Step By Step
Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service
(3 month)

Mid-term Report
February 8 2014

Report prepared by Step by Step Manager - Anne Crestani
## Step by Step – Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>Page 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About Step by Step – Service objectives, principles, governance</td>
<td>Pages 4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision-Values-Service</td>
<td>Pages 5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results Based Accountability Plan (RBA)</td>
<td>Page 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Priorities 2013-2014</td>
<td>Page 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Achievements Table</td>
<td>Pages 9-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Recovery &amp; Service Delivery Issues</td>
<td>Pages 19-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Provision in the first 3 months</td>
<td>Pages 29-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and Operations Timeline</td>
<td>Page 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting and Evaluation</td>
<td>Page 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Needs</td>
<td>Pages 34-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Needs</td>
<td>Page 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward Plan</td>
<td>Pages 37-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendices</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Step by Step Service Manual, Step by Step service brochure, Step by Step Newspaper article</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Executive Summary –
This report covers the first three months (first term) of operations of Step by Step, Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service. The project is now midway through its funded term. It details the context in which the service was developed and implemented, the structure and process of operation, and describes service provision in the first term (3 months) of the initial funded period.

The decision to adopt a framework for time-limited operations for this project is based on both the research and evidence base and the experience of the Warrumbungle Bushfire Support Coordination Service in providing bushfire support services and assistance to affected households in the Warrumbungle Shire. The evidence base supports and strongly indicates the need to transition as soon as is feasible back to the existing service sector. This serves a few important processes. One significant aspect of the recovery process is to ensure that affected households are (and remain) connected to existing health, welfare and community services that can provide for short-medium-long term needs. In addition, if bushfire specific and emergency response agencies maintain a presence in the community over the long term (i.e. years) this poses a risk to the fire–affected communities capacity to re-engage with its own services sector, who after all will continue to provide services to the community long after the fire event has passed.

Sitting alongside this approach is the acknowledgement and understanding that Recovery from bushfire (and other disaster events) is a long and often arduous process. Affected individuals and households will experience recovery in their own unique way and in their own time. Therefore, they require not only critical response and assistance in the first instance but quality connections to appropriate supports in their local neighbourhoods and communities. This often calls for a flexible approach in service delivery time-frames which take into account the time and resources needed for effective engagement with service users and the broader community over the short and longer term. This ensures optimum accessibility and usage of locally based services that have a history and long-term presence in the community.

Of significance, there remains a proportion of bushfire affected households who are only now making first contacts with services (predominantly through Step by Step and the Bushfire Information and Support Centre in Springwood). Many of these clients report that they were unaware of the funds and services that they are entitled to access. This is in spite of widespread local media and other information distribution networks. This possibly indicates the need for a continuing presence of ‘one stop’ first point of contact services over the longer term so as to capture the cohort of households that have not yet had connections with the goods and services they require. *These issues are covered in more depth on page 36 under ‘emerging trends’*
About Step by Step...

- **Step by Step, Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service (BMBSS)** is a temporary service jointly funded by NSW and Commonwealth government under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. The service is coordinated locally by Gateway Family Services. Step by Step BMBSS is designed to help affected individuals, families and communities recover from the October 2013 Blue Mountains bushfires. Step by Step BMBSS is an outreach service that offers a single point of contact to help service users navigate and access the range of services they may require. Over the coming months, those who have experienced significant loss as a result of the fire face major decisions about the future and will experience a range of emotions including intense and prolonged stress. Step by Step BMBSS is designed to strengthen individual/household capability to meet bushfire recovery needs, assist in decision-making and promote wellbeing.

**Step by Step Bushfire Support Service objectives are to:**

- Offer an individualised, relationship-based service that seeks to support and empower individuals, strengthening their capacity over time
- Offer this service based on assessment and agreed goals with the service user according to their preferences
- Facilitate and work with the service user to engage with services, seek financial assistance or information where they find it difficult to navigate the range of services/grants/loans available
- Provide support; co-ordinate with appropriate agencies for immediate needs; provide information; work with people to assess and assist with referral and application processes for required services.

**Principles of the Service**

The Step by Step model is predicated on several key principles:

- One service across multiple providers – Step by Step draws on the skills of both government and non-governmental community-based human services agencies working collaboratively
- The service is free, voluntary and accessible – all those who have experienced distress, significant losses and trauma should have access to support to assist in their recovery process
- Service delivery is locally-driven – trained workers in local human service agencies are best placed to offer this service
- The service is securely linked into the broader recovery processes for the community – Step by Step is represented on the Recovery (Wellbeing) Sub-Committee
- Service delivery is flexible and responsive and provides continuity of care – though Step by Step is of finite duration, the supportive relationships formed will assist long-term recovery
- A commitment to high quality service delivery – the service seeks to provide services of the highest standard.

*(Step by Step Service Manual, November 2013 p 8)*
Duration of Service

**Step by Step** BMBSS is funded for an initial period of six months and will be extended as deemed necessary by a review and assessment of need. The decision to cease the service will be made by MPES based on recommendations of the Step by Step Manager and the Step by Step BMBSS Advisory Committee.

Step by Step BMBSS will not cease operation until appropriate transition plans have been created for service users requiring ongoing support.

Governance

*Ministry for Police and Emergency Services (MPES)*

MPES is responsible for funding Step By Step BMBSS. The Step by Step Manager reports to the Director Disaster Welfare on a regular basis about the operation of the service and outcomes achieved.

MPES will report to Government and NSW Treasury on Step by Step activities, allocation of funds and outcomes of the service.

*Recovery (Wellbeing) Sub-Committee*

The Step by Step Manager is a member of the Recovery (Wellbeing) Sub-Committee. This committee does not have a role in determining Step by Step service direction, but will provide a valuable information sharing opportunity for the Manager.

It is imperative that the Step by Step Manager only actions items from this committee that are directly related to, or within the parameters of the Step by Step (BMBSS) role.

**Step by Step** is a partnership project of Gateway Family Services and MPES under the NDRRA and is jointly funded by the Federal and New South Wales Governments. Step by Step operates within the framework of Gateway Family Services Values and Vision Statement (as stated below).

Our Vision

Safe, healthy, resilient children, young people, individuals and families in strong inclusive communities.
Our Values
The values and beliefs central to this project
- **Respect** - we respect the dignity and rights of all people
- **Diversity and inclusion** - we value diversity, include all and learn from each other.
- **Focus on strengths** - we recognise all families have strengths and resources they can call upon to create a better future
- **Importance of community** - we appreciate the impact of community in people’s lives and the importance of belonging. We work to build connections and strengthen communities.

Who we serve
We serve individuals, couples and families living in the Blue Mountains and adjacent areas affected by the Bushfires of Oct 2013.

What we do
We offer a range of services to support and strengthen individuals, couples and families within their communities including:
- Outreach support and case management
- information
- emergency relief and advocacy
We prioritise services based on relative need with active outreach to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

The Difference We Make
Step by Step works to make a difference with and for individuals, couples and families in the following ways:
- they have their strengths and capacities respected and utilised
- they have their immediate needs met in a compassionate way
- they are linked into resources and support for the longer term
How we measure the success of Step by Step  We will measure Step By Step’s quality and success in making a difference by tracking the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much we do (volume)</th>
<th>How well we do it (quality)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Number of individuals, couples and families</td>
<td>• (Effective reach) Number and % of households who enter:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of individuals by gender, age</td>
<td>o Directly affected by loss of property in the bushfires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of young people by gender, age</td>
<td>o affected by dislocation from neighbourhood/community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of children by age</td>
<td>o due to the bushfires (living 20 kilometres or more from fire affected residence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o self-identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o speak language other than English at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o sole parent family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o carer (of person with disability or frail aged relative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Low (or reduced) income (i.e. Centrelink benefits, aged pension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Experiencing housing stress (or homeless)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o person with disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o child or young person with disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of individuals by gender, age</td>
<td>• Number and % of adult participants who report satisfaction with SBS service - treated with respect; views welcome and included; service was helpful; would recommend service to others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is anyone better off after participating in SBS services (outcomes)

| 1. No of clients report increased capacity to meet practical needs                   | 2.1. % clients report increased capacity to meet practical needs                         |
| 2. No of clients reporting increased awareness and use of other services (Health, Housing and other community services, including charitable organisations) | 3.2. No of clients reporting increased awareness and use of other services (Health, Housing and other community services including charitable organisations) |
| 3. No of people reporting satisfaction with the Support Worker Service               | 4.3. % of people reporting satisfaction with the Support Worker Service                   |
What we said we would do............

Establish SBS in the Recovery Relief Arrangements
1. Maintain close links with MPES Welfare Directorship and coordination of Project
2. Link with the Recovery Coordinator and services provided to people
3. Membership of the Wellbeing Sub-Committee
4. Link with the Goods & services team and the Mayoral Relief Fund
5. Link with the community development projects undertaken to support community renewal and support
6. Develop media and promotional opportunities to increase knowledge of SBS program

Build strategic relationships with other support agencies to support Bushfire affected people
1. Identify opportunities for strategic collaboration with existing services
2. Identify opportunities for strategic secondments from existing services to SBS team
3. Partnerships with key health and well-being organisations in and around the BM LGA
4. Strengthen relationships with referral partners
5. Build partnerships with organisations that can link us to effective support for practical needs of bushfire affected households
6. Establish links with Winmalee HUB and key feeder schools and EEC’s

Consolidate and Strengthen SBS Practice and Service delivery
1. Maintain close links with MPES Welfare Directorship and coordination of Project
2. Provide practice reflection and clinical supervision for all workers in strength based practice and SFBT
3. Maintain regular team meetings and review goals and identify opportunities
4. Maintain all files and records to reflect the service usage and client needs
5. Contribute to the evidence base for effective service delivery
6. Contribute to the evaluation of SBS in the emergency recovery relief framework.

RBA Plan Progress Review
We will review and report on our progress on achieving the above priorities at the 3 month and 6 month period (at the conclusion of the project).
### PRIORITY AREA 1: Establish SBS in the Recovery Relief Arrangements – What’s been achieved so far....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Success Indicators</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Lead Role/ &amp; Resources</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1a) Establish and maintain close links with MPES Welfare Directorship and MPES Disaster Welfare Services (DWS) | By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:  
- Regular feedback from MPES Welfare Directorship in relation to information provided by Step by Step on their activities, client contact numbers, and issues that require intervention at the MPES level.  
- Regular meetings (face to face, email, phone) with MPES Welfare Directorship  
- Regular and open access to direction, expertise and support from appropriate MPES reps when required |  
- Weekly updates provided to MPES Directorship to report on SBS numbers of client contacts, client outcomes, planned activities  
- Liaised and worked alongside the DWS team to access details of clients whose residence was destroyed or significantly damaged. SBS inherited the DWS and Red Cross client database along with the Folders which contained details of clients who requested follow up.  
- Weekly or fortnightly teleconference with MPES welfare directorship for information exchange on SBS and overall recovery activities and for MPES to oversee and approve strategic direction and action plans.  
- Formal and informal meetings with MPES reps and directors as required to deal with issues as they arise (face to face, email, telephone)  
- Provide mid-term report (month 3) to MPES. Progress measured against clearly defined outcomes, report on people’s needs, and progress of outcomes. | MPES  
GFS  
Step by step | To be achieved |
| 1b) Link with the Recovery Coordinator and services | By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:  
- Up to date contact list of key Recovery Committee personnel |  
- Provide end of term report (month 6). Report on current and projected needs (fire impacted households) and performance outcomes of SBS | SBS Manager | To be achieved |

**Notes:**
- MPES, GFS, and Step by Step are the lead roles and resources for achieving the priority areas.
- The priority areas are focused on establishing SBS in the recovery relief arrangements and ensuring close links with MPES Welfare Directorship and MPES Disaster Welfare Services (DWS) to meet success indicators and achieve strategies.
- The table includes detailed achievements and strategies for each priority area, with specific actions and outcomes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provided to people</th>
<th>Access to regular updates from the recovery coordinator</th>
<th>website to receive regular updates from the coordinator</th>
<th>Committee Bushfire Information and Support Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Quality working relationships with Recovery Centre services</td>
<td>• Rotating roster of SBS staff located at the Bushfire Information &amp; Support Centre in Springwood. Other services located at the centre include; NSW Housing, Wentworth Housing, Public Works, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Legal Aid, GIO, Suncorp and NRMA, reps from MPES.</td>
<td>• Gateway Family Services / SBS Managers attend Recovery Committee meetings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>1c) Membership of the Disaster Recovery Wellbeing sub-committee</th>
<th>By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:</th>
<th>By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:</th>
<th>SBS Wellbeing sub-committee</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Access to and input into wellbeing sub-committee plans and initiatives</td>
<td>• Attendance at weekly Wellbeing sub-committee meetings</td>
<td>• Regular communication with Mayoral Relief Fund information line for updates and clarification around eligibility criteria</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Regular opportunities to update the wellbeing subcommittee on SBS plans, activities and current and emerging needs of bushfire affected households</td>
<td>• SBS update report included as weekly agenda item</td>
<td>• Downloaded application forms for Mayoral Relief Fund</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>1d) Link with the Goods &amp; Services team and the Mayoral Relief Fund</th>
<th>By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:</th>
<th>By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:</th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>• The opportunity to have input into the Mayoral Relief fund expenditure planning and decision making processes</td>
<td>• Regular communication with Mayoral Relief Fund information line for updates and clarification around eligibility criteria</td>
<td>• Provide information to Mayoral Relief Fund Committee on current and emerging needs of bushfire affected households</td>
<td>To be achieved</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1e) Link with the community development projects undertaken to support community renewal | By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:  
- Regular participation in planning initiatives and proposals that support community renewal  
- A formal role in providing input and direction to community development projects and initiatives | • Membership of the Steering Committee of FACS funded Community Renewal Project (partnership between Winmalee and Springwood Neighbourhood Centres)  
• Membership of the Wellbeing Sub-Committee which has direct input into the Disaster Welfare Recovery Category C process. | **Achieved** |
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide information on current and emerging needs within Bushfire affected households and communities. To be linked and integrated with other relevant reports and analysis of bushfire related impacts (i.e. economic impacts)</td>
<td><strong>To be achieved</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1f) Develop media and promotional opportunities to increase knowledge of SBS | By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:  
- Promotional materials for distribution across BM community/business/education sectors  
- Completed communication and promotions strategy to cover the BM LGA and surrounding LGAs  
- Communication and promotion strategy that encompasses both on line and print media, strategic websites and social media | 1d) SBS brochures, posters, flyers, information postcards designed, printed and distributed across BM community, business, education sectors. Promotions via MCRN, BMCC Libraries, Children’s Services, Health, G.P. network (Medicare Local), local small businesses in Winmalee, Springwood, Blackheath, Katoomba, Mt Victoria. SBS information distributed across Dargan, Clarence, Bell, Berambing, Bilpin and the Mounts. SBS information included on strategic websites including; Recovery Committee/BMCC, Gateway, RFS website, MCRN, Blue Mountains Family Support Service, Blue Mountains Women’s Health Centre, all of the Neighbourhood Centres in the Blue Mountains. Article in the Blue Mountains Gazette – 1st term 2014 - general topic on psycho-social recovery with a focus on SBS role in assisting households to access information, goods and services. SBS presence at Recovery Committee community events and meetings and locally organised community events and forums. These have included, ‘Moving On Strong’ | **Achieved** |
|  | **SBS Manager,**  
**SBS Team,**  
**Recovery Committee,**  
**Wellbeing Sub-Committee,**  
**Red Cross** |  
| **SBS Manager,**  
**SBS Team,**  
**Recovery Committee,**  
**Wellbeing Sub-Committee,**  
**Red Cross** | **Achieved** |
forums held at Winmalee, Rainbow and Bunya Pre-schools. Blue Mountains Child & Family Forum, Family Fun Events and Movie Nights at Schools in fire affected areas.

- Interview on 2BLU Community Radio outlining Steps to psycho-social aspects of bushfire recovery and information on SBS.

PRIORITY AREA 2: Build strategic relationships with other support agencies to support Bushfire affected people

What’s been achieved so far.....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Success Indicators</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Lead Role &amp; Resources</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2a) Establish Advisory Committee to support and guide the SBS project</td>
<td>By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved: 2a) Advisory Committee set up and meeting regularly</td>
<td>2a) Invite and take expressions of interest from relevant local service representatives to form the advisory committee. The Committee meets and completes the Terms of Reference. The Committee will meet fortnightly. *Due to time pressures and other commitments, those representatives from local Human Services who had expressed an interest in membership of the SBS Advisory Committee were unable to commit to a regular schedule of meetings. Many were already members of other newly formed bushfire recovery committees. It was decided that the Wellbeing Sub-Committee provides (on a weekly basis) an adequate level of input, guidance and direction to the Step by Step project.</td>
<td>2a) GFS &amp; SBS Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b) Identify opportunities for</td>
<td>2b) Strengthened collaborative links with existing service system</td>
<td>2b) Identified and met with or set up communications with strategic service partners. These include setting up of SBS</td>
<td>2b) SBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c) Identify opportunities for strategic secondments from existing services to SBS team</td>
<td>2c) SBS team member/s who have been recruited from existing Blue Mountains Services/agencies.</td>
<td>2c) Identified and approached services/agencies in the Blue Mountains to second suitable workers for the purposes of forming a multi-service team. The services that were identified as suitable had very limited capacity to move a worker over to SBS. Therefore, the majority of workers were sourced from the existing pool of Gateway Family Services personnel. Platform Youth Services (based in the Blue Mountains and Nepean LGA’s) were approached and had capacity to second a worker for 21 hours a week to the SBS team. A Memorandum of Understanding was drawn up and signed off between Platform and Gateway Family Services and the worker has since commenced his contract with SBS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2d) Partnerships with key health and well-being organisations in and around the BM LGA</td>
<td>2d) Increased knowledge of and linkages with key community and mental health services in the BM’s and Nepean LGA. This has included clear and reciprocal referral and communication pathways. SBS will have established protocols and processes in place for assisting outreach locations at Winmalee and Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centres. Communications and referral pathways with the Blue Mountains G.P. Network via Medicare Local, Gateway and Blue Mountains Family Support Services, Blue Mountains Women’s Health &amp; Resource Centre. Partnership activities with Red Cross, Salvation Army, Relationships Australia, Anglicare, Habitat for Humanity, Blue Mountains Child &amp; Family Forum, Blue Mountains Stronger Families Alliance and Winmalee, and Upper Mountains School Community Hubs.</td>
<td>2d) Meetings and communication with Management, Team leaders and teams of Blue Mountains Community and Mental Health Services were held in the first few weeks post-fire event. Communication between SBS Manager and BM Community and Mental Health Services continues via the Wellbeing Sub-Committee Meetings (held weekly). Clear referral pathways and SBS protocols and processes for screening for mental health and action plans for clients experiencing acute and chronic mental ill-health are in</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
2e) **Build partnerships with organisations that can link us to effective support for practical needs of bushfire affected households**

- Clients experiencing acute and chronic mental ill health.
- Increased knowledge of and links to organisations/services providing practical support to bushfire affected households. Collaborate to develop streamlined processes that make it easier for clients to access assistance. SBS will have links with organisations that assist vulnerable and disadvantaged fire affected households with minor repair and rebuilding work.

- These protocols are included in the SBS Service Manual.

- Communications and face to face meetings with Representatives from disaster recovery welfare services (Red Cross, Salvation Army, Vinnies) took place in the first weeks post-bushfire event. These meetings led to the development of streamlined referral pathways that have contributed to clients ease of access to practical assistance.

- Collaborate to develop streamlined processes that make it easier for clients to access assistance. SBS will have links with organisations that assist vulnerable and disadvantaged fire affected households with minor repair and rebuilding work.

- Partnerships have been developed with Winmalee and Blackheath Neighbourhood Centres for use of facilities and rooms to meet with fire affected clients. An arrangement with the Anglican Church at Mt Victoria has allowed the space to be used as an outreach location for workers to meet with residents of Mt Victoria, Clarence, Bell and the Mounts. Two outreach days have been held at Mt Victoria Anglican Church.

- Established collaborative relationships with Habitat for Humanity and Springwood Baptist Church to assist disadvantaged and vulnerable clients with minor repair and rebuilding work to fire affected homes and yards.

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2f) **Establish links with Winmalee HUB and key feeder schools and EEC’s**

- By February/March 2014 SBS has achieved:
  - Clear reciprocal communication pathways and linkages with the Winmalee HUB Coordinator and Committee.
  - Teachers, children and parents liaised with SBS.

- SBS Manager liaised with Winmalee HUB Coordinator to engage the HUB Committee with SBS strategic plans and activities. SBS Manager attended Winmalee HUB Committee meeting to provide and receive information about current and emerging needs of bushfire affected families who attend local EEC’s and schools.

- SBS Manager set up communications with BM District Guidance Officer and School Counselling Teams and SBS Manager and Team.

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families attending Winmalee, Springwood, Mt Victoria EEC’s, primary and high schools have access to clear information and referral processes that will increase their knowledge of and links to SBS

provided information about SBS services and referral pathways.

SBS Manager to liaise with ITAV project worker to develop communication strategy for Early Childhood Centres in Winmalee, Springwood, Mt Victoria.

### PRIORITY AREA 3: Consolidate and Strengthen SBS Practice and Service delivery

**What’s been achieved so far......**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Success Indicators</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Lead Role/ &amp; Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3a) Maintain close links with MPES welfare Directorship and coordination of Project | By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved: 3a) Regular feedback from MPES reps in relation to information provided by Step by Step on their activities, plans and issues that require intervention at the MPES level. Regular meetings (face to face, email, phone) with reps from MPES. Regular and open access to direction, expertise and support from appropriate MPES reps when required | • 3a) Weekly updates provided to MPES Directorship to report on SBS outcomes, activities and client contact numbers  
• Weekly or Fortnightly teleconference with reps from MPES, for information exchange on SBS and overall recovery activities and for MPES to oversee and approve strategic direction and action plans.  
• Formal and informal meetings with MPES reps and directors as required to deal with issues as they arise and recovery updates (face to face, email, telephone)  
• Provide mid-term report (month 3) to MPES. Progress measured against clearly defined outcomes, report on people’s needs, and progress of outcomes. | GFS & SBS Managers MPES Directors |
| 3b) Provide practice reflection and clinical supervision for all workers in strength based practice and Solution Focussed Brief Therapy (SFBT) | By February 8 2014 SBS has achieved:  
3b) A minimum of monthly clinical supervision with an external clinical supervisor. The SBS team have access to both group and individual supervision with opportunity for additional sessions if required (and with approval from the Manager). Team members have opportunities to debrief and reflect on emerging practice issues on a regular and on an ‘as needed’ basis. | 3b) External Clinical Supervisor contracted to provide supervision services for the 6 month funded period.  
- The Supervisor meets with the team and individual members of the team at one of the SBS locations (Winmalee NC/bushfire info/support centre). To ensure confidentiality (both workers and client).  
- SBS team members attend all scheduled clinical supervisions. If a team member is unable to attend a scheduled supervision they are offered a ‘make up’ session either by accessing an additional hour, or having a telephone session with the supervisor.  
- The Manager meets with individual team members monthly for line-management. This provides individual team members with the opportunity to discuss emerging client issues, formal debriefing, management of client data, monitoring caseloads, and burn-out prevention. | SBS Manager & team  
External Supervisor  
Shared Outlook Calendars  
Supervision Venues that provide a private and confidential space | Achieved |
| 3c) Maintain regular team meetings and review goals and identify opportunities. Complete Service Manual to provide workers with guidance and direction on practice, policy, protocols and procedures. | By 8 February 2014 SBS has achieved:  
3c) weekly team meetings held at one of the 2 venues including:  
- Monthly supervision meetings with Manager  
- Completion and distribution of Step by Step Service Manual | 3c) Scheduled set day and time for weekly team meetings – set up in shared Outlook Calendars. Set agenda for team meetings. Incorporate Work, Health & Safety as standing item.  
Scheduled individual supervision meetings with workers | SBS Manager & team  
Outlook Express  
Shared Calendars |
| 3d) Maintain all files and records to reflect the service usage and client needs | By February 2014 SBS has achieved:  
A completed database that is designed to capture data and produce reports related to numbers of clients accessing the service, numbers and types of client contact (ie face to face, online etc), client needs, recovery plans, outcomes and goals.  
Access to database that will allow team members to enter, store and archive relevant client data and complete case notes online. | 3d) Database system designed to meet the client data entering and storage needs of SBS. This includes capacity to generate specific reports as required by SBS Manager, MPES and Gateway.  
MPES Disaster Welfare spreadsheets to be integrated as part of SBS database to allow for cross-referencing and checking.  
Evaluation tools (included on the database) to be linked to SBS RBA plan.  
Database design team to have access to all SBS client information forms templates (i.e. intake form, progress notes etc). | Team notebooks  
Access to remote internet  
Database and access to centralised GFS data back up systems |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3e) Contribute to the evidence base for effective service delivery and contribute to the evaluation of SBS in the bushfire disaster recovery framework | By April/May 2014 SBS will have:  
- Completed the current term of the project and have accessed a significant level of information related to client needs, service delivery and client outcomes  
- Completed an interim final report and interim evaluation of the  | 3e) SBS final data collection and entry completed by last week of April (during current project term).  
- Client closure forms (with client outcomes) completed  
- Client referrals data completed  
- MPES spreadsheets and SBS client data cross checked and signed off  
- Evaluation report created from database and sent to MPES  
- Final report downloaded from database and sent to MPES for sign off  
- SBS Final report made public and distributed | To be achieved |
effectiveness of the SBS project in meeting the brief provided by MPES and SBS’s overall participation in the broader psycho-social recovery processes and operations in the Blue Mountains.

- A document that is available to the community and relevant sectors that provides one piece of the puzzle that integrates with the wider reviews of the psycho-social recovery response in the Blue Mountains. In addition, contributes to plans and direction for the next phases of recovery and community renewal.

- Across the community for comment and feedback (with MPES approval). Key learnings gleaned from SBS report included in a document to be made public and distributed across the relevant sectors (i.e. emergency & welfare services, health etc).

- This document can be utilised as a resource in community planning for future disaster recovery responses, improving processes for linking fire affected people with goods and services, improving coordination and co-operation across welfare, education, health and community service sectors to avoid duplication and streamline communication and referral pathways.

- Link up with FaCS funded community development project to access needs analysis data for fire affected households and communities.
Thematic Recovery and Service Delivery Issues (3 months of Operation)

Service Activities & Operations

- From November 8 2013, Step by Step inherited the DWS database (combined with the data compiled from the Red Cross/Anglicare outreach, where over 6000 households were door knocked/contacted). The initial outreach programs were conducted over 26-28 October, 2-4 November and 8-9 November 2013. The areas door knocked were Springwood, Winmalee, Yellow Rock, Warrimoo, Faulconbridge, Hawkesbury Heights, Mt Riverview, Clarence, Dargan, Mt Victoria, Blackheath, Bilpin, Mountains Lagoon, Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. The Disaster Welfare Team were based at the Recovery Centre (Springwood Presbyterian Church) and collated and compiled lists of fire affected households who had requested follow up. These were compiled and placed into folders and forwarded to Step by Step Manager and workers. The process for gathering this information included a questionnaire which included obtaining client consent for their information to be forwarded to recovery services (i.e. Step by Step).

- Step by Step was initially located in one service outlet (the Recovery Centre at Springwood Presbyterian Church). SBS was co-located with other representatives from State and local agencies which included: Legal Aid, Centrelink, ATO, Red Cross, Salvation Army, EPA, NSW Registry Office, Blue Mountains City Council, NSW Housing, NSW Fair Trading.

- Step by Step initiated a second permanent service outlet at Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre, and is also located at the Bushfire Information and Support Centre (BISC). An upper Mountains service outlet has been negotiated with Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre (BANC). This outlet is predominantly accessed on an ‘as needs basis’ as a venue to meet with Upper Mountains clients. In addition, the Anglican Church at Mt Victoria has been used twice as an outreach venue to promote SBS and meet with clients from Mt Victoria (and beyond).

- Step by Step also utilises a mobile outreach service delivery model for maximising accessibility for clients (particularly transport disadvantaged/geographically isolated/frail). Communication with clients also occurs via email, SMS texts, and SKYPE.

Service Resources

- In the first stage of the Recovery response, SBS workers inherited the mobile phones that had been used by the Disaster Welfare Team. The phones had been donated to the Recovery Centre by Telstra and proved to be inefficient in terms of call “drop-outs” and limited coverage. Alternative arrangements were made by Gateway Family Services to source phones that were more reliable.

- Each member of the Step by Step team has the use of a laptop and a mobile phone. These resources have enabled the team to work flexibly in a range of locations. The mobility of workers has enabled them to meet with clients in locations and settings where they feel most comfortable. Workers have access to photocopying/printing/scanning/faxing facilities at the BISC and limited access to those facilities at Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre.
Gateway Family Services (GFS) has seconded the GFS financial Manager for 10 hrs per week to manage the administrative and financial aspects of the project for the funded period.

A database has been developed and produced to meet the specific data gathering and storage needs of the project. Funds have been allocated from the project budget to cover the costs associated with the database design, staff training and set up.

Workers use their own comprehensively insured vehicles for their jobs. Travel is allocated from the budget to reimburse workers.

**Human Resources – Staffing**

Gateway Family Services Management identified local organisations and services with the capacity to second workers to the bushfire support service team. A number of services were approached with a request for worker services. All services responded but were unable to second workers for more than 7 hours per week (due to issues related to service capacity to backfill staff and existing worker commitments). A decision was made (in consultation with MPES) to second existing staff from Gateway Family Services to form a core team with plans for recruitment from other services/agencies to be progressed.

The Managers from Step by Step and **Platform Youth Services** (Nepean/Blue Mountains) met in December 2013 and as a result a worker from Platform has been seconded to work as part of the SBS team for the remainder of the funded period.

As at February 8 2014 – the Step by Step team consists of:

- 1 x Manager position@ (35 hpw)
- 3 x caseworker positions@ (28 hpw)
- 2 x caseworker positions @ (21 hpw)
- 1 x caseworker position @ (7hpw – focused on the Upper Mtns)
- 1 x client liaison worker @ (21 hpw)

Team members have been provided with position descriptions, Step by Step Service Manuals (which includes worker health and safety, practice ethics, policy and protocols), service delivery forms (client intake, review, case notes, closure), resource and information lists, Blue Mountains services/organisations contact list, weekly team meetings, monthly individual supervision with the service manager, monthly group and individual clinical supervision with an external supervisor (Clinical Psychologist).

Team Members are required to complete time sheets that are accessed via a dropbox that is located on the desktop of their laptops. This enables the service manager to monitor the hours for each position. Gateway Family Services Finance Manager has been seconded to 10 hpw working on Step by Step payroll, budget, staff leave and other administrative matters.
Communications Strategy

**Summary:** Step by Step has extensively utilised existing and newly set up (i.e. Blue Mountains bushfire recovery website) communications networks to not only promote the service but also to promote key messages around resilience, hope and maintaining relationships (family, and community). See appendices for examples. While the distribution of promotional materials and information has been widespread, there appears to persist a section of the community who do not have access to information about recovery processes and services in general. For example, SBS workers are reporting that a steady trickle of clients who 4 months after the bushfire emergency are still unaware of goods and services that they are entitled to. Secondly, there is anecdotal evidence that a section of the bushfire affected community do appear to have access to relevant information but are not engaging with the information (i.e. picking up the phone to make a call etc).

Step by Step hypothesises that this could be due to a number of factors including: clients are not ready to engage with services, they are overwhelmed by the significant amount and flow of information that they are required to digest, there is confusion about the number and variety of services (existing and new) and what they can provide that is specific to each household’s needs. In addition, the Christmas and school holiday period was a time when many fire affected households took the opportunity for some respite to re-focus on family, spending time with their children, taking holidays. This also coincided with the normal “shut-down” period for many services/agencies where normal operations were scaled down to reduced or skeleton levels of staff. With the new year and children back at school and a return to work, many households are now choosing to engage (or re-engage) with the bushfire recovery services system. Timing may be a crucial factor in getting the right information to the community that coincides with their capacity to engage with that information – at different points in the recovery and renewal continuum. With this in mind, Step by Step will adopt a longer term view in developing communication strategies for the next phase of the funded term. These are listed in the forward plan on pages 37-38.

- Promotional brochures and information post cards and A3 poster have been produced and distributed (by hand) across local businesses, pubs, clubs, post offices, banks, pharmacies and the Blue Mountains Public Libraries network
- The Recovery Coordinator and Committee promoted Step by Step via the Blue Mountains Bushfire Recovery website and bushfire recovery update booklet that was distributed to the community at the end of 2013.
- Step by Step workers are regularly in attendance at the Blue Mountains Community Interagency meetings.
- Step by Step workers attended the Community Events held at Winmalee High School and the mobile Recovery Centre outreach held at Mt Victoria.
Red Cross have conducted in total 5 volunteer outreach drives (including the first outreach that covered 5,977 homes). Follow up outreach drives were conducted on February 9 2014 at Mt Wilson, Mt Tomah, Clarence, Bell and Mt Victoria (133 houses in total) and February 18 at targeted streets in Yellow Rock and Winmalee (159 houses). There is another outreach planned for March (which will cover Bilpin and Berambing). Red Cross Volunteers door knocked residents, assessed wellbeing and provided information about and made referrals to Step by Step.

Information about Step by Step has been distributed across the Blue Mountains and Nepean G.P. network via Medicare Local

Public and private schools in the Blue Mountains LGA were provided with SBS information for inclusion in their schools newsletter.

SBS information has been distributed to the social work teams at local hospitals and the Community and Mental Health Teams (SWAHS – Sydney/Western Area Health Service).

Step by Step brochures were posted out along with donated cheques to fire affected families attending Ellison Public School (Springwood)

Step by Step information postcards were posted out to fire affected households along with donated cheques from the Lions Club.

Step by Step information has been included on the websites of Winmalee and Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centres, Gateway Family Services, Blue Mountains Stronger Families Alliance and the Blue Mountains Bushfire Recovery Website

Step by Step has its own facebook page and email address. The Facebook page is utilised as an on-line communications hub which provides the community with information and updates about donated goods and services, the Mayoral Relief fund, Habitat for Humanity and also extracts from articles focused on disaster recovery (i.e. Dr Rob Gordon) and tips on self-care and sustaining family relationships.

An Article and story about Step by Step services (including SBS client stories of how they sustain their hope and resilience) has been published in the Blue Mountains Gazette and included on the Blue Mountains Bushfire Recovery Website.

An email friendly version of the Step by Step brochure has been distributed across the Blue Mountains Community Services network via Mountains Community Resources Network (MCRN) and the Blue Mountains Stronger Families Alliance.

Client Service Delivery – Overview

The core services that have been delivered to bushfire affected households has consisted of; assistance with insurance claims, access to practical support and donated goods and services, providing emotional support and brief psychological interventions when dealing with clients experiencing stress and anxiety, completion of applications for the Mayoral Fund Phase 1 and 2, replacement of lost documents, links to counselling services, inquiries about block clearing and tree removal, advocacy with phone/internet providers and utilities re: higher than usual bills and repayment plans, assistance with moving debris to the front of blocks for council clean up, and block/garden regeneration and beautification.
The first wave of clients to be seen by Step by Step workers occurred in the Recovery Centre. Many were ‘walk-in’ clients who were seeking crisis support and assistance in relation to housing, finances and donated goods and services. There were many instances where Step by Step workers sat (sometimes for hours at a time) with distressed and disoriented people who had lost everything in the fires over numerous cups of tea or coffee. Many clients recounted their stories of making ‘narrow escapes’ from the fires, others spoke of the terror and fear they experienced.

For a number of clients who attended the Recovery Centre, this was their first opportunity to share their experience with someone outside of their immediate family/friendship network. It was noted that for many clients this was a cathartic experience which then enabled them to focus what little energy they had left to planning for their practical needs.

From the second week of operations, Step by Step workers were conducting outreach visits to clients, at their temporary accommodation, the homes of their friends/extended family, local cafes (where workers would meet with them for a “cuppa and a chat”) and Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre.

**PRIMARY PRESENTING CLIENT ISSUES**

- **(October- November)** First wave of presenting issues included: access to government crisis payments through the Centrelink system, access to donated goods such as clothing, food, bedding, furniture, financial assistance, assistance with replacing lost documents, links to legal aid, ATO, Salvation Army, Red Cross, assistance with matters related to insurance and accessing temporary accommodation.
- **(December-January)** Second wave of presenting issues were focused on: Asbestos removal from blocks, clearing of debris from blocks, replacement of fencing to contain and protect animals and pets, concerns about health issues related to smoke and burnt materials (concerns focused on small children, aged and frail), access to Phase 1 of the Mayoral Relief Fund, access to donated goods and services such as furniture, bedding, children’s toys and equipment, preparing for Xmas and the School holidays (November/December), food hampers, target vouchers,
- **(January-February)** 3rd wave of presenting issues focused on: Removal of burnt/dangerous trees from blocks, access to Phase 2 of the Mayoral Fund, advocacy with mobile phone, utilities providers over excessive billing arising from the emergency period, gradual increase in requests for counselling, requests for facilitated debriefs for workers (and families accessing) early childhood services, requests for assistance in clearing and/or regenerating residential blocks, requests for assistance in regenerating/beautifying burnt areas of garden on residential blocks.
SECONDARY PRESENTING ISSUES – these issues were either pre-existing, exacerbated or emerged as a result of the October bushfires. The Secondary presenting issues often contribute to an increased complexity of client cases

- Diagnosis of serious health concerns and/or disruption to treatment regime (due to impacts of fire). For example, a client who not only had to deal with the significant damage to her home caused by the fires while maintaining her appointments for chemo-therapy treatment
- Increased conflict in couple/family relationships. In some cases the relational issues were pre-existing but exacerbated by the fire event which brought matters to a crisis point. In addition, the tremendous stress experienced by some households created more conflicted, and reactive relational environments.
- Pre-existing vulnerabilities in some families can lead to increased risk for children living in those families. This includes domestic and family violence. Increased stress (financial, personal) adds to the volatility and instability of relationships that pose a risk to children and other family members.
- General secondary issues that contribute to vulnerability have included; seniors living with ill-health and isolation (living alone with limited social connections), families with a child or children with a disability, Living (or caring for someone) with chronic ill-health or serious medical condition, pre-existing mental health issues, single males living alone with limited social connections.

Practice Issues – the “how” of working with bushfire affected households

Step by Step Bushfire Support Service is different to many community-based services in the human services sector in that service users that may approach or be referred to Step by Step may not have used a community or welfare service previously. They may have, up until the bushfire, had no need for support in managing crises and loss in their families and community. The decision to name the service “Step by Step” was a reflection of; 1) the need to appeal to the broad sweep of bushfire affected households (many of whom choose not to identify with needing access to welfare and charitable services); 2) recovery from bushfires is often a long process of moving forward step by step and that this process will be different for each household and 3) support workers walk alongside people as they take the next steps on the path to recovery and renewal. This approach reflects a philosophy that explicitly acknowledges the strengths, resilience and capacity of people to reshape their future (while tapping into the resources and resilience of their neighbourhoods and community). In addition, reflects the key message that recovery will take time, may feel frustratingly slow at times and that there will be set-backs along the way. The rebuilding process is not only a period of mourning for what was lost but also a time of transition, where new learnings, new connections with neighbourhood and community begin to emerge.

Step by Step utilises an outreach, “soft-entry” model of reaching households affected by bushfires. In addition, the service has a “no door is the wrong door” philosophy in relation to the types of needs and issues that households may approach the service with. This is an engagement strategy that promotes relationship building with clients who through experiencing a service/worker as helpful and a useful resource are more likely to re-connect with that service/worker at other points of their recovery. Development of trust through personal contact and keeping promises is a priority. As is managing expectations of clients by being transparent and open about the service boundaries and limitations of assistance (Australian Emergency Management
Handbook Series, Section B, Chapter 4, p 38). A soft entry model actively utilises existing conduits of connection within the community to link up with people in locations and contexts that are non-stigmatising, familiar and comfortable. In addition, a conscious decision was made to avoid officious language and terminology to describe the service and its operations to both the community and service users. The ‘soft entry’ approach to linking with potential clients has proved effective in engaging with people in locations and contexts that are non-clinical, community based and locally accessible. The following are practical examples of the engagement model that Step by Step utilises.

- An SBS worker was in attendance at an organised parent-staff bushfire recovery forum held at a local pre-school – many attendees (parents and carers) identified their primary current need was for “time and space”. The worker was able to pick up on this theme and describe how Step by Step could provide assistance that would help families to buy back time and space that they could then use to spend on themselves or for quality time with their children.

- SBS workers attended a community event in November 24 2013 (held at Winmalee High School) organised by the Recovery Committee (there were over 200 bushfire affected people in attendance). While attendees lined up to access some funds in the canteen area, SBS workers walked along the line offering jelly beans to groups of people and engaging in “chat” while taking the opportunity to hand out SBS brochures. In addition workers were able to identify people sitting alone in the hall, offering a jelly bean and engaging in conversation.

- SBS workers attended a second large open community event on December 1, 2013 (where ABC radio were presenting). Workers set up a stall that served cut up watermelon to adults, children and young people. This stall proved to be popular as it was summer and the day was hot and humid. In addition, workers walked amongst assembled groups with trays of cut up watermelon which proved to be effective in engaging people in conversation and providing information about Step by Step.

- SBS worker attended a locally organised “open house” held at a local resident’s home in Mt Victoria in December 2013. The worker was able to share cups of tea with local residents, listen to their worries and concerns and provide information about Step by Step and other programs/services (i.e. Mayoral Funds, Habitat for Humanity etc).

- SBS workers ran a badge making stall at a Family Fun Night held at Mt Victoria primary school (February 2014) where over 250 people were in attendance. Workers assisted families and children to make their own badges from “strengths” stickers. This provided an opportunity for families and children to identify personal and family strengths.

Step by Step aims to promote individual strengths and recovery in a non-labelling, non-pathologising way. When a service user has gained the support needed in negotiating the rebuilding of homes and life after this event, it is appropriate that Step by Step initiates closure with the service user. In general, the approach utilised by Step by Step aims to facilitate and support individuals to identify, prioritise and implement their own recovery process.

**Strengths-Based and Solution Focussed Approach**

A strengths-based and solution-focused approach requires the worker to identify the service user’s strengths, talents, capabilities and resources. A focus on strengths is maintained throughout all phases of intervention. Once strengths are identified, the worker encourages the service user to develop and use them to work on particular goals and tasks in the recovery process.

**Person-Centred Approach**

Step by Step uses a person-centred approach. It is based on engaging the service user, encouraging and supporting him/her to take an active part in planning, implementing and reviewing the recovery plan they develop with the worker.

The person-centred approach incorporates the following ideas:

- the service user has autonomy and choice to express their needs and make their own decisions
- the service user’s values are respected and their dignity is maintained
- the service user’s social and cultural identity is respected in a sensitive way
- the service user is supported to identify their goals and work towards achieving them
- the service user and Step by Stepp are partners in the process
- clear and open communication is used
- the approach is flexible, dynamic and individually tailored
- the service user and Step by Step have realistic, achievable goals, and any unrealistic expectations are clarified early in the relationship.

*(Step by Step Service Manual 2013, p. 9)*

**Step by Step case examples** *(clients have been de-identified)*

**Case Story 1**

Client presented at Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre (WNC) appearing agitated and anxious, in our first week of engagement at WNC. Having dropped her only child off for her first day at pre-school, the client was feeling more than usually overwhelmed and emotional. Whilst she had not lost her home in the recent fires, she had been living with her partner and child at her Aunt’s when the home became threatened. This client had lost a home recently due to fire in another suburb, and the escape from the recent fires with her young daughter had re-awakened many other traumas. We sat together as she explored these issues, assuring me that she had sought therapy and counselling in the past, felt secure that she did not need to do that now, but was grateful to vent and offload with
someone immediately. She was greatly comforted by the presence of Step By Step, and relieved to have had someone to talk to, informally and locally. Our meeting lasted well over two hours, and she left feeling supported and re-assured. I then received a call from her a couple of weeks later, stating that the talk we had had helped her immensely, that she was feeling much better, and that her Aunt was receiving some financial assistance due to my suggestions and information about available services. She was very thankful and reported that her situation was much improved.

Case Story 2

Client dropped in to the Bushfire Information and Support Centre, very worried about her parents whose home had been damaged during the fires. Her elderly father was caring for her sick mother and was not the type to ask for help. We discussed options for them, including strategies for her to provide information to her father without feeling like she was interfering. The client was feeling affected by the fires herself as her community, friends and family were suffering through loss and grief. She was greatly comforted by the fact that I listened to her story and acknowledged her anxiety. She was assured by the fact that Step by Step could refer her for counselling and that we were there to support her parents. We contacted Habitat for Humanity on their behalf, and the client was very thankful for our involvement, and consequent follow-up.

Case Story 3

I met M at a meeting for Mount Victoria residents held in December. Subsequently I visited M’s home to discuss how Step-by-Step can help. M applied for Phase 1 Mayoral funds and was successful. She is currently in the process of applying for Phase 2. She also applied for the Buddhist and Salvation Army funds. M is also registered with Habitat for Humanity for assistance with clearing her garden. Through Step-by-Step, M was able to access Target vouchers, a petrol voucher, a Christmas hamper and towels and sheets she requested for her wildlife rescue work. I accompanied M to the Recovery Office in Springwood where she submitted the receipts for tree cutting to obtain a refund from council. M also inquired about counselling services. We discussed the services that are locally available and the client now has an appointment with her GP to access psychology services through ATAPS. I also provided her with the number for ‘Beyond Blue’. With many of the primary practical and financial supports in place, this client now feels able to address her emotional and psychological needs.
Case Story 4

A is a single mother with four children, two of whom have disabilities. Her home, which she owns with her ex-partner, was significantly damaged in the October bushfire. She is in receipt of a pension, and has house and contents insurance. A and her family were referred to Step by Step by her children’s school. At the time of referral A was also engaged in a court process with her ex-partner and experiences chronic health problems, with no other family to provide support. At the time of referral, A and her children were living in temporary accommodation which was available for a very limited period of time. However, the family needed to wait until their house was made safe before they could return home. When I initially met with A, we shared a cup of tea (at a local café) and she told me about her family’s experience of the past 6 weeks since the bushfire had hit. The client shared with me that it felt helpful to talk with me about how she had managed to escape from the fires with flames licking up the side of her car, and how she felt that she was struggling with everything that was currently on her plate as they organised basic things like housing, food, school routines, dealing with insurers and organising house repairs.

As we continued to talk, A and I explored what would make this one day even a little bit easier for her and her family. A shared her concerns about their temporary accommodation only being available for two more weeks, and not knowing if their home would be ready to return to. She also shared how all of the uncertainty was making it hard for her kids. It was obvious that A cared deeply for the wellbeing of her children and was really concerned about how they were being affected. Together, we decided that some of the phone calls that A needed to make could be made by me, and subsequent information relayed back to her. This freed A to focus on her kids and attend to the specialist appointments she needed to get them to that day. We also explored and discovered the ways that A had supported her kids through change and challenging times in the past. This helped A to remember her own resilience and resourcefulness and to develop some strategies that she could use to support her kids through the tough times they were now facing. A consented to being linked up to financial support services to assist her in meeting extra costs, and I made several phone calls on her behalf to address her housing needs. In subsequent meetings A and myself reviewed the progress she was making towards her goals, acknowledged the frustrations and brick walls she has been faced with and celebrated the small steps she and her kids were making towards recovery. Step by Step continue to provide responsive and sensitive support to A and her family. This includes providing information, support, a space to de-brief and unload, advice, developing achievable recovery plans and referrals to other services - as their situation and needs change.
Service Provision in the first 3 months

The table below summarises the service data for the reporting period 15/11/13 - 15/2/14

*These statistics are derived from the daily client contact logs that are entered each day at each service outlet and outreach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of Referrals (outgoing)</th>
<th>109</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referrals to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of face to face contacts = 199</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of phone contacts = 704</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total combined client face-to-face + phone contacts = 903</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Disaster Welfare Services (DWS) household (follow up) files

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clients</th>
<th>Active Client households</th>
<th>Inactive Client households</th>
<th>Left Message</th>
<th>Not Contactable</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>129.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>173.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>74.57%</td>
<td>4.05%</td>
<td>11.56%</td>
<td>9.83%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Opened Clients
- Closed Clients
- Left message
- Not contactable
Combined DWS and post-DWS **active** client households total = 183

*as at 8/2/2014*
October 17 to November 17

October bushfires

October 21-22 Bushfire recovery committee and coordinator established. Bushfire Recovery Centre opened at Springwood Presbyterian Church

Gateway Family Services is contracted by Ministry for Police and Emergency Services (MPES) to establish and manage a time limited personal bushfire recovery support service for bushfire affected households in the Blue Mountains.

November 1-8 Bushfire Support Service Manager commences work.

Recruitment processes for case work team commenced.

Communication and reporting strategy with MPES set up and made operational. Psycho-social recovery model translated into bushfire support service manual with relevant policies, procedures and protocols drafted up.

Meetings held with recovery committee and key stakeholders and membership of Wellbeing sub-committee commenced.

Referral pathways established with partner services - Red Cross, Salvo’s, Mental Health Team, Anglicare, Housing NSW, Dept of Education District Guidance Officer and School Counsellors.

November 8-14 Bushfire support service team members commence working at Recovery Centre and mobile outreach service model set up and operational. Team commences working through MPES (Disaster Welfare) client follow up files and providing direct assistance to households at the Recovery Centre and off site locations. Central intake phone line set up. Promotional information and resources drafted up.

November 18-December 18

Total Client Contacts so far = 360. Total follow ups for MPES client files so far = 140

Teams attended Community Events at Winmalee High School, Mt Victoria Outreach, weekend community events. All team members attended Rob Gordon Professional Development workshop

Step by Step promotional material completed and distributed

Step by Step Service Manual Completed

Step by Step IT hardware, software, resources purchased and operational (notebooks, mobile phones, website, email addresses). Step by Step client database design process commenced.

Secondary outreach locations established at Winmalee and Blackheath Neighbourhood Centres and Mt Victoria Anglican Church.

Step by Step administration systems completed and operational

External Clinical supervision for team established and operational

Contact personnel in key organisations (e.g. centrelink, ATO, mental health, public works etc) located and communications set up

Team located to new bushfire info and support centre Springwood- team outreach location roster established

Team member strategically located at Upper Mountains (Blackheath, Mt Victoria) and Mounts area (Bell, Clarence, Bilpin, Beramblng)

Recruitment process for seconded worker from local youth service commenced

December 19-January 20

Team attended community events at Blackheath, Mt Victoria, Winmalee

Partnership with Red Cross – volunteers outreach to fire affected residences across LGA to assess wellbeing, provide information about Step by Step and make referrals

Promotions blitz – local businesses, libraries, post-offices, schools, pubs and clubs at Springwood, Winmalee, Blackheath, Mt Victoria provided with step by step information brochures and flyers

Total client contacts so far = 500+. MPES client files follow up completed total = 220+

Bushfire affected households provided with Target vouchers, Christmas hampers, homemaker packs, food, movie tickets and other practical assistance for the Christmas holiday period.

On call – roster set up to cover Xmas holiday period

First demonstration of Step by Step client database completed
**Reporting & Evaluation –**

- The Step by Step team maintain case notes of their work with service users that encompasses intake/referral through to assessment, planning, review and closure, as outlined in the Step by Step BMBSS Service Manual.
- A daily log is completed at each of the service outlets which records numbers of client contacts which occur at; the SBS base locations, mobile outreach, community events, via phone, text, email, face to face, facebook and Skype.
- Weekly Update reports are provided to the Welfare Directorship of MPES and Management of Gateway Family Services
- Weekly updates are provided to the Wellbeing Sub-Committee (as a weekly agenda item)
- Statistical data (numbers of clients, demographic data) and client case notes are entered and stored on a centralised database from which reports (related to specific data) are able to be generated.
- The ‘Mid-term’ report is written at the 3 months stage with the final report written at the closure of the project (6 month stage).
- Evaluation of Step by Step BMBSS has been negotiated with the University of Newcastle’s Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health. This will commence after the University Ethics Approval has been received at approximately 3-4 months after Step by Step commenced. The evaluation will take the form of an Action Research Project which will include the following components:
  1) Survey of current and former service users
  2) Semi-structured telephone interview of key stakeholders (i.e. human service agencies)
  3) Online survey for community members

**Proposed Evaluation Protocol**

- Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health
- 3 Phases
- SBS clients/consumers – mailed survey to all former and current
- Service system level – semi-structured telephone interviews with approximately 20 + key stakeholders including the Wellbeing Sub-Committee, Blue Mountains Interagency, other service providers
- Community level – online survey well advertised (to capture residents who didn’t use the service and their awareness, reasons for not using the service etc)
- University of Newcastle/Hunter New England Local health District Ethics
- Information sheets and informed consent processes; confidentiality/anonymity
- Data collection and analysis by CRRMH; SPSS and Nvivo
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological/Emotional</th>
<th>Financial Needs</th>
<th>Legal Needs</th>
<th>Housing Needs</th>
<th>Practical Needs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clients experiencing emotional overwhelm</td>
<td>Immediate needs – accessing Federal Govt one –off payment through Centrelink</td>
<td>Replacement of legal documents lost in the fires (i.e. wills, marriage certificates etc)</td>
<td>Needing immediate crisis housing. Or having to live in over-crowded housing (e.g. 2 families sharing one 3 bedroom house)</td>
<td>Surviving Xmas. Replacement of toys and play equipment for children</td>
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<td>Clients needing to debrief – and tell share their experience of the fires</td>
<td>Needing help with paying bills. Many clients faced with excessively high phone bills due to high phone usage during the emergency period</td>
<td>Advocacy around Insurance policies – usually referred to Insurance Council of NSW</td>
<td>Difficulty in finding affordable, appropriate alternate housing within a 10-30 kilometre radius of the fire-affected residence. People dislocated from their neighbourhoods and communities. Those whose houses were not destroyed are living in half empty streets – missing the social connections with their neighbours.</td>
<td>Needing to set up house in temporary accommodation. People needing basic furniture, and household/kitchen items, linen and bedding. Basic school items for children (i.e. backpacks, pencils, books etc).</td>
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<td>Clients concerned about the emotional wellbeing of their partner/children/friend/self</td>
<td>Accessing Mayoral Relief Fund Phase 1 and 2 Accessing funds from other charitable organisations (i.e. Buddhists, The Lions Club, Salvo’s).</td>
<td>Legal assistance around ex-partners claiming donated funds, and support for homes they were no longer residing in</td>
<td>Increased financial, practical and emotional stress on family members/friends hosting fire affected family members/friends/neighbours. Issues around caring for additional pets/animals</td>
<td>Assistance with clean up and regeneration of burnt gardens and blocks. Particularly elderly and frail residents</td>
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<td>Survivor guilt – “I didn’t lose my home”, “others are worse off than me” “I should have, could have done more....”</td>
<td>Needing advocacy with financial institutions related to amended plans for more flexible mortgage repayments</td>
<td>Assistance around upcoming or current court issues that were happening concurrently with the bushfire emergency</td>
<td>Moving to sub-standard rental accommodation – due to costs and location. (i.e. house is in bad repair but is close to the children’s school)</td>
<td>Concerns around “dangerous” trees on own or neighbouring blocks. Linking up to Public Works program.</td>
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<td>Family relationships stretched and stressed. Older clients (particularly older women living alone) feeling generally more vulnerable post fires. Some clients reporting that they</td>
<td>Accessing cash cards from the Salvation Army to pay Dentist and Medical bills</td>
<td>Needing legal support around the Family Court and Family Court Issues</td>
<td>Ambivalence about re-building. Many households feel under pressure to make final decisions about re-building or purchasing when they don’t feel ready to make a decision of that size.</td>
<td>Loss of IT equipment, computers, laptops, printers. Needing to access IT equipment through local libraries and neighbourhood centres or the BISC.</td>
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<td>are choosing to stay in their homes rather than venture out into their fire damaged neighbourhoods and streets.</td>
<td>Reported tensions in some couples where one partner is keen to rebuild and stay in the area and the other partner is ambivalent or wants to move out of the area.</td>
<td>Loss of access to the internet</td>
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<td>Parents concerned about impacts of fires on their child/ren. Parents with a child/ren with a disability facing additional pressures and costs associated with maintaining children’s medical appointments and the loss of special equipment in the fires.</td>
<td>Requests for funds to replace key lost items (i.e. tools, furniture, clothing other contents not covered by insurance</td>
<td>Clients struggling with the additional costs associated with rebuilding to existing fire-standards. For some this has a direct influence on their decisions to rebuild or to move out of the area and purchase a home they can afford.</td>
<td>Loss of vehicles, trailers, caravans, campervans in the bushfires some of which are not covered by insurance. This increases capacity to get to work, drive children to school/activities and to engage in family holidays.</td>
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<td>Clients wanting general information about what psychological/counselling services are available – and affordable</td>
<td>Small business owners whose business was not/under insured. No or limited capacity to recover. Under tremendous financial stress. Needing to “lay off” workers or workers getting less shifts.</td>
<td>Living outside of the Blue Mountains LGA. Increased costs associated with travelling further to employment, schools. No finances or time left over to visit with friends/neighbours in their home neighbourhood.</td>
<td>Sheds, garages and outbuildings destroyed/damaged in fires but not covered by insurance.</td>
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<td>Some reported increases in conflict between couples.</td>
<td>Clients injured in fires (sustained burns, psychological injuries) needing to take time off work. Increases financial stress.</td>
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EMERGING TRENDS –

- As stated in the Executive Summary, there appears to be an emerging trend of a cohort of fire affected households (total or partial damage) who have “fallen through the gaps” in both the first wave of registrations for total loss and significant damage and subsequent outreach doorknocks programs (Step by Step and Red Cross). Why this is occurring is currently subject to conjecture around issues pertaining to client isolation (within their own neighbourhoods/communities), clients moving off the Mountains from day 1 of the October fires, clients having limited or no access to reliable telephone/internet, clients located elsewhere for the duration (i.e. lengthy hospital stays), clients with limited capacity to absorb and engage with information (due to high levels of stress and cognitive overload).

- As households move into the next phase of the recovery process and beyond basic survival needs (i.e. food, clothing, shelter), many are just now beginning to make contact with services (e.g. Step by Step) to acknowledge and meet their psycho-social needs. Predominantly these needs are focused on: concerns for their own, child and/or family’s emotional and psychological well-being; now having the time and space to process and begin to integrate trauma around the fire events; experiencing conflict and tension related to decisions around whether or not to rebuild; and related to this - the anxiety and stress around whether households have the financial means to rebuild to the required building standards.

- The issue of trust has become a significant player in how and if households engage with bushfire recovery services. Many households that Step by Step has met with have expressed their general disappointment with significant aspects of community recovery processes. There appears to be a general perception amongst (and beyond) fire affected households that promises have been made that have not been followed through. A significant aspect of the practice employed by Step by Step workers is to recognise that it takes time and persistent (and sensitive) effort to build engagement and relationships with people recovering from the bushfire events of October 2013. As stated previously, there are many clients who are only now ready to begin conversations about their immediate and longer-term future plans.
• **FORWARD PLAN – ‘The Next 3 Months’**

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<th>MONTH</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>LEAD ROLE &amp; RESOURCES</th>
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| **FEBRUARY 8- MARCH 8 2014** | • Continue SBS promotions strategy with more focus on existing and new health/ community services in the Blue Mountains LGA  
• Make contact with clients on DWS database who did not initially request follow up  
• Maintain regular ‘drop-in’ visits to Oasis Nurseries/Winmalee  
• Maintain follow up contacts with schools and early childhood centres in the affected areas  
• Review of active client cases – current and emerging needs. Development of exit plans – in consultation with client households  
• Enter all client data on SBS database | • SBS Manager and Team. Blue Mountains Bushfire Recovery website, Blue Mountains Gazette, post out letters and information postcards  
• Access DWS database and cross reference with DWS call back client forms  
• 2 SBS workers to develop continuity of presence at Oasis – weekly drop-ins and on ‘as needs’ basis  
• SBS workers to meet with principals of affected schools  
• SBS Manager and team to review all active cases  
• SBS Team to enter client data with direction from SBS Manager |
| **MARCH 9 – APRIL 8 2014** | • The needs of young people in bushfire affected households/communities will be assessed and analysed. A strategic plan for linking young people to information and services will be developed and implemented  
• All client information entered on SBS database  
• Integrate with broader community based comms initiatives  
• Transition/exit plans for all clients to be developed  
• SBS linked closely to community development/renewal programs | • SBS worker, Platform Youth Services, Mountains Youth Services Team (MYST), Adolescent and Family Counsellors, High Schools, TAFE, employment network providers  
• Attendance of SBS worker at weekly BBQ’s (held for young people by MYST)  
• SBS workers complete entry of their clients on database  
• SBS Manager continues membership of steering committee of Winmalee/Springwood Community Renewal Project and links with |
| Vulnerable client households identified, needs assessed and transition plans developed | Resilience and Preparedness working group (of Wellbeing Sub-Committee) |
| Complete community services contact list and distribute to SBS households |

**APRIL 9 – MAY 7 2014**

| Communication strategy regarding exit of SBS enacted. At client and community levels |
| Completion of final (6 month) report |
| Transition/exit plans completed for all current clients |
| Information fridge magnet card distributed to all clients containing key services and contact numbers + tips on maintaining personal and relationship wellbeing. |
| Hand-over of statistical SBS data to MPES |

| SBS Manager and team. Blue Mountains Gazette, Bushfire Recovery Website, BMCC website, Neighbourhood Centre websites, SBS face book page (closed) |
| SBS Manager and team. Card designed and approved by MPES. Printed and distributed to all clients (past and current). |