

NO BULL

april 07

INDEX

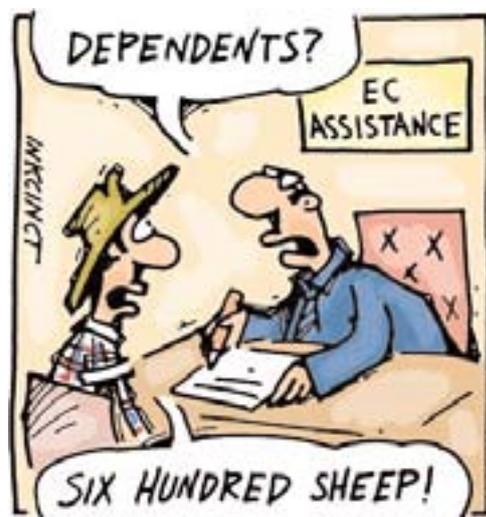
drought counsellor profiles p2 • research notes p3 • success stories p4 • working ideas p5 • solutions from the front line p5 • photo comp p5 • no bullshit therapy p6 • counselling notes p6 • article review p7 • cigs p7

A Dry Run

Welcome to the first edition of *No Bull*; a dry run to see if a newsletter of this sort will be useful. *No Bull* is published by The Bouverie Centre, as part of its role to support Drought Counsellors and research effective ways to promote social and emotional health in rural communities affected by drought.

No Bull is the newsletter of the state-funded Drought Counsellors. However, 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 recently employed across Victoria. Underlying the dilemma of what Drought Counsellors should be called, is a more important question; how best to provide social and emotional support to rural people, families and communities affected by drought?

This is a big question because the impact of drought is so pervasive. Yet much wisdom already exists as Australia has survived drought many times in our history, and Victoria has had a dry run for up to 8-9 years in some areas this time around. *No Bull* hopes to collate and share useful information and practical resources so knowledge is not lost and workers don't have to 'reinvent the wheel'. Over the year, our hope is that the content of *No Bull* will be shaped more and more by its readership. We invite contributions of ideas, struggles, practical resources related to the drought, as well as stories of survival, hope and the indomitable Australian character. In keeping with the title, we also invite *No Bull* feedback; honest, direct and thoughtfully constructive.



No one group or organization can provide an effective response to the drought alone. But each group can do their bit. Networking and collaboration between different organizations is therefore essential. For some counsellors and support workers this means working outside their comfort zone, linking with GPs, Footy coaches, DPI field workers, Police, Clergy, Accountants, Financial counsellors etc. Each profession and organization has its own culture, rules, style of working, so collaboration, although necessary, is not always easy. It is hoped that in a small way, editions of *No Bull* may help Drought Counsellors speak with others - different groups united by the one goal; helping communities build capital and resilience.

Jeff Young (The Bouverie Centre)
Editor

If you represent an organisation doing its bit for the drought, we'd love to publish a profile of your organisation. If you are interested please contact m.wills@latrobe.edu.au

GIPPSLAND

HUME

LODDON-MALLEE

GRAMPIANS

Profiles

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

Grampians Region

Belinda Lees - 5337 3333 or blees@cafs.org.au
Child and Family Services, Ballarat – 4 days a week.



Background and Experience

Rural - Belinda grew up in Ballarat and has since spent some time living in Melbourne. She returned two years ago and loves being able to park out the front of the supermarket.

Counselling - Belinda's background is in theatre and education, and has only recently moved into counselling. In the past, she has facilitated drama-based

workshops for at-risk groups and survivors of domestic violence.

Special Interests

As stated above, Belinda's background is in theatre and education, and she currently lectures 3rd and 4th year Bachelor of Education students in "Drama and Literature". Her favourite hobby is writing and she loves spending the day in front of the computer. She has recently had a children's play published called "Revenge of the Pickled Warberotroober Workers". (Belinda reports that, "You might guess from the title that it was quite absurd!")

Practice notes

Making an effort to connect and engage. Also, remembering small details in the follow up sessions to show the client they've been on your mind.

Robin Lewington - 0429 027 533
or **robinl@wimmera.unitingcare.org.au**
Wimmera Uniting Care, Warracknabeal – Full time.



Background and Experience

Rural - Previous life: youth work, residential care, nursing (general and psychiatric). Social work: child protection, foster care – UK and Australia.

Counselling - Generalist sole practitioner - hospital and community based (outreach). Family, couple and group work.

Special Interests

Mental health, family violence, gender

roles, community education.

Practice notes

Being straightforward, using lay language, use of self, demonstrating empathy, having a genuine curiosity about people.

Hume Region

Wayne Harris - 5823 7000
or **Wharris@familycare.net.au**
Goulburn Valley Familycare - Shepparton- Part time.



Background and Experience

Rural - Wayne owns 7 acres at Goomalibee via Benalla.

Counselling - Men's Program: Counselling men 2 years. Innovations Project Worker 3 years.

Special Interests

Men's behaviour change. Men's parenting.

Practice notes

Cold calling. Show bag of relevant information. "No Bullshit" approach.

Sandy Rodwell - 5332 2200 or 0427 840 430
or **sandra.rodwell@gvhealth.org.au**
Goulburn Valley Health - Hospital - Part time.



Background and Experience

Rural - Sandy is rural born and bred with a farming background.

Counselling - Sandy has 20 years experience in the Human Services field. She has worked in the psych team with Commonwealth Rehab Services Australia and has spent the past 5 years providing Social Work services to the acute wards at Goulburn Valley Health, which developed her crisis intervention skills.

Sandy has a special interest in grief counselling around disability, illness and end-of-life situations. She also runs self-esteem and vocational counselling groups.

Special Interests

Sandy has a special interest in crisis intervention. Also grief counselling, group work and community development.

Practice notes

No Bullshit Therapy - which Sandy believes she has always used as a basis for her interventions, but overall, she believes she uses an eclectic approach.

Call 1300 655 969 (3pm – 11pm) for telephone drought support, professional debriefing or contact details of your local Drought Counsellor

Drought Personal Support Line

1300 655 696

Justine Clear - 1300 655 969

Wesley Mission Melbourne - 2 days per week.



Background and Experience

Rural - Justine has lived on tank water in an isolated area with no public transport near St Andrews for 16 years. In St Andrews there is the General Store, Pub, Tennis Club and the CFA, and through people, they are all inter-related. Justine has been involved in them all. Justine candidly revealed that "if you can't get the gossip from one place, you'll get it from another - usually told with

good humour". She has been the junior football club secretary for 3 years and is friendly with the stock feed outlet, which along with the Weekly Times, keeps her updated about grain prices and the cost of hay.

Counselling - Life-line training, but Justine believes her work in the local General Store for the last 3 years has provided good training for her current drought counselling work.

Special Interests

Justine is familiar with and interested in the machinations of small country towns.

Practice notes

Justine draws on her interest in people, her knowledge of how people cope and her desire to help out where she can. Justine is married with two boys aged 9 & 11 and has two step daughters aged 23 & 35. Seven months ago she became a step-grandmother!

Gippsland Region

Dianne Robinson - 5182 0270 or 0400 841 271
or Diane.Robinson@ydhs.com.au
 Yarram and District Health Service



Background and Experience

Rural - Di's ancestors have been farming since the year dot, which has led to a complete love of farming. She has a personal understanding of the complexity and difficulties of succession planning, having lost her husband's family dairy farm, that she and her husband had farmed in Alberton for 16 years. For the past 5 years, Di and her husband Ross

have lived in the family farm house on 60 acres. The impact of succession planning fuelled Di's passion to help other farming families.

Counselling - Di has a diploma of counselling from the Australian Institute of Professional counselling.

Special Interests

Di is especially good with 60 + year old men. Di feels great satisfaction when these men are able to open up and is especially touched when they say "I have kept this inside for all these years".

Practice notes

Di understands why people can find it hard to talk to others about their pain. For 15 years Di could not tell anyone in her community about the suicide of her sister, 2 years after Di migrated to Australia. This experience has informed Di about the healing quality of talk. Di, one of nine children, is married with two children, Tess 19 and Tom 17.

Research notes

The Department of Human Services has engaged the Bouverie Centre to facilitate a research project to explore "effective counselling strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities."

Drought counsellors in each region have developed CIGs (Co-operative Inquiry Groups - see pages 7-8 for themes that have emerged to date) to explore effective community development strategy to assist communities affected by drought. See some of the success stories reported by the CIGs on page 4.

People seen by Drought Counsellors can participate in the research by offering advice and feedback about what was and what wasn't helpful. Feedback will be important both to inform counsellors in their day to day work and to inform funding bodies about what helps. Here is a selection of the feedback and advice already received:

Someone who has the skills, knowledge and people skill to tell it how it is and the discretion to treat you like a person with hopes and dreams which have been very bruised.

Better financial support from government. Easier access to support.

More information. Through local papers. Mens groups/women's groups. Hopefully peers respected by the community could be available to help- a bit like AA.

*Get out and talk to someone like **. It makes a hell of a difference.*

Work through wives and partners to get their help in bringing their partners to accept that no man is a mountain and that he doesn't have to stand alone.

Have men counsellors. Show real benefits from counselling. Why attend, etc.

Talk/communicate. Having time off the farm and away- holiday.

Give them information and don't talk down to people. Cut the jargon.

Maybe a pamphlet in the mail detailing what help there is. I didn't know there was any help until our friends told us so maybe a lot of us just don't know what services are out there.

Stress. Unable to pay household bills. Transport of hay costs should be subsidized. No future.

It made me realize 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 realize there was help for people like me.

She was very friendly and made me feel I wasn't alone- that there is help out there.

Nothing good about listening to counsellor talk on about self. Being told what I should do. Having pressure put on me to do what counsellors wanted me to do not what I wanted.

news flash!

We got 90 mm in our rain gauge, something which has not been seen in Horsham for 10 years, very exciting.

Regards, Chris 29/04/07

Success Stories

In this section we highlight some of the innovative and thoughtful ways Drought Counsellors have engaged with their local communities to build resilience and connection in the face of drought.

Rochester & Elmore District Health Service is currently advertising for blokes to act as intermediaries / mentors. They will receive mental health training and supervision from a state funded drought counsellor. Contact Kevin Holmes for further details (ph: 5484 4479 or kholmes@redhs.com.au)

Kerang Community Health Service has developed a voucher system. If someone drops in concerned for another's mental health, they are given a voucher to pass on to their friend/loved one. This voucher entitles the bearer to access a program of their choosing at the centre. Philosophy behind this: "you may not be able to control the drought but you can control your own health care." Contact Elaine Carter, CEO (ph 5451 0200 or elaine@ndchs.org.au).

Pamper Days

Yarram and District Health Service Rural Counselling Pamper Day - sponsored by St Vincent de Paul.

On March 26, 2007, thanks in part to the generous support of St Vincent de Paul, a total of 36 drought affected women from Yarram and surrounds gathered together for a day of pampering including hair styling, massage and facials. Lunch and refreshments were provided, as well as an afternoon of laughter with Sister Dianne of St Vincent de Paul's. According to Di Robinson, Drought Counsellor, not only did the day's events provide participants with a couple of hours respite from the stresses of everyday farm life, but gave them an opportunity to connect with one another and talk about their shared plight. One hundred per cent of participants rated the day as thoroughly enjoyable and many commented about the need for a similar event to be held for the men folk in the community. With this in mind, Di writes that she is "working with community groups to put this into motion".

Contact Di Robinson (0400 841 271 or diane@ruralfamilyresources.com)

"Don't Wait - Talk to a Mate"



Coach the Coach

Coach the Coach is an innovative initiative of Familycare designed to reach the highest risk demographic for suicide and depression in Australia; rural men aged between 15 - 30 years. The program uses the football team structure to reach and educate young men in rural towns to recognise the signs and symptoms of depleting mental health, and to say the right things. It will be piloted with the Goulburn Valley Football League, a major league in the Goulburn Valley, which spans from Echuca in the north, Seymour in the south, Mansfield in the East and Rochester in the West, with Shepparton the hub.

How?

Three coaches and two captains (senior and reserve) from each football team in the league will be trained in "Mental Health First Aid".

The coaches, with the support of the 'Coach the Coach' coordinator, will then deliver brief information sessions to the players at their own club about identifying early warning signs of someone in trouble.

Coach the Coach Vision

"To work at a 'grass roots' level throughout rural Victoria, with all sporting clubs including football, netball, tennis and soccer.

To raise awareness and create a cultural shift in supporting each other's mental health well-being through training and education."

For further information contact Sue Medson of Goulburn Valley Family Care (ph 58237000 or smedson@gvfc.org.au).

Nothing inspires more than a success story.

Send your own success stories to m.wills@latrobe.edu.au

Working ideas emerging thoughts that may be helpful

The unique nature of drought as a community trauma

Drought Counsellors who have also been involved in fire and flood recovery report that rural people are more likely to openly seek counselling support in coping with fire and flood than they are for drought.

Flood and fire are very clear, tangible external crises that can be blamed for the individual and families difficulties, whereas a drought is an insidious, gradual process of attrition. Without an external tangible event to blame, people can tend to blame themselves for making poor decisions for example, and the ongoing nature of drought can put greater pressure on close relationships leading to increased family conflict.

The community, and hence families, are allowed to think about fire and flood differently to drought - there is less stigma and hence everyone is more able to seek help openly. Responses to fire and flood tend to be more social as the whole community joins forces to fight the 'one-off' crisis but due to the insidious and ongoing nature of drought, the impact can be more socially isolating as financial pressures make travel increasingly difficult, and there is no single acute crisis, to rally around.



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

Solutions from the front line

People who are seeking help to pay for school excursions or calculators required for school. Smith family will help (further details: Peter Carr - 0438 596 075).

In one instance, a client who is renting has been without water all year - and has been relying on the local community health care centre to have showers a few times a week. The Drought Counsellor linked her in with the salvos - but a lot of people don't know they can help.

Also \$88 - \$264 Rebates are available for concession cardholders. The non-mains utility relief grant (NMURGS) (which also covers LPG) can purchase water (or LPG bottles) on behalf of an applicant where they meet the hardship criteria.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions/publications.htm> or call the information line on 1800-658-521 to ask for application forms for the NMURGS or Carted Water Rebate.

Share your practical ideas with others: m.wills@latrobe.edu.au



This is the original "Chinese proverb" has wrongly been translated as: A Picture Is Worth One Thousand Words.

In fact, the literal translation is: A Picture's Meaning Can Express Ten Thousand Words.

Please send your photo to m.wills@latrobe.edu.au. We will print photos in subsequent editions of *No Bull* and readers can vote for the photo which they feel best expresses the impact of drought on Victoria. **The photo which**

receives the most votes will win the photographer a weekend away from the farm or work! More details in the next edition of *No Bull*.



Thanks to Kevin Luttrell for sending in the web address of a poem about the drought. 'Where's the water gone', by balladeer and bush poet Merv Webster, born in Goondiwindi, home of racehorse Gunsynd. <http://www.abc.net.au/water/stories/s1888518.htm>

Share your personal thoughts and stories. Email m.wills@latrobe.edu.au

No Bullshit Therapy comes to rural Victoria

A collaboration between The Bouverie Centre and State-funded Drought Counsellors

One-day workshops based on the Bouverie Centre's 'No Bullshit Therapy' will be offered free to all private or public rural workers during the second half of 2007. Workshops will be held in rural regions throughout Victoria, including Barwon South West. Contact Bouverie for details on 9376 9844.



No Bullshit Therapy

No Bullshit Therapy - Striving towards honesty

"An approach that is ideal for men and people who: don't like therapy, have had traumatic experiences and are reluctant to trust do-gooders, see counselling and therapy as a middle class wank, don't like being psychologised, are suspicious of the worker's agenda or motives, have had a lot of unsatisfactory treatment, counselling or therapy and are hard to engage in therapy."

counselling notes

In this section we report anonymously on stories of how people found counselling helpful. It is intended to help explain, in plain language, how talking to a counsellor may be helpful.

People attending counselling because of difficulties that are not easily resolved (eg drought), often report that it was helpful to realize that they were not alone and that what they were experiencing was normal given the stress they are facing.

For example, John, 33, talked to his local drought counsellor because he was feeling very stressed due to increasing tension between him and his employer, a local farmer. Talking to the counsellor, John realised that the increased stress he was experiencing was probably linked to the impact of the drought on his employer. Linking his stress to the impact of the drought was very helpful to John, as he stopped thinking something was wrong with him. Instead John was able to talk with his counsellor about some ways to work better with his stressed boss.

If you have a story of how talk helped, please send it to m.wills@latrobe.edu.au Reading other people's personal accounts of what they endured and how they survived can sometimes be the most effective medicine.

Counselling notes are based on real situations, but names and details are changed to protect privacy.

article in review

Fuller, J., and Broadbent, J., (2006). "Mental health referral role of rural financial counsellors." *Australian Journal Rural Health* 14: 79 - 85

This article points out that rural financial counsellors are often the first port of call for emotional support and referral for farmers affected by drought. They experience less stigma about their service than mental health services do. The article reports on a survey of 103 rural financial counsellors across Australia that found on average 20% of their clients required assistance with social, emotional and stress-related difficulties. Almost half of the rural financial counsellors surveyed found referrals to mental health services difficult because of the lack of accessible services plus the client's reluctance to acknowledge such problems, and yet clients commonly spoke to the financial counsellor about their emotional issues, leading many rural financial counsellors to feel pushed beyond their expertise.

The article calls for networking between counselling services and rural financial counsellors to promote the "window of intervention opportunity". The survey found that rural financial counsellors who had less trouble making counselling referrals had good links with counsellors. Active referrals such as calling the referrer with the client, in the moment, appeared most successful. As one financial counsellor observed:

"It often takes a deliberate effort by myself for them to access help... [that] usually means ringing the counsellor while I am with the client and making an appointment. This offer is often refused by stressed people and a follow up support by telephone may secure an active referral." (page 82)

The article points out that Rural Financial Counsellors were established in 1986 due to drought, depressed commodity prices and increasing interest rates, and come under the Agriculture Advancing Australia rural policy program, and are funded jointly by the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and local governments.

CIGs Co-operative Inquiry Groups

All CIGs have had to determine a way to provide support each other whilst networking with and supporting the broader drought response workforce. The main theme of the early CIGs has been community development and how to engage potential clients. The specific themes and observations of each region are reported below:

Grampians



Main themes & observations

Theme: The general community does not know what counselling can offer.

Observation: Contribute facts and figures about the benefits of counselling in a similar format to information supplied by grain brokers. For example, why go to a counsellor?

Theme: People will seek help once the service is known and respected.

Observation: Despite the big stigma about receiving counselling, one member of the group reported being busy in one region. He had to be very visible for some time before clients engaged with the service. For others, referrals have come from a wide variety of sources across the region, including the local shire, police, welfare officers at schools, women's forums and real estate agents. However, a large part of the role as Drought Counsellor in the Grampians region to date has been community development and education, which has outweighed the counselling component.

Theme: Practical issues need to be addressed first.

Observation: Drought affected people in the region are generally requesting practical assistance before they entertain the need for counselling. The lack of water is particularly impacting hard on people who are not on town supply and are on low income. Cracks in concrete tanks, or the water table being so low that well water is absorbed into the soil when it is delivered, are common problems.

Gippsland



Main themes & observations

Theme: The importance of networking with other groups.

Observation: Working in conjunction with financial counsellors. Farmers and small businesses (the target population) are happy to consult with these human service providers (waiting lists of up to 4 months). Connection/networking with financial counsellors could be promoted by offering secondary support, debriefing or training and support for the 'occasional counsellor'. (see article reviewed on page 6)

Theme: Another topic was about what constitutes a "client contact" and what sort of reporting DHS expects / requires.

Observation: The Current reporting systems struggle with the inextricably intertwined nature of community development (community engagement, health education) and counselling services. Ways of recording contacts, such as chats, cuppa tea therapy, opportunistic contacts when they occur, etc were discussed. Conclusion: an effective drought response may challenge the definition of counselling!

Theme: Demographics and Drought

Observation: For example, over the next five years in the Omeo area, a lot of farmers are approaching retirement age which will lead to potential crises such as no-one in the family to take over the farm or multiple family members needing an income from a farm that can't sustain multiple incomes.

Loddon Mallee



Main themes & observations

Theme: "Cold Calling" as one option of engaging potential clients.

Observation: One particular service randomly picks roads in the shire and visits everyone along that road. Workers take information, and with permission, speak to household about the 3F's: Food, Finance, and Future. To date there has been a 68% response rate.

Theme: Counselling may not be the right approach.

Observation: Strengthening the community's capacity to deal with stress through stress management, relaxation, recreation, massage, etc makes for good mental health.

Theme: The complexities of family finances.

Observation: When a couple separate in this climate, for example, they can't sell the farm, so what can they do?

Theme: "You don't always look to the clients and the provider as being hugely removed."

Observation: Counselling staff are often drought affected. For instance, some families may be trying to support a farm through counselling dollars. While others may not be in this direct position, it will be their friends or neighbours or extended family who are.

Co-operative Inquiry Groups - continued

Hume



Main themes & observations

Theme: Networking.

Observation: While often the source of useful information, there was concern that multiple meetings, plus the associated travel, reduce direct client contact time.

Theme: The secondary “victims” (local businesses) of drought.

Observation: It was noted that despite being unpaid, water cartage companies were often still delivering water out of compassion for farmers' plights.

Theme: Engaging Schools.

Observation: One counsellor commented, “We are looking for a community approach; Drought Counsellors can't do it all.” Schools were mentioned as a potential goldmine of resources for children affected by the drought, since they are local hubs of activity and communication. A suggestion by a member of this group re supporting drought affected children was -“What if the Rotary Clubs (Lions' Clubs, etc.) got together across Victoria and sponsored school breakfasts at rural schools?”

Telephone Counsellors



Main themes & observations

Theme: Emotional support is an optional extra.

Observation: As in regional areas where drought counselling services are new, clients have been slow to engage in the telephone counselling program. The generic term “Drought line” doesn't adequately describe the role it plays. Callers typically ring wanting practical information, money, food, feed for animals and then may start talking about personal issues. Emotional support is seen as an optional extra. Callers are not used to someone caring for them, “I shouldn't complain because there's someone else worse than me”.

Theme: Moving from chat to counselling.

Observation: Telephone Drought Counsellors have had success in engaging clients by generalising about the impact of the drought and then working towards the caller's personal situation. For example, “How are things in your area? How are you coping?” This helps callers to start talking about personal issues.

Theme: General counselling vs drought counselling

Observation: In contrast to Lifeline which has a balance of unsolvable and solvable problems, drought line is dominated by unsolvable ongoing problems. This can leave the listener feeling helpless.

Support for Workers - Drought Personal Support Line (1300 655 969)

As well as supporting people directly affected by the drought, the Drought Personal Support Line (3pm – 11 pm) has the capacity to provide secondary support to any staff who are part of the Drought Relief Initiative. Supporting people affected by drought can be stressful and demanding, and when you're on the road, supervision or debriefing may not be immediately available. The telephone counsellors can help talk through any concerns or issues including suicide or self harm. The service is anonymous and confidential, the counsellors are skilled and experienced, and we encourage you to utilise this service, whether a friend, concerned neighbour, family member or worker of any sort. Shaun Walsh, Project Officer DPSL.

Want to join our mailing list? Send your contact details (mailing address for hard copy and email address for e-copy) to m.wills@latrobe.edu.au