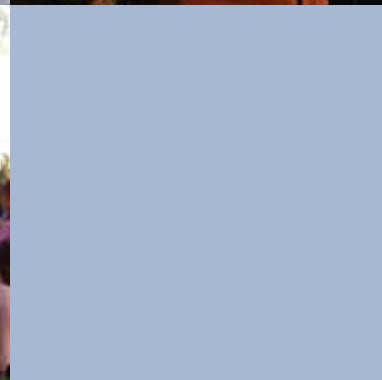
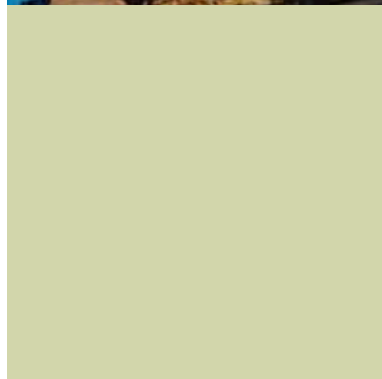




Department of
Primary Industries

Highlights of the Rural Support Program

July 2011 - April 2012



Acknowledgements

Our work over the past few months was made possible only through the partnerships we have developed and fostered and it is those individuals, groups and organisations who we would now like to thank.

Perhaps the most valuable partnerships the Rural Support Program has are those formed with rural and regional communities across New South Wales.

From Albury to Moree, Broken Hill to the Hunter Valley, the co-operation and enthusiasm of local communities and their organisations is essential to our work and we thank them for their generosity.

Our government and non-government partners are also indispensable, and our busy year featured significant collaboration with these groups.

During the recent floods and in emergency management, the Program has enjoyed a great working relationship with Police and Emergency Services, Department of Premier and Cabinet and numerous other agencies. We would particularly like to thank Ross O'Shea from Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The Program had significant support from the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries (DPI), and we would like to acknowledge the Regional Directors, the work of Michael Cashen and the climate team as well as the many extension staff that helped us deliver our activities.

Our association with the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program continues to be strong and we thank Professor Prasuna Reddy, Craig Hart, Jenn Caine and the team.

We have been privileged to work with beyondblue, Rodney Cole from Wesley Lifeforce, and Steve Carroll. David Hill from Skillset has also offered invaluable support during the year.

There have been many others who have provided valuable support, but have not been named individually. If you are in this category, please be assured that you, too, are essential to the building of resilience in communities and we truly appreciate your skills and commitment to rural Australia.

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For updates to this publication, check <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/>

Published by Department of Primary Industries 2012
First published May 2012

ISBN 978 1 74256 282 7

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (May 2012). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information on which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the Leader of the Rural Support Program or the user's independent advisor.

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Foreword

The Rural Support Program has a unique place in the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). It works with communities to enable them to build resilience, have a greater capacity to adapt to a changing climate and manage the impact of variability on economic security and wellbeing.

Rural Support Workers and the Rural Support Program Leader Cheryl Pope work with staff from this Department and other government agencies, many non-government and community organisations to deliver the Program's outcomes.

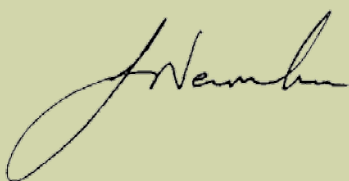
Co-operation and collaboration are the cornerstones of working in this complex system. The team operates across the state and is taking a proactive approach in assisting rural people and their communities to prepare for adverse events. Its reach is wide and its challenges are many.

Since the Program commenced in July, it has delivered 144 activities, including training, workshops and support across the state. By April this year, the Rural Support Program had reached more than 5000 people in more than 70 locations.

The Program also made a huge commitment to supporting rural people following the summer floods which affected 75 per cent of the state.

At the same time it has implemented a project management-based approach to events and has a new monitoring and evaluation framework that will take effect in 2012/13.

The coming year will be equally busy and will continue to provide challenges. I look forward to seeing the Program evolve and capitalise on its successes.



John Newcombe
Acting Director
Skills and Communities Branch
New South Wales Department of Primary Industries

Executive summary

To help rural communities meet their future challenges, DPI has created the Rural Support Program, which delivers training, seminars, workshops and linkages to individuals, businesses and groups across the state.

Focussed on encouraging high quality decision-making and risk management, the Rural Support Workers who operate within the Program aim to build community capacity and resilience through the development of sustainable skills, structures, resources and a commitment to continuously improve as well as an ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

The Rural Support Program draws on the knowledge and skills of existing resources, both within DPI and beyond. The Program's Rural Support Workers and its Leader, Cheryl Pope, collaborate with extension, climate change and emergency personnel as well as community-based service providers and agencies to quickly and effectively respond to the varied needs of rural and regional New South Wales residents.

Over the past 10 months, Rural Support Workers have held 144 activities with more than 5000 farmers and rural residents. These included workshops and seminars on men's health and wellbeing through to farm finance and safety. When the summer floods inundated the state, Rural Support Workers travelled to almost 50 affected areas to provide information on where to get help, whether it was financial, emotional or on the ground assistance.

Next year the Program will continue to build on that work and make changes to ensure rural communities have the best possible chance to be strong, resilient and able to respond to future challenges.



Introduction

Our primary industries are a significant employer and a major contributor to the state's economic and social wellbeing. However, the sector will face significant challenges over the next few years, with changing demographics and climate resulting in different land use and changes to the traditional social fabric of rural communities.

The DPI has an important role to support farming businesses and rural communities to adjust quickly to change and provide them with information, tools, training, and services that businesses and communities need to continue to grow and become more resilient.

The Rural Support Program draws on the strengths of previous programs and works to build social and economic capacity and resilience within rural communities. It works with partners across the state to share the latest information, skills, practices and plans on the issues that matter. The diverse projects that the Program delivers include wellbeing and men's health, succession planning, climate change adaptation, community leadership and governance.

Rural Support Workers also play an important role in linking people and communities with other experts and services that will assist them with their needs.

This document has been put together to show how the Program works and the diverse nature of its activities.

The team

Rural Support Program staff members live and work within rural communities, collaborating with existing DPI programs and community-based service providers to build the capacity and resilience of rural New South Wales.

Leader, Rural Support Program

Cheryl Pope, Orange

Rural Support Workers

Jan Bruce, Grafton
Jenny Croft, Gunnedah
Pip Brown, Dubbo
Caroline Long, Scone
Dick Kearins, Goulburn
Danny Byrnes, Hay
Di Pritchard, Albury

The approach

Rural communities

Rural people live in an environment marked by considerable uncertainty and exposure to multiple, rapid, ongoing changes – economic, social and environmental.

Alongside these changes, rural communities are experiencing more frequent adverse climatic events resulting in emergencies that mean quality decision-making is more important and urgent.

Farmers now need to adapt to the impact of climate variability and adopt new technology to improve their current practices.

Managing personal wellbeing is of great importance and the Rural Support Program works with its partners to help rural people understand how best to manage their health and wellbeing as well as their farming assets.

Through its activities, the Rural Support Program seeks to build individual and community resilience and self-reliance, through the development of social capacity.

Resilience

The Program's definition of resilience is:

"the ability of individuals and communities to recover from an adverse climatic event and adapt to the changed conditions that are a result of the event."

The Federal Government's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, released in 2009, characterises resilient communities as ones where:

- leadership is representative of the community and is visionary and consensus- building;
- all segments of the community are involved in significant community decisions and activities;
- residents are cohesive, with a strong sense of community pride and optimism;
- diversity is embraced by all members of the community;
- there is mutual trust and cooperation; and
- there is evidence of altruism and supportive networks.

***To read this in full go to: <http://tinyurl.com/8x2govl>**

Rural Support Program themes

Prepare rural communities to better manage, plan and respond to adverse climatic events through the delivery of a suite of workshops focused on increasing individual knowledge of climatology and risk management.

Deliver a suite of transformational activities to improve financial literacy and budgeting skills and identify additional sources of farm household income to develop greater economic security for vulnerable farm households.

Strengthen the resilience of individuals and informal networks in rural communities and bridges to support agencies, building the confidence and capacity of individuals to participate in community activities and take control of their future.

Support individuals and rural communities to enhance their existing plans to respond and recover from climatic events, transitioning them to self-reliance immediately following climatic events and resourcing them with skills to seek assistance when their community's capacity is exhausted.

Other organisations

The Rural Support Program has a role as a broker, drawing on the knowledge and skills of existing internal and external resources, including extension, climate change and emergency personnel. Community-based service providers and agencies are also involved in the delivery of information and training to communities.

Collaboration and co-operation are the cornerstones of the Rural Support Program and the search for - and building of - strong partnerships are ongoing.

Partners bring a wide variety of skills and resources to the table and make a significant contribution to achieving Rural Support Program outcomes and driving efficiencies in the service delivery space.

Building social capacity and supporting rural communities

The social capital of a community is a key attribute of its resilience and gives it the capacity to respond and recover from adverse events.

Resilient communities are those with the resources to help themselves and who are in a position to support each other in times of crisis.

Across New South Wales, Rural Support Workers assist rural communities in working to develop a greater voice in the future and become more resilient.

Case study

Helping staff on frontline save lives

As part of the Rural Support Program's role within the New South Wales Suicide Prevention Strategy, it delivers suicide awareness activities.

Figures show there is a higher rate of suicide among farmers and rural workers than amongst their urban counterparts.

In mid-December, Rural Support Worker Jenny Croft organised Rodney Cole of Wesley LifeForce (pictured) to present to government staff after recognising high levels of the stress that farmers in the North West were under. Says Jenny: "These staff are the ones on the frontline."



Rodney Cole

Rodney is a professional trainer in mental health and has had many years' experience in the area. He says there are many factors that contribute to this concerning statistic. These include isolation; stoicism; concerns about privacy and anonymity; a reluctance to seek help; overuse of alcohol and other physical health issues; a lack of services and workers who are able to engage with men.

He says government staff members are often the ones that have direct communication channels to farmers and are faced with the difficult task, at times, of informing farmers of livestock ill health and infection.

"These events are often seen by the farmer as the final straw or trigger event. As a result of this, often people can be left feeling a sense of loss, rejection and failure.



Jenny Croft

"When a crisis is occurring and there is no immediate help available anger, resentment and frustration can often limit a person's ability to problem solve and think clearly. Crisis is often a key risk factor in suicide behaviour."

At six locations, Rodney explained the basics of suicide awareness to DPI and Livestock Health and Pest Authority representatives.

Jenny says often the sessions ran longer than planned due to the high level of interest.

Together with communities, the Program helps develop the skills, social structures and knowledge of the resource base they have available to them; to foster community leadership; develop planning skills; encourage participation; and strengthen local networks.

The activities that the Program delivers are tailored to the needs of individual communities to strengthen their existing capacity, with an emphasis on community participation.

On an on-going basis, the Rural Support Program works with rural communities to implement, reflect on and improve their plans by building on their experiences.

The Program also assists residents of New South Wales' rural communities to understand institutional risk and how it may impact upon them.

For instance, new policies are being implemented at the Federal level to assist people to manage the risk of natural disasters and extended dry periods. The Rural Support Program will help at the state level to improve the rural community's understanding of these changes.

It is not expected that rural communities will be able to implement their plans for preparedness and recovery without assistance for some time.

By building resilience and capacity of community members, the Rural Support Program will ultimately help them to take charge.

Case study

The ABC of farm safety

About 160 students from St Brigid's Primary School in Coonamble took part in a farm safety workshop last December, organised by the Rural Support Program.

Students heard from local police, fire and ambulance services and even a DPI agronomist, who spoke to them about chemicals found on-farm. A teacher and parent qualified in the area also discussed water and farm vehicle safety with students.

Farm safety is a big issue for the school, where almost all of the students live on or visit farms and it is not uncommon for students to come to school bearing evidence of minor farm accidents.

Farm safety also remains a serious issue Australia-wide. In the first three months of 2012, children represented 44 per cent of all on-farm deaths and 19 per cent of non-fatal on-farm injuries.

Pip says there are now plans to roll the Program out to other rural schools. Farm safety programs for adults are also being conducted at field days across the state.



Pip Brown



Jamie Goldsmith explains water safety to students of St Brigid's Primary School while Leonie Goldsmith looks on.



Achievements

The Rural Support Program has worked across New South Wales to build capacity and resilience in rural areas, through workshops, seminars and support delivered to more than 5000 people.

The Rural Support team has delivered initiatives that prepared communities for future climatic events and transformational activities to help households improve financial literacy and budgeting skills to identify the need for additional sources of income.

Rural Support Workers acted to strengthen the resilience of individuals and informal networks and has provided links to support agencies, which was most useful during the recent flooding.

An overview of the Program's activities is shown below and is elaborated upon over the following pages. A selection of case studies is also included throughout the document to demonstrate the scope of the Program's work and the diverse nature of its activities.

Theme	Activities	No. activities	No. attending
Prepare rural communities to better manage, plan and respond to adverse climatic events	Workshops to prepare individuals and rural communities for future climate events through increasing their knowledge of climatology and risk management	72	2849
Deliver a suite of transformational activities to improve financial literacy and budgeting skills and identify additional sources of farm household income	Workshops, seminars and training to improve financial literacy and budgeting skills and identify additional sources of farm household income		
Strengthen resilience of individuals and informal networks in rural communities and bridges to support agencies	Workshops, seminars and training to build the confidence of individuals to participate in community activities in a positive way and access support agencies.	24	596
Support individuals and rural communities to enhance their existing plans to respond and recover from climatic events	Engagement with individuals and rural communities in activities to enhance their existing plans to respond and recover from climatic events	48	1567
		144	5012

Prepare

Benefit to attendee: Attendees will have a better understanding of local climatic trends and drivers of seasonal rainfall variability enabling them to make more informed business decisions

Actions: Delivery of a suite of workshops to prepare individuals and rural communities for future climate events through increasing their knowledge of climatology and risk management

Context: Climate variability and climate change

Purpose: Understanding our climate to better manage, plan and respond to adverse climatic events

Helping rural communities adapt to our changing climate is core business for the Rural Support Program and, as such, features in many of the programs that Rural Support Workers run.

The Rural Support team ran a series of workshops on making the most of climate variability, with Michael Cashen, NSW DPI Climate Risk Management Project Officer, assisting with delivery across NSW.

Farmers are now able to incorporate weather and climate information into their decision making when developing plans for the sustainability of their farm businesses.

A particular success was the collaboration with DPI Dairy Officers to deliver a series of evenings to help prepare dairy farmers for floods anticipated in the North Coast.

They were encouraged to put their flood plans in writing and prepare alternative plans for feeding and milking if inundation occurred. While it is unfortunate the anticipated rains did arrive, dairy farmers were at least able to implement their new plans.

Case study

Dairy farmers write flood plans

If North East dairy farmers were better able to deal with this summer's flooding, it's likely this was in part due to a series of flood preparedness evenings held across the region late last year.

The evenings, sponsored by the Rural Support Program and held in Bellingen, Kempsey, Taree, Coffs Harbour and Grafton, focused on what farmers could do to prepare for flooding.

Says DPI Dairy Officer Julie Dart: "At that time we had predictions we would experience some heavy rains in that area, and we knew floods were coming."

She says staff talked to farmers about writing a plan if flooding occurred. "A lot of them do have those plans in place but they're often in the boss's head. We say to them: 'write them down because, if you get hit by a bus, who is going to know?'"

Issues that farmers needed to consider included how they would feed stock if their farm became isolated. "It could be just a matter of contacting neighbours and getting them to chuck hay over the fence."

She says identifying alternative ways of getting off the farm was also important. "Most of our guys are fairly well prepared, but if they have to truck stock out, they often don't have an alternative route if their road is closed due to flooding. So we talk to them about if police do close the road, you have got to find another way out."

Response to the evening was positive, with a 90 per cent attendance in some areas. The evenings also provided a good forum for farmers to learn from one another about flood strategies. "There was a lot of discussion among farmers about what hasn't worked and things that have worked for them."

Rural Support Worker Jan Bruce, who helped organise the evenings, works closely with dairy officers when floods occur. "We have a meeting after any sort of disaster to talk about any damage and where we can go from there," says Jan.

She says preparing dairy farmers for the extreme climatic events that occur with climate change is now a big part of her role.

"Many farms on the lower country are being inundated now. There's a huge need to plan ahead. We've got to have a way of moving cattle very quickly."



DPI Dairy Officer Raymond Johnston, Taree, at a flood planning evening in Kempsey last December.



Jan Bruce



Deliver

Benefit to attendee: Attendees improve their capacity to provide for their family, build the capacity of their farm household to withstand climatic shocks and remain active members of their rural community

Actions: Delivery of a suite of transformational activities to improve financial literacy and budgeting skills and identify additional sources of farm household income

Context: Economic security and wellbeing

Purpose: Developing greater economic security for vulnerable farm households

Improving the finance and business skills of the state's rural communities is essential to their future viability. As such, the Rural Support Program has carried out a number of activities that focus on these key skills.

In February, the Rural Support team helped farmers plan the future of their businesses, with four successful farm succession workshops held in Central West NSW.

The Rural Support Program also organised '10thousandgirl' founder Zoe Lamont to deliver her well-regarded program in Merriwa and Scone, sharing with local women the basics of life and financial planning.

Case study

Farm succession in the spotlight

In February, Rural Support Program Leader Cheryl Pope helped farmers plan the future of their businesses, through the organisation of four successful farm succession workshops held in Central West NSW.

The workshops were held in response to community demand, with participants taken through information including government programs and assistance; land tenure; conveyancing; interactive business planning; and managing health and wellbeing.

The workshops were presented in conjunction with the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program and brought together local solicitors, accountants, rural financial counsellors, and Centrelink representatives who explained the range of services available to local farmers.



Cheryl Pope

SOUTHERN NEWS

Handing on the family farm

Local farmers and their families have been invited to get the latest information about the ins and outs of farm succession and business continuity planning at free workshops in Canowindra on Wednesday February 22 and Cowra on Thursday February 23.

NSW Department of Primary Industries rural support program leader, Cheryl Pope, said the workshops were being run in response to community demand.

"We've had numerous requests from farm families who want more information about how to start the planning process," Ms Pope said.

"The workshops will give them a starting point and put them on the right path to making decisions which will affect the future of their families," she said.

Ms Pope said participants would be taken through a range of topics and directed to the information they need to make estate and succession

planning decisions.

"Government programs and assistance are available to help people make these significant choices.

"Land tenure, conveyancing, stamp duty, wills, power of attorney, interactive business planning and managing your health and wellbeing will be covered," she said.

Presented in conjunction with the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program, the workshops will bring together local solicitors, accountants, rural financial counsellors, health professionals and Centrelink representatives to explain relevant services which are available to farm families.

The workshops will run from 10am until 1pm at the Canowindra CWA Hall and the Cowra Agricultural Research and Advisory Station with a light lunch provided.

Participants should register by February 16 with Cheryl Pope. Phone: 0428 435 593 or cheryl.pope@dpi.nsw.gov.au.

Just some of the coverage of the Rural Support Program's farm succession workshops last year.

Case study

Goal focus brings changes for Merriwa teen

Eighteen-year-old Cassandra Sutton has been acting a little differently since she took part in the Rural Support Program-sponsored '10thousandgirl' program held in Merriwa last year.

For one, you won't always find her in jeans. When she goes to her office jobs, she'll put on a skirt.

Some of the locals might think she is putting on airs, but Cassandra is confident it is a move in the right direction. "I'm a completely different person."

Cassandra is now focussed on her financial and career goals and she knows she needs to present professionally to get where she's going.

The youngest to take part in the program - typically it is targeted at women aged 25 and over - Cassandra saw clearly the possibilities that her life presented. "The program showed you that you can be what you want to be, if you strive to do it."

Over the two days, Cassandra learnt how to develop and implement career and financial plans from '10thousandgirl' program founder Zoe Lamont and Rural Support Worker Caroline Long. She also heard from Albury-based consultant Sandra Martin on style and image.

Now as well as keeping careful track of her finances, Cassandra has been able to decide what she wants to aim for career-wise: investing in and running her own coffee van.

As well as taking part in the program, Cassandra is a participant in the 100% Knights Program with the Newcastle Knights that targets Indigenous high school students in years 10 to 12 from seven Upper Hunter schools, supporting them in completing school and achieving their post school goals.

Caroline Long, Rural Support Worker from the Upper Hunter, says there was an enormous amount of positivity at each of the sessions, held in Scone and Merriwa.

She says another participant felt so empowered from the financial and career advice she received, she is carving out a new life for herself in Newcastle and is seeking to start a 10thousandgirl GIG (Girl Investment Group) there.

Caroline was inspired to bring the workshops to the region after seeing 10thousandgirl founder Zoe Lamont deliver a session in Sydney. Just 27-years-old, Zoe has worked internationally as a humanitarian and is now a business coach and a passionate social entrepreneur.



Stephen Bell of Ray White Real Estate, Scone, Addresses a '10thousandgirl' life planning workshop in Scone last year.



Caroline Long

Strengthen

Benefit to attendee: Skills to improve their communication, increase their capacity to motivate others and create meaningful networks to support rural communities

Actions: Delivery of a suite of activities to strengthen individuals and informal networks in rural communities and bridges to support agencies and build the confidence of individuals to participate in community activities

Context: Self-reliance within the community and links to support services outside of the immediate community

Purpose: Strengthening the rural voice and the capacity of individuals to take control of their future

Helping communities build their capacity to maintain and improve their region is a high priority for the Rural Support Program. The Rural Support team is confident that by providing residents with the skills, structures and resources they need to make a difference, they will be able to grow their communities and reduce reliance on outside assistance.

In the past year, Rural Support Workers have helped communities set up structures that will help make them more resilient in the future. They ran workshops on engaging men and on how to set up a Men's Shed.

The Program also provided support to the Upper Lachlan Foundation, as residents set up a community trust to fund initiatives that would support the long-term sustainability of their region.

Rural Support Workers raised awareness of health and safety issues, including mental health, suicide awareness and safety on farms.

Men's health and wellbeing has been a particular priority as men are at highest risk. A variety of workshops focussing on this issue have been delivered across the state, including a number hosted by Steve Carroll, an internationally recognised expert in men's health.

Case study

Funding the future of the Upper Lachlan

When more than 600 people turned out to a drought support meeting in Crookwell back in 2006, Rural Support Worker Dick Kearins knew something was up.

Crookwell only has 2000 residents for one. The dinner had been planned with just two weeks' notice, for another.

Discussions at the meeting and the results of the feedback forms submitted at the end of the night soon revealed that this was a community that wanted to work together to help their region survive.

Six years later, it is that same devotion that has led residents of the Upper Lachlan Shire to develop the Upper Lachlan Foundation, which is helping build the sustainability of the community through annual grants.

While Dick still provides some support, the Foundation is driven by the community. To mark the launch of the Foundation, Angry Anderson and local musicians were invited to perform and more than \$5000 was distributed to about 12 community groups.



Dick Kearins

Local community member Ben Carter is chair of the Upper Lachlan Foundation board. He says Dick's help during the early days was important. "Dick was really good because he had a lot of scope and he'd seen a lot of branches and a lot of community organisations trying to do different things."

Dick, meanwhile, is delighted with the results. "I'm really pleased that the Rural Support Program has been able to work with this community to assist them move from providing a crisis response to developing a long term approach ensuring on-going support for the Upper Lachlan community."



Angry Anderson with recipients of Upper Lachlan Foundation funding.

Case study

Less beer, more life for men in the west

Steve Carroll is not your average health professional. Sure he talks about the usual men's health issues: prostate health, cardiovascular disease and bowel cancer, but his language is not what you'd usually find in a consulting room.

It is colourful and it is direct. It also makes rural men listen.

Says Rural Support Worker Danny Byrnes: "He presents stuff the way men like stuff presented. He gets them onside straightaway."

It was Steve's approach that prompted the Rural Support Program to partner with the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP), who had engaged him to speak to a number of communities in 2011. In over 15 locations in western NSW, from Moulamein to White Cliffs, Steve talked exercise, diet and health.

Rural men - and their families - took note.

Danny says he has had a lot of feedback about people changing their ways, which he puts down in part to the simplicity of Steve's message.

"Steve's message is don't go out and change your lifestyle completely because you won't be able to maintain it. He talks about aiming for a 10 per cent change."

Steve is a clinical psychotherapist based in Orange NSW and a national and international expert on health strategies, particularly with regard to men's health.

He says getting guys to talk about their health in a group situation is no easy task, and that straight presenting will get you nowhere.

To get around the wall of silence, Steve spends time scoping the crowd before he starts his presentation. "I have a beer and have a walk round; I can see the ones that want to come up." He makes sure they're willing, but says although his presentations can be confronting, he's always supportive.

Certainly it seems his message is getting through, with 20 to 25 per cent of men who attended the sessions and filled out feedback forms planning to get a check-up. Says Rural Support Program Leader Cheryl Pope: "This is a particularly pleasing outcome for both this program and RAMHP."



Danny Byrnes



Support

Benefit to attendee: Attendees will improve their existing plans to respond and recover from climatic events, while also developing an improved understanding of the role of individuals, communities and governments in managing natural disasters and extended dry periods

Actions: Worked with individuals and rural communities to enhance their existing plans to respond and recover from climatic events

Context: Implementing individual and rural community response and recovery plans and improving these plans through learning for future events

Purpose: Transitioning individuals and rural communities to self-reliance immediately following climatic events and resourcing them with skills to seek assistance when their community's capacity is exhausted

The Rural Support Program has an important role to play in preparing communities for emergencies and helping them recover, when they do occur.

The 2011 Commonwealth of Australian Governments National Strategy for Disaster Resilience demonstrates that communities are now expected to share the responsibility for emergencies.

Giving communities the skills they need to prepare for emergencies is the best long term outcome for rural NSW towns, enabling them to cope with situations independently and reducing the chances of the impact of emergencies reaching critical proportions.

But while the Rural Support Program would like to focus primarily on disaster risk reduction, in these early days, time must still be spent on recovery.

Earlier this year, Rural Support Workers helped NSW rural communities deal with the serious flooding that occurred across the state, at one point threatening to inundate 75 per cent of NSW.

Focussing on the north coast, west and south of the state, Rural Support Workers participated in recovery centres and delivered information sessions outlining support services, loans and grants that were available in more than 50 locations.

Many rural residents suffered psychological stress as a result of the floods and Rural Support Workers played an important role making sure they were linked with an appropriate support agency.

The Rural Support Program also participated in an inter-agency working group, bringing together service providers from across South West New South Wales, to work out how Rural Support Workers can help communities prepare for and recover from disasters.

The heavy rain across NSW in March 2012 resulted in severe damage to the Bribbaree community west of Young for the second time in as many years. Working with the community the Rural Support Program helped overcome labour shortages in the district and get the necessary repairs carried out.

Case study

Helping hands to build fences

In March, the Rural Support Program helped the Bribbaree community address a major labour shortage that was threatening its ability to rebuild after the second major flood in as many years.

The town, located in the Shire of Young, experienced extensive damage to fencing, and while many farms were eligible for Natural Disaster Grant of up to \$15,000, through the NSW Rural Assistance Authority, an acute shortage of labour in the area meant the community would struggle to carry out the work.

At a flood information afternoon, arranged by the Rural Support Program and community members, a need for help with fencing was expressed by 20 per cent of people completing the evaluation sheets.

The Rural Support team followed this up with the Mayor of Young Shire who took up the challenge to work with his community to provide volunteer labour for flood-affected farmers.

BlazeAid, a volunteer group able to assist farmers with fence repair, was contacted and, after the necessary preparations, a basecamp was established at the Bribbaree Showground to provide assistance to farmers in the Young Shire.

The basecamp is supported by the Bribbaree community, service clubs in the Young Shire and Young Shire Council, with volunteers assisting with farm fence repairs since 30 April.

Case study

Working together to deal with disaster

The ability of people living in South West NSW to prepare for and deal with disasters will receive a boost later this year when service providers from across the region gather to talk disaster recovery and resilience.

The providers – who come from government, council and private organisations – are already holding regular meetings in Holbrook to look at how they can work together to tackle the issues facing the region now and in the future.

Now they are organising a two-day conference, supported by Rural Support Worker Di Pritchard in partnership with the Department of Community Services, to find out the best ways to help communities recover from disasters and build their resilience, both before and after disasters occur.

Di says service providers now needed to provide disaster assistance on similar levels to the drought, but with fewer resources. “During the drought times there were a lot of resources put into mental health and support of people. Once the drought was over a lot of the services lost their funding.”

Di says the conference will enable them to explore the aftermath of disasters from different view points, including government, council and private businesses as well as the personal and emotional aspects for people affected.



Di Pritchard

She says the need to build resilience will only increase, with changes in climate still not expected by the bulk of farming communities, and the effects of the floods lasting for some time.

All community sectors will be represented at the conference, including women, farmers, refugees and Indigenous people.

The model developed by the Holbrook interagency working group is just the beginning, according to Di. “It’s a pilot project in its initial stages but if successful we can look at providing the same opportunity around the state.”

Looking forward

In 2012-2013, the Rural Support Program will further the work it began in 2011-2012. The Rural Support team is looking forward to an interagency conference, bringing together service providers from across the Greater Hume Shire, and its members are also excited about taking its workshops and training to new communities.

They have been pleased to see increasing evidence of the resilience and capacity building being implemented across the state.

To ensure it remains relevant and effective, in its second year of operation, a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Program will be implemented. Developed by Pivotal Point Consulting Services, the framework will support consistent monitoring of the Rural Support Program’s progress, and a greater focus on its outcomes and impact. The framework will also provide a valuable basis for more effective collaboration among stakeholders.

Rural Support Workers will build on the widespread community support for its operation. They will continue to bring together suitable service providers and agencies to

meet the identified needs of community.

The Program will build on the positive impacts it has had on farmers and rural communities in preparing for the challenges of the future. It will continue to work closely with DPI’s climate change and emergency management programs, while also helping build more effective linkages with external service providers and agencies.

The team will continue to strengthen the rural service support networks (RSSNs) that proved so valuable during the drought and have a continuing role to play in community development.

While there is much to do in 2012-2013, the Rural Support team is feeling confident. Its first ten months in operation has shown the value it can provide to rural communities and the results that its efforts can garner. The Rural Support Program’s second year is shaping up to be even bigger.

With the immediate impact of the drought and of the recent floods now passed, the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries is focusing on helping to build resilience in rural communities.

The Rural Support Program is concentrating on equipping residents of rural communities - individuals, farms and groups - with the tools and skills they need to tackle the challenges that lie ahead and to optimise their outcomes.

Working with communities, Rural Support Workers help to identify risk areas and scenarios and to plan how they can best prevent, prepare for and recover from events - whatever their nature.

Through workshops, short courses and one-on-one support, they work with partners across the state to share the latest information, skills, practices and plans on the issues that matter: wellbeing, finance, succession planning, climate adaptation and more.

Through extensive networks, they also link people and communities with specialists and services that will assist them with their specific needs.

Interested in finding out more? Contact Rural Support Program Leader Cheryl Pope on 0428 435 593 or email cheryl.pope@dpi.nsw.gov.au.



Department of
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RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAM