**PRACTICAL PREPAREDNESS:**

Dealing with compounding disasters.

**~The St Joseph’s Primary School Experience~**

On 30th March, 2017 an extreme weather pattern hit our area. It was the biggest flood South Murwillumbah, in Northern NSW had suffered to date. Cyclone Debbie descended upon our country town.

St Joseph Primary School is a small school of 145 students. We are 50 years old this year. The school is in a known flood zone; however, the building had been built just above the 100-year flood level.

***Someone forgot to tell Debbie that!***

The entire ground floor of our school was flooded, which included administration, uniform shop, canteen, staffroom, learning support, archive, student toilets, school oval and our library. Luckily all our classrooms and teacher resources were upstairs, so our students were able to be back at school straight after the holidays, three weeks later! Our office, staffroom and toilets were all housed in containers whilst rebuilding began. Our library was downstairs and considered very traditional. It could be split in two, so was shared with computer lessons and music in the past and also learning support. The flood reached a height of approximately 1-metre-high throughout our library. The library was locked up for 3 days before we were able to get in and get ventilation into the rooms.

***Everything was muddy and damp.***

A staff meeting was held with a Flood Cleanup and Recovery Plan to be put in place. My role was to coordinate the library recovery. Below is the sequence followed:

* **Find a room to work from.**

*- We were lucky to be able to use the upstairs assembly room to place books we thought were salvageable and set up a temporary library work station. We quickly decided to make this our new library, as it would ensure we would never have to deal with such devastation again. It was smaller but much brighter.*

* **Complete an inventory of damage and lost items ASAP.**

*- This was ongoing as you wouldn’t realise what you’d lost until you needed it.*

* **Sort and Cull.**

*- The first few months were about sorting and culling. Many donations were coming in from the community. We needed to ask people to hold off on donations until we had more room.*

- *It was a hard decision to cull most of our collection. At first we saved around half the books, those that were on the top shelves, but after a few months mould started appearing and I then decided to cull these too.*

*- Lots of book donations came in and lots of sorting began.*

* **Stock take of remaining books.**

*- Stock taking every second year is one of the most important things you can do, I believe. Without this we could not have proven how large our collection was and how much was lost. It is important to put the cost of the book in when accessioning.*

* **Meet with our Principal to discuss ideas and plans. How many extra hours would be needed for reinstating the library?**

*- More library hours were required to complete tasks. I went from 12hrs to 35hrs per week. Thirteen hours were financed by CCI (Catholic Church Insurance) as part of the insurance claim for 2 years. My other roles were given to others e.g. I no longer did learning support as well.*

* **Work within library flood budget and meet with insurance assessor.**

*- We were so fortunate to have a fantastic insurance assessor as he understood how long it can take to reinstate a library. He genuinely cared. We began sourcing out, obtaining quotes and ordering replacement equipment, furniture, resources, signage, display items, etc.*

* **Organise helpers to stamp, sticker and cover as resources came in.**
* **Ordering of new books.**

*- As our new library space was smaller we aimed for quality not quantity. Many book companies were more than willing to give us great discounts, due to our circumstance. Some authors sent free autographed books.*

*- We were able to genrefy the Senior Fiction section as we were basically starting from scratch.*

* **Ask for help to accession books from other librarians where possible.**

*- From April 2017 – Dec 2019,* ***5183*** *new books were accessioned, stickered stamped, covered, and so on.*

* **A band of book coverers (or is that a collection of book coverers?) was organised and came when called.**

- *We had mums, dads, grandparents and friends covering 1000’s of books.*

* **Students were invited in to lunchtime library to help make display resources and posters that were destroyed.**
* **Students were invited back to borrow, starting with Infants as each section was**

**completed.**

*- It took almost a year for Infants students to begin borrowing again. Most of the new furniture had arrived. Senior students were encouraged to use Sora eBooks (Overdrive) and visit our town library. By Term 4, November 2018, all students were borrowing again.*

**Positives: What we did well.**

* We secured a company to demolish and reinstate very quickly.
* We made immediate contact with our insurance company.
* Photographing of damaged stock.
* Having completed a stock take the previous year.
* Created a new, modern, significantly improved learning environment.
* Quality books were purchased.
* Forced culling, particularly of Non-fiction section.
* Publicity as to our plight resulted in many donations and help.
* Genrefying of our Senior Fiction section.
* We kept our school community: staff, families informed all the way through.

We now have an open, light airy room to enjoy, free from flood threat. Great reading spaces were created with beautiful, modern furniture, cushions, a reading chair, desks with stools and a book nook. It now has the WOW! factor when potential parents enter. It has a great feel as so many of our resources were donated from far and wide. We were able to plan how our library should look. The kindness, caring, assistance and wonderful donations from far and wide were something we as a school will never forget. We realised how resilient we are as a community.

**Negatives: What we didn’t know.**

* The stress involved in making big decisions, like culling most of our books.

*- In hindsight it was the best decision.*

*- Will the new furniture fit?*

*- How will it look?*

* Frustration at the length of time it took to receive furniture, accession and cover all books.
* Others not understanding how much work was involved.
* The time it took to complete reinstating our library - 2 years!
* Distress to families and businesses in the community. Life changing for some.

**How we plan to minimize any future disaster.**

* We plan to continue to always try to complete a stock take at least every 2 years.
* Take photos of the library sections and equipment in the library.
* Planning how irreplaceable resources will be stored and identifying exactly what is essential to take offsite if you have time.
* The old library space is now our assembly room. It has tables on wheels, therefore it is easy to empty the room out in an emergency.
* We have a Crisis Management Policy in place which covers any type of disaster. A collaborative policy with other Parish schools.

Disasters can come in many forms, such as flood, fire, storm damage, hail and vandalism and so on. We thought we were prepared! Whist this destructive event had had many negative effects it also left us feeling stronger, more resilient and closer as a community. The rainbow came out after the storm and so much kindness, caring and warmth shone through.

We lost over 8,000 resources. Our library cost approximately $220,000 to reinstate. We are very fortunate in that my principal values libraries and recognises how important they are to our students learning, literacy skills and wellbeing. It is now a wonderful learning hub. It can be the beating heart of the school at times as many students use it to escape from the outside world, and is just a lovely place to enjoy!

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