Welcome to the fourth edition of No Bull; the newsletter of the state-funded Rural Outreach Counsellors / Workers. I hope you were able to find replenishment over the festive season or are recovering from its demands.

The two-day best practice forum for Rural Outreach Counsellors/Workers (Drought Counsellors) in Bendigo on February 28th and 29th will provide time to reflect on the past year and the year ahead. One thing that springs to my mind is, “How much has been done in just one year and how much still needs to be done,” which reflects the insidious and pervasive impact of drought where enough is never enough. The two day forum, called We Care - No Bull: Celebration, best practice and self care, will be an opportunity to reflect and to document what has worked and what hasn’t and thus contribute to the growing knowledge base about how to respond effectively to the social and emotional impacts of drought and other rural stresses.

The two day forum will also be an opportunity to look at the ‘vicarious stress’ or ‘chronic fatigue’ of Rural Outreach Counsellors and other community members who are hearing other people’s pain and feeling the pressure to do something about it—whether this is possible or not. On page 9 of this edition, Ruth Turpin reports on the successful piloting of a new program called NB (No Bull) Support, which is designed to ‘support the supporters’. It is a half day program for community members who find themselves supporting people directly affected by drought. Ruth and Pam (Rycroft), who conducted the pilot, were moved seeing the connection that was created between the diverse participants: a farmer, a vet, a policeman, a businessman, a teacher, a clergyman, a DPI field officer and some St Vinnies workers. These regular community members provide a vital, but often invisible role in the resilience of local communities during times of rural change and hardship. NB Support is aimed at minimising the ripple effect that drought has through the community.

I was at an industry meeting recently promoting a drought project and was confronted with an angry response. I soon realised the farmer wasn’t angry at me (although it felt like it) but at the lack of services in his isolated area. He had been trying to support a neighbour who wouldn’t let this farmer help him. The resulting sense of powerlessness did not sit well for this “salt of the earth”, capable and caring farmer, who was used to being effective. “Looking out for your Neighbour” and “NB Support” are two projects designed to support (in a No Bull way) people, who like this farmer, support others, and in doing so make rural communities stronger.

In Working Ideas, I report on the links between community development and counselling that have been emerging one year after the majority of Rural Outreach Counsellors / Workers were employed.

Another theme coming in from the CIGs (Co-operative Inquiry Groups) is their rural Outreach Workers/Counsellors are more than just drought counsellors. Helping people adjust to longer-term issues such as social/economic/climate change in rural Victoria, and growing service co-ordination is a more apt description of the work. For example, federal funded drought counsellors are beginning to join state-funded CIGs, and we have found that once state and federal counsellors are both members of a CIG, exciting collaborations and sensible liaison happens naturally. There is nothing that makes country people more angry than duplication of services in some areas, because it means paucity of services in others.

Speaking of CIGs, I am pleased to announce that the Barwon South West CIG has resumed after a hiatus of several months. VFF reps (Peter Wolsgott and Brenda McLachlan) attended the inaugural Barwon CIG which laid the foundation for a close working relationship between the counsellors and the VFF, under the banner of the “Looking out for your Neighbours” project (see page 9).

Also in Pitching in, we have collated the ideas for addressing the social impact of drought generated by counsellors and workers who attended our No Bullshit Therapy training workshops across the state. Enjoy the read and the new year.

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.

Rural Support Line (State-wide)

Angela Galpin - 9666 1234 mobile 0411 772 464 or galpina@bigpond.net.au

Current Role
Angela’s initial role as a Drought Personal Support Line (DPSL) Counsellor has evolved together with the reshaping of DPSL at Lifeline. She now is employed as a Counselling Supervisor, able to offer particular knowledge and support to the volunteer phone counsellors when they take calls from people affected by drought and other rural crises.

Background and Experience
Angela joined Lifeline as a volunteer phone counsellor about 4 years ago with the intention of ‘giving back’ to the community. She has also been involved in the selection and training of new counsellors for the service, and maintains her involvement in volunteer counselling shifts alongside her paid role: to ‘keep it real’ and ‘keep the balance’.

Rural Experience - Angela became aware of the preciousness of water early in her life through friends who were on tank water and remembers being horrified at the wastefulness she saw in the city. However, until she took on the role of Drought counsellor, she admits not having known much of other rural issues. “What an eye opener” is how Angela describes her learning curve.

Counselling and CD - “Through a phone counselling session you can touch the lives of one, but through training and mentoring other counsellors, you have an opportunity to touch the lives of many”. Angela describes being guided in her work by the principles of mindfulness, compassion and an empathic approach. She blends her natural warmth with the skills, knowledge and experience, gained as a long term phone counsellor, to find the unique points of connection with each caller. She describes callers being often more comfortable to ask for practical information or support. The challenge she says, is to create the right environment for reluctant callers to begin to open up and to efficiently find the right referral points in their own locality.

Special Interests
From being passionate about helping to train new phone counsellors to being passionate about singing with microphone in hand (although only at home she insists): Angela is the essential Karaoke Queen – it seems she has truly embraced her inner Diva.

The Bouverie Centre

Elena Tauridsky - 9385 5100 or e.tauridsky@latrobe.edu.au

Current Role
Elena is co-ordinating the “Looking Out for Your Neighbours” project and is the CIG facilitator for the Rural Support Line (formerly known as Drought Personal Support Line). She works Monday and Tuesday each week and has been seconded to Bouverie for 6 months, from Ovens and King Community Health Service where she has been the manager of Counselling and Support Services.

Background and Experience
Rural Experience - Elena moved from Melbourne to the North East of Victoria over 22 years ago. She has experienced the challenges of living both on a property in a fairly isolated valley and for the past 7 years as a ‘townie’ in Benalla. A year spent without any running water was sobering, since having to collect it daily in buckets from the creek at the foot of the hill took time and energy. She still sometimes smiles in gratitude, when she turns on a tap.

Counselling and CD - Elena trained originally as a nurse but also has a Bachelor of Social Work, and many years of experience in community development, counselling and group work in a range of settings, which include women’s health, drug and alcohol, and disability. Elena describes a deep curiosity about the ways in which people create meaning in their lives, and the ways in which they find their way through despair.

Although it isn’t always fashionable, Elena carries a sense of great hope in her work. She is also a member of the Australian Association of Social Workers (however these two facts are unrelated).

Special Interests
Elena describes having a particular interest in the congruence between the personal and professional – her passion for ‘women’s business’ and in creating a more fair and just world underpin this. Music (particularly jazz) and lazy afternoons spent with loved ones fills her cup and keeps her buoyant, and while there was a time when she played music in bands, she is now a closet saxophone player and retired ‘doo-wop’ girl.

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

Ruth Malpass - 5723 4000 mobile 0432 705 901 or rmalpass@umfc.com.au

Current Role
Ruth is a Drought Counsellor employed through Upper Murray Family Care, and is based in Wangaratta. She works from Tuesday to Thursday each week.

Background and Experience
Ruth initially trained as a nurse and went on to practice as a midwife for 25 years in Melbourne. She later studied counselling and family therapy. Prior to taking on her role as a Drought Counsellor, Ruth most recently worked at Odyssey House Therapeutic Community, with individuals and families whose lives had been affected by substance abuse.

Rural Experience - While Ruth lays no claim to first hand experience of rural living, she describes the North East of Victoria as having featured strongly in family holidays and getaways. She speaks fondly of being drawn to the beauty of the region, as well as the diverse range of activities on offer. It is this particular regional interest that has led to her becoming a Drought Counsellor. Ruth currently commutes from her home in North Fitzroy to work with people in NE Victoria.

Counselling and CD - Through nursing and midwifery work, Ruth developed a keen interest in how people communicate and negotiate their family relationships. Since her work also brought her into close contact with issues such as grief and loss, she pursued further study: completing a Graduate Diploma in Health Counselling and then Family Therapy training. Ruth is a clinical member of the Victorian Association of Family Therapists.

Special Interests
From cycling the rail trail to holidaying by the river in Bright; from the Jazz Festival in Wangaratta to the various local food and wine festivals - Ruth embraces all that life has to offer and is currently enjoying the best of both worlds in the balance of her rural-metro lifestyle.

Loddon-Mallee Region

Doug Doran – 0409 213 320 or doug.doran@centacare-sandhurst.org.au

Current Role
Rural Support Worker for the Bendigo area.

Background and Experience
Rural Experience: Doug feels he has always had a connection to rural and farming life. He has memories of visiting family, getting out on the motorbikes and going shooting. He started working at the post office in a rural area and worked in local pumping industry in Castlemaine. He has worked at the Molort Silos, a farming area near Maryborough, and as a hay carter. Doug has worked around Swan Hill, Kyabram and Tongala with DHS and in the Loddon-Mallee with homeless people around many issues including mental health, youth and domestic violence.

Counselling and CD: Doug completed a social science degree and masters in health services. He worked for St Lukes as a project worker in adolescent community placement plans – finding people for adolescents to stay with, whilst aiming towards reunification with parents if possible. He worked on quality improvement between 2005-mid 2007 for St Lukes and also as a researcher into young people’s experience of seeking housing, which culminated in developing a carer model of youth housing. Doug also worked as a youth worker at the Malmbsury Youth Training Centre (Juvenile Justice) and with the Land Environmental Action Program in the early 90’s.

Special Interests
Doug has a keen interest in men’s health. He believes there are limited services for males. For 5 years, Doug has been a part of men’s health working group in Bendigo where he organised a range of male speakers including Gary Mcdonald (anxiety), Con the fruiter (who’d lost a lot of weight at one point in time) and brought a play ‘Certified Male’ by Glen Gyngell (based on Steve Biddulph’s book ‘Manhood’) to the area to promote men’s health. He has published a book called “Dad’s Stories”, a collection of interviews with a ‘bunch of my mates’ and either got them to write a story or interviewed them and wrote up their story about their dad.
Barwon South West Region

Lee Town – 5558 7000 or revelationlee@yahoo.com.au

Current Role
Lee is an accredited mental health social worker and works for Terang and Mortlake Health Service.

Background and Experience
Rural Experience – clinical and health promotion
Initially, Lee found the farming community a bit reluctant to engage, but over time he built up relationships via a number of strategies, such as speaking at a number of drought forums in the ‘looking after yourself’ section. ‘Using the community’s own language’ Lee presents topics such as ‘ten tips to look after yourself’. He also engages the community through writing articles for local dairy publications and using a mental health screening tool he developed.

Personally, Lee took 6 months long service leave in 2006, and ‘milked cows’ at a dairy farm in Camperdown. This was an important experience, as it gave Lee a different perspective about what farming was actually like. Getting up at 6am, not finishing till 8pm, Lee noticed the loneliness and isolation, and really understood the importance of connecting with people during the day, and not just to ‘talk about the weather’.

Counselling Experience - He has a background working in a Primary Mental Health Team. He has been working with farming families for 5 years, providing both clinical support as well as education, training, secondary consultations to field officers and health promotion.

Practice Notes
Lee’s mission is to influence health services to be more responsive to farming families. One key message Lee attempts to impart to the community is ‘try to look after yourself, so you are in the best position to look after your farm.’

Lee likes to be practical and ‘hands on’, describing his core therapeutic paradigm as ‘behaviourist’. Lee explains his own learning paradigm as ‘kinaesthetic’ favouring experiential learning. Lee encourages this in any training he facilitates, by ‘getting people busy’ with role plays and practice outside of the session.

His catch phrase is ‘I’ve got a PhD in common sense-ology’ and he motivates people to get out of their comfort zone by telling them ‘try this, then we’ll talk about it later’.

Lee feels counselling doesn’t have to use ‘high powered’ strategies, but believes that helping people master the simple things and making these skills ‘a part of them’ rather than strategies used only sporadically, achieves the biggest outcomes for people.

Grampians Region

Wilma Gibson - 0429 149 703 or wilmag@wimmera.unitingcare.org.au

Current Role
Rural Community Counselling / Wimmera Uniting Care based at Donald Vic.

Wilma’s catchment areas include Donald and St Arnaud – Northern Grampians Shire. Her outreach position means travelling 1hr to Horsham, 1-1.5hrs to Swan Hill and Bendigo, 1-1.5hrs to Kerang, 1-1.5hrs to Ararat and Stawell. This area has a large involvement in broad acre farming incorporating livestock and quite a few small industries operating within each township.

Background and Experience
Rural Experience - Wilma grew up on a broad acre farm at Manangatang-Mallee. This farm still exists within the family and Wilma never thought she’d be back working in some capacity in the desert, with 40+ degree temperatures, dust storms, red sand in everything and hardly any water to have a garden. Wilma appreciates the Mallee and its flora and fauna now more so than ever. Throughout her childhood on the wheat farm her family grew many plants in the garden, including what is now recognised as “trendy water saver plants”- cacti and succulents. As a child, Wilma could not get her head around the popularity of these plants.

Counselling Experience - Apart from working as a jillaroo, Wilma went on to become a Registered Nurse Division 2, training at Ouyen hospital. Wilma worked at Ararat – East Grampians Health Service for 10 years and Camperdown - South West Health Care for 8 years.

In 2005, Wilma went to work at Katherine in the Northern Territory as a HACC Co-ordinator and CACPS Case Manager. This was very exciting and challenging, and Wilma learnt a lot about the aboriginal culture and the Katherine community. She returned home after 6 months due to a bit of homesickness and too many wet seasons. Back in Victoria, she was employed at Wimmera Uniting Care as a Rural Community Counsellor, a short term Drought funded program, based at Warracknabeal. Wilma spent a small amount of time working with the Family Services Team at Wimmera Uniting Care and then had an opportunity to be employed at the Buloke Shire as a Community Services Officer – Co-ordinator of the HACC team, until accepting her current role.

Special Interests
Wilma loved the Northern Territory wildlife and thunderstorms that are spectacular to watch and so loud “they will raise you off the bed in your deepest sleep.” During the wet season, makeup is on for 5 minutes then off due to the humidity, which gives new meaning to the word “dripping wet”.

Wilma’s Catchment Areas Include:
- Wilma grew up on a broad acre farm at Manangatang-Mallee. This farm still exists within the family and Wilma never thought she’d be back working in some capacity in the desert, with 40+ degree temperatures, dust storms, red sand in everything and hardly any water to have a garden. Wilma appreciates the Mallee and its flora and fauna now more so than ever. Throughout her childhood on the wheat farm her family grew many plants in the garden, including what is now recognised as “trendy water saver plants”- cacti and succulents. As a child, Wilma could not get her head around the popularity of these plants.

Background and Experience
Rural Experience - Wilma grew up on a broad acre farm at Manangatang-Mallee. This farm still exists within the family and Wilma never thought she’d be back working in some capacity in the desert, with 40+ degree temperatures, dust storms, red sand in everything and hardly any water to have a garden. Wilma appreciates the Mallee and its flora and fauna now more so than ever. Throughout her childhood on the wheat farm her family grew many plants in the garden, including what is now recognised as “trendy water saver plants”- cacti and succulents. As a child, Wilma could not get her head around the popularity of these plants.

Counselling Experience - Apart from working as a jillaroo, Wilma went on to become a Registered Nurse Division 2, training at Ouyen hospital. Wilma worked at Ararat – East Grampians Health Service for 10 years and Camperdown - South West Health Care for 8 years.

In 2005, Wilma went to work at Katherine in the Northern Territory as a HACC Co-ordinator and CACPS Case Manager. This was very exciting and challenging, and Wilma learnt a lot about the aboriginal culture and the Katherine community. She returned home after 6 months due to a bit of homesickness and too many wet seasons. Back in Victoria, she was employed at Wimmera Uniting Care as a Rural Community Counsellor, a short term Drought funded program, based at Warracknabeal. Wilma spent a small amount of time working with the Family Services Team at Wimmera Uniting Care and then had an opportunity to be employed at the Buloke Shire as a Community Services Officer – Co-ordinator of the HACC team, until accepting her current role.

Special Interests
Wilma loved the Northern Territory wildlife and thunderstorms that are spectacular to watch and so loud “they will raise you off the bed in your deepest sleep.” During the wet season, makeup is on for 5 minutes then off due to the humidity, which gives new meaning to the word “dripping wet”.
Success Stories - Small things mean a lot

Rural Support Line receives a heart warming call from a ‘salt of the earth’ farmer.

By Justine Clear, Rural Support Line 1300 655 969.

She was overwhelmed by a small gesture.

The caller who was in her 70’s had just ridden her old push bike down to the front gate which was some distance from the house to get the mail. She confessed that she was becoming more and more reluctant to get the mail. She used to drive down to get it, but with the cost of petrol and everything being so expensive, she decided that she couldn’t spare the luxury of driving to get her bills, bills and more bills any longer, so the old push bike was given the ‘once over’ by her husband and off she went.

A small gesture had a huge impact.

Some of the small things drought affected people sacrifice to get by, add up to amazing losses. The caller’s husband didn’t comment on getting the bike out for a dust up, nor did he comment as he watched his wife of many years bouncing atop her bike down the drive. She says he has a quiet commitment to their farm, is a gentle man who knows how he likes his farm to run. When it comes to the running of the house he most definitely does not wear the pants, hence the no comment with the bike!

So what is this small gesture that was so powerful? I hear you ask.

The caller did reveal that she did not really enjoy her ride to the mail box and most definitely did not enjoy the mostly uphill ride back. On this particular day she had been consoling her husband during breakfast as he kept saying to her, “I don’t know how we are going to survive another summer, there’s not been a lot of rain for weeks. I don’t think it will ever rain again.” Most of their breeding stock went to the knackery. Years of breeding, time, toil and money all gone. She had confidently said, “We’ll be right, don’t you worry. We’ll be ok.” However, she did not feel that they would be ok and felt more than a little down as she headed off. The pressure of being her husband’s only support was starting to bear down.

A postcard depicting a child’s artistic impression of how they saw the drought, with a note attached offering hope, support and a sense that there is someone out there thinking of her was waiting with the bills. The joy at receiving even a small gesture of hope was so overwhelming for the caller that she wept at the mail box for all to see, and didn’t care who did either, which by country standards is a mortal sin.

So, thank you to the members of Wimmera Primary Care Partnership for a sustaining gesture of community and hope.

The postcard and support phone numbers listed on the back of your postcard have really made a difference to someone who needed it. The caller had never ridden the bike back so fast to the house before, she felt as if she was flying!

Community Response to Eliminating Suicide (CORES)

WORKCO Limited recently secured funding under the Australian Government’s Stronger Families and Community Strategy to implement the CORES model – Community Response to Eliminating Suicide – in the Victorian township of Donald, due to mental health and suicide concerns within the area.

The CORES initiative, which some may recall from an episode of Landline aired by the ABC in late 2006, was developed in the Kentish Municipality of Tasmania by Coralanne Walker and Ron Chapman in 2002. The original project, funded by the Tasmanian Community Fund in 2003/4, was designed to equip rural and remote community members with the skills and knowledge to intervene with people at risk of suicide, and as such build community strength and capacity to prevent suicide.

In the 2006 Landline interview, Coralanne Walker states that during the two-year period in which the project was funded in Kentish, “to our knowledge there had not been a suicide.” She attributes the project’s success to the community’s ownership of the program. According to Walker, “You could walk up the main street of Sheffield and know comfortably, that at least 200 people in the community had been trained.”

Wilma explains that the CORES package offers the community comprehensive mentoring, support and flexible training through a simple, yet effective, intervention model. The program includes a community meeting to educate the community in suicide awareness and prevention and several one-day workshops designed to help community members from a wide range of backgrounds to intervene and assist person/s at risk of suicide and support them in their efforts to seek appropriate help.

According to Wilma, locals who attend the workshop leave with suicide intervention skills and a user friendly business card sized visual tool which empowers a lay person to “confidentially identify and address the frontline issues of suicide.”

WORKCO aims to train 80 locals from the Township of Donald within a twelve month period. Monthly support groups, comprising people who have participated in the training will also be established.

For further information, please contact Wilma Gibson 0429 149 703 or wilmag@wimmera.unitingcare.org.au
Working ideas

Emerging thoughts that may be helpful

THE BEGINNINGS OF A RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

A clinical psychologist colleague of mine, Dr. John Pead has done a lot of work in the area of critical response, looking at how best to help people and communities recover from the impact of disasters such as fire, flood, accidents and major crime. He pointed out to me that the latest critical incident research suggests that the majority of people (80%) recover from the effects of major trauma with the help of family, friends and other natural community supports. Therefore recovery teams should first focus on supporting existing community networks and to identify those people who may need individual help. John claims only about 20% of people affected by a major trauma require professional help and that this professional help (counselling/debriefing) should be based on brief intervention models with the aim of re-connecting people back into their natural communities as soon as possible. A much smaller percentage of people may need longer-term assistance or referral to clinical mental health services if the trauma sparks off major depression, anxiety or suicidality. Although John did not immediately think of drought as a trauma, presumably because of its long term insidious nature, one might assume similar figures may reflect recovery patterns from a chronic condition like drought. If so, these figures would make sense of the response framework emerging in the work of several CIGs. The framework, beginning to take shape, is represented by the diagram below:

![Diagram 1: Framework for recovery response from drought (chronic trauma)](image)

NEWS (Normalising, Education, Warmth & Supporting Strengths) provides support that normalises stress responses to stressful situations such as drought and also uses approaches such as Single Session Work (SSW) and No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) to help demystify counselling. Together, they provide brief and straight forward support which can help people to re-connect with their natural community supports. Mental health supports can be made available if needed. Professional assistance can help people who are isolated from their community, re-connect with social networks. Helping people re-connect to appropriate networks is what Judith Herman suggests is the trauma therapist’s eventual task. The framework depicted above also reflects that the rural outreach worker/counsellor needs both community development and counselling skills. The framework above also promotes the idea that counselling and community development support each other, rather than compete with each other.

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

NEWS from the BIG shed (DHS)

The Sustaining Community Wellbeing Extension funds are now with most agencies. There is an additional 10 counselling EFT across the state with a few new initiatives. One really exciting initiative is the joint project between the Victorian Farmers Federation, The Bouverie Centre, drought counsellors and their agencies, and DHS. The aim of this project is for counsellors to work closely with their local VFF branch strengthening basic mental health literacy and exploring ways local community members can strengthen networks with neighbours. ‘Looking out for your Neighbour’ addresses two of our most critical roles as practitioners. One role is how we enhance access to services, the other role is doing everything we can to prevent the need for service by building capacity of communities to provide supportive environments to promote a sense of belonging and mindfulness and promote mental health.

Eight specialist primary mental health professionals across rural Victoria will provide secondary consultancy, advice and support to counsellors, GPs and other practitioners. Other initiatives are focused on the volunteer sector through Lifeline and the emergency relief sector. Funds for Lifeline will focus on better supporting personal support volunteers, while the emergency relief funds are aimed at improving communication, connections and service coordination between the primary health and emergency relief sectors.

At the state-wide planning level we are working with Centrelink’s ‘Murray Darling Basin’ program and partnering with the Victorian Division of General Practice at a GP forum on 19th March aimed at linking in the new GP drought funded positions with drought counsellor work. Priorities over the next few months for DHS coordinators include evaluation of the Sustaining Community Wellbeing initiatives with the primary aim of building a ‘what works’ evidence base; supporting better integration of drought counselling models with PCP service coordination objectives; advocating re: amplified rural transport and access issues; and transitioning from a drought to a longer term climate change adaptation and rural adjustment focus within our work.

Sally Rose
Partnerships Team - Integrated Health Promotion Rural & Regional Health & Aged Care Services Department of Human Services (03) 9096 8382
The CIG (Co-operative Inquiry Group) Network: a simple but elegant state-wide knowledge generator!

In times of extreme crisis and limited resources, it must be a difficult dilemma for Government whether to allocate money to support service providers, such as the CIG network, or to spend all money funding direct services.

Checking in with each regional CIG in Victoria has returned strong support for the CIG structure - a support structure for service providers which generates valuable knowledge but also may improve service delivery. CIGs are peer discussion and support groups, facilitated by a Bouverie person and connected with other CIGs across Victoria via email, this newsletter and the Bouverie facilitators. Below are comments about the role the CIG network plays for rural outreach counsellors / workers. Quotes, which have been de-identified, come from summaries or recordings of actual CIG meetings.

Region one - A CIG member who had worked internationally in disaster recovery reported that the “Recursive process of the CIG network is unique and should be protected at all costs.”

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

Region three - “The group members spoke about the purpose of the CIG being research, peer supervision and a networking opportunity. One CIG member suggested that a little more time could be spent on peer supervision issues, as some members don’t receive supervision from other sources. As other networks are becoming so big, members reported that the CIG offers opportunities for more ‘intense talk’ about issues in depth. In addition, as people noted they don’t get many opportunities to catch up with each other and often operate in isolation, the CIG provides that space to connect on a personal level.”

Region four - A summary of a discussion about the value of the CIG is presented, followed by a verbatim transcript.

- A good reference group- I can feedback to our organisation about local government issues & resources raised in the CIG
- Good to have a venue to discuss issues, to check out if individual observations are more general - as a lone worker you can get insular and isolated
- We are all trying to define our role - it helps to hear what others think & do
- Our role is so different it is good to connect with others with similar roles- don’t have to explain everything
- Just having people to email or call is helpful
- A great motivator
- It can be hard to keep motivated in communities that are hard to engage
- Good to feel connected - good to belong to a group- can feel isolated in this work

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

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

CIG member 1: “My (one) day would be pretty useless if I wasn’t part of this group.”

Compiled by Jeff Young j.young@latrobe.edu.au
Women, Drought and Sustainability
by Susan Armstrong, susan.armstrong@kilmany.org.au

On 14th November a group of ten women met at Kongwak to discuss their issues as women and community members of a small rural community.

Such rural communities are often not bounded. In this case it involved the women from up the hill, Bena and Loch, coming down the hill to meet their sisters at Kongwak. One key person in each locality was identified as a community facilitator and asked to invite four women she knew who lived on rural properties in the area. The day was funded by the Victorian Department of Community Development (who provided an excellent lunch) and facilitated by Di Padgett, a community education officer and life coach. She proved excellent at getting the conversation rolling. Her opening comment was “You can tell how a woman feels about herself by the undies she wears.” There was an instant groan as we all acknowledged being guilty of putting ourselves last on the shopping list.

Issues that emerged during the day were the importance of sustainable life styles, including being careful with water, avoiding unnecessary trips into town by planning and carpooling and reconnecting with community.

Country women are careful with water because they know exactly where it comes from, the tank not the tap. During a recent water shortage in Leongatha country women were coming into town to shower at the local swimming pool and have a swim at the same time (thus building fitness). Grey water from washing machines was being used to water vegie gardens. Dairy farms make for a lot of washing. Some participants had actively sought to develop sustainable life styles through the use of solar power, permaculture and drip irrigation systems.

The loss of infrastructure in small settlements was highlighted as a major cause for concern. Bena has recently had its primary school and local store closed. This has meant the loss of a meeting place for community residents. One woman voluntarily produced a fortnightly community newsletter and this has been an important link for maintaining community. The drought has put additional strain on farming families. The job of keeping it all together until things improved was seen as a major task for farming women.

A committee member from CWA also attended and alerted us to the pamper packs that are being provided to women in drought affected areas which include shampoo and body care products. The day was a reminder of the importance of healthy women and healthy families.

To explore these themes the group will meet again in February to look at an energy efficient property in Kongwak and to discuss self care skills that can sustain women through difficult times.

In conclusion, why not take some time for yourself and have a look at Di Padgett’s website: www.youarespecial.com.au

Susan Armstrong
Rural Outreach Counsellor
South Gippsland.

My USB and me
by Rob Baker - Federal Funded drought counsellor, Geelong. Rob.Baker@centacaremelbourne.org.au 0408 251 137

Being new to Drought Counselling I was delighted to attend the second meeting of the Barwon South West Collaborative Inquiry Group at Camperdown on January 22, 2008.

At the beginning of our meeting each CIG member was invited to provide an update on how things were proceeding in their own patch. I had hoped to have something substantive to report. Alas, not one client. What to say? I had read material about reluctant clients, the need for community development and the start-stop-start-stop nature of funding that Jeff Young referred to in the October 2007 issue of No Bull. This had given me some comfort; but little satisfaction. In my previous work there was no shortage of clients and I felt unprepared for the reality of a ‘drought counselling’ position.

When I came on the scene I was supplied with a laptop, a mobile phone and a USB stick. Meeting with local government, other providers, a primary care forum, preparing a mail out campaign, redesigning a brochure, emailing and telephoning was really about all I had done. Pretty much all talk and no action. What really impressed me was what the USB stick told me. I was treading a well worn path. It had all been done before. Why should it be any better this time? I surmised that if the past efforts had borne fruit, at least a referral would pop up...

Our work is about more than drought. It is about many uncertainties. Water shortages, climate change, the pretty common seasonal risks of primary production including fire, flood and commodity prices all take regular toll. The equine flu epidemic was perhaps a little less expected, but it still made a big impact. Stress is experienced no less in the country than the city and things can get tough in the best of families.

Country people are renowned for their resilience and resilience is something to build on. My concern is that the very strength country people exhibit could somehow mask their vulnerabilities and therefore they will not be treated seriously enough when it comes to funding ongoing service provision. My USB tells me the work still needs to be done and my hope is that the sector will be here to do it justice.
Solutions from the front line

CIGs across the state have reported that people from all walks of life are feeling the pressure of supporting others affected by drought and other crises. Because these general community members are not sure how best to help, they themselves are becoming stressed. In this way the impact of drought ripples through the entire community. Some people feel that they have become part-time counsellors as part of their work role, without really wanting to, listening and talking to others who are doing it tough on a daily basis. NB Support is designed to help non-counsellors described above to do what they are already doing, but better and with support.

No Bullshit or No Bull Support (NB also meaning Note Well) is not teaching therapy or counselling. It is a 3.5 hour group workshop that provides easy to follow guidelines on how to support someone you’re worried about.

Interested in attending or being trained to facilitate a NB Support half day? Contact Judy Poll (j.poll@latrobe.edu.au) or your local drought counsellor.

Ruth Turpin from Loddon-Mallee reports on the NB Support pilot held at Rochester last November. Facilitated by Pam Rycroft and Ruth, the 3.5 hour casual meeting received excellent feedback from the vet, police officer, minister, teacher, farmer, businessman, and volunteer workers who attended.

Examples of feedback from participants;

- The opportunity to network with other workers who are in similar situations and sharing their stories was really valuable
- Maintaining a positive outlook on what we can do rather than catastrophising about situations and stories
- Local referral contacts was really worthwhile
- Repeat this workshop for others in other localities
- Keep groups small
- Half-day format suitable, morning better for concentration
- ‘No Bull’ approach very easy to follow, not overloaded
- Older participants good for their experience / sharing as well as professional and non-professional workers
- Very good self help ideas for pressures and stress
- Highlighted the incidences of stress in the community

Participants were all given a “Takeaway bag” of resources and local drought support information. The session finished with strategies for self care and arrangements for follow-up, Ruth reports, “I think we managed to provide common sense ‘simple’ practical strategies for supporting others and looking after yourself, without ‘dumbing down’ the material.”

The NB Support program will be rolled out across the state over the next 6 months.

Ruth Turpin (rturpin@erh.org.au) is a drought counsellor based at Echuca Regional Health.
Pitching in...

In this section, No Bull reports on examples of people from different organisations and community groups networking or working together... for the greater good.

No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) workshops in country Victoria have provided a great opportunity for networking between local helping professionals. To date, ten workshops have been delivered in the following locations: Ballarat, Stawell, Mildura, Traralgon, Bairnsdale, Beechworth, Euroa, Leongatha, Horsham and Bendigo. Hosted by local rural outreach workers (drought counsellors), presented by The Bouverie Centre's Jeff Young and funded by DHS, the workshops have been over subscribed, with 314 workers registering for initial workshops in 2007 and 2008.

Evaluations have been extremely positive pointing out amongst other things that NBT provides a framework for the way many rural counsellors have developed their work to fit with the “straight forward and direct” approaches valued by rural clients. A catch-phrase created by a trainee of NBT “if you front up, I’ll be upfront”, typifies the approach that combines “honesty and directness with warmth and care.” Apart from sharing a model of therapy that is refreshingly relevant to rural people, the NBT workshops have drawn together the thoughts and ideas of a broad range of helping professionals about the impact of drought on their work, what they will take from the NBT workshops and more importantly, ideas they have that could help contribute to a more effective drought response. Below is a summary of those thoughts.

The impact of drought on participants’ work
Many found it difficult to isolate the effects of the drought from the effects of other traumas, (i.e., fires) on clients. The drought was conceptualised by some as “compounding the grief of other problems”. Some participants spoke about communities being hyper vigilant, with the continual threat of fire and the uncertainty of the drought making it difficult to relax. Others observed that the impact of the drought was felt heavily in farming families – particularly by women “who carry so much” and feel “pressure to look after men as men don’t seek help”. The cumulative effects of recent natural disasters were also linked to increased disputes between couples and neighbours, increased presentations to E.D. and to stress induced memories of past sexual assault – with “powerless triggering previous powerlessness”. One group remarked although they were busier, one positive to emerge from the work was the collaboration with other agencies/support workers (e.g., DPI, Stock & Station Agents, Stock Carriers, etc.), as well as a continuation in funding from government.

What participants took away from the training?
When asked about what they would take away and apply from the training, participants’ responses roughly fell into four categories: i) a further strategy/technique to target a particular client group or clients who may be difficult to engage; ii) greater confidence to “marry honesty and directness with warmth and care” when working with clients; iii) the “NBT Self Supervision” exercise for workers, clients, colleagues, self; and iv) recognition, consolidation and validation of existing knowledge and skills.

Ideas for a more effective drought response
Outreach work was one strategy identified as key to responding effectively to communities affected by drought. Some participants remarked that farmers were too busy to come off the farm, therefore “counsellors must come to them”. The success of the drought bus adds weight to this argument. According to others, however, farmers “do not want to talk about the drought or financial issues....they want to know how they can help their neighbours”. These participants suggest that support, like the “NB Support” training for secondary workers is vital. There were also calls for: integrated service delivery; planning for continued community resilience (e.g., community events/community friendly social activities); taking advantage of all the good ideas and activities that are going on (community development approach); and a shift in mindset so that drought is viewed as a part of life and as such, preparations are made for long term water efficiency usage.

Five workshops will be held in 2008. To obtain an application form or for further details of the 2008 workshops please contact Hannah Moon 9385 5100 or h.moon@latrobe.edu.au
In September, 2007, the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Shire Drought Counselling Group decided to complete a small piece of research into “Cold Calling”. Similar “hands on” research / assistance had been highly successful in the North East of the State, where the drought had had a far tighter grip on the land, and it was felt that a comparison with another part of the state that was affected but in a less dramatic way, might be of use.

I have to say as a mental health worker, I was less than convinced of the value of this style of work. My background and training initially led me to believe that calling on people who have not previously requested help was intrusive and might be seen as “positively rude”. Oh how wrong I was! Our group has spent time in December 2007 and January 2008 calling at farms in designated spots. We did decide on one change to our earlier work. Leaflets stating who we were and why we were calling were dropped at every farm in the designated areas, a week prior to attendance in person. Most of us felt more comfortable with this strategy, feeling that people would at least know we were coming and could make up their own minds if they allowed us onto their properties. I also own up to feeling that with pre-warning, people would not think that strangers were entering their property to either evangelise, or to break into their homes to steal.

When it came to my turn to complete a day with one of our Rural Financial Counselling colleagues, an area was chosen in the northern part of the region where the drought has bitten harder. It was a hot and dusty day and we drove for an hour or so to get to the area. My farm-gate partner had already completed a similar day, so was more aware of what to expect. We went armed with “Show-bags” full of information on a variety of drought related topics - financial, Centrelink and health & well-being. As we drove along I wondered how many people would be home and how many would have any time to talk as they rushed to get hay baled and under cover before Christmas. Hay cutting and carting had been later than usual in this region due to a wonderful few days of rain in October.

My initial trepidation about calling on farmers was very soon dissipated. At the first farm we called upon, the husband was indeed sitting on a tractor way off in the distance and a group of dogs greeted us. But then the wife came out and asked us if we would like a drink on such a hot day and we were off and running. This kind woman asked about farming apprenticeships for her young sons, and this led on to information about farm subsidies and rate reductions. We were able to give information with names and contact points and left a show-bag. This time last year this farmer had been carting water weekly to survive - she felt that this year was much better as there was still some water in the dams and there was some hay to cut. I looked around at the parched pastures and got some idea of how bad it must have been last year if this year was considered better.

At another farm, we were greeted initially with suspicion - a lone female farmer thought we might be Mormons, despite me being female and neither of us being young or in suits with ties. He was able to say that he was going well but went off to find a colleague who was in difficulty and had not received much in the way of constructive help when he tried to get it. Naturally, in this circumstance, he was wary of “do-gooding” but relaxed when he had spoken for a while and realised we were giving him “No Bull”. He smiled as we left with a promise from my colleague to follow up financial assistance he had missed out on due to a misunderstanding with Centrelink. As the day progressed I began to wonder why I had ever doubted this way of initiating services. “Taking it to the people” seemed to work and gave people the opportunity to have a say and to identify what would be of most help to them and their community.

A call on a remote property led to a long and serious conversation with a family in distressing circumstances. Follow up was arranged immediately as this situation could not wait. At another smaller property I sat with a woman who grieved for the loss of what had been a beautiful garden until there was no water for it. For her it was the last straw. We met elderly folk who did not want to retire despite the burden of hard manual work with no younger employees or family to help. We chased cows up a road for one farmer and stopped to admire a lone rose left in another farm garden. Work yards were dusty and dry, but refreshments were offered at regular intervals. We spoke of stock and crops, exit plans and health. As my Farm-Gate colleague stated, “if we only help one farmer this way per day it is a good days work.”

At the end of the day I went back to my own small property which has not suffered unduly in the drought conditions, feeling that “Farm-Gate” or “Cold Calling” on farms has a lot of positives and can help spread the load and get issues identified by those who really know - the farmers who are out there in all weathers. As one farmer said, “It has been pretty bad but we aren’t as bad off as others and it is going to get better any day now.”

Evelyn Jack, 0418 595 383
Drought Outreach Worker, Western District Health Service

Contemporary Controversies

FARM GATE VISITING “Reflections on a day of cold calling”

by Evelyn Jack evelyn.jack@wdhs.net
counselling notes

Bowerbird or Snowball? – a cold calling strategy
by Ruth Turpin

Reference to “What they forgot to tell you when you applied to be a specialist drought counsellor...” No Bull October 07.

As one of those people – counsellor, not a counsellor, Rural support / Recovery / Support worker or whatever the title may be, I wish I had had Jeff Young’s article just over six months ago when I took up work as a Drought Support Worker. True to the article, I have been involved in community education, networking, relationship building … and lots of cold calling. With a huge learning curve still in place, I unashamedly use the snowball or is it the bowerbird effect?

With necessary information, grant and referral forms, maps in the backseat of whatever vehicle and partnership person I can link in with, off we go. Sometimes I go alone.

The effect begins with the first visit after the usual self introductions, chats …. and whatever I have gleaned from someone else that is useful. That’s the bowerbird bit. I take notes and pick up articles and gather whatever is useful and use it at every opportunity. As a member of a positive network, we all share whatever events, workshops, opportunities are coming up in our area and pass them on when relevant.

I repeat information from co-workers but also from farmer visits. A farmer may talk about where he got his latest hay from, price, availability, or maybe just his way of fixing a gate or insight into how valuable used farm batteries are …. and this often forms the basis of a chat for my next visit; to be repeated many times along the road with any other bits that either make me look and sound knowledgeable or well resourced, or is of practical use for the farmer visited. By the time the last farmer gets a visit, I am well versed in local weather, fodder supplies, water allocations and any local hints or activities that will benefit all users of the local grapevine. This is the Snowball effect. We don’t have to know it all to be effective, just to use it wisely and generously.

Doug Doran, Drought Support Worker talks about his No Bullshit approach to the work

I attempt to be really respectful of people. I never try to be an expert, just try to provide a good service. I usually just ‘rock up’ to the back door with no pieces of paper or anything, and say, “G’day, I’m Doug Doran, drought support worker, how are you going?” After about half an hour, I’ll say “Is there anything I can do for you?”

I’m always looking for connections – I might ask about the local footy club but whilst I’m having a conversation to engage a farmer, I’m doing a risk assessment at same time – asking if they follow the local footy and seeing whether they go to games helps determine how much social support and contact they might have. I’m always looking out for opportunities to assess risk – I provide an opportunity to talk about suicidal thoughts and offer support and resources. I’ve learnt that you can’t assume farms that look alright, are necessarily alright.

Difficult times can exacerbate isolation. One farmer told me, “I’m glad you popped in, not even the agents come now because we’ve got nothing to sell.” But despite the difficulties, people are so fantastic, so positive. I am so impressed, working with dry land farmers, how they are always recalculating, making major decisions and taking the risks in their stride. I’m learning more from them than they do from me.

I have been in this game for 25 years and I think it helps to be a bit extroverted. But you also have to be sensitive. Farmers really care about their stock. One farmer I spoke to said, “the only time I get upset is when I go outside and see the stock up (not getting enough feed and water).” For most farmers it’s not just a job, it’s their life, it’s their love, there is a spiritual connection to the land.

In simple terms, the key to being a good drought support worker, I believe, is to connect with people and not be an expert.

Doug Doran (doug.doran@centacare-sandhurst.org.au) Bendigo, has edited a book called Dad’s Stories, a book of 21 rural stories published recently by St Lukes innovative resources. His current drought work may inspire a new book called ‘kicking dust with the farmer’.
rain from nowhere
By Murray Hartin

His cattle didn’t get a bid; they were fairly bloody poor,
What was he going to do? He couldn’t feed them anymore,
The dams were all but dry; hay was thirteen bucks a bale,
Last month’s talk of rain was just a fairytale.

His credit had run out, no chance to pay what’s owed,
Bad thoughts ran through his head as he drove down Gully Road,
“Geez, Great Grandad bought the place back in 1898,
Now I’m such a useless bastard, I’ll have to shut the gate.
Can’t support my wife and kids, not like Dad and those before,
Crikey, Grandma kept it going while Pop fought in the war.”
With depression now his master, he abandoned what was right,
There’s no place in life for failures, he’d end it all tonight.

There were still some things to do; he’d have to shoot the cattle first,
Of all the jobs he’d ever done, that would be the worst.
He’d have a shower, watch the news, then they’d all sit down for tea
Read his kids a bedtime story, watch some more TV,
Kiss his wife goodnight, say he was off to shoot some roos
Then in a paddock far away he’d blow away the blues.
But he drove in the gate and stopped – as he always had
To check the roadside mailbox – and found a letter from his dad.

Now his dad was not a writer, mum did all the cards and mail
But he knew the writing from the notebooks that he used at cattle sales.
He sensed the nature of its contents, felt moisture in his eyes,
Just the fact his dad had written was enough to make him cry.

“Son, I know it’s bloody tough; it’s a cruel and twisted game,
this life upon the land when you’re screaming out for rain,
there’s no candle in the darkness, not a single speck of light,
but don’t let the demon get you, you have to do what’s right
I don’t know what’s in your head but push the bad thoughts well away
See you’ll always have your family at the back end of the day
You have to talk to someone, and yes I know I rarely did
But you have to think about Fiona and think about the kids
I’m worried about you son, you haven’t rung for quite a while

I know the road you’re on ’cause I’ve walked every bloody mile
The date? December 7 back in 1983
Behind the shed I had the shotgun rested in the brigalow tree
See I’d borrowed way too much to buy the Johnson place
Then it didn’t rain for years and we got bombed by interest rates
The bank was at the door; I didn’t think I had a choice
I began to squeeze the trigger, that’s when I heard your voice
You said, where are you daddy? It’s time to play our game
I’ve got Squatter all set up, we might get General Rain
It really was that close, you’re the one that stopped me son
And you’re the one that taught me there’s no answer in a gun
Just remember people love you, good friends won’t let you down
Look you might have to swallow pride and take that job in town
Just ’til things come good, son, you’ve always got a choice
And when you get this letter ring me, ‘cause I’d love to hear your voice”

Well he cried and laughed and shook his head, then put the truck in gear
Shut his eyes and hugged his dad in a vision that was clear
Dropped the cattle at the yards, put the truck away
Filled the troughs the best he could and fed his last ten bales of hay

Then he strode towards the homestead, shoulders back and head held high
He still knew the road was tough, but there was purpose in his eye
He called his wife and children, who’d lived through all his pain
Hugs said more than words – he’d come back to them again

They talked of silver linings, how good times always follow bad
Then he walked towards the phone, picked it up and rang his dad
And while the kids set up the Squatter, he hugged his wife again
Then they heard the roll of thunder and they smelt the smell of rain.

This poem was commissioned by the Salvation Army to raise awareness of rural suicide due to effects of long term drought.
community development

A primer by Judy Poll, Bouverie. j.poll@latrobe.edu.au

There has been much debate in CIGs across the state about the gap between the position descriptions of ‘drought counsellor’ and the reality of what’s actually needed in the position. The phrase ‘community development’ has often popped up as an explanation of what people have needed to do initially, in order to: engage the community, develop trusting relationships and ultimately gain referrals for counselling! Below is a discussion about community development, offering a few perspectives on what it could mean, particularly in the context of ‘drought counselling’.

So what exactly is ‘Community Development’?
Probably due to its very nature of being a less structured and constantly developing process, community development (CD) can be a somewhat slippery beast to define. Dr Jim Cavaye of Toowoomba Queensland, suggests that, ‘Rural community development fundamentally involves a process – a series of actions and decisions – that improves the situation of a community, not just economically, but also as a strong functioning community in itself.’

This definition highlights that CD is a process (rather than a one off event) that improves the situation of a community. Cavaye goes on to explain - ‘It is through action, participation and contact that the community becomes more vital, more able to manage change with stronger networks, organisational ability, skills, leadership and passion.’ This suggests that the ultimate aim of CD is to help the community better manage change – so relevant in our unpredictable climate in rural Victoria.

Community Development Exchange (UK) outlines the basic process of CD as working with a community to:
• Identify their strengths, needs, rights and responsibilities,
• Plan, organise and take action, and
• Assess the effect of any actions taken.

However, it’s HOW you do the process that is so important in CD. Jim Ife argues that, “The community has its own inherent capacity to develop its true potential, and community development is about providing the right conditions and nurturing to enable this development to occur (2002).”

Notice the emphasis here is not on DOING ONTO the community, but rather just ‘providing the right conditions’. This implies one important tenet of CD - that the community needs to define for itself what the problem is, and what the possible solutions could be, rather than us as the professional being the holder of all knowledge.

What basic values underlie CD?
From the above definitions, it’s clear that the process of CD is strongly influenced by its underlying values. There are numerous CD values discussed in the literature, and so below are just a few of the more popular ones.

1. Empowerment - Empowerment is a term that gets bandied around until it often loses its meaning (particularly when even the corporate sector now uses it to sell products!). But CD ideally aims to provide the conditions in which a community can genuinely define and solve its own problems.

2. Valuing the local - Acknowledge wisdom, resources and skills within the community. It’s also important to use local processes and culture – CD workers don’t set up a brand new meeting system when there is a good trusted town meeting process already in place. CD respects and values the community’s existing attributes and encourages the development of these.

3. Collective working - Maximise participation for different people in different ways, as people have different skills. Change things to increase diversity of participants - eg disabled access to a meeting room. The more people can participate, the more likely you can raise awareness of both issues and skills, and the more likely the community can experience empowerment as a result.

4. Balancing process with outcome - CD can achieve its outcome through its process – if the aim of a CD project is to build the capacity of the community, the community may plan a particular project to achieve this (such as a training program in a particular skill), but capacity can also be built through the process of doing this project. For example, imagine a community getting together and recognizing the need for this particular skill. Then imagine members of the community being supported to take on leading roles to explore what possible models might work, perhaps being trained in facilitating interviews with another town who’ve instigated a similar program, or lobbying government for funding, or writing a media release. Perhaps other members may take on mentor roles in the program. As a consequence, these members and the community at large may well feel more connected to each other, feel more skilled and feel like they actually have some power to change other things in their lives. Imagine the possible impact on their future behaviour because of this experience. This is empowerment through the process of CD, quite apart from what outcome is ultimately achieved.
6. Political awareness
CD is a inherently, political process, because what a CD worker is trying to do is to ‘change the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives’. Why does CD need to be political? Because CD is based on the idea of ‘holism’ – that everything relates to everything else, so we need to take a broad systemic view in understanding any issue (i.e. we need to take into account the social and political factors that contribute to a problem).

7. Sustainability
A final value underlying CD is sustainability. Whatever processes your CD work sets up, ideally these need to eventually be ‘community-led’ without substantial input from you or an agency. There is no point you facilitating a great series of workshops, and then leaving taking your expertise with you. However, if you train members of community to run the workshops, and help them to organise on-going funding and support, this would be a much more sustainable CD process.

So in summary, key points to remember about CD:
• Start where the community is at;
• Only seek outside knowledge when it is clear it is not available in the community;
• Maximise participation for different people in different ways;
• In CD, the process is the outcome;
• Help people link their own struggles with both other community members as well as broader political and social factors; and finally
• To make CD sustainable, aim to do yourself out of a job.

Drought: a challenge to photographers!
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

Drought, Discourse, and Durkheim: a research note
Reviewing newspaper articles, political speeches and popular literature, Brad West and Philip Smith from the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Queensland have written a thought provoking paper that argues that although drought is most commonly described as a “deviant, freak of nature that threatens the community”, one in three of the past 130 years have been drought years. They indirectly pose the question, “What would the response to drought, at all levels, look like if drought was considered an expected feature of the Australian climate?”

Would Government drought support follow a “stop-start - stop-start” funding pattern? Would the wisdoms from previous drought counselling services be lost? Would a response plan be ongoing?

West and Smith also provide a useful sociological analysis of the city vs country divide and of the symbolic power of acts of interest / generosity between the two in facilitating healing narratives around drought. The exchange program for rural / urban school children, promoted by the DPI, discussed in the Gippsland CIG, may be seen as an example of this type of symbolic ritual.

This article, available from your local CIG members, or Michelle Wills (m.wills@latrobe.edu.au) is not a practical how to, but provides an interesting cultural analysis that may help us understand the ways the community understands drought and the symbolic nature of practical responses to it.
Organisational Profile

Integrating drought work with the host agency

Rural Community Counselling Program, Wimmera Uniting Care.

The Rural Community Counselling Program commenced in March of 2003 with funding from the Drought Social Recovery Strategy. Funding has always been of a time limited nature. Initially funding covered two counsellors, one at Nhill and one at Warracknabeal, however over the past year the extended funding allowed us to provide counselling services to four communities. Liz Both works in Nhill, Machele Jelsma works in Warracknabeal, Nicholas Kitchen in Edenhope and Wilma Gibson works in the Donald/St.Arnaud region. Chris Ash, our Co-ordinator, works from Wimmera Uniting Care office in Horsham.

Five years later, we still do not have ongoing funding and once again face the prospect of losing workers only to find we have been refunded at the last minute. This has made it difficult to maintain a continuous service to the client group and it is understandable that the communities involved at times lose trust in the counsellors ‘staying around’.

The program services four communities, Nhill, Warracknabeal, Edenhope and Donald / St.Arnaud, using a ‘text book’ community development model in each. Back in 2003 the workers made contact with key players in the community such as the Department of Primary Industries, the Water Authority and the Victorian Farmers Federation. Speaking engagements were organised alongside these organisations and slowly referrals for counselling started to come in.

Whilst many referrals were from farmers, many more were from those people living in the small country towns who were having issues similar to any counselling service, like relationship difficulties, parenting issues, health concerns and isolation to name a few. It has only been in the past 12 months or so that many more referrals from farmers (20% of the referrals) have started to come in; we believe this to be due to the 10 year ongoing drought conditions in the Wimmera and the community acceptance that the stresses involved really do need an outlet.

Today our counsellors find themselves doing quite a diverse range of activities. We conduct many community education sessions where we talk about stress and depression, the signs of these conditions, strategies and supports to help. We write articles for newspapers, are represented on many networks and overall see ourselves as Family & Generalist Counsellors serving the whole of the Wimmera. We work with individuals and families around a vast range of issues and overall see ourselves as an important service to the community.

Sessions are held in the office or at clients’ homes. One of our workers sees one of her clients working alongside her with the animals and another driving on the tractor in the paddocks.

While we are happy to look after our clients, it is also very important to find ways of looking after ourselves. Despite our four counsellors working vast distances from each other, peer support is very important. Our phones are busy connecting to each other, running over cases and generally providing a friendly ear. We find the connection to the bigger Wimmera Uniting Care family to be important, monthly meetings occur, fortnightly supervision occurs in our neck of the woods and when opportunities arise such Cup Day we make the trip to join in the festivities.

We feel very fortunate in having the support of our CEO, Peter Brown. He has lobbied endlessly to have our funding continued and hopefully 2008 will find us funded in an ongoing way. We no longer see ourselves as Drought Counsellors but more as Generalist Counsellors which all of our communities very much need, drought or no drought.

This year it has been wonderful to be involved in the Bouverie Research Project. We very much enjoyed meeting counsellors from all over the state at the forum in February and engaging in the No Bullshit Therapy Training. We enjoy our meetings with the Co-operative Inquiry Groups and find the sharing of stories with our ‘cousins’ from Stawell and Ballarat very supportive and enjoyable.

Doing this work can be taxing and tiring, however the big positive is that we are engaged in a very diverse and interesting job, we are connected to our communities and every day we experience or learn something new from our clients.

Chris Ash, (chrisa@wimmera.unitingcare.org.au) Horsham
Reflections on “Drought Counselling” after a Year in the Field

The following comments are reflections on the demand for counselling services resulting from the worst drought Australia has faced this century and on some of the things I have learnt after 12 months of trying to respond to this demand. They do not necessarily reflect the views of my employing agency or the publishers of “No Bull”.

Drought is certainly a major stressor to individuals, families and communities. However it is not the only source of stress and dislocation and nor is it necessarily a discrete issue as usually portrayed. Provision of government assistance based on “proven exceptional circumstances” has probably exaggerated this perception with communities either being “in drought” and receiving considerable support or “not in drought” and therefore receiving nothing.

Other sources of stress may arise from other environmental disasters such as bushfire and flood. The experience of many Gippsland communities during 2007 is eloquent witness to this. Less obvious causes may be related to long term environmental changes, particularly the now incontrovertible process of climate change through global warming. The fact that such changes may be cyclical or permanent rather than seasonal is ominous in the extreme to those directly affected. Other changes that have caused considerable stress to farming families and communities may result from economic factors such as change in market conditions. Radical changes in Australian farming have occurred over little more than a generation since Australia largely depended on the UK as an agricultural market. Now we necessarily trade throughout the world, although are still excluded from EU and US markets. Related to such pressures has been the ever increasing demand on farmers to develop and employ technological skills far beyond those of the previous generation. These skills are often being required of farmers who have relatively little formal education received years ago. Now they are running businesses that have technical, financial and personnel management requirements beyond those of most urban firms. Demographic changes provide yet another source of stress within rural communities. This may stem from the well identified loss of young people to urban communities. However the relatively recent influx into rural communities of “sea and tree changers”, retirees and low income families seeking lower costs has also presented considerable issues which have been identified by rural families as creating extra social stress.1

Our experience and the findings of Wimmera-Mallee research initiated by the Birchip Cropping Group2 strongly suggest that the effects of drought build on and exacerbate pre-existing stress factors for individuals, families and communities. It is naïve to think that “when the drought breaks” everything will revert to a normal state and that all will be well. The study, called “Critical Breaking Point?” suggests that the most damaging process occurs when people are exposed to ongoing cycles of stress; where they are knocked down again after each recovery. In such cases initial resilience is sapped until finally a “critical breaking point” may be reached.

It is important to recognise that the effects of major stressors such as drought and the related issues referred to above will vary greatly between individuals and families. A minority will be relatively well prepared and will cope relatively easily, effectively growing in strength through successful problem solving. A larger number will be greatly challenged, particularly in the face of ongoing or cyclical stresses. These are often younger families with less experience and greater debt loads, as well as older families who have been looking to retirement but are now finding demands upon their personal superannuation savings and physical resources to be overwhelming. Succession planning thrown into chaos has been a recurring theme noticed by a number of drought counsellors, with the threat that immediate stresses will be perpetuated into another generation.

Recognition of these complex issues is likely to be necessary in order for drought counsellors to be able to provide effective assistance. Particularly important will be a proper appreciation of the pre-existing sources of stress on farming families and communities and an understanding of the interaction of these with current drought conditions. Equally necessary will be a capacity to foresee and understand potential long term consequences.

References


John Bell - 5153 0308
Rural Outreach Counsellor
South Gippsland
CIGs - Cooperative Inquiry Groups

Contact details

Gippsland CIG

Standing Left to Right
Peter Carr  Sale  5144 1151
Kevin Dmytrenko  Omeo  5199 0125
Di Robinson  Lakes  5155 1151
Lauren Gordon  West Gipps  5624 3548
Leah Henderson  DHS Sale  (Resigned)
Judy Richards  Sale  5144 7777
Pam Jarvis  Sale  5144 7777
John Bell  Leongatha  5657 4436

Seated Left to Right
Robyn Bradley  Yarram  5182 0270
Sue Armstrong  Leongatha  5657 4436
Teagan Steen  East Gipps  5153 0308

Loddon Mallee CIG

Left to Right
Pam Rycroft  Bouverie  0385 5100
Ruth Turpin  Echuca  5485 5800
Kevin Holmes  Echuca  5481 4010
Emma Brentnall  Rochester  5484 4489
Alana Brennan  Campaspe  5851 3432
Allannah Jenkins  Kyabram  5852 0000

Not in Photo
Jann Barkmann  Swan Hill  5032 9755
Travis Edwards  Bendigo  5438 1330
Doug Doran  Bendigo  5438 1330
Sue Thornton  Mildura  5023 7313
Samantha Bell  Bendigo  5434 6479
Pat Andruchow  Rochester  5484 4401

Rural Support Line

Original Members Left to Right
Justine Clear  State-wide  1300 655 969
Angela Galpin  State-wide  1300 655 969

Not in picture
All lifeline staff
Grampians CIG

Back Row Left to Right
Fiona Tischmann  Stawell  5352 6203  
Chris Ash  Horsham  5382 6789  
Glenn Peters  Grampians  5358 7400  
Nicholas Kitchen  Edenhope  0428 138 476

Front Row Left to Right
Belinda Lees  Ballarat  5337 3333  
Mary O’Brien  Horsham  5382 6789  
Robin Lewington  Warracknabeal  0429 027 533

Front Row Left to Right
Kevin Luttrell  Ballarat  5337 3333  
Rebecca Wood  Ballarat  5337 3333  
Wilma Gibson  Donald  0429 149 703  
Machele Jelsma  Warracknabeal  5382 6789  
Yvonne Dawson  Stawell  5382 6789  
Liz Both  Nhill  5382 6789  
Sarah Noakes  Grampians  5358 7400

Barwon South West CIG

Left to Right
Judy Poll  Bouverie  9385 5113  
Larry Neeson  Hamilton  0438 596 550  
Evelyn Jack  Hamilton  5551 8450  
Bronwyn Beazley  Lismore  5558 3000  
Sue Williams  Bellarine  52512291  
Kate O’Sullivan  Warrnambool  1300 361 680  
Kristy Sabell  Bellarine CHC  5256 1311  
Wendy Garner  MacArthur  5563 1292  
Rob Baker  Geelong  5221 7055  
Chris Johnson  Barwon  5260 3800  
Lee Town  Mortlake  5558 7000  
Bec Corrin  Warrnambool  1300 361 680  
Simone (previous member)  
Brenda McLachlan  VFF  
Peter Walsgott  VFF  
Fiona Wilson  Warrnambool  1300 616 680  
Marika Dam  Warrnambool  1300 616 680

Hume CIG

Back Row Left to Right
Jane Rushworth  Benalla  0432 705 902  
Tina Whittle  Bouverie  9385 5100  
Rachel Robertson  Shepparton  0427 840 430

Front Row Left to Right
Terry Reedy  Shepparton  5823 7000  
Ruth Malpass  Wangaratta  0432 705 901

Not in Photo
Wayne Harris  Shepparton  5823 7000  
David Bacash  Wodonga  0408 230159
Resources

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.

BOOKS

Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (2005) Effective Engagement: building relationships with community and other stakeholders. Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne.

While this practical planning guide was initially designed to assist Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Department of Primary Industries (DPI) staff in planning the community engagement component of a project, the publication has also proven valuable to other practitioners committed to "working with identified groups of people, whether connected by geographic location, special interest or affiliation, to address issues affecting their well-being."

The kit, comprising three books - Book 1: an introduction to engagement, Book 2: the engagement planning workbook and Book 3: the engagement toolkit, draws on the research, learning and experiences of a range of practitioners about the practice of engaging communities and other stakeholders.

**Book 1** outlines the principles and importance of effective engagement, as well as explores a model for developing best-practice engagement activities with communities and other stakeholders.

**Book 2** guides the reader through a step-by-step process for developing their own Engagement Plan. This book also provides a number of sample engagement planning documents and engagement case studies.

**Book 3** lists a broad selection of tools which can be used in the planning, implementation and evaluation of engagement activities. Each listing includes a detailed description of a given tool, including its objectives, resource requirements, a discussion of its strengths and weakness and further references for exploration.

Effective Engagement: building relationships with community and other stakeholders (Version 3) is available free from www.dse.vic.gov.au/engage


In this Australian textbook on community development theory and practice, Professor Jim Ife – Head of the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Curtin University - writes: "There has been increasing interest in development at the community level as potentially providing a more viable and sustainable basis for the meeting of human need and for interaction with the environment. Among activists concerned with environmental and social justice issues, the establishment of viable community-based structures has become a key component of strategies for change. Community development represents a vision of how things might be organised differently so that genuine ecological sustainability and social justice, which seem unachievable at global or national levels, can be realised in the experience of human community. This book represents an attempt to articulate that vision and to provide a theoretical framework for community development that will relate analysis, context and action." Pg xi

While this book sets out to expand the reader’s theoretical understandings of community development and to explore the nature of practice, according to Ife, it does not offer simple prescriptions of how to perform community work as it is “at heart, a creative exercise and ...impossible to prescribe creativity”.

Note while this material is highly accessible, the book assumes some familiarity with basic social and political ideas, such as social class, power, the division of labour, Marxism, feminism and socialism.

INFORMATION SHEETS

**What is community development?**

This pamphlet, produced by the Community Development Exchange of the UK, provides a relatively brief and straightforward introduction to community development, including a discussion about what it is and what it is not. Free in e-copy at www.cdx.org.uk/files/u1/what_is_cd.pdf

WEBSITES

http://www.grants.dvc.vic.gov.au

Visitors to this site can access information about the various grant programs administered by the Department of Planning and Community Development. They can also “apply for grants online, download guidelines and applications forms, read about what community organisations have done with some successful grant applications and find hints and tips on how to apply for a grant”. Special thanks to Kevin Dmytrenko Gippsland CIG for this contribution.

Support for Workers - Rural Support Line

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

Want to join our No Bull mailing list and / or email resource list? Send your contact details (mailing address for hard copy and email address for e-copy) to m.wills@latrobe.edu.au

GIPPSLAND  BARWON SOUTH WEST  HUME  LODDON-MALLEE  GRAMPIANS