# The emerging role of the community educator

# A case study on the Lower Eyre Peninsula

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# Executive Summary

The federally funded Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre combines the efforts of more than 30 research, fire, and land management agencies in undertaking research on social, economic, and environmental aspects of bushfire. Project C7, the “Evaluation Framework” project at RMIT, forms part of the program called “Community Self Sufficiency for Fire Safety”.

The Wangary region in South Australia has a population of 14,000 people, is some 650 km from Adelaide and supports businesses in grain, grazing, fishing, and tourism.

On 11 January 2005, a bushfire burnt through approximately 78,000 hectares leaving 9 people dead, 93 homes, many other buildings, vehicles, and 46,000 head of stock destroyed.

The Community Education Unit of the South Australian Country Fire Service requested Project C7 to conduct a study of the emerging role of the Community Education (CE) worker.

Accordingly research was undertaken to investigate the Community Education program in the Wangary area, the effectiveness of the program, and, in particular, the role, function, and success of the newly appointed Community Education Officer.

The Wangary Community Education Officer was appointed some eight months after the fire and her appointment was the first appointment of a Community Education Officer for the region. The bulk of the data collection for this project was done some 18 months after her initial appointment and represents a snapshot of what was clearly a work in progress.

The report makes a number of findings and offers a number of observations and suggestions which are summarised in the early part of this document.

The key findings are that:

- The Community Education Officer, through her diligence, her energy and her initiative, has been responsible for the conception and implementation of a successful community education program in the Wangary region.
- The CFS is to be commended on the initiative involved in the initial appointment, on the support shown to the Officer and the program, and

for allowing the Officer the freedom to develop the program as she saw fit.

- The Wangary Region Community Education Program has and will form a model for future programs. This is in large part due to the flexibility with which it has developed allowing for local initiatives to be pursued. The Community Education role in other parts of South Australia could be compared and contrasted with that of the worker on the Lower Eyre.
- The experience and understanding of community education provided by the Wangary Community Education program has suggested ways in which programs of this type might be enhanced in the future. It is to be hoped that the fire services will find the resources and the will to investigate these future possibilities.

# Summary

## Research Approach

**The preliminary research questions were:**

- what are community education initiatives seeking to achieve?
- what are the ideas, or 'theories' which underpin these initiatives? (broadly, a program theory approach)
- what are the processes put into place which follow from these ideas? and
- what are the outcomes expected of these initiatives?

**The data gathering phase of the project included:**

- Three trips to the Wangary region in the Lower Eyre Peninsula
- Eight interviews (taped and transcribed) involving four CE staff at various levels
- Several guided conversations involving a number of CE staff at various levels
- Interactions with a range of community members and staff from other community organizations at agency, organisation, or community group meetings.
- Four interviews (taped and transcribed) with community members of a Community Fire Safe group in the region
- Interaction with Lower Eyre Peninsula Fire Awareness Discussion Group
- Observation of a Regional Bushfire Prevention Committee meeting
- Observation of a District Bushfire Prevention Committee meeting
- Participation in a Women's Day Gathering, Lower Eyre Peninsula
- Presentation of data from interviews at a specially convened meeting with multi-agency staff conducted in July 2005 which involved discussion and information exchange
- Joint presentations with two CFS staff at two Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) conferences (2007 and 2008) which involved discussion and information exchange

- Analysis of data from Community Fire Safe group evaluation forms
- Collation, together with a Research Assistant, of survey data from a Women's Skills Workshop mounted by Rural Solutions and the CFS

## Results

- The CE function is best managed and delivered by a CE Unit within the fire service.

  Specifically
  - The CE officer was selected by, and supported by the CE Unit at Head Office. This support related to consistent work quality and included:
    - regular meetings with CE manager and staff
    - access for phone consultation
    - advice where necessary
    - access to professional clinical supervision as required.
    - administrative support around Human Resources issues, and
    - ensuring supplies of relevant materials
  - The CE Unit was also exploring the possibilities of redeveloping a program called VOICE – Volunteers in Community Education.
  - Opportunities exist for developing future collaborations of these two approaches to CE. The CE Unit will need more resources to facilitate what could be a widening of the program reach of both these initiatives to include the CE Unit based officer and the volunteer.
  - There is expertise to be shared across the fire services on these developments. The AFAC Community Safety group could be supported adequately to perform this developmental function.
- The CE officer is best selected from the local community
- Community Fire Safe is the most effective way of delivering community safety messages where the following processes are sought:
  - Its capacity to foster community relationships
  - Its use of narrative as a community strengthening process
  - Its use of adult learning theory to impart discrete program knowledge
  - its use of Community Development principles to guide program delivery
- In addition

- The CE officer's successful performance is characterised by her energy, commitment, respectful approaches to community, and careful and strategic management of inter-agency and community resources.
- The threat to her approach is that it is time consuming and participants may not want to move at the pace desired by the agency.
- The CE officer regularly exceeds her weekly part-time allocation of hours. A large injection of resources will be needed to enable the CE Unit to deliver the Community Fire Safe program more fully in this and in other locations.
- Competition for resources will remain a key feature of this domain.
- Challenges to Community Development ideas remain. It remains difficult to integrate community responsiveness into emergency management structures. CE is able to maximise community contributions to and co-determination, with the emergency services by:
  - supporting self organizing groups
  - taking up of offers from key community people to contribute
  - exploring ways to integrate operational volunteers into community awareness and education initiatives, and
  - demonstrating the value of including a community voice in the formal structures of Emergency Management bodies. This development warrants close monitoring
- CE outcomes are inter-dependent with other agencies and community bodies.

## Discussion

- The principal focus of this project was the role of the CE officer. This was so because:
  - It was a new role and the agency was open to its exploration
  - There was little existing documentation of the roles of CE officers in this sector

- It emerged that fire service staff and volunteers are predominantly operationally focussed and many do not give adequate recognition to either CE staff or to the community itself for community safety outcomes.
- An important issue is whether the CE work is best carried out through a separate dedicated organizational unit or as an integrated component of the agency.
- Boundary issues arose in a range of contexts, in particular:
    - between the fire service and the individual householder
    - between the CE officer and the organization
    - between the CE officer and the Community Fire Safe groups
    - between the CE officer and the community at large
    - between the volunteer as community member and the volunteers as brigade member
- As expected, Community Fire Safe groups displayed varying degrees of self-direction
- The employment latterly of the CE officer on a permanent part-time basis has already resulted in a more settled work pattern and a trialling of new community safety initiatives and programs
- There has been discussion around the use of ‘social profiling’ of areas with a view to influencing the content and delivery of CE programs.
- The strength and coherence of relationships among CE staff is not generally mirrored in the relationships between CE staff the rest of the CFS.
- Resources for evaluation work will always be scarce.
- An apparent increase in frequency of ‘mega fires’ will tie up fire agencies in Royal Commissions, Coronial, and other inquiries for long periods.
- Coronial and related inquiries seriously deplete the internal energy, the stamina, and the good will among volunteers that is critical to the maintenance of a successful organisation.
- Agencies within the fire service should consider increasing their efforts to enhance integration of the various arms of the service towards the broad goal of community safety.

- The mid term should see a greater role in community education and safety for the interested ordinary community member who is neither a volunteer nor officer in the fire service.
- The fire service agencies would benefit from a greater receptiveness to the use of formal internal evaluation processes within and across arms of the service
- The policy framework of desiring community empowerment is a good one and has significant implications for community education and safety.
- In addition to performing a CE function, attendance at Community Fire Safe meetings also strengthened the links in the web that enhances community safety.
- Building informal community networks is a key step in developing community safety. Examination of this process is limited to the aspect of warnings and should be extended.
- Recognition of the CFS's inability to respond to all requests for Community Fire Safe groups has prompted the CFS to explore appropriately extending the role of the volunteer.

## Conclusions

- This report has been framed to allow the reader to draw his or her own conclusions on the actions of the CE officer and their likely impact on community safety.
- The CFS CE staff, Chief Fire Officer and Regional staff are to be commended for allowing the CE officer to develop her new role largely as she saw the need.
- Inherent in an approach to evaluation is the need to work creatively with uncertainty.
- Often resources are put into evaluative inquiry either to justify an argument against a recommendation or for internal use to justify a particular case before an agency Board.
- Evaluation should play a greater role in the fire service and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Council could oversee evaluation of a range of programs without prompting inter-organizational competition.

- It is in local contexts that the idea of ‘participation’ in programs can be best explored. Evaluative enquiry focussed on particular geographical areas can explore:
    - interactions between programs
    - contexts in which they are delivered
    - the predominant structures which influence the idea of community safety
- The perception of ‘risk management’ in the corporate sector has become associated with organisations seeking to displace responsibility rather than reduce or remove hazards.

  Accordingly any program which has the hallmarks of conventional risk management may be viewed with suspicion by the community in the context of fire safety.
- The Community Fire Safe group is, and should be recognised as a stepping stone toward community empowerment.
- While it will take courage from the CE officers to recognise that aspects of their role should be assumed by community members, if this occurs the CE officer’s role will evolve rather than diminish.
- While evaluation is often fraught it has, potentially, an organizational development role which can focus on increasing dialogue within and between organizations, rather than a more singular and limited focus on determinations of resource allocation.
- Inter-agency cooperation is evident in operational responses where interstate collegiality is apparent.
- It is not known whether the same potential to share resources exists in non operational work.
- AFAC could be considered as an organizational frame for evaluation which would promote inter-agency cooperation and collaboration.
- The focus of the task of debriefing has been operational to the exclusion of other issues. Accessing the full spectrum of data from debriefing should be an aim in future.
- There is extensive data collected by the CE Unit which is largely unprocessed. Allocating resources for the analysis of this data would be a worthwhile investment.

- The education of community members in ‘hands on’ operational aspects has been handled by brigade members to date. The prospect of involving appropriately skilled ordinary community members in the process should be examined.
- Opportunities exist to extend the involvement of volunteers directly in the CE program. This will require additional resources and will lead to an extension of the role of the CE officer.
- Approaches to CE to date have paid little attention to the role of non-fire related community organisations. Expanding the involvement of these civic groups should be examined.

# Preface

This piece of work unashamedly takes a particular perspective on describing and analysing a new community education role taken up in a fire affected area in a region in South Australia. This perspective can be best summarised as a 'relational' one. By this I mean that the lens through which the data is analysed, gives priority to issues of 'relationship' (person to person) and 'relatedness' (role to role). This makes it a project about seeking to understand human interaction at multiple levels in community safety, particularly where those interactions are at the core of, or act as processes for, the achievement of sought after outcomes.

The relationships that will be discussed occur at multiple levels, including intra-organizational, inter-organizational, and community levels. They are examined, in large part, through the eyes and the experience of a Community Education (CE) officer, and also through the eyes of her managers, and the CE unit of a Fire Service. In this case, the CE officer is a part time salaried member of staff, appointed initially to a fire impacted area for a period of 12 months. This study, then, is about a particular approach to delivering community education; the approach is the employment of a part-time worker with a supporting CE unit behind her, albeit that Unit being 8 hours away by road.

The domains chosen for closer examination are also guided by evaluative thinking:

- what are community education initiatives seeking to achieve?
- what are the ideas, or 'theories' which underpin these initiatives? (broadly, a program theory approach)
- what are the processes put into place which follow from these ideas? and
- what are the outcomes expected of these initiatives?

Given the newness of the role in question, the lack of descriptive and analytical literature on community education initiatives in relation to the threat of bushfire, and the time constraints for follow up in detail of this new role over time, this report is most focussed on the underlying ideas and program processes. The need for all parties, (fire service officers and volunteers, other key agency staff, researchers, community members) to continue to be mindful of organisational and community outcomes is also clear throughout the report.

Since the data was collected for this case study, Victoria has experienced a fire event of catastrophic proportions, in which 173 people died. It is likely that as a result of this, community safety policy known as the Stay and Defend, or Leave Early Policy will be critically examined and may be changed. Other policies may take its place. Whatever the outcome, even if the policy is shaped more toward the use of power to evacuate residents, there will still be the need for community education processes. In this sense, where this case study emphasises processes of community engagement, these will remain important, regardless of which direction any new policy takes.

# Introduction

The federally funded Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre combines the efforts of more than 30 research, fire, and land management agencies in undertaking research on social, economic, and environmental aspects of bushfire. Project C7, the “Evaluation Framework” project at RMIT, forms part of the program called “Community Self Sufficiency for Fire Safety”. Members of this project have been examining the influences of formal programs and activities on increasing community safety, identifying influences of context on both programs and informal approaches to organizing, and examining mechanisms which operate to engage and disengage key stakeholders in the domain of community safety.

The Wangary region in South Australia has a population of 14,000 people, is some 650 km from Adelaide and supports businesses in grain, grazing, fishing, and tourism.

On 11 January 2005, a bushfire burnt through approximately 78,000 hectares leaving 9 people dead, 93 homes, many other buildings, vehicles, and 46,000 head of stock destroyed.

The Community Education Unit of the South Australian Country Fire Service requested Project C7 to conduct a study of the emerging role of the Community Education (CE) worker. The CE worker was appointed in August 2005 to the Wangary area for an initial period of 12 months. This was a unique opportunity to explore the parameters of this new role. The role had clear goals both of promoting community safety in an area which knew the cost of a catastrophic fire, and of developing the role using processes appropriate to the various community groups within the area.

This report examines the practices of a community education/development officer in a fire service, and tracks some of the officer’s thoughts and practices as they relate to the outcome of increasing community safety. It includes data also from a small number of community participants in groups she facilitates. It also seeks to understand the relevance of intra-organisational and inter-organisational policies and practices.

## Context

Wangary is located on the Lower Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. Its main town is the City of Port Lincoln, which has a population of 14,000 people and is 676 kilometres from Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia. The area supports businesses in grain, grazing, fishing, and tourism. An event known as the Wangary fire, on Black Tuesday on 11th January 2005, left 9 people dead. Those 9 included three women, four children, and two males on private fire units. Six of the seven women and children were caught in cars fleeing the fire.

Ninety-three homes were destroyed along with numerous other buildings, vehicles and equipment and over 46,000 head of stock. The fire burnt through approximately 78,000 hectares (Smith 2005), about "80% of which was highly productive agricultural land used for cereal, oilseed and pulse grain production and extensive livestock grazing on improved pastures" (Tolhurst, Egan and Duff, p.9). Up to the time of the fire the CE work had been carried through two main means: the initiatives of the Regional office staff[1], and the one-off visits of CE staff from Head Office. After the fire the Country Fire Service (CFS) appointed a part time CE/Development officer to the region initially for a 12 month period. The key attributes of the role were that it was a new initiative, it was for a 12 month period, and the context was that it was a post fire affected community.

[1]. The person who had held the Regional Prevention Officer (RPO) role before the Wangary fire, informed me that when he was RPO, he had both delivered presentations, (he named two resident action groups, and four community based agency groups), reviewed organizations plans (eg local school district plans) and had also compiled presentations which were delivered by a Group Officer.

# Terminology[2]

**Table 1 Acronyms used in case study**

| Title or term | Description | Abbreviation |
|---|---|---|
| South Australian Country Fire Service[3] | | CFS |
| South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service | | MFS |
| South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission | | SAFECOM[4] |
| Community education | | CE |
| CE Officer | The role this study explores; part time role in the CFS. The CE role usually constitutes a bundle of initiatives, actions, programs etc | CE officer |
| Regional Prevention Officer | A CFS career position, located in the regions | RPO |
| Fire Prevention Officer | A Local Government position, with certain powers in relation to fire safety | FPO |
| Rural Solutions | A land management agency in | RS |

[2] As in all sectors, the Emergency Services sector is replete with acronyms. See Appendix 6

[3] See http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/about_us/organisation_chart.jsp for both Structural and Functional Organization Charts, as at January 2009

[4] The South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM) is the agency responsible for supporting the Country Fire Service, Metropolitan Fire Service and the State Emergency Service, undertaking strategic policy planning, governance and resource allocation for the overall fire and emergency services sector. SAFECOM also supports emergency management planning across South Australia http://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/site/home.jsp; accessed 9 May, 2009.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | South Australia[5] | |
| Lower Eyre Peninsula Fire Awareness Discussion Group | A loosely formed group of officers with fire safety in their role. | "Fire Awareness Discussion Group", or "Discussion Group" |
| South Australian Farmer's Federation | Self Explanatory | SAFF |
| Eyre Peninsula Community[6] Alliance | An alliance of community agencies across the Eyre Peninsula | EPCA |

## Community Fire Safe Groups

The Community Fire Safe program is the principal mode of delivery of community education in South Australia. The SA Country Fire Service (CFS) modelled this program on the Victorian Community Fireguard program.

The Community Fire Safe program "…. encourages residents living in high-risk areas to form small action groups". These groups are supported and facilitated by Community Education Officers. The curriculum of the fire knowledge and response strategies is set out in Appendix 2. The CE Unit works to encourage community members ultimately to take ownership of their own ongoing learning. CE officers also encourage groups which may already exist to incorporate Community Fire Safe material.

Often a CE Officer will call on the resources of the fire services, such as career officers and volunteers, to assist with group learning but at a typical group meeting the only agency representative present is the CE officer[7].

## Research Approach

Several aspects to the CE appointment suggested that an appropriate research approach to inquiring into her role should be broadly based. I created some

[5] http://www.ruralsolutions.sa.gov.au/about/business_profile ; accessed May 9 2009.

[6] http://www.epcomalliance.com.au/

[7] More information is available on http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/education/strategies_for_community_groups/community_fire_safe_program.jsp

research opportunities and others were generously made available to me. Research opportunities included:

- One taped interview specifically exploring program theory ideas with the Program Manager, Community Education, and two CE staff
- Seven taped interviews with the newly appointed CE officer on Lower Eyre Peninsula
- Guided conversations (not taped) with the Program Manager, Community Education, CFS, program staff, including the CE officer
- Interactions with a range of community members and staff from other community organizations on the Lower Eyre Peninsula, which took place at agency staff meetings, Community Fire Safe group meetings, and other community based groups
- Three trips to the Lower Eyre Peninsula (data from interviews in relation to two of those trips has been published: Goodman et al, 2007; Goodman and Gawen, 2008)
- Interviews with four members of a Community Fire Safe group in the region
- Observation of and interaction with Lower Eyre Peninsula Fire Awareness Discussion Group
- A specially convened meeting with multi agency staff for researcher to present data from interviews conducted in July 2005
- Joint presentations with two CFS staff at two Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) conferences (2007 and 2008)
- Observations of a Regional Bushfire Prevention Committee[8]
- Observations of a District Bushfire Prevention Committee[9]
- Analysis of data from Community Fire Safe Group evaluation forms (with Elsworth and Rowe)

In addition to the above contacts, I have had opportunities to either observe or participate in the following activities:

- Women's Day Gathering, Lower Eyre Peninsula

[8] Each of the six Country Fire Service Regions has a Regional Bushfire Prevention Committee (RBPC), defined in Section 73 of the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005. The responsibilities of this Committee is set out in Appendix 4.
[9] Each of the Councils in rural areas of the State is required to establish a District Bushfire Prevention Committee (DBPC). The responsibilities of the DBPC are set out in Appendix 4

- Together with a Research Assistant, the collation of data from Women's Skills Workshop survey
- The drafting of Conference Paper presented to AFAC, entitled Fiery Women (documenting Women's Skills workshops)

A key focus in this case study is on the relationship between the Fire Service (particularly through the work of the CE officer) and the community members. This relationship is often mediated through other relationships such as between the CE officers and other organizations, and the community members' relationships between their community and other organizations. Paralleling the two-way interaction between the CE and the public, is the relationship between the researcher and the CE officers. I have attempted throughout my association with the CE Unit and its staff, to adopt the philosophical approach espoused by Guba and Lincoln (1983), who argue that the importance of the researcher role is to become a facilitator of conversations between relevant parties, conversations which lead to a more collective evaluative understanding of the field in question. This position also underpins the program theory work of Project C7, where it has sought to engage in explicit discussion with program providers about the ideas which lie behind their planning, management and evaluation of their programs (Elsworth et al, 2007).

## Research focus

The interview with the Program Manager and two staff focussed on the range of activities carried out by CE staff, their aims, expected outcomes. I wanted to identify:

- the aspects that were seen to work best
- the factors which hindered outcomes
- the inter-organizational issues in achieving outcomes, and
- which approach to evaluation they would consider most suitable for their circumstances.

The seven interviews with the CE officer explored the following issues:

- Her links with her region, previous fire experience, taking up a voluntary role in her community prior to becoming the designated officer

- Her approach to her work, including setting up groups, accommodating group members fire experience in the groups; content of group meetings, and interactions with community leadership;
- Her interactions with (inter-dependency with) other key organizational parties with a role in fire prevention, including brigade members, Regional staff, other agencies
- Her interactions outside of Community Fire Safe group meetings, including with a particular family or work group.

Interviews with Community Fire Safe group members (4) included the following questions:

- How they learnt about the possibility of forming a Group
- What were their observations about the nature of the program (group based, meeting in people's homes etc)
- The place of the Wangary fire experience in this learning
- The role played by Community Fire Safe group activities and processes in their learning
- The place of the 'community context and networks' in their fire preparedness
- Any other comments.

Data from the above interviews and opportunities were used in compiling this Report.

The face to face taped interview with the Program Manager and staff, as well as the 7 taped telephone interviews with the CE officer, were transcribed. The coding initially followed a Community Development framework used by Ife (1995), which includes core principles of community development, core skills and four dimensions of the community development role which he calls facilitative, educational, technical and representational. This breadth allowed for both task and process goals to be examined. This study has taken two elements of a community development approach to examine in closer detail – what specific community development practices were drawn on by the CE officer, and how a key element of those practices, the use of human relationships to further community development ideas, was developed by the CE officer.

The staff entered the spirit of the research enthusiastically, and willingly shared far more than can be reported on in detail in this report. Their work, and the research work seeking to understand their activities, is challenging and dynamic, and as this writing is finalised, the importance of community development perspectives as discussed in this report is further highlighted through the devastation Victoria is facing during and since Black Saturday (2009).

A range of literatures is drawn on as analysis proceeded, including from the following fields:

- disaster experience, prevention and recovery (Gordon, 2004; Paton, 2006; )
- Importance of practitioner knowledge to evaluation study (Schwandt, 203a; 2005; Elliot, 2001; Fook, 1996;)
- program theory in evaluation, (Weiss, 2000; Rogers, 2000; 2000a)
- approaches to evaluation which highlight organizational development (Gray, 1998; Campbell & McClintock, 2002;  Patton, 1999)
- adult education (Boud & Walker, 1990; Edwards & Usher, 2001; Preskill & Torres, 1999)
- systems thinking (Stacey, 1996; Sanderson, 2002; Miller & Rice, 1967;)
- organizational and inter-organizational dynamics, including systems psychodynamics (Long, 2009; Gould, 1993; duGay, 1997; Gergen & McNamee, 1999; Hoggett, 2003; 2005; Marris, 1996; Long & Newton, 1997)
- social and community psychology (Paton, 2000),
- community development (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006; Dibden and Cheshire, 2005; Kenny, 2002),
- partnership collaborations (Hill, 1998; Kanter, 1994)

Different theories contribute to illuminating different aspects of community safety practices and processes, as they do on the differently constituted human systems under review, from households, to communities, to organizational and inter-organizational systems. CE officers influence and are influenced by all these systemic layers, and elements of these layers are discussed in this study. These various theories all underpin the disaster specific literature, much of

which explicitly or implicitly, argues that disaster resilience (a major goal of community safety) requires an integration of perspectives from multiple systems (Paton, 2006, p 305).

## Bridging comments

### Introduction

There are twp contexts for this research – that of the CE role with a fire service organization, and also in a particular geographic context. The CE function within the fire service is not a role which is derived from legislative requirement. The CE Manager brought this to my attention early in my association with the Unit. “Despite the rhetoric about community education and how important it is, there is nothing in our legislation which requires those who are currently fulfilling fire prevention obligations under our Act to a) utilise community education strategies, or b) undertake any community analysis that may help develop education and awareness strategies that are relevant to the target audience” (email, June 2006).

The second context is the geographic one. The CE worker was appointed to service a particular region – one that had experienced a severe fire event. “Fire awareness” per se, or at least the awareness that fire can have devastating consequences, in the main was widely appreciated by members of the community. The exceptions were those who had moved into the district after the fire, and those who thought that another fire event was unlikely in the foreseeable future. Another perspective on awareness is not directly about the threat of fire, but is about the importance of the social bonds which unite or divide a community. These perspectives were held intuitively by some members of the community. I discuss them at length, as the Community Fire Safe group process draws heavily on the theory of the need to strengthen social bonds at the local level.

### Structural changes

Over the three years of my association with the Country Fire Service there has been significant structural change. The manager of the CE Unit when my association started, left the position in July 2008. His initial role title was Prevention and Community Awareness Officer, and later Manager, CE Unit.

The CE officers' positions were made permanent, although still part time, in July 2008[10].

## Inquiries and Reports

The Coronial Report was handed down on 18th December, 2007, nearly two years after the Wangary fire. Of the 34 recommendations, surprisingly few had to do with Community Education. Two were specifically about CE, Recommendations 11 and 12, which were as follows:

> 12: I recommend that the Minister of Emergency Services in conjunction with the South Australian Country Fire Service conduct tuition courses to be made available to the general public to enable members of the public to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to implement to implement their preparation and planning for bushfires.
>
> 13: I recommend that the Minister for Emergency Services and the South Australian Country Fire Service implement programs to develop in the minds of citizens a heightened awareness of bushfire risk and in particular to encourage citizens to listen for radio announcements relating to the progression of fire during the course of a bushfire incident.

The appointment of the CE officer to Lower Eyre was made within 6 months of the fire, and 18 months before the handing down of the Coroner's report. To this extent, the Coroner's report cannot be said to have been a direct influence on the CE role appointment to the Lower Eyre.

A Ministerial Review of Bushfire Management in South Australia delivered its Final Report on 23rd July 2007[11]. Some of the results of this Review are being implemented as this report is being finalised. A key focus of the Review pertains to what might be called the 'institutional arrangements' – the

[10] The Manager of CE provided me with documentation pertaining to the development of the CE Unit. Documents included Community Bushfire Education and Awareness, Program Development and Implementation Strategy; Proposal to develop a CFS Community Education and Information Unit, dated 16th June 2005; Bushfire Community Education and Awareness Strategy, Kangaroo Island, 13th December, 2005.

[11] This Review was commissioned in late 2006, by the then Minister for Emergency Services, the Honourable Ms Carmel Zollo. It was commissioned to address the Wangary bushfire, the 2005 prevention recommendations from Project Phoenix (known as the SACFS Internal Review), and the Independent Review by Dr Bob Smith.

governance structure for bushfire management[12]. Some of the recommendations from this Review require legislative change before they can become operational. These recommendations awaiting legislative change largely pertain to redrawing what is a three tiered prevention framework into a two tiered bushfire management framework, and will ”incorporate a broader perspective on bushfire management values and local knowledge through an expanded number of stakeholders and increased community engagement” (p.3). One aspect of the Review which is relevant to this CE role study, is the recognition that

> reducing risk and building resilience is brought about by a combination of different elements of bushfire management. *The success of one of these strategies is often reliant on the implementation of another*. This approach can be applied to other hazards in South Australia (p 11).(emphasis added)

I conceptualise this idea of success in one strategy as being reliant on another strategy, as ‘inter-dependency” of programs, or initiatives. It is a key idea in this report and a key idea as to why we should think broadly about evaluation. One of the Bushfire Management report recommendations pertains to Bushfire Management Committees. Recommendation 14.1 which talks about the Bushfire Management Committee lists the following as relevant to the Bushfire Management Committee role:

> …Collaborative community education and consultation... Annual Community Forums and community question time at Quarterly Meetings is seen as a place for community engagement and opportunity for further transparency of bushfire management performance. ….Community can participate in the planning process and offer input to the Bushfire Management Risk Plan during the statutory public display period”. (p.14)…Community education strategies can be developed based on an understanding of the needs and expectations of the local community. This will ensure that the correct mix of education and awareness is applied across the landscape….. There will be a ‘person nominated by the community” on the Bushfire Management Committee.] Community nomination has been included as a new member to capture values, beliefs, and social norms to ensure the most appropriate

[12] In Victoria also, considerable effort has been put into the development of Integrated Fire Management Planning (IFMP) process.

> strategies for sustainability and resilience can be applied within the Bushfire Management Committee area of responsibility.

In addition the Review recommends the development of Codes of Practice for Bushfire Management. The Review notes that

> …stakeholder and community comment [captured during Review consultation] supported a cooperative approach to fire management through Codes of Practice, as long as they did not replace legislation….This was seen to improve the current situation as a 'code of practice contains a level of detail and interpretation, which cannot be covered with legislation, increasing individual and community understanding. The development through a participatory process is more likely to result in desirable bushfire safety behaviours. [It] can be flexible in that local conditions can be applied according to risk. A Code of Practice can be more easily and regularly updated, ensuring that new research or technology can be quickly incorporated. There is community buy in rather than the need to moving to legislation. (p.17).[13]

While these changes, at this stage, have not been implemented, it is clear that new words are entering the language – such as resilience, sustainability, participatory processes, and new structures and categories of representation, such as the 'person nominated by the community', and 'codes of practice'. An aspiration toward more engaging community practices is evident, at least in policy terms. However, these initiatives are yet to be felt in the field, and hence have not influenced the CE role as described in this case study.

Again, surprisingly little in this Review relates specifically to CE initiatives. This is an interesting phenomenon in itself, and warrants further study. It is difficult to move beyond the 'institutional issues', - the infrastructure of roles and responsibilities between that bodies which already exist, and to look outside these structures[14].

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[13] There has also been a Review of the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005, known as the Murray Review. (Accessible through Safecom website).

[14] The Murray Review referred to the 8 areas Schapel (Deputy Coroner) had made Recommendations in relation to the Wangary Fire. These 8 were: Farming practices and bushfire management; Local government fire management; Community warnings; **Community education**; SACFS operational policies and procedures; Public advice; After market vehicle mufflers; Native vegetation code of practice. Murray was able to deal with Community education in one line. He stated that the two recommendations in relation to community education ( R29.9(12) and R29.9(13)) were ":both recommendations can be achieved through administrative action without legislative amendment." (p.94, Murray Review).

## Rapidly evolving CE role

While a key focus of this report is on that aspect of the CE work in which Community Fire Safe groups are facilitated and supported by the CE staff, there are several other aspects to the role of the CE officer. The CE officer summarised these at a public meeting of the Eyre Regional Development Board in July 2008. Included in that presentation were the following statistics:

**Table 2 Workload of Community Education Officer as at July 2008[15]**

| | |
|---|---|
| Total number of meetings: | 88 |
| Total number of Community Fire Safe meetings: | 56 |
| Other meetings: | 32 |
| Current Community Fire Safe Groups: | 18 |
| Other current groups: | 19 |
| Dormant Community Fire Safe groups: | 7 |

On January 14th 2009, the Proper Bay fire occurred on the outskirts of Port Lincoln. For the first time in the experience of the current CE Manager, the operational cost centre for 'cost of fire' was used to fund the CE officer to form 8 new Community Fire Safe groups and to hold two meetings with each group. Since the fires, there has been a request for 20 more groups, and the CE officer has been asked to prioritise group selection based on those residents within the fire affected area. Now, with the events of Black Saturday in Victoria in 2009, preliminary discussions between the CE Manager and the Chief Fire Officer suggest that the CE role could be further expanded.

[15] This workload is constantly evolving and growing. Organizations with which the CE officer collaborates include the Primary Industries, Resources South Australia (PIRSA), Eyre Peninsula Community Alliance (EPCA), Women in Agriculture and Business, (WAB); Uniting Care, Riding for the Disabled, TAFE, Primary and Secondary Schools, Aboriginal Organizations, Greater City of Port Lincoln. She regularly presents on ABC Radio. She liaises with consumer groups such as Diabetes Support Groups, as well as starting new Community Fire Safe groups and where possible maintaining pre existing groups. She also liaises with the Regional and District Bushfire Prevention Committees.

The number of groups started by the CE officer continues to expand, as does her work with community agency staff who are thinking more about how they should respond themselves to a Total Fire Ban day, and what this response means to their own work load, including those who have clients. On one such day in 2009, a decision was taken on the afternoon prior to a Total Fire Ban (TFB) day, by the Education Department to close the schools.

Conversations between other agencies on how they manage their staff and clients is throwing light on a sector, human services, whose work is often carried on outside the attention of the public. Matters including the number of paid staff in an office, carers out attending to clients in their homes, and numbers of clients, are all matters which are gradually emerging as key issues to be managed. My picture of this emergence is of two silos – in the first are those structures and roles which form the pre-existing or newly emerging institutional structures – the multitude of Emergency Committees, Regional and District Bushfire Prevention Committees, the roles and tasks of local government and its staff. In the second silo, the myriad of community agencies, staff, clients, members of the public, who are asking increasingly hard questions, of themselves, and of others. The CE officer stretches across these two silos[16].

The CFS and Local Government have carried out extensive work which has resulted in the Greater City of Port Lincoln Bushfire Prevention Plan[17]. Some aspects of this Plan have impacted on the CE officer's role. The role of the CE officer is also sometimes cited in District Bushfire Prevention Plans, such as the District Council of Lower Eyre Bushfire Prevention Plan 2008[18].

The District Council of Lower Eyre plan includes, as do most, an extensive Bushfire Prevention Works Program. Works Programs have been a feature of District Bushfire Prevention Committees. What is relatively new is placing an explicit emphasis on individual landowners accepting responsibility for protecting their property and lives by preparing their own "Bushfire Action

[16] While I am using the word silos to refer to an intra organizational phenomenon, Murray, in his Review of the Fire and Emergency Services Act, noted that the Emergency Services Organizations, present as independent agencies. "Expressed colloquially, they demonstrated a tendency to remain as organizational 'silos'. (p.1, Murray Review).

[17] http://www.lowereyrepeninsula.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Greater_City_of_Port_Lincoln_Plan_Completed_08_08_08.pdf

[18] http://www.lowereyrepeninsula.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Bushfire_Prevention_Plan_2008_-_Draft.pdf

Plans". These Bushfire Action Plans involve landholders undertaking their own preparatory fuel reduction and strategic placement of fire fighting equipment or sprinkler systems and water storage tanks. Community Education has been identified by the Committee as being of paramount importance in fire prevention and the introduction of a *CFS Community Awareness Officer* to the area will help convey the message that the whole of the community needs to be involved with fire prevention.[19]

The above comments from policy and other documents provides some insight into the rapidly developing domain into which CE is being delivered, and with which it either has, or will, interact. As noted above in the Ministerial Review, different initiatives interact with and mutually impact on program outcomes. It is, in part, due to these interactions within and between organizations with responsibility in fire safety, that I argue in this Case Study for an evaluation framework which takes in the whole of the organization.

# Orienting ideas

## Levels of organization

This report examines at least three layers of organizational 'type' or fields which influence the CE role. Data is described and analysed using the broad fields of "intra-organization", "inter-organizational" and "community". The CE role intersects each of these fields, and the fields intersect with each other, independent of the CE role. Table 3 below provides a schematic representation of these points of intersection. In this study, the CE role is, in the main, the lens through which the other fields are discussed.

**Table 3 Organizational domains of analysis**

| **Fields of organization** | |
|---|---|
| **A: Fire Service Agency CE role** | **B:** Intra-organization |
| | **C:** Inter-organization |
| | **D**: Community |

[19] I am assuming that the reference is to the CE Officer (cf Community Awareness Officer)

Table 3 schematically points to multiple possible combinations of domains of analysis. This could include AB: relationship between the CE staff (A) and other parts of the fire service (B), such as the CE officer working with a fire service employee from another part of the organizational structure, such as a Regional Prevention Officer. It would also include work where the CE officer works alongside volunteers such as a Brigade Captain in delivering a program. This would also be an "AB" domain of analysis. An AC domain would include a description of CE tasks where an involvement with other agencies was necessary to achieve a particular outcome. This would be relevant to those activities which the CE officer carries out with another agency such as Rural Solutions. While this study takes a particular focus on the work of the CE staff, hence the dominance of the "A" domain as the lens through which the study takes its focus, there are clearly other combinations of domains deserving of more attention which are only touched on in this study. One example is D: community level relationships, where these relationships are critical for the delivery of the CE work, and also both B and C – where initiatives within and between these domains have their own distinct impact on community safety outcomes. [20]

## Program Theories

### Introduction

A Program Theory approach to program planning and evaluation in fire services has been documented elsewhere (Rhodes and Gilbert, 2008).

Essentially, this approach seeks to elicit ideas of how programs are seen to work – what the presumed links are between the program activities and the program outcomes. What are the assumptions which underlie the two phenomena: program activities theory and program outcomes? Project C7 is influenced by the work of Pawson and Tilley (1997) who talk of program contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. The approach, when used broadly, as I have done in this report, looks at the contexts in which programs are delivered,

[20] A volunteer workload study was carried out by V Lee HRM Consulting (2008) , in which brigades were asked to nominate other activities they carried out. One response category was 'community education'. http://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/site/initiatives_and_reviews/volunteer_initiatives/volunteer_administrative_review.jsp; accessed 29 April 2009. See Appendix * for detail of Question asked and Response received.

and what special characteristics of this context need to be elicited in order more fully to understand how the activities are thought about and enacted.

In this case study, for example, the context in which the program was commenced, was a region which had had a serious fire event. Aspects of this context permeated the thinking of the CE Unit managers and guided to some degree, the selection of the officer and the nature of the support they offered to her role.

Program theorists refer to ‘program factors’ and ‘non program factors’ which influence outcomes. Some of these non program factors can be seen as context. Mechanisms can be thought of as ways in which desired changes are brought out in programs. In this case study, I argue that sometimes processes can be seen as outcomes, as these two concepts interact with each other particularly in community development work. An example of this would be the outcome of having neighbours get to know one another better, which can also serve as the means through which people interact and work together on planning for children, or improving the level of preparedness of properties. In such an example, the process and outcome become integrated.

The first of two main ways of developing program theory, is to develop theory from existing social science theories. The second is to generate theories, or assumptions underpinning program ideas, from interviews with and observation of program managers, staff and program participants. In this study, I have used both approaches. During interviews with the program managers and the CE (CE) officer, I elicited ideas about the rationale for the program, both at its outset in August 2005, and also during follow up interviews and discussions with CE staff as the role unfolded. I have also taken ideas from social science theories which seemed most pertinent to understanding the CE role in this particular context.

In writing up this study, I have selected a number of assumptions and theories which came from CE staff and managers. One such assumption was “the CE officer is best selected from the local community”. One of the research tasks has been to explore the intended meanings of these assumptions. Why is the selection of the officer from the local community seen as the best approach in this case? What are the underpinning assumptions to the claim? In other cases, I have named and used explicit theory (eg theory about resilient communities) and have grouped explicit statements (from any or all of the

various organizational levels as set out in Table 3) which can be seen to be linked to this theory under this ‘resilience’ umbrella.

One example is the role of creativity in building resilience. One way creativity can be seen as operating, is when CE officers explicitly allow space for community members to bring their own responses to the fire impact, and to name the aspects of recovery and future preparedness they wish, together with others, to work on. That is, the CE officers bring their creativity to bear on community responses, and at the same time, allow for the expression of the creativity of community members, as together they work on safer responses to the threat of fire.

While I have used the phrase ‘resilience theory’, it is really best thought of as a number of theories, or a way of thinking which has community and organizational response capacity as its core. It constitutes a complex web of ideas which more or less coheres, and which shares some common vocabulary. The breadth of this approach was consciously adopted, given this field of CE practice is relatively new and is rapidly developing.

Who the identified key stakeholders in this field are is constantly changing and developing, and the shape of various roles within communities and organizations is still emerging. In some instances, officers used theoretical constructs in their descriptions (such as resilience); at other times I have named theoretical constructs after listening to and observing CE practices. Similarly I have made use of large scale ideas such as ‘program inter-dependency’ under which are housed other less broad but still complex theoretical ideas such as collaboration, and engagement.

I introduce here some terms and concepts that the reader may find challenging, but in my view it is worth both of us, the reader and me, making an effort to examine and appreciate the broader context in which I am addressing these complex issues.

This study is about the role of community relationships in general, and the notion of ‘shared responsibility’ in particular, in building community safety. A crucial part of developing shared responsibility in community relationships is the concept of ‘mutuality’. Mutuality is a somewhat technical term which, in summary or at least in large part, boils down to the comprehensive appreciation and understanding of the viewpoint of another – referred to here as the ‘other’. The fostering of mutuality is a subject in itself but, again in summary, it entails

recognition and appreciation of the source and content of the views and perspectives of the other. We are familiar with the rational foundation of the other's views and these can be articulated and defended in ways which are familiar; indeed rational discourse is one principal mode of communication in our lives.

However, mutuality also entails recognition and appreciation of the subjective components of the other's view, and this is more difficult. This is not to suggest that subjective perspectives are irrational, or that they defy accurate communication; indeed, it is these non-rational, subjective perspectives that truly drive our lives. However the communication of subjective perspectives is a more complex process than that of rational or objective perspectives. So, as researchers in this area, we approach this task with care.

One theoretical concept which encapsulates the above ideas is 'inter-subjectivity'. Inter-subjectivity entails an attempt to suspend or distance oneself from the rational perspective that are, or are likely to be, barriers to appreciation of the subjective perspective of the other.

Finally, in this context, the unifying component in all of this is: respect. Respect can be seen as the mechanism which allows the development of mutuality. The combination of respect and mutuality constitutes a mutually reinforcing relationship. So respectful mutuality is at the heart of the idea of shared responsibility.

An important aspect of this field of study, is that many of the 'stakeholders' are either volunteers such as those who provide the fire service, or 'ordinary' members of the community who are being asked to 'share responsibility' for community safety with the fire services. I find this idea exciting, in that neither of these groups can be 'bought' or coerced, or at least not if community safety outcomes are to be respectfully worked on together and are to prove to be sustainable.

## Program development for Community Education within a CE Unit

One key program assumption pertaining to the appointment of the CE officer, was that this person should form part of the CE unit located within Prevention Services within the fire service, and therefore not be directly under the

operational line of command[21]. The underlying ideas here were that the CE officer would be expected to form part of the CE Unit, be supervised by the CE Manager, and be supported by and learn from other staff within the CE Unit. This could be summarised as follows: the best chance of good program outcomes is a 'professional orientation' to service delivery. By professional I mean a view that:

- the role should be salaried
- the role holder hold or be trained to acquire certain knowledge and skills
- the knowledge and skills required for *community* education were not presumed to be present in a person trained in operational response including fire behaviour, and
- the supervision of the CE officer was carried out by a person experienced in the CE role, who held the requisite knowledge, skills and experience.

The opposing view to the professional model is that the CE role is best carried out by a volunteer with an operational background. Among the reasons cited by those holding this view is that those with an operational background know about fire, its risk, likelihood of occurrence within particular areas, and patterns of fire behaviour. This line of argument often includes the view that some members of the community look to, and/or look up to, volunteers and seek guidance from them in every day life, so that having a volunteer deliver CE is only an extension of this role.

This study takes no stance on this question as at the time of the commencement of this study the salaried CE role was the only one formally in use in this Unit.

The CE Unit does not hold an 'either /or' line on this question, as evidenced by a current project within the Unit. Funds for this project were obtained to review a program known as VOICE – Volunteers in Community Education. A project officer is currently employed and is reappraising the curriculum and the training materials for use in this program. Studies of BRAG in Western Australia (Gilbert and Marsh, 2009), the New South Wales Community Fire Units (CFUs) (Lowe, Haynes and Byrne, 2008) and work in the Blue Mountains with the Rural Fire Service (Gilbert, 2005) will provide some comparative material on the program

[21] See http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/about_us/organisation_chart.jsp; for a Functional and Structural Organization Chart of the CFS. accessed 29 April 2009;

management and outcomes under different models of delivery of community education.

In summary, assumptions about the role of community education as a service within a fire agency are contested and multifaceted.

## The CE officer should be selected from the local community

The program manager and a senior member of the Regional Office held firm views that the officer appointed to the LEP should be drawn from local residents. Several program benefits were seen to flow from this stance, including:

- That this would lead to greater capacity building – that the officer would most likely remain within the community, even after finishing in this role, thereby keeping the knowledge and skill gained, within the community.
- That as a local, the person would have local relationships and that these relationships would expedite the task of getting the safety messages out into the community. The underlying means, through which this was seen to operate, was that the officer would utilise his or her pre-existing relationships to access key community members in a way that would reduce the time this usually takes. One senior officer expressed the view in this way:

  > With [name] being able to be on the ground, we may get that [access to key community people] a bit earlier than we would have if we didn't have her.

  The ongoing presence of that person in the community was also important in this officer's mind.

  > The community… will see there's somebody they can come back to.

- That being local would be the most effective way of maximising the chance of a culturally appropriate intervention, as a local person would be more attuned to what that community's particular experience, than a person appointed from outside the community.
- That, as the dominant mode of delivering the CE program was through group work in people's homes, a local officer would be the most appropriate person to cross this work/home boundary.

On writing up this study, I realised that what wasn't explicitly stated in the 'program theory' conversations I have had with the CE staff, was the fact that the CE officer herself had experienced a fire, the Tulka fire. While this is not a formal expectation of the CE role, the CE officer had come to the attention of the fire service after the Tulka fire in 2001, and in 2002, she was invited to speak about her experiences to three community groups in the South East of the State. So this appointment was characterised, in part, by the CE officer combining the community experience arising from her being a local person, with her having had the experience of an actual fire.

While the CE Unit did not explicitly state that the CE officer's personal fire experience was critical in her selection, this experience was in the mind of a senior regional officer when he spoke to me about the role:

> [Name] has been through it, which I think is a pretty good leg in the door, you know. It's not like a Johnny-come-lately, who's never been through it and doesn't know … You know, they might know all the right words, might know how to read all the books, but physically [they] haven't been there.

Inherent in the idea of the CE officer being a local, is the valuing of 'local' as a stand alone value. This value stance is linked to the principle of 'subsidiarity', which can be understood as the principle whereby decisions are made at the level at which they are enacted, in ways which involve or ideally are determined by those to whom they will apply (Lowell, 2006). Other assumptions include that a local officer would hold more of the community's trust than someone from outside, particularly someone from 'Head Office'. The local person would also have greater knowledge of local services and facilities, such as local media, and would be more likely to be able to utilise local norms, attitudes and values.

These ideas also point to the importance of the idea of 'local knowledge' (Indian, 2007), which includes respect for the knowledge held by people in their local settings, and also draws attention to what factors might be pertinent to a fuller understanding of context.

A senior officer with the CFS expressed his views on the aspirations for the CE role, and markers of when he would see it as being successful. His views were not dissimilar to those of the CE Managers, in his emphasis on the social and locally embedded elements of the role.

> Are we hitting [the mark] …and is it the right message? And is the community interested enough to actually adopt it and get up and make something of it? …Are [you] actually increasing the number of people attending meetings?...And are you listening to the people who are coming to the meetings?….. This is starting to work, you know, we've got a couple more people in the street interested, those sorts of things…. And if you're doing the right thing, you know, talk to your neighbours down the street if they aren't doing the right thing. That sort of community spirit …Community feeling, you know, you look round a lot of places, lot of people don't know who their neighbours are.

This officer did not expect immediate results from the appointment of the CE officer:

> Give it a decent period of time to see whether it starts to work, if it doesn't work, well perhaps you do something different, but don't expect outcomes in 12 months.

## Resilience Theory

I have made reference to the term *resilience* in the foregoing part of this report. In this context resilience has some associated technical meanings but I will be using it in a more conventional way. So here, perhaps belatedly, is a brief outline of the term.

Resilience refers to the set of traits and capabilities that influence a community's ability to respond effectively to extreme hazardous events (Paton, 2006). Communities with a high level of resilience are better prepared for crises and better able to withstand the loss of life and property they bring. Assisting residents of the Lower Eyre Peninsula to recovery from the Wangary fire event, and working with them to identify ways in they can learn from the tragedy, was seen as an opportunity for creativity. Creativity is theorised as a property of resilience (Maguire & Hagan, 2007;), most evident where learning from a disaster experience takes place and people emerge with higher levels of community functioning.

The program manager, the local officer, and other staff of the CE unit whom I was able to converse with during contact with the agency, explicitly used ideas of community resilience in their thinking and brought forward several

overlapping ideas in their discussions with me. These are grouped here under resilience and include:

A. The Community Fire Safe group, its establishment and successful operation, is the dominant approach to achieving resilience

B. The use of narrative is a major modality in the operation of the group

C. Key elements of adult learning theory are incorporated into the guiding principles which support the use of group work

D. The incorporation of specific curriculum content within the context of local knowledge and experience is a key aim of the Community Fire Safe group

E. Community Development theory is drawn on in the curriculum delivery which leaves space for people to respond creatively to the threat of fire

These five issues (A to E above) are now elaborated on in the above order

### A Groupwork as the program medium

A central idea in appointing the CE officer was that she would use existing groups in the community, and develop new ones, as the central medium for delivering CE. In discussion with the CE staff, the ideas underpinning this approach included the theoretical idea of '*collective* efficacy'. While this was not the term used by staff, the ideas behind it were apparent. Collective efficacy seeks to

> capture the link between the degree of mutual trust in a neighborhood and residents' willingness to act for the public good of that particular neighbourhood. (Moore, et al, 2004)

This was clearly the idea they were referring to in their discussions with me. Collective efficacy can be seen to be a property of, or the desired outcome of, a process of 'community strengthening' – sometimes referred to as 'community building'. Other theories from education, particularly the sociocultural theorists believe that the individual learns via participation in socially and culturally organized practices.

The practice then of bringing together members of communities into groups can be seen to be underpinned by different theoretical ideas, which share concepts having at their centre the social milieu as the medium for change. Also at their core is an idea which has found prominence under the heading of 'asset based

community development' (ABCD). ABCD focuses on the strengths and capacities of local communities, and rests on the conviction that sustainable development emerges from mobilising and building upon local resources within a community, not from outside[22].

In these approaches, 'community' is at the centre of the approach, and the community interaction, and the strengths which flow from this interaction, can, in part, be seen as the outcome. This is where socially based practices are fostered, where effort is focussed on strengthening or helping to mobilise community skills, expanding networks, harnessing energy and resources, and applying them in ways that achieve collaborative and positive social change.

The community leading its own processes is seen commonly as a hallmark of CD theory and practice (eg Cheers, 2002b). In this case study, set in a fire service, I argue that we can see key elements of CD theory in use, although not necessarily in their 'purest' (community *led*) form. The case study provides considerable detail on CE practices which strongly draw on, and rely on, community members bringing forward their knowledge and ideas. The case study also refers to groups self-organizing, which is one variant of a community led process.

### B Narrative as a program practice

Another idea underpinning resilience, is the use of the practice of *narrative* as a technique in the group work. This is seen explicitly by the CE officers as a particular practice, and it is aimed at building social cohesion, itself a platform for further action. Social theories in this area are overlapping and used in different ways. One more obvious one, where narrative is used to build social cohesion, is self explanatory. The story requires a teller and a listener, and in listening, others are showing respect, that the story is worth hearing, or that the story may hold information which could be useful to the listener. Thinking of story telling in this way, also links to the idea of inter-subjectivity - the capacity to recognise 'the other'. A key element in recognising the other is being willing to listen to the other. In this way, the interaction in the process of story telling between group participants, is one form of what Wilkinson (1991) talks of as

[22] The Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD), established in 1995 by the Community Development Program at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research, is built upon three decades of community development research by John Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/abcd/; accessed 29th April 2009

"interaction theory" – where he argues that communities both retain cohesion and further develop through opportunities for interaction.

There is another layer of importance which is a bit less obvious, but nonetheless important.

Narratives are used in a range of circumstances and can be seen to be a process of building what Holmes (2000) calls "autobiographical competence". The telling of a story, particularly one which holds some degree of pain, provides a possibility of some mental processing, and in so doing, a new internal 'making sense' can be brought about. Something in telling the story can bring a distance which allows this to be 're-integrated'[23].

I was very aware of this process in the first round of interviews after the Wangary fire where, five months after the fire, household members often remarked in our presence, that the other was telling bits of the story which had not been heard before. It was this which led me later to offer to those interviewees whose contact details I still had, a CD with their interview on it. All those to whom I made this offer accepted it. This was a gut feel on my part that this was what I should do, for the reason that the re-integration of the story was a work in progress for many households.

Being able to be reflective about something can, in certain circumstances, lead to a reconstruction of an event which then allows a new approach to acting in relation to this event. The roots of the idea of 'to represent' are 're' - denoting 'again', and to present. There is an implied sense here that the focus does not need to be the event itself, but how that event is represented. This idea then suggests that one having the opportunity to weave together a story of a traumatic event, can provide an opportunity to review that story and 'rework' it to allow for a new story in a future event.

[23] Tedeschi & Calhoun (2003) refer to 'cognitive' processing as contributing to post traumatic growth. To this I would add the work of Hoggett and Thompson (2002), Long and Newton (1997) and others who affirm the importance of pathways which recognize the integration which can be done when emotions are also explicitly worked with. Hoggett & Thompson draw on the work of Young, who argues that this is particularly so in community organizing to enable the viewpoints of CALD community members, and women, to be heard. Paton and Burgelt (2005) found that sharing stories about bushfires and how to deal with them with others, was an important influence on their level of bushfire knowledge and the protective actions adopted. In different ways, all these authors highlight the importance of discourse in the process of how people construct ideas pertaining to risk and emphasise the importance of the sort of engagement between community members and community educators which forms part of the rationale of community fire safe group formation.

The idea of eliciting a story and then, where necessary, ‘re-working’ that story, has parallels in the work of the late Donald Schon[24] who argued that when we become attentive to the framing of social problems, we may then become aware of conflicting frames of reference. These conflicting frames of reference can then be explored as is done at the group level in the use of narrative in Community Fire Safe groups. Once frames are elicited, frame restructuring can take place. This can be seen as ”constructing a new problem setting story, one in which we attempt to integrate conflicting frames by including features and relations drawn from earlier stories, yet without sacrificing internal coherence or the degree of simplicity required for action” (Schon, 1993, p. 270).

## C Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory is closely linked to some of the above ideas.

The hallmarks of adult learning theory indicate that adult learners:

- are actively involved in scoping their own learning
- work toward finding their own solutions (another link to creativity)
- appreciate a less structured and less formal learning environment (as offered through Community Fire Safe groups), and
- make frequent use of narrative.

One senior CE officer expressed this sentiment as follows:

> Where experience can be shared, that this is the most powerful form of education.

Three strongly interlinked elements of this belief include the importance of experience, the necessity to listen in order to share, and the opportunity to creatively mould these elements together in a facilitated CE process.

Again, without explicitly referring to theory, the terms the officers used to articulate their ideas, mirrored the thinking of Arvai (2003) who pointed out that people invest their own collective decision making with a higher degree of legitimacy than decisions made by other methods[25]. There are various public policy principles too which inform this idea of keeping decisions as close to those who are affected by those decisions, so they can participate in their making and shape their impact. One such public policy principle already referred to is subsidiarity.

[24] Schon (1993) was a key writer on managing change in organizations
[25] Usher (1085) explores the link between adult learning and experience

## D Community Fire Safe Curriculum – imparting knowledge

A key focus of the Community Fire Safe group is the necessity to impart specific knowledge to group participants. The usual content of a Community Fire Safe group curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 in its skeleton form only. The content varies according to the time available, the issues presented by the community, community experience, and the background of group members. As this case study points out, the content is typically imparted in highly interactive ways with group participants. It is this interaction, between facilitator and group member, and group members with each other, which is the hallmark of the community development orientation of this particular program.

## E Community Development Principles, the use of creativity

It is probably appropriate here to reflect briefly on past and present conventional approaches to the issue of education for bushfire safety.

While these approaches did, and do, vary widely from place to place, region to region, and even state to state, some common features emerge. To date most programs have featured an information delivery mechanism that entails an essentially unilateral process in which the responsible agency officer instructs residents on a range of issues. This has often involved an assembly of a significant number of residents, but the mode of delivery is essentially the same as if the interaction were one-to-one, but with a reduced capacity to ask questions or clarify information. So, the conventional model has made little or no use of the capacity of the residents to give feedback to the agency officer or to interact with each other in an information sharing fashion. This process could only be called a ‘community education’ process in that the recipients were members of the community; indeed the circulation of a newsletter would fulfil this definition.

Accordingly, the general acceptance of the importance of involving the community in a broader way, a way that reflects that notion that the community is more than a collection of individuals, represents a departure from common previous practice. We bundle this initiative, together with other related programs, under the title ‘community development’. Finally, it is probably worth mentioning that this transition is occurring in many fields, not just in relation to bushfire.

The field of community development in relation to bushfire safety is still in its infancy. There are at least three good reasons for this. Firstly,as indicated

above, the field of community education initiatives, and the approach to community safety in this field, is seen to be undergoing a 'paradigm shift' (Elsworth et al). The emphasis is still heavily oriented toward specific concrete operational thinking and responses to the threat of fire. Secondly, the problem which programs are designed to address in the case of fire entails threat and anxiety for anyone involved. Given this, it is understandable that the community may be more vocal about the need for increased operational resources such as strengthening response capacity with aerial suppression, and calls for increased fuel reduction efforts. Thirdly, while recent events may have some impact, there is a tendency among vulnerable communities to regard the threat of fire as remote, and accordingly a lesser candidate for serious attention.

One consequence of the adoption of a community development model for education is that the responsibility for safety becomes shared between the fire agencies and the community. In common with other community activities, and notwithstanding some capacity to make regulations, meaningful community involvement in bushfire safety is an intrinsically voluntary activity for individual community members. Accordingly, successful implementation of shared responsibility relies on the successful implementation of programs that effectively and comprehensively engage the requisite number of community members.

This is a challenging idea in a field which has to have a strong command and control ideology for its operational response. It is difficult to contain within the one organization, an additional alternative approach which is defined by its absence of command and control. In systems psychodynamic terms[26], such a dilemma involving two apparently contradictory tasks – a strong response culture and a 'loose' community development approach - will require a 'strong container' to hold both together. In organizational terms, such a strong container would mean a strong supportive climate organizationally for both command and control strategies and community development strategies to coexist and mutually reinforce – and respect - each other. The CE Unit have bravely (and in my view, wisely) nailed their colours to the mast in this environment, and utilise community development principles to the extent that

[26] The interested reader will find a series of papers which take a systems psychodynamic approach, in the archive of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations . http://www.ispso.org/

their practice opportunities allow, which is particularly through their facilitation of Community Fire Safe groups.

One idea inherent in community development is to aim to provide opportunities for creativity, a human process one outcome of which is a new level of human functioning. This new level of functioning may include a newly found confidence, a stronger sense of connectedness to neighbours, a means through which neighbours can assist each other, both with preparedness and with informal warnings.

One idea underpinning resilience is that people can recover from a community trauma, such as the Wangary fire, and, in some cases, do so in such a way as to reach a new level of functioning. In the case of the threat of fire, recovery includes being more prepared in future for a similar or related threat. One way in which this future preparedness contributes to resilience, is that it reduces the loss of confidence which the trauma can engender. Community education around preparedness for fire, when seen in this light, contributes to people's creativity as they find their way through the confusion occasioned by the trauma. These ideas, when expressed in the literature, see creativity as embodying one of the traits of resilience (Maguire and Hagan, 2007). The CE program therefore is contributing to resilience where it works with those who have experienced trauma, and facilitates the emergence of creativity, assisting people to find actions they can carry out, to help themselves and each other, their families and their immediate neighbourhoods, to mitigate loss in a future fire event.

The above paragraph refers to theoretical ideas which underpin a community development approach to community safety, particularly as it is practiced by, or facilitated by, the CE officer in a fire impacted area. Community development as facilitated by a paid officer exists on a continuum of practice. At one end of the continuum is an officer encouraging independence in the group participants while at the other is the officer who operates with only slight modification to the conventional stand and deliver approach. Somewhere in between is the idea of 'self organization', which can occur as a result of facilitation, on its own, or as a mix of 'input' from an officer and independent group activity. There are several examples in the case study of independent community led groups either acting alone in community safety, or acting in partnership with the CE officer. Self organization is particularly pertinent to the idea of creativity. Newton (2007) refers to self organization as the

> spontaneous initiative and capacity of salient role holders to create responsibly (response-ability) the forms of role connected-ness (organization) necessary to undertake work and tackle problems under variable local conditions. The emphasis on local responsiveness and learning-in-experience is supported theoretically by the complexity science approach that reveals the limitations of prediction and control as management values, and hence the futility of operational blueprints for increasingly complex and inter-sectoral problems.

Self organization is a particularly important idea in community safety, and one which can create a conundrum for fire services. A substantial amount of attention in the Coronial findings (Schapel, 2007) was given to the issue of how private fire units can work in more effectively with the formal fire service: two of the Wangary deaths were men on private fire units. Essentially, those seeking to integrate these organizational forms, private fire units and brigades, can be seen to blend 'self organization' with 'formal institutional organization'. There are accounts in this case study of an individual with considerable fire experience, assisting members of the public during both the Wangary fire and the Rustler's Gully fire. People in formal organizations, including members of the fire service, were critical of these actions. This suggested to me that there is a long way to go before self organization can be fully accepted as a legitimate form of community organising. [27]

## Program Inter-dependency

### Inter-dependence – the broad idea

Table 3 above set out a range of domains with which the CE officer interacts. One was an intra-organizational domain. Here CE officers saw their work as explicitly inter-dependent with other initiatives within the organization; that is, these other initiatives held the possibility of both enhancing and impinging on

[27] There has been considerable community discussion following the trauma of Black Saturday, about the issue of bunkers as future protection against the threat of fire. In public meetings the fire services have needed to be cautious in their advice to the public, that there is no current CSIRO research available on the matter of bunkers which can be conclusively offered on the matter. However, the fact remains that community members will self organize, will do so and be required to do so by their own convictions and the roles they hold as family carers, and that this will occur before the matter of bunkers can authoritatively (meaning in this case scientifically) be reported on. Working creatively with self organizing groups is a key challenge for fire services.

desired CE program outcomes. The Ministerial Review explicitly named this issue by stating in relation to bushfire management strategies, that

> *The success of one of these strategies is often reliant on the implementation of another*. This approach can be applied to other hazards in South Australia (p. 11).(emphasis added)

Examples cited by the CE officers of intra-organizational influences on their CE program outcomes, included the close relationship between activities of the media section of head office, including warning systems[28], and the production of program materials, such as brochures, DVD;s etc. Another aspect of the intra-organizational influences included brigade members' participation in CE sessions. When CE is partnered with the volunteer component, these outcomes can be seen as shared outcomes.

Inter-dependent relationships cited by the CE officers included those with local government, or relationships with Departments such as PIRSA where CE officers deliver part of a curriculum in a learning opportunity devised by and managed by someone else. Community relationships can be thought of as relationships taken up when the CE officers draw on some form of civil society infrastructure. I take 'society infrastructure' here to have social components deriving from pre-existing characteristics of the constituent community members, as well as physical components such as the availability of a community hall[29]. Sometimes physical and social infrastructure blends together. Many examples were cited in the interviews, including the role and support from Progress Associations, and community agencies supporting particular groups such as Riding for the Disabled. Among the more static infrastructure supports used heavily, and hence depended upon by CE, included the

[28] I note the Wangary recommendation that Incident Management Teams should now include a Regional Public Warnings Officer (see Recommendation 10, p580, Schapel, 2007 ); also that members of the public can now subscribe to receive Bushfire Information and Warning Messages, news and updates from the CFS and view real time updates on current CFS incidents as advised in a media release posted on the CFS website.

[29] Often infrastructure in the field of disaster management is quite concrete in its language. The Natural Disasters Mitigation Program 2009/2010 funding round in relation to South Australia, made 13 projects available to this state. In the Press Release announcing the grants, the Commissioner, Mr David Place, used social theory terminology: "Should disaster strike, we want to help communities recover more quickly and be able to demonstrate increased resilience during the event" (emphasis added). While using social theoretical constructs, the grant scheme on my assessment, heavily funded more concrete infrastructure. The grants were as follows: 7 in flood detection, levee construction and stormwater upgrades, 1 to do with generation of electricity, 1 to do with the installation of a fire tower, 4 relating to risk management mapping, and one to do with communication systems to increase community awareness.

availability of community halls and venues which provide places for community members to meet other than in homes.

It is common to hear the idea of dependence being referred to in negative terms in community safety discussions. The observation is along the lines of “we have to work hard to discourage the dependence of members of communities on us”. In this sort of conversation, “dependence” is often painted as a ‘state of mind’ or ‘state of affairs’ to be avoided. The concern goes along the following lines: that a community member who is seen as inappropriately ‘dependent on’ the fire services may erroneously believe, or worse - be led to believe, that he or she can rely on assistance from a member of the fire service in the event of a fire. This line of thinking is often brought to the surface around questions such as whether a community agency or service should have a register of vulnerable community members who may, for example, have difficulty in responding to a warning. One of the perceived risks of such a register is that devising a register could lead people to be dependent, in that they may wait for a warning that may not come, and in so waiting, increase their own vulnerability. Drawing up such a register is seen by some to be ‘encouraging dependency’ and this is spoken of in negative tones.

‘Inter-dependence’ contains the idea that, through a relationship of some sort, there is, or may be, a mutually beneficial interaction. Allowing oneself to recognise and experience inter-dependence is emotionally challenging, and may require going out on a limb in some way. It can give rise to questions and concerns such as: Will the other party with whom one is seeking some inter-dependence, ‘deliver’? Will they be reliable, keep agreements, share resources etc. The emerging research on trust in emergency services in Australia being carried out by Emily Sharp (2008), will be a welcome addition to our understanding of the dynamics of trust, which can be seen as a mechanism which facilitates ‘inter-dependence’.

On a global level, inter-dependence arises with issues such as climate change and the global financial crisis. In an increasingly complex world, solving problems requires us to inquire into and examine our ‘inter-dependencies’. This is also true in the domain of community safety.

The state of mind of openness to inter-dependency becomes corrupted when particular pressures push people to treat others as ‘instruments’ in their own policy agenda. An example would be a person with a professional interest

pushing his way through to disaster victims for the purposes of documenting the event. There is a close link between ideas of inter-dependency, and inter-subjectivity. Corruption of inter-subjective processes leads to disengagement, with associated loss of trust, an increase in cynicism, a propensity to blame, and ultimately, alienation. These processes can be seen to operate in parallel – at the interpersonal level, and the inter-agency level.

## Collaboration and engagement

While I have noted above that there is a close interaction between many parts of the emergency management and community systems with which the CE role is inter-dependent, I do not elaborate on these areas in any detail except to emphasise their inter-dependency. I have already noted the state of flux of the legislative and regulatory environment in the State.

What I mean by collaboration is the simple meaning of 'to labour with'. This can be thought about at at least two levels. At the level of individual actors, this could include a CE officer working alongside a Brigade Captain, in the delivery of a particular part of a Community Fire Safe Group. At the agency level the collaborative process could entail two agencies, such as a Fire Service and a Land Management Agency, working towards imparting fire safety information to program participants who have presented for a course on land management issues.

Often collaboration is regarded as a construct which itself is for a purpose such as facilitating engagement. Engagement is defined by Elsworth et al (2009) as follows;

> Engagement is a broad idea that includes individual curiosity and interest, and the motivation to learn more, think carefully and form the intention to commence appropriate planning and preparation activities.

The DSE Community Engagement workbook casts a broad definition, as follows:

> Depending on the situation in which you are working, 'engagement' can cover consultation, education, public participation, participative democracy or working in partnership.

The CE officers define empowerment when a community group can continue on its own, to carry out adequate steps to achieve community safety, with perhaps the underpinning of 'agency' support.

The desired end result of engagement is seen as empowerment, a state in which the individual feels able to manage, to enact a safe course of action, and to do this without further support.

At a local level there are two broad groups. One, the self-organising group, acts to inform themselves and become empowered without accessing the resources of a fire safety program. The other group strives toward empowerment through using such agency programs as are available. Of course in reality it is not black and white and, as this case study shows, people use resources available to them in a range of ways. The CE officer provided occasional input to those groups which typified the self-organizing group.

When an agency's efforts seek to underpin community efforts, this process and intent, are consistent with the aim of subsidiarity. The idea of subsidiarity, and 'self organization' are themselves fluid concepts and are seldom in a steady state. Ross Connor (2005) argues that community environments are dynamic, and evaluation tools often are focussed on the presumption of relatively stable single projects, "not initiatives consisting of multiple, loosely related projects with both project-level and community level outcomes" (p.70). As the CE officers take a flexible approach to the development of Community Fire Safe groups, this necessitates finding an equally broad and flexible approach to determining what are desirable outcomes in different areas, and whether these outcomes are achieved.

The CE Unit draw on the work of Arnstein, (1969) in particular, her 'ladder of citizen participation', as one way of thinking about collaboration between services and members of community. Her ladder, again using the idea of a continuum, ranged from minimal participation by the community member in the processes of the service provider, or in the language used here minimal 'engagement', through to a middle ground, a version of collaboration where the community member forms a partnership with the 'service provider', and finally through to that of empowerment, where the community members 'stand alone' ready and able to act in their chosen stance of desirable 'community safety'.[30]

Several authors make significant contributions in this area, see Appendix 5.

[30] There are many different ways of expressing these points of intersection between service providers and members of the public. In writing about relationships between researcher and researched, Kushner (2000), drawing heavily on his colleague McDonald (1987), refer to three styles of working as autocratic, bureaucratic and democratic. It is the democratic style which is most closely aligned here with the idea of collaboration – labouring *together*.

## Inter-subjectivity

I introduce here the term 'inter-subjectivity'. This is a technical term, and while I won't be using it in a technical sense, the concept is central to this part of the discussion so I will use it and give the reader a brief explanation of inter-subjectivity.

We, that is all of us, are used to exchanging ideas on a rational basis, indeed rational discourse is the principal mode of communication in our lives. An essential, some would say *the* essential, feature of rationality is objectivity, wherein all will agree on a set of basic objective facts. But the communication of subjective experience is much more difficult[31]. However, for all that it is difficult, it is important in many contexts that people undertake this communication of subjective perceptions, and it is important to do this as well as possible. Moreover, this is particularly true in the bushfire context where, as we know, subjective perceptions of the same objective reality will routinely differ widely. An approach to this task is the development of inter-subjectivity. Inter-subjectivity is also strongly associated with allied concepts such as mutuality and respect, but for the purposes of this discussion it is probably sufficient to think of inter-subjectivity as practical empathy.

The concept of inter-subjectivity is at the heart of our appreciation of the processes and mechanisms through which parties - organizations, officers, and community members - get to more fully understand each other. [32]

While not using this terminology the CE officers hold that the work they do, in their approach to communities through Community Fire Safe group work, seeks to engender or promote inter-subjectivity. They see that they do this in a variety of ways but particularly through the process of leaving space for group members' narratives to emerge. It is in the course of this process that members develop fuller understandings of each other. This enhanced understanding of

[31] Scheff (1997) holds that solving complex problems seems to need not only logical connections, but also idiosyncratic ones, including ones which link with emotional connections. Emotional associations are seen to allow for a diversity of connective paths.

[32] This concept is a major motif of what is known as 'relational' theory, and particularly seeks to theorise about the possibility of equality of relationship between subjectivities. Long (2009) notes that using the word equality here refers to the mutual existence, assertion and recognition of subjectivities. This includes the recognition of the need for an existing 'other' subjectivity, "in order that our own subjectivity might exist and be asserted". Long notes that the 'other' is not simply an object to be internalised introspectively into a world of inner objects solipsistic use, although may play this part on many occasions. She argues that subjectivity in this way of thinking is not synonymous with individuality but a position *within a system* in relation to other subjectivities The other is required to be really 'other' for subjectivity to develop. Long's account of a 'community event' within GR conferences is provided in a pending publication.

each other is one of the means through which community members engage in, or work together in, future community based planning. As the accounts in the Results section below will demonstrate, the need to create this space, where people could hear each others' concerns, is particularly pronounced in an area which has been profoundly impacted by fire. Indeed, the CE officer reported that while she specifically allowed space for people to bring forward their ideas and listen to each others' perspectives, she felt that it could not be otherwise. The community members themselves ensured, by the way they participated in the group discussions, that this happened, at least in the early stages of group development. Again, these ideas strongly overlap with theory of adult education, and with theory about resilience, particularly the development of resilience in post fire communities.

I argue later in this report that the idea of inter-subjectivity lies at the heart of the idea of '*shared responsibility'*, a central idea in community safety. For this to actually materialise, each party in any 'shared responsibility' relationship needs to recognise the existence of the other. One of the qualities intrinsic to mutuality, is respect which could be seen as a mechanism which facilitates inter-subjectivity. The two concepts, respect and mutuality, can be seen to be mutually reinforcing, and to be key components of inter-subjectivity. In a real sense respect is the opposite of coercion, a strategy or tool used by one party to force a view or belief, or outcome, onto another.

### The role of role

In systems psychodynamic thinking, *role* lies at the intersection between the person and the system or organization. It mediates organizational life and allows the person to find a place or identity in relation to others. Long (2009) argues that role is far more than just the position within a task system because it incorporates the person who is part of many different systems within the organization. She refers to role as a lively concept, as it is through taking up the authorities and accountabilities that different roles offer, we learn to become effective social beings. Understanding the roles that are taken up allows for a better understanding of the systems we are in - the organizations and other systems in which we live, participate, interact - and hence the frameworks from which we interact with others. (Long, p15). Inquiring into role, and being attuned to the dynamic account of inter-subjectivity and how it comes into being in the way we 'are' in work, family and community roles, provides a useful backdrop to a study of a complex and demanding role of a fire service officer.

The factors which influence inter-subjectivity from the perspective of the CE officer include:

- That she works out of her own community: role boundaries are complex, often 'fuzzy' and sometimes permeable
- That she draws extensively on her own 'self': her self-understanding, values, and 'extensions of herself', including her community based relationships
- The way she draws on her own fire experience - and near death experience - when seeking to understand the fire experience brought forward by community members
- The manner in which she integrates her own experience, and the knowledge and skills imparted to her through her work based training, and her work and community relationships, in an iterative manner.

Long holds that inter-subjectivity among interacting members of a community system - informal systems- provides a form of social glue. In this study, inter-subjectivity is also experienced within and across formal organizational boundaries.

The idea of inter-subjectivity, particularly as it relates to understanding how we take up roles in agency and community life, provides some theoretical underpinnings for the phenomena of trust and mutuality. If 'the other' cannot be recognised and affirmed in some respectful way, the cooperation which can flow from inter-subjectivity as a phenomenon, or mechanism, is likely to be halted. Where barriers to the operationalising of mutuality exist, people - and programs, and organizations - become stuck in defensive positions.

This is seen in the silos which exist between organizations who have a shared interest in a particular field, such as two fire services, an urban brigade and a rural (volunteer) brigade. Where they are unable to see each other as people - that is, utilising and engaging in inter-subjectivity - they act out of a defensive uncollaborative position, and much valuable potential knowledge and experience is lost to each service and to the community. So too when a rigidly 'operational work only' brigade sticks to a narrowly defined perspective of its utility to the community. Much is lost when it acts as a 'closed system' in this way. Efforts to open up such rigidities however sometimes requires some careful understanding of what factors are contributing to the need to keep boundaries narrowly defined and difficult to permeate. They do not become

rigid by accident – the rigidity has some history and is usually serving some purpose. Some organizational reward systems feed this silo effect, such as narrowly prescribed organizational performance measures which do not reward collaboration.

Community education in relation to community is challenging work and is particularly challenging for CE fire service officers in carrying out their role. They seek to create spaces in home settings, with a view to increasing the likelihood that people will relate relatively freely with one another. That is they encourage people to seek to explore their inter-subjectivities without the usual defences an office environment may provide, while they explore what they can achieve together.

# Results

This next section takes the theoretical ideas set out above, and examines them in relation to the data from the case study interviews and observations I have made over the time I have known the community education officer in the Lower Eyre Peninsula.

## CE Unit Based Program Development

One of the CE program assumptions was that the CE management structure would provide a CE officer with management support and the opportunity for ongoing relationships with other officers that would be educative and supportive. These structures and supports would maximise the chance of the CE officer achieving the desired program outcome of contributing to a safer community.

This leaves open the question as to whether there could have been some disadvantages of separation from the operational structure of the organization.

The CE officer works in a matrix authority structure. When she was first appointed, she asked the Manager of CE who her bosses were. She was advised that there were three – himself as Manager of Community Education, the Regional Prevention Officer (where CE was seen as part of Prevention) and the Regional Commander. My observation was that the latter two roles (RPO and Regional Commander) were less lines of authority and more support roles on which the CE officer could call to assist her in CE activities. One of these officers talked in terms of wanting to see, and seeing, a gradual uptake of community involvement in fire prevention programs, and another officer talked in terms of wanting to see a ‘cloning’ of the CE officer to allow for an increase in the sorts of interventions she was pursuing.

It was the CE Unit supervisors who provided more direct support, ongoing education, and saw to the availability of the materials necessary for the CE role. The sense of trust between the CE officer and her city based (CE) supervisors was clearly apparent. The CE officer reported being strengthened by the experience she has of being part of a larger group of staff who also had CE responsibilities. She finds the group meetings a source of support, encouragement and new ideas.

While the CE officer was trusted by her superiors, along with that trust went an expectation that she would use her own initiative in the way she took up the detail of her new role, particularly given the extent of the losses of life and livelihood which had occurred there. This freedom also meant that the city based supervisors would sometimes take a back seat when present on her 'turf'. In a recent fire on the Peninsula (the Proper Bay fire, January 14, 2009), the Manager of Community Safety attended a Community Meeting with the CE officer, but 'sat at the back'. The Manager noted that the community 'did not need to see someone from Head Office'. The support for the locally based CE officer is present, but the prominent role is left to the local officer. This is a fine line to walk, but one which the CE staff work at maintaining.

Did I perceive any negative consequences of delivering the CE work in this model?

There were certainly ongoing issues within the CE Unit as to funding of the position. This may not have been different had the positions formed part of the dominant (operational) organizational culture. I observed the yearly struggle with appointing staff and then putting them off, and witnessed how this drew down considerably on the strengths and strategic direction setting capacity of the Community Education group within the organization.

There were multiple ways in which the capacity of the service was impacted by this fluid and uncertain environment. The putting on and off of staff was experienced by some staff as stressful. Some staff also believed it sent a message to the community that the short term nature of the CE contract period suggested to them, the public, that the fire service placed less importance on community education. Some staff felt it eroded trust between the fire service and the community, as community relationships which were begun and fostered were severed and there was no guarantee that they would be able to be picked up again at some future time. The uncertainty surrounding whether there would be a budget allocation for a CE officer on Lower Eyre after the initial period of 12 months became a public matter, and letters to and from the community and Head Office of the fire service were reported in the local newspaper. The insecurity took considerable time and energy away from the community education task at hand, and will be referred to again below in relation to a possible decrease in trust by the community. One CE officer remarked:

> We don't know where we are up to, we're stopping and starting and coming and going.

This has now changed, and as from August 2008, after some 10 years of effort to achieve this, the staff are now permanent part time.

Some CE staff felt the knowledge and value base of the CE staff were not accepted by the more operationally oriented parts of the organization. A major task of the Community Fire Safe groups is to strengthen local social networks. In this context, one staff member queried whether the organization

> puts a value on a person having met their neighbours through having been to a Community Fire Safe group?

Another officer commented:

> I really struggle with transferring knowledge from other areas into our area – or [others] being prepared to step outside our area – and just to take that time to have a look and see how it relates

This comment was made in a conversation in which CE staff were describing the intellectual stimulation and support from a community building conference they attended in another state. The stimulation they received from this conference was visible in the lively account they gave. This observation gave some weight to their view that the ideas they valued, and professional development they saw as important, were not constantly reinforced within the dominant culture of their own organization.

When the CE positions were made permanent, I asked the (LEP) CE officer what difference that had made to her approach to her work. She responded:

> Now we can get our teeth into things. I've had stuff I've wanted to do for ages. We can have more longer term projects. Like the work with groups who need more one on one, or who need more practice.

The CE officer provided examples of groups and contexts where more one-on-one time is needed.

One particular example was the work she had done with a facility which provides a form of sheltered employment to young disabled people. The site of the employment is a farm some distance from town. This work has included assistance to the agency with developing policies and procedures. She noted that the agency managers and staff have now taken a policy decision, for

example, that they will not take program participants out to the farm on a Total Fire Ban day. They have fire safety procedures now in relation to staff, to program participants, and to the farm itself, including the animals. They have carried out considerable work with contractors, and have made improvements around the farm. They applied for and received some grant money to assist them with purchase of additional equipment, including Personal Protective Equipment. They have had a practice of their Fire Response Plan with agency staff and program clients. The CE officer plans now to only make contact on an annual basis. She applauded what the staff, volunteers and clients had achieved. “They have done so much work…If only able bodied people would do as much”.

The agency achievements were documented in the Port Lincoln Times, on 22nd November 2007, in an article entitled “Farm Bushfire Ready”.

Sometimes tensions arose for the CE officer due to being outside the ordinary line of command, and hence communication, and to some degree operating out of a different culture.

I observed an interaction between a senior member of operational staff and a CE officer, in which the senior officer responded in what seemed a sweepingly dismissive fashion to the CE officer’s question about whether a particular community was likely to be successful in their efforts to form a brigade and therefore be likely to be the recipients of a fire truck. (The response was that this community would not succeed in these efforts).

The CE officer was somewhat taken aback by the response, as was I. She also wondered if the community themselves then knew what she now knew. I asked her what may have been behind the puzzlingly dismissive response. I wondered if it was a sensitivity to lack of resources. The CE officer responded that she was still puzzling over it and wondered if it might have been because she was new, or younger than the officer concerned, or a woman.

While these questions remain unanswered, and in some ways are unanswerable, they provide some insight into some of the possible structural barriers to the way a role is taken up. They also point to the dilemma for a CE officer who sits on the boundary between an organization and a community some of whose members she is likely to know personally.

## Embedding the CE officer into the community

The assumption here is that the CE officer should be 'embedded' in the community. In this context embedded means an established member of and actually living within the relevant community.

This was seen to maximise the chances of

1. increasing community capacity by the officer 'staying on' in community
2. more expeditious use of officer's time due to familiarity with resources and networks
3. the CE officer being more attuned to community experience
4. the CE officer being best placed to cross the private/public boundary into the home

### 1: Increasing community capacity by officer 'staying on' in community

The first claim above can only be answered by time. Certainly, the officer was embedded in the community, and at least in the foreseeable future, all things being equal, will remain so. The geographical location of the Lower Eyre Peninsula is such that it supports the largest town for some hundreds of kilometres.

### 2: Resource and network familiarity will facilitate access to community members

The second claim is that knowledge of available community resources, participation in local relationships, and access to local networks, increases the officer's ability to carry out the CE role effectively. There is ample evidence in our interviews to support this view.

The CE officer noted that, in her appointment, the fire service got 'what money can't buy'. She explained:

> I've lived here 40 years, and I know a lot of people. ….You use that to your advantage in a job like this.

There were many examples of this through the interview data – of knowing who to call to get a link into the Progress Association, who to call to get access to a

particular facility, who to talk to in the local media to get a story across, which community leader might be the best access point on a particular issue, and so on.

> I ring a lot of people I know. ..I'm using that relationship that I've already established with them…You've already got that platform that you start on….If you come in fresh, you've still got to establish those networks and you've got to establish the trust through other ways.

The CE officer's work with an Aboriginal community demonstrated the value of the prior knowledge of people, and the trust that came with this prior knowledge. In one example the CE officer noted how, in her conversations with a key member of an Aboriginal community, she can talk fire preparedness to her while they are working together in another non fire service related organization. The officer referred to what I would call a sense of mutuality in their role interactions. "You know, we are *helping each other* in our jobs".

Speaking of accessing another of the Aboriginal communities, the officer explained that she approached one of their leaders, someone she has known for a considerable time. Members of this community were wanting to talk about some of their community buildings in relation to protection from fire.

> It's because [name of Aboriginal leader] knows me and has known me for a long time, and trusts and respects me. [person had said]..I don't want a heap of white fella's coming up here, looking at us, poking their nose around and seeing what we're doing up here.

The CE officer negotiated with the Aboriginal leader for a suitable time and date, a process which took some time. She brought a senior CFS officer with her to enable a formal organizational operational response to the community's request for increased fire resources. She added:

> I've organized it for a day when I'm not doing my other job so I'll pick him up, take him out, introduce him to [Aboriginal elder and leader]. I don't know how long we'll be there but it's one of those things….you just can't breeze in…

She said that this leader said he would be glad for her to come out and see them, but

> When you come, I don't want you here too long, you know, I don't want to sit there and listen to all this ra ra ra…He's very to the point…..and I

> said, I appreciate that…To be invited into that situation the first time, but to be invited back and then to be allowed to bring a guest, is a very privileged position.

However, the 'localness' of the CE officer also brought with it some other perhaps unintended, or unanticipated and somewhat interrelated consequences. Two sorts of such consequences are briefly documented here.

The first is the community action which resulted from the public and local agencies becoming aware that the funding for her position was not secure and may not be forthcoming. The second is two examples of what could be generally classed as 'role strain'. The first of these examples is the burden which can result when one uses one's 'personal' relationships in a professional domain. The other example of role strain is when the CE role and the 'community member' role become blurred.

Managing community expectations

When the funding ran out for the first 12 months of this officer's appointment, local organizations and the media ran a campaign of letter writing to the Chief Fire Officer, to argue that the position should be continued. The officer herself also felt that, as her role had become quite high profile, the community could perceive the fire service as ambivalent about the idea of community safety, by not acting decisively on her appointment. Some discontinuity occurred for a time before the decision was made that the position was to be continued for another year.

Struggling to keep the service going under insecure funding arrangement put stress on the CE officer and her community relationships, as well as relationships with her managers. Letters were sent to the Chief Fire Officer from the CEO of one of the Local Government bodies, affirming the importance of the CE role. The Chief Fire Officer replied that he was heartened to hear first hand of the success of the CE work.

> [Name] should be congratulated on the professional manner in which she had diligently taken on her work….[and that he was] working with the government to seek an extension after the announcement of the state budget about late May. After the budget has been handed down, I will write to you again to advise you of the future of this program. I have been greatly heartened to hear first hand of the success of [name..'s] work.

This correspondence was quoted in the Port Lincoln Times on Thursday 7th June 2007. In anticipating finishing up, the CE officer recounted that her manager was coming over and

> getting a handover and winding the job down…I suppose I'll find out then whether he wants us to actually ring all our pending groups..ring everyone and say, this is what's happened ….or what do we do, just disappear? Did they just never hear from us again?

The resolution of this occurred in August 2008, with the CE officers' positions being made permanent part time.

Role strain

The second consequence of using local networks is the pressure this puts the officer under in her ordinary life, particularly when problems are experienced with the delivery of the program.

Regarding pressure in her ordinary life, she noted that it is hard to 'get away from the job'. As she explained to me, "Living in a small town, I don't just see these people at their meetings".

Using one's relationships is particularly burdensome when problems arise. On one occasion, the officer had approached three people who were local fire service volunteers, to assist her with a particular meeting. Closer to the time of the meeting, the meeting host, a member of the community, felt she couldn't go ahead with the meeting and forgot to let the CE officer know. This meant that the officer had little time to cancel those volunteers she had asked to come, some of whom were brigade members. She was concerned that her future requests to volunteers may be harmed.

> They might just say, 'too hard', or '[we] can't rely on you', but hopefully they'll give me a second chance…I did everything I could.

The officer also saw this experience as not only a source of pressure on her, but also a reminder of the need to keep attuned to the possibility that the change of plans may also have reflected a fluctuating resilience in community members – that tackling some issues on certain days is more manageable than on other days.

The CE officer uses her local knowledge too in making everyday decisions about who she will ask to assist her with her meetings. She is mindful not to 'overuse' the volunteers.

> [Name – a volunteer] does come to do many meetings, but I prefer to ask [salaried staff member] first; at least I know he is getting paid for it, and [volunteer] can stay at his job and earn himself an income.

Another version of role strain occurs when roles become blurred – when is one in a CE role, and when is one more a local person with local affiliations and loyalties?

I was present when a senior officer told the CE officer that a particular community would not have response vehicles sent into it in the event of a fire. This concerned the CE officer as she knew this community quite well and believed that they were not aware of this stance. At the time she discussed this with me, she was not clear how she would respond to this unwelcome piece of information.

Community Fire Safe group members' perspectives on the importance of local community networks

While the discussion above has concentrated on the importance for the CE officer of using local networks, I made note when this awareness worked the other way as well; of community members using their own networks to hear of the existence of the CE officer and what she would have to offer.

Community members reported several sources for their awareness of the Community Fire Safe group and the existence of the CE officer's role. One group member said he had learned that the Region now had a CE officer through three different channels. He had read about the appointment in the local paper. He saw the CE officer for the first time in her role when they had both attended a community event, which was the launch of "Black Tuesday", the book of community stories of the Wangary fire. Finally he cited the advertisement in the local roadhouse for the initial Community Fire Safe group meeting. He responded to these information sources and at the time I spoke to him he had attended four Community Fire Safe group meetings.

Two other Community Fire Safe group members knew that starting a Community Fire Safe group was under consideration, through their role in

another community group where this was discussed, and also through their associations with people within the 'fire professional network' in town.

The fourth community member I specifically interviewed in relation to Community Fire Safe group meetings was also a member of a brigade. In this role he partly supported the group as a local group, and he was also used as a resource for the group when specifically invited to bring his brigade knowledge to group discussions.

### 3: A local would be more attuned to community experience

Another perceived advantage of having a local CE officer was that this would increase the chance that the CE officer role and program would be in tune with local community experience.

All three officers in the Management Group interview emphasized the importance of 'mindfulness' about the community. The word 'mindful' was the word they actually used. Other phrases included:

> this is where you have to know your community
>
> this is where an understanding of the community profile is particularly useful

Knowing your community was seen as particularly important when there had been a fire event, such as at Wangary.

One officer noted that he believed in an area where there has been significant community losses from a fire, that initially one can 'trade on' - meaning 'get away with' - some of the 'less engaged' community approaches in offering one-off community meetings, or holding a particular education event. In such situations he felt the 'trade off' of not being a local could be set against a sense from the community that they may be more eager to respond to 'anyone' seen as knowledgeable and willing to assist them from a community education perspective[33]. But in the main, there was an expressed preference from the CE Unit management for the CE officer to be situated within the community.

Another sensitivity which the CE Unit portrayed, was to invoke the community development principle of, where possible, being guided by the community's wishes and concerns. In discussing the role of the newly appointed CE officer,

[33] Dunstan outlines in New Community Quarterly (2007) an intervention in which she acts in a more 'visiting specialist' role to a community. This model of service delivery draws on some similar and some different sets of skills and networks within the community.

the manager of CE noted that it is most desirable to move into a community setting at the invitation of someone in the community. This can, of course, be engineered in a positive way where an officer knows the networks of community leaders.

While a CE officer can be attuned to others' experience without knowing any of the people involved in that experience, it was certainly the case in my interviews with CE officer that she was very attuned to community experience on an ongoing and regularly revived basis. She recounted an experience she had, travelling through a particular part of the landscape to her first meeting with a community group who lived among some of those who had died in the fire

> I'm going into an area to talk to people about stuff that they already know about, and that was forced upon them. The knowledge that they have was forced upon them, under probably terrifying circumstances….
>
> I've really got to do this right, you know, these are real people. You know, when you talk about people, you don't just talk about the letters p-e-o-p-l-e or something, or you know, community, or this airy fairy thing you can't touch….These are real people like me, you know, they have hearts and souls and feelings and emotions, just like me. And how would I want to be treated?……. I think it's good, every now and then, to be really, really, really, really reminded of what you're dealing with and who you're dealing with…… It was a good grounding for me, just to say, okay, just remember what you're doing, and just remember who you're dealing with, and just stay focused, and stay yourself, and you know, stay connected.

While this study has been particularly focussing on the role of the CE officer, other officers also value the role of experience. One officer speculated about the numbers in Adelaide Hills who had been through Ash Wednesday. He estimated only 20%.

> The rest of them, the other 80 odd percent have never been through it, so they don't understand

### 4: The CE officer and the private/public boundary into the home

The principal mode of delivery of the CE program is with groups of community members in the home of a resident. Sometimes the same group

will meet in a number of different homes. The CE officer being an established member of the community eliminates one potential problem, that of everything that attends the invitation of a stranger into someone's home.

## Resilience Theory

The major claims here are that the CE programs, in particular the Community Fire Safe groups, provide an opportunity, under guided facilitation, for people to get to know each other, or to get to know each other better, or in particular ways.

These interactions are used as a basis for further exploration of fire knowledge, household and community planning and sharing of resources.

The following is discussed:

- the focus on the home as the place of preference for meetings
- the particular emphasis on the use of narrative in facilitating meetings
- the utilization of adult learning theory
- the pursuit of community development principles
- the explicit creation of time and space for community members to take up opportunities for creativity.

All these factors are argued to make an overall contribution to community resilience.

The above claims are responded to in turn.

### Group work in home environments within close geographic proximity

#### The social basis of group work

The CE manager noted that in Community Fire Safe

> a lot of personal time is spent with people….it is not you standing there telling people this is what they should be doing in future. It's actually more powerful [than that]…What happens within Community Fire Safe

> is to get their friends, their peers, even family members that they respect, those most able to influence their decision…..

He gives the example of

> having seen mothers talk with another group of mothers, and they toss it around…They provide other solutions to that issue. ..come next door….You've just created the time and space for that to happen

The view here is that this can only happen when time is used for people to get to know each other and share enough of each other's circumstances that creative solutions can be found to the problems they face in increasing their own safety in relation to the threat of fire.

There are many examples in the data of the way the CE officer, when delivering the Community Fire Safe program, explicitly seeks and fosters these community relationships. This is captured in the words of the CE officer, when she told me of her work with a particular group of women who came together for the first time as a group, despite living in close proximity to one another. Eight households were represented in the initial meeting, of whom over half had lost their homes, and in one household, all members of the family were present. She reported group members listening attentively to one another. She commented:

> It's a shame that a tragedy or a near death experience or a loss of everything you own, is the catalyst to make you meet your neighbour ….I"m sure if we hadn't had the Wangary fire, they still wouldn't know each other.

I heard many times from CE staff that community members, when they are asked what they expected from attending this session, frequently respond

> The best thing that happened was that I got to know my neighbours.

I have no reason to doubt that community members make such comments with this level of frequency, I have heard community members say it, and I have heard community members in other studies (eg Mt Bold case study, Goodman, Stevens and Rowe, 2008) express the need, after a scare with fire, to get to know their neighbours better.

**Program participants' perspectives on the social basis of the group**

Community Fire Safe group members reported that the social basis of the group was very important. Their accounts were unambiguous on this question. They all recounted conversations and arrangements with group members which they do not believe they would have had or made, without their involvement in the group. This included:

- the importance of having a telephone tree[34]
- the need to let each other know their thoughts regarding fire and their fire plans
- the need to inform each other of their decisions such as whether they were going to be home on a Total Fire Ban day "so that if a fire occurred, time was not wasted looking for someone who wasn't there"
- the need to identify in these conversations, who some of their more vulnerable neighbours are, and to talk through ways this knowledge can be used for possible inclusion of these people into their plans
- the flexibility of the group process which allows the inclusion of others into the group who have not attended previous meetings.

The Community Fire Safe group I spoke with held its first two meetings in a public place and has subsequently gone into people's homes.

One participant spoke in terms of endearment about the next meeting of the 'mob', those who had met to form a Community Fire Safe group, which was going to be at his place. He was looking forward to this. Another participant said he thought he would offer his place next, though he hadn't made this offer yet. Again, what I drew from this was that it was said with anticipated pleasure, or at least some degree of pleasant expectation. While there were some concrete matters each person wanted the groups' view on, (reported elsewhere), there was nonetheless a pervading sense of interest in the social nature of the group process. However there was an explicit understanding and expectation that the group membership would gradually increase.

Three of the four participants had given thought to what they saw as the desirable size of a Community Fire Safe group. One person thought it could get up to as many as 20, and two others thought that up to 10 was about right.

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34 http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/education/strategies_for_community_groups/community_telephone_trees.jsp; accessed 30th April 2009

They saw that this would allow enough room for people to all talk, and for all to listen to each other.

One participant was very clear on one of the benefits of having a group process as the medium for community discussion on fire safety. “Everyone thinks differently – no two people are the same”.

He regarded this as a strength, seeing this directly linked with harvesting a diversity of ideas.

One member thought that having a mixed model of delivery of fire information and support could be considered. He wondered if some community people could be ‘trained up’ to be able to give local residents some particular knowledge about how to prepare their house. He felt this could be ‘offered’ and if the offer was not taken up, then no harm was done. While being careful to avoid any gesture which could be interpreted by others as coercive, he also wanted to build on the latent interest in home safety he believed existed. He also believed that it was important to work alongside those in whom the community would have trust, such as those ‘in a CFS uniform’.

I commented that it is difficult to juggle how much time can be asked of those in these positions, at which this participant gently reminded me that I had asked him to comment on what he thought would be possible if one had an ‘open cheque book’. With an open cheque book, one didn’t have to be constrained by resource barriers. This interchange pointed to the dilemmas for the fire services, that they are in positions where their knowledge is valued by many in the community, and the uniform does bring with it some authority. And yet as a resource they are ‘thin on the ground’.

The social basis of the group also reaches across the boundary of the group, back into the community. One participant talked of how he was keen to let others know of the existence of their Community Fire Safe group. I commented to him on his social orientation. He replied that others say of him that he is a ‘disseminator of information’. He was already thinking about someone he was to invite to join the group. This person has some short term memory loss, so he will also remember to ask her again a few days closer to the meeting. He anticipated the conversation. “I’ll say – ‘will we walk or drive’, and she’ll say “let’s walk, to get the exercise”. (The walk was about 20 minutes). He commented further, “Anyway, during the walk, we can look at what needs doing in the town”.

One participant thought the group based nature of the learning and development was such that it would suit the spectrum of community 'types'. He felt that some group participants will stay until they get what they need and then drop out. He recognised that some will never think they need assistance. Others, he added, "will take a broader view and stay and help others". The participants interviewed in this case study were certainly those who took such a 'broader view' of their sense of responsibility for themselves and others. How they can be supported to extend their thinking and work at a community level, if this is what they wish to do as the Community Fire Safe group meetings formally cease, remains to be seen.

**Meeting in a home environment**

Meeting in people's homes is a central aspect of the delivery of the Community Fire Safe program. CE officers believe that taking the home as a program anchor point, keeps the participants geographically near the things that they are being asked to think about, including the geography of the terrain, the structure of the home, and the role of neighbours[35]. The home environment also specifically is seen to make more accessible, some of the more emotional content of parts of the CE task such as personal involvement and the influence of other family members or pets on the task of devising a fire plan. These issues are very present when working in a home environment, and are used extensively by CE officers in their practice.

Program staff also appear to draw on this 'home as program context' idea for its relatedness to trust. The CE officer noted that

> I think the minute you go into someone's home, it's almost like the door's been opened [relevant issue]

Some program staff hold the view that in agreeing to have a meeting in their home, and inviting their neighbours, that residents are more likely, consciously or not, to have extended some trust to you as an educator. This trust might operate as a mechanism which assists in opening their minds to you and what you have to say. Related to the issue of trust, staff also draw on the idea that the home is, in many though clearly not all circumstances, a place of increased intimacy. This intimacy is seen by community education staff to break down some usual barriers to communication, increasing the likelihood that members will share their concerns in a way that allows the educator to build on these

[35] See "Community Strategies" used in Community Fire Safe groups in Appendix 2

specific concerns and target educational messages in ways meaningful to the participants' actual 'lived experience' and presenting concerns.

Sometimes CE officers are able to use groups which meet in a home environment, but whose purpose in meeting predated any motivation to discuss preparedness for fire.

Dunstan (see Goodman, Dunstan and Boulet, 2007) provides a case example of how she was able to use community relationships which had formed well prior to her meeting with the group of women, allowing her to move quite quickly into their concerns, in an atmosphere of mutual caring and respect. Interestingly in this case, the group had been brought together through funding for an agricultural program for women, and when the program funding ceased, relationships had formed to such a degree that the group was able to take on other issues which concerned them as members. Fire safety was one such concern. They continued to meet in one another's homes, and used this detailed knowledge of their individual home circumstances, in their discussions about the threats they each faced.

Clearly for some the opposite is also true – that being in a home with others is the least likely environment in which they will want to learn. Obviously the most desirable mix is a range of program types, including support to self organizing groups.

It should also be noted that not all Community Fire Safe meetings are held in homes. The CE officer pointed to two different experience she had as a CE officer, one where she was imparting community education material

> under a shelter in North Shields [in a public place]… [as against] where the residents are drinking red wine [in a home], such as at Garratt Rd.[36]

While it might be less satisfying to the educator to be in a public venue, the more public type of group setting is preferred by some residents. The meetings the CE officer has convened at Louth Bay provide an interesting mix of public contexts. Part of the meeting comprises a 'walk around', where those assembled move around parts of the small community, looking at different homes. Another part of the meeting consists of a barbeque in a public hall. The different contexts provide a range of 'participation choices' for residents, and opportunities for staff to explore some similar and some different strategies for

[36] The Garratt Rd group provide an interesting exemplar of a productive interaction between the CE role and a group of astute self organising residents engaged in local action.

community education. The CE officer reported that some Louth Bay residents indeed did make a range of choices in relation to the event: some stayed for the whole process, some for the 'walk around', and some for the barbeque.

**Participants' perspectives**

One participant saw that one of the advantages of meeting in one another's homes, was that neighbours may be led to ask – 'what were that lot doing at your home last night?'. He saw this as a way of subtly drawing in others to the Community Fire Safe group. Other advantages cited included the opportunity to focus on specific home attributes. One participant was in the middle of building a new home and was keen to seek as much critique of their iterative decision making about the home as possible.

Three of the four Community Fire Safe participants made mention of the issue of mulch. Mulch as a carrier of fire was discussed in the group meetings. They each recounted to me what the CE officer told them she intended to do with her mulch which was to put it in a wheelie bin and take it away from the house area. One participant said that he wouldn't be doing that, but he had a system of sprinklers planned for his mulch. Another participant said that what the CE officer had planned "would be no good to him". His wife laughed in such a way as to lead me to think that the issue of mulch in this household was an unresolved area of risk. They were all keen gardeners and mulch was a key ingredient in their garden activities.

## Use of stories.

The CE officer had, some years earlier, been invited by the fire service to 'tell her story' to two community meetings in another part of the state, a coastal area similar in terrain to her own home of Tulka. The basis of her story was her own experience in the Tulka fire. She reported that she was somewhat surprised at the depth of response from some of the audience, and how several came up to her after each presentation, and had visibly engaged with her story. She recalls that most of those who responded in this explicit way were women. While it was some time ago, she remembers the responses quite vividly. She recounted that women particularly said things like

> We've been meaning to do this forever…I *promise* you we'll do this now…we'll get organized. We'll do this together'……

She had many who said

> Thank you for coming, thank you for sharing, you're very brave.

I asked the CE officer whether she had a sense of what 'doing it together' meant. She said she could only speculate, but she got the impression that they meant with their families and their neighbours. I also asked her what she understood about the strength of their reaction. What she was unable to say for herself, but which is clear to me, having observed her work several times, is that she is a very good story teller. She exudes generosity and compassion, she is very articulate in the detail she provides and holds the story line coherently. Also, her own story of surviving the Tulka fire, involves a near death experience, and in imparting this there was a clear component of strong emotion. She offered some of her own hypotheses about the strong level of engagement between her and the audience.

- That there may have been a strong identification with her due to the landscape in the two areas where she had been invited to speak having some similar features to that of Tulka, and this featured in the story of her own experience. One issue is the proximity of the sea. One common assumption from people who live near the sea is that in the event of a fire, they will 'go to the beach'. This is not always a straightforward solution, and the CE officer's own story, as she came under ember attack, was that she nearly became stuck in the mud while attempting to push a boat out into the water at low tide.
- That it was predominantly women who came up to her, and that they may have been more comfortable to do so as she was a woman
- That they thought – I don't want this to happen to me. She noted: "I suppose they're thinking – I don't want to be in that situation".

In discussing the role of the similarity of terrain (both beachside towns, similar vegetation, difficult access in parts for fire vehicles), the CE officer noted:

> I think familiarity comes in many forms, whether it's the familiarity of having been in the same situation or the familiarity of being women, or the familiarity of being a similar age, or familiarity of having been through a similar crisis. Maybe if I had been through a flood or something, it may have still have had the same amount of impact, I don't know….That we've been through a crisis? The familiarity of perhaps all being in the same state, and then if you serve that up or

> wrap that up with emotion or genuine, you know, genuine feelings that people can see and touch and witness….”

It is now some years since her talks to these communities, and as the CE officer for the Lower Eyre, she finds in her own groups, convened to discuss fire safety, that she needs to spend the first meeting ‘as a story telling session’. Group members have typically had some experience of the Wangary fire.

> They all want to share…Them sharing their stories is as educative and as important. …[but] it’s so much more time consuming. ,,,,and with that went the emotion.

Sometimes the stories are shared around the program materials when working on a fire plan together. People

> ..take what’s been written,…and personalise it….you’re making it yours and they’ll be making it theirs.

She noted that

> it’s very personal, or it can be…It doesn’t start off personal, but it seems to slide that way very quickly.

The CE officer described the early phases on one particular group.

> They were all very willing to talk, you know, like nobody seemed shy or apprehensive, and obviously it was conducive for people to share…They talked about how really frightened they were…and how they were really worried about their children.

She said they were eager to talk with each other. She emphasised to me that

….they had so much to share…With every little thing along the way, there was a story. They all had a story

She talked about how participants readily shared with each other their experiences of the fire, and what they had learned from them

> And with that went the emotion..It was very emotive…The more it bubbled and it just kept flowing, and I couldn’t stop them…..[name] had drinks and coffee ….she’s so hospitable”.

Practices, such as the use of stories and how these are tied up with some of the program materials, produce a dense set of interactions. These can be seen as flowing from the officer, to the community members, from them to each other, and around again in further iterations. The CE officer brings a lot of her

own narratives into her group work with community members. She introduces her own family's fire plan when facilitating group meetings, and then often receives offers from other community members to contribute their plans, with identifying detail removed, for her use with other groups. Participants interact with the materials and with each other in ways which facilitate their immersion into the topic. They become engaged with the task of 'personalising the threat'.

Community members both 'doing' and 'sharing' their plans could be construed as demonstrating that some *interactional* community based process was occurring. This process provides community members with the opportunity to offer their own work and thinking. So the program materials used in Community Fire Safe groups, while products in their own right, also become vehicles for both program processes and program outcomes to be built around.

The CE officer reported that the making and sharing of plans typically generated a lot of group energy which indicated to her a degree of engagement. She also noted that the outcome for *her* as group leader from participants sharing plans was that *she* always learned something she had not previously considered.

One of the very strong values which emerged from the discussion with all CE officers, and in particular from the CE officer, is the need for time and space to be left for community members to bring forward their own ideas. This can be seen as both a value and a practice. Sometimes this includes 'new' communication between community members:

> The group allows newer residences to look at and learn from older residents

This also leaves those in CE roles at risk of having their work appear as less visible, as some of these facilitative processes are closely linked to group outcomes and are less easy to measure. Moreover, as already noted, some of these interactional outcomes which build community relationships may not be immediately seen by others within the organization as relevant to community safety.

While the use of narrative promotes community interaction, its use needs to be carefully managed. The CE officer was attuned to this, and sought to promote a respectful culture within the group as one approach to managing this. Her awareness of the delicacy of these processes was apparent.

> Whoever's talking I suppose is taking a risk about whether or not their story's being received or how it's being received or whether or not it's being respected….I suppose when you share your story, you know, it goes out there for every person to interpret, as they all hear it differently …Once you speak it out loud, it's public property.

## Adult Learning Theory

Clearly the CE Unit staff, managers and officers, with varying degrees of explicitness, draw on foundational adult learning principles, by making it possible for the group participant to be an active participant in a process of inquiry. The process itself also builds on the background, needs, interests, problems, and concerns of the group members. This has been well documented above in relation to the use of narrative.

Ways of building residents participation is also exemplified in practices such as framing the next steps in the life of a group in such as a way as to allow group members to 'buy in' to times, dates, places and content of future meetings. Questions used include: "what do you want to work on next time?" Strategies of seeking group input into the degree to which group members learn about each others' needs, resources, requirements, and capacities which may be called on in the event of a fire, build group understanding.

### Participants response to learning together

Participants I have observed, and also those I have spoken directly to, appeared to enjoy learning together. They emphasised in their accounts of the group environment, that they learned from each other, and also that the learning was particularly 'applied learning' – that it was learning in the context in which you were seeking to make changes, such as around your home. One participant had bought a new tank, but was waiting for the 'mob' (the Community Fire Safe group members) to come around at the next meeting. This meeting was to be at his home, so he was looking forward to talking about this issue and where he should place his tank.

Another participant who lost his house in the fire, was particularly keen to have the group at his temporary dwelling, so he could talk about some of his ideas for rebuilding. This participant also had particular skills and knowledge from his place of work which was relevant to both property construction and machinery such as pumps. He often had to train new officers in these matters at his workplace, and would be willing, if asked, to share any of this knowledge and

experience with others. He was particularly keen to talk about the stainless steel mesh he had seen advertised on television as a home security product; he could see its applicability to the home environment for its fire retardant qualities. The Community Fire Safe group was the place he intended to bring these thoughts to and where he looked forward to having these discussions.

**Experiential learning is a key aspect of adult learning.**

It was not that this had to be ‘planned into’ the Community Fire Safe group sessions, it was that it couldn’t be kept out. Everyone had their own experience of the Wangary fire. One key learning from the fire, was that the emergency services were overwhelmed. As one group member noted:

> All our [fire] trucks were busy. You could see a couple of miles of fire. We had to do our own thing.

This fact alone was seen by participants to highlight the need for households and communities to plan together. Another key understanding which the Wangary fire brought home was the variable impact of fire. It came into their seaside town in ways which were unpredictable, from directions which were not expected, and jumped breaks (eg the highway) in ways which surprised residents. One participant recounted what she called three ‘pieces’ of fire – three different pathways the fire took through their town. Another participant used the more specialist terminology, when he talked of the ‘fingers of fire’ and how they weaved through the town, burning some houses, leaving others.

All the participants reflected on how some people, on face value, don’t seem to reflect on the fire, or on what they should now do about their future preparedness. One group member wondered if the Wangary fire event was still too recent – that people may psychologically be resisting dwelling on the facts and the experience.

Two participants talked of the desirability for some community members to have at least a basic level of preparation. This would include a discussion of what they would do, a plan as a household, and a basic kit of radio, torches, and protective clothing. They thought that that would at least be a start.

These things had been covered in their Community Fire Safe group meetings and while they were all considered critical, they were seen in some ways as also basic. For one Community Fire Safe participant, two particular things which she had learnt stood out in her mind. One was that a ‘super soaker’, a

toy used by children, can be good to have in a fire, for the task of getting into a man hole to check for embers. A squirt from one of these ‘guns’ can be effective; she could see herself being able to use this device in that way. Another was that one can purchase a hardware item which can be attached to a hose for filling gutters.

The participant raising these issues was an older woman, and she was relieved to know she would not have to be on a ladder in the wind strengths she experienced the day of the Wangary fire. Being part of a group discussion with her husband allowed one female participant to observe that while she seemed to focus on self protection, her husband’s attention was more focussed on external matters like property protection. She thought this may have been because she was asthmatic, and also perhaps different responses due to their gender differences.

## Community Development Principles, particular the use of creativity.

### Balancing group initiatives and CE role leadership

The CE officer was given an early introduction to the use of community development principles in CE practice, well before responding to an advertisement for the CE role she currently holds.

She had called a meeting in her own community some time after their own fire in 2001, well before she voiced an interest in the CE job advertised for her region in 2005. The meeting was to discuss with neighbours whether there would be enough support for the development of a Community Fire Safe group. Those at the meeting affirmed that there was. This was conveyed to the CE Unit and a CE officer was sent to begin the Community Fire Safe group process. At the close of the meeting, “he [the visiting officer] said, basically, the ball’s in your court as a community”. The CE officer commented that she realized at this point that it was, indeed, up to them as a community. They decided to continue, and were supported in their future development, rather than the process being driven by the CE staff.

The practice of getting community members to problem solve together forms a key part of this results section. The CE officer gave examples of how she would leave room for participants to ‘buy into’ the process, and also how she has, over time, gradually modified her own practice. She reported starting out leaving the group process very open, and has gradually introduced more of a mix of group generated ideas and her own ideas about the next steps which

could be taken. One example she gave of how she has modified her practice related to the issue of group homework. Initially she didn't give homework to group members.

> Now I'm inclined to say: how would you feel if I asked you to bring this plan back filled in? One participant got up at 6am to do her plan, saying if we didn't have this meeting today, she said I still wouldn't have done it.

What we don't know in this case is the degree to which this woman engaged other members of her family in making the plan. However, that aside, the effort she expended was apparent to the group. The CE officer noted that this woman had not been as keen as the other group members to meet again at the date selected, feeling it may have been too soon for her. So the CE officer was surprised that this particular woman not only returned on the scheduled date, but that she had developed a most comprehensive plan. The detail of her plan stimulated considerable interest in both the group and the CE officer.

The practice of keeping the group members moving at their own pace requires constant monitoring. The following text gives one account of the CE officer both leaving the space somewhat open, while monitoring progress and looking for the most suitable next step with a group.

She reported saying to members of one of her Community Fire Safe groups:

> CE officer: I said "Well, when you went home last time, what did you talk about? You know, what did you find helpful? What did you find no good, you know, what do you want to rehash again?"
>
> Researcher: And what did they say?
>
> CE officer: Well you know, they're always nice to me…But they said, "no, no, no, it was all really good and we made notes of things and we've noted down here what questions we wanted to follow up with you"

That participants would return with questions suggests that the open ended approach, but with some structure, appeared to work well.

There are some occasions when the retort "the ball's in your court", would be a premature or inappropriate 'next step'. This was evident in the following account. The community in question had narrowly escaped the main impact of the Wangary fire, but were anxious about how to look after their community members next time.

In the course of the discussion between this community group and the CE officer, one of the members expressed very vividly how frightened she was, and how her escape was very narrow. The CE officer interacted with her, directly, then turned back to the main group.

> All the men had tears in their eyes and were looking downcast. …Their shoulders were rounded….[The CE officer at this point was asking herself the best way to continue…]. Do you keep talking? Do you keep asking questions? Do you keep *them* talking? Do you stop? What do you do from here?..This is far beyond an education session now…It's still very, very raw, and very personal, and very emotive issue, and that they have to deal with that every time.

In another account the CE officer spoke of a member of one of her groups who was bereaved by the fire wanting to bring others to the meeting, which she saw as both extending the reach of the group and also perhaps healing for him.

Much of the CE role is a multi-dimensional balancing act. The use of creativity in community work takes the emphasis away from the 'professional' as the driver of action, and leaves space for members of the public to bring forward ideas of how they wish to respond to what they see as the task they are facing. However these initiatives often need to be balanced with organizational requirements, policies and resources. The CE officer intuitively had a sense of the importance of this balance. This was apparent in the story she told of her negotiation with a senior CFS staff member and an Aboriginal community group.

The story is one she told against herself. She spoke of the 'excellent' community engagement skills of a senior CFS officer who came to the region to talk with an Aboriginal community about their expressed wish for a particular fire response resource. This issue needed to be carefully negotiated. The CE officer's praise of the senior officer was around how well he managed the boundary issues of entering this community, and how carefully and respectfully he explored the relevant issues at an appropriate pace. The CE officer found herself wanting

> *technical* reassurance…Was what they wanted what they *should* want?…I kept saying to [. ]. 'What do you think, or what do you suggest'. And he would say – 'what do *they* want'. All I wanted, I

> suppose, was some technical reassurance that what they wanted was the most appropriate thing.

How this worked out with the senior CFS officer and the Aboriginal community was a good learning experience. It was also an interesting account of the complexities of balancing a community development approach in a field in which there is a lot of 'technology' involved, such as fire safety.

A CE officer in another part of the state has utilised the creativity of members of the public who have developed their own presentation entitled "This could happen to you". Resources brought to bear on this work included a creative response from a member of the community from another part of the state who had gone to Wangary to assist a friend after the fire, photographs of the Wangary fire taken by a local photographer, an engaged Local Government Fire Prevention Officer, and a CE officer open to using the community members creativity[37].

**The group as container of members' exploration**

In an area which has experienced serious trauma, efforts to progress the work of Community Fire safe groups requires enormous sensitivity from both the group members and the CE officer. There were many examples in my interviews with the CE officer, and with some community members, which indicated that both provided this sensitivity, CE officer to group participants and participants to each other. They are also moments requiring delicate management of the group as 'container'.

One example provided of this was of the group which has as one of its members, someone who had a close family member killed in the fire.

> Last time he got teary there again, and everybody just sits and listens

Nothing could be more difficult for some people than to be able to 'just' sit and listen. That group members can do this in such a setting is itself an important outcome.

The CE officer provided another account of a woman who had done a lot of work in preparing for a future fire, having suffered considerable property loss in the Wangary fire. This woman reported that some members of her community queried the decisions she was making about how she was rebuilding the family

[37] This story of creative, multi-party involvement needs elaboration elsewhere, and in full, and by those involved in this work.

home. They conveyed to her that she had 'gone overboard'[38].This was difficult for her. She found she didn't want to talk about her ideas at large, but found a supportive place within a Community Fire Safe group to share her ideas and further her knowledge.

Managing emotionally challenging circumstances is part and parcel of the group environment. At one point I noted to the CE officer that it takes a particular range of skills and confidence to create the environment in which such circumstances can be managed. She responded:

> I don't think it's in mine, but it's been put into mine, and I'm just handling it as best I can

In my observation she was handling this environment with sensitivity and direction, allowing the time and space for others to bring their contributions, while also shaping the environment where members worked toward improving their bushfire responses and hence increasing the likelihood of safer outcomes.

I did not explore with the CE officer in any detail how she dealt with the various beliefs community members hold which deviate from the accepted wisdom about preparedness activities.

It was clear to me that the group structure can contain such discussions in ways which would be problematic in many other places where community members interact. I am thinking here of conversations between community members at a public event, or in a supermarket queue. One such belief pertains to whether the Wangary fire was an 'extraordinary' fire or not. The concern is that if the prevailing belief is that it was an 'extraordinary event', then more narrowly prescribed conclusions may be drawn from it. One community member said during our interview that "this [fire] was an exception. I don't think you could plan for *that* fire"[39].

To challenge such ideas requires the existence of a reasonably safe space in which informed and facilitated discussion can occur, in which ideas can be recognised, challenged and further developed. I did observe the CE officer challenge some sacredly held ideas; one key one on the Lower Eyre Peninsula

[38] I heard from another source also, that this particular woman was queried by members of her own community, an experience she found difficult to deal with.

[39] This discussion could link to the discussion on "Megafires": http://www.bushfirecrc.com/fkn/downloads/megafire0703.pdf; accessed 2 May 2009. In this presentation Jerry Williams from the Brookings Institute in the US, argued that high impact large fires are increasing in frequency, and that they exceed all efforts at control.

being that the beach is a safe space to be in a wildfire. An account of a resident's frightening account of *getting to* the beach in this region is given elsewhere (see Goodman and Cottrell, publication pending, 2009a).

A contained group environment allows opinions to surface as the first step in challenging them. One such opinion, put to me in an interview by Community Fire Safe participant, was that farmers didn't need to be advised of Community Fire Safe groups.

> They would have their own plans; they wouldn't need to attend.

I noted that while in some ways this was correct, that many farming men did have skills knowledge and confidence. But that these attributes were not always held by females in their households, and that often the male partner is away from home at the time of a fire. The participant subsequently provided some qualification of his view, that "*in their heads* they think they don't need [Community Fire Safe]."

This brief interchange demonstrated that the simple act of providing an alternative view can be taken up by people when they have time and are willing to think about it. By the end of the interview, this participant was very firmly putting the view that 'the CFS was right to try and target women'.[40] By the end of our discussion, he was also thinking more broadly about the difference between fire skills - able to be demonstrated in fire fighting - and the idea of having a plan for a single dwelling, such as a home. He felt, on reflection, that farmers may not be as good at having a plan for the home, or its usual occupants, as they might have for the rest of the property and livestock.

Fires challenge people in varied ways. It was clear to me as a researcher that in an area so seriously impacted by a fire event there may not be many places where community members can reflect on their responses to the event. One participant recounted conversations he had had with farmers in which they were questioning whether, given that they had the equipment on hand, they should have been backburning, or putting in breaks on the day of the Wangary fire. That is, were there things which they could have done which would have reduced the impact of the fire? In the publication with Cottrell, we raised the idea of the burden of responsibility particularly held by some men (Goodman and Cottrell, 2009a).

[40] He was aware of the Women's Skills Workshops delivered on the Lower Eyre Peninsula in 2007

One participant talked of the likelihood that the Community Fire Safe group in which she was a participant would grow and develop in a particular way. She thought that the current members, the numbers of which had stabilised, could form a nucleus and reach out to other people, to either join or have some link with them in ways which had yet to be explored.

Groups, if facilitated in particular ways, and with the right spirit and membership, can open people's minds to the opinion of others in ways which may be difficult to 'hear' outside the safety of a group structure. One participant noted that another couple who were group members were very receptive to the comments from the RPO who, in the course of a Community Fire Safe group meeting at their home, pointed out to them some of the fire protection problems they may face with the home they were currently building. The RPO was able, for example, to point out places most at risk of ember attack. One Community Fire Safe group member present during this RPO's advice, commented to me:

> Most people would be interested in what other people perceive. We can walk around here for six months, and a stranger can come in and point something out. That's the difference…..The uniform [in this discussion in question the uniform referred to a CFS uniform] makes a difference. If he's in a uniform, he knows what he's talking about.

While this comment is well founded in relation to the Lower Eyre with the then RPO, this may not be so in all circumstances. Pointing to the importance of the CFS uniform raises the question of how much the public can differentiate between full time officers and volunteers. In the example above, the Community Fire Safe group participant was able to make this distinction. This would likely in some circumstances, as on the LEP with the then RPO, but may not be so always. In this example the Community Fire Safe group participant was able to make these distinctions.

By the end of my interview with one particularly community minded member of a Community Fire Safe group, he was saying that while he had not thought about it, during the course of the research interview he became aware that part of their household plan should include any neighbour who may need additional support in a fire event. With someone in mind, he said: "that should be part of our plan, to look after [name] providing she'll let us". It was easy to imagine this man raising this issue for discussion in his Community Fire Safe group. The

space for these ideas and initiatives to surface and be thought about further can be, and is, provided in Community Fire Safe groups[41].

One participant talked of her difficult experience in the Wangary fire as a grandmother, in relation to her teenage grandchild who lived nearby.

The grandmother wanted the grandchild to come into their home as both the teenagers parents were away, but the grandchild had other ideas; she wanted to go home and look after her pets. The participant noted that "If I had been a grandma 20 years ago, there would be no choice. But now, you give them the choice". The grandmother was unhappy with what then occurred in relation to her granddaughter. "[She should have] been with me, and got her dogs and brought them over".

These are issues which can be explored in a number of ways by people, but one such environment is a 'Community Fire Safe" group environment. The CE officers have many examples of how they use community experiences, fears and likely responses and put these to good use in a group situation where community members assist each other to find solutions to possible future threats. In addition to conventional familial caring relationships, according to Carers Australia, one in eight Australians are in a caring role in relation to someone with a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail [42]. These issues are commonly thought about, articulated, and considered in a Community Fire Safe group environment.

I asked participants if they were aware of anything about the 'group' per se, over and above their individual uptake of new information, which facilitated learning and mutual support. Participants responded that there was, and that increasing their knowledge of each other increased their responsiveness to one another. Even information such as whether people are home is critical if one is thinking about neighbours.

Current Community Fire Safe members provided an account of neighbours in their town, working together "in a human chain" to help save houses during the Wangary fire. "When [**] could see that he couldn't save his house, he said to .[…], come and help me put out [..'s] house". The chain formed between the neighbour's pool from which water was being bucketed, out towards those homes that neighbours were actively defending, with buckets being passed

[41] Again, as pointed out by Dunstan when talking about the Kangaroo Island group (Goodman, Dunstan and Boulet, 2008).
[42] http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/; accessed 22nd April 2009

along the chain which comprised both men and women. While people may form such informal task groups without knowing each other, it is reasonable to conclude that having some knowledge of one another in most cases would facilitate the steps required to create such a human chain.

In the words of one participant, even having the place to discuss the fire impacts and think about future impacts, is important.

> We think talking about it makes it easier

They recognised that this cannot be generalised across all community members, but was so for them.

**Keeping the community perspectives in the main frame.**

The CE officer was aware that it took particular vigilance to keep community issues in the front of one's practice. This is a key idea of a community development approach, and one which is often hard to do, given the number of demands faced by agency staff. This emerged in our discussions about an impending Women's Day event in Port Lincoln. The Women's Day event in question was a follow on from an event commenced in the first year after the fire, drawn together by the Community Development officer appointed post fire, entitled: "It's more than flashing lights"[43]. When the Community Development funding ceased, the governance arrangements for the Women's Day event moved to one of the State Government Departments. The CE officer had been asked to speak at the event in 2007, as had I. I asked the CE officer what she understood to be the thinking about the impending Women's Day event.

> If you hadn't have asked me that question the other day ……And then I stopped to think…What is the history? ..The two times [the coordinator] rang me, I think one I was shopping and I think the next time I was at a birthday party or something and neither time I really gave it much thought. I just said, yeah, I'll talk…But now that I've found out a bit of a history and a little bit about what it's about and, you know, I mean it is very important to find out what the women's expectations were last year, and what they had hoped to achieve, and had they actually got that by the end of the session and …what they did actually want out of this event?

[43] The inference in the title of the event, suggests that some women believe the operational focus (symbolized by flashing lights) predominates to the exclusion of other factors.

I observed her putting effort into focussing her mind on what the community might want or expect and she amplified her experience in our conversations with other examples. One such example is discussed above where she attended a meeting in an area where families had experienced deaths of family members.

Debates ensue in the academic literature about ‘what is community’, and discussions proliferate in agencies about the difficulty of talking meaningfully about ‘community’. However, despite conceptual problems with the term ‘community’, there is no doubt in this CE officer’s mind that she is going to talk to members of a *community*. She reminds herself of some of the characteristics of that community in her mental preparation for the event. She, and other CE staff, often spoke about this need to be ‘mindful’, the need for ‘discretion’, or ‘just being aware’.

Sometimes keeping the community need uppermost was not always possible. In collaboration with one of the Community Fire Safe groups, the CE officer had set a date on a Sunday, which, when the date approached, was found to be Mother’s Day. She found she could not keep the date, due to her need to attend to her own family commitments. The strength of the resistance of two of the group members to cancelling the meeting, surprised her. I asked what she thought lay behind the strength of their resistance to the thought of cancelling the meeting.

> They still wanted me to come. [They said]: ‘Oh no, don’t cancel it, don’t cancel it, people will still come’. ….Like if I wasn’t strong, you know you have to ... there is a line to be drawn somewhere.

I asked if one reason could be that they had let others’ know of the meeting date.

> I don’t think so, because I hadn’t done up any invitations or anything. I think they just looked forward to it, and whether or not it's a ... chance just to catch up or debrief or ... or maybe motivate them. Oh quick, **’s coming ... We'd better do the next thing on the list. I'm not quite sure. But they were both very adamant that they wanted to go ahead with it, so I had to stick to my guns and say no.

In my experience overall in this state, the key question was not how to stimulate the interest of the community in fire preparedness. The real question was: how can the fire service respond to the demand?

**Participants' perspectives on 'community' as a frame of reference**

One Community Fire Safe group member in particular had had quite a bit of experience with community based organizations. He observed that 'community input' was wanted everywhere, but "no-one wants to fund 'community'". An account was given of a Local Council having a funded community liaison person, but that funding for this position was withdrawn some years ago. He saw that cooperation between community groups is often difficult to muster, as many services want to 'do their own thing' and not be 'tagged onto another program'. Community organizing requires funding – it requires premises, and some salary. It is widely recognised that sustainability of even formally constituted community groups can be problematic.

The Eyre Peninsula Community Alliance (EPCA) was discussed with one household, where both household members had some experience in the community sector. The EPCA is a body which is made up of a broad range of community service providers. Again, the two participants were aware of some of the difficulties faced by the Community Alliance to keep its funding and to progress as a representative body of the Community Sector[44].

Community members routinely hold a lot of knowledge about community infrastructure. One participant told me how, while he had put flyers in residents' boxes at the post office in his small town, he was aware of how many boxes were for residents of the town, and how many were for farmers who lived away from the town. He was also aware that many residents did not have boxes in their own town but had boxes in Port Lincoln. Clearly this knowledge is critical if relying on post boxes as one method of getting information out to residents.

The question of who constitutes community and how the interests of all its members can be kept in the main frame is particularly interesting in relation to the role of women in community safety issues. This is addressed in part in writing by Delaine et al (2008). The CFS has sought funding to continue its work with Rural Solutions addressing women's skills in relation to responding to fire, and hopes to widen the target audience to include women who are also volunteer fire fighters.

One of the aspirations for the next phase of these workshops is that increasing women's familiarity with the CFS as an organization may lead to recruiting more women as volunteers. One brigade captain suggested that certain

[44] http://www.epcomalliance.com.au/default.asp; accessed 22nd April 2009

attitudes toward women may still be acting as a barrier to this goal. He resisted sharing in the joke about the lack of toilets for volunteers at the brigade premises.

> We're supposed to have basic needs and we've got no toilet and the joke was going around - …. [if the women need a toilet] plant another tree out the back, and things like that. I didn't think that was funny, because we're employees of sorts and we should have …somewhere to wash our hands and somewhere to go to the toilet.

**Containment for the CE officer**

One of the assumptions made by the CE Unit, as noted above, is that the Unit can offer ongoing support to officers who are managing a complex role in their work with community members. This support has been offered and taken up by the CE officer, and has included both management support from Head Office, through visits to the Region, and CE Unit meetings. It has also been offered in a more focussed way through individual sessions with a professional with clinical expertise in trauma. This service is available both to the CE officers and to any members of community groups who self identify, or who are identified, as being able to use additional support. The officers are aware of the need to keep monitoring themselves as to the impact of their work, and their group members so as to be alert if there is a need to offer counselling.

## Program Inter-dependency

The key idea here is that inter-dependency is relevant for several groups:

- agencies interacting with each other
- community groups interacting with agencies, and
- community groups with each other

Intra-agency collaboration
**Introduction**

The 'Prepare, Stay and Defend, or Leave Early' policy [45]relies on a member of the community knowing that the content of the policy is relevant to their own circumstances. He or she needs to be mindful that this policy is relevant. In broadest terms, this means knowing that one lives in or could be impacted by fire. How to best impart this knowledge and awareness to community members is a matter of enormous and ongoing concern to fire agencies and communities alike.

Then there is the question of responses to an actual threat – an event itself. The readiness of the fire service to 'name' and 'call' a threat' is itself often problematic and controversial. A very large part of the Coronial Inquiry Report into the Wangary fire focused on the Coroner's efforts to come to some understanding as to why those in Incident Control positions during the early phase of the fire event, did not regard the conditions as being a significant threat to the community, an attitudinal stance which, with the benefit of hindsight, was seen to be in error [46].

I observed an operational debrief meeting in relation to a fire in the Port Lincoln area.

This was a fire which moved quickly to the outskirts of Port Lincoln[47] through difficult terrain. Managing the fire, and getting information back to a source which can then provide public warnings, is a difficult 'double task' – where the demand is to contain the fire, and also provide information for use in public warnings[48]. While CE staff routinely remind community members that they may not receive a warning, and that they should utilise their own networks to keep themselves informed, (other analysis we have done shows that some community members do do this anyway, see Goodman, et al, 2008), it remains a reasonable presumption that community members receive a warning if one is able to be given. Clearly a fire event brings to the fore the importance of

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45 http://www.afac.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/3673/PositionPaperonBushfiresandCommunitySafety.pdf; accessed 22 April 2009

46 See Sections 23.1 to 23.28 of the Coroner's Report (pp. 538 to 552, Schapel, 2007).

47 An account of aspects of this fire is given in Goodman and Gawen, (2008).

48 Interestingly, the Deputy Coroner (Schapel) recommended that the CFS create and develop a role of the Regional Public Warnings Officer (see Recommendation 10; p 580, Schapel), a recommendation presumably in recognition of the difficulty of the 'double task', both operational responsibilities in fighting a fire, and also the need to warn the public in specific terms of the likelihood of fire impact.

collaboration between each part of the fire service, including the CE role in the preparedness phase, operational staff and volunteers in response, and internal media in relation to warnings.

**Opportunities for intra-organizational contact**

The CE officer has a desk allocated to her in the Regional Office, but does a lot of work away from the office. While she felt she was included in a lot of the office functions (such as the Christmas Party) she commented on one particular fire service event she was not included in.

> I suppose that it's because I'm not there all the time and I do think that they do their best to include me, but sometimes they just forget

This points to a normal aspect of intra-organizational relations – that proximity and frequency of contact maximises the likelihood of one part of an organization, keeping another part 'in mind'.

Internal agency resources

The CE officer emphasised that the resources generated by the CFS were of great benefit to her in her work with groups. She talked of agency resources complementing each other. In relation to the Community Fire Safe program she commented on the material components such as educative materials, media advertisements and the like:

> They don't really work by themselves because really, [Community] Fire Safe wouldn't work unless you had the information, the fact sheets, or the brochures. …It can act as a trigger for other things….Getting the brochure in the mail might be a trigger to go, oh well, I do want to know more about this; I do want to participate.

Another form of intra-agency collaboration was acted out in late 2008, when the CE officer was continuing to work in excess of her part time load. The amount she was exceeding her usual allocation, responding to expressed community need, was often twice and sometimes three times the fortnightly allocation of 40 hours. Following a request that she document why this continued to be so, a decision was taken that some CE time would be paid for from the Operational Budget This allowed the CE officer both to assist with Community Meetings which followed the Proper Bay fire in January 2009, and to set up new Community Fire Safe groups in the region surrounding Proper Bay. This has

been referred to elsewhere in this document, where I point to the rapidly changing contest in which the CE role operates.

Another account of the relevance of intra-agency collaboration was illuminated through the CE's story of getting ready for the Cleve Field Day. The CE officer had made extensive plans for the field day, a major event in the calendar of the Lower Eyre, and one where the CFS was typically well represented. A key focus of the CE presentation on the day, and in fact a key focus of the CFS presence itself, was a (fire ready) Cubby House which the CE officer had painstakingly prepared. The plan was that a particular CFS truck (with hydraulics etc) would be used to take the cubby to Cleve, unload it and then reload it at the end of the 3 days. The intra-organizational arrangements required to make this truck available fell down, and the CE officer and others spent an unexpected additional amount of time while alternative arrangements were made. These intra-agency collaborations, when they fall down, are particularly problematic when the CE officer is under pressure of being part time.

The CE officer was also alarmed, on receiving an invitation to a high level regional meeting, to find that she had a key place on the agenda, without her knowledge. This meeting was a specially convened meeting of the Eyre Peninsula Development Board, in July 2008, where she was listed as giving feedback to those present on certain outcomes of the Coronial Inquiry in the Wangary fire[49]. While she received prompt attention to her concern when she rang her managers about the matter, she questioned how she could have been placed on an agenda of such an important external community meeting without this being brought to her attention. "It is just bewildering".

She didn't conclude that these issues should be read as disrespect toward her or her role, but rather that communication takes time and in her view, the workloads of many CFS staff are already excessive.

## Inter-agency collaboration

### Lower Eyre Peninsula Fire Prevention Discussion Group ("Discussion Group")

Several formal government bodies have responsibilities for fire safety in their brief. The CE officer became part of an interagency group of officers in the

[49] Forum date 24/7/08; held at Ravendale Sports Complex, Port Lincoln.

region from these organisations. Members included the Regional Fire Prevention Officer from the fire service, an officer from the Department of Heritage and the Environment, another from another land management agency, and one from Local Government, who had some fire prevention duties. This group became known as the Lower Eyre Peninsula Fire Prevention Discussion Group. While the Metropolitan Fire Service person had been invited, he had not attended on any of the three occasions I attended these meetings.

The CE officer described this as a group where people listened to each other, respected each others' points of view, differed where necessary, but 'never in a way which threatened the cohesion of the group'. Interestingly, the qualities she told me of, map closely onto propositions about the behavioural requirements and core principles for dialogue in the literature[50]. Through these meetings she learned more about the roles and regulatory frameworks in the working environments of the people employed in the field of fire management.

In particular, she learned a great deal about the regulatory and practical barriers to furthering community safety. One particular revelation was the extremely difficult role of the Local Government officer, who, in addition to administering some fire regulations, was also the person who dealt with stray animals and abandoned cars. One of these officers described his role as follows: "that you are paid the least, you have to be the bad bastard, and you have the least hours of anyone to do the job". There has been some change in the Fire Prevention Officer's role at Local Government level since I met with the Lower Eyre Peninsula Fire Prevention Discussion Group[51].

The CE officer found that having more knowledge of the tasks carried out by each of the officers who formed part of the Discussion Group was helpful to her in her own role as a CE officer in her interactions with the public. Some of these officers were also in operational roles in a fire event, and she drew on this knowledge for her own development. These individuals at times also participated in her group work with the public. While she did not need to retain a lot of the knowledge they held, in terms of carrying out her role she felt better

[50] See, for example Isaacs (1999, p. 420).

[51] Habner (undated) compiled an Emergency Handbook for Council Staff for the Lower Eyre Peninsula, which outlines key roles for Council across the Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery cycle. The City of Port Lincoln has increased its budget allocation to the work of Fire Prevention. Fire Prevention Officers are now called General Inspectors. The RPO has consulted extensively to the City of Port Lincoln Bushfire Prevention Committee.

informed having the chance to hear these staff talk about their understanding of the key issues from their agency's point of view.

The matters which they discussed included the issues Council struggles with in managing 'section 56 notices' (those notices which Local Government is empowered to deliver to landholders to order them to undertake certain tasks of clearing properties). One Local Government officer informed the group that it is sometimes Government agencies who are the worst offenders when it comes to not looking after land they manage, leading to the humorous picture of a public servant becoming buried in Section 56 notices.

Other matters included the legislative and regulatory framework of the Native Vegetation Act, and that there were more powers in the provision of this Act to reduce Native Vegetation than most people realise. Sometimes the discussion was around different perspectives on the current farming practices and likely impacts of fire risk [52]. The experiences and knowledge of other officers all contributed to the CE officer's deepening understanding of the complexities of the system in which she was working.

The Manager of Community Safety – from CFS Head Office - suggested to the Lower Eyre Discussion Group that they might like to make a submission to the State Based Inquiry into Fire Prevention, which was open for submissions in 2007. In making this suggestion, he said he felt there would be few groups in the State who would have such a multi-agency membership, such a collaborative ethic, and as much combined knowledge. Group members responded to this suggestion, and a submission was drafted, with input from all members. I assisted the group by providing some working notes on barriers and enablers to furthering community safety, made while observing a range of fire safety activities during my visits to the region.

Group members prepared and circulated a draft submission to the heads of the organizations represented in the Discussion Group. The work of the group was almost halted by the action of the senior staff of one of the participating organizations, who took exception to part of the submission provided by the officer from his organization. I could not be told which particular aspect of the submission concerned the agency, as this was 'confidential'. Alterations were made and the submission forwarded, and in the end, only one agency became

[52] Questions on farming practices and their association with fire risk were referred by the Coroner for further research. Tolhurst et al reported on these matters in 2008.

the signatory to the submission[53]. The fact that the task nearly foundered points both to the importance of inter-agency collaboration and to its potential fragility. That fragility is increased when appointed representatives lack appropriate levels of authority or organizational support in the carriage of their roles.

The CE officer strongly believed in and utilized inter-agency collaboration. She believed that this contributed to stronger community safety outcomes. She derived enjoyment from participating in the group. She believed that it is important for those involved in education about bushfire safety to try to convey the same key messages, and her participation in this local group enhanced the likelihood of that occurring. The group did discuss key messages and how they each understood and worked with these key messages in their respective job roles.

**Workload allocations and impacts on Community Safety**

Allocation of resources among the various agencies involved in fire management was a consistent theme in meetings I attended in 2006 and 2007.

At one of the District Bushfire Prevention Committee meetings I attended, some members felt that requiring volunteers to authorise the issuing of permits-to-burn was an unreasonable impost, particularly as the new policy necessitated a training component. As one volunteer put it:

> As far as our brigade is concerned, members are starting to feel used. When is enough enough?

When asked to clarify, the person concerned noted:

> It's the red tape. There's a lot of ill-feeling out there

Some of these administrative workload concerns were addressed in the Volunteer Review Of Administrative Workloads Across The Emergency Services Sector, Report (V Lee, 2008). While circumstances will have changed since I visited the region, these comments point to the ever present delicate balance in relations with volunteers who carry out significant components of community safety activity.

**The changing boundaries of fire planning and representative organizations.**

[53]Delaine is noted as a contributor to the Ministerial Review http://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/site/initiatives_and_reviews/ministerial_review_of_bushfire_management_in_south_australia.jsp, p. 23

When I observed the Regional Bushfire Prevention Committee meeting at Wudinna on 26th September 2006, I noted that this Committee had sought a change in their Constitution to allow the involvement of the Operations Manager, City of Port Lincoln, on their Committee.

Since this time the Greater City of Port Lincoln Bushfire Prevention Plan has been accepted, with signatories being the following:

- The Mayor of City of Port Lincoln
- The Mayor if the District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula
- Native Vegetation
- Country Fire Service
- Metropolitan Fire Service
- The State Emergency Service
- The South Australian Police (SAPOL)

The governance structure appears to be constituted in terms of collaboration and partnership.

Page 3 of the Plan states:

Spirit of Cooperation:

> The undersigned commit our agencies to work together in the spirit of co-operation for the purpose of improving community safe outcomes. This will be achieved through application of our staff and resources, and through alliance with the community in identifying highly valued community attributes to assist developing appropriate prevention and preparedness plans.

Again, page 8 of the Plan states that it has been developed using a landscape approach, and will be

> managed on a landscape scale. This requires that all stakeholders take responsibility for *working in a collaborative manner* to treat the risks identified (emphasis added)

The Plan refers to the role of the Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR) framework as follows:

> This plan lays out the Prevention and Preparedness roles with a clear linkage to response planning in the identification, implementation and maintenance of the Fire Track network as well as identification of water resources.
>
> Linkages to Recovery are yet to be identified as part of the current plan but the work undertaken with the community by various agencies is well recognised (p.8).

Getting to this stage with the Greater City of Port Lincoln Bushfire Prevention Plan has clearly been a huge and important piece of work. The above text however also makes it clear that there is still a lot of work to be done to link up the more obvious emergency services elements of a community wide plan. Further clarification is required as to which particular aspects of the relevant authorities are linked and on what issues. This makes the less obvious elements, such as the community based links, a work in progress, as indicated above by the phrase: “Linkages to Recovery are yet to be identified”.

**Impact of changing boundaries on CE officers workload and understanding of task**

While the CE officer has not been prevented from working within the City of Port Lincoln boundary, it historically has not been part of the CFS domain. Different governance arrangements existed between the rural District Councils with their close association with the CFS, and the City of Port Lincoln, with its corresponding close association between the MFS. The advent of the Greater City of Port Lincoln Bushfire Prevention Plan sees part of the CE officer’s workload as determined by the Plan.

She has begun work in the area deemed highest risk in this Plan, an area known as the North Side Hill Zone. Using the Australian Standard 4360 process and descriptors, North Side Hill Zone is defined as ‘extreme risk’, due to the likelihood of fire rated as ‘certain’, and the consequence as ‘catastrophic’.

A fire in the North Side Hill zone, called the Proper Bay fire, was flashed across national television screens on January 11$^{th}$, 2009.

The CE officer worked in this area in 2007, in a loose collaboration between the CFS and the MFS, with the latter having no dedicated CE resource. The CE

officer had carried out a Bushfire Blitz meeting, from which two community groups emerged as wanting to go further and form Community Fire Safe groups. One of these groups went ahead, while the other faltered due to ill health in the family of the community member who had taken the lead. In relation to the former group, the CE officer will be encouraging them to extend the boundaries of their group. This is in part because those who had come together to form a Community Fire Safe group were residents in the same street. However given the topography, it is likely that in the event of a fire, people who live ‘over the hill’ from the current group members, would be impacted in the same fire.

This raises the interesting issue of motivators to join groups and whether group boundaries are as permeable as the CE officer hopes they will be. In her thinking, she will encourage the group to ‘open up’ to include people who are not residents of the street. The CE officer has also to develop more contact with the businesses in the area. She feels that the zoning which was done to develop the Greater Port Lincoln Plan will aid her in her work, particularly the use of the word ‘catastrophic’ as a descriptor of the combination of the likelihood and consequence for the North Side Hill Zone.

The CE officer noted that the Regional Prevention Officer has spent a lot of time on the Greater City of Port Lincoln Bushfire Prevention Plan. In praising the work of this RPO, one of the Local Government Councillors pointed to the fact that he had managed to get the Plan to where it is now in eight months, which was considerably less time than it took to develop the previous plan. I drew from her comment that lead agencies in fire prevention are working hard at talking with one another and reaching agreement.

The reliance of the City of Port Lincoln on an interrelated web of regulatory frameworks including the Metropolitan Fire Service and the Environmental Protection Authority in relation to burning off is one example of the inter-dependence of authorities in the fire safety area. During the meeting of the Lower Eyre Peninsula Fire Prevention Discussion Group held at the Council Chambers on 2nd November 2006, at which I presented some data from the initial community interviews (reported in Goodman, Healey and Boulet, 2007), several examples were provided of inter-agency and inter-organizational issues which impact on fire safety. These issues included aspects of new developments, implications for regulation as to whether properties are classified as rural properties or not, the requirement of water provision per

bedroom in new houses, and whether developments were still being allowed right up to the boundary of Reserves.

**Tension in centralist demands and local control.**

In 2006 I observed a long discussion at the (LEP) District Bushfire Prevention Committee (DBPC) about whether the Prevention Plan could be shortened and the structure of the Plan altered. The Committee member (a community member) leading this discussion felt the Plan was too long, was off-putting in terms of 'readability', was repetitive. He observed that if *he* felt this, as someone very interested in fire prevention, it is likely it would be regarded as a difficult read by someone for whom fire safety was not such a high priority.

The Committee was advised that plans from across regions were required by the State Bushfire Prevention Committee, but that 'distribution elsewhere was not large'. While changes may have been made to the content of District and Regional Plans, the discussion captured the usually pervasive tension between State wide requirements and local use.

Fires are great disrespecters of boundaries of all kinds. The greater the capacity of officers to cross the boundaries of their own organizations, the greater the chance of collaborations which increase community safety.

**Other implications of inter-agency collaborations for the CE role**

In addition to the already mentioned advantages to the CE officer of meetings with the Fire Awareness Discussion Group, she also reported a very specific flow-on effect in relation to establishing new community fire safe groups. A local government officer who had been a member of the Discussion Group, referred her to someone he had met in a high fire risk area where he knew the CE officer was keen to start a group, but it was an area where she had fewer personal connections. He reported to her that he had found someone "you might find useful".

The CE officer approached this 'useful' man, a retired person, about the possibility of developing a Community Fire Safe group in his area. This area was particularly fire prone, had access by only one narrow road, comprised a large number of retired people and in summer experienced a sharp increase in tourist numbers. The CE officer was looking to 'make a start' in this particular district, and the tip off from her local government colleague proved very valuable.

> [LG officer] said, here's someone you might be interested in, or might be able to help you, so I just rang him up…He's a [,,] farmer and a retired gentleman….He's been very active since then….
>
> CE officer: He doorknocks everyone, drafts up a little note and walks around and delivers it all. Doorknocked everybody in the area.
>
> Researcher: Just his area?
>
> CE officer: No. There's a little tiny sort of sub-division just behind them too, and he went there as well. But nobody from that area came. A lot of it hasn't been built yet, some are still building, some are holiday people and stuff.

The CE officer commented on how well networked the group seemed.

> They were sitting round, saying, oh, you know, Mary and John aren't here because they've … been away and Fred and Wilma aren't here 'cause…. So they seemed to know why people weren't there.

With the very useful male came a very helpful wife. They agreed to have the meetings at their home, with the wife providing sandwiches. "They're *very* helpful"

> "Couples, they all came as couples. Oh, Dianna didn't. She came on her own. But all the others come as couples. They're all sort of semi-retired people, retired people should I say, and I think they might, you know, sort of meet for cups of tea or whatever anyway occasionally. They seem to be quite friendly, seem to know each other quite well. The second meeting, a younger family came and he's actually a brigade member at [name]; he's not the captain, but he's sort of, he does have a rank so to speak."

The CE officer also spends time delivering CE sessions held under the auspices of another organization, where she is the guest, rather than having other agency staff at her CE meetings as guests. The State Department called PIRSA – Primary Industries and Resources South Australia - has an educative role with both large and small landholders[54]. In the PIRSA sessions for small landholders, there is often an emphasis on newly arrived small landholders, who often need assistance with managing weeds, vermin, etc. The CE officer

[54] PIRSA delivered an important post Wangary program called Bushfire Emergency Response Program – BERP, for landholders.

delivers a one off session on fire safety at these meetings. I have attended one of these meetings in the Adelaide Hills, where the CE Manager was the guest speaker. He started out being invited to fill a time slot of half an hour, and at the time I attended, he had successfully extended his presentation to 2.5 hours.

It would be naïve to paint a picture that collaboration was straight forward, and always positive.

This is never the case. During one early meeting of the Discussion Group I was present at, the RPO made the comment that what was needed was a cloning process so that 2 or 3 CE officers could be brought into existence. I observed at the time that this comment was met with silence. I wrote in my notes: “What is this about? Are there turf issues here? Do [agency x] think they should do community education? Does Local Government think they should do it? Or did something else occur at the time which took their attention which bore no relation to the comment”.

Issues of inter-agency relations, particularly in times of resource constraints where competition is particularly pronounced, are always, however, complex and delicate.

A senior officer conveyed to me that he had become impatient with inter-agency quarrels on a National scale. He took the view that the fire services and related agencies had been too slow in trying to get consistent and coordinated action across Australia on bushfire planning, bushfire messages, and alert systems.

> And forget about the parochialism of whose it ought to be – use a CRC or whoever else and turn around and say yes, we’ll accept it; it mightn’t be exactly what we want, but we’ll accept it and get on with life….I reckon the EMA is probably the one that can make it happen…. if fire authorities can’t make it happen….because they can’t get everybody to agree, somebody steps in over the top and says bang. You’ve had your chance of a discussion …we all worry about our own little patch ….

There are, nevertheless, increasing examples of inter-agency collaboration around community safety in relation to fire. One such example is the development of the Women’s Skills Workshops on the Lower Eyre Peninsula.

**Women’s Skills Workshops – a case study in inter-agency collaboration**

Delaine et al (2008) provide some background to the development of the Women's Skills workshops in their AFAC conference presentation of that year. Further documentation of this important work will be drawn together by Mae Proudley, in collaboration with Delaine, Dunstan, Goodman, Pedler and Probert, which will be available by the end of June 2009[55].

**Impact of other societal institutions**

A senior officer provided what could be seen as an interaction at the 'inter-agency' or 'institutional' level, when he provided his opinion about the impact on the fabric of community of the Coronial Inquiry. By institutional in this example I am referring to the 'legal system' as a societal institution. This impact could also be seen as a 'societal' (cultural) force as well as an 'institutional' one.

The key concerns raised by this senior officer were that the Inquiry was focusing on and naming particular individuals, and this was seen as causing immense harm at the local level. Added to this was the civil action being taken by some residents against the fire service, begun, as this officer put it, "before the flames were out". This officer feared that actions like this would have an impact on community safety overall, as it would result in a decrease in both volunteering and also a decrease in those willing to work for the CFS. He said of the CFS and the Ambulance Service who were 'battling to get crews':

> Nobody will want to take that responsibility, and you can't blame them. We'll lose the lot if we're not careful.
>
> They give their ruddy time and effort, they train to the best of their ability, … and then you get people willing to criticise. Hang on, you never stepped forward ..and took part yourself, but you'll stand around and criticise. And people get sick of that …[The Coronial process], and everybody's saying the same, this is tearing our ruddy town to pieces

Some members of the Fire Awareness Discussion Group saw that the Coronial process also impacted directly on the CE function, and hence, in a broad sense, in terms of this discussion, can be seen as an 'inter-agency' issue. They

[55] Gooding (2008) reported in his analysis of the interaction between a regulatory system and a community engagement process, that a key factor was that of interaction through face to face relationships. "The results strongly indicate that rather than the use of a specific decision making tool, the fundamental mechanisms to improve statutory planning decisions are good decision making processes, particularly consultation. For example, it is felt that the most benefit was obtained by conducting joint meetings of agency staff and the planning permit applicant on site to discuss site constraints and potential development design solutions".

raised the concern that the expert reports elicited by the Coronial Inquiry were tied up in that process and hence not available for use in work in CE. This was seen as particularly problematic as the timing of the Coronial Inquiry also coincided with the time when the public was most open to learning. Some members, however, felt that many fire behaviour myths were so hard to dispel, that even the availability of expert reports was unlikely to have a major impact.

**Participants perspectives on inter-agency collaboration.**

To date in this study I have little information on participants' perspectives on inter-agency collaboration. Two Community Fire Safe participants were aware that the CFS had been working collaboratively with Rural Solutions to develop a joint proposal for funding workshops for women to learn bushfire skills.

> They're right to try and get hold of women. They're the ones left at home…."

## Organization-community member collaboration

### The Garratt Road Group

The Garratt Rd group comprised Port Lincoln residents who formed a group after the Wangary fire. I refer to them as a self organizing group.

The CE officer recounted that

> they obviously realised how close they were on the day of the Wangary fire [to] coming to grief, so they got themselves up and organised straight away

The group had experienced difficulties with getting permission to burn off vegetation which they had cleared from their properties. The CE Manager had voiced to me his concern that the nature of the regulatory difficulties which such groups typically experience, while legitimate and important, can risk consuming too much of a CE officer's limited time. The CE officer was mindful of his concerns, and walked a fine line between accommodating his advice and being open to residents' concerns. She did not reject the approach made to her by the group, and heard enough of their concerns to be able to offer some limited advice.

Through her involvement with the Fire Awareness Discussion Group she had learnt quite a bit about the different regulatory frameworks impacting on their problem. The relevant fire service authority in their case, as City - of Port

Lincoln - residents, was the Metropolitan Fire Service and she was able to advise on the authority structure of the service and where the group might take their concerns next. She felt she could have done more, but reported that the group spokesperson had said to her that she had motivated him again.

> You've given me some insight…You've put me onto the right people.

Interestingly, after getting to know the CE officer a little through this interaction, the informal leader of the group offered to talk to any of the Community Fire Safe groups which the CE officer was establishing, covering "some of the things that they did to get themselves up and running". This informal leader had recently retired from the workforce, and had just begun to attend some of the CE officer's groups as a local resource. It will be instructive to see what eventuates from this interesting constellation of resources and dynamics –the CE officer, the Community Fire Safe group members, and the leader of the self-organized community group.

**Approaching 'community'**

Sometimes agencies can 'cherry pick' members of the community as if they were representative of 'community', and use this selection as a proxy for community. Sometimes this is done in order to 'bestow' something on the community. This is often done with good intent, and often the person selected may well be the person the community would select to represent it. However, it can lead to a privileging of certain community members, which could potentially also have harmful effects.

I observed two examples of this while doing field work on the Lower Eyre.

I became aware of one instance told to me by a senior executive with a leading philanthropic organization who literally flew into town shortly after the Wangary fire, and asked for advice as to whose opinion would be trusted by the community to speak on their behalf in relation to possible uses of philanthropic grants. The senior executive who told me the story said she had thought often about that afterwards and wondered if they did the right thing. I heard about this same story from others in the community. The person nominated by some of the community, as requested by the philanthropist, did seem to have a strong community base, but I became aware that leaders in formal agencies managing recovery appeared to hold some resentment towards this person.

In this second case a high ranking officer of an emergency service selected a community member with whom to commence discussions about the possibility of a particular resource being made available to this person's immediate community. The basis of the connections between the high ranking officer and this community member were said to have their roots through a male sporting club and a private school network.

When mechanisms such as these become the medium for allocation of resources into an area, many community members feel bypassed, and future problems of engaging community members arise. Conversations of the 'senior officer direct to the community' type can also be alienating for those staff who have a legitimate interest in being part of a discussion process through which new community safety initiatives are conceptualised and developed.

**Mix of community and agency auspice for fire safety activity**

The CE officer utilised her own network to gain advice about an appropriate channel to use to start discussions in the Louth Bay area on fire preparedness. Her query fell on fertile ground, as the town had an active Progress Association, and this Association agreed to host the first meeting. Where there is an organisation with strong community links driving the agenda, this can make for a lively demand on CE program resources, and demonstrates an interesting mix of agency/community, and intra-community initiatives. The CE officer spoke of the response she received when she asked if they would like to have a Community Fire Safe meeting.

> CE officer: They'd love to have a meeting –
>
> Researcher: Sounds like they were pretty ready?"
>
> CE officer: Oh absolutely. And then they wanted us back again for three more, which we did.

I observed one of these meetings, a meeting which took place relatively early in the first year of the CE officer's appointment. The meeting was also attended by the CE officer's supervisor, as well as the CFS Regional Prevention Officer.

Another of these meetings also included the Local Government Fire Prevention Officer, and a member of the local brigade. This meeting comprised a 'walk around' the town, with input from the RPO, the FPO and the Brigade Captain. This event included some social interaction with a Barbeque, and a meeting in the community meeting rooms, and a walk around the town observing property

and landscape preparedness. She reported that different activities attracted different community members.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the Louth Bay work is that the Progress Association has determined, at a meeting of its members that, circumstances permitting, the Community Hall would be the place where residents could congregate in the event of a fire. The decision took account of the local topography and also the older age of the residents. The Progress Association has since also successfully applied for funds to fit the roof of the Community Hall with sprinklers, and to add an additional tank to their premises.

Another interesting development provides a further perspective of the creative mix of agency and community capabilities. This development has now turned into the Cummins Emergency Ready Committee.

From the CE officer's perspective, this development began when she was invited to speak at the Cummins Probus Club. This was a mixed gender group, though more women than men. They were largely retired and were business oriented. Their first reaction to the CE officer's input was that fire preparedness was less relevant to them as they lived in the town. The CE officer gave them her perspective on this, which was that one of the groups they represented were grandparents to those who were on farms with young families, and that some of these families may be trying to get into town to assist them in the event of a fire. She emphasised that they could be more resourceful and develop their own plans for what they would do in such an event.

As the discussion flowed, the Probus members suggested that the CE officer meet with two women from the town who were particularly well connected and experienced in community organizing. She did this and out of this meeting she was referred to the Cummins Enterprise Committee. Meeting with this committee the CE officer emphasized the need for the community to drive their own agenda, which they then did.

They called a meeting and at this meeting, various decisions were taken as to how they wished to move ahead. The CE officer had been thinking that the focus was fire, but the community representatives decided they should take an all hazards approach. They also requested some specific fire preparedness input and the CE officer delivered two sessions, one during the day and the other during the evening of the same day. Community members were concerned that these two meetings only drew a small number (10 and 6 people

respectively) but the CE officer disagreed with them, noting that there was another competing community function that night, and also that if these 10 and 6 were keen, that that amounted to a significant number who could move things ahead.

The Cummins group decided that they would have a larger meeting, invited a range of other organizations, and nominated the Bowling Club as the meeting venue. A wider range of community organizations again was invited to the next meeting, including the Red Cross, the hospital, and other Emergency Service providers (SES, Police, Ambulance). At this meeting a number of people did not know each other, requiring introductions. Those present at this meeting named their development, and called themselves the Cummins Emergency Ready Committee (CERC).

While the CE officer praised the efforts of local people, she too had to do quite a bit of work. She made mention of how many calls she had to make before the Hospital would come to a decision as to who it would send to the meeting. Part of the issue was that some aspects of the Cummins Hospital's management are performed in Port Lincoln. A decision was finally taken that two designated roles would be nominated by the Hospital for attendance at the meeting.

The group decided on the next activity which was to be an emergency based training exercise called "Emergency 0", run by the Ambulance Service. The group had decided to hold each meeting at a different organization, so as to increase members' familiarity with each organization. They also decided to use the Bowling Club as a community meeting point. The CE officer gave some advice about the sorts of supplies they should have on hand if the Bowling Club is to be a meeting point.

A key element of discussion was around where the likely staging area would be if there was a fire in the area. The group was not wanting to make a plan if the "Incident Controller could march in at the last minute" and change the plan. The CFS officer who could have informed the group of a likely location of a staging area had not been able to attend this meeting, nor any of the meetings up to the time the CE officer last spoke to me about the Cummins development.

The absence of this information proved to be a significant impediment to the progress of the Cummins Emergency Ready Committee. The relevant CFS officer here is a senior member of the service, but a volunteer. His absence from CERC meetings could be seen as an issue of volunteer workloads, and

also that particular boundaries often exist around the role of volunteers; boundaries that commonly include only the most minimal aspects of community education.

**Agency Community interaction regarding warnings**

The Rustler's Gully fire had occurred in 2006 on the edge of Port Lincoln.

A senior officer told me that after this fire he was approached by someone from the community, who was critical that the information the CFS was broadcasting was not keeping up with the pace of the fire. He reported that the local news broadcasters in the street were giving more up to date information live to air. This remains a difficult issue for the fire services across the board. As the senior officer explained:

> We take our information from the chain of command and officers on the ground, and I don't know how we capture that local information, because we've got a process we've got to go through to do it. But I don't know how we actually capture that at the moment.

He added that the development of initiatives such as Community Fire Safe resulted in increased prevention happening at the street level. He thought that maybe Community Fire Safe group members whose homes were not under immediate threat might step forward and help those whose houses were. This idea extends beyond warning, but includes the idea of warning, and points to the informal role which community members can and do, take up for each other when fire threatens.

**The role of volunteers**

<u>Operational Volunteers</u>

It is usual for the role of the operational volunteer to come up in discussions about how community safety can be increased. Often the question under discussion is whether the role of the volunteer can be expanded from that of an operational responder, to more of a community education role. This is a vexed and complex question, which I can only touch on here.

<u>Volunteer as Ancillary to CE function</u>

As highlighted in this report, the CE officer already seeks the contribution of operational volunteers when carrying out CE tasks. There are many examples in the sections above. This might be called an ancillary role – ancillary to the

work of another – in this case a CE officer, who takes major responsibility for the delivery of the education session, and provides space of guests as experts.

Volunteer as informal community contact

I have heard accounts by operational volunteers which highlights that in their 'civic' role they use their knowledge and expertise either in response to community requests for information, or on occasions when they initiate contact with community members during an impending threat. An account of this sort of intervention by volunteer fire fighters in their 'off duty' community role is given in Goodman, Healey and Boulet, (2008).

Volunteer as a stressed resource

My observation of volunteers, such as in meetings of the District or Regional Prevention Committees, is that they often refer to themselves as 'change weary', or already overburdened. One senior CFS officer has referred to them as "maxed out" in terms of adoption of new roles. This is a dilemma and, at present, often an intractable one[56].

Volunteer as deliverer of CE

The CFS CE Unit is currently undertaking a project looking at the use of volunteers in CE (as at April 2009)[57]. One aspect of this project is to update materials so that they are ready for any future volunteer training course. Volunteers have been asked for expressions of interest in playing a role in CE, a request which has been put through the chain of command. One of the CE Manager's concerns is that the organization might underestimate the extent of resources required to train, supervise, support and maintain any CE volunteer network which is created.

Civic Volunteer

There is another sort of volunteer which deserves mentioning, even though justice cannot be done in the space available.

I encountered a member of the community on the Lower Eyre who had particular skills and knowledge in fire safety, gained from roles in fire response in different agencies. Only after I had met him in 2007 did I realise that he figured in interviewees' accounts of their Wangary experience, interviews we conducted in July 2005. This man figured again in the interviews we carried out

[56] See V Lee and Associates, Volunteer Administrative Review, 2008.
[57] Phone advice to me from CE Manager, 2 April 2009

after the Rustler's Gully fire, where he again rendered assistance to members of the public. He is briefly mentioned in the article by Goodman and Gawen (2008).

Two things stand out from the accounts I have had from members of the community who have been assisted by this person. One is that the assistance he was able to provide was probably critical at least to their property surviving, and possibly to them surviving also. The other thing which stood out was the range of reactions his intervention provoked from some staff in formal roles. These reactions ranged from ambivalence to outright hostility. I will outline the types of responses, rather than the source of the responses, although clearly the latter is important when those sources are also influential opinion holders in relation to fire safety.

One officer put to me that the actions this man carried out were done because he was 'in it for a quid". The man had a small business in town and it was assumed by this officer that the man was looking for his business to be engaged after the fire, to clean up the property. Another response from two senior members of another agency was that 'he had better watch himself', as he might run into 'trouble' if he's advising people on a course of action. This response focussed more on the probability that this man could become the focus of litigation.

One refreshing response came from a member of the fire services, when I outlined for him the range of opinions I was gleaning about the actions of this man. This officer frankly said that "[name] needed to realise that as fire services, we are control freaks' and that as organizations fire services typically had difficulty with anyone on the fire ground acting in a response capacity, albeit a 'civil response', who was not under the control of the fire service.

These varied agency responses all pointed to a paradox – that in a sector where there were scarce resources, high impact and serious event consequences, and a large number of the public who did not know what to do in a fire, that the considered and helpful responses of a member of the community, voluntarily yet expertly given, would be judged so harshly. I interpret the responses that I have outlined as largely 'defensive' responses. They point to the need to continue to be open to understanding phenomena in ways which take less account of rational explanations and more account of ways of thinking which offer some explanation of these defensive responses.

Fortunately, some members of the fire service are not defensive about this man and are able to acknowledge his expertise. The person himself is not looking for affirmation and will continue to do what he does when he is able, during a fire event. His rejection by some in positions of authority does point, however, to some of the barriers to the overall shift toward 'shared responsibility'.

To share responsibility the fire services, and senior government officials, will be required to give due recognition to the capacities of others. To acknowledge what others can do may, in fact, be experienced by those parties as having to 'give up' or alter something. One 'something' they might have to give up, or at least revise, is the idea that only *they* are really competent to assist the public with fire response. This is a challenge to the Community Education Unit as well. In some cases their task will be to seek out and support key community members who may, in some cases, ultimately have the capacity to offer an equal but different community education function. These community members may need support and facilitation from CE staff, which may need their support and facilitation. This requires a collaborative approach and a sharing of the 'turf' with others from a range of known and possibly yet to be discovered, backgrounds.

Self organization

I have already talked above about the capacity of community members to self organise in relation to forming their own version of 'community fire safe' groups.

The example given was the Garratt Road group. Another self organizing group of residents who formed to assist each other with fire preparedness was referred to in the article published by Goodman and Gawen in 2008. Another form of self organization is exemplified in the Harvesting Code of Practice[58], a code which has been developed in South Australia, where groups of nearby grain growers agree together to abide by the terms of the Code in relation to their harvesting practices on high fire risk days. As the pamphlet outlining the Code states:

> During previous Fire Danger Seasons, fires have been started by harvesting operations and have escaped. Although grain harvesting is not the cause of the greatest number of fires, those that occur from grain harvesting generally result in greater loss (in hectares) than other avoidable fires

[58] http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/fire_restrictions/codes_of_practice.jsp; accessed 24th April 2009

Farmers were keen to circumvent the likelihood that if they did not get organized that they would be regulated. The model in Western Australia which regulates the grain production schedules is not always beneficial to the grain grower. As one farmer explained:

> Western Australia have … legislation that if they get bad fire weather, they put a total ban on reaping, right across Western Australia. So that's from the Western edge right to the Eastern border.
>
> And what it means is if you were near the coast where those perhaps adverse conditions will assist you in reaping, you can't reap.

The Code of Practice was developed through a partnership between the Country Fire Service and the South Australian Farmer's Federation (SAFF), but its operation relies on farmers self organizing. As one senior fire officer told me,

> … they're policing it themselves, which is the right way to go. And then if you get somebody step out of line, … the local community group says 'oi, you're not playing the game'.

Another aspect of self organization is demonstrated in the increased activity of private fire units as first responders to a fire. A senior officer noted that this development needs to be kept in balance, given the farmers with their fire units are also often those who are called on to make up brigades when the fire breaks out.

Coordination of private fire units at the fire event is also required, which also applies at the 'mop up' stage. This (salaried) fire officer noted the importance of relationships as the means through which these decisions can be made.

> Part of the difficulty … we do have with them is once the flame's gone, they all want to go home, and we get left with the mop up. So we've got to turn around and try to say ..well, you know, let's all of us do an hour and a half mop up, and then we'll *all* go home. But that's a bit of that personal relationship from the officers on the ground with the people driving the vehicles. I mean build that before the fire and not while the fire's on …Get together well before the fire season and talk about all those sorts of things.

While this 'code of practice' example is somewhat removed from the direct focus on the CE officer's role, it is revealing for its emphasis on what has been a theme in this research, which is how much community safety work is carried

out through 'relationship'. In the case of the Code, the basis of the regulation is a scientific concept involving an understanding of the Grassland Fire Index. But the mechanism through which it is enforced, when certain farmers do not adequately 'self monitor', is essentially an interpersonal one. Social pressure is brought to bear by the group. This use of 'relationship' as a key medium through which the work is done is a consistent theme in this study. This is so internally within the service, between the different parts of the service, such as the operations/CE role, and between the actors in the service, both operations and CE, and members of the community, in their various roles. It is largely through relationship that the work gets done.

### Inter-subjectivity

The data set out above serve to highlight the interrelatedness of structures including groups, actual practices, and values and how these inform and are taken up by the CE officer in her task of increasing community safety in relation to the threat of fire. I would now like to highlight some of the inter-subjective processes - the capacity to recognise 'the other', in a meaningful and respectful way, and in so doing, be able to bring to the task one's own self, with one's own beliefs, knowledge, skills and sense of purpose.

CE staff often used terms like the officer needing to be 'aware' of community issues and dynamics, being discreet, compassionate, mindful, understanding and capable of empathy. All these qualities, or values, or practices, contribute to the possibility that inter-subjectivity can be realised. Without this, only limited progress can be made toward really understanding how we each see ourselves, our roles, and our responsibilities – agencies and community members alike.

These qualities of sensitivity, tact, mutuality matter at the level of desirable human relationships in civil society in general[59]. They also matter at the level of community education and awareness activities at the community level. This might be particularly so in a region which has experienced a severe fire event which continues to impact on the daily lives of many residents. I would argue that these qualities are also relevant in the everyday work of CE officers, who cross the boundary into people's homes with a brief to encourage household

[59] Scheff (1997) refers to Martin Buber's "I Thou" and "I It" distinction. The "I Thou" can be seen in the context of this discussion as relevant to the idea of mutuality, and the "I It" a way of describing the situation when we treat the other as an object. See page 79 of Scheff, 1997.

members to build on what they already know and do, and to further develop the everyday practices which will make for a safer community.

Thinking about inter-subjectivity also points us toward identifying dynamics which threaten the process. Some of these threats, while at one level can be seen as ‘interpersonal’, can perhaps be better thought about as structural.

One structural barrier, pertained to ways of thinking about the Eyre Peninsula Community Alliance. As a researcher with an orientation particularly toward seeking an understanding of community processes and infrastructure, I was curious as to the reasons the Eyre Peninsula Community Alliance (EPCA) was not a body on the radar of the officers I was interacting with.

As it was described to me, the EPCA was initially brought into being as the third leg of the stool – with the other two legs being the Eyre Peninsula Development Board (Economic Development) and the Catchment Management Authority (the natural environment). Differences in resourcing from Government and other sources meant that the Community body remained the poor cousin.

Struggles for community sector groups have been documented elsewhere (see Fels, 2007). There are often also barriers to collaboration when community groups have to compete with others for funding. Certainly, those with whom I spoke in the Emergency Services either had not heard of the EPCA, or if they had, they couldn’t see the relevance of it to the work of bushfire preparedness.

One Local Government officer in the Fire Awareness Discussion Group saw Local Government as the body best able to represent the community. Local Government is certainly a key player but to date, on my observation, Local Government involvement essentially boils down to the role of the Fire Prevention Officer. The multiple calls on the time of the person in this role in addition to fire safety have been referred to elsewhere in this report.

This situation had changed to a degree. On my last contact with the LEP I learnt that the EPCA had provided some support to a joint application between Rural Solutions and the CFS for funding to extend the Women’s Skills work.

Other barriers to collaboration, which can also be seen as barriers to inter-subjectivity, have been erected through the process of the Coronial Inquiry and other legal action. When a prominent member of one representative board or authority within a community plays a lead role in legal action against a fire

service, this affects the capacity of those in these representative positions to think across organizational boundaries in a cooperative manner.

The CE officer repeatedly demonstrated a non-judgemental attitude to residents she was working with. That residents were sensitive to judgement was apparent in the Women's Day workshop I attended in 2008. After the presentation made by a research colleague which contained data on actions taken by residents the day of the fire, some women participants noted that residents shouldn't be blamed for actions they took, as 'panic can take over' and cause you to act in ways you could not foresee.

While the research presenter made strenuous efforts to avoid any element of judgement in her reporting, the strength of women's efforts to emphasise the difficulties they faced on the day of the fire, highlighted the sensitive nature of the topic of responses to fire[60].

The CE officer was mindful of these sensitivities in her presentations. She was also mindful and non-judgemental toward those who thought they would take some action to increase their safety, and then allow this intent to fall away. As the CE officer put it to me:

> Real life takes over. People think about these things and they put them in the toilet and they read them and you know, they sit down and three week's worth of newspapers go on top of it, throw all of those out, they get busy with the next thing.

The CE officer's approach to understanding 'real life' did not appear to slow down her enthusiasm for her work in conveying to as many people as she could the importance of preparedness and in facilitating the efforts of those willing to work on the issues. Her non-judgemental approach may also have offered her some protection against developing the mind set one sometimes encounters in staff tasked with increasing community preparedness for fire.

[60] Dealing sensitively with these ideas in this fire affected environment, required a willingness and capacity to work with the emotions expressed and experienced in the work. It is now nearly 35 years since the publication of Hochschild's influential essay "The sociology of feelings and emotions", in which she argued that sociology's emphasis on the cognitive rational actor helped to make invisible an important dimension of social life. The same struggle remains today, particularly in two fields – that of Emergency Services and that of Evaluation. Linda Anderson (1998) in the evaluation literature holds that 'evaluators have a tendency to exaggerate the meaning of rationality. We underestimate and sometimes neglect the impact of emotional and irrational motives, instead seeking and constructing rationality as the queen of science. The emotional drive behind our choice of research methods, theory, and interpretations is a fact that we underestimate or ignore too often. Rationality has a tendency to dominate at the expense of reflexivity" (p.51).

This mind set is characterised by pessimism - that the public overall was lazy and unwilling to act in their own defence.

## Evaluation perspectives

While the focus of the work of Project C7 has undergone some changes with the change in group membership, leadership, and management at both the University level and the CRC management level, our overarching task pertained to understanding and putting forward ideas in relation to program evaluation.

In this section I provide some data which reflects some perspectives of the CE Unit staff themselves, on the broad and interlinking approaches which they think would best guide an approach to evaluation. I respond to some of these ideas and put forward some findings from this case study. These ideas can be considered by end users as they think about the various ways they have developed the programs to assist community to prepare for the possibility of fire.

I would suggest to end users that they engage in a participatory approach to further their understanding of what is happening in their programs. This should involve both those who deliver the CE initiatives and at least a selection of those who respond to the programs, both community leaders and 'ordinary' community members. This will provide the content for discussion within agencies across functional divisions, and then laterally with relevant other agencies and key community groups.

Firstly, I set out some of the views of the CE staff themselves on approaches to evaluation.

### "Casting a broad net"

<u>Introduction</u>

CE staff were wanting to consider an approach to evaluation which was more comprehensive than the evaluation requirement for their programs at the time the research was being carried out.

At this time, CE staff evaluative reporting included providing detail on the number of groups they convened, and with some of those groups, they collected data from group participants, both on commencing the group and on

completion[61]. They particularly wanted an approach which would, in their terms, 'cast a broad net'.

They explained that the belief which lay behind their sentiment, was twofold. The first belief was based on their observation that they saw that people do not move in a step wise manner toward preparedness, but rather in a more iterative fashion. The second belief stemmed from the fact that CE outcomes were highly dependent on the activities of other parts of the fire service, other lead agencies in community safety, and community members themselves.

Moving iteratively toward preparedness

Firstly, the observation that at least some people move toward preparedness in an iterative manner.

The CE officer provided her own case as an exemple of this phenomenon. She had been asked by the Fire Service, as a member of a community who had experienced a fire in 2001 (the Tulka fire), to speak to communities in another region of South Australia about her experience. She noted:

> That was how I started to learn about it .['Community Fire Safe']. .. and what I learnt over the day or two that I was involved, I just thought that this program was the most amazing thing, like it actually empowered people~ on the ground, like they could work with each other, free of or with the assistance of, or with the guidance of an agency. It was done informally, but it was done professionally, it was done accurately and there was heaps of technical information. They were given the support, but they decided what they wanted to do as a community, and I'm thinking ... this is the best thing since sliced bread, like how come this is not compulsory?

The CE officer then noted that despite this strongly held belief, it took her another *four* years (her emphasis) before she put up her hand to start a Community Fire Safe group in her local community.

So while she was excited at the idea of Community Fire Safe as a group, and she believed it was a worthwhile program, her belief and her knowledge was stored for action at a later stage. It was four years later, after the Wangary fire,

[61] Helen Goodman and Catherine Rowe with assistance from Gerald Elsworth, have done an analysis of Community Fire Safe participant responses derived from evaluation forms used by CFS CE staff. This work is held in a draft report entitled 'Community Fire Safe Program Evaluation', which is held by the CFS CE Unit.

which did not threaten her area directly, that she finally decided to act and seek assistance in setting up a Community Fire Safe group.

What triggers the step between awareness and action will vary, but the case example of the CE officer points to key themes of this case study. Key triggers include:

- the importance of experience
- the willingness of community members to step forward and lead
- an appreciation of the existence of program processes
- availability of relevant materials, and
- availability of staff to respond to community initiatives

The CE service was able to respond in a timely manner to the Tulka residents request which maximised the window of opportunity she was presenting them with.

So the overall goal of strengthening community will often only be furthered in small steps not always in the same direction. This is particularly so given the reality of current levels of expenditure on CE within the fire services. I would see the practices which they cited in their accounts of their work and which I observed, as 'micro practices', and it is through these practices that community outcomes are achieved.

Inter-dependency of outcomes on factors outside of CE programs

In addition to 'casting the net broadly' so as to capture the iterative nature of people's movement toward preparedness, staff also suggested the idea of segmenting or allocating 'outcomes' to different sorts of interventions.

For example, what message might one expect a community member to gain from a 30 second advertisement? What is the nature and 'level' of this intervention as an outcome measure?

One desirable outcome example might be that a person or a household group take in the message that 'bushfires can be dangerous' – a legitimate and important outcome from such an intervention. However, one can expect a different order of outcomes from programs which are more engaging of community members, allowing them to interact, share and build knowledge, and increase their familiarity with the desired messages as well as with one another as residents in a particular locality.

These levels of outcomes would never be expected from a 30 second television advertisement, but the advertisement may add weight to the process of bringing people together. This may be a background trigger, perhaps from an advertisement, that bushfire is something to be taken seriously. These can be seen as both iterative processes and perhaps 'interactive' processes[62], although this would be hard to detect.

Coming to a clear picture of what factors are most responsible for the adoption by households of desirable procedures and practices in bushfire preparation is a complex task. What the CE manager sees as unarguable is that

> people need a clear perception of the threat, …and are motivated to act on it.

But then he notes how much more needs to be in place.

In discussing the role of Community Fire Safe as one response to assisting the community, he sees that it contributes by providing a place where people can meet with each other, and work to

> come up with solutions for their own problems…..*Yet it is done on such a small scale section of the community as a whole*".

That group work is time and resource consuming is clear from the data in this report.

The manager of the CE Unit at the time this research was begun, summarised well the dilemmas for program development and for evaluation in this field. Pointing to the white board onto which we were recording aspirations for program outcomes, he added

> What I see happens is that people want safer communities, that's what we've got written up there (referring to program outcomes on agency documentation on the white board). But to actually achieve a safer community, we have to spend a whole lot of time and energy. Then the community has to be fully committed and they have to really get involved. And then all things [these activities] have to go like clockwork for that to be achieved.

So part of the clockwork includes a range of other internal agency functions, such as warning systems, and external agency functions, such as other parties

[62]. The Mt Bold case study provides some insight into the web of interactions at the local level, in an area one hour's travel from Adelaide. See Goodman, Stevens and Rowe, 2008.

including local government and land management agencies, also working together toward the same goal.

Then there is the question of ‘program reach’ - how far can the CE function be spread?

> Do we have to have everybody involved in Community Fire Safe to really achieve these outcomes?

The CE officer adds to the above discussion:

> And that’s a huge goal, especially if your threat or your hazard only comes along once a year, or once every 10 years.

As I finalise this report, the quote about ‘does everybody have to be involved in Community Fire Safe to achieve these outcomes, has two levels of meaning. I think the ‘everybody’ was intended to mean all members of communities in high fire risk areas. A second level of meaning could also be: do all the key institutional parties have to support the idea of Community Fire Safe as a community process? These parties would be intra-agency people and structures within the fire service, and key external parties.

I would agree with the CE staff, that an evaluation framework needs to ‘cast a broad net’. The question is how broad, and this can only be answered by different program managers, different states, and different parts of the fire service organization. It may also need to include other agencies which form part of the community safety domain.

## Summary of findings

The case study provides data on all the findings below.

- The CE function is best managed and delivered by a CE Unit within the fire service. Specifically
    - The CE officer was selected by, and supported by the CE Unit at Head Office. This support related to consistent work quality and included:
        - regular meetings with CE manager and staff
        - access for phone consultation
        - advice where necessary
        - access to professional clinical supervision as required.
        - administrative support around Human Resources issues, and
        - ensuring supplies of relevant materials
    - The CE Unit was also exploring the possibilities of redeveloping a program called VOICE – Volunteers in Community Education.
    - Opportunities exist for developing future collaborations of these two approaches to CE. The CE Unit will need more resources to facilitate what could be a widening of the program reach of both these initiatives to include the CE Unit based officer and the volunteer.
    - There is expertise to be shared across the fire services on these developments. The AFAC Community Safety group could be supported adequately to perform this developmental function.
- The CE officer is best selected from the local community
    - The CE Unit Manager at the time of the LEP CE officer appointment, was cautious in his approach given the trauma created by the Wangary fire. He and the CFS as a whole, both centrally and regionally, provided a supportive environment in which the person appointed was entrusted to perform the CE duties in the manner most acceptable to the community. The assumptions that the appointed person would use her networks to gain access to key community areas were well founded.

- Community Fire Safe is the most effective way of delivering community safety messages through
    - its capacity to foster community relationships
    - its use of narrative as a community strengthening process
    - its use of adult learning theory to impart discrete program knowledge, and
    - its use of Community Development principles to guide program delivery
- In addition
    - The CE officer brings her own unique blend of values and principles, and her successful performance is characterised by her energy, commitment, respectful approaches to community, and careful and strategic management of inter-agency and community resources.
    - The threat to her approach is that it is time consuming and participants may not want to move at the pace desired by the agency. The CE officer regularly exceeds her weekly part-time allocation of hours. A large injection of resources will be needed to enable the CE Unit to deliver the Community Fire Safe program in more locations[63]. Competition for resources will remain a key feature of this domain.
    - Challenges to Community Development ideas remain. Just as it is hard to envisage a closer integration of CE into the dominant organizational culture, it remains doubly difficult at the community level to integrate community responsiveness into program delivery. CE can show the way here, in the multitude of ways in which it maximises community contributions to and co-determination, with the emergency services, of responses to risk at the community level. Example of this include
        - the support of self organizing groups

[63] As I finalise this case study, news reports today suggest that the Victorian Government is about to make available an increase in resources relating to operational response and warning systems following the events of Black Saturday, February 7, 2009. It will require agency leadership to promote community development approaches to increasing community safety, as these processes are not widely understood or valued.

        - the taking up of offers from key community people to contribute to the CE function
        - the possibility of integrating operational volunteers into community awareness and education initiatives, and
        - the inclusion of a community voice in the formal structures of Emergency Management bodies. This development warrants close monitoring
    - CE outcomes are inter-dependent with other agencies and community bodies.

# Discussion

## Casting a broad net for evaluation

### Examining the CE role broadly

This study has mainly focussed on the CE officer's role as the vehicle through which to inquire into the delivery of community education in relation to fire awareness. Around this central theme I have built a picture of the high degree of what I have called inter-dependent roles, relationships, and structures. These are relevant either as the means by which the CE officer gets her work done, or as factors in their own right in a community's efforts to increase its own safety.

There are two main reasons for the emphasis on the CE role as it unfolded. One was the agency's openness to exploring in some detail, the elements of a new role in a region which had no CE staff previously, and the newness of the environment given the community impact of the Wangary fire. The second was that there was little existing documentation of the roles of CE officers in this sector.

### Variability of role

Given the absence of a detailed documentation of the CE role, any comparisons to other, more defined and settled, work roles in other sectors, such as teachers, is problematic. However, even with teachers, there is of

course a high degree of variability in the roles they take up. Carew and Lightfoot (1979) (cited in Fien, 1995):

> Teachers, after all, are people – unique, individual, multi dimensional human beings. They have personal histories that significantly affect their professional role; they bring different values and objectives…and personal predilections into school; and most important, they are insightful knowers of their classrooms, who reflect upon, justify and critique what goes on there (p.103)

That statement holds true for the CE officers in the Unit, and aspects of the uniqueness of the CE officer in this case study are evident.

Among these aspects are:

- her long standing connections with the area
- her own effort to start a community group
- her own experience of fire, both the one which directly impacted on her immediate community in 2001, and her subsequent experience of the Wangary fire
- the way she used her local knowledge in her work, and
- her careful and regular assessment of the sensitivities needed to carry out the work.

All these issues can be thought of as having something to do with the officer as 'agent'. I also have attended to aspects of structure such as the institutional and other structural factors which both constrained and enabled the development of the CE function. I have provided examples of how these two factors, agency and structure, interact and blend together at times to produce both general and particular outcomes.

## Interaction of role and structure

I have been careful to watch for examples of how the beliefs of the CE officer translated into actions in groups and meetings. That is, to seek to balance these two broad ideas of agency and structure and see, where possible, how they interact[64]. This interaction involves a key attribute of the CE officer herself

[64] .This is written about in the literature as a mutual shaping in a dialectical manner. Dialectic here means an emphasis on interaction.

(described elsewhere) and the structures with which she interacts in pursuing her goal of increasing community safety.

This interaction includes both the processes and the structures she creates in the particular social practices she uses to carry out her work[65]. It also includes those she supports, those which may be working for community safety of their own volition. These latter groups I have referred to in this study as self organizing groups.

A previous senior fire service officer has argued that fire service staff and volunteers are predominantly operationally focussed and many do not give adequate recognition to either CE staff or to the community itself for community safety outcomes[66]. This arises in part from the tendency of the fire services to overestimate the importance of operational performance and underestimate the capacities of the public, and their responsiveness to CE.

## The place of CE in the structure

This raises issues in relation to the premise that the CE work is best carried out through a separate dedicated organizational unit. On the one hand separation from the operational division of the service will remove the CE staff from potentially difficult interactions with operational personal. On the other hand, removal of routine exposure of the operational staff to the work and personnel of the CE division would reduce the prospect of the operational staff favourably reviewing their attitudes to CE. In more reflective moments, operational personnel themselves point to how they have contributed to this culture. I have sighted Christmas cards from fire service agencies which state the message: “we’ll be there”. This message is, of course, contrary to key messages delivered through the CE program.

I have heard senior officers of fire services talk of the denial engaged in by community members about the threat of fire. These views may be breaking down, and denial may be harder to hold after Black Saturday (Victoria, February 7th 2009). It remains the case, however, that as fire is a fearful occurrence there is an understandable societal expectation, or perhaps hope,

[65] For the reader who wishes to explore further ideas set out in what is known as structuration theory, Clark offers a readable summarised account where he sets out the scope of structural theory as four interrelated propositions. See Clark (1990)

[66] Barry Hamilton, presentation at the Annual Australasian Education & Fire Awareness Conference, 17-19 May, 2007, hosted by the Rural Fire Service (RFS), and held at Newcastle Civic Centre. Most often referred to as the RFS Newcastle Conference, 2007.

that when fire threatens there will be a fire service to respond. So the CE role, within a CE Unit, is seen as facing a double jeopardy – they exist in an organization with an historical association with the primary task of 'response', in a society which wants the same - an agency which will respond to them quickly in a crisis.

On balance, my view is that the separate CE organisational structure is preferable, but this structure should be augmented by a serious program to promote mutual respect and role recognition across all sections of the fire service.

## The CE program: evaluation approaches

Carol Weiss (2000) addresses the question of how many theories one can or should seek to track in carrying out program theory based evaluation. The first task is to see what theories are operating in the minds of program managers and practitioners and then to see what theories are helpful from the social science literature. Weiss suggests that other than investigating the thoughts of managers and practitioners, those who are investigating approaches to evaluation give consideration to the following:

- Can the program do the things the theory or theories are assuming? (plausibility)
- Are there particular theories which seem more central than others to the program outcomes? And: within those theories, are their particular links which seem most crucial to the success of the program?

These questions are underpinned by questions about the practicalities of the evaluation environment including the availability of resources and data.

I will respond to the two questions above, and in doing so, will collapse them together.

I argue that broadly, yes, the CE program, particularly its work with Community Fire Safe groups, and its other more explicitly focussed Community Development activities, can do the things the theories it espouses suggest.

## The social basis of groupwork: an essential perspective

In relation to the question as to whether the Community Fire Safe group program has particular theories which are more central than others to the

program outcomes, the answer is yes. The particular theoretical links I have developed in this study, links which the data suggested as well as those links representing my own assumptive world, pertain to the social nature of the 'group' as a medium for delivery of the program. These social links can be seen as forms of relationship and these are developed within the group, between the CE officer and group members, and between group members and other members in the community. The group is dependent on its social interactions for its development. These are the central and particular links which constitute the group, its facilitator, and its work together.

The first and obvious point, but it is worth reiterating, is that you can't *make* a group work. Its members need to want to be present and to wish to attend to the key or primary task. In the case of Community Fire Safe groups, attendance is voluntary. We know from group dynamics also that there are a number of forces present in any group situation, which will, and commonly do, drive it to go off task[67]. However, the facilitator is present to assist in the process of keeping a focus on the task of working toward both increasing the members' knowledge, and also facilitating members' awareness of and willingness to work with each other, to improve community safety.

This is both an individual and a social process. This research has pointed to a range of ways in which the Community Fire Safe facilitator seeks to engender a capacity development approach to group building. I also note that in her presentation in August of 2008 to the Eyre Peninsula Development Board, the CE officer referred to having a number of 'dormant' groups. It is possible that these groups are dormant only from her perspective in that she hasn't interacted with them. It may be that in some ways they are continuing to engage in some sort of work. Research which focuses on the dynamics of groups per se, focusing on Community Fire Safe groups, would be valuable. This could complement the work which has been carried out on the dynamics of Landcare groups[68]

Newly forming community groups, such as Community Fire Safe groups, can be seen as emerging at the boundary between the 'organization' (the fire

[67] This phenomenon is known in the systems psychodynamic literature as 'basic assumption behaviour'. Groups will persistently engage in a range of strategies in order to avoid doing the work of the group. See Lawrence et al, 1996, for further reading on these ideas.
[68] The work of Byron and Curtis, 2001, Byron, Curtis & Lockwood, 2001, Sobels & Curtis, 2001 on burnout and other phenomena relating to Landcare groups warrants exploration for what insight it may offer the more newly emerging groups in bushfire safety.

service) and the ‘individual’ (the householder) and hence can be seen as having a boundary system. These two groups interact and accordingly influence each other’s development. So, to a greater or lesser degree, they are evolving together.

This raises the question of groups developing largely on their own and at their own pace, where only the participants can define the meaning they develop together. Dunstan (in Goodman, Dunstan and Boulet, 1997) describes a group she has supported on Kangaroo Island which had a life of its own before she intervened with Community Fire Safe ideals and ideas. This group was continuing to develop its own agenda after her departure

Group formation and development can be seen to occur along a spectrum. The “Garratt Road” group on the Lower Eyre operates largely independently from the CE officer, although she has made contributions to its work tasks from time to time. The group at Louth Bay meets under the auspices of the Progress Association and draws on the Community Fire Safe group content through the CE officer. In this context the CE officer also draws into this space her supervisors, other CFS staff, such as the Regional Prevention Officer, and volunteers, such as members of the local brigade. However, the Louth Bay group also progresses in its own right, securing funding to increase the safety of its key meeting place. The Cummins Emergency Response Committee provides a good example of the operation of the principle of subsidiarity, where the officer supported the development of a community based group to achieve the goals it sets for itself, including its decision to regard all hazards as within its brief.

## The CE officer/group interface

There are some particularly important and demanding aspects of this ‘officer’ ‘group’ boundary system, in an area which has been severely impacted by fire.

This is most evident in groups in which members have had significant losses. The pace of development of such a group toward an objectively set goal of arriving at a particular stage of content specific knowledge may be ‘slowed’ on that measure. But it may be strengthened on other measures such as the development of trust and cohesion of the group as a learning environment. In another group, there may be particular energy to move ahead quickly with a defined aspect of their fire safety agenda.

The CE officer walks a fine and sometimes difficult boundary line in this activity system. This was evident in the account of the person who did not tell the CE officer that she had decided not to go ahead convening a particular meeting leaving the officer to cancel the volunteer brigade input at the last minute.

Working in a fire affected environment where people's capacities and energy levels fluctuate unpredictably is just part of the picture for the CE officer in the 'boundary system'. This is particularly true in a program which explicitly seeks to move at the pace indicated by the group members and to work along 'community development' lines. Where there is a rhythm at all in the life of the CE officer, it is certainly a fluctuating one. What might look to be random group patterns can, on closer examination, be found to be purposefully distinct fluctuating patterns of group and officer interactions.

## Leaving room for emergence

Rogers and Funnell (2006) point to the presence of these sorts of fluid dynamics in their Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) conference address, where they emphasized five points in summarizing their learning from the evaluation of the FACS[69] :Community Strengthening program. Their points were:

- That the outcomes were emergent
- That specific measures may not be able to be developed in advance, making pre and post comparisons difficult
- That specific objectives were evolving and responsive to emerging needs, opportunities and solutions
- Many projects focused on capacity building in response to community identified issues
- Specific objectives were often locally determined.[70]

While the CE worker worked at the boundary between herself and the Community Fire Safe group, she also worked at another boundary, which lay between herself and the organization[71]. In this space the CE officer uses her relationships with CFS staff who make significant contributions of time and

[69] (Australian Government) Family and Community Services (FACS); now FaHCSIA (Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs).
[70] Rogers, P., and Funnell, S. (2006). Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) Annual Conference, Darwin.
[71] Sahlin-Anderson's (2002) work on project management as boundary work is illuminating.

knowledge at various stages in the way she works with Community Fire Safe groups. She is supported by her supervisors, and traverses the dilemmas she faces when she learns something in her role as a CFS employee, which directly relates to and threatens to compromise her role as community member.

The officer is now permanent part-time and, with a more settled pattern in her work, some more clear pattern of program development at the officer/group boundary may emerge. It can be assumed (though this would need to be tested) that a more stable pattern of employment will prompt her and her supervisors to test some of the program assumptions over time.

## Barriers to CE program development

Other barriers which impede program development within the CE Unit include:

- changeover of personnel
- large work loads
- essentially unlimited community demand
- particular aspects of organizational culture, and now,
- an increasingly difficult economic climate, just at the time when there is growing awareness about the need for community education.

A third boundary system, as mentioned above, is that between the officer and the community.

Within this system, the officer draws heavily on her relationships with members of the community in order to access a range of opportunities which are either created by or responded to by her. Those she creates, such as offering her time to a particular organization which comprises residents with a disability, require a readiness from those involved. In this case the casually employed staff in the facility must be receptive to the need and be willing to work on ways which might address the need. In many instances the officer is responding to a need expressed by a member of the community: a school teacher or principal, a household member, or a range of other ‘actors’ in the activity systems which comprise community.

These different boundary systems, if the CE Unit and others find them salient, may be highlighted for further internal study. Each CE officer will have particular experiences at each of these boundary systems.

## Social profiling

These comments relate to the socio-demographic context in which the fire services operate.

There has been a lot of discussion within this field of research, about the need for fire services to engage in 'social profiling' of their areas, so they can form an accurate view of the socio-demographics of their area[72]. This came up also in the discussions with the CE Manager and staff. This can be consumptive of time in an already stretched service. If relationships exist between organizations which already use social profiling data in their social planning tasks, such as Local Government, then relevant elements of this data ideally could be shared.

In many cases, 'real life' happens well before socio-demographic patterns can be picked up in ABS data. There is a need to liaise with larger organizations which hold data broken down into meaningful categories such as those which might mirror brigade and group boundaries and organizations working with newer arrivals. This, again, ties in with the community development idea already advanced by these CE staff, which is that 'local matters'.

Being attuned to the particular socio-demographic factors at play in particular communities is a critical part of program planning. However, to link in with Local Government on these matters requires time to develop the inter-organizational relationships which serve as the basis for sharing of such data. At present, in the main, the time to explore these sorts of network developments is greater than is available to CE officers within their part-time status. Data sharing is only one example where positive inter-organizational relationships which could assist the CE staff in their work.

## Implications for Evaluation

### Inter-dependency of working relations: intra-agency dimensions

CE staff report the existence of strong and cohesive relationships within their work group, and I have observed this. However, the inter-dependency of working relationships across the fire service is not routinely recognised, and

[72] The work of Alison Cottrell at James Cook University is pertinent to this topic. Her work on social profiling should be available by August 2009.

would need to be if a more holistic evaluation framework were to be considered. In such a framework all aspects of a fire services' contribution to community safety could be examined.

Resources for evaluation work will always be scarce. There is a range of reasons for this including:

- community safety is an emerging field
- there is more demand on the CFS CE Unit than can be met
- there will always be pressure to spend more on direct services to the public, and
- there will never be quite enough equipment for bushfire operations.

However, if we can expect a future of more mega fires[73], there is going to be an increase in community need for CE processes.

At the same time, an increase in mega fires will require fire services to be tied up, in some cases for years, in Royal Commissions and Coronial and other inquiries. These processes can be forces for change, and the broader community is entitled to be informed of the circumstances of these catastrophes. However, it should be noted that these inquiries do not come without cost.

The broader community, and governments at all levels, have some awareness of the cost of inquiries in terms of money and general community resources. However, the cost to the fire services, particularly the volunteer based services, is of a different order of magnitude.

Coronial and related inquiries seriously deplete the internal energy, the stamina, and the good will among volunteers that is critical to the maintenance of a successful organisation.

In my view an evaluative perspective needs to accommodate two perspectives. One is how different parts of a fire service agency contribute to CE outcomes. The second is that which looks specifically at community level processes which contribute in their own right to Community Safety, and how these processes can be more strongly supported.

[73] See talk by Jerry Williams, Brookings Institute, USA, on the megafire pheonomenon. http://www.bushfirecrc.com/fkn/downloads/megafire0703.pdf; accessed 3rd May 2009. Talk given at a Canberra forum entitled "Are Big Fires Inevitable?" Bushfire CRC Forum, Canberra, Parliament House, 27/02/2007.

More work needs to be done *within* the fire services in order for the organizations to willingly reflect and think together on how their various parts contribute to the broader goal of community safety. Intra-organizational factors will include:

- the activities of Boards and Chief Fire Officers where they use their roles and resources to make decisions relating to Community Education and Development
- the media divisions whose expenditure on media campaigns is often considerable
- the range of activities carried out through 'operations' which also have an impact in ways other than direct fire fighting

Structures and processes must be found that can illuminate and support those who can work at the boundaries in particular ways, so that people approach each other with openness and generosity in the spirit the community might expect. This is a big ask, even if on paper it seems a reasonable expectation. However it needs to be an aim; otherwise the development of a comprehensive understanding of fire service initiatives toward community safety will remain limited.

There is a considerable literature on deliberative processes between 'community members' and members of an organization, such as might be engaged in evaluation practice (eg: House & Howe, 1999). There is less emphasis on the use of these processes *within* organizations. This might be so due to evaluations being paid for by organizations to study the 'client' or 'consumer' rather than to turn their focus of attention on themselves.

## Inter-dependency of working relations: inter-agency dimensions

This case study provided an account of the Fire Awareness Discussion Groups efforts to make a submission to the Ministerial Review. These efforts nearly foundered when the authorising organization of one group member withdrew their support for the submission. This account could be seen to be insubstantial, in that nothing great apparently rose or fell on whether the submission process was completed or not.

However this account can be taken as an exemplar of a key phenomenon in inter-agency collaborations, where representatives from different sectors, systems and subsystems seek to work together. They need to balance perspectives of what Newton (2003) called their 'back home' system (their auspicing agency) with their own internal beliefs and loyalties, and with the perspectives of the 'new' group of which they are a member and with which they are seeking to work collaboratively. The tacit processes involved in collaborations are influenced by:

- the strengths of prior relationships
- the degree of trust operating between partners
- the respective experiences of and support by their 'at home' systems
- the differential power relationships between partners, and
- their shared concern for the focus of work, being the task of decreasing community members' vulnerability in relation to fire.

## Support for collaboration

Powell & Colin provide 10 suggestions for 'true' support of community engagement.' The 9th suggestion was

> Systemic institutional mechanisms for ongoing long-term citizen involvement need to be created and incorporated into academic and government institutional decision-making processes (especially those related to scientific and technological developments.)

Institutionally, we see the introduction of a single 'citizen' representative role in the proposed Bushfire Management Structure in the South Australian system referred to in this report. While this represents progress, it is progress on a very small scale. A minimum of two such roles would have allowed for a stronger community voice. Being a lone voice amongst others with pre-existing institutional relationships and access to special expertise and information can be a difficult role.

There are several interesting and powerful examples of the way the CE officer was able to meaningfully engage and support citizens who wanted to take up a more strategic role at the community level to further community safety. I am thinking here of the Progress Associations, and the Cummins Emergency Ready Committee (CERC).

In relation to the place for citizen involvement, and here I mean citizens who are not members of brigades, the near future will still be occupied with different levels of the fire services and other emergency players attempting to reach agreement on how their own roles (what I would call 'institutional roles') can be more fully integrated. It may be that considerable time needs to elapse before the role for 'ordinary people' in governance issues in community safety can get the necessary attention. This will leave the focus on community as being the target of bushfire ready initiatives, but with little opportunity to play a more active role in bringing community issues more clearly to the table[74].

Barriers to community taking up a leadership role can become more pronounced when a Coronial process is required following deaths from a fire event. Coronial processes take considerable time, energy and resources, and members of the Emergency Services are often the focus of inquiry. These people face extreme pressure which occupies their thoughts, as anyone observing the CFS officers in the 23 months between the Wangary fire and the Coronial report becoming available can attest to. These factors can hamper a community development approach at both the wider system and more local level.

These sorts of barriers make the role of community groups like Community Fire Safe groups even more important. Given that the CE staff (correctly in my view) are theorising community fire safe as a community development program, this makes these groups potential breeding ground for a more active citizenry in bushfire safety.

## Approaches to evaluation

### Gray's approach

I believe more emphasis should be placed on approaches to evaluative inquiry which emphasis what Gray calls 'co evaluation'[75]. In his support of this way of thinking about evaluation, Patton applauds the way Gray and others have developed this approach to ongoing evaluation as a means of organizational

[74] . I noted that on one of the Women's Day, that there was to be a place for a woman from the community on the Zone Emergency Management Committee. Expressions of interest were called for. Last time I inquired with the Office of Recovery, membership of these Committees had still to be finalised.

[75] Gray, Evaluation with Power. See bibliography

learning. He outlines five significant ways in which it differs from 'old conceptions' of evaluation in:

- Organizational effectiveness – that evaluation as a field of professional practice has focused on evaluating projects and programs, whereas the co evaluation approach joins the work on organizational development with recent work on empirically oriented evaluation
- Evaluation is ongoing: Co evaluation focuses not on episodes at particular phases of a program
- Evaluation as learning: 'End of project' with its emphasis on summative judgements lead to resistance; evaluation as learning keeps the emphasis on improving rather than proving.
- Evaluation as internal – co evaluation is described as the highest form of accountability, which is self accountability, requiring intra-organizational collaboration with a developmental focus
- Evaluation is doable – this emphasises keeping inquiry processes at a level where everyone can engage with them, and staff and volunteers are not required to 'give up' the role of inquiry to experts. (Gray, p.xii-xiii).

Another reason to consider co evaluation, is that resources for evaluation work will always be scarce. There are a range of reasons for this to be so. The most obvious one is financial resources. This is an emerging field. I have observed in my time working with the CFS CE Unit, that there is always more demand on the service than can be met. Money for evaluation will always be up against the pressure to spend more on services for the public, if not on more equipment for operations.

Gray's approach was developed in the not-for-profit sector, and includes an emphasis from the level of the organizational governing body (in the case of a fire service this could be a Board, such as the CFA, or a Senior Level Group, such as the CFS), through to the staff, volunteers, and community members.

Gray's work conceptually then sits comfortably with those forms of evaluative inquiry which favour participatory approaches. Opportunities for participation in the inquiry process need to be opened up at all stages of the life of an organization. At the community level, being open to and seeking understanding of what it takes to '*be'* community as much as what it takes to 'prevent fatalities and damage to private property' in bushfires is important.

## Community capacity and desire

The data from our research suggests that people do want to work more at 'being' a community and that there are genuinely altruistic aspirations in many people to work to integrate elements of their social, personal and physical well being. The policy framework of desiring community empowerment is a good one. Communities have this capacity, or at least latent capacity. The fire services in particular, through programs like Community Fire Safe, can and do play a role in helping to 'en-able' people to live in closer harmony with their neighbours and the environment.

In writing about the politics of 'risk', Raynor makes the point that the ideas of 'engagement' between 'communities' and 'organization' are increasingly seen to be a necessary process, but that often the models of 'citizen' in some portrayals of engagement are too simple.

That there is some ambivalence about evaluation work is also to be expected. Included in this ambivalence is that evaluation work may not live up to expectations, there may be a history of disillusionment, it is essentially uncontrollable unless so tightly proscribed as to be too limiting, and it is consumptive of management and staff time. In my own case, the time lag between gathering data and reporting on that data has been too long.

## More than one hat

We need to work harder at understanding where the boundaries lie between the volunteer as community member and volunteer as brigade member. This 'boundary activity system' is different again and within it some of the key questions are

- In what ways are activities within this system focused in community safety outside of the demands of operational response?
- How and in what ways can a particular brigade speak for a particular community locality? This then opens up the question of what should be done where the brigade representation is not as diverse as the community it serves.
- For those brigade members with an interest in and skills in supporting non operational community safety, what training, support and supervision do they require to carry out this role?

- What other aspects of this ‘activity system’ need to be discussed and addressed to support this interface between the brigade and the community?

## Groups and networks in community education

Links in the web that constitutes community safety are strengthened as a result of a community fire safe group attendance.

Community members both learn new knowledge and skills and also have affirmed and extended their everyday practices. Safety resides primarily in community, and is supported and strengthened by the sorts of practices which the CE officer engages in as highlighted in this case study. These ideas are well argued in literature, and include approaches such as Wilkinson’s interaction theory (Wilkinson, 1991).

Building informal community networks is a key step in a collective way of understanding community safety. How these are linked to only one aspect of community safety, being warnings, has been set out by Goodman et al (2007). Warnings is only one of a number of mutual aid tasks which aggregates of households, as communities, perform with and for each other.

Paralleling this process of community members strengthening networks through their involvement in Community Fire Safe groups, is the officer herself using her networks to carry out her work. This is clear in her accounts of: how she accessed an Aboriginal Community group and worked carefully with them while they discussed their needs as a community, how she worked with a family with a disabled child, and how she managed several interventions with a community organization and their residents who are young people with an intellectual disability who work a farm.

Personal connections in these examples are often the medium through which the work is carried out. This may involve the household or organization contacting the officer because they know here or know of her work through community conversations. Or it may involve the officer using one of her own connections within a household or organization to gain access to the group. These connections arise from the use of her surname (an established family name of long standing on the Lower Eyre), her networks formed through her previous work roles, community roles as member of schools, sports teams, both her own and her children’s, and by word of mouth.

### Volunteers in community education

In recognition of the fact that the CE Unit cannot respond to all the requests from community to start and support Community Fire Safe groups, the CFS has moved ahead with exploring the role of the volunteer in supporting the development of the capacity of the CE Unit to respond to community demand. This project is currently underway.

This is a delicate interface. Some sectors of the fire services are heavily unionised. In Victoria the Union involvement in the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board work around issues of diversity in the workforce has slowed the development of the research agenda around diversity[76].

These issues are made even more complex by the CE Unit staff having little time to network across organizational borders to assist in the development of creative responses which would strengthen community safety. This is an area in which considerable energy must be found in the near future, particularly so as to be positioned with ideas and resources which may flow from the government response to Black Saturday.

## Summary of Discussion

- The principal focus of this project was the role of the CE officer. This was so because:
    - It was a new role and the agency was open to its exploration
    - There was little existing documentation of the roles of CE officers in this sector
- It emerged that fire service staff and volunteers are predominantly operationally focussed and many do not give adequate recognition to either CE staff or to the community itself for community safety outcomes.
- An important issue is whether the CE work is best carried out through a separate dedicated organizational unit or as an integrated component of the agency.
- Boundary issues arose in a range of contexts, in particular:
    - between the fire service and the individual householder

[76] See Decision: Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board v United Firefighters Union of Australia. Commissioner Deegan, Canberra, 19/12/2008, Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

  - between the CE officer and the organization
  - between the CE officer and the Community Fire Safe groups
  - between the CE officer and the community at large
  - between the volunteer as community member and the volunteers as brigade member
- As expected, Community Fire Safe groups displayed varying degrees of self-direction
- The employment latterly of the CE officer on a permanent part-time basis has already resulted in a more settled work pattern and a trialling of new patterns and programs
- There has been discussion around the use of ‘social profiling’ of areas with a view to influencing the content and delivery of CE programs.
- The strength and coherence of relationships among CE staff is not generally mirrored in the relationships between CE staff the rest of the CFS.
- Resources for evaluation work will always be scarce.
- An apparent increase in frequency of ‘mega fires’ will tie up fire agencies in Royal Commissions, Coronial, and other inquiries for long periods.
- Coronial and related inquiries seriously deplete the internal energy, the stamina, and the good will among volunteers that is critical to the maintenance of a successful organisation.
- Agencies within the fire service should consider increasing their efforts to enhance integration of the various arms of the service towards the broad goal of community safety.
- The mid term should see a greater role in community education and safety for the interested ordinary community member who is neither a volunteer nor officer in the fire service.
- The fire service agencies would benefit from a greater receptiveness to the use of formal internal evaluation processes within and across arms of the service
- The policy framework of desiring community empowerment is a good one and has significant implications for community education and safety.

- In addition to performing a CE function, attendance at Community Fire Safe meetings also strengthened the links in the web that enhances community safety.
- Building informal community networks is a key step in developing community safety. Examination of this process is limited to the aspect of warnings and should be extended.
- Recognition of the CFS's inability to respond to all requests for Community Fire Safe groups has prompted the CFS to explore appropriately extending the role of the volunteer.

# Conclusion

## Introduction

I have written this study with enough detail for the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about the relationship between the actions of the CE officer and their likely impact on the domain of community safety.

The CFS CE staff, Chief Fire Officer and Regional staff are to be commended for not encumbering the CE officer with too many restrictions, allowing her to develop the role largely as she saw the need.

Structural support was provided by the organization, and valued by the officer. She was mindful of and responsive to the institutional requirements of her role including prioritising high risk areas such as are documented in the new Greater Port Lincoln Fire Plan. She was also developing relationships with civil society groupings such as the sheltered employment program. The rate at which she has supported the development of Community Fire Safe groups already exceeds the time to monitor all the groups and service their needs. That the groups work at developing their own relationships as community members around the topic of fire safety testifies to the value of the idea of Community Fire Safe.

The above influences lead me to question the predominant approach to evaluation, which is often program specific, and to argue for evaluation practices which seek to work in two intersecting ways. Firstly across an organization such as a fire service and secondly within a particular 'patch', a term used by Alison Cottrell in her work for brigades called "Know your patch,

Grow your Patch" [77]. While this work focuses on a brigade area, the area under consideration at the field level might well be bigger than this and might be able to accommodate the way the current districts or catchments are structured in particular areas.

## An Approach to Evaluation

### Issues for consideration in Evaluation

#### The need for an organisation-wide perspective

Gray's evaluative approach spans an organization.

In Gray's approach the various parts of the organization at the outset together seek to surface the common and different assumptions and practices across the interrelated aspects of their function. The program theory approach was used with the Integrated Fire Management Planning (IFMP) process, about which members of the CFA who were participants have publicly affirmed its value[78]. To assist in the process of establishing core approaches to shared goals, a variant of this program theory workshop idea could be developed with willing participants. These would be both intra-organization and inter-organization, and across the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery cycle. There is a need to work across organizational boundaries to articulate multiple perspectives.

In the Mt Bold study I have referred to dualisms as 'splits'. Examples of splits include those between CE and operations, between community members and fire service employees, and between salaried fire service officers and volunteers. Any inquiry which breaks down dualisms, or 'splits', should be encouraged. There are plenty of societal tendencies which push toward one side and away from the other. One dimension in the social field has the individualistic focus at one end and a more socialised focus at the other. Beck (1986) posits that individualization is the core process of societal modernization, and that the mediating structures between the individual and the organization are weakening. These include mediating structures, close communities, kinship bonds, and even family structures. Many societal

[77] This work is currently being finalized by Alison Cottrell. Anyone interested in this should inform Alison at the Centre for Disaster Studies, James Cook University in Queensland. Alison.cottrell@jcu.edu.au

[78] Owen Gooding, CFA, reported in a seminar at AFAC in 2008 at which I was present, that the program theory workshop idea was valuable to the IFMP process.

intermediaries are falling away to leave the individual facing society more individually than before. If Beck is right, and I think he is, these are powerful forces pushing toward the individualistic end of the spectrum.

### Managing uncertainty

Inherent in an approach to evaluation in this way of thinking, is the need to work creatively with uncertainty. While one element of uncertainty was eliminated for the CE officer when her role became permanent, there are many other aspects of uncertainty, paradox, tension and contradiction which when explored in a supportive environment and in an inquiring manner, can be productive opportunities for learning.

### The need for inter-agency cooperation

The Community Safety Committee of Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Council could provide a context in which a range of different program types can be selected for evaluation, with these evaluations shared across agency boundaries. While inter-organizational competition can have its benefits, in the main I see resources put into evaluative inquiry which is designed to either argue against a recommendation or for internal use in arguing a particular case before an agency Board. An example of the latter could be the evaluation of Community Fire Guard as recommended in the Esplin Inquiry following the 2003 fires. A report was completed but was never made available outside the agency in question. Evaluation resources are too scarce to be provided for internal agency use only in this way.

### The need for a local focus

It would be desirable for evaluative inquiry to be focussed on particular geographical areas, so as to really explore the interactions between programs, contexts in which they are delivered, and the predominant structures which influence the idea of community safety in relation to the threat of fire. It is only in local contexts that the idea of ‘participation’ in programs can be explored in a meaningful way, beyond the simple idea of counting the numbers of those attending programs.

### Community Fire Safe: a mechanism for community consolidation

I have argued in this report that interventions such as Community Fire Safe can be seen as important programs which provide a medium which counters the

individuality which referred to above. The program relies on drawing on the more communal aspects of our human natures which some community members are willing to build. The CE Unit cannot keep up to the demand for development of these groups, pointing to the urgent need for fire services to develop creative responses to increasing both professional and volunteer activity in this area.

## The Risk Management Approach

The risk management approach can work against creative responses of staff and community members, particularly at the organizational level, where the notion of 'risk reduction' is used more as a managerial tool than as a community safety action. When operating in this light, an emergency service might act in such a way as to lessen the risks which may be attributed to them as an organization, without concern for, or 'responsibility' for, where the risk is then experienced.

While organizational risk reduction is a necessary organizational concern, it may diminish community responsiveness, or fail to capture community initiative if what the community is seeking is not a high priority on the organizational list of risk reduction strategies. In this culture of organizational risk management, the slow pace of community building as seen through the operation of community fire safe groups, itself risks being overlooked. Given the events of "Black Saturday" (7th February, 2009), it may be that the pace of Community Fire Safe program development may be seen to be too slow. However, there is little that can take the place of organic growth which can be achieved in Community Fire Safe groups, except 'more of it'. The CE Unit is already looking at expanding the use of volunteers in community awareness raising. The integration of volunteers with paid staff will be an exciting opportunity for the state.

## Making room for collective responses

Eng and Parker suggest that the benefits of collective problem solving competence "require that societal institutions act in ways that empower community members and provide the resources, including information, required to act on issues deemed salient by a community**"**. (p 56, Paton, citing Eng and Parker) .Community Fire Safe groups go beyond providing information and resources to community members. Community Fire Safe groups as a program modality, draw on collective problem solving and can be seen as an example of

an institution providing resources at a community level so community members can increase their own competence, with facilitation from a fire service CE staff member.

These groups however, can be seen as one form of stepping stone, toward community empowerment. It will take courage on the part of the CE officers, to recognise that aspects of their CE role could be, and should be, 'taken over' by community members. Some groups do stay on and continue to be active, and these need to be supported. This will include the offering of support, encouragement, facilitation, problem solving, and, when required, mediation. This entails the true meaning of subsidiarity: to be subsidized by, staff with the values that the CE staff group subscribes to.

These groups may form the basis of what Eng and Parker denote as needing to be nourished – an empowered group of citizens who can take their place at the table where Emergency Planning is being discussed. Ideally, in the longer term, elements of the Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery cycle will be integrated, such that in a fire event the response capacity is seen as a critical mix of agency and community capability, locally driven, and integrated and supported by (subsidized by) the Emergency Services. The effort which goes into seeing where the formal services can be better integrated needs also to occur at the community level, where the mission is to support and strengthen community capacity so community members themselves can also play a role as key actors in the network.

## Supporting Incremental growth of knowledge

Weiss (2000) notes,

> Given the astronomical variety of implementations of even one basic program model, the variety of staffs, clients, organizational contexts, social and political environments, and funding levels, any hope for deriving generalizable findings is romantic. Nevertheless, theory-based evaluation can add to knowledge. Even relatively small increments of knowledge about how and why programs work or fail to work, cannot but help to improve program effectiveness. And that is what program evaluation is all about (p.44).

Evaluation is often fraught. It is beyond the ambit of this study to elaborate on the reasons for this[79]. My own opinion is that it would preferable to focus more on evaluation as an organizational development activity, and in so doing, encourage an approach which favoured using it to increase dialogue within and between organizations, than for determinations on resource allocation. I don't think the latter situation is a likely pressure, at least in my experience of the Country Fire Service. I see it is more likely that the presence of the CE role will be increased. While it has not been in a position to do so to date, it may then be in a position to argue for some funds to be allocated to develop stronger means of monitoring its progress in ways which would take into account the regional similarities and differences in the role as it unfolds. I would see additional ways in which the CE role can be developed.

## AFAC as an umbrella for Community Safety evaluation[80]

AFAC could be considered as one organizational frame for evaluation activity. This would necessitate inter-agency cooperation and collaboration. Inter-agency cooperation is evident in operational responses, where interstate collegiality is apparent. Whether the same willingness to share resources exists in non operational work is unknown.

Often considerable resources have been expended by agencies on internal evaluations, particularly those which have involved the use of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing, often as follow up to the delivery of programs in particular areas. These reports appear to be used as reports to Boards but are not generally available for review by others, particularly other fire services. Some services have more resources to spend on evaluative activity than others. It would be desirable for the fire services to develop collaborations around evaluation work auspiced by AFAC, so results could be useful across its member agencies.

AFAC could coordinate evaluation interventions for community safety, and select from different states, different program types, such that the core

[79] See Cummins, 2002; Gregory, 1995; Shore & Wright, 1997; Sinclair, 1995; 2001; Kilburg, 1980; Palumbo, 1987; Power, 1997.

[80] AFAC: Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council is the peak body for public sector fire, land management and emergency service organizations in Australia and New Zealand. The organization fosters and promotes an integrated approach to emergency service operations and business management by identifying opportunities to share knowledge, collaborate and optimize the use of resources.( http://www.afac.com.au/

assumptions of the program types can be examined at their very broadest level. Those programs which use volunteers as community education and development officers would be encouraged to tease out the relevant program assumptions inherent in this approach, which could then be examined alongside those approaches such as is best represented by the South Australian model, of part time staff in a CE Unit. Programs which are multi hazard could also be compared with single hazard, for the learning inherent in this. This would further the teasing out of the program theories further, which is one key way to build evaluation capacity

## Intra-agency collaboration

The task of (operational) debriefing consumes considerable agency resources. Considerable effort is given in organizations to the task of (operational) debriefing. While this task has specific requirements for the fire fighter, inevitably, and appropriately, other issues are sometimes discussed at these debriefings, such as fire fighter observations about the degree of property preparation, community members' behaviour, and ability of first responders to get information back for us in public warnings. Closer organizational ties (along the lines argued in this report in relation to collaboration) would allow for the development of a shared organizational intelligence which encompassed both operational and community safety perspectives. South Australia for example, is developing an approach called a Centre for Lessons Learned. The scope for widening 'Lessons Learned" to include community education issues could be explored.

This idea of collaboration within the fire service arises from the various accounts in this case study, which emphasise the issue of 'inter-dependency' – that the community safety outcomes often rely on a range of factors, many of which are outside the immediate control of the CE worker. The factors on which they depend are both outside the CE Unit but inside the organization, or outside the organization and reside in the community or in other agencies. However, while there are limits to how widely one can interact in relation to evaluative activity, it is reasonable to conclude that if the willingness is there, that different parts of the fire service could seek to collaborate on intra agency collaborative activity. This will require new ways for agency staff and volunteers to interact with each other in order to develop enough of a shared or collective identity to facilitate this partnership . .

## Evaluation within the CE unit

The CE Unit currently uses a range of data collection techniques to monitor their programs. One particular method, a ‘pre’ and ‘post’ evaluation form is used in some circumstances to monitor participants responses to their membership of a Community Fire Safe. Project C7 has carried out an analysis of feedback from group participants (Goodman and Rowe, 2008). This exercise demonstrates some of the time and resources needed to carry out this work. It also highlighted some data response categories which need alteration in order to strengthen the likelihood of meaningful results.

The CE Unit also maintains a data base which contains information on selected aspects of the CE workload. While the CE staff gave me access to this data base, I have not been able to give any time to understanding its contents or its promise as a monitoring framework. On one quick look at it, it did highlight for me that there is considerable data in it that would be useful if it could be developed into a narrative about the multiple ways in which members of the community interact with the CE Unit. For example, there are references in it when a community member rings and makes asks for resources to be sent, or for a worker to be made available to a community group. That is, there is considerable data in this data base on unmet need, as well as data about certain activities by CE officers.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the CE Unit has a regular meeting with its far flung CE Officers. Formal opportunities could be created during these meetings for a structured reflection on an aspect of the work, and in so doing, gradually build their own body of knowledge and test their assumptions gradually over time.

# Issues for program development.

## Community Fire Safe

The Community Fire Safe group as a program idea, is sound. That there is more demand for it than can be met, is also apparent. That it provides a vehicle for a community development approach is also clear from this case study.

## 'Ordinary' members of the community assisting each other

Participants in one of the Community Fire Group raised the idea of community members being 'trained up' to assist others in the community along the lines of at least a basic level of assistance. This idea requires further development within the CE Unit. There is already some likelihood that one of the members of the self organizing group, the Garratt Rd group, will volunteer his time to assist others in the community, and to assist the work of the CE worker. This is an exciting development and one to be monitored with interest. That there might be some barriers to this idea is apparent from the account of the 'fire competent' community member who assists community members during a fire event. That his contribution is questioned by some is an alert to what may be both conscious and unconscious reasons for rejecting this contribution.

## Operational volunteers as a CE resource

The CE Unit is current investigating this idea through their work on VOICE – Volunteers in Community Education. This is a work in progress

## The role of civil society groups[81]

There is plenty of evidence in this case study, of the actual contribution and possible future contribution of civil society groups. Members of Progress Associations who understood and welcomed the CE officer into their midst, and themselves made concrete contributions to the development of aspects of community safety, provided a picture of the importance of such community based groups to this field. The extent of their contributions have yet to be

[81] In finalising this case study, I found reference to a talk given by Rhodes and Foster in Rhodes A. and Foster, L., 'Reducing Fire Risk: Civil Society as a Partner for Prevention'. Paper presented at Fire, Rescue and Safety Conference, Singapore. This warrants finding and reading. Rowe and Frewer (2000) set out some criteria for evaluation of public participation methods, which include representativeness, independence, early involvement, influence on final policy, transparency, resource accessibility, task definition, structured decision making, and cost effectiveness. The Hyogo Framework for action argues in relation to public participation: (h) Promote community participation in disaster risk reduction through the adoption of specific policies, the promotion of networking, the strategic management of volunteer resources, the attribution of roles and responsibilities, and the delegation and provision of the necessary authority and resources. [The World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held from 18 to 22 January 2005 in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, and adopted the present Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities]

explored fully. This too requires resources to follow up, but in my view, the benefit would outweigh the costs of this exploration.

Other case study data (eg Mt Bold Case Study) provided a picture of a small group led by a community member, who acted as a fire warning resource to each other, and who also ran a small newsletter which notified community members of upcoming events, and particularly ones which related to community safety. A number of people in that interview study leant of the existence of Community Fire Safe as a program through this Newsletter.

The work the CE worker was able to do with the Cummins Emergency Response Committee was a powerful portrayal of the benefits of a mix of formal CE role with a community group able and willing to actively be involved in carving out their own unique role and response to emergencies.

Many of the accounts provided in the case study are themselves works in progress. They have no end point. Interestingly in my last conversation with the CE worker, she was herself starting to think through whether she would buy a roof sprinkler system. In many ways her own story itself holds the elements of a wider story – that progress toward safety is iterative, unfolding, and seldom finished. Her story unfolded from her experience of the Tulka fire, then to being a volunteer speaker to other community groups, then experiencing the Wangary fire and initiating a Community Fire Safe group in her own town, to then becoming the CE worker. The Cummins Emergency Response Committee itself didn't just materialise – it unfolded from a series of events and activities, and is also a work in progress[82].

Findings ways to document, share and critique the unfolding story of CE in this field is an important task for the fire services to nurture and develop.

[82] Millicer provides an account of her response to Ash Wednesday fires, a response which was triggered again by fires in 1991 near Anglesea in South West Victoria. After the second trigger, as a citizen, she mobilized with others to create the "Patchwork Project'. It would be interesting to see if there is any connection between this work and the current bushfire safety initiatives in this area, which is Anglesea.

## Summary of Conclusions

- This report has been framed to allow the reader to draw his or her own conclusions on the actions of the CE officer and their likely impact on community safety.
- The CFS CE staff, Chief Fire Officer and Regional staff are to be commended for allowing the CE officer to develop her new role largely as she saw the need.
- Inherent in an approach to evaluation is the need to work creatively with uncertainty.
- Often resources are put into evaluative inquiry either to justify an argument against a recommendation or for internal use to justify a particular case before an agency Board.
- Evaluation should play a greater role in the fire service and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Council could oversee evaluation of a range of programs without prompting inter-organizational competition.
- It is in local contexts that the idea of ‘participation’ in programs can be best explored. Evaluative enquiry focussed on particular geographical areas can explore:
    - interactions between programs
    - contexts in which they are delivered
    - the predominant structures which influence the idea of community safety
- The perception of ‘risk management’ in the corporate sector has become associated with organisations seeking to displace responsibility rather than reduce or remove hazards.

  Accordingly any program which has the hallmarks of conventional risk management may be viewed with suspicion by the community in the context of fire safety.
- The Community Fire Safe group is, and should be recognised as, a stepping stone toward community empowerment.
- While it will take courage from the CE officers to recognise that aspects of their role should be assumed by community members, if this occurs the CE officer’s role will evolve rather than diminish.

- While evaluation is often fraught it has, potentially, an organizational development role which can focus on increasing dialogue within and between organizations, rather than a more singular and limited focus on determinations of resource allocation.
- Inter-agency cooperation is evident in operational responses where interstate collegiality is apparent.
- It is not known whether the same potential to share resources exists in non operational work.
- AFAC could be considered as an organizational frame for evaluation which would promote inter-agency cooperation and collaboration.
- The focus of the task of debriefing has been operational to the exclusion of other issues. Accessing the full spectrum of data from debriefing should be an aim in future.
- There is extensive data collected by the CE Unit which is largely unprocessed. Allocating resources for the analysis of this data would be a worthwhile investment.
- The education of community members in ‘hands on’ operational aspects has been handled by brigade members to date. The prospect of involving appropriately skilled ordinary community members in the process should be examined.
- Opportunities exist to extend the involvement of volunteers directly in the CE program. This will require additional resources and will lead to an extension of the role of the CE officer.
- Approaches to CE to date have paid little attention to the role of non-fire related community organisations. Expanding the involvement of these civic groups should be examined.

# Appendix 1: Agreements between researcher and CE Unit of CFS

Draft agreement between the researcher and the CE Unit of the CFS

**A role study of a community education worker: description and analysis of key initiatives undertaken in the early phases of a new role in a fire affected region.**

*Rationale* - why do we believe that an investment of resources in the decision to appoint a part time community education worker for 12 months in a fire affected region is likely to contribute to conditions that lead to a safer community in relation to the threat of bushfire? A key aspect of the role it is designed to provide some flexibility in its development, thus allowing for the necessary but hard to detect element of community responsiveness to the question of safety in *their* context. This small piece of research of a new role in Region 6 in South Australia will provide some empirical information which will add to the data and knowledge already accumulated within the fire service community education section of the CFS on the question of how community development principles and practices contributes to community safety.

What does the research evidence tell us about this identified strategy tell us about how it contributes to the desired outcome of safer communities? This question will guide an analysis of the literature in relation to understanding how communities can themselves take up stronger roles in relation to community safety, and what enables and constrains them in taking up that role, and how a community education worker in a fire service can facilitate the role of community.

This piece of work will produce an indepth description of the role as taken up by one community education worker in a region having experienced an extreme fire event, with loss of life and property. The work will give detail of the resources required, the skill and knowledge drawn on by both the individual worker and her supervisors within an education arm of a major Country Fire Service. It will lay out the pathways the worker took to make links with various members of the community, members with a range of usual “connectnedness”

to the community – from usually well connected to those less connected to the dominant community structures and relationships. The work will also demonstrate where the role intersects with other aspects of community safety infrastructure - both formal infrastructure such as the various District Fire Prevention Councils, Local Government officers, and Brigades, and the informal community support systems, such as community members grouped on an identity basis – including special needs groups and other minority groups. It will highlight where work is required to be carried out across the silos of conventional boundaries to include other domains which make a contribution to the outcome of greater community safety. It will also point to the limits of the role, and intends to identify issues in the broader context which both support or constrain local action in relation to community safety. The work will also point to the structural requirements for the maintenance of the role.

This piece of work will assist other end users make choices about investments, program design, and policies in relation to encouraging community involvement in and action in relation to community safety.

The work will be carried out collaboratively between the researchers in C7, and the community education staff of CFS – in particular, Therese Pedler, community education officer Region 6, Fiona Dunstan, and John Gawen. The researcher (Helen Goodman) has already gained some appreciation of the context of the Eyre Peninsula. The first part of this aspect of the research will entail 8 one hour weekly discussions with Therese Pedler, commencing as soon as possible, following any necessary clarification between the parties.

The above was taken from a document dated Wednesday 3rd January 2007.

Guiding questions for discussions with CE officer

- Her links with her region, previous fire experience, taking up a voluntary role in her community prior to becoming the designated officer
- Her approach to her work, including setting up groups, accommodating group members fire experience in the groups; content of group meetings; interactions with community leadership;

- Her interactions with (inter-dependency with) other key organizational parties with a role in fire prevention, including brigade members, Regional staff, other agencies
- Her interactions outside of Community Fire Safe group meetings, including with a particular family or work group.

Guiding questions for discussions with Interviews with Community Fire Safe group members (4)

- How they learnt about the possibility of forming a Group
- What they had learnt from the sessions they attended to date
- What were their observations about the nature of the program (group based, meeting in people's homes etc)
- The place of the Wangary fire experience in this learning?
- The place of the Community Fire Safe group in their learning
- Is the Community Fire Safe approach 'good value'?
- The place of the 'community context and networks' in their fire preparedness
- Any other comments.

# Appendix 2: Community Fire Safe Topics

**Community Fire Safe Topics** *(Forwarded 14th April 2009 for inclusion in Case Study)*

| Objective | Topic / Issues |
|---|---|
| **Personal Survival Plans** | **Experiencing a fire**<br>• What does a major fire look, sound and feel like?<br>• How much warning of a fire will I get?<br>• Will reticulated water, power and telephones work?<br>• What can I expect from the CFS, police or other authorities?<br>**Bushfire Behaviour**<br>• What factors influence how intense a fire is likely to be?<br>• How will a major fire in this area be likely to behave?<br>**Personal Safety**<br>• What are the dangers to personal safety?<br>• How safe is my house? Can it provide shelter during the passage of a fire front?<br>• Are my family and I physically and psychologically capable of staying and defending our home?<br>• How safe is it to evacuate the area?<br>• What is the situation with roads and road blocks?<br>**Bushfire Action Plans (Personal Survival Plans)**<br>• Should I stay or should I go?<br>• What do I need to do to ensure personal safety in either case? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • What if circumstances mean I can't follow my preferred plan?<br>• Are children and visitors considered in the development of survival strategies?<br>• Does planning include taking care of animals? |
| **Property Protection Plans** | **Bushfire Behaviour**<br>• How is a fire approaching my property likely to behave?<br>**How Houses Burn (and How They Survive)**<br>• What are the ways in which houses can be ignited during a bushfire?<br>• What can be done to improve their safety?<br>• How can entry of sparks and embers be prevented?<br>• How can I reduce fire intensity around my home?<br>**Street Walk, Property Inspections**<br>• Do I have a realistic appreciation of my home's chances of survival?<br>• What are the risks to my home in the event of a major fire?<br>**Bushfire Action Plans *(Property Protection Plans)***<br>• What passive and active fire protection measures can I take to improve its chances of survival?<br>• What are the options for managing the risks and how can I achieve them?<br>What do I need to do during the year, at the start of the fire season, on high risk days or on days of actual fires? |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Community Strategies** | What are some of the community strategies our group can undertake to reduce risks in our street or area and improve our chances of survival? For example:<br>• Early warning systems or phone trees<br>• Nominating safe house / refuge<br>• Plans for less able bodied residents<br>• Working bees to reduce hazards and likely fire intensity<br>• Bulk buying firefighting equipment<br>• Lobbying for improvements to water supply or reduction of hazards on public lands |

# Appendix 3: CE as a % of Volunteer Administration

**Community Education as a % of Volunteer Administration**

Question asked in the V Lee HRM Consulting Review (2008) Of Administrative Workloads Across The Emergency Services Sector in SA.

7. What administrative role do you undertake for your Brigade/Group/Unit or Station (Tick more than one box if appropriate):

Administration

Finance

Purchasing

OHS&W and Injury Management

Communications

Training

Logistics

Recruitment

Cadet Coordinator

Community Education and Planning

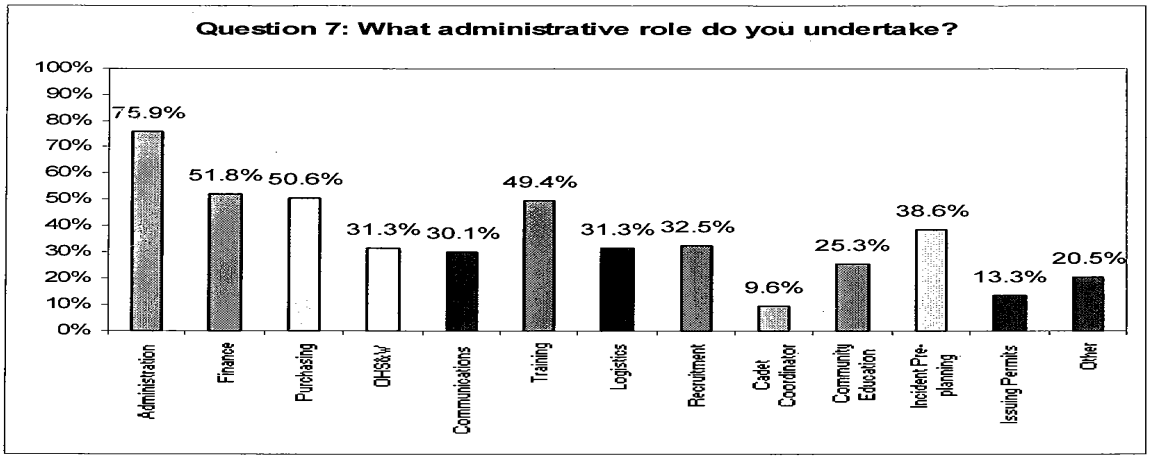
Incident Pre-planning

Other (please specify)

(page 19 of the Report).

Responses

Question 7 responses showed that 25.3% of respondents said they carried out community education functions.




# Appendix 4 Responsibilities of the Regional and District Bushfire Prevention Committees

## Regional Bushfire Prevention Committee (RBPC)

Regional Bushfire Prevention Committee (RBPC) is responsible for:

Assessment of fire hazards in the region

Coordination of bushfire prevention planning in the region

Making recommendations about bushfire prevention to relevant authorities within, or adjacent to the Region

Consulting with adjacent regional committees and cooperating with District Bushfire Prevention Committees (DBPC) in the region

Advising the South Australian Bushfire Prevention Advisory Committee (SABPAC) on relevant matters.

[Ministerial Review of Bushfire Management in South Australia. p.7]

### District Bushfire Prevention Committee

The District Bushfire Prevention Committee is responsible for

Assessment of fire hazard in the area

- Advising the relevant authorities in the area about bushfire hazard removal
- Development of a District Bushfire Prevention Plan for the Council area
- Consulting with adjacent district committees and ooperating with the Regional Bushfire Prevention Committee
- Formulation of guidelines for the issue of permits in the area
- Reporting to the Regional Bushfire Prevention Committee in May and October each year.

[Ministerial Review of Bushfire Management in South Australia, p.8]

## References

The reference list is long, and it includes references which were not cited in the case study. I wanted to include them however, as I am hopeful that some of the

ideas in this document will warrant further exploration, and the reference material may be useful in that context.

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# Appendix 6 Additional Reference Material

Aslin and Brown, (2004) in their work on community engagement in a Catchment Management Authority, refer to consultation, participation and engagement. In their terms, consultation does not imply that something in particular will be done with the information gained. Participation is an unspecified act in a variety of forms and can be seen similarly as involvement. They see engagement as capturing people's attention and focussing efforts on the matter at hand. This suggests people are personally involved and there is an implied commitment to a process which has decisions and resulting actions. In the sense described by Aslin and Brown, engagement overlaps with ideas of adult education, where authentic engagement, sought with a democratic intent, is a desirable practice goal. It can also be seen as a mechanism through which outcomes are achieved. Aslin and Brown also differentiate 'knowledge cultures', a useful idea when considering the culture of the emergency management sector. It is often stated that the fire services have a 'narrative culture' – where written material is less attended to than narrative, or stories. Aslin and Brown offer practical guidance on how to navigate those different cultures, and emphasise the importance of respect (which links back to the idea of inter-subjectivity).

However, looking at Aslin and Brown's ideas of consultation, participation and engagement on a continuum, engagement (on their scale) can still be seen as being at some distance from the idea of empowerment (the upper end of Arnstein's ladder), the framework used by the CE Unit, or 'self organization', the term more used in complexity science[83]. The basic premise of community strengthening (for example in ideas such as the Asset Based approach to community strengthening, as reflected in the work of Mathie and Cunningham, 2003), is that valuable knowledge and ideas are readily available within communities, and the role of government is to develop mechanisms for sharing this knowledge. The Frierian perspective (ideas developed by Paolo Friere, 1996) emphasises that it is only where community members invest their experience, knowledge and skills that the 'empowerment' process be

[83] The field of complexity science contains ideas of particular use to community safety, as both are constituted by uncertainty and unpredictability. Stacey, 2003; 2007

materialised. The ‘empowerment’ element emphasises the idea that to ‘learn’ something in such a way as to adopt its meaning usually requires a full engagement of one’s person. This cannot, by definition, be a process that is done *to* someone – it can only be a process which is enacted or embraced when a person really takes on board the learning to the point that he can act ‘from within’. That is, for the transformation to occur, a new belief in oneself is required, and in holding this belief, awareness and capacity are engendered.

Using this idea of a fuller involvement of people where learning outcomes of the most ‘engaged’ nature are sought after, Cavaye (2001) talks of an upper end of the continuum of engagement as

- *involving* the community through a range of mechanisms to ensure that issues and concerns are understood and considered as part of the decision making process
- *collaborating* with the community by developing partnerships to formulate options and provide recommendations
- *empowering* the community to make decisions and to implement and manage change.

If a central thought of the notion of ‘empowerment’ is that the object of the action (the action being a delivered program,) is a person, or a community, and that this person or community undergoes some change as a result of that action, then, in the Freirian sense, one cannot actually *predict* what the nature of that change will be, much less ensure that it will be the change as desired by the agency ‘delivering’ the program. It may be that the person who is enabled to act differently through a CE program in relation to the threat of fire, decides that the best way for them to respond to their changed mindset is to move out of a particular geographic area. In a word, one cannot ‘control’ the result of an ‘empowerment process’, even if one can define it. This makes this domain of practice – where the desired outcome of a program being some measure of empowerment, a complex one to define, work in, and evaluate.

The research literature in preventive health, particularly the work of Laverack and Labonte, would be useful to explore for its utility to the field of community

safety. Preventive health has been a significant domain of work and research for some decades now. While by comparison community education in this field is new by comparison, and is still poorly resourced, comparisons with preventive health literature could none the less be fruitful.

Laverack, G., & Labonte, R. (2000). A planning framework for community empowerment goals within health promotion. *Health Policy and Planning, 15*(3), 255-262.

## Institutional structures relevant to emergency management

The governing legislation is known as the Fire and Emergency Services Act. Under pinning this is the regulatory framework. It is stated on the SAFECOM website that only five of the 34 recommendations of the Coronial Inquiry remain to be implemented and these require legislative change. Federally there is the Australian Emergency Management Committee (AEMC). This committee brings relevant State and Federal Government agencies and other stakeholders together in a single forum to address priorities identified in the National Strategy. Underpinning AMEC are a number of Committees, such as the Remote Indigenous Communities Advisory Committee (RICAC). At a State level there is the State Mitigation Advisory Group (SMAG). This Group in SA has established an 'across government committee' to implement the National Emergency Management Strategy. Representation on the Committee includes agencies such as the three emergency services organisations, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, Dept of Health, Dept of Families & Communities, Dept. of Aboriginal Affairs & Reconciliation (Premier & Cabinet), Commissioner of Aboriginal Engagement, SA Police and the Australian Red Cross. The SA Governement announced (press release, 4/3/09, accessed from CFS Media Archive, 9/5/09) a Bushfire Taskforce to analyse key issues arising from the Victorian Bushfires in February 2009

## Principles for Intergroup Projects: A first look.

June 1999.

Association for the study and development of community.

1: Groups must identify an important common issue and work towards common goals to address the issue

2: People and organizations representing different groups need to be brought together as equals in terms of power, respect and importance.

3: There needs to be an opportunity for members of groups to get to know one another as individuals.

4: There should be an opportunity to identify similarities between groups.

5: Groups need to identify each other's assets (eg culture, language, history, relations, etc) and use and exchange them as part of the intergroup process

6: Conflicts need to be identified, respected, and transformed into improved capacity and relations

7: Successfully completed collective action not only improves the communities that groups live in, but also strengthens their relations

8: Relationships must be sustainable to support the process for strengthening intergroup relations

9: There must be institutional support for promoting intergroup relations

10: To be effective, intergroup strategies need to operate at multiple levels including the individual, relational and institutional levels.