regard to access to disaster recovery offerings that originate from within the community (George, 2013; Skerratt & Steiner, 2013). Similarly, the assumption that shared locale equates with commonality of interest or similarly experienced history may well be a flawed premise in that each individual within the community experiences that community in different ways (Crowther & Cooper, 2002).

For the purpose of research around flood recovery it is important to note that the individuals within the community had different ideas and values about their individual flood experience, different knowledge and varying access to resources available within the community setting. Contextually for this research, there were notable barriers with the inclusion in the population of women (single women in particular), people with disabilities, people of varied ethnicity, people with physical or mental health issues and also representation across a wide array of socioeconomic groups.
In conceptualising community, it was also possible to consider the connection between ‘community’ and ‘spirit’ where spirit is considered to be those unmeasurable and non-material things that are subjectively experienced (Waddock, 1999). Waddock (1999) stated that spirit, though seemingly intangible, is no less real nor valuable despite its intangibility and further argues that without the inclusion of individual, subjectively interpreted meanings and the noted importance of feeling, emotion and beliefs into organisational life, the concept of community may not be fully realised. It is here that community and spirit appeared inextricably linked. We may see here the idea that community spirit is the subjectively experienced emotion or feeling of the subjective experience of community.

**Sense of community.** Within the literature that explored the subjective experience of community, it is, in part, conceptualised as ‘sense of community’. As for community, sense of community has numerous interpretations but generally is thought to focus on the relationships people have with others in their community and the feelings of connectedness, membership, belonging and sharing that people within a community affectively experience (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009; McMillan, 1996; Silver & Grek-Martin, 2015; Xu, Perkins, & Chow, 2010).

Membership is central to the conceptualisation of a sense of community and it is membership within a community that affords residents a sense of safety and belonging, creating a sense of identity and boundaries around the community that require certain elements for people to be included (McMillan, 1996). Home ownership and long-term residence afford one membership to a community, inducing a sense of community (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009). However, it is also the experience of community life, the sharing of experiences with others in the same community, and the individual personalities, life histories and the interaction of these elements within the community context, that contribute to a sense of community (Silver & Grek-Martin, 2015). Xu et al. (2010) stated that it is membership or belonging that fosters emotional connections between the people in a community who share history and experience, which in turn prompts participation in community life thus fulfilling personal and community needs through collective, participatory action. McMillan (1996) described a
participatory response as a responsibility to sacrifice for the community in return for membership which provides the sense of safety. McMillan (1996) further stated that spirit replaces membership in the theory of sense of community and that spirit may be seen in the “sparks of friendship” (p. 315) that create the psychosocial and emotional connections upon which a sense of community depends.

Community Spirit: Subjective Meanings

The term ‘community spirit’ was widely used in Australia in public discourse, the media, social media and by government, in a wide range of contexts and applications. A quick online search yielded an array of examples documenting numerous applications of the term including in fundraising efforts and generous donations, promotions of community activities and even in pointing out perhaps a perceived lack of community spirit where people fail to participate in community events.

Narrowing to a flood recovery focus still yielded many examples of the use of the term community spirit in the Australian media. The NSDR, the federally endorsed framework for disaster relief, endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b) following the Black Saturday bushfires, noted community spirit in its opening remarks. In a flood, and more broadly, a disaster context, community spirit is noted as an inherent attribute upon which the character of the Australian people in the face of disaster can be defined (Allen, 2013). Numerous Australian political representatives, from a diverse array of ideological positioning, commented on community spirit in response to adverse community experiences inclusive of disasters, tragedies and other noted challenges to the smooth flow of community life, as recorded both in the media and in the Hansard.

It was to be expected that a literature search of the academic literature would provide substantive results around what community spirit means. However, it rapidly became apparent that community spirit is conceptually a subjective term with little in the way of concrete definition. Thesauri were utilised in an attempt to obtain a definition but to no avail, with the databases that offer Thesauri (ProQuest Social Science, Soc Index and EBSCOHost Psychology) offering nil returns upon searching. The Oxford
English Dictionary offered a simplistic definition of community spirit, which it describes as being related to the feelings of solidarity and fellowship experienced within a community setting (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). With community defined earlier as a subjective concept with multiple meanings, it is assumed that if community spirit relates to feelings experienced within a community setting, then community spirit must also be conceptually subjective.

It was clear from early on—at the way the term was being presented in the media at least—that different users may have different meanings in mind, presenting the same term but with different nuances of meaning. The first step then became identifying different users in the flood recovery process—distinctly different groups all utilising the same concept around a common point of discussion. These groups were identified as: academia; people (flood impacted residents); media; and leadership/governments. This review will deal with the meanings of community spirit around the flood recovery context as presented in the academic literature.

The literature review began with a general search for meanings within the academic literature using Charles Sturt University’s library search facilities. Eventually the search process culminated in the results presented in Table 1. A search of the term “community spirit” alone yielded 46,351 results. This search was narrowed to include only the last ten years of academic literature in categories of “community”, “communities”, “community development” and “community life”. This narrowed the results to 1,027. Further categorisation was used to narrow the results to a pool of 467, which included articles on a vast array of contexts and topics not always entirely pertinent to the research. The search terms were then altered to “community spirit” and flood. This yielded 33 results comprising 8 audio visual entries, 15 newspaper articles and 10 journal entries. Of these 10 journal entries, 2 were pertinent to the research, dated 1981 and 2011. It soon became apparent that using Primo Search facilities in this way was not providing adequate results to uncover the meaning of community spirit and in particular within a flood recovery frame. This particular search, as well as the following search as documented in Table 1, indicated that community
spirit is a term more commonly found in media reporting on flood recovery, rather than within the body of academic literature.

The search process was extended to search within specific databases. Google Scholar was also used to source literature resources pertinent to the topic. As demonstrated in Table 1, extensive searching of 13 relevant databases yielded a total of 40 articles, which was further narrowed, upon reading, to 15 which were applicable for review. In addition, Google Scholar produced 13 relevant academic articles culled from an original 19. Further, random finds account for 15 articles and these were sourced primarily from scouring reference lists of the other articles.

Table 1: Literature Search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Search terms</th>
<th>Relevant articles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soc INDEX with full text</td>
<td>24/4/14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>AB “community spirit” AND AB flood Full text Peer reviewed</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiley Online Library</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>AB “community spirit” AND AB flood Full text Peer reviewed</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Database</td>
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<td>ScienceDirect</td>
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<td>“community spirit” AND flood</td>
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<td>Full text Peer reviewed</td>
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<td>“community spirit” AND flood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jstor—Humanities, Social Sciences</td>
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<td>1/5/2014</td>
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24
Within the academic literature, there were examples of the use of the term community spirit by academic writers, researchers and the community members themselves by way of participation in research. Much of the contemporary research and writing around flood recovery and wider disaster management revolved around the concept of ‘resilience’ and it is here that the concept of community spirit was most situated.

**Community spirit as resilience.** Embedded in disaster focused literature on community resilience, there was a discussion around the concept of community spirit. Resilience, conceptually, refers to the ability to withstand stressors or forces or return to a pre-stress condition (Prosser & Peters, 2010). With historical roots in the sciences, physics, chemistry and mathematics, the concept of resilience has been increasingly adopted by the health and social sciences fields as a means of explaining the capacity of people to cope with stressors that impact wellbeing (Prosser & Peters, 2010). Furthermore, a sociological perspective located community resilience in the ability of a community to withstand both stressors and change and to bounce back to a functioning state (Price-Robertson & Knight, 2012; Prosser & Peters, 2010).

Increasingly over the last decade, community resilience has become conceptually important to policy makers, practitioners and academics in many disciplines (Price-Robertson & Knight, 2012). For disaster management at the global level, the concept of community resilience has risen in status in reaction to the Hyogo Declaration, the 2005 framework issued by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (Manyena, 2006). The Hyogo Framework specifically focuses on the building of community resilience to disasters and incorporating the collaborative efforts from a number of players including nations, agencies and disaster experts, from the global to local levels. The successor to the Hyogo framework is the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and this framework, too, focuses on resilience which comes from shared responsibility and collaborative effort from all sectors and stakeholders with the state having the primary responsibility (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction [UNISDR], 2015).
For Australia, the outcome of the increased emphasis on resilience and in particular, community resilience, has led to the implementation of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). The NSDR is aimed at identifying and informing the different stakeholders in the emergency management arena of their roles in supporting the building of community resilience (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). The adoption of a resilience based approach to contemporary disaster and emergency management recognises the responsibility of many players in disaster preparedness that enhances community resilience (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). Specifically, the NSDR promotes a model of ‘shared responsibility’ which endorses the notion that in order for community resilience to be achieved in the disaster management sense, governments, communities, businesses and individuals must work collaboratively towards this common aim (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b).

Pupavac (2012), in an article considering disaster management at the global level and the change in attitude towards community government in accordance with changing views of the nature of disasters and associated responsibility, stated that it is the rise in community resilience as a model for disaster management that has led to an increased reporting of community spirit. Pupavac (2012) believed that this increased reporting of community spirit associated with disasters is a response to the globally encroaching attitude that communal values and participatory social responses are the means to coping with future disasters. The Pupavac article is of particular significance as it highlights the way in which the communal view of disaster as enforced by governments can impact the expected response at the community level. This study explored the perceived meaning of community spirit as it factors in the flood recovery process. Understanding the community meanings presented may be important in illuminating the differences in expectations at the community level as compared with the wider macro system.

The academic literature that discussed community spirit and resilience focused on five key underpinning concepts: community spirit as a source for community resilience, as critical for giving a sense of place, as social
capital, as resistance to resilience, and psychosocial health and wellbeing. It does so in the following ways described below.

**Community spirit as a source for community resilience.** Skerratt and Steiner (2013) stated that a community resilience model functions at an optimal level in communities where there is active participation in the processes aimed at building capacity to cope with stressors and change and that such communities are effectively empowered by engaged participation. They noted that their research participants held the view that there is a high level of community spirit during moments of crisis, formed through the shared anxiety of these moments of crisis by the gathering together of the people within the community and leading to engaged participation from which community resilience is instigated. Here, community spirit had nuances of meaning relating to sharing, and connectedness through gathering as well as through engagement.

W. Smith et al. (2011) considered the fact that during their study of farming households in New Zealand post flood, the network of helping relationships formed during the flood reignited the community spirit, leading to more significant and long-term communal relationships that effectively increased community resilience. Meaning of community spirit here revolved around a sense of communality and relationships or connections between people. Similarly, Armour (2010) stated that it is the interconnectedness of a community that helps to create resilience for that community during a disaster, linking interconnectedness to community spirit that may further be equated as neighbouring.

George (2013), in an ethnographic account of her own flood experience in Brisbane, Australia, noted that community resilience, in line with federal expectations of shared responsibility, fosters working towards building a sense of community through the invocation of community spirit which is seen as having meaning here around volunteerism, helping and altruism. Further, Tobin (1999) stated that community resilience is built when internal conflicts within the community are decreased due to the increased community spirit that arises in a crisis situation as the members concentrate their energy on the recovery task at hand in a collaborative fashion. Thus community spirit is viewed in the context of this research, in analysing
sustainability and resilience in hazard mitigation contextually located in Florida, USA, as a short-term phenomena that relates to the sharing of social values and organisational consensus within a transient and “synthetic” (Tobin, 1999, p. 21) post disaster community. Again, meaning was found in the themes of collaboration, sharing and consensus.

Stevenson et al. (2012) studied individual and community resilience in the post cyclone context, following Cyclone Larry in Queensland, Australia, and found that community spirit was one of the most significant means for help post cyclone. This study also found that at the mesosystem (family, friends and neighbours), community spirit as defined as a sense of community provided resilience through connectedness which allowed for the people around to provide help. Interestingly, help was noted as coming both from strangers as well as people that have prior connection. Here, community spirit appeared to mean helping, connectedness and cohesion.

In each of these studies, community spirit, whilst having different nuances of meaning, was deemed as being a source of community resilience. Madsen and O'Mullan (2013), in work around social memory and community narratives and the way they contribute to social resilience following a disaster, considered the way in which community spirit is represented in local narratives. These authors stated that the community narratives based on shared values which incorporate historical aspects of pioneer resilience such as hard work, self-sufficiency and community spirit through volunteerism, add to post disaster resilience. These values, including community spirit, were viewed as “the very fibre that forms the community” (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2013, p. 61). There was a clear meaning of community spirit as volunteerism as well as links to the sense of place of the members of the community.

**Community spirit as critical to giving a sense of place.** ‘Sense of place’ conceptually addresses the relationship between people and their living environment and encompasses the feelings, emotions, beliefs, memories and experiences of people living in a shared locale (Silver & Grek-Martin, 2015). Pooley, Cohen, and O'Connor (2010) concluded, from a study with bushfire communities regarding the building of resilience for future bushfire disasters, that the competence of the community and the
attachment it has to place is a factor which can be fostered to enhance community resilience. Sense of place, which is contributory to community resilience, is noted as being the same as community spirit by the residents that participated in this study (Pooley et al., 2010). Contrastingly, Manock (2012) stated that it is community spirit that fosters a sense of place, and also attachment to place, which leads to the need for community resilience as people are reluctant to leave communities which are located in even high-risk areas. Viewed here was a cyclical relationship between community spirit and resilience. These two studies offered sense of place as meaning for community spirit but offered no substantive discussion around meaning.

The most significant research around resilience to disaster, that noted community spirit as important in fostering a sense of place and thereby promoting community resilience, was the work of Boon (2014) and the collaborative efforts of Boon, Millar, Lake, Cottrell, and King (2012). These academic works discussed research focusing on disaster resilience in both flood impacted towns and in disaster affected communities in multiple settings across Australia. Boon (2014) discussed community spirit as noted by flood impacted residents as the most helpful factor during a flood, and goes on to discuss community spirit in terms of connected, neighbouring communities who chose to stay in situ post disaster for the benefits that the community afforded them by way of coping with adversity as well as lifestyle. In the collaborative research by Boon et al. (2012) which noted community spirit as a sense of community and having a place within your community, nuances of meaning around community spirit such as solidarity, cohesion, helping, altruism, selflessness and social connectedness were also noted. Community spirit featured quite significantly in this piece of research but no real discussion occured that made solid a definition for meanings of community spirit, nor the specific way it has been conceptualised by the researchers for the purpose of the study. Meaning in this study appeared to have been drawn from the noted responses of participants, and seemed at times to have been constructed from the researchers’ conceptualisation of community spirit and applied to responses given.

**Community spirit as social capital.** W. Smith et al. (2011) stated, in connection to their research into community resilience and flooding in New
Zealand, that ‘social capital’ is seen as the key in the shift of disaster management to a community resilience and sustainability model rather than the recovery and response model which preceded it. Hawkins and Maurer (2009) conceptualised, albeit simplistically, social capital as resources that are formed as a result of social networks and social support systems amongst family, friends or community. Social capital is noted, in a disaster recovery context, to bring numerous benefits to the affected community including information, access to resources, tangible aid, childcare and psychosocial and emotional support (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014), and that social connectedness or capital is correlated with speed of recovery as well as the increased capacity for communities to facilitate the sourcing of assistance from authorities (Aldrich, 2012).

In writing about community based disaster preparedness, Walia (2008) commented that community spirit is a crucial part of social capital for community resilience in a disaster scenario. In considering the role of social capital in the government relationship for building community capacity in low socioeconomic communities of the United States/Mexican border, Wilson and Guajardo (2000) definitively linked community spirit with social capital. They made this link by stating that a community produced mural, which was designed to increase social capital, now stands as a symbol of the emergent community spirit. Cronan (1998) stated that whilst a disaster in the short term can dismantle community bonds or capitals, the emerging community spirit as evidenced by people, including strangers, helping each other, can help to reconstruct these broken bonds. Here was evident, the distinction between bonding and bridging capitals and the perceived role of community spirit in activating the bridging capitals.

Conversely, W. Smith et al. (2011) found with their research that community spirit was reignited by networks of helpers who came together as a result of floods. There are links between community resilience, social capital and community spirit where the social capital ignites the spirit. H. Smith and Boruff (2011) discussed in their research findings that community spirit is enhanced by social connectivity and social bonds strengthened by opportunities to connect with each other. Allen (2013), in discussing the interpretation and significance of resilience in contemporary
disaster management, linked social capital (as bridging capital between the impacted community and the broader community) with volunteerism. This volunteerism is further seen to be constructive in immediate disaster recovery and the rebuilding of the community in a more resilient way. Allen (2013) deemed the community spirit that fosters volunteerism and the disaster response from the community to be an inherent aspect of the Australian people by government in policy. Allen felt this may be aimed at more cost effective government where the onus of responsibility is being subtly shifted to communities rather than the state.

Forrest and Kearns (2001) presented an article that considered the decrease in social cohesion as being linked with increasing individualism, changes in social identity as a result of changes to the concept of neighbourhood, and a decrease in or lack of social capital. Within the Forrest and Kearns article, community spirit is viewed as an elusive and romanticised concept. They stated that in low socioeconomic areas, the notion of a cohesive community with high community spirit is an unrealistic and romanticised idea. They further stated that community spirit is rated much higher in wealthy and mature neighbourhoods and is interpreted by these authors as the capacity to act collectively when required. Although the meaning was similar to that of other authors, that being around connectedness and collectivism, the broader meaning of community spirit here may not be as positive as it was from other authors who deemed it a disaster management asset.

**Community spirit as resistance to resilience.** Connecting with the concept of community resilience was the broader concept of flood and disaster management. In a study by Box, Thomalla, and van den Honert (2013), which analyses flood management in Australia and the various stakeholders involved in contemporary flood management, there was discussion on the NSDR in which the notion of shared responsibility for community resilience to disasters was explored. In their findings on resilience building for future flood events during dry times, they noted the response of one participant who said that by the one-year anniversary of the Brisbane flood of 2011, learning from this event was limited mainly to reflections on community spirit rather than any in-depth analysis of means by which community resilience could be enhanced for future disaster events.
Evident here was the understanding of community spirit as an indicator of a lack of serious response to flood risk by any level of government and as a transient flood response rather than a contributor to longer term community resilience.

Fairbrother et al. (2013) presented research around preparedness for bushfire as a natural disaster, contextually located in rural Victoria, Australia. The core participants of this study were members of what is known as a community fireguard, which are community based, bushfire preparedness and resilience promotion groups organised by the Country Fire Authority. Whilst the researchers noted that policy makers use rhetoric to promote self-reliance in the promotion of community based groups, participants themselves note the importance of community spirit as a feeling of connectedness which they deem as fostered by such collective, community based activity. They discussed connectivity through meeting and sharing or the responsibility of goals of preparedness of those people who are geographically close by, and noted a sense of connectedness as the primary positive outcome of the group work program. Fairbrother et al. (2013) noted the limitations to fostering and expression of community spirit and included discussion around the issues of geographical boundaries where there were noted issues for spirit with neighbours deemed too far away to connect with. In this way, the meaning of community spirit was seen as linked with resilience in a negative manner.

**Psychosocial health and wellbeing.** Contextually, community spirit was also, within the broader flood recovery context, located within research which documents the impact of floods and disasters on psychosocial health and wellbeing. A number of authors noted the connection between community spirit and psychosocial health and wellbeing including Carroll, Morbey, Balogh, and Araoz (2009); Ceobanu and Grozavu (2009), and Convery and Bailey (2008). Whilst one could argue that psychosocial wellbeing at an individual level certainly leads to wellbeing at a community level, and thus is intimately tied to social health and community resilience, the examples of research do not specifically approach the concept of community resilience.
Carroll et al. (2009) discussed their qualitative study into the social and health impacts of severe flooding and their subsequent findings that included the correlation between flooding and psychological health issues, specifically Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depressive illnesses. Carroll et al. (2009) stated that numerous participants from their study, including those flooded and workers from support agencies, noted community spirit and bonding as part of the rebuilding process leading to recovery. Community spirit in this context appeared to hold meaning around the friendships, connectivity and bonds which are seen to have been strengthened by the sharing of a traumatic experience. This study noted that community spirit and bonding may be further linked to rectification of psychosocial ill health caused by broken place attachments and alienation from community as well as the assault on identity instigated by the flood. They noted that in as much as some relationships were strengthened by the community spirit following the flood, there were also a number of broken relationships that followed.

In research around the same flood event, Convery and Bailey (2008) again studied the health and social impacts of the same flood on the community of Carlisle in the United Kingdom. They discussed physical ill health and similar psychological issues and also noted the sense of place that is lost during a flood event and the psychological distress that may eventuate. Research participants from this study noted a renewal of community spirit with neighbours helping each other but also noted a loss of community spirit as evidenced by thefts and a subsequent loss of trust within the community. The meaning for community spirit around neighbouring or connection between people and place was seen as either as a positive outcome from disaster or as a negative outcome which is constituted by a lack of spirit.

Ceobanu and Grozavu (2009), researching the psychosocial impacts of flooding in Romania, reported in their findings that a lack of community spirit leads to decreased social health and increased impact on psychological health. They link building community spirit with flood preparedness. The meaning for community spirit here was derived from researcher opinion which was based on participants noting the lack of assistance that people within the community offered each other. Ceobanu and Grozavu (2009)
further stated that management for future disaster should involve the building of community spirit as connection to each other and solidarity, and as a sense of and means to community self-reliance. Similarly, Shepherd and Williams (2014) noted that community spirit was reported by their research participants as being a resource that was readily available during the response to disaster and was considered as evidence of shared local values.

Writing by Ladrido-Ignacio and Perlas (1995) and Vasterling (2008) provided interesting comparison between developed nation disasters and those occurring in the developing world. Both articles noted that participation of flood impacted residents in the recovery stage is crucial to psychosocial wellbeing as well as being linked with a sense of purpose, re-emerging hope and community spirit. Both articles noted the acts of community collectivism that contribute to community spirit; however, Ladrido-Ignacio and Perlas (1995) noted more so the intervention by formal disaster management personnel. The increased formal intervention may be a result of the historical context and top-down focused policies rather than resilience based. They also note that community spirit is only useful where there is an end to the disaster and not so much for developing countries where deficiencies in infrastructure and lack of emergency funding may impede the recovery process by significant amounts of time. Meaning is perhaps tied to collectivism but differs between developed nations and those still developing.

Where meaning for community spirit is around connection between people and the capacity for collective activity at the community level, there was demonstrably clear links between psychosocial wellbeing and community resilience and the role of community spirit.

**Meanings from these Five Concepts**

It was apparent that community spirit is significant to the development of community resilience, for the wider disaster management context, as well as for psychosocial health and wellbeing within the post disaster context. It is also apparent from this review thus far that there is little by way of concrete examination of the concept of community spirit in and of itself and little by way of firm definition. Even where the literature noted the importance of
community spirit, there was little offering as to what meaning community
spirit has within the disaster context and how indeed it was and can be
constructive in the recovery from flood or disaster.

From the sources examined in this review, with a view to investigating the
meaning of community spirit around a common reference point of flood
recovery, a number of themes have emerged and have been categorised into
the following thematic groupings: sense of place; connectedness; helping;
and human nature.

**Sense of place.** ‘Sense of place’ is again a contested and subjective
term used by numerous disciplines from anthropology to environmental
science. For the purpose of this research, sense of place took a
multidisciplinary view incorporating sociological, anthropological and
geographical definitions. Sense of place was viewed here as the attachment
to place and community, the affective relationship between people and
place, and the subjective interpretation of the relationship with the
environment (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009; Silver & Grek-Martin, 2015).
Sense of place is constructed individually from life experience, values and
personality as embedded within a sociocultural context (Silver & Grek-
Martin, 2015). Scholars liken sense of place to the emotive bond of
marriage and note the sense of security, belonging and identity it
affords (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009).

A number of authors allude to community spirit as having meaning related
to sense of place. They include Madsen and O'Mullan (2013), who spoke of
shared values between community members, and Boon (2014), who
discussed the desire to stay in an impacted community that is also at future
risk, and the sense of belonging that facilitates this desire. Madsen and
O'Mullan (2013), in linking community spirit with volunteerism and the
identity of small, cohesive rural communities, discussed the narratives
around identity and sense of place that people provide and a meaning for
community spirit as being a part of those narratives. H. Smith and Boruff
(2011) discussed community spirit as having meaning around sense of place
as belonging and deem it to be produced by long-term, multigenerational
residence. Respondents placed considerable emphasis on community spirit
with a strong sense of belonging and shared beliefs, with the foundation laid by founding fathers still existent in town (H. Smith & Boruff, 2011, p. 9).

Sense of place was viewed as arising from a feeling of community spirit which sees people as connected to their geographical space by shared values, history, and attachment to people, familiarity and lifestyle. H. Smith and Boruff (2011) discussed sense of place as common in regional areas and state that resilience is enhanced by the community spirit where meaning is interpreted as the ethos of well settled, non-transient and small-in-size populaces. Within this theme, community spirit was viewed as an inherently positive element of the disaster recovery, present predominantly during the event and the recovery.

**Connectedness.** Connectedness is a particularly common theme mentioned throughout the literature which pertains to community spirit and flood and wider disaster recovery. Connectedness here referred to social connectedness or the connections between people and community as a group.

Within contemporary policy aiming for community resilience for disaster, Cheshire (2015), in discussing the importance of neighbouring to policy on community resilience in the urban setting, noted that it is the connectedness of the people within a shared locale that is thought to induce a sense of neighbourliness. Cheshire (2015) noted that the mere sharing of a locale is thought to induce neighbourliness incorrectly, as there need be connections between the people within the locale. Skerratt and Steiner (2013) referred to community spirit as having connectedness in the context of a collective threat to the community. W. Smith et al. (2011) alluded to community spirit as having communality and the relationships between neighbours that are reignited in a disaster event fostering people to help each other and connect in ways they otherwise would not. Others spoke of collectivism (Boon, 2014; Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Ladrido-Ignacio & Perlas, 1995; Pupavac, 2012; Vasterling, 2008), solidarity (Boon, 2014; Ceobanu & Grozavu, 2009) and cohesion (Boon, 2014; Stevenson et al., 2012). Perhaps in the most succinct effort within the academic literature, Forrest and Kearns offered meaning for community spirit as follows:
Community spirit, interpreted as the capacity to act collectively as and when required, is rated higher in mature and wealthy home-owning areas, perhaps indicating the importance of a combination of material and social resources (Forrest & Kearns, 2001, p. 2131).

Within the interpretation from Forrest and Kearns (2001), was the notion that community spirit has meaning also around social capital as well as other capitals. Vasterling (2008) noted that upon return to her flood damaged community there was a spirit of closeness between residents that she felt had not been evident prior to the disaster and where we may interpret meaning for connectedness. Ceobanu and Grozavu (2009) discussed the evident lack of community spirit in a flood event, where people looked only after their own interests rather than assisting people in the locale around them, where we may interpret meaning for community spirit around solidarity, or lack thereof. Boon (2014, pp. 690,691) noted community spirit when discussing the community “banding together” with a “help thy neighbour attitude” indicating meaning here around connectedness.

Social capital, by definition as based on connections creating social networks, was also included under this theme with the work of Walia (2008), who definitively linked community spirit and social capital. Walia (2008) stated that the unifying nature of a disaster, where the community is connected through the shared experience, forcing the community to be the first responder in an emergency, fosters a reliance on community spirit where it had meaning here for Walia as social capital.

The use of self as helping. This theme related to the idea that in a disaster often what people offer as a resource is themselves. This may be in the way of tangible physical helping such as sandbagging, making or providing food or cleaning, or perhaps emotional help such as offering support through listening to stories. In whatever form it takes, the use of self, given to people and communities in time of suffering, may or may not involve a prior relationship with the people and communities to which the help is offered. The use of self as helping was a theme again common to the literature for this review. For meaning of community spirit as pertaining to a common reference of flood recovery, the use of self as helping is thought to
Volunteerism is well documented with respect to flood recovery and was perhaps one of the most widely used terms with connection to community spirit in the media setting. Media reports commonly noted the connection between those people who volunteer in a disaster situation and the concept of community spirit (J. Alston, 2011; "Brisbane to commission 'Mud Army' statue; The Queensland Government says it will commission a statue to commemorate Brisbane's so-called 'Mud Army'," 2012 ; "Community spirit shines after flood," 2011; Harrison, 2012a; Stewart, 2012). Such examples cited volunteerism as an indicator of community spirit or as a means to building community spirit—and there was generally a positive correlation between the two concepts.

In the academic literature, meaning of community spirit as composed in part of the notion of volunteerism was similar, though not as widely noted, as in the media. For the purpose of this study, volunteers were thought to be inclusive of those people who freely give their time to organisations that respond to flood events such as the State Emergency Service (SES), Rural Fire Service (RFS) and the Army Reserve, as well as those individuals who simply turn up to help such as the ‘Mud Army’ ("Brisbane to commission 'Mud Army' statue; The Queensland Government says it will commission a statue to commemorate Brisbane's so-called 'Mud Army'," 2012 ).

In discussing volunteerism within the academic literature, the meaning relevant to community spirit was the seemingly selfless act of giving time to help people in need. Volunteerism was considered to be inherent to the community and individual response and readily available in the immediate aftermath of a disaster event. Meaning for community spirit was indicated here;

In many instances the floods appeared to have reignited community spirit as networks of helpers formed and reformed in response to the flooding (W. Smith et al., 2011, p. 548).
Neighbouring was also noted in the body of academic literature. Neighbouring was viewed as the assistance and services provided by and for people who live in close proximity to each other. Neighbouring, as an act of people who are geographically connected and provide assistance to each other, is again seen to be indicative of community spirit as well as a means to building community spirit (Stevenson et al., 2012). Neighbouring may be viewed as an overlapping of the two themes of connectedness and helping as evidenced by the previous discussion of W. Smith et al. (2011), who alluded to meaning for community spirit in the neighbourly helping that is reignited by a disaster event.

Similarly, community spirit is seen to have meaning related to the help of strangers. For the academic literature sourced for this review, the help of strangers referred to people who had no prior knowledge of each other before the flood event, providing some assistance to flood victims. Of course, most volunteers are strangers to the flood victims themselves, and neighbours can also be strangers. However, the help of strangers is noted by flood victims, and then by researchers for whom those victims are participants, as being an indicator of community spirit that is evident during disaster events and other crises. Cronan (1998) succinctly describe the meaning for community spirit around the notion of helping strangers as follows:

> During and immediately after the emergency an immense feeling of community spirit is usually evident, with people helping others who prior to the event did not even know each other (p. 20).

Tobin (1999) believed that in the immediate post disaster context there is an increased display of community spirit visible through the collective efforts of the community, and more broadly, towards the recovery. He alluded here to meaning for community spirit around cohesion and collaboration, located around the event and which was not noted at other times. Nuanced meaning for community spirit was reiterated by W. Smith et al. (2011) who discussed the way that networks of helpers reignite communal relationships and work together towards recovery in a sense of camaraderie.

**Community spirit as an inherent aspect of human nature.** Several writers incorporated concepts of helping and neighbouring into community spirit by mentioning ideas such as altruism, selflessness, stoicism,
camaraderie and mateship (Boon, 2014; George, 2013; W. Smith et al., 2011). These may well be viewed as personal characteristics that are inherent to human nature and that are particularly evident during a flood crisis and that are also contributory to the recovery process. Vasterling (2008) also spoke of hope as it is associated with psychosocial wellbeing during flood recovery and stated that community spirit is indicative of such hope. This implied that where there is capacity to hope, as inherent to the human species, there is indeed community spirit. George (2013) spoke of the human attribute of kindness with respect to the meaning of community spirit within her flood experience context as follows:

…community spirit that was shared during and after the floods, in the acts of kindness and lines of volunteers that filled our streets and farming communities (George, 2013, p. 44).

The work of Waddock (1999) was quite pertinent to this theme in that she asked not only why there has been little discussion about the connection between community and spirit but stated that spirit, as defined as the ‘feeling’ of community, has been lost in the quest for all that is objective and empirically tested.

Yet as anyone who has ever experienced community, felt a strong emotion, had an idea or a dream knows, the fact that these things are of the “spirit”, of the “heart”, or of the “head”, does not make them any less real or valuable than the material goods pursued so vigorously in the modern world (Waddock, 1999, p. 335).

We can interpret in the work of Waddock (1999) that meaning for the spirit element of community is linked to spiritual experience, and thus inevitably will be subjective or affective experiences of community, as defined in Western contexts as a shared locale or set of values. That people feel some sense of community and experience a spirited connection to that sense of community inherently reflects elements of human nature and experience.

**Linking Themes to Role in Flood Recovery: The Gap**

There are numerous nuances of meaning for community spirit from the academic literature as discussed within the themes above, which when considered overall, alluded to a definition of community spirit as being an experience, linked to the community itself as well as to disaster, that fosters positive actions from within the community and into the broader
community. Much of the academic literature appeared to view the meaning of community spirit as having a positive correlation with the flood recovery process and as being an almost tangible, albeit subjectively interpreted, resource. There would seem to be much in the way of justification in this point alone for the in-depth examination of the meaning of community spirit, given that flood and other disasters are inevitably part of the future for the global population. In discovering meanings, we can then guide the application of what appears to be a resource.

There may well be questions around what the meaning of community spirit is when one considers further literature. Offe (2012), in his discussion about the benefits of the concept of the common good, asked if there is credibility in government that attempts to shirk responsibility or perhaps shifts the onus of responsibility to the people by invoking rhetorical concepts such as civic self-help and community spirit. Certainly the contemporary position of Australian government is well stated in the NSDR as one of shared responsibility and as enhanced by the inevitable community spirit that is inherent to Australians. Even where this responsibility is deemed shared between governments, communities, business and individuals, it remains vital to acknowledge the major responsibility lies with the state in providing disaster management and relief.

The meaning one holds about the concept of community spirit may be correlated with the way in which one would expect community spirit to then function in the disaster management context. If the meaning is connected to helping, volunteerism and neighbouring, then we would look for ways in which enhancing community spirit can foster increases in activity in these areas to enhance community resilience, or conversely, how increases in these activities and connections can build community spirit. Similarly, if meaning for community spirit is seen to be tied to sense of place—the feeling of connection to a location—one can work towards building community spirit through interventions that foster and celebrate this sense of connection. Perhaps meanings of community spirit will appear to be different when viewed from a different perspective than that of academia, for example, from leadership, the communities themselves and the people who help them.
Chapter 3: Community Spirit in Australian Government Literature: The Link to Community Development

Chapter 3 answers Part B of the first section of the research question (RQ1b). This question asks how community spirit is presented in Australian government-issued flood recovery/disaster management literature. This chapter firstly provides discussion around the contemporary policies and frameworks currently used to guide the flood recovery process. After illuminating the relevant policies, the chapter explores the way in which community spirit is conceptually located within these policies and frameworks and then discusses the concepts of shared responsibility. This chapter then locates contemporary social work practice in the disaster context. It identifies a link between disaster recovery and community development. Finally, this chapter looks at the potential for community spirit to be utilised as an asset by contemporary social work and within a community development framework for the purpose of building community resilience for future disasters.

Disaster and Floods: The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) and Shared Responsibility

What is a disaster? Disaster is a term that is applied to a great variety of occurrences and circumstances in contemporary times. For the purpose of this thesis we will consider natural disaster as:

…a serious disruption to a community or region caused by the impact of a naturally occurring rapid onset event that threatens or causes death, injury or damage to property or the environment and which requires significant and coordinated multi-agency and community response (Emergencies and Animal Welfare Biosecurity, 2011, p. 1).

Disasters may then be caused by naturally occurring or human elements interacting with communities in ways that can range from inconvenient to catastrophic. Certainly notable is the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami which killed hundreds of thousands of people globally, including over 10,000 in India alone, and injuring countless others (Kayser, Wind, & Shankar, 2008). This catastrophic disaster destroyed livelihoods, obliterated entire communities, displaced people either over extensive periods or
permanently, and caused immeasurable mental health issues, personal suffering and turmoil. This type of catastrophic event was matched, at least at the level of global recognition, with events such as the nuclear contamination in Chernobyl, Hurricane Katrina, the Japanese Tohoku Tsunami and the Christchurch Earthquake.

The United Nations (2005), in their publication of the conference proceedings of the Hyogo Framework for Action following the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, noted that hydro meteorological events are the causative factor in the majority of disasters, that developing countries face greater vulnerability, that despite the vulnerability in developing countries all nations face an increased disaster issue by way of global responsibilities, and that vulnerabilities are increasing due to a startling array of factors. These factors include: changing demographic, technological and socioeconomic conditions, unplanned urbanisation, development within high-risk zones, under-development, environmental degradation, climate variability, climate change, geological hazards, competition for scarce resources, and the impact of epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and more currently, Ebola (UNISDR, 2015; United Nations, 2005). Those people who are already most vulnerable in our communities face the greatest impact from disasters inclusive of lower socioeconomic groups, the unemployed, people who live in substandard housing, the frail aged, Indigenous peoples, single-parent families, humanitarian entrants and newly arrived migrants, and people who live with disabilities (Australian Council of Social Service [ACOSS], 2013). These factors combine to create an ongoing and increasing threat to humanity at a global scale, threatening economy and sustainability of developed and developing nations alike. Expressed statistically, in the last 20 years, disasters in a variety of forms have impacted almost 200 million people annually (United Nations, 2005). It seems that few of us will be immune.

In conjunction with increased vulnerability from these socio-political, cultural and historical factors, the global community faces increased risk from disasters, particularly those of hydro meteorological nature, due to climate changes (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014). In the State of the Climate report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014b), the Australian Bureau of
Meteorology comments on the significance of climate change with predictions for the future of the nation inclusive of increased rainfall over the Northwest and decreased rainfall in the Southeast but with increased incidences of heavy rainfall. This report also notes increased sea levels and the potential for less frequent but more intense cyclones (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014b). These factors clearly increase the vulnerability of the Australian people to flood events resulting from increased frequency and impact of extreme sea level events, increased impact from floods resulting from intense rainfall event, and increased impact from floods resulting from cyclones.

Flood, as one type of disaster impacted by hydro meteorological events, is defined as a:

…relatively high water level which overtops the natural or artificial banks in any part of a stream, river, estuary, lake or dam, and/or local overland flooding associated with drainage before entering a watercourse, and/or coastal inundation resulting from super-elevated sea levels and/or waves overtopping coastline defences (State Emergency Service, 2008, p. x).

**Responsibilities in Australia.** The increased risks for Australians from floods, droughts, storms and cyclones stem from numerous factors including: climate changes; changes in population locations by sea-changers and green-changers; policy shifts towards individualism; and a dependence on volunteer response agencies (M. Alston, 2010). As a result, disaster management has become one of the key areas for policy work for contemporary governments.

In Australia, disaster management is the responsibility of all three tiers of government and involves the collaborative interplay between governments, non-government organisations (NGOs) and voluntary organisations, and may be defined as those processes which support the restoration of not only physical infrastructure but also psychosocial, economic and physical wellbeing (NSW State Government, 2010). At the broadest level, emergency management is the responsibility of state and territory governments. Australian constitutional arrangements allocate responsibility for emergency management to the states and territories and furnish them with legislative powers, funding mechanisms and organisational
arrangements to facilitate management (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014a). This set of arrangements allow for the coordination of government, private and volunteer organisations in managing disasters irrespective of type, causation or intensity.

Recovery is one of the core elements of the comprehensive approach concept endorsed by disaster management arrangements which is inclusive of other elements of prevention, preparedness and response (PRRR) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a). Australian state and federal government recovery arrangements may be instigated as need demands. For flood recovery specifically, within the broader emergency management context, the responsibility lies in the first instance with local emergency services and other resources at the local level. For example, Wagga Wagga is managed with the local State Emergency Service (SES) under the Wagga Wagga flood plan, or by the NSW State Flood Plan for more serious flood events, and supported by local government, NGOs and volunteer organisations (NSW State Government, 2010; State Emergency Service, 2006, 2008).

Conceptually, any recovery process should aim to leave the affected community more resilient than it originally was (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014a). Given this aim, recovery from disaster is based on the following principles (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014a):

- Understanding the context: Successful recovery is based on an understanding of the community context.
- Recognising complexity: Successful recovery acknowledges the complex and dynamic nature of emergencies and communities.
- Using community led approaches: Successful recovery is responsive and flexible, engaging communities and empowering them to move forward.
- Ensuring coordination of all activities: Successful recovery requires a planned, coordinated and adaptive approach based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs.
- Employing effective communication: Successful recovery is built on effective communication with affected communities and other stakeholders.
Acknowledging and building capacity: Successful recovery recognises, supports and builds on community, individual and organisational capacity.

Key to this thesis are the two principles relating to acknowledging and building capacities and the use of community led approaches. Fundamental to the process of flood recovery is the concept of community led recovery and the emergency management arrangements acknowledge this core focus, linking the concepts of community resilience, community sustainability and community development. Facilitating communities to steer their own recovery as well as building local capacities for recovery is viewed as key for contemporary disaster management, which in recent years has been impacted by a paradigm shift.

As a result of this paradigmatic shift, community resilience has become the focus of disaster management. This shift has prompted the adoption of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) in 2011. The NSDR was written following a decision by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to adopt a “whole of nation and resilience based approach” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b) to disaster management, effectively viewed as a collaborative and inclusive approach to replace the previous ‘top down’ approach. Central to the top down approach was the belief that disaster management was deemed the responsibility of the state, with little expectation for individuals and communities to fend for themselves. The NSDR, with a focus on resilience, endorses the expectation that people and their communities will be partly responsible for building their own disaster resilience and also incorporates prevention and preparedness. It is here, embedded within the NSDR, that the term community spirit is being utilised within the flood recovery context. The NSDR reads in the opening comments as follows:

Australians are also renowned for their resilience to hardship, including the ability to innovate and adapt, a strong community spirit that supports those in need and the self-reliance to withstand and recover from disasters (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b, p. IV).

Fundamentally, the NSDR’s notion of ‘shared responsibility’ is a move towards a more ‘bottom up’ style of disaster management where individuals,
communities, and businesses and industry are expected to share in the disaster process. This responsibility is inclusive of participation in building resilience, incorporating personal, social and community resilience, resilience of built infrastructure, and the utilisation of insurance to foster self-reliance throughout the recovery process. Embedded within the notion of shared responsibility is the expectation for active participation in resilience building by individuals, communities, community groups and volunteers. It is in these roles that one would expect community spirit to provide the support that the NSDR desires.

**Community Spirit in Shared Responsibility: Altruism or Rhetoric?**

From the perspective of the NSDR and at face value, shared responsibility denotes a collective approach to disaster management that endorses a role for all members and sectors of Australian society, including governments at all levels, businesses, the non-government sector, communities and individuals (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). It is understood that each component of the collective has its own strengths and resources that, when combined, enhance the capacity for a community to cope with disasters and thus facilitate resilience. Further, part of the role of individuals within the concept of shared responsibility is seen to be comprised of active participation in community disaster management arrangements as well as participating as a volunteer (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b).

Community spirit is presented as a characteristic strength of the Australian people which inherently allows us to support each other in times of need (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). It seems that in this context that community spirit has meaning around altruism, self-reliance and helping each other. No substantive definition or meaning was offered within the NSDR with regard to community spirit other than this statement of existence, importance in disaster recovery and an implied expectation for it to be drawn on when disaster strikes.

The rationale offered within the strategy for a conceptual focus on shared responsibility in coping with disasters and thus building resilience lies in both the increased need for management resulting from increased risk from climate changes as well as other noted factors such as demographic changes,
community fragmentation, altered social networks and decreasing sustainability of volunteer groups. These noted factors readily promote a need to embrace initiatives and programs which utilise what are considered inherent resources such as community spirit. It would seem then that the NSDR, with its core focus on shared responsibility for resilience building that embraces the strengths and resources of the collective groups of contemporary society (one of which is noted as the inherent community spirit of the Australian people as social support in times of need), is a strategy of altruistic motives. The overall aim of the strategy is viewed as promoting positive outcomes for the nation by way of collectivist, collaborative focus towards the common goal of resilience in the face of ever present and increasing disaster. It is important to question here whether this assumption around the inherent availability and consequent reliance on community spirit is valid for every community.

Community spirit was viewed as an attribute which should be rewarded by both government and the private sector. This is evidenced by awards such as the Pride of Australia Medal as issued by News Corp. Australia, which recognises community spirit as one of the categories for recognition of worthy and contributory Australians ("About Pride of Australia," 2014); The Gladys Elphick Community Spirit award acknowledging outstanding Indigenous women by the South Australian government (Government of South Australia, 2013); and also the Bundaberg Australia Day Spirit Awards ("Nominations open for Australia Day Awards," 2013). For the Australian government, community spirit was deemed a positive attribute of the populace and one which demonstrates what good citizenship is. There are similarities here with the concept of shared responsibility, where the public is rewarded for performing duties and services for the common good and where there is an expectation and reward for doing so.

In general political advertising and communication from political representatives, community spirit was linked to the community flood response (Maguire, 2012). This provides substantiation again of the notion that the general public has some positive role to play in flood recovery and that this is an attribute of the good citizen.
Our elected representatives provided many instances of the use of the term community spirit in relation to not only flood recovery and more broadly, disaster, but also in a whole range of applications relating to their perceptions of community and the people who contribute positively (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011e, 2011g, 2011h, 2011j, 2011k, 2011l, 2011m, 2011n, 2011o). Whilst the array of nuanced meanings that the Australian government presented around community spirit in a flood recovery context will be discussed in a later chapter, an example by former Senator the Hon. Brett Mason in his response to the Queensland 2011 floods demonstrates the individual and community level interpretation of community spirited response.

The same connectedness and sense of community that all of us experienced as the floods unfolded unleashed an amazing outpouring of community spirit as tens of thousands of people eagerly and cheerfully volunteered to help (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011p, p. 53).

At an organisational level, the expectation of community spirited response in recovery was presented by Hon. Ian McFarlane MP as involving organisations such as charities and the Army Reserve.

...and also the charities and community spirit organisations who are still working to heal the wounds of the flood (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011q, p. 23).

Media presentations of political representatives using the term community spirit were also easily located particularly around disaster events (Fogarty, 2011; Franklin & Kerr, 2011; Harrison, 2012a, 2012b; Osborne, 2011; Swan, 2013). The expectation and interpretation of community spirit in the North Wagga flood event, as presented by The Hon. Barry O’Farrell, then Premier of NSW, was as follows:

The Premier praised the community spirit in Wagga Wagga. “I've met people; I've talked to community members who are filling sandbags; I've seen others who have been affected,” Mr O’Farrell said ("Fears Wagga Wagga levee bank will fail as flood peak nears.," 2012 p. 4).

However, community spirit was also viewed within the concept of shared responsibility for disaster management presented as part of a neoliberal paradigm that shifts the onus of responsibility from state to communities.
and individuals. Offe (2012) stated that the use of concepts such as civic self-help and community spirit should be read as the means by which the ruling elite utilise rhetoric to shift the onus of responsibility to the people. Eminent social worker, M. Alston (2012) stated that a neoliberal policy framework has led to a shift in emphasis from community mindedness to self-reliance and the idea that people should look after themselves. She argued that policy is not aimed at governments supporting resilience at the community level. Cheshire and Lawrence (2005) also noted this shift in responsibility in respect to Australian farmers coping with droughts and floods and link it with the embracing of neoliberal political ideology, the rise of individualism as a result of political restructuring, and the inevitable changes to the conceptualisation of community. This is particularly important to note for a context such as disaster management where the impact on people can be devastating economically, socially, psychologically and physically, creating disadvantage and vulnerability, and limiting people’s capacity for self-reliance. To give credence to the conceptualisation by Offe (2012), as well as the assumption by M. Alston (2012), we can consider the following passage as quoted from the NSDR.

> Potential escalation in the frequency and magnitude of hazards and our increasing vulnerability to disasters presents governments with unprecedented calls on their resources and expertise. Governments’ desire to help communities in need, and pressure to help those affected, may be creating unrealistic expectations and unsustainable dependencies. Should this continue, it will undermine community capability and confidence. Therefore, communities need to be empowered to take shared responsibility for coping with disasters (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b, p. 1).

Pupavac (2012) offered the opinion that the contemporary resilience model is effectively still a top down approach which promotes reliance on professional interventions rather than placing any real trust in the individuals and communities themselves, indicating that the conceptualisation of shared responsibility on behalf of government is merely tokenistic. Embedded within the NSDR is comment which notes that whilst individuals and communities should take more responsibility with regard to disaster preparedness, they should also acknowledge that the state is better suited to advisory roles, and that part of the expectation from individuals
and communities is acceptance of state power and acquiescing with orders as they arise. This indicates perhaps a lack of faith in the local knowledge and connectivity accrued within the community over time and with experience, and from whence resilience would inevitably form. Pupavac (2012) stated that a refocus on community spirit is indicative of a tokenistic shift towards a resilience model that in reality promotes self-reliance through engagement with insurance companies and compliance with government strategies aimed at decreasing cost rather than being true partnerships between communities at risk and the government bodies with the duty of care to provide for them. Box et al. (2013) highlighted an issue here in that insurance companies are private business entities, not tied to the relationship between people and the state, indicating perhaps an intention for government to shift responsibility and lessen the bonds associated with their duty of care.

Redclift, Manuel-Navarete, and Pelling (2011) noted that within the context of aiming to decrease vulnerabilities to climate change, good government often incorporates stakeholder engagement with a view to boosting the capacity of the vulnerable to cope. Such coping strategies include building capacities for group action and self-protection, community risk assessments and social capital mobilisation (Redclift et al., 2011). However, these authors note that such government strategies assume a hegemonic vision of development for vulnerability reduction, perhaps not embracing diverse community groupings, cultures and values, and as such may well constitute a top down approach whereby decision makers lead the community along what they deem the appropriate path. In the local context, this may be viewed in the attitudes towards the appropriateness of community relocation, the assumption that floodplain dwellers should ‘accept’ their situation as potential disaster victims, and that the ‘choice’ of living in a floodplain overrides the right of floodplain dwellers to have expectations for contributing to decision making for their long-term community safety.

It was therefore apparent that there are questions around motive for the utilisation of community spirit as a component of the concept of shared responsibility for disaster management in contemporary Australia. Those questions include:
whether the invocation of community spirit is complementary to community led recovery which in turn may foster enhanced community resilience; and

whether it is merely cost-effective government aimed at shifting costs to the people.

It was important to consider whether this strategy is, in part, designed to influence the population to believe that self-reliance is beneficial and crucial to the ongoing sustainability of the nation. The underpinning intention of government is important in that it has implications for where the increasingly limited funding is channelled. With a true focus on community relationships as the means to building capacity to cope with disasters and thus increase community resilience, funding will inevitably be funnelled towards programs designed to build these relationships.

If one agrees more with the opining of writers such as Offe (2012), Pupavac (2012) and Redclift et al. (2011), there will be no such channelling of funding and the government dollar will be spent elsewhere, perhaps on infrastructure and higher level management with the expectation of personal insurance filling the void at the individual level. The underlying intention, or at least the end outcome, if indeed it is to force self-reliance rather than enhanced community resilience, is also significant for those who are implementing the policies. There may be an ethical dilemma if the ethical assumptions of those charged with delivering policy are contrary to government. Within ethical social work practice, facilitating policy that fosters a neoliberal assumption of self-reliance, as M. Alston (2012) suggests, is contrary to professional practice and certainly may add to the oppression of vulnerable people. A critical social work frame is conducive to identifying such potential for oppression.

Irrespective of whether community spirit is the contemporary catchphrase by which governments promote an altruistic means to coping with increased disaster risk or whether it is merely the effective use of rhetoric to limit state responsibility in a neoliberal ideological environment, there is a need to explore meanings of community spirit as significant to resilience in floods and the wider disaster management context. The NSDR notes the presence of community spirit and the assumption of shared responsibility and the
Sendai Framework notes shared responsibility (UNISDR, 2015). This generates the need for exploration. The exploration of intent of the Australian government in developing the NSDR is relevant in exploring outcomes with respect to funding and provides links between the concept of community spirit within community development frameworks that may be supported with government funding and facilitated with ethical social work service provision.

Community spirit, as explored from the perspective of those who are deemed to have directly experienced it, may well have meaning to all sectors that render it useful in coping with floods and other disasters. Community spirit may well be inherent to people thus making it readily available, and perhaps may be promoted in some way which then makes this spirit a manageable resource. Meaning may also differ depending upon the perspective from where it is experienced. The local government representative may hold a different meaning to that of the local flood victim. It is only in the elucidation of meaning from flood victims, those who help them and stakeholders at the level of government, that these questions can be answered. With the exploration of meaning, and the subsequent exploration of the questions raised here, there is potential for follow-on impact on funding and the allocation of roles and expectations for the collective with shared responsibility for contemporary disaster management.

**Locating Social Work, Disaster Recovery and Community Development**

Social work aims to work at the interface between people and their environments, with a knowledge base that supports work which empowers people to enhance their wellbeing (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). M. Alston and McKinnon (2005) and M. Alston (2009) noted that whilst retaining a focus on social justice and human rights, social work practice has had to make changes in line with ideological shifts, subsequent marketisation of welfare delivery, and the change in government discourse around vulnerability and disadvantage. They call for a return for social workers to the community base and suggest that contemporary social work needs to be at the grassroots level (M. Alston & McKinnon, 2005), particularly in the disaster context where social work has roots which
originated from grassroots movements using the inherent strengths of people in collectives in dealing with adversities (Mathbor & Bourassa, 2012). M. Alston (2013) and M. Alston, Hazeleger, and Hargreaves (2016) noted one of the emerging areas for social work and human service practice as in climate related events and disaster work. Dominelli (2011) and Mathbor and Bourassa (2012) agreed that social workers are charged with the responsibility to work with people in their environments and from a social justice and human rights perspective, and thus disaster work is well within the realm of practice.

Social work must embrace this emergent practice in disaster recovery work for a number of reasons, including:

- events are predicted to increase in number and intensity;
- the social impact of disasters is so detrimental to human wellbeing;
- social work skills are relevant to disaster work; and
- those most impacted by disasters are also those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged (M. Alston, 2013; M. Alston et al., 2016; Mathbor & Bourassa, 2012).

With increasing disaster events causing detriment to an increasing number of people, disaster work for social work professionals is becoming more relevant. Contemporary historical disaster events such as the bushfires in Victoria in 2009 and the 2011 Queensland floods have spurred the need for discussion and research around the role that social work can play in recovery (M. Alston et al., 2016). Irrespective of one’s personal beliefs around climate change and despite neoliberal assumptions of individualism and personal responsibility, M. Alston (2010) recommended that social work add a response to disaster similar to that which would follow a major pandemic or terrorist act. With lives lost, communities damaged or razed, and homeless and displaced people, social work can offer ethically sound, theoretically informed, and importantly, effective service provision, in the way that only social work is able.

Social workers have skills in crisis intervention and case management, the skills to work with diverse people of different cultures, socioeconomics, gender identities and ages (M. Alston, 2013), and experience in group and
Community work, counselling, sourcing grants, advocating for services, mediation and needs assessment (M. Alston, 2010). Much of the practice skillset of the contemporary social worker is relevant to disaster recovery work as is the understanding that social workers’ work is embedded in community work (Teater & Baldwin, 2012).

Given that those who are already disadvantaged and vulnerable are most impacted by a disaster, and with social work being concerned with human and community wellbeing and social workers having the skills to foster the sharing of resources so critically required in the post-disaster setting (Tan & Yuen, 2013), there is an assumed responsibility for the profession to respond. Certainly disasters impact those most vulnerable and disadvantaged, but disasters also create disadvantage with their impact on psychosocial and emotional wellbeing. Critical social work theory is beneficial here in allowing for identification of disadvantage of vulnerable groups and the oppression that accompanies such disadvantage.

Furthermore, a critical social work frame is also of benefit where it allows social workers to identify where government fails to recognise people are socioeconomically or culturally oppressed and vulnerable as a result of issues related to psychosocial wellbeing, age or gender and thus more so impacted by disaster, and where they fail to act to rectify it. A critical social work frame fosters the equitable distribution of human service provision to decrease the vulnerability of the most disadvantaged who are impacted in disaster. In addition to the three points made by M. Alston (2013), there is an increasing policy direction towards disaster work that is compatible with the fundamentals of professional social work and increasingly rooted in what can be described as critical social work theory as well as community development focused social work.

Community led recovery is the model desired by the Australian government for recovery post disaster and one which recognises both individual and community resilience as a core features (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a). Indeed, the NSDR noted “…that achieving a higher level of disaster resilience is a shared responsibility for individuals, households, businesses and communities, as well as for governments and the non-government sector” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). Community resilience is
thought to be determined largely by social factors based on interdependencies, which are in turn based on partnerships between all levels of government, non-government and corporate sectors (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). These partnerships are thought to be enhanced through support programs, services and resources provided both during the disaster and into the recovery period. These means to resilience building are core to the very definition of social work, to link people with government and advocate for people in their associations with broader systems, to provide avenues for communication within partnerships, and linking people with resources and services that promote their individual and community wellbeing (M. Alston, 2010; Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010).

For social work, community resilience has developed from theoretical knowledge around individual resilience and there is acknowledgement that community resilience is linked to community empowerment, participation, volunteerism and optimism (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2001). Chenoweth and Stehlik (2001) commented on research that suggested that community resilience is built through utilising protective factors, including community support, community empowerment and communal coping. Within the social work profession, despite an uneasy definition, widely acknowledged is the notion that resilience is built through the experience of struggle and adversity as people apply coping strategies to overcome challenges presented to them over the course of their lives (Pulla & Kumar Das, 2015).

Pulla and Kumar Das (2015) noted that resilience may become part of the culture of a community as it inevitably becomes part of their cognition and is shared between people and over generations. For social work, this is crucial practice wisdom that must be incorporated into contemporary practice in a neoliberal political environment and where there may be a decreased role for governments and policy aimed at self-responsibility, and indeed, an increasing risk of disaster. To discover the means by which a community can increase resilience, particularly if those means are inherently available within communities and able to be driven by communities themselves, can offer the social worker a sound practice
framework that meets needs, is ethical and works within policy, where the policy, and consequently the funding, cannot be altered.

Resilience was also noted as significant in the contribution that social workers are currently making in disaster recovery work. M. Alston (2010, 2013) noted the contribution of volunteers to community coping and resilience and pointed out a need for volunteerism to be supervised and managed, which she considered a role for social work, fluctuating as the individual and community coping and resilience changes throughout the stages of recovery. In the early stages, M. Alston (2010, 2013) felt that the community driven resilience coping can be decreased by a lack of time and energy, and that the role of social work is to pick up the slack until the community becomes ready to take back their control. There are links here for long-term resilience building with community development.

Dominelli (2011, 2013) also described the importance of social work in facilitating community resilience in areas affected by climate change, resulting in disasters. Dominelli (2011, 2013) described the role of social work in this context as providing empowering, community driven, community development work. Pyles (2007) concurred that community driven, community development work is the future for social work in the disaster context and cited a predominance of funding in crisis intervention and trauma counselling and a subsequent lack of funding for longer term community development work as an obstacle. Tan and Yuen (2013) concluded that social work in disaster recovery, from a strengths perspective, must incorporate a community’s inherent resources, capacities and coping. These authors’ discussed the importance of social recovery over individual recovery, and linked this underpinning with a strengths perspective which recognises inherent assets and strengths, with coping and community, and with social resilience.

Certainly, in a typical flood event and in the immediate flood recovery period, a crisis response is initiated and managed by emergency responders and local government and which incorporates the coordination of a voluntary response from charitable organisations, voluntary emergency responders and government agencies (M. Alston, 2010; M. Alston et al., 2016; Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b; Mathbor & Bourassa, 2012;
NSW State Government, 2010; UNISDR, 2015; Wagga Wagga City Council, 2015a). This has been the historical place for human service provision in the disaster context (M. Alston, 2010; Mathbor & Bourassa, 2012) and certainly there has been and will remain great contributions made by social work professionals in this context. Pyles (2007) and Mathbor and Bourassa (2012) similarly noted that social work historically has been more involved in disaster work that offers trauma intervention and coordination of relief efforts. However, increased needs, assumed shared responsibility and stretched federal, state and local resources, create a space for social work to make a broader contribution. With community development having a role in fostering the abilities of individuals and communities in building resilience in the disaster recovery context, and the long relationship between social work and community development, there is an inherent fit between social work and community development focused disaster work.

**Asset based community development.** Researchers espouse a community development model based on existing assets which incorporate social capitals and where the social worker has roles of advocate, manager and community organiser (Tan & Yuen, 2013). Tan and Yuen (2013) described assets for disaster work with communities as physical, individual, organisational and societal assets, as well as the different voluntary associations, social-cultural groups and faith-based organisations. An asset based approach for community development in disaster impacted communities is also embraced within the community recovery framework espoused by the NSDR (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a).

As defined in the Community Recovery Handbook (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a), community development is a way to work with people so as to empower those people and their communities to manage their own recovery. Important to note is the recognition that community development during recovery may be markedly different from community development work outside the disaster period (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a). Asset based community development (ABCD) was the recommended community development approach within this handbook in order to implement an optimal disaster recovery process.
ABCD is a specific assets based approach to community development (Kretzman & Knight, 1993). Kretzman and McKnight (1993), basing their work around three decades of community work experience, designed their framework around an alternative, capacity based, internally focused and relationship driven community development model (Kretzman & Knight, 1993). With numerous approaches to community development, there may be a distinction made between those models that work from a deficits approach and those that then take an assets based approach. The difference is relatively simple in that deficits approaches may consider the needs or issues within the community with a view to needs assessment for problem solving, whereas asset based approaches seek to identify assets that already exist within the community itself (Kenny, 2011; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). ABCD was defined similarly in the Community Recovery Handbook as the practice of using existing local networks and strengths, although this handbook noted the need for assessment of these capacities and their ability to meet community needs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a). Within an ABCD framework, if this assessment is not made with consideration of community collaboration and involvement, the reversion to a top down approach is a risk.

Kenny (2011) noted that asset based approaches are not premised on the idea that communities are perfect and have no issues, but rather that the people who comprise these communities and the communities themselves already contain significant resources, relationships, skill sets and knowledge that they use in times of need. An ABCD framework begins with the assumption that any community will inevitably have some strengths or capacity, and that each person within a community will have a gift or something to contribute. An ABCD framework also makes the assumption that the community development process should be internally focused, meaning that any agenda building and problem solving retains a focus within the community, not excluding the notion that external forces are present but ensuring that the first thought remains the community itself (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The third assumption rests on the idea that the ABCD process is relationship driven where relationships are viewed as connections both within and outside the community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003), and where the role of the community developer may be
defined as practice that fosters the connections between people and the relationships that result (Kretzman & Knight, 1993).

Kretzman and Knight (1993) considered the development of these relationships to be the most successful route to producing sustainable communities. This was reiterated by Chenoweth and Stehlik (2001) and Mathbor and Bourassa (2012), who discussed the role of the human service professional in linking the community from their reactive stage, in this context as flood recovery, to the proactive stage where the community participates in actively building resilience. They argued that despite the assumption that reanimation of community spirit by charismatic leadership is beneficial in reaction to a community trauma, this denies the longer term benefits of alliance or relationship building that fosters visible support networks between community members and from them to practitioners (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2001). ABCD links together with the concept of community led recovery that utilises community spirit as an asset if community spirit has meaning around connectedness internally and externally to the community, helping each other, sense of or a relationship with place, and also being an inherent aspect of the human condition or an inherently human asset.

Traditionally, disaster management has been centered around development with an economic focus for communities, and ABCD may not fit well for communities where government still retains this focus (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Bryson and Mowbray (1981) argued that the move towards community and community development work is problematic in and of itself, as in reality, community is a tokenistic and government cost cutting approach that romanticises the traditional geographic community and thus is irrelevant in a society where this is no longer the norm. ABCD also requires participation by the people within the communities which may not be easily attainable where there is little social capital or collectivism within the community (Bryson & Mowbray, 1981). With a core assumption of ABCD being that development—and in this case, for disaster management—should be an internally driven process, there may need to be clarification around the roles of external agencies and the limitations they may present (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Internal leadership to foster
communication of needs, collaborate with external agencies and collate community assets and needs, is also critical (Mathbor & Bourassa, 2012), and this may present challenges where clear leadership is lacking (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Finally, Mathie and Cunningham (2003) discussed enabling environments, and for the context of this thesis, there may be issues around the environment during times of disaster, particularly with regard to displacement of people and destruction of physical infrastructure and other capitals, that will present issues for utilising an ABCD framework.

**Community Development Based Social Work and Community Spirit**

Community spirit was recognised within the academic literature and in Australian government literature as both inherent as well as increased in a crisis situation, seemingly making it an obvious choice as a component of ABCD framed, community development focused, social work as an asset, strength or resource. Numerous authors commented on participants in their research commenting on a heightened sense of community spirit that arises out of the shared experience of a disaster (Boon et al., 2012; Carroll et al., 2009; Shepherd & Williams, 2014; Skerratt & Steiner, 2013; W. Smith et al., 2011; Tobin, 1999). Boon et al. (2012) noted in their research around bushfire that:

> Key informants were surprised by the strength, and by the breadth, of community solidarity during and after the fires. They found that locally, great community spirit emerged (p. 344).

Similarly, Carroll et al. (2009) commented with regard to their research in a flood affected community, that both service providers and flood victims note that a shared negative experience strengthened bonds within the community and allowed for the processes which facilitated community spirit and community bonding. Pupavac (2012), in connecting modern disasters with the work of Emile Durkheim, discussed the suggestion that communal meaning derived from shared disaster experience allows people to rise above the anomie, or the breakdown of social bonds and purposelessness, that Durkheim considers to be an element of modern society. In considering the significance of the increase in community spirit in a crisis situation, also consider the work of Shepherd and Williams (2014) who, in discussing
enhanced, nonphysical resources that arise in a disaster experience, noted the following:

If there is one thing the people of Marysville have shown in the face of the bushfire tragedy, it is community spirit (p. 14).

Community spirit appeared here to have meaning around the way that people consider other members of the community from within the crisis situation, and make efforts to connect with them in order to enhance their recovery process. The significance of community spirit which arises in a disaster was reiterated by Vasterling (2008), who stated that “community spirit dominated” (p. 24). It is also pertinent to note the work of Tobin (1999), who acknowledged the rise in community spirit as a response to the crisis of the disaster event, but added time limitations to the rise in spirit in stating that it may be limited to the immediacy of the disaster and for a short time after.

Given the recognition of community spirit that may be generated by the commonality of the disaster experience, and then acknowledging the potential for community spirit to then be considered one of the assets, strengths or resources that contribute to community recovery, we must then consider if community development focused social work can effectively harness this asset for the benefit of the community in future flood or other disaster situations. If community spirit is viewed as an asset and one which is contributory to the disaster management context for building community resilience and enhancing flood recovery, and social work is embracing disaster work as a context for contemporary practice, then social work must consider how to locate and foster the utilisation of the resource that is community spirit.

**A Broader Application for Social Work in the Disaster Context**

If indeed the invocation of community spirit is more the rhetoric of government literature looking to shift the onus of responsibility to individuals—even where it is a noted resource available for community resilience building—there is then room for argument that the role for the professional and ethical social worker in a disaster management context must embrace community development to facilitate the relationship between
people and government, perhaps in a broader manner than merely in a disaster recovery context. This thesis asks whether community spirit can be contributory to an asset based community development framework in the recovery context, as espoused by policy. The thesis then assesses the capacity for social work practice to participate in that process.

In keeping with ethical requirements encompassing recent research that endorses recognising community assets as a resource (M. Alston et al., 2016) and in line with critical social work theory, practitioners must strive for anti-oppressive practice which offers self-determination and empowerment to community members rather than the enforcement of top down, managerial and paternalistic ideas. Even as policy espouses shared responsibility and community development that builds resilience, it provides a narrow, event-related timeframe. The policy speaks about community development in the recovery period that fosters building resilience. If community spirit is inherent to communities and can be utilised from an ABCD framework to build community resilience, then perhaps social work may need to consider work outside the recovery context. Perhaps shared responsibility from a social work perspective requires empowering communities to build resilience in preparation for disaster, and particularly where there is a question as to what shared responsibility means at the policy level to act as advocate and agent for policy change.

If the policy is viewed as rhetoric and there is dissonance in peoples’ meaning for community spirit, social workers must ensure that their practice remains empowering rather than fostering the neoliberal requirement for self-reliance, lest that prove to foster oppressive practice for people who are already disadvantaged. Certainly, conceptually core to the ethical code underpinning professional social work, the code of ethics are the ideas that social workers, engaging in practice at the interface of people and their sociocultural and physical environments, have respect for personal autonomy of all people, work to promote justice and community participation, maintain a conscious application of power, facilitate self-determination, and promote empowerment of people and communities (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). Of particular importance
is the concept of empowerment embedded in Section 5.1.3: *Commitment to social justice and human rights*, where the code of ethics notes:

Social workers will aim to empower individuals, families, groups, communities and societies in the pursuit and achievement of equitable access to social, economic, environmental and political resources and in attaining self-determination, self-management and social and emotional wellbeing (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010, pp. 19).

With community development work highlighted as crucial for contemporary disaster work for the social work profession, and the application of an ABCD approach as endorsed at the federal level, broader application has the potential to mesh well with ethically located, professional social work that works with communities utilising assets like community spirit, in developing their resilience to disasters. For the context of this research, a specific context was decided on to ensure not only the best research outcomes in terms of adding to the professional social work knowledge base, but also safe and ethical practice. The context of North Wagga will be briefly described in the next chapter.
Chapter 4: The Flood Recovery Context (North Wagga Flood, March 2012)

The Location and the Event

This chapter provides historical and demographic information about the context of North Wagga. It includes information about the locale and the unique history associated with North Wagga and floods. It also describes the community that resides in the locale of North Wagga. And, finally, it offers information about the specific flood event which provides the context for this research.

Figure 1. Map of the Murrumbidgee Catchment Area.

(Note. Sourced from (Green, Petrovic, Moss, & Burrell, 2011, p. 25)).

This research is contextually located in the North Wagga community, a small rural suburb adjacent to the main city of Wagga Wagga in New South Wales, Australia. North Wagga is located on the northern floodplain of the Murrumbidgee River, which is both part of the Murrumbidgee catchment area (see Figure 1) as well as being the second largest river of the Murray Darling Basin (Catchment Management Authority, 2013). North Wagga is comprised of a varied demographic with regard to age, gender and socioeconomic status. With a history that dates back to the 1830s when it was originally settled as part of Eunonyhareenyha Station (Morris, 1980),
North Wagga today is home to 1,187 people in the wider area (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006), and 600 people within the village itself are recognised as protected by the levee system (State Emergency Service, 2006). North Wagga has been subject to a number of floods, the last noted inundation prior to 2012 being in 1974—and with road access suspended to the city in 1991 and evacuation in 2010 (State Emergency Service, 2006).

As the original site for white settlement in the area and growing from humble rural roots, North Wagga had become a thriving community by the late 1850s comprising two hotels, several lucrative businesses and the means to cross the river via ferry, vital with the area having become known as the junction of several important roads (Morris, 1980). Interestingly, the local Indigenous people did not settle on the floodplain, either on the higher section in North Wagga or the lower section in the central business district, but choosing instead to settle on sand hills near to the river but unlikely to flood (R. Green, personal communication, May 30, 2015).

Development continued, more on the southern bank of the river, but North Wagga still remained despite many challenges. Historically, the population was predominantly male and as a result the area was considered seedy and dangerous (Morris, 1980), perhaps worthy of less attention from government. As a result, North Wagga received the amenities available in line with development at later times than the rest of Wagga Wagga. With floods always an issue, the council decided during the 1950s to levee the city main and leave out North Wagga, rezoning the area as non-urban and imposing building restrictions (Morris, 1980). With an increase in restrictions in the 1970s as a result of record flooding in 1974, the population had to fight to remain and also to retain their rights, such as they were. In her history of North Wagga and the local school (1980), local historian Sherry Morris cited these inequities and historical difficulties as the reason for the cohesion and “self supporting spirit” (p. 20) demonstrated by the community of North Wagga.

With numerous and substantial flooding in the early 1970s, the North Wagga Residents Association, then headed by Albert Burgman, lobbied for levee protection for North Wagga (Morris, 1980). Burgman was a Dutch migrant and surviving prisoner of war who arrived in North Wagga after
leaving the Netherlands in 1950 (Burgman, 1990). He settled in North Wagga and commenced a life of significant community involvement during which his presidency of the North Wagga Residents Association was central to the flood protection and mitigation efforts that still protect North Wagga today (Burgman, 1990).

Historically, the most significant flood event occurred in 1974, which saw the river peak at 10.74 metres and which resulted in inundation of the entire northern floodplain. Despite a report commissioned by Wagga Wagga City Council in 1979 that recommended 1 in 100 year levee protection for North Wagga (Sinclair Knight and Partners, 1987), North Wagga has only ever been protected to a 1 in 20 year level by a ring levee, which was completed in 1991. This protective ring levee totals 4.3 kilometres in length and is constructed to a design height of 9.9 metres including freeboard (Richards, Conway, & Gray, 2014). Within this North Wagga ring levee are approximately 200 homes, some commercial and industrial enterprises, and also a public school and a preschool. Outside the protective levee are another 25 homes at risk of flooding as well as a number of dwellings that are not currently considered subject to flooding.

Figure 2. “We shall not be moved” signage at entry to North Wagga.

Upon entry to North Wagga via the main entry from the city main, one is met with a simple sign which states “we shall not be moved” (see Figure 2), which is the sentiment that local council met upon suggesting that the suburb be relocated following the 1974 flood. This sentiment is still widely
spoken of by residents and indeed factors into contemporary conversation around potential, local government responses to the 2012 flood. The signage and attached sentiment is noted as symbolic of the spirit of the North Wagga community in the face of both flood adversity and threat of displacement by local authority, and may well be indicative of a sense of place or place attachment commonly arising out of collective experience of natural disaster (Silver & Grek-Martin, 2015). Viewed as symbolic of the cohesive strength of the community, this same sentiment — “we shall not be moved” — may then well be viewed as defiance from the perspective of local authority.

Figure 3: Aerial view of the 2012 flooding in North Wagga.

During the period between 2010 and 2012, with successive La Niña periods—the 2010-2011 being the strongest in documented history (Bureau of Meterology, 2012a) — the floodplains of the Murrumbidgee experienced a number of flood events of varying intensity. A wet catchment and full dams, coupled with a significant rain event over the already sodden catchment, resulted in a major flood event which caused significant flooding and inundation along the entire length of the Murrumbidgee River in March 2012. This rain event in early March 2012, as a result of a slow moving low pressure system, resulted in record rainfall for the Murrumbidgee catchment over a 7-day period (Bureau of Meterology, 2012b).

During this event the floodplain adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River at Wagga Wagga was inundated with floodwaters. The river, peaking at 10.56 metres at the Hampden Gauge, meant that the North Wagga levee (with a final design height of 9.9 metres) was overtopped significantly (Richards et
al., 2014). This was the first time the protective levee had been overtopped, with only one serious threat in 2010 and an instance of being isolated by floodwaters in 1991, an event which anecdotally reinforced the notion of the security of the levee as it occurred almost at the same time the levee was completed and there was no inundation at that time.

For some people, the threat of this 2012 flood was regarded as erroneous with the assumption that the levee would provide protection and that North Wagga would never flood. During the 2012 event, at a community meeting on the Friday prior to inundation, the residents were informed by the lead agency that they would not need to evacuate and that they should prepare to be isolated for up to a week. Two days later, at around 4 pm on Sunday afternoon, the residents received evacuation orders via text and phone call and were given instructions to evacuate that evening.

For the residents of North Wagga inside the protective ring levee, the 2012 flood event resulted in inundation of approximately 190 homes, commercial and industrial enterprises, as well as both the school and preschool (Richards et al., 2014). The residents were ordered to evacuate and refused the right to return until lead authorities (the SES and Wagga Wagga City Council) gave permission. There were a number of residents who refused evacuation and remained in their homes for the duration, with at least one instance of people sheltering on a rooftop for some time (Hone, 2013-14). The length of time that residents were refused re-entry is, to date, a notable theme of concern, perhaps also providing evidence to support the theoretical significance of place attachment in the disaster recovery process (Silver & Grek-Martin, 2015).

Impact varied considerably on an individual basis, with some homes being inundated up to a depth of 2 metres to homes that narrowly escaped inundation. There were also properties which, having been raised following the 1974 flood, were equipped to deal with this flood event. Variables in flow behaviour and preparedness activities also factor into the individuality of experience of flood impact. Insurance was another notable variable with some properties being fully insured, some insured for certain types of flood and thus not covered for this event of riverine flooding, and some uninsured.
Variance between experiences with different insurance companies is a commonality in narratives post event.

In the 3-year period since that time, the community of North Wagga has demonstrated what may be considered recovery, evidenced by the rebuilding of infrastructure of the built environment, as well as indicators of psychosocial and emotional recovery such as the strengthened Residents Association and the return to pre-flood lifestyles. The majority of homes have either been renovated, or in some cases, rebuilt. A small number of homes have been lifted and flood proofed at significant personal cost. The commercial enterprises have resumed trading, including, for example, two hotels, a mixed business and cafe, and a mechanical workshop. Two of these commercial ventures have changed hands in this post flood period, indicating a return to commercial real estate viability. Industrial enterprises have resumed trade, and numerous small businesses which were home based have been re-established.

The school has recommenced activity as has the pre-school, both having been functional in alternative accommodation in the central business district from as early as a few weeks post inundation. The local Residents Association, in conjunction with council and funded both by council grants and privately sourced funding, has built a community park, community noticeboard, resumed management of the community hall, repainted and reroofed that hall, and completed a community development art project. The association has also successfully lobbied for rezoning as a village to decrease rates, for a major school crossing, and for numerous small improvements to community infrastructure.

Further visible signs of recovery include the return of the residents to their homes, the tenancy of rental properties where residents had relocated in the recovery period, the reconstruction and preparedness activities visible in the community, the sale and purchase of real estate, the resumption of community activities such as the football/netball club, and the resumption of business activity coupled with the establishment of new businesses. There are still visible signs of flood impact with water-level marks still apparent on some fencing and commemorative plaques placed in a number of locations such as the local hotel. The “we shall not be moved” sign remains
at the entry to the village. Focus has shifted to local council responses to levee upgrade and future flood preparedness.

In March 2014, at the celebration of the 2-year post flood milestone, the residents celebrated with a barbeque at the local park, which the President of the local Residents Association, Laurie Blowes, had identified as a way to raise community spirit ("Mayor set to lose trademark beard," 2014). Mr Blowes had, in earlier media articles, linked this same community spirit to the capacity for the community to rebuild (Brunsdon, 2012). Today, North Wagga is still acknowledged in the media for its community spirit as a means to community recovery and resilience (Shyling, 2014).

This flood event, having the widest impact and thus the most significant community response, is the event commonly referred to when people discuss contemporary flood recovery in the local context. Indeed, upon hearing that one is a North Wagga resident when conversing with people from outside the suburb, this is the one event to which the majority of people refer, followed by the 1974 event. This particular event then is the most appropriate context in which to embed this research. The 2012 event is still widely and openly discussed within the community. It is common to hear residents sharing their flood event narratives in most social settings. With current political discussion at the local government level focusing on future flood options for North Wagga and the city main (Wagga Wagga City Council, 2010), interest in the 2012 flood remains elevated and contemporary discussion revolves around preparedness for future events and resilience building.

Given that every flood is different, the impact varies, the response from the wider community differs, the experience of the disaster victims differs, and the outcomes are also varied, restricting the research to this one specific event and within this one context appears sound. Although, prior to the 2012 event there was definition between those residents who are long-term residents with previous lived experience of floods, and newer residents who joined the community in the post levee construction period, both groups were likely to have some awareness of the flood history of the community irrespective of their acceptance of the possibility of future flooding. Embedding this research within the context of a single event in one
community context allows each participant to provide data around the same experience. In this way, the variance in lived experience may be viewed as nuanced interpretation by each individual.

The community has had little opportunity for formal research to be undertaken and there is a feeling among some residents that people outside “don’t understand what it’s like”. As such, there exists a reluctance to engage with external researchers. This research, with an insider view, may have appeared to be more inviting to engage with. For a community which has experienced little formal research, there were a number of advantages. The community was not tired of participating and this research represented a fresh opportunity. The opportunity was also beneficial to the participants in that it allowed them to share their stories of their own volition, in a safe environment and with a known community member. The fact that this community has demonstrated recovery, remains at risk to date, may well be at increased risk due to factors such as climate change and development in the floodplain, and had the opportunity to share their story with a researcher with whom there is established connection and trust, provided rationale for researching in this context and around this specific event.

The Community

Discussion of the community must inevitably explore a number of elements: membership, structure, tenure and some historical context. With an earthen wall providing an inherent delineation, the North Wagga community appears to be neatly defined with membership simply organised by geographical location. There are of course people whose homes are outside the levee who have varying levels of membership. For the purpose of this thesis, participants have been drawn only from the population inside the levee for a number of reasons. Firstly, the experience of evacuation and return are slightly different for people inside and outside of the levee. There are different emergency response procedures for those inside the levee. They are forced to evacuate, often with threat of prosecution if necessary. The people who reside outside the levee are able to make that decision for themselves. The people inside the levee receive emergency evacuation messages from the SES but are also prevented from returning to their homes.
until the SES gives the all clear. People outside the levee are able to return whenever they can facilitate their return.

Secondly, within the community there is also status, and commonly held community membership beliefs. It is assumed knowledge from within the levee that the residents outside the levee are not considered to have the same membership to the community and are often viewed as outsiders to varying degrees. As such, they do not appear to benefit from this membership in the same way, they do not attend the local Residents Association meetings, and they do not participate in community life to the same degree that residents inside the levee do. There are of course some exceptions to this unofficial rule, and for some external levee dwellers there are social connections within the levee that foster for them a more cohesive sense of membership.

Thirdly, with development limited by local government planning controls, there has been little change to the community size and residential organisation over time. New residential development is prohibited within the levee so very few new dwellings have been constructed, only where a previous dwelling has been demolished. There are a number of vacant blocks resulting from council buybacks after the 1974 flood and unpaid rates stemming from that event. In the early 2000s, Wagga Wagga City Council offered these blocks for public sale. They were largely purchased by the adjoining property owners and, as such, there are a number of small acreages. Most of the blocks in North Wagga are at least a quarter acre and North Wagga is popular as a place to raise families, keep horses and poultry, and grow vegetable gardens. North Wagga has a particularly rural style.

Historically, due to the flood risk, financing a home through bank borrowings was not possible. With the completion of the levee in 1991 and a significant number of flood-free years, the sense of risk diminished both within the community and in the broader community. There was increased interest in North Wagga as an economical alternative to highly priced central Wagga Wagga living, and real estate prices increased accordingly over time. As some of the older residents passed away during this period, there was opportunity for other people to buy into the community. Some of these were the grown children of existing residents, returning home with young children to raise their families in a familiar community setting with
family close by. Some of the people that bought into the community at this time were complete newcomers with no existing ties.

The older homes were renovated and, in most cases, without consideration for flood proofing with the decreased sense of risk fostering a new sense of security. Council development protocols required that homes still be renovated with flood proof materials but this was largely ignored by those who did not require development approval for their renovations. In recent years, a number of blocks have been purchased by tradesmen and light industry, and sheds have been erected for the storage of materials and as a work base. This has changed the experience of community somewhat as there are people who are present only during the day and who don’t appear to participate in the community life apart from residence but yet have some claim to membership through this residence. For a community with a long history of primarily rural residential living, this is quite a change.

Anecdotally, people within the North Wagga community make distinction between those who are ‘locals’ and those who are ‘newcomers’, which is reflected in the following statement from one of the research participants:

I noticed a drift in the years between floods and that there was people buying houses in North Wagga and believe it or not it’s those people who bought in the latter years who like in the ten years before the 2010 flood, those who have moved in and were not full au fait with what North Wagga was fully about, were the first to complain about we didn’t know, we didn’t know, well that to me is ignorance (Graeme).

There are a number of long tenured families living in North Wagga with a number of generations all remaining in the community or, as mentioned, returning when space opens though the passing of older residents. These people are well connected to community, have social and familial relationships which offer social ties and support, and are considered somewhat exclusionary at times by others. The ‘newcomer’, prior to the 2010 and 2012 flood events, who may actually have lived in the community for ten or more years with the last inundation having been 1974, would usually have had significantly less connections, no shared experience of flooding and less shared history with regard to the threat of relocation. In the post flood period there is a heightened sense of belonging for the latter group and an increased sense of cohesion amongst all members. The
‘newcomers’, having survived the 2012 flood, are now considered locals by those residents such as Graeme, who consider them to now have the knowledge of flood.

“We shall not be moved”. No research around flood recovery in North Wagga could ignore this statement that is to be found on a sign at the main entry to the community. The original sign, recently re-erected following vandalism of a newer model that had been donated by the local football club, is well known both within the community and by the broader community, for the sentiment it invokes. The sentiment expressed by the sign is maligned by those who still wish to see North Wagga relocated and razed, and cherished by stalwart locals to whom the very mention of relocation of the village promotes an outcry. The sign represents a collective response to the suggestion of relocation following the 1974 flood and has become a catchcry for the perceived spirit of North Wagga, invoking concepts such as stoicism, stubbornness and the idea that North Wagga is a close knit, cohesive and independently minded community with a unique history and identity that sets it well apart from the city main (Hone, 2013-14).

Significantly, since the 2012 flood there has been the expected discussion around levee protection and the adequacy and equity around levee protection for North Wagga (“North Wagga resident backs one in 100 year flood protection for suburb,” 8 April 2015). There is within the community, much derision aimed at council for the inequity in levee protection, with the city main having an expectation of protection at a 1 in 100 year level, but with North Wagga only being expected to have a 1 in 20 year levee protection. In the post flood period, modelling has deemed both levees inadequate with regard to their original design expectations (Richards et al., 2014) and there has been much discussion about what the upgraded protection should be.

The North Wagga Residents Association, unhappy with the idea of lesser protection and in response to council information gathering as being deemed inefficient for this specific community, has recently conducted a suburb wide doorknock to determine public opinion about levee protection. Overwhelmingly, the community requested 1 in 100 year protection which
was deemed both environmentally and fiscally sound in the most recent modelling conducted by council (Richards et al., 2014). As a result, council has resolved to consider equitable protection for North Wagga.

Simultaneously, there has been much discussion around a proposed harness racing track development that is proposed within the North Wagga floodplain and involves significant development on land that council sold to Harness Racing NSW for a small sum (E. Smith, 2015; Wagga Wagga City Council, 2015b). The proposed development has resulted in much animosity towards council and developers from many people including the North Wagga community for whom there is concern regarding increased flood impact (E. Smith, 2015). This is an ongoing issue and creates some acrimony both within the community, as some residents have harness racing interests, but also some cause for consternation between North Wagga and the broader community where some believe that choosing to live on a floodplain means accepting the inevitable consequence of flood irrespective of future development.

These factors combine to make North Wagga a unique context for this thesis and a great context in which to have stimulated discussion around community spirit. It is in this context that this researcher had inside knowledge of the community and thus an insider understanding of how the community functions, the key players in the community and of the flood experience, which allows for a more complete understanding of the way that these factors may influence the experience of flood and community spirit. With new understanding of the meanings that community spirit has, the applicability to other communities can now be addressed.

It is evident that the context of North Wagga, whilst a beloved geographical and relational community for the participants of this study, has also been a source of both historical and contemporary conflict and of course trauma. It is vital then that research performed in this context and by a fellow resident who is also a social worker, was ethical, professional and above all non-harming. Thus, a sound conceptual framework was required comprising an underpinning in critical social work to foster ethical and anti-oppressive work, and a qualitative methodology that fostered the expression of
participants’ lived experiences in a way that is both safe and empowering and allowed for tangible research outcomes.
Chapter 5: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology for the thesis, which was conducted as a qualitative study, located phenomenologically and framed by Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This chapter discusses the theoretical underpinning of this research with critical social work theory. It also details the way that IPA is utilised as a framework to allow for each of the parts of the research question to be answered.

With an aim to make a significant contribution to our understanding of community spirit, this study explores meanings from a range of existing sources pertinent to the flood recovery process, including the macro view from Australian governments and the media. It then builds on this information through exploring the experience of community spirit from residents of a flood impacted community, as well as other stakeholders in the recovery process including service providers and local government and community leaders. These nuances of meaning will be explored to determine if meaning is correlated with the expected role of community spirit in the flood recovery process as per the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) and broader Australian government. Using this new information the study will then explore the ways in which community spirit may be employed through an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) framework to promote community led recovery. The ABCD framework is most appropriate to use as it has been federally endorsed (Emergency Management Australia, 2003) as the proposed model for contemporary disaster management.

This study aims to achieve this knowledge and understanding through research conducted as an insider researcher and as a critical social worker, guided always as a social work professional by the AASW code of ethics to ensure safe practice (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). With these aims, the three-part research question has been developed as follows:

Research Question

1) What does the term ‘community spirit’ mean? (RQ1)
   (a) How is community spirit presented in academic literature? (RQ1a)
(b) How is community spirit presented in Australian government issued flood recovery/disaster management literature? (RQ1b)

(c) How is community spirit presented in other literature which has a flood recovery focus, including Hansard and the media? (RQ1c)

2) What is the lived experience of community spirit with regard to a flood event for individuals and other stakeholders such as local government representatives, service providers and community leaders? (RQ2)

(a) How did stakeholders, including government representatives, community leaders and service providers, experience community spirit during the North Wagga 2012 flood recovery process? What meaning have these stakeholders constructed about community spirit as a result of their flood recovery experience? (RQ2a)

(b) What was the experience of community spirit for residents within the North Wagga community who have recovered from the 2012 flood event? What meaning have these people constructed about community spirit resulting from this recovery experience? (RQ2b)

(c) Is there congruence in the meaning of community spirit between communities, stakeholders and macro level disaster management policies and frameworks? (RQ2c)

3) If considered an asset, how can community spirit be contributory to community development frameworks which may be utilised to promote community led recovery as endorsed by the state? (RQ3)

(a) If community spirit can be considered an asset from an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, how may it best be utilised to identify capacity to promote community led recovery and disaster management from preparedness through prevention, response and recovery? (RQ3a)

**Critical Social Work Theory**

This study was theoretically framed within critical social work theory. Critical social work may be defined as social work practice that is derived
from a diverse range of theoretical approaches that aim to critique the social status quo and attempt to formulate the means to addressing the practice that may endorse it (Weiss-Gal et al., 2014). These critical theoretical perspectives are influenced by Marxist, radical and socialist theories as well as feminist models and also anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and human-rights based approaches (Weiss-Gal et al., 2014). For Australian social work, with its underpinning in psychoanalysis, critical social work can be traced to the radical movement during the 1970s which was influenced by Marxist thought and sociological theories and that argued that social work was merely a form of social control aimed at preserving the conservative, elitist, Western hegemony (Briskman, Pease, & Allan, 2009).

A key concept of critical social work is the critique of this social status quo and thus critique of the role that social workers play in maintaining it (Weiss-Gal et al., 2014). With the basis of social work grounded in a therapeutic and medical model and with a history of paternalism and oppressive practice across numerous contexts for social work practice, critical social work offers the contemporary social worker the means by which to address oppressive practice (Weiss-Gal et al., 2014).

A key aim for this study was to ascertain whether there was there congruence and dissonance in meaning of community spirit between communities, stakeholders and macro level disaster management policies and frameworks. It also examined whether contemporary disaster management policy offers what it promised—that is, a partnership between government, business, communities and individuals—or whether it is more a policy-driven passing of responsibility to individuals and communities. A critical social work frame allowed for this investigation to be conducted through exploring the lived experience of key players in a disaster event, seeking clarification of their experience of the concept of shared responsibility in and around their experience of community spirit.

The NSDR endorses shared responsibility; however, it perhaps does this without alerting or clarifying the individuals and communities of their role in this responsibility. Members of parliament noted that community spirit was influential in the disaster recovery context but without expansion to discuss management, application or participatory roles. Certainly, as a
resident of North Wagga prior to the flood event, I had no knowledge of the NSDR document nor any understanding of this interpretation of my share of any responsibility. There was, and still remains in the community, a widely held belief that perhaps the authorities don’t offer the right type of help, that people need to be somewhat self-reliant, and that there was in this event, tangible hindrance of self-reliance activities by the State Emergency Service (SES) and local council as the visible lead agencies (this is discussed further within the participant’s responses in the findings chapters: Chapters 7 and 8).

There is no formal structure within the community to date which offers to manage community spirit as a resource; rather, it is an assumed element. It is important to consider this policy and understanding of responsibility and community spirit as inherently flawed if there is no dissemination to the very people it includes in its execution, with clarity so that roles and responsibilities are fully understood. If there is an intention from the Australian government, through policy and rhetoric, to merely pass on the cost of disaster recovery to individuals, assuming they should and will provide for themselves through insurance and utilise their own individual and community strengths (including community spirit) to recover from disaster, there is a possibility that social work operating within these policies and under such government, and delivering service as indicated, may add to oppression of the vulnerable and disadvantaged people they purport to assist. If also, there is an interpreted meaning for community spirit which factors into the expectations of the Australian government which effectively involves volunteers and individuals helping each other, which is then hindered in action, a critical social work frame allows for the unpacking of disparity and highlights negative outcomes for the community (Mendes, 2009).

This research aimed to explore constructed meanings from stakeholders and from macro level policy and then to explore the way that macro level meanings equate with or differ to those from residents and various flood recovery stakeholders. In illuminating any dissonance in meaning between residents, stakeholders and government, a critical social work frame allows for the challenge of any oppressive outcome or structural oppression for any
of these groups resulting from such dissonance (Allan, 2009b). This study looked at macro level Australian frameworks and policies that impact at the individual and community level, and the power held by residents and other stakeholders in their flood recovery process as they provide interpreted meanings of community spirit, which they note as pertinent.

Fook (2003) noted that critical social work should aim to challenge any action that may oppress a marginal group. In elucidating deeper meaning for community spirit, and meaning that originates in the people that are assumed to be utilising this spirit, the enhanced knowledge effectively provides the people with power that comes from knowledge. Further, it is assumed that the findings and resultant discussion of this study will offer a contribution to the body of knowledge for social work in community development, which is focused on resilience in disaster, in a way that offers benefit to people and communities rather than fostering oppressive practice. This investigation, within a critical social work frame, will allow for the role of social work to be better understood in the balance between meeting individual and community needs in the disaster context and the requirement to work within contemporary policy, indicating the areas where social workers need to advocate for change.

In adopting a critical social work frame for this research, the researcher has engaged with participants who have been assured that participation will be to their overall benefit rather than detriment, which was particularly important for a community that has already suffered serious trauma. With an insider researcher, there was the potential for issues around the incentive to participate, the consideration of potential for negative outcomes from participating, and the potential focus of the researcher on personal goals and desired outcomes. Importantly, a critical social work frame created a safe research space as it asks the researcher to seek and be aware of the potential for oppression of participants. For social work, where much of the vast body of knowledge can be attributed to practice wisdom and insider roles in the acquisition of knowledge, critical theories give substance and purpose to this practice wisdom (Pease, 2009), and also for the purpose of this research, they endorse an insider researcher role.
Critical social work also calls for practice which is reflective and reflexive (Fook, 2003; Pease, 2009), which again corresponds with the chosen methodology, IPA, in that researcher knowledge, values and experiences can be understood and used beneficially, their influence noted, and practice altered accordingly. This critical reflection is viewed as a source of knowledge as the social work researcher interprets the diversity of the participant transcripts alongside personal wisdom and values, and can allow for the most sound interpretation of participants’ lived experience without being impacted by the researcher’s own experience (Pease, 2009).

Community led recovery, enhanced by community development work from an ABCD frame that recognises inherent community strengths, is appropriately framed by critical social work as evidenced by the following:

Critical social work within a postmodern tradition challenges assumptions about power … as something that is possessed, repressive and operating in a top down way… (Allan, 2009b, p. 34).

The desired outcome of this research was to determine if community spirit can constitute a source of power that individuals and communities exposed to flood can use and create for times of recovery and also for preparedness in building resilience. Coupled with an ABCD framework as espoused in policy (Emergency Management Australia, 2003), and which sits comfortably within both researcher social work positioning and similarly fostering an insider approach, a critical social work frame will further enhance the importance of community owned and driven responses within a disaster context (Allan, 2009b). This allowed for the exploration of power as a ‘bottom up’ source of power that is empowering for individuals and communities. Community spirit may function as an invisible power network between communities and the wider disaster management community and it is perhaps community development, which is asset based (assuming community spirit is an asset), that may facilitate the broader social work practice context for building and using community spirit in a meaningful way.

Briskman, et al, (2009) stated that critical social work must acknowledge some critique. Such critique indicates critical social work may have a lack of awareness of feminist theory (Briskman, et al., 2009) which is relevant
for discussion around disasters where often women are more vulnerable prior to disaster and face a greater impact post disaster where their vulnerabilities are exacerbated and as well as where their response being impacted by gender roles, societal expectations and response (Drolet, Dominelli, Alston, Mathbor and Wu, 2015). In maintaining focus on the research questions and core focus of this study, these gender based issues were not explored for this research but are duly noted here.

Further critique offers that there may be an issue where in deciding what an issue is for a group and attempting to foster their empowerment through consciousness raising and facilitating advocacy, there may be potential to limit self-determination and autonomy where the interpretations and feelings of the group and the individuals within the group are not adequately heard (Briskman, et al, 2009). For the disaster context this is important critique in that when people are in a vulnerable position due to a disaster event, they may not be able to identify, interpret or communicate their needs or conceptualise their future requirements and thus may not be in a position to advocate for themselves even where supported. It is critical here that the social worker practice reflectively and reflexively and be aware of the limitations that people may be facing.

Choosing a Methodology: Qualitative Research

Social research has an overarching aim of identifying and exploring social patterns and social meanings (Walter, 2013) and can allow for the utilisation of the accrued knowledge to identify issues and problems and the ways and means to amend them (Sarantakos, 2005). I have a personal leaning towards a qualitative methodological positioning. This results from professional undergraduate training in a social work skillset that encourages active listening and understanding the positioning of people as a result of their lived experience. It also results from the communication skills and practice wisdom that foster interpretation of underlying issues from information provided by people coupled with knowledge of broader mitigating factors.

The research question certainly also lends itself well to a qualitative frame. Far from simply being defined by the absence of quantifiable, statistical data, qualitative research offers the opportunity to discover and explore meanings and interpretations that people make in their everyday lives as
they interact in and with the social world (Walter, 2013). Given (2016) states that qualitative research explores the ‘why’ questions, probing the meanings that people make of events in their lives that can lead to developing an understanding of why people think the way they do. Qualitative research also values rich and descriptive data, it is firmly located within the individuals’ perspective, and it has a grounding in everyday life (Howitt, 2010). For this study, which seeks to explore diverse meanings that people have constructed from a shared personal experience of a flood recovery, the use of a qualitative methodology was both foreseeable and logical.

This study was conducted with a qualitative methodological positioning where several assumptions were made about the nature of qualitative research. These assumptions included (Given, 2016):

- That qualitative research focuses on individual, subjective thoughts, experiences and meanings and is contextually specific.
- That qualitative research supports the notion that multiple meanings are probable.
- That qualitative research is interpretive in analysis and writing.
- That qualitative research is inductive so that theory may (or may not) emerge from the data.

Qualitative research by nature suggests interaction with live participants who, if we don’t ask what they think, then we cannot assume to know (Given, 2016). In this study, the use of Australian government documents, written text from political speakers via Hansard, and media and various social media sources as secondary data, added to the rich data collected from the human participants.

Methodology is the strategy of the research as guided by ontological and epistemological positioning (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 29). Locating the researcher within ontological and epistemological positions guides the way that the research design evolves (Given, 2016). Given (2016) stated that the researcher’s worldview shapes the research design through influencing decision making throughout the research process. Thus, positioning oneself with regard to ontological and epistemological philosophical stances is an
important first step in research design. In accordance with researcher worldviews, overarching broader theoretical concepts of constructionism and interpretivism were used to frame this study.

This study was rooted ontologically in constructionism where social research allows for the search for meaning as interpreted from conscious interaction with the everyday world and constructed within a sociocultural and historical context (Sarantakos, 2005). The result is that people construct different meanings, or different versions of reality, depending on how they interpret their experience (Given, 2016) within their personal and also the social world (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 54). For this study, the context remained the same so that the experience from which the human participants were constructing meaning was invariable.

Epistemologically, this study was situated within an interpretivist frame which relates to the fundamental way in which people go about making meaning from interaction; that is, how they interpret what they experience (Carey, 2012). J. A. Smith and Osborn (2008) stated that it is within this interpretivist frame that the researcher explores a participant’s lived experience, through their own experiential lens, to discover the meanings the participant has made from their perception of a specific event. This research was embedded within a specific event in a set context to foster interpreted meanings that could be analysed alongside of each other to note the differences and similarities in meanings. The secondary data remained embedded within the broader disaster/flood context to achieve the same end. These philosophical underpinnings fostered a phenomenological paradigm to guide this research.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience as experienced within the sociocultural context in which phenomena occur and are experienced, and from the perspective of the person who has the experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). This study was phenomenological in that it explored the lived experience of the participants in relation to their interpretation of community spirit and the meanings they hold for the concept with regard to their flood recovery experience, within the 2012 March flood event in North Wagga.
Phenomenology is located somewhere between realism and relativism (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011), where interpretative phenomenologists who align with the work of Heidegger lean towards relativism (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011). Phenomenology can be attributed to the work of Edmund Husserl whose aim was to provide “fundamental descriptions free from distortion by theoretical predispositions” (Cooper, 1999, p. 215). Husserl thought knowledge was to be derived from the way people experienced things “to the things themselves” and where the researcher involves themselves in a process of “bracketing off” (Cooper, 1999, p. 215).

Heidegger, building on Husserl but still belonging to the broader phenomenological tradition, believed that people were too much “beings-in-the-world” (Cooper, 1999, p. 216) for this bracketing off, and that inevitably the study of the experiences of people was always going to occur through a sociocultural and historical lens (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). This positioning will further be demonstrated in this study to facilitate an insider researcher positioning where the researcher is also embedded within the same sociocultural context and where that enhances the research in fostering the interpretive process.

Eatough and Smith (2008) state that as important as Husserl’s belief of ‘to the things themselves’ is, the underpinning idea from Heidegger is ‘Dasein’. Dasein means ‘being in the world’ and relates to the idea that people interpret their experience as they are contextually located in the world within that experience, but with what Heidegger called the ‘factual experience’. Phenomenological researchers seek to explore the factual existence or the experiences that people have in the way that they appear to them. People construct meaning as a result of these experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008), with the understanding that these meanings may be different for other people within the same setting. This study proposes that the meanings that people hold for community spirit in relation to their experience in the 2012 North Wagga flood, they have constructed from being embedded in that experience and have interpreted though their own unique lens (Eatough, Smith, & Shaw, 2008). The end result is not new knowledge because the experience is already understood by the person, but rather that this understanding comes to be interpreted (Bleicher, 1980), in this case, by a researcher who shares the experience.
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and the Insider Researcher

Further narrowing from this broad phenomenological lens, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analytical (IPA) conceptual framework was used. IPA supports the constructionist notion that sociocultural and historical processes impact lived experience and affect the interpretations people make about their experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA also has underpinnings in hermeneutics or the theory of interpretation which endorses Heideggerian ideas about meaning being interpreted by individuals, from within their lived experiences and from within the context of experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Importantly, IPA notes the difficulty in viewing that unique lived experience readily and acknowledges that interpretation is required from both the participant in interpreting their experience and also for the researcher in interpreting that interpretation (Eatough et al., 2008). This process is known as the double hermeneutic (Eatough et al., 2008; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008).

IPA incorporates the Heideggerian concept that the role of the researcher is dynamic (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007) and requires the researcher to use their own knowledge, experiences and intuitions to interpret the interpretations provided by the research participants (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). The researcher’s understanding of phenomena is always mediated by their existing knowledge and experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008), but these preconceptions and this knowledge are critical in making sense of the interpreted world of the participant (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). IPA supports the idea that the researcher is attempting to achieve an insider perspective (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). An insider research perspective may present some difficulties but the rationale for the choice of research context, where in this case the researcher is an insider, is supported by the choice of an IPA methodology which facilitates this insider positioning.

IPA assumes that the researcher will have values and viewpoints that may well influence both the data collection and analysis as well as the interpretive aspect (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011). For the purpose of this study, in an insider role, this allowed me to embrace my experience as a resident in the context for study, utilise my connections and access to
participants as a resource, as well as to induce an empathetic relationship with participants that facilitated their sharing of narratives which form the data for the study. An insider role also enhanced the data analysis as well as the presentation of findings in that the sharing of the experience fosters a deeper interpretive ability embedded in an empathetic understanding of the event.

There are both benefits and detriments to taking an insider role in a community setting, whether researcher or practitioner. This study proposes to link the two (research and practice) with recommendations for social work in a community development focused, disaster context. Kalei Kanuha (2000, p. 441) state that an insider researcher “often arrives at a project from an emic perspective. Emic suggests a subjective, informed, and influential standpoint”. Thus, of benefit is that the researcher’s shared lived experience with the participants will potentially increase researcher credibility, more rapidly induce the trust necessary for participants to be open, and perhaps allow for a depth of exploration not otherwise achievable from an outside researcher. It must be noted that other researchers did attempt to engage the community via the Residents Association in the post flood period. My insider researcher knowledge, and my position of secretary of the Residents Association (which included liaising between these researchers and the residents), allowed me to see that the external researchers’ attempts were met with distrust, an assumption that researchers would lack understanding, and some fear of judgement and reprisal for choices made during the flood such as the choice not to evacuate.

Of further benefit is the idea that being firmly embedded in the research context may also increase the researcher’s sense of responsibility in designing ethically sound and constructive research that is of benefit to the participants (Lee, McGrath, Moffatt, & George, 2002). Kalei Kanuha (2000) infers that an insider researcher position for social work research may dissolve some of the inherent power imbalance formed by insider-outsider or subject-object dichotomies. There is also the benefit that as an insider researcher I knew the community, the event and the people so I understood immediately what and who the participants were referring to without need
for explanation. This would appear to be the most significant means to establishing the trust-based relationship between researcher and participant.

Of course, there are also inherent difficulties associated with an insider research role. The re-living of difficult personal traumatic experience by the researcher in hearing narratives is probable (Kalei Kanuha, 2000), and need be noted at least for the potential impact that may have on the research and the participants. This indeed was an element of the research that was experienced and I found that taking the time between interviews to process each narrative was integral. Indeed, even in the collection of literature this was an element to be noted, when the reading of a Hansard document would often produce an emotional response. Acknowledging the personal impact was necessary so as to not negatively impact the interpretive element, but it was also useful during data collection with the human participants as sharing of the emotive experience fostered a greater rapport. The use of self in this way may be critiqued within a social work professional context; however, in this case the participants had prior knowledge of my sharing of their experience and thus, may be considered a useful tool of engagement. Within a critical social work frame, however, this reflective and then reflexive practice is desired.

Of course, where a research methodology assumes that experience is individually interpreted, one must assume that the researcher too has individually interpreted their own experience and that this becomes only one more interpretation, rather than an example by which all other interpretations can be compared. An insider researcher role further allows for the researcher and participants to share language and a culture—the culture of the shared community and shared flood event experience. From a social work perspective, this facilitates communication in a culturally responsive way, which in turn promotes autonomy and self-determination in accordance with ethical requirements at the professional level (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010), and also consistent with an anti-oppressive critical social work frame (Pease, 2009). Knowing when to distance oneself from the commonality of language and cultural experience, and knowing when to engage for the benefit of the research, are crucial factors (Kalei Kanuha, 2000). At times, it may be helpful to have shared
language that facilitates understanding of expression by a participant, but at times assumed understanding may be counterproductive. In this research, that shared language is based around the culture that North Wagga has as well as the language of the flood context.

For this study specifically, I have explored lived experiences of a flood event and recovery and the meanings of community spirit constructed from this event. Meanings have been explored with both my own knowledge, experience, understandings and prejudices alongside those of the participants. The end point will be a new place of knowledge and interpretation for both researcher and participants. With a professional background in social work, an understanding of the importance of ethical social research underpinned by an ethical code, and from a critical social work theoretical framework to further foster safe practice, I have practiced critical reflexivity to ensure that my own knowledge and lived experience was acknowledged and examined and brought to the interpretive process in a constructive manner.

It is this insider role, in facilitating participant voice, which also allows the researcher to have conducted research with the community rather than on the community (Breen, 2007). This is ethically sound practice, particularly for social work researchers with a critical social work frame aimed at upholding broader concepts such as empowerment and anti-oppressive practice and social work ethical principles, such as social justice and self-determination (Allan, Briskman, & Pease, 2009). It is this insider role that binds together the theoretical and conceptual frameworks to facilitate research which is both participatory within a community and beneficial for the community, policy and academia alike.

**Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis in Practice**

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) assumes that people construct meaning from their experiences as they occur embedded in sociocultural and historical contexts, and that the stories they tell about these experiences are key to understanding their meanings (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA assumes that what people say about their experience is connected to their thinking even though sometimes they may struggle to succinctly describe their experience (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). This
fosters the need for the interpretive analysis from the researcher to understand meaning but with the assumption that the analytic account can never be exact nor final (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). Despite origins in psychological analysis, IPA employs an in-depth qualitative analysis which is idiographic in nature, meaning that it may employ a smaller sample size as it does not aim to make probabilistic claims about groups or populations (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). For an IPA-framed study the most powerful tool then is the semi-structured interview, although IPA is not restrictive, and as such, other forms of data collection that capture a personal account may be utilised (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

The methodological practice of IPA is detailed as follows (Eatough & Smith, 2008):

- Research questions are directed towards aspects of lived experience.
- The idiographic commitment encourages the study of small homogenous samples.
- Semi-structured interviews are the exemplary data collection method for IPA.
- Other methods include diaries and unstructured life history interviews.
- Data collection is dialogical with the participant given the freedom to take their dialogue where they will.
- Analysis is an iterative inductive process, beginning with several close detailed readings to provide a holistic perspective, noting points of interest and significance.
- Step-by-step analysis then proceeds to the description of analytic themes and their interconnections, taking care always to preserve a link back to the original account.
- Analysis continues into the writing-up stage and finishes with a narrative of both participant's and researcher's meaning making of the topic under investigation.
- Ideally the final narrative should move between levels of interpretation: from rich description through to abstract and more conceptual interpretations.
The doing of IPA analysis involves engaging deeply with the texts that represent lived experience with different levels of interpretation (Eatough & Smith, 2008), and where IPA offers a set of flexible guidelines that can be adapted to fit the research question (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). IPA guided analysis in order to address the research questions specifically in the following ways:

1) Community spirit in academic literature was addressed in the literature review. Using Charles Sturt University Primo search facilities in library databases to generate articles for inclusion in the review has resulted in a collection of literature that spans a number of disciplines including sociology, politics, social work, psychology and philosophy, as well as incorporating a number of subject areas including disaster management, social capital and resilience, community and community development. Themes that pertain to meaning of community spirit within a flood recovery lens emerged from the literature and are presented in Chapter 2.

2) Community spirit in Australian government and disaster management literature was addressed in Chapter 3. These documents were coded with the same lens of the interpretive researcher, again allowing themes to emerge. Also interpretively explored here were the motivations/expectations behind the meanings presented.

3) Community spirit, as presented in the media and in Hansard as secondary data sources, were explored within an IPA methodology, effectively forming transcripts and being interpreted and coded by the researcher. Although semi-structured interviews are considered to be the ideal means for gathering data in IPA, other methods are encouraged (Eatough & Smith, 2008). It must be noted that in comparison with the primary data, the secondary sample is historical and publically available in print. This means that the IPA expectation of the participant being able to take the interview where they feel appropriate cannot be maintained.

4) Community spirit in lived experience was explored with the same IPA lens, with in-depth analysis of verbatim transcripts allowing codes and then themes to emerge from the data. The transcripts of each participant and from across all three groups were analysed in
great depth to make best use of the rich data that is collected in an IPA research project. This study incorporated an insider researcher’s knowledge to interpret the interpretations provided in the interviews with not only the codes and themes that emerged from the literature review in mind, but also allowing new codes and themes to emerge from the data.

5) Meaning from community/stakeholders were then explored comparatively with meanings from macro level government policies and frameworks, in order to explore potential dissonance in meaning. The evaluation included exploring meaning and the motivations behind the presentation of meaning.

6) Meanings were then be interpreted with a community development lens, specifically an ABCD lens, to determine propensity for use as an asset for development.
Chapter 6: Research Process

This chapter discusses both the data collection and data analysis processes in depth, as per an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework. The chapter begins with discussion about the collection of secondary data (from Hansard and the media) and then moves onto discussion about the collection of primary data (from human participants with lived experience). The chapter then presents data analysis of first the secondary data followed by the primary data. The chapter concludes with consideration of ethics for this research and a discussion on the study’s limitations.

Data Collection

Secondary data. Secondary data in the form of media articles and Hansard entries was utilised in the exploration of meaning of community spirit in flood recovery. The use of secondary data was, in part, the means by which the first part of the research question was answered: the meanings of community spirit held by the Australian government and within the media (RQ1). Though there are limitations to using secondary data, which will be discussed throughout this chapter, the sample represents a publically and thus readily available source of narratives that may offer answers to the research question that may not be otherwise attainable due to the status of some of the public figures included.

The media. Media as a data source provides opinions from the public via interviews and recorded narratives. For this thesis, articles pertaining to flooding which link that experience with the term community spirit, have been sourced in order to clarify the perceived meaning of community spirit. In sourcing media resources that may allow for this elucidation of meanings of community spirit with reference to a flood event, Charles Sturt University access to the ProQuest database was utilised (see Table 2).
Table 2: ProQuest Media Search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Search terms</th>
<th>Relevant articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ProQuest—Australia and New Zealand Newsstand (media articles)</td>
<td>23/4/14</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>AB“community spirit” AND AB flood Full text Peer reviewed</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is evident in Table 2, ProQuest readily provided 62 articles all of which, under scrutiny, proved pertinent to the study. Further searches were conducted manually in major newspapers, particularly those in areas where serious flooding had occurred. Search terms were a combination of “community spirit” and “flood”.

Table 3: Manual Media Search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Courier Mail</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Telegraph</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagga Daily Advertiser</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 represents the manually sourced media resources that did not replicate those discovered via ProQuest. The local newspaper, The Wagga Daily Advertiser, was searched with particular interest as this newspaper represents the context in which the research was to be undertaken. The same search terms were utilised. For the secondary data, the parameters were expanded to include flood events outside the research context to ensure an adequate representation. This perhaps has also allowed for the significance of community spirit to be analysed at a national level. This may counteract
the possibility that local media writers were potentially influenced by their local colleagues in choice of terms such as community spirit.

For the analysis process, the resultant media articles were then grouped into categories such as general media, articles portraying the views of political representatives, and articles pertaining to the context and event for this study. Some articles may be attributed to more than one of these categories. However, in categorising the articles this way it was thought possible to perceive the different nuances of meaning as portrayed in the articles as being from the different viewpoints afforded by the position from which they were written.

A quick search of *The Daily Advertiser* with the keywords “North Wagga community spirit” yielded 1,830 results of which the first five pertained to the 2012 flood event. Certainly, it was in a media article that the idea for this research began. At celebrations of the two-year mark for recovery in the North Wagga context, community spirit was noted by the leader of a local grassroots residents’ group as being built by the collective celebrations of the anniversary ("Mayor set to lose trademark beard," 2014). Again during the course of this study, community spirit was indicated, as evidenced by the production of a community mural, as significant to the community resilience of North Wagga (Shyling, 2014). Again at the four-year anniversary, community spirit was documented as important in the recovery process by the leader of the State Emergency Service (SES) response at the time, James McTavish (E. Smith, 2016).

**Hansard.** In determining the meaning that politicians, and thus governments, hold for community spirit a search was performed for Hansard entries that use the term community spirit with respect to a flood or broader disaster context. In order to make a thorough representation of meanings it was necessary to extend the search outside the parameters of the North Wagga flood context, and so the search included all states and a number of disaster contexts inclusive of the catastrophic Queensland floods of 2011 and flooding in other states between 2010 and 2012. The timeframe for these events relates to the North Wagga flood event. There was insufficient Hansard discussion around the specific 2012 North Wagga flood event; however, there has been some discussion in the media by local politicians.
Some of the viewpoints of these local politicians will be captured further, in more depth, in the human participant interviews. There was perhaps an opportunity to examine a more extensive sample by increasing the date span to be analysed; however, it seemed pertinent to limit the search in this way to ensure that current meanings are used for analysis. In extending the dates, there may have been an opportunity to examine changes in meanings over time which could be relevant to the outcome in terms of utilisation in a community development role. Analysis with regard to changes in line with historical context is outside the boundaries of this thesis.

The data collection process involved the systematic search of Hansard from both the Australian Commonwealth Government and then systematically, each individual Australian state government website. The search engine of each website produced significant results with 145,552 hits within 2,040 documents from the Queensland Parliament Hansard. There was a clear requirement to contain the results to a manageable number, particularly with respect to the number of search results for the Queensland Parliament. Upon initial rudimentary analysis, a number of the documents were culled due to their irrelevance to the thesis topic in that they did not relate to a flood event. In numerous examples, the search terms had snared articles where the word “flood” was used as an adjective, such as “community spirit flooding in”, but where there was no disaster context. In some cases, the words “community”, “spirit” and “flood” were all present in the article but such that they were unrelated to each other, particularly where the words “community” and “spirit” were unrelated.

Following professional advice on searching for a more adequate sample, I tightened the search terms to the exact term “community spirit” and “flood”, which narrowed the sample considerably to a more manageable amount and provided a more representative sample. With the search terms explicit in this way, I was able to capture a sample that related to a flood event and where the term community spirit was used in relation to that event. This left a sample that consisted of the following search terms and resulting documents for analysis (Table 4):
Table 4: Search Results for the Hansard sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hansard and term searched</th>
<th>Documents used for analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth of Australia “community spirit” AND flood</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland Parliament “community spirit” AND flood</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament of SA “community spirit” AND flood</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament of Victoria “community spirit” AND flood</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Primary data.** The primary means of acquiring data for this study, in utilising an IPA approach, was the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews involved a purposive sample of participants from three key stakeholder groups identified as:

1) Residents from within the levee boundary, remaining in the suburb to date and visibly demonstrating recovery.

2) People who provided service to the community, emergency responders and recovery focused responders including voluntary and charity based organisations or individuals.

3) People in leadership positions including council representatives, local political representatives and people in positions of leadership in local community organisations.

A purposive sample ensures that the research question is relevant for the people being interviewed (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is here that the insider researcher position becomes important in that I was able to know specifically who the sample should include, and I also had the necessary connections to source these identified people. Having been a part of the same event, I witnessed who the key service providers were and who provided leadership, and I also have extensive knowledge of the people who reside in the context so that a broad demographic could be reached.

Whilst no two researchers will get the same results irrespective of their positioning, I believe that an outsider researcher could not achieve the same
depth of result as much of what happened during the flood event occurred within the community and was not recorded. An outsider researcher would also not have the depth of knowledge about the local people, the ways they connect and the hidden roles they perform within community life. Of particular importance was that which was community-oriented in organisation but was hidden to the outside world, such as the origins of the recovery barbeque and the assistance that the community members sought and received. Indeed, even some of the lead agency representatives were unaware of the origin of efforts that came from within the community, such as the barbeque.

For this study, the process began with compiling a list of people who could be potential participants and then working through the list to determine the most appropriate in terms of the previously noted parameters. It was recognised at the outset that some participants may well be allocated to multiple categories. This was an important factor in that there were, for a number of participants, no clear boundaries around their positions or roles in the flood recovery process, which of course shapes experience. For example, interview participants could have been residents but also hold (community, state and federal) leadership positions. There were also examples of service providers who had historical resident status. A list of back-up participants was compiled in case people were uncontactable or unwilling to participate. For the resident group, I aimed to present a broad demographic in terms of gender, marital status, insurance status, length of time in the community and perceived connectedness. With my insider knowledge I was able to source residents so that these categories were covered, some of which became pertinent in terms of research findings. As a critical social worker it was important that the research not be a source of disempowerment, so I chose carefully with consideration for people I knew to have had mental health issues or identifiable disabilities and for whom participation may have added to their vulnerability.

The sample size as per IPA methodology is generally considered to be best at between one and 30 participants, with a smaller sample size thought to better facilitate the in-depth analysis of lived experience where the researcher is aiming for a balance between discovering something nuanced
in a particular person and the general meaning of a group or population. This is to ensure that the researcher is not swamped with data but enveloped in rich descriptions and with enough participants to enable comparison of similarities and differences (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). For this study the sample size was set at 10 people per group. Ten was deemed an adequate size where the categories were defined as separate (even allowing for overlap within groups) to ensure depth for each group. Final numbers were decreased by the withdrawal of one participant due to ill health and the failure to secure one participant. This participant held the role of SES lead solely and as such there was no valid replacement. However, statements this prospective participant made publically regarding community spirit within this flood event have been utilised in the thesis.

A letter of introduction and information sheet was mailed or emailed directly to the chosen participants and a follow-up phone call made within the following two weeks. The reaction was mixed. Some participants, across all groups, were so keen to be involved that they immediately made contact upon receipt of their invitation. Some of the participants who agreed to participate were happy to make appointments at the point of the phone call. A few of the participants had relocated and were not contactable and were replaced from the back-up list where appropriate alternatives were available. A very small number of participants were reluctant to participate because they felt they had nothing to say or they were uncomfortable with the process and they were replaced with others. There were of course other difficulties in scheduling people and clashes in availability. Overall, participants expressed their contentment in taking part and it appeared that for some people, it was a positive experience in validating their stories and their experiences.

Demographic details of each participant were noted, including their previous flood experience, length and level of perceived connectedness within the community, age, gender and position/role within the community. The participant biographies are located in Appendix A. A summary of the participants is found in the following table (Table 5). Note: participation in the community was judged on the participant’s engagement with community activities, which are organised primarily by the Residents Association and
the Football/Netball Club (the two major organisations in North Wagga). The level of participation was also noted personally by the participants and relayed to me prior to the beginning of this research in the numerous discussions I have had with fellow residents since the flood event.

Table 5: Summary of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating residents</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>Married, young, female, insured, new resident, non-participatory with community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>Married, male, uninsured, long-term resident, large North Wagga family, highly participatory, flood experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Female, married, long-term and participatory resident, passionate about non-relocation, part of a couple, flood experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>Single, older, female, long-term resident, no family, community minded, not flood experienced, positive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graeme</td>
<td>Older, married, male, insured, lifetime resident, flood experienced, community minded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Married, mother of five, lifetime resident, insured, negative experience, not participatory in community despite long-term residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Married, younger, female, short-term resident, participates in community, positive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>Married, insured, younger, female, high social capital despite short-term residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Partnered, female, uninsured, high impact but positive experience, short-term residence with few connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Service providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Fire brigade, was concerned that the services retreated too early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Paid emergency responder, community minded and participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alisa</td>
<td>Family connected, community minded, organised community barbeque, previous resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>School leader but also State Emergency Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drake</td>
<td>Rural Fire Service, community minded, community development background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dom</td>
<td>Head of lead charitable organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon</td>
<td>Personal volunteer, helped numerous people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kris</td>
<td>Organiser of community barbeque, high participation in community, previous resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Leads a private charity, assisted at community barbeque with resources, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni</td>
<td>Personal volunteer, helped numerous people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Des</td>
<td>State MP, Liberal Party, also a resident, property but not home inundated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Director at local council, significant leadership in flood event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Head of flood recovery centre, community development history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanie</td>
<td>Leader in local Residents Association, also a resident, property but not home inundated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerrie</td>
<td>Community development at local bank which provided significant assistance in the flood event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position and Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lew</td>
<td>Leader of local Residents Association, also home owner of rental property which was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inundated, now a resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>Federal Member for Riverina, National Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Leader for Federal Labor, also a resident, home inundated, wife part of multi-generational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
<td>Council community engagement officer, local government representative for the flood event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant interviews.** Sitting somewhere between structured and unstructured interviews, the semi-structured interview is considered to be the exemplar for IPA research (Eatough & Smith, 2008; J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). The semi-structured interview is guided by a schedule but not determined by it, involves the development of rapport with the participant, may follow a different order for each participant and allows the freedom to explore areas of interest as they arise (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). As per IPA guidelines, a schedule was developed around the themes that arose from the literature review that would foster discussion around the research question. (The interview schedule is available in Appendix B.)

The schedule allowed in the first instance, and as discussed, the collection of demographic information that was considered pertinent as it related to connection to the community and initiated the positioning of the participant mentally, within the community context. Next, an opening question on the participant’s conceptualisation of community was offered to stimulate discussion around their positioning but also to allow for time to develop rapport and establish that the participant was comfortable in the interview. The interview technique could then be adjusted to suit. It is both the insider positioning of the researcher, coupled with a social work skillset that fosters reflexive communication, that promoted productive interviews but within an ethical frame. This ethical frame was of course vital as part of my professional ethical requirement as a social worker, and particularly so when
embedded within a critical social work frame which endorses reflective and reflexive practice (Allan, 2009b; Pease, 2009).

The schedule then contained a list of prompt words collated under the four main thematic groupings developed from the literature review. These prompt words were used to stimulate discussion as required. The subthemes for each of the four key themes provided some of the prompt words. This allows the interviewer to shape a question using key prompt words to stimulate discussion from the participant. As new themes arose from the participants themselves, new avenues for discussion opened and were also able to be incorporated into future interviews. Participants were allowed the freedom to take the interview where they felt their experience led them. An IPA interview assumes no leading by the researcher; however, the schedule may be used to gently steer the interview, particularly for those participants that are less at ease in expressing themselves (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). This freedom to lead for the participants is consistent with a critical social work frame in that it fosters a sense of empowerment and a feeling of participatory research (Mendes, 2009; Pease, 2009) The interview schedules were worded slightly differently for the residents as opposed to the service provider and leadership participants to reflect the fact that their role in the flood event differed.

The overarching aim for the choice of participants within the three stakeholder groups was to provide as broad a sample as possible covering the diverse subgroups within each group so that meaning could be explored from the broadest base possible and congruence with Australian government policy could be thoroughly assessed. The overarching aim for the interview schedule was to open narratives in order to answer the three-part research question; that is, the meaning of community spirit as constructed from lived experience and the congruence of this meaning with that of the Australian government and its policies.

It is vital to note that people respond in different ways to being interviewed and this was certainly the experience here. Some participants were eloquent and vocal and required little prompting, while others were less able to succinctly express some of their more complex ideas and required increased
participation from the researcher by way of paraphrasing to ensure understanding.

It was critical to understand that the interview should allow the participant a strong say in where the interview goes to maintain the phenomenological undertaking even though at times this may feel like there is a veering from the schedule (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Eatough and Smith (2008) describe the participant role as story teller and the result can often be the capture of rich and detailed data where the participant has the freedom to introduce themes that perhaps the researcher had not considered. This was indeed the case for this study and the new emergent themes will be discussed in later chapters.

IPA interviews generally last around an hour and can be intense, as was the case for this study because the experience is so significant to the participants as well as to the researcher. The participants were given the option to choose where they were interviewed and mostly they chose their own home, office or a comfortable public space such as the local park or a nearby coffee shop. The coffee shop location made for difficulties in transcription in some cases and the difficulty in maintaining privacy was noted, although the choice was the participant’s and these considerations were discussed prior to commencing.

Key to a good IPA interview is monitoring the participant, watching for verbal and non-verbal cues that would indicate discomfort, and adjusting the interview accordingly (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). Reflective and reflexive practice from within a critical social work frame was critical here, validating both the partnership of IPA and critical social work and also ensuring ethical and empowering practice (Allan, 2009b; Mendes, 2009). This proved important, particularly for some of the interviews where the participants were apparently using the interview to vent some pent-up anger at how the flood event was managed and their resulting experience. Through monitoring and gentle prompting around the themes on the interview schedule, I was able to maintain their focus on their experience as pertinent to the research question. It is noted that expressed anger around management was relevant to the research question in some cases, though not
specifically part of the interview schedule, which will be discussed in later chapters.

The interviews were voice recorded which is not strictly required by an IPA framework. However, it is difficult to capture the richness and detail of an interview without recording. The transcripts were then transcribed verbatim with pauses, laughs, etc, noted in the transcript (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). A number of the transcripts were prepared by a professional transcribing service. However, these were limited to those people who specifically noted that confidentiality was not an issue. The transcribing service was sourced via a contact at Charles Sturt University and credentials checked prior to sending data. It was interesting to note that this service, whilst adequate, did not have the insider researcher knowledge and thus had to be carefully checked for quality relating to people and place names and other details.

For the secondary data, the Hansard transcripts functioned in the same way as the participant transcripts, although they did lack the finer nuances of non-verbal communication. The media articles were also considered to present in a similar way to a transcript although with much less depth or richness. The primary data transcripts were focussed specifically on the topic and thus had rich detail that was not evident in either the Hansard or media transcripts. Upon transcription of the primary data transcripts there was also the potential to add in details such as laughter, body language and other non-verbal communications. IPA offers the flexibility as a methodology to allow for the inclusion of these alternate sources of data (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007).

**Data Analysis**

The role of the researcher in IPA analysis is viewed as one of interpreter. The researcher interprets the data provided which consists of the interpretation of events or experiences by the participant. Within an IPA framework it is recognised that knowledge is dependent on what the participant tells the researcher about their experience (Carey, 2012), and that researcher’s interpretations form the basis of how the phenomena under exploration is being understood by the participants (Howitt, 2010).
IPA is an inductive process where the aim may not always be to generate theory but to increase and enhance knowledge and understanding (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). J. A. Smith and Eatough (2007) find that an IPA study is not dissimilar to an anthropologist’s ethnographic account which may not purport to make generalisable statements about all cultures as a result of their research, but perhaps to offer knowledge in much greater depth about a particular culture with the assumption that the research will be built upon by others. Here, the reader is given the responsibility and the freedom to make links between the findings, their own lived experience and the literature (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007). Similarly, critical social work values the lived experience of participants, expressed effectively as narratives, and the pairing of this experience with professional knowledge, here of the insider researcher (Allan, 2009b).

For this study, analysis provides the reader with the findings that answer the research questions. Although the study aims to make what could be interpreted as a generalisable statement about whether community spirit can be utilised within an ABCD framework, the outcome of analysis around this part of the research question indeed provides much depth about the experience from within an affected community. The analysis within this study also provides significant and a much broader depth of knowledge around the meanings that people make about community spirit. Using an IPA framework, together with a critical social work theoretical underpinning throughout, provides a consistent conceptual frame for the study.

**Analysis of secondary data.**

**The media.** The selected media articles were imported into NVivo and were allocated into three separate groupings: general (where the opinion is that of the reporter or reporting of a community member); political (where the opinion of a political representative is being noted); and North Wagga specific. It is important to note that unlike the primary data where the topic of the interview was known to be community spirit, the secondary data topics were much broader and there was no opportunity to expand on certain points, as in participant interviews. The relevant part of the transcript for each example of the secondary data may have then been quite brief.
Each article was then read through numerous times with coding ongoing throughout each reading. At first read, a general feeling of the overall transcript was determined and coding was commenced with codes formed as they presented and allowed to evolve freely. During this first read there was no clustering of codes and little comparison across the articles. On the second read, each article was coded in more depth with a large number of codes being initiated. The coupling of the reflective practice of critical social work with the IPA methodology was useful here as reflection upon what is interpreted from the ongoing reading of transcripts is fundamental to the ‘doing’ of IPA (Storey, 2007).

This initial coding was then organised into themes which were refined as the process continued. Each code was analysed for meaning and then those with similar meanings were clustered together. For example, there were numerous codes that related to what eventually became the theme of connectedness. The way that the codes were collapsed into themes is available for view in Appendix C. For example, where one participant may have noted friendships, another may have commented on knowing each other. The theme of connectedness went through various name changes as the analysis progressed so as to best capture the nuances of meaning that it incorporated. This was a non-linear and cyclical process, ongoing throughout the subsequent reading of each transcript and the analysis stages. This fluidity was important methodologically but also because the nature of the themes is that they are sometimes closely related. Familiarity with the articles was critical throughout. At all times, the research must stay grounded in the lived experience of the participant so regular connection between the research question and the transcript was maintained. Where the researcher has the role of interpreter in IPA work, to ensure subjectivity but with an insider positioning, it is important to keep asking the questions “Is it in the text?” and “Where does it say that in the transcript?” , referring continuously back to the transcript (Storey, 2007, p. 9).

**Hansard.** The same process was continued for the Hansard entries. Separate groupings were established for Commonwealth and State entries although this made little difference in the end. It was pondered whether the political affiliation would make some impact on results but this proved to be
perhaps too broad a question for the research to answer. The same was found for gender based differences, although future research could well venture into both these areas. Numerous thorough readings were completed with ongoing coding throughout. A process of an initial read and coding ensued with codes arising freely from each transcript. The codes were clustered as well as allocated to themes as they arose throughout the subsequent readings. The codes of both the Hansard sample and the media sample were eventually worked on as one sample, with the codes across both data sets clustered together. This was deemed appropriate as the research question asks for the meanings of community spirit from the secondary sample as a whole. Again, the relationship between the research question and the transcripts was ensured.

As secondary data sources, there was no prior introduction to the study so the authors/speakers were not informed of their participation and there was significantly much less depth of discussion and no capacity for the researcher to ask for elucidation around certain themes. Thus, the analysis of the secondary sources produced a lesser quantity of initial findings and much less depth than that which the primary data would later provide. The codes that arose out of the secondary data were collapsed into the four main themes that are presented. These themes would appear again in the primary data; however, there was much richer data to be found within the primary data sample. There was also not the opportunity for the authors/speakers to position themselves within their definition of community in the same way the human participants were able to.

**Analysis of primary data.**

**Participant interviews.** It was clear at the completion of the first interview that the human participants would provide more depth of meaning around the concept of community spirit than was to be found in the secondary data. These participants were aware of the thesis topic from receipt of the recruitment letter and so had time to think about their conceptualisation right through to when they decided to participate and into the interview itself. Thus, the analysis of the data from the participants was a much deeper and more complex process than that for the media or Hansard.
Again, the transcripts were imported into NVivo and they too were kept separate in three groups: residents; service providers; and leadership. It was important to maintain these boundaries because the research question specifically asks for some comparison between the groups, as well as comparison between these groups and macro level policy.

Each transcript was read through initially to get a feel for the interview as a whole although some tentative coding began from the first reading. A set of codes was established, arising out of the primary data, separate from that used for the secondary data so that the themes that arose from the primary data would be identifiable. NVivo was used effectively as a management tool; to store and organise the data. This allowed for the codes that emerged from the subsequent readings of each transcript over time to be rearranged into the emergent themes. Each transcript was fully examined, numerous times and with coding for that transcript completed before moving to the next. I aimed to allow some time between transcripts so I could acknowledge the data arising from the last transcript and bring a fresh interpretative lens to the next.

Using this freshness, the codes that arose from the primary data were allowed to freely arise by remaining present with the transcript and asking repeatedly “What does the data say here?” and also by allowing numerous codes to arise. There was some correlation with themes from the secondary data and these similarities are noted in the findings and discussion chapters (Chapters 7 and 8). However, many new codes arose from the primary data which, upon analysis in a cyclical manner, were eventually collapsed into the themes that are presented in the findings. Codes that were similar thematically were grouped together. The codes that arose from the primary data and the themes that they were collapsed into are presented in Appendix C.

Throughout this process it was vital to continuously reflect on my personal experience within the insider researcher perspective and to consider the impact this had on interpretation. This is consistent both with the reflective practice of the critical social worker to ensure ethical practice, but also with the phenomenological underpinnings of the IPA methodology to ensure transparency (Storey, 2007). The codes were collapsed by grouping those
with similarities in meaning so that a thematic framework eventually evolved that could be used to compare the data from the three groups. In keeping with an interpretive phenomenological analytical positioning, where there was only noting of a code by one or few participants, this data was still considered important.

Storey (2007) notes that it is vital to recognise identification as a potential issue for IPA research, where an insider research position is desired but has ramifications which must be noted. Identification occurs where the researcher has a shared lived experience with the participants and can unconsciously force the data to conform to the researcher’s experience. This was where my social work theoretical and practice wisdom provided the ability to critically reflect, re-examine and revisit the connection between the research question and the transcripts.

With a critical social work frame, reflective and reflexive practice is central (Allan, 2009a). I found myself un-coding, recoding and rewriting memos numerous times. It was important to simultaneously remain conscious of my experience and remain embedded in the transcript. This was confronting at times as it required me to reflect on my own experience and my emotive interpretation of that experience so that I could ensure that my lens was not clouding the participant data but rather enhancing it. Again here, a critical social work frame provided the impetus for reflective and reflexive practice, allowing for awareness of my own experience and the way it may impact my interpretation of the participant experience (Allan, 2009b). On a personal level, this required me to revisit my trauma rather than look at it from the safe and clinically removed distance found over time. Within a critical social work frame this is appropriate as espoused by Tew (Allan, 2009a) where the feeling of emotions as a result of lived experience, the expression of those emotions, and the catharsis and empowerment that results from this practice, are ultimately beneficial for sound research.

At the beginning of each fresh transcript, a memo was started in NVivo where I could make notes, jot questions to myself and as the reading progressed, make notes about the thematic framework that was developing. Traditionally, IPA writers refer to this process as occurring in a manual way, making notes in margins and highlighting coding (J. A. Smith &
Eatough, 2007; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008; Storey, 2007); however, I found the use of NVivo a most valuable tool as long as the idea that the interpretation rests with the researcher rather than the software, remains firm throughout. I used the memo function of NVivo, linking each transcript with its own memo, and utilised coding stripes to ensure rigour across separate readings.

Each group of transcripts was analysed separately, and again, with time between to ensure fresh interpretive work for each group. The findings were drafted at the completion of each group of transcripts. Significantly, one of the new emergent themes became apparent during one of the earlier interviews even though the analysis of this interview was in the second group. The non-prescriptive process of IPA allowed for this theme to be worked into the interview schedule, noted in the first group of transcripts and followed through to the last group. This is perhaps the greatest benefit of qualitative research: that it can be a non-linear process that fosters new knowledge development throughout.

The findings for an IPA study are written up in narrative form (Storey, 2007), and for this study, the findings noted the thematic framework distinctly for each group dependent on the importance each group appeared to assign for the themes presented. It should be noted that an IPA study also notes as important, a theme discussed only by one participant. Effectively, the findings demonstrate the depth of meaning for each group and this was thought to foster a reasonably thorough comparison between groups at a later stage.

In drawing from IPA work from numerous sources, the following guide (see Table 6) was followed to provide a tangible structure to refer to and provide aid throughout the interpretive process. With the idea that what the participants with lived experience were saying was providing such depth and emerging knowledge, it was most important to ensure that the analytical process was sound, consistent and reliable.
Table 6: Nuances of Meaning from the Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors in IPA data analysis</th>
<th>Strategies used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>IPA and critical social work both encourage eclectic use of theoretical constructs through interpretative process (e.g., psychological, sociological, community). Don’t force the data to fit a theory; find the theory(ies) that fit(s). Narratives are key.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insider researcher positioning</td>
<td>Remain connected to the transcript, no forcing of data to meet researcher experience, acknowledge own experience continually, know how own experience can influence interpretive process. Reflective and reflexive practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting subjective experiences</td>
<td>Each transcript separate from each other and time to ‘forget’ between. Each group separate from each other and time to ‘forget’ between.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping track</td>
<td>Coding and the development of a thematic framework as a continually cyclical process. Using technology for management not interpretation, writing comprehensive memos, making tables to keep track of details.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Allan, 2009a, 2009b; Eatough & Smith, 2008; Pease, 2009; J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008; Storey, 2007)

Writing Up

As previously stated, the writing up stage utilises a narrative form (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008; Storey, 2007). The analysis for an IPA study continues into the writing with the explanation of themes, illustrated with verbatim extracts from the transcripts, to support the interpretive case of the researcher (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). J. A. Smith and Osborn (2008) state that an IPA study can utilise one of two broad presentation strategies; this study has utilised the second of these whereby the findings section contains the emergent thematic analysis in narrative form, with some
discussion offered at the end of each findings chapter relating to what has been presented within the chapter. In this presentation, the separate discussion section links the analysis back to the broader, existing literature. This study utilised this approach due to the volume of findings from the primary coupled with the secondary data. It perhaps was not anticipated at the outset that the primary data would produce such voluminous information while the secondary data did not. This study will also utilise this presentation so that the findings from each of the three groups of stakeholders can remain distinct from each other. This will allow for the nuanced differences between the three groups to be further illuminated. The data that arises from the coding around dissonance, which then offers the lived experience of this concept from the human participants, will be incorporated into the discussion section (Chapter 8).

**Ethics**

Fundamental to social work practice is an ethical service provision (M. Alston & Bowles, 2003; Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010; Bowles, Collingridge, Curry, & Valentine, 2006). A core component of research then, as performed by a professional social worker, is ensuring that the research is ethically completed (M. Alston & Bowles, 2003). This ethical positioning is consistent with a critical social work frame where anti-oppressive practice that aims to alleviate structural oppression and foster empowerment is crucial (Allan, 2009a; Mendes, 2009; Pease, 2009) Also part of my core belief as a member of the local Residents Association is the assumption that any action I am associated with would be ethically conducted. Finally, in keeping with university requirements, ethics approval was sought from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to beginning data collection, given that collection involved interaction with human subjects with respect to traumatic experience, the recounting of which may cause discomfort. Ethics approval was granted on 27 February 2015 (approval number 2015/012).

As part of the ethics requirements, appropriate post interview counselling services were identified for participant use as required. While each participant acknowledged the offer of assistance, none gave an indication that they would require such a service. Invariably, the participants noted
their eagerness to participate. Where there was a lack of response to the offer to participate, it was assumed that the person was not content to cooperate and that person was no longer contacted. Those who chose to participate invariably appeared to enjoy the experience, and in a number of instances appeared to find the interview cathartic in sharing their narrative and the accompanying opportunity to be frank and open about aspects of the experience that they identified as issue laden.

Ethical research incorporates the concepts of informed consent and voluntary participation (M. Alston & Bowles, 2003), with the participant having recognition of their right to withdraw from the project at any time. In this study, information sheets and consent forms were distributed and explained at onset of interview and signed copies retained by the researcher. The researcher explained that each participant would be de-identified as much as practicable for the purpose of the thesis and any other written outcomes. This has proven difficult particularly for the leadership participants due to the public visibility of their roles. Much discussion has been undertaken with the supervisory team to ensure ethical requirements can still be met regardless. As it was, a majority of participants suggested that they would like to waive their right to privacy, indicating that they were content for their positions to be identified in the thesis or other written outcomes. This included the majority of the leadership participants who acknowledged that the public nature of their position fosters their belief that nothing they say is ever private. It should be noted I still endeavoured to protect privacy and confidentiality even where participants have suggested it unnecessary. This is in alignment with my personal understanding of ethical research and also part of my requirement to adhere to the professional code of ethics for social work (M. Alston & Bowles, 2003; Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010; Bowles et al., 2006).

Even though ethically it is important not to identify one participant to another, it is appropriate for the participants to discuss their participation amongst themselves (Given, 2016). It is important to note that the context for study in this case was very small, and most people were aware not only that the research was occurring but there was much discussion about who participated and who did not. Often the participants would talk openly in
front of me with each other about the project which is of course their right. This was more common with the resident participants and those other stakeholders who happen to also be residents. Quite often, during the interviews, participants discussed each other or other community members. I have endeavoured at all times, during analysis and I will continue for future publications, to ensure that this has no negative ramifications for anyone involved and have changed every name to a pseudonym to avoid identification.

At all times throughout the research the data was stored in accordance with Charles Sturt University policy, locked safely within my office within the School of Humanities. During field work any data was coded to ensure confidentiality. The data will be managed according to Charles Sturt University policy on completion of the project.

**Limitations**

Limitations to this methodological positioning were seen in the connection of researcher to context, with the potential for people to be wary of participating due to concerns of anonymity and confidentiality. This, in practice, was not an apparent issue in the completion of the data collection stage. The participants noted their enthusiasm for participating, and in one case, a participant who was offered a half-hour interview chose to extend the interview due to his enjoyment of the process. There were two participants who did not respond to the initial invitation to participate and after some follow-up these two participants were no longer contacted. One of the participants was readily replaced.

As an insider researcher, there is potential for limitation where the researcher is emotionally connected to the participants or indeed the flood experience itself, in a way that clouds the ability to hear the participant narratives or view the recovery experience objectively. The interpretive phenomenological analytical framework for this research was specifically chosen for its requirement to foster research that had at its core, an awareness of this limitation. A critical social work frame that espouses reflective practice was also chosen to ensure that this emotional connection as an insider researcher did not adversely impact the research.
Another potential limitation for this research is the potential impact of the triggering of the researchers own trauma or experiencing vicarious trauma from the reading and hearing of the trauma narratives of others. Awareness of this limitation was pertinent throughout the research from the design stage to the completion. The reading of transcripts and Hansard entries proved quite an emotional experience. In the interview stage it was the case often that the participant expected some sharing of stories and then in reading and writing about the traumas that others experiences was also confronting. At the same time, there is catharsis in sharing and also a sense of empathy for both researcher and participant. Again the critical social work frame which fosters critical self-reflection, coupled with the use of the supervisory team for supervision and efficient self-care was the means by which this limitation was mitigated.

The next limitation to note is related to the secondary data. The participant interviews which form the primary data were embedded in the topic of community spirit from the very beginning when participants received their invitation package. Thus, they were able to participate fully in the way that an IPA study expects, where the interview is a dialogue that the participant has some freedom to undertake as they will. This allowed for a greater depth of meanings to be explored in the primary sample. The secondary sample was more broadly embedded in a flood/disaster context and the offerings made without the participants being aware of the context of this study; indeed, they will perhaps never have the knowledge that their words have been utilised in this way. They are publically available records and thus remain ethically sound for use but result in discussion of a much lesser depth of meanings. Despite this perhaps being a limitation in that there is less opportunity for interpretations, conceptualisations and meanings to be drawn from the data, an IPA study recognises the significance in even minor details.

The formality of the approach involving university letterhead and my full name and qualifications (as a fellow resident that people knew in a different capacity) had the potential to cause anxiety for some people. One resident, who knew me only as the secretary of the Residents Association and a local mother, had no idea that I had studied at university and commented that this
made him feel uncomfortable as he had only finished high school. This formal request for participation made him too uncomfortable to participate. The reflexive practice of the critical social worker (Allan, 2009b) is critical for this stage of the research in that social work skills are used to determine genuine interest in participating as opposed to fulfilling a sense of duty as a fellow resident which would result in unethical practice, not allowing for self-determination (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). With ethical requirements for voluntary participation and informed consent, people who were concerned about sharing in a more formal manner were able to exclude themselves.

Another resident who received an invitation to participate did not correlate the formal letter with their knowledge of me as a person in the community. That person, upon realisation that the offer was from me, was noticeably uncomfortable with me as a person for some time as his perception of me was drastically altered. There may have also been a feeling of distrust as I was suddenly a different person to what he had interpreted. His choice was not to be interviewed for the study. The important point to note is that for some, my status in the community and as a person has altered somewhat temporarily. Again, reflective and reflexive practice is critical to ensure that community relationships are maintained and to safeguard the social fabric of the community even where people chose not to participate.

Further limitation may be seen in the fact that with a previously established community relationship there may be situations where the research participant assumes the researcher has prior knowledge on certain topics and may not divulge information meaningful for the research. Critical social work, in asking the question “Who does the research serve?” (Fook, 2003), asks the researcher to use skills and self-reflective practice to be aware of their own knowledge while giving voice to the participants and ensuring that they are also reflective of their assumptions about researcher knowledge. At times throughout the interview process, as the researcher, I deliberately asked for explanation of any idea or topic for which I had no prior knowledge but where the participant assumed knowledge.

Another limitation was that some of the chosen participants had relocated and thus could only be contacted by alternate means or excluded. One
participant chose to be involved via a telephone interview. One of the service provider participants who was pivotal in the recovery process did not respond to numerous efforts to secure participation. The end result was that this participant had to be excluded from the study. The nature of qualitative research from an IPA conceptual frame, which endorses semi-structured interviews (Eatough & Smith, 2008; J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007) that allow for examination of meaning derived from lived experience, leads to an inherent limitation where participation cannot be secured. A critical social work frame that fosters participatory research but in an anti-oppressive and empowering manner (Pease, 2009), requires a researcher to be practicing reflexively in finding a balance between making a request and allowing a prospective participant to walk away.

One final limitation to this research was that there was not enough scope to explore in depth a number of elements for community spirit in the disaster context that are touched on briefly throughout the thesis inclusive of; the impact of gender, culture and age on the disaster experience, the impact of disaster and community spirit on psychosocial wellbeing and the role of social work with these elements. It is important to acknowledge that disaster recovery that aims to alleviate the complex and varied needs of the entire community requires a multi-disciplinary effort which engages social work at all levels. Research that explores disaster recovery at this depth is well outside the scope of this thesis and as such it was necessary to remain focused on the research question and accept that the thesis will have limitations.
Chapter 7: Results

Chapter 7 presents the findings from the study from the secondary data (Hansard and the media) and then through the stakeholder groups: residents, service providers and leadership.

The Secondary Data Hansard and the Media: Themes to Meanings

This part of Chapter 7 presents the findings on meaning of community spirit from the secondary data. It provides answers to Part C of the first section of the research question (RQ1c): “What does community spirit mean in sources such as Hansard and the media?” Answers are provided through application of the IPA methodology to an in-depth analysis of the chosen Hansard entries and media articles. Presented first are the findings from Hansard which provide insight into the meaning for community spirit by our elected representatives. It then presents interpreted meanings of community as described in the media. The media often uses quotes taken by journalists from people in leadership and government positions as well as impacted residents and so this data will also somewhat reflect these views.

Hansard. The 61 chosen Hansard documents, subsequently coded to analyse their content for meaning of community spirit, offered nuances of meaning around the themes that evolved from the literature review. As noted in Chapter 6 (in the section: Analysis of Secondary Data), the Hansard entries differ from the participant interviews in that they are historic narratives where there was no prior knowledge of the topic of community spirit and no opportunity for the interviewer or participant to delve into the nuances of meaning they present. Thus, the Hansard entries presented a limited array of meaning. No record offered a definitive meaning for community spirit with respect to a flood recovery but instead they offered commentary around community spirit. The depth of the Hansard entries was no more than the depth of discussion found through the literature review, and as such, there was little more in the way of further interpretations or meanings found in the secondary data than was found in the literature review. It was not until the primary data analysis that new, deeper and more nuanced meanings were uncovered. The limited nuances of meanings of community spirit from the secondary data were examined around the themes
of: the use of self as helping; the inherent nature of humans; connectedness; and sense of place. Each of these themes will be examined in turn.

The use of self as helping. This theme incorporated concepts such as care/concern, collaboration, generosity, reciprocity, support and volunteerism. It was perhaps one of the most common meanings for community spirit noted in the selected Hansard entries. Irrespective of political persuasion or indeed type of disaster event, the idea that community spirit is tied to the act of people within a community helping each other as well as those from outside the community coming in to help, was a frequently noted meaning. For the purpose of this thesis, the use of self as helping will refer to any help offered irrespective of motivation.

Overwhelmingly, volunteerism and the help of strangers featured in the Hansard entries. For example, discussion of community spirit around volunteerism in parliamentary speeches is partly in reference to the “gumboot army”, the enormous group of people who flocked to Brisbane and Queensland in the 2011 floods to offer help. Invariably, these were strangers and everyday Australian citizens who, at their own expense and of their own volition, made their way to the disaster stricken communities and made tangible helping contributions—their use of self as helping.

Commentators note this as community, Aussie, or Queenslander spirit.

Some got in there and started shovelling the mud away and some even walked around with cold bottles of drink, sandwiches, food and home-cooked items and handed them out to the volunteers during this time. This is the Queensland and Aussie spirit… (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011n, p. 36).

The volunteerism of both individuals, as well as those who participate in teamwork with organisations, were all noted as having meaning for community spirit, as noted here by Senator the Hon. C. Brown. The use of self as helping in this instance may refer to individuals who volunteer in various agencies which are then engaged in a disaster event: “The level of community spirit and support shown by the public is extraordinary. For the work undertaken by defence personnel, the SES and all the volunteers involved” (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011g, p. 58).

Similarly, Mr S. Emerson MP discussed the display of community spirit as being evidenced by the outpouring of help in the post disaster period. He
included in his discussion help that comes as volunteers from the community itself, charitable and community organisations, and the help offered by leadership in controlling the helping (Queensland State Parliamentary Debates, 2011).

Mr B. Van Manen MP also linked community spirit with the volunteerism and help that is offered in the post flood period which he believed to be part of “the Australian people”, waning under the pressure of contemporary life but reignited by the crisis event.

It is heartening to see the many volunteers. In Brisbane many thousands of volunteers got out there in their gumboots or, if they did not have gumboots, because the state sold out of them, in whatever they had to clean up the mud and the mess and to help people start to rebuild their lives. Having been through floods before, I know what a horrible, smelly job that is. I believe that these events have served to reignite a community spirit that may have been waning under the pressures of everyday life. It is reassuring to see that community spirit (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011u, p. 350).

In this theme of the use of self as helping, the Hansard entries invariably show the speakers considered community spirit to have meaning around the notion of selfless helping that is effectively fostered by the collective experience of an adverse event. In all cases, community spirit is considered to be the positive and almost inevitable outcome of this collective adversity. The speakers all commended the display of community spirit and it was noted as being a lasting positive outcome, indicating that it is expected to remain as a resource for future helping.

Connectedness. Thirty-three Hansard entries linked community spirit with the theme of connectedness, which made this the second most noted theme in the Hansard entries. This theme encompassed subthemes such as cohesion, collectivism, neighbouring, solidarity and the union of people in adversity.

Connectedness was evidenced through the use of terminology such as “the ties that bind”, as stated by Mrs G. Brodtman MP in relation to the Christchurch earthquake (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011f, p. 3087). Senator the Hon. G. Brandis noted that the people of Brisbane are “in this together” and that community spirit is evidenced by the gathering of the
people. The meaning of community spirit is seen here as an expression of the connectedness and collectivist nature of the community.

Everybody had a shared sense that we were in this together. The spirit of community was palpable as the people of Brisbane gathered themselves (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011e, p. 33).

“Pulling together”, or “banding together”, as a sign of the community spirit that arises in an emergency, is another common term used by at least five of the speakers examined, which may be closely related to the notion that people in a community who suffer adversity become united as part of their spirit of community. Speakers noted the cohesion of community as demonstrated by the community spirit as volunteerism and helping that they witnessed as a response to a shared adversity.

We need to take this message back to our community about the spirit they have shown, the resilience they have shown during these traumatic times and the way the experience has brought our community together and united us: we do not need to wait for a natural disaster to occur to repeat this in the future (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011i, p. 338).

Connectedness as the means to unleashing community spirit that then fosters neighbouring and helping was discussed by Senator the Hon. B. Mason:

The same connectedness and sense of community that all of us experienced as the floods unfolded unleashed an amazing outpouring of community spirit as tens of thousands of people eagerly and cheerfully volunteered to help. They volunteered to help not just friends and neighbours but, in most cases, complete strangers (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011p, p. 53).

The Hansard data showed speakers commenting on community spirit around the theme of connectedness, all expressed in terms of the relation between people within a community that fosters the recovery process, and the connectedness between a flood/disaster affected community and the broader communities that come to help. This difference between connectedness within the community and connectedness from outside the community may be noted in the mention of neighbouring versus strangers attending an impacted community to help.
Inherent to human nature. Central to this theme was the notion that there are characteristics of human nature that are inherent in human beings and that are expressed as socially recognised concepts such as mateship, courage, camaraderie, pride, dignity and hopefulness. Within the Hansard documents some of these characteristics were regarded as linked to the meanings that the speakers hold about community spirit. In discussing mateship and camaraderie as evidence of the lasting community spirit that he views as the legacy of the floods, Mr. I. McFarlane MP noted that the disaster event has rekindled the shared purpose and created new bonds within the community.

…even more than the hardships, the most significant and far-reaching consequence of these events of 10 January will be the rekindled sense of common purpose and the reach of the new bonds of mateship and camaraderie in our community. As we move forward through the recovery phase. [sic] This community spirit will be the real legacy of the floods of January 2011 (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011q, p. 23).

Terms used in Hansard such as determination, selfless generosity, stoicism, tolerance and humour (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011r), are aspects of human nature that speakers linked to their meaning for community spirit within the flood recovery context. The human aspect of kindness was also presented as having meaning for community spirit: “The community spirit that emerged in the face of this disaster was a true testament to the generosity and kindness of local residents” (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011s, p. 434).

Numerous speakers noted community spirit as synonymous with Australian spirit and note it as an inherent response to disaster events and an element of citizenship. For example: “I believe it is during times like these that the true Aussie spirit is revealed” (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011c, p. 1025).

All of these speakers used community spirit to make positive comment about human characteristics that are common to the disaster response, demonstrating meaning around the notion that community spirit is perhaps, in part, integral to human nature or at least a component of human behaviour as located within response to adversity.
**Sense of place.** Sense of place was the theme perhaps least commented on throughout the Hansard entries. This could be attributed to the fact that the speakers are not in fact community members, and as politicians, perhaps quite removed from the communities about which they are speaking. As such, political leaders are only able to construct their meanings from what they can observe as outsiders. Mr S. Sidebottom MP states that despite Australian’s being well known for their sense of community, which he believes is in part inherent to our collective psyche, he also believes there is also an element of our sense of place where modern life prevents us from participating until there is a crisis when mateship and inherent volunteerism come to the fore.

Australians have a great sense of community. I think it is part and parcel of not just our DNA but, indeed, also our environment, yet our time-poor lives tend to exclude us from that. I hope that some of those communities that have been seriously affected by some of these disasters get some positive ongoing benefits from that tremendous community spirit that has been demonstrated (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011 t, p. 340).

However, Mr D. Bradbury MP stated that the Australian sense of place is such that despite overwhelming devastation caused by natural disaster, the resilience of the people in these communities affords them the ability to return and rebuild (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011d). Dr B. Flegg MP spoke of a young couple he met during flooding in Ipswich who had been in their home for only three weeks, having lost their previous home in another bushfire-affected community (Queensland State Parliamentary Debates, 2011). Dr B. Flegg MP spoke of the couple’s sense of place, stating that they will stay to rebuild as they have a connection to this new community that is fostered by the great display of community spirited helping that followed this flood event. He told of how the young couple returned home to a group of 15 stranger volunteers who came to help them clean up and were waiting for them at their door when they returned home.

Senator the Hon. B. Mason spoke about the sense of community that fosters an unleashing of community spirit through volunteerism and helping in times of adversity that connects people to their community by supporting the recovery and rebuilding process post disaster (Cth. Parliamentary
Debates., 2011p, p. 53). He stated that this is part of the Queenslander sense of place. Ms L. Markus MP stated that it is the ability for people to empathise that fosters the outpouring of community spirit in a disaster that facilitates a sense of place that prompts the return and rebuild of devastated communities (Cth. Parliamentary Debates., 2011k, p. 423).

Every Hansard entry analysed for this thesis used the term community spirit in a positive manner. Community spirit was invariably presented in a way that suggests that it is an inherent aspect of community flood recovery, its presence inevitable as a response to adversity. Speakers, as represented by their Hansard records, presented nuances of meaning that differ but that all indicate that the speaker assumes community spirit to have positive attributes which add to the flood response and recovery.

The media. Eighty media articles were found and analysed for this thesis in accordance with the methodological framework. The media in discussion presents the views of politicians and leadership, of participants—be they those affected or those involved in response and recovery—and also of the reporters themselves. Again, it must be noted that the transcripts are historical, already in print and much broader in topic than that of the participant interviews, where the participant was aware of the topic of community spirit from the point of invitation and thus had the topic in mind from the beginning. The media articles, as for the Hansard articles, provided limited discussion and depth, and again, the new, more nuanced and deeper meanings stem from the participant data. The media sample offered themes that included: the use of self as helping; connectedness; community spirit as inherent to human nature; and sense of place.

The use of self as helping. Within 29 media articles, the use of self as helping as a theme for meaning of community spirit was apparent. Overwhelmingly, the media articles linked this theme of the use of self as helping with the notion of volunteerism. They discussed the way that in a crisis, volunteers form an important part of the disaster recovery effort. In quoting the Hon. Mr B. O’Farrell Premier of NSW, one article written during the 2012 North Wagga flood event promoted this meaning for community spirit around volunteerism and helping.
The premier praised the community spirit in Wagga Wagga. “I’ve met people; I’ve talked to community members who are filling sandbags; I’ve seen others who have been affected,” Mr O’Farrell said. “There are families putting up with an enormous amount, but do you know what, they're doing it well and even more extraordinarily, when sandbags are required to be filled, that community just emerges from the darkness to do so” (“Fears Wagga Wagga levee bank will fail as flood peak nears.,” 2012).

And also from the Hon. Ms A. Bligh Premier of Queensland: “There's extraordinary community spirit at the moment, you've seen the pictures, people lining up to volunteer, rolling up their sleeves” (“Reality of disaster yet to hit: Bligh,” 2011, p. 1). From the North Wagga context, the local member Mr D. Maguire MP was presented in the media as stating: “a large acknowledgement is reserved for the people who showed great community spirit and just wanted to help” (Maguire, 2012).

However, the media, in and of itself, also reported the same theme as evidenced by the following: “But, if there is anything to be gained from the devastation of the January flood, it is that a community spirit emerged far stronger than the foundations of our houses and buildings (“Community spirit shines after flood,” 2011)”.

Irrespective of whether the media was delivering rhetoric or the interpretation of either reporters or disaster participants, it is apparent that community spirit had meaning around helping and particularly the concept of volunteerism. Of the articles, seven noted specifically the help of strangers rather than neighbours, friends or family who are commonly thought to be first responders in a crisis. This may include donations from local businesses, or volunteers who turn up to help a stranger clean out their home or simply present at a community location to fill sandbags or serve sandwiches. The generosity of people, as a display of community spirit, was also noted in the media articles as was the notion that community spirit is about people supporting each other, whether that be flood affected neighbours or non-flood affected people supporting impacted communities.

**Connectedness.** Much of the discussion about community spirit in terms of connectedness involved reporting on people within communities “banding together” or “pulling together”. This was common to the idea that
people within a community become more connected during a crisis such as a flood and that this facilitates positive outcomes for the community.

It’s been a time of pulling together for the townspeople, those with four-wheel-drive vehicles have ferried their neighbours to the shops, while neighbours have kept an eye out for each other. “I’ve met neighbours I’ve never spoken to before,” said Pat Williams, a resident in Riverview Rd for 12 months (“Flood, sweat and tears,” 1998).

In some cases, this reporting mentioned how community spirit was used by politicians and leadership,

During her evacuation centre tour, Ms Gillard said she was proud to see the community pulling together. “This is the Queensland way, coming together, pulling together in times of difficulty,” she said. “We are seeing, on display, the best of that community spirit” (“Julia Gillard ‘humbled’ by Bundaberg flood victim's new year wishes,” 2010).

Similarly, the theme of connectedness appeared to be both similar and common. The media’s meaning of community spirit was centred on a collectivist response that is strengthened in a crisis; however, there was little in-depth discussion beyond acknowledgement.

Inherent to human nature. Altruism was the most common way for the media to express meaning for community spirit as an inherent aspect of human nature.

A remarkable display of community spirit, more than 20,000 signed on for duty, ready to bend their backs to help fellow residents reclaim their homes and waterlogged possessions from the stinking sludge left behind by the worst floods in a generation (“The day an army of angels turned up—The great flood—Heroes & heartbreak,” 2011).

This article is indicative of the way in which altruism was often presented. It discussed a response to the flood crisis as part of a moral and social obligation and describes an array of participants from diverse demographics indicating a belief that community spirit is not particular to any specific social demographic.

Stoicism, the notion that people are inherently resilient, was another theme noted in the media articles. The Hon. Mr B. O’Farrell Premier of NSW, in relation to the North Wagga flood, noted this stoicism of the residents that
he had met with: “There are families putting up with an enormous amount, but do you know what, they're doing it well” ("Fears Wagga Wagga levee bank will fail as flood peak nears.,” 2012).

Mateship, considered an inherent part of Australian cultural and perhaps also human, nature, was also noted in the media as a meaning for community spirit. The Hon. Prime Minister of Australia, Ms J. Gillard, referred to mateship as a meaning for community spirit.

She said the special bonds of mateship were especially strong this year because “we've seen them on such strong display” during the floods. “We will never forget those we have lost in this period, but we should also never forget the community spirit that has been shown” Ms Gillard said. (Coorey, 2011).

**Sense of place.** This theme was not widely noted in the media articles, and when it is, it predominantly involved discussion on the sense of community that neighbours feel during a flood event which fosters a sense of community spirit with them helping and supporting each other through shared experience to return and rebuild.

Community spirit and morale were high as locals vowed to rebuild their lives and reclaim their homes and businesses. They took out second mortgages, spent their superannuation balances and drained their savings accounts to do so. Some crumpled under the pressure of losing everything and left Laidley permanently but most stayed, buoyed by the community support and determined to put the past behind them (Lutton, 2013).

This article was of particular interest in that it then discussed the sense of place of one family who had twice been badly flood impacted, with no insurance, which had resulted in crippling financial loss. The article quoted the family as stating they were desperate to remain in the community where they felt a sense of place, but they were unsure how they were going to achieve their goal. In this context, community spirit has meaning around sense of place and it performs as a resource to foster the return to community and rebuilding.

**Discussion.** In answering Part C of the first research question (RQ1c): “What does community spirit mean in sources such as Hansard and the media?” this section has outlined how the term community spirit was presented by Australian government, through the examination of political
speeches (in Hansard) and also as political opinion delivered by the media. The media sample also draws on the opinions of other stakeholders: the residents and reporters themselves.

Invariably, as for the academic literature, the political speeches and media entries contained similarities in themes. Within the secondary data sample, which was already in print, undirected and much broader in topic than the community spirit focused participant interviews, it must be reiterated that there was no opportunity for expansion around themes as they arose during the interview and thus the depth of conceptualised meaning was very much limited. As a result, there was no more depth offered than that discussed in the literature review, or perhaps even less. Nonetheless, even with limited nuances of meaning presented, the sample does offer an answer to Part C of the first section of the research question (RQ1c) in that this sample is what is available.

Even though no discernible new themes arose out of this sample apart from those discussed in the literature review, the meanings that are offered here remain valid and useful. Within an IPA methodological positioning, every offering is important and significant (Eatough & Smith, 2008; J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2007; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008; Storey, 2007). Within a critical social work frame, it is reflective practice that allows the seemingly shallow nuances of meaning to come to the forefront. With reflective interpretation of nuances and consistent reflection around what this offers in terms of meaning of community spirit, similarly named themes as presented within the literature review were able to express their own meanings in and of themselves within this secondary data sample.

Within the academic literature, community spirit was heavily linked to resilience and this was also mirrored to some extent in the secondary data. Whereas in the academic literature, resilience was a core focus, resilience in the secondary data was less so, although still present. Within the political speeches, commentators spoke of the display of community spirit as a demonstration of the resilience of the community. Within the media sample, the reporting of community spirit was deemed as the means to reinforcing the government resilience model as a way to decrease government responsibility. With resilience significant in Australian government policy
around disasters, as well as significant in social work within this context, there remains a need for further exploration.

Community spirit was invariably noted as a positive resource that is characteristic in flood recovery. Community spirit from the political commentators as well as the media sample was presented as a positive element of citizenship, part of the social responsibility for all the members of society. Further, in the media sample community spirit was presented as a cultural expectation whereby people are expected to give of themselves to help others in their community. There was congruence with the Australian government presentation of shared responsibility. There is, at this point in the thesis, a remaining requirement to more fully investigate community spirit, if it is indeed a positive resource that is an expected element of citizenship, as where this assumption is incorrect there is the potential for a serious gap in flood recovery assistance.

Within the Hansard sample, the views of political commentators showed there was a distinction made between community spirit that comes as help within the impacted community compared to that which is delivered from outside an impacted community, or from the broader community. This is significant in that it is assumed that there will be a positive, community spirited response from two distinct sources in the case of an adverse community event.

Residents’ Interviews: Themes to Meanings

This part of Chapter 7 presents the meanings of community spirit as conceptualised by the resident participants, and in doing so provides some answers to Section 2, Part A of the research question (RQ2a). This section first considers the residents’ conceptualisation of community spirit around the themes identified in the literature review and discussed with regard to the secondary data. It then considers a supplementary thematic framework that has arisen from the primary data for this study: the participant interviews. It concludes with a discussion that offers an interpreted meaning from the residents for community spirit.

Residents’ conceptualisation of community. Each resident was initially asked during their interview to locate themselves within a
conceptualisation of community. The purpose was to facilitate the participants’ thinking about the concept of community, what that meant for them, and what their experience had been of that conceptualisation over time. The participants were then able to narrow their conceptualisation to the specific North Wagga community; indeed, this was where some participants inevitably led the interview to. The residents were either led to the flood experience or they ventured there independently, and their construction of community was discussed with regard to how it may have changed or stayed the same and what if anything it offered during the flood experience.

Across the residents’ interviews there was consistent linking of conceptualisation of community with that of constructed meaning for community spirit. Participants then used many of these themes to construct their meaning for community spirit. Veronica notes that community was both emotion and action: “It’s a hard thing to put into words because I think of it as an action and a feeling”. She then linked community with community spirit in saying that, for her, community spirit was how her experience of community made her feel: “but that is exactly what I felt too that we were so loved. Valued or worthwhile, that someone had taken their time to think of us”.

Community, conceptually, was described by the residents in the following ways: as family; as a place of safety; helping; closeness; friendships; connections between people; neighbouring; shared experience; and belonging. All of the residents described community as a shared geographical location which they further connected with concepts such as rurality and the size of the community. Some residents noted their idea of smaller communities within broader communities and described membership of those communities as people having something in common. Invariably, the residents viewed community as a shared space with shared experience or commonality and the idea that from this shared space come benefits that are experienced by the members of the community—whether that is a sense of belonging or safety or tangible help in times of need. The residents all noted that community required participation of the people within the shared space, and thus a core concept for this group of
participants is the understanding that community involves some reciprocity in the relationships between the people in a shared locale who have some commonality, which could be simply that they share the same geographical space.

Interestingly, Ally (who has short-term residency, no historical flood experience and little connection to community) notes that community in North Wagga is a different experience dependent on tenure and previous flood experience. She notes increased closeness for those with long-term membership and with historical flood experience and suggests that this fosters a sense of exclusion within the community for those who don’t meet these specific membership requirements. This idea is echoed by Rita and Veronica, also both short-term residents, who note an increased closeness and sense of belonging to the North Wagga community in the post flood period, during which they made new connections and accrued the required experience to facilitate membership. It is significant that the residents with less tenure presented themselves as being almost secondary members of the community prior to the 2012 event. It was noted that at a community flood meeting when a resident spoke and introduced himself as a new resident, a long-term resident interjected with a comment that inferred that surviving the 2012 flood affords those survivors residency status.

The residents note that while community is about shared space and commonality, they consider North Wagga to be a close community for a number of reasons. This closeness was deemed significant to the sense of belonging and security the residents draw from the community, as well as the sense that friends and neighbours in the community all look after each other and offer help as required, more so than in other communities. A common theme that many residents applied to their conceptualisation of the North Wagga community specifically is rurality.

The notion that North Wagga has this element of closeness because it is a small, rural community with shared values such as cohesion and collaboration and an element of stasis over time was common throughout the residents’ interviews. Graeme believes that rural communities are special with respect to the sense of closeness and the sense of community in that as much as there are close relationships between people who all know
each other, there is also a sense of privacy and space where people are “not hemmed in”. Graeme also connects neighbouring with community when discussing his relationships with his neighbours who have been living alongside each other for up to 40 years. He comments on the trustworthiness he feels about his neighbours and the sense of security this gives him in his everyday life. He correlates this security with the stasis of the community.

It is evident from these participants that this sense of closeness they deem particular to the North Wagga community is also comprised of a sense of privacy between the residents. This idea was reiterated by Kelly, who notes the security derived from the closeness of the North Wagga community due to its rurality. She extended her idea further in describing North Wagga as a “gated community”, separated from the city main by levees which provide safety, and with ample sized blocks that simultaneously afford privacy along with a sense of connectedness and exclusivity. Ed related North Wagga to other small communities and says that in these “one-horse places” and small close-knit communities, people band together and help each other out. This help is offered irrespective of any close personal relationship and is merely considered to be part of the duty of living in a small, rural community.

The most common theme for the residents in their conceptualisation of community, and more specifically the North Wagga community, as constructed around the 2012 flood event, was the theme of helping each other. The residents, irrespective of their length of tenure, all commented on the help they both gave and received during the flood event as central to their conceptualisation of community and the way that community functions in a disaster. They discussed the help they received from the immediate North Wagga community as well as the broader community. All participants noted that help in the pre flood period was mostly derived from friends and family in the broader community, and that little help was offered by the North Wagga residents at this time as they were busy with their own evacuations. Some tangible help was offered in the aftermath of the flood with the long-term residents offering more physical assistance to neighbours and friends in the North Wagga community than the newer residents. All the newer residents note an increased sense of responsibility to offer tangible
assistance to neighbours and friends in the North Wagga community in future events.

Every resident noted the significant sense of support and psychosocial and emotional helping they received from within the North Wagga community throughout the flood event and into the recovery period. The community barbeque, organised by two former residents with ongoing connections to the North Wagga community, was the predominant example used by the residents to demonstrate this psychosocial and emotional support and help.

Yeah, well that BBQ that me daughter organised was one thing. I never gave it a thought, that was hilarious. She rang me up and said I’m gonna bring you over some lunch. I said that will be great. She rang me back half an hour later and said, “I’m gonna feed North Wagga”. I said “You do what you gotta do mate”, you know? And she pulled it off and it was bloody fantastic and everyone I spoke to had a steak sandwich up there and they all raved about you know and you could see everyone was in the same boat and you would go up there for lunch and everyone was congregating around all talking about the same stories, what they found, what they didn’t find and what not you know, and getting out there and talking about things is the best thing in the world you know … Oh yeah, cos a lot of people who couldn’t handle the mess and the stress and how are they gonna rebuild and stuff like that later on, especially if they are on their Pat Malone, um, you know they would just put their head in their hand and be a cot case. I reckon by getting up there and talking to people that have got the same problem they sort of realise we are all in the same boat you know (Ed).

The camaraderie, the sharing of both trauma and recovery ideas, the sense of empathy available from others, the sharing of narratives and the catharsis of doing so, and the capacity to source recovery requirements and connect with necessary resources, were noted aspects of the community helping which were created at this barbeque space across all the residents’ interviews.

There were numerous similarities in themes in the residents’ collective conceptualisation of community which may be summarised as the sharing of geographical space and also lived experience, with some commonality to connect the people who are required to form participatory and reciprocal relationships with people who live close but with a sense of privacy. That membership to the community may change dependent on factors such as tenure and shared historical flood experience, and this membership may at
times feel exclusionary to some who are unable to meet the membership requirements. Also, there will be some tangible benefits from the community experience, namely help which may be in the form of psychosocial and emotional support, in a disaster context.

**Constructed meanings of community spirit.** From their conceptualisations of community, and specifically of the North Wagga community related to the flood event of 2012, the residents were asked what they considered the term community spirit to mean from within this experience. There were notable links between the conceptualisation of community and construction of meaning for community spirit. The residents discussed their meaning for community spirit as action, being and doing, performing the participatory elements of community, being the friend and neighbour, and doing the helping.

Consistently, the residents commented on their conceptualised meaning with respect to a number of themes providing new information that was not reflected in the literature review. The residents expanded on these themes in ways that the literature did not explore. Those themes include:

- Sense of place
- Connectedness
- The use of self as helping
- Inherent aspect of human nature

This chapter will examine each of these themes in turn with regard to the constructed meaning from the residents’ shared experience of the 2012 North Wagga flood.

**Sense of place.** The literature explored the ways that people feel connected to their geographical space through the sharing of values, history, attachments to people and lifestyle, and the sense of belonging that arises from this affective experience. There was similarity in the exploration of the meanings of community spirit residents have constructed around the theme of sense of place from the 2012 North Wagga flood event. Veronica definitively stated that meaning for community spirit for her, in relation to her flood experience, was around the sense of belonging she now has in the community. She has constructed a strong meaning of community spirit
around belonging that links to the help and support she received, where this help and support (or love as she also describes it) gives her a feeling of being valued and belonging.

In contrast, Ally spoke about the exclusion and lack of belonging she feels in the North Wagga community, and gave the example of the community Christmas party where not many people spoke to her. However, Ally did note an increased sense of belonging post flood and has clearly conceptualised community spirit as belonging, and as connective relationships made through engagement via different community based opportunities.

…when my kids are older, I'll have a different experience of the community because I'll be connected through friendships and if we end up going to the school there'll be a different sense of belonging then as well, because I'll have more in common and more reason to socialise (Ally).

Shared history or experience was an element of the theme of sense of place that featured in the constructed meanings for community spirit and was noted by most of the participants. The residents all share the flood event but they also all live in the same locale which has a long history of flooding and refusal of relocation for long tenured residents as well as much other shared history. Ed appears to have constructed meaning for community spirit around the idea that the shared experience or common history provides a common narrative for residents. When asked whether the community spirit of North Wagga is contextual, and whether it would remain if the community was relocated, Ed answered that it would only be true in part. He felt that the aspect of helping one's neighbour would remain but that the richness of dialogue arising from the commonality of that shared history would be lost.

Ally touched on the sense of spirit that comes from the shared knowledge of the historical adversity of North Wagga and the connectedness that sharing fosters in a community setting: “So I, I think the history is really important to North Wagga, I think the struggle is really important to North Wagga and a sense of community spirit”. She discussed this shared historical struggle as being linked to sense of place in that the shared struggle effectively binds people together and stimulates a sense of defensiveness about place that in
turn strengthens their resolve to remain in a cohesive manner. She referred to an “us versus council” concept or that of having a shared enemy.

Kelly similarly noted an increase in community spirit in a sense of drawing people together though a shared feeling of injustice. She stated that it is community spirit manifesting as collective injustice experienced across the community that binds people together, and she gave examples of the shared feeling of inadequacy around the flood evacuation and return processes as well as the group action to protest development in the floodplain as well as to increase the levee protection. In this way, Kelly considered community spirit to form an important resource, useful in a flood recovery context, but also increasing as a result of the collective experience of trauma that binds the people of the community together for the future action required to address identified community needs such as flood protection.

Belonging and sense of place were also linked with meaning for community spirit by Ed, who compared the sense of place between rental tenants and homeowners. He believes that renters have a different sense of place and participate less in community life, which decreases the community spirit they experience as they have limited connections to other community members. Within Ed's narrative, one gets a feeling that Ed has a strong sense of belonging and an intense place attachment. When you ask Ed why he lives in North Wagga despite its location on a floodplain, he answers: “because God lives here”.

Local knowledge was central to Ed's narrative of the flood experience, and in this narrative there was a clear conceptualisation of community spirit around sense of place and belonging, and also of ownership. This subtheme of local knowledge has emerged from the residents’ interviews as a significant element of sense of place which was not evident in the literature reviewed for this thesis.
…that flood we had in 2010, I was getting a bit edgy cos we have seen what it could do so I rang the 1800 number they give us to ring for information and I got a fella in Wollongong who asked me if Wagga was downstream or upstream of Gundagai. My god what I am I ringing this number for? I'm obviously wasting your time and you're wasting my time so I flew over town and checked the height down under the old Hampden bridge and with the knowledge of that height I went and put the two sticks in the bank over here. One at the water level at that height and one a metre or so up the bank so I could monitor from those two sticks what was going on (Ed).

In this statement, Ed showed some distrust of council and emergency response, and a belief that lead agencies may not have the required local knowledge to be assistive and give relevant information to people. Part of community spirit for Ed is listening to the older, experienced residents and using his own local knowledge to take the necessary steps to prepare for flood. Community spirit may create a protective barrier around the community, perhaps protecting them from decisions made by lead agencies that prove detrimental and perhaps enhancing resilience by fostering self-coping.

**Connectedness.** Connectedness, for the purpose of this thesis, relates to the social connectedness between the people within a defined community. The literature illuminated such elements of connectedness as: engagement and sharing; members of the community connecting with each other; neighbouring relationships; collectivist actions; and social capital, as either bonding capital or those connections between people in close relationships, or bridging capital, the connections between acquaintances or more loosely connected social groupings.

Engagement and sharing as meanings for community spirit were reflected in the residents’ interviews in numerous ways, and by a range of participants across numerous demographics, including gender and tenure. Veronica equated the meaning she has constructed for community spirit with her lived experience of the 2012 flood, and with the engaged participatory communities she has explored on the NSW North Coast where those residents live communally and are highly engaged with all other members of the community. Veronica viewed this as an effort to create the same
community spirit she felt during and since the flood in coming together with other flood affected community members.

In a comment that Julia made about how some people in a community choose to participate with others in the community, she viewed community spirit as a deliberate form of participatory relationship with duty or responsibility to care for other members of the community.

Well I do think it means everybody pulling together but now that we say that there is obviously people that choose to not join in on that … No I think people have got to want to join in and they have got to want to do it cos I mean you can move anywhere and just not socialise (Julia).

In answering a question about whether she thought some people were more community spirited than others, Julia provided an affirmative answer but also commented that some people choose to associate with others in the community and some just live there for the advantages that the locale offers. This indicates that Julia viewed community spirit as a participatory relationship that requires interaction of the people within the community in some form.

Eleanor talked about community spirit as a sense of connection to a community of people who help each other and who stay united in adversity. She considered this to be present in older generations. Eleanor discussed the way that older people still demonstrate this community spirit through connectedness by attending meetings and functions and by sharing their local knowledge, particularly about flooding. She also linked community spirit with friendships. When queried as to how community spirit came to be part of the North Wagga experience of community, she related it to the formation of close friendships.

Carol correlated community spirit heavily with what she terms “being friendly”. She described being friendly as saying hello to people in the community, talking with them, and extending offers of assistance to those in need, such as when she talks about her friendship with her neighbour. She didn’t seem to believe that people act in a friendly way to purposefully build connections to other community members, but rather believed that friendliness is partly an aspect of rural or ‘country’ life, and human personality with ‘countrified’ values. She described community spirit as a
side effect which is built within a community through these friendships and helping relationships.

Rita also appeared to strongly conceptualise community spirit around the idea of community friendships, positive neighbourly relations, and relationships between the people who share the same locale but also the same experience that allows people to bond together. When speaking about community spirit, Rita explained how she met other local residents as a result of the flood event where attendance at community meetings brought everyone together, allowing them to make new connections. She notes the positivity she drew from this experience and goes on to discuss the guilt she felt at not having been able to assist other residents during their flood evacuations.

Ally also commented on cohesion as an element of her constructed meaning for community spirit as derived from her flood experience when she states: “I think community spirit happens if you all agree”. Ally appeared to view community spirit as a demonstration of the way the people within a community are connected cohesively so that they form an almost homogenous group, from which they can draw benefit in a post disaster context.

The idea of people ‘banding together’ as a meaning for community spirit from within the 2012 flood event was common to six residents’ interviews. Ed described banding together as the action of community spirit in terms of helping, neighbouring and providing support and resources in time of need. Graeme also discussed connectedness, which he correlated with relationships that facilitate freedom to speak and act as desired, as well as the capacity of the community to provide help to each other in both good times and in adversity. He commented on the local playground, which he viewed as an indicator of the safety that comes from this connectedness, in that children are able to play without perceived risk as the connections between people foster this sense of security.

Social capital, as connectedness between people within the North Wagga community and as part of the constructed meaning of community spirit for the residents, was noted in a number of responses. Bridging capital, those
broader community connections that link North Wagga to the city main and other communities, have demonstrated meaning for community spirit for Veronica, who related the story of Belinda from Wantabadgery. Belinda gave away some of her own belongings to flood impacted North Wagga residents, at her own cost and for no public accolade.

I keep thinking of about a week after we got in we had a woman driving around here, drove up to my driveway, and introduced herself as Belinda from Wantabadgery and she had some, her sister’s wedding had been a fortnight, and she had all the dinner service plates and she said would you like a set of plates? And we had nothing to eat off and that’s the stuff that completely breaks your heart. And then she was saying “tell me who else is in trouble” and there was a woman just up the end of the road, there was Eileen just up the left, people were able to direct help to each other I found (Veronica).

This sort of altruism was part of Veronica’s constructed meaning for community spirit but it also indicates bridging social capital that links one community to another. Eleanor conceptualised the North Wagga community as a “close knit, little village”, but noted that the community is aware that they need assistance from the “outside world” and are accepting of that help when it arrives. Meaning for community spirit for Eleanor can be seen as bridging social capital as an important flood recovery resource.

Graeme described the show of community spirit as help coming from the broader community, which he described as different between the 1974 and 2012 floods. This suggests that bridging capital, as a theme of community spirit, forms a resource that may be contextually specific according to the demographics of the community. Perhaps the bridging capital is more active if the perceived beneficiaries are older and deemed less capable of assisting themselves. Graeme said: “For some it made a big difference you know. Back in 74 there was probably a lot of younger ones around. The mix was probably a bit more toward the younger person. I do know that”.

Bridging capital, as community spirit which is superior to bonding capital, was noted and may be seen in examples such as:

Yes, I can’t help you cos I have my own stuff and I can’t help Julia cos she has her mother and sister, so her outside help is really limited family wise. I mean my mother in law took our kids and I just had a lot of people. And I text a lot of people and said righto get your ass over here. It’s happening (Rita).
Rita’s meaning for community spirit was around bridging capital, which can offer help from outside the community in a disaster, and also her awareness that this capital does not offer the same level of assistance for all flood victims.

**The use of self as helping.** The use of self as helping as meaning for community spirit was discussed in the literature as volunteerism, neighbouring and help from strangers. These are also themes that were noted by the residents in discussing their constructed meaning for community spirit. Eleanor definitively conceptualised community spirit as use of self as helping when she discusses the lack of understanding of newer or younger residents around this helping.

Well they get their mail in the mailbox every month of what is going on in the area but they still don’t understand that people can be like that, that people can have that community spirit, that people can be in there helping each other (Eleanor).

Rita has constructed meaning for community spirit around helping those in the community, feeling a sense of responsibility to help, and feeling a sense that there should be equity in the impact each resident must bear. Carol stated that people from rural areas are brought up to have values that foster helping each other. She discussed the response to the Queensland floods and the way people from rural areas all over the nation went to Queensland to offer their physical assistance in the flood recovery. Carol has constructed meaning around this aspect of people helping each other, as community spirit.

Kelly considered community spirit to be, for some people, the only resource they have available in a flood event and she included the paid help provided by the Army, the Red Cross and the SES as she considers joining such groups to be evidence of an inherent personal sense of community spirit. She made the important distinction between community spirited helping from friends, family and neighbours, and that of larger organisations by saying that the support from friends, family and neighbours is more personal and perhaps more integral to healing.

Ally commented on the help that comes from the broader community such as the Army or the fire brigade, describing it as indicative of community
spirit, with meaning she has constructed around the use of self as helping. The theme of volunteerism with community spirit has meaning around people volunteering for organisations as well as those people who individually volunteer.

Graeme stated that it is community spirit in the form of trusting bonds between neighbours that he considers pivotal in the flood recovery process. He believed these bonds allow for sharing of resources, including labour, as well as facilitating a sense of safety when vulnerability are already increased in the disaster. Graeme has had the same neighbours for around 40 years. Similarly for Ed, another long-term resident, neighbouring is key with Ed offering help to his neighbours and seeking help from other neighbours in return. Ed conceptualised community spirit as those neighbours banding together to help in a crisis.

Inherent aspect of human nature. Whereas the literature discussed the meaning of community spirit as related to altruism, stoicism, mateship and hope as well as the notion that community spirit is the ‘feeling’ of community, the residents noted only some similarities. Kelly described community spirit as having meaning around altruism in considering the people that volunteer for organisations such as the SES or the Red Cross: “If you want to help someone out of the goodness of your heart for no other reason. Other than feeling good about yourself”.

Kelly acknowledged the inherent presence of community spirit in people and in communities. To reiterate her point she recalled a speech by the Hon. Ms A. Bligh Premier of QLD during the Queensland floods where Ms Bligh discusses the “Queensland spirit”. Kelly responded to this with, “I’m thinking it’s not Queensland mate, everyone’s got it!” Similarly, Carol noted that she feels community spirit is something that is at the core of people, the way they have been raised and their values, and that you can see that as kindness in people's faces. This indicates that for Carol, community spiritedness is something that some people have and some people don’t. Julia also believed community spirit to be inherent to people and communities and she linked her constructed meaning for community spirit with stoicism and the inherent resilience of the North Wagga people.
...and I think it’s something you have got or you haven’t got. It’s a special thing I think. If you want to, it’s just obviously the right people get the same feeling and the people that turn a blind eye, turn off or have no emotion, they don’t get it. If you are open to it (Julia).

Ultimately, it is evident that Julia believes community spirit—the essence or feeling of the community that draws people and entices them to stay, connect and build spirit through those connections—to be something that some people can feel while others can’t.

**Broader meanings.** The meanings that the residents have constructed for community spirit from the shared experience of the 2012 North Wagga flood are, however, much broader thematically than the meanings that are derived from the literature. The residents’ interviews yielded discussion around a number of themes that were not discussed in the literature. They have been clustered into the following groups:

1) Psychological
   - Adversity
   - Identity

2) Social
   - Generational
   - Leadership and organisation
   - Tenure

3) Locale or community related
   - Place attachment
   - Community size and type
   - Barrier around community

4) Negative
   - The dark side of community spirit

**Psychological elements.** Adversity and identity relate to residents’ discussion around community spirit as aspects of the human psychological and emotional response to disaster and the flood recovery experience. Residents here have explored their experience and conveyed constructed meanings around how their emotional response relates to community spirit.
Adversity. That community spirit has meaning around adversity was thematically represented in a number of residents’ responses. Adversity explores the idea that community spirit is the inherent response to crises at a community level and that it is from the adverse event that community spirit emerges.

Meaning for community spirit in relation to adversity was demonstrated by Veronica, who believed that community spirit is tied to adversity, although she found this disturbing because she inherently viewed community spirit as a positive outcome for a community and was saddened by the idea that in order to experience community spirit, one must first suffer. Ed conceptualised community spirit with meaning around adversity differently. He stated that the community spirit of North Wagga—that spirit of adversity and coping in that adversity by helping each other and knowing what to do—is part of growing up in North Wagga, stating that “we live with the river”.

Carol linked the adversity faced by the North Wagga community, the adversity of being the ‘underdog’ and yet surviving both floods and ongoing threat of relocation, as part of her conceptualisation of the unique North Wagga community spirit. As a long-term resident, Carol has been engaged with this sense of adversity for a great length of time having faced the attempt to relocate the village following the 1974 flood, so her meaning for community spirit was correspondingly entrenched with this theme of adversity. Ally, a short-term resident, corroborated this meaning; however, with her discussion of the local knowledge of shared adversity and in an earlier quote, she noted the “struggle” as being part of the North Wagga community spirit. Veronica called it a “battle”. Ed made a convincing argument about his belief that the spirit of the North Wagga community is linked with adversity, that it is an inherent response to hardships.

Yeah I don’t know well, when someone wins the lottery then everyone gets the willies with them. That doesn’t bring out the community spirit no. No I think that community spirit is about hardships and the likes of the floods and that. That’s where you’re gonna get it from (Ed).
Kelly noted an increase in community spirit with meaning related to drawing people closer together though a shared feeling of adversity manifesting as injustice.

Identity. Some of the residents noted that, for them, the North Wagga community spirit had meaning around identity and that this identity is specific and connected to the historical context of adversity and the ongoing stigma of residing in a flood affected area.

The community spirit of North Wagga had some meaning around the “feeling” of living in North Wagga for Julia, who talked about the unique North Wagga feeling being the reason she lives here, encouraged her husband to come live in the suburb, and also the reason she returned post flood, despite ongoing criticism from other people about her choice to remain. She described this feeling as being specific to North Wagga and stated that she has not experienced the same feeling anywhere else. It is for her, the North Wagga feeling of spirit. Veronica too had experienced the stigma of choosing to return to the flood zone, and like Julia, she also described the North Wagga community spirit as unique, with her meaning around identity correlated with the history of the battle for survival. She notes the “we shall not be moved” sign as evidence of her construction of meaning around this specific identity.

Rita had a sense of shared identity as part of her conceptualisation of the spirit of North Wagga, which she demonstrated through her use of the pronoun “we” in the quote below. Again, this community spiritedness is considered to be part of the North Wagga identity: that the residents live here, collectively, in the face of danger.

Social elements. These are themes that refer to the way that people relate to each other within society. They note the relationships between generations, the relationships that people have with communities, and also the organisational structure within these communities.
**Generational.** This theme was predominately explored by one resident but it is relevant to consideration of the meaning of community spirit within the flood recovery context in that other stakeholders noted the same theme. This theme explored the idea that community spirit is an element inherent in older generations. As North Wagga has an ageing population in people of long-term residence that will remain despite flood risk, this theme is relevant.

Eleanor discussed helping and sharing in the context of different generations. She stated that older people in small communities are raised with values that prompt them to consider helping and sharing within the community to be an element of everyday life that effectively contributes to a pool of resources and connections that comprise the community spirit that is then available for use in times of adversity.

> The younger ones don’t share. The older ones are still prepared to share and the opportunities are still there whether it’s a community meeting once a month that they don’t come to and they are prepared to whinge about, but they don’t come, the help is still there, that community spirit is still there (Eleanor).

Eleanor believed that even when younger people are participatory, it occurs in a distinctive manner. The older people, Eleanor indicated, give as much as they take from the community spirit, actively sharing and participating within the community in a concerted effort to build a shared resource for future hard times.

**Leadership and organisation.** This theme was presented in the residents’ responses and was represented by two core concepts: leadership and organisation. Kelly defined community spirit in conjunction with community leadership.

> Well see if it’s not organised that does, something like when the North Wagga Residents Association started that really boosts community spirit I think it really does because it gives everyone an opportunity to um you know get together and talk about community issues (Kelly).

Kelly has constructed meaning around the idea of awareness of community needs and issues that she views as part of the spirit of the community. She believed that this is facilitated by community recognised leadership that acts to bring people together, disseminate knowledge and promote cohesive
problem solving. She distinctly stated that this is not the case when people get together at the pub or school playground because that collectivist environment lacks the focused direction towards those recognised community issues and needs that leadership provides.

When asked how one would go about building community spirit as the tangible resource that Ally considers it to be, she noted the following:

I think you've got a group of residents that actually are driving it, you've got your Residents Association, people that are proactively and some people are proactively trying to, you invite us, you give us the residents’ news, we're the ones that aren't accepting of coming, we're the ones that aren't coming. So there are some people that genuinely open their arms that are driving this community, that are actually saying, “Let's make a positive difference, everyone come on board”. And to some degree, some of us just don't come on board, we're, we're passengers and that's our own fault as well (Ally).

Ally considered community spirit to be a relationship between acknowledged leadership who are actively attempting to build community as their enactment of their sense of community spirit, and the community participants who are able to choose their own level of engagement.

**Tenure.** Tenure, for the purpose of this thesis, refers to the length of the period of residence in the North Wagga community. There was a recognised distinction, community wide, between those residents who have lengthy, often lifetime and multigenerational tenure in the community as opposed to those who have shorter periods of residence. With a history of floods there have been strict development controls in place, limited geographical space for development, and limited opportunity historically to borrow funds to purchase in North Wagga due to the flood risk. As a result, there has been a stasis in the population up until the late 1990s when the long flood free period, coupled with the completion of the levee system, led to decreased limits on borrowing and an increased sense of lessened flood risk. This meant that a substantial number of new residents bought into the community and these residents, although having lived there for up to 20 years, were recognised as newcomers.

Ed linked community spirit with tenure, stating that apart from a few isolated cases of newcomers, who got involved with the community during
the 2012 flood, there remains a distinction between newcomers and those who have had extensive time in the community. Ed comments that this is perhaps linked to the local knowledge that comes from long-term residence and historical flood experience.

Oh there is the odd one that did I think that got right involved, well you did there, like here we are, look at that! No the odd one did but there’s probably some that couldn’t handle the heat and got out of it you know. But it’s a part of growing up in North Wagga and that’s about it. We live with the river (Ed).

Ed has constructed meaning for community spirit around participation and engagement in the community and noted a difference in that participation dependent on tenure.

For Graeme, the meaning for community spirit around tenure related to expectations of help. He talked about the difference in local knowledge or awareness between older residents and newer residents, and stated that newer residents seemed to expect more in the way of assistance than the older ones did, and also made more complaints because they did not know fully what North Wagga was about.

For Carol, with constructed meaning for community spirit around relationships, particularly in the form of friendships, tenure was significant in that she acknowledged the changing dynamic of these friendships over time. She discussed how, when her children were small, she had different friendships with other parents in the community and that this has changed as the children have grown. She also discussed the difference in relationships as a result of newcomers in the community and particularly noted the industrial developments in the form of work sheds. This, she felt, changed the community spirit in that there are less long tenured residents with whom she has friendships and more transient newcomers with whom she has no relationship.

Locale or community related elements. These themes relate to the community itself, either as noted elements of community or related to the locale, size, type or geography.

Place attachment. Place attachment, subjective in definition, for this thesis as embedded in a disaster context, is broadly defined as an emotive
bonding between people and their places of importance (Carroll et al., 2009; Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009; De Dominicis, Fornara, Ganucci Cancellieri, Twigger-Ross, & Bonaiuto, 2015; Mishra, Mazumdar, & Suar, 2010; Scannell & Gifford, 2010), generally positive (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009) and capable of fostering community participation in a post disaster period (Mishra et al., 2010), as well as facilitating the grief process stimulated by relocation (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009). Within this disaster context, it is a positive place attachment that fosters feelings of safety and wellbeing (Mishra et al., 2010) and an emotional involvement with the North Wagga context (De Dominicis et al., 2015). As such, a positive place attachment that fosters a bond with North Wagga appeared to have some importance for residents when constructing their meaning for community spirit. This is particularly noted around their sense of rootedness or desire to return, this post disaster behaviour having demonstrated significance with this conceptualisation of place attachment (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009). The residents discussed place attachment as an element of their constructed meaning for community spirit in a number of ways.

Firstly, the residents’ place attachment appears to have remained unaffected by the flood, remaining a positive bond and part of their experience of community spirit in that it fosters this attachment and promotes a desire to return post flood. Carol was an adamant believer that the village should not be relocated, and despite the fact that she feels she has less connection to people now than she did when her children were little and she knew more people and there were less industry related properties and more residential properties, she has retained her positive attachment to North Wagga. For her, community spirit has meaning around this place attachment and she described the way that people who do not live in the village cannot understand this attachment. Eleanor expressed her place attachment and links it to her experience and constructed meaning for community spirit by saying, “Well that’s why people live here, that community spirit”.

Secondly, place attachment is strengthened by the flood event with the warmth and belonging fostered by the community spirit experienced increasing a sense of attachment. Veronica now appears to have quite a
strong and positive place attachment to North Wagga, and it appears unhindered by the extreme negativity of her flood experience, and in fact, strengthened. Veronica remembered a quote she read that was written on the side of the local pub during the event: “North Wagga you have given me more than the flood could take away”. Certainly, Veronica’s place attachment was strong enough to draw her back to an extreme level of devastation and uninsured damages; however, she readily disclosed that it is the community spirit that fosters this enhanced level of attachment. Rita noted that she feels that anyone who did not have a strong attachment to place has sold up and left. For Rita the community spirit fosters her place attachment though enhancing her sense of belonging and connection to her home and locale, and the ability for her attachment to facilitate the grief process and the sense of safety it offers.

The consistent discussion by the majority of the residents around community spirit in conjunction with the community recovery barbeque may also be a significant example of the connection between place attachment and community spirit. Where the barbeque was seen as a demonstration of community spirited helping (organised by two ex-residents), this community participation in the post disaster period is consistent with the definition of place attachment.

Finally, some residents felt an attachment to the river itself with the spirit of the community fostering that attachment and effectively facilitating the grouping of people with the same attachment to the river. Ed noted that “we live with the river” and he saw attachment to the river itself as part of the spirit of the community of North Wagga. He talked about knowing the river and flood behaviours of the river that allowed him to remain in situ for the duration for the flood, his attachment to place so strong he refused to evacuate. Ed’s constructed meaning of community spirit in North Wagga was effectively framed by the river and his experience of the river in his lifetime by its side.

*Community size and type.* Many residents commented on the size and type of community they perceive North Wagga as, and the relevance that has on their constructed meaning for community spirit in the research data in numerous ways. Firstly, the small size of the community fosters
connections between the residents that then facilitates the emergence of community spirit. Eleanor demonstrated this with her belief that community spirit is born and bred in small rural communities, and that in times of adversity, the spirit comes to the fore. She comments: “those people it’s been born in them, it’s been bred in them. And in those small communities”. One significant factor that Ally continually noted in her conceptualisation of community spirit from the context of her flood recovery journey was size. The smaller size of North Wagga, she noted, enables people to know each other, to have local knowledge and it makes the community appear strong against a common enemy.

Further, rurality and the attributes of rurality appear to foster an inherent community spirit. Carol made a connection between rurality and community spirit and it is clear that community spirit has meaning around what she terms “country life, countrified values”. She stated that people from rural areas are brought up to have values that foster people helping each other.

Finally, the specific geography of North Wagga fosters a unique community spirit in allowing both connective relationships that afford a sense of security but at the same time enough personal space for freedom and privacy. Graeme believed that North Wagga as a rural community is special with respect to the sense of closeness and the sense of community in as much as there are close relationships between people who all know each other, there is also a sense of privacy and space. Similarly, as much as Julia finds security in a small community and has constructed meaning for community spirit around this idea of security, she also was keenly aware of her own privacy, notable in her comment about North Wagga having “the yards”. This is a reference to the fact that most properties in North Wagga have a substantial land size which affords residents space between dwellings and boundaries and thus privacy when they want it.

*Barrier around community*. This theme explored the idea that the community spirit acts as a protective barrier around the North Wagga community, as well as potentially excluding North Wagga from the broader community. Where community spirit had meaning for residents around knowing each other as a means to ensuring safety and security, the spirit is viewed as a protective barrier. For Julia, who had constructed meaning
around knowing her neighbours and having a sense of responsibility for their safety, there was an evident protective barrier. Also, where there is perceived stigma from identifying as part of an inherently risky community and the spirit that comes from that identity, community spirit acts a barrier around this stigma.

Similarly, this barrier may be perceived as exclusionary. Ally related this unique sense of North Wagga community spirit—which almost isolates North Wagga—to the sense of conflict between council and North Wagga residents by describing council as the common enemy to fight against, which binds North Wagga residents together. Again, it is important to consider the meaning of community spirit from Kelly, who saw the connectedness of people within the community, as well as to the community, as evidence of North Wagga being a “gated community”—“I always joke you know, North Wagga is a gated community you know, how did you get in. So posh”. Kelly laughed when she made this statement, indicating she was making a joke as North Wagga is not literally a gated community.

**Negative element.**

*The dark side of community spirit.* Overwhelmingly, community spirit was presented in the literature, in the media, and by leadership and the Australian government, as a beneficial resource and an identifier of a positive community response. All of the residents interviewed presented constructed meanings that had definitively positive elements and, indeed, outcomes. However, as the term ‘dark side’ suggests, they also noted a number of less positive connotations which occur alongside the positive elements, within their constructed meanings for community spirit, which need exploration. If indeed community spirit forms a resource for future flood preparedness and recovery, then any potential issues should be explored to ensure best outcomes for communities and the people that live within them.

With constructed meaning around helping, the dark side of community spirit is represented by the notion that not all helping is considered helpful by the recipient, that community spirited helping is uncontrolled, that there are
residual feelings of guilt for the help recipients, that the helping may be inequitably distributed, and that help may be limited at certain times throughout the flood event. The notion of help being unwanted and uncontrolled was noted by Kelly, who talked about unwanted help as being perhaps a negative element of community spirit where residents are disempowered by their helpers who make their own decisions about what helping is. She gave the example of her elderly neighbour, whose grown children came after the flood, and in what Kelly deemed spirited helping, threw out all of their mother’s belongings without her being present to make decisions.

**Kelly:** That’s a big problem. Like my next door neighbour, she didn’t get anything up right? Nothing pretty much all her stuff and her family came and cleaned up and she wasn’t home. They threw out all her stuff. I wanted to go and get stuff off the pile. I didn’t but I had to stop myself from picking up her stuff and washing it off and taking it back to her. They were cleaning her house out and I was thinking what are you doing you idiots, and really sad because she is old and all of her stuff that she had was just little stuff but that was her whole life you know? And it was all gone.

**Researcher:** Is that a negative to community spirit?

**Kelly:** I think yes. Misguided help. Yes definitely.

Ally talked of her distress about the helping she received, from her husband’s work colleagues and partners with whom she wasn’t well acquainted, and the sense of discomfort that she experienced as a result of having strangers in her home and her lack of control over the process of packing, with people effectively making decisions on what to pack and where to take it. Rita spoke about the lack of empathy and understanding that is felt from those who come to help in the name of community spirit. She described the disempowerment she felt at having people come to help and whilst doing so, give their opinions on her choice to live in a flood zone. She noted the lack of ability to defend herself because she needed to accept their help. In this sense, community spirit, while providing tangible assistance, can simultaneously have a detrimental impact on the recipient, disempowering an already vulnerable person and thus potentially having a significant psychosocial impact. Rita made a distinction between people
who help as an act of community spirit and those who are self-interested to do so.

There are those nosy parker helpers that want to gloat … “yeah had to help me mate out” “was bad over there, it’s bad” fully making it way worse than it is. Yeah definitely and that’s what makes it harder too, shit we need um garbage bags, you try to get to Woolies and there are all these nosy parkers, so they block that bridge off because of the nosy parkers and we can’t even, or to drop the kids off, you can’t get there because of all the people, they are not helping. No (Rita).

There was meaning also around the help of strangers which may not be viewed as entirely beneficial by the residents, Julia and Ally both commented on “stickybeaks” and “strangers” coming to North Wagga under the guise of offering community spirited help, but in reality, only assuaging their personal curiosity. Julia noted the feeling of distrust and discomfort she felt when confronted by what she terms “stickybeaks”. She identified them as people who came into North Wagga from the broader community during the flood event, ostensibly to assist, but as Julia and Ally both noted, there was an element of curiosity attached to this helping attendance. As an example of community spirit, Julia and Ally believe it is not beneficial.

I hated them. It was just such an intrusion on your private life. Because everything you own was going out the front. Everything that had meaning to you, you are putting it out there. And I know people were coming along and taking stuff (Julia).

…if you had stuff out the front, no, none of your neighbours looked at it, even, even gave it a second thought, whereas people would come and, and look at what you throwing out and whatnot, but you wouldn't even look at your neighbours’ pile (Ally).

Ally also considered community spirit to have meaning around sharing of resources but that she considered that spirit to have issues related to the equitable sharing of such resources.

**Discussion.** In providing answers to Section 2, Part A of the research question (RQ2a) around the meaning of community spirit for the residents of North Wagga as constructed from their 2012 flood experience, there were some differences about how this spirit is conceptualised in the literature and within the secondary data (Hansard and the media). Ostensibly, the residents conceptualised community spirit around the relationships they have within
the North Wagga community. Of the themes that arose from the literature review, the residents conceptualised community spirit foremost around their sense of place and connectedness. While the use of self as helping was a theme unto itself, they also refered to connectedness, and community spirit as an inherent aspect of human nature, as least significant in their conceptualisation.

The residents noted their sense of place as significant to community spirit as a sense of belonging, which may be viewed as the relationship they feel with North Wagga and which is reiterated in their discussion around the importance of shared history. The residents also commented on community spirit as stemming from local knowledge, which is new information arising from this study in regard to the sense of place theme. There are links to resilience here in that the residents felt that self-coping which enhances their resilience comes from this local knowledge.

A critical social work frame that espouses consciousness raising as sound practice for working with groups would view this as beneficial in assisting residents to understand their position as part of the broader socio-political context, and thus to gain insight into the power they hold within the community as a collective for building resilience to disaster by utilising their asset of community spirit (Allan, 2009a). The notion that community spirit had meaning around relationships also comes from the residents’ conceptualisation of connectedness, where they considered that participation with others in the community leads to community spirit. The discussion around friendliness as part of small, rural community life is also significant. Where the residents noted the use of self as helping, it centred on neighbouring as part of responsible rural living. The residents discussed community spirit within this theme as social capital. They also noted the difference in bridging capital coming from outside the community during the disaster event, but more healing bonding capital available within the community occurring after the event in the recovery stage. The broader meanings that arose from the participant interviews similarly linked community spirit with relationships between people and their place, North Wagga.
Connecting community spirit with resilience—where the spirit is an inevitable response to adversity—is part of the psychological element. Also considered here was the identity of North Wagga residents tied to the flood adversity, and the adversity of a threat of relocation which prompts the slogan: “we shall not be moved”. This is a tangible source of power for the community. For social work, it is also important knowledge in that this power may well foster resilience to future disasters through empowerment. This fosters a ‘bottom up’ approach to resilience building consistent with a critical social work frame (Allan, 2009b). There remains however, a responsibility for social workers here to ensure that the community members are not so vulnerable in the immediacy of the disaster event that they are unable to utilise any sense of empowerment. To fail to recognise their vulnerability may perpetuate or foster oppression. This identity theme focused on the relationship that residents felt with North Wagga and through the collective disaster experience.

The social element themes of generation and tenure are linked by the fact that the long-term residents are ageing and remaining in place. Where community spirit comes with age and with long-term residence, there is clear meaning around the relationship that North Wagga residents have with each other over time. Where leadership and organisation factored in residents’ conceptualisation of community spirit, it is where that leadership as the Residents Association fosters togetherness and participation of the people within the community. The locale related element of place attachment speaks to the relationship residents have with their place, which as a small rural community, is thought to promote relationships through engagement. Where there is a barrier around the locale, this was thought to promote internal relationships over those that bridge residents to the external community. Again, this barrier may represent a source of power that the community may use to challenge structural oppression that may result from the political context (Allan, 2009a; Mendes, 2009).

In the residents’ discussion of the dark side of community spirit, a link with relationships is present once more. Where the dark side refers to negative elements of community spirit related to unwanted external help, there is a lack of relationships that are deemed necessary for the interpretation of
helping. Where the spirit is negative in terms of inequitable distribution, it was seen to be a result of a lack of connection or relationships within the community, which were viewed as deciding who the recipients of community spirit are. A critical social work frame was particularly useful when considering this dark side of community spirit where there is potential for oppression and disempowerment through the application of community spirit (Allan, 2009a; Mendes, 2009; Pease, 2009). Social work must also be aware of the professional and ethical responsibility to ensure that people in a time of increased vulnerability are able to realise a position of empowerment and use their professional skillset to facilitate this where required. For social work, the important knowledge is that the relationships within the community are what protect the residents from inequitable distribution of resources that are an element of this dark side of community spirit.

**Leaders’ Interviews: Themes to Meanings**

This part of the chapter offers the findings from the leadership stakeholder participant group. As such, it offers a partial answer to Section 2, Part B of the research question (RQ2b). As for the preceding part of this chapter, these findings begin with a conceptualisation of community, followed by a discussion of meaning of community spirit around the themes derived from the literature review. As for the residents’ group, this section then considers the broader meanings from the thematic framework developed from the participants’ findings. As such, it offers the conceptualised meaning of community spirit from the leadership stakeholder group around their experience of the 2012 North Wagga flood.

**Leadership conceptualisation of community.** During the interviews, each leader was initially asked to locate themselves within a conceptualisation of community to facilitate their thinking around the concept of community. With the leadership participants drawn from different levels and types of leadership, a variety of conceptualisations were expected. Leaders who participated included those who lived in the community (some impacted by flood and some not), those who were in leadership positions for the duration of the flood response, and those who were in higher level government positions. For this thesis, it was pertinent to
stimulate discussion around the leaders’ conceptualisation of community generally, as well as their expectations for how that would function in a flood event. They were also asked about their conceptualisation of the North Wagga community—to determine how they experienced or witnessed the flood recovery response from within that perspective.

Common to the leaders was the idea that community involves groups of people who share some common connector, inclusive of locale, values, purpose or experience. Four of the leaders noted specifically that their conceptualisation of community involved the idea that community has meaning for them around groups of people that offer help to each other, generally as neighbouring, volunteerism and altruistic giving. Tom spoke about having “meaningful relationships with those in your proximity”. He went on to explain that relationships are stronger for people with some sort of commonality, such as the people of North Wagga who share a locale. He pointed out that locale has unique properties that influence the experience of those people.

The most noted concept related to community from the leadership participants was the idea that community invokes a sense of belonging, arising from the connectedness and relationships of the people. This concept was noted by two high level political leaders, both of whom live within the North Wagga community; two flood recovery leaders with extensive broad scale community involvement; and also a local council leader who draws his conceptualisation around belonging from his own experience of community. These participants noted a sense of belonging as an important aspect of community—the feeling that they belong somewhere—and stated that this belonging further offers people support from within their community. These connections, which foster a sense of belonging, are believed to result from people participating in the life of the community. That may include membership in smaller groups within a broader community, such as the fire service that Harry spoke of joining specifically to feel part of the community, and participation in local events, which Jim felt offered opportunities for connection and requires shared public spaces in which to host these opportunities.
Community, for some leaders, involved the cohesive rurality of the small North Wagga geographic location. Mitchell, as a political representative, uses the term “parochial”, which indicates that his conceptualisation of community involving its existence in small, conservative, close-knit groups. He stated that community for him is about “good old fashioned country values”, resulting from being “country bred”. Tom and Des, two of the higher level political leaders, noted that rurality makes community a different experience that includes closer ties and more help and support because people know each other. Violet also considered the village atmosphere central to the collectivist nature of the North Wagga community. The size and nature of the community fosters the ability of people to be well acquainted with each other.

Three of the leader participants, who do not reside within the community, noted the North Wagga community as being unique. Of interest is that the perspective of the North Wagga community as unique was noted as a potentially negative aspect by Mitchell, in his high level political position. He describes the North Wagga community as being unique in the sense that there is a display of what he considered to be a message of defiance of government intervention. He pointed to what he considers to be an adversarial display of the sign: “we shall not be moved”.

**Mitchell:** The sign is very powerful—“we shall not be moved” is a very powerful…

**Researcher:** Yes it is a very powerful slogan.

**Mitchell:** It’s a message for everybody who drives through—what is it the corner of Hampden Avenue and Olympic Way is it?

**Researcher:** It’s Hampden and William Street.

**Mitchell:** It’s where Alan’s old petrol station was. Alan’s old motor mechanic shop, it’s right on the corner there and it sends a powerful message to anybody, it’s almost like William Wallace in Scotland. We shall not be moved!

**Researcher:** Well it’s a fairly unassuming sign really…

**Mitchell:** But it has so many ramifications, it’s telling civic leaders, it’s telling political leaders, it’s saying we stand for something and if you dare say that we’re going to do something that we don’t want to do we’ll over ride you!
Mitchell further stated that “no other community would get away with this”. For the other two leader participants, Harry and Violet, the uniqueness of the North Wagga community was discussed as a positive. These participants noted the special cohesion and collaboration of the community that they see as providing strength. Harry noted the sign as an indicator of defiance resulting from a cohesive community response to council. He further described the way that the North Wagga community engaged with council as a cohesive group, albeit with some animosity towards council, but nonetheless with a sense of collective interest that embraces the diversity of the North Wagga people. Violet noted the same sign as symbolic of the power of cohesion that she views the North Wagga community as holding. She believed that the shared historical adversity has been crucial in binding the community together in this positive way. “I think there has been that battle of we shall not be moved, and it was won. And it’s not forgotten and that sign is there as an eternal reminder for everybody. At whatever cost”.

Two high level political leaders from opposing political ideologies, both of whom reside in the North Wagga area, noted similar aspects in their conceptualisation of the North Wagga community specifically. These aspects included tenure and local knowledge. One leader noted local knowledge as stemming from long tenure and experiencing flood, and noted a different experience for those who are less historically connected or experienced. Contrastingly, the other leader noted that whilst long tenure may offer a heightened sense of ownership within the community, short tenure does not prohibit local knowledge. He felt that there is adequate information available, particularly with respect to flood, and that local knowledge is attainable through research as much as it is experience, adding to the experience of community.

**Constructed meanings of community spirit.** From their conceptualisation of community, and specifically of the North Wagga community around the flood event of 2012, the leaders were asked what they considered the term community spirit to mean from within this experience. The leadership participants, as for the residents, commented on their conceptualised meaning with respect to the themes noted throughout the literature. The leaders commented on the same themes with differing
relevance to those of the residents. For the leadership participants, the themes were noted as follows:

- Sense of place
- Inherent aspect of human nature
- The use of self as helping
- Connectedness

_Sense of place._ Sense of place was the least noted theme from the leadership participants. It is notable that four of the leader participants are also residents. Where sense of place relates to the bonds between people and place, there was meaning constructed by few of the leadership participants. Mitchell appeared to believe that community spirit is partly about having a sense of place which connects people to the space in which they live: “You get it by people having an ownership of their own city”. He calls it “ownership” and he states that it is greater in the broader Wagga Wagga community because of the infrastructure that is to be found there that draws people to the city, such as the university and defence training bases.

Harry also drew a comparison between the city main and the North Wagga community. He felt that the sense of place held by the North Wagga people, as a connection to space and shared feeling of that connection as a result of their shared history and experience, resulted in the residents demonstrating their community spirit through collective action, respect for each other and supportive assistance. Harry did not witness these elements of community spirit in the city main; he believed this was due to the different sense of place the residents in the city main had prior to the flood, with little shared history or experience. “Yeah. I saw a lot of people loading things into their cars, “get out of my way” you know? Didn’t see that in North Wagga.”

Violet also linked sense of place with shared experience in her conceptualisation of meaning for community spirit. She viewed the sharing of experience as what connects people to their community and which fosters the way they understand their place. She too drew comparisons between North Wagga, where she felt the collective risk experience fostered a strong and cohesive sense of place, and other suburbs where she sees people as living independently and not connected to either each other or their place.
She believed community spirit was more visible in North Wagga where the shared sense of place fosters participation in all manner of community matters.

**Inherent aspect of human nature.** The linking of community spirit with the human characteristic of altruism was the most commonly noted theme constructed by the leadership participants with respect to their 2012 North Wagga flood experience. Across the coding for this theme, seven leadership participants noted meaning for community spirit as human nature in a variety of ways.

Lew commented that it is community spiritedness, which he considers to be an inherent aspect of human nature that draws people to other helping groups, as a way to join a community and to give.

> Yeah it’s like I said, everyone can’t live in a small village so they join the fire brigade or the SES because they are that sort of person. They want to give in some shape or form. So it’s an offshoot of community spirit. I think the same sort of person, I don’t know how to say this, I think an SES person would fit into our community, very easily. So I think they are interchangeable (Lew).

Lew believed that people sought out communities to join because they were community spirited and wanted to participate and help people. For some people, he stated that their community spirit was visible and that they lead the group, whereas others chose to be community spirited in a way that was less visible but no less helpful. Kerrie similarly commented that some people may be inherently more community spirited than others and that this too may be further tied to rurality.

> Yeah, maybe it is a part of your makeup, your personality, whatever that is. I have always been that way inclined because I grew up in Coolamon and the community back in the sixties and seventies back in Coolamon that was everything. And local country people it is in us I think (Kerrie).

Des defined community spirit as a "gut feel" and said that you either have it or you don't.
I think it's a gut feel, community spirit, I think it's in your guts, and I think you've either got it or you haven't. Most people have got gut feel for certain issues or gut feel for I like this person, I don't. And I think they have gut feel for what is their responsibility as a citizen, what is their, their duty, their, I guess their conscience. It's, I think it's the gut feel, I've got to do something and if you don't, you're sick in the guts if you don't, you know what I mean (Des)?

Des appeared to firmly believe that community spirit was inherent to some people, and that for others to be community spirited was impossible: “They're … insular, selfish, self-focused, self-centred, so no matter what you do you couldn't implant it in them”. He made the assumption that a community will inevitably have some community spirit due to the fact that it is inherent in some people. He stated that the “right DNA” is part of the greater majority. Interestingly, he considered it impossible to build spirit within a community; however, he did then discuss the way that one can entice people to develop a community spirit by teaching them as children to be participatory in helping vulnerable people.

Harry noted his conceptualisation of community spirit as incorporating altruism in the way that he witnessed the community members showing concern for others’ whereabouts during the flood event. He noted that people often came to the hall where the response agencies had set up, and enquired or offered information about other people in the community that they were concerned about. Finally, Tom linked community spirit with community mindedness and stated that he didn’t believe that people participated in community spirited activities to ensure that others in the community will think highly of them, which indicated an element of altruism in Tom’s conceptualisation of community spirit.

**The use of self as helping.** The use of self as helping was noted as significant by most of the leadership participants in a couple of distinct ways. Firstly, they noted that helping is part of the expected community spirited outcome, of membership within a community, and also that volunteerism is an act of helping that stems from community spirit.

Tom definitively noted the idea of shared responsibility in community spirit as the means for the community to provide itself with assistance. He indicated that each person in the community has this responsibility, but that
people engage with the spirit in varying degrees. He conceptualised community spirit as the sense of responsibility to consider other people within your community. He noted that for North Wagga and the flood event, community spirit for him related to a sense of duty to share information with and assist his neighbours: “yeah I think so, more obligation, responsibility is the right word. Yeah it is just the right thing to do”.

Lew similarly noted the responsibility to help as part of the community spirit within a community. He believed that community spirit was a resource ready to provide help within the community when it was needed.

It’s something that’s just there. And it’s there for um, that core group of community people to draw on. You draw on community spirit. It’s just like it’s in the bank until you need it and then you just draw on it and the people of the community are fully aware that someday they’re gonna be asked to help do something. You know draw from this community spirit (Lew).

Lew felt that community spirit was directly tied to the idea of the shared responsibility attached to membership in the community, where that community is expected to help when needed.

In discussing helping as an element of her conceptualisation of community spirit, Joanie discussed her own helping role during the flood recovery as an example of her community spirit. She discussed the idea that without community spiritedness, or the actions that she considered as resulting from that spirit, the community would be more negatively impacted during flood recovery.

Oh it would be pretty demoralising, you would be pretty down in the dumps if you didn’t have that. It was uplifting, totally. And I think more friendships got built in that. I’m sure more friendships got built in that oh well my friendship with Cliff, cos I didn’t really know him before that, but now I’m missy cos I delivered the paper to him, like Lonnie lived up with his ex and didn’t want to be there and we went away on holidays and said come and live in our house (Joanie).

Joanie felt it was her community spirit that fostered her helping of other people within the community, some of whom she knew before the flood and some that she was not well acquainted with. For Joanie, the help that arises from community spirit was a significant source of her conceptualised meaning.
Harry conceptualised community spirit within the North Wagga flood context as people from within the community caring for and helping each other. He described this as an altruistic style of helping whereby people came to seek assistance for others rather than for themselves. Harry felt that North Wagga has that community spirit, where people know and care about each other, because of the ongoing threat of flood that the community faces.

Helping was also important to Violet’s conceptualisation of community spirit. Violet stated that the most effective means of helping people through a disaster is to offer financial support. She discussed how shocked she was during this flood event to see just how few flood affected people received NSW State Government support, in comparison to the Federal Government flood allowance which was non-discretionary. She further commented that the act of people claiming their flood allowance and then donating it back to those charitable funds that were supporting flood impacted people was an act of community spirit. She equated this sort of community spirited financial support as comparable with the financial support offered by the Buddhist organisation Tzu Chi, other smaller local organisations and the Mayor’s flood appeal.

And so in a sense of whether state was helping individuals, that was very, very limited, but that’s where things such as the monks came in, and they are a community organisation, and Rotary, and good old Kerry Pascoe [then Mayor of Wagga Wagga City Council]. And um, you know Angels for the Forgotten to be honest, I was a bit sceptical of them but they helped (Violet).

As a result of her experience in the flood recovery centre, Violet believed that the best source of help actually comes from within a community spirited and thus supportive community such as North Wagga, but also from community organisations such as Tzu Chi (Buddhist charitable organisation) or Angels for the Forgotten (private charitable organisation) rather than from government. Interestingly, the North Wagga community leaders and most of the others who commented on helping as part of their conceptualised meaning of community spirit, noted help as coming from within the community. It is the two higher level political leaders who noted help as coming from the broader community.
Volunteerism, as a way of helping, was also noted as having significance to the conceptualised meaning of community spirit. Des conceptualised community spirit as people who are personally unaffected by the flood coming to volunteer their help in the crisis. He described meeting people while filling sandbags and spoke about the way a father and his children came out during the night to fill bags. Community spirit has meaning for Des related to helping, volunteerism and altruism. Kerrie conceptualised community spirit as having meaning around altruistic giving, people helping each other through volunteerism or other means, and the community supporting people in need, including financially. In discussing community spirit in relation to volunteerism and altruistic helping, John commented that organisations such as Tzu Chi may be operating out of a sense of community spirit in that they are a community themselves, and they perform acts of altruistic helping and volunteering as part of their presentation of that spirit.

**Connectedness.** Connectedness was noted by the leadership participants as having meaning for their conceptualisations of community spirit. Violet conceptualised community spirit as connectedness between the people of a community who are bound together through shared experience. She viewed community spirit as a factor of people knowing each other. In comparing North Wagga with other local suburbs, Violet stated that the community spirit in North Wagga was markedly different. “Like there is no connection between the people that are there. No one knows each other … I think it’s about disconnection in those communities.”

Connectedness resulting from engagement with and participation in a community was perhaps the most noted meaning for community spirit by the leadership participants, with five of the participants commenting. The idea that engagement and participation lead to connectedness, which then fosters or provides access to the community spirit, that then becomes a resource for help and assistance, is the way that numerous leadership participants have conceptualised meaning for community spirit around the connectedness theme.
Well it gets there by this core group of people and then the rest of the community can see that this half a dozen people, um, value, value the community and the community spirit so the more people you have got that want to be part of it the higher that community spirit is I think (Lew).

Lew considered community spirit to be the sense that there will be helping actions that can be produced from membership and participation within the community. He considered the core group (which he considered to be the Residents Association), and thus recognised community leadership, to be the key to enlisting other people to engage. When people engage with the core group, the actions that arise from this group produce the community spirit that facilitates people helping each other. Effectively, Lew saw community as the relationships between people, which means there are people to help when needed and also a feeling of community spirit that people should and do help each other.

Kerrie viewed community engagement to be crucial in accessing community spirit, which she views as a stored resource that requires some nurturing through engagement within the community. For Mitchell, community spirit had meaning around participation and engagement with the community, whether that is the local North Wagga community or the broader Wagga Wagga community. He believed that participation in the North Wagga community was the responsibility of each person to initiate, and he indicated that every person will be welcomed warmly. He then stated that even those who do not participate are also assisted. Des made a clear distinction between his conceptualisation of community, which he described as coming together as a group and having a sense of belonging in that group, and community spirit, which he felt was the act of helping the vulnerable people in that group. Thus, spirit is the action of the community arising from the connectedness of the people in the group that forms the community.

In discussing how a community acquires community spirit, Tom and Sarah (his wife) offered the following:

**Sarah:** I don’t know if you can build the spirit. You can build the community by creating places for the community to happen.

**Tom:** And events and moments, creating shared moments. Like the Christmas barbeque was just a great memory. For anybody who turned up.
Sarah: And that’s where the spirit is. When you get together that’s when the spirit happens.

Meaning for community spirit is evident in these comments as the outcome of gathering, participating, socialising, making connections and building relationships.

Broader meanings. The leadership participants commented on similar broader themes to the resident participants, but with variance in importance. The broader meanings that the leadership participants presented around their conceptualisation of community spirit are discussed from within the following framework.

1) Negative
   - The dark side of community spirit
2) Psychological
   - Adversity
   - Identity
3) Social
   - Generational
   - Leadership and organisation
   - Tenure
4) Locale or community related
   - Place attachment
   - Community size and type
   - Barrier around community

Negative element.

The dark side of community spirit. The dark side of community was a phrase coined by one of the leadership participants which gave name to what was quite a common theme throughout all three of the groups of participants, more particularly the residents and service providers. However, seven leaders noted the dark side of community spirit in nine instances across the coding for this theme. The theme related to the idea that there may be negative elements to community spirit, which is more usually discussed as a positive concept.
When Tom discussed his meaning for community spirit as a sense of duty to help others within his community, he went on to note what he terms the “dark side of community spirit”. He explained this as the idea that not all people feel the same sense of duty or responsibility and therefore do not participate in the community spirit in the same way.

Yeah I think so, more obligation, responsibility is the right word. Yeah it is just the right thing to do. And I think that connects with that maybe this is the dark side of community spirit and that is that it is frustrating when you turn up to Clean Up Australia Day and you’re the only one there and the neighbours don’t turn up (Tom).

Tom also discussed the sense of inclusiveness that was facilitated by the community spirit of North Wagga. He gave the example of a local resident with a developmental disability who, without the spirited inclusiveness, may otherwise have difficulties engaging with and thus participating in the community. The woman’s flood recovery experience was dramatically improved due to her inclusion in the community, and as such, she was able to access community spirited assistance.

Tom then spoke again about the dark side of community spirit where this inclusivity is challenged by numerous factors such as tenure. He commented on the opinion expressed on a community Facebook page which alluded to the idea that people without extensive history in the community were lesser residents than those who have lived in the community for some length. At first, Tom discussed his anger that arises, but then leads into a discussion around how this idea potentially arose from the long-term residents need to protect themselves from outside dangers. His wife added:

So that means if you are going to have that community spirit, you are going to have to be open to a whole different bunch of people. So um, yeah the refugee family, or disability or gay or whatever, they have a right to live in the community and be a part of it but then there is a sense of entitlement that if you are here for a very long time (Sarah).

The dark side of community spirit mentioned here was perhaps not that people are not included, but that community spirit does not facilitate a great enough sense of safety for residents to feel happy in welcoming anybody and may thus feel the need to exclude people. Tom also explained the dark side of community spirit in part as where the residents have such an
entrenched suspicion of council resulting from interpreted historical events, that they inherently view any council opinion as negative and as merely another way for “council to screw North Wagga over”. Tom and his wife viewed this as a negative element of community spirit in that it may not facilitate forward movement or progress for North Wagga.

**Tom**: Gosh. It’s hard to imagine a time when those stories aren’t … because they are archetypes, they become archetypes … And that is the thing isn’t it. It’s when history becomes myth and that doesn’t make it less historical. But it does become the way you interpret everything.

**Sarah**: The lens.

**Tom**: The lens yeah. Which is…

**Sarah**: …and if it is an inherently negative or defensive lens then it can … possibly prevent you from moving forward in some ways.

Exploitation of the resource that community spirit offers was commonly discussed in a variety of ways. Des stated that often the people who are not community spirited are the first to ask for help and receive the benefits of the spiritedness of others. He linked community spirit with volunteerism, and described the way that volunteers can become burnt out, then making it difficult to find further volunteers. He stated that community spirit is the same: although a tangible resource, it can be used up though the exhaustion of the community spirited providers. Where Lew conceptualised community spirit as the helping actions that arise from relationships formed through participation in the group that is the community, he saw some issues for equity. He stated that even if people do not give to the spirit equally, if they live within the community they are likely to benefit from it regardless. This, he said, can make people feel they are being exploited and want to withdraw from participating. Unconsciously or with ill intention, Violet believed that community spirit may be exploited by leadership.

And I was very conscious of not interfering. I wanted to do more than I did but I tried to figure out where I should keep a boundary and you can’t, Tony Abbott going in and washing a couple of beer glasses. No, God no. And that is exploiting and that really pissed me off but you know, what did he offer, nothing. Did he say if we get into government I will help to blah, blah, blah, no! Just a photo opportunity (Violet).
The uncontrolled and unbounded demonstration of community spirited help, which may be either unhelpful or unwanted, was another aspect of the dark side of community spirit. Violet considered the help that some individuals offer as potentially not very helpful.

And people can mean well and most people mean well and whether Tony Abbott meant well who am I to judge. So yeah but um for yeah, for individuals they do mean well but they don’t necessarily realise the impact of their gesture. Actually causes more harm than good or hinder (Violet).

Joanie discussed community spirit as having a negative element in that people felt they couldn't control it. She talked about how, in a leadership role within the community, she had people approach her to say they did not want strangers coming into their homes. She felt that this aspect of community spirit—that people come and help without invitation and are thus unwanted and uncontrolled—was something that people found confronting.

When they found out the Army and the fire brigade and everyone was coming to help, people came to me and said, I don’t want anyone in my house going through my possessions and I actually stood up at North Wagga, at the school and said if you feel threatened, and don’t want people to come into your yard and help you then that’s fine, but say so (Joanie).

That community spirit is a limited resource is another way that leadership participants discussed their conceptualised meaning for community spirit. Des gave the example of community spirit as a resource where time limitations may factor in limiting its applicability. He believed that spirit was available only for short-term help and that over time the spirit will wane. Kerrie felt that community spirit, as a feeling, is not the most tangible of resources for a disaster, however effective it may be. Because she saw the need for it to be activated and driven in some way, she felt that in a disaster there is a requirement for specific targeting of community spirit so that it may be used as the resource that it is. She states that the use of media is crucial, along with coverage of pertinent human interest stories.

Psychological elements. These two themes (adversity and identity) relate to the leaders’ discussion on community spirit as aspects of the human psycho-emotional response to disaster and the flood recovery experience. For these two themes, leaders explored their experiences and conveyed
constructed meaning around how they perceive their or others’ emotional responses as relating to community spirit.

Adversity. That community spirit is linked with adversity was commonly noted by five leadership participants in discussing their conceptualised meanings for community spirit. They noted this link in the following ways: community spirit is an inherent response to risk and adversity; the community spirit of North Wagga results from, and is activated or strengthened by, ongoing adversity around relocation and historical events; and during adversity, community spirit comes from the broader community.

Mitchell commented that the community spirit demonstrated in, and by, the North Wagga community during the 2012 flood event (which he considers to have meaning around the way that people band together and help each other in adversity), to be an inherent response to adversity in any community. Kerrie similarly believed that community spirit, also available in other communities, is an inherent part of the response to adversity as demonstrated in the following comment:

Yeah I think community spirit is always there and I suppose it is a shame that it takes something like a natural disaster to bring that out in people. I think people naturally have to want to help in the community in some way but for whatever reason they get too tied up in whatever else but I think that our community spirit is at its best through a natural disaster where we all pull together and that happens everywhere, not just Wagga, in a flood or fire or whatever, people call it the Aussie spirit, mateship and all that sort of stuff and for me I love to see that happen. I think it’s just a shame when it only comes out in a disaster (Kerrie).

For a number of the leadership participants, community spirit had meaning around adversity where they feel that the community spirit of North Wagga comes from, and is strengthened by, the ongoing adversity that results from the threat of relocation and the shared history of this adversity. In discussing whether all communities have community spirit, Tom compared the community spirit of North Wagga to the sense of belonging he experiences within his other most prominent community, his political party.
The other community that I am in that has that same sense of deep, and I suppose it is an emotional thing, maybe it’s a real sense of belonging is being a member of the XXX party for me, because, and there is probably a lot of parallels, it’s another community who share a strong sense of lots in common and also feel like, well they keep getting flogged frankly. So it’s that sense of we have weathered the storm together. And I think North Wagga has that narrative as well (Tom).

Similarly, Jim spoke of community spirit as being evidenced by the way people bind together, which he says is likely in case of a threatening situation. He noted that these threats include flood, relocation and stringent development controls. For Jim, community spirit meant sharing the experience and the fear it invokes, fostering the need for people to connect for group support. In this way, community spirit is tied to the adversity of flood, but also relates more deeply to the collective experiences and emotions that the flood instigates for people and for which they seek solace in others. Harry also felt that North Wagga has community spirit, where people know and care about each other, because of the ongoing threat of flood that the community faces. He believed that the North Wagga community spirit is tied to the adversity connected to the fight against relocation and that the spirit is strengthened by a crisis such as a flood event.

Lew commented that community spirit in an adverse event is demonstrated differently by different people, and that it comes from different places depending on the progression of the event.

It had a different effect on a lot of people. We are all different in our emotion, our fears. We were that busy after the flood, I never even thought about community spirit. But um you know like, I spose it was stronger but the big thing, the hardest part was that everyone was trying to clean up their own stuff. And didn’t quite have the time to help other people (Lew).

Identity. Identity was not widely commented on by the leadership participants, apart from one of the internal North Wagga community leaders, who commented on identity as part of her conceptualisation of what she deems a resilient community spirit.
Yeah. If you think about it. Conversations where do you live, in North Wagga. I live in North Wagga. So that is probably a good identifier. We identify ourselves to an area. We are not afraid to do that. We are not afraid to say we live in North Wagga even though we live in a floodplain. Oh you live in a floodplain, oh you live in a floodplain … yeah I know that (Joanie)!

Despite the popular critique of people choosing to live on a floodplain, Joanie considered part of community spirit to be residents’ ability to identify themselves as part of the North Wagga community with a sense of pride rather than apology. She commented that North Wagga residents refer to themselves as being from “North Wagga” rather than individuals from a certain street, which she felt residents of the broader Wagga Wagga community more commonly do. She also discussed the lack of community spirit in those residents from North Wagga who do not identify themselves in this same way.

Violet commented on the fact that a community’s spirit is unique to them, which alludes to the idea that for her there must be some meaning around identity.

Yeah absolutely, cos it’s your community spirit and community spirit is a label in that it’s and it’s a generic term whereas North Wagga community spirit is very different to Ladysmith community spirit. To Glenfield community spirit (Violet.)

**Social elements.** These are themes that refer to the way that people relate to each other within society. They note the relationships between generations, the relationships that people have with communities, and also the organisational structure within those communities.

**Generational.** That community spirit has meaning around the transmission of community spirited values and practices throughout the generations was commented on by only Kerrie from within the leadership group. Kerrie felt that community spirit is generational, that it was bred into older generation in smaller communities, and that it is recognisable in the sense of responsibility to help others through participation in connected community groups and organisations.
Out of the 200 odd community groups I work with, most of the members are 60 plus. So it’s definitely a generational thing, there you go, as well. It’s definitely the generation you and I grew up in, so you know it was always go and help and do this always and our families were just so intertwined. Community groups in small communities were just the backbone of the community. Everyone sort of radiated towards the CWA ladies or the football club so that started with me very young and I think that’s why I fit into this role so well (Kerrie).

**Leadership and organisation.** The leadership participants made the following connections between leadership and community spirit: leadership is a requirement for effective use of community spirit; and leadership fosters increases in community spirited behaviours or drives the spirit that is already present.

Lew believed that leadership of the core group (the Residents Association) is the means to applying the community spirit that exists in a purposeful manner. On commenting on what he considers community spirit to mean, Lew offered the following:

No its just there. It’s something that’s just there. And it’s there for um, that core group of community people to draw on. You draw on community spirit … Well it gets there by this core group of people and then the rest of the community can see that this half a dozen people, um, value, value the community and the community spirit so the more people you have got that want to be part of it the higher that community spirit is I think. (Lew)

Violet reiterates this idea.

Yeah it’s not effective otherwise, it’s just a collection of random people all trying to do things all over the country trying to offer help with different things and actually, it doesn’t help (Violet).

Des also discussed the requirement of leadership to facilitate community spirit. He stated that leadership is required for coordination and recruitment of volunteers, and also to ensure that all the resources the volunteers will need to be effective are in place. He provided the example of filling sandbags, with numerous volunteers arriving to fill bags for the people who needed them. Des believed volunteering can be part of people’s community spirited “gut feel”; however, without leadership, this act of helping can become chaotic. In this instance, without someone to source sand as stocks ran out, the community spirit would be wasted. “Well it … needs direction
if you're going to meet a challenge or do something you need some kind of direction because we, we all can't be headless chooks.” Interestingly, Des, despite his status as a leader, believed that this leadership can come from anywhere and may well emerge as an adverse event unfolds.

Where he is considering community spirit to be positivity as demonstrated by leadership, Mitchell commented that:

Yeah well you can by being a little bit positive and I know that in the last flood there were some community leaders who perhaps could have showed just a little bit more positivity because it’s really important. Community engagement is crucial at a time when people are feeling low, and people either, they are not quite sure about, they might have been forced out of their home and they might be in that awful, uncertain, unknowing 48-96 hour period where they haven’t been able to get back to their home to see the damage done; they mightn’t have been able to pick up all their treasured mementos and artefacts and family heirlooms and at that time it really is important for community leaders to be upbeat to talk about the sorts of things we’re going to put in place to get through this (Mitchell).

Lew, as a local community leader, made a similar comment in discussing his belief that community spirit is tied to leadership. He believed if people witness strong leaders demonstrating community spirited helping, giving and doing within the community setting, then they are more inclined to engage and participate, and thus the community spirit of the community, as a tangible resource, is inevitably enhanced.

I think it is. I do I really, if I didn’t print the newsletter and you know people see me mowing the park and whatever, I think it’s something that I’ve got to keep … what do you say? Well adding fuel to the fire. Well you just gotta be seen doing it (Lew).

Joanie connected the idea that community spirit comes from a sense of trust people have in local leadership and trust that the leadership will facilitate the needs of the community during flood recovery, by managing the community spirit. She went on to discuss the notion that there may be an impact on community spirit if the people of the community do not like the leadership. She gave the example of an elderly woman who critiqued the previous leader of the Residents Association (Albert Burgman), who was well known for his community work following the 1974 flood. She also
mentions the way one elderly couple critiqued the naming of the new park after that leader at the official park opening.

…they came to one thing and whinged about Albert Burgman having his name on the thing so I think a lot of the resentment of community spirit was from way back in Albert Burgman’s day because he was a bit of a one man show. And a lot of people say that he was the voice, he was the only voice, he was the mayor of North Wagga and I think people resented that (Joanie).

Tenure. The leadership participants discussed tenure with regard to their conceptualisation of community spirit in the following ways: tenure fosters community spirit; community spirit entices tenure; and tenure may have negative outcomes for utilisation and experience of community spirit. Jim stated that it is the stasis of the North Wagga community—with multiple, long-term residents who have extensive knowledge of floods and the shared experience of the adversities of floods, relocation and developmental control by council—that instigates a strong community spirit. He saw this community spirit as then fostering stability within the community. In discussing the community spirit of North Wagga, Jim offered the following:

I think it’s there and it’s there because it is stronger than most communities and it’s there because of the multiple threats. Threats aren’t just floods, although they might be linked to that. The threat of wiping out the community by not allowing anymore building work, that was on the table some many years back and that was for want of a better term, watered down. But it um it and so now those that are there are a finite number really, um and then have that bond and that bond drags them together I am sure. And you would know better than I, it seems a stable community, not too many people come and go (Jim).

Lew also believed that community spirit and tenure in the community are tied. He spoke of the community of North Wagga as having its own spirit or essence that draws people to come and remain for generations and return as young married couples to raise families, all despite the ongoing threat of flood.
It’s got a lot to do with the amount of time people have been here you know like the generations of Collins’ that have been here they just couldn’t see themselves living anywhere else. Dot’s boys they are all brought up in William Street the she brought up the twins [then they came back]. That’s exactly right! [So they come back why?] Well because it’s North Wagga! Cos it’s what it is … Well this might be just my way of thinking. I think you have got to be a part of a community to experience community spirit (Lew).

In contrast to these participants who observe a positive correlation between community spirit and tenure, others offered a differing view. With respect to tenure as part of her conceptualised meaning for community spirit, Violet considered that those with less tenure may experience less of, or have lesser access to, the community spirit in their time of need. She connected tenure with the shared history or experience that connects the people of the community and also fosters their community spirit. She stated that if one does not have this shared experience of history then they may be excluded from the group that does.

**Locale or community related elements.** These themes relate to the community itself, either as noted elements of community or related to the locale, size, type or geography.

**Place attachment.** The only two participants to comment on place attachment with respect to their conceptualised meaning for community spirit were the two North Wagga leadership representatives. Lew discussed what he considers to be the special and unique North Wagga community spirit which he believed draws people to the community and also draws them back after a flood event. He believed that the presence of long-term, multigenerational families, as well as the return of grown children with their own young families, as evidence that the spirit of North Wagga fosters a place attachment that is unaffected by the risk or experience of flood. Lew believed it is the spirit of North Wagga—unique, connective and protective—which fosters their place attachment: “Well because it’s North Wagga! Cos it’s what it is”.

Joanie, another North Wagga based leadership participant, discussed her place attachment in conjunction with the Murrumbidgee River itself.
I think the river does it, I think the river brings the spirit out. … It’s the river, we live near the river, we go over the river, we’re over the bridge, we talk about going over the bridge, we talk about going over to town, you know it’s the bridge, it’s the river … We named our house after the river (Joanie).

Community size and type. The leadership participants’ meaning for community spirit related to the type and size of the North Wagga community, and with respect to the 2012 flood event, involved discussion around two main concepts. Firstly, the small size of North Wagga, but with the retention of privacy, was considered relevant to the participants’ conceptualisation of community spirit. Secondly, rurality was considered to be a factor for the way that the leadership participants conceptualised community spirit.

Kerrie felt rurality was an important element of community spirit in that she believed the spirit is created by the networks or connections between people in the community. She believed it is easier to achieve in a small rural community where people have stronger and longer term connections. Kerrie also believed that some people may be inherently more community spirited than others and that this too may be tied to rurality: “And local country people it is in us I think”.

She compared her experience of community spirit with that of other people within her organisation who live and work in more urban settings, and said they have never been able to stimulate community spirit the same way that she does. In comparison with an urban setting, Kerrie believed community spirit is still contained within smaller communities that are rurally based and with families: “…so particularly those small rural towns, I think it just there all the time.”

Similarly, Joanie connected her conceptualisation of community spirit in North Wagga with rurality. Joanie thought that people with families experience more community spirit and she connected this with rurality.

It’s the fact that the kids can run around in the yard. They can have animals and a vege patch and you can light a fire and all that sort of thing, all that stuff. I think it’s the ruralness [sic]. The rural outlook (Joanie).
Joanie discussed community spirit as being part of her upbringing in a very small rural community. She talked about attending school with only 15 other students, and of the older students being responsible for helping the younger ones. For her, this spirit is inherent to that sense of rurality. She talked about the size of her land, the distance from neighbours and the fact that she can have a backyard fire, as important aspects, but she coupled that with her care and concern for those close to her.

Yeah totally, that’s what I grew up in totally, and I think rural always build community spirit … Yeah and once again we use the word isolated because they are. People in a rural area, I will use Milbrulong as an example, you are just isolated, we were just ten miles from town, we had one shop. Like Rita and I, have you got an onion? Yep, can I have some eggs, yeah sure (Joanie).

Harry conceptualised the North Wagga community as close knit, cohesive and strong in that cohesion. He viewed it as a village rather than part of the broader urban city main. He compared the experience of community spirit in North Wagga to his experience of the city evacuation and stated that he didn't see the same cohesive, helping community spirit in the CBD evacuation. Harry related this to the smaller size of the North Wagga community and the shared history of adversity.

*Barrier around community.* The idea that community spirit created a barrier around the community, which then works as protection from outside forces or excludes the community from the broader community, are ways that the leadership participants demonstrated meaning for community spirit. Lew, as an internal North Wagga leader, spoke of the community spirit in North Wagga as protection or a source of power. He considered membership in the community to be integral to its spirit and that this spirit can form a protective barrier between the community and outer forces. He also believed the community gained strength from asserting its needs and desires as a community.
I think the people that, like councils and things like that, they can see that we have community spirit but they can’t see the strength of it. And um, I don’t know I think community spirit is a very good weapon, you know it is. Not a weapon, yeah well … council has to come over here to meet with us. We don’t have to go over there! It’s all part of the community spirit just being out there letting people know you are not going to be walked over or not gonna float away (Lew).

In conceptualising community spirit, Harry offered the following:

And they are very tight and they will pretty much separate themselves from us and say well we’re not listening to you, you are an outsider, um. So I suppose we think we can do more to help the community and that’s what we are trying to do. But the community is sometimes pretty much shutting us out (Harry).

He felt that community spirit was a feeling within the community of collectivism or cohesion which can sometimes make others feel excluded from the community even when they are offering assistance. Harry saw an element of distrust of authority in the community spirit of North Wagga, which he felt distances them from Wagga Wagga City Council in particular.

**Discussion.** In answering Section 2, Part B of the research question (RQ2b), this chapter, in part, offers conceptualised meanings for community spirit from the leadership participants, some of whom are also residents. For the leadership participants, including the local North Wagga leaders and the federal and state leaders who happened to also be residents, the conceptualised meaning for community spirit had a different overall meaning than for the resident stakeholder group.

Whereas the residents conceptualised their meanings around relationships with people and place, the leaders conceptualised their meaning around a sense of responsibility to help others. They viewed this responsibility as being part of the membership of society and part of the fundamental social contract. A critical social work lens was useful here in determining whether this sense of required duty as part of civic duty has the potential to be a source of structural oppression, where people are perhaps unable to participate due to vulnerability or where participation fosters vulnerability (Mendes, 2009; Weiss-Gal et al., 2014). For the leaders, helping others was viewed as part of being a ‘good’ human being and part of the responsibility of community life. It is this helping that the leaders primarily conceptualised
their meaning for community spirit around. This conceptualisation is consistent with that presented in the literature and also in the secondary data. Whilst the residents did consider helping to be a responsibility connected to small rural community life, their conceptualisation is tied more to the long-term relationships of neighbours rather than the idea of civic responsibility where the leaders tend to have conceptualised their meaning.

Volunteerism and altruistic helping, and the use of self as helping, featured heavily in the meanings presented by the leaders. Community spirit is the act of helping others in their time of need and is considered to be a positive element of human existence. The leaders went so far as to say that whilst there are some community spirited people, not all people are so inclined and these people are considered lesser in the community as a result. This may indicate a potential site of oppression for those unable to meet the community’s expectation (Mendes, 2009), and thus can be considered important social work knowledge within the disaster context. Shared responsibility featured heavily: the idea that it is every community member’s responsibility to participate in self-help and community level help, and that this participation is a sign of responsible citizenship. Notably, the local North Wagga leaders discussed this in terms of internal helping within the community itself, whereas the state, federal and broader community leaders considered this responsibility as external help coming from outside North Wagga.

From the thematic framework of the broader meanings that arose out of the participant interviews, it is important to note that for the leaders, the most noted theme was the dark side of community spirit, which is perhaps the best justification for a critical social work frame. Indeed, this term arose from a leadership interview. The importance the leaders placed on the dark side of community spirit is significant because of the stark contrast with the way that community spirit is presented by Australian government. The Australian government presents community spirit as an entirely positive resource, whereas the leadership participants with lived experience noted the potential and the actuality of negative elements and outcomes from the application of community spirit as a resource. This may indicate potential for structural oppression at the macro level, which the participant leaders are
aware of. It may also be where disaster based social work can work towards consciousness raising to facilitate policy level awareness (Allan, 2009a), and at the least, are ethically bound to challenge (Allan, 2009b). The leaders talked of exclusion, exploitation, unwanted help and limitations due to timing, where community spirit is available for only a short length of time. The mention of timing is significant in that in the literature and the secondary data there were no limitations noted.

The leaders did note the significance of some themes that are similar to the residents around long-term, multigenerational residence in small rural communities. For social work, this is important knowledge in that there may be a source of power in these residents with long-term, multigenerational residence that may foster resilience and empower the rest of the community. The leaders that noted these themes tended to have associations with this style of community life themselves or be existing North Wagga resident leaders.

**Service Provider Interviews: Themes to Meanings**

This part of Chapter 7 offers the second part of the answer to Section 2, Part B of the research question (RQ2b). This question asks what community spirit means to other stakeholders in a flood recovery process. This part of the chapter offers conceptualisation of the meaning of community spirit for service providers during the 2012 North Wagga flood. It begins with a positioning around community and then discusses the themes that arose out of the literature review. The section then addresses the broader meanings that arose from the participants’ interviews around the thematic framework that has been developed as a result.

**Service provider conceptualisation of community.** Each service provider was initially asked during their interview to locate themselves within a conceptualisation of community. As for the residents and the leaders, the purpose here was to facilitate the participants’ thinking around the concept of community. The service providers included people from a diverse array of not-for-profit and charitable organisations, people from response agencies or organisations appropriated as part of the emergency response team, and businesses that participated in the response efforts. The service providers also included private individuals who attended the flood
recovery response either at the community or individual level. As such, some variance in conceptualisation was expected.

For the service provider participants, the most commonly noted theme in their conceptualisation of community was that community involves helping one another. Kris offered simply, “It’s my friends and I want to help ‘em”. For Toni, community meant helping those close to you who are in need of assistance. For Toni, as for her husband Gordon, the idea of “looking after the oldies” was central to her conceptualisation of community. For Dom, his conceptualisation of community relied heavily on the idea of helping others. He heads an organisation whose primary focus is helping people, and he is entirely voluntary in a role that sees him facilitate a multifaceted helping approach across a broad geographical area. Dom believed that there is always this sense of community in Wagga Wagga, which offers support and facilitates the meeting of needs through donations and volunteerism, but that the sense of community rises in a calamitous event.

It’s a great community Wagga. I think they’re always there. It’s when you’ll have crisis like fires and floods and that sort of thing that everyone puts their hand up and rallies (Dom).

For numerous other participants, their incorporation of the concept of helping revolved around their conceptualisation of the North Wagga community specifically. Only two of the seven participants have direct links to the North Wagga community, whereas the others were present for only the flood recovery. Brett, who was part of the community in a professional capacity but also a service provider in the flood event, offered the following as his conceptualisation of community in North Wagga:

…they feel comfortable that they're able to have other people within the community that they're able to call on or for assistance or be able to assist those people in some way (Brett).

Community in North Wagga, Drake noted comes to the fore to help people in a disaster setting. He also noted that helping someone that you have prior knowledge of has a different meaning to helping a stranger. Alex noted that, in most cases, when he offered his help to people in North Wagga, these residents were also involved in whatever task they required help with. In only a few cases were the people of North Wagga passively accepting
assistance from service providers. He felt that even though helping is core in
a community, there may be a decrease in help offered in the future.

So for those communities that are at risk of disaster I guess they
have got to look at ways to deal with it with um, less assistance.
And you know you look at some of the fire disasters we have
had in the last five or ten years. No fire service in the world
could cope with them (Alex).

For Andy, helping was part of his conceptualisation of community,
particularly in North Wagga, and he tied this concept to participation. Andy
stated that he witnessed the North Wagga community pulling together as a
group during the 2012 flood event to help each other recover and rebuild.
He also noted that as a service provider, for whom community is about
helping vulnerable people, he found it aggravating to help people he
considered able bodied but who prefer to use services. Molly conceptualised
community as a diverse array of people coming together, united in purpose,
to achieve common goals. She believed that during the adverse 2012 flood
event, people came together to help in a way that was different to usual;
they relinquished their normal boundaries—what she terms segregation—
and worked together for the common purpose of flood recovery.

The service providers also provided conceptualisations for community that
incorporated place and the idea that groups could be communities, including
service groups or groups who shared interests and values. From these
groups, the service providers thought that a sense of belonging evolved.
Andy described his conceptualisation of community as incorporating groups
and group work. He included groups that he has personal experience with,
including sporting groups and charitable groups such as Rotary. He stated
that the sense of community he has experienced within these groups is a
result of being able to form connections to people with shared values and
similar attitudes. From these connections that foster community, Andy said
that the resultant outcome is a “feeling of belonging, that you are part of
something, you are not just a lone wolf”.

Brett defined community as people sharing a locale, with some
commonality that draws them to come to know each other and share
whatever resource is available as a result of that group collectivism. He
noted size as being particularly important to the formation of community as
a place where people know each other and share. Alex defined community as having a sense of belonging to a group of people who share some commonality, whether that is commonality of locale or interest. He gave examples of groups such as sporting groups. Alex made the distinction between locale based community and interest groups in the following way:

…the first one is because it’s a place you live, it’s a space you are in at the time, the other one is that there is activity occurring in that community that you want to be part of and enjoy so that’s why you want to be part of it. So obviously when you talk about a living space, you know the beach, you might want be really attracted to the beach so you go and move to a community there. It’s not just people that attract you to that community, it’s something that um is a feature and then you become, it may lead on to you becoming part of it I guess. Or more of a part of it (Alex).

There is a major difference between becoming part of a locale based community almost by default where perhaps the only commonality is the shared locale, compared to seeking a community to join as part of an interest group where there is an assumption that the people will have some shared interests and values.

For others, community was about relationships between people. Alisa conceptualised community according to her experience growing up in North Wagga compared to her later experiences living in the Wagga Wagga suburb of Kooringal. She believed that community is about being in a place where everybody knows each other and she speaks about the neighbourhood children she grew up with. Alisa also commented on the unique presentation of community in North Wagga where she believes people are friendlier due to the rural location and the tendency towards long tenure. “I think North Wagga is more a rural community, old school kind of because everyone has lived there for a very long time.”

She commented on the enhanced sense of belonging that residents experienced in the post flood period. Alisa is part of one of the longest standing families in the North Wagga community, of which there are many members still in situ and spanning multiple generations. The family who have left have retained ties with the community through memberships in the football club and other community based activities and groups.
Drake viewed community as primarily place related, but he also acknowledged a social aspect where the way people live creates the community experience. He viewed community as an extension of family and believes the community has a role and responsibility in raising children. He also believed the size of the community was relevant. He felt that in a smaller community, based around a shared place, there was more interaction between people and generally closer relationships. “In a huge community you don’t have as much interaction because at a certain size everyone interacts with everyone or has the potential to, but the bigger you get…”

Kris conceptualised community as the locale in which she lives and also the relationships that result from that shared locale, which she described as friends and neighbours. Kris had quite a broad conceptualisation of community; she recognised an immediate community but also broader groups and areas. She also recognised groups as communities and the idea that there is diversity within these community groups which facilitates individual thinking within shared values.

The service providers also conceptualised community around the idea that there is a collectivist means to addressing needs within a shared locale. In Toni’s definition of community:

What’s community? Oh it’s a group of people that have an outlook in their local area that want to see things changed or improved. Things made better for the community to live in like parks and things like that (Toni).

When asked what the community provides for the people within North Wagga, Alisa responded simply that it means “you can get things done”.

**Constructed meanings of community spirit.** From their conceptualisation of community, and specifically of the North Wagga community around the flood event of 2012, the service providers were asked what they considered the term community spirit to mean related to this experience. The service provider participants, as for the residents and leaders, commented on their conceptualised meaning with respect to the themes noted throughout the literature. The service providers commented on similar themes to that of the residents and leaders but with variance in importance and in differing ways. They commented on the following:
The use of self as helping. For service providers, whose primary aim is to provide assistance in a disaster event such as a flood, it is likely that they would discuss the use of self as helping. They linked this theme with their conceptualisation of community spirit in numerous ways, including: community spirit is expressed as helping; community spirit has meaning around the duty or responsibility to help others in the community; helping is the altruistic or selfless expression of community spirit; community spirited helping is self-motivated; and community spirit is helping the most vulnerable.

For Dom, community spirit had meaning predominantly around helping and support.

Yeah, I think generally most towns have got community spirit but it takes a disaster or something really sad to bring that out. I mean you’ve only to see over the years that you might have a fire and they rally around helping people. A house gets burnt down or someone goes through a bad time with children that are sick and have lost a loved one, they support one another and I think that’s a thing that we underestimate with our community. I mean our community is so strong (Dom).

Dom felt that community spirit is an indicator of the strength of a community, which he viewed as a place where people know each other and where that closeness and connection fosters cohesion. The spirit of that community fosters people to help each other when they face an adverse event. Dom also noted that, in his experience, people who have received help often want to give back. He viewed the desire to give back as part of community spirit, the idea that the spirit fosters people to help each other in a reciprocal and cyclical manner. Where Dom conceptualised community spirit as support and helping other people within the community, he noted that he believed this occurs as it is the inherent nature of people to act collectively in this way.
Alex considered community spirit to be the helping actions that result from caring for others in the community. He believed there is a “giving quality” in certain people that makes it likely for them to want to help and to join organisations that help others. The community gains strength from these helping actions that arise from community spirit.

Well they could well do because alright the Tolland Red Cross they might go and provide assistance to the North Wagga community to recover and it is that spirit that drives them to do that, the hockey club might go and do a raffle and raise some money or something like that, I don’t think it necessarily has to happen to one of the members it’s just that quality of volunteerism and helping out people that the community has that you know is shared with another group, because of their empathy (Alex).

Alex had conceptualised meaning for community spirit around the use of self as helping that comes from of people whom he felt have the giving spirit that fosters them to provide assistance to others.

During the flood event, Kris believed the North Wagga community spirit was pivotal in helping people in their recovery. Kris was the organiser, along with another woman, of the recovery barbeque, where she rallied together copious volunteers and coordinated the donated food and supplies to feed and help North Wagga residents, as well as organising other helpers for the week when clean-up began. She was, due to her close involvement with the football club, aware of other forms of assistance offered by people from the broader community. She linked this assistance with community spirit and deems it the actions of good people who care for others.
Um well a lot of people, at the time, I know a lot of the football groups, the players, they all went from house to house helping people clean. They went to places that were part of the footy club and older ones, they went to their houses and helped hose them out and clean up and stuff. See all that stuff that you don’t know that goes on, um, like the footy club come and helped. They just jumped in. They weren’t asked, they said righto lets go help, where we can and who we can. And that’s what everybody does and see that’s because I knew so many people I didn’t know how to help so many people in one go. And I found this, like on the Wednesday night when the floods were on I said I want to do something, I can’t sit here and not do something. I can’t go and help you know, everybody and if I go to someone’s house then I can’t go to … you know what I mean? … So on the Wednesday night I’m like I’m gonna do a barbeque cos they are gonna have no food and no drink. Anyway I found out Alisa wanted to do the same thing. By the Friday we are sitting down together at the Angels for the Forgotten place nutting out what we are going to do. And by the Sunday we are in here cooking. So within four days, five days it’s just, it’s just happened. Cos we made it happen, otherwise … and we had to fight council. Oh my god yes (Kris).

This narrative shows that Kris felt community spirit involved people helping each other. Also evident is the sense of duty that she felt. She discussed the tangible assistance she saw as the result of community spiritedness.

Gordon felt that whilst there is always some spirit in the community—the desire to help, work together collectively and care for each other in small ways—there is a heightened sense of community spirit during a disaster. He offered examples such as preparing meals for elderly neighbours or helping with home repairs. He stated, “Yeah it’s shown more. You know who your friends are”. For Gordon, there was meaning for community spirit around helping and friendships. He felt this rise in spirit was enhanced during a disaster in that there are more people with needs which trigger the helping response which is inherently available.

For Toni, community spirit had clear meaning around the act of helping the most vulnerable within a community. She stated that this can sometimes mean helping strangers and she gave the example of the friend she brought with her to evacuate homes in North Wagga. Toni spoke about community spirit as being a helping act in a number of ways, such as joining groups that structure and organise the spirit so the help is constructive, and volunteering. She made a distinction between the help she performed for the
benefit of the community and the help she offered to friends during the flood. She considered the help she offered during the flood as mateship rather than community spirit because she doesn't view the outcome as benefiting the community as a whole. It is possible to interpret that community spirit for Toni includes helping actions (such as group work on the Progress Association and school P&C) and volunteerism that benefit the community.

In conceptualising meaning for community spirit, Andy offered the idea that community spirit is an emotive experience. Andy added an element of selflessness, where community spirit refers to the help a neighbour offers with no expectation of financial gain.

For Brett, community spirit was an inherent part of people that fosters them to put others before themselves and offer help and support in times of need and with a sense of selflessness, even when they themselves are impacted. He discussed this in the context of a friend’s behaviour in a recent storm where even though her home had sustained damage and there was no power, she offered support and assistance to others in greater need.

...but and that's the thing where, where people regardless of what's happening around them they put other people first, ahead of their, their problem (Brett).

Drake conceptualised community spirit as the following:

Yeah I could see that and it’s overdone. In a way like the people that turned up to give away gloves and free hamburgers and drinks just come from everywhere. To me it’s a yearning to be part of, of that universal thing, that universal spirit. It’s there within us all. And we like to be able to express it and here’s an excuse, here is a reason. I will get over there and I will help out. I might get in the way because there are probably three times as many people as they really need but I will go and do it because that’s what makes me feel good and this is what I sort of feel like I do. I mightn’t have any skills or I haven’t got a job, give me a job and I will feel good about what I have done and I will have connected with that universal or community spirit (Drake).

Drake has conceptualised meaning for community spirit around helping, particularly voluntary helping. Interestingly, he didoes not appear to find the concept of community spirited helping to be entirely beneficial or positive. He noted that it is “a yearning” which would indicate that people offer their
community spirited helping for their own purpose rather than from a sense of altruism. He also felt community spirit that fosters people to come and help may be detrimental in that it is unregulated and thus may perhaps be overwhelming and perhaps unskilled.

**Inherent aspect of human nature.** That community spirit is a part of the nature of human existence was widely commented on by the service providers as part of their conceptualised meaning arising from their lived experience of the 2012 North Wagga flood. All 10 participants noted that community spirit is a part of the personality. They linked their conceptualisation of community spirit with the idea that this spirit is an element of personality or human nature for some people, resulting in the desire to help or perform actions that are beneficial to the community. Four of the service providers thought community spirit to be symbolic of altruism or selflessness which they attribute to the nature of people. Two service providers also commented that community spirit was an emotive experience that they could feel.

Kris alluded to community spirit as the way a person thinks, “Those people that are like minded like me and you”. She described herself as a person who has always liked to help others and she linked this with community spirit where helping people in one's own community is part of the duty of being a member of that community. She went on to say how it “cannot be anything other than the blood thing” where she saw community spirit as an inherent part of personality for some people.

Dom appeared to have constructed part of his conceptualisation of community spirit around the idea that such spirit is inherent to the nature of people and the means by which they contribute to the community in a beneficial way.

It can only happen, it happens because of the way you are … You’re getting involved with the community and your faith if you want to—if you’ve got faith, you don’t have to have faith. As long as you’re a good Christian person, care about your fellow man. And that builds up your community. That’s what happens. You then, if you’re in sport and you’ve had a team thing, you’ll get your kids will go to school so you get involved with the school, P&C and all that sort of stuff and so you’re getting involved with a charity, help charities (Dom).
Molly considered community spirit to be inherent to some people's character. She indicated that for some, offering help for the greater good is altruistic, whereas for others there are other motives that are perhaps less altruistic. She also felt that a small number of people possess what she considers genuine community spirit.

Molly: The majority of the community will show community spirit, but it’s conditional. And then a small number that will do the hard yards 24/7 and not give a crap.

Researcher: Do they have true community spirit then, those people?

Molly: I would think so, the ones that do it and really don’t care whether someone comes and pats them on the back, yep.

Although Brett felt community spirit was inherent to the Australian psyche, he also felt that some people are more spirited than others.

No I think it's part of people but it's, there's more of it there in some people than others, and, and you do have to sometimes rally it and, and bring it up to the surface because people get, people get involved in their busy lives and sometimes they do, some of the things they do just get in the way (Brett).

Similarly, Andy noted that community spirit may be an inherent aspect of human nature that varies in intensity from person to person.

Yes and no. I think you can to a point then I think in the bad times people’s moral compass takes over to some degree. Some people think I am prepared to help to this point and others might be prepared to go further than that. It's not in everyone. It’s not everyone’s makeup. Some people want to help and some people, some people would rather not (Andy).

Drake further explained that although he feels community spirit was part of some people’s inherent nature, this was not the case for all people. He appeared to divide people into two groups: those who have the inherent spirit as expressed as the desire to help others; and those who are ego driven and more individualistic in their ideological positioning.

It is inherent. It just comes to the fore and it’s easy to come to the fore in a natural disaster. Because there is a reason for it, there is an excuse. That’s not everyone, some people are withdrawn into their little selves, me the ego, I’m not gonna help I am gonna do this that suits my purpose. I am gonna go and loot something (Drake).
Some service providers believed community spirit is a feeling or emotion that people experience within a community as part of their human experience. In conceptualising meaning for community spirit, Andy offered the following:

Yeah really, I find it’s a bit hard to describe but it’s like a feeling, without getting airy fairy, it’s like a feeling where you get inside where you want to get up and help. Yeah, the vibe, it’s like a feeling like you want to get up (Andy).

Andy conceptualised community spirit as the feeling that people should help each other in adversity.

Alex believed he could feel community spirit as a “vibe” when he visits a community. He saw visible evidence of a community’s spirit in solid infrastructure and where there is an engaged and active participation in the provision and maintenance of this infrastructure. He appeared to assume that signs of a strong community include active caring for others and collective efforts to provide supportive infrastructure. Alex viewed community spirit as the feeling that arises from a cohesive and strong community, the emotive experience of community. This feeling is what spurs the community to action, collectively, to meet the needs of the community as a whole and as individuals. He believed this spirit was evident in the North Wagga community to date as evidenced by the increased activities of the Residents Association as well as the building of infrastructure such as the new park.

…yeah, sometimes you do feel it. It’s like a school I am a part of, from the first interaction I had with the school there I felt there was a good vibe in that school, you could feel a good vibe in the way people were walking about, the attitude from the people. You can feel that vibe just from a bit of brief interaction with people. You can just feel there is a good community here … Yeah that’s right you can feel it and um and you can see it too, obviously there is great infrastructure there and good facilities and there is an active group supporting this facility or whatever it is and then once you start talking to people and interacting with people well then that’s when you get down to the nitty gritty of how well it is working (Alex).

For Drake, the feeling element of community was perhaps a deeper emotive experience that he connected with spirituality. Drake described community spirit as being a lesser spirit than what he termed the “universal spirit”, which he stated encompasses religious ideological thought.
In a way, no. Community spirit is shallower than the deeper spirit because it is one step out, this is my theory … religions, philosophies and in the middle you have got spirit for each one which is universal. Everyone is heading for it so you draw an arrow for Roman Catholics and arrow for Buddhists, the central thing is spirit or spirituality and it is essentially a spiritual existence … Spirit is the basis of the whole thing so community spirit you have added on community so it’s like a lesser sort of the universal spirit (Drake).

For Drake, community spirit was linked to spirituality and he felt that community spirit, at a lesser depth than overarching spiritual philosophies, offers similar elements to people that they seek from religion. He believed this may be a more accessible, and indeed acceptable, form of spiritual enlightenment that does not require religious affiliation but produces similar outcomes. His concern was that due to increased individualism, this community spirit is diminishing alongside the affiliation with religion as the means to attain spirit.

**Connectedness.** Connectedness was discussed by the service providers with relevance to their conceptualisation of meaning for community spirit in two main ways: as engagement participation and gathering; and related to familial style community relationships.

Firstly, many service providers believe that community spirit involves, is the outcome from, or is expressed as engagement through gathering, participation, teamwork or banding together. Drake felt that community spirit serves the purpose of allowing people to feel connected to others. He believed that people participate in groups, organisations and communities in order to be around others. They do this, he believed, to feel connected to others, and in some cases, connected to what he terms a universal spirit, which he described as a sense of belonging to something other than just the self.

Teamwork and cohesive, collectivist effort is what Dom felt builds the spirit in a community; that feeling which fosters people to help each other. He used sporting teams as his primary example of how teamwork builds spirit. Dom believed community spirit was actively built and he indicated that this is achieved through participation in groups, activities or connections between people.
Secondly, many service providers believed community spirit had meaning around the relationships between people within a community. These may resemble familial relationships, involve knowing others, relate to a common purpose, or have some relation to connections within and to the community. Alisa (once a North Wagga resident) conceptualised community spirit as people knowing each other, and as mateship and families. “Yeah, I think community spirit is um you know everyone for a long time, you’re all mates. It’s families isn't it?”

Toni also felt that community spirit was about people within a community getting to know each other and building friendly relationships. She believed this is where the community spirit is built; that the people in the community make the spirit that they can then use to fulfil their needs.

Kris saw community spirit as something that is always present in a community and which is expressed by the community coming together and participating with each other in a cohesive manner. She equated community spirit with the idea that it forms an extension of traditional family ties. In response to a question about whether Kris thought there could be community without community spirit, she responded affirmatively, believing there could be a group of people living close to each other but with no caring relationship between them. Locale was less important in Kris’s conceptualisation of community spirit than were the relationships between the people and the actions that these relationships produce. These actions included caring and doing for each other in the community.

**Sense of place.** For the service providers, sense of place, which encompasses the way people feel some connection to place and belonging through sharing of values and history, was not often noted. This theme was commented on by only two participants, related to the idea that community spirit involves the sharing of historical flood knowledge with newer residents to assist them in preparedness. Drake combined concepts of local knowledge and leadership in the following comment:

Well you really should have elders, you know you should have a council of elders or respected people that pass that knowledge on. And there is a little bit of that in your flood knowledge (Drake).
For Drake, community spirit had meaning around the local knowledge that is held in older generations with previous lived experience, and he believed this knowledge should be shared in a way that demonstrates some reverence for those with the wisdom. He felt this is lacking in modern society. However, local knowledge and the sharing of flood wisdom in this context were thought to be part of community spirit that fosters self-care.

Alex felt that the increased community spirit after a flood arises from the sharing of local knowledge. He considered this to be part of the helping response by what he termed as “mentors” (those in the community with lived experience) who can facilitate the disaster response in subsequent events. Alex extended his belief to the organisational response, where he considered organisational groups that form part of the broader emergency response to also benefit from the local knowledge that arises out of the community spirit.

I think it’s the seventies since it last flooded so we are looking at a hell of a long time, so you are looking at a really long time between floods and obviously as I said the makeup of that community has changed. So if we had another flood now it’s going to be a much bigger group of mentors there to help the people, pretty much everyone over there will know what they need to do and how they need to cope with it (Alex).

Kris believed that community spirit facilitated helping from people having a sense of place and a feeling of connectedness and belonging. Kath felt that the best community spirited helping came about as a result of those organising it having connection to and within the community they are helping. She believed that the help she provided was different as a result of having connections to, and a sense of place within, the North Wagga community.

Yes because we still feel that we are a part of the community, you know what I mean. So this is our community and Alisa will feel the same, oh my word her parents are here, her grandmothers here, we lived here, the kids have friends here, to me this is still part of our community and so I’m gonna do what I can to help where I can (Kris).

Kris discussed the sense of place that people have in the North Wagga community that fosters long-term, multigenerational families who return in the post flood period. She believed people remain because they love the
small community which adjoins a large city with many amenities. She also stated that people live in North Wagga for its community spirit.

I don’t know, um they feel comfortable here, safe, because of the community spirit that is here, most people know their neighbours, most people their family is three doors down (Kris).

**Broader meanings.** The service providers discussed similar broader themes to the residents and leadership participants but with notable differences and of varying importance. The broader meanings that the service provider participants have presented around their conceptualisation of community spirit are discussed from within the following framework:

1) Psychological
   - Adversity
   - Identity
2) Negative
   - The dark side of community spirit
3) Social
   - Leadership and organisation
   - Generational
   - Tenure
4) Locale or community related
   - Place attachment
   - Community size and type
   - Barrier around community

**Psychological elements.** The psychological themes of adversity and identity were the two most commented on themes from the service provider interviews. As people who primarily came to North Wagga as a response to an adverse event, they noted adversity as important in their conceptualisation of community spirit.

**Adversity.** Adversity, as part of the conceptualised meaning for community spirit for the service providers, was noted by nine of the participants in a number of ways. Generally, they believed that community spirit is increased in a disastrous or adverse event and that community spirit comes from adversity. Brett felt that the greatest display and prime trigger for community spirit was adversity.
I guess, when, with that type of, with that type of trigger, you're not going to get the same effect as what you'd, what you'd get if there was a, something that's happened that's, that's major a negative, like a, like a flood (Brett).

Brett felt that in more positive situations it was easier for people to decide not to take time out of their live to participate in helping activities. In a disaster the impact is so great that people find it difficult to justify not helping.

Dom also considered community spirit to be enhanced by an adverse event or situation: “Yeah, I think generally most towns have got community spirit but it takes a disaster or something really sad to bring that out”.

Toni believed that community spirit was always part of a community and that it increases when there is a reason for people to pull together. This may be during adversity when helping actions are obviously necessary, but it may also occur during more positive moments. Toni described the Christmas party, which offered the community an opportunity to gather and foster their relationships.

Andy conceptualised community spirit as the feeling that people should help each other in adversity. He believed that in hard times, people “rally” and band together in a group to assist each other, so that community spirit increases in adversity. “Well I think when the chips are down you would rally.”

Identity. Kris described community spirit as being part of the identity of people who live in North Wagga. She linked this identity with the stoicism and place attachment that is signified by the “we shall not be moved” sign at the entrance to the village.

Yeah that is, that is, from within your house, ok I am ready for the next one, bring it on, cos I am staying. Try and get me out! “We shall not be moved”. It’s the sign. The sign has always been there (Kris).

Alisa described community spirit as “a bit of an old school you know Aussie battler thing”. For Alisa, adversity was significant to her conceptualisation of community spirit in that she felt it is linked to her notion of the Aussie battler: a local person who helps their mates and faces the turmoils of life
with a sense of stoicism and humour. Alisa also commented in her
discussion of community spirit that after a flood “you’re a real local”.

Brett conceptualised community spirit as part of the identity of North
Wagga, and indeed as part of the identity of Australians more generally. “I
think it's an Australian thing and I think it's a, too, it's also a community
thing and I think it's the sort of thing that people in North Wagga would do.”

**Negative element.**

*The dark side of community spirit.* The dark side of community spirit
refers to those elements of the service providers’ conceptualised meanings
that may not be positive in outcome or beneficial to people or the
community. The service providers commented on the following elements
that were considered less than positive: community spirit is a limited
resource; the help stimulated by community spirit may be non-helpful or
unwanted; people may have a false community spirit; community spirit may
be exploitative or dangerous; and discussion of community spirit may be
motivational political speech.

Alex commented on the limitations of community spirit as a resource for
disaster recovery. He sometimes felt that a small number of community
spirited people who voluntarily lead the community may take on too much
responsibility, and thus what they offer becomes stretched and is rendered
less effective.

> I think it probably is because only people, that 10 per cent of
people who want to be the drivers behind developing it, or have
their own motivations for it, what they are, who knows? I don’t
think I am in that 10 per cent all of the time, I am for some of
the time or for some things. But and then you look at other
people, I can think of other people that have got their finger in
every pie going. They get involved in it and they tend to do a lot
of those things poorly because they don’t make the time to
dedicate themselves to one or two things. Particular causes
(Alex).

Brett felt that in order to have community spirit available when disasters
occur, it must be nurtured in the good times. He also noted that for some
people, there was a lack of knowledge about how to use their community
spirit, which may be a negative aspect for using community spirit as a
resource.
I think that some people, I think some people have, there's all sorts of varying degrees of community spirit, I think that some people don't, it's not that they don't have any community spirit, I don't think some people know how to do it. They don't, they don't know, they want to help but they don't really know, so it's okay somebody else will be coming along and, and do that. There's, and I don't think it's that they're lacking any, any community spirit it's just that I don't think they know how to help (Brett).

Andy also noted that community spirit is a finite resource that is needed most by those in a community who have no other options.

Well you would like to hope that’s where the emergency services would step in. But certainly I am sure there are elderly people out there who have no family to help them. So there has to be that resource to be available to help those people, cos community spirit can only go so far (Andy).

Alisa noted that community spirit, where it is conceptualised as cohesive action to meet community identified needs, may prove a hindrance for government. She gave the example of the potential differences between council plans and community desires: “…maybe the council. If we have an uprising and we want something done and they don’t want to do it. Maybe they don’t. Because we have gathered as a community”.

Alex noted that as community spirited helpers, volunteers come to help with the best of intentions, but that their help is sometimes so plentiful in disaster events that it becomes counterproductive and thus has the potential to be harmful rather than helpful.

There was almost too much helpful. Yeah well something like that too you tend to get people, like it’s a big event and you probably do get people who tend to basically try to over help. Well too community spirited and you may find you get too much of a response. Too many people. And they are good, well meaning. Their intentions are probably right. Their intentions are probably in the right direction but the way they apply them is probably, hasn’t been successful (Alex).

False spirit was discussed by the service provider participants as opposing altruism or as more self-serving. Molly felt that sometimes people offer their assistance under the guise of community spirit, but fail to listen to what the people want and are therefore in danger of participating in a way that is not helpful and perhaps would result in forcing opinions on someone who is
already vulnerable. She believed that this leads to mental health issues at a later stage for those people who aren't effectively assisted and who may feel invalidated.

Kris also felt that some people exhibit what appears to be community spirited helping, but that they do so for their own purposes rather than to be truly spirited. She gave the example of a bank officer who donated her time to the community barbeque as part of her workday. Kris described how the bank officer was unhelpful apart from when her manager was in attendance. She concluded that some people pretend to be community spirited but that is more for their own benefit rather than for those they are pretending to help.

That’s self-indulgent spirit. They think they are doing the right thing in their twisted way of thinking I’m helping I’m doing my thing but if you watch them they’re not. They are just out there at the times and I saw it, it was a classic example when we were down there. One of the girls from the NAB, and her and I couldn’t see eye to eye when we had a discussion down there one day about stuff. She’s very up herself so she turned up one day and I thought I’m gonna get a lot of fucking work out of her! I was right she stood back on her phone all the time, boss turns up and she’s in there doing her thing. Soon as he left she was back on it again. I told him. I said this fucking lazy bitch don’t send her back. Completely different! She was only doing it because she had to (Kris).

Drake noted meaning for community spirit here as “a yearning”, which would indicate that people offer their community spirited helping for their own purpose rather than from a sense of altruism. He also felt that community spirit that fosters people to come and help may be detrimental in that it is unregulated and thus may not always be beneficial, and in fact may be overwhelming and unskilled.

To me it’s a yearning to be part of, of that universal thing, that universal spirit. It’s there within us all. And we like to be able to express it and here’s an excuse, here is a reason. I will get over there and I will help out. I might get in the way because there are probably three times as many people as they really need but I will go and do it because that’s what makes me feel good and this is what I sort of feel like I do. I mightn’t have any skills or I haven’t got a job, give me a job and I will feel good about what I have done and I will have connected with that universal or community spirit (Drake).
Molly explored in some depth the idea that community spirit as a resource that prompts helping in a disaster may prove dangerous or exploitative.

Well it’s not, and that’s the thing it’s really not fair and equitable … and then it’s the ones that work, and they have good family connections and good family ties, and blah-blah-blah. And yeah, the community comes together for them in spades and gets the job done and everything’s fine and dandy, but if you’re a single parent or an elderly person, or someone on welfare, someone who doesn’t work or maybe already has a mental health issue or a disability, no, screw you, basically—that’s how it is (Molly).

This is an important statement from Molly, as her conceptualisation of meaning for community spirit had a sense of inequity and thus dangerous outcomes for some people. She believed community spirit that fosters people banding together to assist others to whom they are connected within a community, does not work effectively unless you have the right connections. If, for some reason, a person is already vulnerable to isolation from the community, then the spirit won't be available to them.

Alex offered: “…there is a pretty fine line I guess between community spirit and gossip and things like that and I guess too there is people’s privacy to be considered”. Alex also noted that some people within a community may not be able to access the community spirit, or that it will be respectful of the rights of people to privacy and the ability to be self-determining. He noted the importance he felt of asking people what they wanted him to do with their belongings during clean-up. Even though people may offer their help as a result of their feeling of community spirit, it was important to Alex to ensure that the individuals he was helping were active participants in the process.

It was funny, that was one of the things I was concerned about. I always went to people and said is this, um, is this all to go, and I would always go and speak to them before I would start loading stuff and chucking it (Alex).

When conceptualising their meaning for community spirit, service providers considered that sometimes community spirit has no more meaning than to be motivational political speech. Kris felt there is a lack of understanding from higher level officials in the flood recovery hierarchy of what community spirit is and what it can achieve in terms of community
recovery. For Kris, to understand what community spirit means, one has to play an active part in the helping process at the community level. She felt that those who make decisions from outside the community, but yet for the community, cannot understand the community spirit within. She drew some important distinctions between service providers in saying that even those who are in paid positions, such as the Army Reserve, still participate within the community spirited helping, and thus are part of and understand the meaning and application of community spirit. She viewed the higher officials who don't participate and for whom service is a paid position, as different.

Well I don’t know what they think they mean cos they don’t know what it is. You know what I mean. They wouldn’t know what it is they weren’t … I don’t know how they would know what community spirit is unless they were part of it and they weren’t part of it. They deliberately separated themselves, the higher ones, from everything that was going on. The other guys, the actual council workers, they were in there working their asses off, they were in there helping people, they were great, they were helping. But they were still getting paid for their job. They weren't volunteering. Same with the SES some of them were volunteers and some of them were paid. The Army they were still getting paid. So you know, even though they were getting paid to do it they were still in the spirit of helping do you know what I mean and then you have got on the other hand the volunteers who will do it because they want to. And they will do it till they drop (Kris).

Brett said that as much as he would like to believe that politicians use the term community spirit with the same intent that residents would (as the feeling of responsibility within the community to come together in support and help in times of need), he felt that for politicians there was an element of self-promotion involved.

I would also imagine that they're trying to promote their own, have a voice for, so that people can hear what they're saying, so then they're promoting their own political situation or party as well, I think that's part of it. I think they do know, I think they are, I think they're … [sic] genuinely know what it looks like and I know that, I know a couple of politicians and they, they generally want to be involved and, and know what … that looks like but to have community involvement or to have, to have that. But at the same time I don't, I think they also want to know how, what, what are they going to get out of it as well (Brett).
Gordon stated that that the media uses the term specifically “just to lift people’s hopes in North Wagga”. Of politicians, he noted that whilst he believes they do have some genuine concern for people, disasters such as the 2012 North Wagga flood present an ideal opportunity to influence voters.

**Social elements.** These are themes that refer to the way people relate to each other within society. Service providers noted the relationships between generations and also the relationships that people have with communities and the organisational structure within those communities.

**Leadership and organisation.** In discussing how community spirit comes about within a community, Kris offered, “you just need the little core group thing to start it. Then it grows”. She found some meaning for community spirit in leadership and organisation, and believed it requires a core group to organise and lead the community spirited voluntary helping response.

Alex felt that people who have the desire to see their community grow and prosper actively work to build the spirit in their community, and for this, he believed active and skilled leadership is required.

I think people who definitely want to see their community expand and grow and prosper, you know so, some people definitely do it. I think probably only 10 per cent of the people in the community are interested in seeing that spirit grow. Or have the skills and have the time and the interest and the leadership to take it on (Alex).

Drake believed that community spirit requires organisation via a framework to be both effective and equitable. He believed that without this organisation, the opportunity for helping that turns out to be exploitative is elevated.

I think within a framework because the guys controlling whatever, the floods, the roads, us hosing out the houses, like it does, it needs discipline for sure. It needs discipline otherwise it gets a mass of people and then they would end up, I would imagine, prioritising what’s in it for me. Get mine done first before him (Drake).

For Alisa, the actions that are facilitated by community spirit were key to her conceptualisation. Although Alisa felt that the resource of community
spirit was the best means to meet community needs through leadership and action, she believed that leadership should be internal to be most effective.

Definitely, people will listen to someone from the inside rather than … Like Dad's a very stubborn man but if he had one of the old blokes say no Ed this is what we have got to do, he would listen. Whereas some guy in charge in the SES he’s not gonna (Alisa).

Alisa linked the Residents Association with the ability to use the spirit for the community’s benefit, and further stated that even though the local hotel fostered connectedness between community members, it didn’t facilitate the same community spirited actions. She specifically stated that while the leadership must be internal, it must still be viewed as leadership rather than just a community group or meeting place where collective discussion occurs.

Similarly, Toni, who had conceptualised meaning for community spirit as people within a community who will step up with a sense of responsibility to help meet identified needs, there is also meaning related to leadership. For her, spirit was about doing what needs to be done, and she referred to organisations such as the Progress Association as examples of people who are doing this. She also believed in internally led community building—that it is better for people within a community to propose to government what they feel their community needs.

**Generational.** The idea that community spirit is different for people of different generations was discussed by the two service providers (Alisa and Drake) who have strong connections within the North Wagga community, including having resided there historically. Alisa noted:

I think it has still more so with older residents and there are people my age who I grew up with who are still there with Mum and Dad. People that you have known for a very long time (Alisa).

Drake noted a general decline in community spirit among younger generations, which he correlates with the rise in technology and social media.

Well to me it’s the change in society, all these gadgets, mobile phones, TV’s, social media, um transport and people have gone private, they have gone me rather than we (Drake).
Dom measured the number of volunteers he sees as part of his charitable organisation, and links the lessened community spirit with the societal changes for younger generations.

Well the reason is that if you look at my generation and that’s say 65 to 75. They always did volunteer in some way. The younger generation you normally we find is the wife and the husband work and so putting time aside to do voluntary work is very difficult particularly if the kids are involved with sport or whatever the case may be. So getting people in the younger age, under the age of 50 to be involved with voluntary work is very difficult (Dom).

Tenure. Alisa, in her conceptualisation of community spirit, offered the following with regard to tenure having some meaning for community spirit: “Yeah I think community spirit is um you know everyone for a long time, you’re all mates”. Alisa, who has lived experience as a resident and many family and friends with long-term, multigenerational residencies, had clear meaning for community spirit around this theme.

For Andy, the correlation between community spirited helping and tenure is a matter of both having the connectedness that fosters the desire to help but also the knowledge of what others will need.

If you have known someone for a long time and you have lived next door to them then I am sure you have are gonna have a lot more experience and want to help more(Andy).

Locale or community related elements. These themes relate to the community itself, either as noted elements of community or related to the locale, size, type or geography.

Community size and type. The service provider participants discussed their conceptualisation of community spirit around the type and size of a community with regard to the ideas that community spirit means safety and that community spirit is linked to rurality. Gordon talked about how the community spirit which fosters people to know each other can also offer a crime-free and safe environment. For Brett, community spirit was about putting one’s own worries aside and helping others in times of need so that they feel safe and secure.

Kris offered the view that people live in North Wagga for the community spirit that makes them feel safe, with loved ones close by and their
neighbours checking on them. Rurality had importance in Kris’s conceptualisation of community spirit in North Wagga. She considered the community to have a rural sense but she also felt that community spirited helping is crucial to survival for all rural communities.

…it feels like a rural place but next to the city … they have to be, because if you’re on a 500-acre farm out there and the nearest neighbour is 5 kilometres down the road you need to know who they are cos if something happens, that’s why those smaller communities out there are still going. Cos they get together and talk to each other because that’s a survival thing (Kris).

*Place attachment.* Community spirit had meaning around place attachment for two of the service providers in two ways. Firstly, place attachment was not altered or was increased in the flood as a result of the community spirit. As Drake said, “They come back to that spirit that’s the thing that counts. Not your possessions, your possessions possess you in the end”. Gordon also pointed out:

> So if you look at some of the rebuilding work that has gone on, if they didn’t have the spirit they would have moved out. They spent as much money as they could have done on another new house. And if they didn’t like the community spirit, well I call pubs the community pubs, they would have packed up and left (Gordon).

Secondly, part of the community spirit for the North Wagga community is in their attachment to the river. Drake said, “They love the river. They love where they are they have that connection to that place. We shall not be moved, just like it says”.

*Barrier around the community.* Alisa noted the divide she can see between North Wagga and Wagga Wagga City Council as a result of the community spirit. She said that the spirit of North Wagga, which through organisation by internal leadership fosters a collective response and action, can at the same time create a barrier between the community and council. She said this may be a negative aspect to community spirit depending on what the issue is and what the outcomes are.

*Discussion.* The service providers offer a distinct conceptualisation overall that is not dissimilar to that of the leaders. They offered meaning for community spirit primarily around the use of self as helping and as an
inherent element of human beings. Whilst they didn’t use the term responsibility in the same way as the leaders did, the same sense of duty is evident throughout the service provider interviews. The service provider participants considered the use of self as helping to be part of the appropriate human response to disaster, and effectively considered it the duty of community spirited people to provide assistance, either individually or as part of a group. Whilst this may not have the same potential for macro level structural oppression as the leaders’ view of civic responsibility, there is potential for it to occur for those who are unable to participate in the collectivist helping which is considered to be a required and inherent human response. Within a critical social work frame, this potential for oppression is significant and unethical (Mendes, 2009).

For the service providers, the use of self as helping was viewed as part of being a ‘good’ person, being a giving person or having giving qualities. Participating in groups that serve the community is integral to their sense of duty as a person. The joining of groups that provide assistance was how this stakeholder group conceptualised community spirit, and overall, the collectivism of joining those groups was viewed as a positive attribute of people and communities. The service providers deemed ‘good’ people to be those who were selfless or altruistic, giving, community minded and non-individualistic. These inherent aspects of human nature were heavily tied to the service providers’ ideas about helping others. Where they discussed connectedness as part of their conceptualisation of community spirit, it was around this same concept of collectivism or propensity to participate and engage with groups and become involved in teamwork. The only service providers who were similar to the resident participants in the way they spoke about relationships were those who were previous residents and still retained family or close friends in the North Wagga community.

From the broader framework, the service providers discussed foremost adversity and identity. They felt that community spirit was triggered by adversity and increased during adversity. The service providers also discussed a sense of stoicism, particularly around the notion of “we shall not be moved”. From a critical social work perspective, this is important
knowledge in that this stoicism may represent a source of power or at least
evidence of empowerment (Allan, 2009a) that may well foster resilience.

The service providers also discussed the dark side of community spirit in a
number of ways. Firstly, they felt that community spirit as a resource may
be limited, non-helpful, false or even dangerous or exploitative. This is
critical knowledge for social work, as from a critical social work theoretical
frame, it signifies the potential for oppression of the most vulnerable people
who may not be able to advocate for themselves in the event of a flood
(Weiss-Gal et al., 2014). Similarly, where the service providers spoke about
community spirit as merely motivational political speech, aimed at
prompting spirited helping, social work must, in the disaster context,
challenge the structural oppression in a neoliberal political context where
other resources may be limited (Allan, 2009b).

The service providers also discussed leadership with regard to their
conceptualisation of community spirit. They saw this leadership as a source
of empowerment as well as the means to ensure equitable distribution of
resources. For social work, this knowledge fosters practice wisdom related
to where the sources of power reside for resilience building for disasters.
Where the service providers spoke about community spirit as a barrier
between the community and local council, a critical social work perspective
requires the practitioner to challenge this barrier as a potential oppressive
element within the community.
Chapter 8: Discussion

This chapter focuses on answering the research questions posited by this thesis and, in doing so, aims to add to the scholarship around non-material, social resources such as community spirit, for the flood recovery and broader disaster context and with particular regard for the profession of social work. In summary, the research question was threefold:

- A definition of the meaning of community spirit as presented in literature, by the Australian government and in the media.
- The lived experience of community spirit within a flood recovery event for stakeholder groups that include residents, service providers and people in leadership positions, and further, whether their conceptualised meanings from within this experience are the same as those meanings presented within the literature, by the Australian government and in the media.
- Whether or not, and also how the concept of community spirit, as experienced in a flood event, can be utilised within a specific asset based, community development framework to enhance the resilience of that community for future floods and disasters. This final question simultaneously incorporates discussion around where social work fits within the application of that framework.

In order to answer these questions, this chapter systematically explores each one in the context of the findings for this study.

Conceptualisations of Community

Pivotal to this thesis is the positioning of both participants and researcher with respect to their conceptualisation of community. With the concept of community being notoriously subjective and incorporating numerous definition elements in academic literature, it was important to have an understanding of what each participant held as meaning for community. This meaning would then impact how each person conceptualised community spirit. With community also central in disaster related policy, and much of the impact of disaster occurring at the community level (Satterthwaite, 2011), positioning of all parties around the concept of community was a natural starting point.
As an insider researcher, it was also important for this research to be embedded in a distinguishable definition of community from the researcher perspective. Community was conceptualised for the purpose of this research as having firstly a locale or place based element. With an unwavering sense of place and connection to that place that was and is not inhibited by the flood event, locale is central. Although the conceptualising of community as place based is thought to be contentious, with historical place based conceptualisations being formed around the concept of the cohesive village and not including the impact of modernity (Goel, 2014), a place based conceptualisation is relevant for this study in that: the participants noted place as relevant; the disaster impacts within a defined locale; and in this case, the notion of place as relevant only to small, cohesive villages remains relevant for the North Wagga context.

Alongside the locale element is a social element which incorporates the relationships within the locale and where the community was viewed as a social system (Taylor et al., 2008). This social element is in the form of a sense of belonging and membership to a group of people who not only share a space, but also an experience and some shared values. Tied to membership within the North Wagga community were expectations of stoicism, sharing, respect for privacy and freedom, and a shared sense of the community as being defiant of Wagga Wagga City Council.

Community also had meaning for this research around the relationships within the community and the support they offer, in flood times and otherwise. The sense of responsibility to help each other in the North Wagga community was notable. As an insider opinion, the shared flood experience appeared to strengthen the sense of community for some time after the event, creating new relationships between residents, and both linking the North Wagga community to the broader community and, to some degree, simultaneously creating a barrier between North Wagga and local government.

This positioning is consistent with what the literature had to offer in terms of including the elements of locale, relationships and shared experience (Bell & Newby, 1971; Kenny, 2011; Taylor et al., 2008; Wild, 1981). The literature noted the idea of collective action for the common good as well as
power relations both within the community and between the community and government (Kenny, 2011). This is consistent with researcher positioning in that there is noted meaning around the idea that the community has the responsibility to help each other, effectively acting collectively. Certainly, the power dynamic between community and government is also noted within the research conceptualisation of community.

Where there is interpreted animosity between the North Wagga community and local government related to their actions during the flood event as well as ongoing concerns about levee management and floodplain development, this is consistent with the idea that the use of the term community is by those with power positions in society. This can be construed as a means of state control for the perpetuation of social inequity (Kenny, 2011). Within a critical social work theoretical framework, the knowledge of where the power is within a community is pivotal, particularly where there may be the propensity for structural oppression as a result (Fook, 2003; Mendes, 2009; Pease, 2009). For the North Wagga community, this may require knowledge about the perceived importance of tenure on membership, awareness of local gender or culture based vulnerability and local power structures and positions, Within the literature was also the idea that community in disaster acts towards breaking down anomie and fostering collective recovery (Pupavac, 2012), which was again consistent with the positioning of the researcher and the critical social work frame in fostering an empowered community (Mendes, 2009).

For the residents, there was definition of community as the sharing of geographical space and also lived experience, with some commonality to connect the people who are required to form participatory and reciprocal relationships with those who live close by, while still retaining a sense of privacy. The leaders embedded their discussion within a conceptualisation of community that included themes of belonging as a result of connectedness and relationships. Their conceptualisation of North Wagga as rural and collectivist, with a unique history of “we shall not be moved”, was important. There was a perception from some leaders that the sense of community in North Wagga was sometimes directly confrontational with what the leaders wanted to do within the community. It was evident that the
notion of community as an act of control through state sanctioned propaganda that ensures compliance with government (Kenny, 2011) may be validated. For the service providers, central to their conceptualisation of community was the notion that community involved helping, particularly participatory helping which is in keeping with the origins of the word community as “to serve together” (Francis, 2013, p. 20). For the service providers, community held meaning around groups and group work that led to a sense of belonging. This is a more modern approach to community, as suggested by Goel (2014), where place is secondary to the relational aspects and the conceptualisation is broader as a result.

In summary, most of the participants held a similar beginning conceptualisation for community across the stakeholder groups as well as within the literature and with the researcher positioning. The interpretation of the meanings for community spirit all originate from a similar conceptual starting point.

Community Spirit: Meanings

This section specifically answers Section 1 of the research question (RQ1) related to meaning for community spirit from the academic literature, the Australian government and within the secondary data (Hansard and the media).

As an insider researcher, prior to undertaking this research I gave a significant amount of thought as to how I conceptualised the term community spirit. The only mention I found in my social work literature was that community spirit is about pride, caring, welcoming and friendliness (Taylor et al., 2008). This seemed an inadequate explanation for a concept that was being credited with such significant action in the North Wagga flood recovery and with what I had felt throughout my experience. It was methodologically important to be aware of the impact of my own opinions, ideas and values in the interpretive process; thus, I needed to be first cognisant as to what they were.

Reflective and reflexive practice is at the core of critical social work (Allan, 2009a, 2009b), facilitating ethical practice of which ethical research is a part (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). At the outset, and indeed
to date, it is the positioning of the researcher that community spirit is the ‘feeling’ that comes from being part of a community where there is a shared locale which results in sharing of experience, some values, a feeling of cohesion and support, and the knowledge that the people within the community will take care of each other, inclusively, both every day and in times of adversity. It is the emotive experience of feeling as though I belong somewhere and that I am part of the group that is North Wagga, along with a sense of stoicism and pride which is especially important as being here has not always been easy or comfortable.

This feeling of community spirit is both fluid and tangible. It is experienced differently depending on who you are and how you connect with the community, changing over time and with the sharing of experience and values. It seemed particularly strong after the flood. In response to a question posed by a participant during the interviews as to what I thought community spirit was—my answer at that time was that it was the feeling of belonging, safety and contentedness I experience every time I drive over the river to come home. Consistency with the work of Waddock (1999) is evident here where the spirit is the subjective experience, unmeasurable and non-material, and an integral and important part of the community experience.

**Academic literature and the positioning of community spirit.** The concept of resilience is central to the way that community spirit is presented in academic literature, albeit in a subjective and non-definitive way. Resilience is considered to be the ability of people and communities to bounce back from disaster as a result of their resourcefulness (Bhadra & Pulla, 2014; Francis, 2013; Price-Robertson & Knight, 2012; Prosser & Peters, 2010; Pulla & Kumar Das, 2015). Resilience is increasingly considered in policy for disaster management (Price-Robertson & Knight, 2012), resilience is also considered to be beneficial for social work within the disaster context (Francis, 2013). It is important to note that there are different kinds of resilience such as community, economic or infrastructural and that the term may be interpreted in differing ways. Pulla and Kumar Das (2015) discussed the need for a paradigm shift for social work to embed practice in a strengths based, resilience focused approach to foster the
coping of communities in future disasters, alongside the dominant community organising methodology which Bhadra and Pulla (2014) regarded as efficient.

Meeting the ethical requirements of the social work profession with regard particularly to empowerment and self-determination (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010), as well as being consistent with a critical social work frame that promotes an empowerment approach (Allan, 2009a), this is a significant and appropriate positioning. The idea that individuals, communities, business and governments all have a ‘shared responsibility’ to work towards resilience to increasing disaster risk is identified by the Australian Federal Government as the way forward (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). There is no discussion around different understandings of resilience, social, economic, infrastructural, etc, nor the way that the specific groups are linked to different types of resilience. This is echoed by Pupavac (2012), who discussed the increased reporting of community spirit resulting from this focus on resilience that arises from communal values and participatory social responses.

It is clear that from within the academic literature there is an intrinsic link between resilience to disasters and the concept of community spirit, where the spirit is inherently positive and adds to the collection of social resources that people and communities have as part of their arsenal against the trauma of disaster. Whilst the literature around community resilience to disaster made note of a sense of community (McMillan, 1996; Silver & Grek-Martin, 2015; Skerratt & Steiner, 2013; Waddock, 1999; Xu et al., 2010), what was lacking in the literature was concrete definition of meaning for community spirit and thus no elucidation as to how this resource would work within the disaster context. With a lack of in depth exploration around how sense of community as an element of community spirit and how that adds to resilience building for the community, there was a lack of understanding demonstrated within the literature.

Where community spirit is discussed in the academic literature, it is noted as a resource, as inherently positive and fostering resilience with the actions that it facilitates during a disaster event and in the immediate aftermath. There is little consideration here for the notion that community spirit may
not always be positive and thus not positively correlated with resilience. Within the literature is a consistent notation of community spirit as available within a specific time context around a disaster event. Community spirit is discussed as being available both during the event and in the recovery period that follows, but more specifically, in the clean-up phase where there is physical and tangible effort made to return to a pre-disaster state. There is no discussion in the literature as to what happens to the spirit once the event has passed—whether it remains ready for the next event or whether it enhances the resilience of the community so that the spirit is no longer needed.

The presentation of community spirit by the Australian government. The primary discussion on community spirit within policy is within the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR), where the idea of shared responsibility in building resilience is coupled with reference to community spirit which is viewed as inherent to Australian people as they support each other in disaster (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b). Within the NSDR policy, community spirit is presented as an element of the means by which the state can foster collaborative and fiscally sustainable disaster prone communities with the expectation that people will support and look after each other in a disaster, and indeed, are believed to have the responsibility to do so. This is in line with contemporary neoliberal political ideology, which by nature promotes self-reliance and decreased responsibility for government. There was no definitive discussion of what community spirit means within the NSDR and how precisely it offers itself as a resource in a disaster event. It is merely noted as an expectation alongside the concept of shared responsibility, so that it appears as though it is an Australian government expectation of performance and thus afforded the validity and credibility that political opinion characteristically has.

Community spirit has also been recognised by the Australian government as an awardable feature of the populace, linked with good citizenship. Governments at all levels award people for their community spirit in the face of adversity and for their service to their community (Government of South Australia, 2013; "Nominations open for Australia Day Awards," 2013). There are some similarities with the way that community spirit is
presented in the NSDR: that the presence and utilisation of the spirit in adversity is one of the ways that individuals and communities take responsibility for themselves and others. In awarding people for their community spirited behaviour, the Australian government is further endorsing community spirit as an element of the resilience of communities, and in particular, those communities that face adversity.

General political advertising by politicians in their everyday business promotes community spirit as an inherent part of public response and also promotes good citizenship, such as when the NSW State Government representative for Wagga Wagga used photos of volunteers sandbagging during the 2012 North Wagga flood under the banner of community spirit as part of his general political advertising (Maguire, 2012). This is endorsement of community spirit by government as a community responsibility to help each other and is also portrayed as an element of the community response to disaster that is both desirable and commendable.

The media. Community spirit was presented within the media sample for this study as being representative of political opinion: in instances where political representatives were quoted; the opinion of individuals and communities where impacted residents were quoted; and also the opinion of the reporters themselves. As presented in Chapter 7, it was considered that use of the term community spirit within media coverage of floods and disaster events led to reinforcement of the resilience model as presented in contemporary disaster policy, where the media is utilised to promote self-organising and personal agency in flood recovery so as to decrease the dependence on government interventions (Bohensky & Leitch, 2013).

Within the media there was little discussion around the concept of resilience in and of itself. As a concept which has been derived from beginnings in the sciences, physics, chemistry and mathematics, resilience may be interpreted in a diverse number of ways even where it remains the means of explaining the capacity of people to cope with stressors that impact wellbeing.

In the Hansard sample, community spirit was not discussed in depth within the media but provided a shallow presentation of what is considered a cultural expectation for Australian people to help each other in adversity, inherently a positive element of recovery. This is consistent with Bohensky
and Leitch (2013), who assumed that community spirit was used by the media as a way to promote the civic or cultural expectation of people to help themselves and others.

Ultimately, the nuances of meaning and their importance, as presented within Hansard and the media samples for this study, demonstrated considerable similarity with each other. This is illustrated in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Meaning—Hansard and the Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hansard</th>
<th>The Media</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The use of self as helping</td>
<td>• The use of self as helping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connectedness</td>
<td>• Connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inherent to human nature</td>
<td>• Inherent to human nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sense of place</td>
<td>• Sense of place</td>
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</table>

The use of self as helping, in whatever form that may involve, as well as coming together through adversity in connectedness—ostensibly to help and support fellow human beings—was the most significant meaning presented within the secondary data sample for this study. Community spirit was discussed in glowing terms and with reverence for people who participate in the spirited helping. Community spirit was represented as a natural outcome of the adversity of a flood event, completely positive for all who either participate in or receive the spirit, which is available during the event as well as into the recovery period. Again, there was no discussion about what happens to the spirit outside the flood event: whether the spirit existed prior to the flood, and if and how to create it so as to ensure its availability or equitable distribution. This is consistent with the way that community spirit is presented by the Australian government at all levels.

In answering Section 1 of the research question (RQ1), it is noted that consistently throughout the academic literature, as well as by Australian government, Hansard and the media, there is a demonstrated expression of meaning for community spirit as being expected civic duty, citizenship, and a national or cultural factor or shared responsibility for disaster response and recovery. Community spirit is thought to be a commendable and inherent human response to adversity that facilitates resilience to disaster. There is
some expectation that it will and should be part of all disasters. How it comes about, whether it works for all, and what happens to the spirit outside that event, is not considered.

The Lived Experience of Participants

In this section, the second part of the research question (RQ2) will be answered, around the lived experience of community spirit within a flood event for stakeholders such as residents, service providers and community leaders. From the broader thematic framework that was developed from the themes presented by the three participant groups, the following comprehensive nuances of meaning for community spirit are summarised below.

Residents. As noted in the findings in Chapter 7, the residents conceptualised their meanings for community spirit primarily around their relationships with each other and with the community as a place. Sense of place is pivotal to the sense of belonging that residents feel in North Wagga, sharing history and experience which is unique to the people of the North Wagga community. For the residents, their resilience, as their capacity to respond to an event and recover comes from knowing each other and local knowledge of the community, including how to respond, who to help and what to do. Notably, the longer term residents have had more time to form relationships with each other and to build local knowledge. However, it is commonly noted that in the post flood period, even those residents are deemed to hold these elements of resilience with the forming of connections through the event and the acquisition of first hand flood knowledge.

Pulla and Kumar Das (2015) noted that resilience effectively becomes part of the culture of a community, transmitted through the generations. This may be considered community or social resilience although there remains a requirement for infrastructural and economic resilience also. Connectedness also rates as highly important where the connections between family, friends and neighbours—as well as close connections and participation in community life alongside these people—is what fosters or builds the community spirit. The use of self as helping also relates to their relationships where it is viewed as neighbouring and the helping of vulnerable members of the community family. There is a noted difference
between help that occurs within the community and help that comes from outside the community. Outside help tends to come after the disaster event, is short lived and is tangible, physical help. Internal help tends to be about relationships, supporting each other and empathising from within a shared experience. Bhadra and Pulla (2014) noted also the different stages of disaster recovery and state that social work, as performed by community development workers, can make an important contribution in each of these stages.

Where the residents noted negative elements (which are the least of their noted thematic elements), it is around the lack of relationships, as well as less connected or disconnected people not having access to the spirited helping such as was noted by the newer residents. The residents’ conceptualisation markedly differed to that found within the literature, from the Australian government and from the media. The residents did note a sense of responsibility but it was centred on their relationships—that people care for their family, friends and neighbours. This is the internal spirit that lingers long after the disaster event, well past the external spirit that comes in from outside the community. It is ever present in a small, well connected community where the people know each other, engage often and participate together in community life. This is the spirit that fosters coping and thus builds resilience, which Pulla and Kumar Das (2015) described as being culturally ingrained and intergenerational.

**Leaders.** As discovered in Chapter 7, the leaders’ overall conceptualisation of community spirit differed to that of the residents. Whereas for the residents, meaning was based on relationships with people and place, for the leaders, meaning was based on a sense of responsibility to help others. Helping others was seen as a fundamental responsibility of good citizenship. This conceptualisation is similar to that offered by the literature, the Australian government and the media.

For the leaders, the use of self as helping was pivotal in their conceptualisation of community spirit, where they view volunteerism and altruism as important. The use of self as helping was viewed as inherently positive and stimulated in adversity from those with a sense of civic duty. The commonality of a focus on shared responsibility was noted.
Significantly, the leadership participants gave importance to the dark side of community spirit. This was blatantly different to meanings discussed from all other sources and in particular, the Australian government. The Australian government primarily presented community spirit as a positive resource, whereas the leadership participants with lived experience discussed the potentiality for negative outcomes such as exclusion and exploitation. Time limitations are noted in that spirit is deemed available for a limited time as a resource.

**Service providers.** In Chapter 7, the service providers presented a conceptualisation of community spirit quite similar to that of the leaders, and thus also to that presented in the literature, by the Australian government and by the media. The same sense of duty to provide help to fellow humans in times of disaster, as an inherent aspect of the human condition, was noted as meaning for community spirit. There was similarity to the leaders’ sense of civic duty and the government expectation of shared responsibility.

Similar to the leadership meaning for spirit as civic duty, the service providers viewed the use of self as helping as being a ‘good’ person and tied to a sense of duty as a human being. There was little discussion around the relationships the residents discussed. Where the service providers discussed connectedness as part of their conceptualisation of community spirit, it was with regard to the joining of groups to provide help to others as a form of teamwork. Again for the service providers, as for the leaders, the dark side of community spirit featured heavily in their conceptualisation. The service providers comment on potentially negative outcomes resulting from the limitations of spirit, such as unhelpfulness, exploitation and the belief that discussion of spirit may be merely government propaganda. For the service providers, community spirit comes from outside the impacted community in times of disaster and it retreats as the initial recovery is deemed completed.

Overall, the nuances of meaning conceptualised by the residents, service providers and leadership from within their lived experience of the 2012 North Wagga flood, and the importance each theme has assumed for the groups, is demonstrated in Table 8.
Table 8: Nuances of Meaning—Residents, Leadership, Service Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Service Providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of place</td>
<td>• Inherent aspect of human nature</td>
<td>• Helping</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Connectedness</td>
<td>• Helping</td>
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<td>• Inherent aspect of human nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>1) Psychological</td>
<td>1) Negative</td>
<td>1) Psychological</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Adversity</td>
<td>• The dark side of community spirit</td>
<td>• Adversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identity</td>
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From within the lived experience of the 2012 North Wagga flood it is evident that community spirit, as in the academic literature, has no concrete definition but is rather a highly nuanced and subjective collation of themes.
that differ depending on the way that a person engages with a flood event. There are two significant findings for meanings of community spirit to note here. Firstly, for residents, meaning was more strongly linked to the relationship they have with the community as a place and with the people they know there. Secondly, there are negative elements of meaning for community spirit which were more frequently noted by service providers and leadership.

For residents and people impacted by a flood, meaning for community spirit tended more towards their relationships within the community and the relationship they have with their place. These relationships influence the helping they both give and receive in an event. The residents’ meanings for community spirit appear intrinsically linked to their sense of place, their attachment to that place, and the identity and local knowledge they have formed as part of that community experience. The reluctance to relocate, the ‘we shall not be moved’ sign, stasis in the population, the respect for and connection to the river and the pride of place that the residents discussed indicated the importance that they feel in their connection to the geographic place. Clearly the residents felt that community spirit was a part of being in the North Wagga locale. It is this connection to, and spending time being in the geographic place that affords the residents the opportunity and time to forge the relationships from which the community spirit is built. They noted a difference between internal community spirit centred on the relationships they have within the community, and external community spirit that comes from outside the community via helping and volunteerism.

For the residents, there was deeper meaning around the themes of sense of place and connectedness in that they discussed concepts such as tenure or long–term, multigenerational residence, which they thought relevant to their conceptualisation of community spirit. They considered that the people who share the North Wagga locale, history and flood adversity over the generations form relationships with each other and also with North Wagga as a place. They become proud North Wagga people who know and care for each other like extended family—and this is what they consider community spirit.
Residents also expressed the idea that there was more community spirit in small, rural communities where people can and need to get to know each other. This is an important idea for the North Wagga residents who took part in this study and is part of their significant conceptualisation of community spirit. They conceptualised community spirit around the idea of small rural communities where people live for generations, younger family members return as they start their own families, and people know each other in close relationships. There are limits in that new residents do not always feel the same in that they have not formed such long term relationships and prior to the flood were considered to have a different degree of tenure. However in the post flood period the newer residents have formed more connections which they retain to date and they also are considered to have full membership in the community with their lived experience and the local knowledge they have accumulated as a result. Further, they considered it to be a formidable asset in their flood recovery as people help each other in a familial way, offering support and assistance in preparation and recovery. For the residents, community spirit is part of their proud North Wagga place identity, and their sense of cohesion in adversity, stoic in the refusal to leave and caring about their friends and neighbours. It is this spirit that may foster a sense of empowerment which in turn promotes the self determination to make decisions about remaining in North Wagga and preparing for the next event.

The non-residential stakeholders, as service providers and leaders, noted more meaning for community spirit around volunteerism and the sense of civic duty to help others in need. For the leaders and service providers, meaning for community spirit was intrinsically linked to their sense of shared responsibility to help others and the personal characteristics one holds that foster a sense of citizenship. They may indeed have had no prior relationship with the North Wagga community but merely have an inherent belief that people should help each other in adversity. For many, this was the noted reason for joining whichever service group they were affiliated with. For the leaders at all levels, the idea that community spirit means helping in adversity was considered a duty. It was noted that to not perform in their duty to give to the community could be considered a failure to participate in society in the appropriate manner.
There are significant differences between the residents and the service provider/leadership groups. It is in these differences that there can be an impact on outcomes. For the residents, for community spirit to exist, there needs to be participation and engagement of people within the community and preferably over a long period of time, outside of any event, so that people can form relationships with each other. This is consistent with the interactional theory of community where social interactions within the community are significant (Taylor et al., 2008). For social work in disasters, this fosters a ‘bottom up’ approach which involves the interaction of community members, strengthening relationships to build resilience (Francis, 2013). There has been some previous adversity that contributes to this meaning and that also contributes to the identity that residents align with within the community. For service providers and leadership, engagement and participation outside of flood events is not critical as it does not figure into their conceptualised meaning.

A new and significant finding from this research is the conceptualisation of community spirit as having negative elements, or a dark side. The terminology for this theme arose firstly out of an interview with one of the leaders, who is also a resident and thus has the capacity to witness the negatives first hand as they play out within the community. Negative elements were commonly noted throughout the stakeholder group interviews, though more so by service providers and leaders, in the following ways. They expressed the ideas that community spirit: has limitations; may be non-inclusive or inequitably distributed; may be non-helpful or detrimental; and there may be a lack of control over spirited helping. This is significant new knowledge in that not all people benefit equally or positively from community spirit and, indeed, for some people there may be serious ramifications from inequity and negativity. From within a critical social work frame, the propensity for the dark side of community spirit to be oppressive may be challenged as is the requirement for the critical social worker (Weiss-Gal et al., 2014).

In relation to residents, they may receive help that is unhelpful and causes further anxiety and suffering, or they may receive no help at all depending on how they have engaged with the community prior to the event. In linking
the residents’ conceptualised meaning around relationships to people and place, if relationships have not been formed prior to the event, there may not be community spirit available to them. Consider newcomers or transient rental tenants who don’t have the time to form solid relationships. There are also those people who cannot participate and engage, at all or fully, with the community in order to form the relationships around which the interpretation of community spirit hinges. There may be residents with different social status, who have disabilities that preclude participation, or who merely reside in the community but predominantly work and socialise outside the community. There may be issues for these people around access to community spirit. Inequitable application of the spirit as an asset may result. This was noted in a succinct manner by one of the service providers in her work with the homeless people that reside on the fringes of the North Wagga community, not engaging in community life and of low social status. These people received no community spirited helping that the residents within the community enjoyed.

The lack of control of community spirited helping is also a significant negative element in that although there may be benefit, without some guidance or framework to support helping, adverse outcomes may occur. Although the residents noted some elements of the dark side of community spirit, it was a more important issue for the leaders and service providers. This is a significant finding, particularly when coupled with the idea that for leadership there is a civic duty to provide spirited helping. If the Australian government at all levels expects people to volunteer and help in a disaster, as part of the community spirited component of a recovery but without knowledge of, or consideration of that knowledge, the potential negative ramifications of that helping, may be that there are people who suffer as a result.

In linking the conceptualised meaning of the service providers and leadership around helping, volunteerism and civic duty, those who come to help have a sense that they must provide community spirited help to be performing as a citizen. However, if the help is unwanted or unhelpful as perceived by the residents who receive it, then the outcome may be detrimental either in terms of extra trauma to the flood victim or the service
provider feeling a lack of fulfilment of their civic duty, potentially impeding their propensity to exhibit the same community spirited behaviour in the next event. The result could be the need to force help upon people for whom that becomes an issue, or a lessening in the amount of help available to the community on the next occasion. This can result in a feeling of disempowerment and oppression for those most vulnerable, which is the antithesis of the desired outcome for critical social work (Pease, 2009). It is also contradictory to ethical practice generally (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010), and is certainly not conducive to a resilience focused, empowerment framed social work disaster response (Bhadra & Pulla, 2014; Pulla & Kumar Das, 2015).

**Dissonance.** With the research question seeking to ascertain where there may be congruence and dissonance in the way that community spirit is presented between communities, stakeholders and within disaster policy via the Australian government, this study found that there was demonstrated dissonance between the way that the stakeholder groups conceptualised community spirit and the way that the concept is presented and interpreted by government. Firstly, it is imperative to point out that all of the participant groups noted congruence in community spirit having positive connotations, with the way that community spirit is presented by the Australian government. Each of the participants within the three participant groups noted that community spirit did indeed involve helping and supporting those in need in a flood or disaster context, that community spirit was readily and inherently available, and that it was contributory in a positive way with respect to coping and recovery, which in turn fosters resilience into the future.

From the findings presented for each of the participant groups (as presented in Chapter 7), the participants provided nuanced meanings for community spirit that demonstrate dissonance. The meaning for community spirit in Australian government policy was centred on increased responsibility and self-reliance for resilience via community based helping through volunteerism and the concept of shared responsibility. It is evident that meaning differs substantively between the government and those residents with lived experience. It also incorporates a more relationship based
meaning for leaders and service providers where there is a potentially negative outcome. There is, therefore, dissonance in these areas.

Most significant, with regard to the noted dissonance, is the finding that for residents, meaning for community spirit is based more around their relationships to place and to people within their place rather than the meaning conceptualised around helping through volunteerism and responsibility which was presented by the service providers and leaders. Although all groups noted helping as significant for meaning of community spirit, at the policy level, rhetoric around connectedness promotes the responsibility or duty to help those we are connected to as members of society. This contrasts with the resident participants, for whom the inclination to help is considered inherent to being a good friend and neighbour within their experience of community life rather than being a civic responsibility. Helping a neighbour or mate is part of rural living in a small community.

Within the literature, connectedness is discussed in terms of social capital (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014; Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2011; Walia, 2008) and using relational terms such as neighbouring (Cheshire, 2015; W. Smith et al., 2011). From government, however, including the government connected study participants, meaning for community spirit is decidedly lacking. This is critical knowledge to consider in order for the Australian government to utilise the readily available asset that it considers community spirit to be for the disaster context. Indeed, the government needs to be aware that for the communities themselves, the meaning of this asset is different.

Critical social work requires that the profession challenge the status quo, initiate consciousness raising and in doing so, alleviate structural oppression and promote an empowered community towards resilience (Allan, 2009a; Weiss-Gal et al., 2014). The Australian government requires an awareness that, for residents, community spirit means knowing and caring for each other over long periods of time, across generations and building a small community based on ideas of rural living, sharing resources, caring for each other and respecting privacy. Without these relationships, there may be no spirit.
As the meaning for community spirit is different, so then is the means to build, acquire and nurture it. To foster and fund the means for communities to build relationships with each other over considerable time and across generations of families, possibly involving periods of threat or adversity, interventions need to initiate relationships that may not otherwise occur as the way to foster community spirit so that it may be an asset. This is how community spirit can make the expected contribution to community resilience to disasters. This is critical new information presented by this study which is crucial in a neoliberal political environment where increasing disasters are being met with decreasing state responsibility as evidenced by the expectation of shared responsibility in the NSDR. Allan (2009b) posits that it is the role of critical social work to formulate ways to promote social change in this neoliberal context with restricted resources and opportunities for advocacy and increasing expectations of managerialism. She finds that reflective and reflexive practice offers the means to provide activist work that fosters the empowerment of people and the social work skills to help initiate the community interactions required to build spirit.

For the residents, part of living in the North Wagga community is that people care about each other, know each other and tend to have relationships that endure over time. Their sense of community spirit is further tied to their sense of, or attachment to, place. From the broader thematic framework that arose from the primary data for this study, it is evident that community spirit for the resident group is based more on the individual, and the relationship of that individual to place and to people within that place. This is demonstrated by the importance of the psychological, social and locale related subthemes.

For the residents of North Wagga, their identity is very much tied to their shared history of adversity during historical and contemporary floods. Their identity is informed by this history, forming an attachment to others within that context and to the context itself. Sense of place has been demonstrated to be heightened when threatened by disaster (Anton & Lawrence, 2014; Silver & Grek-Martin, 2015) and has been correlated with the desire to return and rebuild (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009). Where sense of place is highlighted as a component of the conceptualised, nuanced meaning of
community spirit for the flood impacted North Wagga residents and as a positive element in their recovery and thus part of their coping that leads to resilience, there is an appropriate place for community spirit in community based disaster work. For the Australian government, this is vital information. All levels of government need to demonstrate an understanding of that sense of place and place attachment through meaningful consultation—in a way that validates the attachment rather than trivialises it—as a key to the collaborative relationship required between communities and government with regard to disaster management.

In the context of the North Wagga community, there are barriers to a meaningful, collaborative and respectful relationship between council and community. Residents describe the community as gated and exclusive and there is critique of emergency management and community led recovery practices and the facilitation of return post flood. In terms of discussion on relocation, the “we shall not be moved” sign provides a tangible reminder of a lack of communication. This study demonstrates clearly that to foster shared responsibility through the use of community spirit as an asset, there needs to be a full understanding of the community’s conceptualised meaning of the relationship with people, time and place, at the government and policy level. This is a new niche for social work. The paradigm shift has been noted by Pulla and Kumar Das (2015), both partnering with and simultaneously challenging traditional therapeutic interventions (Weiss-Gal et al., 2014) and crisis intervention approaches, moving towards a resilience focused and empowerment based response (Bhadra & Pulla, 2014).

There was discernible dissonance noted in meaning of community spirit between communities, stakeholders and macro level disaster management policies and frameworks. Although it may be almost certain that community spirit provides some form of tangible asset irrespective of motives or intentions, these intentions remain significant. If the endorsement of spirit is in fact a measure aimed at cost effective government policy with regard to disaster, there may be an expectation over time that further decreases to funding, and thus an increased need for community spirit to fill the void, will occur.
Cheshire and Lawrence (2005) noted the embracing of neoliberalism that has led to a decreased focus on equity in favour of self-reliance and economy. They noted that the focus on self-reliance and economy has led to an ironic discourse of community and collective action where people are not viewed as individuals but rather as components of communities who hold the social capital to foster the self-reliance assumed under neoliberalism. Where community would normally be viewed as opposition to the hegemonic individualism espoused by neoliberalism, Cheshire and Lawrence (2005) describe the use of community as rather more strategic. In relation to community spirit, this study demonstrates that where stakeholders identify issues for the use of community spirit around equity, safety, longevity and substantiveness, there is a potential issue if community spirit is expected to perform without measurement and management by government. Where community spirit must function without the support of an equity ensuring framework or intervention by professions such as social work to protect against disadvantage, there will remain potential negative ramifications.

Where community spirit has a demonstrated dark side—and particularly where leadership is aware of the dark side as demonstrated by the leadership participants—the hypocrisy of embedding disaster policy in community is illuminated. The unmanaged utilisation of spirit is intrinsically flawed unless well managed. Coupled with the move to local government and community level responsibility for building community resilience to disaster (Begg, Walker, & Kuhlicke, 2015; Thaler & Priest, 2014), and the underpinning policy assumption of shared responsibility (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011b), the issue of reliance on community spirit is further noted and the lack of communication of this knowledge from local leaders to policy writers can be viewed as pertinent. This study allows for knowledge to not only be acknowledged but also disseminated to policy makers as part of the advocacy commitment that ethical social work practice espouses (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010) and which critical social work demands (Allan, 2009a). In this way, social work can act as the linkage between community and government (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2001).
There is also an issue for communities where their meaning for and thus characteristics of community spirit are not fully recognised and supported by government. Community spirit can also be potentially inhibited by legislation so that the community loses the capacity to facilitate recovery using community spirit even as state financial support is simultaneously decreasing. This is clearly both disempowering and oppressive where the source of power is at the government level, even if there are assets within the community that may be utilised. From within this new knowledge there is the evident need for a more collaborative and meaningful relationship between disaster prone communities and local government. The community needs to feel that the embedding of policy within a community framework is more than a tokenistic attempt to engage with constituents. The community needs to feel that they are being heard and that they retain the empowered position of being self-determining in how their lives will be lived within the community.

The link between government and community is the place of social work in the contemporary disaster context (Taylor et al., 2008). Where policy is aimed at promoting long-term, multigenerational residence that fosters the connectedness and relationships to people and place, and where the community itself is instrumental in driving processes aimed at enhancing this, credibility of the focus on both community and community spirit is simultaneously enhanced. This would prevent the correlation of government with the false, propagandist interpretation of community spirit rather than true, altruistic community spirit.

Patterson, Weil, and Patel (2009) noted that where communities are viewed by government as autonomous actors with capabilities and capacities for self-care that are intrinsically linked to the relationships between people within the communities, as well as a common purpose or shared goal, there is a need for a meaningful relationship based on preparedness and recovery between communities, governments and other stakeholders. Communities respond better to ‘bottom up’ interventions and equitable collaboration with government for post disaster work which allows for a sense of agency in decision making for long-term community resilience and sustainability (Dominelli, 2015; Drolet et al., 2015). Certainly, agency is consistent with
social work ethical positioning and values around self-determination (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). From this study emerges the knowledge that for meaningful relationships that can enhance disaster resilience through collaborative work that incorporates the community spirit, there must be an understanding, by all stakeholders, of what the spirit means at the community level. There must also be illumination of the dissonance of meaning from an Australian government interpretation.

Where meaning within the community for community spirit is based around the relationships with people and place that grow and build over time and generations and with stasis, social work can offer to illuminate this meaning. This can ensure the resilience of the community is not impeded by the connection of local government to more superficial community spirited displays that emerge only during a flood event and are not consistently spirited over time (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2001). Without understanding, even the use of the term community spirit from government will appear tokenistic and ‘top down’ and create further barriers between government and community. With these barriers, shared responsibility will retain an appearance of being disingenuous and propagandist, aimed at reducing the burden of the state and decreasing the capacity of community spirit in being effective and providing pivotal assistance.

By positioning social work in the nexus between communities and governments, community resilience to disaster can be enhanced through the ability of social work to facilitate collaborative, meaningful and proactive partnerships between community and governments that endorse and promote the concept of shared responsibility and utilise an inherent asset within well connected, enduring communities (Bhadra & Pulla, 2014; Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2001; Francis, 2013). The skillset of critical social work that combines advocacy and activism, group work, consultation and collaborative community communication is required here (Allan, 2009a; Saleebey, 2004).

Clearly, in providing answers to Section 2 of the research question (RQ2), about the lived experience of community spirit from different stakeholder positions during a single flood recovery event, the research shows residents hold distinctly different meanings which are embedded conceptually in the
relationships they have with people and place, than those of leaders and service providers whose meaning around the concept of responsibility or duty prevails. There is, then, an inherent dissonance in meaning between the conceptualisations presented by the different stakeholder groups, and also between those with lived experience and the literature and secondary data. Dissonance, without awareness, may impact the capacity or way in which community spirit can provide a social resource for building resilience for flood and other disasters, making consciousness raising through social work, key (Allan, 2009a).

The Implications for Social Work

Clearly, from this study it is evident that a critical element of meaning for community spirit is relationships. For the residents, the relationships they conceptualise their meaning for community spirit around are primarily internal, with people in the community and with the place in which the community is located. These relationships are built over time, with knowledge and care of each other, and a commonality in experience tied to that community. They are personal relationships which require interaction and participation over time and place. They are enduring, available in the immediacy of the event (though stifled by individual focus on survival) and last well past the clean-up and into the longer term rebuild and even further. These relationships form a culture of intergenerational resilience (Pulla & Kumar Das, 2015) and are also considered the fusion stage of disaster recovery (Taylor et al., 2008), which Taylor et al. (2008) considers more transient.

For the other stakeholders, the relationship is between an individual and their conceptualisation of their duty, responsibility or citizenship. These are the relationships that are stimulated in adverse conditions, may involve no prior relationships between the participants, and are often tied to service organisations or formal helping structures. This is the domain of traditional crisis intervention and therapeutic models (Bhadra & Pulla, 2014). They remain available for a short while—during the event and in the clean-up stage of a disaster. There is significant difference in meaning for the impacted residents as compared to the leadership and service provider groups. This demonstrates that, for residents, community spirit is much
more centred on their sense of place, in the relationship they have with their locale and in the connected relationships they have with other people within their locale. This is significant knowledge for the social work profession around where and when to embed their professional skillset.

Pyles (2007) notes that there has long been an absence of social work presence in community building work post disaster for long-term community resilience, and rather that the focus for social work has been on the trauma intervention stage. Where a practitioner attempts to build community spirit through engagement with spruiking for and managing volunteers alongside the service providers and leadership, through the trauma intervention stage rather than facilitating relationships between people over a longer timeframe, outcomes in terms of practice as well as for the community, will be dramatically different. Working with established groups, grassroots organisations and community based collectives (Pyles, 2007), well outside the immediacy of the disaster event, is an important change for the community worker utilising social resources such as community spirit in a social work role aimed at enhancing resilience. M. Alston et al. (2016) similarly note the long-term post disaster phase as an important time for social work to endeavour to empower people to foster social capital and build resilience through community development that engages all stakeholders and utilises community based assets. Bhadra and Pulla (2014) similarly discuss the example of small community projects, which were a resiliency building activity, with human service practitioners prompting the completion of developmental activities that facilitated cohesion and participation of community members.

In focusing on the social work implications from the findings presented in the thematic framework from this study, there are numerous spaces for social work to make significant positive impact in community work for building resilience to disaster. Mathbor (2007) notes, in his work on building bonding capital for disaster resilience within the community, that capital may be built through gatherings, participatory activities, political organising, business connections, physical infrastructure, and psychological and social supports. To promote the ‘sense of place and connectedness’ that builds community spirit, social work may involve itself in such community
building interventions as: securing funding for collaborative work with grassroots organisations to build community spaces; stage gatherings; hold celebrations of community spirit; and create tangible reminders through public art or commemorative plaques. Francis (2013) similarly recommends a community development approach that includes social work interventions such as: initiating grassroots activities to strengthen relationships; initiating activities that strengthen infrastructure; building community based leadership; encouraging participatory planning; and addressing disadvantage.

For the ‘psychological’ elements of meaning for community spirit, social work may assist impacted communities to foster identity through commemorative and public infrastructure demonstrating the overcoming of adversity. A perfect example is the “we shall not be moved” sign at the entry to North Wagga, as well as the public art mural (Shyling, 2014). Similarly, for the ‘social’ elements of the nuanced meaning for community spirit, social work can concentrate on an advocacy role in disseminating the knowledge and understanding of the importance of long tenure and multigenerational residence and what this offers in terms of spirit for community resilience. Social work can facilitate and support local leadership and organising, as described by Mathbor (2007), speaking with and for the community in consultative processes post disaster.

For appreciation of ‘locale’ or ‘community related nuances’ of community spirit, it may be relevant to consider the work by Dominelli (2013), who notes that for social workers in post-tsunami Sri Lanka there was need for an advocacy role to ensure that return to homes was both appreciated by emergency management bureaucrats and timely, so as to foster the connection to place and the connectedness of the people who return together. Advocacy work, or indeed case management, aimed at enhancing the appreciation of place attachment and facilitating prompt return, as well as fostering an understanding and sharing the knowledge of what small, rural community living can offer and thus facilitating relationship building between community and government to break down barriers, can be a more effective site for social work in building community resilience (M. Alston et al., 2016).
Social work and the dark side of community spirit. In order that the negative elements that form the dark side of community spirit do not add to the vulnerability and disadvantage of people impacted by disaster, social work can play an important role utilising core skills, such as public awareness raising and advocacy, to foster self-determination and autonomy. This is the ethical positioning of the profession, and that a dark side of community spirit exists, effectively prompts a necessary, ethical and professional response from social work (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). Dominelli (2015) notes that while social work has a long history of supporting people in disasters, there may well be oppressive practice where the desires and needs of the impacted peoples are not considered (M. Alston et al., 2016). Within a critical social work frame, there is a need to address oppressive practice through critical reflection (Pease, 2009). Where disaster victims may not be heard due to uncontrolled volunteer helping or their own inability to process their experience and formulate an assessment of their needs, social work must react accordingly. Thus, social workers involved in immediate disaster work, as well as longer term community work, must illuminate and work towards decreasing the potential negative impacts of community spirit through awareness raising (Allan, 2009a).

Social workers, even when engaged in crisis intervention or trauma counselling, can support clients to use their voice or provide advocacy to ensure that vulnerability is not increased by well-meaning but perhaps poorly controlled and delivered community spirited helping. This will ensure, at the micro level of practice that oppression as result of being embedded in trauma or due to any number of factors such as age, gender, culture, can be monitored and steps taken to rectify. Social work should also situate itself here to ensure that no community member is excluded from the available community spirit further addressing structural oppression at the individual and community level. Where social work is employed in more traditional roles, there will already be contact with vulnerable people, and having an awareness of the community spirited helping available can ensure that the practitioner is connecting clients with community spirit wherever possible. An increased awareness from social work is required about what community spirit means to the different stakeholders in a flood event. This
allows for a different engagement with the community (over the longer term and before an event) than is currently established. Where there is community spirited helping, social work should aim to ensure that the potential negative ramifications are known and they should work in the nexus between people and bureaucracy.

### Linking Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and Community Spirit, Timing and Limitations

This section answers the third section of the research question (RQ3) which was focused on whether the research findings about community spirit might contribute to community development frameworks used to promote community led recovery. Francis (2013) and M. Alston et al. (2016) state that a community development approach for social work the disaster recovery is critical in: ensuring the rebuilding of communities; promoting resilient and empowered communities; and ensuring better outcomes long term for psychosocial and physical wellbeing. These authors further state that the ‘bottom up’ style of community development work that fosters a sense of agency and incorporates the community in decision making builds resilience. As a community development approach, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) utilises the strengths and capacities of the community for an ‘inside out’ or participatory approach to promote recovery (Taylor et al., 2008). In using community strengths and capacities within the community itself, resilience building may be assured. In critique, ABCD is premised on the assumption that a community will have assets and also those required for disaster recovery specifically, which may not be the case. An ABCD approach also, does not offer an assessment of deficits as would other community development frameworks, significant where there is a dark side to community spirit. However, it was not the intention of this thesis to determine if an ABCD approach is sufficient as a singular approach and this thesis assumes that there will also be micro practice as well as intervention from disaster management agencies that will exist alongside the ABCD approach. The thesis in adhering to its core focus asks whether community spirit is an asset for ABCD work and thus a space for social work professional interest and simultaneously acknowledges that there may be critique for utilising an ABCD approach.
Certainly, the findings and discussion for the first two sections of the research question (RQ1 & RQ2) demonstrate that community spirit is indeed an asset that was important within the North Wagga 2012 flood event. The findings also suggest that community spirit would perhaps then be available in other communities where similar elements of meaning for community spirit exist. This may occur in communities where: the residents have a sense of place and attachment; the people are connected to each other, in small, multigenerational and static, rural communities which generate local knowledge; there is a common purpose or collective threat; and there is collective action to counter that threat. In these communities, the findings suggest there is potential for there to be community spirit available for disaster recovery.

The findings similarly note that where there is community spirit available as an asset for disaster recovery, there are limitations to that availability. This occurs where the participants noted a dark side to community spirit and also where the spirit is noted as available only during the event and into the immediate recovery. The findings also note that community spirit as an asset may require some elements in the ‘out of flood time’ so as to be available in full capacity during a disaster. This study also indicates a role for social work outside of floods or disaster events, which ties nicely to the application of an ABCD community development framework to foster community spirit, ensure ethical service provision and facilitate best practice for disaster based community development which is positioned, as always, in the nexus between communities and government.

At the core of ABCD is a focus on social relationships as capital which form assets within a community, as well as drawing upon the strengths illuminated through shared experiences within the community (Kretzman & Knight, 1993). This should be coupled with the underpinning assumption that citizens should drive community led development that utilises inherent assets in an empowering and inclusive way, builds relationships with an ever widening circle within the community, and fosters meaningful, collaborative relationships with significant external stakeholders such as council and emergency management (Bhadra & Pulla, 2014; Carnegie UK Trust, 2009; Francis, 2013).
With community spirit having meaning for residents around these relationships to place and to each other, community spirit is an available and appropriate asset for ABCD based social work provision in the disaster context. Aligning with the concept of fusion (Taylor et al., 2008), whereby the social connectedness of a community is increased in the post event period, Gordon (2009) speaks about the social infrastructure that emerges within a community in the post disaster period. He flags this as a period when new social structures and leadership form, along with the combined threat to create new fusions of community subgroups, forming barriers to preserve the identity of the community and creating a new social system that lasts well past the initial recovery. This is the space where the community spirit of residents, which they consider to exist all the time but be reinvigorated in a flood event and with their meaning around relationships to people and place, fits snugly within an ABCD framework. Here, social work can utilise the professional skillset to foster this new social system and facilitate it in engaging with local government to secure the support needed to build community and thus resilience to future disaster.

The findings demonstrate that whilst there is community spirit within the North Wagga community, outside the flood event it exists in a state of latency—present but with activation unnecessary due to the lack of threat. The flood event stimulates the community spirit with spirited help readily offered and available during the event and into the early recovery stage. At the point the initial clean-up is completed, the community spirit from the broader community (service providers, leaders and volunteers) retracts and the internal community spirit remains. This is the community spirit, held within the community members, which has different meaning and thus is stimulated and built in different ways.

Internal community spirit is available all through an event (though it tends to lessen as people tend their own evacuation and recovery needs). It is this spirit that lingers when the external source is depleted or retracted. It is internal spirit that has the best correlation with an ABCD framework and thus the best correlation with social work. The internal spirit may linger for perhaps a few years post event where, in contexts similar to North Wagga, there is significant time between events. The North Wagga community art
project which prompted the study was an indicator of the lingering community spirit some two years post flood, as were the commemorative events planned for the two-year milestone ("Mayor set to lose trademark beard," 2014; Shyling, 2014). However, with social work traditionally presenting alongside external spirit as support during an event and in the immediate recovery (M. Alston, 2013), as psychosocial support through the trauma period and coordination of relief (Pyles, 2007), there is space for inquiry into a new positioning for social work in the rebuild and longer term community development phase for building community resilience to disaster (Bhadra & Pulla, 2014; Dominelli, 2013; Francis, 2013; Pyles, 2007). This is the place where community spirit is demonstrably able to be an asset for that ABCD framed community development in North Wagga and perhaps other communities.

Locating social work with community spirited ABCD work.

Rowlands (2013) states that the role of social work in disaster recovery in Australia is located with both state and national planning, but that the specific role is not clearly expressed. Also, in keeping with ethical positioning around responsible service provision, the responsibility to rectify the lack of clarity around role lies with the profession to ensure best practice. Similarly, M. Alston (2013) notes the role of social work as integral to disaster work and linked to government prompted emergency management. She further describes community development as a critical component of this role.

With an ethical responsibility to promote social justice and human rights, social work makes a professional promise to foster empowerment of communities, particularly those that are vulnerable, and facilitate their participation in achieving self-management towards psychosocial wellbeing and sustainability of wellbeing (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010) This has an inherent compatibility with an ABCD approach, which itself is an inherently internally driven approach aimed at participation and sustainability (Kretzman & Knight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Coupled with the policy recommendation that community development, and specifically ABCD community development, be the means by which communities may be empowered to be participatory in their own recovery
and ultimately resilience building (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a), we can easily see a complementary positioning for social work in utilising an ABCD approach for disaster recovery work in communities.

This study has found that community spirit is believed to be an asset, readily available and inherent within communities. Community spirit is found where there are relationships between people and place. It is also available at different strengths throughout a disaster, perhaps latent in the time before the disaster and waning back to latency as recovery becomes established, rebuild nears completion and the shared adversity becomes part of the historical narrative. Figure 4 demonstrates the correlation between timing and latency.

![Diagram](Image)

Figure 4. The correlation between latency and timing.

The recommendation from my research is that social work can be placed for best practice within an ABCD framework, when positioned at the community level in the post disaster period, after the initial clean-up and rebuild period which is more benefited by a traditional crisis intervention and trauma management approach (M. Alston, 2010, 2013). It is here in this immediate post disaster period where the social work skills of micro practice, such as counselling and case management are able to provide assistance to psychosocially impacted and vulnerable victims. Development work may involve the social worker with the collaborative decision making
and participation of the community, initiating projects, securing funding, building infrastructure, strengthening bonds and liaising with leadership in order to foster resilience building through the fostering of community spirit (Francis, 2013). My research also finds that community spirit can be used as an asset for an ABCD framework by social work where the following assumptions, derived from the research participant’s narratives, are understood.

- Participation and engagement builds spirit.
- Internal leadership is significant in building the community spirit.
- Generational and tenured residence builds spirit.
- Community spirit is stimulated by tangible, physical reminders.

*Participation and engagement builds spirit.* The participants noted that participating in and engaging with people and events within the community promotes the building of community spirit. Thus, in order for social work to offer best practice from an ABCD framework, there need to be interventions aimed at fostering participation. Positioning social work here, within the appropriate timing, can ensure the best outcomes for community resilience to disasters through utilising community spirit as an asset which may be utilised in a flood recovery. In working with communities from an ABCD framework, social work can assist with planning events, creating and securing spaces for communing and gathering, and garnering funding for the provision of halls or public spaces for connection and community events. Work, outside the time of disaster, allows social work to foster the connectedness and sense of place that builds community spirit so that it can be available as an asset in times of disaster. There may be a need to fund this type of role through local government to ensure a presence outside the event. This requires time and effort over lengthy periods and a presence that can engage appropriately with both the community and funding bodies. Of course, there may well be social workers who reside in the community whose professional skillset may be procured, but to ensure best practice, there may need to be a formal position that remains in situ over time.

*Internal leadership is significant in building the community spirit.* Numerous authors note the importance of community led and community
driven approaches (M. Alston, 2010; Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Taylor et al., 2008). The participants’ findings from this study reiterate the concept of community led recovery in discussion of the importance of internal leadership for the building of community spirit which then becomes an asset in flood times. For social work within an ABCD framework, this may mean such interventions as assisting with the congregation of grassroots organisations, endorsing and supporting naturally occurring leadership that exists prior to or emerges in disaster time, and then advocating with and for such associations and the leader(s) at the local, state and federal government level. This should occur well in to the recovery and rebuild, and then again when the spirit becomes latent. Social workers may fill the role of ‘connector’, a pivotal position within an ABCD framework that is often a person more in the background. The person in this position would assist the identified leader, illuminate assets, make connections within and outside the community, and understand the power in the connection of people (Kretzman & Knight, 1993). This type of community work by skilled social work practitioners offers the vast skillset of the social work profession in supporting local, internal leadership to promote timely and proactive work, which then fosters community resilience by building the community spirit that becomes the asset for disaster.

*Generational and tenured residence builds spirit.* From within an ABCD framework where community spirit presents as an asset for disaster recovery, social work can promote the importance of long-term, multigenerational residence in building community spirit. In an advocacy role, social work can assist in sharing the knowledge that such long tenured residence builds the community spirit that then performs as an asset for disaster recovery and fosters community resilience to disasters. Social work can promote this knowledge to local, state and federal policy makers, and the profession may also offer validation of this knowledge within the community. Social work can assist in evaluating existing policies to ensure that the return of community members as fast as is safely possible post event, is written into emergency management policy and the importance of this understood. It may be as important to ensure the community is aware of the value of their asset of community spirit through long-term,
multigenerational tenure so that they can feel comfortable and supported in their choice to remain in a disaster prone place. Validation can occur during or as a result of events, gatherings, meetings or collaborative works or perhaps in more formal means such as the dissemination of policy information at the community level.

**Community spirit is stimulated by tangible, physical reminders.**

Social work practice from within an ABCD framework can foster the utilisation of local community skills, assets and capacities to promote the provision of tangible, physical reminders of flood survival and recovery that publically display the community’s resilience. Public infrastructure, such as the North Wagga park ("Mayor set to lose trademark beard," 2014), publically produced artworks (Shyling, 2014), signage and commemorative plaques of flood depths, are all examples of such tangible reminders. As a social worker, and as part of the local grassroots community organisation, I was able to utilise my social work skillset within the community to assist with a number of such projects locally. These projects were not dissimilar to the small community projects discussed by Bhadra and Pulla (2014), where funded, participatory projects were designed and implemented with the community to build resilience. Social work can offer a vast skillset here in securing funding, supporting collaborative works, facilitating group work and promoting the infrastructure or events.

With the new knowledge presented here, it is pertinent as a social worker that there be recommendation to advocate for and effect policy change at all levels of government and including the community level (Dominelli, 2011). Two policy recommendations are noted; a position at local council level for a resilience building/community engagement officer and that policy reflect the appropriateness and importance of place for disaster prone communities.

For the North Wagga context there is a requirement for a paid social work position at local council level in a resilience building/community engagement role. Anything less than a paid position will not afford the social worker enough power to be heard and thus advocacy work will likely be ignored by council staff. This social work position would require knowledge of community spirit and the way that it is formed within the community, via relationships, so that the social worker can foster local
government understanding. The social worker can participate here in disaster management planning as well as ABCD community development work fostering and utilising the existing internal spirit. This fosters the link between community spirit and community resilience.

Policy must reflect and promote the appropriateness and importance of sense of place in terms of swifter returns post event, an acceptance of the need for community building and also understanding of the attachment to locale and the benefits it offers to community resilience. Policy must reflect on such elements as the connection to locale and the importance of long term multigenerational tenure and the link between place, community spirit and resilience. Policy needs to recognise that if people are not able to stay in their communities despite risk, form relationships that foster community spirit, return as soon as is practicable and not be threatened with relocation, their resilience is likely impacted.

In summary, community spirit may be deemed an asset for an ABCD framework for social work in disaster recovery, when the work is appropriately positioned with respect to timing around the event and where respect for the limitations around community spirit is ensured. Social work, underpinned by an ABCD framework, needs to be positioned in the post disaster period and towards the end of the rebuild where the external community spirit has vacated and the bulk of the cleaning and rebuild is completed. This allows for the focus of residual internal spirit on development work. This is a significant change from the historical focus on crisis intervention and trauma recovery work that social work has been engaged in around disasters—which is critical work but does not offer the paramount utilisation of community spirit as an asset. From an ABCD framework, social work can offer best practice where it offers service premised with the assumptions that: participation and engagement builds community spirit; internal leadership is significant in building spirit; generational and tenured residence builds spirit; and spirit is stimulated by tangible, physical reminders.
Social work can utilise an ABCD framework to provide ethical and professional best practice within communities and at an appropriate time. That service provision can foster and utilise community spirit, which in turn builds resilience through strengthening an inherent and readily available asset for recovery in the next flood or disaster.

**Chapter 9: Conclusion**

This research adds to the substantial body of knowledge on social work related to the disaster context. Specifically, it addresses the gap in knowledge around the nuanced meanings of community spirit and in doing so, informs the professional practice theory base of social work with an understanding of the broader role for social work within an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) framework.

Firstly, this research offers more nuanced and richer meanings for community spirit in a flood recovery context where meaning is conceptualised around the themes of connectedness, sense of place, the use of self as helping, and community spirit as inherent to human nature. Significantly, this research discovered deeper meaning for the relationships that stakeholders provided as meaning for community spirit. The North Wagga residents conceptualised relationships as internal, between long-term, multigenerational residents in a rural setting, and also spoke about their relationship to place. The other stakeholders spoke of community spirited relationships as their duty of citizenship to help others in need. This research, as situated in a specific context, does not claim to make generalisations about every flood impacted community. However, where communities have similar characteristics, there may be similarities in their experience of community spirit which are worthy of exploration.

This research discovered new themes which emerged from the data and which are highly significant for both the flood and broader disaster recovery contexts. These significant new meanings for community spirit include: the dark side of community spirit; and conceptualisations of long-term, multigenerational residence and rurality. For example, it is significant that the dark side of community spirit may cause inequity in providing
assistance. There may also be potential negative ramifications where community spirit is not adequately managed. As a result, there is a requirement for awareness within the social work profession that the wellbeing of everyone in the community needs to be considered, as well as an ethical requirement in not perpetuating vulnerability and oppression.

The significance of the conceptualised meanings of long-term, multigenerational residence in rural communities relates to the resulting connections between people and their places, which are strengthened by this longevity. This enhances the community spirit, which in turn facilitates resilience to disaster.

In expanding the understanding of the meaning of community, and the nuances of meaning that different stakeholders hold from within the same flood event and resultant recovery, there may now be more comprehensive understanding of the impact and outcomes of the concept of community spirit. Where community spirit fosters positive outcomes in a flood recovery, this is an important implication for social work when embedded in a neoliberal political framework. Where there are increased expectations of individual responsibility due to neoliberal ideology, knowledge of an inherent community asset may be crucial in providing best practice.

For social work, embedded within an ethical and professional framework aimed at assisting the vulnerable and ensuring equity and social justice, this thesis demonstrates a potentially increased or different role. There is an important role for social work in advocating for better understanding and management of community spirit for the benefit of the entire community. There is also a role in assisting in the management and application of community spirit in an equitable way. Finally, there is a role for social work in providing intervention on occasions where community spirit has led to inequity, oppression or disempowerment.

This research also offers new knowledge about the dissonance in conceptualised meanings between different stakeholders in the flood recovery context. This thesis has demonstrated that for residents and those impacted directly by disaster, there is a marked importance placed on their meaning for community spirit around sense of place and connectedness, and
the relationships they have with their community as a locale and as a group of people. However, the non-residential stakeholder groups—those who deliver service or leadership to the residents in time of flood but are not personally impacted—have a leaning towards meanings related to volunteerism and helping. Although both groups acknowledge the positive outcome and benefits from what they see as community spirit in action, there is a difference in views that may create issues. Where disaster recovery relies on long established, strong, multigenerational relationships between people and place (one form of community spirit), these relationships may not always be present. Where there are limited relationships, transience and community spirit is not nurtured, recovery may fail. This is an important finding as there is an expectation from the Australian government that there will be community spirit available in times of disaster which will fill a substantive and crucial role and then require lessened government spending.

At the impacted community level, if there is no relationship between the people that share the same locale, or no connection felt by those people to their place, there may not be community spirit available in time of flood or disaster. For example, where relocation (even when temporary during the flood event) is thought to remedy future impact, the act of relocation may, contrary to intention, actually lessen the connections between people and place and thus diminish community spirit.

In recognising dissonance in meaning, there can be both understanding of where community spirit may arise from, as well as when community spirit is established or built, so that it does indeed present as an inherent asset in times of flood. For social work, there is an important role in awareness raising and advocacy so that policy makers are aware that the dissonance in meaning can impact their conceptualised capacity for community spirit as a flood or disaster recovery asset. There is also an important social work advocacy role in ensuring that the internal community spirited help that community members offer each other is facilitated as part of the traditional social work position in crisis intervention. There is also need for policy recognition of the importance of place, swift return to place and the resilience that is derived by way of community spirit from long term
multigenerational residence in that place. This is also significant information for social work, and particularly social work with a community development focus.

This new knowledge around meaning and dissonance of community spirit may be incorporated into the position that social work has already established within a disaster context, in trauma counselling and crisis management, and in advocacy work, where social work is positioned in the nexus between people and government. However, in answering the third part of the research question, this thesis finds that there is also room for an expanded role for social work in community development. This expanded role could perhaps be undertaken in a different timeframe rather than merely during the event and in the immediate recovery from a disaster, thus readily presenting as an asset for use within an ABCD framework.

The research found there are time constraints and limitations for the use of community spirit as an asset for ABCD. The presence or level of community spirit may change outside the time of the event and become latent where there is a length of time without adversity, which impacts the application of ABCD framed community development work. This is critical information for social work in that timing for community development work needs to be considered prior to an event to ensure the community spirit is available.

This is a specific location for social work, outside a disaster, in focusing on community work that fosters and encourages the relationships between people and their connection to place that in turn fosters community spirit. There needs to be community led ABCD framed work in the time before an event so that the relationships between people and to place can be strengthened and enhanced. This is the space for social work to utilise professional skills to foster the community to recognise their own assets and participate in community life in such a way that community spirit is inevitably being built. Social work can play an instrumental role in facilitating group work; promoting healthy community building through assisting with securing grants and funding for community art, infrastructure and activities; and acting as the link between community groups and councils and other governments. This role should be in the form of a paid
position at the local government level as resilience building/community engagement and allow for social work input at the disaster management level. It is in this social work role that partnerships between the profession and local government may be strengthened and enhanced so that funding from this level of government can be channelled by the community development framed social worker into the community in a meaningful way for the building of community spirit.

There also needs to be social work intervention with an ABCD framework during the recovery phase to assist in driving the rebuild so that community spirit is retained through relationships between people and place. This is a distinctly different positioning for ABCD framed social work intervention. In framing social work with ABCD in this way, there may not only be more beneficial intervention in managing the application of the community spirited rebuild but also for longer term community rebuilding. While the local grassroots community groups and individuals are busy with their own recovery efforts, social work may fill the void by acting in a transitional leadership positioning. In this way, social work can ensure that the needs of the community during rebuild for the purpose of retaining community spirit are met. The social worker can advocate for rapid return of residents, and secure funding that facilitates communing and gathering as a group during the recovery.

There is the opportunity for this new information around the meaning of community spirit and its applicability as an asset in ABCD, to foster and build a new or enhanced role for social work in disaster management. A stronger partnership between social work and government, particularly at the local council level, is needed. This partnership could involve social workers fostering community development and assisting the community to work together outside of disaster to ensure the connections and relationships fundamental to community spirit are built and remain strong. Then, when an adverse event occurs, the social worker can play an advocacy and leadership role focused on long-term community recovery and on the way outside help is brought in to assist. This dual role would ensure that the asset of community spirit remains strong for the long term and remains an asset to draw on in adversity.
Appendix A: Participant Biographies

Residents

**Ally.** Ally is a 31 year old, married, mother of two small children. She is an educated, articulate woman. She works outside the home as a counsellor and holds a degree in social work. She has come to the community via marriage to a man who has connections to and lived history in the community. She has few connections of her own. Interestingly, the people in the community with whom Ally was friends, via external work related networks, all relocated after the flood and no longer live in the community. She has lived in the community for only a short while.

This participant is known to me through a common friend, one who has left the community post flood. When I have met with and spoken to Ally in the past, she has spoken of her feeling of lack of connection to the community and the fact that she feels it is quite exclusive in favour of those who have lived there for greater lengths of time. She doesn't attend community meetings organised by the Residents Association, but she did attend the community Christmas barbeque in 2014. I personally invited her to this barbeque via a flyer in her mailbox as I was aware of her feeling of disconnection. She spoke to me during the interview about this party, saying that aside from me there was only one other person who spoke to her.

We also spoke about her relationships with her neighbours and she does have connections to those people in closest proximity. She also spoke about how she felt her networks in the community would build when her children began attending the local school and she stated that her ability to engage with people was limited by her lack of commonality with other residents along with her work commitments. As such, Ally appears to have little social capital within the community.

A few years ago when I told Ally that I was thinking about a PhD to do with North Wagga, she told me that she wanted to participate because she had things to say about North Wagga. I wanted to interview Ally because of her disengagement and because she had alluded that, for her, there was little that was positive in her experience.
Ed. Ed is a third generation North Wagga resident. He lives in the same street that he grew up in with his mother who still lives across the road. Before the flood, his brother lived about four doors up the road, but has since sold his property which was rented at the time.

Ed is a local community character and is involved in the local Residents Association. He is often involved in community events and is well known within the community as someone who will help in any way. He is popular in his immediate locale where he lives surrounded by three elderly widows, one of whom is his mother. Ed is often asked to assist with household tasks as well as make decisions for these elderly women. He speaks about assisting Mrs Smith in deciding about an insulation job on her home.

Ed is very much a proud North Wagga resident and was identified in the media during the floods as an iconic local man who refused to leave. In fact, he remained throughout the duration of the flood and I recall seeing a photograph of him standing in the phone booth, chest deep in water.

Ed has a wife who has serious, ongoing health issues and two grown children who have left home. He speaks with great pride about his daughter Alisa, who organised the community barbeque after the flood event. His best friend lives down the street and they go fishing and camping together. Their children are also friends. He has a great deal of social connection within the North Wagga community.

I wanted to interview Ed because of his engagement with, and long-term residence in, the community. I was also interested in the perspective of an uninsured man and one who remained in situ during the event.

I interviewed Ed at his home with his wife present. He was very enthusiastic about participating and he sees this PhD as part of the broader work that I do for the community in terms of advocating for levee upgrades, opposing development and community building. He told me to “keep up the good work”.

Carol. Carol is a long-term resident having grown up in North Wagga and remaining there after marrying Graeme. Together, they have raised four children and are still actively involved in caring for grandchildren. Her own children have not remained in North Wagga but two are located on rural
properties not far away—and these two women have also married local North Wagga men.

Carol is married to Graeme, who was blinded in a workplace accident in the 1980s so she is his carer. She is a quietly spoken woman who took on a whole new role after her husband was blinded. She recently took up dance classes at the local hall and is enjoying that activity. She and Graeme travel around Australia in their caravan with Carol doing the driving. She is a keen patch-worker and an active participant in the Residents Association. Carol speaks about her experience in the 1974 flood quite differently to the 2012 event. In 1974, she was a new, young mother. Graeme was not blind at that time and he took a leadership role in the relationship. Carol speaks about how she was not allowed to see the house until Graeme had cleaned up and indicates that this is Graeme being protective. In the 2012 event, she describes a more participatory role as Graeme’s carer and talks about having to drive him to meet with assessors. Carol returned to the community very soon after the 2012 flood event and she and Graeme lived in their caravan in the backyard.

Carol has had the same neighbours almost all of her married life, is well known within the community and has been very active in the community in various ways as her family has grown. I wanted to interview Carol because of her attachment to place, long history in the community and because she is actively participative. I also wanted to capture her as part of a couple. She is a proud North Wagga resident and is vocal about her reluctance to relocate. This was also an element I thought required exploration. Carol was very keen to participate because she is keen to help North Wagga in any way.

**Eleanor.** Eleanor is a long-term community member who has no family or generational links. She is, however, a very connected woman having been participatory in a huge array of community organisations. She has also worked in the local hospitality industry for the last 40 years. Eleanor has one daughter whom she raised as a single mother. She has not had a partner for many years and has no immediate family nearby. She came to the community after the 1974 flood but was present for the 1991 and 2010 floods. She held executive roles in the previous Residents Association and is also a member in the current association.
Eleanor was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease in the post flood period, at which time she was living in a caravan at her home whilst it was rebuilt. She is a very independent woman and extremely capable. She does not suffer fools and expects every person to work as hard as she does. She works many hours despite her age and her Parkinson’s. Eleanor is notably vocal within the community about local issues.

I wanted to interview Eleanor because she has great social capital, both bonding and bridging. I thought this pertinent as she is a single, older woman with little family support, factors which would otherwise make her quite vulnerable.

I interviewed Eleanor at her home. She participated because she said she greatly appreciated the opportunity to share her story. She has strong opinions about North Wagga, participation and responsibility in a community.

Graeme. Graeme is a long-term resident having lived in the community since childhood. He has been married to Carol, also a lifetime resident, for about 40 years. Together, they have raised four children and are both actively involved in the lives of their grandchildren. Two daughters married local men and live on properties close by.

Graeme is blind, having lost his sight in a workplace accident 20 years ago. He is active and independent and is assisted by a guide dog. In the 17 years I have known Graeme, I have seen him walking grandchildren to school, painting his house, walking alone all over the city and he once helped me diagnose a motor vehicle problem solely with his hearing. Graeme is held in high regard in the community and is respected as a person with great local knowledge and a keen advocate for North Wagga.

Graeme has a very strong place attachment and is publically vocal about his desire that North Wagga never be relocated. He attends most local functions and is a regular at residents’ meetings. He is well known as a speaker at public meetings and is a supporter of Wagga Wagga City Council, as his daughter works there.

I wanted to interview Graeme as he is a lifetime resident, and also as he is part of a couple. I was aware of Graeme and Carol’s place attachment and
their feelings about relocation. Graeme is also an example of personal resilience and he has a great deal of social capital that I wanted to explore. He was the first person to come to see me from the community post flood to check on my family. He also told his insurance agent to delay fixing his house until all the young families were back in their homes—which I thought constituted a great example of community spirit that I wanted to explore. Graeme was keen to be interviewed as he is happy to do anything to benefit the people of North Wagga and because he also knows me to be an advocate for North Wagga.

**Julia.** Julia is married to Will and is a mother of five small children. She has lived in North Wagga most of her life having grown up with her family in the suburb then moving away to Wagga Wagga for some time and then returning after she married. She loves living in North Wagga and says that her husband does also, despite some early misgivings as a result of the 2010 flood evacuation which occurred soon after they relocated. She still has her mother and her sister and family living around the corner. They appear to be very close and Julia’s mother will often pick up her children and her sister’s children from school.

Julia moved back to North Wagga just prior to the 2010 flood evacuation, at which time she and Will had just had their fifth child. As Julia is my neighbour, I have spoken to her many times about her 2012 flood experience. I was aware that she does not report many positive elements about her experience.

Despite Julia's long-term residency, she is not highly participatory in community activities. With five small children, one of whom has ongoing health issues, and working shift work and weekend hours outside the home, Julia states that she does not have not a lot of time for community activities. I wanted to interview Julia because she was a long-term resident with a strong place attachment but with little engagement within the community apart from her family and her children at school. She appears outwardly to have little social capital despite her long-term, multigenerational residency. I was also aware that she felt abandoned during the flood and very much as though she and Will had to cope on their own.
Kelly. Kelly is a tattooist, as is her husband. She is a mother of four children and is known for her alternative worldview. She practices yoga and is socially connected to the local sub-community of people who practice what are considered alternative lifestyles of environmentalism and sustainability.

Kelly is down-to-earth and connects socially with a diverse range of people. I have prior experience with Kelly in offering assistance to a man from another culture who was experiencing racism and discrimination within the community. Kelly appears to be happy and content with her life and is an engaged parent often seen at school events with her children.

Kelly and her family relocated for the flood but then returned to the community in two different rental properties while they elevated and renovated their home. Kelly was visibly engaged in the rebuild process in a hands-on manner, often seen completing a building task. She and her husband completed much of the rebuild work themselves.

I wanted to interview Kelly because of her expression of how much she had gained from the flood. She has openly stated that she is better off financially post flood. She also has a lot of social capital both within the community as well as in the broader community.

Kelly was happy to participate and commented on how great she considered what I was doing to be. She draws some parallels between us as we both have a similar number of children and complementary worldviews.

Rita. Rita lives close to my home and I have known her from social interactions and through common friends. She is a mother of three small children and a teenager from a previous relationship and has recently married her partner. Rita is a newer member of the community, but through a number of social activities and family/friend networks, she has a great deal of social capital and connections. She is social and is often seen at social functions and enjoying a girls’ night out.

Rita works part time outside the home and she and her family live in a small, older style cottage. She speaks about building a new house on her land and seems to have a strong place attachment to North Wagga. Rita is well connected to her neighbours and enjoys the rural lifestyle that North
Wagga offers. It is common to see her children riding bikes in the street and playing with their friends at the park.

I wanted to interview Rita as both a married and insured person who has great connections and who received a large amount of assistance from friends and family in the broader community. She seemed keen to be interviewed, as a friend and also because she wanted to have her say. The interview felt almost at times like an opportunity for Rita to share her trauma narrative. She was visibly and verbally happy to share her story.

Veronica. Veronica lives with her partner and son in one of the worst flood impacted areas in North Wagga. We do not know each other socially but we are known to each other. Veronica is an educated and professional woman who is not local and who came to North Wagga from a city environment shortly before the 2010 flood event.

I stood beside Veronica at a meeting during the flood event—when our inundation was formally announced. She was visibly upset and confided in me that she had no insurance and had not gotten all her belongings out of her house. I recall saying to her that it would all work out, that people would come to help, and that if offered help she was to accept it without any stoicism or pride preventing her from doing so. I remember Veronica being visibly reassured by those comments. After the event, I also connected with her to source some beds for a friend of mine so they had something to sleep on. In return, I was able to supply Veronica and her family with some doors that another friend had donated to me for someone to use. I know that Veronica and her family also received some help from my ex-husband who is a builder as well as from the president of the Residents Association who is also a builder.

Although I know Veronica is not heavily engaged with the Residents Association, she does engage on occasion and particularly with important issues such as levee upgrade work.

I wanted to interview Veronica for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted to interview her as an uninsured person who gratefully received significant assistance from within both the North Wagga and broader communities. I
also wanted to interview her because I have a media article from the time of
the flood where Veronica used the term community spirit.

Veronica was quick to respond when she received her formal invitation and
she was keen to be interviewed. Following this, she was slow in her
responses and I felt she might be disconnecting, which I allowed her to do.
When I had all but given up on the interview, she organised a concrete time
and we were able to go ahead.

Service Providers

Andy. Andy is a local plumber and fireman who has been known to
me for 20 years. We worked together in Temora in a local supermarket.
During the flood, Andy was in North Wagga as a member of the retained
fire brigade. During that time, his brigade went to people's homes and
assisted by washing mud from their houses with a fire hose. This was his
first disaster experience but he has attended numerous trauma causing
events such as house fires.

Andy is married for the second time—with three small children from that
partnership and two from his first union. He is social, has many friends from
work and the sporting groups he is involved with, as well as from numerous
other networks.

I wanted to interview Andy because I recalled him at the time of the flood
saying to me that he thought they had retreated too soon and that people still
needed their help. I also wanted to interview him because I knew him to be
socially connected and having a great deal of social capital. Andy was
worried he wouldn’t have much to say and it was a challenging interview in
that his answers were short and I had to work to get information from him.

Alex. Alex is a fireman and married father of two, who during the
flood event, participated in his role as a member of one of the responder
organisations. The role of this organisation was to assist the State
Emergency Service (SES) in restoring community infrastructure; however,
they did also enter private homes to assist. He has not assisted in disaster
work prior to the 2012 North Wagga event, but was personally involved in
assisting me as a resident in the 2010 event.
Alex is a family oriented man who is active in his community in numerous ways: within his service organisation, on the P&C, and also with his family and neighbours. He is connected to numerous social groups from work, from childhood and through family. He gives a great deal of his time to others, volunteering as well as looking after his widowed mother and caring for his father who was dying. I know Alex to have suffered great grief and loss in his life. He remains a very compassionate and caring man, generous with his time and knowledge.

I wanted to interview Alex as a representative from a paid organisational structure that was particularly assistive during the flood event. I also wanted to interview a service provider who is known to have a particularly participatory life history to explore whether community spirit is linked to his decision to be in a service provider role. Alex was the only person who made any comment about being reluctant to participate as he was concerned about his confidentiality and asked that I did not identify his service association.

**Alisa.** Alisa is the daughter of a large, well known, long-term and multigenerational, local family. Her parents told me the story of how, after the flood, Alisa rang them to see what she could do and her mother asked her to bring some lunch, Alisa rang back and said she would bring lunch for everyone. She then proceeded to organise an extensive community barbeque that fed the entire community around a week after the clean-up began. There was no cost to residents and it was one of the most importantly noted components of the recovery effort by every resident. The residents were grateful for the offering of food and drink as well as a public meeting space for sharing narratives and ideas. Alisa had previous experience during the 1991 flood which resulted only in isolation for North Wagga. She had moved prior to the 2010 evacuation but her family still remained in North Wagga,

Alisa is now 26, so at the time of the 2012 flood she would have been 23 and had just had her first baby who would have been around six months old. Her husband did say that he got a bit frustrated with the time she spent helping in North Wagga as he was left to care for the baby, but he also spoke of her efforts with great pride.
Alisa is well connected to the North Wagga community, having grown up there and with parents and grandmother still living there. As I was finishing the interview, one of the other young women who grew up in North Wagga arrived at her house to visit. Alisa’s connection to the community remains strong.

I wanted to interview Alisa because of her extraordinary efforts in the flood recovery. She wanted to participate and was keen to have me come to her house to participate as she is a young mother with small children. She was keen to tell her story and was visibly pleased when I praised her efforts.

**Brett.** Brett was the local school principal who had only been at the school for a short time before the flood event. He is also a member of the SES and was active during the flood event in that role. This was his first disaster recovery experience. Brett had no connection to the community other than his role as school principal and he has now left the community.

I recall speaking to Brett shortly after the flood, while the school was relocated to Johnston Street in Wagga Wagga, about some of the kids having nightmares and difficulty sleeping. He responded with knowledge about the trauma process and what appeared to be genuine interest in the children's emotional wellbeing. He thanked me for alerting him to the need to speak to them further and to my knowledge he did exactly that. I found him keen to have my feedback and interested in forming solutions to problems. He was also heavily critiqued by both staff and parents for his role during the flood recovery.

I wanted to interview Brett for his dual role as leader of the school community recovery and also as an SES member who volunteers his time for the benefit of the broader community.

**Drake.** Drake is a person whom I know from university and also from yoga and permaculture groups I have an interest in. He is an older person in his sixties but with a long history of community development work and an interest in community. During the flood, Drake was involved as a member of the Rural Fire Service. He identifies as being connected to Indigenous people and has also verbalised a connection to the local Murrumbidgee River. Drake had no experience in disaster recovery prior to this event.
Drake is interested in sustainability and has built his own home by hand from mud bricks. He is well connected within his social circles and has some connections in the North Wagga community.

I wanted to interview Drake in his role as a volunteer in a community organisation and as someone I knew to have experience in community work. I was also aware of Drake’s interest in Indigenous communities as well as his strong attachment to the river so I was interested to hear his opinion around place attachment and connection to the river. Drake was keen to be interviewed and offered himself as a participant when I had him on my list of possible interviewees.

**Dom.** Dom is the head of a major charitable organisation in Wagga Wagga and for the Riverina region. I had some previous experience with him as a multicultural case worker as his organisation runs the volunteer program that coexists with the case work program. Dom is an older gentleman. He is a dedicated man and his work is completely voluntary. I get the feeling that he works extremely long hours. Dom had prior experience in disaster work with his organisation during flooding from 2010 through to 2012 across the Riverina region.

Dom was an overwhelmingly positive person and could see community spirit in nothing less than a positive light. When I asked some questions about negative aspects, he seemed almost offended and offered nothing but positive attributes. Dom also had some solid ideas about sport.

I wanted to interview Dom because he was the head of a major service provider and I had spoken with him on some collaborative work during the floods. He was enthusiastic about participating and verbalised how thoroughly he enjoyed speaking about his work.

**Gordon.** Gordon is a man in his sixties, newly retired and a keen camper and outdoors person. He is married to Toni and father to three adult children with one teen at high school. I have known Gordon for many years, with our daughters attending school together and being friends for many years. Gordon is a down-to-earth tradesman. He is community oriented, having been part of the Estella community for many years. He says that Toni makes him do things but in my experience Gordon is always keen to
help even if only offering advice. He is often doing things for neighbours
and friends.

During the flood, Gordon helped me pack my belongings and then stored
some for me at his house, delivering them to me when I was established in
Johnston Street in Wagga. His wife, Toni, rang me to say they would
accompany me home when the time came. They met me at my house the
day I returned home. They stayed all day and Gordon brought his own
equipment to hose out my house, cut my carpets so I could haul them out,
and he helped in the shed as well. He then went to another neighbour’s
house to help them and to another woman’s house to help her.

Gordon was the major source of assistance in my flood recovery and his
help allowed me to clean up without using any of the organised service
providers. He was also instrumental in helping numerous others. He offered
accommodation to some neighbours whom he had housed during the 2010
evacuation. Apart from Gordon and his family, the only other assistance I
required were some Army men to help carry out a piano. Gordon’s favourite
memory was when I said there would be no power for his pressure washer.
He still has a laugh today about me not realising he would bring a generator.

I wanted to interview Gordon as he was a volunteer who helped numerous
people in the community that is not the one in which he lives, but to which
he has some ties. He was happy to participate, mostly in order to help.

**Kris.** Kris is a human dynamo. She is in her mid-forties with three
children, one of whom has had serious heart issues. Her husband has a
butcher shop and they also breed stud horses. Kris runs the junior footy club
in North Wagga. Her kids went to school in North Wagga and they lived in
the community for some time. They later moved to Estella and then to a
rural property. Kris is the quintessential Australian woman: hardworking,
down-to-earth, capable and confident. She speaks with a strong Australian
accent with plenty of colloquialisms, slang and swear words. She is a great
leader and has exemplary organisational abilities.

During the flood, Kris and Alisa organised a community barbeque to feed
the North Wagga community and all the associated helpers and onlookers.
The barbeque became a hub for political and media activity and amassed a
diverse array of helpers. The barbeque organisation was voluntary and all goods and services were donated. This event was critical in the recovery process for many residents as it provided a space to connect and rest, as well as providing food and water.

I wanted to interview Kris for her contribution, and because I know her as a passionate, community minded person. I also know her to be a straight talker who would be blunt and honest and with a worldview that encompasses much lived experience in community work and volunteerism. It seemed important to retain balance by interviewing both of the organisers of the community barbeque. I knew she would have inside knowledge that would be pertinent. Kris was keen to speak to me, to tell her story, and to let me know how she felt the council response could be rectified.

**Molly.** Molly is not someone I knew personally before the flood. She runs a charity which I had certainly heard of and I remembered receiving a cleaning package from her at the barbeque during the clean-up. I don’t recall meeting Molly at this time but I certainly knew she had a role to play.

Molly has a publicly known, personal lived history of being a foster child. She discussed her abandonment in her interview, suggesting some salient issues, which of course brings different elements into her conceptualisation of community spirit.

It became more pertinent to interview Molly as a few of the other participants had mentioned her work in a negative way. Another participant critiqued the fact that she had to tell Molly that putting methylated spirits in unmarked water bottles was not a good idea. Some of the higher level service providers also commented that they were unsure of whether Molly was credible as a service provider.

She was very keen to be interviewed despite the fact that she had relocated and we conducted her interview over the phone. Her interview was extremely interesting in that it started out with her saying mostly positive things, but when I prodded a little she launched into a rant about her experience in the flood event and the very negative things that occurred for her.
**Toni.** Toni has been a friend for many years; our daughters having been at school together. She is like a mother figure to me and is consistently like that with most people. During the flood, Toni, her husband and one of their friends helped me pack to relocate. She also kept in contact with me until we were allowed to return and I recall her ringing me to say that I did not have to go home alone and that she and Gordon would come with me. It was one of the more meaningful moments of my flood recovery and Toni had forgotten she had said it at the time I asked about it during her interview. The assistance she and her family provided in my recovery experience was critical in both securing my home and physical infrastructure but also in maintaining my mental health throughout and into the longer term. Toni also assisted people in the 2010 event with their evacuation and provided accommodation for a North Wagga family.

I wanted to interview Toni because she was a volunteer at multiple sites and over numerous events, has a long history of community engagement and involvement and is the partner of another of my participants which offers something by way of comparison of narratives.

Toni agreed to be interviewed as a favour to me. She was not overly enthusiastic as she found it confronting to be recorded. Her answers were straight to the point and she does not elaborate in any great detail; however, this is her normal communication style. She is a private person who would rather talk about others than herself.

**Leadership**

**Des.** Des is the locally based, NSW state legislature representative, Member for Wagga Wagga. He also happens to be a local North Wagga resident, although he lives outside the levee on a hill. His house remains out of floodwaters although the remainder of his rural property is inundated and his wife has in the past been isolated on the property. He runs, alongside his political career, a horse agistment business. He is semi participatory in local community life and I have personally served him at the local school fete. He makes a point of buying his newspaper at the local corner store and having the odd meal at the local pub.
Des seems to have a strong place attachment and a keen understanding of the sense of place that residents have. He also experienced the evacuation for the 2010 flood and I recall standing next to him at a meeting during that event where he told me he understood how I felt. I remember thinking at the time that he could not possibly understand.

Des has assisted the Residents Association by helping us secure funding for our hall, painting and a new roof. He has also been helpful to the pony club in assisting them post flood to replace their infrastructure which was washed away.

Des tells his story as rags-to-riches through sheer hard work and clearly demonstrates that he expects the same of others, which is in keeping with his liberal political ideology. However, he does demonstrate some empathy for North Wagga and its people. He doesn't seem perturbed by North Wagga’s location nor is he a proposer of relocation.

During the flood, Des was both in a leadership position and also a resident. He had to secure his own property as well as assist numerous other people in the community with advice, storage, loaning trailers and utilities, and general support. In his leadership role, he was participatory in major decision making, and of course in the flood recovery, his role was pivotal in securing disaster declaration and funding.

I wanted to interview Des because of his dual role as leader and resident. I also wanted to interview him because his political ideology is sometimes in direct contrast to his behaviour and I wanted to explore his meaning of community spirit from both of these positions. I knew Des felt some connection to North Wagga. He was keen to participate, happy to be directly quoted and described his opinion as a politician as being public information.

Harry. Harry was the director of a department in Wagga Wagga City Council and I interviewed him in lieu of the general manager. In hindsight it was a better choice because Harry had more active involvement during the flood event. During the flood, he was the public face of council and spent some time in the hall during the recovery period answering questions.

Harry is not popular in the North Wagga community as he was the public face of decision making about levee and other infrastructure planning. There
is much angst for many locals around issues such as kerbing and guttering, and drainage. Interviewing Harry has given me more insight into his personality. I think Harry performed well in his role, had a genuine empathy for North Wagga residents and coped well with people being quite rude to him at times.

I wanted to interview Harry as a council representative who was in a leadership position during the 2012 flood. I wanted to explore his awareness of the recovery work that occurred within the community. He participated in the interview because his secretary organised an appointment for him and he agreed to only half an hour at that point. By midway through the interview, he had become so comfortable that when I asked him if he wanted to stop he declined. He seemed to enjoy the conversation and the opportunity to talk and be appreciated rather than scorned, which is his usual reception in North Wagga. Shortly after his interview, Harry resigned amidst some controversy. He seemed quite nervous at the beginning of the interview but I adopted a casual style to allow him the freedom and comfort to be open.

Jim. Jim was the person chosen to head up the recovery centre during the 2012 flood. This service centre was aimed at assisting all affected by the 2012 flood event, including people from North Wagga, and as such drew clients from numerous impacted communities throughout the Riverina. It was the site of the collaborative efforts of state and federal government support agencies and charitable organisations including Human Services, Department of Housing and the Red Cross. By all accounts, it was a last minute decision and a rapidly set-up centre with no model or plan to follow. For the impacted people, this was where you went for financial assistance and advice. I personally received no assistance despite meeting several criteria as a vulnerable person.

Jim was keen to speak with me and to tell his story in a positive way. He was difficult to track down due to his hectic travel schedule but eventually we settled on a date. Jim spoke with a great deal of pride about his role in the flood recovery. Interestingly, he spent little time within the actual flood context, having spent nearly all his time managing the different agency responses at the recovery centre. He has no prior disaster recovery experience nor has he any connections in North Wagga.
Jim is a committed community worker. He spoke to me of the ways he engages his immediate community even within his personal life. He speaks as though he is always in a leadership role, however, and I wonder if he would find it difficult to accept a backseat role in community engagement.

I wanted to interview Jim because I knew him to be community focused, and because he held leadership position but never participated with the North Wagga community apart from when he spoke to people at the recovery centre. I wanted to explore what he knew about the community and the way that recovery happened at that level. Jim was keen to participate and was enthusiastic throughout the interview. I got the impression that he was keen to provide his narrative and that he wanted that narrative to be shared.

Joanie. Joanie was, at the time of the flood, the Vice President of the North Wagga Residents Association. She is also, of course, a resident although her house is new and thus elevated as per council specifications so as to be not inundated in a flood event up to a certain height. Her home in the 2012 flood was not inundated but her shed and extensive gardens were.

Joanie had a recognised leadership role in the Residents Association and she was present at all the post flood meetings. Although I wasn't really aware of all that she did during the event, I do remember her handing me a dish of lasagne one day as I was driving down the street. It was touching at the time as it was difficult to manage everyday tasks on top of all the extra work involved in flood clean-up.

Joanie was keen to be interviewed and said yes as soon as she received her invitation. She was one of the more difficult participants to interview as she tended towards blunt and short answers rather than the lengthy discussion the methodology would endorse. She also tended to be simplistic in her answers so I had to dig to get some depth. This is in part her personality however. I wanted to hear Joanie’s perspective as a leader and as a resident who didn't have floodwater in her home and thus with more time to help others.

Kerrie. Kerrie is the community development worker at a local bank. She is a committed and dedicated believer in community work in spite of
the fact that she works within the profit-driven finance sector. During the flood event, Kerrie was responsible for a great deal of fundraising events. Part of the marketing of the bank she works for focuses on community spirit.

Kerrie is a passionate and vibrant woman who is enthusiastic about the work she does for the community. She uses the term community spirit in her everyday language and was most enthusiastic to talk to me. She was suggested to me by another participant, and as a resident, I was probably not aware at the time what Kerrie actually did during the flood event.

She had little flood recovery experience but an enormous amount of experience working in communities and also living in small rural communities. She has some limited connections in North Wagga. Kerrie is middle aged and a single mother to two young adult daughters.

She was extremely keen to be interviewed. In talking to Kerrie I came to understand that community spirit is a part of her life. She is very passionate about her work and the spirit that she sees in her clients and their communities.

**Lew.** Lew is the face of North Wagga. He is recognised by both the North Wagga community as well as the wider community as the foremost representative for North Wagga. He is well known at Wagga Wagga City Council and within the business community where he has connections both from his business career but also from his long involvement in Rotary and other service and community groups.

He has been a long-term North Wagga resident, having married into the community and raising part of his family here with his wife. They had moved to a central home about 10 years ago, and despite the fact that Lew heads up the Residents Association, he did not reside in the community at the time of the flood. He did have a rental property in North Wagga, however, so he had some of the experience of working with insurers and so on, although he did that with a sense of detachment. He did have to evacuate in the CBD evacuation.

After the flood event, Lew moved back to North Wagga and is now fully engaged with floodplain dwelling including having difficulties securing
affordable insurance. It seems to have altered Lew's opinion about levee protection and council responsibility somewhat. Despite his long-term residence in the community, Lew has managed to miss participating in any flood events. He thus has no disaster recovery experience. He does, however, have a wealth of experience in volunteering, facilitating community events and management.

In his role as leader through the flood event, Lew was sensational. He was an advocate for many, he coordinated high level political visitors such as the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. He personally went into people's homes and repaired broken items. He facilitated agreements with building suppliers so people could access cheap building materials. He helped people move home. He arranged for waste disposal after council services were stopped and he personally drove around and picked up hard waste from the footpath with his stepson to help him.

I wanted to interview Lew because he is the person who used the term community spirit that first caught my eye. He said in the media that it was the community spirit that helped North Wagga rebuild and recover.

Lew was happy to participate. He is a passionate North Wagga resident who has genuine care for the community. He was a little nervous but was visibly happy at the end of the interview. I wondered if it were a cathartic experience for him, which provided validation for the work he had done in this time.

**Mitchell.** Mitchell is the Federal Member for the Riverina and a member of the National Party. I organised his interview with his secretary but he told me at the time of his interview that he makes a point of doing interviews for PhD students.

He was interesting to interview, keen to waive his confidentiality rights, and when I turned on the recorder he slipped into his ‘political mode’. He seemed well practised in the art of giving bland practised answers, although towards the end of the interview as he became more comfortable, he started to give more personal opinions.

It was an interesting interview in that Mitchell made comments throughout which appeared to be his way of demonstrating his knowledge of the
community. There were some issues with the validity of some of his comments which I queried.

I wanted to interview him partly because I understood what his opinion was about North Wagga and could see some contrast with the way he presented himself in the media throughout the flood recovery event.

**Tom.** Tom holds a leadership position in the local Riverina Labor Party. He is also a resident in North Wagga. He and his wife purchased their first home in North Wagga six weeks prior to the flood event. Tom’s wife’s family also reside in North Wagga and they happen to live next to Eleanor, who is a well-connected person. Prior to moving to North Wagga, Tom and his wife were city dwellers but they describe their city experience as containing what they considered to be similar elements of community.

Tom is particularly active in numerous community related events and attends residents meetings as often as he can. He also organised a movie night in the local hall and is present at most community functions where he makes a concerted effort to talk to people. At the time of the flood, Tom’s role was more one of resident, but in the time since he has come to be recognised as a community representative. Despite the fact that he works for council, for which there is much distrust in the community, Tom is well liked and respected.

I wanted to interview Tom both for his leadership qualities and as someone holding an opposing political ideology from the other two political representatives I interviewed. I also wanted to interview Tom as a new resident who had little connection to the community at the time of the 2012 flood, but who has remained and appeared to enjoy a significantly increased social capital post flood.

**Violet.** Violet was the community engagement officer at council at the time of the flood and has since moved on to start her own business. She told me she left council because she was unhappy with the management. Violet was recognised as a council representative on the ground post flood and I was interested to learn that she only took the position on at the time of the flood. I had originally thought she was in the role prior to the event. I can remember her saying to me during a heated moment at a post flood meeting.
with council and residents, that if we complained too much “they will make you leave”. I remember at the time being surprised by the way she distanced herself from council decision making despite being part of that team.

Violet is a well-educated and eloquent woman who was compassionate to the people of North Wagga during the flood recovery and after. She had little disaster recovery experience and was visibly moved in providing her narrative. She is aged in her mid-30s, single, with no children, and not a local but with some rural community childhood experience.

I was keen to interview Violet due to her leadership position within council. She was keen to share her opinion, especially given her degraded relationship with council. It allowed her to be much more frank as she has no further alliance with them and the relationship is acrimonious in her mind. Violet was a most enthusiastic participant who sees great importance in what happens to North Wagga.
Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Interview Questions: Residents

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Opener: What is community and what is your experience of community?
Community

- Locale, size, time.
- Shared goal/purpose/support.
- What is community in North Wagga? How does it work?
- How does community work in a flood event? Positive and negative.
- What makes North Wagga different to other communities in a flood event?
- Is the North Wagga community the same after the flood?

Helping

- Who helped or who did you help?
- Who should help? Roles of community and stakeholders.
- Reciprocity
- Strangers/volunteerism and neighbouring.

Sense of Place

- Connection to place—need/desire to return.
- Belonging.
- Long-term and multigenerational versus newer residents.

Connectedness

- Collectivism.
- Cohesion.
- Connections within community/to wider community.

Inherent aspect of human beings

- Characteristics that enable coping.
- Why do people help?
- Altruism/ stoicism/courage/mateship/hope.
- Past trauma experience/giving back.
## Interview Questions: Other Stakeholders

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Opener: What is community and what is your experience of community?
Community

- Locale, size, time.
- Shared goal/purpose/support.
- What is community in North Wagga? How does it work?
- How does community work in a flood event? Positive and negative.
- What makes North Wagga different to other communities in a flood event?
- Is the North Wagga community the same after the flood?

Helping

- Who helped or who did you help?
- Who should help? Roles of community and stakeholders.
- Reciprocity
- Strangers/volunteerism and neighbouring.

Sense of Place

- Connection to place—need/desire to return.
- Belonging.
- Long-term and multigenerational versus newer residents.

Connectedness

- Collectivism.
- Cohesion.
- Connections within community/to wider community.

Inherent aspect of human beings

- Characteristics that enable coping.
- Why do people help?
- Altruism/ stoicism/courage/mateship/hope.
- Past trauma experience/giving back.
### Appendix C: Themes and Codes Collapsed to Themes

#### Secondary Data

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care and concern, collaboration, generosity, help of strangers, physical help, reciprocity, support, volunteerism</td>
<td>Cohesion, collectivism, connectedness, local venturing, neighbouring, solidarity, united in adversity/pulled together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of place</th>
<th>Inherent to human nature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging, sense of pride in community, sense of community</td>
<td>A feeling or sense, altruism, camaraderie, courage, determination, dignity, generosity, heroism, hope/hopeful, humour, mateship, self-pride, quintessential goodness, selflessness, spontaneous, stoicism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Primary Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adversity</th>
<th>Barrier around community</th>
<th>Community type and size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aussie battler, comes from adversity, increased after flood, community waning after flood</td>
<td>Broader versus North Wagga community, community spirit as exclusionary, protection from outside forces, sense of protectiveness or defensive</td>
<td>Feeling of space and privacy, small communities, personal space, rurality, safety and security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational</th>
<th>The use of self as helping</th>
<th>Inherent to Human Nature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decreased in contemporary society, differs between generations</td>
<td>Comes from seeing people help themselves, feeling helpless, giving back to community, help from broader community, helping individually without judging, helping neighbours, helping people, helping selective people, volunteerism, need government help, reciprocity, sense of responsibility to help neighbours, sharing, shared community benefit, support, help those in need, respect for each other in clean-up, helping out of curiosity, strangers helping</td>
<td>Altruism, part of personality, respect, camaraderie, strength, get up again resilience, is a feeling, caring, empathy, people seeking connection with universal spirit, positive outlook, self-determination, selfless caring, selfish versus selfish, something we just do as people, spirituality, trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and organisation</td>
<td>Place attachment</td>
<td>Sense of place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building through community engagement, focused leadership, structure and organisation, relationship between leadership and community engagement, requires leadership</td>
<td>Connection to the river, attachment increases after the flood, desire to return unaffected by the flood</td>
<td>History and shared experience, defensiveness about community, local knowledge and history and service and sharing information provision, lack of local knowledge, sense of place, through common experience, sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Connectedness</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity of “we shall not be moved”, part of community identity, North Wagga feeling, stigma and sacrifice of living in North Wagga, varies in unique communities, united by negative opinion of living in a flood zone</td>
<td>Close knit, band together, closeness, common purpose, connection to broader community, friendships, consensus, extension of family, inclusion, networking, teamwork, community stays together, knowing each other, belonging, strengthens, community ties</td>
<td>Differs for old or new residents, static community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The dark side of community spirit | | |
|---------------------------------| | |
| Limited resource, motivational political speech, sense of entitlement, dangerous, exploitation of shared | | |
| resources, false spirit,  
guilt at being helped,  
inequitable, a fall  
back, uncontrollable,  
negative lens, not  
everyone participates,  
non-helpful helping,  
not knowing how to  
do it, not knowing  
how to get involved,  
stickybeaks, unwanted  
help, too busy to help  
in early stages |
References


Pease (Eds.), *Critical social work* (pp. 3-14). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin.


North Wagga resident backs one in 100 year flood protection for suburb. (8 April 2015). *ABC News*.


