

Response to Covid 19 - UHPCP Conversation Hour

In response to the Covid 19 Pandemic, particularly the isolation that occurred as a result of people from our Member Organisations working from home, UHPCP commenced 'Conversation Hour'; a weekly interactive conversation with innovative thinkers, facilitated by Dr Kathleen Brasher. Conversation Hour aimed to bring together people from across the Ovens Murray and beyond to explore ideas that matter. During this pivotal moment in our shared history, UHPCP Conversation Hour sought to create a space to share ideas and to connect with others.

Conversation Hour took place between April and August 2020 via the Zoom. Each of the eighteen sessions (see overleaf for a list of sessions) followed a similar format: two or more presenters were invited to speak on a shared topic; they were briefed by Kathleen during the week or so beforehand; on the day Kathleen introduced participants, asking them to respond to an open question for 10 minutes or so and then followed up with questions. Participants were invited to put comments/questions into the 'chat box', which was monitored by a PCP staff member. After about 30 minutes, the conversation was open to all participants who were encouraged to present their comments or ask a question. At the end of the session participants were invited to leave a one-word comment in the chat room summing up how they found the session. After week 1 all sessions were taped and made available on the UHPCP website (<http://upperhumeccp.com.au/a-conversation-hour/>).

Conversation Hour attracted over 132 individual people, and shared the stories and thoughts of 39 different presenters. Participants were drawn from the community as well as from diverse sectors including health, human services, agriculture, local government, arts, IT, university and the public service. They came from metropolitan Melbourne as well as regional Victoria. An average of just over 20 people were 'on the screen' each week, with over 80% of people taking part in up to 10 sessions.

The one-word evaluations were always positive. Words included: 'powerful; inspiring; rich; right pace, right time; enlightening'. We also conducted two surveys; one in early June and a second at the end of the series. Findings showed that:

- 81% of people simply enjoyed the conversation whilst around 60% also appreciated the information provided, the range of topics, the engaging speakers.
- Others noted the skill of the facilitator, and the 'break' from thinking about Covid. The inclusive environment was noted by 50% of participants.
- Everyone agreed that the sessions positively impacted their wellbeing whether that was because they provided a 'time out space'; enabled a connection beyond the confines of home; the thought provoking and positive nature of the presentations; local people for the most part doing some interesting things, and sessions that didn't demand anything other than to listen and enjoy.
- Almost half of responders had connected with someone they met through a conversation hour following that session.
- The format, the skill of the staff involved; and the safety of the format were all appreciated.

Quotes included

A great initiative of the UHPCP. What a way to connect up all in a positive and informal way, in a time of uncertainty, change, and high pressure- these are as informative and inspiring as any webinars I've been to.

This has been a great thing to offer people during this time - I really like that the people are local

I have found them extremely enjoyable, without pressure or expectation to participate but opportunity to if I wanted. This relaxed feel has been obvious in the sessions but also unusual to some of the other online forums/webinars/workshops I have attended during COVID-19

Conversation Hour – List of sessions

Date	Presenters	Title
April 30	Dr Kathleen Brasher and Ms Loretta Carroll	An Age-Friendly Approach to Disaster Recovery
May 7	Dr Belinda Cash & Robin Harvey Charles Sturt University	Virtual Meetings – pitfalls and challenges
May 14	Dr Alana Hulme (DHHS) and Brydie Donnelly (UHPCP)	Working in a different way
May 21	Dr Rachel Winterton (La Trobe University) and Dr Geoff Woolcock (University of Southern Queensland)	Community Wellbeing in a Post-Covid World
May 28	Michelle Dunscombe (the Fire Foxes, Kinglake) and Sarah Crosthwaite (UHPCP)	Authentic disaster recovery and post-traumatic growth
June 4	Paul Ryan (the Australian Resilience Centre) and Sarah Crosthwaite (UHPCP)	I'm over Resilience: how can we ensure resilience continues to matter?
June 11	Amanda Kelly (Womens Health GNE) and Errol Obran (Corryong Neighbourhood Centre)	Who's sitting around the campfire?
June 18	Mark Ashcroft (Beechworth Health Service) and Jacki Eckert (Gateway Health).	Providing health and social care during the pandemic
June 25	Amanda Aldous (Wangaratta Digital Hub) and Jess Perrin (Infoxchange)	How big are the holes in the World Wide Web?
July 2	Dr Melanie Davern (RMIT University) and Dr Rachel Winterton (La Trobe University)	Living locally post-COVID
July 9	Professor Jane Farmer (Swinburne University of Technology) and Sophie Rhys (UHPCP)	Social connection and loneliness
July 16	Lachlan Campbell (NE Catchment Management Authority) and Paul Dahlenburg (Winemaker)	Healthy land, healthy communities
July 23	Cr Jenny O'Connor (Indigo Shire) and Peter Kenyon (Bank of IDEAS)	Bringing about change: the role of power & leadership
July 30	Ashleigh Giffney (Indigo Shire) and Trevor Matthews (Yackandandah Historical Society).	What makes a story historically significant?
August 6	Cr Mary-Ann Brown (Rural Councils Victoria) and Kate McRae and Karina Bonnitcha (Projectura)	The new Local Government Act: Community Engagement.
August 13	Stephen Montgomery (Gateway Health) and Rachel McKay (Womens Health GNE)	Becoming a different man.
August 20	Jodie Farrugia (Albury Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council), Liz Hare and Jill Craig (Albury Wodonga Diabetes Support Group) and Tricia Hazeleger (UHPCP).	Community engagement – more than tea and biscuits?
August 27	Pete Denahy (musician) and Liz Zito (Regional Arts Victoria)	The consolations of art.