



Victorian Council of Churches
Emergencies Ministry
Newsletter

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*Suffering is not what destroys people, rather “suffering without meaning”.
 (Victor Frankl)*

A Bi Monthly Newsletter

Issue No 9. February 2013

VCC Response to Victorian Fires

VCC EM continues to support affected communities in emergencies

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Operations

VCC EM has responded to or been placed on stand by for number of events across Victoria.

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State Manager heads to Tasmania

Stuart Stuart flies to Tasmania to train volunteers and meet with key leaders to discuss systems and structure options for the faith community

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Research

Stuart shares his understanding on recent research

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VCC supports fire affected communities across the State of Victoria this fire season.

VCC Emergencies Ministry has been extremely busy over the summer, supporting numerous DHS regions, Local Government Areas, towns and communities.

On the 8th January a fire started near Beaufort in the Snake Valley area. The Pyrenees Shire made contact with VCC very early and within 40 minutes of the phone call, Personal Support Workers and Chaplains were in the Relief Centre in Ballarat. VCC then staffed the relief centre in the Snake Valley hall for the next week. Outreach was also provided by volunteers to a number of neighbouring communities.

On the 18th January a fire began in the Aberfeldy area, Gippsland. It has now burnt over 90000 hectares. There was loss of life, stock, buildings and fencing.



The Wellington Shire Relief Centre is located at the Sale Baptist Church. VCC had a presence in that space and then later in the sports centre for over two weeks running 3 shifts per day of five volunteers, sometimes overnight teams were needed. Again, outreach services were activated very early on and VCC provided volunteers to support the towns of Seaton, Glenmaggie and Heyfield. VCC were running volunteers

across Relief, Recovery and Outreach simultaneously.

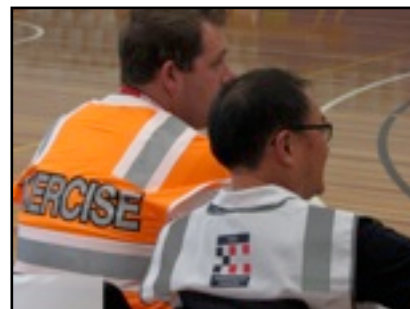
VCC provided support to the Omeo Relief Centre for the Harrietville fires.

Towns in the line of the Grampians fire was also supported by VCC and outreach continues to this day.

At one point VCC were activated in 3 relief centres and on stand by for a further 3 relief centres whilst conducting outreach services.

The Incident Coordination Centre was activated at the VCC offices and staffed by 7 people.

Thank you to everyone who responded to the call, without it, this would not be possible.



Operations:

Debbie Laphorne

A significant amount of work has occurred in the operations area of the program.

Events

January 8th

Beaufort - Snake Valley Fires

January 18th

Aberfeldy Fires

January 2013

Harrietville Fires

February 14th

Grampians Complex Fires

EXERCISES

FEBRUARY 13th

Knox City Council Emergency Relief Centre exercise

Boroondara City Council Emergency Relief Exercise.

Training & Development

Craig Campbell

530 attended accreditation or refresher Chaplain/PSW volunteer training, developing volunteer capacity; 39 Module A Coordinator training and 44 Module B Coordinator training, greatly strengthening middle management capacity; 77 attending specific Multi-Faith seminars, deepening mutual understanding across the faith communities of Victoria.

This improvement in volunteer capacity is complemented by substantial development in middle management capacity. Debbie Laphorne's development and delivery of Incident Activity Coordinator (Module B) training with 44 volunteers has been demonstrated as highly effective in delivering quality service with affected people and Shires.

Module A training has also been developed and delivered to 39 Coordinators, better preparing them for recruiting and retaining volunteers, and building the quality of our connection with Local Government and DHS.

The twelve month Multi-Faith Project Officer position has brought very effective focus to training and to the general culture and awareness of VCC EM personnel.

A further 40 people have been trained through January 2013 in two further Accreditation Training events, and a full schedule of training events is listed and developing for the rest of the year.

11 of 17 (65%) Regional Coordinator positions are filled
57 of 79 (72%) Area Coordinator positions are filled
Again, the Coordinator training activity has increased the readiness and capacity of Coordinators in place.

**TOTAL NUMBER OF
VOLUNTEERS AS AT END
OF DECEMBER 2012**

1700

Volunteer Skill & Training Audit

23% have skills and training in:

- Grief and Loss
- Mental Health
- Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)
- Emergency Management Liaison Officer (EMLO)
- Australasian Inter service Incident Management Systems (AIIMS)
- Intro to Relief & Recovery Centres
- Intro to Emergency Management
- DHS Personal Support
- Other Chaplaincy

2/3rds of our volunteer base also have significant Pastoral Care training and experience.



State Manager Stuart Stuart visits Tasmania to train volunteers and meet with Government

A huge fire burnt out of control in the Dunalley area of Tasmania in the Sorrel Shire in January this year.

The faith community responded and supported affected communities.

It was identified early on that some form of training would be useful for Clergy and Lay volunteers, as many had no formal training in response to emergencies like this.

Stuart spent a week in Hobart working with Major Graham Roberts, Tasmanian Council of Churches (TCC) President to establish protocols and systems that would suit the Tasmanian context.

Almost 60 people were trained during this week and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. UnitingCare teams were also present and keen to do further training in this area.

VCC continue to support the TCC by completing all of the administrative requirements for registration, so producing ID cards, sending out certificates of attendance and the development of a database for TCC.

Stuart took a tour of the fire affected area see get a perspective of the size and magnitude of the fires. "I couldn't believe how big this fire was. You seemed to drive forever and the landscape was black".

During the training, a number of participants shared stories they had been told by affected individuals. One story of survival was recounted like this:

"a father of 5 children goes on a bush walking expedition, his wife heads into Hobart for a funeral, and they leave the children with their grandparents for the day. The fire roars down the valley and the only place for the grandparents to retreat is in the bay hiding under an old wooden pier with the children. The grandfather protects his wife and

grandchildren by using his hat as a bucket to put out spot fires on the pier."

This was just one story shared among the group during training, which gave an opportunity for informal debriefing to take place in a safe environment.