

Speak Out Loud:

Stories of Strength from the Southern Downs

EPISODE: PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

GUEST: Elizabeth Searle, Psychologist

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SUMMARY OF EPISODE

Elizabeth Searle is a psychologist based in Stanthorpe on the Southern Downs in Queensland. This conversation with Elizabeth is unique because not only is she a psychologist who has been providing counselling support to residents and workers on the Southern Downs, but she also knows first hand what it's like to deal with bushfires burning very close to her home.

Elizabeth grew up in a bushy suburb in Sydney which sets the scene for living in the rural Southern Downs later in life. She commenced studying as a mature age student which gave her plenty of time and opportunities for life experiences which she says is really useful for psychologists. Working as a farm labourer prompted Elizabeth to find a more comfortable work environment, so she undertook several years of part time study and part time work combined with full time parenting to find a different direction in life.

Elizabeth relocated to the Granite Belt in 2004 and after 3 years of commuting to and from Toowoomba she set up a private psychology practice based in Stanthorpe. Elizabeth lives out of town in a cute 100 year old timber cottage with a bush 'garden'. Elizabeth says it is beautiful but rather scary during fire periods.

Listen to the podcast conversation to hear Elizabeth explain:

- some of the psychological challenges that people in the region experienced when the fires were active in 2019 and 2020
- the strategies or actions that were the most helpful for people at that time when they were dealing with the anxiety and worry but also the very real dangers of the bushfires
- how she prepared for the possibility of fires on her property, the actions she took and the need for an exit plan if danger becomes imminent
- the signs of recovery she noticed across the natural landscape shortly after the fires and as time has gone on
- how you can nurture your own recovery journey
- some of the barriers that prevent people from accessing or accepting help after a disaster and what we can do about that
- what 'survivor guilt' is and what you can do about it
- giving and receiving can play an important role in the recovery journey
- things you can do to optimise your inner strength, grow your mind skills and improve your mental fitness to build resilience and stress management
- how to connect with nature to manage stress

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www.kathrynwalton.com.au

TOP 3 TAKEAWAYS / TIPS

Elizabeth's tips to boost mental health and wellbeing:

1. Look after yourself – try to sleep well because if your sleep is good you can deal with lots of things; eat well – eat more spinach than sugar; move your body
2. Connect with people – you are not alone
3. Notice anything that's good or special or wonderful around you

RESOURCES MENTIONED IN THE PODCAST

Emergency Services – Fire, Ambulance, Police

P: 000 (Triple Zero)

Crisis Support - “Lifeline”

24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services

P: 13 11 14

Local hospitals

Find your closest hospital on the Darling Downs here:

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/darlingdowns>

General Practitioner (GP)

My GP is _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

QUEENSLAND

Current bushfires and warnings

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/Current-Incidents>

Current Bushfire Incidents

<https://www.getready.qld.gov.au/alerts-and-warnings/current-bushfire-incidents>

Queensland Rural Fire Service

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/about-us/frontline-services/rural-fire-service>

Make your Bushfire Survival Plan

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/bushfires>

Prepare for bushfire season

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/prepare/bushfire/prepare-for-bushfire-season>

Know your risk

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/prepare/bushfire/know-your-risks>

Tune in to Warnings

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/prepare/bushfire/tune-in-to-warnings>

NSW

NSW Rural Fire Service – Fires Near Me (web version)

<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/fires-near-me>

Apps

Fires Near Me NSW (Apple and Android)

GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Community and Volunteers

<https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/careers-and-volunteering/community-volunteers>

NSW Rural Fire Service Association Inc Raffles

<https://rfsaraffle.org.au/>

BOOKS

“My Year Without Matches: Escaping the City in Search of the Wild”

Written by Claire Dunn (2014)

SLEEP HYGIENE

Sleep Health Foundation

<https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/>

Kathryn Walton

Kathryn Walton Consulting and Outdoors is my Therapy

<https://www.kathrynwalton.com.au/>

Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN

<https://www.ddwmpnh.com.au/>

Use the clickable map to find mental health services in the region