

Australian Practitioners Emergency Response Network APERN Bulletin 11th April, 2009

A big thankyou to all of the APERN volunteers for your heartfelt generosity and compassion in responding to the needs of so many people affected by the Victorian bush fires. In the past couple of weeks we have been documenting the data and experiences gained during the events. There has also been ongoing consultation with affected communities to ensure that we tie up any loose ends and continue to be sensitive and responsive to their needs. We hope to feed this information back to all volunteers including those who registered their interest to help but were not placed once the emergency needs of affected communities were met.

Beyond APERN`s emergency response, longer-term needs may arise that will require ongoing community-based care and we will keep registered volunteers informed and involved of these initiatives. A Thankyou gathering is being planned at Whittlesea (date to be finalised) and will provide an opportunity for volunteers to meet in person.

- **Update**

Over two months have now passed since the bushfires of Black Saturday devastated so many Victorian communities and we continue to grieve the loss of lives and personal suffering. However, beyond the tragedy is the overwhelming support and goodwill that continues to flow to those affected by the tragedy.

APERN was established as an urgent, compassionate and coordinated response to assist those affected by the tragedy. Practitioners who volunteered their services covered a range of different modalities including Bowen therapy, Chiropractic, Osteopathy, Psychology, Massage, Reflexology, Myotherapy, Naturopathy, Social Work, Traditional Chinese Medicines and essential administrative support.

Despite teething problems arising from a need to match the volunteer practitioners (over 300 people contacted APERN to volunteer) to help with the ever-changing needs of the affected communities, we feel the APERN team coped well in a situation with no precedent.

One of the challenges included trying to meet the health needs and expectations of Emergency Workers who were being deployed in highly stressful and unpredictable circumstances. In some communities, practitioners also assisted affected community members either in their own practices or in Relief Centres. Everybody involved worked incredibly hard in extremely stressful and trying environments and the responses from those receiving treatment was heartening.

Tuesday Browell contacted the Emergency Response Massage International (ERMI) for guidance, who in turn provided us with a systematic and professional protocol for massage therapists to follow. This protocol was then taught to volunteers on-site in fire-affected communities as well as at Endeavour College of Natural Health and the Australian College of Massage.

At a meeting organised by Rickie Nuske at her Whittlesea practice, Psychologist and trauma counsellor, Dr Sam Ginsberg reminded us of the need to acknowledge the collective achievements beyond the individual differences and difficulties. We were learning as we went. The experience would help to refine a future response. He also reminded everyone present that “we can’t give from empty pockets” and to be mindful of the need for practitioners to replenish and nurture themselves as well as those that they care for.

Tying up loose ends

- **(APERN Manual)**

Michael Howard, Honourary Treasurer of APERN and Hands On Health Australia spent many hours working on a manual for APERN, based on the ERMI structure. He was assisted by other members of the APERN network including Emma Gierschick, Tuesday Browell, Rickie Nuske, Liz Lewis, Kallika Bruce, Deanne Lind, Lisa Casanelia, Angela Anderson, Peta Kampman, Tanya O`Sullivan, Bernie Sullivan, and Jodie. This work is still ongoing.

- **Thankyou gathering for APERN volunteers.**

Ivan Peterson from the Whittlesea Council and Uniting Church has kindly offered APERN volunteers (both those who volunteered and those who offered their help) an opportunity to join a general Thank you gathering for all community Volunteers.

Although a date has not yet been fixed, we will keep you posted. It is our hope that all APERN volunteers participate in this gathering with volunteers from other organisations, but that we can also allocate some time and space to respond to any outstanding needs of APERN volunteers. The gathering will also give us an opportunity to discuss **where we go to from here**. Many volunteers have expressed interest in providing ongoing support as health practitioners, administrators and coordinators.

- **Ongoing community support through Hands On Health**

Some Team leaders have continued to liaise with affected communities to discuss the possibility of providing longer-term help by establishing Hands On Health (HOH) programs. Flowerdale and Kinglake West are being explored as communities which may benefit.

A HOH starter Kit (which includes a DVD and manual) is available by contacting Nancy Lowe on nancyhoh@otusnet.com.au or 03 9465 8149. The kit provides communities with an overview of how to establish a HOH program. Dein Vindigni is available to speak to groups interested in planning a longer-term response. If you would like to register interest in being involved in any ongoing response you could also call the **Volunteer line** on **0402 733 443** or **0431 891 789** or apern09@yahoo.com.au and we will get back to you.

Dr Sam Ginsberg has also passed on contact details for those requiring counselling support. The Australian Psychological Society-APS (Melbourne) have counsellors volunteering to assist people affected by the bush fires. See: <http://www.psychology.org.au/>

There is an extensive section offering resources for both health professionals and affected communities that can be freely tapped into. See: <http://www.psychology.org.au/bushfire/briefing/>

- **Financial assistance for exceptional financial hardship**

We are aware that there are programs available for those that have experienced exceptional hardship as individuals or small businesses in their efforts to assist in the bush-fire relief efforts.

More information can be found by calling 1800 180 213 or at: www.dhs.gov.au/bushfireappeal

Email enquiries: vicbushfireappealfund@dhs.vic.gov.au

- **The Murrindindi Shire also has regular updates on its web-site:**

http://www.murrindindi.vic.gov.au/Files/Bushfire_Response_MCHS.pdf

- **Outstanding equipment**

We are still missing a few massage chairs. If you know the location of the any of the following equipment please contact Kalika Bruce elwoodmassage@bigpond.com

- 1 x firm and fold of Murray College (new style)

- 4 x firm and fold (new style) purchased for APERN
- 1 x green (old style) firm and fold (Kallika's)
- 1 x blue (old style) firm and fold (Kallika's)

Once again, on behalf of the APERN Committee we thank you all for your generosity of spirit and service. The collective goodwill and practical, positive contributions have made a big difference to the health and well being of affected communities. We look forward to building on this goodwill as time unfolds and will keep you informed of future developments.

Dein Vindigni
Chairperson
APERN