Farm Gate Cold Calling: an open or shut case?

An Evaluation of the Practices of Farm Gate Cold-Calling in the Campaspe Shire
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in the Campaspe Shire

January 2007 • September 2008

This document has been prepared for
the Campaspe Primary Care Partnership by

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1. Executive summary

Cold calling, as an engagement approach has been practised in various forms in several regions of the Department of Human Services (DHS) across the State of Victoria, as a valuable adjunct to the provision of services and support to people who would not have sought out assistance and are otherwise difficult to reach.

In 2006, the Campaspe Primary Care Partnership (PCP) member agencies, which included local health services and other members of the Shire of Campaspe’s Drought Social Recovery Committee, agreed to apply a consistent and collaborative approach to support farming families within the Campaspe Shire area. The outcome was the development of a co-ordinated approach termed the Farm Gate Pathway Model, which arose from an initial pilot of cold calling undertaken in 2005-06. Early reports had revealed a promising uptake of both practical and psychological supports made available and, as a result, Cold Calling became a key drought response practice in the Campaspe Shire.

Workers who undertook the calls spoke about seeking the most effective ways to respond to the needs of people in their rural communities while protecting the privacy and dignity of each person they visited. Despite opposition raised by some counselling professionals that the calls would be seen as unwelcome and counter productive, callers reported this assertive outreach activity enabled them to create a first link with farmers who would not otherwise seek help, and to provide a personal element to otherwise faceless organisations. They reported that they were not being turned away without at least a brief ‘g’day” and an opportunity to pass on some valuable information about services and grants available.

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.

There is no definitive response to the question of whether or not to cold call. While the evaluation drew from the experiences of a small group of farmers and workers, those who were interviewed spoke primarily of a very positive experience. Their reflections on the multiple factors influencing the practice, rather than simply on their own outcomes, provide valuable critique from which much can be learned. Beyond that, it is possible only to speculate on the spread of these experiences and responses in a wider population.

The voices of the people who were called on at their farmhouses, at milking sheds, in paddocks over the farm gate or on the roadside, and those workers who made those visits, together create a rich, multi-storied foundation on which to further build much needed avenues to provide support to farming communities.

‘A number or brochure that says to ring something or other, or someone… this means nothing. But if you know the person then you’ll ring that person. You can’t undervalue that within a community.’

Interview with farmer - December 2008
2. Introduction

‘Cold Calling’ is a practice with roots planted in a time before the establishment of shop front businesses or the ease (or intrusion) of electronic and other telecommunications. The practice of hawking wares, unannounced, from door to door is one that often elicits eye rolling and a sense of irritation. Privacy is protected and intrusion from those peddling merchandise, offering ‘hot deals’ or religious salvation, either by phone or in person, is generally not viewed as welcome.

It is interesting then to see the principles of cold calling applied purposefully as a strategy to engage rural people, who are stereotypically considered to jealously guard their privacy. Employing the practice of cold calling to address the impact of the current drought comes at a time when isolation faced by rural people is particularly widespread: not simply the isolation that comes from geographic distance, but the isolation that comes from enduring hardship with pride, stoicism and a gritty determination to ‘get through this alone’.

‘Farm Gate Cold Calling’ is an assertive outreach approach to support people affected by drought that is practised with some variations in different parts of the state and by a range of health and welfare workers. However all these approaches also embrace some fundamental similarities. Rather than selling anything or expecting any predetermined outcome, it ‘offers’ something (ie. emotional and practical support), at no cost or obligation. The practice was developed in response to the growing recognition that many drought affected farmers were not seeking out the traditional support services available through local agencies, and was informed by similar practices that had been undertaken during past drought conditions.

The initial pilot\(^1\), from which the Farm Gate Cold Calling Model of co-ordinated service delivery arose, was trialled in one community. It yielded results which were remarkable enough to prompt a closer investigation: to explore if this model could be replicated across other communities, with equally positive outcomes. It was with this intention that a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to Cold Calling was established and embraced by the many agencies that make up the Campaspe Primary Care Partnership. An initial internal review of the Campaspe Shire’s Farm Gate practices was informal but showed promise. The Campaspe PCP understood that future planning of Cold Calling as a viable practice could benefit from an evaluation by an external research team; hence the current evaluation was commissioned.

\(^1\) As presented in “A couple of Jars of Chutney” forum presentation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACRONYM</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIGs</td>
<td>Co-operative Inquiry Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Department of Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSRC</td>
<td>(Shire of Campaspe) Drought Social Recovery Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRSRN</td>
<td>Campaspe PCP Drought &amp; Rural Support Recovery Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Exceptional Circumstances (disaster status leading to financial support to affected regions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPs</td>
<td>General Medical Practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCP</td>
<td>Primary Care Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC</td>
<td>Rural Financial Counselling</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER TERMS</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold Caller</td>
<td>The terms ‘worker’, ‘cold caller’ and ‘visitor’ have been used interchangeably throughout this document, and refer to any paid or unpaid worker who undertook ‘Farm Gate Cold Calling’ work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Is a term used to cover both women and men who are involved in a farm business, regardless of their role (ref. p 22).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Background to the evaluation

With the establishment of the Shire of Campaspe Drought Social Recovery Committee (DSRC), a growing awareness of farmers who were isolating themselves was becoming apparent as workers shared their knowledge of what was happening in their communities. Whilst community events and information workshops related to drought were acknowledged as valuable, the Committee determined the best way to engage farmers would be on an individual basis and in their own environment. It was hoped that through this tailored approach, they could ensure farmers were accessing appropriate assistance, and provide an opportunity for anxious, stressed or depressed farmers to talk with a counsellor.

The initial Cold Calling work, which underpins the development of the Farm Gate Cold Calling Pathway, was undertaken by two workers from the Campaspe PCP in 2005-06, and involved visits to 120 Irrigators in the region. A simple evaluation of the visits by the workers indicated that 30% of the farmers accepted some form of practical assistance and 68% engaged in at least one psychological counselling session with local Health Services. Given the difficulties reported in engaging rural people who are affected by drought and other extremes of weather in counselling, these figures were seen as very promising.

One of the original participating workers, interviewed for the current evaluation, recalls that their initial intention had been to visit each farm for about ten minutes, and that they had estimated knocking on 20-30 doors per day. At the end of their first day, they had visited only five houses and found many households at some kind of crisis point.

'We came away feeling shell-shocked and exhausted. We had not anticipated the intensity.'

Phone interview with worker – December 2008

Due to the varied situations and needs of people at the households they visited, the number of houses visited each day varied. On some days they were able to visit 10-15 farms, on other days it was just a few. One of the significant discoveries during these calls was a realisation that many of people they visited had never accessed local health services. They indicated that although they had heard of these, as 'the place where mum goes for her feet', they had never considered attending for their own needs.

In 2007, after further discussion at the DSRC, and an allocation of drought specific funding, the member agencies agreed to develop a consistent and collaborative approach to support farming families within the Campaspe Shire Area. The outcome was the Farm Gate Pathway, a co-ordinated intake model across the Shire of Campaspe, which incorporated the Farm Gate Cold Calling approach. The Farm Gate Cold Calling work was undertaken by six key workers who partnered with each other and with volunteers from a range of local agencies.

The responsiveness of those developing the Cold Calling model is apparent in the inbuilt flexibility to respond to the needs being expressed. While psychological support was always at the ready, a strong emphasis was placed on the provision of information and support to enable streamlined access to grants, Centrelink Exceptional Circumstances (EC) benefits and food/material aid.

2 “A couple of jars of chutney” Campaspe Farm Gate Approach presentation
3 Appendix 1
This was in itself a key feature of the Campaspe Farm Gate Cold Calling Pathway model: that with a range of agencies involved in the co-ordinated approach, a whole service system was able to be mobilised to respond to the various needs uncovered through the initial farm gate visits.

Prominent founders of the Farm Gate Pathway model were, at the time, also involved in a major Drought Research project being undertaken by Jeff Young, Director of The Bouverie Centre. This qualitative research, which also provides Ethics approval for the Farm Gate evaluation, asked ‘What are effective counselling and community development strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities?’

The research project brought together drought counsellors, and others involved in drought support, on a monthly basis in Co-operative Inquiry Groups. These groups were a regular opportunity for workers to share ideas and explore the efficacy of what they were doing. They also served as a place to reflect on the practices, knowledge and wisdoms being gained through trying out many different approaches to providing appropriate supports to farmers and business people affected by the long term drought. Included in the discussions were those that centred on the practice of cold calling: a practice that had emerged as a controversial strategy across the state.

This evaluation, conducted by The Bouverie Centre as an independent external research organisation, is a result of the relationships established between Bouverie and members of the Campaspe PCP during the broader drought research project.
3.1 Demographic data - regional context

The Shire of Campaspe is situated in north central Victoria within the Department of Human Services Loddon Mallee Region, about 180 kilometres north of Melbourne. It is bordered to the north by the Murray River and has a total land area of about 4,500 square kilometres.

Figure 1
Location of Campaspe Shire within Victoria

It is a predominantly rural area, with Echuca and Kyabram the largest two towns, with populations of 12,974 & 6901 respectively\(^4\). The main land use is devoted to agriculture: in particular dairy farming, cereal and other grain growing and sheep grazing.

Figure 2
Campaspe Primary Care Partnership area
- including townships and rural centres

\(^4\) (Informed Decisions, 2008)
Table 2: The three largest industry sectors in 2006 were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDUSTRY</th>
<th>SHIRE OF CAMPASPE</th>
<th>REGIONAL VICTORIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry &amp; Fishing</td>
<td>16 9.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>15.3 11.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>11.4 12.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between 2001 and 2006 data from the Shire of Campaspe Community Profile reveals a decrease in employment (from 3039 in 2001 down to 2523 in 2006) within the Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry sector: a loss of 516 jobs. During the same period the Construction, Government Administration and Defence, and Health and Community Services all recorded increased employment. With an approximate population of 35,500, 45 per cent falls within the 35-69 age bracket, with 21 per cent of the total population being within the 35-49 years age group\(^5\).

\(^5\) (Informed Decisions, 2008)
4. Literature review

In looking at the literature which explores the environment and circumstances that surround the emergence of the practice of cold calling in rural health and welfare fields, it has been necessary to examine the impact of a major and long term drought on rural communities, as well as the ways in which health and welfare services have traditionally been offered and viewed by rural people.

While little is written formally about the practice of health-related farm gate cold calling beyond internal agency evaluations and reflections by those who undertake this activity, it is possible to understand more about the principles and practices from the experiences of those who use cold calling as a mode of reaching the potential consumer. Mental health services are one such service type that have engaged reluctant clients using assertive outreach models of practice. Many businesses too, such as household and farm suppliers, have long used various forms of cold calling as a way of promoting their goods and services to farming communities.

4.1 Context of Cold Calling

Rural communities are in transition, facing rapid social, economic and demographic change\(^6\). Climate change adds further uncertainty. Rural and remote areas are facing the drift of young people from country towns to cities\(^7\), and reduced numbers of farms\(^8\), which result in larger farms, less infrastructure and less people to populate remote communities. The economic pressure experienced by significant parts of rural Australia has been severely exacerbated by the recent drought\(^9\). Alston points out 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.

In their National survey of 8000 rural people, Edwards and Gray (2008) found 32-38% of participants 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 seen in isolation to the broad changes affecting local communities and the rural sector in general.

High disadvantage such as isolation and poor access to communication infrastructure such as internet facilities, significantly impacts on the ability of communities to cope with and respond well to any change, including drought. The chronic, pervasive, intangible nature of drought leads to less public acknowledgement of drought compared to other more dramatic natural disasters. This also creates greater barriers to the identification and provision of supports, especially counselling, to families who are severely and adversely affected by drought.

\(^6\) (Alston & Kent, 2004; Phillips, 2007)  
\(^7\) (Alston & Kent, 2004)  
\(^8\) (Phillips, 2007)  
\(^9\) (Edwards & Gray, 2008)
4.2 Responses to drought support

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 on the social impacts and experience of living through a prolonged drought\(^{10}\). Given there has been only three major research studies on the social impact and experience of living through a drought\(^{11}\), it is not surprising that there is even less research and evaluation of specific approaches for providing social and emotional supports to farming families suffering the impacts of drought.

Evaluations of past drought counselling initiatives uniformly report a disappointing uptake of specialist drought counselling service. Margaret Alston has called for "innovative models of service delivery and attention to rurally appropriate service models"\(^{12}\).

A recent report written by the Centre for Rural Mental Health\(^{13}\) suggests that apart from a culture of self-reliance, rural people are reluctant to access counselling services for three broad reasons:

i. A preference to seek help from family and friends;

ii. The stigma around mental health problems; and

iii. 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\(^{14}\). Furthermore, men are less likely to seek help for suicidal ideation than for other personal-emotional problems\(^{15}\).

Counselling services established to support drought have typically been underutilised especially short-lived, centre-based counselling services. Young’s research has shown that community development, networking and service co-ordination as well as some form of outreach is essential to an effective response to drought. Cold calling is one of the most assertive outreach approaches and as a result is highly contested, especially in traditional counselling circles. The role of cold calling gradually became more accepted by drought counsellors between February 2007 and September 2008 in the CIGs across the state, however many drought counsellors remained concerned that the practice was invasive and potentially dangerous to the cold caller. Many practitioners who had not used the approach predicted farmers would 'sic the dogs onto unknown cold callers’\(^{16}\).

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\(^{10}\) (Blau, 2006; Edwards & Gray, 2008)
\(^{11}\) (Alston, 2004; Alston & Kent, 2004; Edwards & Gray, 2008; Stehlik, 2004)
\(^{12}\) (Alston & Kent, 2004, p. xiv)
\(^{13}\) (Centre for Rural Mental Health, 2005)
\(^{14}\) (Wainer & Chesters, 2000)
\(^{15}\) (Carlton & Deane, 2000, cited in Cusack, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2004)
\(^{16}\) (Young, 2008)
4.3 Assertive outreach

Assertive outreach is not a new approach. It has a history in business and a key role in providing support to groups that do not naturally seek mainstream services, such as street kids and other homeless people, mental health clients and indigenous communities. Through discussions in the Co-operative Inquiry Groups (CIGs) for the Drought Project (facilitated by The Bouverie Centre in 2007/08), drought counsellors who undertook cold calling reported having more contact with clients, both at the farm gate and through the follow up referral contacts that ensued\(^\text{17}\), than those who did not employ this assertive outreach approach.

4.4 Aims and research questions

The specific research aims articulated in the original brief\(^\text{18}\) to The Bouverie Centre’s research team by the Campaspe PCP were:

- To evaluate the Campaspe Farm Gate Pathway Model with key organisations and farming families across Campaspe Shire and determine key features of the model
- To assess the effectiveness of the Farm Gate model in meeting the needs of farming families
- To gauge the uptake in services / assistance measures as a result of Cold Calling
- To determine the benefits that farmers identify from the visits
- To determine the value of the approach used

The original brief sought to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore and understand the data, however with the difficulties faced, as outlined in the Methodology (5.3.1), the evaluation focused on extracting a greater understanding of the value of the approach, based on the experiences as described by the farmers and workers who were interviewed.

4.5 Significance of this evaluation

There is a general dearth of research which looks at ways to provide drought services – and little documentation to support those practices, thus this project will contribute to the evidence base for broader drought responses. Specifically, it will add to the small amount of documented practice wisdoms around the practice of cold calling as a way of engaging rural people who have not typically sought needed counselling and welfare supports. It will also contribute to the documentation of strategies relevant to rural engagement in general. Young found that drought counsellors did not receive very effective induction and little documented practice wisdom was available from previous drought response services – hence this report will potentially serve as a useful resource for drought counsellors and rural outreach workers\(^\text{19}\).

\(^{17}\text{(Young, 2008)}\)  
\(^{18}\text{Appendix 2}\)  
\(^{19}\text{Ibid}\)
5. Methodology and procedure

The evaluation was designed and conducted by The Bouverie Centre, under the supervision of Associate Professor Amaryll Perlesz. The research design, processes and challenges in the collection and examination of the data are described in the following sections.

An examination of the brief evaluation of the Farm Gate pilot undertaken in 2005-06 elicited significant and unanswered questions. While the report provided important information about the outcome of the calls, little was known of the experiences of cold calling from the perspectives of both workers (the cold callers) and the recipients of those calls (the farmers). Hence the current evaluation explores the direct experience of both groups.

The themes contained in this evaluation, which have emerged from the descriptions of their experiences of the calls as given by both workers and farmers, aim to reveal a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges of cold calling in rural areas.

5.1 The evaluation framework

A modified/constructivist grounded theory approach was used to explore the detailed experience of the workers and recipients of cold calling.

The informants

Two key informant groups were identified: firstly those practitioners (all of whom were members of the Drought Committee of the Campaspe PCP) who had directly undertaken ‘Farm Gate Cold Calling’ activity or had been referral points following the calls; and secondly, farmers who had been the recipients of those visits.

In all, fifteen health and welfare professionals, and ten farmers (six women and four men) were interviewed. This was an opportunistic yet purposeful\[^{20}\] sample designed to build a more detailed (thicker) description of the cold calling approach. The limitations of the sample are discussed below.

Overall, we estimate that approximately 500 cold calls were provided in the Campaspe region during 2007-08. Of the fifteen professionals interviewed, six conducted the majority of these, working mostly in pairs with each other and with some from volunteer agencies. Their professional backgrounds included Social Work, Teaching, Psychology, and Agriculture.

\[^{20}\] (Caulley, 1994)
Limitations of the sample

In order to protect the privacy of all the farming families who were called on, the recruitment process was necessarily devolved to the workers who had undertaken the visits. Their recommendations were followed up by the research team and some (though not all) farmers who had consented, were then interviewed.

The farmers (female and male) interviewed for this evaluation were a very small selection of those visited in the Campaspe Shire, and were primarily those for whom there had been some positive outcome as a direct result of the Farm Gate visit. It was a sample acknowledged to be biased from the outset, despite earlier plans to interview a broader cross-section of farmers: initially aimed to include those who had accepted a call, and those who had clearly not welcomed a farm visit, or had indicated they had experienced a call about which they were not happy.

In practice, it proved insurmountable for the scope of this research to engage farmers who did not accept the call, since their details had not been collected; however, workers reported having not been turned away without at least a brief cordial exchange and having been able to pass on some printed information.

In spite of this limitation, the interviewees’ frank comments provided what seemed to be a sufficiently balanced critique of things that had been both supportive and problematic in cold-calling visits.

Data recording and storage

Interviews were recorded using high quality Sony digital recorders. All interviews were transcribed faithfully and analysed after names and other identifying information were extracted.

Field notes and a reflective journal were maintained, along with audio recordings of all the interviews (individual and group). Cumulatively, these ensured the material was able to be examined from a range of perspectives: the raw data and from summaries of the key themes made during the course of the project.

All data gathered through this research has been de-identified and will be stored securely at The Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University, according to research protocols.

Dissemination of the results

The results of the research are documented in this report and will be made available to all research participants. The findings will also be made available on The Bouverie Centre’s website, as part of the Drought Project and may be presented at conferences. They will be used to assist rural support workers and counsellors, as well as other local service providers in their work, and will inform organisations as they shape ongoing service delivery.
5.2 Evaluation activity

Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>Initial discussions with Campaspe PCP re evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of a brief and budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July – August 2008</td>
<td>Draft invitation to workers for group interviews sent to PCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contract between PCP and The Bouverie Centre is finalised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2008</td>
<td>Communication with key people in Campaspe PCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of Information and Consent Forms for service providers and farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature Review commenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>Group interviews conducted with service providers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 sessions with 15 workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>Communication with PCP and service providers re:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recruitment of farmers for individual interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• collection of statistical data from participating agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information packs sent out to support recruitment drive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow up communication re recruitment of interviewees</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>Negotiation of interviews with farmers commenced</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview framework prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual interviews commence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>Individual interviews continue (by phone and in Campaspe Shire – in home and at health service rooms)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone interviews with workers conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All interviews transcribed and initial themes extracted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarification sought on statistical data received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow up calls made to seek additional agency data related to cold calling activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2009</td>
<td>Follow up with PCP re agency data related to cold calling activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2009</td>
<td>Examination of statistical data provided - email and phone contact with service providers to clarify information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-negotiation of due date for report, due to substantial delays with provision of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>Further examination of transcripts for emergent themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July – August 2009</td>
<td>Report in final draft</td>
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</table>
5.3 Farm Gate call data

Establishing the necessary links to gather both qualitative and quantitative information was mediated in the first instance, through the Campaspe Primary Care Partnership (PCP). Once those early pathways had been paved, it became easier to communicate directly with both workers and farmers to set up interviews, clarify themes and follow up on issues that emerged.

Substantial qualitative data emerged through in-depth interviews with farming folk who were visited and the workers who undertook the visits. Little statistical data, such as the number of cold calls, the number of referrals made, outcome of these referrals etc was available from services involved in cold calling. The focus of this evaluation therefore, is on the experiences of cold calling: from the perspectives of both farmers who received calls, and those workers who drove out to farms to make the calls.

5.3.1 Challenges in collection of statistical data

Formal statistical data collection was scanty despite a paper based template having been developed by the Campaspe PCP for use by workers from its member agencies\(^{21}\). Similar challenges, related to the collection of reliable quantitative data, were found to be uniformly spread across drought work through the state\(^{22}\). This is also a common theme in the broader health and welfare sectors\(^{23}\).

Drought workers and their managers reported that there had been a lack of clarity from funding bodies about statistical data collection and workers struggled to fit the work they were doing at the farm gate into standard data sets\(^{24}\). With this initial hurdle, rigorous documentation had not been a priority, and was further compounded by the context of enormous workloads, limited resources and uncertainty of tenure. In some instances partial records were kept but were fully embedded in other service provision data (e.g. number of hours spent on drought work generally, but not of individuals seen). Information related to the Cold Calling program was therefore not able to be accurately extracted.

This issue was further complicated due to the short term nature of drought funding which meant that in a number of cases those workers who had collected the data were no longer employed or available to clarify aspects of that data. Whilst an appreciation was expressed by the services about the call for retrospective data, those workers remaining (often with very few hours allocated to drought work) indicated that their priority was to undertake work with the community than attempt to make sense of data collected by others in the past.

\(^{21}\) Appendix 3
\(^{22}\) (Young, 2008)
\(^{23}\) (Weir, 2008)
\(^{24}\) (Young, 2007)
5.4 The interviews

5.4.1 Recruitment of interviewees

An invitation to workers from the Campaspe Drought & Rural Support Recovery Network, to attend one of two informal group interviews, was jointly issued by The Bouverie Centre and the Campaspe PCP, and broadly outlined the scope and purpose of the evaluation.

The Campaspe PCP undertook to organise these two group interviews: one over an evening dinner and the other over lunch the following day. Travelling to the Loddon Mallee region to interview the practitioners of cold calling on their home turf, was an important step in building relationships with the workers. The two group interviews were held in Rochester and Kyabram respectively, and were attended by fifteen workers in total.

Not all of the workers who attended the interviews had direct ‘cold calling’ experience. Six of them were employed by agencies, such as Community Mental Health and Rural Financial Counselling, to which some farmers had been referred following a cold call. Others came from a range of other agencies including local government, health and community based services, and schools. All participants at the group interviews were provided with further information about the research, and were asked to give signed consent to enable audio recording of the sessions.

In hindsight, holding a group interview over dinner in an unknown venue created some obstacles for data collection. While the audio recorder was placed centrally at a long table, at times some of the voices are unclear over the clatter of dining and the proximity of people to the recorder. Fortunately, extensive notes were also taken, which have supported accurate transcription of the recording.

Following the group interviews, the workers were asked to approach farmers with whom they had had cold calling contact, to invite them to participate in an evaluation interview. An Information sheet and Consent form were sent to all workers to provide them with consistent information about the nature, purpose and process of the individual interviews, and to enable them to provide these in hard copy for potential interviewees to read and consider.

Initially there were no responses, and after a four-week wait, a follow up email was sent to prompt the call for potential interviewees. By late October, only one response had been received; however by early December sufficient names had been gathered to begin the interviews.

25 Appendix 4
5.4.2 Reflection on the challenges

Although there was no definitive clarity about the silence, previous exposure to some of the issues raised (by the workers) about privacy and concerns about further intrusion in the lives of farmers, provided some explanation for the poor response. The cessation of State Government funding for drought workers around this time had resulted in some workers finding other work prior to the end of the known funding period, because of the uncertainty about any ongoing employment. This possibly contributed to the poor response.

‘These workers left because we could not guarantee them regular work, on an ongoing basis, due to the nature of the State funding for drought, which is ad-hoc and irregular. Most staff want the security of long term and regular positions. I think this is a natural desire. Obviously not having a regular worker is not a good thing. It costs a lot of money, time and stress to attract someone else to the rural setting. It is also spasmodic and challenging for clients who require a service.’

Health Service manager, via email – March 2009

The scanty response was also, in part, a confirmation that on a day to day basis, more pressing commitments in the ‘doing’, can easily overtake tasks such as evaluation. It highlights the benefits of early planning for ‘outcome evaluation’.

Regular discussions with the PCP co-ordinator during this time kept the recruitment issue on the table through the Campaspe Drought & Rural Support Recovery Network; however, after eight weeks the list of names remained insufficient. Each service provider who had attended one of the group interviews was rung individually, to ask again for their support in recruiting farmers to be interviewed. This eventually led to thirteen potential informant contacts, each of whom had tentatively agreed to be interviewed.

Making contact with each of these farmers was also much more difficult than initially anticipated. The assumption ‘that people on farms are home during the day’ was challenged, and revealed how many people were working extremely long hours away from the house and/or were now also working ‘off farm’ to make ends meet. It took three weeks, with phone contact attempted multiple times across all seven days of the week and extending well outside office hours, to arrange the interviews. One person withdrew prior to the interview going ahead, due to unrelated circumstances.

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26 (Young, 2008, p. 85)
5.4.3 The farmers interviewed

Eventually six women and four men were interviewed. Regardless of their prime responsibilities, each is referred to as a farmer, in recognition of the partnerships and myriad tasks required to manage a farm business which were mentioned in almost all the interviews. Without belabouring the politics of women’s traditionally diminished role as the ‘farmer’s wife’, one of the women interviewed was quick to point out:

‘When you are on the land the women get out and they work as hard as what a man does.’
‘I find that different men will ring you up or whatever, and they are pretty quick to say – “Oh is your husband there?”’
‘And I am sort of saying “what do you want him for? What’s he gonna tell you? I’m the one that writes the cheques out and I’m the one that makes the books balance, you know. It’s not him”.’

Interview with farmer - December 2008

5.4.4 The unplanned conversations

An unanticipated outcome of the multiple phone calls made to speak with those who had agreed to be contacted, was that experiences were relayed ‘off the record’. These were by two other people who by chance answered the phone calls, and who, when invited to be interviewed, indicated that while they did not want to be formally interviewed, they were keen to share their perspectives on the matter of cold calling. As with all the other informants, care has been taken to protect their privacy while honouring their voices.

5.4.5 Interview structure

A framework to guide the interviews27 with drought workers and farmers had been developed at the outset of the study, following discussions with the PCP. The enquiry was also shaped through exposure (via The Bouverie Centre’s Drought Project) to the differing viewpoints on ‘cold calling’: a controversial issue discussed amongst drought workers across Victoria. Informed by these debates, the research team approached the interviews with an open mind, and through the process of recursive questioning during in-depth interviews of 30-60 minutes duration, many themes were identified.

This practice is consistent with (one of) the tenets of qualitative research: that language and themes will emerge during the process of data collection. While a framework of questions was seen as important to give shape and purpose28, naturalising the conversations, and having flexibility to deviate from questions being asked in sequence, enabled previously unanticipated aspects of the enquiry to become possible29.

27 Appendix 5
29 (Carspecken, 1996)
5.4.6 Interview venues

Farmers who agreed to be interviewed were offered their choice of venue for the interviews to take place. Consideration was given to the responsibility of being invited into private homes, not the least of which was to convey genuine warmth and an atmosphere of informality. In such an environment, it became more possible to hold conversations that asked the people being interviewed to revisit and reflect on an experience in their lives. The interviews were held at kitchen tables, by phone and in one instance at a community centre in a local town. Each person was assured anonymity, and care has been taken to protect the participants’ privacy while preserving their unique perspectives.

5.5 Risks and benefits

All interviews with people come with attendant risks. Among these is the possibility that when people speak of distressing or other personal matters, painful feelings that have been buried can resurface. These potential risks were minimised through the provision of printed information and verbal clarifications when setting up the interviews, together with signed consent being sought\(^{30}\). Verbal agreement was provided by each participant on audio at the commencement of each interview and a clear pathway to withdrawal from the research process was made available\(^{31}\).

At the time of the interviews, further clarification was provided to ensure people understood they would neither be asked to speak about their difficulties, nor to disclose details of the support they had received through the Farm Gate caller. This however, did not prevent people revealing some of the hardships and points of despair that had led them to accepting a cold call and subsequent assistance.

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. At these points, each person was offered an opportunity to halt the interview, and/or to debrief the call with the recording device switched off. Support was also offered at the conclusion of these interviews, and in two instances they indicated that they would seek out support for themselves during the coming days. This was followed up by the researcher, and while no further debriefing was required, the ease of contact with their ‘cold caller’ revealed the depth of trust in the relationship that had been established through the cold calling activity.

Background skills and experience of the researcher

The researcher / interviewer holds a Bachelor of Social Work and has lived and worked as a counsellor and community development worker in rural Victoria for over 20 years. She has been involved with the Drought Project through The Bouverie Centre, and is currently undertaking a postgraduate research-based Masters degree. Supervision has been provided throughout this project.

\(^{30}\) Appendix 6
\(^{31}\) Appendix 7
6. Findings

6.1 Key issues identified

The key issues faced by farming families, which are presented below are based on the interviews undertaken in this evaluation and the limited statistical data that was available. Broadly, these are:

- financial stress (most frequently named)
- mental health issues (variously described by those interviewed as stress, anxiety, depression, and relationship problems).

Issues related to physical health were also raised by some farmers and workers but were not identified as the prime stressor at any time. These findings, which indicate a similar range of issues being faced by rural people during this protracted drought, were supported by reports gathered from the members of the Co-operative Inquiry Groups (of the state-wide Drought Project undertaken by The Bouverie Centre in 2007-08).

6.1.1 Hidden needs

Most of the workers interviewed spoke about discovering hidden needs when they cold called at the farms. They described meeting people who would try to maintain the illusion that ‘things are still ok’, and yet express relief at being able to reveal the reality when the workers called. Farmers also talked about the benefit which they experienced, in finding someone with whom they could finally let down their guard and speak of how things really were. This was an interesting finding given the cold callers were not always known to the famers and cold calls were typically one-off encounters.

‘Nobody realised what was happening to people who appeared, on the surface, to be coping.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008

Workers also recounted being told that things were going ‘as well as could be expected’ or that ‘things are fine.... fine....’, when it seemed obvious that things were anything but fine. Several Cold Callers recalled that they discovered many people who appeared in desperate situations, yet had not applied for EC, because they had (often incorrectly) assessed themselves as ineligible. This became more evident particularly as the downward trends in global markets began to impact negatively on their other assets.

‘Often what’s immediate and really obvious is someone struggling with the financial and planning aspects.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008
As well as finding those who minimised their financial difficulties, the Cold callers described meeting farmers who remained guarded, and tended to downplay relationship and/or health problems. This was also highlighted by one farmer who revealed, in the interview, that for a long time he had been inclined to keep conversations with outsiders to a minimum, and where he felt he had to, he would put a positive spin on his situation.

“You just tell them you are supposedly coping. The shorter the conversation, the more likely no-one will know.”

Phone interview with farmer - December 2008

The callers also described situations where their visits had, by chance, coincided with a particular crisis, such as a piece of equipment being broken or some grim financial news. At these times, they were able to utilise their diverse skills and call on their networks to quickly mobilise practical supports. They noted that had they not been present at the time of the crisis, it may have just passed unnoticed, yet the cumulative negative effects would have continued.

“That incident would have passed. She wouldn’t have come into any service. She had far too many things going on in her life, even if she had wanted to.”

Worker at group interview – September 2008

A number of workers remarked that the unplanned visits were, at times, opportunistic circuit breakers. They reflected on the resilience of those they visited and realised that while a crisis may well pass, when the callers bore witness to the daily hardships that people faced, this in itself had a powerful and supportive effect; despite not necessarily being able to solve all the problems.

Another worker likened the activity of a cold call to a trigger point, and went on to describe how a quietly expressed murmur as simple as ‘you’ve got a lot on your plate’, on hearing someone describe their current situation, would at times give rise to unexpected tears in both women and men.

“It was like we had given permission to let it all go for a bit.”

Worker at group interview – September 2008

Cold Calling, a type of assertive outreach, at the Farm Gate was thus described as a way which helped uncover some of the issues that people wouldn’t have necessarily volunteered otherwise. From here other supports could be rallied through the co-ordinated pathway of the Campaspe PCP model. This finding is mirrored by Mental Health services research, which has found that assertive outreach to people in their homes is a remarkably successful engagement strategy32. It has been described in one study33 as a more ‘authentic’ relationship which is highly valued and which promotes access to other mainstream services.

32 (Firn, 2007)
33 Ibid, p.27
6.2 Types of calls

While the term Cold Calling is used generically to speak of the farm visits that have been practiced in Campaspe Shire, it is useful to provide greater detail about the subtle differences in this practice. The types of calls fell into two broad categories:

6.2.1 Cold Calls

The term Cold Call refers to visits in which, aside from general media coverage about the program in the area, little to no advance notice of the calling activity was provided to members of the community. The practice of cold calling had essentially two variations.

- **Semi targeted calling** – where a particular locality had been identified as possibly needing particular support. This information was largely gleaned through workers within the drought network sharing information with each other about pertinent community stressors.

- **Targeted calling** – when someone had been identified, either through their contact with another service or via a third party referral, and provided with a visit from those doing the Farm Gate calling, to identify other needs and offer supports as required. In this situation the entire street or road would be cold called so that the individual was not singled out.

Within both, the practice of ‘blanket cold calling’ was used: where an area or stretch of road was selected and each house along that stretch would be visited. A number of the workers spoke about the benefits of visiting all the farms along a stretch of road, referring to it as a useful strategy when they had heard about someone in need but felt there was no permission to intervene. They spoke of the value of it as an equaliser: enabling people to retain their dignity. ‘Getting the cold callers out in the area’ was talked about as one way to make sure some supports could be offered to those who needed assistance without shaming anyone.

‘I think that blanket calling made everyone equal - that again is another empowering thing. If people feel that you’re calling on them, the only one in the street, then that’s a really disempowering way of going about giving people a message, I think.

[One of]the benefits of blanket calling means people can retain their dignity by not feeling singled out, even if there has been a referral on that road.’

Comments from workers at group interviews - September 2008

6.2.2 Warm calls

‘Warm calls’ refer to a slightly different shade of the targeted call. The term has been used variously to describe initial contact with a person, via drought related activities, such as BBQs, Pamper Days or information sessions, that is then followed up with a farm visit. Drought workers from across Victoria spoke about this practice during CIG meetings34.

34 (Young, 2008)
Typically, drought workers spoke about meeting farmers at these events and hearing stories which indicated extra supports might be needed. In these informal settings, they were able to ask participants casually whether they could visit if they happened to be in their area. It meant that the event facilitators could follow up people they were concerned about; to open up possibilities for tailored supports to be offered, without appearing to directly target anyone.

‘I had seen her (the worker) when I was at a group program at the Community House in town.’
Interview with farmer – December 2008

Undertaking farm visits from this almost casual conversation, enabled the farm gate visits to be conducted in a purposeful yet relaxed manner: a manner that enabled people to experience the warmth of the support being offered without feeling shamed or identified as ‘needy’.

6.3 Letting people know

Extensive use of radio and print media, plus word of mouth, was undertaken to give people some prior knowledge of the calls. The workers interviewed reported that people seemed quite accepting of the practice because they saw that everyone was being visited, with no-one being singled out in particular. At various farms, they recalled being greeted with a sense of anticipation for the visit, and that this paved the way for the call to proceed.

‘We’ve used the media extensively to make it a normal occurrence that someone will call in on you. So it’s not extraordinary for someone to actually call in. I know we have driven into places and people will say “oh, I heard you were in the area”. They are very accepting of it because we have made it so that everybody is visited, and we haven’t targeted anyone in particular. That’s been well accepted in the community.’
Worker at group interview - September 2008

More than half the farmers, interviewed for this evaluation, described some prior knowledge of the farm visits being undertaken in the area. Some indicated they had heard through media, word of mouth or had read of it in a newsletter. Some of these also said that they had either met the worker previously through some other engagement with the health service or Shire, or that they knew the worker lived locally simply through having seen them in their neighbourhood or district.

‘Oh, look, in the country that happens all the time: neighbours calling on neighbours – we don’t have a problem with that. Some people do, I believe, but we don’t. We’ve been farmers for thirty years, and both our families are farmers, so that’s quite normal. Having (the drought counsellors) drop in unannounced – that was a lovely thing to do. We were quite happy with that. We knew (names one worker). We knew why she was there before they actually walked inside the house. I know what (she) does.’
Interview with farmer – December 2008
However, despite the media blitz and general community conversation about it, not all farmers had heard about the cold calling activity.

‘Probably two years ago a couple of other girls from the Shire came and again knocked on the door and came in and talked. Then again, we didn’t know they were coming either and hadn’t heard around the district that the girls were visiting’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

None of the farmers who were interviewed commented specifically on whether they had a particular preference in knowing that the Farm Gate call activity was taking place. It is evident from the interviews that some knew and some didn’t, and that their sources for information varied. Those who said they hadn’t heard anything via the media or community conversation also indicated that, as farmers, they were familiar with having folk arrive unannounced at the farm gate. The Cold Callers spoke, in the interviews, about the need to identify themselves and establish the reason for their call, at the commencement of the visit, to clear up any misconceptions.

6.4 Responses to Cold Calling

The range of responses to cold calling ranged from those who described it as having been a warm and friendly visit which provided them with more information and a clearer pathway to supports if they needed them, to those for whom it had been a catalyst to accept the assistance that was available. Overall, the farmers interviewed described having experienced some significant positive benefits in their lives as a result of the Farm Gate Cold Calling activity.

Of the people interviewed for this evaluation, the majority embraced the cold calls as outlined above. And of those, despite some who reported early misgivings, in general the farmers who were interviewed reported a sense of trust in the workers who called. This enabled them to begin to open up and explore some of the difficult issues being faced. The workers in turn reported their experiences of conversations at the ‘farm gate’ and the subsequent acceptance of referrals and other supports as reinforcing the value of the approach. The role of gender in seeking or accepting assistance is explored in 6.5.1.

While the resilience and self reliance of rural people has served to enable them to deal with the adversities of usual seasonal problems, those coping mechanisms have been stretched to breaking point through years of protracted drought. This has been supported by all of the ten people interviewed, each of whom indicated that without the assertive outreach call at their farm, they would not have readily sought out assistance from any one of the support agencies.
6.4.1 ‘On a farm all sorts of people call’

More than half of the farmers who were interviewed spoke about the range of unknown visitors who called in relation to farming matters, and indicated they were unfazed by unexpected visitors:

“Well it had been advertised in the paper or mentioned in the paper that there was a Cold Calling program, so it was not a surprise because practically everyone in the community should have known that there was such a program. I had met (drought worker) before hand, so it wasn’t as if I didn’t know who she was. I didn’t know who she was with. It wasn’t a problem that they called because on the farm all sorts of people call and none of them have appointments...right? We have a huge range of people. We have people selling semen, people selling detergent, people selling fertiliser...’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

6.4.2 Initial reservation

Mistaking cold callers as coming from religious groups was raised more than once during the interviews, by both workers and farmers. One member of the Campaspe Drought & Rural Support Recovery Network, but not a cold caller, who happened to be visiting on other farm business, described being sent by the family to answer the door, because it was thought the people at the door might be from a religious group. As it happened the visitors were drought workers on their cold calling route.

Two of the workers recounted that some farmers told them they had initially thought they were debt collectors or from a religious group. Another worker concurred, cautioning:

‘Yeah, one of the first things you’ve got to do is say, “No, we’re not collecting, we’re not chasing money and we’re not selling religion”.’

Worker at group interview – September 2008

More than one of the workers speculated that these concerns, amongst others, may have prevented some people from opening their doors. In some instances they believed people to be home but had not been able to raise anyone.

One farmer illustrated another reason for the reluctance to open the door to strangers, with a light-hearted yet very real and ‘down-to-earth’ example.

‘When you are busy all the time, your house does get in a bit of a mess, so when a car pulls up you think – “Quick! Hide all the dishes!”... ’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

Interestingly, later in the same interview, this farmer also spoke about coming to welcome the return visits by the drought worker, and on hearing the car drive up would think, ‘Quick get the kettle on.’ This simple expression of the shift in how she felt about the arrival of the Farm Gate visitor, spoke volumes about the value she attributed to the outreach contact that had been extended to her.
6.4.3 Overcoming initial reservation

More than half of the farmers indicated that they had experienced benefits from the call, despite some initial reservation when the callers arrived. They described, for a variety of reasons, feeling a moment’s disquiet or awkwardness when the Farm Gate callers arrived.

‘The reason I felt that (awkwardness) a bit at first was because it is someone who calls on you, and you don’t really know who this person is, so you are really thinking whether you even want to be talking to someone. What are they going to go away and say? Or what are they going to think of you?’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

Another farmer recognised the caller as living in her locality, and said this caused her to feel ‘a little bit set back at first’; however, she went on to say that this initial discomfort soon dissipated as the call progressed as a result of the non-judgemental nature and warmth of the caller.

6.4.4 ‘Someone cares’ - visits that were embraced

Overall, seven of the ten people interviewed reported that the fact that the call was unexpected had not been problematic for them, and three of those people were keen to share that the visit had been both positive and a significant turning point for them. (For a differing viewpoint refer to 6.4.9 ‘The unwelcome call’.)

A number of people interviewed indicated, that prior to the contact with the drought counsellors, they had felt somewhat abandoned by government. They said they had heard of other drought support activities but had not felt included. They felt that the Farm Gate call represented organisations extending a spirit of concern for their wellbeing, and this helped mitigate the feeling of abandonment.

‘These people didn’t want anything, right? Usually people are selling things. My first reaction was “well thank goodness they are doing something..., someone cares”. This area here has probably been the worst affected by the drought for the longest time and it has been totally ignored by the government....When this cold calling came, I think most people thought, “well thank goodness, someone actually cares”.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

‘It was nice having someone show a bit of interest in how we were feeling.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008
One farmer spoke about being somewhat surprised at the length of time it took for the callers to come to making calls in their area.

‘The drought’s been going for say five, six years. I was probably a bit shocked that they’d only just turned up a few months back...especially when we live so close to town. ... I’m sure it takes a long time to get around to everyone, but I was probably just a bit shocked that it had taken so long.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

Some of the Farm Gate callers also recounted that at times they thought a visit from the Salvos might be accepted, though possibly not from other services. They indicated that that people in the communities they visited were initially quite reluctant about accepting ‘goods’ (material aid in the form of food and other groceries). When ‘St Vinnie’s and the Salvos’, however, started a more regular monthly program of delivering goods, there had been a palpable change resulting in greater acceptance of this kind of support. More importantly, workers recognised that the farmers, on whom they called, valued the smallest material contributions, as well as being kept up to date with information about grants and other drought support services.

‘That feeling of someone caring enough to visit and provide them with practical assistance means a huge amount to a lot of these people.’

Phone interview with worker – December 2008

And farmers spoke of their deep appreciation of these unexpected gifts.

‘Well, she has always got... (well when it’s available), sometimes she will bring a bag of goodies, there might just be a packet of tea in there or a packet of biscuits or some food hampers and things. It might not be that you can’t go shopping yourself, but there might just be something in there that you wouldn’t normally buy for yourself. She is so full of information too because she will have literature and stuff on how to apply for a grant or something like this: how you can access things...things that you might not know about. And she has learnt it and is able to come and pass on the information so you know how to access it. You know, that is terribly important.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

6.4.5 ‘Are we really eligible?’

A couple of the workers who were in agencies that received multiple referrals through the Farm Gate Cold Calling model, indicated they believed it was a valuable outreach model which put them in touch with clients who otherwise may have not asked for services.
Other workers had also described this within the context of ‘hidden needs’.

‘We (agency) don’t provide a cold calling service, but we do know that the style of cold calling or the Farm Gate approach is one innovative way of trying to get in contact with our drought affected families and businesses. As we know, there is a real strong reluctance of people to come forward in our rural communities to access support, particularly with respect to Government payments and services.’

Worker at group interview – September 2008

6.4.6 Finding a way in

In another strategic approach, two of the workers described their work in local schools as enabling them to open up conversations with families which focussed on issues related to a child’s schooling. They reflected that through these, sufficient trust could be built, which would create opportunities for other matters to be discussed: particularly about the broader impacts of drought on the family, which might benefit from a referral to other support services.

They reported hearing disclosures that they believe would otherwise have remained hidden: of families struggling financially to meet the costs of basic educational needs such as school lunches, books, uniforms, or tertiary entrance application fees, let alone excursions or extra curricular activities.

‘I joined with (another worker) at the start of the drought, when I started noticing children didn’t have food and clothing at school.’

Worker at group interview – September 2008

The workers were then able to mobilise the practical assistance that was most pressing and support families to access the other supports that were available.

6.4.7 A ‘finger on the pulse’

The profound benefit of this assertive outreach support is mirrored in the voice of one of the farmers below:

‘She knew...she had her finger on the pulse of what farmers were entitled to in the drought related system, like what was available. She even helped fill out the forms and said this was what we were entitled to and I will make sure that you get it. You know, and she did, she followed it up.

She did do that, she was calling in unannounced but then she would say - “I would like to call in and see you again, your family again.” She not only brought us clothes and shoes but her guidance and knowledge.’

Interview with Farmer – December 2008
6.4.8 The Call – as a significant turning point

Many of the farmers interviewed spoke candidly of the profoundly exhausting and isolating effects of the multi-layered stresses of drought, coupled with the uncertainty of their future. Three of the ten farmers indicated that they had felt at particularly low ebb at the time the callers visited. One farmer reported that the cold call had a profound effect, as indicated by the following quote:

‘To be honest at that stage I would have just as soon got the gun and shot myself, so to go almost immediately to go and see what the heck is going on suggests that there is that care and compassion there for starters. I was really at the point that I didn’t want to live anymore. I don’t know what would have happened had she (the worker) not arrived that day.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

Some farmers indicated that while the visit was important, they saw it essentially as just a stepping stone, albeit a significant one, that precipitated a range of supports being initiated. For some this meant access to material aid, for others it meant being linked in to financial counselling, other local programs or a return visit from the worker. Almost all the farmers spoke about having gained greater knowledge about services and supports available to them, and were provided with links and support to access these.

6.4.9 The unwelcome call

As mentioned earlier (ref section 5), finding people who had either not welcomed, or liked the Farm Gate call was challenging. Firstly, there was little documentation of calls unless other referral activity was generated from them, and secondly, it was thought that these people would be less likely to want to be intruded upon further to respond to an evaluation interview.

However, during the course of attempting to make contact with people who had expressed an interest in being interviewed, two shorter and more informal phone interviews with farmers (one male and one female) were conducted. Both of these were opportunistic, but illuminating, and provide an important counterpoint to the other eight opinions offered by farmers in the evaluation.

In both interviews, the farmers clearly indicated they had simply not found it helpful to focus on the difficulties they were experiencing as a result of the drought, and expressed the views that they neither welcomed the unbidden call nor the way the workers approached the issues.

‘They called on us - we wouldn’t have asked for this service.’

‘Talking about the problems brings them close. If you talk about things too much you can end up dwelling on it – it weighs on you after the conversation.’

Comments from phone interviews with farmers – December 2008
In a separate interview, another farmer noted that he had felt he was ‘managing ok’, till the callers arrived. As he recalls it, one of them asked ‘how are you coping? It must be terrible’. He indicated this question–statement had not been helpful and had left him ‘feeling worse and wishing that they hadn’t come at all’.

‘The caller told me I was ‘stressed’ a number of times during the visit. Well I was more stressed after they left.’

Phone interview with farmer - December 2008

These examples highlight the importance of how language is used in conversations, and mirrors a reflection from within the Southern Grampians and Glenelg (SGG) Farm Gate Pilot Project report, which refers to the challenge of refining the ways that counsellors engage in direct conversations about personal matters.

Despite these important pieces of feedback, one of these farmers indicated that while he had personally taken issue with the approach used by the caller, he believed his wife had received some benefit from the call. In light of this he was thus able to acknowledge a degree of positive value in the Farm Gate call.

6.5 Constraints to help-seeking

The interviewees spoke freely about the reasons and the hurdles to seeking external assistance. These are complex and varied, and include age, gender and rural influences. In the main, however, both women and men reflected a similar viewpoint: that men are less likely to seek out or accept assistance in the first instance. One farmer offered an insight into some of the reasons that influence farmers’ help-seeking behaviours, and into their potential wariness of a Farm Gate caller.

‘Perhaps...if you were deeply in debt and you didn’t want to say that you were so far in debt and in trouble like that. I have heard ones around, other farmers, who have said they don’t like people coming in and talking about them...farmers...well the older type of people. They don’t like talking and getting help from other people. They are very independent and things like that. So for a long, long time it has taken me ages to get him (husband) to come round to getting help for the drought.’

Interview with farmer - December 2008

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35 (O’Sullivan, 2008)
6.5.1 The role of gender

The role that gender plays in seeking or accepting help was identified by both workers and farmers. It was also discussed in brief as it relates to the gender mix in the partnerships of the Cold Calling visitors.

Three of the women who were interviewed shared their concerns that their husbands would just talk about farming matters with the drought workers who called at the farm. They expressed their doubts that health or other personal matters would be broached, and revealed the challenges they had had in encouraging their husbands to either seek assistance or to accept the supports being offered.

Two women identified that men and women may require different approaches.

‘There needs to be a bit more emphasis on the men’s side of things. You need to find ways to get men to open up, but you need to do it on their ground.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

Three of the four male farmers interviewed spoke of feeling protective of their integrity as men: of being the supporter of the family and the one who copes or shoulders the brunt of the responsibility for his family.

‘I am supposedly the leader of this family, and runner of this business. I should be capable of making all these decisions.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

‘My father wouldn’t have done it (ask for help) – so I won’t either.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

They also disclosed that they did not want to be seen as vulnerable and acknowledged there was a possibility that men, particularly, find it difficult to open up and speak about how they are feeling.

‘Us males aren’t very good at opening up and relaying how we are feeling. Don’t get me wrong, there are lots and lots of women that are under intense pressure and intense stress and it gets down to the individual situation as to how well they can cope, but I do believe it is the male just being the male that is a little bit more at risk because he doesn’t believe that he needs as much help as what he does. He is not necessarily willing to divulge and open up so that somebody can get to the grass roots level to actually suggest some form of help.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008
Workers, in turn, shared their experiences of finding male farmers somewhat reluctant to initially talk to someone about their problems, and reflected on the difficulties this presented when trying to engage them. These workers spoke about the sensitivity needed to tread carefully with personal enquiries, yet found that at times, despite their warmth and care, they could see male farmers avoiding situations that they thought might lead to a discussion about matters considered to be too personal or potentially shaming.

A male worker, who had been part of the initial Cold Calling program, revealed that sometimes he had found that by going out on a tractor or pitching in alongside a farmer to fix a fence, an opportunity was created to speak about things that may not have been shared in a more domestic context (such as at a kitchen table).

’Some men are so concerned about having to talk to someone who is a counsellor that they’ll stay out in the paddocks.’

Phone interview with worker – December 2008

One farmer revealed the validity of this observation, in the following powerful and candid revelation:

‘To be perfectly honest, at that time I didn’t want anyone driving down my drive. I don’t care who they were. I would say I would be more likely to run and hide in the bedroom than want to go out the back door and meet them. If I was down the paddock and I saw somebody drive down the drive, I would have probably said, “Who the heck is this?” and then “Well I hope I don’t have to go and meet them.”

That wouldn’t be a matter of whether or not it was somebody I knew, somebody who was completely foreign...it doesn’t really matter. The minute I heard somebody come down the drive of any description, except the milk tanker, I honestly would prefer to hide in the bed and pull the doona over me. I just did not want to meet people. I did not want to discuss the situation, and I did not want to be seen as vulnerable.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

The farmer quoted above, who was not at home when the cold caller had initially visited, described having been immensely moved by the small parcel of goods left with a calling card: a symbol of the genuine care being extended. He spoke of how it reminded him of the ways rural people have traditionally conveyed support for neighbours during times of personal stress (such as death or illness), by dropping off a home made apple pie or casserole. He went on to describe this ‘simple act of kindness’ as having been the prompt for him to seek assistance, and through this, regain a sense of wellness and a more hopeful perspective.

Whilst it was the act of kindness (parcel of goods left) that broke the barrier for this farmer, others reported that the warmth of the cold caller and their ability to demonstrate the confidentiality of the conversation enabled them to speak more freely of their difficulties.
6.5.2 ‘Bottling things up’

When interviewing the farmers, both the women and men spoke about the tendency to ‘bottle things up’, and while it is often seen as a male characteristic, they all reported ‘holding things in’ at various times and for a variety of reasons. They revealed their desire to protect themselves from pity or being seen as needy, and spoke of the misleading external impression that this could create. As one man pointed out:

‘You are like a little duck on the water, where you look relatively calm on top, but the legs are going at two thousand seconds underneath, treading water... but going nowhere.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

At the same time, some of the farmers acknowledged that while it was difficult to accept the extremely stressful situations that they were in, talking with the workers who called on them, had helped them to realise that they were not alone in their experience of the stresses of the drought. They identified that this knowledge had made it somewhat easier to accept support:

‘After hearing others are doing it tough and accepting help, we thought maybe it wasn’t so bad to accept help too.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

A number of times during the interviews people spoke about their recognition of the negative impacts of isolation, and their knowledge that they should try not to isolate themselves. But they also reflected on their realisation that this can occur despite that awareness and vigilance to guard against it.

‘After hearing others are doing it tough and accepting help, we thought maybe it wasn’t so bad to accept help too.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

Another farmer elaborated on this theme, pointing out that it often takes several prompts before people will seek help – despite thinking they should:

‘So I had been thinking, for quite possibly three months, that I should avail myself of people similar to (drought counsellor). I promised myself that one of these days I would go along and do that.'
(and he continues): ‘When we actually had the parcel dropped off with (drought counsellor’s) name there, it was probably the thing that prompted me to say “maybe I need to actually contact this lady”. I was quite keen to actually follow up. I had seen (her) at a suppliers meeting, milk suppliers meeting where she was there too again, as part of the support team between Centrelink and all the other associated bodies that were able to lend support. She was there as the drought worker and I was then aware of it. I was quite impressed with the way that she handled herself and spoke and I thought I felt reasonably at ease to speak to somebody of that quality.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

The farmer quoted above is an example of those farmers who had heard that a range of supports were available but had not reached out to access them until the cold callers made a personal visit.

This reflects the practice wisdom that became apparent in the pilot program: that the advantages of cold calling are its flexibility and its mandate to reach out assertively to people, rather than relying on them to initiate contact.

6.5.3 Stoicism or ‘toughing it out’

Two of the four male farmers interviewed, also revealed their reluctance to seek out professional health care. This was evident when they spoke about their physical health needs, and more particularly when they spoke about the impact of stress on their overall wellbeing and the pressure they felt to ‘just cope with it’:

‘You have to be half dead to even go to the doctor.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

‘You have to try to be independent and tough it out.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

Two farmers, one female and one male, made specific references to maintaining a sense of pride in being able to cope, while others alluded to it. Both of these people acknowledged that eventually, with the cumulative strains on their resources, and with the realisation that they were not alone in their difficulty, they had accepted support.

‘Over the years we’d made a way of not having to ask for help... I wouldn’t have gone in to see St. Vincent’s or the Salvation Army ... we had never had to go that far.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008
‘There used to be heaps of pride, but I think that’s almost gone now...there are thousands of people in the same situation.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

Here again, the benefits of assertive outreach via the Cold Calling program are revealed. It seems that until people were visited individually and were exposed to these non-shaming offers of assistance and the universality of supports available, they were reluctant to ask for, or accept help.

### 6.5.4 Trusting the unknown caller

On more than one occasion, the farmers interviewed recounted that despite feeling overwhelmed and finding it difficult to manage things on their own, they experienced advertisements on TV, which suggested they should talk with someone, as being too vague and impersonal. They indicated that this inhibited them from seeking external help.

‘They say ...you can ring up this Beyond Blue or other ‘help line’... but you don’t know who is on the end of the line and it’s something I would never do.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

Almost all of the farmers who were interviewed mentioned their caution about sharing too many details with outsiders who might not understand farming or the life of a farming family. The main concerns expressed were that they would be judged, blamed or pitied for how badly things were going in their farm businesses. From this viewpoint, at least five of them clearly expressed how important it was that the Farm Gate caller be familiar with, if not have direct experience of farming life.

They spoke about ‘just knowing’ when they felt comfortable enough to open up and talk with someone. As one farmer said,

‘I’ve had other drought counsellors around and I clam up, I don’t tell them anything. I don’t know why. I just don’t tell them everything even though they ask, and ask and ask. But you feel comfortable explaining more to people who know you.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008
Another farmer spoke about feeling that anyone without some direct farming knowledge or experience would simply not be able to appreciate the many hours that farmers put into their businesses, nor how difficult it would be to expose the fact that despite this enormous energy outlay, the business was still struggling.

‘I don’t know if they are city people. I don’t know if they just want to know your business, or whether they are going to judge you and say that you are a loser or something because you can’t make it work. You know you work 7 days a week, 16 hours a day and still you haven’t got $100 in your pocket. That’s why you don’t say anything in case they say, “Well you aren’t doing this right or that right”. You know? ... Because they do say it: that you are not managing it right.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

6.5.5. Self doubt

Others spoke of the crippling impact of doubting their own decisions on any level: business decisions, those related to their family or those related to their own health. And as a result, they became self protective and reluctant to disclose anything when asked, yet lacked the confidence to reach out further for help.

‘I believed that I should allow myself to go along and actually have a chat to the drought counsellor, but again, with the male pride, the idea of being the supporter of the family, the one who should be able to cope, you tend to say, “well, if I am not coping then I just have to get over it”. When you wake up the next day and you find that you are no closer to a resolution, you perhaps are already starting to get into a whirlpool of an emotional spiral in which you are being sucked down. When you get into that whirlpool of emotions, it becomes very difficult to have enough confidence to break out.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008
6.6 Elements of successful cold calling

The interviews attempted to uncover the strategies which callers had used which were helpful, therefore farmers and workers were asked about their experiences of the Farm Gate calls: from the perspectives of being a recipient of a home visit and of being the one who undertook the outreach calls. They related a range of constraints and enablers of this practice.

At various times during each of the interviews with farmers, the particular skills of the Cold Callers that they found most helpful were acknowledged and described carefully. From these conversations several key themes emerged, which centred on the callers’ capacity to:

- establish personal and professional credibility;
- communicate an empathic response;
- maintain confidentiality; and
- initiate prompt and appropriate action.

The broader drought research found that emotional regulation, a factor in the response to trauma, is also relevant in understanding the responses of people affected by drought. Drought counsellors developed ways of moving between these: addressing difficulties directly ‘flagging them’\(^{36}\) so they could be returned to by negotiation, while embracing the need to avoid undue distress pain by also talking about lighter day to day issues.

6.6.1 Establishing personal and professional credibility

Establishing credibility at the outset of the visit was highlighted. It was identified numerous times by workers, and many of the farmers interviewed independently, voiced similar thoughts. Central to this seemed to be that many farmers are reluctant to talk to someone who they weren’t sure could understand the nature of farming\(^{37}\). (This is discussed separately in 6.6.5.)

Yet most of the people interviewed recognised there were other elements that contributed to a ‘successful’ Farm Gate visit. These included a range of personal qualities and professional skills. A couple of workers identified humour as being a useful icebreaker and workers were quick to point out that being ‘real as a person’ was the way to join with people in conversations in their homes.

\(^{36}\) (Young, 2008)

\(^{37}\) (Hall & Scheltens, 2005)
Two of the workers spoke specifically about the professional skills and experience required to travel carefully around sensitive issues, and of being mindful about not opening up too many issues when the time available is relatively small.

‘If you are going to open up any issues, you have to have the knowledge and skill to respond to the unexpected.’

Worker at group interview – September 2008

Another worker cautioned against trying to be too ‘deep and meaningful’ when people aren’t expecting it, or are busy in the dairy or elsewhere on the farm.

Regardless of their professional background, all the workers interviewed raised the issue of their ‘duty of care’: to use their skills and judgement to both undertake astute assessments in order to provide responsible interventions, and with care ‘to not do any harm when you go and visit’.

6.6.2 Communicating an empathic response

Workers spoke of the value of having some knowledge of both the practicalities of farming and the stresses that accompany rural life. They highlighted that having an awareness of the social dynamics of isolation and other vulnerabilities created by long term drought and the resulting financial hardships, enabled them to respond without judgement, and to offer care and non-patronising practical support in response to the dilemmas that were shared with them.

While a number of the farmers mentioned their familiarity with multiple unknown farm business salespeople arriving at the farm unannounced, one of them also talked about her ability to ‘size up’ an unknown caller quickly.

‘It could just be me, but then you know if someone comes in here and I don’t sort of take to them, I just don’t want them to come back. It wouldn’t matter what they were going to do for me, it’s like if I am not comfortable with someone I don’t even want them in my house, you know. After I have been talking to someone for five minutes I normally am pretty quick to sort of make up my mind, I sort of fall on first impressions a bit.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

This farmer and others then shared their thoughts on what had stood out for them about the Farm Gate Cold Callers. They said they had responded to the genuine warmth of the callers and that they had valued the down to earth conversations and the practical and emotional supports that were evident. In a number of cases this had resulted in them accepting and welcoming the offer of follow-up visits.
6.6.3 The importance of confidentiality

Both farmers and workers spoke, from their own perspectives, about the importance of maintaining confidentiality and privacy. They talked about it being valued highly and that breaches are very quickly revealed in small communities. At each of the interviews with workers, these issues were discussed, and workers spoke of how they put the principles of privacy into practice. It seemed that their genuine approaches, and their ability to demonstrate their commitment to confidentiality and privacy, meant that initial reservation made way for trust to grow.

‘I just think it’s nice that if someone can just sort of call on you and you can just talk to them or tell them what is going on, then they can tell you how other people are coping and give you a few ideas about what you could be doing. It’s just the fact of having that friendly face sitting across the table whilst you are having a friendly cup of tea or coffee... someone you can talk to and you know basically that it is confidential.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

6.6.4 Initiating prompt and appropriate action

The broader research found that people don’t seek help (refer to 6.5 Constraints) so when they do consider help, it needs to be acted upon quickly. Both farmers and workers stressed the importance of following up on a Farm Gate call with tangible action. Assessment skills and the workers’ ability to determine what would be most helpful, coupled with the ability and the necessary networks to initiate action immediately were recognised by farmers as helpful and practical, as seen by their comments below.

‘They had the skills to recognise the impacts of stress and if a referral needed to be made quickly.’

‘They were very helpful and knowledgeable and knew what strings to pull to get assistance.’

‘They presented a range of options, including all the forms to apply for EC (Exceptional Circumstances) and other grants.’

‘Within minutes they had action on important issues – you can’t put money on that sort of thing.’

Comments from several interviews with farmers - December 2008
6.6.5 Showing knowledge of rural issues

All the farmers interviewed, indicated that callers should have a rural background to enable them to understand the situation, but were divided in their opinions on whether a caller should come from within the community or be external to it.

In some instances farmers described knowing the caller from their locale as an inhibiting factor and a suggestion was made at one point that workers perhaps should work in an area outside their own immediate community. It is significant to note the two elements of this comment below: revealing both initial discomfort together with an appreciation of the care shown through the call.

‘I found that a little uncomfortable (that the counsellor lives close by), because I probably wouldn’t talk if I was having problems, to someone that close – that might sound strange.
But it was still nice – we haven’t had anyone, or very few people call in. Unfortunately we don’t get to go to most of the functions available because there’s always something on that we don’t. But yeah, it was nice having someone call in and just show a bit of interest in how we were feeling.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

A background in farming was often cited as the single most helpful factor in both the interviews with farmers and workers. While there were some expressions of discomfort at knowing the worker in a small community (as above), at least half the farmers, spoke specifically of the benefits of speaking with someone who was very familiar with the local landscape, who had existing and well established links within that community and who ‘knows how things work here’.

‘They (the callers) had farming backgrounds, so they understood what was being described.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

‘The caller also lives on the land, so understands how hard it can be, how long the hours are, and how little the reward is.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

These comments were mirrored by one worker who stressed the importance of:

‘Being able to talk the language ... knowing where they are at.’

Worker at group interview – September 2008
6.6.6 Personal context: ‘being connected’

Those workers with farms in the district indicated this gave them unique insights and yet came with concomitant responsibilities. They spoke about the formal and informal ways of hearing about issues in the communities in which they both lived and worked, and how they managed those tensions. They identified there was a fine line between offering their professional expertise and overstepping the boundary, and reflected on the need for discretion to neither shame people nor damage their relationships. Observing confidentiality was an important consideration – especially for workers known in the local and small communities.

‘Hearing about someone in difficulty (through your networks) and calling in without making it an obviously targeted call.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008

While two of the farmers mentioned initial discomfort on realising the Cold Caller was also a neighbour, other views were shared which provide a counterpoint for the belief that this could be an inhibitor. Three of the farmers indicated that it was helpful to be able to put the caller(s) into a context – knowing them and knowing how, and with whom, they are connected in the community. They stressed the value of subsequently being given specific names and contacts, and of being provided with some personalised information about the referral contact.

‘A number or brochure that says to ring something or someone or other ... this means nothing. But if you know the person then you’ll ring that person. You can’t undervalue that within a community.’

Interview with farmer - December 2009

‘He’s a good chap, so if you’d like to, give him a ring.’

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008

These comments, which were woven through the conversations, highlight important considerations in shaping services for rural people: that the rural worker with established personal and professional connections may be able to more optimally link people to mainstream services. As one worker pointed out,

‘If you brought half a dozen people from the city and asked them to fulfil the role it would be a totally different experience. I think that is a critical component... that you are country people and you understand.’

Worker at group interview – September 2008
6.6.7 Skills required to undertake cold calling

Farmers spoke in various ways about the characteristics that they believed made a worker a 'good one'. They referred to the manner of the callers, and to the skills they perceived them to have. These factors in combination led these farmers to experience a sense of safety in having conversations about personal and other important and difficult issues.

‘She had a gentle chatty approach.’
‘They had a non-invasive manner.’
‘They were very friendly, like country people are.’
‘They were skilled enough to lead with the right questions.’
‘They had a caring manner ... we didn’t feel threatened by it.’

Comments from the interviews with farmers - December 2008

6.6.8 Doing ‘whatever it takes’

A number of workers, both female and male, shared stories of arriving at a farm and pitching in with farm work before getting inside to conversations at the kitchen table which they had initially thought was their goal.

In a few instances, the farmers indicated that they had been profoundly touched when the callers went beyond their role38.

‘They pitched in with farm work because that’s what was happening when they got here. They just went and helped... they didn’t need to do that.’

Phone interview with farmer - December 2008

Two female workers related their experience of chasing cows on their arrival with the farmers they were visiting, because that was what was happening, and reflected on how this had served to ‘break the ice’. And one male worker, indicated he actively sought opportunities to work and talk alongside males on the farm, whether to help with fencing or pulling a calf.

‘Sometimes it’s more productive to work alongside a man on the farm and talk as you work.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008

38 (Willer & Corrigan, 1994)
Undertaking these farm activities in this spontaneous and practical way resulted in conversations taking place both in the paddocks and subsequently around the kitchen table: a by-product of the unplanned bridges being built.

During the interviews with workers it became apparent that their professional skills and experience coupled with their individually crafted gentle enquiries had, at times, led to revelations of underlying stress and depression, which had not been apparent at first glance. All the workers at one time or other during the interviews spoke of being guided by their professional knowledge, their practice and life experiences and instincts in conversations.

None of the workers interviewed, referred directly to the use of any formal assessment tools at the Farm Gate calls; however, they spoke of being guided by an intimate knowledge of the range of questions, based on their collective professional knowledge, that they would need to ask to open up conversations with those they were visiting. They indicated that these naturalised assessments provided the right opportunities for needs to be clearly identified and risk to be carefully assessed.

6.6.9 Cold call ‘tool kit’

While each of the workers described variations in calling style, all the workers said they believed it was important to have knowledge of relevant and up to date information (printed and/or verbal) about services, grants and other supports that might be helpful, and to use the call to pass on that information.

‘Information is power – we actually empower people when we give them that information. We don’t make judgements whether they use it or need it.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008

Diverse opinions were expressed, on the issue of taking printed information in the form of pamphlets when going out on the Farm Gate calls. One worker said that getting out of the car with pamphlets was not a good idea because from a distance it could look like a handful of religious tracts, whereas other callers said that having information pamphlets was a way to break the ice and start a general conversation. In some instances, having pamphlets enabled the workers to simply say hello and pass on the printed information if it became apparent that the farmer did not want to engage in any further conversation.

Workers unanimously indicated that any printed information should ideally be complemented by a more personalised discussion of the most relevant information for that person, plus being able to provide direct contact details about workers from other services.

Others workers too, spoke of the value of being able to bring small grocery or personal care parcels that were practical and immediate, and could speak volumes about the simple and genuine care being extended.
6.7 Partnerships, collaboration, service co-operation and networking

6.7.1 Professional and community networks

Central to the work of some of the Farm Gate callers were the benefits of having lived and worked in the region for a long time. They identified that this had resulted in well established professional and community based networks on which they could draw. It also meant many community members already knew what they did and how they were connected to the community which added to their credibility and reduced some of the distrust that a farm visit by an unknown person might generate.

Workers also highlighted the trusting, professional relationships between the members of the Campaspe Drought & Rural Support Recovery Network and Drought Social Recovery Committee. This was seen to be a substantial contributing factor in the positive work they felt they were able to achieve together. They spoke of feeling valued and respected by others in the network and of being kept in the loop when they couldn’t attend meetings.

Having strong well established relationships with others in the many different agencies providing support, were also identified as vital by workers, to ensure that when a need is identified, assistance can be mobilised almost immediately. It was seen as a hallmark of working in a smaller rural community, with some doubts expressed that this intimate knowledge could be replicated in a larger region.

‘Anyone around the table (drought network) would be able to ring up if they found a family that didn’t have food... and the assistance would basically be there straight away. It’s very important that everyone knows everybody else.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008

6.7.2 Professional partnerships

Workers indicated that cold callers typically work in pairs and that this allowed different professionals to work together. Some of the workers who had partnered with a range of other professionals spoke of the complementary skills that could be brought together. They acknowledged that when one person also had a rural and local background this could balance another worker’s clinical skills.

‘Partnering from my point of view, has been important to actually deliver the best service possible to the people in the community, to get them through the situation they are in.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008
One worker, who had been involved in drought work for a number of years, spoke of the benefits of bringing agencies together through the Campaspe Drought & Rural Support Recovery Network and Drought Social Recovery Committee, from the silos in which many had traditionally operated. Core issues were able to be identified, duplication of services was reduced and active engagement with each other resulted in the ability to support and value each other's work. The strategic impact of the Campaspe Drought Social Recovery Committee (DSRC) was discussed in some detail at one of the group interviews.

'It (the DSRC) has really raised awareness of the social impact of the drought. Three years ago... there wasn’t identification that there was a social impact, drought was a financial issue.... It’s as a consequence of all these really strong working partnerships, that as a whole we’ve really highlighted the issue about the social impact.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008

This was further elaborated on by members of the drought network who highlighted other complementary skills related to lobbying. A clear recognition of the multiple skills required to support their ongoing work was expressed, together with an appreciation of the diversity of skills present in their own professional network.

'Some people have writing skills while others have ideas... the issues are being documented from grass roots level to being put forward to policy makers to increase an understanding of the complex nature of the impacts of drought.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008

And many of the workers also spoke of the personal support gained from working in tandem with another person and of the value afforded to each member of network by the caring group of professionals with which they worked in the Campaspe PCP. They noted the benefits to both community members and each other, as evidenced by the two comments below:

'There’s just something sort of comfortable in having two of you.’
'Supporting one another... that’s a really valuable asset.’

Workers at group interview - September 2008
6.7.3 The role of gender in Cold Calling partnerships

When questions arose about the gender mix of the Farm Gate callers, most farmers who were interviewed did not strongly express favouring either women or men or mixed partnerships as a call team. They did however acknowledge the potential benefits of having male callers as a strategy to engage more easily with men.

Mary: ‘I’m a woman, but maybe if a man had come with them, it may have been more comfortable for the men. I can’t speak for a man, so maybe…I don’t know. (turns and asks partner) Do you think that?’

John: ‘Yeah, quite possibly. (nods) In some cases, yes.’

Interview with farming couple – December 2008

(Names have been changed)

‘Well I don’t know, if it had been two men who had come here, I don’t know if it would have made any difference but it didn’t seem to appear to worry (husband) that it was two ladies. I mean every person is different, everyone is different …I mean maybe he might have talked more to an ex-farmer. I don’t know, but he seemed quite pleased.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

‘Females (callers) are particularly good I’m sure, but I really think there should be…well, a male and a female. Because I find that men – I don’t know, men do find it easy enough to talk to women, but it’s a very big pride thing. I think women probably go out and get the help more than a man would. So I’m thinking maybe there needs to be a bit more focus on men.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008

Speculation on the role gender plays in the development or success of cold calling programs and partnership teams is not possible from the data gathered in this evaluation. In different parts of Victoria drought committees and community agencies established their programs based on worker availability, professional background, aptitude and engagement with the idea of assertive outreach.

Due to the ongoing gendered nature of the health and welfare fields (still predominantly female), only female workers were available to travel out to the farms to undertake the cold calls. In other services that had attracted male workers to the role of drought counsellor / rural outreach worker, other options in Cold Calling partnerships were able to be provided. There was no uniformity based on gender lines, of male and female workers who were either strong advocates or critics of Cold Calling as a practice.

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40 See also 6.5.1 for discussion of gender as a constraint to help seeking
6.7.4 Challenges of partnerships

While the benefits of partnering and being connected professionally were expounded during the interviews, workers also spoke candidly about the challenges they had encountered in partnering with others: both professional and volunteer workers. They acknowledged that while personal styles or professional skills can complement each other, at times ‘they don’t mesh well’.

Workers identified situations they had experienced when their partner was pursuing an angle about which they thought, ‘I wouldn’t have said that’. Other moments were described where farmers began to make personal disclosures that the worker felt were not appropriate to be explored in front of the other caller. Three of the workers voiced their thoughts that at times such as these they felt it might have been better to have been on their own during a visit.

‘Sometimes it’s not appropriate to do counselling at the kitchen table because your partner is not someone from a health background.’

Worker at group interview - September 2008

Two of the workers who identified a clear preference for working alone pointed out that in some circumstances they felt constrained by being with another professional. Other workers concurred that they had also experienced this at times: sometimes simply because the two separate conversations had unfolded at different rates and where one would be at an end, the other was just getting to the core of an issue.

‘There are times when you are just breaking some really interesting ground but it’s nearly time to go.’

‘I would prefer to just go out on my own and hop on the tractor with a farmer – talk while pitching in, but that wouldn’t really work with someone else in tow.’

Comments from workers at group interviews - September 2008

6.7.5 Professional support through partnerships

Almost all the workers indicated during the course of the group interviews that despite differing skills, perspectives and time limits, if they worked in tandem when they visited a farming couple, there were greater possibilities to engage both people. One worker noted that working in a partnership also meant having opportunities to debrief, compare reflections on the visit and provide each other with feedback about their work, as well as support.

Another spoke of the importance of supervision, particularly given the broad range of issues that workers are faced with in their contact with farmers which can cumulatively result in workers feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. ‘Informalising supervision’ was the term she used to refer to the process of ‘keeping an eye on each other as workers’ and noted that this was another benefit of belonging to the professional network.
A couple of other workers highlighted the value of knowing their partner well, and being on the ‘same page’ or having a professional relationship that was robust enough to notice subtle signals to ‘back off’, or to ‘keep going’ in a particular conversation.

6.7.6 Occupational Health and Safety

While Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) matters were acknowledged as important, they were only raised peripherally during the interviews, with some workers noting that there are legitimate concerns about a variety of safety factors when undertaking farm visits. These include dealing with isolated and unfamiliar geography, facing the unknowns of what they might find at a farm, including the unpredictability of vulnerable people. Some workers spoke of their Agency’s policies and protocols which precluded their involvement in outreach visits such as cold calling, while others spoke of concerns being expressed about OH&S issues, but no formal agency procedures being in place to address these.

And while there was some mirth expressed about drawing straws to see who gets out of the car first to greet the ever present farm dog, it was recognised as a very real and potential problem, with at least one worker admitting to having been bitten.

In short, while all workers expressed differing levels of vulnerability, they all agreed that working in partnership ameliorates some of these issues, though conceded that the issue warrants greater attention to maximise worker safety.

6.8 Benefits of Cold Calling

Cold calling was discussed by the workers as a way of establishing contact with farmers who had begun to isolate themselves in response to the pressures and worries of drought. They reflected that the Farm Gate conversations normalised these responses, helping people feel less alone in their experience. Workers who undertook the Farm Gate visits, reported a common theme: that the people who they visited often reported that they themselves were ‘doing ok’, but that their neighbours were ‘doing it tough’. They reflected on the farmers’ increased awareness of the supports available as a direct result of the farm visits, and their desire to let their neighbours know about these services and supports.

‘There’s always someone in a worse off situation than yourself.’

‘We’re not making a profit, but we are not in trouble like a lot of other people.’

‘We are only just getting through, but we are still here – a lot of our neighbours aren’t.’

Comments from interviews with farmers – December 2008
Workers particularly identified the outreach model as being a very useful response to the increased isolation facing many families. They described how it grew from a community issue: initially to support those farmers on the Campaspe Irrigation System whose water allocations had been drastically cut, who were struggling with the wider impact of drought and isolating themselves. Farm Gate Cold Calling was a way of getting out to those people to provide information about the range of supportive services and grants available to them as well as the support of human connection. It also created opportunities to establish enough of a relationship to seek permission to visit again, particularly to follow up other needs or to assess if the first interventions had been helpful.

‘One of the greatest advantages of the Farm Gate model is that you’re able to call in and visit in a non-stigma and non-threatening kind of way.’

‘It is very difficult for people in smaller or remote rural areas to come into town and see workers when things are really stressed and they are struggling.

One of the strengths of Cold Calling is that we can and will home visit.’

‘Seeing people in their own environment is a tremendous strength of the model. When you’re in their environment and they just open up, that’s the best part. They may never have gone to see anyone but because you were there, it worked.’

Comments from workers at group interviews – September 2008

Many of the workers interviewed, described the broad range of supports that could be offered, far beyond emotional support. They spoke about their role as being a conduit for useful information and access to practical supports and described this as being a key strength. Earlier identification of stresses, provision of support at the farm gate and having strong networks in place to make appropriate links to helpful ancillary support services (eg medical practitioners, rural financial counsellors, Exceptional Circumstances grants, food relief, psychological counselling): all these together were identified as important elements of a successful model.

‘Offering support in linking to other services and being either the go-between or just a contact point is significant... takes it away from just those emotional levels.’

‘The call is like a circuit breaker, can help families to tick along. They’re actually able to survive just with that small intervention.’

Comments from workers at group interviews – September 2008
One mental health worker reflected that while the media was filled with news of the stress and depression born of drought, Mental Health services in the Campaspe Shire had not experienced the expected sharp rise in referrals at the severe end of the mental health spectrum. There was some speculation that this might be attributed to supports being in place at an earlier stage; where people are being supported to access grants and financial counselling via the Farm Gate Cold Calling model, before things escalate to a greater crisis or the anxiety/depression shifts from being in direct response to an immediate occurrence to becoming more deeply rooted. While this is not able to be proved conclusively, the comments below, reflect this observation.

‘I don’t know how you prove that it (cold calling) works, but certainly something is working, because we’re not seeing the massive amounts ... that are out there.

More interventions are happening when people need it. A whole host of stuff is available that’s never been there before. Certainly on the figures we have, something is working.’

Worker at group interview – December 2008

6.9 Challenges related to the practice of cold calling

Despite hearing overwhelmingly positive responses about the model of Farm Gate Cold Calling that the Campaspe PCP had implemented, workers and farmers also offered pertinent critiques of both the practice and the broader implications of undertaking an assertive outreach model.

Privacy and confidentiality were identified as issues by some mental health workers. They noted that privacy was not necessarily guaranteed in a small community if, for instance, a known mental health worker was also engaged in Farm Gate Cold Calling. They explained that if they were seen doing a home visit, others in the community might say ‘ah-ha the mental health worker is going in there,’ and speculate as to the problems in that household, when in fact they were doing a visit as part of a Cold Call team.

Aside from this, some services reported having too few clinical staff available to deliver services in the resource intensive Cold Calling model, and would in some cases, leave agencies stretched to respond to referrals in a timely fashion. While it was acknowledged that at times a worker might visit someone who would benefit from the high level clinical skills of a mental health worker, it was felt that within the role of a Cold Caller, initial informal assessment together with provision of support could address the immediate issues. A referral to specialist services could be offered if required.

Some workers identified the broader challenges facing the service network in terms of the future shaping of timely and appropriate responses to drought affected farmers. This was particularly highlighted in relation to resource allocation and the utilisation of workers’ skills and experience.

‘There’s the challenge for the service system (for each organisation that responds in some way to drought or other key rural issues) of who should go out?’

Worker at group interview – September 2008
Other concerns were raised about communities outside Campaspe Shire trying to replicate the model without clear planning. The workers, who were interviewed, cautioned against ad-hoc responses. They identified a number of elements as being vital to the success of the Campaspe model:

- strategic planning with the involvement of key community members;
- establishment of clear service and practice guidelines; and
- a co-ordinated and collaborative pathway to a broad range of community supports

Additionally, workers spoke about the importance of the right mix of professional skill, a knowledge and appreciation of rural issues as well as the ability to engage with farmers on their own terms.

'It (the practice of cold calling) does have the potential to go 'skew-whiff' ... if you don’t have the right personalities or skills.’
Worker at group interview – September 2008

The interviews with workers were held at a time in late 2008, when State Government funding for drought counsellors was ending. In this context, the concerns raised were related to these changes in funding for drought support work and the impact that this would have on the provision of services such as ‘Farm Gate Cold Calling’.

They speculated on the challenges in being able to meet community expectations that may have been raised through this model of assertive outreach. At the same time, other voices spoke about the resourcefulness of workers and the commitment of agencies in rural areas (such as the Shire of Campaspe), to find ways to continue to provide support to their drought affected communities.

### 6.10 The successes and longer term benefits of cold calling

Success, according to one worker, is:

‘if the message is out there, that there are a range of supports services available, and that a face is known’.

Success, according to another worker, is:

‘when another Shire or region hears about what you are doing and the success of that, and adopts that practice in some form’.

Both the Gannawarra Shire and Southern Grampians & Glenelg Drought Committee within Victoria, acknowledge they have been influenced by the Cold Calling work of the Campaspe PCP, and in consultation have developed their own Farm Gate Cold Calling practices.
In trying to understand the longer term benefits of providing assertive outreach services to people who would not normally access supports, one worker explained:

‘Just last week I had a call from a lady that I would have visited 18 months ago, and she had kept my details and she wanted some information, so she rang me up.

She said, “I knew you would know the information”. So we were then able to help her and she was looking at re-training and those sorts of issues. So it’s very hard to evaluate the impact because we don’t really know, it could be 12 months, 18 months, 2yrs down the track.’

Interview with worker – September 2008

This also highlights the hidden nature of any longer term impacts of creating links with people on farms via a Farm Gate Cold Calling model. Since there are no simple mechanisms in place to track subsequent contacts, informal requests for information such as is described above, are directed to a particular worker or agency as a direct result of an earlier visit. It becomes clear that the trust which has been established precipitates the follow up enquiry, but relies on the worker being available and being able to remember that initial contact.

Overall, the practice of Cold Calling was well embraced by workers and farmers who were interviewed, as reflected in voice of one of the farmers below:

‘I don’t know if it is the right way ... but I know it is something. I can understand that some people might feel uncomfortable or feel like they are prying ... but it is something. It is someone reaching out ... and there is not enough of that. Cold calling is the best way to contact someone who wouldn't go to meetings or Drought Support days.’

Interview with farmer – December 2008
7. Conclusion

Cold calling, as an engagement approach, has been practiced in various forms in several DHS regions across the State of Victoria, as a valuable adjunct to the provision of services and support to people who would not have sought out assistance and are otherwise difficult to reach. While no other cold calling programs, to our knowledge, have been externally evaluated, reports such as undertaken by Southern Grampians and Glenelg Drought Committee, and the concerns and the outcomes of the calls shared by rural outreach/drought workers through the CIGs in the state-wide Drought Project, share some similarities with those found in this study.

All practitioners who undertook the calls spoke about seeking ethical non-intrusive but active ways to respond to people concerned about someone else: to ensure protection of both the privacy of the referrer and the dignity of the potential client, whilst not ignoring the concern because it seems too difficult. Despite opposition raised by some counselling professionals that the calls would be seen as unwelcome and counter productive, the workers interviewed reported not being turned away without at least a brief ‘g’day’ and being able to pass on some printed information about services and grants available.

Whilst many, and divided, opinions about the practices of cold calling have been expressed amongst the professional community, the issues raised in these interviews have challenged some of the major critiques of cold calling. Those criticisms which indicate that farmers either do not welcome, or are offended by the intrusion of uninvited professionals are not supported by the interviews with the farmers in this sample.

There is no definitive response to the question of ‘whether or not to cold call’. The ten farmers interviewed for this evaluation were a small selection of the many people visited in the Campaspe Shire, despite attempts to interview a broader cross section, which would include those who had either ceased the conversation at the door prior to the visit being able to progress or had experienced a call about which they were not happy. Possibly a larger study may have enabled an extensive advertising campaign to locate people critical of the Cold Calling model – but experience suggests this may also have been a waste of resources. Ideally, research and evaluation should be factored into programs like cold calling and integrated with program delivery from the start.

Of those farmers interviewed, eight reported that they had experienced some positive outcome as a direct result of the Farm Gate visit. What can therefore be drawn from the evaluation is that for the farmers and workers who were interviewed, it was primarily a very positive experience. Beyond that, it is possible only to speculate on the spread of these experiences and responses in a population.

In spite of the limitations of the sample, the interviewees offered disarmingly frank comments and provided a sufficiently balanced view of things that they experienced as positive and aspects that were less useful, which cumulatively lend credibility to the study. Their reflections on the multiple factors which they believe are essential to the practice, rather than simply on their own outcomes, provide a valuable critique from which much can be learned.

The voices of the people who were called on at their farmhouses, at milking sheds, in paddocks and on the roadside or over the farm gate, and those workers who made those visits, together create a rich, multi-storied foundation on which to further build a viable avenue of support to farming communities.

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41 (SGG Drought Committee, 2008)
8. References


8. References cont...


9. List of appendices

1. Farm Gate Pathway Campaspe PCP
2. Farm Gate Model Evaluation Brief
3. Campaspe Data Collection Templates – Cold Calling
4. Farm Gate Participant Information and Consent Form – Workers
5. Farm Gate Evaluation – Interview question framework
6. Farm Gate Participant Information and Consent Form – Farmers
7. Withdrawal of Consent Form
8. 2007 Farm Gate Model Protocols - Campaspe PCP

(NB: updated Protocols June 2009 available through Campaspe PCP

(www.campaspepcp.com.au)
Campaspe Farm Gate Pathway

Client/Drought Affected Person

Drought Workers (Counsellor &/or Community Development Officer) apply Farm Gate Model
• visit farm or business

Initial needs identification: Determine if needs require further action.

Yes

No

If no identified needs, provide information on services etc. via brochures, fact sheets, etc.

Determine services required. Gain consent for referral/services

Psychological needs

Apply K-10 tool/ Conduct clinical assessment

K-10 score >16

Mental health assessment required

Potential treatment/support interventions:
• Maintain supports
• Offer counselling services
• Connectedness opportunities
• Health info brochures, etc.
• Careers support

Referral services:
• Mental Health
• GP
• Community Health counsellor
• Psychologist
• Social Workers
• Hospital Accident & Emergency
• Family Service Counsellors
• Drug & alcohol
• Relationship
• Domestic Violence
• Police

K-10 score <16

Practical needs

Use Shire of Campaspe Referral form as per needs identified

Rural financial counsellor

Centrelink

Department of Primary Industries

Practical assistance ie. Welfare agencies
- St Vincent de Paul
- Salvation Army
- CWA

Field officers

Follow-up to ensure referrals are actioned

Liaise with other services as required & review services

If indicators for suicide/self-harm, contact TRIAGE on 1300 363 788 and/or hospital A&E admission

February 2007 (version 1)
Farm Gate Model Evaluation Brief

Rationale/Background:
Farm Gate Model Development
In 2006 the Campaspe Primary Care Partnership (PCP) members involved in drought related service provision agreed to apply a consistent and collaborative approach to support farming families within the Campaspe Shire area. To support this approach, Campaspe PCP facilitated development of the Farm Gate Pathway which was based on the evidence and success of Rochester and Elmore District Health Service and the Shire of Campaspe farm gate cold calling approach implemented in 2005-2006. The methodology applied in this pilot program demonstrated a 30% uptake of farmers for practical assistance; and a 68% intake of farmers with community health counselling for ongoing support of the 200 irrigators visited.

The organisations of Rochester and Elmore District Health Service, Shire of Campaspe, Kyabram & District Health Services, Echuca Regional Health and Kyabram Community and Learning Centre agreed to implement the Farm Gate Model and apply it through the work of their DHS drought counselling funding. This commenced with most organisations in December 2006 – January 2007.

The Campaspe PCP Drought Recovery and Support Committee commissioned to evaluate the Campaspe Farm Gate model and pathway with key organisations and farming families across Campaspe Shire.

Aims of the Review:
Given the difficulties reported in engaging rural people affected by drought and other extremes of weather in counselling these figures are very promising. The proposed research aims to better understand this model of engaging rural people affected by drought and other extremes of weather.

The following are the objectives for the Farm Gate evaluation;
- To assess the effectiveness of the Farm Gate Model in meeting the needs of farming families.
- To gauge the uptake in services/ assistance measures as a result of the Cold Calling
- To determine the benefits / challenges farmers and workers identify from the Cold Calling approach
- To document the practice wisdom discovered by people applying the approach.
- To document feedback from people offered / not offered the approach

Participants:
Organisations
Shire of Campaspe, Echuca Regional Health, Rochester & Elmore District Health Service, Kyabram & District Health Services, Goulburn Valley Health – Waranga, Murray Plains Division of General Practice, Bendigo Health – Community Mental Health, Centrecare, Kyabram Community and Learning Centre, Salvation Army, Centrelink, Department of Primary Industries, Department of Human Services, Department for Planning and Community Development and Campaspe PCP.

Farming Families
From the farming districts of Rochester, Lockington, Gunbower, Tongala, Kyabram, Rushworth, Stanhope, Girgarre, Echuca.

**Process:**

**Research Method**

A qualitative action research paradigm will be used to explore the experience of the Farm Gate Pathway model from the perspective of clients and practitioners. Key informant interviews will be held with practitioners who have conducted cold calling, including rural outreach workers and rural outreach counsellors etc. The key informant interviews will allow theoretical selection (purposeful sampling) of people who have experienced cold calling as clients. Clients who did not like the approach, clients who found the approach helpful, clients who would not have sought help otherwise etc will be interviewed to provide a 'thicker' description of the approach.

Interviews will be recorded using high quality Sony digital recorders and themes developed. The data will be analysed and triangulated and documented in a report that will be made available to the participants. Quantitative data, qualitative learnings and existing 2007 data will be triangulated to provide rich findings. Two-three worker forums will be held to identify variations in application of the Farmgate model, and to recommend WHO and HOW (eg. Telephone, Individual, Family, Group, Email) to interview the client sample.

Interviews will be organised locally by the Campaspe PCP members and the Research designed and conducted by The Bouverie Centre, under the supervision of Associate Professor Amaryll Perlesz.

**Dissemination of the Results:**

The findings will be published in No Bull, Rural Journals and Conferences. The findings will help inform federal funded drought counsellors and local service providers.

The Bouverie Research team will be as follows:

- Bouverie Project Manager: (Chief Investigator) Jeff Young
- Project Worker (Key Researcher) Elena Tauridsky
- Research Assistant Carmel Hobbs
- Research supervisor Associate Professor Amaryll Perlesz

**Timeframe:**

To be completed by the end of March 2009.

**Funding:**

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<th>Anticipated Timeframe</th>
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<td>- interviews and focus groups</td>
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<td>November 2008</td>
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<td>- service utilisation</td>
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<td>Data analysis</td>
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Funding for this initiative has been provided from the following:

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<td>Campaspe PCP: Drought Recovery Support Network</td>
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<td>Shire of Campaspe Drought Social Recovery Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loddon Mallee Region Department of Human Services</td>
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Partnering Organisations and Arrangements:
Supervision and management of the research will be the responsibility of the Bouverie Centre, via the Program Manager of Community Services, Jeff Young who will be responsible to the Employing body Project Manager, Emma Brentnall with Campaspe PCP to achieve the delivery of the project goals.

The Bouverie Research Team will collaborate with the Campaspe PCP around the implementation of the research.

Members of the Campaspe PCP will provide practical support in organising local workers and people involved in the Farm Gate Model to participate in the evaluation process.
# Campaspe: Farm Gate 'cold calling' Data Collection form

**Organisation Name:**
**Practitioner Name:**

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Geographical area</th>
<th>Farm/Business Type</th>
<th>Male/Female</th>
<th>Issue(s) Presenting</th>
<th>Referral(s) Made to</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
<th>Uptake of Referral(why)</th>
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Participant Information and Consent Form - Workers

In 2006 Campaspe Primary Care Partnership members, involved in drought related service provision agreed to apply a consistent and collaborative approach to support farming families within the Campaspe Shire area. The outcome was the Farm Gate Model of ‘cold calling’, where workers drop into all farms in an area to offer support and information about the impact of drought and other related pressures.

The Campaspe PCP Drought Recovery Support Network, the Shire of Campaspe Drought Social Recovery Committee and The Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University are conducting a research project: Farm Gate: an open or shut case? As part of the research and evaluation project we have invited you to participate in one of two informal discussion groups to help us understand more about this practice of reaching out to farming families.

Study Aim

To investigate:
- The practice of cold calling
- What worked well and what has not worked as well?
- Challenges and barriers to the ‘cold calling’ approach

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. The information collected during this research will be kept confidential and only the researchers will know the identity of the participants.
The group interviews will be recorded using high quality Digital Recorders. Themes will be identified and analysed from the recordings and may be used in reports, articles and presentations. It is also anticipated that this evaluation will inform future rural support strategies.

Individuals will not be named in the reporting of the research and all identifying information about you will be removed. All transcripts and audiotapes will be kept in a locked cabinet with any computer files being password protected. After the final research report the original data will be kept in a special secure facility at La Trobe University and destroyed after a period of 5 years.

**Ethics Approval**

This evaluation comes under the umbrella of a research project called “what are effective counselling strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities?” which is being conducted by Jeff Young of the Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University. This has received ethics approval under the auspices of La Trobe University and the Department of Human Services Ethics Committees.

If at anytime you have concerns about the project or would like further information about it, please feel free to contact the lead researcher:

Jeff Young, at the Bouverie Centre.

*j.young@latrobe.edu.au* or phone; 9385 5100

or Emma Brentnall at Campaspe PCP

*emma.brentnall@campaspepcp.com.au* 5484 4480
Declaration of informed consent and individual agreement to participate.

I, ........................................................................................................................................

have read the participant information details and any questions I have asked, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the study above, knowing that I may withdraw this consent at anytime during the course of the study.

I agree that information collected from the study may be presented at conferences or published in journals, on condition that I will not identified in the material without my consent.

Signature of participant:...........................................................................................................

Date: .................................................................................................................................

I will adhere to all conditions set out in this document.

Signature of researcher:........................................................................................................ (Elena Tauridsky)

Date: 10 September 2008
Frameworks of questions for the Interviews

1. Group Interviews with Workers

Broad areas to investigate with Workers who undertook Cold Calling

- Explore the meaning of the term “Farm Gate’
- Hopes, fears and anticipated responses when commencing the calls
- Factors that impacted on the work
- Partnering with workers – challenges and successes
- Challenges encountered in the work? (responses from farmers/ OH&S/etc)
- Explore the issue of those farms not visited or where visits were rejected
- Experiences that stand out
- Elicit what is being said about Cold Calling in the general community
- Measures of success in this program

2. Individual Interviews with Farmers

Broad areas to investigate with Farmers who were visited by Cold Callers

- Explore the experience of an ‘unannounced’ visit
- Helpful aspects
- Aspects that were less comfortable or useful
- Ascertain ideas about the ways this could be done differently
Participant Information and Consent Form - Farmer

In 2006 Campaspe Primary Care Partnership members, involved in drought related service provision agreed to apply a consistent and collaborative approach to support farming families within the Campaspe Shire area. The outcome was the Farm Gate Model of ‘cold calling’, where workers drop into all farms in an area to offer support and information about the impact of drought and other related pressures.

The Campaspe PCP Drought Recovery Support Network, the Shire of Campaspe Drought Social Recovery Committee and The Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University are conducting a research project: Farm Gate: an open or shut case?

As part of the research and evaluation project we are inviting you to participate in a relaxed and informal interview, either by phone or at a location that suits you, to help us understand more about this practice of reaching out to farming families.

Study Aim

To investigate:

• What it was like having someone drop in unannounced for a chat?
• What was particularly helpful about a visit like this?
• What aspects were you not so comfortable with?
• Do you have any ideas about things that could have been done differently?

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. The information collected during this research will be kept confidential and only the researchers will know the identity of the participants.
The interviews will be recorded using high quality Digital Recorders. Themes will be identified and analysed from the recordings and may be used in reports, articles and presentations. It is also anticipated that this evaluation will inform future support strategies for rural people.

Individual people will not be named in the reporting of the research and all identifying information about you will be removed. All transcripts and audiotapes will be kept in a locked cabinet and any computer files will be password protected. After the final research report the original data will be kept in a special secure facility at La Trobe University and destroyed after a period of 5 years.

**Ethics Approval**

This evaluation comes under the umbrella of a research project called "What are effective counselling strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities?" which is being conducted by Jeff Young of the Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University. This has received ethics approval under the auspices of La Trobe University and the Department of Human Services Ethics Committees.

**If you would like to be interviewed, please contact me directly on: 9385 5100**

Yours Sincerely,

[Signature]

Elena Tauridsky
Project Worker

*If at anytime you have concerns about the project or would like further information about it, please feel free to contact the lead researcher:*

Jeff Young, at the Bouverie Centre.  
j.young@latrobe.edu.au or phone; 9385 5100

or Emma Brentnall at Campaspe PCP  
emma.brentnall@campaspepcp.com.au 5484 4480
Declaration of informed consent and individual agreement to participate.

I, ..............................................................................................................................
have read the participant information details and any questions I have asked, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the study above, knowing that I may withdraw this consent at anytime during the course of the study.

I agree that information collected from the study may be presented at conferences or published in journals, on condition that I will not identified in the material without my consent.

Signature of participant:....................................................................................

Date: .................................................................

I will adhere to all conditions set out in this document.

Signature of researcher:................................................................. (Elena Tauridsky)

Date: 
Withdrawal of Consent

Date: ........................................

Research Title: Farm Gate: an open or shut case?

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the above research project and understand that such withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardize my relationship with support services in my region, nor exclude me from receiving services from any of these agencies in the future.

Participant’s name (printed): .................................................................

Signature: ..............................................................................................

Date: .................................................................................................

Please mail or fax this form to:

Elena Tauridsky
The Bouverie Centre
Brunswick VIC 3056
Fax: 03 9381 0336

Assoc. Professor Amaryll Perlesz
The Bouverie Centre
Brunswick VIC 3056
Fax: 03 9381 0336

Ethics Liaison Officer
Human Ethics Committee
Faculty of Health Science
La Trobe University
Bundoora VIC 3086
Fax: 03 9479 2507
Farm Gate Model – Critical Reflection:

Context of current situation:
- Farmers are less likely to seek help, feel isolated.
- Men especially are less likely to seek help.
- Those needing the most support are not stepping into our offices.
- Existing rates of mental health, suicide, family violence, substance abuse;
- Natural disaster;
- 10 years in drought plus the carry over debt from previous years and/or generational debt,
- Cyclic aspect, commodity prices, world trade, changes in social capital, etc;
- Loss of resources – schools, people, less economic capacity;
- Ageing – retirement, success planning;
- Loss of young people in community
- Loss of work opportunities,
- Loss of dairy;
- Erosion of resilience.

Farm Gate Workers Practice Wisdom:
- Need Confidence in knowing the community;
- Need farm knowledge/farm speak;
- Knowledge of people in crisis, trauma, stress;
- Knowledge of what is happening in the community ie. fodder, water; and recognising health impacts;
- Use of intuition, courage – ask hard to ask/answer questions;
- Knowledge of mental health issues and how they present;
- Home visits.
- Ongoing Qualities:
  - Effective engagement – establish credentials, legitimacy, non-threatening, non-judgemental, genuineness, continuing usefulness.

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SERVICE ACCESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices/Actions</th>
<th>Meeting in their own environment/coming to us.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cold calling:</td>
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<td>- confidential;</td>
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<td>- doing whole road;</td>
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<td>- you making initial contact;</td>
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<td>Being clear at the beginning:</td>
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<td>- who we are;</td>
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<td>- where we’re from;</td>
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<td>Home visits:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- you go to them;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- personal contact;</td>
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</table>
- family farming able to be flexible/do on own terms;
- counsellor perceived as ok – empathy;
- two people visit – one rural; one counsellor
- flexible time unit;
- transfer of power – info on what’s available, how to contact;

• Now people have heard and accepted:
  - long term crisis;
  - more hardship;
  - people are getting help and looking for assistance;

Resources/ Tools/ Forms

Service information, brochures, fact sheets etc.

NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

Practices/ Actions

• Ask General Open Inquiries like ‘how are you travelling?’

• Observations:
  - how the land looks;
  - networking present between neighbours;
  - intelligence, links to DPI, etc.;

• Approach:
  - matter of fact/practical;
  - introduce ones self, where from;
  - visiting everyone’s door/checking on everyone/road;
  - Are you on EC?
  - Any help needed? We’re here to help;
  - Interest rate subsidy?;
  - How are you travelling? (personally)
  - How are the children?
  - Remember the tone of voice changes ones body language.

Determine if needs require further action

• Non-stigmatising.
• Can offer practical with counselling.
• Counselling then becomes ok - coping with drought and prior issues.

If indicators for suicide /self-harm, contact Mental Health TRIAGE; 1300 363 788 and/or hospital A&E admission

Resources/ Tools/ Forms

Farm Gate worker practice wisdom
PCP Service Coordination Protocols

REFERRAL

Practices/ Actions

Determine Services required. Gain consent for referral /service provision

Apply organisation practice for Referrals

Resources/ Tools/ Forms

DHS and Shire of Campaspe Referral Form
PCP Service Coordination Protocols
## ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices/Actions</th>
<th>Decision making by family – up to family; Normalising, similar experiences, referring onto, level of responsibility regarding risk. Psychological Needs • Apply K-10 tool/conduct clinical assessment • Provide treatment support interventions • Refer where appropriate Practical Needs • Use of Shire of Campaspe Referral Form as per needs identified   o Rural financial counsellor   o Centrelink   o Department of Primary Industries   o Practical assistance/welfare   o Field officers • Breakdown assistance to manageable chunks/steps – practical assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources/Tools/Forms</td>
<td>K-10 Tool Shire of Campaspe Referral Form</td>
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</table>

## FEEDBACK & FOLLOW-UP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices/Actions</th>
<th>Continuing work and/or referral – GP, Rural financial counsellors, etc. Apply organisation practice for feedback and follow-up</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources/Tools/Forms</td>
<td>PCP Service Coordination Protocols</td>
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