

# FACILITATING LOCAL STORIES IN POST-DISASTER REGIONAL COMMUNITIES: EVALUATION IN NARRATIVE-DRIVEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

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## ABSTRACT

Cyclone Yasi struck the Cassowary Coast of Northern Queensland, Australia, in the early hours of 3 February 2011, destroying many homes and property, including the destruction of the Cardwell and District Historical Society's (CDHS) premises. With their own homes flattened, many residents were forced to live in mobile accommodation, with extended family, or leave the area altogether. The historical society members seemed, however, particularly devastated by their flattened foreshore museum and loss of their precious collection of material. A call for assistance was made through the Oral History Association of Australia's Queensland branch (OHAA-Qld), which, along with a Queensland University of Technology (QUT) research team, sponsored a trip to best plan how they could start to pick up the pieces to rebuild the museum. This article highlights the need for communities to gather, preserve and present their own stories, in a way that is sustainable and meaningful to them – whether it is because of a disaster, or as they go about life in their contemporary communities – the key being that good advice, professional support and embedded evaluation practices at crucial moments along the way can be critically important.

## INTRODUCTION

Academics from many fields use semi-structured interviews, such as oral history interviewing as a qualitative method in their applied fieldwork. My discipline is creative writing, particularly non-fiction storytelling through community or public histories, using text, video and images to create rich media packages that can be used to create exhibition material for virtual and physical spaces. I design and deliver appropriate training for community groups, particularly those who have been awarded small government grant funding, and want to use it to create narrative-driven events or exhibitions. My colleague, Ariella van Luyn, and I are often invited to undertake projects based on a combination of our academic expertise and because we are active members of the OHAA-Qld. In recent years this research has been extended to include

stakeholder evaluation methodology: that is, acknowledging the aims and goals of all stakeholders involved in arts-based narrative-driven projects from the outset to ensure the greatest impact. The story told in this article hopes to capture as a case study an example of how embedded evaluation methodology in a community history project, urgently undertaken in the wake of a natural disaster, helped to focus the stakeholders and produced remarkable results. It also illustrates how a small voluntary organisation, relying predominantly on members over 70 years of age, were willing to tackle and address their technological literacy inabilities head on, to help rebuild their community's historical collection, so that their shared stories are accessible and remembered in the future.

Audiences are interested in authentically learning more about 'real' people's lives. Regardless of whether it is a small regional museum that might lovingly archive and house a community's history, shared perhaps only with travelling tourists, or a large urban cultural institution that offers interactive cultural heritage virtual and physical experiences to thousands of visitors from around the world, the process of learning stories of others allows us to inevitably understand our contemporary society and indeed ourselves better.

Yet even with the best intentions, not everyone can tell a good story on cue, articulate their life's work, or recall events they have experienced firsthand in a way that is meaningful to public audiences. Facilitation, curatorial and production expertise is inevitably required. The pressure to get this right, however, can become further exacerbated if a well meaning volunteer team lacks the complement of professional expertise or skills, yet faces strict deadlines, such as a looming event or funding acquittal dates to meet, while still having to deliver key common outcomes for all involved stakeholders.

This article summarises how beneficial innovative evaluation methodology can be when embedded into the project planning phase of narrative-driven projects. Projects that collect, collate and create artifacts such as oral history collections, digital stories, audio, video, text and images to archive or exhibit can enhance multiple stakeholder expectations by embedding formative and summative evaluation strategies throughout all stages. As Sean Field (n.d.: 9) has previously discussed, oral history methods need to be archivable in order to garner their full power. In order to assist communities to rebuild and share their experiences in the wake of a natural disaster, as was the catalyst in this case study, this paper proposes the importance of discussing and determining evaluation with stakeholders from the outset. It also establishes how to support the evaluation process with evidence gathered using a mix of qualitative, quantitative and performative (rich media) indicators (see Haseman 2006). It is worth noting that in Australia, government bodies and agencies that might partially fund community-initiated arts-based projects often demand an evaluation report as a mandatory acquittal requirement. This case study details the CDHS's history project, undertaken during the recovery period of a cyclone and highlights the advantages of embedding evaluation in such a mission.

## CONTEXT

Oral histories are recognised as a resource for healing and empowering individuals and communities in the wake of devastation. Mary Marshall Clark's (2002: 576) discussion of her experience interviewing Americans in the wake of the 9/11 attacks describes the process of interviews as 'an opportunity to try to make sense of what was senseless'. Mark Cave's (2008) research in compiling an oral history collection during the clean-up of New Orleans following Cyclone Katrina revealed the need to include the stories of all walks of life and not take a top-down approach to the data collection process. Field (n.d.: 7), in his work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, also suggests that 'talking or performing stories of traumatic memories can help victims' in controlled and safe environments. In Brisbane, an oral history and digital story collection was created responding to the Prime Minister's 'Apology to the Stolen Generation' where researchers noted a juxtaposition of 'ordinary' responses to an 'official' event, as well as questioning whether the production and display of such stories might also demonstrate a larger mediatisation of public memory (Burgess, Klæbe and McWilliam 2010). Therefore, it is not a new idea that the process of telling and sharing stories can be of significant benefit to a community in the wake of a disaster or to aid reconciliation.

Australia has a history of wild weather across the entire country. The summer of 2009 was rocked by massive bushfires that affected thousands of acres in the southern state of Victoria, tragically killing 173 people (120 in just one fire storm) and leaving an economic impact of A\$1.2 billion for the communities who survived. As a result, many arts-based projects were being funded and trialed in an effort to use storytelling practices to regenerate the communities' morale (Australian Government Disaster Assist 2011). A body of international research on community storytelling has been building since the significant and well-documented disasters of 9/11 in 2001 (Clark 2002: 572), the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004 (Morris 2011), and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Cave 2008: 7). In Australia, where these kinds of projects are often funded through government initiatives, research has also shifted to better understand the impact or value of such initiatives (see Arts Queensland 2011; Osborne & Walker 2007; Belfiore & Bennett 2011). Research is also emerging on the evaluation of narrative-driven arts-based community projects, particularly where storytelling practices are used to build community spirit and resilience (Australian Centre for the Moving Image 2009). The 'Further research' section will discuss the author's involvement with the Smithsonian Institute (SI) and with Betty Belanus in developing material on embedding evaluation.

## THE LEAD UP TO YASI

In the Australian summer of 2010/11, unrelenting rains struck after nearly a decade of drought, soaking much of the eastern states, causing water-laden land and overflowing dam levies that resulted in devastating floods. Over 75% of the state of Queensland was declared a disaster zone (Wallis 2011); we were being compared with New Orleans and

Katrina (the phrase ‘Australia’s New Orleans’ is starting to be used in Brisbane). Less than a fortnight later, the eastern coast was then battered by hurricane winds, the worst being the category five Cyclone Yasi, which caused considerable damage to northern coastal regions. Three weeks later an earthquake hit New Zealand (*Christchurch quake: What we know* 2011), and was followed by an earthquake and tsunami hitting Japan less than a month later (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2011). The whole world was stunned by the enormity of these disasters in such a short period. The word ‘devastating’ was repeated time and again as the population was glued to the images on televisions, computers and mobile devices. Yet there was still a sense of distance for many – it was difficult to grasp what it was physically like for the people living there. We were relying on the ‘on the ground’ account reporting by the locals who spoke to news crews able to penetrate disaster zones, or digital video clips, images and messages uploaded or posted on the internet by locals with the means to do so, each giving a variety of graphic local accounts that were holding the public’s attention.

In Brisbane over that 2011 New Year period, we were experiencing disaster locally in an unprecedented way. We heard stories from neighbours and strangers alike as we worked together in our community on the very large job of cleaning up our city in the aftermath of the floods. Stories of great loss and tremendous bravery were emerging. Premier of Queensland Anna Bligh (cited in Levy 2011) encapsulated the spirit of the time: ‘We are Queenslanders. We’re the people that they breed tough, north of the border. We’re the ones that they knock down, and we get up again.’

Much of the information that filtered through to the public, however, was second hand and with each telling became somewhat embellished or at least altered. This, of course, is human nature, and the act of retelling will forever fuel debate for our academic memory studies colleagues (Thomson 2009; Clark 2002: 573). Even so, with each telling and sharing of these personal stories we were also building a public history and shared memory, and getting just a hint in a very small but tangible way that we were all indeed connected to the simultaneous terrible natural disasters that had occurred, bringing us globally together by a shared pain and suffering.

Everyone was affected in Brisbane and beyond. Lance Armstrong (cited in Dunlevy 2011), who was in Australia at the time, said on Twitter, ‘after hurricane Katrina, you never saw a traffic jam going into New Orleans, like we saw when we were going into Brisbane ...’, and he was right: the entire community pitched in.

In late 2010, Ariella van Luyn and I, both QUT researchers in the Creative Industries Faculty, had been delivering Brisbane-based pedagogically designed workshops in oral history, creative writing and digital storytelling (in partnership with OHAA-Qld) as an appropriate workshop series for public consumption, just before the Brisbane floods and Cyclone Yasi struck Cardwell.

Key volunteer members of the CDHS had enquired about attending the Brisbane workshop in late 2010, but were unable to because of the sheer 1 522 kilometer distance (and therefore associated flying and accommodation costs). When Cyclone Yasi hit,

it destroyed this community's Historical Museum, recording equipment and archives along with most other infrastructure in the township.

A couple of weeks later the OHAA-Qld committee decided to offer any practical help we could to the group (such as donating recording equipment). The CDHS group secretary, Dianne Smith (Personal communication 2011), was immediately enthusiastic, asking if we could run a workshop in Cardwell instead, saying: 'We need to capture all the stories we are hearing – this is history happening and we can't record the stories, because we have to know how to first.' With financial assistance from QUT, OHAA-Qld and the accommodating nature of the people in Cardwell, we confirmed our trip. OHAA-Qld donated recording equipment, while the research team donated their time and expertise.

Our goal was to provide this community group with the means and skills to document their own oral histories in order to capture the personal stories of their experience throughout the severe weather event. Although documenting the stories provides an excellent resource for the communities of their experiences, evaluating the project throughout would encourage more effective strategies of story collection as well as providing crucial authentication and validation of the process.

## WHY EMBED EVALUATION MECHANISMS INTO PROJECTS?

Not all funders demand that evaluation is required from the outset of a programme, but previous research of numerous community history projects showed us that it is strategically smarter to embed evaluation mechanisms into projects from the outset if possible. This allows all the stakeholders to agree on what the aims and outputs will be very early in the project. To do this, we use an evaluation cycle that includes summative and formative data collection points, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative, and performative (including ephemeral rich media such as audio, video and images) methods (Belfiore & Bennett 2010).

Our research team has found formative evaluation methods to be credibly useful to brainstorm, develop, focus and progress programme ideas. Storytelling programmes benefit from the evaluation because there is a formal observation process. This process makes it possible to implement quick changes when required in a timely manner and to problem solve using the principles of action research (Tacchi, Slater & Hearn 2003). It also validates the creative process because of the formal way it has been designed. Arts practitioners and community engagement professionals often are intuitively inclined to use an approach that incorporates action research anyway, and may not see these steps as evaluation but as good project management practices and simply the tacit way they go about their work. The research team wanted to capture and formalise this implicit knowledge.

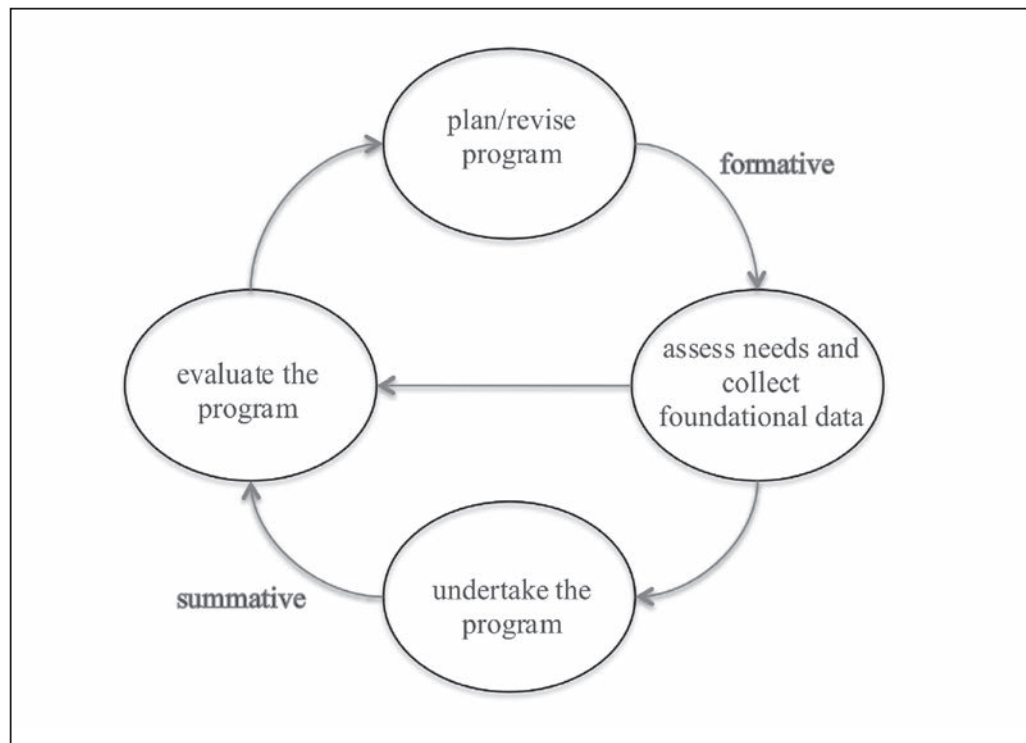


Figure 1: *Action Research Evaluation Plan* (developed by Helen Klæbe 2011)

Evaluation is outcomes-oriented and can be useful where the outcomes are emergent and changing. Within the Arts and academia this can also be referred to as an action research cycle.

The evaluation process developed also aligns with the cycle of a project and falls generally into six stages:

1. Decide on the theoretical framework, based on the programme's goals
2. Identify all the stakeholders and determine logical outcomes
3. Decide on the research methods
4. Collect strategically appropriate data
5. Analyse the data
6. Make the findings accessible

The research team, Ariella Van Lynn, Bryan Crawford and I, took this evaluation process and applied it to the specific case study of Cardwell in 2011, when the team

travelled there for two workshops to train members of CDHS to prepare and collect oral histories and create digital stories. By including evaluation processes throughout, we hoped to generate a clear sense of how effective and useful the workshops were for the community and help provide a best practice model that the community could continue to use in the future.

## CASE STUDY – CARDWELL, 2011

In the following section, the article outlines the experience the research team had in Cardwell, positioning it as a case study of how the process of evaluation forms a significant and useful component of collecting oral histories. It examines Workshop One, what happened between visits, and Workshop Two.

Before embarking on our journey to Cardwell, we worked with CDHS via phone and e-mail. Firstly, we ascertained their goal, which, according to a volunteer at CDHS (Anonymous, Interview 1 March 2011), was to ‘create a sustainable way in which the Historical Group could rebuild their collection, using storytelling’. We then established that our research team goals were to ‘enhance the capabilities of the stakeholders, so as to ensure that money spent on initiatives such as these are likely to have greater impact’; ‘help inform the planning of public narrative-driven programs’; and ‘academically work towards improving evaluation methodology’ used in the field. Establishing these goals allowed the research team to identify their role within the project from the outset.

We had identified together with CDHS that the five stakeholders were: the CDHS members; neighbouring facilitators from the museum, library and gallery in the region; the local public; OHAA-Qld; and QUT researchers. The next step was deciding on the research methods. It was agreed oral history interviews, video footage, photography and creative writing would be used as methods to collect the data. This required the group to also determine who, what, where, when, and how the material would be collected. It was crucial to consider possible concerns such as the age and health of interviewees, gender and geographical location to ensure a good representation of the population and places that experienced the worst of the impact.

It was also important to consider how to organise the collection of data, what secondary material would be required, and determine how to maintain the digital and physical storage of these resources. The research team decided it would produce interview transcripts (full or summaries); a digital stories collection including edited video footage; and a database collection of primary material. This would also include a logical management system of digital files, and include the creative writing outcomes that were based or inspired by the interviews collected. We would capture and mine the primary data material with the historical society members to make the process a ‘hands on’ learning experience. A timeline with two workshops six months apart was proposed, along with a plan for CDHS to apply in advance for funding for the second workshop and post-production work. The collection of data would be available for community members to access in person, so material would be developed for online consumption

and some material would become available when the museum reopened.

By considering the data collection process alongside the stakeholders' goals and measures of success, the Cardwell Oral History Project engaged with an embedded and ongoing evaluation methodology. In doing so, the Cardwell project would be able to analyse its success at various milestone stages of the project, allowing for timely and efficient changes to the data collection and consideration of what parts of the project worked and what did not. By embedding evaluation from the outset the research team in conjunction with the community generated a tailor-made best practice blue print for them to conduct and analyse interviews, allowing the CDHS to continue collecting, collating and producing in the future without relying on external expertise.

## Workshop One

### *Training and Collecting Data*

The project included two workshops, timed six months apart, and was conducted on a tight budget. The first workshop was held on 26–27 March 2011. With evaluation in mind from the start, the main objective of day one of the first workshop was to provide basic training with technical support to as many arts workers and staff of the museums, galleries and libraries in the region, to build a competent and supportive network. Participants learnt that they could conduct quality oral history interviews that could later be used in a variety of exhibitable ways including documentary pieces, digital stories, photographic collections, creative short stories and audio segments, while also drawing together a suffering community.

While this plan went well for nearby institutional facilitators, we spent more time than we expected with the CDHS members, who had been personally affected by the recent cyclone. Their goal had been to capture the stories of others, but it became clear that they needed to 'debrief' and work through their own stories with someone external from their community first. We worked around the group using a story circle, which is an ice breaking technique often used in digital storytelling workshops (Burgess and Klæbe 2009). This exercise revealed a vulnerable group of people who clearly loved their community, but their personal lives had also been physically shattered, so 'moving on' quickly was a difficult proposition. Most still did not have a house to live in and were lodging with friends or family nearby – some were in caravans – but they wanted us to come to Cardwell regardless to immediately help them record the stories of others and to hear their testimony. Similar patterns of this same behaviour had occurred in storytelling workshops after the 2009 bushfires (Fisher and Talvé 2011). In the instance of Hurricane Katrina, Cave (2008: 2) notes the importance of the oral histories collected in future disaster response plans. However, often this can generate a situation where people are determined to keep their minds on community issues, and therefore do not think about their own, perhaps in an attempt to try and hold on to some kind of 'normal'.



The researchers have extensive experience as oral history interviewers, but no psychological training, and do not claim to. Although oral historians often interact with trauma and engage with psychological ideas for ‘working through’ an incident (Field n.d.: 8), we had no intention to act as therapists. We could, however, sense the need to facilitate the session as a group rather than individually, to avoid the situation where participants were reliving painful memories in an unregulated space. For instance, I did not allow the conversations to focus in for too long on any person, instead maintaining less than ten minutes for each participant. Longer conversations naturally occurred in breaks that were one on one, but these were just informal conversations rather than ‘official interviews’. Giving space for lots of informal conversations with the researchers and other arts facilitator participants from nearby regions as ‘outsiders’ of the community seemed to assist the group in moving forward with a shared plan about whom they wanted to interview and the logistics of how this would occur.

The CDHS seemed to focus on their community’s needs, in order to contextualise their own grief – in other words, they were not paralysed about their own strife if they were busy helping the community of Cardwell. Their focus was on rebuilding their town rather than attending to their personal hardships, with a fervour that suggested one might somehow alleviate the other. When a community is passionate about the history of their town, a devastating event is ‘history in the making’ and there was a strongly felt obligation to capture the moment for posterity. It was logical, therefore, to agree to a strategic plan that scoped out an achievable pathway for the group that might also give some immediate feelings of relief, control, empowerment and purpose.

As researchers, we conducted formative evaluation discussions with the team at each break. By lunchtime on day one, we were behind schedule with our presentation on ‘basics’, mainly because we were contextualising with local examples but agreed that it was important not to rush through the delivery of material. It was decided that we would send Bryan Crawford (our videographer) out with a CDHS member to capture professional footage, both video and images, as the group only had personal mobile phone snapshots (for as long as their batteries had lasted), and while there was a lot of copyrighted television footage, they knew the historical society might not have access to this.

We covered the theory and history of oral history interviewing, including an overview of an oral history project, ethics and permissions, introduction to interview techniques, and file management and transcribing. As we worked through the content, we would stop and discuss, prompting the group with questions throughout the day such as:

- So with your project in mind, how will you decide who needs to be interviewed?
- How long will the interviews be?
- Who will be the interviewees?
- How will you manage the digital file management of who is doing what?

- Where will the material collected be kept?
- If you are asking people to sign a consent form, what will be in it?

Asking these questions provided formative evaluation points where the groups could discuss, resolve and record their project's process decisions as they went.

These types of questions are normally asked in our general public workshops, designed so that participants can go home and start planning how to apply what they have learned to their own personal project and circumstances. In Cardwell, they had an urgent and immediate data collection timeline, so we would stop and allow the participants to apply these ideas and determine what they planned to do. This meant another part of the project scope was being resolved simultaneously throughout the training process.

### *Collecting the data*

Day two of the workshop was for CDHS members only and we now had rich media footage collected by Bryan Crawford that could be used to initiate the establishment of the collection in a data management system. Sitting at the computer with Dianne Smith (the nominated record keeper because she still had a computer and a house) we watched and advised as she and the group set up a digital 'filing system' that they were happy with.

We had developed a selection of questions on day one, and had decided to create the collection under three phase headings: 'before', 'during' and 'after' Yasi hit so they could better map coverage and ensure they covered the full timeline. Questions were relatively standardised so that responses could be grouped and examined later, when they were ready to think about exhibiting material. As well as 'who, what, where, when and how' questions, we suggested they also use sensory questions such as, 'when you were barricaded in the bathroom and the storm was hitting, what did it sound like?' or 'when you finally could walk outside after dawn broke, what did you see? What did you smell?' Many talked about the futility they felt with doors facing the sea that could not be opened, and any sliding glass doors or windows still standing were sealed and hazy. One participant said, 'when you felt the glass, it was like sandpaper – the sand had etched the glass and jammed all the locks'.

Some of the participants were concerned about getting 'the facts right' and so we discussed whether stories that told what the experience was like – rather than trying to reconstruct an exact timeline – were more useful to the project and their desired outcomes. All agreed it freed the group from collecting material that was publically available. They agreed that the sheer geographical coverage of the impact site (the storm hit different points at different times), taking into consideration where people were (such as by the sea or inland), and in what kind of structure they were seeking shelter, would mean stories were bound to differ widely. It was considered that the community could use the Bureau of Meteorology website and media coverage at a later

date to map stories to specific events if they chose to. The importance of lifting the responsibility of ‘verifying facts’ off the agenda for interviewees seemed to allow us to break through to the really authentic experiential stories that would make the historical society’s collection unique. Once again, responding to the issues raised throughout the process rather than waiting to provide feedback at the end of the project meant that the data collected and the experience of the participants was greatly enhanced.

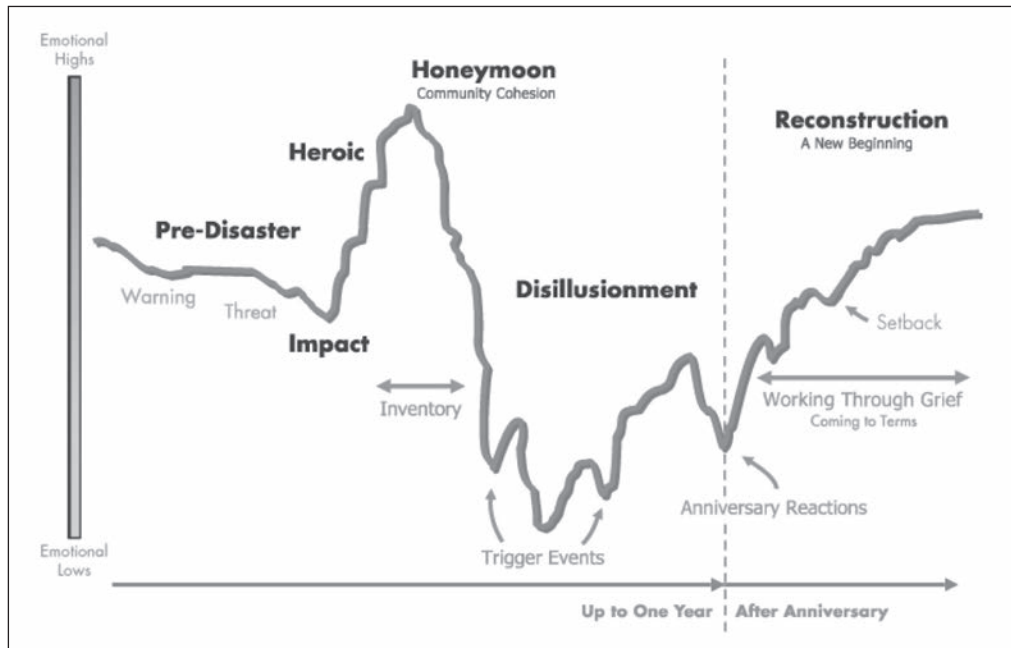


Figure 2: *Phases of Disaster: Collective Reactions* (California Department of Mental Health 2011)

The CDHS committee is a small group of which only six were able to attend the workshop. All but one are over 70 years of age. It is worth noting their enthusiasm to embrace digital technologies, despite their personal inexperience. They were not technologically savvy and this meant immediate training with digital equipment was also required. They practised interviewing as a team of two – one would be the interviewer, and concentrate solely on this role, and the second team partner would be in charge of the recording equipment. They practised on each other, swapping roles as interviewer, interviewee and sound recordist. All the participants appeared comfortable with the process by the end of day two. We even had the opportunity to tell and record their own stories informally, and the urgency in telling ‘what it was like’ had somewhat abated and we were able to record six very engaging short interviews as they practised.

Next we took the newly trained facilitators (and their newly designed consent forms) to the local retirement village, where we planned to interview a couple of residents who were evacuated during the cyclone. This was another opportunity to learn as they worked, as we discussed logistics of interviewing in restricted spaces that might have noisy areas (such as a nearby lawnmower) and the importance of informed consent with the elderly or the infirmed. Using informal conversation to reflect on the experience again created formative evaluation process points, where feedback aimed to improve the long-term process of data collection.

Day two had primarily focused on ‘hands on’ experience interviewing local people *with* workshop participants – guiding them in applied practice, on the theoretical material we had covered in day one. The final evaluation question I asked before leaving was for them to tell me the most important thing that they had learnt from our visit. They all had similar responses, summed up by this one:

We just couldn’t believe that you would come and help us ... you don’t know how much it means to us that you would just drop everything and come to be with us (Anonymous, Interview 27 March 2011).

We then left the historical group with milestone targets (accompanied by plenty of support material) and scheduled our six-month follow-up visit.

### *Between visits*

We stayed in close contact by phone and e-mail, talking through logistics and giving step-by-step information or feedback when asked. As mentioned earlier, CDHS applied immediately for funding for our revisit, and we continued an e-mail exchange setting ‘homework’ and expectations of what the group would need to gather and prepare before it would be useful for us to return.

For the next six months, the graduates of Workshop One conducted more interviews, trained others in the CDHS group to transcribe and collate material, and collected appropriate images from numerous sources, adhering to our shared plan. They also successfully secured funding to support our follow up visit.

## Workshop Two

### *Generating outputs*

Six months later on 24–25 September 2011 we returned as paid research-based facilitators and stayed at a newly reopened nearby Mission Beach resort. The group had also purchased laptops and we found that the material gathered by CDHS was amazing. We had quality primary data at our fingertips ready to mine for outputs together. On day one, while Ariella van Luyn facilitated a session using transcripts as primary source

material to find appropriate anecdotal accounts that would be suitable for exhibitions or digital stories (using creative writing techniques), Bryan Crawford and I accompanied a CDHS member to visit the list of interviewees the group had identified that they wanted professionally video recorded. The group had already conducted pre-interviews and collected images, but wanted some key professional exhibitable footage that they were unable to produce themselves.

The research team edited these interviews in the evening ready to play back sections to the group the following morning. We also reviewed the text edits and storyboards created during day one, based on the transcripts they had produced in the previous six months, and mined the images they had already collected looking for possible digital story ideas.

We created two digital stories as a group during day two of the workshop, based on transcripts and photographs the CDHS group had prepared, digitally editing and cutting the audio with them. Time constraints meant we needed to finish post-production back in Brisbane for the video interviews; however, most importantly, the group made decisions first hand on what they wanted, giving them a sense of achievement, and the confidence that they could sustainably continue on with the project after we left.

## Outputs

Embedding evaluation into projects from the outset gives all stakeholders a clear vision as to what each party sees as a successful outcome. If this is not established at the beginning, then evaluating whether a project is deemed 'successful' or not is a very futile and subjective exercise, as it depends on whom you ask. Outputs are a good way of quantifying success. They are the products produced that demonstrate that funding led to a tangible outcome, in this case a collection of material.

The CDHS reached its goal of successfully creating a historical collection about the impact of Cyclone Yasi, and the outputs produced in and between the two workshops included: three video recorded oral history interviews; ten audio recorded interviews (fully transcribed); two digital stories (fully transcribed); a catalogue of hundreds of images; and edited text ready to produce an exhibition. In conjunction with this, the researchers also met their goal of providing educative upskilling for the participants, and progressing research on evaluation in narrative-driven public programmes. The boost in local community morale is not quantifiable, but the work has certainly led to sustainable outcomes. The CDHS opened a replica museum building in 2013 (Cardwell and District Historical Society 2013a) and in 2012 the group won the prestigious State Library of Queensland's John Oxley Community History award (State Library of Queensland 2012). *A frail farewell: The cyclone Yasi experience of Cardwell's old folk* (Murray 2013) was also published in 2013. Stakeholders feel that we have comfortably met our objectives.



Figure 3: A Defiant Storeowner Prepared for Cyclone Yasi to Hit (*Kiss my Yasi* 2011)

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the main reasons evaluation should be a key consideration in a narrative-driven oral history project is that it will enhance the capabilities of the stakeholders (both internally and externally); ensure that money spent on initiatives such as these is likely to have greater impact for all stakeholders; help inform the planning of community arts-based public programmes; and academically work towards improving evaluation methodology used in the field.

The research team, representing both OHAA-Qld and QUT, highlighted the embedded evaluation methods and positive impact the Cardwell project had produced to successfully convince government funders to support another grant in late 2011. OHAA-Qld had been unsuccessful in gaining such funding support for regional oral history training in the past, but their successful application in 2012 emphasised the need for a multimedia storytelling approach (oral history, digital storytelling, video, audio, images and creative writing) that embedded evaluation into the process to augment and leverage oral history interviews as a mechanism to restore and promote community resilience and pride. The research team has since continued to replicate the combined audio/visual/creative writing workshop approach that was so successful in Cardwell

to other remote rural Queensland communities, including Townsville, Mackay and Toowoomba in 2012, and Warwick in 2013.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

In relation to this case study I undertook a Queensland SI Fellowship (December 2011–April 2012, and June–July 2012) and continue to work with my SI colleague, Betty Belanus, on evaluation. Two narrative-driven community projects of particular interest to me in the US were in New Orleans (Louisiana State Museum 2013) and New York City (Ground Zero Museum Workshop n.d.; Hoffman 2011), chiefly because these 9/11 and Katrina projects use audio, image, oral history interviews and digital storytelling well, and because resilience and community rebuilding also seem to be key aims in these examples. It would be an interesting future research project to map other international examples of narrative-driven post-disaster projects and investigate whether similar methodologies were employed.

As a researcher, I ask, ‘how do we value “the value” of community groups collecting and sharing their local stories in their townships and neighbourhoods, post disasters?’ Growth in evaluation research in this field should be expected and become exemplary standard practice, but in the meantime, starting with even basic evaluation methods embedded in projects is a positive step.

Researchers need to be mindful of not visiting communities that are already geographically isolated from urban services, leaving participants enthused, but with no direction or instruction on how to continue independently without external support. As such, we continue to offer back-up support to the CDHS, as they continue their work independently, making their material available on line as well as physically in their new museum. Material is regularly being added to the website, such as short movies (Cardwell and District Historical Society 2013b). In 2013 our research team is currently working with the community of Warwick, an inland Darling Downs district, in the Southeast region of Queensland, Australia, a region of the state affected by floods in 2011 and 2013. This will be a similarly planned project to Cardwell as we continue to refine our methodology and approach to such post-disaster narrative-driven projects.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges that the methodology produced in this chapter was developed: whilst undertaking a Queensland Smithsonian Fellowship in 2011/12 at The Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH) developing evaluation methods for their Folklife Festival; while facilitating with colleagues Ariella van Luyn and Bryan Crawford in an oral history project based in the Australian regional community of Cardwell – a project rapidly produced in response to a natural disaster; and in my role as a chief investigator on an Australian Research Council Linkage grant *Digital Storytelling and Co-Creative Media: The Role of Community Arts and Media in Propagating and Coordinating*

*Population-Wide Creative Practice* (LP110100127). I would also like to acknowledge the Oral History Association of Australia's Queensland branch.

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Helen Klaebe

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