# Science to Practice Forum 2023

Day 3 Session 4 transcript

(Duration 74 mins 38 secs)

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## Introduction

This is the transcript of one of the Future Drought Fund’s Science to Practice Forum sessions, presented by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. This transcript is for Day 3 of the Forum, session 4, Mental health heroes.

Learn more about the [Science to Practice Forum](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/farm-food-drought/drought/future-drought-fund/research-adoption-program/science-to-practice-forum).

## Transcript

[Recording begins]

Pip Courtney [00:00:01]:

It’s half past 2. I’m Pip Courtney. Welcome back to the final session of the Future Drought Fund Science to Practice Forum. This part of the program is important according to the National Farmer Wellbeing Report, commissioned by dairy Co-op Norco in partnership with the National Farmers’ Federation. Nearly half of Australian farmers have felt depressed with almost 2 thirds experiencing anxiety for one in 7. It’s a frequent experience. Over the next hour, you are going to meet 5 people from regional and rural communities who are changing the conversation around mental health. Kate Arndell is in Tamworth, New South Wales. Kate works as a Coordinator in the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program, managed by Grand Pacific Health and funded by the New South Wales government. Kate has completed the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation’s Drought Resilience Leadership Course. She then led the My Drought Story Project. Welcome, Kate.

Kate Arndell [00:01:04]:

Thanks so much for having me. I really appreciate the time today to talk about this small project that I worked on, My Drought Story. As Pip mentioned, I completed the Australian Rural Leadership’s Drought Leaders Program, and as part of that program, we were able to apply for funding through the FRRR, the Community Extension Grant. I applied for that with some partners that had also done the course, and we were successful in getting about $16,000 to run a project for our area. I also partnered with a media and communications agency, C7, and that gave us greater leverage to work in this space. So here’s my drought story. So My Drought Story is essentially a digital awareness media campaign. We were very conscious of the fact that all areas of New South Wales were very impacted by the drought, and we wanted to provide a place where people could reflect and process this.

So what we were asked to do as part of My Drought Story was to gain submissions from people all over New South Wales in regional and remote New South Wales for images and stories of their experience of the drought. And then we selected these images and collated them into a book. And one of the reasons why we did this is because in my work as a Rural Adversity Mental Health Program Coordinator, I visit lots of different communities. And when I was going out to these communities, even two years after the “end”, in inverted commas, of the drought, I would show this picture and ask people where they felt like they were on this bridge, or where they’d been. And a lot of the time, I was really moved by the fact that people were still really struggling. And when we spoke about that and started to investigate that some more, a lot of the struggle, a lot of the unprocessed grief or the anger, was that the drought had happened, it had been such a significant event in our history, and yet it felt like it had been forgotten. And people weren’t able to move on from that. There was a still a lot happening for them. And one of the reasons, I guess, why that sentiment was within our community is because we had such a cumulative range of disasters, and as a result of cumulative range of stresses that impacted on people. So we had a significant drought, maybe the most significant in recorded history, and it permeated all areas of regional and remote communities. But then we moved straight into bushfires. And so the focus was shifted. We recovered from those, we moved straight into the pandemic, which was unprecedented. We moved into a mouse plague and then we moved into flooding. So all of these things were happening for people, but in the regions I was working in, they were still sort of focused back on the drought and we know inevitably we will have another drought.

So I wanted to be able to think about this experience and to get communities to think about the experience of the drought and what lessons we could learn moving forward. So the importance of looking at my drought story and what we needed to focus on then was a whole range of things. We wanted to get people to be able to process their experience, to think about it, to reflect on it, to work out what learnings they’d taken. So how did they get through the difficult times? What strengths did they draw on? What healthy behaviours did they implement to get through tough days? What things they did that were less helpful. Also wanted to provide validation that this experience had happened, that it hadn’t been forgotten, that it was significant, that it was detrimental, and that people had suffered real trauma.

So the validation acknowledgement of that shared experience was very important. Also to provide connections, so to say that even though the whole in New South Wales was in drought, yes it was a shared experience, but there was also some very unique situations within this. But that connection on that shared experience was important to draw on. And lastly, hope, so we don’t want this book to be doomsday to be a whole lot of really depressing images. We want to draw on that resilience of regional communities and individuals and say to them, when you thought you couldn’t get through these toughest days, you did get through, you built your resilience, and you have that inner strength that you can draw on moving forward for next adverse events. So this is one of the pictures I guess that ultimately started the concept of my drought story.

And this is a picture of my backyard, and what it shows is the during the drought. So this is just something I snapped on the porch, and it came up in my Facebook feed and it really brought back some really visceral sort of feelings and emotions for me that I thought I’d sort of forgotten. And then this one was something that popped up a bit later of my same backyard, but a few years’ time. So what I wanted to think about was to highlight the resilience of the Australian landscape. So to see those two images, the difference and how our landscape responds and bounces back, but also the resilience of regional Australians. So individuals and communities. How do we get through those tough times when the dust’s rolling in, when there’s no grass, when there’s no money and we don’t think we can go another day? What gets us through?

So to give people a sense of hope that we do recover, we can get through things, and we can learn from our experiences. So that’s the sort of concept that we were working with. So how did we do the My Drought Story project? So as I said, it was a media awareness campaign. So although there’s a book at the end, it was a whole campaign that we ran over a period of months and we heavily utilised media, both social media and traditional media for this. We created a Facebook page and an Instagram page. We used sponsored posts, and we also gave people incentives for submitting things. So we were conscious that a lot of people think their stories aren’t unique or they aren’t special. So we tried to give them an incentive to submitting something.

We promoted a number of posts and we shared these through our social media channels, trying to get that engagement of people liking, sharing, commenting. But even if they weren’t gonna submit an image or a story, maybe just being a part of that conversation and recognising that, you know, the drought was being validated, their experience was being validated, and through the use of traditional media, they might have been able to read a newspaper article, listen to a story on the radio, see something on tv, and process that experience for themself and work out, you know, how did I get through that? What did I use for my own self-care? How did I build my resilience? If that happened again, what would I do again? What would I do differently? So we were successful in getting throughout the campaign, 172 media mentions, 17 in-depth interviews, and this meant that our reach was huge.

So I wanted to move away from business as usual and how we normally do mental health events in regional communities. And sometimes we can put a huge amount of work into something and we might travel and we might put a big cost associated with it and we might get 5 people to turn up to an event. So the beauty of My Drought Story is that the reach was huge. We were able to target people right across the state in varying capacities. The other great thing about this project was we worked really closely with partners. So as a RAMHP Coordinator, we have links to these partners and we utilise those. So this might have been that the partners shared the posts for us. It might have been that they submitted an entry, or they might have promoted my drought story to their clients.

So this was really an essential part of how the project worked. And as part of this presentation, I just wanted to show a few images of the sorts of things we received. So there’s an image there of Attunga, which is near Tamworth. This was an image from Marie in Coonabarabran who sent out patterns for people to make little jumpers for lambs, and then went right across the world and people sent in hundreds and hundreds of these little jumpers. So it just showed that kindness and that sense of connection. And then a photo of Jess. Another one here of some girls waiting for the bus, at Cumnock. So what this shows is that, you know, there were unique experiences across New South Wales, but there was a shared connection in people’s experience of the drought. It also showed the drought across the lifespan. So we tried to include people’s experience, you know, from children right through to elderly, but also not that it was just impact for primary producers, it was also impact for small business owners, for people attending schools, for just local town people. It permeated the whole community.

So we’re at the end of My Drought Story and really happy with the way it’s gone. We don’t anticipate that this book will be for everyone. For some people it will be too triggering, and we’ve tried to cushion that as much as possible by putting support services and warnings within the book. But for some people, we hope it is a therapeutic, tangible reminder of the drought and allows them to move forward. So some of the achievements we’ve had, 750 books printed, and these have been distributed to 89 regional councils and 45 libraries. We’ll also continue to distribute these then through the RAMH Program through our regional events. And we gave it to all successful contributors. So everyone has a copy of this book. It’s also available as an eBook, so it’s a really easy way to access it and free. So removing some of those barriers of cost.

We had extensive media coverage, which I mentioned, gave us that huge reach. It validated people’s experience. They’re able to reflect and process to focus on the drought, but then to focus on how they responded and thinking about that moving forward. It reinforced the shared experience and it also challenged the stigma for seeking help for mental health in the bush. And that was one of the really important strategies. So here’s the final product, something that we’re very proud of and we hope will serve as a tangible reminder of such a difficult time in our history. Thanks for your time.

Pip Courtney [00:11:56]:

Thank you, Kate. That was a very moving presentation. We’ve got a lot of questions coming in on Slido for you. One is, such a wonderful program, Kate. Another one, great program, Kate. Was there an image or story that stood out for you?

Kate Arndell [00:12:13]:

Look, some beautiful stories from right across, some heartbreaking, some funny. The girl with the ewe there, they had a ‘Lambulance’, and they put the injured lambs and sheep into the back of an old car and used to take them up to the house. So I loved that one. But I really loved the one about the woman in Coonabarabran, Marie, with the lambs jumpers. I just thought that was the greatest example of how regional Australia comes together when times are tough. And that shared experience, and though even though people weren’t necessarily living in country areas and impacted, they had that sense that they wanted to contribute. And so people from all over the world knitting those jumpers for the lambs, just shows that connection and kindness in a really difficult time.

Pip Courtney [00:13:03]:

Kate, another question here. How do you keep momentum going on a project like this when you are not in drought?

Kate Arndell [00:13:11]:

I think the key to this is this is the right time to be doing it. You know, I’ve been in our community recently and people are using the expression of ‘peace time’. We’re sort of in this peace time, the calm before the storm. And that’s what we want to encourage. You know, with that resilience and building that capacity within communities is we don’t address these things when times are really tough. We need to have these strategies in place in terms of our self-care, in terms of our community connection when we are in good times, so that when we, when push comes to shove and we are in those devastating times, we’re not scrambling, it’s not a reactive effect. So yeah, it can be difficult to get people’s attention because drought might seem like a million years ago for some people. So yeah, it’s an ongoing sort of push, I guess. But to get them to think about preparedness when things are going okay.

Pip Courtney [00:14:07]:

I thought that was quite genius comparing yourself or a farmer or a farming family to the landscape because they know that the landscape will bounce back. I’m just wondering, do you think by processing drought in this way, the people who are involved have set themselves up to be less fearful and feeling more confident about how they’ll go through the next drought?

Kate Arndell [00:14:29]:

I hope so. As I said, you know, this isn’t the be all and end all of the drought and what happened. It’s one small piece of a whole range of things that people would’ve talked about over the last 3 days. It will appeal to some people, certainly the people that contributed, I had some wonderful feedback from them that it was very cathartic. Even people that didn’t contribute but listened to a radio interview or read a newspaper article did comment that it was good for them to process and to think about. So yeah, that was ultimately our aim, is to get the reach right across the state to get people to think about this, to build their resilience, to reflect on their self-care strategies and to, I guess, get stronger and build their capacity inevitably moving into a next difficult event.

Pip Courtney [00:15:19]:

And I think we’ve got time for one more question from Slido. Somebody’s written in to ask, was it a reasonably low cost initiative, Kate?

Kate Arndell [00:15:29]:

So I think one of the beauties with this project is yes, I did have the $16,000 from the FRRR, and I work in Health, so we’re always low on budget, so it was great to have any money. Usually I’m buying a packet of Arnott’s biscuits and long-life milk on my way to an event. So it was exciting to have a sum of money. The difference with this project is I partnered with a private organisation and utilised some of their resources in terms of their skills around project management and social media use. So that was a really great strategy that enabled me to push it a little bit further. And I think there is a social conscience there with private businesses, especially those located in regional areas. They want to do something for their communities, they see a need for it, they have a belief in it. So sometimes it’s just about thinking outside the square and getting those people to with you on a pro bono basis. And, you know, a lot of private businesses want to do good things. Yeah, so just trying to think a bit differently about the way we do things and when we have limited resources, we need to be a bit creative.

Pip Courtney [00:16:38]:

Kate Arndell, Rural Adversity Mental Health Program Coordinator, New South Wales Health. Thank you so much.

Kate Arndell [00:16:45]:

Thank you for having me.

Pip Courtney [00:16:47]:

It’s time for our third and final panel of the forum. We’re continuing the conversation around mental health and the importance of talking when times are tough. Around 7 million people, or nearly 30% of the Australian population live in rural and remote areas. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows they often have poorer primary and mental health outcomes compared to people living in cities. Our panellists are keen to address this gap and normalise the conversation around regional mental health. Here to tell us how they’re doing that are Andrew Daley, Brad Millsteed, and a bloke who goes only by the name of Big Farmer Andy. Andrew, you are a Coordinator of the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program at New South Wales Health in Armidale. Tell us a bit about yourself and your experience in the mental health space.

Andrew Daley [00:17:38]:

A little bit of a background. I work for an organisation called the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program. So we’re a state-based mental health promotion, prevention and education service. And I’m based around the Armidale area, and I cover the New England Northern tableland, and there’s 20 of us Coordinators state-wide, and we all do a similar job, but we’ve all got little different little things we get involved with, depending on our personalities and our skills and background. I’m a mental health nurse originally. I started that up in Queensland, and I’ve done mental health nursing for about 28 years now. I always worked in rural areas. So, I’ve come down to Tenterfield in 2011, then jumped into this position. Previous to that was all clinical work, but now I’m doing education, raising awareness and getting out and servicing those little communities around my area, getting a mental health message out and doing some training too, to help people, you know, the run of the mill people sort of understand the signs and symptoms of when things aren’t going too well. Looking at, you know, stresses, how they’re impacting people, and then giving them a few skills, a few, you know, little tips on how to have a conversation with someone about what’s going on. And then giving them resources to direct those people to, you know, maybe professional help if they need it. A lot of people really just need a chat. They just need someone to listen and take the time to hear what’s going on for them. And then, you know, people usually get on with things with their own sort of natural support systems.

Pip Courtney [00:19:35]:

Thank you for that little intro. I’ll come back with some questions shortly. But Andy or Big Farmer Andy, as your many social media followers know you, can you say g’day to our audience and give us a bit of your background. Hopefully your followers will recognise you with the new hairdo.

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:19:50]:

Thanks Pip. Well, my story starts back in 1936, which is a little while before I was born, but my grandfather came over from Holland, on a ship. He came from a dairy farming family, but they lost everything to the Great Depression. So he was sent to Australia where he had a lease. He leased some land for the best part of 10 years, dairying day and night, rain, hail or shine as a bachelor. But on the farm next door, my nana was being brought up, a farmer’s daughter. And the two of them, of course, they got to know each other quite well and got married in the year 1946 and in 1949, the original part of our farm, the house I’m in right now, and the original part of our farm was purchased. And so from there, now I’m third generation on this farm.

I work the farm solely with my father. So just the two of us, no employees. And I guess I was raised in a very loving household, with a good family, and I have good friends. And today we’re speaking about mental health, of course. And I, like many people have been affected by mental illness, whether it be ourselves or people we know. So I use my social media following to try and get the message out there, about how important it is to speak, how important it is to act, whether it’s you, yourself, who’s got something wrong and you know something’s wrong, or if you notice somebody, an acquaintance or a friend, you notice that something’s wrong with them to point them in the right direction to take a burden off of their shoulders. But I’m a third-generation dairy farmer who through the enigmatic nature of social media, has been allowed into the minds and hearts of many people. And I use that to not only educate and have a laugh but, advocate for mental health in Australia as well.

Pip Courtney [00:21:52]:

Thank you very much, Big Farmer Andy. And I’ll come back to you with some questions. Now onto to Brad, who’s my Twitter buddy. Brad, you’re the Founder of a men’s mental health and wellbeing organisation called the 6 B’s. What are the 6 B’s, and why do you think they have become so popular?

Brad Millsteed [00:22:11]:

Thanks Pip. Thank you very much for the introduction there. So yeah, the 6 B’s was started back in 2017 on the back of an initiative from the Movember Foundation on May the 8th. Mate Day, make that the date to check in on a mate, similar to, R U OK? So we had some timber that had come down in a summer storm. We had a dry start to the area around here. So, I’m actually, the background there is, I’m in Watheroo, is my local town. It’s in the Midwest of Western Australia, exactly halfway between Perth and Geraldton, which puts you about 2 and a half hours north of Perth and an hour inland off the coast. So it’s a family farming operation, mixed enterprise with grains, being wheat, lupins and barley, and a self-replacing Marino flock on farm with a previous generation or a father and uncle on the farm, and a cousin and myself.

So often, I refer to it as the world’s biggest hobby farm slash retirement village. But yeah, we’re going along alright. But no, look, the 6B’s was formed in 2017. And as we’ve already said, we’re both on Twitter and the invites to it, I just flipped out a lot of invites via text to local mates. And my extroverted partner put it out on Twitter as well. And yeah, the local ABC Regional Drive program in the afternoon wanted to connect with me over it. So while I was doing the 6 P’s of Prior Preparation Prevents Piss Poor Performance, I’d come up with the 6 main ingredients that were gonna be there that night, which was Bloke’s, Barbecue, Bonfire, Beers, Bonding, and [inaudible]. So it was, the last bit normally comes after the first 5 are all incorporated, but yeah, it was just an excuse to try and get guys together.

We had about 25 there, I suppose, and it’s just grown organically from there. There’s no formal structure in place in the background. I toyed with working about a charity or coming up with a charity and all the rest of it, but a good mate of mine, I’ve talked to a lot with it and helped me along the way with the setup of it. We just keep coming back to the fact that we’re about raising awareness, not raising money, and as soon as you’re a full-blown charity, somebody’s on the earn, there’s a lot of banner waving that has to go on and that’s not what we’re about. We’re just trying to, yeah, just trying to give guys that that knowledge that it is okay to be a bloke, there’s nothing wrong with it. And yeah, to connect more with themselves and connect more with their mates. And yeah, try and keep a few more of us blokes alive for a little bit longer so we can give you babes a bit of hassle for a bit longer, Pip.

Pip Courtney [00:24:57]:

Thank you. Do you think us babes have got something to teach you guys, because we can get together at the drop of a hat and we’ll talk our heads off and share personal stuff, and you guys, well, you’re a bit rubbish at it sometimes. So is that what you’re trying to do? Take a leaf out of our book?

Brad Millsteed [00:25:15]:

How many words a day do females normally speak? 7 or 10,000 or something. And I think most of us blokes think that’s a pretty good month’s work, so yes, you are right. That’s the idea of a 6B’s event is to have that term of a safe place. But yeah, just around the fire for blokes to get there and talk. And it’s no disrespect to our families, our wives or partners or our kids. We love you all more than anything, but just for blokes to be able to get there and not be worried, is mum ready to go home? What’s little Johnny up to? What do we need to be doing? They can just be there and be themselves and talk about whatever they want to talk about.

It’s not always gonna be mental health, but just to be in a group of peers and maybe hear somebody else talk about, as we age, our body changes and things don’t work like they used to work and all that sort of thing. Just to hear that sort of thing can be very reassuring. Or to hear the story of the bloke that buried a mate who had a lump that didn’t go and get anything done about it 18 months after he’d found the lump. So, you know, that maybe just gives us a bit of a kick to, yeah, to get along and go and get some professional help.

Pip Courtney [00:26:40]:

Well I was one of the many on Twitter who followed the adventures of the 6B’s. And did you at the time have any understanding that it was going all around the country and probably all around the world through your Twitter family and actually helping people who didn’t attend the actual events?

Brad Millsteed [00:27:03]:

It was never formed with any vision of where it might be or any idea. It was simply that one night on May the 8th, big bonfire, a barbecue and 25 blokes that I hadn’t seen a lot of, you know, some of my best local mates were there and I hadn’t seen a lot of ‘em.

And as we grow our businesses, our families get older, we don’t have any male, well, we didn’t have any male team sport in the town at the time, so that we didn’t have that pool to go out and catch up with everybody. And not everyone goes to the pub, so, you know, we just weren’t seeing each other enough. So it was just a bloody good excuse to get the band back together, basically. And I know at one point during the night I was out in the dark making room for my next can, and just sitting there in the dark, looking back into the light that the fire makes and hearing my mates, they’re laughing and telling the same stories, they’re just get better every time that they’re told. But I’ve just gone, yeah, this is tick, this is a big win, I love this. And from there it’s grown organically and as you say, we’ve had lots of events across WA and a few further east. So it’s, yeah, it’s fantastic. Overwhelming and humbling.

Pip Courtney [00:28:49]:

Well, you did help a lot of people and I was watching it, so I was lurking. I don’t know if you allowed girl lurkers, but I was one.

Brad Millsteed [00:28:56]:

Hey, we’re gonna get a few lurkers. That’s all right.

Pip Courtney [00:29:03]:

Andrew, you take a more clinical approach to spreading the word about mental health. How are you trying to shift the conversation to support people to get them to understand that it’s okay to chat about it, to raise a white flag and say, I need some help?

Andrew Daley [00:29:21]:

Yeah, thanks Pip. Yeah, I’m in a privileged position where, you know, I get paid to go out and engage with my local community all up and down the tablelands. And we’ve got a range of ways of doing that. So we do a lot of partnering with agricultural businesses and organisations, so we get a bit of a platform. Because believe it or not, you know, mental health isn’t, you know, talked about all that much in the bush. There’s still a bit of stigma around it. So we try to get into some of these, you know, more mainstream conversations and then have our wellbeing message as a part of that. So also, you know, I’m attending lots of community events like shows, Ag field days, just rubbing shoulders with people and getting to know them and them getting to know me.

And then we can have conversations or there might be the opportunity for an organisation, say Landcare, CWA, Rotary, who might want a more formal understanding of mental health. So we’ve got little training packages we can put people through for a few hours just to give them the basic understanding of mental health and what that looks like using a stress model, not necessarily mental illness. And then, you know, we’ve got a range of those right up to Mental Health First Aid for those who wanna become more proactive in actually providing help. And that’s very important. The more people we get educated, the more people who’ve got skills, the more people who are prepared to have conversations with their partner, their mates, their loved ones, and the more opportunity there is to intervene early and get them the help they need.

Pip Courtney [00:31:09]:

Do you think it’s working? Do you hear, anecdotally, do you hear that more people are brave enough to say, hey mate, are you okay? Do I need to get you some phone numbers? Or do people actually know how to ask the right questions at the right time?

Andrew Daley [00:31:25]:

Look, I think it’s improved over the years, most definitely. And I’ve been doing this area for three years, now, and yeah, and from my point of view, yes, I, I’m getting those phone calls from family members or, or farmers sort of reaching out for help. So I know that’s happening all across the state, so, you know, it certainly is working, but there’s a lot of work to do. There’s lots of gaps, there’s lots of service gaps. But it’s great to see initiatives like Andy and Brad getting on board too, because those grassroots things are fantastic for providing social support, connectedness, and in that regard, people mightn’t go on to sort of need any sort of crisis intervention. They might be able to deal with things just as it is, but if they do have that conversation, those people around them will know what to do next.

Pip Courtney [00:32:30]:

And Big Farmer, Andy, how many people talk to you about mental health issues? Because people can chat to Andrew maybe face-to-face, but you can be on your keyboard talking to you and you won’t necessarily know who the person is. Do people open up to you?

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:32:46]:

Fairly often. Not only through just messages, but actually I do livestreams a fair bit through social media and we’ll have discussions with hundreds of people at one time or thousands about, you know, or even through videos as well on TikTok and all, but the livestreams and the messages are much more connected. And yeah, a lot of people come to me and say, hey, this is what’s, now I don’t have any qualifications. I am just somebody who uses my lived experience, but also my desire to help and my personality to try and get through to people and point them in the right direction. But yeah, no Pip, a lot of people probably find it more comfortable to speak with me through a screen rather than maybe face-to-face with somebody, which is one another good thing about like Telehealth, that’s also a great thing for people, not only people in the bush, but people who are a bit anxious perhaps, and don’t want to see people. The first step is very hard when it’s seeing somebody physically and sometimes doing it over the phone is a lot easier.

Pip Courtney [00:33:59]:

Did you ever, when you started sharing pictures of the dairy farm, did you ever think that it would veer off into this very sensitive but very important territory?

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:34:09]:

No, and that wasn’t, I mean, I never had the intention of it ever blowing up anyway. I had a nose surgery back in, to breathe, unfortunately, not cosmetic, back in, a shame, isn’t it? But back in 2020, back in November 2020, and I just posted some videos of newborn calves and it all blew up from there. And I thought to myself, what can I do with this platform? The right thing? Don’t try and take money from it. Don’t try and you know, exploit people, do the opposite. Give people something. And so mental health to me is very important. And I thought that’s something I can just try and encourage people to do something about their mental illness, if they have one, or if they know somebody, they can read that somebody else has one, to do the right thing.

Pip Courtney [00:34:59]:

Can you tell the people watching, your little play with words or letters, mental illness to mental wellness? And you replaced the ‘I’ with ‘we’. Sorry, I believe that you said somewhere, mental illness, take the word Ill and make it Well, let’s talk about not illness, but wellness. Or was that you, Brad?

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:35:26]:

That wasn’t, no that wasn’t me. Was that you, Brad?

Brad Millsteed [00:35:30]:

Oh yeah, I think that was me. I’m just coming up with it now, so that I quote it correctly.

Pip Courtney [00:35:39]:

I thought it was a bit of genius just from you, Brad.

Brad Millsteed [00:35:41]:

Yes. No, no. It’s, I think it’s a saying I’ve actually heard Glen Mitchell, the very prominent ex-ABC sports presenter, who’s had his own battles and is very public in trying to get people to come along. But yeah, the saying is, let’s all try and take mental illness to mental wellness. That’s taking the ‘I’ out of it and putting in a ‘we’. When we include others into our wellbeing, it is so much better. Start the conversation with someone. Sometimes easy to reach in, than to get others to reach out for help. So, yeah, no, it’s the take the ‘I’ out of illness and put the ‘we’ in it by including somebody else into your life and you get wellness. So you can take illness to wellness quite easily.

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:36:29]:

I wish I was genius enough to come up with that. Yeah, that’s really brilliant, isn’t it? I like that.

Pip Courtney [00:36:38]:

So Big Farmer Andy. I write like a doctor, so I had it written down that it was your idea and not Brad.

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:36:44]:

I mean, I’ll take it.

Brad Millsteed [00:36:48]:

You can have it, Andy. And on the back of that script, take 2 and see her in the morning. It’s all fine.

Andrew Daley [00:36:53]:

Hey, good ideas are worth sharing.

Pip Courtney [00:36:59]:

Andrew, what do you think about that idea that, to encourage men to include people, I mean, they might want to keep it quiet, not tell anybody, maybe tell one person. Should they be open about it and share it and think of it less of as an illness and more as a journey to wellness?

Andrew Daley [00:37:15]:

Oh, definitely. I think because, like mental health issues affect so many people, men, women in Australia, like over a lifespan, one in 2 of us, like almost 50%, around 45%, will develop something that could be diagnosed as a mental illness. So it’s there, you know, it’s the elephant in the room really, that we just don’t talk about it. So anything that encourages that conversation is great. And we’ve just seen examples from these guys of, you know, someone having the courage to stick their foot forward and open their mouth and share some of their personal experiences. And then that sort of gives permission or an invitation for other people to come on board. And that’s what it’s like for blokes. And Brad was right when he was saying that, you know, if we’ve got the right sort of environment, we will talk about stuff, we’ll talk about deep and meaningful stuff, and we’ll put words to it.

So the idea that Blakes don’t talk isn’t quite right, it’s just that we’re not socialised in it. So it’s a little bit awkward for us to get going, but once we do, it’s fantastic. So I’ve been involved with, if you can see the banner behind me, the Men’s Table, which is another grassroots initiative running out through Australia, guys get together for a dinner once a month, and, on purpose, have conversations about what’s important to them in their lives so that we’re sharing things about the day-to-day struggles with being a dad, a parent or, you know, or work related stuff. But also those triumphs we have, now and then, you know, guys do get it right. So, we share those things too, so that that’s another great initiative that’s out there at the moment and building a bit of momentum and that’s happening, you know, in our area. We’ve got a few tables now, so it’s a great initiative.

Pip Courtney [00:39:16]:

And this one, anyone can answer. What are some of the best tools or, or programs for managing farmer wellbeing and mental health that you’ve seen maybe in your region or online?

Brad Millsteed [00:39:30]:

I think Brad’s probably best equipped to answer that.

Andrew Daley [00:39:34]:

Just jumping in, I think our program’s quite good. So we’ve got a website and we’re happy to do training. We’ll do it onsite. We’ll go out to farms, we’ll go to little country halls to upskill people. So that’s one thing. ifarmwell’s, another great skills-building program that’s online that came out of South Australia. Oh, sorry, Brad, do you want to go ahead?

Brad Millsteed [00:40:03]:

Oh, no. I’m quite happy listening. You’ve got a far broader reach than me, but yeah, I’m just very big on, as Andy has mentioned, is just trying to get community leaders to stand up and own their own health and wellbeing. And just to spark that conversation, just that the best thing we can do is remove the stigma around the topic. So much of the language that we use when we talk about mental health is so negative. You’re a sufferer, it’s a disorder, committed. You know, they’re all such negative words. And if we can change that language, set the scene better, which as Andy’s also said as well, set the space for the conversation to change that language. And, the big thing is blokes, we talk over our shoulder, we don’t talk face-to-face.

If we are talking face-to-face, it’s generally confrontational, quite often on a footy field or maybe in a bar or something like that. But generally when blokes talk face-to-face, it’s not a comfortable position. We are very good at talking over our shoulder and so, you know, set that scene and I suppose, a bit like Valentine’s Day set the mood and the conversation can start, But the more of us that can stand up and either share as much of your own story that you’re comfortable in sharing. But yeah, just we need our communities to connect more in conversation in general.

Pip Courtney [00:41:33]:

I and Big Farmer Andy, what’s your experience of drought and did you need any help during drought or did your social media community get you through it?

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:41:43]:

Well, drought is something which, yeah, it affects a lot of farmers, doesn’t it? We’ve been affected many times even recently. Our rainfall hasn’t been great, and we’ve had, you know, with drought, you have higher expenditure and with the, very recently, the milk prices dairy farmers, so the milk pricing that’s come out for a lot of dairy farmers, they’re actually gonna be receiving less money in the next financial years to come than what they’re currently receiving. So financial hardship for any kind of farming, but I can speak with authority with dairy farming, is something that’s very hard to handle sometimes. And that kind of can conjure up illness, which is horrible. But for us, support isn’t really, there’s not a whole deal of support, from government, unfortunately, not as much as what farmers might like.

They often speak about drought preparedness, having a plan, but a plan’s not gonna always get you through. Whereas for wellbeing, I guess, you know, in a community like this or any agricultural community, when you’re in drought, it’s a shared experience. So I guess everybody’s, you know, bearing the burden together. And so you’re able to speak about that quite candidly sometimes, whether it’s, you know, over the fence at the rural store, at the vet, at the grocery store. So yeah, no, and that comes back to connection, I guess, and why it’s so important for people to speak about these things.

Pip Courtney [00:43:18]:

And you help people by being on social media, but do your followers sometimes give you the pep that you need?

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:43:27]:

Mate, definitely. They’re the most lovely people. So that’s one thing I’ve learned through social media, is how lovely people are. Of course, you’ve got about, you know, one or 2% of people who just choose not to be so lovely, but most people are just fantastic and do want the best for others. And so, yes, I guess I’ve received a fair bit of support. In fact, it wouldn’t be hard to get a big head from all of the kindness I receive, honestly, people are so lovely. So, yeah, no, I definitely receive a lot of support from people I’ll never meet, you know, and how lovely is that? They just want to share the love anyway.

Pip Courtney [00:44:06]:

And Brad, are you still finding Twitter a useful platform to connect with men and farmers?

Brad Millsteed [00:44:13]:

Yeah, probably. If it wasn’t for the 6B’s [inaudible] on there, I may have moved on from it. There’s that, like Andy, Big Farmer Andy’s just talked about that toxic one or 2%, make time there toxic basically. But, oh no, it was great. I don’t like doing video stuff, which is amazing with a face like this, I know, but it’s denying the world. I know, but look, we’ll just live with that now. But I put up a video about the live export phase out over here, and it wasn’t about the animal welfare part of it was about the human welfare part of it that is gonna be very real. There’s going to be a lot of pressure come onto a lot of people mentally and financially.

And it was just lovely to have a few of the trolls get on there and try and rip into me about the industry and to have other followers just rip the milk crate from straight underneath them and pull ‘em back into spot and say, no, this is not what it’s about. And the best was one, one person that put up there, I really hope that you’d never have the black dog come and visit your family because until you have had him sniffing around, you’ve got no idea. so yeah, the biggest tools you’ve got with social media is learning to swipe past. Don’t engage with those people that are just trying to click you into getting into an online argument with, it doesn’t matter how many facts or how right or wrong you think you are, you’re never gonna change ‘em. So just swipe past, move on. If need be, mute that person. Don’t let ‘em come through your feet so you don’t have to endure their, yeah, just looking for small attention, basically. Just small attention seekers, that’s all they are.

Pip Courtney [00:46:09]:

I once had to put my, well, I once thought about putting my phone in the freezer so I couldn’t respond to a troll, but it doesn’t really work well for your phone. We’ve got some great questions coming in for you three on Slido, and some praise. Love your work fellas. So important to keep it up. There’s certainly nothing wrong with men getting together, whether it be at the pub or at a Men’s Shed, definitely needed. Now this question, which is one I’ve always wondered about, asking R U OK is a great start, but how do we navigate the conversation that comes after someone says, not great mate, and yeah, I’m open to talking?

Brad Millsteed [00:46:46]:

Andrew, would you like to go first?

Andrew Daley [00:46:49]:

I think you guys will answer this eloquently, but I think it’s just putting on both your ears to start off with and then just listening, giving someone that opportunity to share what they’re going through and not trying to jump in too quickly with solutions. Cause some of us blokes, you know, want to get to that point quickly. We wanna fix things, but sitting back and just listening and let people, you know, talk about what’s going on, what matters to them and, you know, acknowledging that it’s tough is a very important starting point. And then depending on, I guess, what the issue is and how intense it is, sort of having in your background knowledge, what’s available for people, where can I take this person if I need to, you know, after this conversation? Cause you know, it might be about safety too, if they’re in a really dark space. But it’s more about being yourself and having that intent, you know, that caring intent and people will pick up on that. If you are authentic, they’ll pick up on it. So it’s not so much what you say, there’s no smart, tricky technical words you need to use. It’s just, be yourself, but show your concern and then, you know, have a few options up your sleeve when you need those.

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:48:11]:

Yeah, Brad touched on this earlier too and it was that, you know, you yourself to be equipped too. You can’t, don’t go in there if you are not a hundred percent yourself, it’s very hard for you to be, you know, you need to be there, up here yourself, before you start seriously helping people and pointing them in the right direction. It’s always important to try and take the burden off of someone else’s shoulders and offer them help and genuinely mean it. And it’s always important to advise them to seek professional help, because if you are really close with somebody, usually that’s the kind of person who’s gonna confide in you. You’ll often have that relationship where they will, you actually, are able to advise them, to go and seek professional help without them going, no, I’m here, you know, they’ll actually listen to you, especially when they’re being vulnerable about their own mental health. If they’ve opened up and said, no, I’m not okay. And that’s, you know, but Brad, I think, he touched on that you, if you’re gonna really offer someone help from yourself, you do have to be equipped to be able to do it, to be able to do it properly.

Brad Millsteed [00:49:24]:

The big thing is you’ve gotta be present as in it can’t just be an offhand thing. It can be via text, but you’ve gotta be engaged in that conversation when you ask that question. And like Andy mentioned earlier, communication. We’ve got one mouth, 2 eyes, and 2 ears for a reason and we use ‘em in that ratio. So speak little, watch lots and listen even more. And a lot of the time people are pretty much just talking out loud, unless the [inaudible] really getting real and it’s getting to the pointy end, it’s just a share of a situational distress and just verbalising that can quite often just clear the decks. One of my best mates, lives 2 and a half thousand kilometres away, on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia.

And we have several beers a week together. It’s all virtual, it’s on the phone. He’s family farming, same as me, but I always feel so much better when I’m finished that conversation. We, you know, we share our good times and we share the bad times. But the big thing is, yeah, to be present and just be prepared to listen lots. We are really fortunate over here in the West, we have a great support group, Regional Men’s Health Initiative based out of Northam, there’s 4 blokes in that and they are absolute top shelf for help and support for particularly blokes in regional WA. They’re, no one’s better in my opinion. And if somebody comes to me to have a chat and as soon as I sense it’s outside my pay grade, which is pretty low, I’m more than happy to handball them their phone numbers and their contact details and that there, it’s having those support facilities at your access is just gold.

Pip Courtney [00:51:16]:

Mary O’Brian, who started Are You Bogged Mate, which you’re probably all aware of, I think she’s got one of your mugs, Brad. She reckons most, for OC Health and Safety, you’ve got all the, the fire brigade, the ambulance, all those numbers in the shed at, in the Ute, back at the house. Should there be a mental health number, like she has a little rubber bracelet and you can put it on the gear stick of the ute or chuck it in the glove box. Do you think if somebody’s going to open up just once, maybe they’re gonna screw up all that courage? Do you think people like yourself, everybody, needs to have a number with them? So if it is critical, you can get help, that you don’t go, oh, I don’t know what to do.

Brad Millsteed [00:52:02]:

I’m actually trying to work on a project at the moment to get the best support agency’s numbers put into a QR code. So it’s as simple as just scanning that, self-populates your phone with those numbers. Each state’s gonna be different, but self-populating, basically of your phone. Because when the shit’s getting real and the fight’s on with the demons, it’s generally at night. The demons love dark, they love solitude, they love silence and they love alcohol and it’s just fuel to a fire basically. But if we’ve already got those numbers on our phone, it’s easier to go and press send and pick it up. Compared to going doing the Google search. The demons just don’t let you go for that search when it’s at that point. So yeah, something like that. I’m aware of another great initiative from a lovely lady who’s over here in the rural press, but she’s brought out coasters to put on bars and they’ve got a couple of really good sayings in there, but then they’ve got the support phone numbers on that for people to yeah, be able to go and follow up and find some support if they need it from a professional source.

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:53:17]:

I see we’re running out of time, so I’ll try and keep it brief, but I know, we lose 9 Australians a day to suicide, and that’s double the road toll, you know, there’s a lot of people and perhaps having a number that’s nationally recognised as a mental support line wouldn’t be a bad idea because we have 000, don’t we? You know, and that helps those emergency situations and I guess it does help with mental illness situations too, but wouldn’t it be great to have something absolutely national, government, that really helped with this thing that’s happening to our nation, this suicide rate, which is huge.

Pip Courtney [00:54:00]:

Andy, Andrew?

Andrew Daley [00:54:03]:

Yeah, look, I think we need all those things. We need a variety and certainly when we are out and about doing our job, we’ve got a lot of, you know, high quality printed material websites. We’re on social media, putting that positive message out and also, you know, guiding people to local services, fridge magnets, anything we can get our hands on, we’ll put those numbers down, but yeah, we’re always, as a part of our message, is making sure that people are aware of where to contact, especially in a crisis.

Pip Courtney [00:54:39]:

And if we look at Slido, some herograms coming in for you guys. Love your work fellas. So important. Fabulous work, Andy, Andrew and Brad. Another one, Brad, grassroots gatherings and initiatives are awesome. Do you think it’s important though, the impact of these types of things are assessed? Is it important to involve the research community or would that hinder the work?

Brad Millsteed [00:55:04]:

Yeah, we’re really not that structured in what we try and do. It’s, you know, the facts are people are going, the blokes are going along, they’re connecting with it. And probably the biggest KPI I get is I guarantee, one or 2 blokes will come up to me after it and thank us very much for it. And the classic is always, I was getting to be a real grumpy bugger at home and I really needed this. So thank you very much.

Andrew Daley [00:55:33]:

Pip, I’d just like to add that, you know, the Men’s Table have taken that initiative, that they’ve done some independent reviews of their program to make sure that, you know, they’re doing the right thing and they’re having results. And, you know, that’s a not for profit. So sometimes it’s great, but sometimes you don’t wanna get things to be a barrier to things that are working and we know that are working from common sense. Cheers.

Pip Courtney [00:56:02]:

Well, thank you all. I could keep talking, unfortunately, Brad, you might have pegged me as one of those women who talks a bit so, I could keep going, but I’ve got some timekeepers here who won’t let me. Yeah. So thank you very much for all three of you, for your insights and Big Farmer Andy, I think you are the only farmer on social media I know who gave a shout out to his pussy cat when it died. And you know, you’re my favourite now. Sorry, Brad.

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:56:30]:

I did too. Yeah. Misty, the farm cat. Yeah, she was lovely.

Pip Courtney [00:56:36]:

Misty. I know it was a beautiful photo too. Yeah. Thank you very much for your time. I’m sure, just looking at Slido, you’re having a big impact, but talking to all of us, everybody today. So thanks again.

Andy [Big Farmer Andy] [00:56:48]:

Thanks for listening to us hey. See you everybody.

Andrew Daley [00:56:50]:

Yeah, thanks Pip. Thanks guys.

Pip Courtney [00:56:55]:

Thanks a lot. For a conversation at any time, keep the Lifeline number handy on 13 11 14. And a handy tip I was given in the last drought was to have those important numbers on a card in every vehicle, glove box, on the place. Rural communities are keenly feeling the effects of climate change, making social networks even more important. Kate Gunn is an Associate Professor at ifarmwell at the University of South Australia. She leads an FDF Networks to Build Drought Resilience Program, aimed at strengthening wellbeing and reinforcing social support networks. She leads a team of researchers working with farmers to find ways to improve and maintain their wellbeing. Her Vocal Locals initiative has gone from strength to strength and after a very popular presentation at last year’s Science to Practice forum, Kate is back again with an update. Thanks Kate.

Kate Gunn [00:57:54]:

Thank you Pip. Yes, so I grew up on a farm in South Australia near the Minnipa node and I actually am heading there tomorrow morning, but I spend most of my time using my training as a clinical psychologist and in behavioural science and leading a team at UniSA that does research in farmers’ wellbeing. So over the last seven years or so, we’ve been working with farmers from around Australia to co-design and keep improving our free resources, which are designed to help farmers grow their own wellbeing. And you can find all these free resources on the ifarmwell website. So the content on there is created by farmers, for farmers. It’s accessible anywhere you’ve got the internet. And importantly, it’s relevant specifically to farmers and pastors and is confidential and free. So over the years we’ve evaluated the impact of the ifarmwell modules, and we’ve found that completion of those modules is associated with improved levels of wellbeing and reduced levels of distress.

And now hundreds of farmers from across Australia have done these modules and built these skills into their lives, but of course there are thousands more who could benefit from them. So we’re always looking for new ways that we can increase our reach. So after years of trying various strategies like social media and turning the modules into a podcast and training professionals who work with farmers to recognise distress and refer to things like this, we thought maybe we should take a more targeted approach, one community at a time. And that’s where a musical, called Kick Off Ya Boots, written by a very clever farmer called John Gladigau came in. So the Kick Off Ya Boots musical was performed in Loxton in South Australia in 2021 and then again last year. And Kick Off Ya Boots is all about celebrating rural life, exploring challenges that are commonly faced by farming families such as succession planning and importantly demonstrating really practical ways that farmers can effectively manage in difficult circumstances.

So John, the farmer who wrote this, and he also performed in the musical, he ensured that it addressed many of the causes of stress that our research had shown are problematic for farmers over the years. And the play also incorporated a number of the key ifarmwell strategies that our research has shown significantly improves farmers’ wellbeing. So we then worked with Loxton locals to perform the show to thousands of people over about 10 dinner shows. And at the end of each performance, I stood up and I prompted the audience members to identify one thing that they were going to do differently, to improve their wellbeing in the next two weeks. And we then sent them text message reminders and checked in whether or not they did it, which hundreds of people reported they did. So the response to the musical, which was incredible.

And we wanted to find meaningful ways to keep these important conversations about mental health going in the Loxton community, rather than the play being what John describes as a once off sugar hit. I also believe that if you raise awareness about the need to invest in wellbeing, you also have a responsibility to ensure that people are equipped with really practical strategies to do so. And we know that farmers are most persuaded to perform new behaviours by people who they consider to be like them. So with all of this in mind, I started to consider the science around social network campaigns, and I wondered if that might be a way of continuing to share practical ways that the Loxton community members could invest in their wellbeing. So we’ve heard a bit about behavioural science today and social network campaigns are often underpinned by the socioecological model of human behaviour, which really just means that behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs shift and change via interactions that occur as people move within different environments, different social environments, sorry.

So with this in mind, and our behavioural science training up our sleeves, we then worked with a number of agricultural industry groups, the Loxton Drought Hub, and lots of locals, to develop what became known as the Vocal Locals campaign. So the way that that worked is we had 10 local, trusted, influential people who became known as Vocal Locals, and then we ran some mental health awareness training in the community that anyone could go to. We had an orientation session for Vocal Locals. The Vocal Locals then went away and did the 5 ifarmwell modules so that they could increase their knowledge of practical ways they could improve their own wellbeing. They then did 8 sessions of wellbeing coaching, and most importantly, over the 2-month campaign period, they posted once per week about what they were learning and what they were doing to invest in their own wellbeing on social media.

And these posts were developed with some support from the Wellbeing Coach. At the same time, Neighbourhood Watch did a letter box drop to thousands of people about local services. We had notices in footy and netball budgets, and we also had a number of dinners to keep the Vocal Locals connected with each other and us as the project team. We also did a community survey before and after that 2-month campaign to measure our impact and we were really pleased to find that the campaign led to significant increases in the number of conversations about mental health and wellbeing that community members were having, as well as improvements in their level of comfort about speaking to others about mental health issues, and to increase the amount of engagement that they were, and activities to maintain their own wellbeing. I’m now going to play a video to show how it worked.

[Video voiceover begins]

Speaker 7 [01:03:42]:

My name’s Mark and I am a Vocal Local apparently now! I am an almond grower and a beekeeper and a YouTuber.

Speaker 8 [01:03:47]:

My name’s Tim Paschke. We currently farm 4,000 Acres.

Speaker 9 [01:03:51]:

My name’s Chloe Oldman. I’m a full-time student studying interior design and architecture.

Speaker 7 [01:03:56]:

My name’s Darren Triplet, I’m a local egg farmer.

Speaker 10 [01:03:59]:

Hi, I’m Leanne. I’m live with my husband Paul on a farm, that we own and manage.

Speaker 11 [01:04:03]:

Hi, I’m Pari and I’m a farmer’s wife and a mum.

Speaker 8 [01:04:07]:

Brenton Crane, I’m a dry land farmer.

Speaker 7 [01:04:10]:

I’m Steven May and I a farm at [inaudible].

Speaker 12 [01:04:12]:

I am Travis Fly. I’m a 4-generation broadacre farmer.

Speaker 8 [01:04:15]:

What is a Vocal Local? Well, it’s someone with spheres of influence.

Speaker 9 [01:04:21]:

Not just having the, hey how are you? Good, convo and then keep moving on, like really checking in on each other and making sure that we’re okay.

Speaker 7 [01:04:28]:

And it would be nice to be able to have an ability to be able to share, you know, perhaps your struggles, but not feel like you’re gonna get judged.

Speaker 12 [01:04:36]:

Basically in understanding that it’s okay to be vulnerable, that we can all help each other and we’re all facing similar challenges.

Speaker 13 [01:04:43]:

You’ve been doing something very special here in the Riverland for the past couple of months. Would you like to share a little bit about what it is and how it started?

Kate Gunn [01:04:52]:

To spread information about how people can look after their wellbeing and also, to help open up conversations around mental health and make it easier for people to talk to each other about these sorts of issues and also reach out to professional health.

Speaker 14 [01:05:06]:

I think the Vocal Locals campaign, as much as it’s about how do you look after your own wellbeing, how do you identify where you’re struggling yourself, how do you manage your own thoughts? And it’s only, I guess by looking after yourself that you can actually probably look out, you know, for other people.

Kate Gunn [01:05:21]:

Over that period, we’ve managed to get over 860 followers on our Facebook page. Fantastic. And then from that page, we’ve been able to share all of the amazing posts that our Vocal Locals have come up with. Their posts have been liked nearly 5,000 times which means that that’s 5,000 times people in this community have stopped and really read and thought about wellbeing and then thought about how they might apply it to themselves.

Speaker 8 [01:05:51]:

Something I’ve taken from this experience is that everyone has a story. Your story is as exciting as the next one.

Speaker 9 [01:05:59]:

In the sporting community, it’s been able to open a few doors with people interacting with posts that wouldn’t normally. And so hopefully that’ll be a chain reaction.

Speaker 16 [01:06:09]:

They would come up to you like they’d known you because they’d followed your journey on Facebook. They would see that you’re a Vocal Local and they’d comment on how they thought it was a great idea.

Speaker 17 [01:06:21]:

Friends that I’ve been involved with one, asking them the question and getting them to, yeah, to be open about it, but also me when I’ve been, things have been down or I’ve been blue, just the, to be able to talk about it, get it off your chest is the most important thing.

Speaker 18 [01:06:32]:

After we had our first meeting, I thought, well that was pretty exciting way of spreading the message. I think the first message was saying, well I’m not shell shocked and, you know, I want to break free and I’m a crack up. You know, just sort of those words that still mention the word, I’m using the egg, but something to do with your mental health that you’re not just cracked, you know, we’re all in the same boat.

Speaker 7 [01:06:52]:

My final piece of advice would be do the ifarmwell module would be a good start because I think it’s pretty incredible.

Speaker 19 [01:06:58]:

Try and just seek the people that you trust and feel comfortable with, which may be a Vocal Local.

Speaker 20 [01:07:04]:

Might be as simple as smiling, it might be breathing, it might be going outside and enjoying the sunshine and getting some fresh air and a walk. We have resources here and to not feel like we have to either be struggling so badly that we need to reach out, there are things that we can do right now.

[Video voiceover ends]

Kate Gunn [01:07:29]:

So after the success of ifarmwell Kick Off Ya Boots and Vocal Locals, we’ve had lots of requests to work with other communities to help them roll out similar programs there. But it is hard to be everywhere and doing things like Vocal Locals isn’t a cheap exercise. So what we’re currently doing is bringing together key national players in this field and we’re hoping that we can find some funding to continue to do this sort of creative work in partnership with farmers, spreading important wellbeing messages in agricultural communities, but ideally at a national level. So while we don’t currently have funding to do this, we do have a really clear plan and great partners, including the National Farmers’ Federation, and we’ve been really grateful that South Australian Drought Hub have generously given us some money to pilot some of these ideas in South Australia this year, which we are hoping next year we can get some money to try nationally.

We hope that a top down consistent large scale industry-led approach, reinforcing the same messages in various ways over many years will compliment all of the great bottom up community driven approaches like Brad’s Triple B program that we’ve heard about today. And the idea is that if these important wellbeing messages listed on the screen could really take hold, it would lead to the uptake of all sorts of resilience building initiatives, whether that be the RAMH Program, Triple B, or Kate’s My Drought Story project, for example. Because ultimately, what we’re all trying to do is improve resilience, improve productivity, and reduce suicide rates in communities across Australia. So keep your fingers crossed for some funding for us, and thank you all for your attention and the chance to share this with you today.

Pip Courtney [01:09:21]:

Thank you, Kate. That Vocal Local I was, that’s quite emotional. I wanna go and live wherever they all live. I think you brought that community together beautifully. Now we are getting some questions in, which is great. This type of work isn’t easy. Kate, what keeps you motivated?

Kate Gunn [01:09:40]:

Oh yeah, good question. Look, it’s a real pleasure to be able to get out and about into these rural communities and work with farmers who are such good practical problem solvers and they are so resilient and to be able to draw this out of them and then kind of communicate it and amplify it to a larger audience is a real privilege. And I think, you know, having come from a farming family myself, you know, when I go back to my local pub tomorrow night, to be able to have the local farmers there come up to me and sort of be able to relate to the work that I’m doing is pretty special and they sort of keep me going.

Pip Courtney [01:10:19]:

Another question. What’s your vision or ultimate goal for this work?

Kate Gunn [01:10:24]:

Yeah, look, what, what I’d really love to see is us to create more a culture of more openness in the agricultural industry, that enables farmers to have permission to spend time away from farm work and invest in their wellbeing, and openly support each other to talk about these issues and to reach out for professional help if needed. And if we could create that culture, which is what we’ve would really like to be able to do with some national, industry-based kind of top down work, if we could create that culture, I think we’d probably find it easier to attract mental health professionals to rural areas. You know, that would be a culture in which they really feel valued and respected. And of course by creating that culture we would also improve our productivity, you know, make our farms safer and you know, I’d really love to be able to convince people that by investing in their wellbeing, it actually makes good financial sense as well.

Pip Courtney [01:11:25]:

Absolutely. The town where you did the Vocal Locals, have they been able to sustain that wonderful atmosphere that we saw in that video, or do you need to go back and remind them or is it self-sustaining, self-propelling?

Kate Gunn [01:11:42]:

Yeah, that’s a good question. So the campaign that we ran was just for two months, so it was pretty short. But what we really hope is that that, you know, a lot of members of that community did do the ifarmwell modules, which is great. And our research has shown that if people go on and do those modules, for example, the gains are maintained for, you know, beyond the last module. So with ifarmwell, at least six months after they’ve completed the module. So yeah, look, it’s always hard to say, we haven’t gone back and surveyed again. But I think, you know, the support networks that we created within the Vocal Locals and the conversations that were sparked, I really do hope that it’s continuing to have influence.

Pip Courtney [01:12:31]:

And in the video, it seemed to be quite a wide age range. Did that surprise you? Because that must be a great result that you’ve got all sorts of different age groups from within the community all participating.

Kate Gunn [01:12:45]:

Yeah, that was quite deliberate actually. So we had local people, who sort of had a good understanding of who was influential in that community choose who became the Vocal Locals. So we wanted, you know, different demographics and I think that definitely did help to increase our reach into different, sort of sectors of the community.

Pip Courtney [01:13:09]:

Well I know John Gladigau, he’s a great farmer and I know he’s a great cook at harvest time and now he’s a playwright and director. That’s amazing.

Kate Gunn [01:13:21]:

He can even sing. So there you go.

Pip Courtney [01:13:26]:

Kate, thank you so much for your contribution, it’s a great way, I think, for us to finish up today. So thank you very much for your time.

Kate Gunn [01:13:35]:

Thank you Pip.

Pip Courtney [01:13:38]:

Thank you to all the presenters, panellists and video participants, the delivery partners and Department staff for their incredible contributions over the past three days. And a special thanks to you watching and listening at home on the farm or in the office, for your participation and your great questions and comments. A thank you from me, thank you to the wonderful studio crew who made it all happen for the last 3 days. And also to our, and there we are, and also to our streaming and technical director Simon Byrne, assisted by Jess Abby. They have wrangled the participants from all around the country and overseas, and they’re not even here in the studio. They’re in a secret bunker somewhere in Canberra. So thank you Simon, Jess, and everybody here on the floor. I hope everyone at home has enjoyed hearing about the ways farmers and communities are preparing for drying conditions as well as the outcomes of programs run through or connected to the Future Drought Fund or the 8 Drought Resilience, Adoption and Innovation Hubs. All forum sessions have been recorded and will be available online at agriculture.gov.au/fdf. You can subscribe to the Future Drought Fund’s newsletter to stay up to date too, or simply follow DAFFGOV on social media to stay connected. And there are so many people who’ve been on the last couple of days, who have Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, go and find them, Instagram, find them, support them, and you’ll enjoy them. I promise you. Thanks so much for your company. I’m Pip Courtney, good afternoon.

[Recording ends]

**Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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