A Dry Run

Welcome to the third edition of *No Bull*, the newsletter of the state-funded Rural Outreach Counsellors/Workers. Did I read Rural Outreach Counsellors/Workers, instead of Drought Counsellors, I hear you say? In the first edition of *No Bull*, I was in a dilemma as to what to call the workforce, which reflected common disagreement about the most appropriate name. It was a dilemma that made writing the first editorial difficult. Six months later, there seems to be a growing agreement that Rural Outreach Counsellor / Worker is the more apt term, given core tasks include some form of outreach to a range of needs, not just drought. So I will use this term (explored further in “working ideas”) until further debate requires otherwise.

Feedback from CIGs and general counsellors attending our state-wide *No Bullshit Therapy* workshops, reminds us that drought affects the whole community and therefore an effective response requires a whole community approach. Strong service co-ordination promoting cross service collaboration is being called for and because each local area is affected differently and has its own unique community culture, outside help needs to tap local solutions and community resilience.

Minister Lisa Neville’s recent announcement of additional funding for counselling in areas of most need and funding for NB Support (see Solutions from the front line), Helping Our Neighbours (see page 11) and Mental Health First aide is most welcome. However, the strong message coming from the bush is that long-term commitments are required.

The Barwon South-West region is about to join the CIG collective. Evelyn Jack, the first worker to be appointed, is profiled on page 2. The Barwon South-West Rural Outreach Counsellors / Workers will get together later this year to share resources, receive training in *No Bullshit Therapy* and establish a CIG which will be facilitated by Judy Poll, a new Bouverie team member. Judy is profiled on page 2. The CIG network is proving to be a simple, but elegant state-wide knowledge generator and mutual support system.

Recently, along with my fellow CIG members, I visited Licola, a small remote town in Gippsland which has been savaged by drought, fire and flood. We enjoyed a wonderful presentation by Alex McLean, (manager of the local Lions camp) about the impact of the different natural disasters. He praised the Licola community’s extraordinary stamina and resilience in the face of these disasters. During our visit a couple of significant observations illustrated how drought is different to other natural disasters. Alex photos of the dramatic impact of the fires and flood, but none of the drought. Driving into the township, road and bridge reconstruction was tangible evidence of both the severe impact of the flood and that the recovery process had started. In fact, Alex told us how the locals built a temporary bridge into the town the day after the flood. These rebuilding projects, apart from giving communities something positive and productive to focus on immediately after a disaster, provide clear evidence that the recovery process is under way. In contrast, the recovery from drought is not as clear, tangible or as social. Later, Kevin, one of our CIG members pointed out that each person is at a different stage of crisis during drought and so although drought affects the whole community, people can feel like they are going through it alone.

I want to draw your attention to a couple of sections in this expanded edition of *No Bull*. Contemporary Controversies, looks at the role of cold calling in engaging people who would not otherwise seek help. Inside Story shares details of how drought is affecting indigenous communities. The expansion of Pitching in reflects the growing evidence of different groups working effectively together for the greater good. In Research Notes, we report that despite the prevailing view that farmers hate counselling, once they seek help, the majority find “talking helps”.

Jeff Young, Bouverie (Editor)
Profiles

Combining counselling skills with community credibility is an important facet of drought counselling. Counsellors cannot be faceless professionals hiding behind a brass plaque waiting for people affected by the drought to contact them. In this section, No Bull profiles workers from each region about their background and their approach to the work.

WELCOME BARWON SOUTH-WEST TO THE STATE-WIDE CIG NETWORK!

Barwon South-West Region

Evelyn Jack 5551 8450 mobile 0418 595 383
evelyn.jack@wdhs.net
Frances Hewett Community Centre, Western District Health Service. 4 days per week, Monday to Thursday.

Background and Experience

Rural - Evelyn moved from Ocean Grove some ten years ago to a small farm near Heywood, Victoria with husband, Rob. They breed Angus cattle, and have a number of Irish Sport Horses, which they had bred whilst in the Geelong area.

Counselling - Evelyn commenced work in the human services field in 1971, and has worked with Government Departments in NSW, ACT and Victoria. She has also worked for non-government agencies such as Smith Family, and with Anglican Community Care in South Australia. Until the move to the Western District, Evelyn had worked for DHS for 20 years in both Child Protection and then as Regional Court Advisor in Juvenile Justice. For the past eight years Evelyn has worked as a counsellor for WDHS. She is currently Senior Counsellor, working in the area of anxiety, depression, grief and relationship counselling. Over the past eighteen months issues arising from prolonged drought have significantly featured within the counselling service offered at Frances Hewett Community Centre, linking with the work of Sustainable Farm Families Project. This has led to extended hours (evening) being made available one day per week to assist farming families who are unable to attend during the day. Home visits to the farm are also available.

Special Interests

Trauma counselling, also chronic disease management and perinatal depression counselling.

Practice notes

My aim is, where possible, that people go away from a session feeling more positive than before. Evelyn uses a reality-based approach to her work, which neatly fits in with “No Bullshit” theory.

The Bouverie Centre

Judy Poll 9376 9844 or j.poll@latrobe.edu.au
Judy is the Bouverie CIG facilitator for the Barwon South-west region.

Background and Experience

Roles - Besides being the Bouverie CIG facilitator, Judy also works as a psychologist providing individual and group programs at Eastern Access Community Health in the Eastern Metro region.

Rural - Judy freely admits to having no personal rural experience, and is keen to learn from the CIG about what it’s actually like working and living in a rural area.

Counselling / Community Development - Judy has a Masters in Community Psychology from Victoria University, which equipped her to work as a psychologist as well as a health promotion worker in a number of community health services. Before working in community health, she worked in the mental health sector, working in a psychiatric disability support service for at-risk young people, before moving onto coordinating a volunteer helpline for carers of people with a mental illness. Judy has assisted the development of community health counselling policy for the sector, has a (very) small private practice and in the past has co-ordinated a regional community health counsellors’ network.

Special Interests

Judy has a particular interest in the connection between counselling and community development practice. She conducted research in this area whilst studying Community Psychology and has held a number of dual roles in community health as a counsellor-health promotion worker herself. Judy enjoys working with people of all ages around many different issues, but has a special passion in working with people who struggle with the effects of anxiety, and has developed an 8 session group program around this issue. On a more personal level, she has a partner, a boisterous family including a gorgeous niece and nephew and feels practising yoga and playing piano are her secrets to keeping (reasonably) sane.

Call 1300 655 969 (24/7) for telephone drought support, professional debriefing or contact details of your local Drought Counsellor
Gippsland Region

John Bell 0418 382 540 or john.bell@kilmany.org.au
Rural Outreach Counsellor, Kilmany UnitingCare, Leongatha.

Background and Experience
Rural and Counselling - John is 54 years old and has had a varied career, combining services to others with working on the land.

Born and brought up on a dairy farm in South Gippsland, John initially trained in psychology and then completed a Bachelor of Social Work at LaTrobe University. For several years he worked in planning and service delivery in Mental Health and Child Welfare. After travelling in Europe and North America he returned to marry Sue Armstrong and manage the Ringwood Office of (the then) Community Services, Victoria. In 1985 John and Sue moved to South Gippsland with their young family and established a home on the farm where John was raised. The next twenty years saw them raise a family of four, develop a vineyard and winery and continue careers in Social Work; John working as a sole local government/hospital worker combining extensive service delivery (especially counselling) with service and social development roles. During this time he and his sister, Robin took over management of the family dairy farm which they have now built up to a 370 head herd.

Special Interests
John has now returned to direct service delivery in the role of Rural Outreach Counsellor with Kilmany Uniting Care, sharing this role with Sue. His extensive experience in welfare services combined with agriculture and especially dairy farming give him particular enthusiasm and interest in this work.

Practice Notes
The taciturn farmer is a myth, they love talking about things they know – but they may struggle to talk about areas they don’t. Therefore, I talk to them about what they know, family, the farm etc.

Grampians Region

Machele Jelsma machelej@wimmera.unitingcare.org.au
Rural Counsellor, Wimmera Uniting Care, Warracknabeal.

Background and Experience
Machele is a Family and Generalist Counsellor based in the rural sector and covering the Yarriambiak Shire. In this role Machele is mobile, so she can and does travel out to all parts of the shire to see clients when necessary. Machele is funded under Drought Relief and works on the premise that in rural communities everyone is affected by the drought at some level. Some of the tasks Machele performs can be as simple as arranging and delivering food parcels, or making complex assessments and referring clients onto more specialized services. The needs of the shire range greatly, including mental health issues, domestic violence, suicide, relationship issues, poverty and isolation, to mention just a few.

In the past, Machele was a drug and alcohol worker in the juvenile justice system for two years, working with young males 16-18. In her current role, she’s found Wimmera Uniting Care a really supportive organization, and feels she is at home.

Special Interests
Machele, who used to live in New South Wales, sees taking the position at Wimmera Uniting Care as a ‘kind of adventure’, now that her last child has left home and she can be ‘footloose and fancy free’. She has noticed that moving across the border has been like moving to another country. Victorians seem to have a proud culture and compared to NSW, a really distinctive feel, even down to the look of rural towns – federation stamp all around, old lace work on buildings, all of which Machele really enjoys.

Practice Notes
When people are emotional, Machele sees that they lose the road map, and all she is doing is helping them get back on track, to pull out the emotion a bit and bring things back to normality.
News from the Hume CIG

Tina Whittle from the Bouverie Centre is taking some time off for personal reasons. We all feel extremely fortunate in having had Tina as our CIG facilitator. Although some of our sessions seemed far too short somehow Tina always managed to include everyone and make sure all of us had a chance to have our say and be acknowledged. Out of all of this Tina consistently managed to articulate the complex issues and provide insightful feedback. We thank you Tina and wish you all the very best.

Although we will miss Tina we are happy to welcome Kerry Proctor from the Bouverie Centre to the position of Hume CIG facilitator and look forward to working with Kerry.

The Bouverie Centre

Kerry Proctor 9376 9844 or k.proctor@latrobe.edu.au
Kerry is the new Bouverie CIG facilitator for the Hume region.

Background and Experience

Rural - Originally from Melbourne, Kerry and her family lived in Newbury, a little hamlet 7 kms out of Trentham, one of the wettest and coldest parts of Victoria, nearly 300m above sea level for twenty-four years. She and her husband were initially hobby farmers, trying their hand at spud farming for five years, and then moving on to a smaller property where they ran a B&B for fifteen years. She worked locally, as well as commuting to Melbourne to study and work while the children were growing up. In 2001, the family moved, very reluctantly, back to Melbourne at the point her oldest daughter went to University there. They plan to move back ‘home’ once the youngest child is through secondary school.

Counselling - After teaching in secondary schools for ten years, Kerry retrained as a counselling psychologist. She has worked in community health, at Relationships Australia (Ballarat), as a school counsellor and in private practice. For the last 11 years she has worked with the Bouverie Centre on the Acquired Brain Injury Team, Clinical Services, and more recently on the Community Health Team and a newly developed Indigenous Project Team. Over the last six years, she has also managed the Breaking Through Project, which involves students, teachers, counsellors and families in a whole school approach dealing with bullying and discrimination. In 2006, she completed her PhD on her implementation of Breaking Through in schools down the Calder Highway corridor from Castlemaine through to Gisborne and across to Melton. Currently, Kerry is involved in a number of training projects as well as the supervision of counsellors individually and in groups within organisations outside of the Bouverie Centre.

Special Interests
Kerry has had interests in a number of clinical areas over the years, including anxiety and depression, grief and loss, sexual abuse, trauma, working with same-sex attracted adolescents and their families, and a commitment to involving all of those in an individual and family’s support system in counselling. On a more personal level, Kerry and her partner have three children, with two older daughters who are wedded to travelling and are currently both working and volunteering in India, and a son who is in his last year of primary school. Gardening and landscaping are her passion and she is slowly learning what is possible in a suburban back garden with limited space and water after being able to grow anything (frost and snow tolerant) in her sub-alpine chocolate brown soil. Chooks and ducks have played a special part in her rural life and her experience tells her that they can play a therapeutic role in managing stress! To be continued.

Kevin Luttrell (CAFS) from the Grampians CIG, hosted the first No Bullshit Therapy workshop in Ballarat on 11/10/07. The workshop was a great success with all 30 registrants turning up, networking and actively engaging with the No Bullshit Therapy material presented by Jeff Young (Bouverie).
**News flash!**

Travis Edwards, Rural Outreach Counsellor, Centacare Bendigo, presented a paper at the National Men’s Health Conference Adelaide in October. His talk was called “Standing at the Back of the Ute.” The name came about when Travis stood at the back of a Ute with a guy who, after a good ninety minutes of conversation, said, “You don’t know a counsellor, do you?”

Travis: 0438 036 181

**Success Stories - Beyond the Gate**

Kevin Holmes, Rural Outreach Worker and Counsellor, and his colleagues have created a powerful event that resulted in positive repercussions throughout the local community - Beyond the Gate.

On 5th September, Todd Russell and Brant Webb were invited to Rochester to talk about their experience of the disastrous mine collapse at Beaconsfield on April 25th 2006 and the resilience they discovered through that life-altering event.

Tod and Brant walked up and down the main shopping streets talking to members of the community prior to giving a very funny ‘warts and all’ insight into their experience of being trapped underground. They delivered a powerful message of how their community and their families supported them through the ordeal, and still do today. Tod and Brant described how the best emotional healing for them has been through talking to family, friends and audiences like Rochester, a community that has been trapped in a different but none the less natural disaster for seven or more years. Todd pointed out that, “When things get tough, these little communities band together and support their mates” and Brant added, “That’s when the Aussie fighting spirit really comes out.”

Kevin Holmes reflects that, “These men have learnt in order to move on and remain sane they have had to express themselves, explore their thoughts and options and confide in those they feel safe with.” Another important aspect of their healing came through writing and publishing their own story, which is very different from how their ordeal was portrayed in the media at the time.

Todd and Brant’s final message was “If anyone is in trouble, get behind them and help where you can and they’ll appreciate it for the rest of their lives.”

Over 450 people attended Beyond the Gate, all fed by the local hospital staff. They also heard Dr Charles Fahey, a senior lecturer in history from Latrobe University (Bendigo), who has researched the history of the Central Goldfields. Dr Fahey spoke about the resilience of rural communities from settlement through to the present. He suggested the history of rural Australia was one of constant crisis, where, “Farmers have been able to face the challenges and conquer them and, although things are at their worst today, we should not give in”.

The evening was hosted by radio professional Dave Lennon of Central Victoria ABC Radio. REDHS used the occasion to launch its Men’s Link project. Everyone was entertained at the event by music performed by local school children.

For a more detailed account of Beyond the Gate email m.wills@latrobe.edu.au or contact Kevin Holmes at Rochester and Elmore District Health Service on (03) 5484 4465 or kholmes@redhs.com.au

**South Gippsland and Bass Coast Shires have been buoyed by the recent declaration of full EC status allowing Federal Government support of farmers and farm dependent businesses.**

**You Won’t Die Laughing**

Leongatha Football Club August 24th

This special event was organised as a free night out for all people on farms and living in or near South Gippsland. The presenters talked about the importance of laughter as a way of coping with stress. They soon had everyone in the audience participating and enjoying themselves. Over 250 people attended and discovered the joy of laughter. Overall the evening was a great success. Initially planned as an event for the South Gippsland Branch of the Australian Veterinary Association it was extended to the whole community as a recognition of the impact of drought on all people living in rural areas. Other sponsors included Department of Primary Industries, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Land care, Department of Victorian Communities, South Gippsland Shire Council and local dairy producers Murray Goulburn and Fonterra.

For further details contact Sue Armstrong Susan.Armstrong@kilmany.org.au

Nothing inspires more than a success story.

Send your success stories to: Michelle Wills m.wills@latrobe.edu.au
Working ideas
emerging thoughts that may be helpful

COUNSELLING VS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Let’s face it: developing a new service in rural areas takes time; time to get known, time to be trusted. Word-of-mouth, the bush telegraph and personal relationship seem to be the most effective forms of promoting a service. It makes sense that any group (not just farmers) who are not familiar or downright suspicious of a service like counselling would take some time to test out and engage such support. Unfortunately this fact does not fit well with the start-stop-start-stop funding that characterises Government’s need to be doing something ‘new’ to support voters effected by natural disasters.

Consequently, as the ‘stop’ part of the funding cycle for drought counsellors comes into view, sustainability of the counselling services is beginning to be a theme in the regional CIGs (Co-operative Inquiry Groups- regional peer networks). A natural shift is beginning to appear, where drought counsellors are calling themselves Rural Outreach Counsellors / Workers. The Rural bit is obvious, the Outreach is seen as essential to get to the people who need help the most and Worker reflects that it is a lot more than counselling that workers are doing; community development, case-management, advocacy, practical assistance, cup-of-tea therapy, back of the ute chat and counselling. An integration of all of these elements should be reflected in the job description of a Rural Outreach Counsellor / Worker. The loss of Drought in the preferred name represents the growing need to encompass all disasters: drought, fire, flood and the social impacts of broader economic / climate change. Another option preferred by some services is to emphasise rural in all services.

The graph below is an early attempt to pull together the information and wisdom coming from the state-wide CIGs. It shows the developmental nature of establishing new services of Rural Outreach Counselling / Work; few clients in the first 6 months, but lots of community development work, then more counselling as client numbers grow as the service is established. This pattern has been found by more established services. The resilience of the community continues to grow, as early service is established. This pattern has been found by more established services. The resilience of the community continues to grow, as early service is established.

Diagram 1: Different type of work performed by Rural Outreach Workers / Counsellors

![Diagram](image)

For thoughts and comments email Jeff Young j.young@latrobe.edu.au

NEWS from the BIG shed

(DHS)

The ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing’ guidelines and funding have now been supplied to agencies and PCPs, providing additional capacity until June 2008. This funding will continue to assist in the response to community need through counselling services, as well as targeted partnership, planning and development approaches. Primary Health and Emergency Management Branches within DHS are currently working on a strategic and integrated plan, aimed at building a more coherent and evidence-based drought response now and into the future. This will be drawn from the statewide evaluation planned for early 2008; The Bouverie Centre research; and the ongoing feedback and reporting provided through funded programs.

Department of Primary Industries ‘Changing Social Landscapes Research’, a recent forum held by the Climate Adaptation Science and Policy Initiative (CASPI) at Melbourne University, and the work on ‘Heatwave Planning’ in Public Health are just some of the current actions. All recognise the need for a more strategic and integrated response to the drought, climate change and rural adjustment challenges already impacting on rural communities. The DHS Drought Working Group is working to ensure that while drought might be the focus, it needs to be considered within the broader context of these other challenges that compound the impact of drought on rural communities.

Building on this, is the the Rural PCP Workshop on Wednesday 3rd October; Climate Change and Human Health Conference [www.healthclimate2007.com](http://www.healthclimate2007.com) held on 16th and 17th October; and the Victorian Planning Institute’s Communities in Drought Forum in Bendigo, 25th October (inquiries 9347 1900) focusing on social and community planners working in local government. The Community Health-PCP-DHS drought response around the theme of cross-sectoral partnerships and planning was presented at the Climate Change and Human Health Conference.

For some people it can feel as if there is too much discussion with not always enough action. In many ways this drought and its possible links to climate change are unprecedented. Advocating about these challenges and working together to determine what actions are effective is vital, and can only be done by being in constant dialogue with our colleagues and more broadly across sectors and with government.

Sally Rose, Partnerships Team - Integrated Health Promotion Rural & Regional Health & Aged Care Services Email sally.rose@dhs.vic.gov.au
Inside story

The impact of the drought continues
Kevin Dmytrenko reports from East Gippsland:
Green paddocks and mountains do not mean the drought is over; feed on much of the ground is only 1cm long because of the cold ground conditions. Farmers still need to buy feed and feed is expensive because of its scarcity and because of the high transport costs to this remote area. Young lambs are wearing out their teeth on the dirt surface as they feed on the short grass, and therefore need to be sold on to better pastures. Also the poor condition of stock means that a cold snap is likely to kill many stock.

“Farmers have struggled to bring their animals through the drought and then have been severely hit by flood which has left massive amounts of silt on the land which they had spelled ready to bring the freshly calved cows onto. Calving is in full swing and cows at their greatest demand for feed are now eating silt as well as grass, which is settling in their rumen unable to be digested or expelled, making the animals very sick and losing all the condition they had gained prior to calving.”

Tracey Moffatt reports on the impact of Drought on the Koorie Community:
Socially the drought does not affect the Koorie community. Traditionally the Koorie people had a relationship with the land that was not as exploitive as our’s is today. They hunted and gathered without depleting stock so there would always be enough food. When the leaves fell off the gum trees that was recognised as a time of drought. Physically the Koorie people carry a Thrift Gene, which ensured that they could store food in their body fat in time of plenty to prepare for times of famine.

Economically however, it is a totally different situation. Koorie people often rely on income from seasonal unskilled work. In this area that means vegetable picking and working in the food processing factories. Drought has made these jobs scarce, and the flow on effect to the community has led to higher unemployment and lowering of income. The affects on the community are cumulative as the community misses out on the cash that picking brings in, and the people who would have added to the viability of the community, become instead a liability. Koorie people culturally and socially have restricted access to employment. The Drought means even the limited employment available becomes less obtainable.

Sue Armstrong reports on the impact on women and children:
Families have been doing it so hard that they were unable to purchase the weekly shopping and were making do on stored cupboard items such as flour and rice. Many dairy farmers have had a reduced income during the last three-four months over the calving period. One of the solutions has been for women to get some part-time work to supplement farm income. However many women have reported work has been hard to find and the jobs are likely to be casual with no security of a regular weekly income. Significant numbers of children are unable to go on school camps or participate in after school and sporting activities. Families have not been able to afford relevant clothing for their children, sending kids off in summer school camps or participate in after school and sporting activities. Families have not been able to afford relevant clothing for their children, sending kids off in summer school uniforms during the winter months. School tutoring has fallen victim to reduced family budgets.

“One women who has three children of school age talked about how hard it was to ask for help. She had always been active in the local community and involved in voluntary work. With the drought she had to cut down on driving and phone calls so her isolation has added another burden.”

The Changing face of Community through Drought – Loss of family, friends and neighbours, Ann Pratt reports:
Drought drastically affects the very fabric of communities: PEOPLE. With little farm return, declining business opportunities and loss of jobs, many people are forced to seek income outside of their local community, leaving an already depleted community further depleted. These people rarely return full time back into the community.
In this piece, I point out what new drought counsellors can expect in the first few months when employed to start a counselling service for rural people affected by drought.

Don’t expect any documentation of what counsellors did during the last drought that hit the region. Whether or not it is because of its slow and insidious onset and chronic nature, drought seems not to benefit from ‘corporate’ memory. Whilst fire and flood response is relatively well organised at all levels of Government and Community, drought response seems not to enjoy the same level of organisation and integration.

Whilst you have been employed as a counsellor – don’t expect to do much counselling in the first few months – that will come later. It takes time to establish a new service, especially one that needs to engage people who are neither enthusiastic nor familiar with counselling. Initially you will find yourself doing more community development work, community education, networking and relationship building - work you may or may not have been trained to do. You will gradually call yourself something like a Rural Outreach Worker or Counsellor, as this will reflect more accurately the work you do. If your job description is restricted to centre-based conventional counselling, you’re in for a lonely few months.

If your host agency is supportive, you will probably find yourself personally and professionally working outside your comfort zone. Farmers are proud people. Initially, they want practical help, such as financial support and fodder, not counselling. So you will find yourself linking up with Centrelink workers or Rural Financial Counsellors to help eligible farmers and business people to fill out EC forms and sourcing money from all sorts of funds – that come and go much quicker than the drought. In practice your work might look something like:

- contacting as many people and service providers as possible,
- leaving newly developed flyers in your wake and
- developing trust and relationships with GP’s; hospitals; Primary Mental Health Services; Community Health Centres; Police; churches; Veterinarians; local businesses; CWA’s; Stock and Station Agents; Rural Financial Counsellors; water cartage contractors; Charities; Women’s Health organisations, even pubs. You are likely to find yourself talking to schools about the impact of drought on families, establishing peer support networks and participating actively in Drought and Community Recovery Committees.

I should point out that not all regions currently have a drought recovery committee. Although they help co-ordinate services, drought is relatively low status and due to its chronic nature, is costly. Thus it is hard to sustain interest in ongoing disasters. However, you can expect to gradually develop personal networks with local agencies and begin to integrate your counselling with community development work.

If you are a traditional counsellor, you are likely to be challenged about protecting people’s privacy, and the need for assertive outreach, assertive referral and No Bullshit Therapy. You are likely to develop skills for responding to people concerned about someone else, and finding ways to follow up these concerns whilst ethically protecting the rights of the referrer and the potential client. ‘Who is the client’ may not always be clear. You will find yourself having to take a position on “to cold call or not to cold call”.

However creatively you engage clients, you can expect to talk to many individuals with personal stories relating to the effects of long standing drought. You can expect your clients to talk about previous trauma, whether drought, flood or bushfires. You can expect to hear immense suffering, interlaced with amazing stories of stoicism and resilience. You can expect people down on their luck to be concerned for others, more than themselves. You are likely to hear the words, “I guess there is always some-one worse off than me”, over and over again. You can expect that people who do eventually receive counselling will typically report finding it helpful to talk.

Your clients will typically deny the traumatic impact of the drought, so you should expect some degree of vicarious traumatisation. You may feel there is so much to do and so few resources. You should expect to confront your own personal and professional powerlessness in the face of limited rain, limited finances and limited hope. Consequently, you should seek out good supervision in your host agency and link up with other drought workers. You will do well to engage with the monthly C.I.G. meetings, or similar network, as an invaluable adjunct to your practice as a Drought Counsellor in order to: debrief with colleagues; share stories and ideas; be ‘clinically’ re-vitalised; be affirmed in your practice and; to connect with fellow workers across the state.

After a short period of adjustment, you are likely to love the work and develop personally and professionally from working outside your comfort zone. You may even find yourself becoming a skilled practitioner of No Bullshit Therapy.

One other thing you can expect. Funding for your position may be threatened just at the point you have built up community connections, awareness and trust of your service. Surprisingly, your clients are likely to express their emotional pain after the worst of the crisis, “dropping their bundle because they can” and long after the media has lost interest in the drought. Pointing out that this is normal, will help them realise they are not crazy.

(Although expressing my views only, I want to acknowledge Jane Rushworth & Ruth Malpass, for inspiring me to write this piece. J.Y.)
Contemporary Controversies

What are the benefits of ‘Cold Calling’ with farming families?

By Wayne Harris [Wharris@familycare.net.au] and Terry Reedy [treedy@familycare.net.au] Rural Outreach Workers, Familycare, Shepparton.

It was the week before Christmas. We had just received funding to provide support services to drought affected families in our service area.

While we were considering how we would initiate the service, the calls began to come in and the need to respond was imperative. The requests for service to the farming community were not coming directly from the farmers. Referrals were being made by concerned professionals, neighbours and community members who were aware of the pressures endured by these families. Callers also suggested that a visit from ‘social workers or counsellors’ would not necessarily be welcomed, so we had to think about how we could offer support without being overly intrusive.

Through previous drought responses and research we discovered the concept of ‘Cold Calling’. We felt that the benefits of using a low key non-threatening approach would assist with the engagement of farming communities hence informing them of supports and benefits to which they are entitled.

‘Cold Call’ efforts are determined by identifying areas to target rather than individual properties.

Our practice is to take an unpretentious approach to engagement by pulling up the drive to the houses in our Ute ensuring a low profile. We could be just another farmer or tradesman visiting the area and so our visits are more welcomed. There is usually less suspicion and angst about our visits as we present a non-threatening approach to engaging in general conversation, starting with a warm “G’day how’s it going?” We introduce ourselves using our names and indicating that we are ‘rural outreach workers’ (we never use social worker or counsellor) and we provide identification to establish our

Familycare association. We let them know that we are visiting all farms in the area so that we can make sure they are all provided with information about services and benefits available to them. Every farming family is given a package of information containing pamphlets, forms and contacts outlining benefits and support services that they are eligible to receive and how they can access them.

Our experience is that there is always a degree of inquisitiveness when we have face-to-face contact. We have not yet been asked to leave a property. Many farmers see us as a mobile referral point to assist in accessing benefits and supports. Because we have used an unobtrusive approach of engagement we are usually able to get into more depth and begin to connect more to the emotional needs of the families. A high percentage begin to respond to counselling or other in-home support services although they are usually maintained using relatively informal models. Building a rapport can take several visits and it often starts over a cuppa or in the milking shed or down in the paddock. There have been times when effective engagement has occurred in the milking shed whilst assisting with farming task such as milking or in the paddock assisting in calving.

Solutions from the front line

NB Support

Providing emotional support to isolated farmers is not easy for a counsellor – even if you are employed to do just that. However, there is a range of other workers who do provide emotional support, whether they intend to or not, during their regular contact with farmers. For example, DPI extension officers, animal welfare officers, vets, milk factory field officers, Milk carters, Rural financial counsellors, truck drivers, St Vs, Salvos, Childcare workers, Teachers, hairdressers etc.

CIGs from several regions have been thinking about ways to provide secondary support to these workers who, consistent reports say, are experiencing vicarious traumatisation as a result of talking to stressed farmer after stressed farmer. Alana Brennan, from the Loddon Mallee CIG has suggested adapting ideas from Jeff Young’s No Bullshit Therapy, to provide simple guidance about listening in a supportive way for non-counsellors. Alana’s suggestion has lead to a collaborative project between the Bouverie Centre and Rural Outreach Workers across the state. The project, which has the working title of NB Support, will be piloted in the Loddon Mallee and then hopefully implemented across the state. NB Support (No Bullshit Support or No Bull Support, also play on NB meaning Note Well) is not teaching therapy or counselling. It aims to provide easy to follow guidelines on how to support someone in trouble. It is hoped it will reduce some of the pressure people experience when they are not sure what to say when worried about a friend, neighbour or work colleague. Training will be brief and practical, designed to help workers who have regular contact with farmers doing it tough to do what they are already doing (providing a listening ear), but to do it with some support and training so they themselves, don’t get stressed.

Any ideas or concerns, or just want to know more about NB Support: Contact Jeff Young j.young@latrobe.edu.au
In this section, No Bull reports on examples of people from different organisations and community groups networking or working together... for the greater good.

General Practitioner Referrals to Drought Counselling
A Pilot Program

A recent initiative between the Ararat Medical Centre and Grampians Community Health Centre (GCHC) encouraging GPs to refer drought stressed people to the health centre’s counselling services has been a resounding success.

Earlier this year the West Victorian Division of General Practice (WVD) approached GCHC asking for their involvement in a general practice ‘quality improvement program’ in dealing with drought stressed people. The program called Collaborative Care Models for Care Planning was implemented in response to the increased presentations of drought affected rural people with low mood, depression, stress and anxiety in the region’s doctor’s surgeries. The WVD’s intention was to acknowledge that GPs are often the first ‘port of call’ and play an important role in assisting drought affected people to manage their stress. The WVD also wanted to inform GPs that drought related counselling services were operating within their region, were effective and could assist GPs in working with patients affected by drought.

The program was aimed largely at improving the way practices engage health and community services to plan and facilitate optimal patient care. So, working within the crowded timelines of a busy rural practice and those of drought counsellors, WVD sought to network the two services and forge a framework for possible referral. Although this process sounds easy it was by no means the case. The initial perceptions the two services had of each other at our first meeting were not particularly flattering. GCHC counsellors claimed that GPs were never open to hearing from, or meeting with, health centre workers, were always ‘too busy’ to hear of new health centre initiatives and were not open to the idea of counselling. GPs claimed that the GCHC never notified them of staff changes and were sloppy in feeding back to GPs, post referral. GPs stated that they would like to know more about counsellor’s qualifications, processes and methods of feedback.

A working party of WVD, GP representatives, GCHC drought counsellors and Wimmera Primary Care Partnership community development workers initiated a process of information sharing and education in turning these poor perceptions around. GPs were informed of GCHC counselling processes and skill bases, a solid feedback system was agreed upon and a greater regard for the way each could assist the other in the larger goal of rural patient care was implemented. An interesting fact that came out of the info/ed process was that some GPs at Ararat Medical Centre were recent arrivals from overseas or on international graduate programs. Within this group, some were from developing countries that had experienced humanitarian crises like poverty and famine, civil war and other extreme hardships. To these GPs, the drought we are experiencing was not a crisis or emergency compared to what they had seen in their homelands. Much of the education and info process was explaining the impact of drought on ‘this’ community and how by relative standards, the drought is a very traumatic event for the Australian rural community.

At present, we are nearly 10 months into the program, the two groups have married up well and referrals are happening. The initial assistance focus of primarily providing people with access to generalist counselling has branched out to wider ranging support at GCHC. Now GPs refer drought stressed patients to other services we provide such as: The Carer Respite Centre, Community Health Nurse, Gamblers Help, D/A Homed Based Withdrawal, Men’s Health, Family Violence Support and the list goes on. We have even included Stawell Medical Centre in the program now and a slow but steady stream of referrals is coming from them, meaning we are reaching more people from a wider region. The pilot has been welcomed by GCHC drought counsellors who feel that people are more likely to present to a GP with physical stress symptoms rather than contact counselling services directly. GCHC envisions GP referrals should increase gradually over time with wider GP awareness and promotion of GCHC drought and generalist counselling services.

For more information on the program please feel free to call Glenn Peters phone 03 5358 7404.
The highs of being a drought counsellor

We recently received a referral from Wangaratta Shire Council to speak with a worker from Dhurringile Prison. The prison has a team of staff and prisoners replacing fences in fire and drought affected areas. There was a query that perhaps direct contact with locals affected by fire and drought could have led to “secondary trauma” for some of the prison team.

First let's borrow from an article written by Ken Seymour (A/Operations Manager - H. M. Prison Dhurringile) who describes the Prison project:

“The Team from Dhurringile travel to the area each Monday morning and stay at one of the school based camps until the following Friday. One staff member and a team of carefully selected prisoners work on properties of people who were badly affected by the bush fires. Many of the properties were rendered unmanageable by the fires that were so hot and so fierce that fences no longer exist and what was left amounted to nothing more than rubbish. The Dhurringile Team have managed to remove approximately 13 km of fence that was difficult to reach by conventional methods and have replaced a staggering 140 km of plain wire, 7 km of wire mesh, 3600 steel pickets and in excess of 500 posts. These properties are generally made difficult by the harsh steep terrain. There have been days where the team have been hip deep in black stagnant water tying off fences and other days where they have been ankle deep in fresh powder snow. ”

So yesterday we drove along logging roads, across some of the most beautiful terrain in Australia and finally found the team at the top of the world overlooking Cheshunt and down upon Powers Lookout, almost touching heaven. We were greeted by an energetic, cheerful team leader and an aged doe-eyed dog. In the distance we could see a team of blokes busily sinking one of the posts that are part of the 140 kms of fencing erected to date.

What we discovered was a small robust team made up of prisoners, a land owner and team leader; and an energetic story about resilience, sharing, mutual respect and, in some cases, life changing experiences. The traumatic stories are there, but are balanced with immense local appreciation for the work done by the prison team for a community seriously ravaged by fire in the midst of the region’s worst drought for a long time. Ken made reference to the profound link between re-building fences and re-building lives.

Happily our services were not required. It was a pleasure and a privilege to be on top of the world bearing witness to building lives.

The Victoria’s Farmers Federation (VFF) and State-wide Rural Outreach Workers have joined forces to co-develop local workshops to support farmers to reach out to their neighbours. The project funded and initiated by the VFF, aims to help educate farmers about the impact of drought and other stressors on relationships and families, and to generate ideas on how farmers can network and look out for their neighbours.

Local VFF branches and local Rural Outreach Workers are getting together to develop a locally relevant workshop, with back up support from The Bouverie Centre. The CIG network is used to share workshop programs, evaluations and good ideas across regions. These events, which have already been conducted in the Bairnsdale and The Kiewa Valley, receive considerable media attention, thanks to the work of the VFF.

If you are interested in developing a Helping Our Neighbours event in your region, please contact Brenda McLachlan mclachlan@vff.org.au (VFF) or Jeff Young j.young@latrobe.edu.au (Rural Outreach Counsellors / Workers).

Organisational Profile: Yarriambiack Shire Drought Advisory Committee

FARMER welfare and health, Wimmera-Southern Mallee rainfall deciles, extent of farmer take up of Exceptional Circumstances as well as general effect of drought are among some of the many issues raised at bi-monthly Yarriambiack Shire Drought Advisory Committee meetings.

Farmers, business people, health and welfare workers, rural and financial counsellors, the police, educators, town committee representatives, Department of Primary Industries agricultural advisers, Centrelink staff, Primary Care Partnership workers and a community engagement officer are just some of the people to regularly report to the well-attended meetings. The group has proven to be a vital information-sharing source, allowing updates on farmer issues and issues affecting general health and wellbeing. The group has also lobbied successfully to governments and other organisations on issues of community gain.

Yarriambiack Shire is in the state’s central west with its base at Warracknabeal. It has a population of about 7,000 people and relies on agriculture as its major income source. Other towns include Hopetoun, Murtoa, Minyip and Rupanyup.

Contact Faye Smith 0427 821 510 fsmith@yarramiack.vic.gov.au
Community Building Initiative Facilitator
Yarriambiack Shire Council
counselling notes

When and how to move from “chatting” to “counselling”?

Compiled by Jeff Young

John Bell, rural outreach worker from Kilmany Leongatha, asked me at the two-day forum in February this year, “How do you move from chatting to counselling?” with people who may benefit from, but don’t want or don’t necessarily understand, counselling. At the time, I muttered a simplistic and probably unhelpful response because I didn’t know enough to even understand the significance of John’s question. Eight months, 31 CIGs, seven debriefs with Bouverie CIG facilitators and the odd BBQ at rural information afternoons later, I understand the significance of the question and can report on some of the strategies rural outreach counsellors, including the DPSL counsellors have found useful. Firstly, other ways of asking John’s initial question are, “How do you “break in” and change the level of conversation, when the conversation has a pattern and flow of its own?” When do you reveal your counselling role? In theory this last question is easy, “As soon as possible, earlier the better.” In practice it is not so easy, as many counselling encounters start genuinely as just a general chat and may morph into counselling.

In practice, intuition will be one of your best guides. Tracking the conversation is another, noticing themes that are more easily linked to a counselling referral. The referral may be to someone else or to yourself. The idea of making overt the changing of hats can be helpful. Ideas from No Bullshit Therapy can be helpful to mark the change of conversation level in an upfront way, making overt any constraints to the shift. For example, “In a moment I’m going to ask you how you’re going, because I’m a counsellor and that’s what counsellors do! I know its probably the last thing you feel like talking about, but…”

If there is a crisis point within the general conversation, this can be linked to its impact on other family members. Even the most independent stoic person is often more open to seeking help for their children, partners or friends. With this in mind, Justine Clear (DPSL) uses what I call the “funnel approach” with clients who ring in wanting practical help rather than counselling. She asks a series of questions that would start broad and general and gradually become narrower and specific. For example, “How’s the drought affecting the region? What’s been the biggest impact on your neighbours? How’s your farm doing? How is it knocking your family around? What’s the hardest thing your wife has to manage? Sounds like you’re under a lot of financial stress, what have you done that’s helped the most? Is there anything I could do to help you?”

Outreach work allows a range of engagement opportunities, from pairing pigeons to helping to deliver calves, but these activities can make it even more difficult to move from chatting to counselling. Travis Edwards, a rural outreach worker from Centacare Bendigo, has a number of general assessment type questions to help move toward understanding how a person is coping. Again within the “funnel approach” the questions start general, such as “How is the local footy team doing?” Questions like this can provide a sense of social connection or degree of isolation.

The ideas in this report are clearly only the early stages of documenting some of the specific skills of a rural outreach counsellor. I have no doubt that many of our readers have approaches that work well. Please consider sharing your practice wisdom with others, in order to add to this small but growing body of knowledge.
Drought: a challenge to photographers!

The impact of drought is not as easily represented pictorially as other more acute and dramatic natural disasters as demonstrated here with contrasting images of flood and drought in Gippsland.

Got a photo which depicts the impact of drought better than words?

We will print photos in subsequent editions of No Bull and readers can vote for the photo which they feel best expresses the impact of drought on Victoria. The photo which receives the most votes will win the photographer a weekend away from the farm or work! Please send your photo to m.wills@latrobe.edu.au

The Hands of Help

A poem by Adrienne Hicks

Right now I feel a stranger
while treading paths unknown
In seeking the familiar
I often feel alone.

For things that have been smooth so long
and running without pause
are suddenly a trial to keep
from breaking without cause.

And mind and body, spirit too
have taken quite a hit
The drought that’s struck on all our land
has really, truly bit.

But right now let me take in mine
the hands of help nearby
and show me over and again
I’m not alone to try.

To get back up and to be strong
although it’s sometimes hard,
to let me think beyond the worst,
forever on my guard.

The lessons learned, the measures taken
let them now be the way
to see the clear path we must tread
progress day by day.

Adrienne Hicks
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Community capacity building via the arts

Kerry Easton, a Beef Cattle producer and Secretary of the Gippsland VFF (2 days per week), is currently devising a strategy to make the East Gippsland Art Gallery (EGAG) more relevant to the community and to assist in building community mental health. She reports that “involving the arts in recovery can help lift spirits and help people to ‘get away’ from their stresses.” Kerry told a poignant story of a woman who organised a play during the 90’s drought. Her husband felt it was a waste of time, time that she could spend helping him on the farm. Just before opening night she asked (with some intensity) if he was coming, and to her surprise he attended. Her husband is now a performing actor.

Rural Arts Victoria is currently conducting a statewide arts project exploring and expressing issues concerning water, called Fresh & Salty. According to RAV’s website www.rav.net.au content generated by Fresh & Salty, as well as participating communities / partners, will be showcased in a 2008 statewide tour.

For information on Fresh & Salty please call 03 9644 1800 or 1800 819 803 (toll free country Vic).
No Bullshit Therapy

No Bullshit Therapy - with a focus on working with people affected by drought. Presented by The Bouverie Centre, hosted by Local State-Funded Drought Counsellors and funded by DHS.

Free one day regional workshops
Open to any counsellors / rural workers

No Bullshit Therapy - Striving towards honesty. “An approach that is ideal for men and people who: don’t like therapy; have had traumatic experiences and are reluctant to trust do-gooders; see counselling and therapy as a middle class wank; don’t like being psychologised; are suspicious of the worker’s agenda or motives; have had a lot of unsatisfactory treatment, counselling or therapy and are hard to engage in therapy.”

No Bullshit Therapy: What is it?

Most simply, No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) is about creating constructive contexts for mutual honesty and directness in working relationships. Creating contexts for mutual honesty, sometimes just by stating that is how you would like to work, can be liberating and productive. If combined with warmth and care, honesty and directness can enhance intimacy, connection and trust. NBT is consistent with the general trend toward more transparent negotiations about how to work with clients, which has been shown to contribute to effective therapeutic outcomes by the common factors researchers, (Miller et al, 2004).

NBT has five basic clinical guidelines:

1. Striving for mutual honesty and directness in working relationships
2. Overtly negotiating levels of honesty and directness
3. Marrying honesty and directness with warmth and care
4. Being upfront about constraints
5. Avoiding jargon

In times of increasing media hype and blatant political spin, the general population appears to be becoming suspicious of community leaders including professional counsellors. NBT approaches can help break through prevailing stereotypes of therapist as being warm and fuzzy but indirect and ineffective, even subtly manipulative. No Bullshit Therapy counters these negative perceptions, where they exist, offering a refreshingly direct approach where mutual honesty and directness are overtly negotiated.

No Bullshit Therapy does not promote honesty as the only policy or even as always the best policy, instead it encourages counsellors to overtly negotiate with clients the degree of honesty and directness that they would prefer in the working relationship. Most clients seem to embrace offers of honesty and directness when made by a counsellor (eg “That’s what we’re here for”). Honesty on the part of the counsellor, for example about what the counsellor can do and can’t do, also promotes trust. Especially when there is “bad faith”, directness (without blame) and upfront honesty usually does more to create trust in working relationships than good intentioned, but misguided, attempts to avoid conflict.

Because it can be difficult to negotiate the counselling relationship with people who approach therapy with strong anti-therapy stances, (ie people who hate being psychologised, see therapists as warm and fuzzy but not trustworthy, feel confounded by jargon or are disempowered by specialist knowledge) a No Bullshit Therapist may have to negotiate honesty and directness rhetorically. Depending on the language of the client, the therapist may indicate early on that he or she “prefers to practice no bullshit therapy – where I don’t bullshit you and you don’t bullshit me”. For people who are very suspicious of therapy, this can be a breath of fresh air and can create a context for productive straight talking – especially if combined with warmth and care, and an acknowledgement of constraints.

No Bullshit Therapy does not have to involve swearing. Other colloquial terms for honesty and directness can be used such as “not pussy foot around”, “say it straight”, “not walk on eggshells”, “cut to the chase”, “be direct”, “call a spade a spade”, “to be frank” etc. The shock value of NBT may be helpful to disrupt the usual stereotypes of a professional counsellor or it may get in the way. Selecting the terminology to express the intent of the clinical guidelines requires judgment.
For people who are not so suspicious of therapy, the level of honesty and directness in the work can be more subtly negotiated over time, or raised when greater frankness is therapeutically advantageous - such as when therapy feels like it is not going anywhere. Therapeutic techniques such as creating signposts for moments of honesty allow the client to prepare themselves to hear direct feedback. For example, asking “Can I be really direct with you?” gives the client time to organise themselves so they can hear challenging feedback without blocking it out. This can be helpful when the counsellor feels stuck and the counselling predictable and ineffective.

Strategies to help promote productive, rather than harsh honesty, include marrying honesty and directness with warmth and care, dimensions often seen as mutually exclusive. NBT encourages a weaving back and forth between these dimensions. For example, “I can see you want the best for you kids (warmth) but unless you can address your anger, there is not much chance of them wanting to see you (directness). I’m being pretty direct with you (making directness overt) because I want the best for you and your family (care), I can see you are a decent man (warmth) and don’t want your kids to be afraid of you” (honesty). Really believing that most clients have the best of intentions is another philosophical position that allows honesty and directness to be constructive.

NBT also encourages honesty and directness about constraints – rather than pretending they don’t exist. For example, a middle class therapist might be upfront about her class, “I haven’t got a clue what it’s like to live on the streets (honesty) but I can help you get a meal” (care). A drought counsellor may acknowledge that “there is absolutely nothing I can do about the drought, and you’d probably prefer to see a water tanker than me, (upfront about constraints) but I might be able to suggest some ways you might help your family survive it intact (directness) and I get the impression you’re the sort of bloke to whom family is everything” (warmth and care).

NBT has led to a range of therapeutic techniques which use the same clinical guidelines to generate processes for clients to do their own therapy, including No Bullshit Self Supervision and No Bullshit Self Reflection, which clients can use outside the counselling.

Self supervision, for example, is a 5 step process to help clients address stuck relationships, within the family or with work colleagues. The counsellor takes the client through 5 steps and records their answers verbatim. The client is encouraged to fully embrace each step, one at a time, before integrating the steps into one sophisticated approach. The five steps are:

1. What would you say if you shot from the hip (to the person they are struggling with)?
2. Describe the impact of the “problem” person’s actions on you using “I” statements
3. Acknowledge any difficulties or constraints that make it hard for the person to do what you would like them to do
4. Articulate the person’s strengths that will help them change
5. State what you want to happen in specific and tangible terms

The therapist reads back the client’s verbatim answers to each question, combining them into one flowing request that combines honesty and directness with acknowledgments of constraints and strengths. The client is then invited to practice doing the same, in their own time before trying it out with the person with whom they are struggling.

Relevance to Drought Counsellors
The NBT approach has been received well by many counsellors / workers attempting to engage people who are suspicious of therapy, including drought counsellors. The general approach of NBT is not new to many workers, especially rural workers such as drought counsellors, but the theoretical framework of NBT helps legitimise their approach and provide some helpful guiding principles to extend their work and to ensure that directness is softened by warmth and care.

NBT partly grew out of Single Session Work (SSW), which accepts the statistical fact that many clients will only attend 1-2 sessions, and therefore encourages the counsellor to “cut to the chase” in order to get the most out of each session. Evaluation studies of SSW (Boyhan 1996) have found that clients love this way of working, which suggests that the constraints to honest and direct working relationships are often more to do with us therapists than our clients. It will be interesting to see what the research says about effective ways of providing counselling support to drought affected communities. I imagine that like most other clients, combining warmth and care with honest and direct ways of working that acknowledges constraints to the work will be valued and effective.

References


No Bullshit Therapy was developed by Jeff Young, The Bouverie Centre.

For details of 2008 NBT Workshops contact your local rural outreach counsellor / worker or Hannah Moon h.moon@latrobe.edu.au or phone 9376 9844.
“A Farmer’s Creed” was originally written for New Holland in 1975 in preparation for the US Bicentennial celebrations but the response to it has never ceased, and in fact, just keeps growing. Now, it has been reprinted as a poster by New Holland and made widely available through their suppliers, for another generation of farmers around the world to enjoy.

A FARMER’S CREED

I believe a man’s greatest possession is his dignity and that no calling bestows this more abundantly than farming.
I believe hard work and honest sweat are the building blocks of a person’s character.
I believe that farming, despite its hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honourable way a man can spend his days on earth.
I believe that farming nurtures the close family ties that make life rich in ways money can’t buy.
I believe my children are learning the values that will last a lifetime and can be learned in no other way.
I believe farming provides education for life and that no other occupation teaches so much about birth, growth and maturity in such a variety of ways.
I believe many of the best things in life are indeed free: The splendor of a sunrise, the rapture of wide open spaces, the exhilarating sight of your land greening each spring.
I believe that true happiness comes from watching your crops ripen in the field, your children grow tall in the sun, your whole family feel the pride that springs from their shared experience.
I believe that by my toil I am giving more to the world than I am taking from it, an honour that does not come to all men.
I believe when a man grows old and sums up his days he should be able to stand tall and feel pride in the life he’s lived, I believe in farming because it makes all this possible.

Special thanks to Wilma Gibson (Grampians CIG) for this contribution.

Organisational Profile:
Rural Financial Counsellors

According to national selection documentation, a rural financial counsellor’s (RFC) role is to provide assistance to primary producers, fishers and small rural businesses experiencing financial hardship by:

- Analysing clients’ farming or business activities and financial circumstances.
- Helping clients identify ways they can better manage change and adjustment, with the aim of becoming self-reliant.
- Facilitating negotiations with lenders and financial institutions.
- Facilitating access to government and other assistance schemes, including industry and community-based programs.
- Referral to other relevant professionals, including accountants, lawyers, social counsellors, agricultural advisors and government agencies.

“RFC’s do not provide financial advice, family, emotional or social counselling or prepare farm succession plans but they can provide referrals to appropriate professionals.”
CIGs - Cooperative Inquiry Groups

Six monthly punctuation of the busy life of a CIG Group - Process of the review

Our newest CIG facilitator Judy Poll, reviewed the minutes from the CIG groups over the past six months, and created one potential narrative that could summarise the life of each group so far. These narratives were then read by the facilitators of each CIG and then sent to each CIG member, for a short ‘window of opportunity’ to edit. CIGs had two concerns, (1) that the summary was commissioned by DHS (it wasn’t) and (2) that the summary did not reflect the many outcomes achieved by each CIG (it didn’t- the summary inadvertently became more of an account of the developmental group process of each CIG, rather than an audit of outcomes of which there were too many to record).

Grampians

The Grampians CIG have met a total of six times. Initial meetings focused on sharing information, particularly engagement strategies though community development activities. The group returns to this theme throughout subsequent meetings. Beginning meetings also allowed members to discuss ways to strengthen partnerships with other key organisations. These early meetings were also used as a space to debrief around the dilemmas within the short-term nature of funding of the ‘drought counsellor’ role.

Trust continued to develop by meeting three, as evidenced by discussions around philosophical positions members held in relation to the work – for example on naming the role as a ‘drought’ specific service or not. More capacity building activities began to be discussed in this meeting also – for example, linking up with GP’s.

By the fifth meeting, membership had increased to include two new members. From meeting six, members reflected on the usefulness of the group and noted their enjoyment on hearing how other workers are undertaking the job. Members also appreciated gaining new ideas from the group. This sharing of information has also assisted members to map what services are available in the region. Members expressed the benefits of using the CIG to discuss contentious issues such as ‘cold calling’ and also noted an appreciation of the link between the CIG and DHS, with hopes that the CIG forum will feed important information back to the funding body.

As the meetings progressed, it can be seen that discussions moved into even greater detail about the ‘nitty-gritty’ of engaging community members, with examples of ‘opening lines’ and strategic plans such as using practical assistance as an engagement strategy whilst prioritising the most pressing needs of community members.

Membership again increased in meeting six. By this meeting, the group had progressed to thinking more broadly about how knowledge can be managed in organisations so that wisdoms gained by drought counsellors can be used by subsequent employees – for example, the creation of guidelines for the role, including community development models and general tips.

Gippsland

The Gippsland CIG began with strong numbers (8 at first meeting) with steady membership at around this number at each meeting. Initial meetings were used to share resources, brainstorm ideas for community development activities and discuss philosophical issues with the funding nature of roles. Already by meeting two, members were planning collaborative projects – for example, a leaflet outlining all services in area.

Meeting three clarified that the need for members was less for clinical support and more for support around community development concepts and ways of working. By meeting four, collaborative ideas were in full flight, with a Pub Crawl attracting 55 people, and plans to create partnerships between counsellors and neighbourhood houses. Trust and connectedness between members was evidenced by this meeting, when a reflective team approach was used to farewell one member, reflecting on her contribution to the group. By meeting five, members reflected on the usefulness of the group, noting similar benefits as the Grampians CIG, with added positives of reducing isolation by connecting to other drought workers and noting support occurring outside of formal CIG meetings.

By meeting six, the guest members from VFF attended and collaborative projects were tangible outcomes of the group – i.e. ‘helping neighbours workshops’ and the ‘NB support’ idea suggested by another CIG.
CIGs - Cooperative Inquiry Groups

**Loddon Mallee**

Despite small numbers, the Loddon-Mallee CIG began strongly, with discussion in the first meeting about the contentious cold calling issue, with some clear proponents in the group as well as others who are more cautious. This meeting was also used to share members’ philosophies about the most helpful ways of working, seen as often not formal counselling, but instead promoting community capacity building. This led to a debate around one example of community building - how best to support families and children who aren’t having breakfast. Some members felt schools could be funded to provide meals whereas others felt a better way would be to build parents’ capacity to provide breakfast to their children.

In initial meetings, some negotiation and discussion occurred around the CIG venues and dates due to the large distances people had to travel, which may account for the smaller numbers of attendees at meetings. Local service information was also shared in these meetings, such as new group programs members were setting up. More philosophical discussions occurred around whether ‘drought counsellor’ positions were in fact the best way that government could support rural communities.

Attendee numbers flagged in the June meeting, and yet important discussions still occurred, such as vicarious traumatisation and ways for CIG members to build their own capacity by becoming co-trainers in No Bullshit Therapy training in future.

One fascinating idea suggested by a member in a later meeting this year was to adapt the No Bullshit Therapy training to assist non-counselling community members who end up playing a support role to farmers and small businesses. As a result, Bouvierie and CIG members are planning to pilot a ‘NoBull Support’ training in this region to people such as vets, DPI workers, water carriers and any other community members who would like more support and ideas on how to take care of themselves whilst providing informal support to farmers and their families. If successful, CIG members would eventually be able to lead this training in the future, thereby creating a self-sustainable resource for the area – a nice example of community development where capacity building ideas have come from the community members themselves.

**Hume**

The Hume CIG began their first meeting noting the tension between spending precious time in meetings versus time available for the client work. Three meetings later, the group decided to extend their CIG meeting time by one third! This could be a clear indicator that the CIG has been significantly helpful for members, particularly for debriefing about the impact this work has on workers. Again, the realisation was made that whilst the role was entitled ‘drought counsellor’, most members saw the advocacy/casework and community development roles being as useful and as needed as the ‘counselling’ work. Such a reflection about the evolving nature of the roles was to continue in subsequent meetings.

Differences around cold calling vs more traditional counselling approaches were gradually acknowledged and accepted as all having value.

Early meetings used the space to share engagement strategies and discuss the complex dual role nature of living and working in a rural community and the benefits and constraints this can bring – for example, it can assist to engage people if they feel you know something of their community. By the second meeting, members had already set up peer support groups external to the CIG with a broader membership.

Members also appreciated having the opportunity to provide some strong and detailed feedback to the DHS rep who joined the third meeting. Subsequent meetings were used for case presentations as well as sharing the growing examples of partnering with other agencies (i.e. with primary mental health nurses) in order to access the community.

By the fourth and fifth meeting, this CIG was sharing some philosophical debates around the role – how can counselling be useful when people’s basic needs are not yet being met? As well as noting broader policy changes and their impact on farmers’ livelihoods and decision making.

At the sixth meeting there was a change in facilitator from Tina to Kerry, and members were asked by Tina about their experience of the CIG. One member dramatically described its benefits as ‘providing an oasis in the work’ - the CIG had helped maintain that member’s optimism, such a critical component to sustain this challenging work.
The Barwon South Western Region of DHS stretches from Geelong to the SA border and is made up of nine Local Government Authorities (LGA’s). All LGAs in the BSW Region were declared fully EC on the 9th March 2007, except for the City of Greater Geelong, which was fully declared during 2006.

After some respite through July and early August, farmers across the majority of the Region are now enduring a very dry period and facing the prospect of another bleak spring.

Demand for assistance through the Rural Financial Counselling Service has been consistent with rainfall, tapering off for a few weeks but strong again now and widespread across the Region.

The outlook for spring 2007 shows a 65% chance of warmer than average temperatures across all of Victoria and only a 35-40% chance of above average rainfall across the South West.

The Region is now eagerly awaiting the rollout of the “Sustaining community well-being in drought” program, which will involve eight agencies and up to twelve drought counsellors.

The initial 2 day training program for counsellors, which will see the establishment of the BSW CIG, will be at Camperdown on Wednesday 21st and Thursday 22nd November.

Larry Neeson
Regional Drought Coordinator
Barwon South Western Region DHS

The DPSL CIG has had three meetings to date, and has discussed similar constraints to their work as the outreach CIG members; low referral numbers initially, brainstorming about engagement and promotion strategies, the farming culture of reluctance to ask for help. In the first meeting, the CIG came up with some ideas to promote the service, including it’s secondary consultation role to drought counsellors and other workers. There was much trust between members from the beginning, evidenced by the sharing of the impact of the work on members personally i.e. a sense of helplessness and feeling overwhelmed with ‘unsolvable problems’.

The second meeting included some debriefing as well as brainstorming particular clinical issues – i.e. third party suicide calls and how to be helpful. The third meeting began well with the announcement of an extension of funding for another year. This meeting really began to get down to the detail of doing the work – how to explain the process of counselling and the importance of normalising the draining nature of the counselling process at times. Members also discussed helpful attitudes in rural work such as use of humour and being less ‘serious’, being upfront and asking about the impact of the drought initially, rather than asking about feelings.

The DPSL CIG has been temporarily suspended whilst an organisational re-structure takes place which has resulted in the extension of operating hours to 24 hours / 7 days a week.
In this section we feature a selection of resources readers have found useful in supporting rural and regional communities living through the experience of drought.

Beyond Reasonable Drought (BRD)
The "Many Australian Photographers Group", a non-profit association of 80 emerging and well established photographers, is currently completing a nation-wide project documenting "the impact of the ten-year drought on the land, the people and the psyche of the nation: Beyond Reasonable Drought (BRD)."
So far, participating photographers have made hundreds of road trips throughout Australia recording what they see and the stories they hear. For examples visit www.beyondreasonabledrought.noelb.com/information.html
In addition to donating all imagery back to the towns and people involved, as part of the National Photography Festival the BRD will be exhibited at Old Parliament House (OPH) Canberra, July to October 2008. Any revenue generated by the exhibition and related book sales will be donated to the Country Women’s Association.

Special thanks to Kerri Easton (VFF Gippsland) for this contribution.

Exceptional circumstances relief:
recipients eligible for free career planning

Career Planning is a four hour course designed to help people in all different stages of work and life make decisions about what type of jobs to look for, and what skills and training are needed to get those jobs. Bri Cartlidge from CRS Australia writes “the course is for those who: don’t know what type of job they want to do; are feeling unsure about their job prospects or anxious about their future; know what job they want to do but don’t know what is needed to get it, or need a new direction after years in the one job.”

Career Planning runs in small groups in most local communities. Those interested in attending should speak to their local Centrelink office or Job Network provider. For more information please contact Career Planning on 1800 289 289 or visit www.crsaustralia.gov.au/careerplanning

Support for Workers - Drought Personal Support Line
Call 1300 655 969
(24/7) for telephone drought support, professional debriefing or contact details of your local Drought Counsellor

Drought Law Forum: Free online information on the law for rural Australians
People experiencing legal problems because of the drought can now anonymously post questions about legal issues affecting them online and receive free, accurate and timely answers from state-based legal experts.
To access the Drought Law Forum visit Rural Law Online at www.rurallaw.org.au
The Drought Law Forum is funded by the Federal Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and is auspiced by Rural Law Online.

Critical Breaking Point: A report into the effect of the drought on farming families in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region of western Victoria

In February 2007, sixty randomly selected farmers and their families in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region were interviewed by trained interviewers in an effort to explore the pressures upon, and experiences of, farming families in a time of drought - including how they are responding, their concerns about the future and their current attitudes to drought assistance measures.
Key findings to emerge from this research, commissioned by Birchip Cropping Group, are now available to the public from www.bcg.org.au
Special thanks to Machele Jelsma (Grampians CIG) for this contribution.