

Conclusion

It is nearly five years since those bushfires and on most days people can be reminded of the disaster.

A person who lost everything may still look for a precious or an everyday possession. The loss of a treasured garden is a constant reminder of loss, as are the blackened tree trunks and the deformed erratic re-growth on the trees. Favourite

picnic spots have gone from the mountain. Traditional activities like collecting pine cones from under exotic cedars for Christmas decorations have gone. The neighbour who lived next door pre-disaster and who was unable to return to the blackened area, has gone. Even today people still remember vividly the details of the night that changed their lives and the traumatic recovery they endured.

Anniversaries are remembered, sometimes assisted by the rarely welcome media, but often commemorated as a private occasion.

As a Community Development Officer living and working in my own community, I found the post-disaster phase a rewarding and unique working experience which provided me with a rich life experience.

"THE OUTREACH PROGRAM"

As described in other articles, recovery activities following disaster are many and varied. One system developed in Victoria as a way of making contact with community members in a disaster area is called *The Outreach Program*. This model was developed initially in the Warrnambool area and was put into practice just seven days following the fires. It involved immediate community contact, acquired vital information on who was affected and in what ways, practical requirements, how people were coping, immediate plans, and provided a basis for the management of incoming resources and support services.

The basic objectives were to:

- (a) offer personal support and practical assistance to all those in the disaster affected area
- (b) ensure that people were aware of and had access to the services provided, and to assist with applications
- (c) arrange appropriate referrals for those who seemed in need of specialist services
- (d) establish a link between the people and the more formal recovery structures e.g. the Area Co-ordinating Committee
- (e) provide a data-base of information to

assist with the planning of appropriate services.

Outreach programs were established in all areas affected by the Ash Wednesday fires. Within six weeks 3,500 families had been visited, and follow-up programs were conducted over the next 6 months. The program was most effective when it was integrated with other community activities, and contributed significantly to the successful recovery of the community.

The Rev John Hill
Uniting Church Minister,
formerly resident in the
Warrnambool Fire-Affected
Area 1983.

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

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BOOKS: Author's name and initials; year of publication (in brackets); title of book underline; publisher, page reference, if appropriate.

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3. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum.

4. Each article should be prefaced with a brief resume.

5. Contributors are invited to submit a brief biographical note and a current photograph suitable for printing.

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