

Bushfire Resilience Inc.

Kids and bushfire plans

Interview with students at Kangaroo Ground Primary School

Interviewer: Malcolm Hackett OAM



Malcolm

My name's Malcolm Hackett and I'm here in Kangaroo Ground Primary School in the old school building with three student leaders Molly, Alexander and Anouska and we're going to talk about involving young people and children in planning for a bushfire.

It's lunchtime so there might be some noise and laughter outside and a bit of traffic going by as well. We're here to talk about involving young people, particularly even down to young children, in bushfire planning. And these student leaders have been involved in discussions with their other classmates on the topic and I'm going to find out a little bit about what they've been doing.

Perhaps we'll go Anouska, Why do you think it's important to involve young people in bushfire planning?

Anouska

It's important to inform young people on the bushfire plans so in the case of emergency they feel prepared and confident in what they're doing even though most children that wouldn't know would feel slightly panicked and wouldn't know what to do.

Malcolm

Alexander anything you'd want to add to that?

Alexander

Pretty much just what she said, I think having a bushfire plan and knowing what you're going to do would be a lot more calming instead of rushing around not knowing what your parents are doing

Malcolm

Absolutely, couldn't agree more. When you've discussed this with your classmates how many of them do you think actually, their family has a bushfire plan Molly?

Molly

I think a couple, I'm not totally sure. But a few have said what their bushfire plan is. And then some others have just given us ideas of what they would do if there was a fire.

Malcolm

So do you think it's a need in this community for more people to have a bushfire plan and to share it and work on it with the young folk, their children? Anyone can answer.

Anouska

Most definitely I reckon.

Alexander

Yeah absolutely.

Anouska

I don't know reckon people not have a bushfire plan, and in the area it's particularly bushy. So I reckon they should have one.

Malcolm

I suppose I could push on a bit further and say has your family got a bushfire plan Molly?

Molly

Yes we do. It's a bit outdated but it's still really going to be the same until we move house

Malcolm

And is your bushfire plan involve leaving if there's an extreme day Alexander?

Alexander: Yeah. We leave at severe I think.

Malcolm

Tell me a little bit about in the in the discussions you've had with the other students have they been worried about bushfires?

Anouska

I reckon they've been cautious about it, but they haven't necessarily worried about it as the bushfires haven't come close to us in quite a few years now. So I wouldn't say they're worried about it but I don't think I'd say that they're overly confident.

Malcolm

I think that's possibly true right throughout our Shire. Have you had any involvement with the local CFA? Have they come to talk with you about any of those things?

Anouska

Yep, so they often come up and just do little talks with the classes. And once a term we have a bushfire evacuation rehearsal and they come up and help us with those and just go through the drills again.

Malcolm

Molly how important do you think it is for people to practise things?

Molly

I think it is very important because you have to know how long it's going to take and know how much stuff you're going to fit. Because say you've got one big backpack and as much stuff that's important to you can fit in that then you will take along with you. And you want to make sure you can fit everything in your car as well. And so it's good to know how much time it's going to take because what if it takes you 30 minutes to get all packed and then the fire's already come into your house and nearly killed you?

Malcolm

I hear a lot of people in bushfires they worry about their pets and their animals. Is that one of the sort of things that you'd be thinking about it in a bushfire plan Alexander? What about you?

Alexander

Well, it's kind of sad really but the only pets that I have are fish, so I don't really know what it's like. But for other people I reckon pets would be a priority after all they are man's best friend.

Malcolm

I did hear a story of a student somewhere else in the state who messed up the family's bushfire plan because he wouldn't leave without his fish. So because you got to have a tank or a bag I suppose you'd have to plan how am I going to get my fish out of here?

When you've been talking with your classmates what sorts of things have they suggested for ways that young people could be involved?

Alexander

It really depends on where you live. Most of the kids have said it's their job to get their dogs by the leash or get their horse, open the horse paddock gate so they can run free, because it's a lot of work to load them into the trailer.

Malcolm

And there's a lot of horses in our area isn't there? So a lot of people have got that as an issue. So what sorts of jobs have students suggested that they might carry out in their bushfire plan?

Anouska

Many have said that they would help pack with the family so they might get their most prized possessions and put them in a backpack and then go get the dogs or something.

Malcolm

What about Alexander? Have you heard any other ideas?

Alexander

Yeah a lot of kids have said pack all my clothes and stuff.

Malcolm

So you don't think that's such a good idea?

Alexander

No. All your clothes I reckon is a bit much. And they all really say the same thing when you're talking to them. Well, most of the younger kids anyway.

Malcolm

Have you talked about the idea that if you were going to pack all your clothes you'd need plenty of time to do that so really that might be something you're going to do the day before?

Many people think they'll wait and see what happens before they decide to leave, or do they really sort of plan to leave early?

Alexander

I reckon leave before but if you see smoke it's too late to leave they say. So I reckon yeah. Always plan ahead.

Malcolm

So in the discussions you've had if people decide it's too late to leave we're going to have to stay what sorts of jobs do they think they might have then?

Alexander

A lot of kids have said get the fire hoses out, arm the sprinkler system, fire extinguishers they said which wouldn't really help. But yeah there's been a lot of wide variety of ideas.

Malcolm

Molly have you heard of any others?

Molly

Some would call the CFA and get some water in buckets or some things that they can pour onto the fire if it comes too close to them.

Malcolm

They all sound like pretty good suggestions to me. In the discussions that you've been having do you think people are going home and then saying to their parents "We need to think about this?" Are they talking like "We haven't got a plan we should do something?"

Anouska

I reckon a few students have. I know that we interviewed a class once, only five people put up their hands to say that they had a fire plan and then we went around the next day and instead eight people put up their hands. Which we noticed and we thought it was a good step considering that three more people learned that knowledge.

Malcolm

So they're thinking about it and talking to their parents about it? We did hear this morning that young people are the ones that are most likely to take up new information and actually then take it home to their parents and get them to do something. So the work you're doing is pretty important I think.

How long is this project going to go on for? What do you do next?

Anouska

I reckon we just try and raise more awareness and get more people thinking about what their fire plan is. And then I reckon we just take it from there I guess, one step at a time.

Malcolm

Are there many students in the school that have been through a fire or near a fire? Have many people talked about their experience?

Molly

I have actually once, it was Grade 3, got home from school, it was very rainy and thundery and there was lightning strikes going everywhere. And one of the lightning strikes actually hit the ground not too far off my property. So I was sitting there with my dog and my neighbour's actually a fire fighter at the KG CFA, so they came over with their hose in their board shorts and thongs and we called the fire department and dad went down to help as well.

Malcolm

So you know that board shorts and thongs aren't a great idea? What should you wear?

Molly

You should wear protective gear.

Malcolm

Right, which is usually what sort of things?

Molly Long pants and long tops.

Malcolm

Yeah, boots and things like that. Yes, good idea Molly, well thought. If you thought "Gee we're going to need to leave home because there'll be a fire threatening us tomorrow" what would you take? Molly?

Molly

I'll take a couple pairs of my earrings, maybe a necklace or two and a bracelet or two. I'll get a couple hundred hair ties because my hair is very thick so it needs a couple of hundred hair ties sometimes. I will get some of my clothes and some photos that are very special to me and I'd get one of my teddys which I'm really hooked to that I've had since I was a baby.

Malcolm

That sounds like a treasure to me. What about you Alexander?

Alexander

Probably all my technology, medals, even though I've only got a couple, just things that are sentimental in value and stuff

Malcolm

And Anouska what about you?

Anouska

I would pack anything that's mainly valuable to myself and the family. So pictures or important jewellery or even just statues I've collected over the years or achievements as well, like medals.

Malcolm

Good thinking. I've been through a bushfire, and it happened so quickly I didn't get anything out of the house at all. But I can tell you that if you make a list - that thinking you were just doing then - and you write those things down it's a lot easier when a drama comes you can say "Right where's the list?" and off you go.

Suppose that's the other thing about plans, they say writing a plan down is much better than just having a plan in your head, is that the way everyone talks when you've been talking with the school?

Anouska

I reckon it's quite hard to think in a bushfire. You're panicking. You need to tend to the horses or dogs, everything. And then probably one of your least concerns is gathering the essentials. So much so that you forget what to pack and you just grab the first things that you see and get out there. I think it's good to have a list.

Malcolm

They do say that. We talked with a psychologist this morning that said exactly what you said then. When your head is in a stressed state you forget all sorts of things. But if you've got a plan written down you're more likely to do it, and if you've practised the plan like you do with your fire drills well then you're more likely to get those things right because you've been practising and it becomes part of the way you think.

If there was a fire threatening your home would you rather stay or would you prefer to leave?
Alexander?

Alexander

Well, I'd leave 100%.

Malcolm

You'd leave 100%. Anouska?

Anouska

I would leave almost definitely. Unless there's something happen like the wind would change direction and block our path to get out of there so then we'd be forced to stay down the hill or something.

Malcolm

What about you Molly?

Molly

I would definitely leave but if the wind changed and it blocked off the end of our road we would go over to our neighbour's with our stuff because they have an underground bunker. So we would stay under there with them.

Malcolm

That's fortunate. Particularly if it's big enough to hold everyone. That idea about leaving. You wouldn't want to leave right at the very end, very dangerous isn't it? In Kangaroo Ground there's a few roads out and a few roads in, not lots of easy places. If you were going to leave early though where would you go to? Anouska?

Anouska

We would go to our grandparents' house. They have quite a big house and it's able to store our family of six which is good. So we'd probably go there and see how long we can stay there because they're always willing to let us stay. And then we'd go and try to find another place to stay probably.

Malcolm

Alexander what about you? Where would you go do you think?

Alexander

Same as her, I'd go to my grandma's house because she lives in suburbia and there's not much bush.

Malcolm

And Molly where would you go?

Molly

I'll go to either my grandma's house or my auntie's house because they live in Croydon so it's not too bad there. And then we would find another place to stay until it's all done.

Malcolm

Until it was all over. And when you were talking with other students did they all think they would have somewhere to go?

Anouska

Yeah most of them had grandparents or aunts and uncles that they would go to. So they were confident that if they did need to stay somewhere they had a place to stay.

Malcolm

That's good. All right, thank you for your time and for telling us about that project, it sounds like you've been doing some great work.