DISTRICT D9630 ROTARY DROUGHT RELIEF PROGRAM STUDY REPORT 2018

Shen Huang

For more information, please contact Rotary District 9630: http://www.rotary9630.org



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	32	
About the Author		3 2
About Rotary District 9630		
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY		
Program Highlights		4 2
Study Findings Highlights		
Recommendations Highlights		
BACKGROUND		
The Problem		6 2
Current Assistance Gaps		
ROTARY DROUGHT RELIEF PROGRAM		
Vouchers		10 2
Family Days		
Rotary Reading Assistance Program		
PARTNERS	142	
STUDY METHODOLOGY		
Study Design Rationale		<u>15</u> 2
Fieldwork		
Limitations		
FINDINGS	<u>17</u> 2	
Overall Perceptions		<u>17</u> 2
Economic Benefits		<u>17</u> 2
Social Wellbeing Benefits		
Pride		
Challenges		
Comparison to Other Aid Programs		
RECOMMENDATIONS	<u>22</u> 2	
	<u>23</u> 2	
	<u>24</u> 2	
APPENDIX 1: QUEENSLAND DROUGHT MAP APPENDIX 2: ROTARY DISTRICT 9630 MAP		

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you all to the Western Queensland Rotary Clubs of Roma, Mitchell, Charleville, and St George and Rotarians of District 9630, local small businesses, voucher recipients, Rural Financial Counselling Services counsellors, and RACQ Foundation that all participated in this study. Without your generous time and candid feedback, this study would not be possible. Sincere thanks are also given to the District 9630 Drought Committee, especially Chairman Phillip Charles and Marlene Charles, for their invaluable roles in facilitating and sponsoring the study field trip, coordinating the interviews, and being an integral part of the research evaluation team.

About the Author

Shen Huang holds a Masters of Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Queensland in Australia. She is a Rotary Peace Fellow, and her studies were funded by the Rotary Foundation based in the United States. She was sponsored by the Visalia County Center Rotary Club in the United States (District 5230) and was hosted by Rotary Club of Woolloongabba in Australia (District 9630). She declares no other interests.

About Rotary District 9630

Rotary District 9630 is part of the global Rotary International organisation, which is a nonpolitical and non-religious service network. The District includes 51 service clubs and almost 1200 Rotarians covering the Queensland area from Redland Bay, south of the Brisbane River to Beenleigh, along the western line to Charleville and south to St George.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to evaluate Rotary's Drought Relief program in Western Queensland, Australia. Rotary is an international service organisation that comprises of business people, professionals, and community leaders. This Drought Relief program was initiated in 2014 by local Rotary clubs in Rotary District 9630, which covers much of Southern and Western Queensland, in order to help drought-affected farming families and small rural businesses. Adverse drought-related impacts include: slowing down the economy, increasing stress levels, limiting opportunities for youth, and fraying the social fabric of families and communities. This report is intended for interested Rotarians, corporate funders, policymakers, philanthropists, and the general public.

Program Highlights

- Over \$950,000 has been raised to date, in partnership with a variety of private, nonprofit, and corporate sponsors.
- Rotary's program uses a 'whole of community' approach and is completely run by volunteers and does not incur any overhead or administrative expenses.
- This holistic aid program includes distributing vouchers to farming families for essential supplies from local small businesses to stimulate local economic growth, organising community 'Family Days' to promote mental health and social wellbeing, and distributing a free monthly book subscription to rural children to promote literacy and youth development.
- The identities of voucher recipients are confidential because an impartial non-profit service provider, the Rural Financial Counselling Service Southern Queensland, determines eligibility criteria and generally distributes the vouchers, not Rotary.
- A total of 21 communities and 71 small businesses have participated.

Study Findings Highlights

- Overall, participants resoundingly were positive about the Rotary Drought Relief Program because the 'whole of community' approach has been viewed as very effective.
- The program helps promote economic benefits in local rural towns and social wellbeing.
- The majority of businesses said that the Rotary Drought Relief program was the most effective in their experience compared with other aid programs because the

vouchers create a mutually beneficial relationship between recipients and local businesses, as well as being practical and letting recipients purchase exactly what they need.

• Pride is often an issue that can prevent people from asking for help and in some cases, from redeeming the vouchers.

Recommendations Highlights

- Continue to grow the eligible partnering local businesses, such as chemists.
- Integrate the program with the other aspects of Rotary such as creating a pipeline of rural kids to attend Rotary's youth programs (Rotary Youth Program of Enrichment, Rotary Youth Transition Seminar and Rotary Youth Leadership Awards), or consider hosting a Rotary youth program in Western Queensland.
- Expand fundraising and donation opportunities by advertising the program at agricultural tradeshows, communicating that donations are tax-exempt, and building more corporate partnerships.

"Just wanted to say 'Thank you very much' for the vouchers that we received in the mail today. As you are probably very aware, we have been in a bit of a tough patch lately and haven't received so much of the rain that has been around. We have been feeding for some time now, so these vouchers will certainly help with some basic necessities. We really appreciate the help of Rotary and having local business houses that we can support as well is a great idea."

-- Rotary Drought Voucher Recipient

BACKGROUND

The Problem

Queensland, the second largest state in Australia, has been experiencing a historic drought over the last six years, due to record high temperatures and low rainfall. Most recently in July 2018, 57% of the state remains officially drought declared, with the worse impacted areas in the southern and western parts (Queensland Government, 2018). For a map of the Queensland drought areas, please see Appendix 1. While some areas have received rainfall, this is not the case for many other areas. The town of Charleville recorded the lowest rainfall in 2017 since records began, an indication of the worsening and prolonged conditions in the west (Cripps, 2018).

The drought has impacted entire rural communities, including farmers, graziers, small businesses, and families. According to the Rural Financial Counselling Service Southern Queensland, because many primary producers have struggled with many years of drought, they are exhausted dealing with the challenges and uncertainty of the future. Rural people continue to demonstrate resilience and determination, in spite of these difficulties, to remain on the land they love.



Figure 1: Drought-impacted paddocks in Western Queensland.

Current Assistance Gaps

While the state and federal governments offer several programs to help farming families, including the Federal Government's Farm Household Allowance (FHA), free financial counselling assistance planning services from RFCS-SQ, mental health support from the

Royal Flying Doctor Service, and financial assistance to help offset some educational costs of children attending schools away from home, there still remain many gaps.

In June 2018, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Agriculture Minister David Littleproud, and others visited drought-stricken communities in Queensland and New South Wales to learn about the current dire conditions. Because the drought has gone on for longer than the three-year eligibility period of the FHA assistance program, the Federal Government consequently decided to extend the program for a fourth year. However, many farming families have struggled more than four years, and it is unclear if drought conditions will mitigate or end within a year. In addition, there is no assistance for rural small businesses in towns such as grocery or hardware stores that rely on the business of primary producers to survive.

Lastly, mental health, social isolation and suicide remain significant challenges, in part due to feelings of 'pride' and fear of stigma. Suicide is unfortunately a concern within the whole farming family. There is a higher than average youth suicide rate. Some of the farming children come home from boarding school because the parents can no longer afford to send them. They find it hard to fit back into their local communities easily and become depressed. Other children begin to feel they are a financial burden to their parents.

To support the mental health aspect, the Rotary Drought Relief Program has funded the printing of fridge magnets with Crisis contact phone numbers which have been distributed across the south west.

		Tmar	anoa
Non of the second secon		ne veni i ne veni ne veni ne veni i	1990 (342, 226 1990 (46) (46) 1990 (20) 400 1990
Manual Method Sector Development	DNA Duality Service 108 Court Dil 109 Court Dil 109 Court Dil 109 Courter Notation Parks Court of Rest Court of Re		1900-000-100 1000-000-100 1000-000-000 1000-000-

ROTARY DROUGHT RELIEF PROGRAM

Since 2014, Rotary has helped rural western Queensland communities hit hard by the drought through the Rotary Drought Relief Program. Over \$950,000 has been raised to date, in partnership with a variety of private, non-profit, and corporate sponsors. Rotary's program uses a 'whole of community' approach and is completely run by volunteers and does not incur any overhead or administrative expenses.

Vouchers

Economic Development

Family Days

Mental Health & Social Wellbeing

Reading Assistance Program

Youth Development

Figure 2: Rotary Drought Relief Program's Whole of Community Approach

Rotary District 9630 is home to some of the communities hardest hit by the drought in Western Queensland, with Rotary Clubs in Roma, Mitchell, Charleville, and St George, which also support surrounding communities. Please see Appendix 2 for a map of Rotary District 9630. In fact, the Rotary Club of Charleville is a central hub whose area covers 12% of Queensland. As part of a global network of volunteer service and philanthropy, Rotarians are actively involved in helping to improve the quality of life of communities affected by poverty and natural disasters such as drought. Rotary recognizes that the drought adversely impacts rural communities with several flow-on effects, including slowing down the economy, increasing stress levels, limiting opportunities for youth, and fraying the social fabric of families and communities. Rotary's Drought Relief Program was in part designed to align with Rotary's key areas of focus, which include supporting economic development, health, and youth development. The Rotary Drought Relief Program is an innovative aid program because it tackles these multi-layered challenges holistically. With nearly \$1 million dollars raised to date, this program is a significant investment and flagship initiative of District 9630.

The 'whole of community' approach recognizes that in times of drought, entire communities -- from farmers, graziers, small local businesses to families and children -- are all in it together. The principle to invest in the local communities and businesses was shaped by lessons learned from previous Rotary aid programs, such as providing emergency relief to the communities impacted by the Queensland Floods of 2011. Often the attention is on primary producers in times of drought, but small businesses are also impacted and receive little to no assistance and often are carrying debt. Rotary made an early decision not to donate 'stuff' into the communities because it can be seen as detrimental as the goods are brought in, are not purchased locally, and recipients do not have an agency assisting in deciding if these goods meet their needs.

The program includes the following 3 key components:

- Vouchers -- to stimulate economic development in local communities, by providing mutually beneficial exchanges so farming families purchase essential goods from and therefore support local small businesses
- Family Days -- to promote mental health and social wellbeing in local communities, by creating a safe, family-friendly environment to socialize and strengthen support networks
- Reading Assistance Program to promote youth development, by providing young children a monthly supply of books, which is often considered a luxury during tough times

Vouchers

The four Western Queensland Rotary Clubs in Roma, Mitchell, Charleville, and St George partner with an impartial third-party, the Rural Financial Counselling Service - Southern Queensland (RFCS-SQ), to implement the voucher system. It is estimated that the value of the vouchers go around the community 5-7 times (multiplier effect), thus stimulating the local economy. To date, a total number of 21 communities and 71 businesses have participated in the Rotary voucher system.

The RFCS-SQ is a non-profit service provider that assists primary producer clients to develop strategies to be financially self-sufficient. Funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments, the RFCS-SQ provides assistance under the Rural Financial Counselling Service Program providing services that are free, confidential, and impartial and is well-respected within rural communities.



Figure 3: Rotary presenting RFCS vouchers (left). A sample of a Rotary drought voucher (right). Photo credit: RFCS-SQ.

Rotary clubs do not select or know the identities of the recipients. Instead, RFCS-SQ distribute the numbered vouchers to eligible farming families, who are selected by the criteria set by RFCS-SQ being based on financial hardship and need. These vouchers need to be spent in local rural businesses in town who have agreed to support the voucher

system. Vouchers are primarily spent on food, fuel, and farming supplies. Local businesses return to Rotary their invoice with the vouchers attached in order to be reimbursed and receive the funds through a bank transfer. A summary of the voucher distribution and redemption process is illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Rotary Drought Relief Program voucher system process

Family Days

Local Rotary Clubs have hosted a series of free, small community get-together events in local halls, sporting clubs, and other community centres in rural communities such as Tambo, Surat, Bymount, Quilpie, and Hebel. These community gatherings aim to improve the social wellbeing of drought-affected populations and bring together people who often feel isolated and under enormous pressure. In other words, according to Rotary, Family Days are 'mental health relief in disguise.'

Family Days bring together people to interact in a social and welcoming environment facilitated and catered by Rotarians. Barbecue supplies are purchased locally to support small businesses. Local businesses and guest entertainers such as bush poets Murray Hartin and Sandy Thorne have also donated their time and effort to support these community gatherings. Adult participants are encouraged to mingle with each other and share experiences. There are also pampering stations (e.g. massage, hairdressing, and manicures), since these things are first let go when people feel the financial pinch. Rotarians act as facilitators and generally try to stay unobtrusive while the adult

participants talk to each other. Rotarians also offer childcare and kid-friendly activities such as paper plane competitions, play stations, and games. In addition, Rotary vouchers have also been distributed at these events.



Figure 5: Rotary Family Day in Surat (left) and in Brymount (right). Photo credit: Rotary.

Rotary Reading Assistance Program

Rotary provides one new book every month to young children in drought affected areas. To date, over 200 children have benefited from this program. A library is being planned so children can share the books with each other. This program is intended to support the development of literacy of young children and also be a source of emotional wellbeing because during tough times, children's books are often considered a luxury item, though studies have shown that home environments that support reading and have access to resources such as books correlate to later reading success (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).



Figure 6: Rotarians helping promote the Reading Assistance Program. Photo credit: Rotary.

PARTNERS

"The voucher system run by Rotary aligns with providing financial relief for both farmers and impacted local businesses. It also offers a good opportunity to partner with local expertise such as the Rural Financial Counselling Service in a wide geographic location. If this voucher system helps to remind those affected that people care, or helps to alleviate just some of the stress of getting by day-to-day, then the RACQ Foundation is proud to fund this program."

--- Darryn Hammond, RACQ Chief Risk Officer and General Counsel

The Rotary Drought Relief Program is supported by a wide range of financial partners, including Rotary Clubs in Queensland, New South Wales and across Australia, Rotaract, various non-profit organisations and charities, corporate RACQ Foundation, and private individuals (see Table 1). These sponsors choose to partner with Rotary due to the effectiveness of the Rotary Drought Relief Program and trusted reputation of Rotary Clubs in the local rural communities. The program is also supported by RFCS-SQ who helps implement the voucher system, as well as participating local businesses accepting vouchers when farming families buy essential supplies.

Table 1: Examples of partners financially supporting the Rotary Drought Relief Program

SPONSOR	TYPE OF PARTNER	DONATION
Fergies for the Bush Awareness Campaign (Rotary	Non-profit and	\$100,000
District 9630 & Lockyer Valley Regional Council)	government	
Combined Brisbane Bayside Rotary Clubs	Non-profit	\$42,000
Lockyer Valley Rotary Club	Non-profit	\$15,000
Rotary Clubs of Central Blue Mountains, North	Non-profit	\$21,000
Rocks and Umina Beach (NSW)		
Toowoomba Rotaract Club	Non-profit	\$30,000
Hand Heart Pocket (Queensland Freemasons charity)	Non-profit	\$266,000
Queensland 4x4 Club	Non-profit	\$4,000
Gatton COTA Seniors Centre	Non-profit	\$1,500
Major anonymous donors	Individuals	\$70,000
RACQ Foundation	Corporate	\$50,000

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Study Design Rationale

The study was designed and implemented four years into the program operation. The motivation for this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Rotary Drought Relief Program and seek feedback for future improvements, as the program has come at a crossroads, with nearly \$1 million dollars raised and the committee strategizing the future of the program. In particular, the focus of the study was on the voucher system, since the vast majority of the program funding is devoted to this particular component of the program.

The research team included Shen Huang, a University of Queensland postgraduate with expertise in research methods, and Philip Charles, the Rotary District 9630 District Drought Committee Chair and native Western Queenslander. This partnership between academic and boots-on-the ground was vital and paved the way for program partners to open up and candidly share thoughts about the Rotary Drought Relief Program. The research team decided that the most appropriate research method for this study was to utilize open-ended qualitative interviews with program partners in order to create a comfortable, conversational environment to learn about people's experiences and suggestions.

Fieldwork

For a week in June 2018, the research team conducted qualitative interviews either in person or by telephone with 24 businesses, 1 voucher recipient, and 7 Rural Financial Counsellors from 9 communities in Western Queensland. Communities included the following: Surat, Roma, Mitchell, Charleville, Cooladdi, Quilpie, Cunnamulla, Eulo, and St George. Please see Figure 7 for a map of the participating communities.

All participants interviewed for this study were referred by and gave verbal consent to participate to the local Western Rotary Clubs, who then liaised with the research team to coordinate the interviews. The small business participants were selected for the study because they have been the most commonly utilized businesses in the voucher system. The Rural Financial Counsellors that participated were based in the RFCS-SQ field offices in Roma, Charleville, and St George. Due to confidentiality requirements of voucher

recipients in the program, the study did not focus on interviewing voucher recipients. However, 1 recipient willingly participated.

Limitations

While the small business participants were not randomly selected nor are necessarily a statistically significant sample of the entire spectrum of businesses that participate in the voucher system, these participants represented the most frequented businesses in each community and also offered rich quality of observations and feedback. This study is intended to provide a snapshot of how the Rotary Drought Relief Program works and is perceived by people on the ground administering, benefiting from, or being involved with the program.



Figure 7: Map of the Communities Involved in the Study

Distance References:

	Quilpie	1041 kilometres
	Charleville	744 kilometres
Brisbane to:	Mitchell	566 kilometres
	St George	495 kilometres
	Roma	478 kilometres

FINDINGS

"Rotary is plugging the hole because there is no other assistance available for many of these communities."

-- Rural Financial Counsellor

From the interviews, several key themes emerged: 1) overall perceptions, 2) economic benefits, 3) social wellbeing benefits, 4) pride, 5) challenges, and 6) comparison to other aid programs.

Overall Perceptions

Overall, participants resoundingly were positive about the Rotary Drought Relief Program because the 'whole of community' approach has been viewed as very effective. Overwhelmingly, businesses said that this was needed because they see lots of people 'doing it tough' or 'in trouble.' Rotary has generally been very involved in local Western communities, and participants were familiar with Rotary and indicated it was well respected. The communities that showed the most effective implementation of the Drought Relief program was due to having a partnership of trusted local Rotarians and Rural Financial Counsellors who could carry out the operations of the voucher program efficiently and speedily. In areas like St George in which the presence of RFCS-SQ is not as strong, some participants suggested partnering with other non-profit organisations to spread the word about the Drought Relief Program.

Economic Benefits

Across the board, small rural businesses noted that they often feel forgotten during the drought, since the attention is on the graziers. They do not qualify for any government assistance for drought. However, local businesses noted that they are vital members of the community. For instance, one financial counsellor noted that once a small business or a school leave town, there often can be a domino effect in which businesses after businesses close down. All business owners interviewed said that they were happy to be

involved as part of the program and to see families being able to feed themselves. Overwhelmingly, participants said that the benefits of the voucher program goes around in a big circle, since it can not only help the primary producers, but keep the local businesses operating and continuing to employ staff. As a result, it ends up being more beneficial for everybody in the local communities. Most participants indicated a strong sense of communal solidarity to help each other in tough times such as drought, because everybody is in it together.

Small businesses all indicated that the vouchers helped out with business. In some cases, the vouchers acted as a stimulus to bring in new customers because they must be spent in town locally. Participants noted that they can be easily overlooked because the prices of goods sold by small businesses are often set higher than larger businesses, so without the vouchers some primary producers would not normally shop there. Several participants mentioned that the vouchers provided an opportunity for people to set a foot in the door to see and learn about what small businesses offer and encourage people to support local businesses.

Voucher cycle - Each Rotary voucher is a gift that gives multiple times in the community



Social Wellbeing Benefits

Many small business participants indicated that the Rotary Drought Relief Program also helped promote social wellbeing. Not only do the vouchers help keep money in the local economy, a large share of existing town businesses has partnered to accept the vouchers, so that people have a choice of spending them that can boost a sense of wellbeing. One business owners said that it was heartening to see the money stay in town and a farming couple have the ability to be able to have dinner at the pub with the help of the voucher because with hard times, that is something that is no longer normal but a luxury.

Additionally, rural financial counsellors indicated that they typically distribute the vouchers all year round when they visit or receive a visit from clients and also around the holidays or before school terms starts, in order to help alleviate high financial stress felt by families due to need for increased spending. Rural financial counsellors also like to keep a few vouchers handy for emergency situations when new clients come in under dire financial and emotional stress. These vouchers help relieve some of the pressure felt by families who are worried about covering basic necessities in the immediate future.

Small business participants who were familiar with the Rotary Family Days were positive about these community gatherings. People tend to be stressed, so being able to come to these events and just bring themselves without worrying about preparations is a big weight off of people's shoulders. The Family Days are a time for people to relax and socialize. Many times farmers are isolated, so a few participants said that it is an opportunity to bring them out of the 'woodwork' and see people they have not necessarily seen in a while. Participants emphasized the importance of creating such safe spaces, because the drought has not discriminated, so people can open up and commiserate with others who are in the same boat. This can help individuals feel less isolated and strengthen support networks.

Pride

A strong theme of feelings of pride from rural people has been reoccurring throughout the interviews. Pride is often an issue that can prevent people from asking for help because they are accustomed to being self-reliant. One financial counsellor said that in the past some vouchers were returned because the recipient felt that there were other people more deserving and could benefit more. A few local business owners who have grown up in the rural communities could sympathise with the feelings of pride, reluctance to seek for

assistance, and fears of being judged. However, another financial counsellor noted that because the drought has been going on for 6 years, many families have reached the point of desperation, and therefore distributing the vouchers has not been a problem because the need has been so great, as well as trusting that the voucher system and partners such as the rural financial counsellors and businesses to be discreet.

The financial counsellors and Rotary have addressed potential barriers that pride can pose in several ways. First, rural financial counsellors take time to explain and assure recipients that the vouchers are a way to support the local businesses - the money is not meant for just the recipients. Additionally, financial counsellors noted that the design of the vouchers has evolved to be smaller and less obvious size to mitigate embarrassment when redeeming them in stores. In Charleville, the local Rotary Club is running a pilot to see how effective the uptake of extending the option to direct deposit the value of the vouchers without the physical need to go to the store for redemption is. Lastly, in a few instances in which the recipients were physically not able to come into town or it was logistically difficult to redeem the vouchers, financial counsellors have assisted with this process. In Mitchell, partnering businesses hang a small sign saying that they support the Rotary Drought Relief Program, and many financial counsellors say that this could be extended to other communities since it helps give recipients a sense of welcome.

Challenges

Several long-time business owners expressed anxiety that the current drought situation has been among the worst in decades, and it is uncertain when it will improve. They said that the feelings of pressure - be it financially or emotionally related - are hitting home. Mental health is one of the most significant challenges that participants raised. In a community west of Charleville, a participant noted that the town is worried and looking out for a farmer who has isolated himself and may be suicidal. A few participants noted that mental health often remains a stigma in the communities, but at the same time needs to be addressed. While the Rotary Family Days and other community-organised events such as comedy nights play a role in bringing people together and socializing, some participants noted that individuals also may need counselling and more personalized and regular assistance. In these cases, however, there may be financial obstacles such as fuel costs that prevent people from being able to travel to seek help or attend mental health workshops.

Comparison to Other Aid Programs

The majority of businesses said that the Rotary Drought Relief program was the most effective in their experiences when compared with other aid programs. Most businesses noted that the vouchers were the most useful for recipients because they could buy what they exactly needed, in comparison to pre-determined donations such as Christmas hampers and hay bales sent by external organisations and donors. Many local businesses noted that while these outside donations of 'stuff' have good intentions to help farmers, they can create unintended consequences. First, these products were typically not sourced locally and therefore small businesses are unable to benefit. Participants said that recipients feel grateful, but also can feel conflicted about the 'stuff' does not necessarily meet people's needs. One owner expressed, "When we see a truck load of donated gear, we might as well shut our doors." For instance, one small grocery store noted that in one year, due to donations of hampers, their Christmas hams in the store were not purchased by locals and therefore went bad. A hardware store owner explained that the logistics of storing, distributing, and ensuring the quality of large quantities of donated hay bales could be difficult and unwieldy, and with the vouchers, farmers could purchase supplies they needed. Furthermore, some participants brought up that other aid programs that use debit cards do not benefit local businesses because recipients would purchase in bigger cities or do online shopping.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most participants indicated that they were very satisfied with the Rotary Drought Relief Program and did not have any suggestions for improvements to the voucher system itself because they believed that it was working quite well. The following is a list of recommendations that participants made in general for Rotary's consideration to expand and improve the program:

- Add chemists (e.g. St George) to eligible partnering local businesses because medicines are often a large expense to families and assistance via vouchers would be appreciated, and chemists are often a source of psychological and emotional support.
- Expand the implementation of posters that indicate local businesses support the Rotary Drought Relief Program (e.g. in Mitchell) to all communities that are part of the program, so that people are aware of which businesses take the vouchers and also show that the businesses are welcoming and supportive of this philanthropic initiative.
- Create more outreach efforts and partner with other local non-profits to spread the word because many people, including potential recipients, still are unaware about the program.
- Help fund the costs of fuel to encourage drought-impacted people to be able to go to mental health workshops. The tyranny of distance is immense from a financial perspective. In the early days, a number of Roma vouchers were distributed a fair distance from Roma and as a result were not used because the recipients couldn't afford to travel to the stores participating through the Roma club.
- Integrate the program with the other aspects of Rotary such as creating a pipeline of rural kids to attend Rotary's youth camp programs (RYLA and RIPE) or consider hosting a Rotary youth camp in Western Queensland.
- Expand fundraising and donation opportunities by advertising the program at agricultural tradeshows, communicating that donations are tax-exempt, and building more corporate partnerships.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the District D9630 Rotary Drought Relief Program has embraced a 'whole of community' approach to help drought-affected farming families and small rural businesses in Western Queensland but can be a model of aid for other communities in other areas that suffer from natural disasters. This program promotes economic development, mental health and social wellbeing, and youth development through the voucher system, Rotary organised community days, and book subscription program for children. Completely run by volunteers without any overhead expenses, this drought program is built on the foundation of strong relationships and partnering with local community leaders, organisations, financial counsellors, and businesses in order to delivers an aid program that is respectfully attune to what the needs of the local rural recipients are.

REFERENCES

- Cripps, S. (2018, 24 Jan). Murweh mayor shares drought concerns with Agriculture Minister. *Queensland Country Life*. Retrieved from <u>https://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/5186137/charleville-records-lowest-rainfall-ever/</u>
- Dickinson, D. K., & Tabors, P. O. (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Paul H Brookes Publishing.
- Queensland Government. (2018). Queensland Drought Situation Updated 2 July 2018. Retrieved from <u>https://data.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/Drought/2018/20180702.pdf</u>



APPLENIDRXie ed for UEENSLAND DROUGHT https://data.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/Drought/2018/20180702.pdf

APPENDIX 2: ROTARY DISTRICT 9630 MAP

