



Thursday 13 February 2020

### **World-renowned disaster specialist to attend Beechworth fire recovery forum**

A specialist in disaster recovery who has enhanced her skills around the world following the earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand, will be a key presenter and trainer at a bushfire recovery forum in Beechworth on Sunday 23 February.

Jolie Wills is a cognitive psychologist who developed and led the psychosocial recovery program after the Christchurch earthquake for New Zealand Red Cross. Jolie then went on to become the National Psychosocial Advisor and led the support for the bereaved families in Christchurch. She has studied how the mind works under prolonged pressure, how we make decisions and how our reactions and behaviours are impacted by stress.

Jolie has lived experience as a survivor of the Christchurch earthquake herself and has been collating lessons learned from disasters around the world and supporting recovery capacity building and recovery in action.

She was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship to study how best to support the workforce resilience of those working in disaster recovery ([www.supportingthesupporters.org](http://www.supportingthesupporters.org)). She is co-author of *Leading in Disaster Recovery: A Companion Through the Chaos*, primary author of the New Zealand *Psychological First Aid* guide, is a 2019 Edmund Hillary Fellow, and was contracted by Australian Red Cross for a national tour to build disaster recovery capacity in internal and external agencies across the states of Australia.

The bushfire recovery forum in Beechworth will be a practical, hands on event with interactive workshops on ways to connect with and offer support to fire-impacted communities.

Other speakers include:

- Ken Lay, Chair of Bushfire Recovery Victoria
- Dr Rob Gordon, a psychologist involved in recovery after the 2009 Black Saturday fires
- Anne Leadbeater, a community recovery expert
- Malcolm Hackett, from the Strathewen community bushfire recovery committee.
- Jill Hanlon, Social Works – caring for yourselves and other carers/leaders
- Pat McNamara, the head of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund.

Joint organisers, Susan Benedyka and Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Interim Executive Officer Roberta Baker said they hoped to have 150 participants attend the forum, graduates of AVCL and Australian Rural Leadership Program, local government leaders and councillors, service club leaders – those who will be on the ground working beside their communities, those who are recognised as leaders, and those who have become ‘accidental’ leaders who often emerge in a disaster, who step up because they see a need.

The event will be live-streamed via the AVCL facebook page and people are encouraged to form

'watch' parties to follow the event online with a group of like-minded people, they said.

Government agencies and non-government agencies, who are providing recovery support, financial and emotional assistance and co-ordination, will have information stands and staff at the forum.

The forum is being held at the Kerferd Conference Centre at Mayday Hills, in Beechworth, on Sunday 23 February from 10am to 4pm. Funding and support has been supplied by Dominoes, Charles Sturt University, Into Our Hands Community Foundation, Meat & Livestock Australia, Bushfire Recovery Victoria and Bang The Table.

In order to manage numbers and catering people are asked to register at Eventbrite <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/bushfire-forum-our-community-supporting-recovery-tickets-92684894013>

For more information, visit <http://avclp.org.au/bushfire-forum-our-community-supporting-recovery>

To tune in for live streaming, go to: [www.facebook.com/events/210938330090946/](http://www.facebook.com/events/210938330090946/)

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