**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.

**Rural Support Line**

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

**PHOTO EXHIBITION**

“A day in the life of rural Victoria” a photographic exhibition of images of rural people and landscape which depict the impact of drought is available for loan or on CD. **Contact Richard Watts - Business Development and Communications Manager VicRelief Foodbank telephone 03 9362 8300.**

**LIVING LIBRARY**

Australia’s first Living Library was launched in Lismore, NSW in November 2006. It is based on the successful European model, which began in Denmark in 2000 and has spread across Europe. The Living Library is like a normal library, however the books in the living library are people representing a wide range of community groups, especially those who are frequently confronted with prejudices and stereotypes and are often the victims of social exclusion or discrimination.

Living Books can not only speak, but can reply to readers’ questions, and engage in discussion for mutual learning. The ‘borrowers’ are ordinary community members who have the opportunity to ‘borrow’ a living book for an informal half-hour conversation. The Library provides a safe environment and encourages the participants to engage in constructive dialogue. When diverse members of the community are brought together in this way, understanding is increased and social cohesion is built.

**Contact**

Dale Reddick — Anglicare Victoria, The Rights Centre Telephone 03 9375 0955 or dale.reddick@anglicarevic.org.au

**INQUIRIES**

**Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities**


**INDEX**

Welcome to this ‘Drought Forum Special’ edition of No Bull: the newsletter of the state-funded Rural Outreach Counsellors / Workers. The forum, held at the Shamrock Hotel in Bendigo on February the 28th and 29th was entitled, ‘We Care – No Bull: Celebrating, past practice and self care.’ The forum reflected the growing practice-based-evidence of drought work and provided some much needed R & R for the drought workers. The two days showed the spectrum of community development work, revealed the sparkling moments in counselling and took a critical look at engagement strategies such as ‘cold calling’. All of this, as well as an opportunity to share knowledge, develop friendships and working relationships. This is why we were devastated to hear that Samantha Bell, a vibrant member of the Loddon-Mallee CIG passed away unexpectedly on Friday 16th May. Our thoughts go out to her family, friends and colleagues. A tribute to her and her work can be read on page 2.

The celebration of the work during the forum was tempered however, by the feeling that just as good networks were bedding down, just as counselling numbers were growing and just as people affected by drought were getting help to address its emotional impacts, rather than just wanting practical help, funding is likely to dry up for many state-funded counsellors. Whilst the irony of this led to understandable frustration, over time, the CIGs (Co-operative Inquiry Groups) across Victoria have reflected on what legacy the state-funded counsellors would like to leave, ‘embedding ‘hard won knowledge’ gained over the last year (and in some areas continuously since 2003) into the existing ongoing workforce and sharing practice wisdom with the newly employed federal-funded drought counsellors, have been strong themes.

**State-funded counsellors are beginning to get new jobs, some doing similar work but with different sources of funding, others are changing roles but taking rural outreach and drought wisdom to these positions and others are being employed by their host organizations in capacities to address the broader issues around rural adjustment. Doing similar work but funded by the latest fad, is common to rural settings.**

**The uncoordinated short term funding, together with the cyclic nature of drought begins to explain the loss of knowledge about drought I noticed when I started working in this area. As drought workers’ contracts come to an end, they have to start thinking about more pressing needs such as putting food on the table rather than how best to transfer knowledge to others. It is unreasonable to expect individual workers who no longer have jobs to be personally responsible for this task. The fact that drought, unlike fire, threatens irregularly rather than at the same time each year, also means that drought response is not routine. How and who to pass on the knowledge of the state-funded workers is still an open question - my team are keen to receive your suggestions.**

The only constant is change. We need to accept this but also celebrate the many success stories, that have happened across Victoria and who to pass on the knowledge of the state-funded workers is still an open question - my team are keen to receive your suggestions.

**Out For Your Neighbour** - a collaboration between the Rural Outreach Workers and the VFF, was launched by Minister Neville, in Stawell on April 22nd. These community workshops discuss the impact of drought on families and communities, and have ‘look started’ community activities, such as a men’s breakfast and an older person’s social group, that had become dormant due to the impact of chronic drought.

There has also been a growing interest in research and formal evaluation of drought work. The influential ‘Farmgate model’ will be evaluated by Bouverie in collaboration with the Loddon-Mallee CIG, local PCP, DHS and others. There has been a lot of interest in the Birchip Cropping Group’s (BCG) research, summarized on pages 16-17. Several CIG members have expressed interest in replicating the BCG research in their own areas. The interim report of the action research conducted by Bouverie, based on the work of all the CIGs across Victoria has been submitted to DHS. I can tell you the wisdom generated by the CIG network is overwhelming!

Enjoy the read and good luck to those workers seeking new positions.

Jeff Young, Bouverie (Editor)
Tribute to Samantha Bell
Drought Response Officer,
Community and Cultural Development Team
City Of Greater Bendigo

It was with great shock and sadness that we heard of the sudden death of Sam Bell, Drought Response Officer with Greater Bendigo Council on Friday 16 May.

Sam died in her sleep, possibly from a blood clot, leaving behind her partner, Martin and three young children. It has been such a shock for her team at Council and those who worked closely with her over the past five months or so since she started in early January.

Sam was such a passionate, determined and engaging person who took on her role with great conviction and belief about making a difference to the people she dealt with due to the impact of drought and other rural issues. While only knowing Sam for such a short amount of time, she made such an impression on people through her warm and engaging personality which was reflected in the vibrant and committed approach she had to her work and the relationships she developed. She was often ‘straight on to things’, following up issues and passing on information. It is my memory of her in our later meetings and discussions that her feisty, strident and determined approach to ‘make things happen’ came through. She was ‘ever questioning’ and reflecting on what can be achieved for the communities she worked for.

It was from these qualities that we could see how she made such a significant contribution to her community in Newstead through her role as President of the Newstead Primary School Council over a number of years, bringing the community together and holding firm through difficult times and changes for the school community. Sam’s commitment and responsibility to family, friends and other interests, involvements and her general approach to life was reflected in the wonderful funeral service and the memorable walk to the Newstead cemetery, some three to four kilometres out of the township, by the hundreds that attended, where she was laid to rest in the fading sunlight rays in a beautiful rural setting.

We extend our sincere sympathy and thoughts to Sam’s partner, Martin and their three children, Oscar, Isabel and Saskia and her extended family, many friends and colleagues in their loss and grief. She will be very fondly remembered and very sorely missed.

Laurie Whelan, on behalf of the Loddon Mallee Drought Response Coordinators network.

A brief description of Sam’s Community Development project, Activating Women of Leadership, is highlighted on page 7.
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

Jo Verduci - 03 9666 1247 or jverduci@wesley.org.au

Current Role
Jo is a telephone councillor and counselling supervisor at Lifeline based at Wesley in the heart of Melbourne. She joined the Rural Support Line CIG at a time when the shape of service delivery was changing. With her long-standing experience of telephone counselling, she contributes to the ongoing skill development of all Lifeline counsellors in their ability and confidence to respond to calls from rural people, which are prompted by drought and other specifically rural stresses.

Background and Experience
Jo’s family story is richly dotted with significant points of change and loss, which have influenced Jo’s passion in supporting people to navigate critical times. After completing a degree in Behavioural Sciences majoring in Psychology, Jo looked for some ‘hands on’ experience and began as a volunteer telephone counsellor at Lifeline. Fifteen years later she is now a counselling supervisor, as well as continuing with volunteer phone counselling shifts.

Counselling Experience: Jo's interest in psychodynamic theory and her understanding of the layered effects of life experiences have enabled her to recognise the profound significance of what may appear a small catalyst for one person, yet which may be the last in a long series of stressful events for another. She understands the natural guardedness with which people place calls and works to build trust within the call. Though she didn’t find the drought line daunting, her main concern with these calls, was to gather enough information on the referral pathways to quickly link people to appropriate local services.

Special Interests
Jo describes being moved by how isolated people were and how she adapted her phone counselling skills to suit the needs of these callers. Her connection with the isolation of rural people is evident when she speaks of her family in the Alpine region of Italy. She refers to the ‘sound of music’ experience on finding herself surrounded by the mountains on her arrival there some years ago, and her admiration for the ways these people and other people “carve out an existence” in harsh circumstances.

CIGs - Cooperative Inquiry Groups

Contact details

Gippsland CIG

Standing Left to Right

Vivienne Masseau at pamper days run in Gippsland
Shirley Millard Hayfield 5153 2012
Teagan Steen East Gippsland 5153 0308
Anita Wood East Gippsland
Lauren Gordon West Gippsland 5624 3548
Judy Richards (resigned) Sale 5144 7777

Seated Left to Right

Di Robinson Lakes 5155 1151
Peter Carr Sale 5144 7777
Kevin Dmytrenko (resigned) Omeo 5159 0125

Not in photo

Pam Jarvis Sale 5144 7777
John Bell Leongatha 5657 4436
Sue Armstrong Leongatha 5657 4436
Tracey Moffatt Bairnsdale 5153 2012
Jeff Young Bouverie 9385 5100

Back Row Left to Right

Terry Reedly Shepparton 5823 7032
Ruth Malpass (resigned) Wangaratta 5723 4000
Wayne Harris Shepparton 5823 7000

Seated Left to Right

Jacqui Star Moira 5743 3200
Christine Cummins Shepparton 5823 6000
Ivan Lister Violet Town 0402 856 374
Karen Dean Shepparton 5831 5399

Not in photo

Rachel Robertson Shepparton 0427 840 430
Jane Rushworth Wangaratta 5723 4000
David Bacash Wodonga 02 6022 8888
Naomi Mason Wodonga 02 6022 8888
Glen Canning Shepparton 5831 5399
Les Hume Shepparton 5831 5399
Caroline Harlow Strathboogie 0408 552 482
Tina Whittle Bouverie 9385 5100
Kirsten Green DHS 5722 0530

Left to Right

Jo Verduci Statewide 1300 655 969
Justine Clear Statewide as above
Angela Galpin Statewide as above

Not in photo

Elena Tauridsky Bouverie 9385 5100

All Lifeline staff who take calls from the RSL

Hume CIG

Rural Support Line

Barwon South West Region

Jennette (Jay) Robinson - 5564 6000

Current Role
Primary Mental Health Team (PMHT) Warrnambool.

Background and Experience
Rural Experience: Four years ago Jay moved to Warrnambool for a “Sea Change” and commenced work with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Southwest Healthcare. In the last twelve months she has moved into the Primary Mental Health Team (PMHT). In this role Jay works with General Practitioners to assist in the management of the psychological health of their clients. Services include support and enhancement of the capacity of primary care professionals to prevent, recognise and treat mental health problems, short-term case management support to individual clients and facilitated referrals to specialist psychiatric services. Therapy consists of short-term (6-12 sessions) therapy intervention for high prevalence disorders (anxiety and depression) – largely CBT based treatments and skills training in stress, anxiety and depression management.

Counselling Experience: Jay is a qualified psychologist and has been working in public clinical mental health and managing her private practice, Think Inside Out, for the past 10 years. Jay has worked in Melbourne at the Royal Children’s Hospital and the Albert Road Centre for Health. Jay is trained in child and adolescent psychiatry and clinical group work.

Special Interests
Recently Jay was appointed to facilitate drought activity work within the PMHT. This work involves secondary mental health consultation to drought counsellors, Mental Health First Aid workers and other front-line staff who work with primary producers and others (including families and children) affected by drought. She undertakes joint home visits with drought workers where indicated, and assists with early streaming of access to specialist mental health services. Jay also participates in the Barwon SW CIG and worked closely with the Bouverie Centre to facilitate the No Bull Counselling Workshop in Warrnambool. Jay is also working closely with the Southern Grampians and Goulburn PCPs to map better access to services for people affected by drought.
Hume Region

Terry Reedy - 5823 7000 or treedy@familycare.com.au

Current Role
Terry is a Social Worker based in Shepparton, working full time at Family Care in the Goulburn Valley.

Background and Experience
Agroulture runs in Terry’s veins. Originally from a military family in New Zealand, Terry moved straight from school into dairy farming and subsequently to market gardening after immigrating to Australia, where he grew a diversity of products, from carrots for export to flowers for the domestic markets. He has farmed in WA, Queensland and Victoria. A change of direction in his late 30s saw Terry commence a BA, where his interests in rural sociology and sustainable development (which had first seeded ‘while milking’), were further nurtured. He completed his BA, followed by a degree in Social Work and attributes the development of his ideas, in part, to his exposure to Critical and Feminist Theories as well as Ecological Social Work perspectives at university.

Counselling and Community Development: Terry’s current work involves individual counselling, assertive outreach to farming families through ‘cold calling’, group work where he likes to bring ordinary people together to explore issues common to them, and some community education. To maintain the dignity of farming families who may need support Terry and his co-workers have adopted an innovative approach to their practice of cold calling at farms. Instead of using standard agency-issue late model sedans which look like ‘the welfare’, they advocated for the purchase of ‘an old ute’, which they use to drive the long, straight, dusty roads of their region.

Special Interests
While Terry lives in the flatter country of Northern Victoria, he describes his love of riding the winding roads of the high country, exploring both on and off road riding and camping. In his work, he identifies that his own interests and experiences help him support people as they begin to develop an awareness of the broader environmental issues and how these relate to their own situation, and acknowledge that things cannot continue as they are. Terry’s passion for supporting people as they make these critical connections and changes in their lives is clearly evident.

Barwon South West Region

Kate O-Sullivan - 1300 361 680 or kosullivan@comconnect.com.au

Current Role
Kate is a rural outreach worker with Community Connections.

Background and Experience
Kate completed her initial social work training at Melbourne Uni followed by family therapy, mediation and bereavement counselling. Recently, in collaboration with Southern Grampians and Glenelg PCP, Kate has enjoyed developing, conducting and evaluating the Farmgate Pilot in the Barwon South West region. This ‘cold calling’ model is a slightly modified version of the Campaspe Shire model. Kate pairs up with other workers (financial counsellors, Balmoral bush nursing staff etc) and visits farming families to ‘break down the barriers’, bring referral information and offer immediate advice. In her current role, Kate has also worked hard to ‘take the pulse of the community’ by linking up with the Centrelink drought bus, attending farm information nights, climate change forums and Field Days. Over her career Kate has held a number of positions in foster care, child protection, psychiatry, Centrelink, Volunteer Co-ordination and Youth Mediation.

Rural experience: In the 1970s, Kate moved to the country from Melbourne, near where she grew up on farm in Barwon South West when her parents moved there in the 1950s. Her grandparents and cousins’ families currently live in the region.

Practice Notes
In her work Kate has found her mediation training very helpful and uses this framework a lot when families ‘don’t want counselling’. She finds this way of working helps to create a future focus and assists negotiation. Kate has also found her bereavement training beneficial in her current role. She describes how it has helped her to demystify some of the aspects of grief and loss for her clients, to find the balance between being sensitive and upfront in talking about these things, and in sitting with grief instead of ‘trying to fix it’. Kate is passionate about advocating for outreach services to rural areas; seeing this as a critical and much needed service for rural communities, which are ‘often left out’. She refers to this advocacy as ‘affirmative action’ for rural areas. And to sustain her work, Kate returns to her family, plays in her (now sustainable) garden and spends time with her ducks.

The rural community is fatigued and fragmenting
- Many people are concerned about how others are faring.
- Issues of rural decline are ongoing and problematic.
- Fractures are appearing within the farming community.

Assistance has been utilised and is needed
- Families have benefited from various types of financial assistance
- Calls were made for further information and improvements to the financial assistance system.

Overall, the interviews suggest that the six months between February and September have involved an exhausting series of highs and lows for farming families in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region and beyond. The interviews capture a period when the growing likelihood of further drought was threatening to derail the renewed efforts and plans of many farming families. They highlight how farming families’ attempts to recover from previous drought conditions require them to cope with additional calls on their reserves as they prepare for production again. It also highlights how they need to cope with the unavoidable lag period that exists between them committing further reserves and receiving the subsequent financial rewards that will help them recover. This process of recommitting and waiting places farming families in a vulnerable position long after drought has seemingly disappeared. It also leaves them exposed if drought appears as a possibility again, as in September it seemed to be doing.

Irrespective of how seasonal conditions develop from September on, the interviews suggest that the threat of further drought has already inflicted a serious toll on the farming community. Due to this and the low levels of financial, emotional and social reserves farming families were already operating on prior to the recent dry conditions, the next six months will once again form a momentous period. The pressure on decision making already present in February this year will continue to mount as we move towards February 2008. Although to date no major decisions about the future have been made by the farming families interviewed in September, the signs suggest that the interviews we conduct as the summer draws to a close next year will reveal that, unfortunately, some critical breaking points have been reached.

• Calls were made for further information and improvements to the financial assistance system.

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


Masseuse Yvonne Smith providing a rejuvenating massage to Machelle Jelima (Grampians CIG) at the Bendigo forum.

Yvonne provides free massage to people attending Pumper Days organised by members of the Gippsland CIG which give people affected by drought some time out.

For a full copy of the report contact: Alexandra Gartmann CEO
BCG (Birchip Cropping Group)
PO Box 85
Birchip, Vic. 3483
Telephone 03 5492 2787
www.bcg.org.au
Critical Breaking Point?
Understanding long term impacts and recovery processes among farming families in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region

A report undertaken by BCG & RMCG Consulting with support from RIRDC & Tattersalls

George Adams Foundation

Summary

The aim of the ‘Critical Breaking Point?’ (CBP) research is to gain a better understanding of how Australian producers and their families are responding to drought and other pressures. Based on in-depth interviews with farming families in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region of north-western Victoria, this research uses an unprecedented longitudinal approach to track the experiences of farming families during a time of severe drought and - it was expected and hoped - a period of drought recovery.

The CBP research is based on two phases of research. Part One interviewed sixty randomly selected farming families during severe drought in February 2007. Part Two involves two follow-up interviews at six monthly intervals (September 2007 and February 2008) with a subset of twenty of the sixty farming families interviewed in Part One. This group represents some of the younger and older families of the original sample, who were selected in order to allow us to further explore some of the particular challenges that farming families at these stages of life are facing.

This presentation relates to the Interim Report for Part Two: reporting on interviews conducted in September 2007. It builds on the understanding we developed in Part One about the issues farming families are facing in a period of great uncertainty and diminished capacity. Like the first round of interviews, it explores immediate and longer-term pressures upon farming families and their decision making around the present and future.

Eight key findings emerged from the interview data:

After a period of hope, stress was rising again in September
• Following a difficult period of waiting, spirits rose with the Autumn break.
• Many farming families are now more vulnerable financially than ever.
• The threat of further drought is having a significant impact
• The threat of further losses is causing great anxiety.
• Most people’s hopes for a redeeming year have been crushed.

Some people are losing faith in nature and farming
• Disbelief, despair and depression are widespread.
• People are becoming frustrated with agriculture.
• There is growing concern about the challenges facing the industry.
• Defiant optimism is present and encouraged.

Risk has been approached in a wide variety of ways this season
• Risk-taking and risk-averse strategies to production have been used by different farmers.
• The cautious approach being encouraged by drought challenges the dominant traditional ideal in farming.
• Decisions around enterprise mix are complicated by assessments of risk.
• Efforts to adopt on-farm drought proofing measures are limited by a lack of capital.
• Forward selling has badly impacted some farming families.

Many farming families are looking to increase their off-farm income
• Many view alternative income as key to “drought proofing”.
• The time and capital being committed to farming is decreasing.
• Farming families of all ages are trying to protect themselves with off-farm investments.

People are questioning their plans for the future
• Professional and personal plans are being postponed and compromised.
• Virtually all families are questioning the value and possibility of staying in farming.
• Some people are restricted from leaving by financial and family reasons.
• Even those deeply committed to farming are questioning its value to them.

The Bouverie team hosted a two-day forum at the Shamrock in Bendigo on February 28th and 29th, to mark the one-year anniversary of the CIG-CIGAR network. A competition to name the forum was won by Kevin Holmes, from the Loddon-Mallee CIG. The title, “We Care - No Bull: Celebration, Best Practice and Self Care”, reflected suggested topics from CIGs across the state. Seventy people attended including state and federal funded rural outreach workers, primary mental health staff and guests from DHS and the VPF. The Forum promoted networking, provided a ‘bigger picture’ perspective for individual rural outreach workers/counsellors and helped some counsellors entertain new ideas (eg cold calling). Providing a reflective space allowed the attendees to consider the legacy they would like to leave over the next 6 months, if their positions are not renewed, rather than just fade away at the end of their contracts (or before) along with their hard won wisdoms.

Celebration
The forum was a rare opportunity for rural outreach workers, often working in isolated, sole positions, to get together and celebrate their ‘profession’. Some of their achievements are summarised on pages 6-7 (community development activities) and pages 8-9 (sparkling moments in counselling).

Best Practice
Providing appropriate support to people who are stressed but independent, stoic and suspicious of counselling requires ongoing reflection and debate. A robust debate was able to be had at the forum around the pros and cons of cold calling. Over the year, more drought counsellors have tried cold calling and have found it a productive way to reach people who would not otherwise seek help.

Self Care
Looking after yourself is necessary if you are to look after others. A presentation on vicarious traumatisation, summarised on page 14, was highly valued according to evaluation of the forum. It seemed to raise awareness of the potential insidious vicarious impact of working with chronic disaster; an awareness that has led to the engagement of supervision by some workers.

A position statement that represented how participants at the forum felt services to rural Victoria should occur into the future was developed during the forum. It is presented here as a way of promoting the best and most efficient support services to assist rural Victoria combat the many challenges it faces.

Position Statement of the Drought Counsellors / Rural Outreach & Support Workers

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

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

A strong and effective service would assist in developing communities’ abilities to address a variety of rural crises (ie fire, flood and extremes of weather such as drought) and support ongoing change, with coordinated funding from each level of government, and integration with key services.

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

The pages that follow have been inspired by presentations at the Bendigo Drought Forum. Let us know what you think!
community development

In the early months, newly appointed drought counsellors found that they had to use community development strategies simply to engage clients. Over time, drought counsellors, now called rural outreach workers / counsellors have begun to explore the philosophies (and strategies) along the community development continuum. Below are examples of work posted on the continuum at the conference, along side a brief descriptor of the five key aspects.

1. Individual Risk Assessment: involves a process of detecting individuals at risk of health problems including physical, psychological or behavioural.

Farm Gate Model The Campaspe Farm Gate model involves a counsellor and rural worker visiting farming families at the farm gate. Farmers are visited in a ‘blanket road approach’ (visiting everyone), and discussions are based on an acknowledgment of stresses and strains as well as opening up conversations to acknowledge their resilience. Workers ‘have a yarn’ on arrival – opening up natural conversations throughout which screening, needs identification and referral processes are interwoven. Screening measures are applied for both practical matters (finance, fodder, future) and psychosocial issues (opportunity to talk and connect, normalising their experiences, K-10 scale check). Workers help raise awareness of supports and appropriate assistance measures available to farmers and make themselves available as a further resource for counselling or support to access appropriate services.

2. Health Education / Information: includes the provision of education to individuals or groups with the aim of improving knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy and individual capacity to change.

Pit Stop is a program developed in response to men’s poor health. Generally speaking, men are noted to pay little attention to their health: rarely going to the GP for a check up, and then only if they become really sick. The worst affected tend to be men living in rural and remote regions of Australia. Pit Stop is a healthy lifestyle ‘one-stop shop’ program for men, based on a mechanical theme designed to encourage better self-care, in much the same way that they might look after their cars. They are asked ‘if you were a car, would you be a hot-rod or a clapped-out bomb?’ The participants put themselves ‘over the pits’ to have their Oil Pressure (blood pressure), Torsion (flexibility), Ducto (skin cancers) or Exhaust Emissions (smoking) tested as well as other health checks to see if their bodies are in roadworthy condition or requires follow-up maintenance. It goes to where men are and in a humorous way gets them to think about their health.

Strong Women Strong Families is a program in the Goulburn Valley designed to treat women to a day of pampering and demonstrate a range of self-care activities to support them during the sustained stresses of drought. It is born of the recognition that women often juggle multiple responsibilities in their role of being the carer in their families, with the many other roles, paid and unpaid, which they take on. They often leave their own health and wellbeing to last. This program is offered at no cost to the participants, and encourages women to ‘switch off’ for a while, be nourished and learn ways to nurture themselves. Diverse activities are offered to enable participants to unwind: from introductions to ancient eastern practices such as Tai Chi, to learning how to put balance back into your day, being treated to a free beauty ritual such as a foot spa or hand massage. ‘Scrumptious’ local fine foods are served while women relax and recharge in the company of old and new friends.

NEWS from the BIG shed

Over the past 18 months rural communities have been drawing on existing, as well as additional capacity in order to strengthen their ability to manage the impacts of ongoing drought. Additional counselling, using the proactive ‘No Bull’ approach has played a vital role in supporting farmers to maintain and build the emotional capacity necessary for how they manage and consider their current and future needs.

Change driven by many factors, including drought, has always been part of rural community life. Change will be continuous, impacting across many groups. Impacts from climate change, fluctuating global markets, petrol prices and long-term demographic change as set out in Department of Primary Industry’s ‘Changing Rural Social Landscapes’ research need to be considered as part of the planning and service delivery of every aspect of health and community organisations. The additional programs provided through the Department of Human Services drought response, ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing’ have provided an opportunity for re-regenerating traditional practice while establishing new cross-sectoral relationships, expanded referral pathways, improved access for ‘hard to reach’ groups, and a counselling approach that is pragmatic, brief and effective. Workforce development, health promotion and service coordination initiatives have provided support for these new approaches. The challenge is now to embed these new ways of working within mainstream planning and program delivery. Embedding the ‘No Bull’ approach in mainstream counselling programs is a key priority over the next few months.

DHS centrally and regionally, is working with rural health and community services, to assist them in moving from a specialist drought response to a more integrated mainstream approach. Embedding a long-term ‘rural change’ approach within all of our work that best utilises the innovative and responsive approaches developed through the ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing’ initiatives is another way we can all work together to create more responsive rural services.

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

Expanding & sustaining the CHANGE

Strengthening the planning and organisational structures to better enable an ongoing ‘change management’ response to rural challenges is as important as increasing service delivery opportunities. Primary Change Partnerships (PCPs) are a DHS funded platform to provide a planning and organisational focus with a primary interest in enhancing integrated health promotion and service coordination. In addition to the ‘drought’ counselling initiative, the ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing’ provided further capacity for PCPs to develop a more specific drought focus within their health promotion planning and service coordination work. This has included strengthening links with Divisions of General Practice, expanding cross-sectoral partnerships through Drought Recovery committees and supporting the planning and development of targeted health promotion and service co-ordination initiatives.

‘Drought’ counsellors have undertaken community development, expanded access and referral pathways, and built skills and knowledge through innovative approaches. It is vital that this work is captured within the strategic planning and partnership thinking of PCPs. There are many examples of how the broader PCP strategic partnering process and the more proactive and integrated approaches of ‘drought’ counsellors have strengthened and reinforced work across a range of areas.

Some examples include: Northern Mallee PCP, with strong leadership from the Rural City of Mildura has developed a co-design process linking the local planning strategy to monitor community need which enables better utilisation and communication and referral pathways between organisations. Or without specific ‘drought funding’ there has been strong leadership from primary health, family services, general practice, mental health, financial counsellors and schools, are drawing together the knowledge, skills and resources of multiple organisations to better target and maximise resources.

Campaspe and South West Victoria, PCP and ‘drought counsellors’ have worked together on a planned and well thought through ‘Farmgate’ approach.

Southern Grampians, Glenelg and Wimmera PCPs are the taking the community development approach to ensure small isolated rural communities experiencing multiple impacts of rural change can have enhanced access to a range of integrated human services. This planning approach is being built into broad rural and climate change planning processes.

PCPs are nothing other than a partnership between their member organisations. They are the manifestation of the information, ideas, learning, leadership and commitment generated through existing and potential partners. It is critical, particularly as we transition from a ‘special drought’ to a ‘mainstream rural change’ response that the learning and platforms of work established by ‘drought counsellors’ be included within ongoing PCP rural change planning.

Translating the innovative and developmental work of ‘drought’ counsellors into longer term planning and practice is vital if the value and benefits of the work are to be sustained. A key part of that translation needs to happen as part of the PCP process. The important work of Co-operative Inquiry Groups (CIGs), community health and family service management, and relevant professional and organisational working groups is to inform your local PCP.

This is vital work for the next few months as the drought response transitions from a medium term specialist ‘drought’ response to a longer term and integrated ‘rural change’ approach.

Sally Rose
COMPASSION Fatigue

by Pam Rycroft and Tina Whittle, The Bouverie Centre

A summary of the presentation called “Effective for the Long Haul” at the Bendigo forum.

“A feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause.” Webster, 1989, p.229

Compassion fatigue has only recently been identified as a common (some would say ‘inevitable’) side-effect of working with clients whose stories are full of distress, pain and trauma. It is interesting that, while we are often good at getting our clients to exercise self-care, many of us don’t take our own good advice. Compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma can affect every aspect of our functioning: physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual. Making a project of knowing and understanding the way we express stress and fatigue, and developing a serious self-care plan is an important step in helping us to sustain ourselves in this very important work over time. Compassion fatigue is a normal response to the work – a tribute to our humanity – and needs to be taken seriously by individual workers and by organisations.

Arguably, one of the most corrosive and constraining myths that continues to pervade the helping professions is that Compassion Fatigue (aka Vicarious or Secondary Trauma) only impacts inexperienced, under-skilled, and/or incompetent workers. This is a shaming myth that often prevents people from asking for help, especially if they are a supervisor or manager themselves, trying to support other workers. Another myth that both sustains, and perpetuates, and deepens the problem, is that its impact is only superficial and brief, so one can and should be fully restored after a single debriefing in the hallway to a colleague, or after sharing a couple of beers with a friend.

In fact, Compassion Fatigue can overcome even the most experienced, highly trained, and resilient workers. No therapist or counsellor is immune to its effects. However, when or if one succumbs to it will depend upon a few factors: the nature of the work; the length of exposure to distress, pain, and trauma; personal history; current life stresses; and coping strategies.

Secondary trauma can affect people profoundly, altering one’s world view so that life is rendered meaningless, violating one’s ability to trust, and ultimately severing one’s connections, both in intimate relationships, and within the wider community. Besides personal self-care, managed one-on-one or within one’s private circle of friends and family, wider supportive networks can serve as a community to prevent secondary trauma. A team or network attuned to the impact of the work can both support and challenge its members, and can help to absorb and diffuse the effects of trauma. The greater the exposure to trauma work, the greater the need for a community.

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Rural Financial Counsellors

Rural Financial Counsellors are often the first point of contact for farmers and small businesses struggling with the adverse impact of drought. Although the financial and emotional often go hand-in-hand, many people find it more acceptable to approach financial rather than social and emotional counsellors. One consequence of this is that rural financial counsellors can find themselves confronted with overwhelming social and emotional issues as they consult about financial decision making. The advantage of collaborative working relationships between the two different types of counsellors is obvious: rural financial counsellors could assist their clients in getting the right social counselling support early on and social counsellors could provide support to rural financial counsellors when they feel overwhelmed by the psychological aspects. It was with the possibilities of such collaborative synergies in mind that Ted Gretrix, Co-ordinator of Rural Financial Counselling Services for North Central Victoria, was invited to present a paper at the Bendigo drought counsellors’ forum. Here is a summary of what he presented.

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Rural financial counsellors are busier now than ever because of the drought. The north central service had 500 clients in 2006 and 700 one year later. This is in the context of Australian farm debt having increased from $30 billion (2001) to $50 billion (2006). Ted provided a pie chart indicating access to EC interest rate subsidies in Victoria between 2003 & 2007, which gives one indication of the areas most affected by the drought.

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For further information please call Ted Gretrix 03 5442 2424.

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It can be difficult to celebrate your work when the community in which you work and live is dealing with the serious adversity of drought. It was with some relief when Shane Weir from The Bouverie Centre asked people at the forum to recall the sparkling moments that made their job worthwhile.

Documenting or speaking your sparkling moments aloud is an act which challenges the tyranny of silence that can breed hopelessness. Like success in dealing with drought itself, successful outcomes are best measured in small increments.

The sparkling moments presented below, document the diversity and unique nature of what it means to work with drought-affected communities. Acknowledging what we’ve done well also opens up space for us to consider what we can do differently to improve our work.

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“I guess mine was being able to walk side by side with a client to assist with various issues including grief and loss. And helping this client to move through that with success, I’m still doing that but in nowhere the amount of time.”

“Just a small highlight was taking a delightful Christmas hamper out to a farming family who are the instigators of a major committee and doing lots of events and seem to do do do for everyone else. I took a hamper there at Christmas and the wife just burst into tears and said, ‘What, one for us?’ And I think it was just overwhelming that she got something back when she was always giving.”

“I went out to visit him and he still wouldn’t answer the door. The keys were in the car so I knew he was home. I then phoned work and said, ‘Look, I’m just going to go inside.’ So I went in and found the bloke sitting there, obviously contemplating something he didn’t want to do. So I talked him into going for lunch. So I put him in the car and drove him all the way back into town and we went to the local restaurant where there were about 50 people in the room, and ordered lunch. His name happens to be John as well. The guy behind the counter serving was one of – there were four males in the room – and he had a name tag on – his name was John. He then turned to the other male in the room and started talking to him, who he knew. He said ‘John, what would you like?’ There were four males in the room and they were all called John. The guy sitting with me, who was about 6 foot 6, thought that this was quite humorous. He’s quite a happy bloke at the moment.”

“One sparkling moment was when we were on farmgate calling and I was with a rural counsellor – a rural finance counsellor – and we spent probably about three quarters of an hour running up a road behind a herd of cows that had got out of a farm that was farmed by an 82 year old who was on his own and could hardly move. So we had great fun with the car and me running along beside, trying to herd these cows back into the farm.”

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“It was meeting a farming family for the very first time. I had a call to go out and see the family. I arrived for an 11 o’clock appointment. Before I started to get out of the car the woman asked me what was happening for the rest of my day. I said I didn’t have another appointment until 12:30 – we had plenty of time. With that she yelled out to her husband ‘Des, we’re having lunch at quarter to twelve – the worker has a 12:30 appointment’. She had a roast dinner waiting for me and I’d never met this lady. So that was really important. The other thing was at Christmas time my desk had lots and lots of gifts – all handmade, a dozen eggs – just a time for people to say thank-you.”

“The things that we came up with is just the privilege of people who are in a vulnerable situation who will share their stories with you and trust you with that knowledge and realise that there’s a mutual respect between both the so-called client and the so-called professional.”

“I suppose the one that sticks in my mind is a farming family who were in terrible strife and couldn’t make a decision and point the way to a more positive outcome for them. We did lots of issues. And through the networks we have and the wonderful drought counsellors we have and the welfare sector, they were able to go in and assist them through the decision-making journey where they were able to move on with their lives.”

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Drought

by Ivan Lister

I've practised all my dad ever taught me and I've tried to stick to the plan,
But without any rain it's different, when one makes his living from this land.
I've planted the seed when I'm supposed to, after spraying the weeds – what a task!
The cost of fuel and the super can break you. Out the gate the dollars go fast.

With no rain we all watch hourly and continually look at the sky,
It may rain, but it mightn't. Buggered if I know why.
Me dad said “fill up the hayshed son”; He joked “save some for a rainy day”.
But it's no bloody joke now dad, and the dams have all gone dry.

We watch as the markets go lower than any of us have ever been through.
"Look at the stock and cull them", Yeah, I can hear dad's voice again coming through.
How the hell can we sell them, it's cost us $1.60 up 'til now.
Cull out the steers, be rid of them. Can't feed them anyhow.

At the market we get $1.70. Done money, but no feed with the frost.
Take our yarding, agents and carting: $1.90 more like the cost.
We look at the sky in the morning – it's red. Rises some hope.
Then away go the clouds and it's 40. How the hell will we cope?

“I've hear about this bloke from Violet Town way”, the farmer's wife cautiously said.
“I've heard he can help with some dollars, that'll help keep us all fed.
“So now I can't support us?” was the farmer's hopeless reply.
If it would only bloody rain by the autumn. Dad didn't say it would be this dry.

"Can I ring up the bloke I spoke about, it surely won't hurt to try.
It's not you, it's the drought that's broke us. No one's seen it this dry.
We owe for the mortgage, the power, the rates, school fees, car payment and the like.
No money for hay or for petrol. Now Roundup has taken a hike".

Okay, ring up the guy you heard about. Bluey said he'd helped him out.
And sure we need a hand to stay here. Dad never saw such a drought.

Images produced by CIGs, symbolically depicting their work as rural outreach workers.

Shane Weir, Bouverie, invites participants at the forum to recall their sparkling moments and record the values underlying them on stars that were then displayed.
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Feedback and Advice Questionnaire 2007
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“The incident we’re going to highlight is having a client who had post-natal depression who hadn’t been to counselling before. Through one session of ‘nothing but just listening’ and providing services, I think she was able to unburden a whole lot of stuff. I never heard from her again, I never saw her again but it just did the trick.”

“I was meeting a farming family for the very first time. I had a call to go out and see the family. I arrived for an 11 o’clock appointment. Before I started to get out of the car the woman asked me what was happening for the rest of my day. I said I didn’t have another appointment until 12:30 – we had plenty of time. With that she yelled out to her husband ‘Des, we’re having lunch at quarter to twelve – the worker has a 12:30 appointment’. She had a roast dinner waiting for me and I’d never met this lady. So that was really important. The other thing was at Christmas time my desk had lots and lots of gifts – all hand-made, a dozen eggs – just a time for people to say thank-you.”

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Drought projects often share strategies and may over time move from one part of the continuum to another. Gippsland Pamper Days are an example of a project idea which in some communities is in the process of moving from being initiated and driven by drought counsellors (Health Education/Information), to being embraced by community members to shape and organise themselves (Community Action).
community development

In the early months, newly appointed drought counsellors found that they had to use community development strategies simply to engage clients. Over time, drought counsellors, now called rural outreach workers / counsellors have begun to explore the philosophies (and strategies) along the community development continuum. Below are examples of work posted on the continuum at the conference, along side a brief descriptor of the five key aspects.

1. Individual Risk Assessment: involves a process of detecting individuals at risk of health problems including physical, psychological or behavioural.

Farm Gate Model The Campaspe Farm Gate model involves a counsellor and rural worker visiting farming families at the farm gate. Farmers are visited in a ‘blanket road approach’ (visiting everyone), and discussions are based on an acknowledgment of stresses and strains as well as opening up conversations to acknowledge their resilience. Workers ‘have a yarn’ on arrival – opening up natural conversations throughout which screening, needs identification and referral processes are interwoven. Screening measures are applied for both practical matters (finance, fodder, future) and psychosocial issues (opportunity to talk and connect, normalising their experiences, K-10 scale check). Workers help raise awareness of supports and appropriate assistance measures available to farmers and makes themselves available as a further resource for counselling or support to access appropriate services.

2. Health Education / Information: includes the provision of education to individuals or groups with the aim of improving knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy and individual capacity to change.

Pit Stop would you be a hot-rod or a clapped-out bomb? The participants put themselves ‘over the pits’ to have their Oil Pressure (blood pressure), Torsion (flexibility), Durco (skin cancers) or Exhaust Emissions (smoking) tested as well as other health checks to see if their bodies are in roadworthy condition or requires follow-up maintenance. It goes to where men are and in a humorous way gets them to think about their health.

Strong Women Strong Families is a program in the Goulburn Valley designed to treat women too day of pampering and demonstrate a range of self care activities to support them during the sustained stresses of drought. It is born of the recognition that women often juggle multiple responsibilities in their role as being the carer in their families, with the many other roles, paid and unpaid, which they take on. They often leave their own health and wellbeing to last.

This program is offered at no cost to the participants, and encourages women to ‘switch off’ for a while, be nourished and learn ways to nurture themselves. Diverse activities are offered to enable participants to unwind: from introductions to ancient eastern practices such as Tai Chi, to learning how to put balance back into your day, being treated to a free beauty ritual such as a foot spa or hand massage. ‘Scrumptious’ local fine foods are served while women relax and recharge in the company of old and new friends.

NEWS from the BIG shed (DHS)

Over the past 18 months rural communities have been drawing on existing, as well as additional capacity in order to strengthen their ability to manage community to the impacts of ongoing drought. Additional counselling, using the proactive ‘No Bul’ approach has played a vital role in supporting farmers to maintain and build the emotional capacity necessary for how they manage and consider their current and future needs.

Change driven by many factors, including drought, has always been part of rural community life. Change will be continuous, impacting across many groups. Impacts from climate change, fluctuating global markets, petrol prices and long-term demographic change as set out in Department of Primary Industry’s ‘Changing Rural Social Landscapes’ research need to be considered as part of the planning and service delivery of every aspect of health and community organisations. The additional programs provided through the Department of Human Services drought response, ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing’ have provided an opportunity to reconsidering traditional practice while establishing new cross-cutting relationships and expanded pathways, improved access for ‘hard to reach’ groups, and a counselling approach that is pragmatic, brief and effective. Workforce development, health promotion and service coordination initiatives have provided support for these new approaches. The challenge is now to embed these new ways of working within mainstream planning and program delivery. Embedding the ‘No Bul’ approach in mainstream counselling programs is a key priority over the next few months.

DHS centrally and regionally, is working with rural health and community services, to assist them in moving from a specialist drought response to a more integrated mainstream approach. Embedding a long-term ‘rural change’ approach within all of our work that best utilises the innovative and responsive approaches developed through the ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing’ initiatives is another way we can all work together to create more responsive rural services.

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

Expanding & sustaining the CHANCE

Strengthening the planning and organisational structures to better enable an ongoing ‘change management’ response to rural challenges is as important as the increased service delivery opportunities. Primary Change Partnerships (PCPs) are a DHS funded platform to provide a planning and organisational focus with a primary interest in enhancing integrated health promotion and service coordination. In addition to the ‘drought’ counselling initiative, the ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing’ provided further capacity for PCPs to develop a more specific drought focus within their health promotion planning and service coordination work. This has included strengthening links with Divisions of General Practice, expanding cross-sectoral partnerships through Drought Recovery committees and supporting the planning and development of targeted health promotion and service co-ordination initiatives.

‘Drought’ counsellors have undertaken community development, expanded access and referral pathways, and built skills and knowledge through innovative approaches. It is vital that this work is captured within the strategic planning and partnership thinking of PCPs. There are many examples of how the broader PCP strategic partnering process and the more proactive and integrated approaches of ‘drought’ counsellors have strengthened and reinforced work across a range of areas.

Some examples include: Northern Mallee PCP, with strong leadership from the Rural Ofrice of Water, has developed a co-ordinated local planning strategy to monitor community need which enables better utilisation and communication and referral pathways between organisations. With or without specific ‘drought funding’ the partnership includes primary health, family services, general practice, mental health, financial counsellors and schools, are drawing together the knowledge, skills and resources of multiple organisations to better target and maximise resources.

Campaspe and South West Victoria, PCP and ‘drought counsellors’ have worked together on a planned and well thought through ‘Farmgate’ approach.

Southern Grampians, Glenelg and Wimmera PCPs are the taking the community development approach to ensure small isolated rural communities experiencing multiple impacts of rural change can have enhanced access to a range of integrated human services. This planning approach is being built into broad rural and climate change planning processes.

PCPs are nothing other than a partnership between their member organisations. They are the manifestation of the information, ideas, learning, leadership and commitment generated through existing and potential partners. It is critical, particularly as we transition from a ‘special drought’ to a mainstream rural change response that the learning and platforms of work established by ‘drought counsellors’ be included within ongoing PCP rural change planning.

Translating the innovative and developmental work of ‘drought’ counsellors into longer term planning and practice is vital if the value and benefits of the work are to be sustained. A key part of that translation needs to happen as part of the PCP process. The important work of Co-operative Inquiry Groups (CIGs), community health and family service management, and relevant professional and organisational working groups is to inform your local PCP.

This is vital work for the next few months as the drought response transitions from a medium term specialist ‘drought’ response to a longer term and integrated ‘rural change’ approach.

Sally Rose

Projects completed by rural outreach workers were written on stickers, and placed on the community development continuum at the forum.
Critical Breaking Point?
Understanding long term impacts and recovery processes among farming families in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region
A report undertaken by BCG & RMCG Consulting with support from RIRDC & Tattersalls
George Adams Foundation

Summary
The aim of the ‘Critical Breaking Point?’ (CBP) research is to gain a better understanding of how Australian producers and their families are responding to drought and other pressures. Based on in-depth interviews with farming families in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region of north-western Victoria, this research uses an unprecedented longitudinal approach to track the experiences of farming families during a time of severe drought and - it was expected and hoped - a period of drought recovery.

The CBP research is based on two phases of research. Part One interviewed sixty randomly selected farming families during severe drought in February 2007. Part Two involves two follow-up interviews at six monthly intervals (September 2007 and February 2008) with a subset of twenty of the sixty farming families interviewed in Part One. This group represents some of the younger and older families of the original sample, who were selected in order to allow us to further explore some of the particular challenges that farming families at these stages of life are facing.

This presentation relates to the Interim Report for Part Two: reporting on interviews conducted in September 2007. It builds on the understanding we developed in Part One about the issues farming families are facing in a period of great uncertainty and diminished capacity. Like the first round of interviews, it explores immediate and longer-term pressures upon farming families and their decision making around the present and future.

Eight key findings emerged from the interview data:

After a period of hope, stress was rising again in September:
• Following a difficult period of waiting, spirits rose with the Autumn break.
• Many farming families are now more vulnerable financially than ever.

The threat of further drought is having a significant impact:
• The threat of further losses is causing great anxiety.
• Most people’s hopes for a redeeming year have been crushed.

Some people are losing faith in nature and farming:
• Disbelief, despair and depression are widespread.
• People are becoming frustrated with agriculture.
• There is growing concern about the challenges facing the industry.
• Defiant optimism is present and encouraged.

Risk has been approached in a wide variety of ways this season:
• Risk-taking and risk-averse strategies to production have been used by different farmers.
• The cautious approach being encouraged by drought challenges the dominant ideal in farming.
• Decisions around enterprise mix are complicated by assessments of risk.
• Efforts to adopt on-farm drought proofing measures are limited by a lack of capital.
• Forward selling has badly impacted some farming families.

Many farming families are looking to increase their off-farm income:
• Many view alternative income as key to ‘drought proofing’.
• The time and capital being committed to farming is decreasing.
• Farming families of all ages are trying to protect themselves with off-farm investments.

People are questioning their plans for the future:
• Professional and personal plans are being postponed and compromised.
• Virtually all families are questioning the value and possibility of staying in farming.
• Some people are restricted from leaving by financial and family reasons.
• Even those deeply committed to farming are questioning its value to them.

Position Statement of the Drought Counsellors / Rural Outreach & Support Workers
A sustainable long-term vision is vital to support rural communities as they adapt to social, economic and environmental changes.

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

A strong and effective service would assist in developing communities’ abilities to address a variety of rural crises (ie fire, flood and extremes of weather such as drought) and support ongoing change, with coordinated funding from each level of government, and integration with key services.

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

The pages that follow have been inspired by presentations at the Bendigo Drought Forum. Let us know what you think!
**Hume Region**

**Terry Reedy - 5823 7000 or treedy@familycare.com.au**

**Current Role**
Terry is a Social Worker based in Shepparton, working full time at Family Care in the Goulburn Valley.

**Background and Experience**
Agriculture runs in Terry’s veins. Originally from a military family in New Zealand, Terry moved straight from school into dairy farming and subsequently to market gardening after immigrating to Australia, where he grew a diversity of products, from carrots for export to flowers for the domestic markets. He has farmed in WA, Queensland and Victoria. A change of direction in his late 30s saw Terry commence a BA, where his interests in rural sociology and sustainable development (which had first seeded ‘while milking’), were further nurtured. He completed his BA, followed by a degree in Social Work and attributes the development of his ideas, in part, to his exposure to Critical and Feminist Theories as well as Ecological Social Work perspectives at university.

**Counselling and Community Development**
Terry’s current work involves individual counselling, assertive outreach to farming families through ‘cold calling’, group work where he likes to bring ordinary people together to explore issues common to them, and some community education. To maintain the dignity of farming families who may need support Terry and his co-workers have adopted an innovative approach to their practice of cold calling at farms. Instead of using standard agency-issue late model sedans which look like ‘the welfare’, they advocated for the purchase of ‘an old ute’, which they use to drive the long, straight, dusty roads of their region.

**Special Interests**
While Terry lives in the flatter country of Northern Victoria, he describes his love of riding the winding roads of the high country, exploring both on and off road riding and camping. In his work, he identifies that his own interests and experiences help him support people as they begin to develop an awareness of the broader environmental issues and how these relate to their own situation, and acknowledge that things cannot continue as they are. Terry’s passion for supporting people as they make these critical connections and changes in their lives is clearly evident.

**Barwon South West Region**

**Kate O-Sullivan - 1300 361 680 or kosullivan@comconnect.com.au**

**Current Role**
Kate is a rural outreach worker with Community Connections.

**Background and Experience**
Kate completed her initial social work training at Melbourne Uni followed by family therapy, mediation and bereavement counselling. Recently, in collaboration with Southern Grampians and Glenelg PCP, Kate has enjoyed developing, conducting and evaluating the Farmgate Pilot in the Barwon South West region. This ‘cold calling’ model is a slightly modified version of the Campaspe Shire model. Kate pairs up with other workers (financial counsellors, Balmoral bush nursing staff etc) and visits farming families to ‘break down the barriers’, bring referral information and offer immediate advice. In her current role, Kate has also worked hard to ‘take the pulse of the community’ by linking up with the Centrelink drought bus, attending farm information nights, climate change forums and Field Days. Over her career Kate has held a number of positions in foster care, child protection, psychiatry, Centrelink, Volunteer Co-ordination and Youth Mediation.

**Rural experience:** In the 1970s, Kate moved to the country from Melbourne, near where she grew up on farm in Barwon South West when her parents moved there in the 1950s. Her grandparents and cousins’ families currently live in the region.

**Practice Notes**
In her work Kate has found her mediation training very helpful and uses this framework a lot when families ‘don’t want counselling’. She finds this way of working helps to create a future focus and assists negotiation. Kate has also found her bereavement training beneficial in her current role. She describes how it has helped her to demystify some of the aspects of grief and loss for her clients, and find the balance between being sensitive and upfront in talking about these things, and in sitting with grief instead of ‘trying to fix it’. Kate is passionate about advocating for outreach services to rural areas; seeing this as a critical and much needed service for rural communities, which are ‘often left out’. She refers to this advocacy as ‘affirmative action’ for rural areas. And to sustain her work, Kate returns to her family, plays in her (now sustainable) garden and spends time with her ducks.

**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

-The Editor
CIGs - Cooperative Inquiry Groups

Gippsland CIG

Contact details

Standing Left to Right

- Vorone: Massacre at panther days run in Gippsland
- Shirley Millard: Heyfield 5153 2012
- Teagan Steen: East Gippsland 5153 0308
- Anita Wood: East Gippsland 5624 3548
- Lauren Gordon: West Gippsland 5144 7777
- Judy Richards: Sale 5155 1151

Seated Left to Right

- Di Robinson: Lakes 5153 0308
- Peter Call: Sale 5144 7777
- Kevin Dmytryenko: Omeo 5159 0125

Not in photo

- Pam Jarvis: Sale 5144 7777
- John Beil: Leongatha 5657 4436
- Sue Armstrong: Leongatha 5657 4436
- Tracey Moffatt: Bairnsdale 5153 2012
- Jeff Young: Bouverie 9385 5100

Back Row Left to Right

- Jacqui Star: Moria 5743 3200
- Christine Commins: Shepparton 5823 6000
- Ivan Lister: Violet Town 5066 856 374
- Karen Dean: Shaperton 5831 5399
- John Ross: Shepparton 5027 840 430
- Jane Rushworth: Wangaratta 5733 4000
- David Bicasi: Wodonga 502 6222 8888
- Naomi Mason: Wodonga 502 6222 8888
- Glen Canning: Shaperton 5831 5399
- Les Hume: Shaperton 5831 5399
- Caroline Harlow: Strathbogie 5408 552 482
- Tina Whitte: Bouverie 9385 5100
- Kirsten Green: DHS 5722 0930

Rural Support Line

Jo Verduci - 03 9668 1247 or jverduci@wesley.org.au

Current Role

Jo is a telephone counsellor and counselling supervisor at Lifeline based at Wesley in the heart of Melbourne. She joined the Rural Support Line CIG at a time where the shape of service delivery was changing. With her long-standing experience of telephone counselling, she contributes to the ongoing skill development of all Lifeline counsellors in their ability and confidence to respond to calls from rural people, which are prompted by drought and other specifically rural stresses.

Background and Experience

Jo’s family story is richly dotted with significant points of change and loss, which have influenced Jo’s passion in supporting people to navigate critical times. After completing a degree in Behavioural Sciences majoring in Psychology, Jo looked for some“hands on” experience and began as a volunteer telephone counsellor at Lifeline. Fifteen years later she is now a counselling supervisor, as well as continuing with her volunteer counselling shifts.

Counselling Experience: Jo’s interest in psychodynamic theory and her understanding of the layered effects of life experiences have enabled her to recognise the profound significance of what may appear a small catalyst for one person, yet which may be the last in a long series of stressful events for another. She understands the natural guardedness with which people place calls and works to build trust within the call. Though she didn’t find the drought line daunting, her main concern with these calls, was to gather enough information on the referral pathways to quickly link people to appropriate local services.

Special Interests

Jo describes being moved by how isolated people were and how she adapted her phone counselling skills to suit the needs of these callers. Her connection with the isolation of rural people is evident when she speaks of her family in the Alpine region of Italy. She refers to the “sound of music” experience she felt on finding herself surrounded by the mountains on her arrival there some years ago, and her admiration for the ways these people and other people ‘carve out an existence’ in harsh circumstances.

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 works from each region about their background and their approach to the work.

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Barwon South West Region

Jennette (Jay) Robinson - 5564 6000

Current Role

Primary Mental Health Team (PMHT) Warrnambool.

Background and Experience

Rural Experience: Four years ago Jay moved to Warrnambool for a “Sea Change” and commenced work with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Southwest Healthcare. In the last twelve months she has moved into the Primary Mental Health Team (PMHT). In this role Jay works with General Practitioners to assist in the management of the psychological health of their clients. Services include support and enhancement of the capacity of primary care professionals to prevent, recognise and treat mental health problems, short-term case management support to individual clients and facilitated referrals to specialist psychiatric services. Treatment consists of short-term (6 to 12 sessions) therapy intervention for high prevalence disorders (anxiety and depression) - largely CBT based treatments and skills training in stress, anxiety and depression management.

Counselling Experience: Jay is a qualified psychologist and has been working in public clinical mental health and managing her private practice, Think Inside Out, for the past 10 years. Jay has worked in Melbourne at the Royal Children’s Hospital and the Albert Road Centre for Health. Jay is trained in child and adolescent psychiatry and clinical group work.

Special Interests

Recently Jay was appointed to facilitate drought activity work within the PMHT. This work involves secondary mental health consultation to drought counsellors, Mental Health First Aid workers and other front-line staff who work with primary producers and others (including families and children) affected by drought. She undertakes joint home visits with drought workers where indicated, and assists with early streaming of access to specialist mental health services. Jay also participates in the Barwon SW CIG and worked closely with the Bouverie Centre to facilitate the No Bull Counselling Workshop in Warrnambool. Jay is also working closely with the Southern Grampians and Glenelg PCPs to map better access to services for people affected by drought.
Tribute to Samantha Bell
Drought Response Officer,
Community and Cultural Development Team
City Of Greater Bendigo

It was with great shock and sadness that we heard of the sudden death of Sam Bell, Drought Response Officer with Greater Bendigo Council on Friday 16 May.

Sam died in her sleep, possibly from a blood clot, leaving behind her partner, Martin and three young children. It has been such a shock for her team at Council and those who worked closely with her over the past five months or so since she started in early January.

Sam was such a passionate, determined and engaging person who took on her role with great conviction and belief about making a difference to the people she dealt with due to the impact of drought and other rural issues. While only knowing Sam for such a short amount of time, she made such an impression on people through her warm and engaging personality which was reflected in the vibrant and committed approach she had to her work and the relationships she developed. She was often ‘straight on to things’, following up issues and passing on information. It is my memory of her in our later meetings and discussions that her feisty, strident and determined approach to ‘make things happen’ came through. She was ‘ever questioning’ and reflecting on what can be achieved for the communities she worked for.

It was from these qualities that we could see how she made such a significant contribution to her community in Newstead through her role as President of the Newstead Primary School Council over a number of years, bringing the community together and holding firm through difficult times and changes for the school community. Sam’s commitment and responsibility to family, friends and other interests, involvements and her general approach to life was reflected in the wonderful funeral service and the memorable walk to the Newstead cemetery, some three to four kilometres out of the township, by the hundreds that attended, where she was laid to rest in the fading sunlight rays in a beautiful rural setting.

We extend our sincere sympathy and thoughts to Sam’s partner, Martin and their three children, Oscar, Isabel and Saskia and her extended family, many friends and colleagues in their loss and grief. She will be very fondly remembered and very sorely missed.

Laurie Whelan, on behalf of the Loddon Mallee Drought Response Coordinators network.
Email: laurie.whelan@dhs.vic.gov.au

A brief description of Sam’s Community Development project, Activating Women of Leadership, is highlighted on page 7.
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.

**PROGRAMS**

**Festival for Healthy Living Program**

The Festival for Healthy Living (FHL) is an innovative mental health promotion program developed under the auspices of the Royal Children’s Hospital Integrated Mental Health Program, Victoria. The Festival provides a collaborative and creative approach to mental health promotion, linking schools (primary and secondary) and their communities. The approach uses performing and visual arts as a tool for exploring mental health issues and recognises schools as core social centres. This approach is consistent with research demonstrating its efficacy in promoting resilience, reducing risk factors, and enhancing protective factors in children and young people.

The FHL Program was featured on the ABC’s 7.30 Report, particularly looking at the impact of the Program in a drought affected area. This story can be viewed at the FHL website www.rch.org.au/fhl

For further information please contact Harry Gelber Manager, Community Development

The Royal Children’s Hospital Integrated Mental Health Program

Email harry.gelber@rch.org.au or telephone 0419 378 042.

**INQUIRIES**

**Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities**

A copy of the inquiry’s report is available at www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rrc/inquiries/youngpeople/

**INDEX**

**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.

**Rural Support Line**

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

**PHOTO EXHIBITION**

"A day in the life of rural Victoria" a photographic exhibition of images of rural people and landscape which depict the impact of drought is available for loan or on CD. Contact Richard Watts - Business Development and Communications Manager VicRelief Foodbank telephone 03 9362 8300.

**LIVING LIBRARY**

Australia’s first Living Library was launched in Lismore, NSW in November 2006. It is based on the successful European model, which began in Denmark in 2000 and has spread across Europe. The Living Library is like a normal library, however the books in the living library are people representing a wide range of community groups, especially those who are frequently confronted with prejudices and stereotypes and are often the victims of social exclusion or discrimination.

Living Books can not only speak, but can reply to readers’ questions, and engage in discussion for mutual learning. The ‘borrowers’ are ordinary community members who have the opportunity to ‘borrow’ a living book for an informal half-hour conversation. The Library provides a safe environment and encourages the participants to engage in constructive dialogue. When diverse members of the community are brought together in this way, understanding is increased and social cohesion is built.

Dale Reddick — Anglicare Victoria, The Rights Centre Telephone 03 9365 9555 or dale.reddick@anglicarevic.org.au

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

**Welcome to this ‘Drought Forum Special’ edition of No Bull: the newsletter of the state-funded Rural Outreach Counsellors / Workers. The forum, held at the Shamrock Hotel in Bendigo on February the 28th and 29th was entitled, ‘We Care – No Bull: Celebrations, Ist practice and self care.’ The forum reflected the growing practice-based-evidence of drought work and provided some much needed R & R for the drought workers. The two days showed-cased the spectrum of community development work, revealed the sparkling moments in counselling and took a critical look at engagement strategies such as ‘cold calling’. All of this, as well as an opportunity to share knowledge, develop friendships and working relationships. This is why we were devastated to hear that Samantha Bell, a vibrant member of the Loddon-Mallee CIG passed away unexpectedly on Friday 16th May. Our thoughts go out to her family, friends and colleagues. A tribute to her and her work can be read on page 2.

The celebration of the work during the forum was tempered however, by the feeling that just as good networks were bedding down, just as counselling numbers were growing and just as people affected by drought continue to want help to address its emotional impacts, rather than just wanting practical help, funding is likely to dry up for many state-funded counsellors. Whilst the irony of this led to understandable frustration, over time, the CIGs (Co-operative Inquiry Groups) across Victoria have reflected on what legacy the state-funded counsellors would like to leave, embedding ‘hard won knowledge’ gained over the last year (and in some areas continuously since 2003) into the existing ongoing workforce and sharing practice wisdom with the newly employed federal-funded drought counsellors, have been strong themes.

**State-funded counsellors are beginning to get new jobs, some doing similar work but with different sources of funding, others are changing roles but taking rural outreach and drought wisdom to these positions and others are being employed by their host organizations in capacities to address the broader issues around rural adjustment. Doing similar work but funded by the latest aid, is common to rural settings.**

The uncoordinated short term funding, together with the cyclic nature of drought begins to explain the loss of knowledge about drought I noticed when I started working in this area. As drought workers’ contracts come to an end, they have to start thinking about more pressing needs such as putting food on the table rather than how best to transfer knowledge to others. It is unreasonable to expect individual workers who no longer have jobs to be personally responsible for this task. The fact that drought, unlike fire, threatens irregularly rather than at the same time each year, also means that drought response is not routine. How and who to pass on the knowledge of the state-funded workers is still an open question - my team are keen to receive your suggestions.

The only constant is change. We need to accept this but also celebrate the many projects that have emerged from the CIGs. One project that continues is NB Support, a program for people who are not counsellors but who provide a listening ear for people affected by drought and other stresses, and feel stressed and uncertain playing this unintended ‘counselling’ role.

Over 60 drought counsellors have been trained to be NB Support Facilitators, including the first ever drought counsellor employed in Tasmania. Another, "Looking Out For Your Neighbour" - a collaboration between the Rural Outreach Workers and the VFF, was launched by Minister Neville, in Stawell on April 22nd. These community workshops discuss the impact of drought on families and communities, and have ‘kicked started’ community activities, such as a men’s breakfast and an older person’s social group, that had become dormant due to the impact of chronic drought.

There has also been a growing interest in research and formal evaluation of drought work. The influential ‘Farmgate model’ will be evaluated by Bouvier in collaboration with the Loddon-Mallee CIG, local PCP, DHS and others. There has been a lot of interest in the Birchip Cropping Group’s (BCG) research, summarized on pages 16-17. Several CIG members have expressed interest in replicating the BCG research in their own areas. The interim report of the action research conducted by Bouvier, based on the work of all the CIGs across Victoria has been submitted to DHS. I can tell you the wisdom generated by the CIG network is overwhelming!

Enjoy the read and good luck to those workers seeking new positions.

Jeff Young, Bouvier (Editor)