



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 8. November 2012

Multiple responses to Emergencies

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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Multiple Exercises and Responses to Emergencies keep volunteers busy

The last two months have seen some very extensive work by the Emergencies Ministry program.

The program has supported Municipal Exercises with Hume City Council, Darebin Council, Stonnington Council, Corangamite Shire, and Macedon Ranges Shire. On one day, 16th October, three exercises were running consecutively.

VCC EM has also responded to three events. Melton Shire requested that VCC Em conduct outreach along Blackhill Road to gauge how the residents were travelling after the body of Jill Meagher's was discovered in their quiet street.

Many residents contacted the Melton Shire thanking them for sending the VCC out to see how they were.



Volunteers responding to Coolaroo Incident

The second incident was in Coolaroo, where three young people were tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident.

A number of young people had gathered at the site of the collision, a few had decided to camp there. Hume City Council requested that VCC

volunteers attend the site each night from 7pm til 11pm to engage the young people in finding alternative ways to express their grief and an alternate safer space to do so.

Teams maintained a presence engaging the young people from Monday 12th through 19th November. By Saturday, all young people had removed themselves from the site.

Lastly, Wyndham City Council called asking for a VCC presence at the candlelight vigil in Point Cook for Sarah Cafferkey. Volunteers provided an opportunity for people to talk about their experience of having an event like this take place in their neighbourhood.



Coolaroo Incident



Operations:

Debbie Laphorne

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

Events

June 26, 2012

Petrol Tanker roll over, Mildura
VCC EM on stand by for Personal Support to evacuated caravan park residents.

June 30, 2012

Gippsland predicted rainfall
VCC EM on stand by - stood down next day

July 5, 2012

Dunkeld Fire - Information contact to VCC EM

July 9, 2012

Operational readiness, rain event NE Victoria

July 11, 2012

HOBEX - pre exercise briefing

July 13, 2012

Stonnington City Council - Gas Leak - Evacuation.
VCC EM on stand by.

July 18, 2012

Airport power outage - contact by DHS
VCC EM on stand by.

July 19, 2012

HOBEX - Hobsons Bay City Council Emergency Exercise.

Involved were 13 Personal Support Workers, Metro West Regional Coordinator, Hobsons Bay and Wyndham Area Coordinators.

September 12th, 2012

Numurkah - Child Fatality - supporting soccer club.

October 6th, 2012

Outreach support for Blackhill Road residents - Jill Meagher

Oct 16th, 2012

Darebin Exercise – 11 volunteers + management staff

Stonnington Exercise – table top

Barwon South West Exercise – table top

Oct 24th, 2012

Hume City Council Exercise Swift Parrot - 11 volunteers supported the exercise

Nov 12th to 19th, 2012

Coolaroo Triple Fatality – supporting Hume City Council and young people.

Nov 22nd, 2012

Point Cook community candlelight vigil for Sarah Cafferkey

Training & Development

Craig Campbell

A significant training program was developed for 2012. There has been considerable interest in training since the middle of 2011.

With the implementation of the new VCC EM website, people are able to see training dates and locations as well as apply for training online. This is a huge benefit to both the program and those trying to access training.

2012 has seen substantial structural development, especially in middle management capacity:

The numbers are always quite fluid, however we have about 54 of 79 Area Coordinator positions filled (69%) and 11 of 16 Regional Coordinator positions filled (68%). This has us ahead of our strategic plan schedule.

Importantly our capacity has been enlarged through implementation of newly developed Advanced Training for Coordinators, with 32 completing Module A (Preparation) and 44 completing Module B (Deployment).

Incident Control Centre training on 19th November will enlarge capacity at State Office level to manage large events – 4 volunteers undertook ICC training.

This growth of middle management capacity has proven itself in our response to the Hume Region floods and in other events through the year, and has been further demonstrated in an energetic annual Coordinators Conference.

Level 1 & Level 2 Training 2012

478

Coordinators Training Module B

End 2011		
	CBD	2
April		
	CBD	10
July		
	CBD	3
Aug 8	Mirboo North	10
Aug 20		
	Wangaratta	9
Oct 8		
	CBD	6
Nov 19		
	CBD	4
		44

Coordinators Training Module A

Oct 24	Carlton	32
		32

ICC Training

Nov 19		4
		4

Multi Faith Seminars

21 April		
	Kinglake	14
31 May		
	Islamic Council of Victoria	60
		74

TOTAL PEOPLE TRAINED TO DATE in 2012 632
(includes those undertaking update training plus new trainees)

TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS AS AT END OF NOVEMBER 2012

1700

Volunteer Skill & Training Audit

312 volunteers or 18.35% 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.



Coordinators at this years conference



Carmel Flynn, Director EMB opening conference



ICC training

Coordinators Conference 2012

Coordinators Conference 2012 held on 26th October.

This year the Coordinators Conference was held at The Salvation Army Hall in Carlton.

Again, we had record numbers of Coordinators attend the conference with 32 volunteers from all over the State.

Carmel Flynn, Director Emergency Management Branch, Department of Health and Human Services kindly opened the conference. Carmel acknowledged the long standing positive relationship between DHHS and the VCC and her continued support of the program into the future. She also commended the work of the VCC and the value it has in the community especially in times of emergency.

Craig Campbell then delivered the module A curriculum for coordinators.

As well, coordinators had an opportunity to meet each other, some from very different parts of the State with different experiences.

Incident Coordination Training

ICC Training 19th November 2012

Training and exercising is not just for the volunteers and local coordinators. On the 19th November 2012, 4 people went through a training program with the State Manager, Stuart Stuart in how to run an Incident Coordination Centre in large scale events.

The members were given an overview of the AIIMS structure which is a recognised model of managing large scale events and consistent with other emergency service organisations.

Members were then put into an exercise with three Level 3 incidents running consecutively.

There were two fire events, one in Barwon South West, one in Loddon Mallee, and the third was a train accident in Sydenham.

This was possibly a little over zealous, but the volunteers handled the pressure well and what was impressive is that they were able to get a first shift of volunteers to each event within an hour.

These people will now be called into a Level 2 or 3 incident to back up the State Management team.



Multi-faith project

Martin West

Exercises

In July Hobsons Bay City Council held "HOBEX" in Altona. As part of the exercise, forty local residents who are newly arrived Karen Burmese refugees were brought into the emergency relief centre. Four Karen-speaking personal support workers played a crucial role in interpreting and supporting this group. A Vietnamese-speaking personal support worker and a Buddhist monk who speaks Indonesian and several Chinese languages were also involved.

In October Muslim, Buddhist and Assyrian Chaldean volunteers have been involved in exercises with Darebin City Council and Hume City Council.

Airport Chaplains

Any visitor to Melbourne Airport is struck by how international an environment it is. To respond effectively to an emergency at Melbourne Airport we need chaplains and personal support workers from different religions, with varied language skills. We have already recruited Buddhist and Muslim chaplains who speak Indonesian, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Malay, Mandarin, Hokkien, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Thai and

Lao. We hope to soon recruit Hindu and Sikh chaplains who will speak even more languages.

Training

We have trained sixty-six Buddhist volunteers, thirty Muslim volunteers, two Hindu volunteers and one Sikh volunteer.

For many non-Christian volunteers, simply joining VCC Emergencies Ministry is a big step into the unknown. Therefore, we have aimed to bring our training to the community rather than asking the community to come to us.

We have held training sessions at Quang Minh Temple in Braybrook, at Hoa Nghiem Temple in Springvale South, at Medicine Buddha Centre in Frankston South, and the Virgin Mary Mosque in Hoppers Crossing. We are very grateful for the support we have had from Buddhist monks and nuns and Muslim imams for welcoming us and promoting volunteering with VCC Emergencies Ministry in their community.

We are holding discussions with a Hindu temple and a Sikh gurdwara about holding training with them.

While these training sessions are targeted at these communities, they are open to volunteers from all the major religions. We have had Christians and Muslims attend the training sessions we held in Buddhist temples, and they were made to feel very welcome.

Partnerships

VCC Emergencies Ministry works in partnership with the Islamic Council of Victoria and Muslim Emergency Management Organisation (MEMO).

In May the Islamic Council of Victoria hosted an information session on Islam, Muslims and emergencies. We were delighted that sixty of our volunteers came out on a weeknight to this session.

Muslim volunteers who complete our training are also registered as volunteers with MEMO. In November we held a joint training with MEMO at the Virgin Mary Mosque in Hoppers Crossing.



Research

New research is emerging related to the benefits of providing an holistic broad based psycho-spiritual care framework for disaster trauma affected individuals and communities

There is a growing body of evidence, especially from within the Social Work and Psychology literature of the understanding and importance of spirituality, religion and its effects on trauma recovery.

In practice, health care professionals are increasingly identifying the importance of religion and spirituality in post emergency personal support. Janoff-Bulman (1992) states that "positive coping develops out of a sorting through the impact of a disrupted worldview to incorporate a new view, which includes the trauma experience."

People need the opportunity and time to talk about their experience, to language the event as they understand it and to find new meaning in that experience.

Through this process of new self discovery, some people will begin to question their identity. They may begin to ask questions about a new worldview having been touched by significant stress. And these questions may include exploring the spiritual or religious paradigm. In fact, Bulman (1992) argues that an individuals pre existing worldview is no longer viable post trauma, and as a result individuals face an overwhelming coping task. Vis (2008) states "research in the area of posttraumatic growth has suggested that the immediate reaction to trauma challenges an individuals worldview and meaning." She goes on to assert that spirituality is an extension of worldview, coping and meaning making, and is essential to healthy posttraumatic processing.

For many years, trauma has been the domain of social work and psychologists alone. The function of trauma and its effects on brain activity and emotional reactions has been essentially locked away in the world of psychology. However, Parlotz

(2002) says, "we wonder whether individuals can fully determine the answers to any of these questions without some attention to transcendent meaning making. The experience of trauma cannot be simply seen as a cognitive, behavioural, psychological, or sociological encounter. It is also a spiritual experience, if for no other reason that it forces a partial, if not total, reorganisation of the value system and worldview of the victims as they process the event."

In my own clinical practice, I remember patients coming to see me, people who did not prescribe to a faith, religion or spiritual paradigm. They would begin talking about their traumatic event, and invariably they would begin to ask questions about the broader issues of life, its meaning now post the event. Some would go further and begin to question their identity, who am I? And others would ponder and wonder about something, someone beyond the physical that is somehow connected to them or their experience.

During post emergency outreach and relief and recovery campaigns we have heard many stories of people talking about how they believed someone or something was 'looking after them'. Others (non religious people) have said, 'I am sure there was an angel watching over me today' as they tell of their near death experience.

People will look to find comfort in all sorts of different ways, including the belief that there is something beyond the physical somehow protecting them. And for them that is comforting, adaptive and helpful.

That is not to say that everyone will experience the event the same way or go on to question their worldview in the same way. But there does need to be a recognition that

for some this will be an important part of their journey and will be a part of their posttraumatic growth.

Emmons (1998) states that "religion and spirituality can provide a unifying philosophy of life and serve as an integrating and stabilising force that provides a framework for interpreting life's challenges and provides a resolution to such concerns as suffering, death, tragedy and injustice."

Chaplains and VCC EM Personal Support volunteers come to the emergency space with an understanding of the psychology of trauma. They come with the framework of Psychological First Aid principles and methods, to effectively support trauma affected individuals and families. Importantly, they also come to the space with a deep understanding of the need to integrate psychology and spiritual care.

This notion is also supported by the World Health Organisation policies in disaster response and UNHCR principles in supporting refugees.

Simply understanding the psychology of trauma will not fully support post traumatic growth of an individual, there must be an holistic approach which integrates an understanding of, and values the importance of the spiritual and religion.

**The Rev Stuart Stuart - State Manager
M Em Mgt., B Soc Wk. MAASW**