The Bouverie Centre’s
Collaborative Action Research, Support and Training
Project with Victorian Drought Counsellors

Final Report
February 2007 — September 2008

Written by Jeff Young supported by The Bouverie Team:
Carmel Hobbs, Amaryll Perlesz, Judy Poll, Kerry Proctor,
Colin Riess, Pam Rycroft, Elena Tauridsky, Michelle Wills,
Shane Weir and Tina Whittle

This report is based on the work of the Victorian
drought counsellors, their colleagues and their clients

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Executive summary, key learnings and recommendations

Drought can be seen as a chronic, intangible, pervasive and intermittent natural disaster that exacerbates the impact of recent socio-economic and climatic change on rural communities or as a predictable risk of living in a country with a dry and variable climate. Either way, drought affects people and businesses differently and at different times. Because of these qualities, prolonged drought can isolate individuals and place great stress on relationships within families and within the community, leading to increased mental health issues, alcohol and drug use and domestic violence at an individual and family level, and inequity, division and exhaustion at a community level.

These qualities also mean that hard won practice wisdom and service memory of drought recovery can be easily lost, especially if the period between droughts is long and the specialist drought workforce is redeployed due to stop-start funding. Although the risk of drought is greater for farmers than fire, farmers and the community are probably better prepared for fire than drought because the community does not face the perils of drought each year like as it does the risk of fire. Drought is difficult to prepare for and to respond to because of its chronic, intangible, pervasive nature.

Because of these difficulties, long term, co-ordinated planning is required; namely:

- Co-ordinated funding across federal, state and local government.
- Long term services comprising skilled workers networked and co-ordinated with other services. Skilled workers, possibly called rural outreach workers, should be trained in responding to rural change in general (e.g. Drought, fire, flood, climate change, socio-economic changes) rather than drought only.
- Local regional multi-agency networks (e.g. Drought recovery committees).

The skilled workforce providing ongoing support for the range of difficulties facing rural communities, need support to do their difficult work in order to avoid isolation and burnout, namely:

- Support from within their host agencies and networking opportunities with other similar rural outreach workers.
- Training and support in innovative, effective ways of working with drought and other difficulties in a rural environment, including outreach, approaches that are culturally sensitive to small rural groups, and strategies that integrate counselling and a whole of community approach.
- Access to collaborative research, development and documentation between front line workers and academic institutions to build greater evidence based and practice based evidence around rural change, exacerbated by natural disasters and climate change. This work will need to challenge current practices and be guided by innovation that flexibly responds to the constraints and opportunities of rural practice.
- Job descriptions and employment conditions that reflect the service delivery requirements outlined in recent drought evaluations, including this report.
Finally because extreme drought does not attract the same level of community support of other natural disasters, and yet creates major hardship and pain at an individual, family and community level, a concerted effort needs to be made by government to lead a community awareness program about the impact of drought. Finally, the community members who provide support to others but eventually feel overwhelmed, need appropriate supports called for in this and previous drought evaluations.

The key learnings are supported by data in the result chapters (4—8). The recommendations grow out of these chapters and I encourage you read them as a conclusion to these chapters. However, the recommendations, including policy and practice implications are also reproduced here as a summary.


4.14 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: DHS should be congratulated for providing support to the Victorian drought counsellors that promoted connection, collective problem solving and resource sharing, collaborative documentation of practice wisdom, professionalisation and self care, because drought counsellors are often employed quickly, with little induction, unrealistic job descriptions and little support.

4.14.1 Policy and practice implications

Workers employed to respond directly to severe natural disasters such as drought require support themselves that encourages:

i. Networking and creating a feeling of being part of a larger project;
ii. Co—operation and collaboration between services;
iii. Professionalisation of the workforce;
iv. Role development, clarification of job descriptions and skill development;
v. Increased motivation and improved confidence;
v. A conduit for communicating with the funding body;
vii. Promoting transfer of knowledge;
viii. Debriefing and self care opportunities; and
ix. A collective voice.
CHAPTER 5: CONCEPTUALISING DROUGHT: HOW THE NATURE OF DROUGHT INFORMS DROUGHT COUNSELLING

5.6 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: Drought is an intangible, intermittent, chronic, pervasive, disenfranchised natural disaster can lead to community exhaustion, inequity and division, leaving individuals vulnerable to feeling emotionally and socially isolated. Community tensions caused by drought can exacerbate tensions that already exist due to longer term social, economic and climatic change. Strategies to address the hardships caused by drought need to promote social connection, keeping in mind that timing will be important and communities may need assistance to ‘kick start’ or re-energise in order to embrace social capital building strategies.

There are opportunities to address drought in ways that create ‘healing narratives’ (West & Smith, 1996) which address the underlying divide between rural and urban Australians – bringing people together instead of letting the drought further divide these communities.

5.6.1 Policy and practice implications

i. A common symptom of drought is social and emotional isolation and hence a fundamental task is to maintain people’s social connection and to reconnect people with appropriate networks when they become isolated.

ii. People may not link increased conflict with the overall tensions caused by the drought and so making this connection may help them make sense of hardship at an individual, family or community level.

iii. Responses to drought need to appreciate that the community may be exhausted and divided and hence recovery strategies need to find ways to ‘kick start’ community action. Such events must be held at an appropriate time and presented in a sensitive way. For example, community oriented interventions may need to create a response culture of ‘we are all in this together, even though we are all affected differently and respond to hardship differently.’

iv. Strategies to promote ‘bridging social capital’ as well as ‘bonding social capital’ are needed to build community resilience and so that dominant groups do not render smaller groups invisible.

v. Policy in response to drought needs to actively promote social connection and monitor against inadvertently dividing communities.

vi. A policy context that promotes service co-operation rather than service competition is needed.

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1 The term disenfranchised is taken from Doka (1989) and used to describe the lack of broader community acknowledgement of the impact of living with prolonged drought.
CHAPTER 6: DROUGHT COUNSELLING STRATEGIES

6.18 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: The current research concurs with Boydell and her colleagues that small rural communities are both preventative of mental health difficulties and possibly constrain some people from seeking help. Feedback from participants in this research suggests that talking may be helpful for rural people affected by drought, however culturally accepted ways of presenting counselling, providing it and publicising it are required.

6.18.1 Policy and practice implications

Further research, conceptual development and practice wisdom documentation is required in the following areas:

i. Approaches that build on word of mouth, but are sensitive to confidentiality and privacy.

ii. Assertive outreach services, including third party referrals.

iii. Specific skills required for drought work such as ways of moving from chatting to counselling, engaging cautious clients and emotional regulation.

iv. Creative and effective strategies that address the well documented reasons why rural people don’t seek help early.

CHAPTER 7: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DROUGHT COUNSELLING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: TWO CASE STUDIES

7.6 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: Community development and counselling are inextricably and intrinsically linked in drought response work. People affected by drought may not seek counselling but they do talk to someone. These support people can then get stressed themselves unless helped. Providing support to these ‘natural unofficial counsellors in the community’ can lead to more resilient communities.

No Bull (NB) Support is one example of providing support to the natural counsellors in the community. It promotes links between local drought counsellors and people who have contact with (and provide support to) members of the population who won’t seek professional counselling. Another key element of community development for drought counsellors is the need for networking and collaboration between groups who may not usually work together, this was most evident in the Looking Out For Your Neighbours (LOFYN) project which brought drought counsellors and the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) members together.
7.6.1 Policy and practice implications

i. Drought response policy should reflect the inextricable and intrinsic link between community development and direct services such as counselling.

ii. Interest in NB Support suggests that the program could be used broadly to support communities facing major difficulties.

iii. Approaches that train up local professionals to support the members of the general local community to support people affected by natural disasters should be further investigated.

iv. Support for innovative projects that connect key groups who do not typically connect should be considered as a way of promoting connection and addressing community division which can occur following severe natural disasters.

CHAPTER 8: HOW TO STRUCTURE DROUGHT COUNSELLING SERVICES

8.8 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: The current study supports the call from previous drought counselling evaluations for co-ordinating policy, funding and service delivery across the federal, state and local levels of government. Services should be co-ordinated but guided by local needs. A key outcome of such co-ordination with local input would be the increased possibility of long term planning and ongoing services that could become known and accepted by local communities.

8.8.1 Policy and practice implications

i. Holistic services where counsellors and community development workers work in concert.

ii. Innovative projects to support the unofficial community counsellors who, although providing much of the emotional and practical support to people directly affected by drought do so invisibly and eventually, if drought is long term, are likely to experience compassion fatigue and avoid this role.

iii. Structures are needed that promote service co-ordination and networking at all levels, including front line workers. Local input is required to influence service delivery because each area is affected differently and has a unique regional culture.

iv. Any workforce employed to address drought, or fire, flood, extreme weather and rural change responses, needs to be supported and professionalised, including job descriptions and targets that support:

   • A combination of community development and direct services
   • Outreach work
   • Facility to provide practical supports and emotional support
v. Further research that feeds back into service delivery.
vi. Documentation of practice wisdom that can inform future drought and other extreme weather responses.

vii. Media campaigns that educate the general community about the disenfranchised nature of drought, and its effects on individuals, families and communities and promote cohesion.
Chapter one

1 Introduction

1.1 Foreword

Conducting research into a contemporary and prominent topic such as drought, whilst a large part of Australia was in the midst of the worst drought on record, increased the relevance, sensitivity and the politics of the research and hence the responsibility associated with it. It also increased the speed at which the research was conducted and the pressure to extract recommendations and key learnings for significant deadlines that could influence policy, such as the Federal Government’s call for submissions on the ‘Social Impact of Drought’ which closed in September 2008. The contemporary and prominent nature of the research topic helped attract interest, commitment and funding.

This report owes a vast debt to the hard work and commitment of those around me. This statement goes beyond a simple acknowledgement, it speaks to the many parallels experienced between those people directly affected by drought, their families, friends and communities; the specialist on—the—ground workers upon which this study is focused, and the support workers and researchers, such as myself and my colleagues at The Bouverie Centre. One such experience felt by most involved with drought at some point is isolation and powerlessness due to the intangible but far reaching chronic nature of the disaster. An analogy that came to mind during the research was, ‘tackling drought is like trying to solve world peace, no matter how hard you work, you can easily feel that you’re not doing enough and that it is difficult to know whether what you are doing is making a difference or not.’

During much of the research I realised that extreme commitment and hard work could co—exist with feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness – and that this topic can only ever be a work in progress. I must thank this research for providing me with a valuable life lesson, namely: that the only sustainable way to contribute to addressing the impact of a chronic, intangible, pervasive disaster like drought, is to:

i. Engage with others;

ii. Link your small efforts with the efforts of others so you feel part of a larger helping community;

iii. Document and reflect on what can and can’t be done;

iv. Celebrate your achievements and the achievements of others;

v. Name and validate the difficulties and constraints you face; and

vi. Put effort into creating contexts in which failures can be confronted in an upfront and non-blaming way in order to invite action rather than paralysis.
In other words, promoting constructive relationships and creating a sense of community is the underlying narrative of this work – in all its exquisitely human complexities.

1.2 **DHS background to the current project**

Towards the end of 2006, The Victorian Drought Taskforce Response allocated $3.4 million of non-recurrent funding to drought counselling under the Tackling Mental Health and Drought Counselling Strategies Initiative. Funding (initially for twelve months to December 2007 and then extended to September 2008) provided: (i) 4 EFT of additional counselling in each of the Exceptional Circumstances (EC)\(^2\) declared regions – namely Loddon Mallee, Grampians, Hume, Gippsland and Barwon (from December 2007); (ii) a telephone information and referral line for farming communities; (iii) rural training and development for rural counsellors provided by The Bouverie Centre; (iv) funding to Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) to conduct a range of activities and to coordinate services.

All initiatives were expected to locate clinical work within a whole of population approach and to endorse mental health promotion strategies. Although counsellors employed as part of this project were expected to outreach, promote counselling with a wide range of community groups and strengthen existing community networks, the responsibility for co-ordination of the broader network of services, was located with the PCPs as indicated by the briefing document.

"Primary Care Partnerships are recognised as the most appropriate mechanism for supporting integrated planning partnership development. PCPs will also support the co-ordination and facilitation of the range of training and service development programs with a particular focus on counselling; general practice; kindergarten and early years staff; health promotion and community leaders support leadership work in this area. This will include collaborating with a range of services that have also received drought support funding including Local Government through Department of Human Services" (Department of Human Services [DHS], 2006b, p. 1).

The current research was expected to focus on the counselling component of the drought response. The counselling component and network co-ordination, however, would be inextricably linked, albeit not always in the formal ways outlined by the DHS guidelines.

1.2.1 **Overall aims of the DHS initiative**

The DHS Community Health drought counselling guidelines (2006:16) outlined four aims of the initiative:

- To help people in farming communities manage distressing thoughts and feelings resulting from living through the experience of drought.

\(^2\) Barwon South West was not EC declared until 1 month into the project. EC declaration is considered for rare and severe events outside those a farmer could normally be expected to manage using responsible farm management strategies.
• To develop and provide counselling approaches that are accessible by members of farming communities affected by the drought, particularly those people who would not normally consider counselling.
• To have counsellors participate in health promotion activities through involvement with Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs).
• To contribute to the development of an evidence base about effective counselling practice in rural areas.

1.2.2 Target group

The DHS Sustaining community wellbeing in drought initiative: 2007—08 Counselling guidelines (Department of Human Services [DHS], 2007, p. 4) state that the target group for the initiative was: “Members of farming communities, farmers and their families and other people who have been employed in primary industries and associated businesses.” As part of the initial brief, rural people who were doing it tough due to the drought, but unlikely to engage counselling services, were to be actively considered.

1.3 The overall aim of the research

The overall research aim was to explore ‘effective counselling and community development strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities’.

1.4 Funding

The original budget for the rural training and development project for rural counsellors provided by The Bouverie Centre was $200,000 for the period December 2006 – December 2007. An additional $295,000 was provided to support the state-wide implementation of two projects that emerged from the research and to extend the overall project until June 2008. The two state-wide projects were No Bull Support and Looking Out For Your Neighbour, developed in response to a need identified by on—the—ground drought counsellors. A further $39,000 was provided to extend the project to September 2008, which coincided with the contracts of most State-funded drought counsellors ending. Since that time, some counsellors in Grampians, Hume and Loddon-Mallee have been refunded. Finally, $25,000 was provided for the write up of this report.

1.5 What the report describes

Although compiled by me with support from my Bouverie Centre colleagues, this report is based on the work of the state and some federally funded drought counsellors across Victoria, their colleagues, clients and communities. Co-operative Inquiry Groups (CIGs) provided a research structure to enable the drought counsellors to plan, act, observe and reflect on their work, and to record the process of this journey, the practice wisdoms generated and the key findings that emerged over the 19 month period.
The report updates the outcomes first reported in the interim report in August 2008 and provides further data analysis and conceptualisation of the findings from the research.

1.5.1 Reading the report

Because of the action research methodology, key learnings from the research were not simply made public at the conclusion of the research, but fed back to the drought counsellors throughout the project. This was done via the Co-operative Inquiry Group (CIG) network and No Bull, the newsletter of the drought counsellors. This report should therefore be read in parallel with the six editions of No Bull, available from the Bouverie website (www.bouverie.org.au), which provide a quarterly punctuation of the ongoing development of the drought counselling project. The reader will be directed to No Bull at relevant stages during the report, but the editions could also be read chronologically for another perspective of how the research unfolded.

1.6 The research: a brief summary

Using a mixed method approach ‘hosted’ within a Participatory Action Research Co-operative Inquiry methodology, the research explored how traditional counselling approaches need to be adapted and re—thought to effectively engage and support rural people affected by drought, especially those who are reluctant to seek help. Two specific approaches were explored as a starting point for the research:

i. A Community Development framework, to see what it offers the traditional ways of engaging and supporting individuals and families reluctant to seek or accept counselling; and

ii. No bullshit Therapy (NBT), incorporating Single Session Therapy (SST) ideas to see how they can make counselling more acceptable to potential rural clients.

A Co-operative Inquiry Participatory Action research approach (Reason & Rowan, 1981) was used to explore how drought counsellors would adapt these ideas, along with documenting other successful strategies for achieving positive counselling outcomes (emotional and relationship support for individuals and families affected by drought). The results led to learnings about:

i. How to support a specialist rural drought counselling workforce;

ii. The nature of drought and how it impacts on individuals, families and rural communities; and

iii. Counselling strategies specifically suited to supporting rural people affected by drought.
1.7 Writing style

I chose to write this report in the first person because it is favoured by qualitative researchers and reflects rural communities’ demand for personal commitment over distant expertise. I have also endeavoured to write this report with the minimum of jargon, both because this is my favoured style, but also to be consistent with the philosophy of No Bullshit Therapy, which informed the research.

1.8 Context of the author

I define myself as a city person although I lived in the country until the age of 18. Acknowledging my ‘outsider’ status was an important part of engaging with the rural workforce and provided recognition of the specific cultural difference and underlying tension between rural and urban communities. Having a farming background helped me to be open to the particular cultural sensitivities of rural life, without overly romanticising it. My lack of recent farming and rural experience meant that I had to ensure that I worked hard to engage with my rural colleagues — a task I shared with the drought counsellors, as they had to work hard to engage with their local communities.

I was the lead researcher, manager of the project and line—manager of all members of the Bouverie research team, except for my research supervisor and the CIGAR facilitator (explained later). Furthermore, I was the person most closely relating to the funder. I was also completing a PhD on the project — which afforded me personal outcomes from the research, but also added to my rigour and commitment to it.

1.9 Terminology

Whilst employed as drought counsellors, “Rural Outreach Worker” or “Rural Outreach Counsellor” was the generally favoured terms at the time of writing this report, reflecting a broader role for drought counsellors than first imagined. The change in name does not diminish the counselling skills required for this work, but does reflect the way in which drought counselling challenges conventional ways of providing counselling services. The key learnings about the most appropriate terminology are complex and hence a simple conclusion is at risk of diminishing future possibilities. Hence I use the term ‘drought counsellor’ throughout most of this report:

i. Because it relates to the original brief of the project;

ii. Because the name assigned to counselling in rural communities affected by drought remains contested; and

iii. To minimise confusion.
1.10 Confidentiality and respect

Although many of the drought counsellors who participated in the CIGs would be happy to have their names associated with the quotes presented in this report, (because they are rightly proud of their work) I have changed names to protect the confidentiality of secondary people and out of respect for their colleagues who made equally valuable contributions but whose direct quotes I have not used. Only quotes from already published material, such as No Bull, retain the author’s real name.

1.11 Glossary of key terms

**Bonding Social Capital**— A sociological concept to measure the network of relationships within a community or group to support its own ‘like-minded’ members.

**Bridging Social Capital**— Capacity for a community to reach out and support members of another community or group.

**CIG** — Co-operative Inquiry Group (Peer groups of drought counsellors in each region facilitated by a Bouverie team member which provided mutual support, opportunities to share resources and practice wisdom). CIGs were the key forum employed by the research to conduct and record collaborative inquiry around topics of mutual interest.

**CIGAR** — Co-operative Inquiry Group Action Research (Debrief meetings of all the Bouverie Centre facilitators of the CIG meetings). The CIGAR meetings provided a formal venue to reflect on the themes and issues arising from the data collected in the CIGs.

**Cold Calling**— A strategy drawn originally from business of calling on potential clients without a formal appointment to introduce a service.

**Community Development**— A wide range of definitions exist which largely suggest helping a community to build its capacity to prosper and to cope with difficulties. Community development practitioners work to identify problems and assets within the community, help organise resources for the community and offer information, including analysis of local power structures, in the pursuit of helping the community to build its own capacity.

**Compassion Fatigue**— is a term that refers to a gradual lessening of compassion over time usually as a consequence of working directly with people experiencing hardship or trauma. The indicators of compassion fatigue include hopelessness, a decrease in experiences of pleasure, constant stress and anxiety, and a pervasive negative attitude, which naturally effects people personally and professionally. First diagnosed in nurses in the 1950s, Charles Figley elaborated on the concept in a book called Compassion Fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized (Figley, 1995).

**Disenfranchised Grief**— Doka (1989) who used the term disenfranchised grief to describe the experience people have when their loss is not fully acknowledged by the general community including the structures such as rituals, public awards, media coverage and political speeches. (described further in section 6.14.1.3.1)
**Disenfranchised Natural Disaster**— The term ‘disenfranchised’ Natural Disaster is taken from Doka (1989) who used the term disenfranchised grief to describe the experience people have when their loss is not fully acknowledged by the general community including the structures such as rituals, public awards, media coverage and political speeches.

**DPI** — The Department of Primary Industries which supports the agriculture, fisheries, petroleum, minerals, energy and forest industries in Victoria. The DPI have over 2,500 staff in 80+ locations across Victoria, who help rural industries develop and have a role in helping communities manage natural disasters.

**DSE** — The Department of Sustainability and Environment leads the Victorian Government’s efforts to sustainably manage water resources and catchments, climate change, bushfires, parks and other public land, forests, biodiversity and ecosystem conservation. It is the lead agency for drought response.

**DHS** — The Department of Human Services is a Victorian Government department that provides a wide range of health and welfare services to Victoria. DHS funded the research and the drought counsellors and is the lead agency in the State Government responsible for social components of the drought response.

**Drought Counsellor** — Initial title of the workforce, which changed to rural outreach counsellor / worker over the course of the research.

**EC Declared** — When a region is declared as having Exceptional Circumstances. EC declaration is considered for rare and severe events outside those a farmer could normally be expected to manage using responsible farm management strategies. EC declaration means a range of supports (e.g. Centrelink payments) become available to farmers and business people.

**Looking Out For Your Neighbour (LOFYN)** — A community workshop developed in collaboration with the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF). The workshop looks at the impact of stress and loss on relationships and invited participants to kick start community networks to help address the impact of drought. The workshops were run by local drought counsellors and organised by local VFF branches.

**No Bull** — Newsletter of the State-funded drought counsellors.

**NBT (No Bullshit Therapy)** — A form of counselling that combines honesty and directness with warmth and care, acknowledges constraints to the work and avoids jargon. Developed by Jeff Young and colleagues at The Bouverie Centre, Melbourne.

**NB Support** — No Bull Support is a half day workshop designed to help lay people who help others cope with the impact of drought and other stresses.

**PCPs (Primary Care Partnerships)** — Primary Care Partnerships are the regional mechanism in Victoria for supporting integrated, planned partnership development between locally based health and community services, including local government. PCPs are responsible for leading a collaborative approach to developing a range of community—based activities to build community resilience to the effects of the drought.
RFC (Rural Financial Counsellor) — A trained person who provides assistance to primary producers and small rural businesses experiencing financial hardship. Rural Financial Counsellors are funded by federal, state and local governments and governed by local boards of management. They are sometimes confused with ‘drought counsellors’ by rural community members.

Rural outreach worker – The generally preferred, but still contested title of the drought counselling workforce which was interchangeable with rural outreach counsellor throughout the research.

VFF — The Victorian Farmers Federation is the peak body representing farmers. It is connected to a National federation with the mission to advance the commercial, environmental and social interests of Victorian farmers. The VFF is organised into 243 member branches representing different produce groups.

Vicarious Traumatisation— Traumatic symptoms experienced by witnessing another person, family or community experience a trauma.
Chapter two

2 Brief literature review

2.1 Understanding drought in Australia

2.1.1 Defining drought

Defining a drought is not simple. When is a drought a drought? The impact of drought affects people differently, even in the same area. Unlike fire and flood, it is not obvious when a drought begins or when it ends. When is a drought merely a predictable variation of our extreme climate, a business risk to be managed, and when is it a freak of nature; a slow grinding natural disaster to be endured and survived?

In a research project commission by the Birchip Cropping Group, Rickards (2007, p. 16), notes that “Not only is the onset of drought gradual, but so is recovery from it.” Based on in depth interviews exploring the impact of drought on 60 randomly selected broad acre farming families in the Wimmera and Southern Mallee, Victoria, Rickards (2007) found that uncertainty is one of the main psychological impacts of drought, uncertainty about how much it will affect the business and if or when it will end.

Linda Botterill and Melanie Fisher (2003), who edited a recent Australian multi-disciplinary book on drought, point out that there is no agreed upon definition of drought. They list meteorological, hydrological, agricultural and / or socioeconomic definitions separately. Ben Edwards, Mathew Gray and Boyd Hunter (2009), from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, who recently conducted the largest telephone survey on the impact of drought on Australian families, concur that there is no agreed upon measure of drought, but separate out technical and social definitions. The major definitions of drought they use are:

- Meteorological – The degree and duration of dryness compared to an average for that area
- Hydrological – Measures of water supply (Stream flow and reservoir / lake / ground water levels)
- Agricultural / Economic – Measures of farm production / economic impact
- Social – People’s perception of the severity and impact of drought

A 2004 Bureau of Meteorology fact sheet reproduced in an edited collection by Justin Healey (2005) points out there is no universal definition of drought because there are so many different uses of water and each group defines it in relation to their interest. Drought is certainly not simply low rainfall otherwise much of inland Australia would be in perpetual drought. Janette Lindesay, who led a major research project in the early 1990s into southern African climate variability and drought, is clear that any meaningful definition of drought needs to be specific to a particular
region and the type of business under consideration. She points out that areas and industries that rely on high water usage are usually more vulnerable to water shortage. Lindesay (2003) argues drought is best understood using general definitions because exact definitions are elusive, alluding to over 150 different specific definitions in the literature to make her point. Botterill and Fisher (2003, p. 3) suggest a fundamental definition of drought is when there is a “mismatch between the water available and the demands of human activities.”

The literature on drought is as diverse as the impact of drought itself. It falls into three broad categories, and in each category there is lively debate around definition and recommendations for dealing with drought. They are the biophysical and climatic elements that lead to the physical conditions of drought; the social and cultural factors that influence the way drought is perceived, experienced and responded to; and the policy environment that creates the overall political context in which individuals, the community and services respond to drought. Although interrelated, each are often discussed separately. One theme that is consistent across all commentators of drought is that it is a pervasive and complex beast that cannot be fully understood by examining it from one perspective alone.

2.1.2 Drought: Predictable climate variation or natural disaster?

“Australia is the highest user of water per capita in the world, despite being the driest inhabited continent” (Australian Conservation Foundation, 2009)

A confusing and potentially divisive underlying thread throughout the literature is best described as a question: should drought be perceived as an expected part of farming in an arid continent or as an unpredictable natural disaster? According to the Australian Government Bureau Of Meteorology (BOM), "research indicates that severe drought affects some part of Australia about once every 18 years. This does not indicate that severe drought regularly and predictably recurs every 18 years; intervals between severe droughts have varied from four to 38 years” (2009).

In the introduction to their 2003 collection, ‘Beyond Drought: People, Policy and Perspectives’, Botterill and Fisher go as far as saying that they would like to see the word ‘drought’ removed from the national lexicon and replaced with climate variability, to promote greater climate literacy amongst Australians and “an end to the stunned amazement at the onset of drought” (2003, p. 3). They argue for a move away from a crisis response to drought to a set of policies that are in harmony with Australian biophysical and climate reality. Both Botterill and Fisher have extensive experience studying drought. Botterill is experienced in public policy and has advised the Commonwealth Minister for Primary Industries and Energy on drought and rural adjustment, and Fisher is deputy executive director of the Bureau of Rural Sciences in the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Botterill concludes the collection by strongly arguing that as Australians we have to accept the realities of our biophysical environment and climate systems:

“Once this is achieved, we will be able to move away from an idealised, essentially European image of climate, weather and agriculture. Part of this understanding will come from improved climate literacy. This means living with
a highly variable climate – and recognising that the concept of ‘average’ rainfall is essentially a statistical construct that bears little resemblance to most seasons. This approach suggests that the notion of ‘drought’ may be meaningless in an environment in which extremes are the norm, particularly as the term is so value laden and evocative of unexpected disaster” (Botterill, 2003a, p. 197).

Climatologist, Janette Lindesay reiterates that climate literacy would centre on Australians understanding that Australia has an inherently variable climate, with a high degree of variation between seasons and between years due to the geographic location of the continent and the associated atmospheric and large scale oceanic influences such as the El Nino Southern Oscillation\(^3\), which are themselves unpredictable. Lindesay goes on to inform us that regions with high degree of annual rainfall variability are more likely to experience prolonged drought (Lindesay, 2003).

A number of contributors to Botterill and Fisher’s book argue that the view of drought as an unpredictable disaster has its roots in the history of white Australia. Mark Stafford Smith, who has worked at the CSIRO centre for Arid Zone Research in Alice Springs for more than two decades, believes that early white Australians regarded the variable and unpredictable climate affecting much of Australia as an “unfair imposition” rather than a “normal feature of the environment, to be managed and celebrated” (Smith, 2003, p. 10). He and others argue that whilst Indigenous Australians “walked this continent relatively lightly, capitalising on years of plenty while coping with deprivation in years of drought” (Smith, 2003, p. 10), white Australians originally based agricultural production on familiar but inappropriate European models where the climate is more predictable.

The perception of drought seems to depend on the aspect of drought being investigated. The first large detailed investigation into the ‘lived experience’ of farming families living through an extreme and prolonged drought (1995 – 1996) found that many farmers felt abandoned and misunderstood by what they saw as an uncaring broader community (Stehlik, 2003). Possibly related to this, they found a growing feeling of ‘doing it alone’ amongst people affected by the longer term drought crisis. In this earlier research, which will be discussed in detail when I explore the social impact of drought, Daniela Stehlik and her team concluded that Australian farmers do try to operate sustainably, actively managing risk and variable climate but expect support during times of unmanageable financial strain created by extreme and prolonged drought (Stehlik, 2003). Botterill says that “This mismatch between the perception of the media and politicians about the public’s response to the drought, and that of those experiencing the impact of drought first—hand is as disturbing as it is poignant” (2003a, p. 199). In order to understand this mismatch further, we need to wander between history, sociology, media studies, climatology, psychology and politics.

Exploring the literature I found intriguing conflict between the perception of drought in the bush, in the media and in government policy. These differences, explored further in the three sections that follow, may help explain why the State-

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\(^3\) Recent research from the University of New South Wales, Sydney has proposed that the oceanic temperature oscillations in the Indian Ocean are responsible for drought in south east Australia – not the El Nino Pacific Ocean Oscillations.
funded drought counsellors were thrown into positions with little induction, into organisations with little service memory of previous droughts and into situations with very few documented resources about how to respond to drought. With Australia’s rich history of drought, ably documented in poems, songs and anthems, such as Dorothy MacKellor’s ‘My Country’, why is Australia not better prepared for drought? As the following excerpt from ‘My Country’ warns, Australia’s variable climate should not be ignored.

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror –
The wide brown land for me!

2.2 Rurality, drought and the media

“It is a terrible irony that in this country, with the most variable rainfall in the world, the language of war and disaster, and the imagery of suffering dominates drought coverage in the media” (Wahlquist, 2003, p. 85).

Asa Wahlquist (2003), a rural reporter who has worked for The Australian and ABC radio and TV, makes a riveting claim in her chapter looking at media representations and public perceptions of drought. Wahlquist argues that today most urban Australians have little knowledge of life in rural and regional Australia and what they do know mostly is learnt through the media. She points out that this is in contrast to pre—World War II when more than half of the four million Australians lived in the bush and most urban families had a relative on the land and hence were intimately aware of the impact of drought, bushfires, commodity prices etc. Wahlquist reports that by 2001, 64% of Australians lived in capital cities making Australia one of the most urbanised countries in the world. Only 14% of Australians lived in the bush (inland Australia) in 2001 and the figure is even less now. She argues that this has led to less direct connection to rural Australia and a greater reliance on media that is understandably urban centric. Others have pointed out more strongly, that “Australia as a whole has undergone a dramatic transformation from a rural society to an urban society” (Kenny, 2008, p. 6). Wahlquist argues that urban Australians have an outdated perception of modern rural Australia that does not reflect “the reality that one—third of farmers are women, most are computer literate, around 40% belong to Landcare, and thus are … active conservationists…” She goes on to argue that “Australian farmers are among the most efficient – and least protected – in the world” (Wahlquist, 2003, p. 69).

Brad West and Philip Smith from the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Queensland argue that drought should be a normal part of Australian life. Reviewing newspaper articles, political speeches and popular
literature, West and Smith have written a thought provoking paper arguing that although drought is most commonly described as a “deviant, freak of nature that threatens the community”, one in three of the past 130 years have been drought years (West & Smith, 1996). Equally compelling evidence for this stance is provided by Sartore and her colleagues when they argue that only four of the 30 years prior to 2005 have passed drought free in the eastern Australian environment (Sartore, Hoolahan, Tonna, Kelly, & Stain, 2005). Given the frequency of drought years in Australia, it is surprising that there is not more cumulative documentation and coordinated planning for drought prevention, support and recovery.

West and Smith (1996) argue that even with compelling evidence to the contrary, the dominant discourse is to publicly evoke the ‘people against an unpredictable nature’ narrative, and attempt to unite a community against an external threat rather than accepting it as a predictable recurrent hazard of Australian rural life. Calls for greater climatic literacy, for understanding our harsh climate and for debating the way we should live within our environment have also gathered momentum due to the future predictions of climate change.

The impact of climate change challenges the way we have perceived drought in the past – as current drought areas may not simply return to pre-drought conditions, which creates a challenge for the way we need to be thinking about drought in the future. The predictions of increases in global warming are likely to bring more frequent droughts and changed climatic patterns. These broader predictions, (DSE & DPI, 2008) although controversial, are likely to create additional uncertainty for the rural community, a major symptom experienced by farmers in response to the current drought (Rickards, 2007). Interestingly, Patricia Fitzsimons (Fitzsimons & Xia, 2007), a research scientist with the Department of Primary Industries who has an interest in psychological attitudes toward climate change, argues that the current extended drought has made community members more open to the idea of climate change and the need to adapt our lifestyles to manage it. If the predictions of climate change are true, failure to make major changes will have dramatic social and economic consequences.

2.3 Drought policy: a change of paradigm

“There are rural Australians on farms and in small communities who feel overlooked, unsupported and forgotten” (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. xiv)

Up until April 1989, from a policy point of view, drought in Australia was seen as a natural disaster, and hence the responsibility of the State Government, with back up from the Federal Government. In April 1989, a major policy shift occurred. Drought was removed from the Commonwealth—State natural disaster relief arrangements and made the responsibility of farmers, under the paradigm of farm management. Drought, at a policy level at least, suddenly became a risk to be managed like any other business risk such as changing commodity prices and interest rates (Botterill & Fisher, 2003). However, according to Botterill, the attitude and business practices of rural communities did not quickly embrace this new ‘self-reliance’ paradigm. Since 1989, drought policy has been fundamentally based on assisting Australian agricultural industry to adopt new farming practices in line with a risk management approach to drought. Some of the key issues are highlighted below.
In July 1992, the Commonwealth and State Governments agreed on a National Drought Policy (Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, 2007). The objectives of the new policy, which remain today, are to:

- Encourage primary producers and other sections of rural Australia to adopt self-reliant approaches to managing the risks stemming from climatic variability;
- Maintain and protect Australia's agricultural and environmental resource base during periods of extreme climate stress, and
- Ensure early recovery of agricultural and rural industries consistent with long—term sustainable levels.

A Rural Adjustment Scheme provided a range of supports under the National Drought Policy to help farmers adopt a risk management approach to drought, but the one that gained greatest interest and debate was called Exceptional Circumstances (EC). The EC declaration triggers short-term support for farmers in drought conditions beyond the scope of normal risk management and when the future of significant numbers of farmers in a region is at risk. Support is also available to agriculture—dependent small businesses. A whole region is declared EC not a particular farmer.

According to Botterill (2003b), the National Drought Policy did not get off to a good start. 'Exceptional Circumstances' was not defined in the relevant legislation or the Second Reading Speech. The criteria for Exceptional Circumstance (EC) declarations remain somewhat subjective – or at least political. The distinction between a dry spell and a drought is debatable but very important given the former is the responsibility of farmers and associated business people and the latter, is shared by governments, in the form of Exceptional Circumstance supports (Botterill, 2003b).

Although the Exceptional Circumstances criteria clearly states that EC events are defined as a one in 20—25 year occurrence, the interpretation has varied depending on political sensitivities and effectiveness of drought affected communities to argue their plight and has, in the opinion of some, (O'Meagher, 2003), been progressively watered down. At the end of March 2007, all of Victoria’s farm land was EC declared for the first time in history (Fitzsimons & Xia, 2007). In effect, the declaration of EC is the new ‘practical definition’ of drought as a natural disaster rather than simply a dry period that is part of a predictable climate variation that is expected to be managed as a business risk.

As pointed out by O’Meagher (2003, p. 114) “There has been a long and at times controversial history of debate concerning the role of public—sector intervention in meeting these challenges”. The provision of welfare support to farmers affected by drought is seen by some as a disincentive for the adoption of new risk management strategies (O’Meagher, 2003), and by others as a right to be enjoyed like it is enjoyed by others in the community who lose income. Botterill summarises the challenge for policy makers, especially in the context of climate change, when she declares “the challenge for policy—makers is to promote sound management practices in the face of the emotionally charged policy environment in which such policy is so often developed, while responding sympathetically to the hardship being experienced” (O’Meagher, 2003, p. 62).
A complicating factor, pointed out by Botterill (2003b) is that social welfare benefits target wage and salary earners and do not cope as well with the needs of farmers or the self-employed who may be asset rich and income poor. Furthermore, determining people that qualify for EC support, given the variability of impact and the difficulties of defining drought is usually emotional and controversial. The changing emphasis between government intervention and acceptance of the pain of structural change is reflected in the drought policy in Australia (Botterill, 2003b). It could be argued that the policy position of drought as a risk management strategy has not filtered down to the community as a whole and the ongoing debate or uncertainty about when government should intervene adds to the inherent uncertainty generated by extreme drought itself.

With further structural changes required to manage the far reaching effects predicted by climate change, the Federal Government, as part of its 2007 election commitments is again in the midst of reviewing the National Drought Policy. Mr. Tony Burke, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry commissioned an expert panel to explore the social impacts of drought on farmers and the rural community. Chaired by Peter Kenny, President of AgForce Queensland, board member of the National Farmers’ Federation and a cattle producer in Queensland, the panel held 25 public meetings across the country attended by over 1000 people. The panel also received more than 236 public submissions, including a summary of the key learnings and recommendations from my interim report on the current research findings (Young, 2008). The Social Impacts of Drought panel submitted their report to Mr. Burke on the 30/9/08. In a press release announcing its receipt, the Minister said, “This is the first time a National Government has engaged farmers, their families and communities and asked how the drought is impacting on them personally” (Burke, 2008).

In keeping with Botterill’s call, the first sentence of the executive summary of the final report to Government (Kenny, 2008, p. 1) calls for “a new national approach to living with dryness ... rather than dealing with drought.” The report goes on to reaffirm that Australia will face periods of prolonged dryness in the future which will have an “adverse impact on the wellbeing of farm families, rural businesses and communities.” The expert panel who authored the report, point out that the better social outcomes are likely to also result in better economic and environmental outcomes. They propose that future government policy focuses on people and changing their perspective on the drought, providing incentives for people to prepare for periods in dryness during better times, rather than crisis driven responses – essentially moving to promote “environmentally responsible management under variable seasonal conditions” (Kenny, 2008, p. 10). The challenge, the panel acknowledges, is to address the social wellbeing needs of rural communities experiencing adjustment stress in ways that do not inhibit the efficiency of agricultural industries.

The tension between the need for structural change and social well—being will require thoughtfulness and informed debate. The prominence and title of the report, It’s About People, Changing Perspectives on Dryness, suggests that there is a

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4 The social impact of drought was one of three reports commissioned by the Government as part of the overall review of drought policy. The other two were the review of climate projections by the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, released in July 2008, and an economic assessment to be developed by the Productivity Commission.
growing recognition that the current drought and future climate change will have far reaching social impacts on rural Australia, which will need researching. This leads us closer to the focus of the current study; responding to the social impact of drought.

2.4 The social impact of drought

"Drought involves a high level of uncertainty and considerable risk, particularly for agricultural producers" (O’Meagher, 2003, p. 110).

Despite the extensive history of frequent extended drought in Australia and the well documented economic impact of extreme and prolonged drought, there has been surprisingly little local research undertaken on the social impact and experience of living through a drought. Three major Australian studies (Alston & Kent, 2004; Edwards & Gray, 2008; Stehlik, 2003) are explored here.

Daniela Stehlik, who is the inaugural Professor of Stronger Communities at Curtin University in Perth and was an expert on the recent ‘Social Impact of Drought’ panel, was the first to conduct a study exploring the lived experience of drought whilst the participants were actually in the midst of it rather than recalling the experience in retrospect. Ninety percent of respondents reported that their farm was in drought at the time of the interviews, with most in the third year of drought. Stehlik and her team spent two years exploring the long term impact of the drought on families and on their relationships with their communities (1995—97) as part of a collaborative study undertaken by the Rural Social and Economic Research Centre at Central Queensland University and the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University.

Their research design had the advantage of comparing two different agricultural areas. Stehlik and her team interviewed 103 people (51 men and 52 women) on 56 different properties in Central Queensland (cattle grazing area) and in Western NSW (wheat / sheep), using a semi—structured interview developed from several focus groups and in—depth interviews with nine families. Using a ‘snowballing’ approach they called ‘rhizoming’ (Stehlik, 2004) and advertisements to recruit participants, Stehlik et al sought to understand how participants in the research made sense of the drought, how it impacted on them and their families, and how drought influenced the management strategies they applied to their farms. They found that whilst farmers perceive drought as something individual producers need to anticipate as a normal event, and thus plan for (in line with the principle self-reliance underpinning the National Drought Policy) there were strong arguments from all producers interviewed that no—one could plan for extended drought.

Stehlik and her team reported that the hardship was real. They argued that the family was the first defense against that hardship and that the uncertainty of the drought put extra pressure on family relationships. Stehlik’s team, like Alston and Kent (2004), found that the impact of drought was highly gendered – which I explore later when examining if different approaches are required to engage men and women as part of drought counselling strategies.

Whilst Stehlik et al’s research made a major contribution to the understanding of the social impacts of drought they did not explore the impacts on people other than
farmers, nor farmers who were forced to abandon their properties. This study, like Edwards and Gray (2008), was cross-sectional and did not explore how attitudes changed over time – although the in-depth interviews provided some sense of this.

Similar to Stehlik et al, Alston and Kent (2004) conducted their study during a major drought (2002—03), however expanded the focus to partly explore the impact of drought on the wider community. Also using a largely qualitative methodology, Alston and Kent conducted in-depth interviews with farming family members (62) and key informants (60) including rural financial counsellors, health and welfare service providers, teachers, local government personnel and small business owners. Alston and Kent compared three different sites. They interviewed farmers, most of whom were in their third year of drought in a remote area (Bourke), a dry land irrigation region (Deniliquin) and a broad acre cropping area (Condobolin). They reported that “The emotional impacts of the drought were evident in each interview” (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. 51). Whilst all 62 farmers interviewed noted the devastating impacts on themselves or their families resulting from the drought, men’s responses were more likely to be linked to “land and stock and the emotional trauma of watching the land and stock suffer”. Women, on the other hand were more inclined to note the “emotional impact of having no income, the struggle to support their families and to keep their children in school, and the sheer energy sapping efforts associated with their multiple roles” (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. 51).

A particular strength of Alston and Kent’s study was that they interviewed children, and asked parents and service providers about the impact on children. They reported that the impacts on children in Bourke included:

“the need to work on the property, the impacts on School of the Air education, the effects on access to higher education and the stress of watching their parents suffer. Service providers noted that children are operating in an adult world, usually as full-time workers, surrounded by stress, and, because they do School of the Air, they often have no outlet from the farm” (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. 51).

A particular worry and an indication of the severity of the emotional impact of drought was Alston and Kent’s finding that “children and young adults are likely to try to deal with their own levels of stress in isolation so as not to upset their parents” (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. 54).

Whilst Stehlik et al and Alston and Kent compared people from two and three regions in drought respectively, Edwards and Gray (2008) argue that it is difficult to disentangle the impact of drought from the influences of general social and economic decline reported in inland rural Australia if non-drought areas are not compared to drought areas. To address this gap in the methodology, they conducted a computer assisted 25 minute telephone survey of 8000 rural people across Australia, between September and December 2007. Using a meteorological definition of drought, they averaged the last three years of rainfall for a particular area and compared this average with the last 100 years. Based on the percentage they divided target areas into four categories: Severe Drought (0—5% of last 100 year average), Moderate Drought (6—10%), Below Average Rainfall (11—49%) and Above Average Rainfall (50—100%).
Edwards and Gray (2008) found the economic impact of drought on Australia was profound. Fifty percent of farmers they interviewed, including those not in drought, reported that their business would not be viable if the current climate continues. One third of farmers reported that farm production was at its lowest level ever. The financial flow on effects for rural people not employed in agriculture was less than farmers but still significant. Edwards and Gray were surprised to find that the intense economic hardship did not flow into deteriorating family relationship and individual wellbeing as they had expected. This finding may not be that surprising because their study only surveyed people at one point in the drought (September – December 2007). Others (e.g. Rickards, 2007) emphasise the importance of taking a developmental view of drought – engaging with it over time given the chronic but ever changing nature of its impact. Another limitation of Edwards and Gray’s study was that they did not examine the impact on children. Whilst the farmers are known for being stoical, they are often willing to share concerns for people other than themselves, especially their own children. Given Alston and Kent’s (2004) report that strong emotion was evident in the majority of the in—depth interviews they conducted, a 25 minute phone interview on the impact of a complex and insidious experience like drought may not be the most effective methodology for eliciting the subtle or underlying emotional impact of a long—term crisis. Evidence in the literature suggests that researchers should be very cautious about interpreting the emotional impact of drought from data that is not sampled over a longer period of time. For example, the service providers interviewed by Alston and Kent expected, “that the numbers of stress—related presentations will increase when the drought breaks as people face the fact of their reduced options” (2004, p. 55).

Edwards and Gray (2008) found that the social definition of drought, namely people’s perception of drought and the associated implications, seemed adequate in defining drought and that whilst a more objective measure may be important for the distribution of financial aid, increasingly sophisticated statistical definitions of drought did not shed significant extra light on the social impacts of this natural phenomenon. Research has focused more on the economic than the social and emotional impacts of drought.

2.5 The socio—economic context of drought

“The drought then is an added factor in an already unfolding story of inland destabilisation.” (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. xiii)

Several commentators (Adler, 1982; Alston, 2004; Alston & Kent, 2004; Edwards, et al., 2009) have highlighted the importance of disentangling general socio—economic changes in rural communities from the impacts specific to drought. Given the current study did not seek tangible data on the socio—economic status of people affected by drought, I have summarised key elements of the literature on these changes occurring in rural Australia – so that the data collected from this research can be analysed with an awareness of the broader economic context.

Drawing on their experience of providing telephone help-line support to over 1000 distressed callers from a range of rural communities acutely affected by drought during 2002—03, Hall and Scheltens (2005) argue that rural communities should be seen as suffering chronic disadvantage and that the impact of drought is only one
part of a more complex picture of rural crisis. They list the following pre—existing issues affecting rural Australia as underlying the impact of drought:

“disruption to family and community in ‘aging’ rural communities; ongoing financial strain faced by many rural people which is not necessarily linked to the drought; confusion experienced by rural families linked to a repositioning of gender roles, particularly where there are strong ‘traditional’ family values; and social isolation, which can contribute to helplessness and domestic violence” (Hall & Scheltens, 2005, p. 349).

The authors, to make their point, present a range of case studies of callers who are struggling with these underlying issues, exacerbated by drought. The complexity of viewing the impacts of drought in the context of dramatic and ongoing changes to rural life can feel overwhelming, but if drought response is to hear the call from previous drought counselling evaluations, (e.g. Anonymous, 2006; Johnston, 2003; Sartore et al., 2005) for support to be ongoing and focused on drought as part of larger changes affecting rural communities, the broader rural socioeconomic context will need to be taken into account. Some of the major changes are summarised in the following section.

2.5.1 Rural disadvantage and structural adjustment

Emily Phillips, sociologist and senior policy advisor from the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), points out that the aging of rural populations, due to population loss to larger regional centres especially among the young, is a key factor affecting rural communities. She explains that increases in farm size have meant that there are fewer farmers to contribute to community infrastructure (Phillips, 2007). In a presentation during a DHS Strategic Drought Planning Workshop on the 24th July 2007, Phillips reported that the number of farms in Victoria had almost halved since 1970, suggesting that structural adjustment began well before the 1989 shift in drought policy. Phillips reports that 10% of farms are responsible for 40 – 50% of agricultural production, leading to a growing differentiation between wealthy and poor farming families (Alston & Kent, 2004). Furthermore, 50% of farms produce just over 10% of agricultural production and increasingly rely on off—farm income (Phillips, 2007). Overall, whilst agriculture has become less central to Australia’s GDP (a fall from 14% in the early 1960s to 2% now) the farming sector has experienced the pressures (and benefits) of increased efficiency, with agricultural output having increased two and a half times over the same period (Kenny, 2008).

Professor Margaret Alston, formerly the director of the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University, now at Monash University, argues that globalisation and agricultural changes have resulted in major changes to inland Australia, including the drift of young people from country towns to cities and from inland to coastal regions and to regional ‘sponge’ cities [cities that soak up population from surrounding rural areas] (Alston, 2004; Alston & Kent, 2004). Alston cites Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures for the 12 month period prior to June 2000 that show of the 270 shires that lost population, most were rural, with those dependent on broad acre farming most likely to lose population. The loss of population is most striking among young people. Based on analysis of ABS data, in—depth interviews and focus groups with key informants as well as her own surveys of
young people and their parents, Alston (2004, p. 300) concludes that, “the loss of young people, and the greater loss of young women, is driven by a lack of employment options\(^5\), the need to access tertiary education, (and) by a need to escape the small town milieu”.

The loss of young people, including the resulting gender imbalance, contributes to a loss in social capital. Social capital, Alston argues is a key ingredient of a thriving rural community. Social capital is the human glue that holds a community together—the participation, trust, reciprocity, generation of networks, etc. In practical terms, lower social capital means fewer sporting clubs and other community groups and organisations. In times of drought, social capital can become fragile at the very time it is most needed. The chronic nature of drought, combined with the resulting prolonged economic stress erodes engagement in activities outside of the bare essentials. The revitalisation of social capital may therefore be a key factor in helping communities to manage the impact of drought. Alston found that in the eight Local Government Areas (LGAs) she studied, “it was evident that social capital is an important and fragile condition of a rural community’s capacity to survive” (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. 310). The concept of social capital will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 8, along with other community development principles.

Phillips (2007) points out that small rural communities are in transition, facing rapid social, economic and demographic change. She argues there is a reverse—migration to rural areas of new residents searching for life—style changes or affordable housing and the survival of these rural areas may depend on the existing communities’ ability to absorb these new members. For example, the ability to absorb retirees and lower income migrants who may have different cultural values to the existing mainstream in small rural towns may be the key to renewal for some rural areas. This ability Phillips calls ‘bridging’ social capital, is the ability to create a bridge between the old and the new. She points out that rural communities tend to score higher on ‘bonding’ social capital (internal networks, the ability to get help from friends, family and established neighbours) than ‘bridging’ social capital. Phillips argues that, “Too much bonding and not enough bridging capital restricts a community’s capacity to respond to change” (Phillips, 2007:slide 9).

Neil Barr, senior social researcher with the Department of Primary Industries, articulates four major trends in the rural landscape of Victoria: production, amenity migration, demographic transformation and irrigation landscapes (Barr, 2005). He points out that in the ever increasing demands of more efficient productivity (the ‘get big or get out’ adage), production landscapes will diminish the population and hence the sustainability of small towns. In landscapes that attract people because of the amenities, Barr points out farms will get smaller (‘get small or get out’) and be composed of a mix of rural retreats and hobby farms. In landscapes where the demographics change, he argues that tensions caused by divergent community views will make community building complicated. He cites the conflict over plantation, forestry and wind farms as an example of this conflict. The irrigation landscapes, Barr points out, face potential social disruption because of the rapid change due to the increased trading in water entitlements.

The rate of change has a significant impact on a community’s ability to cope, as one would intuitively expect. Phillips points to a “general rule of thumb that most rural

\(^5\) For example, Alston quotes that in the Local Government Area of Tumbarumba, 90% of apprenticeships available were taken up by young men.
communities can cope with less than 3% fall in farm numbers per annum” (Phillips, 2007:slide 6). Drought obviously affects the rate of change and hence the adjustment response. The average fall in farm numbers in the 10 years prior to 1996 was 1.3% per annum. However, according to Phillips, the DPI predicts exit rates due to the current drought will be even higher than previous droughts, perhaps temporarily as high as 9% per annum in some production/transition landscapes, due to a combination of factors including global competition, unregulated markets, water trading and the high demand for water and land. Rapid change such as this would lead to significant pressures on employment and social cohesion making the response to drought more difficult.

Alston contends that the lack of employment options is driven not only by economic changes in agriculture, but also in the withdrawal of institutional capital from smaller towns. With 50% of farms dependent on off—farm income (and more so in times of drought) coinciding with a loss of rural jobs to metropolitan areas, social tension within rural communities is inevitable. Edwards and Gray (2008) found 32—38% of participants in their telephone survey reported closure of a key service in the three years prior to the telephone interview – with the higher percentage being in areas of severe drought and the lower percentage in areas of above average rain fall. Therefore the impact of drought on rural communities is significant but cannot be viewed in isolation to the broad changes affecting local communities and the rural sector in general. In other words, developing models of service delivery that integrate counselling and community development approaches may be necessary.

2.6 Responding to the social and emotional impacts of drought

An understanding of the drought literature clearly indicates that responding to the social and emotional impacts of drought needs to take into account the complexity of drought, as reported in a recent influential study. This study was commissioned by the Birchip Cropping Group, a grassroots farming association in North West Victoria, rather than a university based research group, which helped it gain the co—operation of participants who were randomly selected from the telephone book. Lauren Rickards, a partner in RMCG consulting who conducted the research, interviewed 60 farming families in their own homes. Rickards randomly followed up 20 families one year later, and thus was able to report on the changing response as the drought progressed.

In her interim report, Rickards writes:

“The impacts of drought on the Wimmera Southern Mallee region are multi—layered, widespread, significant, long—term and growing. As its ripples spread through the community, reinforcing other waves of change, its accumulative impact is growing at both individual and collective levels. The effect of the drought on farming families cannot be isolated either from pre—drought pressures or from community level processes or individual level decisions. The resultant complexity adds to the uncertainty that characterises the occurrence of drought, and which is one of the main psychological impacts of it.
Psychological / social / emotional effects and financial effects are tightly coupled not only to the physical phenomenon that drought superficially seems to be, but to each other” (Rickards, 2007, p. 1).

In addition to the complexity of any natural disaster, the long term nature of the drought has further implications for the recovery response and hence previous evaluations of drought initiatives have called for longer term planning. In a consultative conference held in 2003 at the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health in Orange, New South Wales, 23 professionals representing NSW Health, Mental Health, Agriculture, the Department of Community Services, and Rural Financial Counsellors, generated three general strategies for minimising potential adverse mental health effects of drought. The strategies were:

“Community—building and education about the physical, financial and mental health effects of drought; co—operation between and co—ordination of agencies in delivering mental health and other drought support; and continuity and planning of improved mental health services” (Sartore et al., 2005, p. 315)

Sartore and her colleagues go on to describe the importance of planning beyond the end of the drought and the bringing together of government and non-government agencies to promote community capacity for dealing with mental health issues. Similar conclusions have been clearly and strongly articulated by other drought response initiatives (e.g.Blau, 2006; Johnston, 2003), but these calls seem to go unheeded at government and non-government levels. Is there a lack of 'service memory' in responding to drought because of its intermittent nature or is there a lack of will on behalf of Government because the chronic and pervasive impact of drought is so costly? Or do the characteristics of drought or the way drought is perceived make it hard for services to be better prepared?

If drought was perceived as an expected part of Australian life rather than as a capricious freak of nature, in the service system, as is expected of the farming fraternity, would drought support follow a 'stop—start—stop—start' funding pattern? Would the wisdoms from previous drought counselling services be lost? Would a drought response plan be ongoing? Would drought be part of an integrated response to the range of stresses affecting rural Australia?

Stop—start funding does not allow services to establish a reputation that they are in it for the long haul or to establish robust networks that lead to co—ordinated services. Rural communities suspicious of counselling are less likely to trust or invest in services that have the potential to be 'here today and gone tomorrow'. As Johnston, who evaluated an established national counselling organisation’s (Relationships Australia) attempt to establish specialist drought counselling with only four months funding, eloquently points out,

“In establishing new services in rural areas, it is not just the local community with which a relationship of trust must be developed. The existing professional community also must become familiar with the 'newcomer'. This combined process takes time. For the most value for money, these networks need to be
Apart from services needing time to get established, there is also a time lag between rains and recovery from drought at a farming and local community level. In fact for farmers, rain brings with it additional costs needed to take advantage of the rains (Rickards, 2007), such as buying stock, sowing new crops etc. A number of post-project evaluations and drought research projects point out that the full emotional impact of drought only occurs after the most intense period of the drought, just as funding and the wider community is moving onto the next acute crisis (Alston & Kent, 2004; Johnston, 2003). The Relationships Australia drought counselling evaluation points out that it is only, “After rain, (that) other issues such as depression and relationship breakdown come to the fore” (Johnston, 2003, p. 13). The final report of the Birchip Cropping Group’s research (Rickards, 2008), which describes in depth follow—up interviews with some of the farming families who were part of the group’s original research, documented a greater focus and acknowledgement of emotional issues further down the track. The current study will try to understand this contradiction; that designated drought counselling services are often cut just at the time when people affected by drought are most likely to seek or need counselling support.

The issues faced by drought counselling are common to many rural health initiatives, therefore exploring the help seeking behaviours in rural communities was an obvious area of the literature to review. The extensive available literature is only briefly touched on in this next section in order to understand what engagement difficulties may be endemic to rural health provision and which are specific to drought response. It is hoped that the current drought research, as well as drawing on this literature may, in a small way, return the favour and help inform the provision of rural health services more generally.

### 2.7 General help seeking in rural communities

The task of people providing social and emotional support to people affected by the drought is not an easy one – because providing social and emotional support to people in general is not easy. The ‘Burden of Disease and Injury in Australia’ study conducted in 1999, found that across urban and rural Australia, mental health problems are the leading cause of disability, accounting for nearly 30% of the non-fatal burden of disease (Mathers, Vos, Stevenson, & Begg, 2001). And yet only one—third of people with mental health problems access health services (Wainer & Chesters, 2000). Several studies point out that whilst the level of mental health difficulties experienced by rural people is similar to urban folk, rural people are less likely to seek help. A recent report written by the Centre for Rural Mental Health (2005) suggests that apart from a culture of self-reliance, rural people are reluctant to access counselling services for three broad reasons:

1. A preference to seek help from family and friends;
2. The stigma around mental health problems; and
3. Limited knowledge and availability of services.
Non help seeking does not equate with an absence of problems. Whilst rural men are least likely to seek help, the leading cause of death for young men in rural Australia is suicide (Wainer & Chesters, 2000). Sartore and her colleagues from the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health in New South Wales argue that even without the impact of drought, Australian farmers commit suicide at higher rates than the national average and for comparable rural populations around the world (Sartore et al., 2005). A study by Caldwell et al (2004) indicates that although metropolitan and rural men aged 18 — 29 have similar rates of mental illness, rural (40.4 per 100,000) and remote (51.7 per 100,000) men in this age range are more likely to commit suicide than their metropolitan counterparts (31.8 per 100,000) and are less likely to seek help (11.4 vs 25.2 per 100,000). Caldwell et al’s paper calls for research into “why young men in non-metropolitan areas...do not engage with mental health services” (2004, p. 10). Furthermore, Carlton and Deane (2000, as cited in Cusack, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2004) argue that men in general are less likely to seek help for suicidal ideation than for less serious personal—emotional problems.

The exact relationship between drought and suicide is difficult to measure. The insidious and chronic impact of drought means it is hard to determine what is and equally what is not linked to drought, although common sense would suggest that an ill—defined, chronic disaster with major economic, social and psychological impacts would exacerbate potential suicides. In preparation for this research I conducted several interviews with rural counsellors and several reported the same apocryphal story of a farmer who after being offered only $1 for his sheep, shot all his sheep and then himself. Despite direct questions about drought and suicide risk during one of the interviews, it was only after the formal component of the interview that one interviewee mentioned that three farmers had recently suicided in the immediate district.

It also makes sense that help seeking is related to availability and accessibility of services as suggested by Judd et al (2006). For example, access to mental health services is more difficult for people living in remote rural areas given, “there are far fewer psychiatrists (by main place of work) for rural and remote populations (3.3 and 1.8 per 100 000 respectively) than for metropolitan populations (14.2 per 100 000)” (Caldwell et al., 2004, p. s10). In the absence of formal mental health services, community resilience building strategies, including providing training and support to the informal support roles played by lay people, could potentially play a significant role in early intervention and helping prevent rural suicide.

However, it is not just the lack of available services that explain the lack of help seeking in rural environments. In a Canadian study, Boydell and her colleagues (2006) provide a detailed outline of the barriers to rural people accessing mental health services, which are equally relevant to Australia. Their findings, elaborated below, are based on in—depth interviews with 30 parents, mostly mothers of children aged 3—17 years who had been diagnosed with emotional and behavioural disorders, and were receiving mental health services in rural Ontario, Canada. The participants in Boydell et al’s study (2006) were not in drought at the time, and hence provide a general context in which to begin understanding the potential barriers of providing specialist drought counselling to rural areas in Australia.

The authors point out that the same barriers are also often supportive of people’s mental health. Small, close knit communities, where word of mouth is paramount, promote stigma and hence act as a significant barrier to seeking mental health help,
but also act as an informal support and ways of gaining knowledge about services. Thus conducting public advertising campaigns that normalise and de-stigmatise early help seeking as called for by the Australian Health Care Associates (2006), could be particularly influential in close knit communities. Beyond blue, a national initiative to raise consciousness about mental illness has helped normalise discussion of depression. Similar initiatives are needed to do the same for the fore-runner of depression and other mental illnesses, the natural stresses and sadnesses that are normal responses to life’s hardships.

Boydell and her colleagues point out that seeking health services in general is complicated in rural areas due to geographic, economic and cultural factors (Boydell et al., 2006). These factors are discussed in more detail below.

2.7.1 Geographic factors

Rural communities tend to have difficulty recruiting and retaining health professionals, leading to overtaxed and isolated professionals. The more remote, the greater the health risks and the more difficulties in both retaining general health professionals and for the community to economically support more specialised professionals. Lack of information about what to do and where to go for help, financial difficulties exacerbated by large distances, long waiting times and lack of local services are listed as geographic constraints by Boydell and her colleagues. Offering help in local networks where workers are willing to be flexible and provide home visits and where services are integrated into other community services, especially schools for family issues, is recommended (Boydell et al., 2006).

2.7.2 Economic factors

As Boydell and colleagues point out, travel expenses increase in more remote areas which increases the cost of both “providing and obtaining care” (Boydell et al., 2006, p. 182). Her research team point out that travel related expenses such as extra food, accommodation and time off work, add to the cost. The long, insidious nature of drought is likely to further exacerbate the impact of economic hardship in general, leading to greater financial constraints to seeking health care. Furthermore, during prolonged drought, people are less able to travel to engage in usual activities such as sport and social activities because of ongoing financial strain, thus losing the accompanying health benefits (Adler, 1982; Alston & Kent, 2004; Stehlik, 2003).

2.7.3 Cultural / community factors

Stoicism and self-reliance are among the cultural factors associated with rural communities that may restrict people from seeking help (Judd, et al., 2006). Working as counsellors for the Australian Government’s drought hotline and as rural social workers with Centrelink’s Rural Queensland Call service during 2002/3, Hall and Scheltens argue that the,

“interconnectedness of rural families is often seen as a strength, which compensates for a scarcity of outside help. Unfortunately, strong bonds can also
enmesh and entrap family members. Our callers often express concerns or
difficulties in raising issues within their family network ... Feelings of shame or
fear of retribution can also make it difficult for rural people to explore options in
their local area” (Hall & Scheltens, 2005, p. 353).

Boydell et al. (2006) identified perceived stigma and lack of anonymity as significant
barriers to rural people seeking professional help. The combination of "everybody
knowing everybody else's business" and being "labelled" or "pegged" forever
strengthens the power of the stigma. Boydell et al’s findings are strikingly similar to
the barriers found by Aisbett and his colleagues in a study of Australian mental
health utilisation by young (15—17 years) people (Aisbett, 2007). Interviewing
clients of a rural Victorian Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in the
Grampians region, Aisbett’s team found lack of reliable transport, lack of qualified
professionals specialising in young people, long waiting lists and the negative
impacts of gossip networks and social visibility as barriers to seeking help.

Before describing how the current study attempted to support the development of
effective ways for overcoming the constraints to providing help to rural communities
affected by drought, I have reviewed the learnings from previous attempts.

2.8 What we have learnt from previous drought social
response strategies

2.8.1 Towong Shire emergency drought response 2003

The Towong Shire’s Emergency Drought Response was awarded the Australian Safer
Communities Award from Emergency Management Australia for their response in
2003 to persistent drought conditions in the aftermath of severe bushfires. The
Towong municipality has a population of 6,300 people and is in the north—eastern
corner of Victoria. The winning response included an intensive multi—agency
program to inform and assist the community in coping with drought. Two hundred
and sixty—six farm visits were made, business plans and seminars were conducted
and practical measures such as stock disposal and water carting were initiated.

Operating from within a community capacity building philosophy, the shire’s final
report sought to pass on the following lessons in regard to crisis recovery:

• Strategy and process matter, particularly in ongoing community recovery and
capacity building;
• False hopes don’t help – it is important to face reality and tell the truth rather
than filter the truth;
• Being heard is an important part of recovery so opportunities to be heard are
essential;
• Good neighbours only go so far – many people will not confide in their
neighbours or members of their local community so it is essential to provide
external and objective help or counselling;
• You can’t help everyone and fix everything given finite resources, plus
depending on their circumstances, not everyone wants to be helped;
• Focus on the consequences or impact on the community – not just the event; and

• Build on existing structures and skills wherever possible and appropriate.

(Towong Shire, 2005, p. 21)

2.8.2 Relationships Australia drought counselling 2003

Based on only four months of Federal Government funding to provide free drought counselling to 16 local regions across all Australian states and territories, Relationships Australia surveyed a small sample of clients and interviewed the counsellors from the project. Not surprisingly, only 21 client surveys were completed. Eighteen of the 21 respondents reported that they had felt stressed due to the drought often or most of the time. Sixteen of the 21 respondents also reported that they noticed other family members being stressed due to the drought often or most of the time (Johnston, 2003). The key findings from the well documented report are as follows, the first one is obvious given the short-term nature of the project’s funding:

• Services need to be long term, rather than continually coming into the area for short periods of good news and then going away again. Short term ‘freebies’ engender feelings of being victimised, and create mistrust in temporary services. It takes time to build relationships and trust;

• Support services need to be broader than ‘counselling and education’ and need to focus on community capacity building that can be sustained within the community if other services are withdrawn. There is a significant stigma in rural and regional areas around attending counselling and this is stronger for men than for women;

• There is a need for strategic plans for ‘dying’ towns, rather than falsely keeping services alive and then closing them without notice (e.g. more helpful to know – “your primary school will close in 5 years time”, than – “your primary school will close next week”); and

• There is a need to understand the long term economic impact of surviving drought. Just because it rains doesn’t mean that the drought is over – it will take years to recover from drought, with people having accumulated high levels of debt in an attempt to survive the drought.

(Johnston, 2003, p. 17)

2.8.3 Evaluation of the drought counselling assistance package funded under the Family Relationship Service Program 2002—2004

This evaluation, funded by the Australian Government’s Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), was prompted by a 2005 Australian National Audit Office’s report on Drought Assistance. Conducted by Australian Healthcare Associates, it focused on the promotional activities of the
drought counselling assistance package funded in 2002—2004, because of lack of client numbers. (NB: The report points out that there were significant gaps in reporting client numbers).

The paper reports four findings that the authors described as unexpected, including: the resilience and creativity of the drought counsellors; the strength of view that drought counselling needed to continue after the drought was over; little evidence of sharing of resources and experiences; and the lack of funding specifically for promotion and marketing services (Australian Healthcare Associates, 2006). The fact that funding agreements for the drought counsellors were stipulated in the first year but not in the second year and the guidelines for clinical work broadened to include community development activities, suggest that an initial focus on individual counselling sessions did not produce expected results, and was replaced by a greater focus on community development approaches and the ‘blend’ of the two, to mirror the work that was actually needed.

Key lessons learnt are summarised below:
- Document learnings for future drought counsellors, particularly how they blend promotion and service delivery;
- Use media campaigns to normalise help seeking behaviour;
- Consider funding one service provider per geographic region or encourage greater collaboration between providers in the same region;
- Improve reporting mechanisms; and
- Explore improved ways of co-ordinating the promotion and marketing of services, including the existence of the Drought Assistance Hotline.

(Australian Healthcare Associates, 2006)

2.8.4 Countering drought: manual of creative community solutions 2006

The drought manual, supported by the Victorian Department of Human Services Co-ordination Committee for Drought Social Recovery, emerged from a desire to capture the lessons learnt from a range of community projects in the Loddon Mallee Region of Victoria from 2003 — 2006. The projects, many of which were supported by the State Government’s Drought Social Recovery Strategy, were community development rather than counselling projects.

The manual provides the following general hints:
- Different times – different needs ("When planning community activities it is crucial to be aware of the community’s needs at the present time");
- Notice who is NOT attending ("When planning and organising community activities for drought—affected communities, it is crucial to notice who is NOT attending, as these are often the people in most need.” Drought workers are “often faced with the dilemma of needing to respect people’s privacy whilst actively seeking information about people who were known to be in need of assistance but who were always absent. ‘Dobbing in a mate’ became a
positive behaviour as people were encouraged to look out for their
neighbours, particularly those who were isolating themselves from the
community”);

- Combine your efforts (Establishing relationships and new links between a
wide range of agencies, “were vital to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure
that all resources were used efficiently”);

- Caring for the carers (This refers to caring for the drought workers. “As most
CDOs [Community Development Officers] in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region
were themselves members of the drought—affected communities, they too
needed to be supported as they cared for their communities”);

- Caring for lay people supporting others was also recommended (“An
important observation in the DHS Loddon Mallee Region was the fact that
many stressed farmers would not leave their farms, and only had contact with
people employed in the various industries that support the farming sector,
such as stock agents and milk suppliers. These people were listening to the
personal stories of the isolated farmer, but so often they felt unprepared to
deal with what they were hearing”); and

- Forming a Community Recovery Committee (In order to co—ordinate
services, network and communicate between workers and to avoid
duplication, “An important first step in the journey towards community
recovery in each of the drought—affected municipalities was the formation of
a Community Recovery Committee, which represented all sectors of the
community”).

(Blau, 2006, pp. 13-15)

2.8.5 Common themes from previous drought response
evaluations that influenced the current study

The following recommendations informed the current project:

i. A community approach is needed – not simply counselling;

ii. The need for counselling approaches that may be more suited to the bush;

iii. The need to market and promote these appropriate forms of counselling;

iv. That one size doesn’t fit all;

v. Different strategies are needed at different times;

vi. Strategies are needed to engage those who do not attend usual service
supports; and

vii. Networking and co-ordination of services is essential and sensible.

Informed by previous studies, the current research explored the importance of co—
ordinated services and networking, ways to engage reluctant clients in need, and
ways to demystify counselling. The roles played by designated drought counselling
and community development approaches to engaging clients and the relationship
between the two approaches were explored. Ways to look after the drought
counsellors guided the project, and a strategy for supporting lay people affected by
hearing other’s pain emerged ‘organically’. Good ideas and constraints to more
effective drought counselling in the future were continually documented. More specific ideas informing what Bouverie brought to the start of the current study are presented below.

2.9 What The Bouverie Centre brought to the current study

Given the call for “innovative models of service delivery and attention to rurally appropriate service models” (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. xiv) and repeated evaluations that traditional counselling and service delivery models had not been successful in engaging rural people affected by drought, the current research began with an open mind and an exploratory research methodology. However, because the research team also had to provide early training for drought counsellors, we chose Single Session Therapy (SST) and No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) as starting points, along with community development approaches to delivering counselling goals. An outline of the reasons for these choices is presented in the following section.

2.9.1 Models of counselling potentially more relevant to drought counselling service delivery

2.9.1.1 Single Session Therapy

Single Session Therapy (SST) is a service delivery model that accepts that many clients from a wide range of backgrounds and presenting problems will only attend for 1—2 sessions, and that the majority of these clients decide that these sessions are helpful and sufficient (Boyhan, 1996; Talmon, 1990; Young, 1997). Given clinical experience suggests that it is impossible to predict who will attend once and who will choose further sessions, Single Session Therapy encourages the counsellor to create a context to make the most of every session, including the first. Evaluation studies of SST (Boyhan, 1996) have found that clients appreciate this way of working. SST as a service delivery model is consistent with Cusack (2004) and Lackey’s (1995) guidelines for engaging rural men, including being client led and working on what the client defines as most pressing, cutting to the chase, staying on track and sharing advice as it emerges.

No Bullshit Therapy is partly derived from the ‘cutting to the chase’ aspect of SST, and was chosen primarily for its potential relevance to engaging people who are cynical, suspicious or unsure of what to expect from counselling. No Bullshit Therapy is described in the next section.

2.9.1.2 No Bullshit Therapy

No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) aims to create constructive contexts for mutual honesty and directness in working relationships. Creating contexts for mutual honesty, sometimes just by stating that is how you would like to work, can be liberating if challenging. If combined with warmth and care, honesty and directness can enhance authenticity, connection and trust. NBT is consistent with the general trend toward
more transparent negotiations about how to work with clients, which has been shown to contribute to effective therapeutic outcomes (Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 2004).

NBT has five basic clinical guidelines:

- Striving for mutual honesty and directness in working relationships
- Openly negotiating levels of honesty and directness
- Marrying honesty and directness with warmth and care
- Being upfront about difficulties and constraints to the work
- Avoiding jargon

No Bullshit Therapy was chosen in line with Alston’s (2005) call for innovative models that are rurally appropriate, and in line with O’Hagan’s (2005) call for ‘upfront’ approaches to working with drought affected people. The approach was also seen as potentially offering guidance on how to negotiate the difficult task of counselling with people who approach therapy with strong anti—therapy stances, (i.e. people who hate being psychologised, see therapists as warm and fuzzy or not trustworthy, feel confounded by jargon or are disempowered by specialist counsellors).

Whilst SST and NBT were seen as potential starting points, the research team was clear that they would not be sufficient in and of themselves. Apart from counselling practice wisdoms that we knew would be developed and documented along the way, the literature clearly pointed towards the important role played by community development and whole of community approaches. They are briefly explained in the following section.

2.9.1.3 The relationship between community development & counselling

The DHS brief located drought counselling in a whole of community approach, but placed the task of co-ordinating services with Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) rather than the drought counsellors. Whilst it makes sense that counselling and community development are interrelated, how these two roles relate and practically overlap, had not been clearly conceptualised.

Whilst evaluations of previous drought specific counselling projects report that integrating counselling services into existing community structures is essential if reluctant clients are going to be engaged in counselling (Kirkwood & Peck, 1997; Thurston, Blundell-Grosselin, & Rose, 2003) community development and counselling are typically built on different philosophies, values and politics. Hence each field attracts a different professional and both typically compete for limited funding and resources. There are few conceptual models for integrating community development and counselling, let alone specific practice models, despite the call for ongoing specialist mental health workers to co—operate with existing local services and to build community capacity as a key part of responding to the effects of drought (Hall & Scheltens, 2005; Sartore et al., 2005). Therefore, exploring practical ways to understand and promote a healthy relationship between community development and counselling, was another key component of the research.
2.10 Rationale for the research aims

Major Australian researchers into drought have concluded that there had been a number of studies of the economic impact of drought, fewer studies on the social impact of drought and even fewer on the process of drought counselling (Blau, 2007), and the human impact of drought (Edwards et al., 2009). The DHS Brief, which funded and guided this project, was based on evaluations of specialist drought counselling services that report a disappointing uptake of clients. Whilst previous research evaluations have offered broad recommendations such as promoting culturally sensitive ways of working in rural areas, they have not conceptualised the impact of drought on relationships, nor have they explored the specific nature of drought counselling, nor what works and what doesn’t in detail.

High disadvantage such as isolation, lack of internet facilities, combined with low social capital, especially low levels of ‘bridging’ social capital, significantly impacts on a community’s ability to cope with and respond well to any change, including drought. Responding effectively to drought may therefore require addressing these community elements in addition to effective drought counselling. It may be necessary to provide drought counselling in ways that address the elements of disadvantage and promote ‘bridging’ as well as ‘bonding’ social capital. In other words, developing models of service delivery that integrate counselling and community development approaches may be necessary.

Therefore the current research aims to explore how traditional counselling approaches need to be adapted and re—thought to effectively engage rural people. Two specific approaches are explored as a starting point for the research: A Community Development framework is explored to see what it offers counsellors to the traditional ways of engaging and supporting individuals and families reluctant to seek or accept counselling; and No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) ideas, incorporating Single Session Therapy approaches, to see how they can make counselling more acceptable to potential rural clients. The study explores how drought counsellors adapt these ideas, along with others, to achieve positive counselling outcomes (emotional and relationship support for individuals and families affected by drought).

There have been calls for quality research to guide government policy (e.g. Edwards & Gray, 2008). There is a demonstratable need for longitudinal studies to explore the developmental nature of the social impact of drought. Given drought affects different areas differently, research needs to explore the affects of drought across different regions. In response to these gaps in the literature, the current research is state—wide, engages drought counsellors from each local region, and compares experiences across the state of Victoria, over a 19 month period. The extended engagement will allow the current study to examine a concern in the drought counselling literature that designated drought counselling services are often cut just at the time when people affected by drought seem most likely to seek or to need counselling support.

In summary, research that has explored the social and emotional impacts of drought in depth has tended to focus on farming families, rather than a broad range of rural community members. No study I am aware of has explored the emotional and social impacts, in the context of broader issues across the state, looking at both farming and non-farming families, over time. Nor has research looked at the social impacts of drought through the lens of drought counsellors over a sustained period. Drought counsellors develop close working relationships with individuals and families dealing
with drought and hence are in a good position to elicit the social impact of drought. The current research therefore adds to the literature by exploring the social and emotional impacts of drought on a wide range of people across a whole state, through the ongoing engagement with the drought counsellors. Similarities and differences were explored across Victoria, between farmers from different regions and different types of production, non-farmers, men, women and children via the work of the drought counsellors. As members of the local community (either newly arrived or locals) the drought counsellors were also able to reflect on the impacts of drought on a community level, comparing community impacts with individual experiences.

The recording of practice wisdom and effective strategies for providing emotional and relationship support for drought affected communities will contribute to the evidence base for this work, and hence will inform drought relief efforts in the future. With the prospect of global warming increasing the likelihood of extreme weather, including drought in parts of Australia, this work is timely. Especially given that, “Internationally, there is also a serious lack of knowledge about the social, cultural and psychological effects of drought (or other slow-onset disasters) on communities and individuals” (Zamani et al 2006 cited in Rickards, 2008, p. 8). Finally, it is hoped that the focus on drought may also help inform the provision of rural health services more generally.

### 2.11 The research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions December 2008</th>
<th>Addressed in Data Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Question</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are effective counselling and community development strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities?</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER THREE

3 METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

3.1 The DHS work plan

The research methodology had to fit with the following DHS work plan which initially guided the project. It was called ‘The Bouverie drought counselling training and support project (February – December 2007)’ and it read:

"The Bouverie Centre of La Trobe University will provide a comprehensive training and ‘rural practice’ support program for rural counsellors to develop responsive approaches to people in farming communities affected by drought. Evaluation of previous ‘drought counselling’ initiatives have indicated that although there is an identified need for counselling in times of distress (i.e. drought) in rural areas, usually services are under—utilised (Johnston, 2003)."

The training project will focus on developing counselling approaches that ‘work’ for rural people. The project will take an action research approach whereby counsellors will learn skills such as ‘No Bullshit Therapy’ and will also co—develop successful strategies for engaging with rural people. Through the project, counsellors will be invited to collaborate about their experiences, which will lead to the development of improved knowledge and practice wisdom about effective models for delivering counselling to rural communities.

This project has five components:

- A two-day forum (incorporating training) for all drought funded ‘family services’ and ‘primary health’ counsellors after all counsellors have commenced work.
- Monthly rural peer support groups — Co-operative Inquiry Groups (CIGs).
- No Bullshit Therapy training for counsellors from all program areas in the five rural regions.
- A mechanism for knowledge sharing between regions and the development of relevant resources.
- A participatory action research structure to document and begin to establish an evidence—based model for delivering counselling services to drought affected communities.

The Bouverie research team soon became a conduit for communication between the drought counsellors and the funding body; a process that was valued by both parties and was integral to the action research itself (a key learning, see Chapter 4). This role required thoughtful integrity because there were some sensitive issues that
neither party wanted shared, but when these sensitivities were navigated, the research team role gave the drought counsellors a voice directly to DHS and gave DHS an overview of what was happening out in the field. It also allowed the researchers to informally discuss with workers in the field, aspects of the research that were DHS driven (or bottom lines), and possible directions of future DHS funding initiatives. This role played by the research team was formalised via No Bull, a quarterly newsletter that emerged from the research. I created a section called “News from the BIG shed” – written by the DHS project worker co-ordinating the drought response. Drought counsellors were also invited to publish their work. Some CIG groups also invited their local DHS drought co-ordinator to attend meetings – which facilitated DHS / field communication.

3.2 Research methodology

The research project sought to organise and document the practice wisdom of the State-funded drought counsellors and their clients and colleagues across Victoria. A mixed method research design, embedded in qualitative principles was used to achieve this goal (Perlesz & Lindsay, 2003). Co-operative inquiry, a specific form of participatory action research is the core methodology. Additional quantitative measures were used to complement the rich qualitative data. The participatory action research framework meant that findings from the research were fed back to participants as they emerged throughout the research, not just at its completion.

In the next section, an outline of the core methodology is presented, followed by a description of the research participants and a summary of all data sources.

3.2.1 Co-operative inquiry

3.2.1.1 The history of Co-operative inquiry

Co-operative Inquiry was chosen as the most appropriate research methodology for The Bouverie Centre’s role in supporting the drought counsellors because, whilst sharing the reform agenda of critical action, Co-operative Inquiry is more appropriate for professionals who are personally empowered (Pyett, 2002), but facing a difficult task and who wish to explore and develop their practice systematically (Heron & Reason, 2001).

Co-operative Inquiry was developed by Heron and Reason in the 1970s as a research methodology that brings together the interests of practitioners and researchers. Integration of theory and practice is therefore a common outcome of this research methodology. Co-operative Inquiry seeks to develop the thinking and practice of people who share a similar interest (Heron & Reason, 2001). Because of the ‘more equal’ power of the subjects and the researcher, a Co-operativereleationship is promoted where anyone involved in the research can exert influence on the research's direction, even though the initiating researcher may set up certain structures and may be more aligned with significant external influences such as funding bodies.

---

6 Critical action grew out of efforts to empower people who are socially, economically or politically powerless.
An advantage of a Co-operative Inquiry methodology is that everyone participating in the research can develop their skills and increase their knowledge and hence feel empowered in relation to their work (McLeod, 2006). In this way, groups are more likely to actively engage in the research and to continue past the completion of the formal research period. Non-academic participants may be afforded more opportunities to publish their work or learn practical research skills than participants in research based on conventional methodologies.

3.2.1.2 The processes of Co-operative inquiry

Heron and Reason (2001) identify four phases of Co-operative inquiry.

i. To simply get together and agree on a focus of study. In this case, “What are effective ways to provide counselling support to drought affected communities?”

ii. The co—researcher phase, invites participants to observe and record what they and other members of the inquiry are doing – this will typically involve stopping (Wadsworth, 1998) to notice and reflect on their experience of the work, later possibly trying out new forms of action.

iii. The co—subject phase is where inquiry members become fully immersed in their work. Open—mindedness is encouraged so that new ideas and understandings can be elaborated and developed. According to Heron and Reason it is “this deep experimental engagement which informs practical skills and new understandings that make Co-operative Inquiry so very different from conventional research” (2001, p. 146).

iv. In the fourth phase, the co—researchers re—assemble after an agreed upon time and reflect on what they have learnt.

3.3 Research participants

3.3.1 The Bouverie Team

3.3.1.1 The CIG facilitators

The Co-operative Inquiry Group (CIG) facilitators were crucial to successfully implementing the design of the research because of their role engaging the drought counsellors in each region and facilitating the formation of the CIGs – the core component of the research design. They had to manage the internal dynamics of the CIGs and assist their CIG to negotiate the external politics of the local network of helping professionals connected to the drought response. Given the complexities and urban – rural relationship sensitivities, the CIG facilitators’ experience in systemic work was significant. As Caulley (1994, p. 20), points out, “Because the post—positivists inquirers get close to the people they study, the management of human relationships loom large in this form of inquiry... there is a large literature on gaining entry in a group, organisation or culture, of maintaining and managing human relations in the field, and exiting these relationships.” The CIG facilitators were
experienced counsellors / family therapists / trainers / consultants and had a history of working well together.

### 3.3.1.2 Bouverie project team members’ roles and qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Member</th>
<th>EFT</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Project Role and Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Young</td>
<td>0.5 EFT</td>
<td>BSc (Hons), MSc (Clinical Psychology), Grad Dip (FT)</td>
<td>Project Manager, Lead Researcher (Dec 06 – Mar 09) &amp; CIG facilitator for Gippsland (Feb 07 – Sept 08) and Drought Personal Support Line&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt; (March 07 – May 07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane Weir</td>
<td>0.2 EFT</td>
<td>BA, Cert in Community &amp; Residential Services to Intellectually Disabled, BA in Social Work, Grad Dip in FT</td>
<td>Team Leader &amp; CIG facilitator for Grampians (Feb 07 – Sept 08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Rycroft</td>
<td>0.2 EFT</td>
<td>BEd MA (Clinical Psychology)</td>
<td>CIG facilitator for Loddon Mallee (Feb 07 – Sept 08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina Whittle</td>
<td>0.2 EFT</td>
<td>BA, MSc (Psych)</td>
<td>CIG facilitator for Hume (Feb—Aug 07 and Feb 08 – Sept 08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Kerry Proctor</td>
<td>0.2 EFT</td>
<td>BA, Dip (Ed), BEd (Couns), MA in Family Therapy, PhD</td>
<td>CIG facilitator for Hume (Aug 07 – Feb 08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Poll</td>
<td>0.5 EFT</td>
<td>MA Community Psychology</td>
<td>CIG facilitator for Barwon South West (Dec 07 +)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>7</sup> Drought Personal Support Line (DPSL) was later called the Rural Support Line (RSL).
### The drought counsellors and colleagues

Late October 2006, the Ministerial Drought Taskforce allocated $3.4 million of non-recurrent funding across drought declared regions of rural Victoria, under the Tackling Mental Health and Drought Counselling Strategies initiative. Department of Human Services (DHS), Victoria announced that 20 Effective Full Time (EFT) drought Counselling positions would be funded for twelve months from the 1st of December 2006 to the 1st of December 2007. Management of the 20 EFT was split between Family Services (FS) and Community Health (CH) counselling services. The distribution of the counselling funding was decided by Regional DHS officers, across

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>EFT</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elena Tauridsky</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>BA Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CIG facilitator Rural Support Line (Jan 08+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-ordinator of Looking Out For Your Neighbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lead researcher – Farmgate evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Colin Riess</td>
<td>1hr per month</td>
<td>MBBS, B Med Sc(hons), Cert. Child and Adolescent Psychiatry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assoc. Prof. Amaryll Perlesz</td>
<td>1hr per month</td>
<td>PhD, MA (Neuropsychology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Margot Schofield</td>
<td>Minimal contact</td>
<td>BA, DipSc, M Clin Psych, PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Wills</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>BA (Hons) Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Moon</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmel Hobbs</td>
<td>0.4EFT</td>
<td>BHlthSc, BIntDev</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the four EC declared\(^8\) regions of Gippsland, Grampians, Hume, Loddon-Mallee and a state-wide Rural Telephone Support Line which was located in Melbourne.

The current study commenced with the 35 drought counsellors who attended the first face-to-face gathering (two-day forum) in Melbourne on the 22—23\(^{rd}\) February, 2007. This represented 73\% of the state funded drought counsellors who were employed or due to be employed at the time. Over the next few months, the remaining State-funded drought counsellors were employed and all drought counsellors were invited to join the research, by attending the CIGs. Over time, most did.

Several months into the research, Barwon South West region was EC declared (March 2007) and six months later 4.0 EFT of new drought counsellors were employed. Once employed, the Barwon South West drought counsellors were invited to join the research, forming their own CIG, which commenced in November 2007.

Over the course of the research, the Bouverie CIG facilitators actively sought to engage local State-funded drought counsellors in their own way depending on the unique characteristics of the region and the local drought counsellors. Over time each CIG engaged federally funded drought counsellors and other local professionals including rural financial counsellors, Victorian Farmers Federation members, managers of the drought counselling services, chaplains, welfare workers, and volunteers in CIG meetings. Over the course of the 19 month research project over 100 people from 88 different organisations had attended 70 CIGs across the state.

Services granted state—government funding delivered the counselling dollars in different ways. Some agencies added counselling hours to existing general counselling services and promoted drought issues across their whole service, some used the dollars for health promotion services, some created new specialist drought counselling positions, some extended existing counsellors hours tagging them with a specialist drought counselling role and a few services contracted private practitioners for face-to-face sessions only. The latter strategy was least successful because clients did not readily self refer. I have provided a more detailed discussion of the advantages and problems associated with each approach in "Working ideas: emerging thoughts that may be helpful" (No Bull - April 2007, p. 5).

### 3.3.2.1 Qualifications of the State-funded drought counsellors

People employed as drought counsellors typically had a mixture of counselling and rural / community development experience. As the research developed, the importance of community development knowledge, not just community connection, emerged. Few counsellors had formal community development training, even though they developed a basic practical knowledge of its principles via their colleagues, personal research, the CIG network and No Bull.

The conditions under which prospective counsellors were employed were not attractive (short term contracts, unclear job descriptions). The need for local rural knowledge led to a restricted pool of available counsellors, hence counselling qualifications were not universally high. The drought counsellors formal training was

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\( ^8\) EC stands for Exceptional Circumstances (see glossary).
general counselling (12), social work (7), psychology (5), nursing (5), family therapy (2), theatre (1), education (1), social science (1), and a Bachelor of Arts (1). The drought counsellors were largely well connected with or had been connected well with rural communities. The following table lists the community organisations the drought counsellors attending the first forum were currently or had been associated with.

Table 3.2: Community organisations to which drought counsellors were associated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community organisation</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>% of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(17.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten committee</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For young people</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scouts/Brownies/Guides</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local business</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lions Club/Apex</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books/toy library</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender specific</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood house</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film/Theatre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine making</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: Italicised non-bolded entries are subcategories of the bolded entries)

3.3.3 The drought counsellors’ clients

A small number of clients (75) seen by the drought counsellors were directly engaged in the research via interviews (1), questionnaires (5) and clinical tools (69). Little demographic information was recorded.

3.4 Summary of all data sources

Table 3.3 summarises the range of data, its collection and analysis – before each is explored in greater detail.

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9 See “Profiles” in each of the editions of No Bull, pages 2-3, No Bull is available at www.bouverie.org.au
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity / Data Source</th>
<th>Number conducted</th>
<th>Collection method</th>
<th>Analysis conducted</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drought counsellors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-day forum gatherings for all drought counsellors across the state</td>
<td>Two:</td>
<td>Take-aways given to all participants in Feb 2007 and evaluation forms in 2008</td>
<td>Thematic comparative analysis recorded in research diary</td>
<td>Forums acted as bookends to the first 12 months – allowing comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February 2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-operative Inquiry Group Meetings (CIGs)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Peer discussion groups for drought workers)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gippsland 16</td>
<td>CIG facilitators recorded each CIG and summarised each session after listening to the recording</td>
<td>Thematic analysis of 79 CIG summaries and then deeper exploration of selected audio recordings of CIG meetings</td>
<td>The core data set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grampians 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hume 16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loddon–Mallee 17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barwon SW 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RSL 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-operative Inquiry Group Action Research Meetings (CIGARs)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Debriefs for CIG facilitators)</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Each CIGAR was recorded and transcribed by an admin support person</td>
<td>Thematic analysis of transcriptions of each meeting</td>
<td>A process analysis of the CIG facilitators’ debriefs about CIG discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Bull Newsletter of the drought counsellors developed as part of the research</strong></td>
<td>6 editions</td>
<td>Ideas were drawn from CIGARs, CIG minutes and lead researchers role as a CIG facilitator. Also articles were sourced from the CIGs.</td>
<td>Thematic analysis of content of editions</td>
<td>Editions provided a punctuation of the research – providing a developmental perspective of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drought counsellor questionnaires</strong></td>
<td>35 pre</td>
<td>Pre questionnaires were given to all drought counsellors at the start of the first forum. Post questionnaires</td>
<td>Descriptive comparison for open ended questions and comparison of pre and post likert scales</td>
<td>Provided comparison between drought counsellors expectations and learning after 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18 post</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were given to the same people still employed at the second forum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Feedback</th>
<th>Problem and Progress sheets (Proforma noting presenting problems and what helped)</th>
<th>65</th>
<th>Filled out by drought counsellors after counselling sessions or help line calls.</th>
<th>Descriptive analysis</th>
<th>Inconsistent – semi — direct feedback from clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Takeaways</td>
<td>(Scripts completed at end of session)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Given to clients during sessions.</td>
<td>Descriptive analysis</td>
<td>Direct feedback from clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client 'Feedback and Advice’ questionnaires</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Offered to clients at the end of counselling.</td>
<td>Descriptive analysis</td>
<td>Direct feedback about clinical work and service delivery Single case example – detailed description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In depth client interviews</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Followed up by lead researcher after client expressed interest in the client 'Feedback and Advice’ questionnaire.</td>
<td>Descriptive and Thematic analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5 Data sources, collection and analysis

#### 3.5.1 The two-day forums (Book ends to the research)

#### 3.5.1.1 The first two-day forum

Table 3.4: Scope of the first two-day forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First two-day forum</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Pre-questionnaires</th>
<th>Main task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22—23 February 07</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first two-day forum provided an important symbolic and tangible start to the research project. It seemed important to create a context to promote connection because my early research suggested that many of the drought counsellors were geographically, professionally and personally isolated. The forum was also an opportunity to engage the drought counsellors in the research. Informed by a ‘quick’ literature review, clinical judgment and an interview with two practicing drought counsellors, the forum was designed to create a feeling of ‘we’re all in this together’.

The program for the two-day forum included the completion of informed consent forms, completion of pre-project questionnaires (near the start of the forum), activities to build connection between drought counsellors in each region, training in No Bullshit Therapy, and opportunities to share frustrations, good practice and resources. Funding was successfully sought to accommodate all drought counsellors in the same motel, to provide a dinner on the first night and a working breakfast the following morning. I presented a rationale for methodology and requirements of the research to all CIG members for discussion. The main outcome of the discussion was the need to engage the host organisations of the drought counsellors. Letters explaining the research were later sent to all relevant CEOs.

The two-day program was designed to create a sense of connection between the CIG members and the Bouverie CIG facilitators, who had been randomly allocated to a regional CIG prior to the forum. The establishment of the CIGs was promoted by ‘get to know you’ activities within each CIG and a light hearted rivalry between the CIGs. Practical details, such as monthly meeting times, venues, and CIG membership were also organised at the forum.

3.5.1.2 The second two-day forum

Table 3.5: Scope of the second two-day forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second two-day forum</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Post—questionnaires</th>
<th>Main task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22—23 February 08</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>18 of the original 35 drought counsellors</td>
<td>Sharing best practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One year into the research, drought counsellors across the state requested a second two-day forum. Having learnt the importance of supporting rural community economies, the second forum was held in Bendigo, a regional hub in Loddon-Mallee, a region severely affected by the drought. A competition to name the forum was won by Kevin Holmes, from the Loddon-Mallee CIG, with the title: ‘We Care — No Bull: Celebration, Best Practice and Self Care’. The title reflected the key themes from the CIGs across the state at the time. The second forum is featured in No Bull, Edition 5 (No Bull - May 2008)\(^\text{10}\).

Heron and Reason (2001) suggest that the fourth and final stage of an ongoing cycle of Co-operative Inquiry is to get participants back together to share their work and to reflect on what they have learnt. The first forum, conducted at the same time of the year 12 months earlier was a natural anchor point from which to make comparisons and recognise key learnings.

\(^\text{10}\) Copies of No Bull are available from www.bouverie.org.au
3.5.2 Worker pre and post questionnaires

The 35 drought counsellors who attended the first two-day forum in February completed pre project questionnaires recording their perceptions of drought work and key dimensions of No Bullshit Therapy along with other competencies associated with counselling in rural and drought affected communities. The 85 item questionnaire, which was developed specifically for this research explores drought counsellors’ views about the work and how these views changed as a result of the project, comprises open-ended questions and 5 point likert scales. Respondents still employed in their positions were asked to complete the same questionnaire 12 months later. Of the 35 drought counsellors who attended the first two-day forum only 23 were still employed 12 months into the research, of whom 18 completed the post-project questionnaire. The pre and post questionnaires provided some qualitative and quantitative indication of how the drought counsellors’ attitudes to drought counselling changed over the course of the research. Pre and post questionnaires were compared using t-tests for likert scales and a content analysis for the open-ended questions.

An example questionnaire is contained in Appendix A.

3.5.3 Co-operative Inquiry Group meetings (CIGs)

Table 3.6: Scope of the Co-operative Inquiry Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIG Region</th>
<th>Number held / number audio recorded</th>
<th>Written CIG summaries completed</th>
<th>Different venues / attendees / organisations</th>
<th>Starting date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15/35/20</td>
<td>February 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1/20/6</td>
<td>February 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hume</td>
<td>16/15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4/19/12</td>
<td>February 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loddon-Mallee</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4/31/25</td>
<td>February 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barwon SW</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/16/10</td>
<td>December 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Support Line</td>
<td>8/7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1/8/1</td>
<td>February 07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Barwon CIG joined the research late (December 2007) and there was a hiatus of RSL meetings due to a host agency organisational restructure between June 07 and March 08

The acronym CIGs helped promote the research because it gained high recognition and acceptance throughout DHS and the drought counsellors’ networks. The CIGAR acronym (Co-operative Inquiry Group Action Research) was a bigger stretch, but provided a helpful short-handterm for the debrief sessions of the CIG facilitators.

CIGs lasted between 2—3 hours and discussions were electronically recorded. Bouverie CIG facilitators took notes during the CIG meeting and produced CIG summaries, produced from the recordings and notes, which were emailed to all CIG members, including members who did not attend. CIG summaries were shared.
between all Bouverie CIG facilitators. CIG facilitators were given the initial research questions and the DHS Brief, and asked to provide a summary of the CIG discussions to share with the CIG members and other CIG facilitators. Sharing of the summaries provided peer guidelines on how to summarise the CIGs. Summaries tended to grow in detail as a result of peer pressure between the CIG facilitators and due to the developmental nature of the groups.

One of the unique elements of this research was the development of several mechanisms for connecting the six regional CIGs with each other. Bouverie CIG facilitators shared summaries and participated in monthly debrief sessions (CIGARs). A newsletter and email network helped connect drought counsellors across the state on a regular basis and the two-day forums provided a face-to-face get together once a year. Local informal contact occurred between drought counsellors, in addition to the formal communication mechanisms which are described below and depicted in Diagram 3.1:

i. The CIG-CIGAR structure;
ii. An active email network;
iii. No Bull: The Newsletter of the State-funded Drought Counsellors; and
iv. Two-day forums.
Diagram 3.1: Communication system for sharing information between the community, drought counsellors, and the research team.

Two-day forums provide annual face-to-face catch up

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Monthly CIG Summaries shared between Bouverie facilitators of each CIG

Three monthly newsletter, No Bull, links regional CIGs + related professionals

Email lists used to share resources between drought counsellors + related
3.5.4 Co-operative Inquiry Group Action Research meetings (CIGARs)

Table 3.7: Scope of the CIGAR meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of CIGARs</th>
<th>Transcriptions</th>
<th>Number facilitated</th>
<th>Main Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 (30 hrs)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Process audit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Co-operative Inquiry Group Action Research (CIGAR), started as an hour long debrief session for the Bouverie CIG facilitators, facilitated by Dr. Colin Riess, Director of The Bouverie Centre. The significance of the Director facilitating the CIGAR was twofold: It created high level support and interest in the research within Bouverie and it provided another external audit, along with my research supervisor, conducted by a colleague with whom I did not have line—management responsibilities.

The role of the CIGAR changed throughout the research. At various times it became a space for debriefing about a difficult or an exciting CIG, an opportunity for peer supervision about developing the CIGs and facilitating CIG group process and a means to monitor process issues by reflecting on the CIGAR’s own group process. I made notes during the 1—2 hour CIGAR discussions and these informed No Bull articles, feedback to CIGs and the reports to DHS. They were also electronically recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analysed thematically. In my role as the project manager and lead researcher, I also spoke informally to each CIG facilitator after each CIG, to provide support and debriefing. The information shared from these informal two—way discussions also informed the research and added an informal element to what became a rich state-wide communication matrix.

3.5.5 CIG-CIGAR network

Reading other CIG summaries provided each member of the Bouverie team information to explore in their own CIG. In my role as lead researcher, I read the CIG summaries from each region and developed themes, triangulating themes with data from the CIGAR transcripts. I used this information, as well as the informal debriefs with the other facilitators after each meeting of their CIGs, and my direct involvement in the Gippsland CIG, to formulate editorials and articles in No Bull, thus sharing the findings as they emerged with all research participants.
3.5.6 No Bull: Newsletter of the State-funded drought counsellors

Table 3.8: Size and distribution of editions of No Bull

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Bull Edition</th>
<th>Number of pages</th>
<th>Hard copy print run</th>
<th>Electronic distribution and hard copy distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 07</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>500 (plus a 250 re—run)</td>
<td>Difficult to measure¹¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 07</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>Hard copies were distributed via CIGs. 471 hard copies were sent to 119 people on the mailing list. Approx 500 copies per edition were distributed via the CIG members who distributed them widely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 07</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>471 hard copies were sent to 119 people on the mailing list. Approx 500 copies per edition were distributed via the CIG members who distributed them widely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 08</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>Electronic copies were sent to 237 people in 97 different organisations. People were encouraged to forward on e-copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 08</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>People were encouraged to forward on e-copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 08</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>People were encouraged to forward on e-copies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The newsletter, which in my mind was likely to play a minor role in the early stages of the research, seemed to grow in significance. Called No Bull, the name was suggested by a drought counsellor during the first two-day forum. The name was derived from No Bullshit Therapy, and its appeal was that No Bull responded to early accounts of rural clients’ suspicion of counselling. No Bull also provided a vehicle for public scrutiny, an important accountability mechanism for the research.

No Bull, which was published every three months during the course of the research, inadvertently provided a regular punctuation of the research, documenting key issues at the time of publication. A content analysis of the newsletter, and of the editorials, became a significant way to chart the developmental stages of the research. Copies of No Bull editions can be found on the Bouverie website (www.bouverie.org.au).

Originally a minor component of the initial DHS Brief to The Bouverie Centre, "A mechanism for knowledge sharing between regions and the development of relevant resources" (Department of Human Services [DHS], 2006a, p. 5), No Bull became a significant vehicle for communication, reflection, conceptual development and dissemination of ideas.

¹¹ Multiple hard copies were given to CIG members who were encouraged to distribute them widely, electronic copies were sent to 273 people who were encouraged to forward them onto others however, the degree that this happened was not measured.
### 3.5.7 Email network

Table 3.9: Size and activity of the Email network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People in network</th>
<th>Organisations represented</th>
<th>Emails sent(^{12})</th>
<th>Main role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>237</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>30 in 18 months</td>
<td>Resource sharing quickly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst the email network did not provide any research data directly, it became a mechanism to share information, especially resources, in a more immediate way, given the newsletter was published only every 3 months.

### 3.5.8 Qualitative and quantitative clinical data

The use of multiple research methods, called methodological triangulation, is commonly recommended as one way of improving the quality of research data (Creswell, 1998; Owens, Stein, & Chenoweth, 1999). From a post—positivist perspective, Perlesz and Lindsay (2003) argue that triangulation opens the potential for the equally enthusiastic exploration of convergent and divergent (complementary and dissonant) data to generate more complex and meaningful findings. They cite examples from their own research where dissonant data led to richer understanding than otherwise would have been possible.

The inclusion of some quantitative questions in the pre and post questionnaires for the drought counsellors, ‘Feedback and Advice’ questions and client session summaries called ‘Problem and Progress sheets’, provided opportunities to explore complementary and dissonant data from the CIG-CIGAR data source. The quantitative measures are described in the following sections.

### 3.5.9 Problem and Progress (P&P) sheets

Initially, Problem and Progress (P&P) sheets were to be filled out by the counsellor and client in the first session, and hence intended to involve the client directly. But due to a poor response rate, it was decided that the sheets would be filled out anonymously by the counsellors. The results therefore are the counsellor’s perception of the client’s experience of counselling. The sheets summarised the problems clients presented with, indicated the relative burden of each problem and noted what helped alleviate the problems. The first ‘Problem and Progress (P&P) sheet’ was received within the first 20 days of the first two-day forum, but the promising early response did not continue.

- 60 Problem and Progress sheets were received between March 2007 and March 2008.
- Age of clients ranged from 25 – 74.

\(^{12}\) Emails were kept to a minimum on purpose so that members of the email network did not feel overwhelmed by constant information.
• Majority of clients held a farming related occupation.
• The majority (48/60) were received from the DPSL later called the Rural Support Line (RSL).

An example P & P sheet is contained in Appendix B.

### 3.5.10 Takeaways

Takeaways were self-duplicating note pads designed to allow clients to record what they would take away from each session. Takeaways, designed and produced by my team in a previous project (Single Session Implementation in Community Health), were provided to drought counsellors who were invited to offer them to clients. Clients took the original takeaway sheet home and left a copy for the counsellors, who, without identifying information, provided a copy to the researcher.

• 12 takeaways were provided from 4 different clients between March 2007 and March 2008. All takeaways were provided by one drought counsellor.

An example Takeaway sheet is contained in Appendix C.

### 3.5.11 Feedback and Advice questionnaires

In an attempt to seek direct feedback from drought counsellors’ clients, drought counsellors were encouraged to invite their clients to complete a feedback and advice questionnaire at the completion of their work together. There was a poor response to the client feedback and advice questionnaire, with only five received between March 2007 and September 2008. Feedback from the drought counsellors was that because they were working hard to engage clients, they did not feel comfortable getting clients to fill out the complex consent forms required for the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also seen as too long.

For the five clients who completed the Feedback and Advice Questionnaire:
• Age of clients ranged from 25 – 74 (same as the P & P sheets).
• Majority of clients held a farming related occupation.

An example questionnaire is contained in Appendix D.

### 3.5.12 In—depth interview

Early in the research I had planned to undertake several in—depth client interviews to gain direct feedback from clients about their experience of drought counselling. Whilst there is a significant gap in the existing literature when it comes to direct feedback from clients, I did not pursue opportunities for client interviews because the CIG-CIGAR network generated an overwhelming amount of data. I conducted one in—depth client interview early in the research to inform myself and I report on this valuable source of data in section 6.3.1.
3.6 Analysis of problem and progress sheets, takeaways, feedback and advice questionnaires and in—depth client interview

My research assistants Michelle Wills and Carmel Hobbs summarised and conducted a primary content analysis of the clinical feedback (Problem and Progress sheets, Takeaways, Feedback and Advice questionnaires and in—depth client interview). I then checked the summaries with the original data. Themes and content were cross referenced with each other for convergent and divergent themes and with the CIG-CIGAR data and reported throughout Chapters 4—8.

3.7 Representation of the overall design

In the interest of demonstrating how the research is integrated, Diagram 3.2 is an attempt to portray the whole research design visually.
Diagram 3.2: Visual depiction of sources of data gathered for the research

Local Communities Affected by Drought

THE WORK

CIG

PRE-PROJECT DATA

Pre-Project Questionnaire - Eliciting drought counsellors’ approach to the work

Problem & Progress Sheets

In depth client interviews

CIGAR

PRE-PROJECT DATA

Pre-Project Data

12 Months

Takeaways

No Bull Newsletter, vehicle for sharing knowledge

POST-PROJECT DATA

Post-Project Data

8-16 Months

Clinical data collected by CIG members & feedback to CIGS via researcher - with the aim of influencing clinical work

Clinical data informs CIGARs & CIGs via researcher

POST-PROJECT DATA

Post-Project Questionnaire - Eliciting change in drought counsellors’ approach to the work

No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) Curriculum - Pre-Project

Changes to NBT Curriculum - Post-Project
3.8 Informed Consent and Ethics Approval

The study received ethics approval from the Latrobe University Human Ethics Committee (application 07-02) on the 19th of February, 2007 and the Department of Human Services Human Research Ethics Committee (application 105/07) on the 7th of November, 2007.

3.9 Quality of the data

Guidelines for determining the quality of qualitative data and the key learnings that are drawn from that data continue to evolve and develop since Glaser and Strauss introduced grounded theory to sociology more than 40 years ago (Creswell, 1998; Howe & Eisenhardt, 1990; Y. Lincoln, 1995). According to Caulley (1994) two broad concepts for judging the quality of qualitative research are trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness (Caulley, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Y. S. Lincoln & Guba, 1986), is a concept devised to parallel positivist criteria of validity and reliability. Caulley (1994) describes ideas for authenticating the data, which is a measure of the power of the data rooted in post—positivism. The current study is considered within these conditions. In particular the study’s trustworthiness and rigour were enhanced by:

i. Prolonged engagement with the drought counsellors for 19 months. The longitudinal nature of the study meant that the CIG facilitators and the researcher were able to build trust with the CIGs and to begin to appreciate distortions in the data;

ii. Triangulation (cross—checking) of data using different methods and sources of data collection (CIGs, Questionnaires, interviews, session feedback), different researchers (CIG facilitators across different regions) and checking of themes across the CIGs;

iii. Member checking by participants in the CIG meetings via the CIG summaries;

iv. Peer review and debriefing of CIG facilitators via the CIGAR meetings;

v. Public scrutiny via No Bull and the Interim reports;

vi. Clarifying researcher bias by acknowledging my assumptions and biases as they emerged;

vii. Rich, thick descriptions offering multiple viewpoints; and

viii. Fairness by presenting both sides of contested issues even handedly.
CHAPTER FOUR


4.1 Chapter orientation

The research question primarily addressed in this chapter: What does the process of engaging and supporting the drought counsellors tell us about providing a drought counselling service?

The main structure of this chapter is provided by the exploration of the outcomes of the key elements of the research: the first two-day forum; the CIG-CIGAR network, No Bull and the second two-day forum. In reporting the outcomes of these key elements, I comment on what these outcomes say about providing support to a specialist workforce charged with providing counselling services to rural communities affected by drought. One outcome from the first two-day forum, the inclusion of the Rural Support Line to the research, also leads me to add the stage of ‘celebration’ to the Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycles that underlie the Co-operative Inquiry method.

Throughout this chapter I describe the relationship my team established with the drought counsellors over time. Understanding this relationship reveals significant insight into the relationship the drought counsellors established with their target audience – their local drought affected communities. In short, the research contributes to the knowledge of drought affected communities through understanding the work of Victoria’s State-funded drought counsellors, and The Bouverie Team’s relationship with them.

I conclude the chapter by looking at how the attitudes and ideas of the drought counsellors changed towards the work over the first year. Following this, I link the CIG-CIGAR network to other similar concepts from other fields and ultimately move onto Chapter 5, where I explore how the nature of drought informs the counselling response.

4.2 Approach to engaging the drought counsellors

In order to understand rural communities affected by drought, the Bouverie research team’s first task was to engage with our most valuable and accessible link with the rural community, our research partners and our main source of information — the drought counsellors. In this chapter I describe the engagement process with the drought counsellors for three broad reasons:

i. To make visible the context from which the key learnings of the research emerged;

ii. To contribute to the understanding of how to support a specialist rural drought counselling workforce; and

iii. To contribute ideas and conceptualisations that may be relevant to supporting other communities of interest.

In this section I begin by describing my personal view of how my team established an excellent working relationship with the drought counsellors over time. Understanding how this relationship was established reveals significant insight into the parallel engagement dilemmas the drought counsellors
experienced with their target audience – members of their local drought affected communities. Hence this section moves back and forth between reflecting on the relationship between the Bouverie research team and the drought counsellors, and the drought counsellors and their clients, prospective clients and their communities.

4.2.1 The initial approach

I was uncertain and anxious about how the drought counsellors would react to me and The Bouverie Centre playing a training, support and research role for their field given our lack of experience with rural and climate issues. I was particularly worried and felt somewhat guilty that The Bouverie Centre had been given funds to provide secondary support that could theoretically have gone into direct services or financial relief for people affected by the drought. My own presumption that rural communities are suspicious and cynical about city based, university managed, counselling organisations, like The Bouverie Centre, lay beneath my uncertainty about how our role would be received. Being sensitive to insider / outsider status was crucial for our engagement with the drought counsellors as it was for their engagement with their local communities.

Now looking back to the early stages of the research, from the comfort of the relationships we were able to build over the 19 months it is hard to articulate the early struggles. The tensions were understandably greater where drought counsellors did not have some historical relationship with The Bouverie Centre or were organised with strong existing support networks. The CIG groups in these regions were slower to engage as indicated by:

i. Poor attendances to early CIG meetings;
ii. Concerns about the research (I received a deputation from one group with concerns the research was “too problem focussed and not local”);
iii. Strident discussions about outsider’s lack of credibility and knowledge; and
iv. Tension felt by a CIG facilitator that she was seen as a young girl from the city.

4.2.1.1 Appreciating insider / outsider status

In retrospect, actively defining ourselves (CIG facilitators) as outsiders, given that we did not live rurally and were not farmers or business people affected by drought, was an important stance that promoted engagement. This provided us with a discipline to remain actively curious, to work hard at understanding the “lived experience” of rural people and to be cautious when morsels of understanding began to appear. Flaskas (2008) further divides the ‘outsider’ into the positions of ‘close outsider’ and ‘distant outsider’. Both positions define the counsellor or researcher as outsider, but the term ‘close outsider’ reflects concerted and visible efforts to bridge the gap of experience. In this instance, to bridge the gap between us, the urban research team, and the rural drought counsellors, we educated ourselves about drought, farming and rural culture, whilst still acknowledging our outsider status.

Our approach reflected the task of many drought counsellors. For example, the Rural Support Line (RSL) staff attempted to bridge the gap between themselves and their clients by using Google Maps to discretely familiarise themselves with the caller’s local area during a call. The RSL CIG facilitator reported later that, “They continue to find it one of the most useful ways to create an instant bridge of credibility and demonstrate to callers that they are valued through this practice” (CIG # 6 Rural Support Line 30/5/08 - Minutes).

The distinction between ‘distant insider’ and ‘close insider’, which was a concept that emerged during the research (see Chapter 6), may be useful to research teams engaging with groups other than
The ‘close outsider’ position of the research team in this project led, we believe, to a more empathic but still active, curious exploration which facilitated engagement. The ‘distant outsider’ risks being perceived as an ‘out of touch’ expert by local practitioners.

4.2.1.2 Striving for close outsider status: An interview to prepare for the two-day forum

I sought inside information through personal connection with two people I knew were sympathetic insiders – my first stakeholder interview. The sympathetic insiders were John Bell and Susan Armstrong, drought counsellors and farmers from Gippsland. This interview was conducted on the 21/1/07 and took place at their dairy and wine growing property in Gippsland. John and Susan, social workers with extensive experience in both urban and rural settings, had been working as drought counsellors for four months prior to the interview. They pointed out the importance of “tapping into existing local meetings and networks” rather than conducting a large community forum as had been suggested to me by an urban colleague. I look back on this advice; advice I heard and understood at the time, and realise how much more I understand it now – 24 months later. John and Susan pointed out that in the city people are used to a “passing parade” of people which allows friendships and networks to form more quickly than in the country. This observation, which John and Susan were well placed to make having lived both in the city and in the country, helped explain what could be seen as a broad cultural rift between the short–term pressures on government to get something happening and the rural imperative to plan for the long—term, especially in agricultural businesses. Their advice for drought counsellors gaining acceptance with rural clients was directly relevant to my approach to engaging their drought counsellor colleagues: don’t be over—confident; say what you can and what you can’t provide; don’t hide behind professional reputation, instead indicate what you have done and do a good job and word will spread. John and Susan’s advice was compatible with the principles of No Bullshit Therapy, but their wisdom reached well beyond counselling models. For example, John emphasised that “farmers love a free feed” — intuitively I had worked hard to provide free accommodation and meals, including a dinner out for the drought counsellors during the first two-day forum, and the parallels between our engagement of the drought counsellors and their engagement with their clients continued.

4.2.1.3 Shift in my thinking as a result of the first stake—holder interview

John and Susan’s advice was clear: create a sense of a joint project between Bouverie and the drought counsellors and promote networking, sharing and communication between the drought counsellors — in a direct effort to address strong feelings of professional isolation — a parallel to the rural clients and farmers they are counselling. In heeding John’s advice, “create a sense that we are all in this together”, the two days became an important ritual for creating a feeling of professional and social connection — rather than an opportunity for the Bouverie team to present ourselves as trainers or experts — as our funders may have expected. Getting the balance right between owning our expertise (No Bullshit Therapy, counselling expertise, research) and acknowledging and celebrating the experience of the drought counsellors (rural, on the ground workers, experience working with rural folk, community, drought, local networks) guided our thinking, and proved to be another parallel to the drought counsellors’ strategies for engaging their clients. The success of this overall approach led me to consider a concept I called practical collaboration — raised in Chapter 3 and explored in greater detail in the next section.
4.2.2 Practical collaboration: Acknowledging difference and the art of articulating a mutually beneficial possibility

Throughout the process of building the collaborative relationship with the drought counsellors I was aware of having to actively avoid the temptation of promoting 'the fantasy of sameness'. I was personally guided here by the practical principles of No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) – to make a feature of a constraint, such as not having rural experience. Another idea from NBT is to be upfront about difference as a way of creating trust — rather than trying to avoid it. In retrospect the idea of placing myself as a ‘close outsider’, led me to draw subtly on my rural background, but to not overstate it, and to practically learn more about the complexities and dilemmas of drought counselling. I was also aware of the need to articulate a mutually beneficial possibility. One of the most obvious examples of this was the need to research and document the work of the drought counsellors — if the drought counsellors were to receive funding beyond the first 12 months. The role of No Bull, the newsletter of the drought counsellors, the interim report and this final report, which are discussed later in this chapter, are practical examples of the manifestation of this stance. Eventually acknowledging difference and articulating a mutually beneficial possibility, led to a relationship based on respectful difference, the acknowledgement of which, led to a connectedness – not a sameness; a collaboration based in difference but with a purpose based in sameness – ultimately a shared wish for a better handling of the impacts of drought. Whilst I am aware there is a vast literature on collaborative practice, it is beyond the scope of the current report to review it – instead I reflect on how the collaboration between the Bouverie team and the drought counsellors developed over time.

4.2.3 The elements of practical collaboration for this project

4.2.3.1 Understand and appreciate historical tensions

In addition to the sense of political power having shifted from rural to urban areas over the past century, along with economic prosperity and population base, urban—rural tensions may be exacerbated by different approaches, including different priorities identified when addressing drought. The following CIGAR transcript suggests that early in the research, drought counsellors were picking up a feeling that farmers felt powerless to determine how resources were allocated to the drought.

Pam: And there was another comment from my group that the one thing they’ve noticed is a whole lot more government cars around. It’s just reflecting the anger about how the money is being spent. One of the group members is a farmer’s wife, and she says she just doesn’t talk to her husband about what she knows about how money is being spent.

Colin: Because in situations where resources are scarce, then all issues of power become absolutely paramount. And these really are issues of power, aren’t they really? Part of it is about saying “who gets to say where the money goes to, what’s important and who should determine that?” Here’s people feeling disempowered in a way (CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript).

4.2.3.2 Acknowledge difference and promote interdependence

Genuinely acknowledging the different expertise of both parties and articulating how they relate was a key theme of engagement throughout the research both in our engagement with the drought counsellors and their engagement with the community. Kurt Lewin, who coined the term ‘action
research’ as well as developing ‘field theory’, argues that a powerful dynamic is created if members of a community or group are dependent on each other in order to achieve their goals. Johnson and Johnson went further arguing that “an intrinsic state of tension within group members stimulates or motivates movement toward the achievement of desired common goals” (1995, p. 175). We repeatedly indicated that the research would help develop, refine and document the practice wisdom of the drought counsellors and thus provide grounds to influence government policy and potential funding, and at the same time acknowledging that without the knowledge and involvement of the drought counsellors the research failed to exist.

4.2.3.3 Indicate good faith and translate into practical help

Good faith is not just a once-off endeavour. There is a need, especially as an outsider, to keep indicating good faith, and translating it into action because as the relationship grows so do the expectations of longer term commitment. Having articulated a mutually beneficial possibility, the next task is making the possibility a reality by building on the relationship and enacting the mutually beneficial possibility. Practical collaboration is not possible if either party cannot eventually provide the other with something valuable. The Bouverie research team was able to facilitate a structure to address the professional and social isolation experienced by the drought counsellors, as predicted by John and Susan in my first stakeholders’ interview. The provision of practical materials, recording the CIG meetings and distributing summaries, sharing themes from other regions and producing No Bull—all of which promoted their work not just our research — were examples of offering something valuable. Sharing resources throughout the research via email also indicated we were interested in practical collaboration.

4.2.3.4 Seek and respond to cultural sensitivities

According to James Lett (2008), professor of general anthropology at Indian River State College, the terms ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ were coined by the linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Pike in the mid 1950s. Lett argues that the term ‘emic’ can be seen as an insider’s perspective and ‘etic’ an outsider’s perspective when studying a community’s cultural systems. He argues that both play an important role in cultural studies. An ‘emic’ approach focuses on the practices that have meaning to the insiders. This meant in our case, approaching drought counsellors in ways that were culturally simpatico with the nuances of their work context and broader rural culture. For example, engaging in a warm and welcoming way, providing food on arrival and late starts (acknowledging that we understood the demands of travelling large distances), valuing the practical action and the avoidance of jargon. We travelled to rural regions for CIGs rather than expecting the CIG members to travel to Melbourne, thus avoiding being seen to be ‘Melbourne’ centric. This decision was validated by the following joke told to me by one of the CIG members, “It’s 3 hrs from Benalla to Melbourne and 5 hrs from Melbourne to Benalla.” In order to enact these emic sensitivities, the research team drew on their personal early rural experiences, intuition and the subtle and not so subtle feedback gained during the research.

4.2.3.5 Be capable but don’t take yourself too seriously

Because it is genuinely part of Bouverie culture, the Bouverie team provided competent work in a personable and friendly way. This just happened to be a good fit with rural cultural traditions. I was surprised by the importance placed on this style by my CIG group in Gippsland made overt during the farewell ritual. At the risk of self promotion here are some direct quotes from that CIG:
“One of the things I like about you Jeff, because here’s this guy coming from Melbourne, and I do have judgemental views sometimes. You haven’t judged me, be a supercilious psychologist or something like that and you have just made me feel that we are not alone … and I’ve always felt comfortable in your presence.”

“You’ve been able to draw on our strength and we’ve been able to draw on your strength. I think it’s been the casualness you know, not the formal professionalism of it that the casualness and the easygoingness of it and the sharing has been wonderful. You’ve been a key person in that as well. I think it’s part of us as well, that we’ve wanted to come along and off load and share and keen to be part of it, you have fitted into our group very well.”

(CIG # 15 Gippsland 28/8/08 - Final CIG, , CIG member direct quote)

The appreciation of a more casual friendly relationship was expressed about The Bouverie Centre as a whole:

“And in awe of Bouverie which I rightly or wrongly regard as a friendly and familiar bunch of friends up there in Brunswick. It’s been special to have you involved in this and getting to know you. I do really appreciate your very special skills and capabilities which I think have given us strengths that we didn’t know that we would have” (CIG # 15 Gippsland 28/8/08 - Final CIG, , CIG member direct quote)

The remainder of the chapter looks at what the research tells us about supporting a specialist drought counselling workforce.

4.3 Learnings from the first two-day forum

My nervousness that the drought counsellors would be dismissive of the Bouverie Team, abated almost immediately when the first few people who attended the forum walked in the door — generous in their openness to the project and pleased to be part of a larger community.

The first two-day forum (22nd and 23rd February, 2007) represented the formal launch of the research. The 41 newly funded drought counsellors were invited (35 attended including seven Rural Support Line, then called the Drought Personal Support Line telephone counsellors). The forum was held in Melbourne. In addition to opportunities for participants to network and receive collegiate support, the first day delivered a shortened version of a one—day training workshop in No Bullshit Therapy and engaged participants in the research. The second day presented basic information about providing help to rural communities (including risk assessment) and gave attendees an opportunity to discuss and share creative ways to use community development approaches to effectively support people affected by drought.

Accommodating all participants in the same motel and organising a dinner the evening of day one and a working breakfast on day two provided an ideal context for the drought counsellors to get to know each other and to share experiences, struggles, ideas and practical resources.

Providing opportunities for networking and sharing of resources helped create a feeling that each participant was part of a bigger endeavour across the state. This was found to be very helpful as most drought counsellors felt isolated and received little direction when employed. Counsellors who
attended the forum reported NBT provided a useful theoretical and conceptual framework for the therapeutic style of work they were beginning to naturally employ with rural clients.

Key issues to emerge from the first gathering of drought counsellors were:
  i. Unsupported workforce charged with a complex and difficult task;
     a) Professional and social isolation with many drought counsellors being lone workers who were geographically distant;
     b) No induction to new positions;
     c) No documented resources from previous droughts;
  ii. Poor co-ordination of resources and the absence of well established professional networks;
  iii. Undeveloped professional identity;
     a) Unclear role with not—very well developed job descriptions;
     b) No agreement on what to call themselves;
  iv. Undeveloped and undocumented skill base; and
  v. Controversy over the concept of cold calling (Research diary 23/2/07).

The main actions to emerge from the first two-day forum were:
  i. Agreement of the drought counsellors to enroll in the research;
  ii. Established that host agencies needed to be informed of the research;
  iii. Agreement to establish a newsletter;
  iv. Agreement to establish an email distribution list for sharing resources between editions of the newsletter;
  v. Establishment and arrangements of the CIGs in each region; and
  vi. Agreement that the Rural Support Line should be included in the research (Research diary 23/2/07).

4.3.1 Evaluation of first forum

Written feedback provided by 31 participants suggests the forum was a resounding success, generating positive feeling and good will. Participants welcomed the opportunity to link in with fellow workers, and were enlivened by the exchange of ideas and resources, putting “faces to services” (increasing referral options), and hearing direct accounts of issues affecting various rural/regional communities. Some reported the two day event served to reduce feelings of isolation.

According to participants, the venue and food, and the less formal aspects of the program enhanced enjoyment of the forum. Many left feeling energised and reported looking forward to ongoing connection with their colleagues through the CIG groups. While NBT ideas gained broad appeal (“offers a framework around how I practice”), some participants would have preferred further discussion and instruction on this topic.
4.4 The Co-operative Inquiry Groups

4.4.1 Unity and diversity

“Invention of unity in diversity” (Freire, 2004)

“Don’t want unity at the expense of diversity” (David Denborough 2008)

The Co-operative Inquiry Group (CIG) meetings occurred monthly with Bouverie facilitation between March 2007 and September 2008. Feedback about the role the CIGs played for the drought counsellors was very positive, namely that they played a significant role in: reducing professional isolation; boosting morale; creating efficiencies; and sharing resources. Possibly the most positive feedback of all is that four of the six CIGs continued to meet after the Bouverie facilitators withdrew due to cessation of funding. At least one CIG continues to meet under a new name twelve months after the completion of the research.

The journey of the CIGs is in many ways the journey of the report and the research — a developmental account of providing drought services to local regions across Victoria – but it is also an account of an unlikely but successful collaboration between an urban research team and a number of dispersed rural workers – a collaboration that transformed both groups. For The Bouverie Centre, it led to new strategies in workforce development and for the drought counsellors, it led to a more connected, confident, self-governing, self-critiquing and more professionalised body of workers.

Each CIG was unique and developed its own way of operating. Apart from cultural differences between the CIGs, the main influence was the period of time the region had been in drought. The longer the region had been in drought generally the better organised they were. Regions which had been in drought since 2001—03 were organised on the basis of factors such as personalities, regional geography and culture and the network of local health related services. It is impossible to fully understand the complexities and subtleties that resulted in the nuanced cultural differences between the CIGs, and another researcher may not agree with my description, but CIGs differed around the degree to which they were social, developed broader networks, were inclusive / exclusive, developed ‘can do’ cultures, the degree to which members were integrated with their host agencies, the levels of debate over approaches, and the balance between clinical and community development discussions.

While each CIG was unique, they also shared some commonalities. For example, all CIGs struggled with the issue of membership throughout the research. CIG members benefited from the safety and comfort of the CIG being a closed group when debriefing and sharing practice dilemmas, frustrations and experiences, but also needed to network with others in order to be effective. Building connection between like-minded people could be called ‘bonding professional capital’ similar to ‘bonding social capital’ discussed in the literature review. Like the small rural communities in which the drought counsellors worked, the CIG members also needed to engage and network with people outside of their profession, such as rural financial counsellors, bank managers, volunteers etc, which could be referred to as ‘bridging professional capital’. Maintaining a balance between ‘bonding professional capital’ and ‘bridging professional capital’ continued throughout the research, with each CIG developing different strategies at different times. For example, some members of the Hume CIG developed an ancillary group to share CIG resources with workers who were not specifically drought counsellors, allowing the CIG to remain a closed group. The Gippsland CIG invited people from other services to relevant CIG meetings, reserving some meetings exclusively for the drought counsellors. Like the small rural towns

13 Personal communication
whose survival may depend on their ability to reach out to new inhabitants ('bridging social capital'), the CIGs sustainability was largely due to building 'bridging professional capital', especially in reaching out to federally funded drought counsellors, which could only be done comfortably once 'bonding professional capital' was established.

Local geographic, economic and cultural factors influenced the development and ‘bonding professional capital’ of each CIG. These factors combined with local drought conditions and the CIG members’ personalities to create a unique CIG culture. In order to contextualise the CIG data, which are presented throughout the rest of the report, I will present brief demographic data for each CIG region, followed by a summary description of each CIG based on interviews with the Bouverie facilitators, summaries from CIG meetings and transcripts of the CIGARs. Then in the sections that follow, I will explore the common themes to emerge across the CIGs.

### 4.4.2 Introducing the regions and the regional CIGs

#### 4.4.2.1 Rural Support Line (formally Drought Personal Support Line)

![Map of Victorian regions and major towns](image)

*Figure 4.1: Map of Victorian regions and major towns*
Table 4.1: Major cities, area, population and industries of Victoria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victoria Region</th>
<th>Major City (Capital)</th>
<th>Area (sq km)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Major Industries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Region</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>227,600</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>Victoria produces almost a quarter of Australia’s total rural output. Source: <a href="http://www.About%E2%80%94Australia.com/facts/Victoria">www.About—Australia.com/facts/Victoria</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Victoria is Australia’s second most populous state. Seventy per cent of the population lives in Melbourne.

4.4.2.1.1 Brief Description of Rural Support Line CIG

Left to right: Jo Verduci (statewide), Ilkin Il (statewide), Justine Clear (statewide), Angela Galpin (statewide).

Not in photo: Elena Tauridsky (Bouverie).

The Rural Support Line, based in Melbourne, is managed by Wesley Mission. Originally called the Drought Personal Support Line (DPSL), the service changed its name to the Rural Support Line because the team felt that DPSL "was too narrow as many people affected by drought present with a wide range of problems and do not necessarily identify the drought as the main problem" (CIG # 3 Rural Support Line 17/5/07 - Summary). The DPSL originally operated a state-wideservice between 3pm – 11pm seven days a week by specialist drought telephone counsellors, but due to the low number of calls, it integrated with the general lifeline service, became the Rural Support Line and operated 24/7. The CIG experienced a hiatus of 10 months whilst this restructure occurred.

Two key developments explored by the Rural Support Line were:

i. The creation of specific drought counselling training. The original DPSL telephone counsellors provided a 2.5 hour training program for Lifeline supervisors who were relieved to learn that “it is OK to NOT know everything about rural matters” (CIG # 3 Rural Support Line 17/5/07 - Summary). The key points of the training and how it differed from general Lifeline training is presented in Chapter 6.
ii. The provision of secondary consultation to the local drought counsellors. Inspired by feedback from other CIGs, the Rural Support Line began to offer telephone support and debriefing / secondary consultation to local drought counsellors out in the field.

4.4.2.2 Gippsland region

![Map of Gippsland DHS region](source)

Source for CIG data & Maps: www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Figure 4.2: Map of Gippsland DHS region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gippsland Region</th>
<th>Major Towns</th>
<th>Area (Sq Km)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Top industries by employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gippsland has six local government areas.</td>
<td>Bairnsdale</td>
<td>41,538</td>
<td>240,114</td>
<td>Retail trade; Health care and social assistance;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although parts are close to Melbourne,</td>
<td>Leongatha</td>
<td></td>
<td>(5% of state)</td>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Construction;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it has dispersed population centres and</td>
<td>Morwell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manufacturing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is divided by a mountain range, which</td>
<td>Traralgon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(DIIRD Strategic Policy Branch, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leads to poor service delivery and</td>
<td>Warragul</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considerable travel.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parts of Gippsland had been in drought since 2006 as well as affected by fire and floods.
4.4.2.2.1 Brief description of Gippsland CIG

Left to right: Di Robinson (Lakes), Peter Carr (Sale), Shirley Millard (Latrobe), Tracey Moffatt (Bairnsdale), Teagan Steen (back row, East Gippsland), Lauren Gordon (front, West Gippsland), Cathy Carr (back, Gippsland), Jeff Young (front, Bouverie), Lesley Edwards (back, Omeo), Judy Richards (front, Maffra), Bianca Pezzutto (Traralgon), Tamworth McGhee (C/W Gippsland), John Bell (Bass Coast), Sue Armstrong (Bass Coast).

Not in photo: Robyn Bradley (Yarram), Liz Craig (South Gippsland), Kay Illingworth (Bass Coast), Pam Jarvis (Sale).

The Gippsland CIG formed quickly due to key people taking a connective role between formal meetings. The CIG meetings rotated around each member’s home town. The appointed host for a given meeting supplied a meal and often an organised tour of the region following the formal meeting. Consequently, a strong informal network grew outside the formal meetings, as evidenced by new drought counsellors being contacted and invited to join the network even before they had started work. The Gippsland CIG was inclusive, also inviting a wide range of workers from related services to particular meetings in order to share information or collaborate on specific projects. Areas within Gippsland endured drought, fire, flood and mud slides during the course of the research which led to comparisons between the different natural disasters, including the different government, service and community response and conceptualisations of drought.

The main focus of discussion was community development strategies because the counsellors had good clinical supervision provided by their host agencies but struggled to engage clients — which led to the following key developments:
i. Pamper Days for different groups; starting with half day events for women, then moving to weekend events for whole families. Gradually the entire CIG membership collaborated to hold several major events.

ii. The Gippsland CIG pioneered the active involvement of the DHS regional drought co-ordinator in the CIG meetings. This lead to a surprisingly effective co-ordination of service delivery, where the DHS co-ordinator was well briefed on what was happening in the field and the drought counsellors understood the policy framework, opportunities and constraints of government.

4.4.2.3 Grampians Region

![Map of Grampians DHS region](image)

**Figure 4.3: Map of Grampians DHS region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grampians Region</th>
<th>Major Towns</th>
<th>Area (sq km)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Top industries by employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grampians has twelve local government areas. The region’s population is concentrated in the east, with more than half living in Ballarat and Bacchus Marsh.</td>
<td>Ararat, Ballarat, Horsham, Stawell</td>
<td>47,980</td>
<td>208,226 (4% of State)</td>
<td>Health care and social assistance; Retail trade; Manufacturing; Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Education and training. (DIIRD Strategic Policy Branch, 2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.2.3.1 Brief description of Grampians CIG

The Grampians CIG met centrally in the one location. The area had been in drought since 2003 and therefore had members who were very experienced in drought work. CIG discussions rapidly focused on community development strategies for engaging the community, and ways to strengthen networking and partnership between different organisations. Given the longer term workers in this region, discussions were advanced around funding, reporting and policy issues. The Grampians region boasted one agency that employed the majority of CIG members. This agency was set up to specifically cater for rural populations and hence the discussion reflected examples where the drought counsellors were integrated into their host agency, which lead to one of the key developments.

Two key developments in the Grampians CIG were:

i. The exploration of ‘whole of agency’ response to drought – including policy, publicity, service delivery, outreach, documentation and reporting strategies.

ii. A program to educate local General Practitioners (GPs) about drought in order to promote collaboration and referral. Several local GPs were originally from war torn countries and hence they did not appreciate the severity of the drought’s impact compared to war trauma, until being involved in the program.
4.4.2.4  Hume region

Figure 4.4: Map of Hume DHS region

Table 4.4: Major towns, area, population and industries of Hume

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hume Region</th>
<th>Major Towns</th>
<th>Area (sq km)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Top industries by employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hume has twelve local government areas. The region’s geography includes Victoria’s alpine areas, some relatively remote farming communities and major regional centres.</td>
<td>Benalla Shepparton Wangaratta Wodonga</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>250,878 (5% of State)</td>
<td>Manufacturing; Retail trade; Health care and social assistance; Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Construction. (DIIRD Strategic Policy Branch, 2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Major parts of the region had been in drought continuously since 2003.
4.4.2.4.1 Brief description of Hume CIG

Left to right: Jane Rushworth (Wangaratta), Louisa Bendendo (Financial counsellor), Terry Reedy (Shepparton), Tina Whittle (Bouverie), Les Hume (Shepparton), Rachel Robertson (Shepparton), Wayne Harris (Shepparton), Christine Cummins (Shepparton).

Not in photo: David Bacash (Wodonga), Glen Canning (Shepparton), Karen Dean (Shepparton), Kirsten Green (DHS), Caroline Harlow (Strathbogie), Ivan Lister (Violet Town), Naomi Mason (Wodonga), Jacqui Star (Moira).

The Hume CIG was the only CIG to remain a closed group until well into the research (12 months). This allowed detailed clinical discussions and clinical supervision, including debriefing, to occur more often than in any other CIG. The CIG also remained small and membership was consistent for the first 12 months, exploring in depth two different approaches endorsed by two different groups within the CIG: cold calling and more traditional counselling approaches. Possibly because of the consistent numbers, the CIG discussed philosophical issues associated with drought counselling; such as the role of counselling and community development, effective ways to deliver drought counselling funds, and the way drought is portrayed in the media.

Two key developments in the Hume CIG were:

i. Articulating their own cold calling strategies; including cold calling to small businesses.

ii. The exploration of ‘vicarious traumatisation’ on drought counsellors and related workers.
### 4.4.2.5  Loddon-Mallee region

![Map of Loddon Mallee DHS region](image)

Figure 4.5: Map of Loddon Mallee DHS region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loddon-Mallee Region</th>
<th>Major Towns</th>
<th>Area (sq km)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Top industries by employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bendigo</td>
<td>58,965</td>
<td>293,516</td>
<td>Retail trade; Health care and social assistance;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Echuca</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manufacturing; Agriculture, forestry and fishing;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kerang</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Education and training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maryborough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(DIIRD Strategic Policy Branch, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mildura</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Swan Hill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The region has 10 local government areas that fall into three separate regions around Mildura, Kerang and Echuca. It is Victoria's largest region.

Major parts of the region had been in drought continuously since 2001.
4.4.2.5.1 **Brief description of Loddon-Mallee CIG**

Left to right: Bronwyn Murray, Anne—Maree Kerr, Laurie Whelan (DHS), Sue Thornton (Mildura), Jann Barkman (Swan Hill), Alana Brennan (Campaspe), Pam Rycroft (Bouverie), Ruth Turpin (Echuca), John Soulsby, Colleen Scriven, Dean Curtis, Philippa Calwell (Castlemaine), Jenny Pendlebury (Bendigo).

Not in photo: Allannah Jenkins, Clint Wardle, Kevin Holmes, Marita Sleep, Doug Doran, Emma Brentnall (Campaspe), Chris Hermans, Melinda Roffey (Bendigo), Lynne Healey, Vesna Simic (Mildura), Travis Edwards (Bendigo).

The Loddon-Mallee CIG took the longest time to establish itself. This seemed to be for two main reasons: the area had been in drought for many years and workers in parts of the region were well organised (especially within the local Primary Care Partnerships) and did not see the immediate need for another network; and the tyranny of distance and the fact that the region is divided into three geographically distant hubs: Mildura, Kerang and Echuca, making it practically difficult for the CIG to meet. Gradually through the persistence of the CIG facilitator; travelling to all three regions, making contact and distributing the CIG summaries to all participants, the CIG grew to have one of the largest meetings, 19 months into the research. A turning point in the CIG, where the research team was respectful and responsive to a criticism of what The Bouverie Centre was offering, helped engage key members, and led to the development of a new program called NB Support, that eventually was implemented state-wide.
Two key developments in the Loddon-Mallee CIG were:

i. The research of a cold calling approach called ‘Farm Gate’ which key members of the CIG had pioneered many years prior to the current project. The CIG engaged The Bouverie Centre to evaluate the ‘Farm Gate’ approach 18 months into the current research (available: www.bouverie.org.au)

ii. NB Support was stimulated partly by a criticism of The Bouverie Centre offering No Bullshit Therapy to local generalist counsellors. Loddon-Mallee CIG members played a key role in developing NB Support (discussed in Chapter 7), co—facilitating a pilot and eventually helping to develop train—the—trainer workshops. This CIG, along with Hume CIG members, led the field in conducting NB Support workshops.

4.4.2.6 Barwon South West Region

![Map of Barwon South—West DHS region](image)

Figure 4.6: Map of Barwon South—West DHS region

Table 4.6: Major towns, area, population and industries of Barwon South West

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barwon –South West Region</th>
<th>Major Towns</th>
<th>Area (sq km)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Top industries by employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This region has nine local government areas. It was the last area to be EC declared and arguably the region least affected by drought.</td>
<td>Colac, Geelong, Hamilton, Portland, Warrnambool</td>
<td>29,637</td>
<td>340,496 (7% of State)</td>
<td>Manufacturing; Retail trade; Health care and social assistance; Construction; Education and training. (DIIRD Strategic Policy Branch, 2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.2.6.1 Brief description of Barwon — South West CIG

Left to right: Judy Poll (Bouverie), Larry Neeson (Hamilton), Evelyn Jack (Hamilton), Bronwyn Beazley (Lismore), Sue Williams (Bellarine), Kate O’Sullivan (Warrnambool), Kristy Sabell (Bellarine), Wendy Garner (MacArthur), Rob Baker (Geelong), Chris Johnston (Barwon), Lee Town (Mortlake), Bec Corrin (Warrnambool), Simone Renyard (Camperdown), Brenda McLachlan (VFF), Peter Walsgott (VFF), Fiona Wilson (Warrnambool), Marieke Dam (Warrnambool). Not in photo: Emma Mahony, Glennis Fabricius, Martin Butler, Jay Robinson.

The Barwon South West CIG had the toughest brief of all the CIGs. The drought counsellors making up the CIG were on the shortest contracts – and were expected to develop their service with less than 12 months funding. Consequently, there were significant tensions within the group around the most effective way to approach the task. Some members of the CIG had considerable experience in rural counselling and others did not. The Barwon South West CIG nonetheless had access to the learnings and experience of the established CIG-CIGAR network; including the NB Support training and Looking Out For Your Neighbours resources from the start.

Two key developments in the Barwon South West CIG were:

i. A local report documenting the application of the Campaspe ‘Farm Gate’ cold calling approach to the Barwon region.

ii. Several critiques of drought counselling policy and service delivery for No Bull.

4.4.3 Common CIG Themes

To look at the research question, “What does the process of engaging and supporting drought counsellors tell us about providing a drought counselling service?” I now explore the common themes and differences between the CIGs and then explore the key factors that led the CIG-CIGAR network to effectively provide support to the drought counsellors’ work.

4.4.3.1 The need for counsellors to engage in community development approaches

Poor Early Response Led to Community Development Approaches

Colin: "I guess... I mean we started off with membership and in a way that was an opportunity to talk about identity and role, and the breadth and nature of the work the group is doing. It seems to be very critical and it really bundles into the larger conversation about engagement and who’s
a customer, everyone’s a customer, the whole community is a customer... where actually the whole community is part of what they are actually looking at supporting” (CIGAR # 1 26/3/07 - Transcript).

CIG members expected to start counselling straight away because of the severity of the drought. When that didn’t happen and case loads were slow to grow they became frustrated and were initially reluctant to openly discuss their client numbers and, I believe, had to manage a growing sense of failure – a parallel feeling to many of their clients.

About four months into the research, the growing frustration from the poor client response is clearly evident:

"Where are the referrals? Why are we feeling that we are still in the early developmental stages of this work? This counsellor figured out that, statistically, she and her co—worker spend about 5% of their time directly on counselling, 28% on administrative tasks, and the rest on networking, training, and health promotion. "Training" means community education, in this context” (CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary).

The frustration, although not openly expressed, was common to all CIG members who had started a new drought counselling role and were not cold calling. Cold calling, which will be explored in Chapter 6, grew out of the need to find alternative ways to engage with potential clients.

During the first few months of the research, drought counsellors were confronted with having to promote their service by developing linkages with services outside their profession and hence outside of their comfort zone. They found themselves exploring networks associated with their target population such as stock and station agents, bank managers, Department of Primary Industry (DPI) field workers and related support services such as rural financial counsellors, general practitioners, mental health workers and volunteer welfare workers, rather than the direct clients themselves. Having to engage with wider networks led most drought counsellors to develop an interest in the theory and practice of community development approaches. The relationship of this work to counselling will be examined throughout the report but more specifically in Chapter 7.

4.4.3.2 The developmental nature of the data

Engaging with the field for an extended period (19 months +) provided an opportunity for me to appreciate the CIG data within a developmental consideration of the drought, the CIGs and the service provided by CIG members. Each CIG went through developmental changes that were a mixture of group dynamics and the developmental nature of drought (see Chapter 5 for a thorough exploration of the developmental nature of drought). This is why reference to CIG quotes includes both dates and the CIG session number so that the reader can place these comments within a chronological context.

The CIG themes and dilemmas would not make sense or worse could be misleading, if conclusions were based only on a cross sectional view of the data. For example, a range of explanations and assumptions could (and were made) from the fact that drought counsellors were not seeing many clients in the early stages of the research. For example, the first CIG summaries in each region universally described tension as drought counsellors struggled to build client numbers. The most obvious or easiest explanations, ‘that community approaches are what is needed or that rural people do not want counselling’ were misleading. Around six months into the research, CIG summaries across
the state began to record that case loads were increasing due to a combination of successful networking, collaboration with local services and community groups, community development projects and the accumulative effect of formal and informal advertising of counselling services. This development suggests that it simply takes time to establish a counselling service — like any business, which usually takes 12 months to get established.

The developmental nature of the drought, which is examined in the next chapter and hence the developmental nature of drought support services, has significant implications for research into drought. For example, the large scale AIFS study Edwards and Gray (2008) which is likely to have significant policy and funding influence, found a surprising lack of emotional and relationship difficulties, despite major economic hardship in rural families. However, the data on which this study was based was only captured at one point in time, at a period where people were in the midst of the drought. In our study, which detailed the experience of drought counsellors across the state over a 19 month period, there was a change in client presentation over time, which could be summarised as moving from ‘crisis response’ to a ‘realistic look at the future’ as reflected in the following CIG summary more than seven months into the research:

“Group (CIG) agreed that they have noticed a ‘change in the attitude to change’ and that people were more open to the possibility of stress related illnesses and seeking help more readily from existing services, such as GPs. The CIG also noticed a greater sense of reality from farmers and their families; some were more accepting of the possibility of an ‘exit strategy’, and thinking about change generally and what to do about their lives — less drama driven seeking of services and a greater demand for assistance with future decisions” (CIG # 7 Hume 19/9/07 - Summary)

Drought counsellors observed a shift in clients’ needs or wants 10—12 months into the research. They noticed clients wanted help making realistic longer term decisions, rather than help to manage the immediate crisis as was the early trend. In parallel with their clients, drought counsellors became more and more confident in their work, in their skill base and in themselves. The process of work force capacity building is discussed in the following section. Whilst the themes clearly refer to the specific context of specialist funded drought counsellors some of the key learnings may be relevant to supporting other workforces to develop capacity.

### 4.5 Building capacity within the State-funded drought counselling service

#### 4.5.1 The CIG-CIGAR network

It is difficult to separate the roles played by the CIGs and the CIGARs and hence I have looked at how the CIG-CIGAR structure helped develop the work of the drought counsellors. Feedback from CIG members about the role of the CIGs in helping them complete and develop their work was overwhelmingly positive and remarkably constant throughout the project, even during times when funding looked likely to dry up. The feedback, along with my reflections on the role of the CIG-CIGAR structure in developing the drought counselling workforce indicate that the CIG-CIGAR structure provided nine types of support – which led to greater capacity to respond to the communities affected by drought. They are listed below and then explored in detail:

1. Networking and creating a feeling of being part of a larger project;
2. Co—operation and collaboration between services;
iii. Professionalisation of the workforce;
iv. Role development, clarification of job descriptions and skill development;
v. Increased motivation and improved confidence;
vi. A conduit for communicating with the funding body;
vii. Promoting transfer of knowledge;
viii. Debriefing and self care opportunities; and
ix. A collective voice.

The feedback presented in this section has been de-identified to protect the privacy of the CIG groups who spoke candidly about the difficulties of their work, but they represent actual quotes as recorded in CIG summaries or in audio CIG sessions.

4.5.1.1 Networking and creating a feeling of being part of a larger project

“Our role is so different it is good to connect with others with similar roles—don’t have to explain everything.”

“Just having people to email or call is helpful.”

Specialist drought counsellors are vulnerable to personal and professional isolation due to large rural distances and because they are often lone, part-time workers who spend much of their time out of the office away from colleagues. Emotional isolation can occur because in the early stages of their work clients are not forthcoming and the work is often not well understood by their colleagues or managers. The CIGs provided a connective space for local drought counsellors and related colleagues, where drought counsellors could feel part of a larger effort, which is reflected in the following CIG quotes:

“Good to feel connected—good to belong to a group—can feel isolated in this work.”

“There is a feeling of connection and doing something worthwhile.”

“Being part of the CIG meetings creates a feeling of connection and doing something worthwhile.”

“Good to have a venue to discuss issues, to check out if individual observations are more general— as a lone worker you can get insular and isolated.”

Once the drought counsellor begins to build a case load, then they are vulnerable to vicarious traumatisation (described in section 6.17) due to seeing constant hardship which cannot be cured. A phrase used by more than one CIG member or CIG facilitator was that drought counsellors often felt like the “carriers of the community anxiety” (CIG # 5 Loddon-Mallee 17/7/07: Summary). These sentiments were summarised in the third meeting of the Gippsland CIG:
“Counsellors are also living in the same community so going through disaster themselves. The drought counsellors face a real risk of burnout because spending long hours in the car, not 9—5, everyone you are talking to is traumatised, including colleagues not just clients, the entire community is traumatised and so when you are talking in the community you are always faced with trauma. As a member of the community you share & experience the traumas of the community (e.g. There have been 12 deaths in (town) recently— including two farm deaths). CIGs have been a real support — given the stressors of the drought counselling work — including the frustrations of seeing the need but not reaching clients easily” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07: Summary).

Drought counsellors can wonder if their work is making a difference in the face of little feedback from clients who are struggling with intractable difficulties, as reflected in the following CIG summary:

“It’s impossible to get the direct feedback when things are confidential – you can’t know what impact you’ve had” (CIG # 5 Loddon-Mallee 17/7/07: Summary).

Connecting with others via the CIGs allowed drought counsellors to discuss their work in detail which drought counsellors reported (see section 4.5.1.5) maintained their motivation to continue the work. A CIG member who had worked internationally in disaster recovery reported that the “Recursive process of the CIG network is unique and should be protected at all costs.” The CIGs reflective practice helped drought counsellors try new approaches and to put their individual efforts into a broader context.

4.5.1.2 Co—operation and collaboration between services

A major outcome of the CIG-CIGAR network could be described as building the capacity of the specialist State-funded drought counsellors to respond to rural communities affected by drought. In the early stage of developing drought counselling services, the CIGs and drought recovery committees allowed for more efficient use of workforce resources as clearly indicated by the following verbatim transcript of a CIG discussion about nine months into the research.

CIG member 1: “Plus I think even sharing with these CIGs and the fact that we network and help each other that way is also a good thing but we really work together for the most effective sort of thing.”

CIG member 2: “As I said yesterday it’s certainly progressed my work and I don’t think I would have been as far as down the track as I am now, not belonging to a group. Because also with the (name) shire drought group that just provided me with so much information I knew what everyone was doing, and therefore I knew what I wanted to do and where I could take it. And the same with the CIG group. … My limitation is only being two days… but … certainly working with CIG member 3 and CIG member 4 and everyone working in, I’ve been able to achieve a lot more in those two days, or a lot more has been achieved in the area in those two days. In my two days anyway.”

CIG member 1: “My (one) day would be pretty useless if I wasn’t part of this group.”
CIG members shared workload and co-operated across services. For example, state and federally funded drought counsellors worked together. If a drought counsellor was not permitted to do outreach work (thus limiting their client load) others who had outreach roles would make initial contact with clients and then refer to their centre-bound colleague.

4.5.1.3 Professionalisation of the workforce (no name, no profession)

It is difficult to feel part of a profession and to establish the technologies of professionalisation if the members of that profession cannot agree on a title. The debate over what would be an appropriate title could not be resolved at the first two-day forum, with suggestions including: Drought Counsellor; Support Worker; Rural Outreach Worker; Drought Family Support Worker; and Supporter. This created a significant impediment for me in writing the inaugural editorial of the newsletter, No Bull. I avoided this dilemma at the time by focusing on the common underlying purpose, "Underlying the dilemma of what Drought Counsellors should be called, is a more important question; how best to provide social and emotional support to rural people, families and communities affected by drought?" (No Bull - April 2007, p. 1).

The research team allowed the important debate to continue naturally during the six months following the first two-day forum. First ‘counsellor’ was dropped or demoted because the rural communities were perceived to be suspicious of counselling and much of the role involved practical ‘case management’ type of help. Second, ‘drought’ was dropped because client presentations were quite general and seldom linked specifically to the drought by clients. Rather than a specific focus on drought, the special quality of drought counselling that set it apart from general counselling was its flexibility to offer practical help or referrals for practical help and to provide assertive outreach. Put simply, the term outreach worker elevated in importance because of the strong pragmatic realisation that “if the clients won’t come to you — you need to go to them.”

Six months into the research, the term ‘Rural Outreach Worker’ was generally accepted, as indicated in the following CIG summary “Group agreed that Rural Outreach Worker was a better title than Drought Counsellor” (CIG # 7 Hume 19/9/07: Summary). However, ‘Rural Outreach Counsellor’ was sometimes used. This change of name was documented by my editorial in the third edition of No Bull, “Six months later, there seems to be a growing agreement that Rural Outreach Counsellor / Worker is the more apt term, given core tasks include some form of outreach to a range of needs, not just drought”. (No Bull - October 2007, p. 1)

However the reasons for changing the name seemed in part to reflect the wider range of work conducted by the counsellors and partly as a way of avoiding the suspiciousness about counselling. One could question, as I do in Chapter 6, whether a longer term response to this suspicion may be community education and changes to the way counselling is performed and presented. The issue of what to call the drought counsellors was resolved, but not completely satisfactorily as indicated by the following extracts from early CIGAR transcripts and CIG summaries.

Colin: “Why don’t they call themselves drought counsellors?”

Shane: “They see that inherently the problems that are coming up are often linked to relationships with general issues, so they’ve decided to go down that track.”

Pam: “Yes, it’s that crowd of people in my group too.”
Colin: "What then is the impact of that for the workers in terms of the focus of their work? Does that mean they are just like everyone else? Or does that give them any kind of... because I would have thought being a specific drought counsellor there might be some pro's about that, some kind of positive consequences around that” (CIGAR #2 23/4/07: Transcript).

A CIG summary seven months into the research points out that the name depends on the context and target audience:

"Prefer the term Rural Access worker to Rural Outreach. It is important to have a name that also distinguishes the worker from other services and professionals so that it does not confuse clients or the general community. The name used depends on the context i.e. the target audience” (CIG # 7 Grampians 11/9/07: Summary).

The loss of the specialist term counsellor for pragmatic reasons also risked losing the advantages of a specialist term, including the status that goes with it. It also risks misrepresenting the service being provided:

"Pam raised the idea from some that talking about it makes it worse. Also – counsellors being seen by some farmers as wankers rang true for this group. There was some discussion about the word “counselling”... One member asked what other people called it, and talked about the fact that the impact of the drought has in fact caused some family breakdown, and that’s very real. To call it something other than counselling (if that’s what we’re doing) can risk misrepresenting ourselves” (CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary).

Results of the pre and post drought counsellor questionnaire reflected the above observations, with a large variety of alternative names suggested. Whilst they varied slightly, the most common terms used in the names were ‘support’, ‘rural’ and ‘outreach’. Both rural and outreach appeared much more heavily in the post questionnaire than the pre questionnaire, where there was more of a focus around talking and resources. One respondent also said "I think we need to keep using the name [counselling] so we build people’s perception of counselling”.

Drought counselling is not new, but the profession of drought counselling feels very new and insecure, possibly because of the intermittent nature of drought. Short term contracts, stop—start funding and isolated lone and part—time workers, who are not paid well given the complex tasks they perform, all contribute to a poor professional identity. The reflective, connective and collective space provided by the CIG-CIGAR network along with the newsletter No Bull (discussed later) helped create a sense of professional identity, role and pride.

4.5.1.4 Role development, clarification of job descriptions and skill development

"We are all trying to define our role — it helps to hear what others think and do.”

"It is useful to hear what people are doing. It is useful to hear the differences between how people are doing the work and get new ideas.”
Through CIG discussions and networking with other drought counsellors, CIG members began to
define their role, as the above quotes indicate. Because there was little documentation about the role
of a drought counsellor and minimal or no induction to the positions, drought counsellors had to co—
develop the role and create workable job descriptions over time. Several workers were in positions
that were unworkable. For example a number of drought counsellors were employed 1—2 days per
week as centre—based practitioners expected to see relatively high caseloads from day one. This did
not happen. Through the CIG network, it became clear that the position description was inadequate,
not the incumbent.

A key role of the CIG-CIGAR structure was the documentation of drought counselling practice wisdom.
This was a natural process once the drought counsellors were gathered together. The outcomes of this
process are presented in the following chapters.

**4.5.1.5 Increased motivation and improved confidence**

“A great motivator.”

“It can be hard to keep motivated in communities that are hard to engage with.”

“CIG member responded that this group provided an ‘oasis in the work’ and allowed her to maintain
her optimism.” (CIG # 6 Hume 15/8/07: Summary)

The competence literature (e.g. Adler, 1982; White, 1971; Young, Harvey, & O’Hanlon, 2005) points
out that one needs to know what is expected of oneself in order to be able to feel competent.
Furthermore, expectations need to be realistic and achievable. The CIGs provided networking which
allowed the drought counsellors to realise what was the norm across the region and the state. For
example, realising they were not alone in struggling to build case loads early on led to great relief and
hence increased motivation to explore more effective engagement strategies. The simple act of sharing
struggles, successes, innovative strategies, ideas, conceptualisations etc inspired the drought
counsellors to try different approaches to the work and ultimately led to increased confidence, as
suggested by the following quote, made at the end of the research:

“I felt lost, very alone when I came into this role   … It has (the project)  really brought things
together for me because I have grown in confidence to go out there and do things and not be
scared, even on my own sometimes” (CIG # 15 Gippsland 28/8/08 - Final CIG, CIG member
direct quote ).

**4.5.1.6 A conduit for communicating with the funding body**

“It is reassuring to think that this project is linked with DHS and may be having some influence
i.e. funding. It is good to discuss some of the contentious issues in the work like ‘cold calling’.
Lots of people continually have to generate work. It is good to map out what services work in
particular areas” (CIG # 5 Gippsland 3/8/07 - Summary).
The degree to which the CIG members valued The Bouverie Centre’s role in feeding information back and forth between DHS and the CIGs came as a surprise. This was done formally through No Bull and reports such as the Interim Report, but also informally via our contacts at head office. The communication between the funding body and the workers in the field was also helped by inviting the DHS project officers responsible for co-ordinating the drought work to both two-day forums, and creating a regular section in No Bull called ‘News from the BIG shed’ – a light—hearted acknowledgement that rural practitioners can feel head office is like the BIG fat controller. Informally, the communications involved regular two—way conversations between me as manager of the project and the project officers at DHS. If individual services wanted Bouverie to advocate for their service we clarified that our role was to provide advocacy for the service system as a whole based on the data / feedback from the project – not to support one service above others.

In addition to the structures between the funding source and the drought counsellors described above, some CIGs invited DHS drought co-ordinators to CIG meetings which led to very constructive interchanges. For example, the DHS drought co-ordinators who attended CIGs were better informed about on—the—ground details in bureaucratic meetings and CIG members developed a better sense of what were some of the policy dilemmas for the bureaucrats. I had formed the view that this is what relationships between the bureaucracy and the field could and should aspire to.

The role as a conduit between the drought counsellors in the field and the Department of Human Services played by the research team was greatly valued by both parties. It allowed the drought counsellors to express their concerns, and feel that their concerns were being directly reported back to the funding source.

### 4.5.1.7 Debriefing and self care opportunities

“CIG member said that the group offset her frustration with the drought committee meetings” (Anon).

The CIGs provided a safe venue to debrief about the stresses of networking, host agency politics and the vicarious traumatisation of the clinical work. This topic is addressed in detail towards the end of Chapter 6 hence it is only acknowledged here that the CIGs played a significant role.

### 4.5.1.8 Capturing practice wisdom and promoting the transfer of knowledge

The CIG structure and the role of No Bull (discussed in section 4.7) helped to capture practice wisdom which then allowed CIG members to share this knowledge with others.

“I’ve done some work in drought and other rural disasters before and I’ve never felt this sense of networking and support. And the learnings have always been lost and what you’ve done through the CIGs process is capture that and you’ve got everyone to really contribute and you’ve captured it beautifully” (CIG # 15 Gippsland 28/8/08 - Final CIG, CIG member direct quote).
The CIGs provided a venue to collect a wide range of information and resources that the members could then share with their host agencies or to network with other organisations. The most organised in this regard were two members of the Hume CIG who developed a ‘sub group’ through which they delivered resources raised in the Hume CIG meetings.

Later in the research, DHS were keen for the drought counsellors to share their knowledge to the ongoing generalist counselling workforce, which occurred via state-wide workshops disseminating this report’s findings as part of the follow-up to this project (contact The Bouverie Centre for details).

4.5.1.9 A collective voice

“The group is eager to hear feedback from the other CIG groups, and as this is often left until last and so missed, we have decided to start there today” (CIG # 5 Hume 18/7/07 - Summary).

Indicated by the quote above, CIGs valued hearing about other CIGs across the state. A side product of providing a co-ordinated network for the disparate drought counsellors was political action, not just professional development. Whilst this created some dilemmas for the research team (explored in section 4.10.2), collective professional action can inform and influence policy and management of resources from the ground up – which in the area of drought response seems particularly important given that drought recovery seems a less developed area of study compared to other natural disasters.

Two themes that developed universally across all regions, in keeping with previous drought evaluations, were:

i. the need for a sustainable ongoing workforce – rather than a workforce reflecting stop-start funding; and

ii. that the drought counselling workforce take responsibility for responding to all stressful disasters and change affecting rural communities.

iii.

These calls were captured succinctly by a position statement generated during a Gippsland CIG meeting (1/2/2008) attended by 19 professionals including managers, drought counsellors, a DHS drought co-ordinator, rural financial counsellors, relationship counsellors, an agricultural consultant and a PCP representative. This position statement was drafted during the CIG, refined by me as the CIG facilitator and then emailed to all present at the meeting for comment. The final statement was presented informally to our DHS representative and formally in the Interim Report presented to DHS.
Request to government from the Gippsland Co-operative Inquiry Group Drought workers:

Demographic, economic and climate change represent a major shift and re—direction in the Australian rural landscape similar to the impact of the Great Depression. Long—term planning, co—ordinated at all levels of government is required to provide social and emotional support to assist individuals, families and communities adapt to these major and accumulative changes.

Local community boards / recovery committees should be established to co—ordinate and advise the response to all acute crises (fire / flood / drought) as well as ongoing change; determining local needs, priorities and workable solutions. Clarity of roles and responsibilities, including lead agencies at each level of government and local services, needs priority to ensure a collaborative approach to supporting rural communities to adapt to the challenges they face.

An ongoing workforce, skilled in counselling and community development approaches, managed by lead agencies, advised by local advisory boards, and accessed via single point—entry is required to support and work with local communities. These appropriately skilled workers need to be integrated with their host agencies, supported by relevant professional development and connected with each other in order to share resources and practice wisdom.

4.5.2 Critique of the CIGs

They were very few criticisms of the CIGs presented to me, the CIG facilitators or any other members of the research team. This does not mean people weren't critical, but we didn't hear it. The lack of structures to seek negative feedback could be seen as a limitation of the research. The main concerns expressed related to lack of time to cover all of the business arising and suggestions regarding how the time was allocated. The following CIG quote, which was one of the few criticisms I could see in the CIG summaries, reflects the latter concern.

“One CIG member suggested that a little more time could be spent on peer supervision issues, as some members didn’t receive supervision from other sources. As other networks are becoming so big, members reported that the CIG offers opportunities for more ‘intense talk’ about issues in depth. In addition, as people noted they don’t get many opportunities to catch up with each other and often operate in isolation, the CIG provides that space to connect on a personal level” (CIG Anonymous : Summary).

4.5.3 The relationship between the CIGs and The Bouverie Centre

4.5.3.1 Creating a reflective space for front—line workers

In between the doing and the thinking about the doing – interesting things emerge. Most workers are too bogged down in the doing to reflect on what they are doing or why they are doing it. Structures are required to promote reflection — otherwise the doing takes over – especially when workers are busy and the work is difficult. As strategic therapy points out, people often do more of the same when things don’t work rather than considering a different approach. In order to promote critical reflection, the supervision literature (e.g. Carroll & Holloway, 1999; Hawkins & Shohet, 2000) convincingly argues a safe place that is well facilitated is needed in which diversity and vulnerability are tolerated and failure and shame minimised. Structures to promote reflection are also required.
There is also growing research that has found when clinicians engage in research, their work improves because the discipline of research helps them focus on what is most important (Stratton, 2008). Stratton further points out that professional governance authorities increasingly expect professional bodies to show how their ‘art has been changed by research’.

One CIG member’s comments six months into the research when clinical numbers were still low is testimony to the value of creating a reflective space to question the work. He commented that:

“the drought has triggered an awareness of needs but the response is not really meeting the ongoing needs of rural families. This is reflected by the absence of referrals” (CIG # 6 Hume 15/8/07 - Summary).

Rather than simply blaming the clients for not attending, this CIG meeting was able to question the service they were providing.

Recording the CIGs and providing written summaries to all CIG members and to other Bouverie CIG facilitators was an arduous task for the CIG facilitators but it played an important role in several ways:

i. It briefed the CIG facilitators about drought and what was happening across the state which increased their credibility and position as local CIG facilitators;

ii. It demonstrated a tangible support role the CIG facilitator could provide to the CIG members; and

iii. It documented the work – thus encouraging CIG members to articulate their work, making it more real and providing a structure to encourage reflection.

For the drought counsellors, being part of a Co-operative Inquiry research process added to the rigour and importance of the reflective space. For example, several CIG members presented about the research to rural conferences.

4.5.3.2 CIG-CIGAR network: Part of a healing narrative?

An expert panel looking at the social impacts of drought found that rural Australians tend to “feel isolated, alienated and disconnected from the rest of the country” (Kenny, 2008, p. 12). Therefore, all effective collaborations between rural and urban communities can be seen as a part of the healing narrative that West and Smith (1996) identify as addressing the urban / rural divide in their article looking at the anthropology of drought. When two categories of people with a historical unease, unite around a common goal, a spiritual element is released. The rural based CIG membership and the urban based Bouverie facilitators became close over the 15—16 meetings. The last meetings encompassed emotional and celebratory moments of some intensity in all but one CIG – farewell rituals were varied but meaningful. The Barwon South West and Hume CIGs took the facilitators out to lunch, the final Loddon-Mallee CIG was the largest with members travelling up to four hours to be together and the Gippsland CIG insisted on conducting what had become a CIG ritual for departing members – ‘gossiping in the presence of’ – where the departing member listens to the group discuss what they appreciated about working with them. I was also presented with six bottles of local wine and a canvas artwork depicting all of the CIG members. Only the one CIG, which had been vibrant and active throughout the research, was less celebratory due to a dramatic turnover of CIG members during the last few months of the project.

The research showed that an opportunity exists to respond to rural crises in ways that promote a stronger connection between rural and urban communities – rather than exacerbating the historical
unease. This finding is equally relevant to policy makers, service providers, local participants and interested researchers, especially as rural Australia is likely to face increasing rural challenges that could pit urban and rural communities against each other.

During the research several members of the CIG-CIGAR network came up with examples for enacting West and Smith’s concept of urban—rural healing rituals:

“One CIG member spoke about the idea of schools ‘buddying’ up – this led to a discussion about how great it could be for rural schools to have a ‘sponsor school’ in the city, who took a particular interest in them, and acted as a sort of ‘Big brother / Big sister’ school. It could help city kids to understand more about the issues in the country, and hopefully doing what they could to help out” (CIG # 7 Loddon Mallee 18/9/07).

Jeff: …“and in terms of broadening the drought, it’s not just rural people because the whole community depends on the rural community going well. In the Friday Forum there was a lot of discussion about getting city people to visit and have their holidays in the rural areas. Spending their money in the rural areas and having their (holidays in country Victoria) ....they’re starting to really develop a program where you have kids on exchange, urban and rural kids on exchange and promoting that dialogue between urban and rural rather than the “us” and “them” which seems pretty strong”  (CIGAR # 1 26/3/07 - Transcript).

4.5.3.3 My role and the role of the CIG facilitators

The role of the CIG facilitators was dynamic and flexible, reflecting the principles of action research and Co-operative inquiry. Each CIG wanted and required different things from their CIG facilitator. It is always hard to reflect on your own role – both the positive impact and the areas that could have been done better. The CIG facilitators were all experienced family therapists and /or capable group leaders – and although anxious about facilitating their first CIG – were able to negotiate their role as needed by the particular CIG. Family therapists have expertise in being able to promote discussion around contentious issues, embracing different perspectives in order to explore productive outcomes that most members of the family can accept – group leaders have similar skills. The CIG facilitators were able to apply these skills to create reflective spaces in the CIGs that allowed discussion of sensitive issues such as cold calling, confidentiality, and insiders vs outsiders without closing down complexity or diversity.

Using our status as ‘close outsiders’ to our advantage, the CIG facilitators were able to help the groups to avoid following a single agenda or to prematurely stop critiquing the work because, in Carmel Flaskas’ words, “simple dichotomies collapse complexity” (Flaskas, 2008). An example of one CIG discussion that was quite heated and at risk of being dichotomised between cold calling or not — introduced the concept of warm calling (see section 6.5.1.4.3) due to the facilitator’s encouragement to explore the contentious issue in greater detail. The goal of promoting open discussion was also facilitated in a broader context by establishing a section in No Bull called, ‘contemporary controversies’. This section was introduced to No Bull in the July 07 (second) edition with the by—line, “This new section is intended to provoke the readership to explore and critique practice issues by generating genuine, respectful – if robust – dialogue around new ideas or issues that draw different, strong and competing views” (No Bull - July 2007, p. 12).

Another role of the CIG facilitators, but for me especially as manager of the project, was advocacy for the position of the drought counsellors with the funding body DHS. This is discussed in the next section.
4.5.3.4 Ambiguity in the relationship between Bouverie and the CIGs

The CIG members were not Bouverie employees even though the Bouverie team had quite a lot of influence with this workforce as the research developed and our relationship with the CIG members grew stronger. The ambiguity of our relationship with the drought counsellors became clear when The Bouverie Centre achieved funding for state-wide projects that emerged out of the CIG-CIGAR network, namely NB Support and Looking Out For Your Neighbour (LOFYN) (discussed in Chapter 7), the latter developed in conjunction with the Victorian Farmers’ Federation (VFF). It was the drought counsellors who were best placed to implement these projects on the ground but The Bouverie Centre was ultimately responsible to ensure the outcomes were acceptable to the funding body (DHS). The Bouverie research team could only encourage CIG members to deliver the NB Support and LOFYN workshops, not direct them to do so. This proved a source of tension when two areas were slow to run LOFYN workshops and the VFF challenged Bouverie believing the drought counsellors were its direct employees. Interestingly, our solution was to enthuse, document successful elements of the projects and to set minimum expectations for each CIG in return for some funds to support the extra workload. This approach was successful as the minimum expectations were exceeded in three of the five CIGs (see section 7.5.5 for details).

4.5.4 The role of the CIGAR: Keeping an eye on process

I provided supervision and informal debriefing with each CIG facilitator individually after each CIG meeting but the CIGAR provided an opportunity for the CIG facilitators to share dilemmas, check out emergent themes and reflect on the process as a group with an external facilitator. I had originally envisaged the CIGAR as being the site for sharing information between the CIGs but the information from each CIG grew too detailed and was best shared via the written CIG summaries, circulated between CIG facilitators via email.

The CIGAR provided a unique opportunity for comparing CIG facilitation issues. For example, one CIG facilitator struggled initially to engage their CIG – partly because they had been responding to the drought since 2003, much longer than most other CIG regions and were well organised in some areas. Other CIG facilitators engaged all of the State-funded drought counsellors more easily and used the CIGAR to discuss issues such as membership, reasons why a CIG would or would not talk about clinical work, and general themes of facilitation. The CIGAR also provided a platform for conceptualising the elements of drought counselling work. For example, CIGAR discussions helped form the idea of drought as a disenfranchised natural disaster (see Chapter 5), teasing out the counselling skills specific to drought work (see Chapter 6), the relationship between counselling and community development (see Chapter 7), and the organisational structures needed to support drought counsellors so they can be effective (see Chapter 8).

The CIGAR allowed reflection on the process of the research by discussing the group dynamics within specific CIGs or by reflecting on the group dynamics of the CIGAR itself. For example in CIGAR # 4 the CIG facilitators felt frustrated with lack of depth of the discussion in the CIGAR. A post CIGAR meeting without the CIGAR facilitator led us to reflect that we had developed so much content that the naive questions of the CIGAR facilitator were constraining discussion. We decided I should facilitate the content discussion as the lead researcher and ask the CIGAR facilitator to take a meta perspective commenting on the discussion rather than directing it and participating in it. Reflecting on this process (taking a more confident lead in the CIGAR) led the other CIG facilitators in particular take a more active role in facilitating their own CIGs – I had put myself more into my group as a result of my position as lead researcher and project manager. Resolving this process conflict in the CIGAR meeting empowered the other CIG facilitators to put more of themselves into the CIGs rather than being polite.
but distant as can happen when a well intentioned person attempts to engage with a group as an outsider.

The question of how many levels of reflection are sufficient can rightly be asked because we could utilise a reflection on reflection on reflection. I believe that due to the vicarious stress of the drought counsellors (discussed towards the end of Chapter 6) the task of providing CIG facilitators a venue for reflection and conceptual development was an essential element of the research structure, as evidenced by the feedback of CIG facilitators in the next section.

4.5.5 Feedback about the CIGARS and role of the facilitator

The value of having an external facilitator is reflected in the following characteristic quote from one of the participants of the CIGAR meetings:

Jeff: "Alright. Well thanks Colin. It’s good to have someone outside the sort of engagement, asking those questions, coming up with new areas and pushing it. So thanks for that, it’s really good!" (CIGAR # 1 26/3/07 - Transcript).

The choice of Dr. Colin Riess, the director of The Bouverie Centre, as the CIGAR facilitator provided added credibility to the process, ensured support for the research within Bouverie and provided a facilitator who had a wide range of interests and refined clinical skills. Colin occupied a position of ‘distant insider’ to CIGAR participants in that he was a fellow family therapist and knew the CIGAR participants both personally and professionally, and was a ‘close outsider’ to the topic because he was familiar with the research overall but not aware of the specifics. As mentioned the CIGAR participants negotiated with Colin to play a more meta—role, as they developed greater confidence – a process paralleled in the participants’ roles as facilitators within their own CIGs. This change of role is described in retrospect during the last CIGAR meeting:

Colin: Do you think this is necessary this role (CIGAR facilitator), actually.

Amaryll: In the CIGARS?

Shane: Yeah it was helpful.

Colin: I’m not saying it’s not helpful...but you have someone outside, would you do it like that again?

Jeff: Yeah I would.

Pam: Some of the questions you asked would not have come from the inside.

Tina: Sometimes I took back stuff that you said and took that back to my group and asked them to reflect on it.

Jeff: There sort of had to be a parallel where we were able to have some say in how you read it rather than you just running it independent of us.

Amaryll: So you took ownership of that and you invited Colin to do what you most needed which was like a reflective voice from the outside.

(CIGAR # 17 15/9/08)
Once Colin played a more reflective role, the fact that Colin was not closely involved in the research was once again an asset to the CIGAR process. His curiosity as a ‘distant insider’ led to the clarification of unclear statements, the deconstruction of unexplored accepted positions, the raising of ideas from different fields of study and the exploration of the personal links to the content, all of which promoted conceptual development. The CIGAR with Colin’s facilitation provided the research with a meta-perspective. Practical decision making tended to be done in a business meeting after the CIGAR which was initiated several months into the research in response to the growing complexity and scope of the project.

4.5.6 The role of DHS support for the CIG-CIGAR structure

Good will on the ground is not enough; to implement a successful CIG structure top management need to promote and support it. Because of the long term productive working relationship the Bouverie team enjoyed with DHS, especially Sue Hughes, the research team was afforded support in the early stages of the research before the value of the CIGs was obvious. An indication of this tangible support is the following email reporting on a telephone link up between the DHS drought co-ordinators early in the project that was carbon copied to the research team (Hughes, 2007, 13/3):

...amongst all the reports & discussion, one person mentioned that the rural drought counsellors were having some luck reaching young men through the local sporting clubs — young men having counselling sessions. However they are doing it — getting young men talking about their stress / feelings, DHS should be officially pleased. This is such a hard to reach group at anytime, it would be interesting to know more about what they’re doing.

...this kind of information will come out over time through the Cooperative Inquiry Groups (CIGs). The CIGs will help these kinds of ideas grow and develop, so gradually counsellors pick up extra skills integrating them into their practice. This is the beauty of the CIGs, compared to DHS people trying to suggest this kind of good practice because it can be misinterpreted as an instruction, which can lead to people trying to implement approaches that don't work for them.

4.6 The problem of clinical data

The CIG data became the key data source because there was a poor response to requests for clinical data; namely the Problem and Progress sheets and client Feedback and Advice questionnaires. Whilst the drought counsellors reported being supportive of the clinical research, feedback revealed they did not feel comfortable getting clients to fill out the paperwork because they were working hard to simply engage clients in sensitive contexts. Further exploration revealed a suspicion of paperwork in the rural community – possibly associated with red tape, complex Centrelink forms and poor literacy levels. Paperwork is commonly seen as overwhelming and as a sign of failure, especially Centrelink forms. The consent forms for the research were seen as too complex and the Feedback and Advice questionnaire too long. Asking the drought counsellors to complete the Problem and Progress sheets anonymously, rather than co—jointly with clients in sessions did not yield any further success – which may suggest clinicians were also uncomfortable with the paperwork. Some practitioners found the Takeaway sheets very useful clinically, but again this did not translate into high returns.
Below is a selection of feedback to support the above claims:

“There was a general feeling that the paperwork is a bit overwhelming, and that clients may retreat — emotionally, physically, or both — if counsellors pull out their bundle of questionnaires and informed consents” (CIG #1 Hume 21/3/07: Summary).

“It seems that once they do have clients engaged, it could feel like pushing the friendship to ask for participation in research, reading and signing forms, etc. Reports from the field seem to be that farmers are pretty fed up with paperwork and bureaucratic processes that seem to create even more obstacles, rather than facilitate their gaining access to resources. Having said all that, it is my impression that the group members are largely supportive of the research and think it needs to be completed. They just haven’t quite got their heads wrapped around a process by which they keep their clients engaged and get them involved with the research at the same time” (CIG #2 Hume 18/4/07: Summary).

“Due to the ‘hard to engage’ nature of the client group, people are concerned that introducing the clinical research component may alienate clients. Some group members have found the Takeaway pads to be useful with some clients. There is also an inordinate amount of paperwork associated with assisting clients to gain drought relief and there is reluctance from group members to add more information and paperwork (at least initially) for clients to complete. The group did express their support for clinical research and were receptive to investigating how it could be incorporated into their work” (CIG # 2 Grampians 16/4/07 - Summary).

“As on CIG member succinctly put it — ‘When I walk in I have got nothing in my hands, except a hat and my name badge on. The conversation starts, and we might get to the end after an hour or so, and only then I might say ‘can I take down some details?’ There was a sense that it could be counter productive to request clients fill in scales and sheets. In addition, it would be hard to do in a dairy, windy, sweeping flies away, not ideal’ (CIG # 9 Loddon-Mallee 20/11/07: Summary).

“As an alternative, we wondered whether workers could ask some basic questions at the follow up phone call instead” (CIG # 9 Loddon-Mallee 20/11/07: Summary).

Telephone follow-ups as suggested in the last CIG quote or face-to-face interviews conducted with the support of respected local institutions such as the strategy employed by the Birchip Cropping Group sponsored research (Rickards, 2007) may have been more effective in obtaining information directly from clients.

### 4.7 The role of No Bull – newsletter of the State-funded drought counsellors

The newsletter seemed to provide a tangible testimony to the connection between the drought counsellors, a symbol of legitimacy for the profession, a vehicle for documenting the knowledge gradually gained by the research and a communication channel for resources and ideas about the drought. The role and significance No Bull played in the research is explored in greater detail in the next few sections.
4.7.1 A quality product indicates ‘you’re worth it’

What seemed like a minor component of the initial DHS brief to The Bouverie Centre, “A mechanism for knowledge sharing between regions and the development of relevant resources” (Department of Human Services [DHS], 2006b, p. 5), became a significant vehicle for communication, reflection, conceptual development and dissemination of ideas. My original idea of a newsletter was of a folded A3 sheet, but with the rapid influx of information from the CIGs I produced an 8 page first edition complete with a professional layout. The brief for the publisher was to design a simple, austere and rurally friendly styled newsletter in keeping with its name: No Bull.

A surprising outcome of the research was the positive feedback about the quality of No Bull. I was very nervous that the field would be resentful that The Bouverie Centre (an urban based tertiary service) was using funding that could have gone to direct service provision, to create a professionally produced newsletter. Feedback suggested the field loved being seen as worthy of a high quality product. The budget was not extreme because of The Bouverie Centre’s ongoing relationship with Inklink publishers and the dedication of the editor – which I believe conveyed the culturally congruent message that The Bouverie Centre would deliver tangible outcomes not just talk, no matter how much out-of-hours work it took. This last point is no trivial matter. Part of being an outsider is having to prove in observable ways (such as hard work) commitment to the cause which is taken as a given with members of the insider group.

Prior to publishing edition three, I had already received over 14 emails conveying positive feedback about No Bull. A sample is shown below:

- You have really excelled yourselves with No Bull. It’s well—presented, lively, informative, creative – and fun, with those well chosen cartoons.
- I took a few copies of the No Bullshit mag to my relatives in ...they loved the cartoons and it even peaked their interest in the project which given their general attitude to anything ‘therapeutic' in nature, indicates the project’s successful appeal!!
- Congratulations on No Bull – I find it supportive and informative ... and am one of those workers who is employed 8 hours a week ....
- Thank you for such a professional and informative product
- Just read your article “Original Piece”. Thought it was fantastic. Seeing a few people here affected by the drought now, not only farmers, but people who are seeing a downturn in their businesses that are not farm related. Keep up the good work. It’s life saving stuff!
- Support workers’ network meeting last week general feeling was that it is getting better each edition with the October one the best so far. Well Done. It is a great reference and support tool for us all.
- Brilliant edition.

4.7.2 Punctuation of the research

No Bull, which was published every three months, inadvertently turned out to be an asset to the research, providing, as mentioned, a regular punctuation of the project by documenting key issues at the time of publication. A content analysis of the newsletter, and of my editorials, became a significant way to chart the developmental stages of the project when writing the interim and this final report. Each edition reflects the themes and issues present in the CIG-CIGAR network at the time and each editorial provides documented evidence of what was uppermost in my thinking (at least what could be
published) at regular stages through the research, rather than reconstructed in retrospect at the end of the research. Hence, I have made available copies of No Bull on the Bouverie website as a simple accountability measure. They should be read in conjunction with the report or from start to finish as an alternative narrative of the research.

**4.7.3 A vehicle for feeding the research back to the field in real time**

No Bull allowed data from the research to be fed back to the field during the research – rather than at the end of the research. Each edition contained a section called ‘Research notes’ which was used to provide formal feedback about the research findings. For example, edition one (No Bull - April 2007, p. 3) reported quotes from the client feedback and advice questionnaires received which readers could use in promotion of their work. Edition two (No Bull - July 2007, p. 6) provided a summary of the only in—depth client interview I conducted, which pointed out the value of talking to a ‘friendly stranger’. Edition three (No Bull - October 2007, p. 7) gave a summary of the 60 client Problem & Progress sheets, which pointed out that practical referrals and talking were reported as helpful. Edition 4 (No Bull - February 2008, p. 7) reflected back CIG members’ views about the CIGs, which could be interpreted as clarifying and celebrating the role they played. The way in which research feedback was interpreted by each reader cannot be controlled, but by providing it for public review and conveying the data in a practical way, the researcher aimed to promote joint ownership of the research process. Hopefully it also informed practice in a helpful way.

Although regular updates on the findings emerging from the research did little to inspire practitioners to collect client data, it most likely helped the research to be seen as relevant, usefully informing practice, and transparent.

**4.7.4 Support to publish**

Many drought counsellors were not used to writing up or publishing their work. The casual style of No Bull allowed for work to be edited simply and published. The Bouverie team edited work to promote good communication whilst trying to maintain the author’s voice. I did not see myself as an editor until an incident putting together the third edition. Excited by a draft that was submitted for publishing in an upcoming edition by two drought counsellors I edited it so dramatically that it was a new piece – committing the worst act of appropriation and naive editorship. The generosity of the drought counsellors in accepting my apologies led to me publishing this piece under my own name and they went on to publish other works. It made me realise that I had become an editor of a professional journal and it taught me the sanctity of people’s words.

The availability of No Bull as a source for publishing the work of the drought counsellors generated considerable interest in writing and contributing to the newsletter, thus stimulating reflective and conceptual discussions in CIGs across the state – simply by having them think “what aspect of my work could I write about – how would I write about it.”

**4.7.5 Encouragement to debate the work**

Once work is recorded and published, it becomes available for critique. I found myself creating a context for promoting debate in No Bull. The section, “contemporary controversies” is the most obvious example. I also mentored authors that were not used to publishing, to write, encouraging them to critique their work or to raise dilemmas in their writing, rather than presenting incontestable truths. I also called for different articles on the same topic — especially controversial topics such as
'cold calling' (See 'Contemporary controversies' No Bull - February 2008, p. 11). Thus, my role as an editor, in a subtle way, encouraged further reflection on the work of the drought counsellors. How much debate No Bull promoted out in the community – I do not know.

**4.7.6 A vehicle for drought counsellors to promote their work – and themselves**

Much is made of the view that rural people are cynical about academics from the city ‘waltzing in and telling us what to do’. I personally was quite anxious that I would be seen in this way. What I found was that the rural drought counsellors loved the opportunity to publish their own work. In fact I suspect academic qualifications are highly valued in many marginalised communities – but the lack of opportunity is more acutely felt – possibly being expressed as cynicism. Whilst I do not have recorded quotes to substantiate this claim, my personal view changed from thinking that rural people are cynical about academics telling them how to do their work, to thinking that rural people who are not used to writing about their work or are too busy doing the work to write about doing the work, are resentful when someone with less front—line experience comes in and co—opts the position of expert. Given the encouragement, opportunity and support to publish their work, I found the drought counsellors were much less cynical about academia. Acknowledging the danger of gross generalisations, I suggest that rural people who appear cynical about research and writing may in fact be resentful about not having a voice beyond their local sphere, and hence have to protect their local authority.

I heard anecdotally through the networks that a drought counsellor was chuffed that when they had introduced themselves to a prospective employer, the employer replied, “I know who you are, I read about you in No Bull.”

**4.7.7 Promoting and making the work accessible to a broader audience**

The new edition of the No Bull newsletter was distributed, and consensus was that it was ‘getting better and better’, and was a good resource for the sector (CIG # 9 Loddon Mallee 20/11/07 - Summary).

No Bull was distributed to over 237 people from 97 different organisations electronically, with encouragement to forward it onto anyone else who might be interested. Multiple hard copies were provided to the CIG groups and people on our mailing list (471 hard copies to 119 people) which resulted in approximately 800-900 of the 1000 print run being distributed. The remainder were distributed via conferences etc. Advertisements inviting people to join the mailing list for No Bull and the email network were included in each edition.

Whilst primarily the newsletter of the State-funded drought counsellors, the non-academic and non-jargonistic writing style made No Bull accessible to a wide range of other people from Government Ministers to some farmers themselves. For example, a female farmer who had read No Bull emailed me to request a counselling referral for her family who was suffering financial difficulties and a friend’s farming family, to her surprise, enjoyed reading No Bull and reported particularly liking the cartoons. The cartoons

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14 Cartoons were generously provided by inkcinct (www.inkcinct.com.au) for a nominal fee.
I also informally discovered that Minister Lisa Neville read No Bull and later put her office officially on the mailing list. Hard copies and e-copies were sent to all PCPs and all DHS drought co-ordinators. The newsletter provided a vehicle for sharing the ideas generated by the CIG-CIGAR network to a wider audience.

4.7.8 Accountability

With a relatively broad and extensive audience, No Bull acted as a subtle accountability measure for the accuracy of the documentation and conceptualisation of the research, and for the work of the drought counsellors. Lincoln (1995) points out that public scrutiny, especially accessible presentation of the research to all affected by the research, is an important accountability mechanism.

4.7.9 Journal of the profession

Most established professions enjoy structures that help create a professional identity for members of that profession. During my involvement in the drought project, I became aware of the powerful role that the family therapy journal and the annual conferences play in promoting and supporting my professional identity as a family therapist. In reflecting on this, I began to consider that No Bull had played the role of a journal for the drought counsellors and the two-day forums the role of annual conferences — two significant structures for establishing a professional identity —especially in the area of health and welfare.

4.7.10 No Bull as advocate: The importance of an appropriate job description to do a good job

Articles in No Bull helped drought counsellors to articulate their role for themselves as evidenced by the following email feedback from a newly appointed drought counsellor:

As this is a new role to (service) and within the (community), I am hoping to touch base with yourself about the support available from The Bouverie Centre for Drought Outreach Workers. I have read 3 editions of your 'No Bull' newsletter which has been helpful in gaining understanding of what my role can look like.

Having articulated their role to themselves drought counsellors were better able to negotiate more appropriate job descriptions for their role. Early on some host agencies had employed drought counsellors under unrealistic job descriptions. This was occurring sporadically right up until the end of our formal involvement with the CIG network. Some job descriptions unrealistically stipulated all hours should be face-to-face counselling sessions and all contact centre-based. Buoyed by CIG discussions, drought counsellors who found themselves in these invidious situations used the CIG discussions and articles in No Bull to advocate with their local management for more appropriate job descriptions. The article called ‘What they forgot to tell you when you applied to be a specialist drought counsellor...’ (No Bull - October 2007, p. 8) was particularly useful.
4.7.11 No Bull: A collective document

No Bull had some parallels to the Dulwich Centre’s concept of the collective document. David Denborough (2008) of the Dulwich Centre describes the task of the editor as “to recognise peoples’ stories, rescue them, and represent them back to the people.” The drought counsellors were doing good work but it was going unrecognised. Using the CIG network, the research helped recognise the skills of the drought counsellors, rescued them and through the CIGAR process helped represent them back to the drought counsellors through No Bull and the formal reports to DHS. Because of the emphasis on documenting the drought counsellors’ work and encouraging them to publish, No Bull became increasingly owned by them as their journal.

4.7.12 Addressing the lack of documentation

The lack of documentation of the practice wisdom from previous droughts was a strong theme that emerged both in my reading about drought, No Bull articles, casual talk and CIG and CIGAR discussions throughout the research. Some of the complexities of recording the drought counsellors’ practice wisdom were raised in the following CIG discussion:

“This fits with Jeff’s research suggesting that information about supporting drought affected communities is often lost or not well documented or distributed. What documentation would you leave? How would you leave it? Who would you leave it with? Is all the information collected in one place?” (CIG # 11 Grampians 31/3/08 - Summary)

CIGAR and CIG discussions posed several reasons for the lack of documented drought counselling practice wisdom in the past, including: drought’s intermittent nature means it can be years from one drought to the next which leads knowledge to be lost; short-term employment contracts lead workers to consider their livelihood towards the end of their contracts rather than documenting practice wisdom; and short-term planning creates a tendency for each drought to be tackled individually. If drought is seen as a freak of nature rather than a predictable occurrence as West and Smith (1996) suggest, documentation and planning will tend to reactive rather than planned. A consequence of the lack of documentation or possibly another factor in the dearth of available information is the poor ‘service memory’ of drought work in the host agencies employing the drought counsellors. This is possibly due to the fact that specialist drought workers are often employed temporarily and because of the short term nature of funding, not integrated into the host agency.

Given this context, the research took on a valuable role in documenting the practice wisdom of the CIG network. The interim and final report to DHS were seen as important by the drought counsellors out in the field, because they grew concerned that their work would be lost with their positions, as indicated in the following passage:

“They are clear that, if their contracts are to finish, they do not want all of the good work they have done and the strategies they have put in place to just disappear without a trace (which brings us back to the legacy). It is very important to the group members that the successes they have had, the barriers they have overcome (or found insurmountable), and the wisdom they have accrued over the past year be well—represented, in a respectful and perceptive way that maintains the integrity of their work, to the top—level politicians who are in a position to make funding decisions. It is in this way we can build upon what we already know, instead of “reinventing the wheel” every time we have a similar crisis” (CIG # 12 Hume 15/4/08 - Summary).
Twelve months into the research it was time to stop, reflect and celebrate as a CIG-CIGAR network. Requested by the CIG members themselves, the second two-day forum began to take on the role of a professional conference enjoyed, or taken—for—granted, by many professional groups in the helping professions. The conference, named “We Care – No Bull” by a drought counsellor as part of a state-wide competition, reflected the key issues at the time; Celebration, Best Practice and Self-Care – a subtitle devised by the CIG facilitators.

4.8 Second Two-day Forum

4.8.1 We Care — No Bull: Celebration, Best Practice and Self-Care

The second two-day forum was held on the 28th and 29th of February, 2008, in Bendigo. The key outcomes are reported, followed by a comparison between the first and second two-day forums, which were held 12 months apart.

4.8.2 Key outcomes

- 59 non-Bouverie participants in total attended the forum:
  - 37 state funded drought counsellors;
  - 10 federally funded drought counsellors;
  - 12 others (3 DHS Reps, 6 Primary Mental Health Team, 2 Shire Workers, 1 Massage Therapist).
- Federally funded counsellors attending CIGs attended the forum for free.
- Accommodation, meals and registration were free to all CIG members.
- Extensive practice wisdom was documented and was published in a special edition of No Bull in May 2008.
- Evaluation was positive and completed by 32 of the 59 participants (Numbers were low because some people left early in order to travel long distances home.)

4.8.3 Celebration and best practice

Whilst drought counsellors’ embarrassment at having very low case-loads for the job they had been employed to do (counselling) was a strong underlying theme in the first forum, 12 months on, Shane Weir guided people through an interactive exercise designed to celebrate sparkling clinical moments and the values underlying their work (See ‘Difficulty of celebrating work’ No Bull - May 2008, p. 8). Acceptable counselling case-loads, expansion of the role to include case management and community work and development of the drought counsellors’ knowledge base and confidence was immediately apparent.

CIG facilitators also recognised the growing confidence in their CIGs, as evidenced by the following reflection,
“What is most noticeable now as the facilitator of this CIG, is that the Rural Support Line staff articulate their role more clearly and with greater authority than even in January 2008” (CIG # 7 Rural Support Line 22/7/08 - Summary).

A noticeable contrast to the first forum was the ability of drought counsellors to place their work within a community development frame – although this remained an area ripe for further education, conceptualisation and development. An analysis of the relationship between counselling and community development in drought work is presented in more detail in Chapter 7 but as indicated by the photograph below a wide range of community development activities were being done in conjunction with direct counselling services.

Photo: Projects completed by drought counsellors along the counselling – community development continuum (Second forum Bendigo, 28—29th February 2008).

With increased confidence in their work role, strengthened working relationships both within and between the CIGs and the culture of robust debate promoted through the CIGs and No Bull, discussions about controversial topics such as cold calling were able to be addressed much more directly, both by the Bouverie team and the participants. In the formal evaluation, for example, when asked what they would apply from the forum to their work, one person wrote “Research stuff from Birchip, cold calling, learning from other regional workers and different professional groups which provide different alternatives to my approach.” One person, however, reported in a CIG following the forum, “Felt cold calling exercise could be more in depth, and be more balanced. Seemed quite pro—cold calling, less time spent on anti—cold calling. Minimising critical factors, though Tina pointed out some of these” (CIG # 2 Barwon South West 13/3/08 - Summary).

4.8.4 Evaluation of the second two-day forum

Thirty-four of the 59 participants completed the forum evaluation. The evaluation asked four key questions:

i. What will you ‘take-away’ from the forum?

ii. What could you ‘apply’ to your work?

iii. What improvements would you suggest?

iv. Other comments?

An overall rating from 1—10 was elicited using a bull’s eye image and the question, “did we hit the mark?”
In response to ‘what will you take-away’, networking was by far the most common answer. The value of networking and the importance of connecting and sharing information were identified as being greatly important to the respondents. For example:

“A decreasing sense of isolation”

“Importance of connecting and getting together to share info”

Comments about the benefits of the forum for information sharing purposes followed networking in response frequency. This included both learning new information, greater depth of understanding about the broader picture, learning about drought issues in general and what other workers are doing across the state.

For example:

“Broader knowledge – Victoria wide and the commonalities state-wide”

“Apart from all the new networks / contacts, I will take back to my organisation, info and hope that there are great programs happening”

“Some great innovative and creative ways of engaging farming communities”

Data collection, cold calling, story telling, compassion fatigue and validation were also noted as things the workers would ‘take away’ from the forum.

There was a wide variety of suggestions for improvements but no one idea was mentioned significantly more often than another. The most common suggestions for improvements were around food, requests for more small group work/workshops, and surprisingly several comments about the evening entertainment:

“make the evening entertainment less drought focused...”

“Although it was wonderful to have organised music – it was a bit depressing focusing on drought, rain etc. Need a total break. The two man band downstairs in bar would have been more fun”

These evaluations suggest that the entertainment, which included songs about drought, was a bit heavy. These participants emphasised the need to have time free of being reminded of the hardship of the drought; a key learning about the importance of emotional regulation in response to chronic disasters, which is explored in detail in Chapter 6.

In response to the question, ‘what will you be able to apply to your work’, networking was again the most frequent response. This was followed by ‘continue with what I’m doing’ and ‘learning from the work of others’. For example:
“Many clues from the experiences shared by more experienced practitioners about cold calling especially”

The majority of the ‘additional comments’ were centered on thankyous, networking and appreciation for the attention to detail and professionalism displayed throughout the forum by the organisers. For example:

“Great attention to all the details. Very professional approach. Felt very pampered”.

Feedback in the CIGs after the forum was also positive focusing on the celebratory nature of the forum. For example,

“Sparkling moments great – good to talk about good things in work, full of humanity” (CIG #2 Barwon SW 13/3/08: Summary).

4.8.5 Self care

A detailed exploration of self care is presented towards the end of Chapter 6 – but I wanted to briefly indicate here the importance placed on the role of self care, 12 months into the project by the Bouverie research team and the participants of the second two-day forum. The self care component of the forum, a recurring theme in the CIGs leading up to the forum, was much appreciated according to forum evaluations, CIG feedback and unsolicited email feedback. The unsolicited email feedback presented below suggests that the participants appreciated that, in addition to a stimulating program, vicarious traumatisation of the workforce was addressed directly, through a presentation on vicarious trauma and ‘self care activities – such as massage, music, providing food and accommodation’. Two unsolicited emails both mention the term ‘nourishment’, consistent with this theme.

4.8.5.1 Unsolicited email feedback from the Bendigo forum

17/3/08 email

Hi Jeff, Shane, Pam, Elena and Judy

A belated but sincere thanks to you all for providing us with the forum that was so stimulating, action—packed, thought—provoking, informative – so many areas covered – as well as entertaining and nourishing.

I know it involved a lot of work for all of you – particularly those late nights in Bendigo! albeit aided by bottles of red – and I appreciate that you all gave so much to make it such a worthwhile get—together.

Thanks again.

Family Counsellor
hi
Just thought I’d share some bits of feedback that have come my way — below are two quotes from emails I received:

Just wanted to let you know that it was a great forum and I was so pleased to have been part of it

Great conference, great people — all round just had a fantastic time and came away with more connections and ideas

I also met with my CIG group today — they loved being at the conference and most particularly talked about the passion and energy which they noticed are evident in this team. They talked about the care that was taken to make it an interesting and fun and nourishing time for everyone who attended. They couldn’t speak more highly of how well it was organised — and they loved the accommodation, the venue and the food. (CIG facilitator)

4.8.6 Position statement of the drought counsellors

A poignant illustration of how far the drought counsellors had come as a professionalised body was the co-development of a position statement about future drought counselling services in Victoria. The statement was prepared collectively by the 70 drought counsellors and related workers at the two-day forum. In order to tap the thoughts of all of the forum participants, the names of randomly selected pairs of participants were placed on an envelope containing two of the following five tasks:

**TASK ONE**  
"50 word Lift Talk"

Suppose you found yourself in a lift with Lisa Neville, the Minister responsible for drought, and she asked you to describe the ideal drought counselling service.

Please record your 30 second (50 word) answer below.

“An ideal drought counselling service..................”

**TASK TWO**  
"Drought counsellor starter pack"

List what you would put in a ‘drought counsellor starter pack’ to help induct your replacement if they were employed in a similar role to you during the next drought.

**TASK THREE**  
The BIG boss for a day

If you were responsible for determining how the drought recovery money was spent, in retrospect, how would you have allocated the cost of employing you and your colleagues? (Dot points are fine)

**TASK FOUR**  
Re—Positioning drought counsellors

List the three most important points you would make in a written submission to extend the drought counsellors role past September. Please indicate the most appropriate name for a ‘drought counsellor’ first.
1. : 

2. : 

3. : 

**TASK FIVE**  
**Creating a Legacy**

If your position was not funded past September, what advice would you have for your employing organisation on how it should carry on your work?

Each pair of participants was instructed to go on a long walk and discuss these questions and then jointly record their answers based on their discussion. The answers were collected and collated into a draft statement during the evening of the first day by the Bouverie Team. The draft was then presented to the participants at the forum for further input leading to the following statement, which was published in No Bull (No Bull - May 2008), and recorded in the widely circulated Interim Report.

A sustainable long—term vision is vital to support rural communities as they adapt to social, economic and environmental changes.

The social and emotional support for this work would be facilitated by Rural Outreach & Support Workers, building on the established networks and knowledge gained through the drought work, informed by universal recording systems and supported by co—ordinated information sharing.

A strong and effective service would assist in developing communities’ abilities to address a variety of rural crises (i.e. fire, flood, pestilence) and support ongoing change, with co—ordinated funding from each level of government, and integration with key services.

To be effective in their work, Rural Outreach and Support Workers would require a repertoire of skills and knowledge, including: assertive outreach capabilities, flexibility and an understanding of the challenges of rural communities. Rural Outreach and Support Workers and their organisations would need to develop effective and innovative ways to combine counselling and community development approaches.

### 4.8.7 Book ends of the research

The two-day forums could be seen as book ends for the research – even though the research continued for a further seven months after the second forum. Having two similar large public events scheduled at the same time one year apart had the effect of punctuating the ongoing work of the counsellors and allowed the research team and the drought counsellors to notice and reflect on their progress between the two forums. The Bouverie team initiated the first forum, and as an endorsement of the success of this event, the drought counsellors across the state called for the second one and “for another forum in 6 months” after that (CIG #2 Barwon SW 13/3/08: Summary).

The increased confidence in both The Bouverie team and the drought counsellors led to greater celebration of the work and greater courage to critique and debate the work, most clearly expressed in
the debate around cold calling, which was a topic that was too controversial for the required robust debate during the first forum. The following section looks at the changes in the thinking and the approach of the drought counsellors between the first and second forum, as measured by a questionnaire completed by drought counsellors as part of the research.

4.9 Drought counsellor questionnaire

The 85 item questionnaire was a mixture of 5 point likert scales and open ended questions. The responses are presented here to enrich the qualitative data already presented, focusing on how the drought counsellors thought about and approached their work and how this changed between the two forums.

4.9.1 Pre and post questionnaires

Of the 35 drought counsellors who attended the first two-day forum, all conscientiously completed the pre-project questionnaires taking over 45 minutes —longer than I expected. Twelve months later only 18 drought counsellors were still employed in their original positions, although some were still doing similar work and had simply crossed over to more secure positions. All 18 completed the same questionnaire.

4.9.2 The sample

- 10 females; 8 males completed both pre and post questionnaires
- Participants ranged in age from 28 to 59, with an average age of 48.35 years
- 5 indicated they had spent most of their life in major city; 13 in the country
- 11 considered themselves locals in the area in which they were employed; 7 did not

Table 4.7: Self rated level of experience of the drought counsellors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self rated level of experience in:</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responding to natural disasters / trauma work</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Counselling</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community development work rurally</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community development work generally</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Counselling</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in Rural Community</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living / working in the farming sector</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in a rural community</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to embarking on the research, participants were asked to use a 5 point scale, where 1 equals no experience and 5 equals a lot of experience, to indicate how experienced they were in various domains related to drought work. Table 1 presents the averages across the 18 participants.
Around half of the sample rated themselves as having above average or a lot of experience in living and working in rural community / farming sector. By comparison, many (47%) reported having little to no experience in responding to natural disasters / trauma work and in rural counselling.

4.9.3 Pre — post comparisons

4.9.3.1 Ideas about working with drought affected communities

Respondents were asked to rate the likelihood that men / women would talk about personal and family problems with various people using a 5 point scale, with 1 representing not likely at all to 5 representing highly likely. (These results are presented in Chapter 6 when I examine whether different approaches are required to engage men and women).

4.9.3.2 Ideas on what makes a good drought counsellor

Table 4.8: Qualities of a good drought counsellor as rated by a sample of drought counsellors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Mean at Time 1</th>
<th>Mean at Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of warmth</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of honesty</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of directness</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Importance of avoiding jargon</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of talking about difficulties upfront</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of care</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant difference in average ratings from Time 1 to Time 2

Respondents were asked to rate how important it was for an "ideal drought counsellor" to possess a list of 6 dimensions (see Table 4.8), using a 1 to 5 scale where 1 equals not at all and 5 equals extremely important. The dimensions were derived from No Bullshit Therapy and not a comprehensive range of skills. Twelve months into the job, respondents’ perception of the importance of avoiding jargon was the only dimension to change significantly, decreasing at the .05 level of significance.

Table 4.9: Qualities judged most helpful at time 1 (first forum) and time 2 (second forum)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>No. of respondents who circled response Time 1</th>
<th>No. of respondents who circled response Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness of warmth</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness of honesty</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness of directness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness of avoiding jargon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness of talking about difficulties upfront</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness of care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants were given a list of 6 dimensions and asked to select two that they found most helpful in conducting their work. Honesty, talking about difficulties upfront and warmth were endorsed more frequently than directness and avoiding jargon. There was little change in responses from Time 1 to Time 2.

### 4.9.3.3 Confidence as a counsellor

Table 4.10: Confidence ratings on particular areas of the work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of work</th>
<th>Mean at Time 1</th>
<th>Mean at Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with rural people</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with men suspicious of</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counselling</td>
<td>*Confidence working with farmers affected by</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with women in general</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with suicidal clients</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with men in general</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with more than 1 person in</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with children</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with wider community</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with clients ref’d by non</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health welfare sector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with angry men</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with family conflict</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence working with reluctant talkers</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates a statistically significant (p<.05) difference in average ratings from Time 1 to Time 2.

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 equals not at all, and 5 equals very confident, participants were asked to evaluate how confident they considered themselves to be in working with a variety of different people. Twelve months into the research, respondents’ average self-rated confidence in working specifically with farmers affected by drought had risen statistically (Mean: Time 1=.3.72; Time 2= 4.11, p<.05). This difference was statistically significant at a .05 level.
4.9.3.4 Importance placed on various helping techniques when working with rural people affected by drought

Table 4.11: Ratings of importance of approaches, comparison between time 1 and time 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of work</th>
<th>Mean at Time 1</th>
<th>Mean at Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance placed on education / information giving</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance placed on emotional empathy</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance placed on practical help</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance placed on family approaches</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Importance placed on individual approaches</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Importance placed on community development approaches</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance placed on counselling approaches</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates a statistically significant difference (p<.05) in average ratings from Time 1 to Time 2

Respondents indicated how important they thought various dimensions were when working with rural people affected by drought using a 5 point scale, where 1 equals not at all and 5 equals extremely important. Table 4.13 shows that over the course of the 12 months, the level of importance participants assigned to individual approaches decreased significantly whilst the value attached to community development approaches rose significantly. Overall, all 7 dimensions were considered very important in working with people affected by drought.

In response to the question, “What do you think you can do as a counsellor to create a good working relationship with rural clients?” drought counsellors noted the following:

Appreciation of being available, maintaining confidentiality, creating visible networks and venue or location of meeting place emerged in the post questionnaire. The importance of local rural community knowledge and trust was maintained from the pre to the post questionnaire.

4.10 Loss of workers between the first and second forums

4.10.1 The effect of stop—start funding

The way in which drought counsellors were employed must be considered when making sense of the CIG data. Drought counsellors are often employed quickly, with little clarity about the role, little induction, with varying support and understanding of their work from host agencies. They are charged with the task of engaging reluctant members of a stressed rural and remote community which is suspicious of counselling and of which they are a part. Whilst dealing with these complexities, drought counsellors have limited and unpredictable tenure. Most State-funded drought counsellors were employed for 20 to 22 months in total — 12 months originally, with a 6 month extension, followed by an extra three. Of the 35 State-funded drought counsellors who attended the first day—forum in February 2007, 12 (33%) had left their positions 12 months into the research, despite funding being extended. Whilst all the factors in play are not clear, the figures suggest that the conditions or nature of the employment are not conducive to a sustainable workforce. A sustainable workforce or an
effective induction and support program are a basic necessity for the professionalisation of a field. The disruptive nature of the stop—start funding and short-term planning can be seen in this anonymous CIG quote which was typical of responses being received from across the state:

“Our CEO is advocating that the effects of the drought will continue for four years even if it breaks soon. Funding for (service) has been extended for an extra 12 months. (Service) still do not know if they will be refunded. Funding delays inhibit staff continuity. It is hard to fill vacancies when workers leave. (Organisation) has embarked on large advertising campaigns for very few applications” (CIG # 3 Anonymous  21/5/07: Summary).

4.10.2 A dilemma for the research team: A surprising responsibility

This role of advocating for the drought counsellors placed me and the CIG facilitators in a complex position. Whilst we had developed very close relationships with CIG members, as contractors for DHS we had certain obligations to our funding body, together with our role in researching the bigger picture of drought response. The Bouverie Centre, and me as its representative, were privy to information that was not official, not confirmed, and yet potentially had serious impact on the drought counsellors. For example, it became likely that the State-funded drought counsellors would not be re—employed after September, 2008.

As the research progressed, a major dilemma began to emerge. We had helped create a co—ordinated, supportive state-wide professional body; there were opportunities for connection through the CIGs, the No Bull newsletter and annual forums; the morale and effectiveness seemed high and counselling case-loads were growing — and now we were hearing from our funding source and the field that continuation of state funding was unlikely. The impact of start—stop funding is addressed above but it led to a major dilemma for the research team and for me in my role as the manager of the project. As an employee of DHS I could not be seen to advocate directly for the drought counsellors – and yet my team and I had become very connected to our CIG colleagues and could feel their frustration and could begin to imagine the impact of them losing their funding — but not the demand for their work. The research provided DHS with feedback which may have played a role (which cannot be described in detail to protect confidentiality) in extending the funding from June 08 to Sept 08.

The role of The Bouverie Centre, providing feedback formally and informally to DHS was highly valued by the CIG members because the drought counsellors were not always well connected within their host agencies and were not united by a professional body prior to the CIG network. Whilst some of the more established workers had created very good channels of feedback (for example, one drought counsellor used their local Minister to raise concerns about the prospect of the funding not continuing in an area of great need) most did not feel they had a strong voice. Hence the drought counsellors wanted us to advocate politically for their positions.

We had to manage our dual role of DHS contractor and advocate for the drought counsellors thoughtfully. Around the middle April 2008, I began to perceive that the government’s expectation was for drought counsellors to pass on their hard won knowledges to the existing and ongoing workforce. I found myself in a difficult position – helping drought counsellors accept that funding would not continue past September 2008, and helping them to pass on their practice wisdom to others – at a time when they were feeling frustrated (and in grief) that they were facing termination of their contracts just as they were beginning to hit their straps in their work. Because there was no guarantee that funding may be found for a further period, it was truly an unsolvable dilemma.
Guided by No Bullshit Therapy, we were as open as we could be (striving toward honesty) and also made overt the dilemma. This dilemma was first addressed leading up to the second forum, which when originally conceived, was planned as a celebration of the drought counsellors’ work. However, as the forum drew near, the end of the funding was a real possibility. The celebratory nature of the forum led to an acknowledgement of the shadow side of the celebration – the potential loss of the drought counselling network.

I used my opening address at the second two-day forum to raise the dilemma directly rather than obfuscate it. After welcoming people to the forum, drawing comparisons between the first forum and what people had achieved 12 months later, and deconstructing the subtitle, ‘celebration, best practice and self-care’, I finally spoke about celebration:

"And finally, may be the most contentious — Celebration.

There is certainly a lot to celebrate — the CIG network, the work, the local projects, the state-wide projects that have emerged from the CIGs (NB Support and Looking Out For Your Neighbours) and the difference you’ve made to people’s lives who otherwise would have gone unacknowledged.

But there is a danger that, just as when you acknowledge grief and loss — people’s inner strengths emerge, when you celebrate successes, potential loss and grief also come to mind.

Several months ago, Celebration, Best Practice and Self Care — seemed to reflect the mood of the CIGs. Now a few months later, as we consider celebrating what has been achieved, the possibility that State-funded positions may not be funded past September is an imaginable distance away – just as the programs are hitting their straps.

May be the forum should be subtitled, Celebration, Best Practice, Self care and Commiseration.

Sustainability of the work and your positions may require a repositioning of drought counselling to more general rural change outreach workers / counsellors. This is a theme of recent CIGs across the state and we have made time in the program to develop a position paper about best practice as one tangible outcome of the forum.

As an NBT practitioner I feel compelled to say upfront, that even if the worst happens and State-funded counsellor positions are not renewed after September – I hope you appreciate how skilled and employable you have become as the government and services look to help rural communities manage a rapidly changing environment. But as a friend of mine, Mark Furlong is fond of saying, “I’m not going to piss on your shoes and tell you it’s raining.” Specific drought counsellors, like farmers affected by drought, always face an uncertain future.

There has been great generosity by the State-funded counsellors in embracing their federal counterparts into the CIG networks and sharing their hard won wisdom at a time when the federal positions have been extended. The irony is that recruiting to the federal positions has been difficult – at the same time that state funded positions are established nicely but face an uncertain future.

In your work with farmers etc as rural outreach workers and counsellors you have become experts at balancing and integrating complex and contradictory emotions in the face of
circumstances that can’t always be controlled – so I know you will face your own personal professional uncertainty ethically, and with wisdom and dignity.

The team at Bouverie has learnt so much from you over the last year — I hope you can find space to celebrate your contribution to drought recovery, reflecting on and documenting your practice wisdom, whilst keeping some space for self care.

Enjoy the next 2 days.”

The research team’s dilemma throws some light on small remote rural communities’ distrust of new services that are often seen as here today and gone tomorrow. In fact the greater the quality of services provided, the greater the grief, including anger and sadness when it is taken away. The concept of pre—emptory grief is commonly used (Rolland, 1990, 2004) to explain how people withdraw from opportunity in order to protect themselves from repeated disappointment and losses. There was a strong theme of distrust of ‘new people’ coming into a local area and offering supports that would not last.

The approach used by the Bouverie team was to create a discussion about what legacy the drought counsellors would like to leave if or when their positions finished. This paralleled the drought counsellors’ work, in that we could not solve the underlying problem (loss of funding for drought counsellors, lack of rain for the farmers) but like the drought counsellors, we could provide a safe place for reflection and discussion that may generate creative options. For example at the start of a NB Support train—the—trainer workshop a newly appointed drought counsellor with considerable rural experience described working with an old farmer who was bereft at having to sell up the farm. Although the farmer would be financially secure because of the asset of the farm, he had been involved in the farm all his life and he was not looking forward to living in the local town with nothing to do. The drought counsellor suggested he consider keeping a small block of his farm for interest and sell the rest. The farmer hadn’t thought of this option and intended to take it up.

4.11 The drought counsellors’ legacy

The advantage of reflective practice – as provided by the forums and the CIG-CIGAR structure was that rather than simply drift off to other jobs and taking their wisdoms with them towards the end of their contracts, drought counsellors were able to explore what legacy they wanted to leave to the community and the service system. Interestingly, these legacies, determined by the drought counsellors themselves, were very compatible with what DHS was wanting the drought counsellors to do prior to vacating their positions. Specific examples keenly discussed during the CIG meetings that immediately followed the second forum fall into five categories, described in the following sections.

4.11.1 Documentation

Capacity building is an important component of leaving a legacy. Leaving well documented evidence about the work carried out by drought workers that is made readily available to the wider service sector, including PCPs (CIG # 11 Grampians 31/3/08 - Summary).
4.11.2 Registers of trained practitioners

“One person suggested building a register of workers etc as an outcome of the group for when funding ends” (CIG # 2 Barwon South West 13/3/08 - Summary).

“No Bull Support facilitators register, register of NBT attendees” (CIG # 3 Barwon South West 22/4/08 - Summary).

4.11.3 Orientation packages for new and future staff

“Orientation package, glossary of rural terms ‘silage’” (CIG # 3 Barwon South West 22/4/08 - Summary).

“A kit or formal booklet in each region or sub—region. This may include a wide range of information including: the history of the state-wide CIG project, general drought work ideas (e.g. farmgate), types of projects (e.g. No Bull Support), information about contacts and networks, what has been done, what is effective in the area, information about the types of farming practices” (CIG # 12 Grampians 28/4/08 - Summary).

4.11.4 ‘Storying’ the drought experience

“Books are commonly produced to celebrate the community response to fire and flood – but not drought books. A journal of our experience doing drought work in Barwon SW; journal – what we would have if we could have” (CIG # 3 Barwon South West 22/4/08 - Summary).

4.11.5 Community action plans

“Community Action Plan that has been written up, which explains how Pamper Days were developed and which provides a model for community members to use to go through their own planning, hosting, and documenting of events. In this way, community members are able to continue the work themselves, with Jane and Ruth acting as consultants as needed” (CIG # 11 Hume 18/3/08 - Summary).

4.12 Sustainability

An important measure of the success of action research is the sustainability of the project. In addition to the key learnings that are likely to influence policy, service delivery and clinical practice, the process of the CIG network continued in five of the six regions, at least for some time. The openness of the CIGs to the federally funded drought counsellors (and to related workers on an invitational basis) ultimately led to the survival of the CIGs past September 2008, when The Bouverie Centre’s formal role finished.
At the end of our involvement, all but the active Grampians CIG continued. The Grampians CIG folded due to key staff leaving at the time that our funding was suspended. Many of the CIGs seemed to grow in size, as significant numbers of founding CIG members moved to other sources of funding and new federally funded drought counsellors joined the State-funded CIG networks. The following section describes one example of a CIG that continued to meet.

4.12.1 The Gippsland CIG Has G.R.O.W.N.

The Gippsland CIG continues to meet. Whilst many of the traditions and practices of the old CIG have been retained, at the time of writing the Gippsland CIG changed its name to G.R.O.W.N. (Gippsland Rural Outreach Workers Network), developed a new charter, and gradually increased its membership. The established format of CIG meetings being hosted by each member at a nice location around the region continues. A new federally funded co-ordinator from the group took over my role as organiser and the task of writing up the summaries of the CIG became shared.

![Figure 4.7 New logo of the Gippsland CIG: GROWN](image)

4.13 Conceptualising the CIG-CIGAR network

4.13.1 The CIG-CIGAR structure: A state-wide knowledge generator

The CIG network provided much needed support and professional identity for drought counsellors. CIGs embraced federally—funded counsellors, promoting co-ordination and collaboration that did not occur at the higher level (funding bodies). The CIG-CIGAR structure acted like a simple but elegant state-wide knowledge generator and as a result, a large amount of practice wisdom was captured and documented – these are presented in Chapters 5—7. The research structures encouraged issues to be raised and addressed during the research. For example, previous drought evaluations (Blau, 2006, pp. 14-15) have called for support for the carers who support farmers. The CIG-CIGAR structure allowed state-wide needs to be identified and responses planned and implemented. Recommendations which are only documented at the end of a project are at risk of being forgotten because of the intermittent nature of drought and the resultant lack of ‘service memory’.

Another example of the value of the reflective structure of the CIGs is that the possibility of drought counsellors losing their funding led to CIGs discussing what practice wisdom legacy to leave and how best to leave it. In the next four chapters I present the data that addresses the four key research
questions, based on the information that primarily emerged from the CIG-CIGAR processes described in this chapter:

i. How does the nature of drought influence the provision of drought counselling services?

ii. What are specific drought counselling strategies for responding to drought affected people and their communities?

iii. What is the relationship between drought counselling and community development?

iv. How should drought counselling services be set up for future droughts?

4.14 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: Support that promoted connection, collective problem solving and resource sharing, collaborative documentation of practice wisdom, professionalisation and self care was essential to the effective functioning of the Victorian drought counsellors

4.14.1 Policy and practice implications

Workers employed to respond directly to severe natural disasters such as drought require support themselves that encourages:

i. Networking and creating a feeling of being part of a larger project;

ii. Co—operation and collaboration between services;

iii. Professionalisation of the workforce;

iv. Role development, clarification of job descriptions and skill development;

v. Increased motivation and improved confidence;

vi. A conduit for communicating with the funding body;

vii. Promoting transfer of knowledge;

viii. Debriefing and self care opportunities; and

ix. A collective voice.

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15 DHS should be congratulated for providing effective support to the Victorian drought counsellors during 2007 and 2008.
CHAPTER FIVE

5 CONCEPTUALISING DROUGHT: HOW THE NATURE OF DROUGHT INFORMS DROUGHT COUNSELLING

5.1 Chapter orientation

The research question primarily addressed in this chapter: How does the nature of drought influence the provision of drought counselling services?

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the nature of drought itself informs drought counselling, which is a major research question that emerged during the project and one that needs to be addressed before exploring the specific drought counselling strategies in the next chapter.

The themes and quotes selected for discussion in this chapter are drawn from extensive analysis of the summaries produced by the Bouverie facilitator of each CIG, transcripts of the CIGAR debriefs interlaced with data arising from the pre and post counsellor questionnaires and client feedback (in—depth interview, Feedback and Advice, Takeaways and Problem and Progress sheets).

In this chapter I begin by looking at the impact of drought on individuals, families and communities in order to understand how these impacts inform the approach drought counsellors need to take in order to be effective. The point is clearly made that the impact of drought differs greatly between different regions and within each region depending on business type and between each individual, depending on luck, planning and business / family developmental stage, and circumstance. I outline some of the more prominent examples of the impact of drought in order to put a human face to the discussion. Emphasising the emotional impact of prolonged drought on individual people and their relationships is important because this impact can remain hidden because of the chronic and intangible nature of drought. Also the Bouverie research team engaged mostly with the drought counsellors (a secondary data source) rather than directly with clients. Whilst this helped develop a state-wide perspective it was at the risk of neglecting the individual stories of the drought counsellors’ clients.

I begin to build a conceptual picture of drought as an intangible, intermittent, chronic, pervasive, disenfranchised natural disaster and then unpack the implications of this construction for the practice of drought counselling and community development initiatives. In the latter part of the chapter I draw on trauma theory to help make sense of the implications conceptually and to begin to build a platform to inform clinical strategies in the subsequent chapter. I close the chapter looking at the implications a disenfranchised natural disaster has for community development strategies and make key recommendations based on this discussion.

5.2 Understanding the impact of drought on individuals, families and communities

In order to provide counselling to drought affected communities we need to understand the unique impact that drought exerts on the individuals and families within those communities and on the

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Disenfranchised is adapted from Doka’s (1989) disenfranchised grief, which he used to describe grief which was not socially acknowledged and hence did not attract the usual community supports to socially acknowledged grief.
community itself. As a family therapist I was interested in the relationships between drought and the individuals it affects, the relationships between such individuals and their families, friends and community, and the broader context in which these relationships exist. There is of course a limit to the breadth of context that can be examined – hence I focus on individuals, family, friends, services and local communities – drawing on what emerged from the data, as well as gaps that inform areas for future study.

5.2.1 Drought is only part of disadvantage within rural communities

The impact of drought needs to be located within the complex interplay between the broad economic, social and climatic changes affecting rural Victoria outlined in Chapter 2. The CIG data was compatible with these broad changes especially the economic and resultant social changes. For example, the breaking down of dynasties of farming families or businesses which impacts on the stability of rural communities, alluded to in the following drought counsellor quote:

“Over the next five years in our area, a lot of farmers are approaching retirement age which will lead to:

- No—one in the family to take over the farm; and
- Multiple family members needing an income from a farm that can’t sustain multiple incomes” (CIG # 1 Gippsland 23/3/07 - Summary).

This report focuses on drought but the results need to be considered within these broad challenges facing rural Victoria. It would be a mistake to attribute all of the financial and social stresses in rural Victoria to the drought, as implied by the following CIG member’s comment:

“A drought counsellor during the same CIG meeting reported that “on his very first day in 2003 in (region) he was asked by a woman what he did – when he said “drought counselling”, she levelled a particular look at him and said: “We’re sick and bloody tired of these morning teas: we want food on the table.” The point was made that poverty existed in rural areas well before this last drought: that it’s not caused by the drought, but exacerbated by it! It would be great to have some supported research into the root causes of such poverty” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

In fact the broad context into which drought has entered is a rural community facing major social and economic change, which is likely to lead to greater health care needs and less infrastructure to provide it. The emotional impact of economic and social change is as complex and subtle as it is far reaching. Strong feelings of guilt and shame were reported when farms and businesses that have been in the family for generations had been lost. Whilst the current generation may grieve what has been lost from previous generations, they may also grieve the losses imagined into the future. The following example of a CIG member’s comments speaks to grieving this imagined loss:

“A woman farmer recently said it costs $400,000 to run the farm per year to realise a $100,000 profit. Their current overdraft is $200,000. Three families are supported by two farms that have
been in the family for three generations. One more bad season and they stand to lose all of it” (CIG # 3 Grampians 21/5/07 - Summary).

5.2.2  Drought impact is not universal

“Farmers are unique in Australia because they do not fit into one box. You have to be absolutely client directed in the first instance” (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

5.2.2.1  Drought impact depends on local regions

In addition to the difficulties in defining drought mentioned in the literature review, the fact that drought affects each region and each particular industry in unique ways, adds extra complexity to defining drought, especially given that drought as natural disaster rather than a business risk to be managed is determined by EC declaration, which defines a whole area in drought not specific industries. Researchers in rural communities must therefore be conscious of clarifying what findings are peculiar to a local region and what findings are general observations.

On the other hand, whilst it is important not to lump all rural people into the same category, farmers, rural businesses and the general community are interrelated. Stress in one section of the community will affect other sections as clearly discussed in the CIGs across Victoria (Poll & Young, 2008, Chapter 7). The ideas raised by the research that may help address this dilemma are discussed in the following sections.

5.2.2.2  Drought impact depends on the type and stage of a business

In rural areas some businesses, such as grain storage manufacturers and hay carters, do better in the midst of a drought, whilst others face annihilation as a direct result of the drought. If the lack of rain devastates a seasonal crop it means losses for one session – for other producers such as grape growers it may mean many years before new vines mature. CIG members began to emphasise the uniqueness of drought a few months into their work, as reflected in the following CIG summary:

“...farmers who are used to living in low rainfall areas are less likely to exhibit the signs of high stress compared to farmers in traditionally high rainfall areas. Farmers in low rainfall areas are used to planning for dry years and generally dry conditions. The extreme conditions fit into the Mallee climate more than other areas. People in the Mallee have always been educated and aware to save water. Other areas have found it more of a shock and have had to make more of a cultural or attitudinal shift to save water” (CIG # 5 Grampians 16/7/07 - Summary).

Each CIG emphasised the importance of understanding that drought affects different types of farming (such as dry cropping, orchardists, vineyards, dairy farms, sheep / cattle, tomato farmers, hobby farmers [under 40 acres]) in unique ways (CIG # 6 Hume 15/8/07 - Summary). These differences lead to subtle differences in types of referrals to drought counsellors. A specific example is presented from the following CIG summary:

“... larger holdings, fewer farms, dry stock are used to relying on variable weather patterns for water usage and storage. Have lived with the impact of the drought for longer. Services been in place for a long time. More a chronic response to drought now. Shepparton still in crisis response mode as more intensive farms highly dependant on irrigation (wet farming) only now deprived of water, fewer services,
greater need for cold calling, farmers still not seeking help easily” (CIG # 8 Hume 17/10/07 - Summary).

The impact of the drought is also dependent on whether farmers derive their sole income from the land or supplement their income with off—farm employment; providing financial diversity but affecting family relationships if off—farm employment is not local. As Emily Phillips (2007, slide 3) reported, 50% of farms produce just over 10% of agricultural production and increasingly rely on off—farm incomes, hence the benefits and tensions to family relationships of off—farm employment needs to be understood and would be a valuable area for further research.

Chapter 4 informs us that in order to understand the impact of drought we need to study it over a period of time, but we also need to understand it within the context of the developmental stage of individual families and businesses. For example, the family that took over my family’s wheat farm (Loddon-Mallee region) reported that they were surviving because they were in a region used to low rainfall, had been farming the same property for many years and no longer had dependent children. In contrast, farmers who had increased debt to expand their properties in order to build economies of scale just prior to the drought were more likely to be feeling the full force of economic hardship. Likewise, a person with small children who goes into debt just prior to a drought to purchase a business which relies on discretionary income from the surrounding farming community is likely to be more seriously affected than an established business with little debt. The following quote early in the study, when CIG discussions were describing the impact of drought on their local communities is representative of many similar comments across Victoria, “Drought seems to be hitting farmers / rural folk with young families the hardest” (CIG # 1 Gippsland 23/3/07 - Summary). This CIG reflection is consistent with Canadian research which found that stress and emotional problems were raised as one of three major problems facing farmers by both men and women, and farmers in their 20—30s experienced the greatest stress (Thurston et al., 2003).

5.2.3 Not just farmers!

"Drought is not just about farmers – it is about drought affected communities” (CIG # 7 Grampians 11/9/07 - Summary).

Drought affects whole communities – not just farmers. This was a strong theme to emerge across the state CIGs as indicated by the following CIG member wanting the government to be aware of small business owners’ distress: “I’m putting in a voice for them. They are really struggling and not getting any assistance.” Other counsellors agreed, saying that “some businesses in local towns are going under (hardware stores, mechanics, etc.) and that even hairdressers are getting less business, due to their usual clientele cutting back on luxuries such as personal grooming” (CIG # 3 Hume 16/5/07 - Summary). Similarly in the Loddon-Mallee CIG, a member made the point clearly, saying “It is not just farmers, but the impact cascades into small businesses and others” (CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary). The difficulty of conveying the widespread impact of drought was stressed by a thoughtful critique I received following the publication of the August 2008 edition of No Bull, which summarised the research and presented excerpts from the Interim Report (Young, 2008). Whilst CIGs across the state clearly indicated that non-farmers affected by drought often felt invisible, I had, according to this No Bull reader (see below) fallen into the common trap of focusing on farmers at the expense of other community members in my interim report.

"I must admit that although there are some good recommendations coming from your Interim Report I am disappointed that your report seems to fall into a common trap of equating “Rural
Communities” with “Farming Communities”. This is very superficial and often leads to a devaluing of the contribution of the non farming sector to rural communities and can add to social divisions and reduce community cohesion, with the non farming sector being seen as less worthy than the farming sector. Rather than enhancing community capacity and participation this oversight can lead to the alienation of significant sectors of our rural communities and ongoing social divisions and inequities” (Rural Financial Counsellor & Community Development Officer, 2008, 28/10).

Whilst a study by the Institute of Family Studies which surveyed farmers and non-farmers in drought and non-drought areas found that the financial burdens were greater with farmers – the impact was considerable in non farming businesses (Edwards et al., 2009). Reflecting on the criticism of my Interim Report, I realised I had focused on the hard—to—reach, isolated farmers, the target group outlined in our DHS brief. The way we respond at a policy level as well as practically and socially to drought can inadvertently add to community division and rivalry, rather than promote the community cohesion most of us desire. Hence in addition to good intentions, the way we respond to drought needs to be thoughtfully considered, carefully documented and continually monitored, to ensure that our response does not cause further community divisions to those already caused by the drought.

5.2.4 The human face of drought

Edwards et al. (2009) found that one third of Australian farmers reported farm production was at its lowest level ever. Whilst the authors were surprised that the 8000 telephone respondents did not report the level of emotional and family distress expected from the extreme financial hardship they discovered, Mathew Gray (2008) warned that, “one of the risks of an analytical / statistical analysis is that you lose the human face” of the impact of drought. Drought counsellors in the current study had a variety of views about significant issues facing farming families.

In the pre and post questionnaires completed by the drought counsellors, the following themes were recorded in response to the question, “From your point of view, what is the biggest decision families typically have to make about their property / business / work because of the current drought?”

Financial decisions and whether or not to continue farming (closely linked) were seen to be the most important decision facing families. Other important decisions included whether or not to sell stock / downsize, day to day survival such as prioritising bills and other lifestyle choices, and the complexities involved in the family connection to the farm vs passing on debt to children. In keeping with the Birchip Cropping Group research (Rickards, 2007) which found that farmers themselves reported uncertainty as an underlying theme to most responses, this commonly centred around the idea of not knowing when to make important, life-changing decisions because things could get better, or they could get worse. In our study, drought counsellors’ views of what issues farmers faced differed between the pre and the post questionnaires. Whilst financial decisions and whether or not to sell were the most common on both and managing stock was similar on both, the idea of day to day survival did not arise until the post questionnaire, possibly because of the another year of drought had passed.

Similar themes were raised more broadly across the CIGs by the drought counsellors. They included: financial stress leading to people not having enough to eat; families unable to send their children to school or to school excursions; families making excuses for why children did not attend university; presentations of stress and grief associated with losses; anxiety and depression and anecdotal reports of increased domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse and suicides. Specific case examples are described below:
A drought counsellor “spoke of her observation that what families are doing sometimes is saying that they are giving the child an extra year before going to school, or that their school leaver is deferring Uni rather than acknowledging that they can’t afford for them to attend. Some kids weren’t going to school because there was no petrol to get them from the school to the bus. They’re little things, but they make a huge impact” (CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary).

The following story which appeared to be ‘doing the rounds’ in Gippsland was reported in an early CIG: ”Dead stock on the property is devastating. A farmer had 200 head and used 201 bullets — shot stock and then himself” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07: Summary).

A CIG facilitator summarised her group’s discussion six months into the project writing, “What this group has encountered in their work is extreme poverty – farmers who haven’t eaten for four days, etc. and the welfare system can’t keep up” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

In another region, a frustrated drought counsellor reported that “in one particular case that she knows of, a family was suffering immensely and it was the police who finally notified services that help was needed.” She says, “this family was grieving enormously … children having to kill animals they've brought up themselves since birth, a teenager having to leave school, extreme financial distress ...” (CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary).

“… spoke of a suicide of a stock and station agent the previous night in (town). Discussion also focused on the emotional demands placed on drought counsellors and the need for agency support and supervision” (CIG # 9 Hume 21/11/07 - Summary).

As we will explore further in section 5.4, the emotional impact of hardship is not only determined by the objective hardship, but by other subjective factors such as how the hardship is interpreted by the sufferer and others, as well as the presence or absence of acknowledgement and understanding from the wider community.

Irrespective of the objective benefits and politics of a proposed pipeline from the Murray Basin to Melbourne17, the following CIG discussion reflects the underlying importance of feeling understood and valued as one goes through a difficult time:

“They’re facing the prospect of no water, and now they have the State Government taking their water to Bendigo in the proposed pipeline...the Campaspe irrigation farmers have been treated terribly – a small group of farmers, and they’ve had 39%, 31% and 0% water for the last three years. Consultants engaged them to talk about seven different proposals for the pipeline, only to find that the government pulled the rug from under them by making a decision before the process had finished. The farmers feel that they are not valued” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

The complexity of acknowledging how people are suffering or may suffer in the future is very difficult given the long term nature of drought as reflected in the following CIG comments:

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17 In 2007 bypartisan support was gained for a Murray-Darling Basin initiative federally which included amongst other local activities, a controversial pipeline which was designed to take water from the Murray-Darling Basin to Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat. The pipeline proposal became a focus of great tension and division between locals and between urban and rural communities.
“This area will be in huge difficulties if there aren’t sufficient inflows into the water storages: at the moment, there is less water in the catchments than this time last year. Irrigation season normally starts 15th August – if they don’t catch up on last year, they’ve got nothing, and dairying will basically collapse!” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Despite the hardships, and in response to every story of pain, stories of resilience were shared across the CIGs. It should be noted that stories of resilience do not diminish the pain suffered or the emotional costs, just as stories of suffering don’t deny the seemingly limitless reserves of rural people’s resilience. The following case example from the Rural Support Line attests to the value of maintaining friendships and relationships during times of hardship.

Call 1: “A shearer in his 20s who would normally be shearing lambs at this time around (town), but has no work and hence no income because farmers are not buying lambs. Although this man only has 30c to his name, he was not going to go to the Salvos or ask for welfare because “there are others worse off than me”. He said that he will have money coming in later. He also said he’d feel “a bit of a bludger” if he got Centrelink support. Instead he was buying a large bag of rice and going fishing in (the) Murray and dining on fish and rice. The caller and his friends were “doing the communal thing” each contributing something and having meals together. In fact he was enjoying seeing more of his mates as a result of the hardship. The increased social connection because of lack of money was a positive. This was the first time he had talked about his difficulties and a friend had told him to call” (CIG # 3 Rural Support Line 17/5/07 - Summary).

A key learning from this study is that drought affects people at different times, in different ways, leading to individual impacts and exacerbating the isolation often felt when people experience hardship that is beyond their previous lived experience. Not everyone affected by drought feels as connected as the caller in the quote above. An overarching task then of drought recovery is to ensure people do not isolate themselves, and if they do, to facilitate their reconnection to local networks. It is important not to ignore the drought induced suffering of less visible groups within a community, and to be aware that drought affects everyone differently and at different times – potentially leading to social isolation and additional strain on relationships within a community. The following conceptualisation of drought helps us explore why drought can be so unsocial.

5.3 Conceptualising drought

5.3.1 Drought is an intangible natural disaster

CIG members across the state reported experiences indicating that the intangible quality of drought has a profound influence on how it impacts on individuals, families and communities. Because it is not obvious when lower than average rain fall becomes a natural disaster – people have to rely on personal definitions of drought. In the absence of an objective and tangible event to indicate that disaster has struck, people themselves have to acknowledge they are affected by drought. In a subtle way, the need to ‘self-define’ the impact of drought can lead to community tension between the different definitions, such as between the ‘stoics and the whingers’.

The lack of a tangible start or finish to drought has consequences for individuals, communities, services and governments. Who defines whether a drought starts today, tomorrow, next week or next
year? When do governments and support agencies go into rescue mode and when into recovery mode? Is there a clear difference between rescue and recovery modes?

Several DHS workers privately admitted to me that the government has less experience in responding to drought than to fire and flood. Part of the difficulty is that a raft of responses are initiated following declaration of the recovery phase in natural disaster management, but because it is unclear when drought begins and ends these responses are not always available to people affected by drought (DHS worker – details not stipulated for confidentiality reasons). As a result, people affected by drought can feel less supported and acknowledged by government than people affected by more acute dramatic disasters – especially pre—EC declaration, when drought is officially defined as a business risk not a disaster. A drought counsellor from Gippsland who spent some time helping in a Relief Centre following the floods in the middle of 2007, reflected, "Flood is so quick. A guy came in and left with a cheque for $900. In drought, that sort of relief would take ages.” In response to a flood that ravaged part of Gippsland, which prior to the flood had been in drought conditions, Steve Bracks, then Premier of Victoria, set up a special community cabinet meeting in Sale (ABC radio 9/7/07). He announced $7 million dollars in relief for farmers and small businesses, a $1 million community fund and described a $6—8 million damage bill. Listening to the radio on the way to a CIG meeting in this region, I reflected that it is much harder to put a specific damage bill to drought as opposed to fire and flood — because it is so diffuse and far reaching (Research diary 9/7/07).

At a personal level, people affected by drought may not realise they are ‘victims’ of a natural disaster, leading to the following call from a CIG member, “Connecting emotional and psychological distress to the drought seems to be a major challenge for the sector” (CIG # 9 Grampians 26/11/07 - Summary). For example, a drought counsellor in Gippsland talked about “a business person who had not had any business for the first time in 4 years, but had not linked his difficulties to the impact of the drought” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07: Summary). This case example is representative of a clear theme in all CIGs across the state and over the entire study, “that people don’t walk through the door with drought as the presenting problem”. The danger of clients not associating their difficulties causally with drought is that they are more likely to blame someone or something else: themselves, their partners, neighbours or the government.

Whilst the direct impact of drought may not have been evident due in part to its intangible nature, indirect impacts emerged over the course of the research. Drought counsellors from each CIG consistently reported (anecdotal) increases in domestic violence, child maltreatment, substance abuse and relationship difficulties during the time of drought. Debate over whether suicides induced by the impact of drought were over or under reported continued in CIGs for the entirety of the research (e.g. CIG # 8 Hume 17/10/07 - Summary). These findings have a profound significance for the planning, naming, and framing of drought support services. A rigorous exploration into the degree that drought contributes to domestic violence, substance abuse and suicide would be a difficult but valuable contribution to policy. As pointed out in Chapter 4, a service called drought counselling is not likely to succeed without a wide—spread education program about the impact of drought — called for in Chapter 6. In the absence of such a significant state-widepromotional program, drought counsellors changed their name to rural outreach workers; broadening the focus of their work to include the emotional impacts of all rural change.

People suffering from intangible crises are less likely to have their hardships acknowledged. For example, regions may be in the grip of drought even though the uneducated eye driving through green tinged country may be totally unaware of the gravity of the underlying drought, as pointed out in the following CIG summary:

"A DPI staff person is conscious that there may be a mentality of the drought having finished because the region looks green. There are concerns in some quarters that agency’s (generally) may ‘drop the ball’ on the issue” (CIG # 4 Grampians 19/6/07 - Summary).
An uneducated community can feel that the drought is over once the rains come, as raised by a CIG member from the Hume region,

“She mentioned that the media coverage of the drought could make things seem better than they are for many farmers, especially when the newspapers seem to be saying now that it has rained, it’s all okay” (CIG # 3 Hume 16/5/07 - Summary).

This theme was so strong that it led to the creation of a regular section in No Bull called ‘inside story’ in order to educate the broader community that the drought isn’t over just because it rains. Even the people who are aware of the underlying severity of the drought can momentarily forget the seriousness of it, as reflected in the following passage from a CIG meeting:

“The recent rain has increased the sense of hope in the region. There has been a halt to meeting with farmers because they are now working hard on their properties to take advantage of the recent rain. The client load is lighter due to the rain. A community education night has been cancelled because of the recent rain. At one community meeting it started raining and people were visibly distracted. The pelicans are back on one river and the lakes have some puddles including Winderee. The catchment for the Wimmera is now at 4.1%” (CIG # 3 Grampians 21/5/07 - Summary).

5.3.2 Drought is an intermittent natural disaster

Drought may have occurred one in three years on average (West & Smith, 1996) but it doesn’t happen every three years. It can occur for 5 years and then not for 10 years, which makes it difficult to prepare and plan for. A CIG discussion in Gippsland four months into the research (CIG # 4 Grampians 19/6/07 - Summary) provided an insight into the differences between fire, flood and drought based on the rare misfortune that parts of Gippsland had experienced all three within a six month period. The CIG members pointed out that people and the community face the dangers of fire the same time every year and hence have become well prepared, whereas drought occurs intermittently, thus preparation is less likely to be continuous. It is much harder to retain practice wisdom and ‘service memory’ and continuity over a 2—15 year drought—free period.

An experienced farmer I spoke to at the VFF conference on the 20th June 2007, pointed out that people are more prepared for fire than drought even though an individual farm is more likely to suffer from drought than fire. He went on to state that it is easier to prepare for fire by creating a fire plan but preparing for drought requires creating some slack in finances, a much harder task – especially when the drought affects finances over a long period. The long term impacts of drought are further explored in the next section.

5.3.3 Drought is a chronic natural disaster

Drought is by nature chronic and long term. Sartore and her colleagues argue that “because of the degree of environmental change wrought, drought may be viewed as a chronic natural disaster, especially as it affects entire communities” (2005, p. 316). The consequences of drought, as well as
the drought itself, are long term. It usually takes at least 2—3 seasons for farmers to catch up financially after a drought, but loss of bloodlines built up over generations, for example, may never be fully replaced (Johnston, 2003). The second of eleven key trends found by Rickards (2008, p. 5) detailed research into the effects of drought on broad acre farming in the Loddon Mallee region, was that “For most farming families, the effects of drought will remain with them for years after the drought ends.” A CIG member and farmer himself, argued in one of the CIGs that:

“... it takes 11 years for livestock farmers to recover from drought affected devastation, and three consistently good years for agricultural farmers. Both Russell and Dean stressed the importance of supporting the reality of these farmers lives, not the fantasy, the need for long term planning, and the importance of our program not being part of a knee jerk response” (CIG # 6 Hume 15/8/07 - Summary).

The emotional and social impacts of drought over the different stages of drought are not well understood. In all disasters, people need to address pressing safety and practical problems in the early stages and only begin to become aware of the need for psychological assistance down the track, often when the immediate threat has passed. People affected by drought are probably no different, except that it is less clear when the main threat begins and when it has passed. Does this set up a context for people to experience a vague but ever present chronic stress, as people experience in response to other long term conditions? Difficulties that persist for a long time can make it difficult to notice change (progress or deterioration) as people tend to live each day at a time (Young, 1994).

These themes are evident in the summary of the third CIG in the region I facilitated:

“...The insidious chronic nature of drought (compared to the acute, tangible, public, external nature of flood and fire) leads to farmers internalising the cause of their problems, adding to family conflict. The long term financial difficulties leads to less money for travel and hence less social contact, volunteer work etc — leading to community fragmentation” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07: Summary).

At the very time when people need greater social contact to counter prolonged stress, financially they and their friends are less likely to be able to afford it. Although drought is chronic, funding for drought counsellors tends to be short term. This stop—start funding (DHS drought forum 16/3/07— complaint from the floor) raised in Chapter 4, is a major limitation to the development of effective drought counselling services over time. Financial constraints obviously need to be considered, but drought counselling evaluations repeatedly call for drought counselling to be considered within a long term planning framework (e.g. Johnston, 2003; Sartore et al., 2005). The need for long term planning for long term difficulties was also a key finding of this study.

**5.3.4 Drought is a pervasive natural disaster**

Although drought is intangible, the financial impact is widespread and pervasive. Acute natural disasters affect a specific number of people, whereas the number of people affected by drought is harder to ascertain due to the chronicity and intangible nature of the disaster. For example it is difficult to answer the following questions that come to mind: “What is the cost to the urban community of responding to drought?” “What is the cost to businesses loosely reliant on the financial viability of people more directly affected by drought?” Edwards, Gray and Hunter’s (2009) national study into the financial impacts of drought found widespread financial pressures on both farming and
non-farming families. Further research into the economic impacts of drought may provide the most effective rationale for ongoing funding for drought management.

The following sections explore how the above conceptualisation of drought helps to explain its unique impact on individuals, families and relationships and communities.

5.4 Impacts of an intangible, intermittent, chronic, pervasive natural disaster

5.4.1 On individuals

5.4.1.1 Farm stress is exacerbated by drought (decision—making)

"Even if farmers have sound business skills they often have an emotional tie to the land which affects decision making" (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

When I attended the farmers’ information day at Yarram, one theme that struck me was the emphasis placed on decision making in managing drought. A farm consultant made the strong point that farmers are experienced decision makers and warned that the worst thing a farmer can do is not to make decisions. Why is decision making so central to stress during times of drought?

One aspect articulated in the quote above, is that decision making is complicated by strong emotional ties to the land and to businesses, another is that making decisions is difficult when the variables upon which decisions are made, are unknowable. During the drought farmers are required to make potentially far reaching decisions in an unpredictable and unknowable climate, which can lead to extreme amounts of stress. The drought counsellors from the Hume CIG reflected this common theme across the state early in the research when they reported:

"that the farmers are feeling stressed about making big decisions these days. "They keep saying they’ve got to make big decisions, but then they make one after agonising about it and it turns out wrong ... their best efforts are not working out." The counsellors’ perception is that these very experienced farmers are left feeling angry, powerless and frustrated, and "like failures", which in turn is leading to more alcohol / drug use and increased incidences of domestic violence and violence against children. One counsellor mentioned a child from a farm in his area phoning the police to ask for help because his Dad was "not behaving well" (CIG # 2 Hume 18/4/07 - Summary).

The National Drought Policy puts the responsibility for managing drought with the farmer, under a personal risk management framework, and whilst it is understandable that farmers should be prepared for drought years, as one farming couple expressed, "how can you prepare for 10 years of drought in a row, in the context of climate change" (Farming couple, 30/10/07).

Separating luck from good farming is not easy when major decisions have to be based on the information available at the time. Farmers whose decisions do not turn out well are losing confidence to make decisions in the face of continuing drought:
“Farmers are making the right decisions given the information they have now — but given the drought it is very hard to make long term decisions. Decisions are also huge — and some are really long—term decisions” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07 - Summary).

5.4.1.2 Shame and blame

The pressure of high risk decision making can lead to self-blame or conflict between family members and neighbours as indicated by the following CIG and CIGAR quotes:

“Farmers also have to make decisions, such as to use water allocations early or late. If you decide to wait, you risk water not being available. Can create friction between farmers — if one property has feed, neighbouring stock can get through fences, leading to conflict” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07: Summary).

“... there seems to be ‘a lot of finger—pointing going on’ in families when things fail” (CIG #2 Hume 18/4/07: Summary).

“Uncertainty but still have to make major decisions — without certainty of conditions which causes stress – have to guess and then held to blame for poor decisions” (CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary).

“...he was talking about his experience of trying to make these difficult decisions and figuring no matter which way he goes it’s wrong and he’s feeling powerless” (CIGAR #2 23/4/07: Transcript).

There is a tendency for blame to be internalised in the absence of a tangible external event to blame as intimated in the following CIG summary written by me early in the research:

“Helpful for clients to realise they are not the only ones and to appreciate that they are not failures but that many of their difficulties can be largely attributed to the drought” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07: Summary).

Whilst some people internalise blame, others externalise it and either blame their partners, different groups such as the greenies, or the government.

“So it’s just then they do make a decision and it’s not the right one and whoever was given the responsibility for may be making the final decision is blamed, I think between spouses. They are saying that all these counsellors’ perceptions was that alcohol, drug use and domestic violence is way up” (CIGAR #2 23/4/07: Transcript).

Shame is the cousin of blame both self-blame and often the exaggerated blaming of others. Shame of losing the family business has been raised earlier in this report, but shame as a result of the business doing poorly – even if it is beyond their control was a theme to emerge as reflected in the following quote:
"We discussed the Land Walks that many farmers take together in rural areas, and one counsellor points out that attendance at the walks dropped right off as the drought worsened, because “people don’t show up if they aren’t going okay with their work, because it would be too shaming.” So, it seems that while there are community events in place to help and support people, many farmers are least likely to attend at times when they are most in need” (CIG # 5 Hume 18/7/07 - Summary).

5.4.1.3 Isolation

"Breaking down isolation is a major aim of services” (CIG # 9 Grampians 26/11/07 - Summary).

Whilst long—term drought can lead to a wide range of emotional and psychological experiences, possibly the most serious is social isolation. Given the slow and insidious onset of drought and the long term nature of it, isolation can creep up imperceptively on individuals. In order to prepare for a spate of media interviews about No Bullshit Therapy and the drought, I consulted an experienced Grampians CIG member whose agency did a lot of media work around drought and she said her agency emphasised the message, ‘don’t isolate yourself’.

If social capital is a key ingredient of a thriving rural community as Alston (2004) suggests, promoting community resilience in the face of drought’s insidious influence may become a key factor in avoiding individual isolation.

5.4.2 On families and relationships

The expert panel on the social impact of drought in Australia (Kenny, 2008) points out that family wellbeing is central to an effective drought policy. To emphasise what affects agricultural businesses affects families, they quote the National Farmers’ Federation findings that 98.5% of Australian farming businesses are family owned and operated. Hence understanding the impact of drought on families and relationships is important for improvements in the resilience of both rural businesses and social wellbeing.

In the pre and post questionnaires, drought counsellors were asked “In good times and in bad times. What do you think people living in the country need to do to look after their well being?”

In the good times, the drought counsellors reported that the two most important things were maintaining social support through family, friends and community and looking after one’s health. In addition to social support and health, the importance of relaxing, taking holidays, preparing for the future, self-care (including emotional awareness), keeping lines of communication open and laughing and having fun were also suggested as things that should be done when times are ‘good’. The biggest change from the pre to the post questionnaire was the enhanced emphasis on health in the post questionnaire. Good nutrition, sleep and exercise were suggested as the key ways for maintaining health.

In the bad times, drought counsellors most commonly reported that support and future planning were the two most important things people living in the country need to do to look after their well being. The importance of future planning was greater in the post questionnaire, as well as the need to take holidays / get off the farm.
Comparing what to do in good times vs bad times, there was much more focus on health in the ‘good times’ responses. The need for social support and planning for the future were reported as important for both good and bad times.

Families may not be able to follow these suggestions articulated in the drought counsellor questionnaires due to the polarising impact of drought on families. Whilst not stated directly in the CIGs, I have found polarisation in families to be a common consequence of any major hardship. Its relevance to drought is explored in the following section.

5.4.2.1 Polarisation

“There are conflicts between couples of whether to stay on the farm or sell, which can have a polarising effect on the relationship in a time when they need to be able to count on each other” (CIG # 5 Hume 18/7/07 - Summary).

Polarisation as a result of chronic hardship is a concept I became aware of in my clinical work with parents of people with a mental illness. Like people affected by drought, the hardship they face is similarly intangible and disenfranchised. The idea of polarisation is this. Parents or partners have different personal styles to life. Everyone responds to a crisis like drought differently and in the absence of a tangible external threat to focus the anger, the different ways family members respond can become the focus – creating tension between the very people who could provide mutual support. For example, a husband may have a practical bent and a reticence to discuss the past, preferring to look to a brighter future. His partner may value the discussion of issues, interested in reflecting on the past and sharing the experiences of hardship as a way of managing them. Prior to the couple facing major hardship, these different approaches to life may be considered complementary in the cut and thrust of every day life. These same styles however can become more extreme in response to a chronic hardship resulting in polarisation rather than complementarity. Over time the source of the hardship (e.g. the drought or mental illness) is forgotten and the focus of tension becomes the conflicting ways of responding, which is attributed to the other, leading to blame at a time when mutual support is most needed. Polarisation can occur with a range of complementary styles such as:

- Let’s talk about it vs Talk doesn’t help
- Fix it vs Leave it alone
- Avoidance vs Conflictual
- Optimistic vs Pessimistic
- Past oriented vs Future oriented

An example of polarisation leading to blame is presented in the following scenario which illustrates the “Let’s talk about it vs Talk doesn’t help” complementary styles:

Fictitious example:

Wife: Things are really getting tough – we need to have a serious chat.

Husband: No use talking about it — just makes everyone feel worse.
Wife: We need to talk about what’s going on so we don’t fall apart as a family.

Husband: What do you expect me to say?

Wife: I just want you to communicate.

Husband: Do you want me to admit I’ve failed the family?

Wife: I was not implying that at all.

Husband: Well I’d like to see you do better.

The role of polarisation, along with the nature of drought, may begin to explain why very few people present to counselling naming the drought as the reason for seeking help:

“... there are still fewer referrals to the drought counsellors however family counsellors are very busy with couples and families presenting with issues not directly attributed to drought but with stress associated with the impact of drought” (CIG # 8 Hume 17/10/07 - Summary).

In addition to the normalising benefits of linking the stresses that couples or families present with to the impacts of the drought, educating couples about the role of polarisation can also help make sense and hence normalise unhelpful reactions to the stresses of the drought. I presented the dynamic of polarisation to the ‘Farmers’ information morning’ held in a small town in Gippsland, several months into the research and felt the nodding heads of several men in the audience showed a sign of recognition, as I reported in the subsequent CIGAR meeting.

“Jeff: Well, one area where I think we can maybe, at least one thing where... it was a small resonance with two blokes in the audience who were drawing on the mental health stuff, how different family members will all respond to a trauma in different ways. Before the trauma you might have somebody who likes talking, someone who doesn't and that’s fine and complementary. But after the trauma they get polarised and they start arguing over how best to deal with it. A couple of blokes were nodding their heads. It’s a small thing that really, I think that connected. I think partly it would be worth us trying to really explore and get some bloody clinical research coming in, that we might be able to start to explain it, in practical terms” (CIGAR #2 23/4/07: Transcript).

Polarisation may also occur at a community level as Rickards (2008, p. 114) reported that divisions were forming within the community “between those who take a different approach to spending and debt.”
5.4.3 On community

5.4.3.1 Exhaustion

Prolonged drought can exhaust a community as people move into individual survival mode. Supporters and support systems can develop compassion fatigue over time. Erosion of social supports creates further isolation and can eat away at community morale, as inferred by two different communities within the same CIG regions:

“A drought counsellor pointed out that in her small community, they have a Christmas party each year...what she has found is that people don’t have that time for connection any more...because of that survival stuff...not getting into the ute or on the bike and connecting as much. Joan said that Swan Hill is not having their Field Day this year.....a two day event – a show – an agricultural show – companies weren’t coming in, so they don’t have enough to run it, so the farmers won’t have that outlet – won’t be able to get together and talk. This is the first time (at least in the last ten years) it’s been cancelled. There was interest in knowing whether the same thing may be happening in other communities” (CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary).

Whilst the negative impact of drought on social activity was widely reported across the CIGs, the causes need to be cautiously interpreted within the broader changes affecting working people across the developing world. In addition to the formal social events affected by the economic impact of the drought, the pattern of social connectivity in rural life is likely to be affected by changes to our working lives in general. My sister, who lives in country Victoria, made the point that, just like urban workers, farmers are having to work harder and longer hours and don’t have as much time in general to catch up with friends and neighbours – a general situation that may be further exacerbated by financial pressures caused by the drought.

I serendipitously met a farming couple whilst discussing the drought project with DHS & VFF representatives at a local café. This couple, who were having a quiet cuppa after attending a Bouverie Acquired Brain Injury counsellor, came over and reported that when the husband had suffered an accident several years earlier everyone had supported the family but now everyone in the community is exhausted by 10 years of drought. They were clear that community tension and exhaustion had replaced the usual ready availability of support. They suggested there was a need to lift the mood of the community (Farming couple, 30/10/07).

An understanding of the nature of drought needs to inform community development approaches, which in turn provide a context in which counselling plays a role. Exhausted communities may need energisers in order to ‘kick start’ community action. A range of interventions that seemed to provide this role were developed by CIG members across the state. Community events such as ‘pamper days’, ‘farming used to be fun’, and ‘you can’t die laughing days’ were events planned to raise spirits and to get people away from the chronic nature of their hardship. Of course there are different points of view about how best to spend limited resources. For example:

"A community member, not a drought counsellor, said that feedback from some of the blokes is that they get really angry when they see all this money going out for drought workers and drought events and they don’t actually feel it caters for them and their needs. They don’t see that stuff as practical, because outside of when there’s relationship difficulties at home, I guess
they see that practical support would help them more than a BBQ with the neighbouring farmers” (CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary).

These differences may be even greater given there is not a tangible acute event to rally around, where people tend to put differences to one—side as is the case with the acute stages of time—limited tangible disasters like fire and flood. However, relief from the day—to—day stresses may be particularly important for farmers and others who live and work in the same environment. If the farm business is in chronic stress due to drought, possible distractions or potential supports, such as family and home based recreation opportunities, may also be under stress and hence less available. Another theme across the CIGs was that the long—term nature of drought began to erode other healthy distractions such as sport and physical activities as reflected in the following quote:

“The drought has meant that people on farms have decreased their physical activity too” (CIG # 1 Loddon Mallee 19/3/07 - Summary).

In her second report for the Birchip Cropping Group into the effects of drought, Rickards points out that the threat of ongoing drought “forces (people) to conserve their financial and personal reserves” (2008, p. 112). The promotion of social connectivity (social capital) needs to be done in a thoughtful way – taking into account that the role of socialisation in coping with drought, like other factors, needs to be seen in a developmental framework. CIG members from Loddon Mallee, a region affected by drought for at least five years made the observation that at times when the impact of the drought and hope for the future was at its worst, the community became exhausted and ‘socialled out’. Hence even well—meaning interventions need to be sensitive to the developmental stage of the drought and of the community’s response to it, as reflected in the following discussion recorded by the Loddon Mallee CIG facilitator:

“A rural support worker made the comment that the community is ‘socialled out’ – people are financially, emotionally and physically exhausted, and just getting up the energy to go to these social events is too much. The information is out there – it’s not like there is too much more to say any more...whilst you wouldn’t give up on those yet, developmentally things are at a different stage”(CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Sensitivity to the developmental nature of drought can inform practice as the Bouverie CIG facilitator for Loddon Mallee discovered when she inquired how counsellors take into account the community’s developmental stage:

“more group work... Jenny is doing women’s strength building.... Claire is going to be doing some grief work, and she offered to help with the women’s strength group. John is looking for another male facilitator to help with the men’s group he is trying to get going” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

The way community activities are presented may be as important as what the activities are. If people perceive community BBQs as trying to ‘cheer them up’ rather than as a part of an overall response to managing a chronic pervasive natural disaster, then they are likely to respond negatively. But if community BBQs are seen akin to fire fighters having a rest after 24hrs on patrol or keeping up their fluids so they can fight another day, then the response is likely to be more positive. Sensitivities to the complexity of people’s reactions may also be a result of future possibilities, for example, Rickards
speculates that the growing coolness she found between people in the community "may also be arising as people unconsciously try to psychologically protect themselves from the pain of physical separation" in case friends leave due to losses of farms or businesses. The growing awareness of the sensitivities of individual, family and community reactions to disasters like drought will help inform drought counselling into the future.


5.4.3.2 Division

"areas are affected differently" (CIG #13 Grampians 26/5/08: Summary)

The chronic nature of drought and the fact that it affects everyone differently and at different times can add to community fragmentation. CIG members repeatedly pointed out that the drought’s effects depend on the specific area (one side of road ok the other not), type of farm, stage in life (for example, young dependents or not) and stage in career (early investment / heavy debts etc). For example, one farm may be affected terribly leading to anger and the farm across the road may be relatively unaffected, inducing guilt (Drought counsellor presentation at the NBT Workshop Stawell, 2007). A CIG facilitator who asked her group about the variability of impacts of drought recorded the following summary of the discussion:

"whether there is any survivor guilt for those people who have these good years...it was acknowledged that they wouldn’t be wanting to broadcast it...it’s pretty much on display if you’ve got nothing...some people inherit their land, so it’s debt free; some people inherit huge debts – so much depends on a thousand things” (CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary).

The distribution of water, the different uses of water (cautious use vs expansive use), and the different impacts of drought on different regions can lead to community conflict and tension. Given its intangible nature, the impact of drought is highly contested and people’s responses are more open to being seen as reflections on their character (whether they are stoics or whingers) or personal abilities (whether they are good managers or not) – rather than as a product of the drought itself – as intimated in the following CIG quote:

"Farmers who have taken early advantage of grants have created a division between those who are perceived as living well and those who are still struggling and have not received funds. This creates cynicism about who is deserving — and who shouts the loudest” (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

These findings are in keeping with the Birchip Cropping Group’s second report, which noted that, “One of the notable changes between the February and September interviews is that stronger divisions seem to have emerged between members of the rural community” (Rickards, 2008, p. 113), and later in the report, “what is galling for those who miss out is that the system’s use of financial criteria presents the view that unavoidable drought conditions are not the problem as much as individual’s financial management” (Rickards, 2008, pp. 114-115).

Drought stress can put pressure on all relationships within a community. A chronic crisis, especially a chronic crisis with few practical tasks to unite the community can lead to protracted arguments about the best way to respond. Rickards (2008) found strong arguments between people who responded to the drought by going into debt and those who managed to avoid it. Our study found that even some
Attempts to safeguard established relationships during the stresses of the drought had unintended consequences. An example of this was raised in more than one CIG:

“Some of them (e.g. bank managers, accountants) have a really long—term relationship, when farmers may have consulted them about all sorts of things, not just finance. John had heard of a particular bank putting someone else in place to give customers the ‘bad news’ – to protect the existing relationship. We discussed the fact that it would still need to be confronted within the relationship in some way. Joan said that this is the basis of the ’No Bullshit’ approach – to be able to say difficult things directly. John had used the term (no bullshit) with a client the other day” (CIG # 8 Loddon Mallee 15/10/07 - Summary).

Solutions to individual people’s financial problems can also lead to conflict with neighbours or impact negatively on other members of the community. An example given by members of the Gippsland CIG was that if a farmer whose dairy is towards the end of a milk carter’s run sells his / her farm to a large international tree company for example – the carters may not pick up milk from the dairy further down the run – which has grave implications for this farmer and can potentially turn neighbour against ex—neighbour (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07 - Summary). Conflict between what is good for the individual and what is good for the community can create further stress as pointed out by the following CIG excerpt:

“Farmers were stressed by the dilemma of a way out for themselves that impacted negatively on their neighbours. Bryan talked about a couple of farmers he has spoken to who are saying the time is now to walk away. They are trying to get through Christmas, and getting the best return they can for their farms, but the big problem is, who they sell it to. Whilst it appears that land values haven’t dropped all that much, they are only as good as the water rights they can get. Some of the big companies are buying up the smaller farms: they have the money to buy temporary or permanent water rights” (CIG # 8 Loddon Mallee 15/10/07 - Summary).

A potentially unintended divisive impact of the financial support response consistently reported by the drought counsellors was that businesses not clearly related to primary industry find it difficult to secure Exceptional Circumstances benefits because it is difficult to prove income losses are directly related to the drought, as raised in the Gippsland CIG:

“(It is) not easy for some small businesses (e.g. corner store) to record and prove the criteria (70% of business affected by drought), whilst for others (tractor sales) it is easier” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07 - Summary).

Even within the farming community there was anger at the financial assistance system also documented in detail by Rickards (2007), which was seen as benefitting some and not others. Whether directly affected financially, in small communities, distress in one member can spread to others as specifically articulated by the following CIG comment:

“Their core business is water or stock—feed or whatever, and the current circumstances have been imposed on them. It’s got to affect their own business: for example, do they cover for a farmer who can’t afford to pay for the feed, etc?” (CIG # 8 Loddon Mallee 15/10/07 - Summary).
5.4.3.3  Inequities

A strong theme to emerge in the CIGs across the state can be summarised as ‘inequity exacerbates community division’. Natural disasters can unite a community but they can also create tensions and divisions, a point clearly made in an article submitted for publication in No Bull by drought counsellor Sandra Rodwell:

“A colleague and I have been cold calling the secondary level of drought affected people – water carters, grain merchants, small business operators etc. We have been well received on a personal level but there is a lot of anger out there particularly from small business owners who are doing it really tough and feeling they are not being supported” (Rodwell, 2007, July, p. 15).

Financial support can also depend on how farmers and business people have arranged their finances. Farmers who receive financial assistance may be resented by farmers who decide not to apply for financial assistance (either because they believe in self-reliance or find the application processes too hard or too shaming). Similarly, Rickards (2008, p. 116) reported that despite, “efforts to avoid creating resentment, it seems that it is growing among some groups of the farming community as stress levels once again rise. Complaints with or jealousy of other groups, such as those with more rain, more water rights or small business assistance also emerged in the interviews.”

In our study, inequity, competition for limited jobs and the effects of long term financial strain were all reported as also taking their toll.

“John said that this inequity is a big issue in his work in Centrelink: it certainly exacerbates people’s mental health issues. He is aware of a number of people who have attempted suicide...he sees this as related to finances primarily. Terry likened it to a ‘pack of cards which is suddenly starting to fall’. Mary mentioned in some of the smaller towns anything from 25 to 60 people are applying for the same job. Denise talked about the hardest part for her – watching families who have been really stoic, but who are now, after 12 months, crumbling” (CIG # 9 Loddon Mallee 20/11/07 - Summary).

In summary, the drought creates divisions which can be further exacerbated by people having different reactions to the drought and still further exacerbated if support is provided, or perceived to be provided inequitably.

5.4.3.4  Community resilience in the face of chronic stresses

“Every community in the (anon) shire have their own resilience and survival strategies. Each community has a different approach which makes it difficult to co—ordinate consistent and seamless services” (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

Hardship and adversity naturally bring forth the notion of resilience. Individual resilience is, according to Hawley and DeHann (1996) defined in three ways:

i. The ability to keep ones equilibrium during a crisis;
ii. The ability to bounce back to previous ways of functioning; and
iii. A non-pathologising response to hardship.
Froma Walsh has translated the ideas of individual resilience and applied it to describe families and communities that keep their equilibrium and buoyancy in the face of hardship such as drought. Walsh (1998, p. 4) makes an interesting distinction between resilience and strengths or solutions when she writes, "Whereas a solution—focused therapist might target a search for strengths in better times, a therapist taking a resilience approach hones in on the worst of time, striving for meaning making and mastery." This may translate into helping communities to search for times when they managed to survive previous hardships and to identify and make sense of how survival was achieved. Practical ways of assisting communities exhausted by chronic drought in line with Walsh’s suggestions were discussed in several CIGs, two examples follow:

“To build up the good memories — we need to focus on the good times as well as the bad times — that helps build resilience in communities. Exploring what communities have done during difficult times — and often good things come out of the bad times – this is a parallel to trauma in families” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07 - Summary).

“We looked again at the factors that contribute to particular communities being tougher and more resilient. Joan highlighted different sorts of farming (e.g. broad acre farming compared to fruit and vegetable growing) was differentially affected by the drought, but also that some communities had a long and strong history of survival, and the farmers in particular areas seem particularly tough and resilient” (CIG # 4 Loddon Mallee 18/6/07 - Summary).

Drought counsellors used a combination of building social capital, celebrating existing examples of social cohesion as well as building resilience through celebrating the community’s efforts during previous hard times. Celebrating positive examples of strong social capital can provide a buffer against the impact of drought, as described in the following community, during a CIG discussion five months into the research:

“Other characteristics which tend to build resilience in some communities over others include being more united as a community. In (area) there are lots of social gatherings often linked to other activity such as sport for example, the bonfire gathering after badminton. People will often debrief each other about whatever is going on at the time. They have close links to the church and sporting organisations. They have the ability to connect with each other and accept who and what they are as people. The ability to do this varies between communities. The ability to look out for your neighbour is important” (CIG # 4 Grampians 19/6/07 - Summary).

Another approach drought counsellors cautiously used was helping individuals, families and communities to articulate positives that had emerged from the hardship of drought. Exploring positives with people suffering a natural disaster needs to be done with exquisite timing, nuanced sensitivity and avoiding ‘trying to cheer people up’. The complexities around this work are explored in greater detail towards the end of Chapter 6. Some specific examples are articulated in the following CIG Summary, but similar examples occurred in all CIG discussions.

“There are some good ideas and ways of doing things that have come out of the drought, such as:

- People are taking a fresh look at how they run things, so new and better processes are being established (such as one counsellor’s “calf feeding routine” that she and her husband initially set up out of necessity but which they’ve found works better than their old methods);
• Water systems are being put into place;
• People are selling old stuff out of sheds as a way of gaining income;
• Farmers are “forced to look outside of their patch…”;
• Some people are relieved when they finally make a decision to sell.”

(CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary).

5.5 Conceptualising drought as a disenfranchised natural disaster

A drought counsellor from the Gippsland CIG tells a funny story of getting stopped by a road worker at a spot where flash flooding had made the main road impassable. The worker asked the drought counsellor what he did, to which he replied, “I’m a drought counsellor”, leading the road worker to reply, “Yeh, what do you really do?” The intangible, intermittent, chronic and pervasive nature of drought can mean that the people it affects are not fully acknowledged by the wider community.

The term ‘disenfranchised’ is taken from Doka (1989) who used the term disenfranchised grief (described further in section 6.14.1.3.1) to describe the experience people have when their loss is not fully acknowledged by the general community including the structures such as rituals, public awards, media coverage and political speeches. The unacknowledged nature of drought has both subtle and profound impacts on individuals involved especially on an emotional level. It affects both people directly affected by the disaster and the people who support them.

5.5.1 Comparing drought with fire and flood

In this section I compare drought to more acute natural disasters, not to create a competition between the natural disasters and not to diminish the pain and suffering experienced in the face of fire and flood, but to help explore the unique nature of drought in an effort to help unearth possible ideas for responding more effectively to it.

5.5.1.1 Community division is different in fire and flood

During fire and floods, communities are more likely to unite to fight the external threat, than during the long and intangible periods of drought, a theme that will be pursued in the following section. Tension and differences tend to emerge after the acute stages of fires and floods when some community members receive more financial assistance than others, as emotions put on hold during the height of the threat are released, and as mental health impacts express themselves. Due to the intangible nature of drought discussed already, the pulling together in the face of crises\(^\text{18}\), tensions over financial assistance, emotional responses etc are all mixed up and occurring during chronic periods of drought. The difference between fire and flood and drought are considerable and are considered in the following sections.

5.5.1.2 No drought heroes – despite heroic actions

There are no heroes in the face of drought! Fire fighters and the people they rescue from the ravages of fire and flood are described as heroes in the media and in the broader community, and yet drought workers and their clients are not. Drought counsellors, who tackle suicidality or attempt to help people

\(^{18}\) Note: Crises happen at different times often unnoticed with drought.
in impossible financial situations, and the families they help who are battling the slow strangulation of drought, are not typically described as heroes, despite their heroic actions. The community, and hence families, are allowed to think about fire and flood differently to drought — there is less stigma associated with fire and flood and hence everyone is able to seek help more openly. The Gippsland CIG members who had been involved in both fire and drought counselling clearly reported that “More people sought counselling after the fires, and fire response led to more assertive referrals compared to drought” (CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary).

Responses to fire and flood tend to be more social as the whole community joins forces to fight the ‘one—off’ crisis. Due to the insidious and ongoing nature of drought, the impact can be more socially isolating, as already discussed. Drought ‘victims’ receive less community support. For example, fewer interstate volunteers, fewer donations from the broader community and media coverage cannot be sustained. The chronic intangible nature of drought is in large part responsible for these different community responses. Whilst people can witness fire and flood in real time in the media, this is not possible with an insidious and long term condition like drought (CIG # 4 Gippsland 22/6/07, ; Research diary 23/2/07). Trauma theory points out that acknowledgement and the bearing of witness to the survivor’s pain and loss is a key step to recovery. The disenfranchised nature of drought may help explain the complexity of dealing with the psychological impact of drought, as acknowledgement of the pain and loss experienced by people affected by it is not as obvious or as forthcoming as it is for other disasters. Drought counsellors commented that even their clients often did not appreciate the significance of the drought’s impact, for example,

“Terry presented a client who was an employee of a farmer who was very stressed but hadn’t linked this pressure to the impact of the drought on his employer. Linking this client’s stress to the impact of the drought was very useful” (CIG # 5 Gippsland 3/8/07 - Summary).

5.5.1.3 Fire, flood and the poor cousin – a field trip

I experienced the differences in community response to fire, flood and drought first—hand during a visit to a small Victorian town with my CIG, in which a local member of the community gave a presentation about the impact of recent fires, floods and drought. This person talked differently when discussing the different disasters. With fire and flood there was a much clearer ‘us against an objectified external entity’ narrative. He mentioned that whilst waiting for the fire to hit the town, the locals responded, “Come on we’re ready to fight you”. The resultant social response of sticking together led to a “feeling of privilege to be part of it”, he reflected. There was immediate talk of recovery, “We’ll be up and running soon” both after the fire and flood, that was absent when talking about the drought.

My major observations about how the social impact of drought differs from fire and flood during this visit and in the subsequent CIG discussion (Research diary 5/10/07), are as follows:

- The fire had a tangible, objectified status which allowed people to join together to fight against the external force.
- During the community member’s presentation, there were a large number of dramatic photos recording the impacts of the fire and flood but none documenting the impact of drought. Drought is harder to pictorialise\(^{19}\) which makes it harder to represent as a tangible threat and

\(^{19}\) This observation led me to create a competition called, “Got a photo which expresses the impact of drought better than words?” in *No Bull*. The competition only received one entry and I vigorously encouraged this one entry. Projects by professional photographers were required to capture the drought. *No Bull* featured two such projects: VicRelief Food Bank’s ‘Beyond
for people to bear witness – making it harder for the broader community to acknowledge its impact.

- Politicians visited flood affected areas by helicopter / large number of people arrived to fight the fires. Drought is much less social. It attracts less resources and publicity.

- Fire and flood lead to extra resources that had been requested for some time being swiftly provided to the local district. Drought seems less likely to lead to substantial external resources being provided.

- On the trip into this small town, significant road and bridge works were being completed. This provided a powerful and tangible symbol, both that some disaster had hit the area, but also that the reconstruction process / recovery process was underway. There are less tangible activities to indicate the crisis or the recovery process in regard to drought.

- The locals had got together and built a temporary bridge the day following the flood taking the bridge out — providing a social, communal, active response to the disaster not readily available for drought.

- A member of our CIG group noted that because people are affected at different times and in different ways during a drought, each person tends to go through the drought individually, rather than as a whole community — as in fire and flood.

- The national media was very interested in the flood, which led to the feeling that the burden was somewhat shared with others (Community member’s presentation).

- The broader community, including people from distant cities can witness fire and flood in real time on television and newspapers, whereas the chronic nature of drought makes this impossible.

- Drought does not gain the same level of community support as evidenced by the generous funds donated by the general population to support fire and flood in comparison to drought recovery efforts.

5.5.2 Disenfranchised natural disaster: implications for community development

Comparison of the pre and post drought counsellor questionnaires revealed that drought counsellors felt community development strategies grew in importance over the course of the research. Community development projects needed effective community consultation, for example, projects needed to establish links with community desires, understand locally defined problems and thorough advertising and promotion. However, the drought counsellors also found that they sometimes needed to ‘kick start’ the community energy before effective engagement could occur. Community activities also needed to be sensitive to timing (for example, not when communities were ‘all socialled out’, after brief respite rains or during busy farming periods). Specific community activities to help combat the impact of the drought also required balance between acknowledging the drought and providing people an escape from the chronic, insidiously inescapable impact of it. Other researchers have pointed to the importance of ‘noticing who doesn’t attend social events’ (Blau, 2006) and that some farmers feel under the gaze at such events – whether they attend or not (Rickards, 2008). Our research also suggested that community development strategies benefited from understanding rural culture. Projects that focused on providing support in ways that were acceptable proved most successful. Two prominent projects that took this approach were: reasonable drought’ and ‘The many Australian Photographers’.
i. The Grampian’s Primary Care Partnership produced postcards with referral information on one side and a child’s drawings and well wishes on the other. These were sent to farmers. Several clients indicated how important it was knowing someone was thinking of them – attesting to the possibility that people feel alone despite showing stoicism to the world. May be the most poignant feedback came via the Rural Support Line from a woman in her 70s who rode her bike to collect the mail. This was celebrated in the February 2008 edition of No Bull and a segment is reproduced here:

“A postcard….depicting a child’s artistic impression of how they saw the drought, with a note attached offering hope, support and a sense of there is someone out there thinking of her was waiting with the bills. The joy at receiving even a small gesture of hope was so overwhelming for the caller that she wept at the mail box for all to see, and didn’t care who did either, which by country standards is a mortal sin” (No Bull - February 2008, p. 5).

ii. A similar approach was used by a drought counsellor from the Gippsland CIG who recruited local artists to help school children from the Bona Vista primary school depict their experience of a farm visit artistically. The finished product, a calendar with referral information, was distributed. Called ‘The Farmers and Community Connect’ project, an image from the calendar is portrayed below.

5.6 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: Drought is an intangible, intermittent, chronic, pervasive, disenfranchised natural disaster can lead to community exhaustion, inequity and division, leaving individuals vulnerable to feeling emotionally and socially isolated. Community tensions caused by drought can exacerbate tensions that already exist due to longer term social, economic and climatic change. Strategies to address the hardships caused by drought need to promote social connection, keeping in mind that timing will be important and communities may need assistance to ‘kick start’ or re-energise in order to embrace social capital building strategies.

There are opportunities to address drought in ways that create ‘healing narratives’ (West & Smith, 1996) which address the underlying divide between rural and urban Australians – bringing people together instead of letting the drought further divide these communities.
5.6.1 Policy and practice implications

i. A common symptom of drought is social and emotional isolation and hence a fundamental task is to maintain people’s social connection and to reconnect people with appropriate networks when they become isolated.

ii. People may not link increased conflict with the overall tensions caused by the drought and so making this connection may help them make sense of hardship at an individual, family or community level.

iii. Responses to drought need to appreciate that the community may be exhausted and divided and hence recovery strategies need to find ways to ‘kick start’ community action. Such events must be held at an appropriate time and presented in a sensitive way. For example, community oriented interventions may need to create a response culture of ‘we are all in this together, even though we are all affected differently and respond to hardship differently.’

iv. Strategies to promote ‘bridging social capital’ as well as ‘bonding social capital’ are needed to build community resilience and so that dominant groups do not render smaller groups invisible.

v. Policy in response to drought needs to actively promote social connection and monitor against inadvertently dividing communities.

vi. A policy context that promotes service co—operation rather than service competition is needed.
CHAPTER SIX

6 DROUGHT COUNSELLING STRATEGIES

6.1 Chapter orientation

The research question primarily addressed in this chapter: What are specific drought counselling strategies for responding to drought affected people and their communities?

In this chapter I build on the conceptualisations of drought developed in Chapter 5 and explore the specific drought counselling strategies to emerge within the CIGs.

The themes and quotes selected for discussion in this chapter are drawn from extensive analysis of the summaries produced by Bouverie CIG facilitators, transcripts of the CIGAR debriefs interlaced with data arising from the pre and post counsellor questionnaires and client feedback (in-depth interview, Feedback and Advice questionnaires, Takeaways and Problem and Progress sheets).

I begin the chapter by pointing out that the biased focus of this study is on engaging rural clients who are reluctant to seek help and present some basic differences that emerged between specialist drought counselling and general counselling – drawing on both the Rural Support Line (RSL) and face-to-face drought counsellors' experience. I look at some of the cultural factors that may constrain rural people from seeking help, which leads into an exploration of how openness to local culture can identify constraints that, if taken seriously and addressed, can generate opportunities for creative and effective counselling strategies relevant to drought.

I document the specific drought counselling strategies that gained traction and momentum throughout the course of the project, sketch out the broader context in which these practice wisdoms should be considered before placing these specific practice wisdoms within a conceptual framework that builds clinically on the 'disenfranchised trauma' idea raised in Chapter 5, with the hope that it will facilitate further development of this work.

I conclude by exploring the impact of the drought on the drought counsellors and the research team, invoking the concept of vicarious traumatisation and compassion fatigue to conceptualise the impact and to link it to other disaster work in order to normalise and contextualise these impacts. Key learnings provide an overarching framework to make sense of the strategies developed and recommendations a way forward.

6.2 How to interpret the data?

The results presented in this chapter are inherently biased. They reflect strategies to engage rural people who are reluctant to seek counselling—like support. This bias is consistent with the original brief to our research team by The Department of Human Services, Victoria. A significant number of people affected by drought are difficult to engage therefore new approaches and even new ways of conceptualising services are required. The many rural people who willingly seek out counselling support or are convinced of the value of counselling probably do not need significantly different approaches to what currently exists. Although beyond the scope of the current study, the degree to which rural people are more suspicious of counselling than their urban counterparts, would be a useful question to research further. A lot of urban people are suspicious of counselling and hence the findings
from this study may find equal relevance in other non-rural contexts – especially close—knit communities of people dealing with chronic hardships.

Interpreting the results of this study is not straight forward. Whilst the raw data may be easily recorded, how to understand it is not. For example, which aspects of the findings are due to rural issues in general, which exclusively to drought, which to the chronic nature of the hardship, which to the disenfranchised aspect of the hardship, and which to the issues of establishing a new service? What is the role of organisational – policy related artifacts?

Whilst I will attempt to tease out the contribution of all these factors, I consider the development of an evidence base for drought counselling in Victoria to be a newish venture. Grace Blau author of the Countering Drought: Manual of Creative Community Solutions, December 2006, points out that there is considerable research into the social and economic impact of drought, less on the mental health impact of drought and almost nothing on the ‘nuts and bolts’ of how counselling does or doesn’t help. The ideas that follow should be seen as an early exploration of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of drought counselling.

6.3 Is it a myth that rural people are more anti—counselling than urban people?

6.3.1 Rural people hate counselling until they have it!

The current research did not seek to explore if rural people were more anti—counselling than urban folk, but it raised sufficient data to begin to question some myths around rural people’s relationship to counselling. For example, whilst not conclusive, there are some signs that rural clients who received counselling found, in the main, that it was a positive and useful experience.

Hidden in research other than our own is further evidence that a significant proportion of farmers have positive experiences of counselling, despite a prevailing view that rural people, especially farmers, hate counselling. For example, powerful insights into how counselling is perceived in farming communities can be surmised from the “Critical Breaking Point?” report because it is based on research commissioned by the Birchip Cropping Group, a farmer driven group in the Mallee and Wimmera in Victoria, not a counselling service. While the body of the report describes farmers as very skeptical about counselling, the report states that 13% of the 60 randomly selected farmers interviewed for the research had experienced counselling in the past and all had found it positive. In what seems particularly counter to the anti—counselling view commonly associated with rural people, 66% of the sample responded, ”I don’t want it but it should be there for those that do”, whilst only 21% responded in the way most commonly expected of farmers — believing it to be simply of no help (Rickards, 2007). The Birchip Cropping Group report reflects what may be an inconsistency between the ‘dominant story’ of anti counselling and the ‘local knowledge’ (White & Epston, 1989) that counselling had been helpful to those who had it and that counselling should be available for those who need it. The research helped me question a number of strongly held myths about rural people and farmers. For example, the myth of the reticent farmer was challenged in the first stakeholder interview with Susan Armstrong and John Bell. John pointed out that farmers’ in general love talking about things they know about – which may not mean they love talking in counselling. John’s comments sparked my childhood memories of waiting in the car for my father to finish talking with friends, colleagues and strangers. The respondents’ qualitative responses in Rickard’s study suggest that pride and concerns about confidentiality were the main obstacles to engaging with counselling openly – not the fear of the talking itself.
I am aware of the bias of drought counsellors reporting on the value of their own work, but the overwhelming theme to emerge from the CIG-CIGAR network was that whilst it took a lot of community development activities, creativity, persistence and time to engage clients – once people experienced counselling, both formally and informally on the farm or in the streets, the vast majority found that it was a great relief to share the burden with someone other than family and friends and that ‘talking helped’.

In addition, the quantitative data (Problem and Progress sheets) is suggestive of a positive trend toward farmers finding it helpful to talk to telephone counsellors. In 70% of Problem and Progress sheets completed by drought counsellors, talking was recorded as the most helpful component of the services. Problem and progress sheets were originally planned to be jointly completed by counsellors and clients towards the end of sessions, but drought counsellors did not feel comfortable doing this, partly because of the form filling required for informed consent. The research team then invited drought counsellors to complete the sheets anonymously at the completion of a session, de—identify them and return them to The Bouverie Centre. Between March 2007 and March 2009, 60 Problem and Progress sheets were received, the majority (48/60) from the Rural Support Line. Hence the Problem and Progress sheets represent the counsellors’ views of the client’s session.

Key findings of problem and progress sheets

- Age of clients ranged from 25 – 74 years.
- Majority of clients had a farming related occupation.
- The top ten presenting problems were: Stress / anxiety / depression (55); Financial concerns (47); Lack of water / feed (34); Relationship issues (24); Isolation (9); Health concerns (7); Lack of supports (6); Anger / frustration (5); Centrelink issues (4); and Concern for others (4).
- 70% of clients responded that talking to a counsellor was beneficial.
- 66% of clients found referrals for practical help (e.g. centrelink support) most helpful.

(No Bull - October 2007, p. 7).

![Figure 6.1: Top ten presenting problems in Problem and Progress sheets](image-url)
Sixty Problem and Progress sheets over the course of the 19 month research is a disappointing response but the endorsement of talking to a counsellor suggests a trend that needs to be taken seriously. The trend is reinforced by the five Client Feedback and Advice questionnaires that were received early in the research. However, one person was very unhappy about the counselling he received, responding:

“I was disillusioned. Farmers need help not airy fairy talk” and “Being given wrong information. Nothing good about listening to a counsellor talk about self. Being told what I should do. Having pressure put on me to do what counsellor wanted me to do not what I wanted. Told me they knew how I was feeling which was not true. No training in this area.”

In contrast, the other four respondents to the Client Feedback and Advice Questionnaires were positive about the counselling they received. Some of the comments indicating what they found helpful are reproduced here:

“She was very friendly and made me feel I wasn’t alone – that there is help out there.”

“Get out and talk to someone like (drought counsellor’s name). It makes a hell of a difference.”

“It made me realise that a lot of people are hurting financially as well as emotionally so I’m not alone. She explained things I didn’t understand. I didn’t realise there was help for people like me.”

A specific but detailed source of data that provides a human face to the suggested trend I am reporting here is an in—depth interview I conducted early in the research with a couple who had experienced a single session from a drought counsellor. I recorded the interview in their home, which is outside a small remote town in rural Victoria. Jean and Bob (names changed to protect confidentiality) are in their mid 60s; Bob was a shearer who, last year, could not get work due to the drought, after recovering from an injury. “We got really depressed” reported Jean in the plural. Jean did most of the talking, which suited Bob. A more detailed report of the interview can be read in No Bull, July 2007, page 6, where it was published as part of the recursive feedback to the field about the research.

Not believing in counselling before meeting Barbara (drought counsellor), Jean said she “thought it was shit, airy—fairy bullshit…I thought the counsellor would tell you what to do, tell you where you’d gone wrong. Barbara gave us some suggestions but didn’t tell us what to do. She was really nice, warm, bubbly… She listened but added advice… She made us feel good. We realised it wasn’t our fault, which really helped. Jean and Bob’s advice to others who are in a similar boat, and considering counselling, “Can’t hurt you, but it could help you.”

Although just a beginning, the current study provides some evidence to indicate that rural people may be suspicious of counselling until they experience it. There is at least enough evidence to question the idea that rural people in general dislike talking to a well trained counsellor. Certainly there was strong evidence, in keeping with the Australian Healthcare Associates (2006) call for education programs that demystify counselling and the provision of non-mystifying, practical, non-pathologising counselling approaches that adopt outreach, personal contact and assertive referral and follow—up strategies. Positive and negative feedback suggest that rural people prefer counsellors who are friendly and empathic, and offer advice but are not prescriptive. A key theme underlying the more specific findings is that counselling approaches need to consider individuals, families, social networks and
whole communities – this last point is explored further in Chapter 7 under counselling and community development.

I discussed the idea that rural people may not have negative attitudes towards counselling any more than urban people in general with Rob Rendell, co-founder of RMCG. RMCG, which consults to rural businesses and communities on environmental issues, helped start the Birchip Cropping Group, the Top 500 as well as many other high profile rural projects. Rob felt strongly that structural factors must be considered when looking at differences between urban and rural attitudes to counselling, such as the size and wealth of the community. For example small communities and communities with low levels of wealth are likely to be more reliant on the community itself for assistance and therefore hold more closed attitudes to services such as counselling, whereas larger communities or communities with greater wealth (which in turn allows travelling and engagement with outside communities) are more likely to have a greater range of reference points within and outside of the community. To be more specific, a wealthy rural area may be more open to counselling because community members travel widely bringing back progressive ideas about health prevention and treatments to the community.

The next part of the chapter explores the question “If talking helps and counselling is the talking cure – why don’t more rural people seek counselling support for drought related hardships?”

This remainder of this chapter broadly explores specialist drought counselling strategies, that emerge from looking at two factors:

i. The difficulties of engaging rural people given the nature of drought;

ii. The specific impact of drought on individuals, families and communities, given the nature of drought as outlined in the previous chapter.

I begin with the first. One of the central tasks of the current research was “How to engage reluctant rural clients in drought counselling?” The Bouverie Centre’s stance in responding to this central question was to begin by understanding the constraints to engaging rural people in drought counselling, as a way of exploring opportunities. Constraints were taken seriously and used to influence practice. Constraints can be viewed as disguised solutions. Hence in the next section I have addressed both constraints to engaging rural people in drought counselling and the opportunities to which these constraints give rise.

6.4 The constraints and opportunities of engaging small communities

6.4.1 Small communities

Overall, the research concurs with Boydell and her colleagues’ insightful statement that small communities are both preventative of mental health issues and possibly also constrain some people from seeking help because of fears of how friends and neighbours will perceive this need. As recorded in the first Hume CIG summary, “No one wants to be seen by their peers talking to a counsellor” (CIG #1 Hume 21/3/07: Summary). Most CIGs reported that whilst people are reluctant to engage drought counsellors during talks and community presentations about the impact of drought some “will try to slip in unnoticed to talk to them, such as out the back of a building after a presentation” (CIG #1 Hume 21/3/07: Summary). This data suggests we need to tap into the health promoting factors of small communities and address the factors that may constrain people seeking help if they need it.
6.4.2 Word of mouth

Whist formal advertisements, mainly in the form of brochures, seemed only somewhat effective, word of mouth, in keeping with Boydell et al (2006) findings, was identified by all CIGs as a powerful mechanism for the promotion of health services. Word of mouth was seen to convey information, encouragement and the seal of approval all at the same time. Word of mouth seems particularly important when attempting to promote a service which community members are cynical, unsure and/or unfamiliar about health services such as counselling. Increases in counselling numbers were often reported as due to two factors, community development and word of mouth, as documented in the following CIG summary:

“His individual counselling case load has increased generally as a result of the community development work over the last 5 months. Person 1 has approximately 8 clients per week for counselling. This has mostly come from word of mouth” (CIG # 2 Grampians 16/4/07 - Summary).

At a recent rural change forum (24/6/09) conducted by the Primary Health Branch, DHS, Rosie Rowe, from the Western District Health Service described an innovative project that tapped local personal networks, similar to word of mouth. Her research team wanted to record the room temperature of homes in a small country town and link these measurements to economic indicators. To get the data loggers (temperature gauges) into private homes her team invited individuals to pass on a data logger to a friend once a specified recording time had occurred. Rowe reported a good uptake using this innovative method of sampling. Exploring further methods to capture the powerful effectiveness of word of mouth in rural promotion of new services would be a valuable area for future research.

6.4.2.1 Third party referrals

“Those most deeply affected by the drought may not be the ones getting emotional support” (CIG # 3 Hume 16/5/07 - Summary).

A common dilemma experienced by drought counsellors and the Rural Support Line counsellors was when a person calls worried about another person (third party referral). Typically this person does not want to be identified to the potential client thus presenting a potential ethical dilemma for the drought counsellor. Drought counsellors debated ways to deal with third party referrals – because they were common and probably more so in close—knit communities – where people are concerned about others but don’t want to be seen to interfere.

“A typical example was, "can you check up on Joe because I think he is struggling, but don’t tell him I told you.” Another common request was from women asking, “How can I support my husband, he won’t seek help” (Drought counsellor, presenting during NBT Workshop Stawell, 2007).

Responding to third party callers is an important way of both responding to community concerns about others and also potentially engaging the caller. For example, a “third party caller who rang the Rural Support Line rang back and opened up about their own issues” (CIG # 2 Rural Support Line 19/4/07 - Minutes).
Drought counsellors developed a range of strategies for assertively following up concerns without compromising ethical practice, including: coaching the referrer to be more upfront about their concerns with the person; seeing the referrer as a client too and providing support for them to help the person; cold calling a whole area where people were identified as struggling (see below); and warm calling (see below). Several Gippsland drought counsellors articulated their approach in detail:

"I won’t say who sent me or made the referral and I will cope with any tension — rather than reveal the referrer, unless they are ok about being mentioned. Another shared that she asks the referrer to get the person they are worried about to call her, but will contact the referrer if the person they are worried about does not contact. If the referrer is still worried about them, she simply contacts the potential client and lets them know there is a service available, without pressure to use it" (CIG # 4 Gippsland 22/6/07).

The following practical ideas for responding to third party referrals were listed in the summary of the second Rural Support Line CIG:

i. Educate caller about risk.
ii. Complete a risk assessment through the caller – discussing what can be done.
iii. Connect the caller with resources and local services.
iv. Support the caller — because it is hard for them. Callers often feel responsible for the person “If they die I will be responsible.” Pointing out they are not responsible is helpful.
v. Validate the caller’s concern.
vi. Getting the balance right between supporting the caller and the third party is tough.

As can be seen by these practical strategies, drought counsellors follow—up third party concerns more actively and assertively than may be done in more traditional counselling services. This led onto assertive outreach which is discussed in the following section.

6.5 Assertive outreach

A key learning from the research was the need for assertiveness at every level of service provision. In line with previous drought counselling evaluations, drought counsellors reported having to go to the people – not wait for the people to come to them. Put simply if Mohammad won’t come to the mountain – take the mountain to Mohammad. The vast majority of CIG members agreed on the importance of counselling being free and available in some form of outreach.

The following example indicates that assertive outreach includes assertive referral, assertive outreach and assertive follow—up:

“John connected with a family before Christmas. The referral came from a social worker at the hospital who was concerned about a dairy farmer. The drought counsellor and colleague did a cold call to the dairy taking a Christmas hamper. They saw the wife first, with the husband noticing they were around but keeping his distance. The wife was appreciative and surprised by their visit, and began to raise a ‘whole range of issues; from drinking water being low, to her needing an operation.’ The counsellors ‘normalised the situation, telling her that a whole lot of
people are in the same boat ...’ One of the counsellors asked the woman if he could give her a call in a few weeks, and she said that would be okay.

When he phoned several weeks later, she was happy to ‘chat’ with him. The counsellor found his knowledge and background in dairy farming to be really helpful” (CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary).

Case studies presented by CIG members who were not counsellors, added assertive re—referral for counselling and other services to the list of assertive actions already mentioned (assertive referral including third party referrals and assertive outreach).

Not all professional counsellors are comfortable with assertive outreach; some because of philosophical reasons others because it is outside their training or personal comfort zone. Of the outreach strategies, the cold calling form of outreach however, was one of the most hotly debated topics throughout the research. Cold calling is explored in the following section.

6.5.1 Cold calling

Cold calling is the practice of calling on all farms in a designated area to offer information, support and referral (if requested). Twelve months into the research several drought counsellors also began cold calling businesses. Cold calling is an assertive engagement strategy, providing information about a range of supports—not a counselling approach, although a cold call may lead to a referral for counselling or may merge into counselling if the person cold calling is a trained counsellor. Cold calling was being practiced in some areas before the establishment of the CIGs—leading to good case loads. Drought counsellors not involved in cold calling struggled to build case loads in the early months of their work. Two drought counsellors who practiced cold calling developed higher counselling case loads than colleagues who did not, as reported in the following CIG summary:

“these two counsellors report a high work load and plenty of clients, which seems to spring from their success at cold calling. They mention that they “get a lot of venting at first, about various organisations such as the water authorities,” but once they get beyond that, they often find that people are willing and ready to talk to them about how they are going. “On a good day, they will open up” (CIG # 3 Anonymous to protect workers: Summary).

Cold calling is based on the idea expressed very clearly and strongly by a retired farmer at a drought information day organised by one of the local drought counsellors in Gippsland, when he interjected, “door knocking is the only way to get to the 50% of people suffering in silence who won’t come for help” (CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary). A number of drought counsellors naturally developed versions of cold calling when they realised that clients weren’t going to come to them, as reflected in the following CIG member’s comments:

“Jason spoke about initially sitting in his office for two weeks….it was either – go and find them, or sit and wait — had he been waiting on referrals, he believes he’s still be sitting there! Traditionally, however, (his service) has been a centre—based service” (CIG #6 Loddon-Mallee 14/8/07: Summary).

However, cold calling is a controversial approach, especially for traditionally trained counsellors who worry about the approach being experienced as intrusive by recipients. An underlying view held by
many counsellors seems to be that clients should come willingly to counselling. Discussion in the Barwon CIG suggested that professions like psychology and social work may have “tighter boundaries around the role and what is ethical” (CIG # 2 Barwon South West 13/3/08 - Summary) and hence may find cold calling more confronting. On the ground, concerns of farmers being singled out as needing help are addressed by workers calling on every farm in a designated area. Some drought counsellors advertise the area and time—table of cold calling in local newspapers — to help prepare the recipients for the calls. This strategy had been so effective in the Campaspe region, where the approach began, that they reported:

“Farm Gate now has a profile across the shire, and it’s acceptable, because it’s been publicised so well that they go from farm to farm and don’t target particular people. This is so well accepted that, after an article in the Rochester paper, a couple of people actually rang to say that they haven’t had a visit yet!” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Initial fears that farmers would act angrily to unsolicited calls did not prove accurate (Two day forum Bendigo, Contemporary controversies No Bull - February 2008, p. 11; No Bull - October 2007, p. 9). In fact rather than being angry most recipients of cold calling were, according to the practitioners, appreciative. As Denise from Loddon Mallee reported one bloke quipped:

“It was about time something came down the dirt track and into the farm...” He was very appreciative that she had driven the 45km to visit him. Others felt that farmers responded most to the idea that someone actually cared about them” (CIG #6 Loddon-Mallee 14/8/07: Summary).

Cold calling requires counsellors to work outside their comfort zone. An underlying constraint to cold calling may be the fear of visiting people in their own environment and not knowing what to expect. Some host agencies, especially hospitals, do not support cold calling because of risk management policies or the perceived risks to health and safety of workers (CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary) – in services which embraced the approach this was addressed by people working in pairs or ringing into the office before and after visits. A theme that emerged regularly during the debate was whether cold calling was more suited to male workers (CIG # 6 Hume 15/8/07 - Summary) and yet in all areas female CIG members were among the biggest advocates of the approach.

The following summary of a CIG discussion is reflective of the common debates across the state:

“Counsellors who mention the cons of cold—calling say: it is an Occupational Health and Safety concern for workers; it is potentially intrusive on the privacy of the farmers whose farms they approach; and it is an expected Aussie response to strangers encroaching on their property to sic the dogs on them or go fetch the rifle (possibly both!). On the pro side of the argument, the two counsellors who are actually doing their work this way have not had any dog or gun threats and have reported a largely positive response. They are seeing clients regularly and have an active caseload” (CIG # 3 Hume 16/5/07 - Summary).

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20 Farm Gate is the name given to “a consistent and collaborative approach to support farming families within the Campaspe Shire area” developed by the Campaspe Primary Care Partnership (PCP) members. The approach, developed in 2006, promoted cold calling as part of a co-ordinated service delivery model. Farm Gate build on cold calling work that commenced the year earlier in 2005-06.
**6.5.1.1 Growing acceptance that cold calling has a role to play**

Over the course of the research, there was a general move towards embracing cold calling as an important approach to reaching the target population who would not otherwise seek help (For an example see No Bull - February 2008, p. 11). Cold calling, especially the 'Farm Gate Model' became very influential, being practiced by drought workers in the Loddon Mallee, Hume and Barwon regions. In the three-four years since its inception, the Campaspe Farm Gate model has been developed into a thorough assertive engagement and referral pathway. A strength of the Farm Gate model is that it helps integrate local services. Counsellors usually go out cold calling in pairs with other service providers, such as DPI field workers, financial counsellors, shire workers or Centrelink staff – diluting the focus on counselling, providing immediate access to practical assistance and building relationships between local service providers. Another advantage of working in pairs is that,

"Each has a particular expertise. For example, Mary uses her dairy farming experience to connect with people....then if there are counselling issues, the counsellor can pick up on that. Often one will be talking to the husband and the other, the wife” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

In addition to improving safety, working in pairs allows 'car debriefing' to occur after each visit (CIG # 9 Loddon-Mallee 20/11/07: Summary). On the other hand, one drought counsellor reported that doing cold calling with other workers means:

"you can’t get into counselling if there are non-counsellors present. Paul does it alone, and this enables him to get into counselling conversations on the spot if needed. He estimates that out of 100 farmers he has visited, about 20 have engaged in counselling” (CIG # 7Loddon-Mallee 18/9/07: Summary).

A formal evaluation of the 'Farm Gate Model' conducted by the Bouverie team (Tauridsky and Young, 2009) emerged as part of the current research and a copy of which can be obtained from the Bouverie website (www.bouverie.org.au).

**6.5.1.2 Cold calling case examples**

**6.5.1.2.1 A typical scenario**

The following case examples convey many of the practices common to cold calling (and drought counselling in general). The first was described in the second CIGAR meeting and the second in a CIG, six months into the research.

**Tina:** There was this great story from one of the guys in my group, who initially went out on a cold call and introduced himself at this barn, and the wife of the farm called him and said "Look, I’d like my husband to spend some time with you but I don’t think he would make the call himself. But what I would like to do is tell him you could come by and may be have some lunch with him or something and kind of ease in?” so he said “Yeah I’ll do that long as you’re sure it’s
The husband was expecting this counsellor who then came to the farm, but this guy had never done anything like this before, so he ended up being there most of the day because the guy gave him the grand tour of the farm and it was calving time. The counsellor, who used to be a farmer himself, helped him do the calving, helped deliver his calves, thereby increasing a bonding credibility. Then they went and sat down to lunch together and over lunch all the time the farmer’s talking, he’s kind of putting up these little red flags and then pulling them back down, putting them up then pulling them back down. Then finally over lunch the counsellor started saying, “look mate how’s it been for you, what’s it really been like?” and he said “Oh, well it’s been really tough.” Interestingly he said like many counsellors, he asked about who are your other supports, do you have other mates that you talk to? And the farmer replied “I have a couple of guys who I consider my best friends, but I can’t talk to them about this stuff,” so he won’t even talk to his best friends. He ended up saying that, and this was the key to the whole session, what things are going on is that they feel like enormous failures” (CIGAR #2 23/4/07: Transcript).

I have selected this case study because it reflects the many examples presented by the CIGs where people were in desperate situations but would not have sought help without the assertive outreach provided by some drought counsellors – and a bit of luck.

“John and Rob had just come from an experience doing a cold call to a farmer who they were wanting to refer on to their counselling colleague Jenny. This was a good opportunity to talk about it. The farmer met them in the yard and they chatted a little bit....they let him know they wanted to give him what assistance they could – talked about financial counsellors. After talking a bit though, he said that his wife had “mental problems” and it snowballed from there. He said that he had never ever told anybody before (despite having gone to lots of community events, etc.) Rob had asked how he was looking after himself — he was in tears – it was a shocking situation. He was aware of his depression – John had talked to him about the things he must be carrying in his "backpack". Rob had offered to make an appointment with the doctor: he fell short of doing that, but he did agree to see the counsellor which they were really pleased about. They thought that they would keep in touch by phone with him now, and may be pop out again. Notably, he asked whether they saw other people like him! He did ask why they called on him, (in fact they’d gone down the wrong road!) but also said that he’d heard of them, and the other family they visited said the same thing....this is great affirmation. (CIG #6 Loddon-Mallee 14/8/07: Summary).

CIG members conducting cold calling also noted that a follow—up phone call after the initial visit is a really important part of the process of cold calling. Calling the client back after a referral is made to another service to make sure the referral was successful is also an important part of the cold calling
process (CIG # 9 Loddon-Mallee 20/11/07: Summary). Rather than being seen as intrusive, as feared by many opponents of cold calling, the vast majority of people visited appreciated that someone cared. This makes sense when viewed in the context of drought being a disenfranchised intangible disaster where people suffer but do not feel their suffering is acknowledged by the broader community.

### 6.5.1.4 Cold calling dilemmas and adaptations

#### 6.5.1.4.1 Responsibilities of reporting criminal behaviour

One of the proponents of cold calling identified a dilemma when uninvited visits reveal emaciated stock on farms:

"It’s a little like notification to Child Protection – you try to encourage the people themselves to talk to the authorities, but if they don't, there's a bottom line, and others may have to call in vets. Farmers are notorious for not calling vets in – for financial reasons...sometimes it costs more to get the vet than the cow is worth" (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Whilst this was not mentioned, cold calling could also lead to the dilemma of reporting suspected domestic violence, child abuse or any other criminal activity that may be suspected.

#### 6.5.1.4.2 Warm calling: semi—targeted calling in a context of limited resources

Whilst some support programs have instigated true cold calling via telephone (i.e. calling all people in a region) most face-to-face cold calling is actually targeted calling due to limits of funding and concerns about certain areas or certain people – as was clarified in the second CIGAR meeting:

**Colin:** Just before you go on, I just want to be clear about this... so the tension is between cold—calling in the context of the lack of resources means that it is kind of an implicit kind of, it’s actually cold—calling with a focus i.e. it’s not truly cold calling it’s actually focused calling? It’s not random, it’s actually....

**Pam:** Well in the one that was presented at the forum, that’s what they do. And my understanding is that they couldn’t possibly cover the whole area.

**Colin:** So they just don’t just go “well we’ll do this street today and that street tomorrow and do it that way?”

**Pam:** No. Well I don’t know whether there is a combination, but certainly that’s what was described when somebody’s alerted as being at risk.  
(CIGAR #2 23/4/07: Transcript)

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21 In an interesting parallel to cold calling out in the field, the Rural Support Line, as a result of the interactive discussions via the CIG-CIGAR network began cold calling on drought counsellors by telephone to see how they were going. Although not done widely this service was received very well by the counsellors receiving the calls.
In practice, cold calling is used to follow—up third party referrals. However, rather than visiting the one person concerned, cold callers will visit 2—3 farms in the same area, thus avoiding being seen to target a particular person in trouble.

Another type of warm calling was developed by a drought counsellor in Gippsland (CIG # 4 Gippsland 22/6/07) where she makes contacts at events, like pub nights, and then says, “I’ll call if I am in the area.” She’ll then call on people she is worried about.

### 6.5.1.4.3 Challenges associated with cold calling

Whilst the potential dangers of cold callers having dogs set upon them and guns put to their faces was raised there were no recorded actual incidences of these dangers, other than incidental dog bites, during the research. Concerns about cold callers being intrusive are harder to assess, but the majority of responses as reported by CIG members was that farmers and small business people were pleased that someone was thinking about them and took the time to seek them out. These responses were further supported in a dedicated evaluation of the Farm Gate Cold Calling model developed in the Loddon Mallee region. The evaluation (available at www.bouverie.org.au) was conducted by Elena Tauridsky from The Bouverie Centre, under mysupervision. Via purposeful sampling providers and recipients of cold calling, namely 15 health and welfare professionals and 10 farmers (six women and four men) were selected for in-depth interviews to explore the experience of cold calling from a variety of perspectives. Working mostly in pairs with each other or other volunteer agencies, six of the 15 professionals interviewed had conducted the majority of the 500 calls completed in the Campaspe region at the time of the evaluation.

The areas of challenge for cold calling identified by the study were:

i. Cold callers fearing or experiencing dog bites;

ii. Farmers being unsure of what could be said to cold callers who they knew; and

iii. The cold callers having to face the unexpected. For example:

> “Three of the ten participants recounted particularly distressing personal circumstances that they had been facing at the time of the Farm Gate visit. These disclosures were at moments, accompanied by lengthy pauses or a trembling voice” (Tauridsky & Young, 2009, p. 21).

Overall, the report concluded:

> “Whilst many, and divided, opinions about the practices of cold calling have been expressed amongst the professional community, the issues raised in this evaluation have challenged some of the major critiques of cold calling. Those criticisms which indicate that farmers do not welcome the intrusion of uninvited professionals are not supported by the findings of this evaluation” (Tauridsky & Young, 2009, p. 4).

### 6.5.1.5 Cold calling counselling techniques

Moving from cold calling to counselling and moving from practical support to counselling requires a specific skill set that drought counsellors began to develop intuitively. These skills are relevant to all forms of outreach, not just cold calling. The main techniques to emerge from CIG discussions are reported in the following sections.
6.5.2 Moving from chat to counselling

“One counsellor offers some feedback to the two counsellors in the group who do a lot of cold calling, saying that "the dropping—by—to—have—a—chat" style that they use is a great way to make an initial connection” (CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary).

Moving from general social chat to counselling requires a range of skills. How to do it effectively and how to do it ethically became a major clinical discussion point across all CIGs. Questions raised included, “How do you ‘break in’ and change the level of conversation, when the conversation has a pattern and flow of its own? When do you reveal your counselling role?” In theory this last question is easy, “As soon as possible and the earlier the better.” In practice it is not so easy, as many counselling encounters start genuinely as just a general chat and gradually move into counselling. Gradually drought counsellors, with CIG facilitators’ help, began to articulate their practice wisdoms around this delicate task. The learnings are listed below:

6.5.2.1 Be useful and wait for an opportunity

Drought counsellors found ways of engaging clients around practical tasks. Helping farmers out while having a chat is a unique characteristic of drought outreach work. It often happens spontaneously. In the discussion you may discover that the farmer is about to go and perform a particular job. It is a way of turning potentially lost opportunities into possibilities (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary). Earlier in the research the Grampians CIG made the following observations:

“Go with the conversation to build rapport and wait for the person to bring things up. Talk seems easy when working alongside people. People bring up the issues that are most pressing for them at the time. Working with people also shows that you have a better understanding of the difficulties facing their business. It is also an opportunity to observe people in their own environment and the interaction between family members i.e. risk assessment of children (CIG # 6 Grampians 13/8/07 - Summary).

6.5.2.2 Move from client’s expertise to counsellor’s expertise

In my interview to prepare for the research, John and Susan had suggested talking to farmers about what they know; such as their family and their farm. Independently a counsellor from the Rural Support Line discovered the same strategy worked.

“The counsellor reported that telling him that she didn’t know much about shearing really helped the caller open up to talking (about something he was confident and knowledgeable about). Reflecting on how she moved from talking about shearing to counselling, the counsellor commented on starting with practical options to do with his shearing and then discussing relationship issues. The caller was very resourceful and quite upbeat. He said his girlfriend made him laugh. The call seemed a positive experience” (CIG # 3 Rural Support Line 17/5/07 - Summary).
6.5.2.3  **Intuition and making overt the changing of hats**

Intuition was reported as one of the drought counsellor’s best guides. Tracking the conversation is another, noticing themes that may be linked to a counselling issue. The idea of making overt the changing of hats can be helpful. Some counsellors used ideas from No Bullshit Therapy to mark the change of conversation level in an upfront way, making overt any constraints to the shift. For example, “In a moment I’m going to ask you how you’re going, because I’m a counsellor and that’s what counsellors do! I know it’s probably the last thing you feel like talking about at the moment, but…”

6.5.2.4  **Informal assessment: The funnel approach**

Counsellors intuitively make informal assessments whilst they are chatting – but a more active way of exploring personal issues was articulated during the research. A female counsellor from the Rural Support Line uses what I call the “funnel approach” with clients who ring in wanting practical help rather than counselling. She asks a series of questions that start broad and general and gradually become narrower and specific. For example, “How’s the drought affecting the region? What’s been the biggest impact on your neighbours? How’s your farm doing? How is it knocking your family around? What’s the hardest thing your wife has to manage? Sounds like you’re under a lot of financial stress, what have you done that’s helped the most? Is there anything I could do to help you?” (No Bull - October 2007, p. 12).

A male face-to-face counsellor uses a similar approach:

“Paul mentioned a set of questions that he asks by way of a sort of informal assessment of basic needs...about (e.g.) how’s the local football (or cricket) club going? (Helps to understand people’s social connections) – might ask where your wife is today (often gets a sense of out of farm income)...any contact with financial counsellors...the main point is around the risk stuff – making sure we are checking out suicidality” (CIG #6 Loddon-Mallee 14/8/07: Summary).

6.6  **Cultural reasons rural people may not seek counselling help**

When drought counsellors were asked to name “Three main reasons why you think rural people are reluctant to seek counselling” the following themes emerged.

There was a very broad spectrum of responses to this question. The three most common responses in the pre questionnaire were privacy / confidentiality, pride, and lack of understanding of how counselling works. The three most common responses in the post questionnaire were lack of understanding of how counselling works, privacy / confidentiality, and tradition. There were a number of themes that arose in the post questionnaire that weren’t mentioned in the pre questionnaire, such as ‘seeing others as being worse off / more in need’, ‘importance of mutual understanding / experience’, and a ‘belief that it won’t help’. The notions of shame, independence, pride, privacy and confidentiality, embarrassment and access to services all were more prominent in the pre questionnaire. In the post questionnaire, a lack of understanding of the processes involved in counselling, the need for practical assistance such as money and water, traditions and long standing attitudes towards help seeking behaviour, fear, and feeling weak were all higher than in the pre questionnaire. It is important to note that these reasons were not listed in any particular order by respondents.
Pride and shame, stoicism, self reliance and looking out for others and confidentiality and stigma concerns were often cited by drought counsellors as to why rural people were reluctant to seek help. During the CIGs across the state, the reasons fell into three similar categories to the pre and post drought counsellor questionnaires. They are each explored in the following sections, along with the opportunities they provide.

6.6.1 Pride and shame

"Dianna identifies the "pride and resilience” of farmers in his area that keeps them from asking for help until they absolutely need it” (CIG # 12 Hume 15/4/08 - Summary).

Elena, the Rural Support Line CIG facilitator fed back to the CIGAR meeting a powerful story from her CIG that tells how pride and shame can isolate people at work, within their community and even within their own family. A woman rang into the Rural Support Line with financial concerns. The woman had taken a job off—farm to help pay the bills and through a simple error at her pay office her pay packet was $10 short of what she had anticipated, which meant she didn’t have the money to pay her rates. She was extremely distressed because she felt she had let her husband down and she did not want to say to the shire “I can’t pay the rates because I am $10 short” and did not want to hassle her pay office because she didn’t want to say that $10 means this much. The story that Elena recounted, led to the following CIGAR discussion:

Colin: So finely balanced. Also the kind of ramifications of that, it’s like she is out, she is “outed”. You want to kind of think about how you might be more open somehow, how is it possible to be more open about the financial challenges one has, so that that situation doesn’t lead to outage.

Elena: Without losing dignity.

Jeff: It sort of puts a lot of meat on the bones...People often say "what gets in the way of people going to counselling or talking about their problems?” and they always say "pride”. That is a lovely detailed example where she is caught, doesn’t want to be shamed at work, shamed at her office, feeling like she has let the husband down but in a way the solution was to be able to talk with her family about it. (The outcome of her discussion with the telephone counsellor). In a way it is probably not a bad outcome.

Colin: It would probably be really useful for her to know that she is not alone and that there are really a lot of people that have those kinds of experiences, people she probably knows. So there are all these people that are kind of suffering in silence.

6.6.1.1 Opportunities provided by pride and shame

I’m sure a range of strategies to provide help in ways that did not evoke pride or shame were employed by drought counsellors but articulating and conceptualising this work requires further effort. Conveying, not necessarily directly, that you know a person’s pride is hurt without confronting them with it, normalising their situation (see section 6.14.1.1.1) and the role of upfront directness to counter—intuitively address shame were approaches touched on during CIGs and CIGARs. A major opportunity exists for drought counsellors to reassure people affected by drought that they are not
alone as the CIGAR facilitator, Colin Riess suggested in the CIGAR transcript quoted in the previous section and to point out that many others are in the same boat and hence their plight is contextually rather than individually driven. Colin has a special interest in shame and has conducted workshops on this topic as part of The Bouverie Centre’s professional development program with colleague Cate Ingram. He argues that shame is felt in relation to a valued community. Because of a perceived failing, people fear being barred from a community to which they feel an important or essential connection and then respond in either of two ways: withdraw and attack themselves or avoid and attack others. For example, farmers or business people who fail in their business due to the drought may experience shame and feel that they no longer deserve to be part of their community and withdraw or feel let down by the world and attack others. Both responses are likely to lead to further social isolation. Pointing out that their failures are not entirely their fault and speaking directly and non-judgementally in ways that do not belittle them, can help diminish the negative effects of feeling shame (Reiss, 2009)

6.6.2 Stoicism, self reliance and looking out for others

“The attitude of ‘she’ll be right’ still abounds” (CIG # 5 Grampians 16/7/07 - Summary).

“Some farmers won’t ask for help because there’s someone who’s worse off! If I ask for help, I’m taking from them….or they’re managing, so I should be too” (CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary).

A farmer I spoke to at the Victorian Farmers Federation conference (2007) put it simply that rural people feel they should solve their own problems, especially family based issues. Self reliance was a recurring theme used to describe Aussie farmers (CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary). The disenfranchised nature of drought articulated in Chapter 5, combined with genuine concern for other members of the community and the culture of stoicism and self reliance can all lead to potential clients questioning whether they are worthy clients or whingers as reflected in the following CIG discussion:

"Caller kept saying ‘I don’t feel like I should contact you as people are worse off than us.’ Also said I’m ok but broke down crying. She was more concerned about the farmers next door who had to support eight kids” (CIG # 2 Rural Support Line 19/4/07 - Minutes).

Drought counsellors across all CIGs repeatedly reported that clients genuinely believed that there was someone worse of than them – and hence were reluctant to put their hands up for assistance – often despite facing desperate situations.

6.6.2.1 Opportunities provided by stoicism, self reliance and looking out for others

Stoicism and self reliance is a quality that should be celebrated and one that should be gently challenged when it becomes counter productive. The following family situation discussed in the Hume CIG may best explain how persistence and providing straight forward practical help can challenge stoicism – especially for the sake of others.
“the counsellor phoned the wife again about three weeks ago. At this point, the woman spoke openly about the stress she was under, and explained that: both she and her husband had major health issues that needed attention; they could not pay their child's school fees (and the school financial officer was not returning their calls); and she was chronically putting herself last. She explained that her husband had been going to the local footy club with their two younger children for a bit of company and a five-dollar meal, but she stayed home herself to save the extra five dollars. She also explained that there was tension between herself and her husband because she was inclined to keep the farm, but he felt that they should sell and get out as soon as possible. The counsellor offered to phone the child's school on the parents' behalf and see what they could work out about fees. The couple accepted this offer, and the counsellor was able to achieve a very successful outcome in a conversation with the school financial officer, in that he waived current and past fees, and reduced future fees. The couple was then very happy to have the counsellor phone a Rural Financial Counsellor for them, who came out to see the family. The family reported to the counsellor recently that the RFC's visit had been, "fantastic!" as the RFC had assessed the farm at a higher value than they expected, and had then fully discussed their options with them” (CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary).

In cultures where the community is held in greater stead than the individual it is not good to be seen as selfish or needy at the expense of helping others. Combined with individual stoicism, the importance of putting others ahead of your own personal needs means that people are more open to helping others – their kids, family, friends, neighbours and community – than themselves. As the following CIGAR discussion identifies, accepting this cultural value provides valuable intelligence on how to present support services. It certainly informed a number of the drought counsellors’ community development initiatives (see Looking Out For Your Neighbour, Chapter 7) and counselling approaches.

Jeff: What came through is no matter how bad somebody is they always feel there are people worse off than themselves, and they’d be more likely to help someone else than to seek help themselves.

Colin: So in fact that could be a very useful entrée, couldn’t it? It seems to me, remember that story of the guy who basically cured his depression by helping others? How you might prepare for helping others might be part of the way people can begin to actually help themselves.

Jeff: Yeah.

(CIGAR #2 23/4/07: Transcript)

Even the most independent stoical person is often open to seeking help for their children, partners or friends. Interestingly, several community development initiatives used creative messages of support from school children to disseminate referral information – as discussed at the end of the previous chapter. Some people will never want or accept help no matter how bad things become. It is important to accept this otherwise drought counsellors and even concerned colleagues and friends (see Poll & Young, 2008, Chapter 7) can be vulnerable to burnout and vicarious traumatisation. The following CIG quote speaks succinctly to this point:

“There are some people who wouldn’t ever come forward – the stoics” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).
6.6.3 Confidentiality fears and stigma

Confidentiality concerns and stigma go hand in hand and can present a major constraint to seeking help, especially in smaller remote communities. Anyone who works in the health professions in small rural communities is aware of the relationship between confidentiality and trustworthiness. The following comment from the Grampians Summary was reflected by CIGs across the state, “Confidentiality is also a sensitive issue in small communities” (CIG #1 Grampians 19/3/07: Summary). Most counsellors would emphasise the need to establish trust in order to conduct successful counselling. Hence successfully navigating confidentiality is an opportunity to establish trust in the counsellor.

6.6.3.1 Opportunities offered by confidentiality fears and stigma

Engagement in small rural towns can be enhanced if drought counsellors are seen to be trustworthy to keep personal information private and confidential. The drought counsellors provided several case examples of people in small communities testing out whether the counsellor could be trusted to keep his or her ‘trap shut.’ The following story related by a drought counsellor in a small remote town describes the importance of confidentiality beautifully:

“She was a pretty hard nut to crack but just going in there regularly, she eventually came around. What have you learnt that you’d pass onto the next counsellor in this position? I suppose it is just a matter of building up her trust and confidence in you. She is a prominent person around town and she wanted to be sure that information wasn’t going to fly around town. I think she fed me certain things earlier, and because it didn’t come back to her, it gave her confidence in me” (CIG # 11 Anonymous to protect workers 11/4/08: Summary).

For drought counsellors who demonstrated that they could maintain confidentiality even under the pressure to share with well meaning or persistent community members, trust was established within the community. Sometimes the pressure to share information was considerable as discussed in the first CIGAR.

Shane: That is a very important thing. He (drought counsellor) also said partly about that but also that he’s now trusted that he won’t spill the beans, as he says people literally walk up to him in the street and ask him about other people. They want to know about other people’s business and he has to say “sorry I can’t tell you that” (CIGAR #1 26/3/07: transcript).

6.7 When do rural people decide to seek help?

6.7.1 When down to their last dollar

The CIG data suggested that rural people will approach drought counselling services if (1) they know about them and (2) the services are recommended by a trusted person, but that they tend to delay this until the last minute when they are desperate. This was a strong theme evidenced by the following quotes:
"farmers won't ask for help until they are down to their last drop of water and their last dollar" (CIG # 1 Hume 21/3/07 - Summary);

"People are ringing when they run out of their last drop of water or are down to their last dollar" (CIG # 2 Rural Support Line 19/4/07 - Summary);

"People who approach workers at Community Education forums are in crisis and are at the end of the road" (CIG # 2 Grampians 16/4/07 - Summary);

"People have engaged when they are in serious crisis” (CIG # 2 Grampians 16/4/07 - Summary).

Whilst it is useful for drought counsellors, people who manage drought counselling services and the bureaucrats who develop policy and fund services to understand this, we don’t know why this phenomenon occurs. Is it because people don’t realise they are being buffeted by drought, because they embrace an attitude something like “we should be able to handle it ourselves”, a case of prioritisation, or a simple lack of knowledge that drought counselling services exist? For whatever reason, one consequence of this finding is that when people seek help they expect services to respond quickly and often with practical help. Awareness of this can inform the provision of services. For example, we found that people wanted accessible services with the minimum of ‘red tape’ – due to the severity of their situation. Other ramifications for service delivery will be considered, after outlining what I have called, ‘people drop their bundle when they can’.

6.7.2 People drop their bundle when they can

Gradually over the course of the research, another type of presentation emerged across the state. The CIG summary below describe this phenomenon:

"In the case of people in crisis, all of their energy and attention is focused on managing the crisis, and it is usually after the crisis has passed that they "drop their bundle" and may then have the time, energy and emotional readiness to think about counselling. Indeed, they may not even recognise how stressed they were until the crisis has passed. Clearly, people in acute states of mental distress must be attended to, but the group members reflected on the fact that those in acute psychological distress (requiring psychiatric attention and medication) are the minority, rather than the majority of the people they come across” (CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary).

This finding fits with the expectations of service providers reported in Alston and Kent’s (2004) drought research that stress related presentations would increase once drought breaks and people face their reduced options. If this is the case, and a significant number of people will seek help after the initial crisis, services need to be available and alert, after weather conditions improve.

Timing is everything. People affected by trauma often put emotions to one side whilst they address practical and pressing issues. Once things improve, these feelings can re—emerge – sometimes surprising the person themselves. At worst, people can think they are going mad because they are feeling worse when things have objectively improved. I found myself suggesting to drought counsellors working with clients in this situation – that “people may drop their bundle when they can”, a therapeutic explanation I use with my own clients.
6.8 Type of service required to engage rural clients

6.8.1 Immediately accessible services

If people won’t ask for help until they are down to their last dollar – it makes sense that when they do they do seek help they will want and expect help immediately. If people are not au fait with the nature of counselling then the immediate help requested is likely to be of a practical nature. Accepting the need to provide immediate, easily accessible practical services can lead to effective ways of engaging people in emotional support. A number of drought counselling services reduced the steps required to access counselling services and found reluctant prospective clients were more likely to follow through.

6.8.2 Services that provide or can access practical help

A strong theme that first emerged from the Rural Support Line was that people, mostly farmers, would ring up requesting practical help such as access to feed, rather than emotional support. The importance of drought counsellors having ready access to practical supports or information to enable quick and easy access to practical support is a key element of successful drought counselling, nicely articulated here by the following Rural Support Line CIG summary:

"where the counsellor first joins with the farmer on a practical matter which can then lead to a conversation about something more personal. ... They may want to talk about that (personal issues) but that’s not what they say they want to be talking about” (CIG # 5 Rural Support Line 12/3/08 - Summary).

Dr. Colin Riess made the connection between engaging rural people in drought counselling and his involvement with another marginalised community suggesting that, “practical help and good will go a long way” (CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript).

My personal experience of growing up on a farm imbued me with a value of doing rather than just talking, which is ironic given that I became fascinated by the ‘talking cure’ (therapy). I recall the words ‘advice should be free’ ringing in my ears as I anxiously attempted to charge people during a brief sojourn into part—time private practice. Fixing things (yourself) and doing things seemed to be regarded as more substantial than talk. The power of doing was a theme that emerged across all CIGs, which suggests that rural people, especially farmers value action over talk. For the Loddon-Mallee CIG, this translated into listing "Follow up – both in terms of offering practical support, and doing what you say you’ll do” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary), as a key component of successful drought counselling.

Rural people value reliability. Doing is embodying this idea. Talk is seen as cheap. Reliability is crucial to credibility as reflected in the following CIG discussion:

"The value of doing; if you say you'll do something, do it or you will lose credibility” (CIG # 7 Loddon Mallee 18/9/07).

I wonder if talk is seen as transitory whilst doing is seen as more substantial, and more in keeping with rural life which is seen as ongoing – over many generations. Practical help may be considered
before ‘pure’ counselling type strategies, hence access to practical solutions are an important way to engage clients. The following example links this section with the related section that follows:

“Person 1 spoke about assisting a woman with pairing up stock. “Need a hand” is the catch phrase with any drought worker. Helping with the task emphasised how important productivity is on all farms. Some experience on farms is often useful (CIG # 6 Grampians 13/8/07 - Summary).

During a drought forum conducted on the 24/6/09 in Melbourne, by DHS, Ivan Lister argued that many farmers fix things themselves because they live and work in isolated localities and hence it can seem very foreign to ask for help, especially unfamiliar help like emotional support. Therefore, beginning with the more familiar, practical help, can be an ideal way to begin to establish trust and a working relationship. Counsellors may therefore be required to do whatever it takes.

6.8.3 Drought counsellors prepared to do Whatever It Takes (WIT)

Traditionally trained counsellors found themselves having to work outside their comfort zone to engage the target population. This meant cold calling and working with different groups outside the health area (rural financial counsellors, truck drivers, vets, etc). Many drought counsellors described ‘pitching in’ to help with practical tasks around the farm, such as bailing hay, milking cows, helping deliver calves etc to build a connection which sometimes led to counselling. “Doing whatever it takes” was a strong early theme noted in CIGAR facilitators summing up of the first meeting:

**Colin’s summing up:** "It wasn’t mentioned in a group but that ‘whatever it takes’ kind of approach, it seems to me that’s a real strong theme in the groups. You do whatever it takes. If you said that to your group, that you are prepared to do... look if you said “I’ll help bale hay, milk the cow,” do whatever it takes to get in conversation and to find a way of being in conversation” (CIGAR #1 26/3/07: transcript).

The Whatever It Takes or WIT approach, used by Barry Willer (1994) to describe his work getting Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) clients back into the community, is a general theme of engagement with people who are not familiar with nor accepting of professional counselling. WIT fits with Boydell and her colleagues’ finding, reported in Chapter 2, that flexible friendly services where workers were reported as ‘going above and beyond the call of duty’ helped overcome some of the constraints to seeking help.

Doing WIT meant that drought counsellors had to manage their professional / personal boundaries to avoid burn out. Drought counsellors had to place some boundaries that they felt afforded them some privacy and personal space. An example of how this was done without offending potential clients was described in the Loddon Mallee CIG:

“John said that the way he deals with the ‘chats’ in the supermarket that begin to sound like professional issues is to suggest that (e.g.) ” this sounds like something that we could talk about at the office why don’t I give you a call on …..?” (CIG # 3 Loddon Mallee 14/5/07 - Summary).
6.8.3.1  A word of warning: Non shaming practical help not welfare

A fine line exists between the relief experienced by people receiving practical help when in desperate need and the shame and embarrassment felt if this practical support is experienced as welfare, handouts or pity. Given the range of responses across the state it seems to depend on how the support is offered and to whom. An example of the complexity and different approaches and view are reflected in the following CIG discussion:

“Ted had mentioned about some farmers feeling ‘offended’ by some of the handouts...John said that in one particular area there are 43 farming families regularly provided with food. He said that they just ask if it would be helpful...if they say ‘No’ – that’s fine...they say: ‘we hand these out wherever we go...’ James likes to think that he doesn’t rely on taking out something...he needs to work on the conversation, instead of ‘hiding behind’ a basket of vegies or something...James emphasises that this is his own personal style. John wondered if this was the difference between trained counsellors and other workers. However, the food packs and the pamper packs are at the end of the visit....James said that his preference would be to take ‘The Land’ out (the newspaper) or The Women’s Weekly or something that people would see as a bit of a luxury. Joan also spoke about movie vouchers as something that could give people a mini-break – especially if you could get a group of families together, hire a mini—bus, which gets them together on the way there and back” (CIG # 6 Loddon Mallee 14/8/07 - Summary).

Overall, my impression was that given the range of perspectives for and against material aid, the most important question is how to provide it as part of a range of services in ways that do not shame the recipient or identify them as a lesser person because they are in greater need.

An obvious learning is that confidentiality is also important around the provision of material aid. The following CIGAR transcript speaks to some concerns about confidentiality:

Shane: a couple of people mentioned that they did a lot of work with professionals in their areas around maintaining sensitivity to confidentiality. Particularly around material aid, and how that was dispersed. They gave lots of examples of how people would have to go to a public place such as the local hospital, and it’s handed over “oh we were waiting for you Mr. Jones” and “here’s your parcel,” in front of the nurses station. (CIGAR #1 26/3/07: Transcript)

The debate about material aid raises the question about how to develop caring communities without reinforcing negative stigma. The Grampians CIG commented that even organising working bees to assist neighbours clean up their properties needs to be thoughtfully organised to avoid diminishing the recipient:

“Some initiatives reinforce the stigma by providing services to people who are ‘in trouble’ as opposed to initiatives that are organised around general community need which incorporate social gatherings” (CIG # 6 Grampians 13/8/07 - Summary).

One of the advantages of whole of community approaches is that these initiatives are potentially less stigmatising. A clear theme across the CIGs and across the entire research was that one approach does not address every need, as the couple I interviewed reported, “we are not social people and
wouldn’t feel comfortable going to a social function.” Healthy debate also emerged about whether different approaches were required for men and women, and is explored in the following section.

6.9 Using different approaches to engage men and women

Drought counsellors were asked to list what sort of people, (other than the counsellors themselves), they thought men and women would be likely to talk about personal and family problems. The drought counsellors listed trust as a key factor in these responses. The level of trust between two people was deemed to be of more importance than under what circumstances they knew each other. For both men and women professionals were identified most often as being the people that they would talk to about personal and family problems and these professionals included people such as Ministers, teachers, hairdressers, health professionals and Centrelink and DPI workers. For men, DPI workers, real estate representatives, and ministers/pastors were the most common responses. Hairdressers, ministers/pastors and teachers were the most common responses for women.

Gender specific services such as Mensline and Men’s Sheds and women’s community groups were also identified as being important. Friends and family for women and sports clubs and ‘the pub’ for men, were more socially focused responses. Over time, there was not a significant difference in the pre and post responses for the question about men, but for women there was more focus on professional help than social supports in the post questionnaire. Overall, there was an increase in the number of responses who thought that men and women would talk to a professional from the pre to the post questionnaires.

6.9.1 Gender and farming

A thorough exploration of gender roles within farming culture, especially from an emic perspective, is well beyond the scope of the current study. However, from a personal perspective, I came to this research with a bias that farming communities tended to embrace traditional attitudes to gender roles. I left the research thinking that the gender roles in farming are both conservative and radical. Conservative in the way gender roles seem quite distinct, possibly leading to the need for separate approaches to engage men and women and radical in that those women play very significant roles running businesses, especially farms. The research team soon realised that it was a mistake to talk about farmers’ wives (they were female farmers). However, at the same time there was a strong theme that women often felt the responsibility for their husbands’ emotional health, as described in the following CIG summary:

“One counsellor talks about men losing motivation due to depression, until finally they become “paralysed,” fall behind and finally completely lose interest in their work. Two other counsellors agree, saying that these men often spend their days (and nights, perhaps) lying on the couch, avoiding further confrontation with the farm. In these cases, their women partners are often the ones picking up the slack, doing their husbands’/partners’ share of the work along with their own. These women farmers are ending up with the enormous task of not only trying to look after

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22 Only 15/18 respondents answered this question.

23 Emic refers to an insider’s perspective – understanding and sensitive to the cultural subtleties that may elude a person who is external to the culture being explored.
their farms and their homes and their children, but also trying to help their spouses climb up out of a pit of despair” (CIG # 5 Hume 18/7/07 - Summary).

In line with findings from the Birchip Cropping Group (Rickards, 2008) the CIGs reported women were experiencing a lot of pressure to look after all members of the family. Therefore, whilst they applauded services specially designed to engage men, they were clear that women also needed support. This was also important as women were often reported as helping drought counsellors engage other members of the family.

Women’s forums are reported by one member as being an excellent way to engage clients, as "women are often the way in" (CIG # 2 Hume 18/4/07 - Summary).

Over time the CIGs developed different specific activities to engage men and women, sometimes offering similar activities but offered separately as targeting men or women. In general, drought counsellors suggested that women were more able to discuss difficulties associated with the drought (especially emotional dilemmas) than men, and approaches tied to farming or with a practical problem solving focus appealed to men.

Drought counsellors began to integrate the work with men and women by moving toward a family / relationship approach. Family emerged as the key unit, especially in farming, as family was both the social and business unit. Organising family fun days and other events worked well. Therapeutically, family therapy training informed my thinking about ways to conceptualise working with the family even if the counsellor worked individually with different parts of the family.

**6.10 Different engagement tasks for insiders and outsiders**

An ongoing debate occurred in most CIGs about the relative advantages of counsellors who were insiders versus those who were outsiders. The debate was most lively during the first year of the research – as drought counsellors were exploring ways to engage with the target population and also debating the pros and cons of cold calling. An example of the debate is provided below:

“A drought counsellor in the Grampians region found that he was busy (even though counselling was stigmatised) because his family was known in the area” (CIG # 1 Grampians 19/3/07).

However, a male drought counsellor from Loddon Mallee made the following counterpoint:

"being a part of the community...has two sides – it can facilitate engagement, but it can also act as a constraint (some neighbours would never talk to their neighbour as a counsellor)” (CIG # 7 Loddon Mallee 18/9/07).
This discussion reported in an early CIG adds further to the two sides of being an insider:

“One counsellor in our group, who has old friends in his community from his farming days, is asked by them, "what are you doing, going around giving people the shits?" While on the one hand, this counsellor’s farming background can lend him credibility with farmers; on the other hand, they seem irritated by the idea that he thinks they could possibly need help” (CIG #2 Anonymous to protect workers: Summary).

Over time the distinction between the value of insider and outsider became more complicated. For a start, drought counsellors when asked in the pre and post questionnaire “What experience or activity do you think has best prepared you for working with drought affected communities”, the most common responses were centred around ‘previous work experience in the field’ especially in regards to counselling and mental health, followed by ‘having lived in a rural area’, ‘farming’, and ‘professional training’.

Fifteen (42%) respondents said that their current and previous experience working in a counselling or related role provided them with the experience they needed to do this type of work. The type of previous roles included Counselling, Mental Health Psychosocial Rehabilitation, working in the family support / service sector, Lifeline and other telephone counselling services. This was followed by the importance of having lived in a rural area which was noted by thirteen (37%) respondents and living / working on a farm which was noted by twelve respondents (34%). Professional training was the fourth most common response with ten people (29%) listing this, and noting things such as choosing rural health related units at University, specific counselling training, social work, domestic / family violence, drink driver education, and men’s issues.

As the research developed, it emerged that insiders and outsiders could both be successful but were required to emphasise different approaches to gain credibility; insiders needed to heed certain cautions around confidentiality and outsiders needed to demonstrate sensitivity and knowledge of rural life. This caution required of insiders led me to add ‘distant insider’, to Carmel Flaskas’ (2008) concept of ‘close outsider’ developed in Chapter 4. The two categories are explored in the following two sections.

6.10.1 Distant insider

A key finding from the formal evaluation of the Farm Gate Model of cold calling that this research seeded, was that recipients of cold calling visits were friendly towards neighbours (insiders) that they knew well but were uncomfortable talking about their personal difficulties to these ‘friends’ or ‘colleagues’ (Tauridsky & Young, 2009). Participants in the cold calling research suggested that friends and colleagues cold call other regions, a position I dubbed ‘distant insider’. The value of being a distant insider or close outsider was also endorsed by Jean and Bob, clients whom I interviewed early in the research, who said, “You crack hearty with friends and put on a brave face, but you can open up and let feelings out to a stranger.” Jean went on to describe Barbara, her drought counsellor, whom she found very helpful despite not being a fan of counselling, as a ‘friendly stranger’. Drought counsellors who are insiders may therefore need to be sensitive to allowing clients, who are open to being contacted because of the worker’s insider status, opportunities to open up to other professionals.
6.10.2 Close outsider

In the pre and post questionnaires there was a significant change in the importance attached to farming knowledge. For drought counsellors who are outsiders, the CIGs pointed out the importance of developing some knowledge of farming practices or local issues. This can even be for practical reasons such as farm safety, as indicated by the following CIG comment:

"As a drought worker you have to be able to speak the language of the land and have a basic understanding of farm practices, especially understanding the current seasonal work. Farmers are often cautious about office workers coming on to the property particularly for health and safety reasons. Once you can speak their language and show some initiative on the farm then they will relax and be more receptive to you" (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

Other possibilities that explain the importance of developing knowledge about farming include: facilitating conversations, indicating a commitment and interest to the farmer, and increasing the range of metaphors and analogies available to the drought counsellor. Drought counsellors without insider knowledge found that being upfront about their ignorance, but open to learning was also well received, as pointed out in the following quote:

“What if you don’t have a farming background? It can be a disadvantage. Some guidelines might be: Try and attain a general understanding of the basics. Declare not knowing and then take an interest” (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

The use of curiosity and acknowledging the client as expert also worked for some drought counsellors who had outsider status, as articulated in the following CIG:

“Another technique mentioned was to use a stance of curiosity to get the client to teach you. Members were clear to ‘never go in as the expert’. A final strategy mentioned was to use personal experience to connect with a client” (CIG # 6 Loddon Mallee 14/8/07 - Summary).

A specific technique that allowed ‘outsiders’ to become ‘close outsiders’ was given the name ‘snowballing’ by the Loddon Mallee CIG (CIG # 9 Loddon-Mallee 20/11/07: Summary). It is described in the following section.

6.10.3 Snowballing or the bowerbird effect

Besides the obvious (research and reading of local papers) a practical strategy non-farming drought counsellors can use to educate themselves about farming issues is called the ‘Snowballing or the Bowerbird effect’ by drought counsellor Ruth Turpin. She describes the information she picks up from each farm visit as forming, “the basis of chat for my next visit; to be repeated many times along the road with any other bits that either make me look and sound knowledgeable or well resourced, or is of practical use for the farmer visited” (No Bull - February 2008, p. 12). At the first property on a road you may only have pretty general conversation, but usually can still take one specific piece of local knowledge from that conversation to the next property visit. You may not use names, but you can begin by saying; “I hear that some people around here are…” You use the local knowledge you gained
at the previous farm, and rework it as you go along”…“By the time the last farmer gets a visit, I am well versed in local weather, fodder supplies, water allocations and any local hints or activities that will benefit all users of the local grapevine” (No Bull - February 2008, p. 12).

6.10.4 The importance of CREDIBILITY

The fact that with time, drought counsellors who did not have farming background were successful suggests that it is not whether you are an insider or outsider but whether you demonstrate credibility. Credibility in this research seemed to translate into commitment, interest, preparation, preparedness to understand the local culture and factors affecting the farm, business, and local community. Informing themselves about local regions and the location of where people were calling from using Google Maps helped generate credibility for the state-widetelephone support line, “people like to feel you know where they are” (CIG # 5 Rural Support Line 12/3/08 - Summary). It also had the practical advantage of facilitating referrals to local services in the appropriate region because “People don’t know what DHS region they are in” (CIG # 5 Rural Support Line 12/3/08 - Summary). Because of these factors, a thorough and up-to-date database of local services and direct contact numbers was essential for credibility of the Rural Support Line.

6.10.5 Authenticity is as important as local knowledge

Interestingly, when invited to share what they thought their greatest skill in being a drought counsellor was, prior to commencing the research project, drought counsellors tended to place more importance on skills and experience, connections to the community and knowledge of farming experience and lifestyle. However, in the post questionnaire, the same respondents placed more emphasis on their personal qualities such as compassion, listening and honesty, and also professional connections / networking.

6.11 Culturally sensitive ways of delivering and promoting counselling services to the bush

“Jeff: It’s interesting what both, where I drew on and what seemed to work too in talking at this farmer group. One of the things that I think we have to get better at is describing how counselling will help. Like in really practical terms, rather than saying it as an ideology like ‘talking helps.’ Well how does it help? Does it always help? I think we have to get better at somehow educating people about how it works, so we have to work out how it helps!” (CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript).

If we build on Flaska’s (2008) idea that of defining ourselves as a foreigner when we counsel another person – rather than viewing our clients as foreigners – we are more likely to adapt our professional ideas to fit more comfortably with the cultural sensitivities of our clients. Doing this from the position of “close outsider” rather than “distant outsider” can allow us to both earn credibility but not at the expense of actively exploring the cultural sensitivities of our clients, their families and their communities. It also brings into relief the need to be aware of the nuanced cultural differences of working in a rural context. The research documented a number of effective efforts to present counselling support to clients in ways more in keeping with rural sensibilities. They are presented in the next section followed by culturally sensitive ways of promoting counselling to hard to engage rural communities.
6.11.1 Culturally sensitive ways of describing counselling

6.11.1.1 Metaphors that link rural people’s skills to the skills of managing one’s relationships

"Often it is useful to assist farmers to link how they use their farming skills to generalise out about other life situations, e.g. Jenny’s example of the farmer connecting how he coped during harvesting time with being more sensitive to his wife’s psychological predicament" (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

Counselling styles that are culturally sensitive to small communities can challenge some taken—for—granted views that are middle class and urban centric. Rather than assuming that rural people and rural men in particular will not seek help, we need to continue exploring strategies that are conducive to them feeling more comfortable seeking help – as suggested by Peter from the Loddon Mallee CIG:

“Peter spoke about the myth that men are hard to engage and talk to...his and others’ experience tell him that, given the opportunity, men can really use the chance to talk through their issues” (CIG # 8 Loddon Mallee 15/10/07 - Summary).

Ideas that emerged from the CIGs are presented below:

6.11.1.1.1 Ute therapy

Two drought counsellors in the Hume CIG convinced their organisation to buy an old ute which they used to do cold calling. They felt the modest investment had really helped them do their job.

Peter spoke of having met two guys from the wheat belt in Western Australia who do something similar to cold calling: they travel around in a Holden ute with "Talk to a Mate" written on the side of it. They were saying that the ute is the best thing they've ever bought – it was enough to start the conversation around the ute (CIG # 8 Loddon Mallee 15/10/07 - Summary).

6.11.1.1.2 Cuppa tea therapy

One CIG group shared ways of recording contacts, such as chats, cuppa tea therapy, opportunistic contacts when they occur etc (CIG # 1 Gippsland 23/3/07 - Summary). Cuppa tea therapy is the practice of having an informal chat over a cup of tea, usually in comfortable and familiar surrounds of the ‘client’.

6.11.1.1.3 Linking counselling with physical health

Using physical health analogies were successful as pointed out in the following CIG summary, "A greater number of people presenting for ‘health related’ issues is an unexpected point of access for counselling. It may be important to pro—actively target district nurses and primary care co—ordinators, as well as hospital outpatient service staff” (CIG # 8 Hume 17/10/07 - Summary). Other metaphors that gained traction included ‘pit stops’ for male health checks.
**6.11.1.4 Tool kits**

One suggestion was “you need this tool to get through this difficulty. We know this tool works. We may need to further explore how to describe how the tool works in more specific detail” (CIG # 3 Rural Support Line 17/5/07 - Summary).

**6.11.1.5 Coach the coach**

An innovative approach that some CIG members were involved in and that No Bull promoted was developed by Goulburn Valley Family Care. The program was called 'Coach the coach'. It recruited the leaders of sporting teams, especially football teams to educate their players about mental illness and to promote more open discussions about emotional health. Its vision is to ‘work at a grass roots level with all sporting clubs’. Taking football as an example, three coaches and two captains (senior and reserves) from each football team in a league were trained in Mental Health First Aid\(^{24}\) so that they could deliver brief information sessions to their club members about early warning signs of mental health difficulties (No Bull - April 2007, p. 4).

**6.11.2 Culturally sensitive ways of promoting counselling**

“Barry raised the issue that the drought counselling services have no state-wide marketing campaign that promotes the service. There is a need to sell the concept of rural community counsellors to the community” (CIG # 9 Grampians 26/11/07 - Summary).

“Most people have not experienced counselling and don’t know what it entails” (CIG # 2 Grampians 16/4/07 - Summary).

An almost universal response of drought counsellors to the suspicion and criticism they received in the first few months of the research was to drop the term counsellor from their name in favour of rural outreach worker or rural outreach counsellor. However, this change in terminology did not entirely solve the problem as reflected in the following CIG discussion which raises the main points of the debate:

“Professor Fiona Judd has done a paper on depression in farming communities, and she found that men preferred to call it “farm stress”. Don from the Loddon Mallee CIG prefers “talking” to “counselling”. Peter raises the other side of the argument: does that then take away from the seriousness of depression? Is it a euphemism? The point was made that the language is important in first meeting people – that it may be a “way in” which could then lead to talking about depression later in the meeting. Again, the important distinction was discussed between the initial cold calling, which is primarily about engagement and information—giving, and the move to a more formal ‘counselling’ conversation” (CIG # 6 Loddon Mallee 14/8/07 - Summary).

Another way to address the cynicism about counselling is to educate the community about its value – in ways that show an understanding of the client’s culture. The need for culturally sensitive ways of

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\(^{24}\) Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a 12-hour training course developed in 2000 by Betty Kitchener and Professor Tony Jorm, with the aim to improve the mental health literacy of members of the Australian community. It is now auspiced by Orygen Youth Health Research Centre at the University of Melbourne.
providing help to reluctant clients was clearly called for by all of the CIGs across the state. I developed the view that in the long term, finding ways to demystify counselling, promoting its usefulness in practical jargon—free ways, developing rural sensitive models of drought counselling and conveying the role that counselling plays in other whole of community approaches are all needed.

Counselling is a difficult type of service for people to comprehend, as pointed out in the following CIG, especially in times of acute stress:

"The word counselling is difficult for people to get their head around. Often using the terms support and assistance are useful or ‘someone to talk to’. People generally don’t understand what forms of welfare support can be provided or have negative stereotypes about counselling. Reassuring about communication is important and talking at the person’s level” (CIG # 5 Grampians 16/7/07 - Summary).

A promotional campaign would need to be long term as pointed out by the same CIG four meetings later:

"Educating and consulting rural communities to understand when it is ok to ask and accept help would also be beneficial. It will take years before people will feel comfortable about using the service. It has to have longer term funding and be identified as a sustainable initiative to support rural communities rather than just a response driven by crises i.e. drought, flood and fire. The Tim Fisher campaign has been effective – why not a campaign for drought workers or rural support workers” (CIG # 9 Grampians 26/11/07 - Summary).

In addition to educating the community that it is ok to ask for help, there were discussions about the need for educating the community about emotional issues and the role of counselling and other talking cures.

"There is one guy who seems to be particularly embedded in his local community and who seems to be fairly successful in terms of the amount of people he has been referred and stuff. He often talks about actually the need to educate people into what counselling is and to dispel the myths. One thing he does when he gets up there is just say "what is it you think I do as a drought counsellor?” and just engages people around the dialogue about that (CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript).

Advantages of a prolonged community media campaign would include:

i. Clarifying the different roles of Rural Financial Counsellors and Social Counsellors – given there is a high level of confusion between the two quite different services;

ii. Educating the community about counselling and promoting emotional health of the community – which would provide an early intervention approach to tackle the mental health issues that could possibly result from the dramatic change to rural life predicted over the next decade; and

iii. Opportunities to promote more culturally sensitive models of drought / rural counselling, as well as innovations specifically developed for rural communities – an example of which is suggested below.
"Advertising services to farmers could include the acknowledgement that they are busy and that workers are willing to come and work alongside them on the farm while talking. Drought workers definitely need to be flexible and be prepared for spontaneous invitations from clients" (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

The next sections outline ideas that showed promise of how to promote counselling to rural communities.

6.11.2.1 Culturally sensitive ways of promoting counselling that show promise

6.11.2.1.1 Explaining the practical value of counselling

"Discussion about the fact that farmers appear to have less aversion to the ‘notion of counselling’ but feel that they don’t need it unless for specific purposes e.g. to talk about how to access Exceptional Circumstances grants" (CIG # 8 Hume 17/10/07 - Summary).

In the early days of the research, CIGs were struggling with how to present the concept of counselling to their local communities. This led to a range of observations with the common theme that support services needed to explain the potential value of counselling in ways that people unfamiliar or suspicious of it could comprehend and make sense of. Here are some examples of those discussions:

"It was discussed that there is a need to dispel myths about what counselling is / isn’t. Educate in a practical, No Bullshit way, why counselling could be useful. Some callers respond that “talking isn’t going to help, it’s not going to fix anything” (CIG # 2 Rural Support Line 19/4/07 - Minutes).

Another idea raised for conveying the ‘real’ value of counselling was the use of real life examples, explored below.

6.11.2.1.2 The use of real life examples – success stories

One suggestion that emerged from a number of CIGs was the potential for promoting counselling and the role of drought counsellors using de—identified real life stories. This was enthusiastically discussed during an early CIGAR:

Pam: A few things however have come up. One thing you were saying Colin is, what they do when they are presenting is they actually have a case study. So they actually present a real, well not a real but a made up case study but it feels real to the farmers who are there, and that kind of helps ground them in how they can be useful”

Colin: I mean this is probably not my role, but it occurred to me that one of the things that might be really important is to have some overt stories like this, or versions of this about actual counselling or story narratives of success in some way.

Pam: Of how people had viewed it” (CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript)
The essential role that expectancy plays (that things will get better) is well documented both in
general counselling (Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004) and traumatology literature (C. Figley, 2008b).
Summarising the research which looks at the common factors that account for therapeutic success
across all models, (Duncan et al., 2004) conclude that about 15% of the successful outcomes is due to
hope and expectancy that things will get better. Hence the use of real life success stories not only
indicates to potential clients that they are not alone and that others suffer similar experiences, but also
provides some indication that counselling can be helpful and how counselling may be helpful. Real
stories of farmers who had sold the farm and lived enjoyable and productive lives post—farming (e.g.
There is a life after farming by McGuckian & Stephens, 1993) have been received well but have not
been widely distributed.

6.12 Single Session and No Bullshit Therapy (NBT)

Both Single Session Therapy and No Bullshit Therapy proved to be helpful to the drought counsellors
and influential in their work. Much of the work conducted by the drought counsellors resulted in one-
of sessions even for serious presenting problems and No Bullshit Therapy provided a framework that
was culturally congruent with the way most rural drought counsellors liked to work. The following
sections discuss the role played by each of these models in the research. They are mentioned here
because ideas could easily be drawn from these models to promote a straight forward, early and short
term intervention that could appeal to rural people reluctant to seek help.

6.12.1 The Role of Single Session Therapy (SST)

“Patricia was able, however, to give an example of some positive changes and movement in a family
that she had been seeing, where the dad had intervened differently than he would have before, and
that the daughter expressed relief that she was able to talk with Patricia about her father’s illness for
the first time. She said that even though the family was able to talk about some positive change, they
did not want any follow—up session” (CIG # 6 Hume 15/8/07 - Summary).

During the first two-day forum I immediately could see the value of the SST framework for drought
counsellors and invited the drought counsellors to attend The Bouverie Centre’s two-day Single
Session Therapy training without charge. One of the surprising findings of SST is that a large
proportion of clients attend only once, despite serious presentations. Unsurprising to SST therapists,
the drought counsellors found the same, as indicated by the Hume CIG quote above. Single Session
Therapy provided a guiding framework for counsellors to make the most of every encounter, whether a
chance meeting in the sale yards, a brief informal meeting at an information night or a first session.
Single Session Therapy encourages counsellors to be client led, finding out what they would most want
to get out of each session, then to regularly ‘check in’ with the client so the work stays on track, and
then to share with the client what they are thinking in an authentic way. These characteristics seemed
to fit well with what rural people were saying they wanted, at least through the eyes of the drought
counsellors. Some examples of how the SST philosophy was enacted by drought counsellors across the
state are reflected in the following Grampian’s CIG quotes:

“Person 1 asked, “what do you really want help with?” The client thought practical help would free
her up to consider the other difficulties relating to family and mental health. By helping it gave
the message of accepting and respecting where the client is at and her judgment about how help
would be most useful. The message from the worker being — ’I value your choice.’ (CIG # 6
Grampians 13/8/07 - Summary).
“Single session ideas are also influential with people. Every session is complete in itself and you never know if people will come back. Giving the clients choice about the contact and following up...Sometimes life intervenes and counselling is less of a priority” (CIG # 8 Lodden Mallee 15/10/07 - Summary).

Educating the community about the little known fact that the most common (the mode – not the average) number of counselling sessions clients typically attend is one, could be used to promote counselling as a quick intervention that can get you back on track. It could be promoted as a mental health check up, just like people have a regular medical checkup. When promoted in this way in other parts of the world, one off counselling sessions have lead to massive financial savings in medical expenditure. For example, as early as 1967, Follette and Cummings (1967) found that one counselling session reduced medical utilisation by 60% over a five year period. The study was conducted by Kaiser Permamente, one of the major health maintenance organisations in America. According to Michael Hoyt (1994) the benefits were still in effect eight years after the single session. Moshe Talmon compared the outcomes for single sessions and ongoing clinical work and found no difference in overall outcomes (Talmon, 1990). It is important to point out here that the complication is that, in our experience at The Bouverie Centre, it is almost impossible to determine who will be satisfied with one session and who will want more. This dilemma can be addressed practically by suggesting that one session may be enough whilst ensuring there is not impediment to ongoing support (Young & Rycroft, 1997).

6.12.2 The role of No Bullshit Therapy

This section examines the original research question, “To what extent do No Bullshit Therapy ideas contribute to effective counselling strategies to helping individuals and families affected by drought — especially those individuals reluctant to attend counselling?” Single Session Therapy ideas are useful, but only when a person has agreed to counselling. No Bullshit Therapy, amongst other approaches, can be useful to work towards a mandate for counselling with people who are suspicious of counselling.

6.12.2.1 NBT: A framework for what rural counsellors do naturally

“Generally a very positive experience. It provided a framework for what a lot of people already do in their practice” Feedback on Ballarat NBT workshop – first one.

The role of NBT in the work of drought counsellors is complex and subtle and my view of its importance changed throughout the research. It was instrumental in Bouverie gaining funding to providing a support role that proved so helpful to the drought counsellors. Drought counsellors, and many of the broader rural counsellors who attended the 15 NBT regional workshops, adopted the framework as a conceptualisation of the way they worked naturally with rural clients. And yet, over the course of the research, drought counsellors began implementing NBT principles in a range of ways — which extended their work and their practice strategies. One CIG discussion commented on the NBT workshop:

25 This fact is little known even amongst well trained professional counsellors and therapists.
“It provided a framework for what a lot of people already do in their practice. Perhaps some more role plays would have been useful. The simplicity of how the material was explained is useful and it was good to see Jeff using the approach. We will definitely incorporate the approach more into our work” (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary)

The different nuanced roles NBT played are discussed below.

6.12.2.2 NBT: Door opener

Clients who are suspicious of counselling often describe it as bullshit. Therefore No Bullshit Therapy acted as a bit of a door opener for these people. As one drought counsellor stated, “People run from therapy but if you put No Bullshit in front of therapy – rural people are surprisingly open to trying it.” Also ideas from Single Session Therapy, such as saying, “we’re not here for the rest of your life — sit down and have a one-off talk” is also appealing. Several CIG members reported that you can see the “relief on people’s faces that they’re not going to have to go on forever”. “Talking not telling” is also important (CIG # 9 Gippsland 12/12/07). These observations fit with a study that found coercive efforts to engage men were related to greater reluctance to seek help in the future (Cusack et al., 2004). A significant predictor of future help seeking for emotional / suicidal thoughts irrespective of pathway to care is if the man perceives the treatment to be helpful in the first session (Cusack et al., 2004). The value of NBT and SST approaches that ‘cut to the chase’ and are ‘client led’ once a working relationship has been established, can therefore be imagined.

6.12.2.3 NBT: A headline grabber

I have already alluded to the difficulties of maintaining the media’s attention during the long term impact of the drought. The community likewise naturally loses interest or suffers “compassion fatigue” (C. R. Figley, 1995) over the course of long term drought. Opportunities to promote drought awareness and to promote drought counselling services therefore need to be creative. No Bullshit Therapy grabbed the attention of the media following press releases by the VFF in August 2007 and by The Bulletin, La Trobe University in April 2008. During subsequent interviews (10) with Radio National, rural newspapers and regional ABC radio, I was able to use crisp (non-jargon) descriptions of the impact of drought and to demystify counselling with NBT, pointing out that rural people “dislike counselling until they have it”. During these interviews I pointed out that people often ‘drop their bundle when they can’, encouraged social connection because drought can lead to isolation, and provided contact details for the Rural Outreach Line and / or local drought counsellors.

6.12.2.4 NBT: A theme to the work

No Bullshit Therapy led to a range of adaptations that created a theme and identity for the drought counselling CIG network. This included the newsletter No Bull, The Bendigo two-day practice forum entitled, “We Care—No Bull” with sections called: Celebrate—a—bull; Measure—a—bull; Do—a—bull; Sustain—a—bull etc. The name of the newsletter and the two-day forum came directly from the drought counsellors themselves.
6.12.2.5 NBT: Demystifying therapy and counselling

Eight months into the research, the CIGAR debrief reflected increased confidence about the work. There was a feeling that, although counselling helped, many community myths about counselling prevailed. A challenge was raised in recommendations by previous drought evaluators (Australian Healthcare Associates, 2006) about how to promote public discussion about counselling. The following quote from the first Grampians CIG reflects a common view, "Generally there is a lack of understanding in the community about what is counselling. Counselling is often stereotyped and there needs to be clear definitions of what counselling is" (CIG # 1 Grampians 19/3/07). A drought counsellor from Gippsland commented that, "NBT is useful in de—mystifying the myths surrounding counselling" (CIG # 9 Gippsland 12/12/07). Apart from the NBT approaches (described in the previous section), it was decided to ask CIG members how they specifically describe counselling to the community. Descriptions included: "Counselling is just like talking to a mate with the added advantage of confidentiality and the counsellor is trained in listening" (Grampians CIG member); "This is not rocket science, so long as we get somewhere..." (Gippsland CIG member).

Community members are often unsure of what should and shouldn’t be said in counselling — consequently they are often cautious or cynical about the motives of the counsellor. Drought counsellors used the NBT guideline (negotiate contexts for mutual honesty and directness) to clarify what could be said in the counselling session. Practice examples reported included: "Be as honest as you can and I will be as honest as I can"; "I negotiate the level of honesty. For example, “I like to work with 100% honesty — you may not want to be so honest”. One drought counsellor reported she had found that children who are the seen as the problem often say they prefer to use 80% honesty when first asked and down the track agree to 100% honesty.

It was common for drought counsellors to address prevalent views in the community that counsellors are 'indirect and wishy washy’ by stating up front that, "I’m not going to feed you any bull and I don’t want you to feed me any bull” but within a context of warmth and care. Another drought counsellor reported using honesty to indicate what she could do and what she couldn’t do in counselling and to make overt when things are moving in counselling and when they are not.

6.12.2.6 NBT: A guide for responding to painful material

No Bullshit Therapy clinical guidelines provided a framework for addressing two areas that proved difficult or complex in drought work: clarifying the counselling role, especially during assertive outreach and talking about sensitive issues. In general NBT validated the workers’ natural ways of addressing difficulties.

Some drought counsellors found NBTs upfront approach helped talk about their role, especially in the grey area between chatting and counselling, as indicated in the following CIG discussion:

"State as early as possible what your role will be if certain information is revealed. Establishing a working relationship is important to help clients be clear on worker role rather than the ambiguity of being too chatty – which some clients may interpret ambiguously. The NBT approach helps with those conversations (CIG # 6 Grampians 13/8/07 - Summary).
The Grampians CIG linked the following approaches to addressing difficult issues to NBT:

"admit what you don’t know, inquire into the impact the issue is having on the person, clarify your role and what you can do to make overt what it means for an office worker coming on the farm or the process generally. Lots of these processes work with office based work as well. Put on the table that they may find the discussion uncomfortable (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

A number of CIGs gave examples of how they used the clinical guidelines of NBT to address painful or sensitive issues. For example, a woman rang the Rural Support Line “saying they were selling the last of their sheep to the knackery: their bloodlines and breeding stock. She was gutted — describing it as ‘selling off her children’”. Because it was a call to the RSL, the TC (Telephone Counsellor) was able to sit and talk with the caller for a lot longer, without typical lifeline reflective responses of ‘that must be hard for you’. The TCs describe feeling able to speak more freely and be more direct. This led to some discussion of the ‘No Bull’ approach being helpful – the natural gravitation to this style” (CIG # 6 Rural Support Line 30/5/08: Summary).

6.12.2.7 NBT: A culturally consistent model of counselling for rural people

The majority of the drought counsellors and 323 generalist counsellors / workers from rural Victoria who attended the No Bullshit Therapy workshops felt the model of NBT reflected the style of work they tend to naturally do – but conceptualised it in a way that had not been done before. Having a name, a framework and some clinical guidelines seem to validate the way of working they had found successful.

According to CIG members across the state, clients also appreciated the approaches that led to authentic encounters

“Give them information and don’t talk down to people. Cut the jargon.” (Feedback and Advice questionnaire.)

NBT was also seen similarly by people in power – The Bouverie Centre got the drought project based pretty much on the potential of NBT. Minister Gavin Andrews at the keynote address to the ‘Tackling Mental Health in Drought’ forum auspiced by Rural & Regional Health and Aged Care Services, DHS, held on March 16th, 2007, made a joke of the name:

“I’ve been advised of an approach from The Bouverie Centre, I don’t know if I’ve been set up. No Bullshit Therapy – it has a measure of earthiness to it. Not to insult their intelligence or to waste their time” (Research diary 16/3/07)

6.12.2.8 NBT: Ways of explaining the value of counselling to rural men who dislike therapy

I want to preface this section by emphasising that the Birchip Cropping Group research which found that only around 21% of the farmers they interviewed saw no role for counselling for themselves or others, because I don’t want to perpetuate the myth that all rural people dislike counselling. I also want to
keep at the forefront of this discussion that “There are some people who wouldn’t ever come forward – the stoics” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary) because expecting that everyone who may need help can be enticed to seek it is a recipe for worker burnout. I also want to point out that I am not referring to all men – just men who find themselves in a counselling situation, yet appear to be suspicious or dislike therapy even though they may benefit from it. For example they may be ‘partner mandated’ ("Shane Weir - personal communication," ) – for example “told to talk to a counsellor or the marriage is over.”

One of my ideas to arise more clearly from conducting the 15 NBT workshops around rural Victoria was that like a game, ‘if clients who are suspicious of counselling do not know the ‘rules’ of counselling they will naturally feel powerless and have two broad options for regaining control: choose not to play the game of counselling or to try to disrupt the game. Another idea to emerge was that to engage people who don’t understand, are suspicious of or dislike counselling require counsellors to work differently to the way they were traditionally trained to work. This is articulated in the following CIG discussion:

“Strategies that seem to be successful with rural men can seem counter to what many of us have been taught in counselling 101. (For example) Educational or rhetorical ways of conveying counselling ideas rather than open ended questions or inquiries about feelings. Example: “You are going to be exhausted after talking about this stuff, expect that you will feel wretched after talking about all this”. “You’ve contained it and done really well, but you will probably feel worse initially from having talked about it” Client was really relieved “Yes that’s how I’m feeling”. The counsellor reported that I wouldn’t normally talk that way” (CIG # 3 Rural Support Line 17/5/07 - Summary).

Mark Furlong argues that in “male stream culture...the realm of the emotional is both dangerous, as it risks one’s self-control, and yet mystified as it is sacred, not to be touched except in special circumstances” (2001, pp. 59-60). He goes on to suggest that some men are more comfortable with counselling that emphasises talking about thinking more than counselling that seeks emotional expression. Furlong points to the “need to provide control and to use emotions sparingly”. For example the counsellor can name and be upfront about emotions without necessarily pushing for emotional expression. As he puts it, counsellors “can be direct about it (emotions) but not directly emotional” (Furlong, 2001, p. 61).

6.12.2.9 NBT: Don’t take yourself too seriously

During the project, I was spontaneously asked to speak at an information day for farmers at Yarram, organised by the Gippsland CIG. In order to quickly prepare for my presentation I vigilantly looked out for the indicators of the local culture, which I gleaned from watching the presenters ahead of me (as I was madly working out what to say to avoid the new boy from the city being run out of town). I summarised my observations in the next CIG summary in this way:

- Not big noting yourself – “I won’t keep you for long”
- Casual – “Just say a few words and the details are in the brochure”
- Wry or self-deprecating humour “I’m the person no—one wants to talk to – a counsellor”
- “Good old Aussie values”

(CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary).
CIG members across the state regularly talked about the subtle nuances of the community presentations used to promote drought counselling services. Whether or not to do power—point? How to be charismatic and engaging but also come across as professional with a bit of power—point? These are real dilemmas for these people doing a lot of these information forums (CIGAR #2 23/4/07 - Transcript). The discussions could be summarised as make your presentations relevant, accessible but not condescending; simple but not simplistic.

6.13 Client feedback

This study sourced limited direct input from clients for the reasons already stated. However, Takeways filled out by clients at the end of each session give some indication of what a small number of clients took away from working with one drought counsellor. Whilst the themes presented below could reflect many client groups, they are consistent with the themes of practicality, the value of talking and avoiding isolation and dealing with conflict outlined previously and fits with the feedback from drought counsellors more generally.

6.13.1 What client Takeaways say

Only one drought counsellor provided Takeaway data but the themes were quite instructive. She provided Takeaways for four of her clients. Client one completed one session, Client 2 completed three sessions, Client 3 completed two sessions, and Client 4 completed six sessions. These sessions were held between May and September in 2007. On average, five ‘Takeaways’ were written per session, providing the clients with things to think about / act upon between sessions with the counsellor.

Themes across the four clients’ takeaways

  i. **Self-directed change oriented comments** (e.g. Get a life; Walk away; Talk not yell; Do something else)

  ii. **Blocking unhelpful patterns** (Do something else — make a phone call; Will not get into arguments about when and where [custody issues])

  iii. **Maintaining positive activities and developing new behaviour** (e.g. Continue knitting; Get out of the house 2—3 times a week)

  iv. **Communicating and sharing** (e.g. To keep communicating; Say I will talk to ** or ** or someone else about it; Happy that I’ve been able to talk about my repetitive dreams; State how you are feeling)

  v. **Specific strategies for managing conflict** (e.g. When someone upsets me — say something to them and not take it out on **; Talk not yell; Be aware of the signs I am getting angry)

  vi. **Taking time out and staying connected** (e.g. Get out of the house 2—3 times a week; Keep in touch with family via phone; Visit Mum every 2—3 weeks; Take some time out — visit library to read.)

  vii. **Referral follow ups** (e.g. Get in to see a doctor about **’s health — mood swing / arthritis)

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26 Significant client feedback was, however, obtained as part of the Farm Gate evaluation conducted as an off-shoot of the current research. This feedback is presented elsewhere (Tauridsky and Young 2009).
6.13.2 How does drought counselling differ from general counselling?

"People need services in remote areas — drought or no drought!" (CIG # 7 Grampians 11/9/07 - Summary).

The Rural Support Line was the first CIG to begin discussing the differences between drought counselling and general counselling because they had a ready comparison – they were involved simultaneously in both the Rural Support Line and the more general Lifeline. In the first CIG, when I was the facilitator, I asked, "How does drought counselling differ from general Lifeline work?" The responses provided an insight into how the chronic nature of drought uniquely impacted on counsellors, as reflected in the following early comments:

"As counsellors we are used to things often improving, drought is ongoing"; "Lifeline has a balance of unsolvable and solvable problems, drought line is dominated by unsolvable problems"; "Stories leave you feeling helpless — can’t solve practical ongoing problems" (CIG # 1 Rural Support Line 22/3/07 - Summary).

Over the course of research, Rural Support Line CIG members developed their understanding of what was 'unique' about drought telephone counselling and 18 months into the research began training Lifeline counsellors on how to respond to the Rural Support Line when the telephone services amalgamated during 2007. The next section reports on these practice wisdoms and the impact of their training program.

6.13.2.1 Differences between Lifeline and drought—line

The following was recorded by me in the role of facilitator of the fourth Rural Support Line CIG meeting:

"Lifeline callers ring because they want to work with you (or may be accept the premise that talking helps problems). Drought—line callers are reticent (initially at least) to talk about personal or emotional problems. It is harder to engage with the emotional side. Clinical experience suggests asking more about the impact of the drought rather than asking directly about feelings. More of an upfront approach seems to work. A relaxed, less serious, humorous approach seems to be more effective. Creating an expectation that farmers may need to consult about mental health like they engage consultants about other aspects of farm management, could be useful" (CIG # 4 Rural Support Line 14/1/08 - Summary).

This early summary raises a number of characteristics that continued to emerge as important to drought counselling during the research and which will be explored throughout this chapter; reluctance to talk about personal emotional problems at first, the role of humour and ways to present counselling. The fourth RSL CIG summary summarised the broad differences in the following table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeline</th>
<th>Rural Support Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most often about personal matters</td>
<td>Most often an ‘information’ call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Counsellor is helping the caller contain the issue</td>
<td>Telephone Counsellor is working to help the caller open up the issue and contain it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to the issue first, then providing referral information lastly</td>
<td>Giving referral information first up, then helping caller open up more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over time the Rural Support Line operators developed greater confidence in their practice wisdom as can be seen by greater knowledge of what their callers wanted and in the detail of the following CIG summary, recorded by my colleague Elena Tauridsky, towards the end of the research:

"The Rural Support Line staff acknowledge callers have obstacles to overcome before they even pick up the phone. It is appropriate then that the structure of the call is different and most important then to satisfy the callers’ need for information. Callers talk about feeling relieved at the end of a call – they didn't waste my time — I got the information I wanted first” (CIG # 7 Rural Support Line 22/7/08 - Summary).

6.13.2.2 Differences between face-to-face general counselling and drought counselling

Further differences between drought counselling and general counselling articulated by face-to-face counsellors in other CIGs included: "Drought’s so big! Enough is never enough. You always focus on what you haven’t done” (CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07 - Summary). The chronic, ongoing nature of drought outlined in Chapter 5 can create a feeling in the drought counsellor that responding to drought is like trying to solve world poverty. You can work 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week and still feel that you haven’t done enough. You also may not see the benefits of your work. This combination of responsibility and powerlessness can make drought workers vulnerable to vicarious traumatisation or compassion fatigue. These issues will be discussed in section 6.17.

Still another CIG emphasised aspects common to most rural work, such as the need to provide services rural communities that lack specialist services, resulting in a counsellor needing to be a ‘jack of all trades’. This CIG also explored the importance of gaining credibility with the locals, and the pros and cons of being part of the local community. It can be challenging to create a work life balance for workers who live and work in their local community, because work boundaries are harder to enforce and dual relationships are part of the landscape. A subtle point made by this CIG was that despite extensive networking workers can easily feel isolated, as lone workers (CIG # 7 Grampians 11/9/07 - Summary).

The following section of this chapter begins to conceptualise the drought counselling strategies – drawing on trauma theory as a way of understanding specific practice wisdoms that emerged during the research.
6.14 Drought: Learning from other chronic conditions

In the mid 1990s my work at The Bouverie Centre was focused on helping mental health services to explore family sensitive practice because family work was not routinely provided despite a clear research base which strongly recommended family based interventions (Pharoah, Mari, Rathbone, & Wong, 2006). During this work I developed a model with the help of my colleagues (Dr. Colin Riess and Brendan O’Hanlon) which conceptualised the impact of mental illness on the family as similar to the impacts of a more acute trauma. This approach led to what I called the NEWS model of systemic debriefing. NEWS was an acronym for the basic tasks of helping families deal with the traumatic impact of an intangible, chronic disorder. NEWS stood for Normalise, Educate, Warmth and emotional support, and Strengths.

Although the word trauma is not usually used to describe long—term insidious hardships caused by drought, much of the human response to drought seems similar – feelings of powerlessness, guilt, shame, relationship conflict etc. Over the course of the research I began to notice some similarities in the individual and family responses to drought, and the individual and family responses to chronic mental illness. Both are chronic, intangible conditions that affect people differently, both tended to isolate people because the people affected tend to blame themselves in the absence of a tangible external cause – and are often blamed by the broader community for bringing it on themselves. Both could be conceptualised as low status, ‘trauma like’ experiences that are not fully acknowledged by the broader community – especially if you talk to the individual families involved. Both have a profound impact on the whole family. Whilst not fully developed, I began to share these ideas with my CIG and the CIGAR, who found they resonated with their working experience.

One of the advantages I’ve found with the NEWS model is that it can be used as a guide for workers after minimal training whilst reflecting on the work done by very experienced trauma workers. Based on the drought research data, I will now present an expanded outline of the NEWS systemic debriefing model as a guide for drought counselling work, followed by some of the complexities and advanced issues to consider which are drawn from trauma theory and other relevant sources.

6.14.1 The N.E.W.S. model for drought work

- NORMALISE and promote meaning making
- EDUCATE and offer practical supports
- Show WARMTH and provide emotional support
- Promote STRENGTHS, SKILLS, SOCIALISATION AND SPIRITUALITY

6.14.1.1 Normalise and promote meaning making

6.14.1.1.1 The importance of normalisation

"Normalise the stressful effects on people. Not even use the term drought. Just start the conversation with how things are going. You can’t assume that people are affected in the same way” (CIG # 5 Grampians 16/7/07 - Summary).

‘Normal responses to an abnormal situation’ is a catch—phrase of trauma work used to describe the majority of symptoms expressed by survivors of trauma. People who are affected by fire, flood and
accidents are more likely to receive debriefing or trauma counselling explaining their symptoms are typically "normal responses to an abnormal situation". Drought counsellors found that in most cases normalising and linking presenting symptoms to the drought was simple but surprisingly effective – given that most clients did not make this link themselves. If people affected by drought are not helped to link their symptoms to the drought, they are likely to attribute the cause to someone or something else – themselves (leading to self-blame and shame), to others at hand (leading to relationship tensions and difficulties – especially loved ones whose support they most need), or organisations and government (leading to paralysis for self action and to community tensions). Normalising helps people feel that they are not alone, not going crazy, not weak. It is a way to provide acknowledgement and validation without blaming or pathologising. Normalising is not minimising of the impact of drought, nor is it sugar coating the impact of the drought – it has more to do with meaning making than trying to make people feel better.

6.14.1.1.2 The importance of meaning making

There is an extensive literature on the importance of making meaning of one’s suffering, with Viktor Frankl’s (1984) “Man’s search for meaning” possibly the most quoted. A recent comprehensive inquiry into the traumatic impacts of war by the National Academy of Sciences (Institute of Medicine (IOM), 2007), found that the only uniformly helpful treatment was described as making some meaning of the event and its impact. For example, researchers found medication was not very successful, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and exposure therapy was helpful, but not for everyone (C. R. Figley, 1995). This research led Figley, an internationally renowned traumatologist, to conclude that meaning making is the most important antidote for surviving trauma. Figley’s conclusion is instructive, but if we perceive drought as a chronic, unarticulated trauma, the first task is to name and acknowledge that a trauma actually exists, before survivors can make sense of it. The role of acknowledgement and validation is addressed in the next section.

6.14.1.1.3 The importance of acknowledgement and validation

The importance of public acknowledgement and validation of hardship is crucial to being able to psychologically survive it. The importance of public support in managing hardship is no better illustrated than comparing the return of the World War I veterans who were hailed as heroes, to the Vietnam veterans – who did not enjoy the same public support on their return, arguably leading to greater ongoing mental health difficulties. With support, humans seem to be able to cope with the most horrendous trauma, but without it – much less severe traumas can affect us severely.

A common theme raised by CIGs across the state, but especially in greener regions of Victoria, was that once it rains, people think the drought is over. This can lead to people still affected by the drought or its sequelae feeling very much alone, forgotten and unacknowledged. As mentioned already, this predicament led me to create the section in No Bull called Inside story – a venue to educate the broader community about the hardships and complexities of drought to which they were ignorant (Example – a piece written by a Gippsland CIG Member - Carr, 2007, July, p. 6).

In addition to the difficulty of having the wider community acknowledge the personal impact of drought over a long period of time, the invisibility of some of the effects of drought also impede community acknowledgement, as expressed by the Loddon Mallee CIG:

"There was agreement with the feeling expressed in other CIGs that recovery isn’t the right term at this point. The drought isn’t over until the water storages have been filled. It doesn’t matter how much grass there is. In this irrigation area, the only resolution is water. This shire
is unique in having three irrigation systems: Campaspe, the Murray and the Goulburn. Also – the highest concentration of food factories, as well as a number of milk factories. They all rely on irrigation water, so the impact will be catastrophic. The crops are looking good, but if we don’t get those follow—up rains, they won’t come to anything, like last year” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Drought counsellors found that acknowledgement and validation of their clients’ hardship was an important component of their work – but that this was not simple – it had to be done without pathologising or overwhelming the client.

6.14.1.1.4 The balance between acknowledgement and distraction

Whilst everyone responds in different ways to drought, a common theme to emerge across the CIGs was the need for drought counsellors to help clients move between facing the full impact of the drought in order to respond to it in a realistic way, and permission to avoid the full impact of it. In an unpublished thesis on the grieving experience of mothers and fathers whose children suffered from schizophrenia, Davis (1995) found therapists addressing the parents’ pain face a similar task. His wise advice was, address the grief "at a pace suitable for the individual. When the individual is overwhelmed by the loss, the counsellor could facilitate the dampening of intrusive processes. Alternatively, when an individual is in a prolonged avoidant phase, the counsellor could gently dismantle the defense processes by exploring the loss and its associated meanings” (Davis, 1995, p. 50). Drought workers had to find ways in both counselling and community development work, to balance the need to acknowledge the pain and suffering of people affected by the drought without emotionally exhausting them. In a similar vein, members of one CIG pointed out that it was, “OK not to focus on the drought…” (CIG # 1 Loddon Mallee 19/3/07 - Summary).

The need to move between acknowledgement of their pain and getting away from it may be greater in a chronic intangible 'trauma' like drought, especially for people living in their business or in small communities all affected by the drought. Unlike ‘nine—to—fivers’ who experience stress at work and who may find relief and solace away from the job with supportive families or friends, people who live in their place of business can feel imprisoned by the drought. It is difficult for farmers who live and work on their property and for people who live in small communities to escape talk of the drought, as reflected in the following CIG summary:

"Peter also spoke of one farmer who didn’t want to be with other farmers who were stressed – wanted to be with others….highlighted that everyone does it differently” (CIG # 6 Loddon Mallee 14/8/07 - Summary).

Whilst communities were not conscious of having to find this balance between addressing difficulties and enjoying relief from them, it was expressed in many somewhat unhelpful ways. For example community members would only attend serious drought information sessions once or twice, as reflected in the following CIGAR comment:

Jeff: “The Gippsland CIG members were saying that people will only come, often only come to these forums once and they won't come again. The locals were saying, the local workers not the counsellors, were saying that people were getting sick of talking about it like it's bad news. It’s sort of like going over old and bad news” (CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript).
Another CIG member further into the research reported that some farmers wanted light relief from the drought:

“Don talked about some of the farmers saying in response to the question of what they wanted: ‘a damn good belly laugh would help!’ Shirley talked again about the show ‘You can’t die laughing’” (CIG # 8 Loddon Mallee 15/10/07 - Summary).

There were differences within the community and between family members, even between professional counsellors as to the degree to which affected people needed to address their difficulties directly. These differences were reflected in their attitudes to the media’s coverage of the drought. Intense media coverage and community acknowledgement of losses associated with fire and flood are only short term, followed with stories of resilience, recovery and rebuilding. Coverage of the drought does not change as quickly. Two drought counsellors in Hume region got very upset about the bleak focus in the drought coverage. Respondents in the Birchip Cropping Group study were also critical of the overly negative and prolonged focus on hardship portrayed by the media (Rickards, 2007).

May be the media need to balance the disaster stories with stories of resilience, opportunity and survival. Genuine stories for example, of families who relinquished their farm only to find a new and productive life in other pursuits. At least greater awareness needs to be raised about the range of needs that people affected by chronic disaster have.

6.14.1.2 **Educate and offer practical supports**

Lack of control and a sense of powerlessness are common responses to chronic disasters and trauma. Education and information can help people regain a sense of control or mastery, as reflected in the following CIG quote:

“Putting the information out there in more than a token way allows for people to make their choices and pick up on opportunities” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

The education drought counsellors found themselves providing fell into four broad categories:

1. Information about the drought itself:
   - How drought affects individuals, families, communities (e.g. stress about decision making);
2. Education about the range of responses to drought:
   - How individuals, families and communities respond to drought (polarisation between family members, normal emotional responses to drought hardships etc);
3. Suggestions about coping with the impact of drought:

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27 This was reflected in some critical feedback the Bouverie team got at the second forum for organising entertainment that was drought related, rather than offering an escape from the seriousness of the work. (see section 4.8)
Communication between family members, socialising, acknowledging emotional responses etc;

4. Details about what services are available:
   Referral options, financial supports and grants, practical and emotional supports.

Whilst showing warmth and providing emotional support is the next component of NEWS, educating people about the emotional impacts of drought hardship was an effective alternative to the typical counselling approaches that assist clients to share or acknowledge their own feelings. Cognitive approaches, particularly when working with men, were often used by drought counsellors. Other approaches to addressing emotions are presented in the next section.

The place of practical help as part of engagement has been discussed (section 6.8). However, practical help, which is sometimes not seen as part of the counsellor’s role, is integral throughout the drought counselling process. The actions however, need to relate clearly to what is important to the client, hence the drought counsellors have to 'listen with action'.

**6.14.1.3 Show Warmth and provide emotional support**

"Giving permission to grieve – comes up all the time" (CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary)

Providing warmth and emotional support doesn’t have to be airy fairy, it can be very practical such as the role of follow—up described in a CIG:

"Follow—up – just takes it from being a token effort to being something that’s genuine. You can’t force people to accept help, but you can continue to keep in contact or send stuff in the mail with a note indicating you’re thinking of them. The biggest thing is knowing that someone cares...having someone hold you in their thinking is an important part of that message. Trying to make people feel as though they are the only one that you’re working for – that what you’re doing for them is one of the most important things you’re doing today. The valuable part of counselling is the conversation – the relating – more than what happens in the conversation itself" (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Providing emotional support is not always easy as simply showing warmth, although it is a good start. Below are some added complexities in drought work.

**6.14.1.3.1 Disenfranchised grief**

Doka (1989) developed the idea of disenfranchised grief to identify and name grief that could not be talked about or named and hence did not receive the community and societal acknowledgement and support afforded other losses. Examples of disenfranchised grief include the loss of dreams, thoughts of future losses, losses embedded within positive experiences etc. Specific examples of disenfranchised grief reported by drought counsellors in the Loddon Mallee CIG below is reflective of losses experienced across the state:
• The loss of a comfortable retirement – despite still surviving on the farm;
• The reduction of local population, with the resulting fragmentation of local communities – including the loss of neighbours and friends;
• Having to sell or worse kill animals;
• Older farmers are grieving that they may be the last of the family to live on the farm — losing the family heritage; and
• The “Sandwich Generation”. For example, a decision to leave the farm on behalf of the younger generation’s future may feel at the same time disloyal to the previous generations.

(CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary)

6.14.1.3.2 Making sense of the need for distraction: The concept of emotional regulation

Providing emotional support to survivors of a ‘chronic crisis’ like drought is complicated because there is often a contradictory need for providing acknowledgement of what has happened and the need for providing a distraction from what has happened. This dynamic balancing act is called emotional regulation in trauma theory. Whilst not articulated during the drought research, in retrospect, the failure of the community to understand this phenomenon may have led to tensions between groups wanting to acknowledge the hardships of the drought and those wanting to forget about them. One of many examples of this tension was recorded in the following CIG:

“‘Grief in your garden’ sessions are being held by the local water authority. Natalie contacted the person organising the event to offer worker services and was told that they wanted an upbeat day and drought workers were not required. Some attitudes in the community still see drought workers as a negative emotional influence at some community events rather than being on call to assist people to get in touch with their loss and recognise their adaptability” (CIG # 9 Anonymous to protect workers: Summary).

The concept of emotional regulation makes sense of the broad strategies intuitively developed by drought counsellors across the state. Overall drought counsellors were constantly walking a fine line between directly addressing the emotional hardship and addressing it indirectly with fun activities designed to help people ‘escape’ for a time. In physiological terms, this reflects the need to balance the sympathetic and para sympathetic nervous system following a major crisis. For example, a theme that emerged clearly was the important role of humour as discussed below, as well as the use of massage, and pamper days combined with opportunities to talk more in depth with a counsellor at another time.

6.14.1.3.3 Red flagging: Moving in and out of emotional issues

Drought counsellors enacted the concept of emotional regulation by ‘moving in and out’ of difficult and highly emotional issues. During the drought counsellors presentation at the Shepparton NBT workshop (10/4/08) the local drought counsellors described touching on emotional issues, ‘flagging them’ so they can be returned to but only after moving to lighter issues. Emotions that threaten to overwhelm rather than liberate, only reinforce a feeling of being out of control, a central experience of the original trauma itself. If difficult issues are flagged, the counsellor can move to general chat mode, and negotiate returning to the sensitive topic at a later time. A drought counsellor in Gippsland reported
having ‘bullshit’ sessions where he talked about anything but the major financial problems faced by his client and ‘no bullshit’ sessions where he raised them. This dilemma of whether to talk about the bad news or not, was reflected in the second CIGAR meeting:

**Pam:** Well Jenny made this comment that sometimes what you’re doing is helping them ‘not’ talk about it. So obviously that filters it right down, to focus away from the problem (CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript).

### 6.14.1.3.4 The role of humour in drought response

Charles Figley not only advocates for the importance of humour in recovery, he embodies this idea with entertaining presentations about the most tragic of international disasters. Throughout this report, are examples of how humour provided an essential balance to the pain and suffering experienced by individuals, families and communities (Laughter workshops, the call for cartoons in No Bull etc). Humour also played an important role in managing the vicarious traumatisation of the front line workers.

### 6.14.1.3.5 Lessons from Rwanda

The role of humour in enacting the concept of emotional regulation played a central role in the Dulwich Centre Foundation and Evanston Family Therapy Centre’s work in Rwanda, following the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi people. David Denborough, Jill Freedman and Cheryl White conducted a five day workshop for Ibuka (The National Survivors’ Association in Rwanda) to address the impact of the atrocities experienced in their community. Because of the emotional intensity, the workshop participants negotiated with the facilitators to have one of them designated ‘Mr. Humour’, whose role it was to jump up and distract the group with humour, song or dance if the emotion threatened to overwhelm the group (Denborough, 2008). A more thorough description of this impressive work can be found in Denborough, Freedman and White (2008).

### 6.14.1.3.6 Humour: A legitimate way of supporting colleagues?

Whilst it may not be wise to generalise gendered ways of supporting friends in times of crisis, one stereotype of Australians, may be especially Australian males, is that humour plays a significant role in supporting others. Rather than being a defensive strategy to avoid getting close to the emotion – trauma theory may provide a different interpretation, namely that humour provides a response that acknowledges the existence of the disaster but does not dwell on it. Aussie humour may be seen to allow for the trauma to be acknowledged but not directly so that the person doesn’t have to face the full pain of it publicly, but knows he or she can express his or her feelings in private, knowing that someone knows and cares. When done well, the stereotypic ‘Aussie’ support, like No Bullshit Therapy, mixes care with humour.

### 6.14.1.4 Promote STRENGTHS, SKILLS, SOCIALISATION AND SPIRITUALITY

"The importance of helping clients get back in touch with their own resources, in particular what’s worked for them in the past” (CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary).
Drought counsellors found themselves facilitating people in acute crisis to explore past successes or to learn from other people’s successes in overcoming hardships. Drought can isolate people from their strengths, their skills and their community. Helping to reconnect people with their strengths, others and their spirituality can facilitate recovery.

It is a challenge to invite exploration about strengths and skills at a time when people feel disconnected to these strengths and skills without seeming dismissive of their hardship. CIG and CIGAR discussions began to explore ways of simultaneously acknowledging hardship whilst exploring other less visible personal qualities and values. These discussions inform the following two sections.

6.14.1.4.1 Strength of farmers and farming as spiritual connection to land

"One member explained they’d mostly come across farmers who are ‘stoic, getting on with it, tough’. Even when a farmer was not having a good day, he would still have a smile and tell one member; ‘I’m gonna give it my best shot’ When that member asked him ‘What are you going to do next year?’ the farmer replies ‘I’ll do it again, and keep on doing it’” (CIG # 9 Loddon-Mallee 20/11/07: Summary).

"One member noted farming seemed a bit like Indigenous people’s connection to the land – farmers seemed to have a similar strong connection, and ability to keep doing it often without any great financial benefit. One member recalled a client whose husband was 68 and had just had a pacemaker operation. They had to sell the cows because they couldn’t keep doing that work, but continued doing other farming work” (CIG # 9 Loddon-Mallee 20/11/07: Summary).

In keeping with the findings of the social impact of drought expert panel, the CIG members often commented on the significance of farmers’ psychological connection with the land and their business, sometimes to the point where decision making was not prudent from a financial point of view. One value of exploring this ‘spiritual’ link with their farm or business, (spirituality in its broadest sense) is to create a connection with core values (such as love of family) that don’t change even as other material things change or are lost. A lovely example of the latter was reported in the Loddon Mallee region:

“(That) sometimes very small things can re—instill hope and a reminder of what is most important (e.g. As one family did, going down to the paddock and cooking damper and sausages with the kids)” (CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary).

In summary, Normalising and promoting meaning making, Educating and providing practical supports, showing Warmth and providing emotional support and reconnecting clients to their Strengths or hidden skills, their core values, spirituality or others (NEWS) – provides some guidance for debriefing and providing supportive acknowledgement of drought induced hardship. The NEWS model could be equally relevant to community development activities. It can be used as a simple framework or used as a basis for exploring more nuanced ways of helping people affected by drought.

I conclude this chapter looking at two factors that permeate each component of the NEWS model: the relationship between hope and despair, and the ‘ripple affect’ of drought on the drought counsellors, their colleagues, the community and the research team.
6.15 Hope and despair: Opposites or natural companions

The early CIGs (Rural Support Line & Loddon Mallee) pointed to the fact that the drought does not get better quickly — one of the clinical characteristics that separates drought counselling from generalist counselling. It is not surprising then, that despair and the role of hope in coping with despair was a common theme addressed within each CIG across the state. Early conceptual discussions in the Loddon Mallee CIG revolved around the relationship between hope and despair. Although these themes permeated CIG discussions across the state, they were of a more detailed and philosophical nature in the Loddon Mallee CIG, due most likely to the Bouverie facilitator of the Loddon Mallee CIG, Pam Rycroft, having a particular interest in this area (see Hope & Despair, Rycroft 2007, pp. 8-9), and possibly also because the Loddon Mallee region faced the annihilation of their dairy industry due to the extended drought.

A drought counsellor from the Loddon Mallee CIG gave the following example of how a person’s construction of the drought is central to their capacity to remain hopeful.

“… if farmers see drought as part of an irreversible climate change pattern, they are more likely to be full of doom and gloom about the future. If however, they have lived through past droughts and see them as part of a cycle of nature, they are more likely to be hopeful for recovery” (CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary).

The above CIG quote makes visible the possibilities of exploring clients’ constructs about the drought, as well as the possibilities for public discussion around these constructs. Such a discussion always raises the dilemma of hope and change. The construct that provides most hope and reassurance, (e.g. it will rain soon, it always does) may also be the one that makes openness to radical change less likely. This is a crucial dilemma to explore given that long term adjustment to climate change requires the realisation that things will not return to normal. Climatically, normal has changed.

Pam Rycroft’s (2007, July, p. 8) points out in her article in the July edition of No Bull, "We each (clients and counsellors) bring with us our own ‘relationship’ to the concepts of hope and despair, and our own lived experience and relationship to the feelings associated with both.” Philosophers over the centuries (e.g. Heraclitus 500 BC) point out that hope and despair are not necessarily opposites: they can exist alongside each other and require each other for definition. Heraclitus developed the concept of the ‘unity of opposites’ where hope contains and is defined by despair and vice versa.

In drought counselling the question does not seem to be whether to encourage hope or to address hopelessness, but to have an open mind to the relationship between hope and despair for a particular client and to be aware of how our own relationship to hope and despair can assist in opening up the conversation or closing it down too quickly. One of the few negative comments in the small number of client Feedback and Advice questionnaires implied that the drought counsellor may have tried to solve the clients’ problems rather than simply sit with and validate their pain before gently exploring what realistic options may exist, "Nothing good about listening to counsellor talk on about self. Being told what I should do. Having pressure put on me to do what counsellors wanted me to do not what I wanted.” (Quote from early Feedback and Advice questionnaire in response to the question).

Pam Rycroft points out that, “It is a challenge sometimes to hold on to hope whilst sitting with our client’s despair and to remind ourselves it is their despair, not ours” (Rycroft, 2007, July). Pam is also fond of saying that it is important for counsellors addressing grief and loss to sometimes embrace the saying ‘don’t just do something, sit there!’
In her No Bull article, Pam writes so eloquently about the clinical challenge of embracing hope and hopelessness with equal openness that I reproduce it here:

"I remember only too well a conversation with a young woman who spoke of death as a welcome friend. As I sat with her reality, ‘standing still’ took me down a path where I felt I was colluding with death and betraying life. I wanted to find the ‘right’ thing to say to make her commit to life again, but it was not available to me at that time. She later told me that it was ‘a relief’ to be able to speak openly about despair, but that most people ‘closed down’ such conversations. Some hopelessness cannot be talked away, but may be tolerated together, while hope is being strengthened” (Rycroft, 2007, July, pp. 8-9).

My own experience of the multiple crises my family endured during the early period of conducting the drought research (for example my partner and I attended 12 funerals in 18 months) was that within the worst times some beautiful moments emerged (people’s responses or the heightened reflections on what I most valued in life) and likewise, some of the best times invite moments of disillusionment.

In an article on grief in response to chronic mental illness that Pam and I collaboratively wrote with carer, Glenn Bailey, we point out that hope and despair can be held by different family members. Pam drew on this idea when exploring drought affected families. For example, “one family member may be the holder of hope while another expresses only hopelessness, or the two may alternate” (Rycroft, 2007, July, p. 9). Family members will respond to hardship and grief in unique ways and these natural dichotomies can easily lead to polarisation as I have described in Chapter 5, and to blame and isolation – at the very time that family members most need each others support.

Whilst hope and despair are complex issues, drought counsellors need to be familiar with practical strategies if clients are potentially suicidal. Drought counsellors were asked about their practice wisdom around suicidality in the pre and post drought counsellor questionnaires.

### 6.16 Responding to suicidality

In the pre questionnaire response to the question, “What are the three most important things to consider if a client is suicidal?” drought counsellors recorded seeking additional help such as a Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (CATT) team, GP or other professional service, and finding out if and what is the client’s plan for suicide, seeking a contract between the client and the worker to seek help if suicidal, listening to them, honesty and planning for the future were all listed more often than in the post questionnaire. Conversely safety, risk, means and history were all listed more often in the post than the pre questionnaire. Making support and resources available to the client and the need to stay with the client was important and did not change from the pre to the post questionnaire.

The strong emotions of people who are despairing, suicidal or have their hopes dashed cannot but affect others. The ripple effect of vicarious traumatisation and compassion fatigue are helpful concepts to help understand the full impact of drought, and these concepts are discussed in the following section.
6.17 The ripple effect: Vicarious traumatisation and compassion fatigue

The following diagram summarises the ripple effect of the drought identified over the course of the research. It reflects the longer term impacts of drought – drawing on the experiences of communities in drought since 2003.

Diagram 6.1: The ripple effect of drought impacting on the community

Diagram 6.1 depicts how the drought spreads through the community over time. The impact on community leaders were reported in regions which had been experiencing serious drought since 2003. The different impacts portrayed in diagram 6.1 are explored in the following sections. (The different support responses required for each level of community affected by drought are discussed in section 7.2.)

6.17.1 Impact on community members

“One trauma will touch another. Usually, when trust has developed within the counselling relationship, the ‘layers of the onion’ will peel off, and clients will disclose what may be behind the issues they are presenting” (CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary).
When I reviewed the early CIG summaries across the state I was not surprised by the stories of hardship experienced by people directly affected by the drought. I was however struck by the degree of stress and distress the CIG members across the state reported they were seeing in community members who were supporting those people directly affected. Although the CIG facilitators did not fully appreciate or understand its importance immediately, despite consistent feedback from participants in the NBT workshops across the state, I came to the conclusion that: farmers may not talk to professional counsellors but they will talk to someone — the milk carters, the DPI field worker, a policeman, a school teacher, friend or other person with whom they come into contact with. The CIGs and NBT workshop feedback pointed out that these community members were feeling overwhelmed by the stories of hardship and pain they were hearing and did not know what to do. CIGs across the state were raising concerns about the stress levels of these natural support people such as in the following CIG discussion:

“DPI and other workers are experiencing a lot of trauma and the drought counsellors may be able to provide a role, supporting or educating them about vicarious trauma, as a way of also engaging with these groups” (CIG # 1 Gippsland 23/3/07 - Summary).

In another example, I recall presenting to a state-wide agricultural group to promote the drought counselling program early in the project and having a member of the group express what could easily have been experienced as an attack on me – but, listening to the content of her conversation, revealed that she felt powerless to help the husband of a female neighbour who was depressed and in desperate financial trouble but who would not seek help. This person was not used to feeling powerless and expressed it to me in a powerful if misdirected way. Another member of the committee expressed anger at the program – absorbing the anger in order to listen clearly to what he was saying revealed that it was the lack of responsiveness, the absence of counsellors who would go out and support their colleagues rather than the existence of counsellors that was his major concern.

The CIG-CIGAR network led to the identification of vicarious traumatisation in the general community as a major concern and the development of NB Support – a support program for these community members, which is outlined in detail in Chapter 7. The overall purpose of NB Support is to help arrest the ripple effect of the drought – and to support the existing support people in the community who provide an invaluable, but often invisible role in the resilience of a community.

An example of the ripple effect within the community of the drought is provided by the following CIG discussion:

“Barry mentioned getting complaints from a number of sources about the worker on the phone at ‘The X Water Utility’, who is hanging up on people when they are ringing about their rebates. It is not clear whether she herself is really stressed, or whether she is just rude. One reported comment was: “well, you chose to be a farmer!” (The drought is having a backlash in the second or third tier here.) Tess made the point that it would be hard to be a messenger as well, if one is dealing with very stressed and upset people” (CIG # 3 Anonymous to protect workers: Summary).

The degree of vicarious traumatisation appeared to grow throughout the research. I received the following email from Dave Lennon from ABC radio in Bendigo, who suggested that the ‘officer class’ was starting to eventually feel the strain of the drought. Lennon referred to the leaders of the
community as the officer class – people who are usually looking after others. In his email Dave reported that:

"we have been covering the drought and its effects for sometime now but a new issue has arrived on the horizon and that is the stress on the rural leaders who up until now we had always figured were coping...there are real fears that particularly the "young" generation of leaders are burning out and in danger, if they haven't already, of falling over" (Lennon, 2008, 11/10).

Neither the drought counsellors themselves nor the research team were immune from the ripple effect and this is explored in the following sections.

6.17.2 Impact on drought counsellors

As the following CIG summary points out, vicarious traumatisation or compassion fatigue is a natural consequence when workers who have the requisite attributes for being engaging and supportive of their clientele, who witness too much pain, identify very closely with a particular hardship or client, and don’t have sufficient professional support in the workplace to do their job:

"Vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue: the very thing that makes counsellors good at their work – that is, empathy — also has a cost. This is especially the case when events / issues are closer to us, either geographically or in other ways. There was a discussion about what is likely to affect us most. For example, the recent train smash touched so many people because of social connections, but also because "families travel on trains" and there were children killed. When trauma comes close, we think "there but for the grace of God go I....." and feel it much more personally” (CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary).

Workers will have different vulnerabilities and different openness to exploring the personal impact of the work on them. Bouverie CIG facilitator, Pam Rycroft asked her group what it’s like for counsellors on the frontline, seeing anxiety, anger and distress first hand. They responded:

"As soon as you set out to be a ‘solver’ you set yourself up to fail. Sometimes it’s just letting people talk, because you can’t solve it” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Around the same time, another CIG reported the same issue from a different perspective:

"What we have become are the carriers of community anxiety” (CIG # 4 Hume 13/6/07 - Summary).

It was not simply the degree of emotional pain drought counsellors were witness to that determined the degree of vicarious traumatisation, but the level of support they enjoyed. The CIG network and supervision and support from the drought counsellors’ host agencies were seen as crucial for surviving the stresses of the work. For example, early on, the comment below was typical of feedback to the CIG facilitators:
“there is a very large need in the field for all drought workers to receive support, especially in cases where they are working in relative isolation from peers” (CIG #1 Hume 21/3/07: Summary).

The existence and quality of supervision from host agencies was mixed, “We are getting exceptional supervision and support from our agency. Without that, I think we would have fallen in a heap,” says one. Counsellors in the group who reported less excellent support from their agencies said that they turn to each other and to other people they know for help, as well as coming to the CIGs” (Anonymous to protect workers).

The CIG-CIGAR network allowed the vicarious impact of the drought on the counsellors and their colleagues to be acknowledged by a larger state-wide audience. What also appeared to help was that compassion fatigue was defined as normal and the realness of it validated in print via articles in No Bull and by external people with some authority (e.g. CIG facilitators). The vicarious traumatisation was noticeable at the start of the research, because of the lack of supports prior to the CIG network, but also grew as the drought became unrelenting, as indicated by the following CIG summary eight months into the project:

“Generally the chronic nature of the drought is starting to take hold. This has a direct effect on workers. There was a sense from the group that they are more personally challenged now. As workers there is a need to make more of an effort to understand (your own) personal reactions to people’s predicaments and how that may parallel the chronic and developmental nature of drought work and the general attitudes reflected in the community. Workers have to hold the emotional anxiety of the community and the individual stories that they hear on a daily basis. It will be increasingly important to attend to potential compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma in workers” (CIG # 8 Grampians 15/10/07 - Summary).

The CIG-CIGAR network discussions also led to the Rural Support Line providing a secondary consultation 24/7 for drought counsellors on the ground, and although this was seldom used, the thought was appreciated by drought counsellors in the field, as evidenced by the following CIG summary:

“’The use of the telephone counsellors as a resource for those drought counsellors who are ‘on their own’ (like Joan in [small town]) is a great idea though, we thought’ (CIG # 4 Loddon-Mallee 18/6/07: Summary).

The physical safety of workers was an issue raised, given the outreach approach needed, as reflected in the following CIG summary:

“No mobile phone coverage can be problematic especially when there are worker safety concerns. Person 1 described one recent incident where a woman farmer had self-referred and her husband was not aware of the outreach appointment and became aggressive when the worker visited. Person 1 now checks in with police where there is no mobile phone coverage” (CIG # 1 Grampians 19/3/07).
But the main stress was witnessing the pain and suffering of clients and feeling powerless either to engage them in counselling or to resolve the impact of the drought — if they could be engaged. The burden of feeling torn between endless responsibility and powerlessness is captured in the following CIGAR transcript:

"one thing the telephone counsellors said that was different between the drought work and normal telephone counselling, was that when things get better more or less (in other areas) there's more of a sense of resolution. Whereas here there's a sense of real powerlessness of things not getting better so you're helping people adapt to sort of an ongoing thing that’s not improving. There is just that sense of powerlessness they felt" (CIGAR # 1 26/3/07: transcript).

6.17.2.1 Not just vicarious traumatisation, drought counsellors are also victims

The following excerpt from the first Loddon Mallee CIG indicates that drought counsellors were not only vicariously traumatised due to their role but that they were also often direct victims of the drought:

"Often our staff are drought—affected as well…it’s all part of their supporting and linking, but it’s also being aware that stories can hit buttons for people…they frequently are shared stories. You don’t always look to the clients and the provider as being hugely removed. Staff meet every Tuesday, plus an open door policy…plus supervision for clinical support…not necessarily about crisis points, often about smaller things, but may be a personal feeling…Some families are trying to support a farm through counselling dollars…e.g. wife going to work as a counsellor to try to save the family finance.” (CIG # 1 Loddon Mallee 19/3/07 - Summary).

6.17.3 Impact on the research team

I personally felt the diffuse pressure of being part of the response to the intangible but pervasive impact of drought. This is why the CIG-CIGAR support network was important as it provided a sense of your little bit being part of a larger effort that did make a difference. I was not the only member of the research team to feel the pressure, but our focus was more on the people we were supporting than ourselves. In retrospect, the CIG facilitators were experiencing pressure that whilst less intense, paralleled the pressure experienced by the drought counsellors, who were in turn experiencing stresses that paralleled the communities with whom they were working.

The enormity of the drought’s impact, combined with the difficulties of the recovery process raised the need for self care, both for members of the research team and for the drought counsellors. By the second CIGAR, the CIGAR facilitator feedback to the CIG facilitators that we were all reflecting on different aspects of the drought’s impact on people, and this reflected a storming process within the CIGAR:

Colin: The feel of this conversation compared to the first one, if I were to be really simplistic about it, would be it has a storming kind of feel to it. There’s a kind of sense of more difference, more pulling different directions, not totally but less unification. Less unified, more different
kinds of differences pulling different directions, problematic, the real problems. I mean there was a complaint and the sense of burden last time that people kind of shared all over the joint. Now it feels there’s almost an anger and frustration coming out from all of your conversations.

**CIG facilitator 1:** I’ve got that sense that it’s so big that these workers are feeling quite honestly like may be we’re struggling with it because there’s so much to do, it’s so complex, where do you stop? We have this small amount of work 10 hours a week or us one hour now, it’s not enough but where do you stop? It’s like where do you stop! I think that helps to explain the burden and exhaustion the workers who have been doing it for longer.

**CIG facilitator 2:** I have to say it made a huge difference, the level of support they were getting from their agencies. I just wanted to add that at the end. The ones who were having great clinical supervision and support from their managers felt supported. A couple of my people said they are really ramped up about how many suicidal people they are seeing. They said people who would never publicly be open about that in the past have been pushed to some extremes. One of them had a guy go into a bank, I think, and say something has to happen or I’m going to do something right now, I mean this is a farmer.

One guy from a local mowing company who just has no business anymore was threatening suicide. So they are running into these kinds of things more now. One of them said that “without the great support we got from our agency I think we would have fallen into a heap by now.”

Another drought counsellor was employed as a sub—contractor. She showed me a really curt and vicious email about whether she was allowed to organise this information day and that’s not one-on-one counselling. She was very upset about it and it was that she has a total dedication to the area that keeps her going.

**CIG facilitator 3:** ... there was that question "if you’re a drought counsellor where does that role begin and end?"

(CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript)

### 6.17.4 The need for self care

Figley (2008c) pointed out that the helping professions attract people who are caring but have a tendency to give and give and give. The need for self care was reflected in the positive response to the self-care components of the two day forum organised by the Bouverie research team.

Figley has developed the concept of care—giver care to guide the areas workers employed in trauma / disaster type industries need to address. The components of care—giver care articulated by Figley (2008c) include self-care (things you can do to help yourself), social supports (keeping socially connected and having a good work / life balance), colleague care (having colleagues who are aware of your work, your successes and difficulties and who are looking out for you) and professional care (having the resources, supports and training to complete your job).

In the current project, The Bouverie Centre was charged with the task of providing support and training as part of the professional care of the drought counsellors. Colleague care is, according to Figley (2008c) under—recognised in general, and was difficult for many drought workers to enjoy because of the vast distance between solo workers. The CIG network helped create colleague care – and I suspect this meant a slower turnover of staff than otherwise would have occurred – even as aforementioned, by 12 months into the research, nearly 30% of the original drought counsellors attending the two-day forum had moved on.
6.18 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: The current research concurs with Boydell and her colleagues that small rural communities are both preventative of mental health difficulties and possibly constrain some people from seeking help. Feedback from participants in this research suggests that talking may be helpful for rural people affected by drought, however culturally accepted ways of presenting counselling, providing it and publicising it are required.

6.18.1 Policy and practice implications

Further research, conceptual development and practice wisdom documentation is required in the following areas:

i. Approaches that build on word of mouth, but are sensitive to confidentiality and privacy.

ii. Assertive outreach services, including third party referrals.

iii. Specific skills required for drought work such as ways of moving from chatting to counselling, engaging cautious clients and emotional regulation.

iv. Creative and effective strategies that address the well documented reasons why rural people don’t seek help early.
CHAPTER SEVEN

7 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DROUGHT COUNSELLING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: TWO CASE STUDIES

7.1 Chapter orientation

The research question primarily addressed in this chapter: What is the relationship between drought counselling and community development?

In this chapter, I explore the relationship between drought counselling and community development in two ways: conceptually and using two case studies. Conceptually, I use CIGAR reflections and CIG summaries to build on the findings reported in previous chapters. I then present two case studies to provide practical examples of how counselling and community development informed each other during the research.

In the first case study presented I outline how the CIG-CIGAR action research process led to the development and implementation of No Bull (NB) Support, a half day ‘de—brief and support’ workshop for members of the general community who support others in their community following disasters like drought. I argue that NB Support is an example of how the current research built capacity within the drought counsellors and outline how they in turn, used NB Support to build capacity in their local communities. The second case study, ‘Looking Out For Your Neighbour’ (LOFYN) is presented as an example of an unlikely collaboration between the Victorian Farmers’ Federation (VFF), the drought counsellors and The Bouverie Centre, that resulted in 17 community workshops addressing the emotional impact of drought on individuals, families and communities. I outline how counselling ideas informed this community development initiative and examine the tensions and synergies between these approaches. Hosted by local VFF branches, presented by local drought counsellors, supported by The Bouverie Centre and funded by DHS, I present the LOFYN project as an example of how networking and collaboration can forge new and productive working relationships needed to address the complex impact of drought effectively. I conclude each section looking at challenges and future possibilities for these case study projects.

7.2 A conceptual relationship between drought counselling and community development

As mentioned, most drought counsellors found themselves doing community development type activities rather than counselling in the first six months of their work. For many drought counsellors this was unexpected and caused significant stress, given that many workers had little community development training or experience and had expected to be providing counselling – as observed by one of the CIG facilitators:

Shane: ....but basically you’ll be doing counselling down the track. But I think that, what’s coming out to me is that they have been dumped in the deep end and they are actually having quite sophisticated (community development) campaigns. (CIGAR # 1 26/3/07: transcript)

Drought counsellors spoke more about community development than clinical cases in four of the five CIGs during the first half of the research. Further investigation into this revealed that most counsellors
received some clinical supervision in their host agencies for clinical case-loads but very little support for the difficulties of case finding, networking and combining community development and counselling. In order to make contact with potential clients, drought counsellors were involved in community activities beyond counselling. These included: physical health checks, information nights, pamper days, men’s health events, ‘farming used to be fun days’, laughter yoga, massage, timeout days, community forums and events, networking between service systems, engaging with local sporting teams and chatting to community and business leaders etc.

The relationship between drought counselling and community development and how, for the drought counsellors, it changed over time intrigued the research team throughout the research. Initially, community development was considered as a possible way drought counsellors could engage local networks and communities and to promote their counselling to what was perceived as a cynical and disinterested community. The following comments by the CIGAR facilitator reflect this:

**Colin:** "In a way one of the biggest constraints to actually being helpful may be the term counselling or counsellor. That could be one of the major constraints to actually being helpful so that we have to think about what we call the work and how, what way this work is helpful. In a way we might have to go in under a community development banner and have the role being a community development officer. You might end up being a counsellor with a community development hat on, because that’s the way to do it. Because that’s OK to do it for the community rather than the individual” (CIGAR #1 26/3/07:transcript).

It is clear from CIGAR transcripts, including the one below, that the relationship between community development and counselling work was not easily defined and certainly not mutually exclusive:

**Pam:** "I think that community development sort of accesses people, or helps to identify people and then the counselling...It gets them in the door if you like and the counselling’s what happens when they’re in the door. But where that begins and ends I’m not so clear on. I do have my own issue about how, at what point it becomes counselling, because I think there is a lot under community development that is already counselling. I’m not saying or passing judgment whether it’s good or bad, but I don’t know where that line is” (CIGAR # 1 26/3/07: transcript).

What initially many drought counsellors called community development was really case finding through targeted publicity, but in doing this work, their efforts generated an interest in the theoretical and philosophical aspects of community development. Gradually over time, with community development training and with reflection provided informally through the CIG–CIGAR network and formally at the second two-day forum, drought counsellors began to develop a greater interest in the range of community development strategies and became involved in more sophisticated community projects. For example, helping communities to determine what they needed and to run their own activities to address these needs. The interest in the LOFYN projects was the most obvious enactment of this interest.

Drought counsellors also began to explore the relationship between counselling and community development. The following CIG summary reflect early efforts to integrate the relationship between the two approaches:
“Still not getting a lot of clients, (about 12 — except large numbers for pampering days). Two workers have come up with a wonderful analogy that the community development work is ‘ploughing the field at the moment ready for future growth’ “ (CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary).

After about six months, with the metaphoric fields ploughed, the CIG members started reporting that they did not have sufficient time to do the community development work, which they had come to enjoy, because their client loads had increased (No Bull - October 2007, p. 6). This feedback, which was consistent across most CIGs, suggests it takes about six months to establish a new drought counselling service, as indicated by Diagram 7.1. I reflected that this is not surprising given that, as a rule of thumb, it takes 12 months for a business to get established. Why would it be any different for a new counselling service?

Diagram 7.1: Work focus for drought counsellors over time

Over time, drought counsellors began to become more confident and aware of their work as combining direct counselling work within a community development framework. They began to integrate the two approaches, for example, pamper days (a day of relaxation and comfort to help distract people from the constant impact of the drought) helped drought counsellors engage one-on-one clients, provided ‘warm calling’ opportunities to engage people in one-on-one counselling and also provided a ‘kick start’ for community members to run their own events. As one community member involved in a pamper day said,

“This isn’t so hard, we could organise one of these ourselves” (CIG # 4 Gippsland 22/6/07).

This led to a growing interest in how to kick start communities ‘exhausted by chronic drought’ including how to re-energise dormant community networks or activities. This interest found its expression most clearly in the Looking Out For Your Neighbour (LOFYN) workshops, where participants were encouraged to consider what their local community needed given the drought (see LOFYN case study Section 7.6).
A key finding from the research is that drought counsellors and community development workers need to appreciate that a community affected by drought is likely to go through periods of exhaustion as indicated in Chapter 5 and hence the community may need opportunities to “recharge its batteries”, before working on local solutions (as promoted by community development theory).

Feedback from the Gippsland CIG, together with general themes raised in the CIGAR led me to publish a diagram that Diagram 7.2 is based on in the February edition of No Bull. Diagram 7.2 and the original it is based on, reflects a growing realisation, reported in the latest critical incident literature (Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, 2007), that only a small percentage of people require one-on-one counselling following an acute disaster if local community networks and services are supported. Counselling is needed to help people isolated, unable or unwilling to be supported by local community networks, to re—engage with some form of natural community. Feedback from the CIGs across the state suggested that a similar relationship between the need for counselling support and that provided by the community was relevant for drought, a ‘chronic disaster’. A finding that surprised many CIG members was that drought counselling is often comprised of one-off sessions, in keeping with the general single session therapy literature.

Judith Herman (1997) points out that “the main goal of debriefing work is to re-connect the person with an appropriate network”. The current research suggests that non-pathologising, practical counselling models (such as Normalising, Educating, Warmth and Strength based work (NEWS), Single Session Therapy (SST) and No Bullshit Therapy (NBT)) may be particularly helpful in promoting an efficient re-connection with the community (No Bull - February 2008, p. 6).

![Diagram 7.2: The relationship between community supports and counselling](image-url)
interest, personality and training of the worker. Yet on—the—ground experience from this research clearly found a need and an advantage to considering these two approaches as integral to a comprehensive drought recovery plan. This is in keeping with the report to government of the social impact of drought expert panel, which recommends that "Community development initiatives, such as community socialising events, should have clear objectives aimed at linking farming families and rural communities with various human service providers and /or facilitate clear referral pathways” (Kenny, 2008, pp. 26, recommendation 28). Reciprocally, counsellors can help support (and provide professional back up) to the unofficial counsellors within the community — thus promoting community resilience and building these links called for by Kenny’s expert panel.

Examples of successful collaboration occurred in some services which had been providing drought counselling work for more than four years. They reported high counselling case loads, due in part to the integration of community development and counselling services within the organisation as indicated by the following CIG summary.

"Janice is not short of clients but that is because of the community education, development and networking that has happened over four years. Established programs have created an atmosphere where the local community can trust and depend on the service. A general concern was expressed about the possibility of systems abuse if services reduced their drought specific assistance” (CIG # 4 Grampians 19/6/07 - Summary).

I have added the role of the non-professional community counsellors, clearly identified by the research as an important component of the drought recovery response. Family members, friends, and colleagues clearly provide counselling like support to people directly affected by drought. Support for these important but often invisible ‘counsellors’ is required to ensure they are not overwhelmed (see NB Support, case study section 7.3)

Over time, the relationship between counselling work and community development work became even more complicated and the reflections on these relationships more dynamic in the CIG meetings. For example, the Bouverie facilitator of the Loddon Mallee CIG (Research diary 17/9/07) attempted to capture the relationship enacted by members of her CIG, where individual counselling, community focused counselling and community development activities to engage individuals and communities represent four points of a two dimensional continuum. Building on that work diagram 7.3 attempts to reflect how counselling can be directed toward re—engaging clients back into the community.
Diagram 7.3: An attempt to depict the complex relationship between community development and counselling

Diagrams 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 together with the ‘on—the—ground’ experience of drought counsellors suggest that counselling and community development activities are inextricably linked in drought work.

Although the DHS funding agreement argues for counselling to be delivered in a whole of community frame and provided funding for service networking via the Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs), it took about 12 months for collaboration between the PCPs and drought counsellors to occur, except in regions where drought has been constant since 2003. In these regions where drought work had been going on for longer, such as in the Loddon Mallee, the link between the PCP and the drought counsellors was very good and both groups shared an interest in counselling outcomes and community development philosophies – leading to the integrated projects such as the cold calling co—ordinated Farm Gate pathway to services (see Tauridsky and Young 2009).

7.3 Case study one: NB Support (A response to communities at breaking point)

As mentioned in Chapter 6, members of the CIG network across the state reported observing a range of workers and community members who came into contact with farmers and business people
devastated by the drought who were themselves feeling extremely stressed and exhausted; burnt out by feelings of powerlessness and depleted by feelings of compassion fatigue for their friends, families and colleagues. People are more vulnerable to compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatisation when they feel responsible and yet powerlessness to help. A sample of quotes from CIG summaries reflecting this tension include:

"Drought counsellors may want to consider training and support for the ‘occasional counsellor’—workers who provide inadvertent counselling support to drought affected farmers but don’t get any training, supervision or debriefing" (CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary).

"What seems clear is that there are people out in the community who are not in any way identified as ‘drought workers’, but who are acting as ‘informal counsellors’ to the farmers who use their services, and who are therefore being impacted by secondary trauma. Yet, most would be unlikely to identify themselves as someone who needs help (i.e. hairdressers, water carters, feed and seed suppliers). So how can we figure out who they are and how to help them?” (CIG # 3 Hume 16/5/07 - Summary).

As can be seen by the quotes above, CIG members across the state were noticing that people from all walks were, as part of their usual day—to—day activities, coming into contact with friends or colleagues affected badly by the drought, and were not sure how best to help. The CIG members were witnessing the impact of drought insidiously rippling through the entire community.

"Grant also wondered how the drought counsellors could support the people in these businesses long—term…these guys are hearing the awful stories day in and day out” (CIG # 8 Loddon Mallee 15/10/07 - Summary).

"Jenny reported that some tanker drivers have been instructed not to go on to properties if the farmer behaves in a difficult manner towards the driver” (CIG # 5 Grampians 16/7/07 - Summary).

CIG members noticed that whilst some people felt powerless to help, others felt resentful that they had become ‘a part—time counsellor’ as part of their work role, without wanting to and without feeling they had the necessary skills. The first CIGAR meeting identified the stressed wider community as an important issue that the drought counsellors were well placed to address as reflected in the following transcript:

Tina: They said that the water cartage guys and the veterinarians, it’s the whole community that is getting affected because they will go up to a farm and they will meet a severely depressed farmer who is not at all coping and they may be the only one to see him that day. Everybody they see is really down and depressed and then they don’t feel ok either, not equipped to deal with it. The veterinarian and the cartage guy, they’re just feeling overwhelmed and like they don’t know how to cope with these people.

Jeff: There’s a real sort of opening for the drought counsellors to provide secondary support, debriefing and sort of training in the occasional counsellor role for all the DPI workers and the stock exchange and drivers and all.

(CIGAR #1 26/3/07: transcript).
7.3.1 Turning observation into action

Despite these widespread observations about the need to support community members secondarily affected by the drought, it was not until the Loddon Mallee CIG facilitator was directly challenged four months into the project, that the Bouverie research team was pushed into action. During a Loddon Mallee CIG meeting (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary) in response to what the Bouverie CIG facilitator thought was a generous offer of free NBT workshops for local counsellors, a CIG member strongly argued that the general community needed support – rather than No Bullshit Therapy training for general (professional) counsellors. She argued for skilling up everyone who comes into contact with the farmers or business people.

The insistence from the Loddon Mallee CIG that something happen sooner rather than later led The Bouverie team to stop reflecting and start planning for action. We drafted up a half day program called No Bull (NB) Support, road tested it with other CIGs and then piloted it in the Loddon Mallee region on the 15th November, 2007. I sought funding for the project from DHS and was ultimately successful, which allowed The Bouverie Centre to provide professionally produced kits for participants and facilitators as well as a train—the—trainer program for facilitators which is described later.

NB Support, a response to the need for “supporting the supporters” had been called for by previous drought projects (Blau, 2006). The action research methodology of the current project allowed the development and implementation of NB Support to occur during the course of the research – rather than simply as a recommendation that it occur at the end of the project. The following section describes the content of NB Support in detail.

7.3.2 Description of the NB Support project

NB Support is short for No Bullshit or No Bull Support (a play on NB also meaning Note Well). NB Support is not teaching therapy or counselling. It aims to provide easy to follow guidelines on how to support someone in trouble. NB Support attempts to reduce some of the pressure people experience when they are not sure what to say or do when worried about someone experiencing difficulties due to the drought or other stresses.

7.3.3 The NB Support program

The No Bull Support community workshop program was developed by the Bouverie team and Ruth Turpin, a local drought counsellor from the Loddon Mallee CIG, in consultation with CIGs across the state. The program drew on a number of concepts from No Bullshit Therapy, Single Session Therapy, Trauma Theory, Grief Theory and general psycho—education around anxiety, depression and stress. The NB Support workshops participant numbers were limited to 10—15 so that participants’ own experiences and wisdoms could be shared in an interactive experiential format. The NB Support sessions provided information and resources and acted as an informal debriefing opportunity. A general framework of the program is provided below:

- Welcome and warm—up
- Sharing (brainstorm) concerns (small groups)
- Psycho—education (impact of stress, depression, anxiety, grief)
- Reflection about what has helped participants cope with difficult situations
- SALVE, CALMER & RENEW – Acronyms for listening and self care
- Role—play of referring on / information about local referral networks
• Self-care and relaxation exercises
• Distribution of a show bag of resources
• Follow-up contact and evaluation (email / phone)

Whilst there are particular modules covered in the workshops, facilitators were encouraged to modify both the format and the materials in response to particular participant groups’ needs and characteristics. Resources were developed to support the program.

7.3.4 Pilot evaluation

The No Bull Support workshop pilot attracted 11 participants including; a minister, a policeman, a producer of farm equipment, a farmer, St Vinnies volunteers, a DPI field worker and a vet. Evaluation was very positive. All 11 participants said they would recommend the workshop to others and could identify others they thought would benefit from it. Participants noted that the half day running time was fine, stating that they wouldn’t be able to get any more time off work. Specific comments included:

• Repeat this workshop for others in other localities
• Keep groups small
• ½ day format suitable, morning better for concentration
• Very well presented
• “No Bull’ approach very easy to follow, not overloaded
• Older participants good for their experience sharing
• Need to find the younger ones too
• Helpful to meet others working in this area
• Very good self help ideas for pressures and stress
• Reinforcement of ideas of people working in same area
• A group of professionals and workers together
• Information was terrific
• Highlighted the incidences of stress in the community

7.3.5 Key outputs

After the successful pilot program, guidelines were developed to support facilitators offering NB Support workshops. To become a certified No Bull Support facilitator, drought counsellors had to complete a one—day Bouverie train—the—trainer workshop and then conduct an NB Support workshop with another trained facilitator.

Essentially, trained facilitators worked in pairs with the recommendation that each workshop should be facilitated by a worker with counselling experience and a worker with training / community development experience.
### 7.3.5.1 The train—the—trainer program

The train—the—trainer program was co—developed by Ruth Turpin and the Bouverie team, especially Pam Rycroft. The agenda included the history of NB Support, outlined the NB Support program and provided opportunities to discuss facilitation skills, attracting participants and the use of resources. Trainee facilitators were furnished with a facilitator’s manual, outlining the program with facilitator notes and resources, a resource CD with evaluation sheets, advertising proformas and a power—point presentation for the NB Support workshop.

The timetable of workshops across the state was co—ordinated by The Bouverie Centre. Participant kits were sent out to facilitators for each scheduled workshop. Email updates were provided to the sector in regard to upcoming facilitator training, and workshops offered by each region. Whilst preparing for Bouverie’s support role to finish in August, several CIGS requested that Bouverie continue to provide a list of accredited NB Support facilitators on its website, which was done (see website www.bouverie.org.au).

Figure 7.1 below details the 86 people who completed the one day facilitator training by region, between February 2008 and September 2008. As can be seen, most participants came from Gippsland (21).

![Figure 7.1: Number of attendees to facilitator training by region.](image)

The advantage of training local drought counsellors to be NB Support facilitators was that it allowed the program to be delivered more widely than the Bouverie staff could have sustained. The local facilitators knew how to advertise the program using local formal and informal networks, and provided local accessible counselling backup to NB Support participants. The contact the drought counsellor facilitators had with the NB Support participants also provided much needed out reach into communities where people were suffering but who would never seek help.

### 7.3.5.2 The NB Support workshops

In the nine months following the pilot, the 86 drought counsellors and colleagues who had attended four train—the—trainer workshops at Bouverie had delivered 21 NB Support workshops which reached over 312 community members. This figure continues to grow and the NB Support program has been updated to also respond to community members supporting people affected by fire, as the research has received additional funding from DHS and The Department of Planning and Community
Development. These developments are not reported here, but can be accessed via The Bouverie Centre website (www.bouverie.org.au).

### 7.3.6 Evaluation of NB Support workshops in the field

No Bull Support participants completed evaluations following each session. Results showed that participants consistently rated all aspects of the No Bull Support program high to very high, and most said they would recommend it to others.

Feedback sought from participants during follow—up phone calls consistently highlighted the importance of the workshop in providing: practical strategies to support people in a helpful way; down to earth information about stress and grief; local referral contacts; and connection with the local drought counsellor who was the facilitator. A range of specific feedback comments are illustrated below:

- ‘Workshops like this are essential for on the ground outreach workers’ – Orbost, April 2008
- ‘With the increase in stress generally in community due to drought...why isn’t this session compulsory (for shire workers)?’ – Campaspe Shire, May 2008
- ‘Good to have a group with different backgrounds for sharing and greater understanding of the issues out there’ – Cohuna, May 2008
- ‘I’ve really enjoyed this workshop and believe I have learnt quite a lot’ – Wangaratta, June 2008
- ‘Format good (includes both) advice on how to deal with farmers / situations but also self-care important (even though we don’t think about it).’ – Benalla July 2008

Some constructive feedback around improving the program included the following:

- Would be good to share knowledge, statistics, what works within Shires / Councils
- Very informative and helpful but I feel a bit overloaded with all of the information
- Networking with other workers — not enough time to do this
- Deeper session / info on grief, spiritual side

### 7.3.6.1 Limitations of the evaluation and NB Support

Getting facilitators to routinely and reliably implement the follow—up calls / contact with participants of workshops, as initially envisaged, was a challenge. Some facilitators did conduct follow—up calls and received valuable information and feedback, as well as cementing new relationships with the participants, however, most facilitators did not. This aspect of the program may be difficult to achieve given the significant workloads of drought counsellors and possibly a reluctance to ‘intrude’ upon participants after the completion of the workshop.
A hiatus of the funding for this project between September 2008 and December 2008 also meant that the Bouverie team could not follow—up workshops around this time.

### 7.4 The relationship between community development approaches and drought counselling informed by NB Support

No Bull Support is an elegant example of drought counsellors using community development principles to address a need. The need was identified by the drought counsellors and an intervention was then developed to build local communities’ capacity to support their own. The intervention, (NB Support) utilised local resources and expertise and was gradually owned by the local workforce and therefore self-sustainable with minimal need for external input. Resources were developed to support the program and a successful pilot was conducted. Rather than Bouverie staff members running the NB Support workshops – the Bouverie team developed a train—the—trainer program to develop local facilitators of NB Support who could run the program locally and who were better placed to provide local professional back up to participants and local referral points.

Initially only drought counsellors (CIG members) were trained to facilitate NB Support so that participants would have back—up if a counselling or related referral was required. At a later stage in the research, professionals other than drought counsellors, but with links to CIG members, were able to become certified NB Support facilitators, thus expanding ownership of the program further into local communities.

#### 7.4.1 Community development approaches to achieving counselling goals

Drought counselling objectives are sometimes best achieved by engaging with the community’s natural resources, including the unofficial counsellors. NB Support assisted drought counsellors to extend their referral reach into the farming and related businesses that are traditionally difficult to engage. Building capacity with the local community and the local drought counsellors, the NB Support program provided professional counsellors with the opportunity to support the community’s natural supports with debriefing, collegial support, training and self-care (supports that professional counsellors see as necessary to do their work) and created opportunities for these two groups to form an ongoing relationship.

#### 7.4.2 A community’s unofficial counsellors

Each community has its own unofficial counsellors which contribute to the natural resilience of the community. By ‘unofficial counsellors’ I mean any members of the general community who support other members of the community when they experience difficulties. At times when the community faces an overwhelming or prolonged trauma or natural disaster, the pressure on these unofficial counsellors increases and they may need support to continue to play their ‘unofficial counselling’ role.

The following story relayed in the Rural Support Line CIG is a good example of the valuable role played by an unofficial counsellor. The worker in the general store could be seen to play a role as the local communities ‘unofficial counsellor’ as described in the following CIG:

"A person I know works in a general store in a small country town. Some customers are more open about the impact of the drought and engage openly in an impromptu counselling session."
Others, the ‘hard nuts’ take gradual ‘wearing down’ before they begin to talk about the personal impact of the drought. The most disarming strategy is to down play the impact and not to be too serious. Interestingly, when the ‘counsellor’ is on duty, the shop is busier and people stay longer and more customers buy coffee, and are happy to wait to have a chat. This is the counselling that you have when you’re not having counselling. The ‘counsellor’ even makes referrals and provides advice. Although the locals are suspicious initially (first year or two) once they feel confident that confidentiality will be maintained they start to trust and open up” (CIG # 3 Rural Support Line 17/5/07 - Summary).

7.4.3 Supporting community resilience and building social capital

The negative impact of the drought ripples through the community and NB Support is an attempt to help arrest this ongoing negative effect by harnessing and strengthening the natural supportive resources within each local community. In this way, the resilience of the overall community is supported.

Community development theorists would understand this process as building capacity. As McKenzie (2007) states, “Capacity building involves human, social, physical, financial and natural capital. Human capital refers to the capability of individuals while social capital refers to the level to which social networks, relationships and processes within a community support individuals to exercise their capabilities. Physical capital refers to infrastructure; financial capital to goods and services produced through human effort including both physical and financial knowledge; and natural capital to the renewable and non-renewable resources found in nature; useful and required for human existence”. When natural and financial capital decline, increases in human and social capital can help maintain a communities’ overall capacity.

The World Health Organization identifies the development of social relations and strong supportive networks as vital to improve the health of individuals in the home, at work and in the community. It suggests that strong social supports give people the emotional and practical resources they need, while the sense of ‘belonging’ gives people a sense of being cared for and valued. These elements are seen to have a powerful protective effect on health and have the potential to reduce both individual physiological responses to stress and the incidence of depression. It also highlights that connecting people together in turn reduces social isolation — and that this is a vital factor in building healthier communities.

Work done by professional counsellors ideally should work in concert with the community’s natural ‘unofficial counsellors’. The NB Support program is an ideal way that counsellors can be involved in community development work – by sharing their expertise with local community members. When NB Support was first mooted, some counsellors expressed fears that it would dumb down their professional expertise or that people participating in NB Support would inappropriately act as counsellors. Our research shows that people out in the community are already operating as ‘natural counsellors / supporters’ – the question is not should they operate or not in these roles – they will, the question is — are they operating with or without support.

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28 Social Determinants of Health – World Health Organization
7.4.4  NB Support key learnings and recommendations

People affected by drought may not seek counselling but they do talk to someone. These support people can then get stressed themselves unless helped. Providing support to these ‘natural unofficial counsellors’ in the community can lead to more resilient communities. NB Support promotes links between local drought counsellors and people who have contact with (and provide support to) members of the population who won’t seek counselling.

Interest in NB Support suggests that the program could be used broadly to support communities facing many difficulties. In fact, more recent interest from interstate and subsequent facilitator training of counsellors from Tasmania suggest this program may have far reaching applicability for both different issues and different regions of Australia. The program has recently been received well in fire affected areas of Victoria.

The successful implementation of NB Support reflects the philosophy of the research: Bouverie providing support to local initiatives, informed by state-wide knowledge generated through the CIG-CIGAR network; drawing on local skills to train up local professionals who can support the natural supporters within local communities, thus promoting community resilience.

Another key element of community development for drought counsellors is networking and collaboration with people they may not usually meet. This was a positive outcome of the early difficulties noted in Larry Neeson’s No Bull report, “There are many examples of partnerships, some unexpected, that have formed throughout the region as a result of the combined drought response. And the work won’t end at the conclusion of the funding period” (No Bull - August 2008, p. 16). The most prominent example of an unlikely collaboration was the Looking Out For Your Neighbour community workshops – the story of which is told in the remainder of the chapter.

7.5  Case study two: Looking Out For Your Neighbour (LOFYN)

"I am reminded of our interdependence (as humans). As John Donne said – ‘no man... [no person]... is an island’. We need each other, if we are to survive.”

(Farmer at LOFYN workshop)

A positive outcome of the drought, and possibly all major traumas (C. Figley, 2008b) is that services and groups that might not traditionally work together join forces for the common good. The LOFYN project is an example of this, and is explored in the following sections.

7.5.1  Background

The "Looking Out For Your Neighbour” project was initiated by the Victorian Farmers’ Federation (VFF) Drought Taskforce and Social Policy Committees, whose members recognised the high levels of stress and ensuing isolation experienced by many farmers and families affected by drought and other related factors. Brenda McLachlan from the VFF social committee invited me to provide a series of planned workshops called Looking Out For Your Neighbour (LOFYN) to local farmers. The venue and advertising for the LOFYN was organised by local VFF branches. Bouverie’s involvement followed the sudden withdrawal of another urban—based workshop facilitator. Rather than provide the workshops as an external urban—based presenter, I suggested that local drought counsellors run the workshops as a way of linking local VFF members with local drought counsellors. I figured this would create valuable networks and referral pathways – similar to that achieved with NB Support. Through my direct links
with the Gippsland CIG, I was able to organise the planned pilot LOFYN workshop to go ahead; five
days after I was contacted. The pilot was conducted in Bairnsdale by CIG members, Peter Carr, Di
Robinson, Shirley Millard and Tracey Moffatt.

7.5.2 Pilot evaluation

Looking Out For Your Neighbours was piloted in Bairnsdale, Gippsland, in August 2007. While initially
conceptualised by The Bouverie Centre, the drought counsellors were asked to help develop the
content and facilitate the first four—hour session.

Whilst the initial workshop attracted only a small group of participants, the evaluation, combined with
resoundingly similar stories gathered by drought counsellors across the state, highlighted a need to
provide some information to farming people about signs and effects of stress and its relationship to
anxiety and depression. The pilot evaluation also suggested shorter sessions.

7.5.3 Description of the LOFYN project

The VFF provided funding for the pilot and funding was sought from DHS to implement the project
state-wide, which was ultimately successful. The VFF also received $50 000 from DHS and $500 was
passed on to local branches interested in hosting a LOFYN workshop for advertising, organising and
catering. The Bouverie Centre also contributed funds which allowed the research team to co—ordinate
and promote the LOFYN workshops via the CIG network. There were significant tensions as usually
experienced when three major groups attempt to collaborate on a significant project.

Based on the research findings, Bouverie staff were aware of the pervasive impact drought was having
on local communities: depleting already stretched resources and exhausting the traditional support
systems. One of the impacts of this can be seen in a reduction of some of the positive aspects of
interconnectedness, for which rural communities are well known. With community development
principles influencing our approach, the Bouverie team sought to design the LOFYN workshops to
promote local community action. The VFF Drought Co—ordinator, Brenda McLachlan had a vision, of
which the drought counsellors were wary, of creating a workforce of volunteer ‘counsellors’ to support
their neighbours.

Through an extensive negotiation, gradually the LOFYN workshops provided two basic roles, an
educative presentation about the impact of drought on individuals, families and communities and a
facilitated opportunity for local community action. The VFF made a further $500 available to LOFYN
participants to follow—up ideas that emerged from the initial workshops.

Because the workshop materials were designed to be tailored to reflect locally expressed needs, Elena
Tauridsky from the Bouverie team provided one—to—one support, consultation and the option of
workshop resources, such as power—point presentations etc (available www.bouverie.org.au). The
Bouverie Centre’s broad aim of connecting local drought counsellors with local VFF branches slowly
developed.

The LOFYN project is underpinned by community development principles, which assume that all
communities have strengths and skills that when tapped, can lead to unique and effective solutions.
When the local community itself defines its issues and develops collaborative projects that are led and
owned by local people, the solutions tend to be more effective and sustainable. The LOFYN workshops
were intended to provide an opportunity for people to share their visions of a connected community,
and to be a potential springboard to assist communities to access ideas, networks and resources that
could develop the connections within their own communities, a vision that was beautifully articulated by a farmer who participated in one of the workshops:

“... staying connected – it’s something we have to keep working at. It’s important to look out over our fences”. (Farmer at LOFYN workshop)

### 7.5.3.1 Development of resources

Each group involved in the collaboration provided their own expertise and resources. The VFF provided good media coverage for the project, which led to considerable media interest in No Bullshit Therapy. Brenda McLachlan recognised that vital information on available drought assistance was confusing in its complexity, and had not always reached farmers. In response, she produced a comprehensive ‘Grants Resource Manual’ which was provided to all participants at the conclusion of each workshop along with the Drought Pack information from Beyond Blue.

The Bouverie team produced and made available a workshop resource kit, including a suite of presentation materials, which was developed and modified over the first few months in response to feedback from LOFYN facilitators. The presentations were designed to support both a basic psycho—education model and a more interactive facilitated group discussion style workshop (See LOFYN report www.bouverie.org.au). The Bouverie Centre also provided local drought counsellors who were conducting the LOFYN workshops with individualised consultation and encouragement.

The drought counsellors who facilitated local LOFYN workshops often presented their own materials or a combination of their own and the Bouverie presentations.

### 7.5.3.2 Training and support

Each of the drought counsellors wanting to conduct LOFYN workshops received individual support (both by phone and / or in person) from The Bouverie Centre, which catered to their particular experience and requirements as workshop facilitators. This individualised training covered core elements of group work, assistance with facilitation ideas and support to adapt sessions to local needs.

Some drought counsellors also used it as an opportunity to talk through the elements of creating sustainable community development ideas, which had begun to emerge from their conversations with members of their local farming communities. Between February and July 2008, Bouverie provided 26 individual consultations to LOFYN facilitators and 24 LOFYN facilitation resource kits were provided.

### 7.5.4 Key outputs

- 16 Looking Out For Your Neighbours workshops have been held with 312 farmers (approximately 20 participants each) attending
- Bouverie offered $2000 to each regional CIG Network to support implementation
- $500 was provided by the VFF to support each workshop
- $500 was provided by the VFF to support initiatives that arose from initial workshops
- Final report available [www.bouverie.org.au](http://www.bouverie.org.au)
Figure 7.2: Number of completed LOFYN workshops February – July 2008.

Figure 7.3: LOFYN participant numbers per region

NB: LOFYN workshops continued past the time this report covers but The Bouverie Centre lost track of the numbers of workshops because the project was not refunded.
7.5.5 Evaluation of the LOFYN workshops in the field

Gathering feedback and data about the workshops, via written evaluation sheets, proved to be challenging. This highlighted the unique relationship between Bouverie and the drought counsellors in the regions: reciprocal good will but not necessarily a sense of obligation to attend to what are generally seen as ‘administrative’ tasks. In response to this challenge, phone interviews were conducted with the drought counsellor / facilitators as well as with some of the VFF branch representatives. As it happened, this elicited a far richer descriptive picture of the workshops than could have been achieved from a simple written feedback sheet. Examples of some of the quotes elicited are presented here:

“...it (the workshop) got people remembering how important it is to just drop in for a casual cuppa... remember how good the chats around the kitchen table are…”

"People became more aware of their health issues and followed them up. There’s been a lot of positive feedback.”

"People ended up making appointments with the Centrelink staff and the rural financial counsellors individually, because they had met them more informally first.”

One of the hidden outcomes of the project was that it brought the local drought counsellors in closer contact with the VFF, a marriage that would not necessarily have occurred. The conversations at the workshops illustrated that the ideas being generated to reconnect as a community were neither ‘rocket science’ nor particularly new, yet there was genuine interest in the ideas of staying connected with each other, as indicated by the following quote:

“Information about signs and symptoms of stress and depression are helpful, but just the simple act of staying connected is the lifeline.”
(Farmer at LOFYN workshop)

Other people spoke of the simple acts of human kindness as being central to well being (both mental and physical). At one workshop, a farmer related an anecdote of camaraderie at a recent fire training exercise. It was a great story which highlighted the way doing things together and having fun together (even when it’s serious) can build relationships between people, and open the door for other communication. In addition to connecting with others, the LOFYN workshops led to a number of community initiatives, some of which are listed below:

- A women’s gardening group – ‘Where weeding and words merge’.
- Re—instatement of a regular ‘Men’s Breakfast’.
- Getting local people and Centrelink workers together to support each other to fill out grant applications.
- Holding a regular community barbeque.
- Re—invigorating a social group for older people.
- Rekindling consciousness about keeping in touch with older people in the community who don’t need assistance but who would benefit from visits.
- Restarting a local VFF branch after a 4—year hiatus.
• Holding a ‘Women and Men’s health’ program for VFF branch members.
• Getting together to share a laugh, so that for a while you can stop thinking about what you
  SHOULD be doing.

The following indicates the mental health advantages of these community activities described above. Prior to getting local people together with Centrelink (point three) these people had not realised that many others were facing similar frustrations and embarrassments about not knowing how to fill out Centrelink forms. The simple act of coming together for a common purpose enabled them to share issues without the usual shaming practices around asking for assistance, as reflected below:

“People were looking around the room at the others ‘just like me’ … helping each other (fill in the grant applications)...talking about it ... sharing gripes and frustrations and having a laugh...”
(phone interview with a participating farmer).

The drought counsellors showed a remarkable adaptability in being able to modify the content of the workshops quickly (sometimes on the spot) to suit each group. Both the workshop resources and the individual training consultations were designed to encourage and support flexibility and a creative approach to the sessions.

**7.5.6 LOFYN key learnings and recommendations**

The Looking Out For Your Neighbour project has shown promise. It has indicated some of the potential benefits (with minimal funding), of drawing together organisations like the VFF with rural outreach counsellors / workers. The community workshops ignited a number of local activities that, with support, could add to the resilience of local communities. Formal support for local action is necessary at times of chronic drought and other intangible hardships because communities can become exhausted and lose touch with their natural resources.

‘Looking Out For Your Neighbours’ sessions, when conducted locally, have the potential to rekindle people’s innate knowledge of the benefits of staying connected with each other, to build useful support structures and help reconnect communities to their local knowledge and resources.

• Projects like ‘Looking Out For Your Neighbour (LOFYN) need to be funded over a longer term to make a significant difference.
• Over time, LOFYN needs to engage other local networks, such as the CFA, local schools, service clubs, CWA etc.
• Linking community projects that emerge from LOFYN with more substantially funded community development initiatives would increase the scale of potential projects and stimulate interest.
• Providing flexible resources is important because each local region is unique and requires individualised workshops and facilitators.
• There is a need to engage with a new workforce to facilitate and support the LOFYN workshops, given that State-funded drought counsellors are no longer funded. This could be found from amongst the federally funded drought workers, and / or from within the general counselling and support workforce of agencies such as community health services.
• Workers who undertake workshop facilitation need training and support or mentoring to develop their ideas, skills and confidence.
• Outcomes need to be documented and the ongoing program evaluated.
• Good outcomes from the LOFYN project need to be publicised in order to promote the program, and also to indicate the power of supporting local knowledge and resourcefulness in the face of this and future hardships facing rural communities.

Drawing on the key learnings from the overall research, including the two case—studies described in this chapter, I present the key learnings and recommendations for this chapter.

7.6 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: Community development and counselling are inextricably and intrinsically linked in drought response work. People affected by drought may not seek counselling but they do talk to someone. These support people can then get stressed themselves unless helped. Providing support to these ‘natural unofficial counsellors in the community’ can lead to more resilient communities.

NB Support is one example of providing support to the natural counsellors in the community. It promotes links between local drought counsellors and people who have contact with (and provide support to) members of the population who won’t seek professional counselling. Another key element of community development for drought counsellors is the need for networking and collaboration between groups who may not usually work together, this was most evident in the LOFYN project which brought drought counsellors and the VFF members together.

7.6.1 Policy and practice implications

i. Drought response policy should reflect the inextricable and intrinsic link between community development and direct services such as counselling.

ii. Interest in NB Support suggests that the program could be used broadly to support communities facing major difficulties.

iii. Approaches that train up local professionals to support the members of the general local community to support people affected by natural disasters should be further investigated.

iv. Support for innovative projects that connect key groups who do not typically connect should be considered as a way of promoting connection and addressing community division which can occur following severe natural disasters.
CHAPTER EIGHT

8 HOW TO STRUCTURE DROUGHT COUNSELLING SERVICES

8.1 Chapter orientation

The research question primarily addressed in this chapter: How should drought counselling services be set up for future droughts?

In this chapter I draw on the key learnings documented in the previous data chapters and the specific recommendations that emerged within the CIG – CIGAR network. It takes the shape of a summary chapter, designed to translate the detailed findings of the research into recommendations for responding to drought in the future.

I begin by pointing out the need for longer term planning to deal with the future impact of climate change and extreme weather, including the chronic, intangible, diffuse and unacknowledged impacts of drought. A theme throughout the chapter is the call for co-ordinating drought and other support services across federal, state and local governments and structures for local co-ordination and service networking which were successful in the current research. I endorse the call from CIG members that ongoing positions are more economically possible if services respond to rural change in general, including drought, fire, flood, climate change and socio-economic change in rural areas. I recommend that support structures for these rural change workers need to be both at the level of the host agency and also networked across the state, backed up by improvements in conditions and professional identity. I recommend that connections be established between drought counsellors and academic institutions to facilitate the documentation of practice wisdom and the development of innovative research. Documentation will help avoid the loss of practice wisdom and the building of a knowledge base rather than the current cycle of re-inventing the wheel each time a drought occurs.

I conclude the chapter by summarising what we have learnt from drought counselling services, including the need to intrinsically integrate community development and direct services within the structure of policy, funding, service delivery and the skills of front-line workers. I argue that counsellors require skills that take them out of their offices and into the community and job descriptions and that allow outreach and the combining of practical and emotional supports.

8.1.1 The need for longer term planning

The chronic nature of drought and the long term impacts of it naturally require long term planning. However, the cyclical nature of drought makes long term planning difficult at all levels; from government funding to service delivery, as explored in Chapter 5.

Rural and remote communities require time to understand services and to build trust in services that they are not familiar with such as counselling. The specialist drought workforce requires long term working conditions in order to develop an effective skill base in a difficult and challenging area. Given there is limited funding for rural support, co-ordination of what funding exists is essential, if longer term planning is going to be possible.
8.1.2 Co-ordination of funding

The idea of co-ordinating policy, funding and services across federal, state and local levels of government is endorsed in principle and has been sought by other drought counselling evaluations (e.g. Johnston, 2003). After 18 months State-funded drought counsellors had established reasonable case-loads, effective formal and informal networks had begun co-ordinating with other local services. The CIG-CIGAR support network was well established and embraced by drought counsellors across the state. At this point, just as people affected by the drought began to seek help, State-funded drought counsellors lost their funding. At the same time, two different Federal Government departments independently (DoHA and FaHSCIA) released funding for drought counselling and drought response via the GP divisions, health and welfare organisations and local government. These auspice agencies found recruitment difficult. The existing State-funded drought counselling workforce across the state began to seek other jobs as their contracts came to an end, thus practice wisdom was lost. The general public and the service system can easily become cynical and disheartened by the duplication of services.

8.2 Structures that promote co-ordination and networking

Since the impact of trauma is so pervasive and systemic – so must the recovery (C. Figley, 2008a). Good intentions or the existing personal networks of individual workers are not sufficient to promote co-ordination and networking between key services.

8.2.1 Different structures locally are required to co-ordinate services

Whilst each region is different culturally, some structures seemed more effective than others. Regions that established both local drought recovery committees, which helped co-ordinate the broad range of services needed to respond to drought, and networking groups for specific professions, such as the CIG network for drought counsellors, seemed most effective. Drought recovery committees facilitated by decision makers at a local council level and with a broad representation were reported as effective by drought counsellors.

8.2.1.1 Drought counsellors or rural change outreach workers

Drought counsellors were clear that their role should be ongoing and should be more generic than simply responding to drought. People present to counsellors describing problems with general financial, relationship, family or emotional issues, (which may be exacerbated by the drought), but do not name drought as the presenting problem. I endorse the call from CIG members that ongoing positions are more economically possible if services respond to rural change in general, including drought, fire, flood, climate change and socio-economic change in rural areas. Although the term is still contested, a generic term of skilled workers to respond to rural change is needed – possibly called rural outreach workers.

8.3 Professionalisation of rural outreach workers

To put it simply, drought counsellors were asked to do a tough job and yet were rewarded with poor working conditions. In order to avoid the vicarious traumatisation of the recovery workforce – there is
a need to build greater professionalisation into the workforce. This will be money well spent because this research suggests it leads to greater effectiveness, morale and sustainability.

Whilst ongoing employment is the most important component of professionalising the drought response workforce, realistic job descriptions and adequate professional support to do the work is also required, including:

- Induction
- Integration into the host agency of drought work
- Specialist networks across the state to develop drought work
- Professional training and skill development and ways to document practice wisdom

8.4 Local organisational support structures

8.4.1 Realistic job descriptions

Late into the research some job descriptions were still restrictive and unrealistic. There is an indication that previous drought evaluations also had to modify unrealistic counselling targets (e.g. Australian Healthcare Associates, 2006). It is a clear recommendation of the current research that drought counselling targets need to account for:

- A combination of community development and direct services
- Outreach work
- Facility to provide practical supports and emotional support

8.5 Skills required in drought counselling

8.5.1 Outreach capacity

It is a clear finding of the research that drought counsellors need to be skilled in outreach and prepared to practice this approach – if they are going to reach the range of people needing help.

8.5.1.1 Capacity to provide practical support

As well as a good knowledge of practical supports available, drought counsellors found they ideally needed access to discretionary funds, because many farmers, business people and members of the community will only pick up the phone for practical support such as financial assistance, access to feed etc. Whilst assistance to complete paperwork for Centrelink support may provide longer term relief, easy access to discretionary funds seemed to make an inordinate difference and helped with engagement for counselling work ‘down the track’ as intimated by the following counselling example:

“A couple with two kids who suffered from ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). They had moved to the area but couldn't get bond assistance because they were asset rich but cash poor. Daryl bought several DVD games for $20 for the kids which really helped. Simple things can make a big difference” (CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary).
Drought counsellors reported that people they helped had very specific requests and small amounts of funds sometimes led to gains larger than the amount provided. For example, Jim from Gippsland had a million dollar debt but was most stressed about not being able to afford a calculator for his school aged kids. The local drought counsellor’s use of discretionary funds for school costs made a significant difference. It is important that funds be available with little formal assessment and red tape, so that the drought counsellor can be seen to be responsive and shame is minimised. “People want practical assistance without making multiple applications to relief funds” (CIG # 1 Grampians 19/3/07). Another drought counsellor was able to provide a new washing machine to a family with small children within 24 hrs, which increased the credibility of the drought counsellor and “helped the family maintain some sort of normalcy” (Drought counsellor’s talk at the NBT workshop Stawell).

8.5.2 A holistic approach to drought response: A combination of community development, drought counselling and support for the unofficial community counsellors

Community development and direct services need to be integrated across the host agency and ideally within each worker. Both counsellors and community development workers also need to recognise and provide support to the unofficial community counsellors who although provide much of the emotional and practical support to people directly affected by drought may do so invisibly and eventually, if drought is long term, maybe vulnerable to experiencing compassion fatigue.

8.6 Research and documentation of practice wisdom

8.6.1 Documentation of practice wisdom

As outlined in detail in Chapter 4, there is a need for strategies for recording and sharing the practice wisdom from drought so it is not lost. Ideas suggested in detail in Chapter 4 included:

- Documentation of practice wisdom
- Registers of trained practitioners
- Orientation packages for new and future staff
- ‘Storying’ the drought experience
- Community action plans

8.6.2 Further research

As called for in Chapter 6, we require the research and development of counselling strategies that are culturally sensitive and effective for rural communities. The current research suggests that rural people may have negative views about counselling until they have it. Further research is clearly warranted to develop models of practice that combine counselling (direct service) with community development strategies. Research is also required to determine how best to present the advantages of counselling to rural communities.

A rich area for further research is exploring the impacts of and effective interventions for chronic hardship, trauma and disaster. There would be valuable links with the impacts and treatments associated with chronic illness. When I spoke to Charles Figley recently (2008a) he did not know of
any work constructing chronic experiences like drought and mental illness as a chronic trauma, and yet this conceptualisation has been very productive for The Bouverie Centre’s work with mental health. John Brier (2002) and Judith Herman point out that abuse that happens in an ongoing way affects the personal identity of the survivor. The current study provides examples that suggest that the impact of chronic hardship, trauma or disaster that occurs in drought also greatly impacts on the personal identity of the people most severely affected.

8.7 Community education and media campaigns

This research calls for general community education about the invisible nature of some impacts of drought. Media campaigns, also called for by the Australian Healthcare Associates (2006) are required to educate the rural community about drought and its effects on individuals, families and communities and to promote effective culturally sensitive ways of providing emotional support – linked with whole of community approaches.

8.8 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learning: The current study supports the call from previous drought counselling evaluations for co-ordinating policy, funding and service delivery across the federal, state and local levels of government. Services should be co—ordinated but guided by local needs. A key outcome of such co-ordination with local input would be the increased possibility of long term planning and ongoing services that could become known and accepted by local communities.

8.8.1 Policy and practice implications

i. Holistic services where counsellors and community development workers work in concert.

ii. Innovative projects to support the unofficial community counsellors who, although providing much of the emotional and practical support to people directly affected by drought do so invisibly and eventually, if drought is long term, are likely to experience compassion fatigue and avoid this role.

iii. Structures are needed that promote service co-ordination and networking at all levels, including front line workers. Local input is required to influence service delivery because each area is affected differently and has a unique regional culture.

iv. Any workforce employed to address drought, or fire, flood, extreme weather and rural change responses, needs to be supported and professionalised, including job descriptions and targets that support:
  • A combination of community development and direct services
  • Outreach work
  • Facility to provide practical supports and emotional support

v. Further research that feeds back into service delivery.

vi. Documentation of practice wisdom that can inform future drought and other extreme weather responses.

vii. Media campaigns that educate the general community about the disenfranchised nature of drought, and its effects on individuals, families and communities, and promote cohesion.
CHAPTER NINE

9 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

9.1 Chapter orientation

*Primarily addressed in this chapter: A summary of all questions, findings and recommendations.*

In this chapter I summarise the key learnings documented in this report.

I begin by trying to summarise the complex and detailed material presented in this report. I point out that the report is intentionally comprehensive in order to address the lack of documentation around drought counselling. I acknowledge that many will not read the entire report because of its length and detail, hence the need for a summary.

I conclude the chapter outlining the limitations of the research and I make suggestions for future research.

9.2 Executive summary

Drought is a chronic, intangible, pervasive and intermittent disenfranchised natural disaster that has exacerbated the impact of socio-economic and climatic change on rural communities. Drought also affects people and businesses differently and at different times. Because of these qualities, drought can isolate individuals and place great stress on relationships within families and within the community, leading to increased mental health issues, alcohol and drug use and domestic violence at an individual and family level, and inequity, division and exhaustion at a community level.

These qualities also allow hard won practice wisdom and service memory of drought recovery to be easily lost, as the periods between droughts may be long and the specialist drought workforce is redeployed due to stop—start funding. Although the risk of drought is greater for farmers than fire, farmers and the community are probably better prepared for fire than drought because the community does not face the perils of drought each year like as it does the risk of fire. Drought is difficult to prepare for and to respond to because of its chronic, intangible, pervasive nature.

Because of these difficulties, long term, co—ordinated planning is required, namely:

- Co—ordinated funding across federal, state and local government.
- Long term services comprising skilled workers networked and co—ordinated with other services. Skilled workers, possibly called rural outreach workers, should be trained in responding to rural change in general (e.g. drought, fire, flood, climate change, socio—economic changes) rather than drought only.
- Local regional multi—agency networks (e.g. drought recovery committees).

The skilled workforce providing ongoing support for the range of difficulties facing rural communities, need support to do their difficult work in order to avoid isolation and burnout, namely:
• Support from within their host agencies and networking opportunities with other similar rural outreach workers.
• Training and support in innovative, effective ways of working with drought and other difficulties in a rural environment, including outreach, approaches that are culturally sensitive to small rural groups and strategies that integrate counselling and a whole of community approach.
• Access to collaborative research, development and documentation between front line workers and academic institutions to build greater evidence based and practice based evidence around rural change, exacerbated by natural disasters. This work will need to challenge current practices and be guided by innovation that flexibly responds to the constraints and opportunities of rural practice.
• Job descriptions and employment conditions that reflect the service delivery needs outlined in recent drought evaluations, including this report.

Finally because drought is a disenfranchised natural disaster that creates major hardship and pain at an individual, family and community level, a concerted effort needs to be made by government to lead a community awareness program about the impact of drought. Finally, the community members who provide support to others but eventually feel overwhelmed need appropriate supports called for in this and previous drought evaluations.

9.3 Limitations of the research and directions for future research

9.3.1 Direct clinical feedback

Direct feedback from clients was disappointing. Client numbers were low in new services at the start of the research – which was embarrassing for drought counsellors whose main job was to see clients in face—face counselling. Six months into the research, the drought counsellors case loads increased but there was a general feeling that the required paperwork was overwhelming, and that clients may retreat — emotionally, physically, or both — if counsellors pull out their bundle of questionnaires and informed consents.

Consequently there is a need to integrate research into the clinical work and to promote innovative research methods such as farmer—led grass roots research. This suggestion emerged during the current research but a funding application was not successful, and hence remains ripe for future exploration.

9.3.2 Links with other data bases

The actual numbers of direct clients seen each month by the drought counsellors was only estimated generally via the CIG meetings, but was not comprehensive or necessarily accurate. Much of the work completed by drought counsellors was not accurately recorded, which had a slightly de-motivating impact on the counsellors, but also missed an opportunity to accurately determine the mix between direct clinical work and community development work.

With a greater lead time and better planning, clinical research would link better with both the drought counsellors work activity and other relevant statewide data bases, including rates of alcohol rated health and welfare conditions, rates of domestic violence, mental health admissions, suicide and suicide attempts.
9.4 Conclusion

Australia is likely to face an increase in drought conditions given predictions of climatic change. Combined with socio-economic changes in rural areas, Australia will need to recognise and respond to its status as one of the most climatically variable and dry continents of the world. I decided to provide a comprehensive report even though it may overwhelm many readers, for three main reasons:

1. The history of lack of documentation in the area of responding to the social impacts of drought;
2. To do justice to the rich practice knowledge developed by the drought counsellors over the course of this 18 month project; and
3. It is difficult to capture the complexity of drought succinctly.

Hopefully this detailed report, which draws on the direct experiences of over one hundred drought workers across the state, their colleagues and clients, will provide a useful contribution to the evidence base and practice base which will guide responses to some of the inevitable challenges Australia will face in the future.
10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix A – Drought Counsellor Pre and Post Questionnaire

Drought Counsellor Questionnaire (Pre and Post Project)  No........

Thank you for sparing some of your valuable time to complete this questionnaire. It is designed to help us develop more effective ways to help rural people affected by drought.

Section one: Basic Demographic Data

Name: ........................................... Age: ..........years

Male / Female (please circle one)

What is your job / profession? Years in this job / profession? ........... years

Please indicate how much experience you have in the following areas

General counselling

|_________________|__________________|__________________|______________|
|No experience     | A small amount  | Average Experience| Above average |
|                  |                |                   |               |

Rural counselling

|_________________|__________________|__________________|______________|
|No experience     | A small amount  | Average Experience| Above average |
|                  |                |                   |               |

Working in a rural community

|_________________|__________________|__________________|______________|
|No experience     | A small amount  | Average Experience| Above average |
|                  |                |                   |               |

Responding to natural disasters / trauma work

|_________________|__________________|__________________|______________|
|No experience     | A small amount  | Average Experience| Above average |
|                  |                |                   |               |

Living in a rural community
No experience | A small amount | Average Experience | Above average | A lot of experience

Community development work generally

No experience | A small amount | Average Experience | Above average | A lot of experience

Community development work rurally

No experience | A small amount | Average Experience | Above average | A lot of experience

Living / working in the farming sector

No experience | A small amount | Average Experience | Above average | A lot of experience

Have you spent most your life in

[ ] a major city [20 000+ pop] (Please tick one only)

[ ] the country?

Do you consider yourself a local— in the area you have been employed as a drought counsellor? Yes / No

How many years have you lived in this local community? 0—5, 6—10, 11—15, 16 + (circle one)

Please list all community groups you belong to or have belonged to in a local community. For example; CWA, CFA, Sporting Clubs, School Council, ZONTA… Please underline the groups on your list that are in the same area as where you are working as a drought counsellor.

What experience or activity do you think has best prepared you for working with drought affected communities?

Section two: Ideas about working with drought affected communities

From your point of view, what is the biggest decision families typically have to make about their property/business/work because of the current drought?
Please indicate how likely, in your opinion, drought affected men would talk about personal and family problems with the following people?

A Doctor (GP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
<th>Highly likely</th>
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A Friend

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<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
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A Partner / Spouse

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<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
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Extended Family

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<tr>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
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</table>

A Financial Counsellor

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<tr>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
<th>Highly likely</th>
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</table>

Another Man

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<tr>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
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A Woman

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<tr>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
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A Drought Counsellor

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<th>Moderately likely</th>
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</table>
A Bank Manager / Accountant

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
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List any other people a man is more likely to talk to about personal and family problems:

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<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
<th>Highly likely</th>
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</table>

Please indicate how likely, in your opinion, drought affected women would talk about personal and family problems with the following people?

A Doctor (GP)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
<th>Highly likely</th>
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</table>

A Friend

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
<th>Highly likely</th>
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</table>

A Partner / Spouse

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
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Extended Family

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<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
<th>Highly likely</th>
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</table>

A Financial Counsellor

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
<th>Highly likely</th>
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</table>

Another Woman

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not likely at all</th>
<th>Possibly</th>
<th>Moderately likely</th>
<th>Commonly</th>
<th>Highly likely</th>
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</thead>
</table>
A Man

| Not likely at all | Possibly | Moderately likely | Commonly | Highly likely |

A Drought Counsellor

| Not likely at all | Possibly | Moderately likely | Commonly | Highly likely |

A Bank Manager / Accountant

| Not likely at all | Possibly | Moderately likely | Commonly | Highly likely |

List any other people a woman is more likely to talk to about personal and family problems:

..............................................................................................................................................................

..............................................................................................................................................................

What do you think you can do as a counsellor to create a good working relationship with rural clients?

What, as a counsellor, are your greatest skills relevant to counselling drought affected clients?

1.

2.

3.

Section three: Your ideas on what makes a good drought counsellor

Rate how important you think the following dimensions are in making an ideal drought counsellor

Warmth

| Not at all | Somewhat important | Moderately important | Very important | Extremely important |

227
Honesty

| ___________________ | ___________________ | ___________________ | _______________ |
| Not at all          | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Directness

| ___________________ | ___________________ | ___________________ | _______________ |
| Not at all          | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Avoiding jargon

| ___________________ | ___________________ | ___________________ | _______________ |
| Not at all          | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Talking about difficulties Upfront

| ___________________ | ___________________ | ___________________ | _______________ |
| Not at all          | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Care

| ___________________ | ___________________ | ___________________ | _______________ |
| Not at all          | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Please circle the **two** dimensions most helpful to you in conducting your own work.

Warmth, Honesty, Directness, Avoiding jargon, Talking about difficulties Upfront, Care

How confident are you as a counsellor in working with?

**Rural People**

| ___________________ | ___________________ | ___________________ | _______________ |
| Not at all          | Somewhat confident  | Moderately confident | Confident      | Very confident |

**Men who are suspicious of counseling**

| ___________________ | ___________________ | ___________________ | _______________ |
| Not at all          | Somewhat confident  | Moderately confident | Confident      | Very confident |
Farmers affected by drought

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Moderately confident</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
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Women in general

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Moderately confident</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
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Suicidal or severely /depressed clients

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<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Moderately confident</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
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Men in general

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Moderately confident</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
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Working with families (more than one person)

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<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Moderately confident</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
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</table>

Working with children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Moderately confident</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
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Working with a wider community to support drought affected families

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<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Moderately confident</th>
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Seeking clients through non-health / welfare networks eg Bank managers etc

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<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Moderately confident</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
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</table>
Working with angry men

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat confident  | Moderately confident | Confident      |

Working with family conflict

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat confident  | Moderately confident | Confident      |

Working with people who are reluctant to talk about personal issues

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat confident  | Moderately confident | Confident      |

In your work approach, indicate the importance you place on each of the following dimensions when working with rural people affected by drought.

Education / Information Giving

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Emotional Empathy

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Practical Help

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Family approaches

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

Individual approaches

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |
Community Development approaches

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<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
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<td>Very important</td>
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Counselling approaches (in general)

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<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Moderately important</td>
<td>Very important</td>
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Section four: Your views about how best to present counselling services to drought affected rural communities

A lot of rural people are suspicious about the word counselling. Please suggest a more appealing name?

..........................................................

List the 3 main reasons why you think rural people are reluctant to seek counselling.

1.

2.

3.

What are the 3 most important tasks a new drought counsellor has to do to successfully promote a drought counselling service?

1.

2.

3.

What are the 3 most important things to consider if a client is suicidal?
1. 
2. 
3. 

List the three main principles that guide your approach to a first session with a drought client.

1. 
2. 
3. 

What do you think people living in the country need to do to look after their well being?

In good times:

In bad times:

Please suggest 3 alternative methods of conveying mental health information to rural people other than face to face counselling, that you think would be effective?

1. 
2. 
3. 

What, in your opinion, would be the 3 most important simple health promotion messages to get across to people affected by drought, in order to promote emotional well being?
Thank you for your thoughtful contribution.
## 10.2 Appendix B – Problem and Progress sheet

### Client Problem and Progress Sheet

Complete with client during first session and review at session two, three and at completion.

Worker: ____________________________

Client No: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 (assign number serially)

Gender: M / F          Age: .... years          Individual / Family (Mo, Fa, Son, Daughter, other)

Occupation: ____________________________

Date of each contact: (circle date of reviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main 4 presenting problems</th>
<th>Degree of Burden the problem causes (1—10)</th>
<th>What most helped reduce the Burden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(complete during 1st session)</td>
<td>(complete during 1st session &amp; repeat at 2nd, 3rd and final session)</td>
<td>(complete at the end of each session)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: |____|__6__|____|__3__|____|__2__|____|__1__|____|
No Burden | Extreme Burden
1. ……………………………… |____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|         ………...………………………… |
No Burden | Extreme Burden
2. ……………………………… |____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|         ………...………………………… |
No Burden | Extreme Burden
3. ……………………………… |____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|         ………...………………………… |
No Burden | Extreme Burden
4. ……………………………… |____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|         ………...………………………… |
No Burden | Extreme Burden

Add new problems after 1st session

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
5. ……………………………… |____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|         ………...………………………… |
No Burden | Extreme Burden
6. ……………………………… |____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|         ………...………………………… |
No Burden | Extreme Burden

Use back of sheet if more space is require
10.3 Appendix C – Takeaways

We recommend you keep your takeaway as a record

Sheet no:.................. Date:...........
Counsellor:.....................
Your next appointment is on:..................
10.4 Appendix D – Client feedback and advice questionnaire (post counselling)

Client Feedback and Advice Questionnaire (Post Counselling)  
Code: Counsellor’s initials + #..........  

Thank you for sparing some of your valuable time to provide your feedback and advice. Your views will help us develop more effective ways to help rural people affected by drought. This questionnaire will be linked to other information you have provided for the research but will be anonymous.

Section one: Basic Demographic Data

Age: ............years  How many years have you been in drought? .......years

Male / Female (please circle one)

What is your job / occupation:  Years in this job / occupation? ............ years

If farmer, how long has your been family been on the land? ..................... years

How has the drought affected your family relationships?

Bad ways:

Good ways:

How have you been affected by the drought?
How would you describe the affect of the drought on your family’s income?

a. Eliminated it completely [ ]
b. Reduced it to its lowest point ever [ ]
c. Reduced it substantially [ ]
d. Reduced it below average [ ]
e. Had little or no effect [ ]

From your point of view, what has been the biggest decision your family has made so far about your property/business/work because of the drought?

Prior to counselling, who did you talk to about the personal and family difficulties you faced?

No—one [ ] Partner / Spouse [ ] Immediate family [ ] Extended family [ ]
Friend [ ] GP [ ] Financial Counsellor [ ] Bank Manager [ ] Accountant [ ]
Religious leader [ ] other ..................................................

Section two: Feedback about the counselling you received

How did you hear about the counselling service?

What got on to actually attend or use the service?
What was helpful about the work you did with your counsellor?

What was not so helpful about the work you did with the counsellor?

What did your counsellor do to create a good working relationship?

What motivated you to keep going once you decided to attend counselling?

Have things got better for you? Yes / No

If yes, what is your theory of how change occurred? (why did things got better)
If no, what is your theory of why change has not occurred? (why didn’t things get better)

What gave you hope that counselling would help you feel better?

What was it about your counsellor that made you expect that things would get better?

What was your counsellor’s greatest skill? .................................................................

Apart from the work you did with your counsellor, what helped you feel better?
Outside of counselling, what helped you and your family cope better with the impact of the drought?

How often were you and your counsellor working on the same issues?

Always [ ]  Almost always [ ]  Generally [ ]  Sometimes [ ]  Seldom [ ]

**Section three: Your ideas on what makes a good drought counsellor**

Rate how important you think the following dimensions are in making an ideal drought counsellor

**Warmth**

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ____________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

**Honesty**

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ____________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

**Directness**

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ____________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |

**Avoiding jargon**

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ____________ |
| Not at all         | Somewhat important  | Moderately important | Very important |
Talking about difficulties Upfront

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all | Somewhat important | Moderately important | Very important | Extremely important |

Care

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all | Somewhat important | Moderately important | Very important | Extremely important |

Please circle the two most important dimensions your counsellor did or showed that you think made counselling work for you.

Warmth, Honesty, Directness, Avoiding jargon, Talking about difficulties Upfront, Care

Before meeting the counsellor, how confident were you that counselling would help you?

| __________________ | __________________ | __________________ | ______________ |
| Not at all | Somewhat important | Moderately important | Very important | Extremely important |

Describe the perfect counsellor (in your own words)
Section four: We would like your advice!

A lot of people are suspicious about the word counselling. What would be a more appealing name for this kind of service? ..........................

You may be aware that lots of rural people are reluctant to seek counselling. Why is this — in your opinion?

What would your advice be about how best to help people who live in the country who are feeling suicidal, but are reluctant to seek help?

What practical strategies do you think would work best to help people who are emotionally devastated by the impact of drought?

What do you think people living in the country need to do to look after their well being?

In good times:

In bad times:
How, in your opinion, do you think the counsellor s in your local area, could make counselling more appealing to men?

How, in your opinion, do you think the counsellor s in your local area, could make counselling more appealing to women?

In your local area, what would be the best place to provide education about “how to help your family through tough times”?

How would you suggest health services help people who:

1. Hate or are suspicious of counselling:

2. Don’t like people feeling sorry for them:

3. Don’t like charity:
Do you have any other thoughts that may help provide better emotional support to people affected by drought?

Would you interested in being interviewed with your counsellor about what helped you so that this could inform work with other people affected by drought?

Yes [ ] No [ ] If Yes please provide Name:..............................................

Contact phone or email:.................................................................

If you don’t want to give your name, let your counsellor know you are interested in being interviewed.

Thank you for your thoughtful contribution!
11 REFERENCES


CIG # 1 Gippsland 23/3/07 - Summary.
CIG # 1 Grampians 19/3/07.
CIG # 1 Hume 21/3/07 - Summary.
CIG # 1 Loddon Mallee 19/3/07 - Summary.
CIG # 1 Rural Support Line 22/3/07 - Summary.
CIG # 2 Barwon South West 13/3/08 - Summary.
CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary.
CIG # 2 Grampians 16/4/07 - Summary.
CIG # 2 Hume 18/4/07 - Summary.
CIG # 2 Loddon Mallee 16/4/07 - Summary.
CIG # 2 Rural Support Line 19/4/07 - Minutes.
CIG # 3 Barwon South West 22/4/08 - Summary.
CIG # 3 Gippsland 25/5/07 - Summary.


Shane Weir - personal communication. In J. Young (Ed.).


