



RI DISTRICT 9800

D9800 BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PROGRAM **PROGRESS REPORT NO. 5** **FEBRUARY 2010**

The particular significance of this Report is that it has been written almost one year after the “Black Saturday” Fires. Much has happened in that period of time.

It is frequently said that “time heals”; however, while this is in part a truism it is not relevant to a disaster such as a large bush fire. Indeed, there is a serious negative effect associated with the efflux of time in such a situation, while a disaster will usually create a great welling up of immediate sympathy and assistance, as time passes the impact fades and external support rapidly diminishes while trauma and suffering persist. It is now quite difficult to attract volunteers to continue to assist in the bush fire affected areas of Victoria and agencies that have given so much to help the damaged communities are now beginning to run out of funds and other resources. Also, more recent disasters have occurred: there is “competition” for available resources, and in the current economic situation the “well is very nearly dry”!

The RI D9800 Bushfire Recovery Fund has been conservative in its application of funds to projects up to the present, being fully aware of the likely position that now seems to be emerging. While the Fund is still capable of responding to project proposals, it must be emphasised that money is not the only requirement: there is still considerable need for volunteers and for people to establish and maintain contacts with survivors in the affected communities. Trauma related effects are still a main concern in these areas; according to expert advice that position is not likely to change significantly in the next several years.

Without frontline support, Rotary efforts would simply comprise provision of money for projects until the resources of the Funds are completely dispersed. It will be necessary to devise ways by means of which the Rotary effort can involve leveraging on available funding via human input: this may even require provision of some on-going financial support for some volunteer organisations (including Rotary Clubs) that are prepared to do real work in the Recovery Program.

Make no mistake, a year has passed but there is still great need for assistance in the areas that were affected by the “Black Saturday” and related bush fires! While in some areas considerable progress has been made in others very little has been done.

The greater Kinglake area:

Much of the D9800 effort has been directed to projects in the greater Kinglake area.

Dealing with survivors in that area has been highly dependent on the relationship that we have built up with *Global Care*. That Organisation has done a wonderful job in assisting the community on so many fronts. Unfortunately, while *Global Care* intends to continue with its operation in Kinglake it is clearly beginning to suffer from a reduction in volunteer interest and shortage of funds. That Organisation will have to become less accommodating to demands for help and will have to seek financial support from agencies (including Government) that previously obtained its services at no or very little cost.

A ten day “Stress Relief” Holiday for 26 residents from Kinglake was organised before Christmas in conjunction with Rotary Districts in New Zealand. This was a pilot exercise in which New Zealand Rotarians volunteered to host the visiting party, *Global Care* selected the participants on the basis of its knowledge of needs in the community and provided coordination and transport in Victoria, Jetstar Airways donated the airfares, and D9800 undertook the overall coordination. This was a “brave effort” that was certainly well appreciated by the recipients. Lessons have been learnt from the experience and will be documented so that other bodies that may care to become involved in similar arrangements can benefit from them. There is no doubt that some long term friendships were made between hosts and visitors, in one case the New Zealand host has committed to assist the visiting family that it looked after to rebuild their house!

A Christmas Party for children from primary schools in the greater Kinglake area was held at Kinglake West with the support of the Rotary Clubs of Prahran, Malvern, Chadstone-East Malvern, and Melton Valley. Some 30 families attended and there was opportunity for adults who accompanied the children to come into contact with counselling services operated by *Global Care* and *Yarra Valley Practitioners Project Inc.* The event was very successful in spite of the fact that it was “competing” with other pre-Christmas functions in the area on the day.



Santa Hands Out gifts at Kinglake West

Work continues on development of a Project Proposal for provision of a **Youth Space (Centre) at Kinglake**. The proponent, *Kinglake Youth Space Committee*, is currently finalising a submission to the *Unified Rotary Districts of Victoria and Tasmania Bushfire Recovery Committee*: drafting assistance is being provided directly to the Committee by a senior officer from the *Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR)*.

The *RI D9800 Bushfire Recovery Fund* donated \$30,000 to enable the purchase of a transmitter and other ancillary equipment by *Kinglake Ranges Radio (94.5 FM)*. The Station was officially launched on 29 January 2010. Much recognition was given to Rotary's generous donation during the Launch. It was also interesting to see that marquees donated by D9800 for use at the *Kinglake Farmers and Artisans Market* were being used as shelters during this event. The donation to the Radio Station enabled D9800 to gain experience of FRRR as a conduit for monies from a "Deductible Gift Recipient" endorsed Fund to a project operated by an entity that does not enjoy such endorsement: that task was completed very smoothly.



Marysville:



Marysville Central - The Official of the Opening on 5 December 2009.

Stage 1 of the Project involving refurbishment of the old Marysville Motor Museum as a market and business centre has been completed to a state where business operations in it have commenced. The premises, now called **Marysville Central**, were officially opened on 5 December 2009. The general view in the Marysville Community is that this action has been very beneficial to improvement of confidence in the area, has provided essential services that have not been available to the local community since the February 2009 fire, has provided employment opportunities to local residents, and has benefitted tourism in the area. There is still some substantial work required to bring the premises up to an acceptable standard for a building being accessed by the public: VBRRA has invited Rotary to make a further contribution to the necessary funding required to complete Stage 2. As the total amount involved is likely to be substantial, it is necessary for all Rotary Districts in Victoria and Tasmania to consider this matter in a “collegiate” manner and that action is already in hand.

Our Rotary friends from Turkey (D2420) arranged for a specimen of Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*), sometimes known as “Lone Pine”, to be planted at a ceremony in Gallipoli Park, Marysville on 2 January 2010. This event was organised by Rotarian John Basarin from the Rotary Club of Brighton on behalf of the Turkish Consulate-General. The event was attended by several politicians and other notable persons. The involvement of Rotary in the Bushfire Recovery Program attracted much comment.



Notable Persons at the Event.

The ceremony went very well in spite of the fact that the sponsoring Turkish Rotarians were unable to attend because they were all confined to their cruise ship suffering from food poisoning. The seedling tree is to be re-located to another site in Gallipoli Park on ANZAC Day 2010 and will be accompanied by a plaque expressing the “solidarity” of Rotary in Turkey with the surviving community in Marysville.

Rotary cooperation from Districts outside Victoria and Tasmania:

Continuing on the theme of need for on-going direct inter-personal contact with surviving communities, it is pleasing to report that RI District 9520 has proposed cooperation with D9800 involving teams of workers from South Australian Clubs being organised by the Rotary Club of Brownhill Creek to undertake fencing and other works in Victoria. D9800 has agreed to contribute financially to that effort: some of the work will be undertaken in conjunction with *Global Care* as that Organisation has responsibilities for managing D9800 vehicles, machinery, and equipment loaned to it. It is interesting to note that D9520 has already made substantial financial, in kind, and labour contributions to projects in D9820 (Gippsland). This form of inter-district and inter-club cooperation is very worthwhile and is to be applauded.

Post-audits of projects:

It is important that follow-up be undertaken on projects funded in whole or part from the *RI D9800 Bushfire Recovery Fund* or the *Rotary Emergency Relief Fund* (held at the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation). Post-implementation reports on smaller projects conducted through Clubs are particularly important and it is pleasing to advise that some D9800 Clubs are providing that information. For example, the Rotary Club of Kew on Yarra volunteered an excellent report on the execution of a small project at the Kinglake Kindergarten: that report demonstrated that benefits from a small D9800 donation went far beyond the initial goal, particularly acting as a catalyst for on-going inter-personal contact between Club members and the surviving community. We must remember the sentiment expressed in the saying "From little acorns do mighty oak trees grow".

The generosity of industry:

Last month we were in desperate need of a set of ramps to be able to load our skid steer loader on to a Hino truck.



Ausramp Loading Ramps in Action.

After some research to identify a suitable supplier, a visit was made to *Auswide Industries Pty Ltd* to seek the best possible price for a set of 3.9 metre long, 4.5 tonne load bearing alloy *Ausramps*. After some discussion with the marketing manager it was decided that an approach would be made to the owner of the Company regarding a discount: later that afternoon a phone call was received from the marketing manager advising that the Company wished to donate a set of ramps, they have a normal retail price of \$2,000. There are still many organisations that are very generous and willing to assist Rotary in its work. Rotary's name can certainly "open doors": it is widely recognised as a community service orientated organisation with the highest ethical standards. We should never underestimate the power that this reputation gives to Rotarians and we must always seek to defend that advantage.

In conclusion:

After the first year of the Bushfire Recovery Program much work still remains to be done. Rotary can and is making a difference and is very well recognised and respected for its efforts. Money is not available to do everything that may be required and desirable; however, with judicious application of available funds and leveraging with other inputs, Rotary is making a meaningful contribution to the recovery of individual survivors and their communities. Our reward is in the personal satisfaction gained from the service we provide; however, the time and effort contributed by our members to the cause must never be taken for granted and our heartfelt thank go out to everyone who has supported the RI D9800 Bushfire Recovery Program.

Author:

Mev Connell PSM

Chairman – RI D9800 Bushfire Recovery Committee.

3 February 2010