Firefighter Food Drive in the Australian Bushfire Crisis

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The Planned Project

- Create a lesson plan that educates on sustainable theatre, and how theatre can be both a tool to promote sustainability discussions, and also employ sustainable techniques.
- Partnering with the Broadway Green Alliance, who would act as an information source for my project, I planned to teach this workshop to high school theatre groups in Morris County.
- I hoped participants in workshops would leave the workshop equipped with techniques they could use to create sustainable theatre, information about our environment and the role theatre plays in it, and excitement about enacting positive change in our world.
The Actual Project

This project developed “on the fly” as I came up with ideas and encountered challenges as I went.

- It started with me making freezer meals and snacks for firemen and delivering them to the New South Wales Rural Fire Service branch at Blackheath.
- As my friends and family realised what I was doing, they also started to make freezer meals and snacks, and would bring them to my house, so I could then go and deliver them to NSW RFS branches at Blackheath and Shipley.
- I started using social media to solicit donations of meals, snacks, as well as canned goods and foods that would keep. I would coordinate people delivering these to my house, and then (as I was in New Jersey at school) I would coordinate a friend or family member to drive these to NSW RFS branches.
- I eventually ceased my project due to two reasons: the NSW fires thankfully ended, and Australians everywhere banded together so effectively in a time of crisis that fire stations were becoming overrun by donations, and so RFS branches were requesting people consider donating money instead of physical food or goods.
Why Was This Project Needed

• Beginning in (approx.) September 2019, and continuing into early 2020, Australia experienced its worst bushfire crisis in history. A total 18.6 million hectares of land were burnt, 34 people died, almost 3000 homes were lost, and 1 billion animals were killed. Additionally, Australia experienced some of the worst air quality world wide during this time.

• Unprecedented fires, combined with catastrophic fire conditions due to climate change, and negligent leadership and governmental response, meant not only firefighters faced the immense task of controlling these fires, but they were left underfunded, understaffed, and under-equipped to complete this task.

• Firefighters (especially the volunteer firefighters who primarily staff RFS branches) barely had enough time to go home and sleep in between shifts, let alone prepare meals and then eat them.

• Many fire stations took to facebook to request all manner of donations, which is how my project was born.
Who Benefitted?

● Obviously the people who benefitted the most directly were the firefighters who were able to eat at the station when they had breaks, or has meals they could eat quickly so they could still have time to sleep between shifts.

● I am not the only person who completed this type of project. As the crisis worsened right before Christmas, I witnessed Australia come together and unite in a way that I have never witnessed before. I think the political climate played a large role in this, but I also think that there was a huge societal consciousness surrounding the effects individuals could have; and society on a whole realised that by giving back, we could create a better world for ourselves, together. This manifested in many food drives (like mine), collections for displaced people, and sewing bees to make supplies for injured animals.
Going Forward

- Australia has a terrible bushfire season every single summer, this one was just particularly bad. I would like to continue this project every summer I can, not just when the fires are bad enough to make international news.
- This project restored a lot of my faith in humanity; it was incredible to see that my community could and wanted to unite over this issue.

Working on this project has also highlighted even further the importance of climate change activism, and I want to continue and grow my efforts in that field, using the skills I learnt from this project: namely how to engage my community, and plan large scale efforts remotely and online.