

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



**Summary Report
February 2007 — September 2008**

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

**This report is based on the work of the Victorian Drought
Counsellors, their colleagues and their clients**

February 2010

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
PROJECT BACKGROUND	3
The drought counselling initiative	3
The Bouverie project	5
Funding 5	
This report 6	
Overview of the project and research methodology	6
Current Research on Drought Counselling.....	6
The Research Questions.....	6
Counselling Models.....	8
The Research Methodology	9
Co-operative Inquiry Groups.....	13
TERMINOLOGY	17
CONFIDENTIALITY AND RESPECT	17
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	18
Research question 1: What does engaging and supporting the Drought Counsellors tell us about providing a drought counselling service?	18
Key learnings and recommendations on “How to support a specialist rural drought counselling workforce”	20
Policy and practice implications	21
Research question 2: How does the nature of drought influence the provision of drought counselling services?	22
Key learnings and recommendations.....	24
Policy and practice implications	24
Research question 3: What are specific drought counselling strategies for responding to drought affected people and their communities?.....	25
Culturally appropriate counselling.....	25
Normalise, validate and promote meaning making	26
Educate and offer practical supports	27
Show Warmth and provide emotional support	27
Promote STRENGTHS, SKILLS, SOCIALISATION AND SPIRITUALITY	29
Clients’ responses	29

Promoting counselling to those who don't seek help	32
Key learnings and recommendations	33
Policy and practice implications	33
Research question 4: What is the relationship between drought counselling and community development?	34
Key learnings and recommendations	40
Policy and practice implications	40
Research question 5: How should drought counselling services be set up for future droughts?.....	41
Key learnings and recommendations	42
Policy and practice implications	42
Limitations of the research and directions for future research	43
Direct clinical feedback	43
Links with other data bases	43
CONCLUSION.....	44
GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS	45
REFERENCES	48

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to acknowledge. I start with Sue Hughes, Senior Project Officer at the Department of Human Services (DHS) at the time the research began. Sue and Sally Rose (DHS project worker co-ordinating the drought response) provided ongoing support as the project grew. The Department of Human Services, Victoria and the Ministers Neville and Bachelor deserve recognition for their foresight in funding support to the front-line workers that improved Drought Counsellors' efficiency, motivation, co-ordination and resource sharing across the state. This support helped ward off the vicarious traumatisation that can occur when isolated workers support people in dire situations over a long period of time. It also contributed to the documentation of the practice wisdom associated with responding to drought affected communities. I want to acknowledge the commitment, ingenuity, compassion, practicality and flexibility of the Drought Counsellors and their colleagues who, over time, provided innovative and effective support to those affected by drought and other hardships. This is their work. I also want to acknowledge the clients and members of the drought affected communities who in various ways contributed to the findings of this report. Hopefully this work will improve future services to rural communities facing drought and other major challenges.

I need to also thank my Bouverie team and colleagues who made this project special.

Image (front cover)

Lauren Gordon, a member of the Gippsland CIG, recruited local artists to help school children from the Bona Vista primary school to artistically depict their experience of a farm visit. Called 'The Farmers and Community Connect' project, these images were collated into a calendar with referral information, which was distributed throughout the community. The image on the front cover of this report is from the calendar.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Previous evaluation has indicated that traditional counselling and service delivery models have been disappointing in engaging rural people affected by drought (e.g Australian Healthcare Associates, 2006; Johnston, 2003). Towards the end of 2006, The Bouverie Centre was funded to provide training and support for state-funded Drought Counsellors to develop approaches that work for rural people. Cooperative Inquiry Groups were formed in the Loddon Mallee, Grampians, Hume, Gippsland and Barwon regions to help Drought Counsellors promote, conceptualise and document successful strategies. Over 100 Drought Counsellors and workers from over 88 different organisations participated in over 170 hours of CIG research. Supported by additional evaluations and quantitative research tools, the CIG action research addressed the

question: *What are effective counselling and community development strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities?*

The research found that Drought Counsellors are often employed quickly, with little induction, unrealistic job descriptions and little support. Structures to promote connection, collective problem solving and resource sharing, collaborative documentation of practice wisdom, professionalisation and self care are essential for Drought Counsellors to provide effective services.

The research found that drought can be conceptualized as an intangible, intermittent, chronic, pervasive, disenfranchised natural disaster that can lead to community exhaustion, inequity and division and leave individuals vulnerable to feeling emotionally and socially isolated. Strategies to address the hardships caused by drought therefore need to promote social connection, keeping in mind that timing will be important and communities may need assistance to 'kick start' or re-energise in order to embrace social capital building initiatives.

The research found that people often don't seek help (if they do at all) until they are desperate but then expect help with a minimum of red tape. Assertive outreach is therefore required along with techniques that link these approaches to counselling. Feedback from participants suggests that talking to a trained counsellor is helpful for rural people affected by drought, however, culturally acceptable ways of presenting counselling, providing it and publicising it are required.

This study supports the call made by previous drought counselling evaluations for co-ordinating policy, funding and service delivery across the federal, state and local levels of government. Services should be co-ordinated but guided by local needs. A key outcome of such co-ordination would be the increased possibility of long term planning and ongoing services that could become known and accepted by local communities. A workforce established in this way could respond to a range of challenges facing rural communities, including drought, fire, flood, climate and socio-economic changes.

This workforce must be skilled in outreach strategies that draw on community development knowledge and counselling approaches that facilitate people to reconnect quickly with community supports. Counselling styles need to be culturally compatible with rural sensibilities, such as Single Session Therapy and *No Bullshit Therapy*. The rural community would benefit from a greater understanding of how drought impacts on individuals, families and communities and the role counselling can play, along with other supports, in surviving challenges such as drought.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

THE DROUGHT COUNSELLING INITIATIVE

Towards the end of 2006, The Victorian Drought Taskforce Response allocated \$3.4 million of non-recurrent funding to drought counselling under the Tackling Mental Health and Drought Counselling Strategies Initiative. Funding (initially for twelve months to December 2007 and then later extended to September 2008) provided:

- i. Four EFT of additional counselling in each of the Exceptional Circumstances (EC)¹ declared regions – namely, Loddon Mallee, Grampians, Hume, Gippsland and Barwon (from December 2007);
- ii. A telephone information and referral line for farming communities;
- iii. Rural training and development for rural counsellors provided by The Bouverie Centre; and
- iv. Funding to Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) to conduct a range of activities and to coordinate services.

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

- To help people in farming communities manage distressing thoughts and feelings resulting from living through the experience of drought;
- To develop and provide counselling approaches that are accessible to members of farming communities affected by the drought, particularly those people who would not normally consider counselling;

¹ Barwon South West was not EC declared until 1 month into the project. EC declaration is considered for rare and severe events outside those a farmer could normally be expected to manage using responsible farm management strategies.

- To have counsellors participate in health promotion activities through involvement with Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs); and
- To contribute to the development of an evidence base about effective counselling practice in rural areas.

The target group for the overall initiative was: “Members of farming communities, farmers and their families and other people who have been employed in primary industries and associated businesses” (Department of Human Services [DHS], 2007, p. 4).

THE BOUVERIE PROJECT

The Bouverie Centre was engaged to deliver part (iii) of the overall initiative: “rural training and development for rural counsellors”. Previous evaluation has indicated that traditional counselling and service delivery models have been disappointing in engaging rural people affected by drought (e.g Australian Healthcare Associates, 2006; Johnston, 2003). Therefore, along with delivering training in innovative models of counselling, the Bouverie Project facilitated a process of broader research not only to determine the efficacy of these models but also to understand, articulate and document other approaches to counselling and community development that would work in rural areas, particularly those affected by drought.

The project started with five components, negotiated between The Bouverie Centre and Primary Health:

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

FUNDING

The original budget for The Bouverie Centre project was \$200,000 for the period December 2006 - December 2007. An additional \$295,000 was provided to support the state-wide implementation of two projects that emerged from the research (The two state-wide projects were *No Bull* Support and Looking Out For Your Neighbours) and to extend the overall project until June 2008. A further \$39,000 was then provided to extend the project to September 2008, which coincided with the contracts of most state-funded Drought Counsellors ending. Since that time, some counsellors in the Grampians, Hume and Loddon-Mallee regions have received further funding. Finally, \$25,000 was provided for the write up of this summary and the full report.

THIS REPORT

This is a short version of the full project report which is available on The Bouverie Centre website (www.latrobe.edu.au/bouverie). The full report contains the research tools used to collect the data, provides detailed data upon which the key learnings and recommendations outlined in this summary are based. The chapters in the full report dedicated to addressing each research question are indicated in Table 1.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Bouverie Project began with two core objectives:

1. To deliver training and development for rural counsellors in order to support them to deliver effective counselling services to people in rural areas affected (either directly or indirectly) by drought; and
2. To investigate effective counselling and community development strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities.

CURRENT RESEARCH ON DROUGHT COUNSELLING

Previous research evaluations have offered broad recommendations for improving the uptake of drought counselling services such as promoting culturally sensitive ways of working in rural areas (Australian Healthcare Associates, 2006; Johnston, 2003), providing different supports at different times (Blau, 2006; Johnston, 2003), combining community approaches and counselling (Johnston, 2003) and building on existing skills and structures (Towong Shire, 2005, p. 21). The Bouverie Project sought to build on these recommendations by:

- Exploring the specific structural supports required to allow Drought Counsellors to do an effective job;
- Conceptualising how the specific nature of drought impacts on individuals, families and communities; and
- Exploring, in detail, specific strategies that are effective in drought counselling.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The final research questions were developed in conjunction with Drought Counsellors, using a Co-operative Inquiry (Reason & Rowan, 1981) methodology, a form of Participatory Action Research, where the Drought Counsellors were active participants in a collaborative investigation. Table 1 shows the research questions for the study.

Research questions	Addressed in greater detail in the data chapters of the full report
Overall Question	
<i>What are effective counselling and community development strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities?</i>	All
Specific questions	
<i>What does engaging and supporting the Drought Counsellors tell us about providing a drought counselling service?</i>	Chapter 4
<i>How does the nature of drought influence the provision of drought counselling services?</i>	Chapter 5
<i>What are specific drought counselling strategies for responding to drought affected people and their communities?</i>	Chapter 6
<i>What is the relationship between drought counselling and community development?</i>	Chapter 5—7 Especially 7
<i>How should drought counselling services be set up for future droughts?</i>	Chapter 8

Table 1: The research questions for the study

COUNSELLING MODELS

The Bouverie training focused on two counselling models: Single Session Therapy (SST) and *No Bullshit Therapy* (NBT). These models were chosen as the Bouverie team were skilled in this work and it had some face-validity appeal to the Australian rural culture.

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

No Bullshit Therapy has been developed by The Bouverie Centre over the past decade as a way of engaging people who are reluctant to seek counselling help. NBT is partly derived from the 'cutting to the chase' aspect of SST and was chosen primarily for its potential relevance to engaging people who are cynical, suspicious or unsure of what to expect from counselling.

NBT aims to create constructive contexts for mutual honesty and directness in working relationships. NBT has five basic clinical guidelines:

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

No Bullshit Therapy responds to Alston's (2005) call for innovative models that are rurally appropriate, and is in line with O'Hagan's (2005) and The Towong Shire's (2005) call for 'upfront' approaches to working with drought affected people. The approach was also seen as potentially

offering guidance on how to negotiate the difficult task of counselling with people who approach therapy with strong anti-therapy stances.

The effectiveness of these two models of counselling was evaluated as part of the project research which also looked more broadly at the way in which these counselling models could be integrated with community development work. The research methodology is described below.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Bouverie Project was state-wide and involved Drought Counsellors from each rural DHS region over a 19 month period between February 2007 and September 2008.

The research involved both qualitative and quantitative methods, including:

- Co-operative Inquiry Groups, discussion and support groups involving Drought Counsellors facilitated by Bouverie research team members;
- A questionnaire eliciting the changing views of Drought Counsellors about their work, completed at the start of the project (22/2/2007) and again one year later (29/2/2008);
- “Takeaways”, (summaries completed by clients of what they take away from each counselling session);
- Problem and Progress sheets (descriptions and ratings of presenting problems and progress recorded by the counsellor in consultation with the client at the end of each session);
- Client Feedback and Advice Questionnaires (feedback regarding the counselling completed by clients once counselling has ended and sent anonymously to the research team); and
- An in-depth interview with selected clients used to elicit detailed feedback about a specific drought counselling experience from the clients’ perspectives.

More information about the research methods is presented in Table 2, below:

Activity / Data Source	Number conducted	Collection method	Analysis conducted	Comments
Drought Counsellors				
Two-day forum gatherings for all Drought Counsellors across the state	Two: February 2007 February 2008	Take-aways given to all participants in Feb 2007 and evaluation forms in 2008	Thematic comparative analysis recorded in research diary	Forums acted as bookends to the first 12 months – allowing comparison
Co-operative Inquiry Group Meetings (CIGs) (Peer discussion groups for drought workers)	Gippsland 16 Grampians 15 Hume 16 Loddon–Mallee 17 Barwon SW 7 RSL 8	CIG facilitators recorded each CIG and summarised each session after listening to the recording	Thematic analysis of 79 CIG summaries and then deeper exploration of selected audio recordings of CIG meetings	The core data set
Co-operative Inquiry Group Action Research Meetings (CIGARs) (Debriefs for CIG facilitators)	17	Each CIGAR was recorded and transcribed by an admin support person	Thematic analysis of transcriptions of each meeting	A process analysis of the CIG facilitators’ debriefs about CIG discussions

<p>No Bull</p> <p>Newsletter of the Drought Counsellors developed as part of the research</p>	<p>6 editions</p>	<p>Ideas were drawn from CIGARs, CIG minutes and lead researchers role as a CIG facilitator. Also articles were sourced from the CIGs.</p>	<p>Thematic analysis of content of editions</p>	<p>Editions provided a punctuation of the research – providing a developmental perspective of the project</p>
<p>Drought Counsellor questionnaires</p>	<p>35 pre 18 post</p>	<p>Pre questionnaires were given to all Drought Counsellors at the start of the first forum. Post questionnaires were given to the same people still employed at the second forum.</p>	<p>Descriptive comparison for open ended questions and comparison of pre and post likert scales</p>	<p>Provided comparison between Drought Counsellors expectations and learning after 12 months</p>
<p>Client Feedback</p>				
<p>Problem and Progress sheets</p> <p>(Proforma noting presenting problems and what helped)</p>	<p>65</p>	<p>Filled out by Drought Counsellors after counselling sessions or help line calls.</p>	<p>Descriptive analysis</p>	<p>Inconsistent – semi – direct feedback from clients</p>

Takeaways <i>(Scripts completed at end of session)</i>	12	Given to clients during sessions.	Descriptive analysis	Direct feedback from clients
Client 'Feedback and Advice' questionnaires	5	Offered to clients at the end of counselling.	Descriptive analysis	Direct feedback about clinical work and service delivery
In depth client interviews	1	Followed up by lead researcher after client expressed interest in the client 'Feedback and Advice' questionnaire.	Descriptive and Thematic analysis	Single case example – detailed description

Table 2: Sources of data, collection and analysis

The most comprehensive findings emerged from the CIG groups and, as such, the findings presented in this report come largely from this research method. Unfortunately, given the sensitivity and delicacy of engaging reluctant clients, the Drought Counsellors reported feeling uncomfortable asking their clients to complete the range of paper and pencil measures, which involved extensive paperwork related to informed consent. Drought affected clients were feeling overwhelmed by the detailed paperwork that needed to be submitted for financial and other support, and were wary and averse to filling out ever more forms. While this may be a limitation of the research, the rich and detailed information about implementation of drought counselling gained from the perspective of counsellors involved in the CIG groups ensures that this project contributes much to the knowledge-base of drought work. The CIG methodology, the major data source, is explored further in the following section.

CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY GROUPS

Participating Drought Counsellors formed six Co-operative Inquiry Groups (CIGs) which met on a monthly basis for between 2-3 hours in each EC declared region. Over the course of the 19 month project over 100 different Drought Counsellors and associated workers from 88 organisations attended 70 CIG meetings in six regions across the state. In total, over 170 hours of CIG meetings, facilitated by six different Bouverie research team members, allowed Drought Counsellors to reflect on and conceptualise their work. All of these CIG meetings were audio recorded and summarised by the Bouverie facilitators and then shared with the CIG members. The Bouverie CIG facilitators met after each monthly CIG to share, compare and contrast themes arising from the different regions. The CIG facilitator debrief sessions were called Cooperative Inquiry Group Action Research (CIGAR) meetings and were themselves facilitated by the Director of the Bouverie Centre at that time, Dr. Colin Riess. Besides a general exploration of significant drought-related themes, the CIGAR meetings provided a format for the cross-regional sharing of fruitful ideas generated at the local CIG meetings. Each CIGAR discussion was transcribed and the ideas were published in a quarterly Newsletter called *No Bull*. In the early editions of *No Bull*, the research team provided most of the content and maintained an editorial role throughout; however, as the project grew, the Drought Counsellors began to contribute work more freely and frequently, increasing their sense of ownership over the Newsletter.

Rather than emphasising training, Co-operative Inquiry Groups provided a structure for Drought Counsellors to embark on an ongoing facilitated process of observing, reflecting, planning and acting on how to deliver relevant support to drought affected rural communities. Drought Counsellors were supported to actively explore what worked and what did not in the relatively undeveloped area of drought counselling. Bouverie Centre staff facilitated and recorded the development of their practice wisdoms and challenged them to articulate their practice and conceptualise their journey. The other research measures provided depth and greater authenticity to the CIG data. Over time, key findings and recommendations emerged, which are summarised in this document.

Previous research exploring the social and emotional impacts of drought has tended to focus on farming families, rather than the broad range of people that make up rural communities, including the friends and associates of farmers, business people, community members and leaders. Further, no study has explored the emotional and social impacts of drought, looking at both farming and non-farming families through the lens of Drought Counsellors over a sustained period.

Drought Counsellors develop close working relationships with individuals and families dealing with drought and hence are in a good position to comment on the complexity of the social impacts of drought. Also, since they have to wrestle with the factors that get in the way of rural people seeking help, they are in an ideal position to articulate opportunities and barriers to supporting rural communities affected by drought.

Drought knowledge is often lost (Australian Healthcare Associates, 2006). The recording of practice wisdom and effective strategies for providing emotional and relationship support for drought affected communities will contribute to the evidence base for this work and hence will inform drought relief efforts in the future. The CIG-CIGAR structure acted as a simple but elegant state-wide knowledge generator and as a result, a large amount of practice wisdom was captured and documented. This practice wisdom is summarised in the current report and presented in detail in Chapters 5-7 of the full report. Informal contact occurred at a local level between Drought Counsellors², in addition to the formal communication mechanisms which are described below and depicted in Diagram 1:

- i. The CIG-CIGAR structure;
- ii. An active email network to share resources quickly;
- iii. *No Bull*: The Newsletter of the State-funded Drought Counsellors; and
- iv. Two-day forums providing face-to-face collaboration, reflection and sharing of resources.

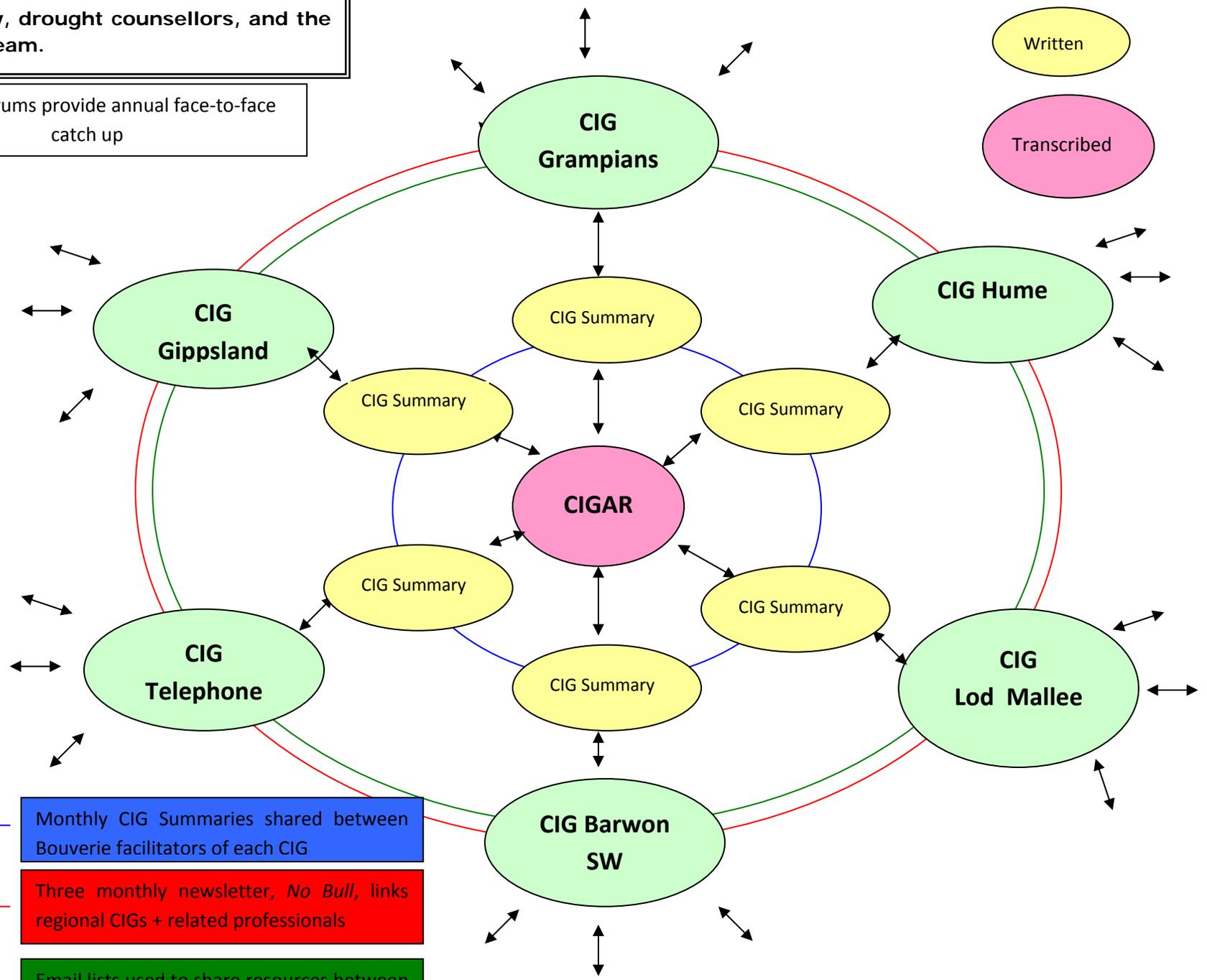
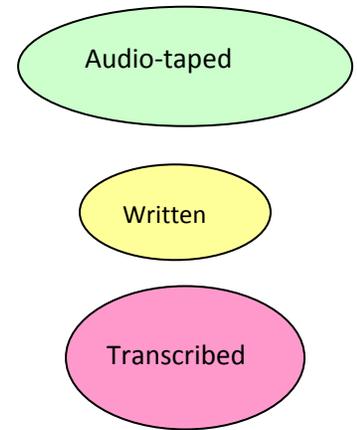
Information collected via the CIG-CIGAR network and other qualitative tools were fed back to participants throughout the project via the CIGs, newsletters and forums. This led to greater implementation of challenging ideas such as 'cold calling' and the development of two state-wide projects, which were identified as needed by on-the-ground Drought Counsellors: *No Bull* Support, which became a half day workshop for community members who supported others affected by drought but at risk of burning out themselves; and Looking Out For Your Neighbours,

² In one CIG a new Drought Counsellor was contacted informally after she had got the job but before she was due to start work and was informed about the complexities of drought work and the CIG support group's next meeting.

which was a community development initiative where Drought Counsellors joined with the VFF to explore local needs. Separate evaluation reports are available for these state-wide projects (www.latrobe.edu.au/bouverie). This report can also be read in parallel with the six editions of *No Bull*, also available from the Bouverie website, which provides a developmental view of the themes as they evolved during the project.

Diagram 1: Communication system for sharing information between the community, drought counsellors, and the research team.

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



Monthly CIG Summaries shared between Bouverie facilitators of each CIG

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

Email lists used to share resources between drought counsellors + related professionals

Additional data was collected from three additional evaluations (Reports available at www.latrobe.edu.au/bouverie):

- i. *No Bull* Support evaluation (NB Support is a program which evolved as part of the research. It is a half day support program for community members who support others in the community);
- ii. Looking Out For Your Neighbours evaluation (LOFYN is a community development workshop that developed as a joint project between the Victorian Farmers Federation and the Drought Counsellors); and
- iii. Farmgate ‘cold calling’ research and evaluation (cold calling involves drought workers visiting farmers in a designated area to offer information and support).

TERMINOLOGY

Whilst employed as Drought Counsellors, the counsellors themselves generally preferred the titles “Rural Outreach Worker” or “Rural Outreach Counsellor” (at the time of this report) which seemed to define a broader role for them than first imagined. The change in name does not minimise the counselling skills required for this work, but does reflect the way in which drought counselling challenges conventional ways of providing counselling services. The key learnings about the most appropriate terminology are complex and hence a simple conclusion is at risk of diminishing future possibilities. Hence I use the term ‘Drought Counsellor’ throughout most of this report for these reasons:

- i. Because it relates to the original brief of the project;
- ii. Because the name assigned to counselling in rural communities affected by drought remains contested; and
- iii. To minimise confusion.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND RESPECT

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

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Any summary of a complex project is at risk of doing an injustice to the subtleties and interconnectedness of the findings. Whilst this summary makes the findings more accessible, I encourage the reader to consult the full report, especially around contentious and complex issues. The findings are collated under each research question, and end with a summary of the key findings and implications for policy and practice.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT DOES ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING THE DROUGHT COUNSELLORS TELL US ABOUT PROVIDING A DROUGHT COUNSELLING SERVICE?

Drought Counsellors have historically been employed quickly often with inappropriate job descriptions and conditions, without much collegial support or an accessible body of resources and practice wisdom. Many of the Drought Counsellors employed prior to the commencement of this study spent the first few weeks of their employment searching the Internet for these supports. The Drought Counsellors responded enthusiastically to the Bouverie training and development support project because they were typically lone workers distant physically from other Drought Counsellors and with varying connection with their host agencies. Without the support of the CIG network, the first six months would have been a lonely time for the Drought Counsellors, which would have challenged their professional confidence.

The study found that new drought counselling services required at least six months to establish reasonable case-loads. Drought Counsellors needed this time to gain credibility and exposure in the local community which was established by building personal relationships within the target population and networking with related services. The majority of Drought Counsellors found themselves trying to establish case loads by doing community development work in the early stages for which they were not trained, did not expect to be doing and did not feel supported in doing. Whilst over time this led to the effective integration of counselling and community development approaches, in the first few months this created extra stress on Drought Counsellors, as indicated by this retrospective reflection:

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

The CIGs provided a connective space for local Drought Counsellors and related colleagues, where members could share difficulties, address dilemmas and collaboratively explore potential strategies, which led Drought Counsellors to feel part of a larger effort, described in the following CIG quotes:

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

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

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

The Drought Counsellors typically faced huge responsibilities without the professional supports other counsellors take for granted. They observed a community in great distress and had to operate with undeveloped service structures, models of practice and interagency networks. As a result, counsellors in several CIGs described themselves as “carriers of the community anxiety” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Specialist Drought Counsellors were vulnerable to personal and professional isolation due to large rural distances and because they were often lone, part-time workers who spend much of their time out of the office, away from colleagues, and reaching out into communities that are unfamiliar with them and their role. Participants in the study greatly valued the newsletter *No Bull* and annual practice forums because they helped create a professional identity. For example, the CIGs and practice forums provided a venue for lively debate about what general title Drought Counsellors should embrace³ a crucial basic element to furthering the professional development of drought counselling.

Of the 35 state-funded Drought Counsellors who attended the first two-day forum in February 2007, 12 (33%) had left their positions 12 months into the research, despite funding being extended. Whilst all the factors in play are not clear, the figures suggest that the conditions or nature of the employment are not conducive to a sustainable workforce. A sustainable

³ Support Worker, Rural Outreach Worker, Drought Family Support Worker and Supporter were all suggested as more appropriate titles in a questionnaire completed by 32 of the 42 state-funded Drought Counsellors at the first two-day forum (Feb 2007), where as Rural Outreach Worker / Counsellor was the preferred title by the second two-day forum one year later.

workforce, underpinned by an effective induction and ongoing support program, are a basic necessity for the professionalisation of a field. The disruption on the service system of stop-start funding and short-term planning can be seen in this anonymous CIG quote which was typical of many responses across the state:

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

Whilst much needs to be done to provide appropriate structural supports to allow Drought Counsellors in the future to be able to contribute to the provision of effective ways of supporting rural communities affected by drought, the Victorian Government should be acknowledged for funding the current innovative collaborative action research which facilitated Drought Counsellors to:

- Avoid isolation by linking with other Drought Counsellors across the state;
- Reflect on their work and develop a richer understanding of the nature of drought and then change practices based on these understandings; and
- Share resources and practice wisdom for supporting drought affected communities, including reaching rural people who traditionally do not seek help.

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON “HOW TO SUPPORT A SPECIALIST RURAL DROUGHT COUNSELLING WORKFORCE”

Key Learning: DHS funding provided invaluable support to the Victorian Drought Counsellors that promoted connection, collective problem solving and resource sharing, collaborative documentation of practice wisdom, professionalisation and self care, which was essential because Drought Counsellors are often employed quickly, with little induction, unrealistic job descriptions and little support. The collaborative research allowed a collective voice, reflected in the following vision, which was generated by all 59 participants at the second two-day forum, one year into the drought project.

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

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

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

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

POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

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

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

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW DOES THE NATURE OF DROUGHT INFLUENCE THE PROVISION OF DROUGHT COUNSELLING SERVICES?

Drought Counsellors found that conceptualising the nature of drought informed the developing of specific counselling strategies (reported under research question 3) and raised issues for community development approaches (addressed under research question 4).

The literature is divided about how to define drought, including whether to see it as a natural disaster or as a manageable business risk associated with living in a country with a dry and variable climate. This division is further reflected in Government policy and within the wider community. Drought as a disaster could be seen as being determined by the political decision to declare Exceptional Circumstance (EC) for a region, rather than as a result of a tangible, calamitous natural event.

In responding to this research question, I compare drought to more acute natural disasters, not to create a competition between disasters and not to diminish the pain and suffering experienced in the face of fire and flood, but to explore the unique nature of drought in an effort to unearth possible ideas for responding to it more effectively.

Communities are more likely to unite to fight an obvious external threat, such as fire or flood, than a more insidious, ongoing and intangible period of drought. However, even in cases such as fire and flood, tension and differences tend to emerge after the acute stages, when perceived inequities surface and unity is challenged, such as: if some community members receive more financial assistance than others; emotions that were put on hold during the height of the threat are suddenly released; and mental health disturbances arising from the events begin to express themselves.

It is unclear, except perhaps in hindsight, whether there are particular acute stages in drought, but it is clear that tensions over financial assistance, emotional responses, relationship stress, etc., are commonly intertwined and concurrent during long-term drought, making it harder for communities to pull together.

The difference between fire and flood and drought are considerable. For example, fire fighters and the people they rescue from the ravages of fire are described as heroes in the media and in the broader community, and yet drought workers and their clients are not usually described in this way. Drought Counsellors, who tackle suicidality or attempt to help people in impossible ongoing financial situations, and the families they help who are battling the slow strangulation of drought, are not typically described as heroes, despite their stoic and heroic actions. The community, and hence individuals and their families think about fire and flood differently to drought — there is less stigma associated with fire and flood and hence everyone is able to seek help more openly. The Gippsland CIG members who had been involved in both fire and drought counselling clearly reported that:

“More people sought counselling after the fires, and fire response led to more assertive referrals compared to drought” (CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary).

Responses to fire and flood tend to be more social as the community joins forces to fight the ‘one-off’ crisis. Due to the insidious and ongoing nature of drought, the impact can be more socially isolating.

Trauma theory points out that acknowledgement and bearing witness to the survivor’s pain and loss plays a crucial role in recovery. The insidious, long term nature of drought may help explain the complexity of dealing with its psychological impact, as wider community acknowledgement of the pain and loss experienced is not as obvious or as forthcoming as it is for other disasters. Consequently, individuals, families and communities affected by drought are at risk of feeling less cared for than similar communities affected by fire and flood, as reported in previous large scale studies exploring the emotional impact of drought (Stehlik, 2003; Ashton and Kent, 2004). Drought Counsellors commented that even their clients often did not appreciate the significance of the drought’s impact, for example:

“Terry presented a client who was an employee of a farmer who was very stressed but hadn’t linked this pressure to the impact of the drought on his employer. Linking this client’s stress to the impact of the drought was very useful” (CIG # 5 Gippsland 3/8/07 - Summary).

Over time, Drought Counsellors began to conceptualise drought as a chronic, intangible, pervasive, intermittent and therefore often unacknowledged disaster, which can:

- Isolate individuals, creating more shame and self-blame with a focus on poor decision;
- Place great stress on relationships within families and within the community, leading to increased mental health issues, alcohol and drug use and domestic violence at an individual and family level;
- Invite inequity and divisiveness; and
- Lead to exhaustion at a community level, due to extended distress and suffering.

The chronicity of drought can lead to ‘death by slow strangulation’ and the imperceptible build up of stress. Drought Counsellors across the state were clear that no-one seeks counselling help for the drought directly — they seek help for practical issues, concerns about their children, marital difficulties, work relationships or financial hardship. Somewhat surprisingly, people seen by the Drought Counsellors tended not to realise how much the drought had affected them personally. Counsellors found that the simple task of linking their clients’ distress to the drought and letting them know they are not alone in that distress, often did a lot to relieve self blame and shame.

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Learning: Drought is an intangible, intermittent, chronic, pervasive, disenfranchised⁴ natural disaster that can lead to community exhaustion, inequity and division, leaving individuals vulnerable to feeling emotionally and socially isolated. Community tensions caused by drought can exacerbate tensions that already exist due to longer term social, economic and climatic change. Strategies to address the hardships caused by drought need to promote social connection, keeping in mind that timing will be important and communities may need assistance to ‘kick start’ or re-energise in order to embrace social capital building strategies.

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

POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- i. A common symptom of drought is social and emotional isolation and hence a fundamental task is to maintain people’s social connection and to reconnect people with appropriate networks when they become isolated.
- ii. People may not link increased conflict with the overall tensions caused by the drought and so making this connection may help them make sense of hardship at an individual, family or community level.
- iii. Responses to drought need to appreciate that the community may be exhausted and divided and hence recovery strategies need to incorporate ways to ‘kick start’ community action. Such events must be held at an appropriate time and presented in a sensitive way. For example, community oriented interventions may need to create a response culture of ‘we are all in this together, even though we are all affected differently and respond to hardship differently.’
- iv. Strategies to promote ‘bridging social capital’ (connection across different groups) as well as ‘bonding social capital’ (connection within like groups) are needed to build community resilience so that dominant groups do not render smaller groups invisible.
- v. Policy in response to drought needs to actively promote social connection and monitor against inadvertently dividing communities.
- vi. A policy context that promotes service co-operation rather than service competition is needed.

⁴ The term disenfranchised is taken from Doka (1989) and used to describe the lack of broader community acknowledgement of the impact of living with prolonged drought.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE SPECIFIC DROUGHT COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO DROUGHT AFFECTED PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES?

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE COUNSELLING

Drought Counsellors observed that common cultural qualities of rural people, especially farmers, such as stoicism, self-reliance and looking out for others, combined with the insidious nature of drought, led many to seek help 'when down to their last drop of water or last dollar', if at all. Once they did seek help, they expected help quickly and with a minimum of red tape. The study also found that a significant proportion of people affected by drought tend to seek help down the track when accumulated stress builds up or the initial efforts to address hardship via practical and financial supports fail to solve ongoing problems or relieve their emotional and psychological pain. Clients who did eventually seek help fell into two broad groups:

1. Those who wanted their immediate concerns addressed directly and with the minimum of fuss.
2. Those who just needed a chat, which then led to counselling support.

Single Session Therapy (SST) and No Bullshit Therapy were useful frameworks to provide straight forward, early and short term intervention that appealed to their clients, including reluctant clients who wanted help with a minimum of fuss. SST was relevant because much of the work conducted by the Drought Counsellors resulted in one-off sessions even for serious presenting problems. No Bullshit Therapy helped promote the work and provided specific strategies which helped Drought Counsellors to address difficult topics directly with a minimum of fuss. SST and NBT provided validation for what Drought Counsellors tended to do intuitively.

For clients who presented to counselling because they felt they 'just needed a chat', Drought Counsellors developed specific strategies to move from 'chat to counselling' such as 'funneling' (talking about local community issues and gradually funneling down to more personal issues) and 'red flagging' (not focusing on emotional issues when they first arose but noting them and returning to them as the relationship developed).

CIG members across the state built up a wide-range of innovative strategies that seemed culturally compatible with rural sensitivities, such as: conducting sessions on the back of the ute, over a cuppa tea or whilst helping farmers with practical tasks. They also raised the need to educate the community about emotional issues and about the role that counselling may play and to normalise seeking help.

"There is one guy who seems to be particularly embedded in his local community and who seems to be fairly successful in terms of the amount of people he has been referred and stuff. He often talks about actually the need to educate people into what counselling is and to dispel the myths. One thing he does when he gets up there is just say, 'what is it you think I do as a Drought Counsellor?' and just engages people around the dialogue about that" (CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript).

The overwhelming theme to emerge from the CIG-CIGAR network was that whilst it took a lot of community development activities, creativity, persistence and time to engage clients – once people experienced counselling, both formally in sessions and informally on the farm or in the streets, the majority found that it was a great relief to share the burden with someone other than family and friends and that ‘talking helped’.

Whether clients were engaged by community development strategies, cold calling, casual chats or via standard counselling sessions, Drought Counsellors reported their approaches needed to be culturally compatible with rural values (honest, authentic, practical, non-jargonistic, warm and friendly) and to take into account:

- Pride and shame;
- Stoicism, self-reliance and looking out for others; and
- Confidentiality fears and stigma.

Whilst trying to summarise the key tasks for the wide range of drought counselling encounters is fraught with danger, the following acronym, N.E.W.S., can be used to capture the essence of what is required:

- NORMALISE, validate and promote meaning making
- EDUCATE and offer practical supports
- Show WARMTH and provide emotional support
- Promote STRENGTHS, SKILLS, SOCIALISATION AND SPIRITUALITY

NORMALISE, VALIDATE AND PROMOTE MEANING MAKING

Drought Counsellors found that in most cases normalising and linking presenting symptoms to the drought was a simple but surprisingly effective strategy – given that most clients did not make this link themselves. If people affected by drought are not helped to link their symptoms to the drought, they are likely to attribute the cause to someone or something else: themselves (leading to self-blame and shame); others (leading to relationship tensions and difficulties – especially loved ones whose support they most need); or organisations and government (leading to paralysis for self action and to community tensions).

Normalising helps people feel that they are not alone, not going crazy, not weak. It is a way to provide acknowledgement and validation without blaming or pathologising. Normalising suggests neither minimizing nor sugar-coating the impact of drought, but rather offering public acknowledgement and validation of hardship.

EDUCATE AND OFFER PRACTICAL SUPPORTS

Lack of control and a sense of powerlessness are common responses to chronic disasters and traumas. Information and knowledge is an effective way to address powerlessness. Drought Counsellors reported educating their clients in four broad categories:

1. Information about how drought affects individuals, (e.g. stress about decision making, emotional reactions such as grief and anger);
2. Education about the impact on relationships (e.g. polarisation between family members, clashes over different emotional responses to hardships etc);
3. Suggestions about coping with the impact of drought, focused on communication between family members, socialising, acknowledging emotional responses, etc;
4. Details about what services are available, such as referral options, financial supports and grants, and practical and emotional supports.

Providing practical help as part of engagement is not necessarily viewed as part of the counsellor's role, yet it is integral throughout the drought counselling process, and in establishing credibility with the community. Any actions taken, however, need to relate clearly to what is important to the client hence the Drought Counsellors have to 'listen with action'.

SHOW WARMTH AND PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

"Giving permission to grieve – comes up all the time" (CIG # 4 Loddon Mallee 18/6/07 - Summary).

Whilst people may respond in different ways to drought, a common theme to emerge across the CIGs was the need for Drought Counsellors to help clients move between facing the full impact of the drought in order to respond to it in a realistic way, and providing the client with permission to avoid its full impact. Drought workers had to find ways in both counselling and community development work, to acknowledge the pain and suffering of people affected by the drought without emotionally exhausting them. The tension between addressing and avoiding the emotional impact of drought was experienced within individuals, between family members and within the community.

Warmth and emotional support can be provided via an authentic friendly chat. Drought Counsellors found the No Bullshit Therapy ideas of combining honesty and directness with warmth and care a helpful guide. For some clients, education about the emotional impacts of drought hardship was an effective alternative to counselling approaches that encourage or expect a more open expression of feelings. Educative approaches, particularly when working with men, were often used by Drought Counsellors to talk about strong emotions. Emotional support can be enacted in very practical ways, such as this follow-up contact described in a CIG:

“Follow-up just takes it from being a token effort to being something that’s genuine. You can’t force people to accept help, but you can continue to keep in contact or send stuff in the mail with a note indicating you’re thinking of them. The biggest thing is knowing that someone cares...having someone hold you in their thinking is an important part of that message. Trying to make people feel as though they are the only one that you’re working for – that what you’re doing for them is one of the most important things you’re doing today. The valuable part of counselling is the conversation – the relating – more than what happens in the conversation itself” (CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary).

Whilst Drought Counsellors naturally had to support people to address anger and grief over obvious physical losses such as income, businesses, stock or family homesteads, they also had to address what the research team called disenfranchised grief. Doka (1989) developed the idea of disenfranchised grief to identify and name grief that could not be easily recognised or talked about and hence did not receive the community and societal acknowledgement and support afforded other losses. Specific examples of disenfranchised grief reported by Drought Counsellors in the Loddon Mallee CIG below is reflective of losses experienced across the state:

- Loss of a comfortable retirement – despite still surviving on the farm;
- Reduction of local population, with the resulting fragmentation of local communities, including the loss of neighbours and friends;
- Loss of animals by having to sell or ‘put them down’;
- Loss of family heritage, such as older farmers grieving that they may be the last of the family to live on the farm; and
- Loss of a certainty regarding generational indebtedness. For instance, farmers of the “Sandwich Generation” may decide to leave their farms in hopes of ensuring a better future for their progeny, but they may simultaneously struggle with feelings of disloyalty to their forebearers. This dilemma also challenges and potentially destabilises one’s sense of identity, integrity and family values.

(CIG # 4 Loddon Mallee 18/6/07 - Summary)

PROMOTE STRENGTHS, SKILLS, SOCIALISATION AND SPIRITUALITY

“The importance of helping clients get back in touch with their own resources, in particular what’s worked for them in the past” (CIG # 4 Loddon Mallee 18/6/07 - Summary).

Drought Counsellors found themselves facilitating people in acute crisis to explore past successes or to learn from other people’s successes in overcoming hardships. Drought can isolate people from their strengths, their skills and their community. Helping to reconnect people with their strengths, with other people and with their own spirituality can facilitate recovery.

Drought Counsellors found it a challenge to invite exploration about strengths and skills at a time when people feel disconnected from them, without seeming dismissive of their hardship. CIG and CIGAR discussions began to explore ways of simultaneously acknowledging the difficulties whilst striving to elicit personal qualities and values that provide sustenance in times of crisis. In keeping with the findings of the Social Impact of Drought expert panel (Kenny, 2008), the CIG members often used the significance of farmers’ psychological and emotional connection with the land or their business (sometimes this connection leads to decision making that is not prudent from a financial point of view). One value of exploring this less tangible, but spiritual, link with their farm or business is to create a connection with core values (such as love of family). Core values don’t change even as other material things change or are lost. An example was reported in the Loddon Mallee region:

“(That) sometimes very small things can re-instill hope and a reminder of what is most important (e.g. As one family did, going down to the paddock and cooking damper and sausages with the kids)” (CIG # 4 Loddon Mallee 18/6/07 - Summary).

CLIENTS’ RESPONSES

The research team invited Drought Counsellors to ask clients questions from the Problem and Progress Sheets as part of their usual sessions and to complete the sheets anonymously at the end of each session, de-identify them and return them to The Bouverie Centre.

Problem and progress sheets:

- Between March 2007 and March 2009, 60 Problem and Progress sheets were received, the majority (48/60) from the Rural Support Line
- Age of clients ranged from 25 – 74 years.
- Majority of clients had a farming related occupation.

The top ten presenting problems are shown in figure 1.

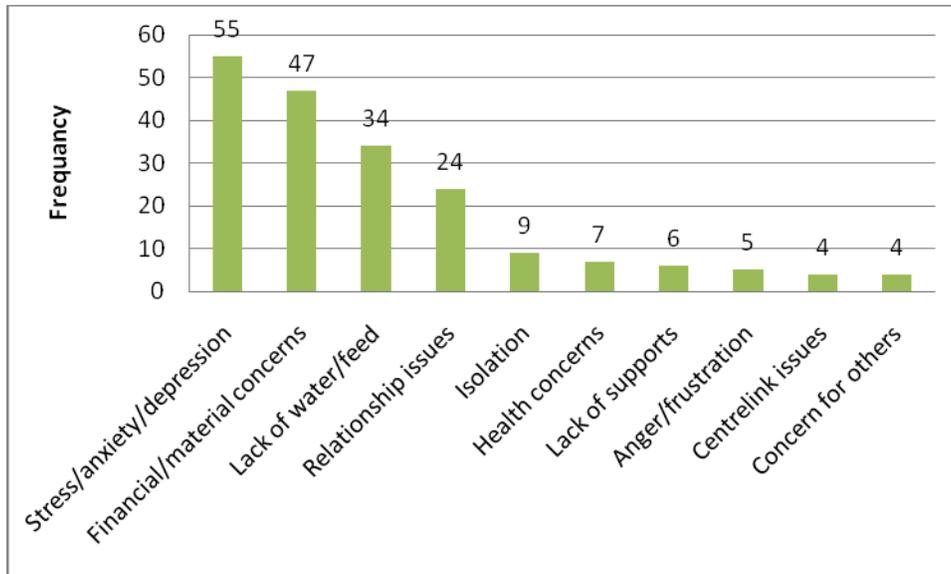


Figure 1: Top ten presenting problems in Problem and Progress sheets

Whilst more sophisticated research is required in this area, the quantitative data (Problem and Progress sheets) was suggestive of a positive trend toward farmers finding it helpful to talk to counsellors. In 70% of Problem and Progress sheets completed by Drought Counsellors, talking was recorded as the most helpful component of the services. Referrals for practical help (e.g. Centrelink support) was the second most helpful service, recorded in 66% of Problem and Progress sheets.

Sixty Problem and Progress sheets over the course of the 19 month research is a disappointing sample but the endorsement of talking to a counsellor suggests a trend that needs to be taken seriously and explored further. The trend is reinforced in four of the five Client Feedback and Advice Questionnaires that were received early in the research. One person was very unhappy about the counselling he received, responding:

“I was disillusioned. Farmers need help not airy fairy talk” and “Being given wrong information. Nothing good about listening to a counsellor talk about self. Being told what I should do. Having pressure put on me to do what counsellor wanted me to do not what I wanted. Told me they knew how I was feeling which was not true. No training in this area.”

The other four respondents to the Client Feedback and Advice Questionnaires were positive about the counselling they received. Some of the comments indicating what they found helpful are reproduced here:

“She was very friendly and made me feel I wasn’t alone – that there is help out there.”

“Get out and talk to someone like (Drought Counsellor’s name). It makes a hell of a difference.”

“It made me realise that a lot of people are hurting financially as well as emotionally so I’m not alone. She explained things I didn’t understand. I didn’t realise there was help for people like me.”

A specific but detailed source of data that provides a human face to the suggested trend I am reporting here is an in-depth interview I conducted early in the research with a couple who had experienced a single session conducted by a Drought Counsellor on their property. I recorded the interview in their home, which is outside a small remote town in rural Victoria. A more detailed report of the interview can be read in *No Bull* (July 2007, page 6) where it was published as part of the recursive feedback to the field about the research.

Jean and Bob (names changed) are in their mid 60s; Bob was a shearer who, last year, could not get work due to the drought, after recovering from an injury. “We got really depressed” reported Jean in the plural. Jean did most of the talking, which suited Bob.

Not believing in counselling before meeting Barbara (Drought Counsellor), Jean said she “thought it was shit, airy-fairy bullshit...I thought the counsellor would tell you what to do, tell you where you’d gone wrong. Barbara gave us some suggestions but didn’t tell us what to do. She was really nice, warm, bubbly... She listened but added advice... She made us feel good. We realised it wasn’t our fault, which really helped. Jean’s and Bob’s advice to others who are in a similar boat, and considering counselling, “Can’t hurt you, but it could help you.”

Although just a beginning, the current study provides some evidence to indicate that rural people may be suspicious of counselling until they experience it. There is at least enough evidence to challenge the idea that rural people in general dislike talking to a well trained counsellor. Certainly, there is strong evidence, in keeping with the Australian Healthcare Associate’s (2006), to support the call for education programs that demystify counselling and the provision of practical, non-pathologising counselling approaches that adopt outreach, personal contact and assertive referral and follow-up strategies. Positive and negative feedback suggest that rural people prefer counsellors who are friendly and emphatic, and who offer advice but are not prescriptive. The following section begins to describe the key guidelines that reflect the successful work conducted by Drought Counsellors across the state.

PROMOTING COUNSELLING TO THOSE WHO DON'T SEEK HELP

Drought Counsellors' efforts to engage clients who did not seek help fell into three broad categories:

1. The integration of counselling and community development approaches, explored under research question 4 which led to clinical approaches such as moving from chat to counselling, already mentioned;
2. Counselling styles influenced by models such as SST and NBT, already mentioned; and
3. Assertive outreach approaches such as cold calling (addressed here).

Drought Counsellors were divided on how to approach people who did not seek help. Whilst some counsellors were reluctant to reach out, others realised 'if they won't come to me, I'll have to go to them'. This led to the development of a knowledge base around assertive outreach strategies, from responding actively to third party referrals (someone seeking assistance due to their concern about another person), to following up people met at community development functions, to cold calling. All of these approaches challenged existing counselling beliefs, especially cold calling, which grew in popularity during the research. Whilst divided about cold calling, most Drought Counsellors came to the conclusion that they needed to reach out into the community in order to be effective, rather than just sit at their desk. Hence, the relationship between counselling and community development is central to drought work.

Cold calling, the most controversial approach debated by Drought Counsellors during the project, is the practice of calling on all farms in a designated area to offer information, support and referral (if appropriate). Participants of several CIGs organised their entire approach around cold calling, most notably in the Loddon Mallee and Hume regions. Twelve months into the research, several Drought Counsellors also began cold calling businesses. Cold calling is an assertive engagement strategy, providing information about a range of supports. It is not a counselling approach, per se, although a cold call may lead to a referral for counselling or may merge into counselling if the person cold calling is a trained counsellor.

Concern by some counsellors that farmers would be averse to the intrusion of uninvited professionals was not supported by a separate evaluation of cold calling commissioned by The Campaspe Primary Care Partnership and conducted by The Bouverie Centre. This evaluation of cold calling which was being practiced prior to the establishment of the CIGs, found that 7 out of the 10 farmers interviewed felt that after some initial awkwardness, the workers' efforts made them feel that someone cared. A number of people interviewed indicated that prior to the contact with the cold callers they had felt somewhat abandoned by government. They said they had heard of other drought support activities but had not felt included. They felt that the cold

call represented a spirit of concern for their wellbeing and this helped mitigate the feeling of abandonment.

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

Interview with farmer – December 2008 (Tauridsky & Young, 2009)

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

Phone interview with farmer – December 2008 (Tauridsky & Young, 2009)

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Learning: Rural people often don’t seek help until they are desperate but then expect help with a minimum of red tape. Single Session Therapy and No Bullshit Therapy are useful frameworks because they promote the provision straight forward, early and short term intervention that is appealing to clients, including reluctant clients who expect immediate help with a minimum of fuss. Assertive outreach is also required to engage clients who will not seek out help along with techniques that link outreach strategies to counselling. Feedback from participants in this research suggests that talking may be helpful for rural people affected by drought, however culturally acceptable ways of presenting counselling, providing it and publicising it are required.

POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

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

- i. Approaches that build on word of mouth, but are sensitive to confidentiality and privacy.
- ii. Assertive outreach services, including third party referrals.
- iii. Specific skills required for drought work such as ways of moving from chatting to counselling, engaging reluctant clients and assisting with emotional regulation in a non-confronting way.
- iv. Creative and effective strategies that address the already well documented reasons why rural people don’t seek help early.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DROUGHT COUNSELLING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

In order to make contact with potential clients in the early stages of the project, newly funded Drought Counsellors were involved in community activities beyond counselling. These included: physical health checks, information nights, pamper days, men’s health events, ‘farming used to be fun days’, laughter yoga, massage, timeout days, community forums and events, networking between service systems, engaging with local sporting teams and chatting to community and business leaders. The research team was surprised that Drought Counsellors spoke more about community development than clinical cases in four of the five CIGs during the first half of the research. Further investigation revealed that most counsellors received some clinical supervision in their host agencies for clinical case-loads but very little support for the difficulties of case finding, networking and combining community development and counselling.

There was strong evidence in the early CIG meetings that drought ripples through the entire community. The following diagram summarises the ripple effect of the drought identified by the research. It reflects the longer term impacts of drought and in part draws on the experiences of communities in drought since 2003.

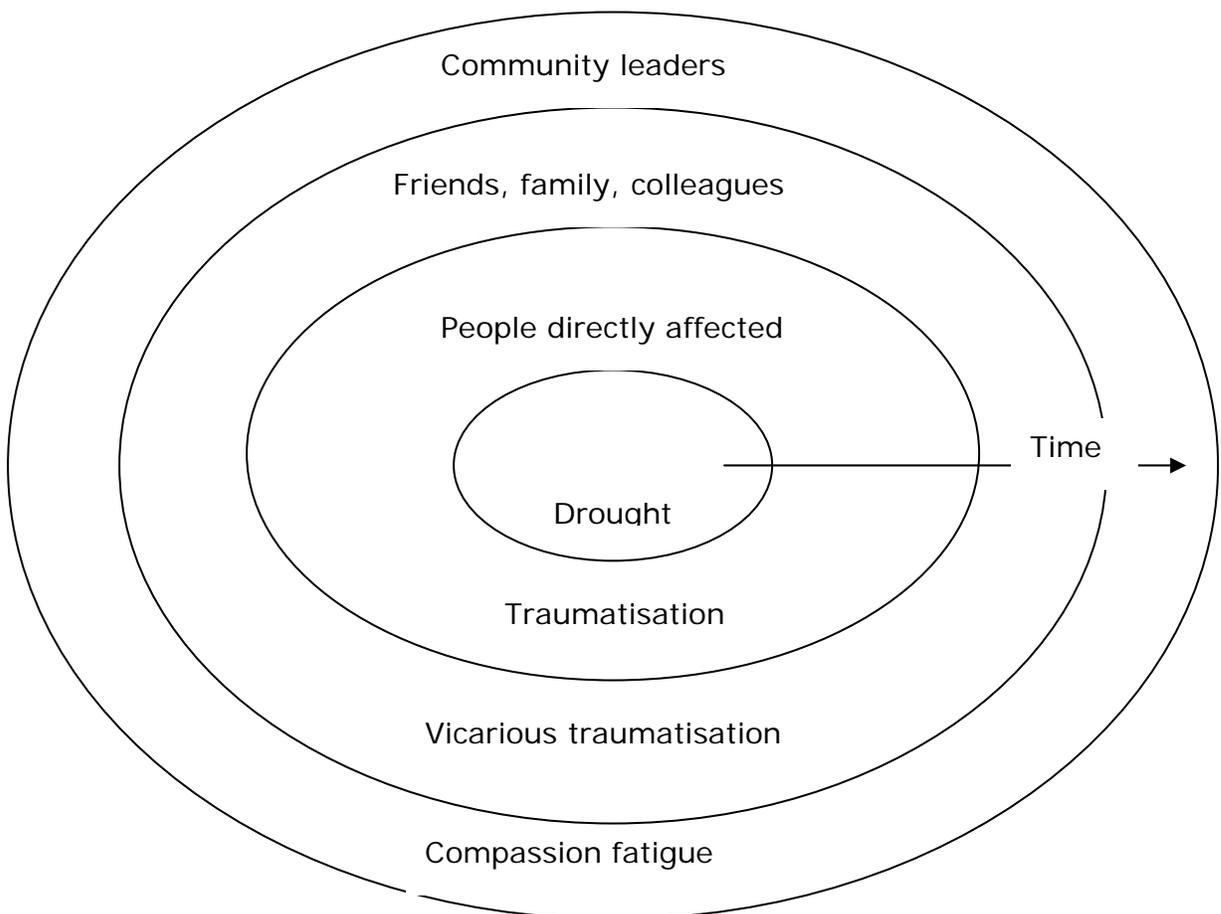


Diagram 2: The ripple effect of drought impacting on the community

A strong theme reported by CIG members early in the project was high levels of stress and distress they were finding in community members who were supporting others directly affected by the drought. Drought Counsellors reported, for example that farmers may not talk to a professional counsellor but they will talk to someone — the milk carters, the DPI field worker, a policeman, a school teacher, a friend or other person with whom they come into contact. The CIGs and NBT workshop feedback pointed out that these community members were feeling overwhelmed by the repeated stories of hardship and pain they were hearing. Many could empathise with this hardship and pain but did not know what to do. CIG members across the state discussed ways to support these natural support people from the first CIG meeting:

“DPI and other workers are experiencing a lot of trauma and the Drought Counsellors may be able to provide a role, supporting or educating them about vicarious trauma, as a way of also engaging with these groups” (CIG # 1 Gippsland 23/3/07 - Summary).

The degree of vicarious traumatisation appeared to grow throughout the research. I received the following email from Dave Lennon, a reporter from ABC radio in Bendigo, who suggested that the ‘officer class’ was starting to feel the strain of the drought. Lennon referred to the leaders of the community as the officer class – people who are usually looking after others. In his email Dave reported that:

“we have been covering the drought and its effects for sometime now but a new issue has arrived on the horizon and that is the stress on the rural leaders who up until now we had always figured were coping...there are real fears that particularly the ‘young’ generation of leaders are burning out and in danger, if they haven't already, of falling over” (Lennon, 2008, 11/10).

CIG members noticed that whilst some people felt powerless to help, others felt resentful that they had become ‘a part-time counsellor’ as part of their work role, without wanting to and without feeling they had the necessary skills. Using the action research methodology, a program called No Bull Support was developed to address the observed need. No Bull Support is described in the following section.

No Bull Support

No Bull or NB Support aims to provide a means of ‘supporting the supporters’ which had been called for by previous drought projects (Blau, 2006). The NB Support comprised half-day workshops limited to 10-15 participants. Workshops were small so participants would feel comfortable sharing their own experiences and wisdoms in an interactive informal format. The NB Support sessions provided information and resources and acted as a debriefing opportunity. Feedback sought from participants during follow-up phone calls consistently highlighted the importance of the workshops in providing: practical strategies to support people in a helpful

way; down to earth information about stress and grief; local referral contacts; and connection with the local Drought Counsellor who facilitated the sessions. A couple of specific feedback comments are presented below:

“Workshops like this are essential for on the ground outreach workers” – Orbost, April 2008.

“With the increase in stress generally in community due to drought...why isn’t this session compulsory (for shire workers)?” – Campaspe Shire, May 2008.

In the nine months following the pilot (15/11/2007) of the NB Support program, 86 CIG members had attended four train-the-trainer workshops at Bouverie and had then delivered 21 NB Support workshops which reached over 312 community members. This figure continues to grow and the NB Support program has been updated to respond to community members supporting people affected by fire, funded by DHS and The Department of Planning and Community Development. These developments are not reported here, but can be accessed via The Bouverie Centre website (www.bouverie.org.au).

No Bull Support is an elegant example of Drought Counsellors using community development principles to address a need. The need was identified by the Drought Counsellors and an intervention was then developed collaboratively, to build the capacity of local communities to support their own. The intervention, NB Support, assisted Drought Counsellors to extend their referral reach to rural communities that are traditionally difficult to engage. The NB Support program provided professional counsellors with the opportunity to gird the community’s natural supports with debriefing, collegial support, training and self-care (which professional counsellors see as necessary to their work) and created opportunities for these two groups to form an ongoing relationship.

Whilst NB Support emerged as a state-wide project that integrated counselling and community development components, local CIG developed their own specific projects that led to a blurring of the line between counselling and community development. One example, pamper days, is explored in the following section.

Pamper Days

Pamper days (a day of relaxation and comfort to help distract people from the constant impact of the drought) helped Drought Counsellors interact with clients directly, provided opportunities to engage people in one-on-one counselling and also provided a kick start for community members to run their own events. As one community member involved in a pamper day said,

“This isn’t so hard, we could organise one of these ourselves” (CIG # 4 Gippsland 22/6/07).

Pamper days also allowed individuals to be distracted from their hardship and to access some means of emotional regulation and soothing in a safe environment (through massage, yoga, contact with others, etc). This led to a growing interest in ways to rekindle communities ‘exhausted by chronic drought,’ including ideas to re-energise dormant community networks or activities. This interest found its expression most clearly in the Looking Out For Your Neighbours (LOFYN) workshops, described in the following section.

Looking Out for Your Neighbours

A collaboration between the Victorian Farmers Federation and the Drought Counsellors, the Looking Out For Your Neighbours (LOFYN) workshops encouraged participants to consider what their local community needed in coping with drought. In addition to connecting with others, the LOFYN workshops led to a number of community initiatives, some of which are listed below:

- A women’s gardening group – ‘Where weeding and words merge’.
- Re—instatement of a regular ‘Men’s Breakfast’.
- Getting local people and Centrelink workers together to support each other to fill out grant applications.
- Holding a regular community barbeque.
- Re—invigorating a social group for older people.
- Rekindling consciousness about keeping in touch with older people in the community who don’t need assistance but who would benefit from visits.
- Restarting a local VFF branch after a 4—year hiatus.
- Holding a ‘Women and Men’s health’ program for VFF branch members.

Over the course of the project, 16 LOFYN community workshops were attended by 312 farmers (approximately 20 participants each). The workshops provided significant outcomes for participants as well, as indicated by the evaluation of the program:

“Information about signs and symptoms of stress and depression are helpful, but just the simple act of staying connected is the lifeline” (farmer at LOFYN workshop).

“People were looking around the room at the others ‘just like me’ ... helping each other (fill in the grant applications)...talking about it ... sharing gripes and frustrations and having a laugh...” (phone interview with a participating farmer).

Over time and the involvement in LOFYN and NB Support, along with the many community development strategies that Drought Counsellors drew on to engage clients early in the project, lead to a growing interest in trying to articulate the relationship between drought counselling and community development. The next section addresses this question.

Articulating the relationship between community development and drought counselling

Diagram 3 reflects a growing realisation, reported in the latest critical incident literature (Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, 2007), that only a small percentage of people require one-on-one counselling following an acute disaster, if local community networks and services are supported. Our research found that counselling is needed to help people who are isolated, unable or unwilling to be supported by local community networks to re-engage with some form of natural community and it may be needed by people who are impacted traumatically in such a way that professional skills are required to assist their recovery (for instance, people with pre-existing mental health issues who become highly symptomatic under the stress and strain of trying to manage through difficult times).

The current research suggests that non-pathologising, practical counselling models may be particularly helpful in providing accessible individual or family support and have the added benefit of facilitating re-connection with the community (*No Bull* - February 2008, p. 6). The work done by the Drought Counsellors and articulated by The Bouverie Centre: NEWS (Normalising, Educating, Warmth and Strength-based work), and the counselling models developed by The Bouverie Centre and adapted by the Drought Counsellors: Single Session Therapy (SST) and No Bullshit Therapy (NBT) met these criteria. Judith Herman (1997) points out that the main goal of debriefing in trauma work is to re-connect the person with an appropriate network.

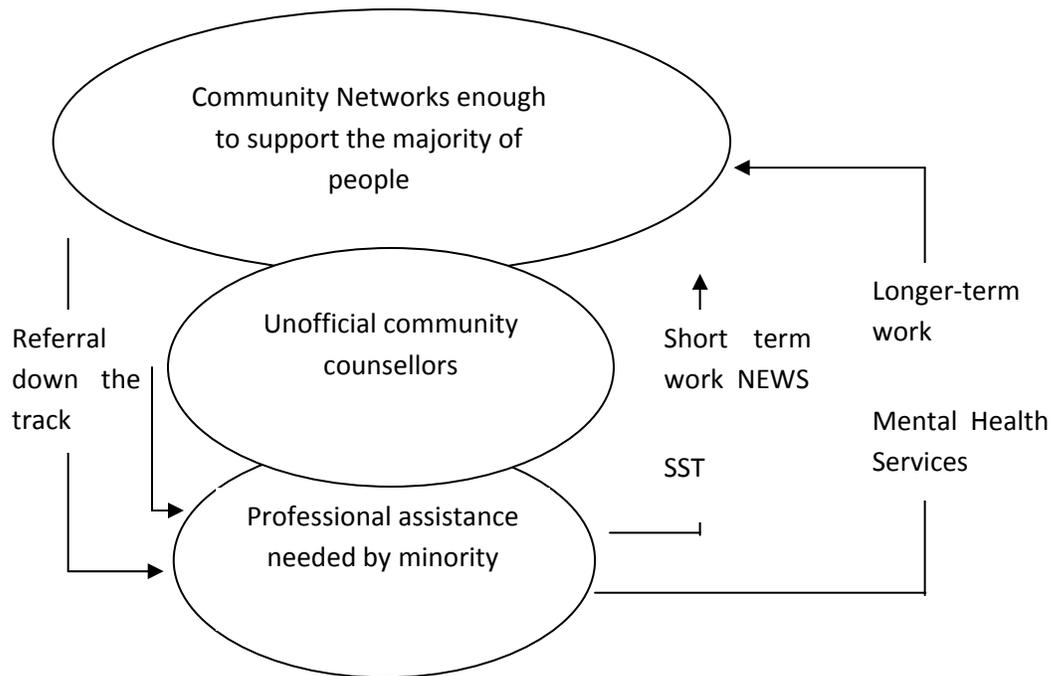


Diagram 3: The relationship between community supports and counselling

Community development and counselling approaches are often separated by government policy, funding sources, job descriptions and the philosophical stance, interest, personality and training of the worker. Yet on-the-ground experience from this research clearly found a need and an advantage to considering these two approaches as integral to a comprehensive drought recovery plan. This finding is in keeping with the report to government of the Social Impact of Drought expert panel, which recommends that: “Community development initiatives, such as community socialising events, should have clear objectives aimed at linking farming families and rural communities with various human service providers and /or facilitate clear referral pathways” (Kenny, 2008, pp. 26, recommendation 28). Reciprocally, counsellors can practice in ways that promote reconnection to natural social networks within the community, thus promoting community resilience.

In Diagram 3, I have added the role of the non-professional community counsellors, clearly identified by the research as an important component of the drought recovery response. Family members, friends, and colleagues regularly provide counselling-like support to people directly affected by drought. Acknowledgement that members of the community play this role will allow support for these important but often invisible ‘unofficial community counsellors’ to ensure they are not overwhelmed, and to allow productive relationships to emerge between professional counsellors, unofficial community counsellors and community networks. In this way, counselling and community development activities are inextricably linked in drought work.

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- i. Drought response policy should reflect the inextricable and intrinsic link between community development and direct services such as counselling.
- ii. Interest in NB Support suggests that the program could be used broadly to support communities facing major difficulties but a supportive organisational and inter-professional relationship network is essential to its sustainability.
- iii. Approaches that train up local professionals to support the members of the general local community who support people affected by natural disasters should be further investigated.
- iv. Support for innovative projects that connect key groups who do not typically connect should be considered as a way of promoting useful networking and addressing community division which can occur following severe natural disasters.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: HOW SHOULD DROUGHT COUNSELLING SERVICES BE SET UP FOR FUTURE DROUGHTS?

The intermittent nature of drought means that hard won practice wisdom and service memory of drought recovery can be easily lost, especially if the period between droughts is long and the specialist drought workforce is redeployed in a stop-start funding cycle. Interestingly, a comment made by one farmer during the study may help explain why knowledge is easily lost; he stated that “although the risk of drought is greater for farmers than fire, farmers and the community are probably better prepared for fire than drought because the community does not face the perils of drought each year like as it does the risk of fire”.

Community awareness and service system response to drought, including worker networking and relationship building, seems to be intermittent rather than developmental in reflection of the nature of drought and its funding resources. The result of this is that knowledge gained from one drought doesn't necessarily build upon the knowledge gained from previous droughts. CIG members and their colleagues repeatedly argued that long term, co-ordinated planning is required to adequately build the necessary knowledge base and service system to respond effectively to the social impact of drought; namely:

- Co-ordinated funding across federal, state and local government.
- Long term services comprising skilled workers who are networked and co-ordinated with other services. Skilled workers, possibly called Rural Outreach Workers, should be trained in responding to rural change in general (e.g. drought, fire, flood, climate change, socio-economic changes) rather than drought only. Combining the tasks of responding to all natural disasters and rural change make ongoing counselling positions more viable and allows the workers to gain credibility in the community by building strong personal relationships and service networks.
- Local regional multi-agency networks (e.g. drought recovery committees).

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

- Support from within their host agencies and networking opportunities with other similar Rural Outreach Workers.
- Training and support in innovative, effective ways of working with drought and other difficulties in a rural environment (including outreach), approaches that are culturally sensitive to rural groups, and strategies that integrate counselling and a whole-of-community approach.

- Access to collaborative research, development and documentation between front line workers and academic institutions to build greater evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence around rural change that is exacerbated by natural disasters and climate change. This work will need to challenge current counselling practices and be guided by innovation that flexibly responds to the constraints and opportunities of rural practice.
- Job descriptions and employment conditions that reflect the service delivery requirements outlined in recent drought evaluations, including this report, such as the ability to provide active outreach and to combine community development and counselling approaches.

Finally, because extreme drought does not attract the same level of community support of other natural disasters, and yet creates major hardship and pain at an individual, family and community level, a concerted effort needs to be made by government to lead a community awareness program about the social impact of drought. Also, the community members who provide support to others but may themselves come to feel overwhelmed, need appropriate supports called for in this and previous drought evaluations (Blau, 2006). Programs such as the one that emerged out of this project (*No Bull* Support) need to be provided to support the natural resilience of affected communities. Drought Counsellors (Rural Outreach Workers) also need support to do their work, given the range of difficulties they encounter and live through themselves as members of the communities in which they work.

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- i. Holistic services where counsellors and community development workers work in concert.
- ii. Innovative projects to support the unofficial community counsellors who are likely to experience compassion fatigue.
- iii. Structures that promote service co-ordination and networking at all levels, including front line workers. Local input is required to influence service delivery because each area is affected differently and has a unique regional culture.
- iv. Any workforce employed to address drought, or fire, flood, extreme weather and rural change responses, needs to be supported and professionalised, including job descriptions and targets that support:

- A combination of community development and direct services;
 - Outreach work; and
 - Facility to provide practical supports and emotional support.
- v. Further research that feeds back into service delivery.
 - vi. Documentation of practice wisdom that can inform future drought and other extreme weather responses.
 - vii. Media campaigns that educate the general community about the disenfranchised nature of drought, and its effects on individuals, families and communities and that promote cohesion.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

DIRECT CLINICAL FEEDBACK

Direct feedback from clients was disappointing. Client numbers were low in new services at the start of the research. Six months into the research, the Drought Counsellors case loads increased but there was a general feeling that the required paperwork was overwhelming, and that clients may retreat — emotionally, physically, or both — if counsellors pulled out their bundle of questionnaires and informed consents. Consequently, there is a need to integrate research into the clinical work and to promote innovative research methods such as farmer-led grass roots research. This suggestion emerged during the current research but a funding application was not successful, and hence remains ripe for future exploration.

LINKS WITH OTHER DATA BASES

The actual numbers of direct clients seen each month by the Drought Counsellors was only estimated by this study via the CIG meetings, but was not comprehensive or necessarily accurate. Much of the work completed by Drought Counsellors was not recorded properly, which had a slightly de-motivating impact on the counsellors, but also missed an opportunity to accurately determine the required mix between direct clinical work and community development work.

With a greater lead time and better planning, clinical research would link better with both the Drought Counsellors work activity and other relevant state-wide data bases, including rates of alcohol-related health and welfare problems, rates of domestic violence, mental health admissions, suicide and suicide attempts.

CONCLUSION

Drought is a chronic, pervasive and yet also intermittent natural disaster that exacerbates the impact of pre-existing socio-economic and climate change challenges in rural communities. Drought also affects people and businesses differently and at different times. Because of these qualities, drought can isolate individuals and place great stress on relationships within families and within the community, leading to increased mental health problems, alcohol and drug use and domestic violence at an individual and family level, and inequity, division and exhaustion at a community level.

Australia is likely to face an increase in drought conditions given predictions of climate change and the history of recurring drought in our country. Combined with socio-economic changes in rural areas, Australia will need to recognise and respond to its status as one of the most climatically variable and dry continents of the world.

A professionalised and supported ongoing counselling workforce may be required to support a range of challenges facing rural communities (drought, fire, flood, climate change, population depletion and socio-economic change). This workforce must be skilled in outreach strategies that draw on community development knowledge and counselling approaches that facilitate people to quickly reconnect with community supports. Counselling styles need to be culturally compatible with rural sensibilities and the rural community may benefit from a greater understanding of the nature of drought and the role counselling may play, along with other supports, in surviving predictable challenges such as drought.

Hopefully this summary report accurately reflects the direct experiences of over one hundred drought workers across the state, their colleagues and clients. I welcome comments and critique, and hope that the report will provide a useful contribution to the evidence base and practice wisdom which will guide responses to some of the inevitable challenges rural Australia will face in the future.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Disenfranchised Natural Disaster— The term 'disenfranchised' Natural Disaster is taken from Doka (1989) who used the term disenfranchised grief to describe the experience people have

when their loss is not fully acknowledged by the general community including the structures such as rituals, public awards, media coverage and political speeches.

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

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

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

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

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

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

No Bull — Newsletter of the State-funded Drought Counsellors.

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

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

PCPs (Primary Care Partnerships) – Primary Care Partnerships are the regional mechanism in Victoria for supporting integrated, planned partnership development between locally based health and community services, including local government. PCPs are responsible for leading a collaborative approach to developing a range of community—based activities to build community resilience to the effects of the drought.

RFC (Rural Financial Counsellor) — A trained person who provides assistance to primary producers and small rural businesses experiencing financial hardship. Rural Financial Counsellors are funded by federal, state and local governments and governed by local boards of management. They are sometimes confused with ‘Drought Counsellors’ by rural community members.

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

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

Vicarious Traumatism— Traumatic symptoms experienced by someone witnessing or hearing about another person’s, family’s or community’s experience of trauma.

REFERENCES

- Alston, M. (2005). Forging a New Paradigm for Australian Rural Social Work Practice. *Rural Society*, 15(2), 276-282.
- Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health. (2007). Australian Guidelines for the Treatment of Adults with Acute Stress Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Melbourne, Victoria: ACPMH.
- Australian Healthcare Associates. (2006). *Final Report: Evaluation of the Drought Counselling Assistance Package Funded Under the Family Relationships Service Program (FRSP) o. Document Number)*
- Blau, G. (2006). *Countering Drought: Manual of Creative Community Solutions: Deakin University, Burwoodo. Document Number)*
- Boyhan, P. (1996). Clients' Perceptions Of Single Session Consultations As An Option Waiting For Family Therapy. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 17(2), 85-96.
- Briggs, J., O'Hagan, R., & North East AgCare Incorporated. (2005). *Drought survival and revival in north east Victoria dairying communities : a Study of the socio-economic impact of drought on dairying communities, Kiewa Valley and Corryong District. Victoria: North East AsCare Incorporatedo. Document Number)*
- CIG # 1 Gippsland 23/3/07 - Summary.
- CIG # 2 Gippsland 20/4/07 - Summary.
- CIG # 4 Gippsland 22/6/07.
- CIG # 4 Loddon Mallee 18/6/07 - Summary.
- CIG # 5 Gippsland 3/8/07 - Summary.
- CIG # 5 Loddon Mallee 17/7/07 - Summary.
- CIG # 15 Gippsland 28/8/08 - Final CIG.
- CIGAR # 2 23/4/07 - Transcript.

Cusack, J., Deane, F. P., Wilson, C. J., & Ciarrochi, J. (2004). Who Influence Men to go to Therapy? Reports from Men Attending Psychological Services. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 26(3), 271 - 283.

Department of Human Services (DHS). (2006). Guidelines for the community health generalist/drought focused counsellors In P. H. Branch (Ed.).

Department of Human Services [DHS]. (2007). Sustaining community wellbeing in drought initiative: 2007-08 Counselling guidelines.

Doka, K. J. (1989). *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*. Lexington, MA.: Lexington Books.

Doka, K. J. (1989). *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*. Lexington, MA.: Lexington Books.

Figley, C. (1995). Compassion Fatigue: Towards a new understanding of the cost of caring. In B. H. Stamm (Ed.), *Secondary Traumatic Stress: Self-Care Issues for Clinicians, Researchers, and Educators*. Lutherville, MD: Sidran Press.

Herman, J. (1997). *Truama and Recovery: The aftermath of violence - from domestic abuse to political terror*. New York: Basic Books.

Johnston, I. (2003). *Drought Counselling Funding Evaluation: Implementing Services in Rural and Regional Areas: Relationships Australia*. Document Number)

Kenny, P. (2008). *Its about People: Changing Perspectives: A Report to Government by an Expert Social Panel on Dryness*. Retrieved. from http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/drought/national_review_of_drought_policy/social_assessment/dryness-report.

Lackey, N. S. (1995). *Some Motivations and Expectations of Rural Men Regarding Professional Counselling Services: "You can't just go to town and get counselling"*. University of Toronto, Toronto.

Lennon, D. (2008, 11/10). Email. In J. Young (Ed.). Bendigo: ABC Radio.

No Bull - February 2008.

No Bull - October 2007.

- Reason, P., & Rowan, J. (1981). *Human inquiry : a sourcebook of new paradigm research* (Vol.). New York: John Wiley & Son Ltd.
- Stehlik, D. (2003). Australian drought as lived experience: Social and community impacts
- In L. C. Botterill & M. Fisher (Eds.), *Beyond Drought: People, policy and perspectives*. Collingwood, Australia: CSIRO.
- Talmon, M. (1990). *Single-Session Therapy: Maximising the Effect of the First (and often only) Therapeutic Encounter*. San Francisco: Kpsseu-Boss.
- Tauridsky, E., & Young, J. (2009). *Farm Gate Cold Calling: An evaluation of the practices of farm gate 'cold calling' in the Campaspe Shire (Commissioned Report)* o. Document Number)
- Towong Shire. (2005). *Towong Shire Emergency Drought Response: Principles, Strategies and Pitfalls of Emergency Management in Small Rural Communities*. Tallangatta, Victoriao. Document Number)
- West, B., & Smith, P. (1996). Drought, discourse, and Durkheim: a research note. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 32(1), 93 - 102.
- Young, J. (1997). Single-session therapy: Capturing the moment. *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 4(1), 18-23.