Step By Step

Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service

Final Report

October 2014

A personalised support worker service assisting people affected by the bush fires with information, decision-making and recovery resources.
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1) Summary - Client Needs and Step by Step Response
2) Step by Step *Continuity of Care and Connection Plan*
3) Step by Step Communications (updates, media articles, client resources)
Foreword

GATEWAY FAMILY SERVICES – EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Gateway has been privileged to undertake the Bush Fire Support service- known as Step By Step in the wake of the October 2013 Fires in Springwood, Winmalee, Yellow Rock, Mt Victoria and the Upper Blue Mountains communities.

We have appreciated the confidence that was placed in our agency to take on this work and we gave an undertaking from the beginning that our intention was to ensure a best practice approach to providing this service and a desire to grow the evidence base in disaster welfare recovery.

In adopting a Solution focused approach, the project was titled very deliberately as Step by Step- thus giving a clear understanding that recovery would happen at the pace of the people affected by the disaster.

This report details how the project was set up and how learning from the people affected by the fires combined with Gateway’s practice knowledge of what is likely to be most helpful to support people on their journey to recovery determined the shape of the project.

In all of this work we were supported by the expert team at MPES- Dr Allison Rowlands, Sonya Ramke, Sally McKay and appreciated the contribution of Rachel Nibbs to the overall Recovery effort as well as the input and guidance of the members of the Recovery (Wellbeing) Sub-committee/Working Group.

We also acknowledge the support of the teams from Anglicare who provided solid assistance in the early days of recovery and Red Cross whose support of the recovery effort has been expert, timely and collaborative.

All of the members of the ‘alumni’ from MPES were a great resource and source of support in the early days.

As Executive Officer of Gateway I want to acknowledge with pride the exceptional work of the Step By Step team. Led inspirationally by Anne Crestani, the team came together quickly and worked tirelessly to ensure that all those requiring support received the very best service possible. Each worker brought their wealth of professional skills and personal qualities to the tasks that were required.

I commend this final report to you in the hope that through its pages you will catch a glimpse of the achievement that has been Step by Step.

Kerry Thomas

Executive Officer
Executive Summary

Following completion of service delivery in the bushfire impacted areas of the Blue Mountains, the Step by Step bushfire Support Service exited on August 29 2014. This document provides a final report on the operations and activities of the project and as a follow up to the 6 month project update. Step by Step has been a partnership project of Gateway Family Services, Ministry for Police and Emergency Services (MPES) under the NDRRA and was jointly funded by the Federal and New South Wales governments. Under these funding arrangements the time-frame for the project was 6 months. The project was extended for a further 3 months with the allocation of funds provided by the Uniting Church’s Disaster Relief Fund Committee. The final report provides an overview of all activities and operations from service set up (November 8 2013) to service exit and project completion (September 12, 2014) and includes the following data sets:

QUALITATIVE DATA

- Abbreviated Summary of Client Needs
  The report provides a brief overview of client needs as they presented over the 4 quarters of Step by Step Service operations.
  *The full table description of client needs and Step by Step service responses is included in the Appendices (appendix 1).

- Step by Step Client Support Model
  The report presents a summary and analysis of the efficacy of the case-work and practice model crafted and utilised by Step by Step during the course of delivering support services to bushfire impacted households.

- Step by Step Communications Strategy and Transition and Exit Strategies:
  The report presents a summary and analysis of the communication and transition and exit strategies employed in the final phase of the project. *Copies of the regular updates, tips sheets, media articles and Facebook page screen shots are found in the Appendices (appendix 3).

- Step by Step Lessons Learned and Recommendations:
  Each report includes an in-house evaluation of the strategies employed by the project and where changes could have been made to increase the effectiveness of the service. Recommendations for future actions are included. It is hoped that the lessons learned from the experiences of the Step by Step project will prove enlightening and beneficial for any future case-management teams set up to assist the recovery process for people impacted by disaster events.
QUANTITATIVE DATA  Client Statistics captured via the Step by Step database over the 4 quarters of service operations
Includes the following:

- total number of clients
- total number (and modes) of client contacts
- total number of clients with total and partial loss
- total number and distribution of services utilised
- total number and distribution of referrals made
- patterns of client mobility (distance moved from impacted residence)
- client demographics (e.g. country of origin, households with dependent children, health/medical needs)
- snapshot - services still required (at time of service closure)
- snapshot - long-term housing plans (clients)
- peaks in service contacts with clients

Where appropriate a brief analysis of the data is included to accompany the graphs and charts.
| Phase 1  
(October - December 2013) | Phase 2  
(January - March 2014) | Phase 3  
(April - June 2014) | Phase 4  
(July - August 2014) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| *Temporary/emergency  
accommodation             | *Elderly/frail clients needing assistance to move debris and waste to front of their blocks for Council’s kerbside clean-up | *Increased contacts received from clients (with total loss) who had not accessed any prior assistance | *Incoming calls and emails from clients in response to Step by Step’s announcement of closure. |
| *Essential goods (i.e. clothing, blankets, furniture) | *Increased contact from households with complex needs | *Clients reporting financial hardship as bills and costs associated with bushfires increase. | *Residents calling to double check their eligibility for grants and financial assistance and to request support for specific needs before the service closed. |
| *Assistance/income support | *Increased “1st time” contacts from fire affected residents not registered on DWS database | *Clients seeking information regarding potential exemptions from paying stamp duty (when purchasing a new home) and council rates on existing blocks. | *Increase in requests for assistance with garden clean up and regeneration |
| *Replacement of lost documents (i.e. birth certificates, passports) | *Increased reports of households facing severe financial stress | *Clients reporting an increased sense of sadness and awareness of the losses they have experienced | *Calls and emails coming from clients wanting to express their appreciation and thanks for support received from Step by Step |
| *Access to telephones, printer/fax, computers/internet | *Increased requests from households for assistance with block clearing and dangerous tree removal | *Clients reporting increased anger and frustration with their situations, in particular the financial set-backs | *Increased number of clients expressing an interest in accessing emotional support through counselling |
| *Clearing of blocks and removal of debris, asbestos and dangerous trees | *Increasing number of clients self-reporting an increase in “strong emotions” and “angry outbursts”. | *Increasing number of clients reporting sub-standard work being completed by builders/tradespeople | *Continuing inquiries from clients reporting concerns about trees on their blocks that they consider dangerous |
| *Toys, food hampers, vouchers and resources for the Christmas/school holiday period | *Client inquiries regarding BAL rating of their property | *Clients requiring assistance with completing Development Applications for rebuilding | |
| | *Continued stress related to level of insurance pay-outs and capacity to rebuild to required building standards. | *Client concerns regarding their capacity to meet increased costs of rebuilding to the required standard | |
Data Analysis:

- At closure - the majority of services utilised by clients were Step by Step (SBS) Miscellaneous Assistance. This included (for example) providing general information and recovery updates, assisting with vouchers and food hampers, assistance with replacing documents, advocacy with insurance companies and utilities, informal counselling, liaising with NSW Public Works and Council, drop-in visits to local businesses and schools.

- Financial Support, Counselling, Recovery Goods and Services and client referrals to Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) represented a significant proportion of services utilised.

- 172 x “Other” represents: 71 Miscellaneous, 34 Public Works, 34 Gateway Family Services, 33 Community Health/GP, 29 Facebook(SBS), 28 Legal Services, 19 Structural, 19 Government Services, 14 Mental Health, 10 Housing, 8 Gardening/Cleaning/Landscaping, 5 Web Page information.

Note: As several clients used multiple individual services listed, combined these total 304, however ‘other’ can only be recorded once.
**FINAL PHASE TRANSITION & EXIT STRATEGY - LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Step by Step’s transition and exit strategies (as part of our *Continuity of Care and Connection* Plan) focused on maintaining the continuity and quality of client links with recovery resources and services following Step by Step’s closure.

- **Lessons Learned**: Step by Step successfully initiated a process of ‘warm transfers’ of clients (with persistent factors for vulnerability) to Catholic Care Social Services Counselling and Family Support Teams. In addition, these teams also had the capacity to continue the ‘structured follow ups’ with clients that were initiated by Step by Step.
  
  **Recommendation**: An ongoing process of reviewing the capacity of the existing recovery service system is required in determining which services are best able to continue intensive case-work and ‘structured follow-up’ with clients.

- **Lessons Learned**: Step by Step was able to transition a proportion of its Upper Mountains support services to Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre (BANC). This was achieved via a proportionate allocation of Step by Step’s project ‘extension’ funds to BANC. This strengthened their capacity to provide outreach support services to the bushfire impacted community in the Upper Mountains (following the exit of Step by Step).
  
  **Recommendation**: Transition plans need to be developed and actioned well in advance of the exit of bushfire support services. This highlights the need for setting up collaborative arrangements with services located in key impact areas. In addition, stress may increase for clients if they are experiencing too many changes in connections to services and service personnel. It is very important that there is adequate forward planning, client consultation and back-up plans in place prior to transferring clients from one service to another.

- **Lessons Learned**: A collaborative relationship was developed between Step by Step and Blue Mountains City Council’s Recovery Team. This enabled both teams to plan and implement an effective strategy which enabled a seamless transition from Step by Step to Council’s Recovery Team in delivering recovery information, referrals and links to goods and services.
  
  **Recommendation**: Building relationships with key recovery stakeholders (i.e. local government, community interagency, emergency services) plays a significant role in effective coordination of services and future transition and hand-over of key roles and responsibilities.
AT SERVICE CLOSURE – TOTAL NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION OF REFERRALS

Where has the client been referred to?

Data Analysis:

- At closure the majority of referrals were directed to Blue Mountains City Council’s Recovery Team.
- At closure a significant proportion of referrals were made to formal counselling services (e.g. Relationships Australia, Anglicare).
- Financial Support and Recovery Goods and Services made up a combined total of 281 referrals.
- Warm transfers and assisted referrals of Step by Step clients to Catholic Care Social Services Counselling and Family Work teams totalled 112 (this constituted a key component of Step by Step’s Continuity of Care and Connection Plan – appendix 2).
Data analysis: All buildings, all contents, fencing, carports, garages, cars made up the significant ratio of total loss.
Data Analysis:

- The largest number of requests for assistance were related to fencing and garages (e.g. fencing/garage replacement not covered by insurance, negotiations with neighbouring properties for replacement of fences).
- A significant proportion of clients (partial damage) requested assistance with clean up/regeneration/beautification of their fire damaged blocks and gardens. A small number of families requested assistance with replacing outdoor children’s play equipment (swings, trampolines etc).
## Final Phase Communications Strategy

<table>
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<th>MONTH</th>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
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| **JUNE** | • Red Cross outreach door-knock targeting residents who Step by Step have been unable to contact. This strategy was initiated following discussions between Step by Step and Red Cross where specific locations (i.e. streets, neighbourhoods) were identified for targeted contacts from Red Cross Volunteers. Red Cross distributed data related to outcomes of the door-knock to Step by Step and the Recovery (Wellbeing) Sub-Committee.  
• Prepare editorials and articles re: Step by Step closure for publication and distribution  
• Commence liaison with Blue Mountains City Council Recovery team to develop transition plan  
• Information flyers, posters and pamphlets created with Step by Step closure announcement and Council’s Recovery Team contact details |
| **JULY** | • Step by Step Manager interviewed on ABC 702 Radio notifying of Step by Step closure and a “call-out” to bushfire impacted residents who may have moved out of the area and had not accessed assistance  
• Closure date announced on Step by Step face-book page and via emails sent out across the client and interagency networks (including Neighbourhood Centres, Community Health, and Medicare Local G.P. network).  
• Two postal mail-outs to all Step by Step clients announcing closure of the service and details of Council’s Recovery team  
• Announcement of Step by Step closure on Blue Mountains Council’s Recovery website and in Council’s Recovery E-Newsletter  
• Step by Step closure flyers, posters distributed across network of public libraries and schools.  
• School Principals, Counsellors and Directors of Early Childhood Centres contacted directly re: Step by Step Closure and transition to Council’s Recovery Team  
• Community ‘catch-up’ events organised at Winmalee and Mt Victoria to provide bushfire impacted residents the opportunity to come together, hear first-hand about Step by Step’s closure and to meet members of Council’s Recovery Team  
• Articles published in the Blue Mountains Gazette (by Blue Mountains Council) announcing Step by Step closure and outlining the transition to Council’s Recovery Team (*See appendix 3*)  
• Initiate final phase of making contact with affected households who have had no or limited contact with Step by Step. The primary purpose of these contacts is to provide information re: closure and transition to Council’s Recovery Team and to assess client needs and ensure connectivity with existing goods and services. |
| **AUGUST** | • Final ‘thank you’ cards posted (and emailed) out to Step by Step clients with Blue Mountains Recovery Services contact list  
• Final ‘thank you’ message emailed across partner recovery service network with contact details of Council’s Recovery Team  
• Completed final phase of “check in” courtesy calls to clients who have had limited or no contact with Step by Step  
• Final message on Step by Step Facebook page (prior to de-commission)  
• Voice message left on intake phone notifying of Step by Step’s closure and the contact details for Council’s Recovery Team.  
• Final articles published in Blue Mountains Gazette – 1. Local State member meeting with Step by Step team 2. Blue Mountains Mayor meeting with the Step by Step team (* See appendix 3*). |
COMMUNICATIONS – LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Lessons Learned**: Having immediate access to accurate client contact details was crucial for Step by Step to initiate and sustain contacts with bushfire affected households. In a proportion of cases the contact details for clients that were listed in the DWS folders became quickly outdated or were incomplete. This was often due to the levels of mobility of bushfire affected households. This meant that many hours and weeks were spent in attempts to locate the correct details and make contact. The task of contacting clients would have been more efficient if a database was available to receive and store information from the first week of the recovery. The accuracy and efficient handling of client data would be an improvement on the current system of working with hard copy spreadsheets. In addition, many clients complained that they were required to undergo multiple identity checks and re-tell their story numerous times as they accessed goods and services when referred by Step by Step. As a result, some clients reported a reluctance to engage with primary recovery goods and services.

- **Lessons Learned**: Gateway Family Services and MPES Disaster Welfare Services Executive took the initiative to set up a database specifically designed for the Step by Step project. This became an invaluable tool for storing client data and tracking needs. However, a great deal of time was expended in entering client data as well as making minor amendments to some functions of the database. There is general agreement within the Blue Mountains Recovery (Wellbeing) Working Group that a centrally managed database is needed to gather and store client data with authorised access provided to key recovery services. Data gathering and entry could commence from evacuation centres and continue to operate from newly set up recovery centres. In addition, this strategy would strengthen the capacity to track client needs and emerging trends (as they happened). Most importantly, collecting client contact details (with consent) would be a one-off process. This would strengthen the recovery service systems capacity to protect client confidentiality and the integrity of data.

  **Recommendation**: MPES design or have access to a database/mainframe that has the essential functions required to gather and store key client data (in the first phase of recovery operations). Administration and management of the database could be negotiated with key recovery stakeholders (although MPES seems the obvious choice). IT training and on-going support would need to be embedded in the project.

- **Lessons Learned**: Many affected households appeared to experience “cognitive overload”. This is understandable given the impacts of the bushfires and the multiple issues and tasks people were/are trying to manage. A significant amount and variety of recovery information was being distributed across the community at regular intervals. For many clients their capacity to engage with that information was compromised. For example, some clients would report to Step by Step that they did not have access to information or had forgotten or lost track of the information they had received.

  **Recommendation**: Key recovery messages and information needs to be concise and worded in simple, easy to understand language that is repeated at regular intervals across each phase of the recovery process. The community is then able to engage with key information at times when they have the necessary “headspace”. In addition, the content (and intent) of recovery communications and messages need to remain consistent over time. Step by Step communications were consistently framed around key themes of hope and resilience and normalising the emotional/psychological responses of people impacted by the bushfires (i.e. “It’s Okay to not be Okay” – Step by Step Client Support Model page 14).

- **Lessons Learned**: Employing a variety of communication methods and technology proved to be the most effective way to stay connected with affected households and ensure a reliable flow of information. In the hours/days/weeks after the bushfires many households did not have access to computers, mobile phones or internet. This often inhibited their capacity to access important recovery information. Over time many clients were able to access online resources as
they replaced computers/laptops and phones. In the final quarter (June-August) a significant proportion of step by step clients utilised their mobile phones as the primary means for receiving and sending information (via Facebook, SMS text and email). There were no requests from clients to meet with a Step by Step worker via SKYPE.

**Recommendation:** Reliable and up-to-date IT hardware/software/training/support is made available to recovery support services from the first day of operations. Email, Internet, SMS needs to be accessible with the capacity to set up a social media site within the first week or two of operations. Access to reliable internet coverage is imperative particularly when providing services in rural and remote areas. Given the increased community reliance on mobile phones as a communication tool “face–time” in addition to SKYPE capability may increase capacity for workers to meet “face to face” with clients in an on-line capacity. The needs of clients who do not utilise on-line resources for their communications needs to be taken into account. For those clients, face to face meetings, telephone calls and information updates via traditional post may be more appropriate.

- **Lessons Learned:** Step by Step received some negative feedback from a very small number of clients regarding 2 x Step by Step e/mail communications. One was a quick guide (devised by Step by Step) to managing “Anniversaries” and the other was a “hope scale activity”. Step by Step needed to be more mindful that some of the more therapeutically focused communications could carry the risk of being misinterpreted or could trigger an emotional response for the recipient.

**Recommendation:** Information that is sent out across the client network needs to be well managed and thoroughly assessed for intended and unintended impacts prior to distribution. For example, some information may need to be delivered in person by a support worker or with the support worker providing a supportive presence (in person or over the phone).

- **Lessons Learned:** Roll out of Step by Step’s communication strategy was held back by approximately 6 weeks due to a number of factors outside of Step by Step’s control. This led to a delay in getting key information about Step by Step out to the community and services network.

**Recommendation:** Any promotional/information resources need to be finalised and approved within the first 1-2 weeks of service operations. Supplementary information materials could be rolled out in stages (if time is a factor). In addition, the line of command for providing approval for roll-out of communication/promotional materials needs to be clarified in the first days of recovery.

- **Lessons Learned:** Less traditional forms of service “branding” appeared to be more effective for engaging the impacted community. In general, clients appeared to be more comfortable engaging with Step by Step via our Facebook page, SMS texts and emails. This was particularly the case from the 3rd quarter of service operations onwards. Step by Step’s Facebook page included pictures and names of the team and a variety of links to other relevant recovery websites (e.g. RFS, Blue Mountains Council Recovery webpage etc.). Emergent social media sites set up by individual community members (after the bushfires) provided additional access points in which fire-affected households could link in with Step by Step (i.e. Blue Mountains Garage Sale, Blue Mountains Fire-watch and Recovery).

**Recommendation:** Communication methods need to reflect the community’s preferences and their access to information technology and media (which can be significantly impacted by a disaster event). Utilising communication strategies that personalise the recovery support service by putting faces to names helps to create a friendly, more accessible service profile. Linking in with emergent community based social media sites casts a bigger net for reaching impacted households.
Graph - Peaks in Step by Step client activity (contacts with clients)

Contacts Made Snapshot - Timeline

Data Analysis:
- Peak client activity times: 15/3, (12/04 – 23/04), (1/05 – 20/05), (29/05 – 10/06), (19/06 – 27/06), (16/07 -1/08), (18/08 -29/08).
- Highest peaks in activity occurred in July and August (final phase of service delivery). This increased level of activity was initiated as part of Step by Step’s Continuity of Care and Connection Plan (see appendix 2). The plan implemented an increased volume in the number of emails and phone calls to clients from the Step by Step team.
- Lowest peaks in activity occurred in late December 2013 and early January (Christmas and school holiday period).
- Highest peak in activity in 2013 occurred in November (Step by Step set up and operating from the Recovery Centre at Springwood) and the period just before Christmas (assistance provided with Christmas hampers, toys, vouchers).
- Low peaks of activity in the middle of May (Step by Step team focused on entering client data on newly set up database). Following completion of data entry there is a significant upward trend in client contacts.
- From April 2014, Step by Step had email addresses and mobile phone numbers for the vast majority of clients. Step by Step then initiated a cycle of regular updates, messages, reminders and referrals via internet (email, Facebook) and mobile phone (SMS, calls).
SUMMARY - STEP BY STEP CLIENT SUPPORT MODEL FOR (psycho-social) DISASTER RECOVERY

*Devised & created by Anne Crestani (for Gateway Family Services – July 2014)
Lessons Learned: The Step by Step Client Support Model integrates 4 key elements of therapeutic intervention to form a coherent, replicable model for responding to clients in a post-disaster environment. The Step by Step model represents the cycle of interventions that were crafted and embedded within each worker-client interaction. Solution Focused Brief Therapy (yellow centre disc) was utilised as the framework for engaging clients in conversations focused on preferred futures.

Recommendation: Dependent on the outcomes of the independent evaluation of Step by Step – training in implementing the model could be offered to future disaster recovery case-management teams.

Lessons Learned: In general, clients exercised their own choices and preferences in relation to how and when they engaged with Step by Step. For example, some client households initiated first contact with Step by Step upon receiving notice of the service’s closure. These clients indicated that while they had not made direct contact with Step by Step they had been receiving the regular updates and recovery messages (via email and/or Facebook). They had utilised this information to access the required goods/services and supports for themselves. In this context, Step by Step was utilised by clients as a type of ‘self-service’ resource. This meant that they would “check in” with the service at times and in ways that were most convenient for them. Other clients reported that while they may not have made regular personal contact with a worker they felt reassured by the consistent presence of Step by Step. Many clients stated “it’s good to know that you are there if we need anything”

Recommendation: Services should avoid making assumptions that if a client has not made direct contact that this is an indication that the client has “fallen through the cracks”. From the experience of Step by Step, it appears that many clients will exercise their own preferences around whether they want or need to have more direct contact with the service. At the same time, many clients will prefer to have more personalised, regular contacts. In general, the service model should be designed with flexibility in mind so as to tailor services to fit with client preferences and individual circumstances.

Lessons Learned: There was significant diversity in the issues that clients presented after the bushfires. For example, simply providing a phone number or an update about recovery services was very helpful for many clients. Other households were experiencing issues that were multi-layered and complex and required more intensive intervention and support. Another cohort of clients seemed to find it very helpful to share (unprompted) their experiences of surviving the bushfires (sometimes repeatedly). Others preferred to leave any topics related to the bushfires firmly out of the conversation. Some clients whose properties had been untouched by the fires or who had sustained relatively minor damage presented as extremely distressed. Other clients who had lost everything presented as relatively calm and accepting of their situation. Some households presented with issues that did not come under the core business of Step by Step. However as potential future clients, they were provided with information and support that was relevant to their current needs.

Recommendation: Regardless of their circumstances, client needs and presentations (in all their variations) should be approached as holding equal weight in terms of the impact experienced by each household. The philosophy that underpins this approach that “no door is the wrong door” understands that there are often multiple (and linked up) pathways that can lead people to the right support and assistance.

Lessons Learned: Step by Step maintained a strengths approach in the way that we viewed and responded to client households. Recognising and utilising the existing resources within households proved to be an effective way of engaging in conversations about current and future capacity. Many of our clients commented that they appreciated that Step by Step did not attempt to step in and rescue or take-over while they engaged in the process of deciding on first steps. Step by Step found that by focusing on what people could do rather than what they could not, the locus of control stayed firmly in the possession of the client. This in turn decreased the pressure experienced by workers to take primary responsibility for clients’ recovery.

Recommendation: All elements of the disaster preparedness and recovery service system actively engages with the philosophies and strategies of a Strengths Approach. Education and mentoring in this approach be rolled out across emergency services, local council, business, and health/community/education sectors.
**Lessons Learned:** Community development played an important (albeit secondary) role as part of the Step by Step client support model. By adopting a broader approach to providing support that extended the focus on meeting immediate needs, important outcomes were achieved. In general, Step by Step was able to work effectively with existing and emerging community development initiatives to provide a more comprehensive response to impacted schools, pre-schools, businesses and staff working in recovery services. This approach played a role in strengthening the community's capacity to support bushfire affected residents.

**Recommendation:** A Community Renewal worker position is embedded within future recovery case management teams. This position can capitalise on the naturally occurring synergies between community renewal work and client casework in post-disaster environments.

**Lessons Learned: Service Time-Frame**

1) Step by Step was initially funded for 6 months which was then extended by 3 months (due to additional funding from a non-government source). This extension of time was critical for Step by Step to connect with impacted households who had not had prior contact. The team engaged in some lengthy detective work to locate and make contact with these clients. In addition, as the community approached the one year anniversary of the bushfires, on-going connection with Step by Step may have provided continuity in support during this milestone period.

2) Following on from the last day of service delivery (August 29) the project required an additional 8 weeks in order to complete the following essential tasks;

- decommission of the Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre service outlet
- write-up of the final report
- auditing and financial acquittal

**Recommendation:** 1) Future case management service is funded for a period that extends for at least 12 months. This allows sufficient time for service set up, establishment and integration with the affected community. In addition, provides a consistent presence that can deliver practical and therapeutic support over the time leading up to (and just beyond) the first anniversary of the disaster event. 2) Project budget calculations include an amount that is set aside to cover costs associated with project wind up and completion. In addition a time-frame (and staffing) be allocated beyond the final service delivery date to complete administrative tasks and report writing.

**Lessons Learned: Staffing**

a) Step by Step team structure included 6 part-time support workers, 1 part-time client liaison worker and 1 full-time Manager with 10 hours per week of administration and IT support provided by Gateway Family Services. In response to changes in work-load, the client liaison position extended to include key responsibilities for managing communications and media relations. b) During the recruitment period Gateway was able to contract a worker from *Platform Youth Services (Nepean/Blue Mountains)* to join the Step by Step team for a limited period of time. Gateway had identified and approached a number of services in the Blue Mountains seeking to populate the team with workers from various local health/welfare services. However with such short notice and organisational constraints, most services were only able to offer very limited hours to the project (i.e. 5 hrs per week).

**Recommendation:** a) Depending on the scale of the disaster event, a communications and media liaison position could be included as part of the team structure. An administrative/intake position within the team would cover key tasks related to intake and triage for incoming client referrals; receipt and despatch of recovery information/updates across the team; administrative tasks including data entry; IT support, payroll etc. b) Capacity for building a multi-service team is built into locally-based disaster preparedness plans. For example, Blue Mountains City Council and MPES identify local services with relevant resources and staff and invite them to engage in an Expression of Interest (EOI) process. Services can nominate to provide specific aspects of case-management services according to expertise and skills base of staff. A lead agency can be selected to take on management responsibilities for the project.
**Step by Step Practice – Client Vignette** (*clients names have been changed*)

Peter and his wife Mary presented at Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre (Step by Step service outlet). The Step by Step worker who met with the couple made them each a cup of coffee and sat and listened while Peter recounted their experiences of the bush-fires and the past nine months of travelling and living on the road in their campervan. Peter shared that Mary had only just escaped the October bushfires with her life. The couple’s property had been totally destroyed and they had only recently made the decision to return to the Mountains to consider their future. They had heard about Step by Step from a neighbour. Peter and Mary were completely unaware of the recovery assistance that was available and they had not registered their property following the bushfires. Mary appeared very anxious, avoided all eye contact with the worker and barely spoke when she was addressed. The Step by Step worker wondered (to herself) if Mary might be experiencing symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and remembered that Peter had stated earlier that Mary was very reluctant to access any professional help.

The worker continued to proceed gently and sit with the couple as they recounted their story of survival after the bushfires. Over the course of the meeting the worker employed reflective listening and empathic responses which assisted in helping Mary and Peter to feel a little more relaxed. The worker identified that Peter and Mary shared a very strong relationship which provided them with a sense of comfort and security. They were also very resourceful in being able to adapt to living in cramped quarters with very few resources to make life a bit more comfortable. The worker enquired how they had been able to manage so well and the couple spoke of the routines they had developed that helped to give their days structure. They also spoke of the hobbies that they shared (knitting, travelling) which provided relaxation and enjoyment. The worker asked them what would be one thing that would make living in their campervan a bit more comfortable. Peter identified that they had no quilts and the temperature at night in the campervan could get very cold. He also identified that some saucepans would assist in cooking meals. The worker was able to provide these resources immediately and the conversation continued with the worker providing information about the relevant bushfire relief funds and services. By the end of the first meeting, Mary had started making eye contact with the worker and between them they managed to share a joke before parting with plans made for a follow up visit. As Peter and Mary walked out the door of the neighbourhood centre Peter was heard to say to his wife “I think you might have just had your first counselling session…..see …it’s not as bad as you thought it would be”.

**Key elements of Step by Step Practice**

- Soft entry engagement model (meeting Peter and Mary in a non-clinical setting, framing meetings as “chats over a cup of tea”)
- Emotion Regulation (providing a consistent regulated worker presence)
- Strengths Approach (identifying existing client strengths and resources)
- Cognitive Scaffolding (breaking down complex information)
- Solution Focussed Brief Therapy – key questions (“what is one thing that would make a difference?” – “how were/are you able to do that?”)
- Safety and Security (provision of immediate practical assistance and information)
- Informal counselling/therapeutic support (unconditional positive regard - client centred - empathetic understanding). *Carl Rogers*
Data Analysis:
Following the October 2013 bushfires:

- The majority of Step by Step clients remained in the local area close to their impacted property (0-5 KM). This number may also include those residents who were able to remain in the impacted property (i.e., due to bushfire damage being limited to outbuildings, garden etc.).
- The number of Step by Step clients who had moved the longest distances (60-100+ KM) from their primary residence were 9 in total. Some of these clients had moved from the Blue Mountains LGA immediately following the bushfires (*see case study above). These clients were often the most challenging to initiate contact and many were only able to be contacted just prior to the closure of Step by Step (when they had returned to the mountains).
- The majority of Step by Step clients remained within a 30 KM radius of their impacted property. Many clients reported that they were willing to pay extra for rental properties that allowed them to remain in their local area. This was particularly the case for families with children who attended local schools and preschools. In addition, a number of clients were able to stay with friends or relatives who resided in the local area.
# Summary - Step by Step Client Contacts (November 8 2013 – August 29 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # Client Case Note entries</th>
<th>11,899</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # Email Contacts</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incoming</td>
<td>7,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td>399 (email conversations with individual households)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7,387</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # face to face contacts with clients</th>
<th>906</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client’s Venue (home, workplace, school, cafe)</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery Centre (including Bushfire Information &amp; Support Centre)</td>
<td>651</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # phone contacts with clients</th>
<th>1,424</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incoming</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # SMS Texts</th>
<th>234</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incoming</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # postal mail outs</th>
<th>1,572</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td>1,456 (bulk mail-mail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>116   (mail outs to individual households)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # of “unable to contact” clients</th>
<th>143</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(*contact unable to be made with client at time of service closure)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis:

- The majority of face to face contacts with clients occurred at the Recovery Centre (Springwood Presbyterian Church) and Bushfire Information and Support Centre, Springwood (BISC).
- The number of incoming emails (399) was larger than the number of incoming phone calls and SMS texts received from clients. Many clients reported being extremely busy with managing their recovery with very little time to investigate what goods and services they were eligible to access. Emails provided a means in which clients could access information and make enquiries at flexible times and places (i.e. at night when children were in bed, at home, at work etc.).
- The majority of information and updates distributed by Step by Step were via emails, followed by postal mail. Email (particularly in the final phase of service operations) became the most efficient and well-accepted means of communicating with a client base with extremely limited time.
SERVICE EVALUATION

- Step by Step is currently the subject of an independent evaluation being conducted by the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, NSW Ministry for Health, University of Newcastle. Centre Director, Professor Prasuna Reddy is providing oversight for the project.
- Step by Step conducted brief informal evaluations with clients (at the time of contact) to ascertain if clients had found Step by Step helpful (YES/NO). The results were entered on the database (see below).

**Did the client find SBS helpful?**

- Yes: 364
- Unable To Contact: 143
- To Be Confirmed: 11
- No: 3

[Diagram showing the distribution of responses]
Step by Step – Client demographics

Primary Client Contact

Area of Origin of Primary Contact

Africa: 2
Australia: 249
Europe: 15
Hong Kong: 1
Malaysia/NGO: 2
New Zealand: 1
To Be Confirmed: 220
UK: 19
Does the client/family have health and wellbeing needs?

- Yes: 169
- No: 149
- To Be Confirmed: 60
- Unable To Contact: 143

Which health and wellbeing needs are applicable?

- Urgent medical needs: 9
- Aged or Disability needs: 37
- Ongoing medical needs: 58
- Non-urgent medical needs: 18
- Mental Health needs: 3
- Counselling needs: 103
How many children at the affected address?

- Yes: 5+ Children: 5
- Yes: 3-4 Children: 59
- Yes: 1-2 Children: 108
- Unable To Contact: 143
- No: 16
- To Be Confirmed: 137

Is the client currently receiving Government Benefits?

- Yes: 87
- No: 104
- Unable To Contact: 143
- To Be Confirmed: 137
Data Analysis:

- At the time of service closure a significant percentage of Step by Step clients (with total loss) reported that they were still undecided about their long term housing plans.
- Many clients reported that while their preference was to rebuild on their block, the additional costs associated with complying with current building regulations (and the amount of insurance payout) impacted on their capacity to rebuild.
- A sub-section of married/partnered clients reported a level of disagreement occurring between them regarding their long-term housing plans (i.e. one partner wanting to rebuild on the block, with the other wanting to move out of the area altogether).
Data Analysis:

- At time of closure the majority of client cases (187) did not require further services.
- At time of closure the majority of services that were still required were SBS Miscellaneous Assistance, links to Council’s Recovery Team and referrals to generalist Counselling Services. A smaller proportion of clients were referred to specialist mental health services (13 in total).
- At time of service closure a significant proportion of clients (143) were unable to be contacted.
Conclusion

During the course of its operations Step by Step was successful in providing high quality early intervention recovery services to households impacted by the October 2013 bushfires. In the final phase of service operations, Step by Step was successful in making contact with the majority of impacted households who had not requested follow up assistance when contacted by the DWS team in the first phase of recovery. A proportion of these clients subsequently became clients of Step by Step. The Service’s Transition and Exit Strategy was successfully executed and I am confident that the community was provided with adequate notice of Step by Step’s closure. Prior to closure, impacted households were provided with appropriate referrals and up-to-date information and contact details of the full suite of local recovery services. This was an important strategy in terms of ensuring that affected residents were linked in with services that could assist them over the period leading up to and beyond the 1 year anniversary. During the final phase of service operations, effective relationships were developed with a number of key recovery service providers (i.e. BMCC Recovery Team, Anglicare and Catholic Care Social Services). These collaborations enhanced the effectiveness of Step by Step’s Continuity of Care and Connection Plan and I am confident that impacted households will continue to have access to the services and resources they require over the longer-term.

Summary - Project Achievements:

- From the original number of bushfire impacted households (330) a total of 521 households were provided with assistance, information and links to recovery goods and services
- Rapid set up and establishment of service operations (1-2 week timeframe)
- Broad acceptance and uptake of the service in a relatively short period of time
- Establishment of a best practice (replicable) model of therapeutic client support with potential broad application across disaster recovery contexts
- A total of 11,804 client contacts achieved over the 10 months of service operations
- At closure – 1,333 client referrals made
- Establishment and maintenance of consistent communications utilising a variety of methods and technology based tools
- Enhancement of core Step by Step deliverables via the roll out of a number of capacity building initiatives which included:

  a) Initiating (in partnership with Red Cross) the first in a series of forums targeting disaster recovery and preparedness across the children’s services sector in the Blue Mountains
  b) Provision of additional resources and support to community development workers at Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre
  c) Organising ‘Moving on Strong’ forums held for Outside of School Hours Care (OOSH) services staff impacted by the bushfires, parents and staff at Rainbow Pre-school and parents and staff at Mt Victoria Public School
  d) Facilitating weekly Step by Step worker “drop-ins” at Oasis and Sonters Nurseries (Yellow Rock) and organising an information forum (facilitated by local clinical psychologist) for a combined staff of 60
e) Organising 2 x community ‘catch-ups’ at Winmalee and Mt Victoria to enable impacted residents to meet with Blue Mountains City Council’s Recovery Team.

f) Facilitating a practice information forum for front-desk staff at Blue Mountains City Council

g) Liaising with Department of Premier and Cabinet to organise meetings between Step by Step clients and the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge

h) Presentation of the *Step by Step 4 Quadrant Model of Client Support* at the 2014 Australasia Solution Focused Conference held in Sydney.

**Summary - Project Challenges:**

- Setting up a service database (from scratch) during service operations.
- Delays in establishing and distributing Step by Step promotional materials in the first 6 weeks of operations.
- Maintaining a consistent practice philosophy and approach (strengths based) in a high pressure, rapidly changing recovery environment.
- Setting up a team consisting of professionals sourced from a variety of local health/welfare services *(see below)*.
- Setting up a project specific ‘steering group’ in an environment where the local service system was already overburdened and operating under significant constraints. Fortunately, the Recovery (Wellbeing) Sub-committee had capacity to provide some oversight, guidance and input into the operations of the Step by Step project.

The Step by Step project is currently the subject of an independent evaluation being conducted by the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, NSW Ministry for Health, University of Newcastle. The evaluation involves the participation of service users, stakeholders and management and staff of Step by Step and Gateway Family Services. I am confident that the outcomes from this evaluation will complement and possibly contribute new information to the current evidence base regarding best practice in psycho-social recovery. In particular, I am hopeful that the experience of the Step by Step project (as only the second service model of its kind to be employed in NSW) will continue to forge the path ahead for the replication and expansion of this particular service model in other disaster events within NSW and across Australia.
Acknowledgements

I would like to personally acknowledge and thank (in no particular order) the following individuals, organisations and groups for their invaluable support and contribution to Step by Step over the course of the project.

*If I have forgotten anyone, please forgive my inadvertent oversight – as there are often too many people to personally name.

The Step by Step team – Eleanor Mann (Team Leader), Ruth Myers (Support Worker), Nicola Horton (Support Worker), Rachel Hannan (Support Worker), Faizah Kaye (Upper Mountains Support Worker), Peter Worboys (Support Worker), Bianca Sobhani (Client intake worker/Communications Officer).

Gateway Family Services – Management Committee & Executive Officer (Kerry Thomas), Financial Manager (Terese Klynhout) and Gateway Staff and Volunteers. Beck Klynhout – IT support for Step for Step

Ministry for Police and Emergency Services (MPES)
Dr Allison Rowlands - Director, Disaster Welfare Services
Sonya Ramke – Senior Manager, Disaster Welfare Services
MPES Disaster Welfare Services Alumni (thanks for the excellent crash course in disaster recovery 101!)

Morna Colbran – Manager, Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre.
Judy Finch – Manager, Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre.
Stephanie Oatley – Executive Officer, Platform Youth Services

Reverend Janice Freeston, Dr Stephen Robinson and the Uniting Church Disaster Relief Fund Committee
Danielle O’Hara and Danny Croucher – Red Cross
Celia Vagg – Catholic Care Social Services
Liz Murphy – Community Renewal Project Worker (Springwood Neighbourhood Centre)
Dan Long, Jai Allison, Brooke Wynn and Justine Sinclair from Blue Mountains City Council’s Recovery Team
Rose Glassock – Blue Mountains District Guidance Officer
Jenny Ranft and David Poulier - Blue Mountains Family and Community Services (FaCS)
Kris Newton - (Manager MCRN) for moral support and endless encouragement
Members of the Recovery (Wellbeing) Sub-Committee/Working Group
Michael Durrant – Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Supervisor for Step by Step
Habitat for Humanity – Brushed with Kindness team, The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, The Lions Club, Rotary, NSW Public Works, Springwood Baptist Church, Anglicare, Relationships Australia (Penrith/Blue Mountains), Lithgow Family Support Service, Lithgow Adolescent and Family Counselling Service.
Last but by no means least - I would like to thank the wonderful clients of Step by Step (and the Blue Mountains Community) who have been a source of constant inspiration, motivation and generosity over these past 10 months. We have learned much from you. I and Gateway Family Services wish you all the very best as you continue to take your next steps towards recovery and renewal.

Anne Crestani
Manager – Step by Step
Practice Manager – Gateway Family Services
Step By Step

Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service

Final Report - Appendices

A personalised support worker service assisting people affected by the bush fires with information, decision-making and recovery resources.
### APPENDIX 1 Summary - Client Needs and Step by Step Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUARTER (4)</th>
<th>CLIENT NEEDS &amp; TRENDS</th>
<th>STEP BY STEP ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. POST BUSHFIRE CRISIS</strong></td>
<td><strong>&quot;I don’t really know what I’m eligible for, and I’m feeling pretty confused about where to go for money and food&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>• SBS located at Recovery Centre and commences outreach visits to affected households</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>&quot;I didn’t think I could come and get help because my house was only partially damaged, I feel guilty asking for help&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Service outlets set up at Winmalee and Blackheath Neighbourhood Centres and Mt Victoria Anglican Church</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>&quot;Thanks for listening&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Key contacts in Govt and non-govt services established (i.e. Fair Trading, Legal Aid, Housing NSW, Insurance Council, Births, Deaths, Marriages)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>&quot;I’m feeling overwhelmed by everything…I don’t know where to start&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Hand-over with MPES Disaster Welfare Team actioned and contacts with impacted households (via client registration folder) commences.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>• Information brochures about service distributed across client/service networks</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>• First development phase of Step by Step client database commenced.</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2013</th>
<th><strong>Bushfire affected households presented at Recovery Centre requiring immediate assistance with:</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Temporary accommodation</td>
<td>• Linked clients up with Housing NSW and Community Housing providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Essential goods (i.e. clothing, blankets, furniture)</td>
<td>• Linked clients up with Salvation Army, Jericho Road, Springwood Baptist Church, Habitat for Humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Finances/income support</td>
<td>• Liaised with NSW Public Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assistance with Insurance Companies</td>
<td>• Organised Xmas Hampers and financial assistance through Mayoral Relief Fund and Salvation Army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Replacement of lost documents (i.e. birth certificates, passports)</td>
<td>• Provided advocacy (on behalf of clients) with telephone and utilities companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Access to telephones, printer/fax, computers/internet</td>
<td>• Liaised with Insurance Council of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clearing of blocks and removal of debris, asbestos and dangerous trees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Toys, food hampers and resources for the Christmas period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLIENT NEEDS &amp; TRENDS</td>
<td>STEP BY STEP ACTIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. DEBRIS/WASTE REMOVAL</strong></td>
<td>• Drop-in visits commence at Oasis Nurseries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I feel I’ve taken a total nosedive”</td>
<td>• Regular information mail-outs to clients commences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We thought we were going OK until just recently”</td>
<td>• Meet with principals and school counsellors at impacted schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I feel like I’m finally getting somewhere”</td>
<td>• SBS staff attend community events held at local schools and neighbourhood centres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“thanks so much for that information, makes it so much easier to make one phone call rather than twenty”</td>
<td>• Commenced entering client data on purpose build SBS database</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Life’s a bit of a juggle, just taking it day by day”</td>
<td>• Step by Step Facebook page set up and operational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“you guys have been wonderful, I feel cared about, thanks for letting me know about the Kerb-side clean-up”</td>
<td>• Commenced making contact with DWS “no follow up” clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Thanks so much for doing that! I just couldn’t manage it!”</td>
<td>• Recovery articles published in local newspaper/manager interviewed on local community Radio</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Organised “Moving on Strong” forums to be run at local pre-school, schools and community organisations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JANUARY-MARCH 2014</strong></td>
<td>• Liaise with Habitat, Springwood Baptist Church to assist with moving debris to front of blocks. Garden clean-ups and regeneration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elderly/frail clients needing assistance to move debris and waste to front of their blocks for Council’s kerb-side clean-up</td>
<td>• Linking clients to mental health, counselling, drug &amp; alcohol services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased contact from households with complex needs</td>
<td>• Linking households to Mayoral Relief Fund, Salvation Army Fund</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased “1st time” contacts from fire affected residents not registered on DWS database</td>
<td>• Liaise closely with NSW Public Works and Blue Mountains City Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased reports of households facing severe financial stress</td>
<td>• Provide informal counselling, link clients to psychology services through Medicare Local ATAPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased requests from households for assistance with block clearing and dangerous tree removal</td>
<td>• Liaise with insurance companies and link clients to the Insurance Council of Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increasing number of clients self-reporting experiencing an increase in “strong emotions” and “angry outbursts”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Continued stress related to level of insurance pay-outs and capacity to rebuild to required building standards.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. MOVING BACK-MOVING OUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLIENT NEEDS &amp; TRENDS</th>
<th>STEP BY STEP ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“My kids seem to feel heaps better now that we are rebuilding”</td>
<td>• Liaised with NSW Dept. of Premier &amp; Cabinet to organise clients to meet with Duke and Duchess of Cambridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We are muddling through, we have to rise to meet the challenges”</td>
<td>• Database entry completed. Database goes live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“That was a wonderful experience, it’s good to know people haven’t forgotten about us” (client comment after meeting the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge)</td>
<td>• Commenced planning of Step by Step transition and exit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I just get reminded (of the fire) all the time. Even my underwear is donated. It is hard to get away from”</td>
<td>• Continued making contacts with “no follow up” fire-affected residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think we have everything in place, but it’s one step forward then two steps back”</td>
<td>• Organised information session from Medicare Local psychologist for combined staff of Oasis &amp; Sonters Nurseries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Completed hand-over of case management of upper Mountains clients to Support Workers at Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. Upper Mountains Support Worker exits May 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Created Community Services contact sheet for distribution across client network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Met with Council’s Recovery Team to discuss transition and exit plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUARTER (4)</td>
<td>CLIENT NEEDS &amp; TRENDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| APRIL-JUNE 2014 | • Increased contacts received from clients (with total loss) who had not registered and had not accessed any prior assistance  
• Clients reporting financial hardship as bills and costs associated with bushfires increase.  
• Clients seeking information regarding potential exemptions from paying stamp duty (when purchasing a new home) and council rates on existing blocks.  
• Clients reporting an increased sense of sadness and awareness of the losses they have experienced.  
• Clients reporting increased anger and frustration with their situations, in particular the financial setback.  
• Increasing number of clients reporting sub-standard work being completed by builders/tradespeople  
• Clients requiring assistance with completing Development Applications for rebuilding  
• Client inquiries regarding BAL rating of their property  
• Client concerns regarding their capacity to meet increased costs of rebuilding to the required standard  
• Contacts from clients who have moved out of the area and still requiring information and assistance  
• Continuing inquiries from clients reporting concerns about trees on their blocks that they consider dangerous | • Linked clients up with recovery goods & services  
• Linked clients to Phase 2 of Mayoral Relief and Salvation Army Funds  
• Linked clients to Legal Services and Blue Mountains City Council  
• Linked clients to counselling services  
• Linked clients to financial counselling services  
• Linked clients to NSW Fair Trading  
• Linked clients to Blue Mountains City Council |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUARTER (4)</th>
<th>CLIENT NEEDS &amp; TRENDS</th>
<th>STEP BY STEP ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. STEPS TOWARDS RENEWAL</td>
<td>“I saw that you are closing, and I’ve been worried about this tree for ages, and thought I should just ring you before you are gone”</td>
<td>• Compiled a list of clients to transfer to Catholic Care Social Services counselling and family work teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Phase of Service Delivery</td>
<td>“I’m starting to notice how tired I feel, and I really need a break but it’s not good timing to get time off” (staff member working in a recovery support service)</td>
<td>• Facilitated practice forum for frontline staff at Blue Mountains City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I received your letter, and I just want to check what I am eligible for”</td>
<td>• Coordinated community catch-up events where clients were able to meet with Council’s Recovery Team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s been great getting your emails (updates), I know I’m getting the right information, and don’t need to worry that I’m missing out”</td>
<td>• Step by Step closure communication strategy actioned and completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Step by Step have been pivotal in rebuilding our lives”</td>
<td>• Step by Step team complete transition and closure plans for each client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s been wonderful to have someone to talk to, and who didn’t have an opinion or agenda about what I should do with the rebuilding of my home and life”</td>
<td>• Coordinated with Blue Mountains TAFE for free massages to be offered to staff/volunteers working in bushfire recovery</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>“It’s been a relief just knowing that you were there if I needed anything”</td>
<td>• Final referrals made, warm transfer of clients to Catholic Care counselling team completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULY-AUGUST 2014</td>
<td>• Incoming calls and emails from clients in response to Step by Step’s announcement of closure. Residents calling to double check their eligibility for grants and financial assistance and to request support for specific needs before the service closed.</td>
<td>• Thank You Cards and local services contacts list distributed across entire client base</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increase in requests for assistance with garden clean up and regeneration</td>
<td>• Final client data entered, cross-checked and completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Calls and emails coming from clients wanting to express their appreciation and thanks for support received from Step by Step</td>
<td>• Facebook page de-commissioned</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Clients expressing an interest in accessing emotional support through counselling</td>
<td>• Pack up and de-commission of service outlet at Winmalee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Linked clients with Council’s Recovery Team</td>
<td>• Linked clients with Sydney Church’s Garden Beautification project</td>
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<td>• Linked clients with Sydney Church’s Garden Beautification project</td>
<td>• Linked clients to Community Renewal events and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Linked clients to Community Renewal events and activities</td>
<td>• Linked clients to counselling team at Catholic Care Social Services, Relationships Australia, and Psychology Services through ATAPS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2

STEP BY STEP - CONTINUITY OF CARE & CONNECTION PLAN

June 1 - August 30 2014

Summary: As Step by Step implements a phased exit from the Blue Mountains Bushfire Recovery Response a strategic action plan has been developed to meet the following requirements:

- Each SBS client household has a completed individual Care and Connection Plan. The plan will include timelines for exit from the SBS project, review of current progress (i.e. how close to reaching short-term client recovery goals), assessment of current and future needs (next 6-12 month), assessment of quality of linkages to other goods/services/information/community renewal projects, identification and celebration of achievements so far.
- A comprehensive Communications Strategy that encompasses both specific client and broader community/services populations.
- All SBS client households are entered on SBS database and all case-notes and other information are completed and up to date by August 30.
- Resolution of project resources (SBS database, mobile phones, notebooks).
- Final budget/funds resolved and acquittal provided to MPES
- Final clinical/management supervision for SBS team – check in on psychological well-being of individual team members.
- SBS project client household statistical data handed to MPES
- SBS Final Manager’s report provided to Executive of MPES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>BY WHOM</th>
<th>BY WHEN</th>
<th>COMPLETED (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1a) Each SBS client household has information, linkages, referrals to the goods, services, community renewal activities that they need for the next phase of their recovery | 1a) Transition plans enacted for each SBS client household  
- All fire affected households are contacted (including non-DWS follow ups) and have a needs and wellbeing assessment.  
- All fire affected households provided with information about community renewal projects/activities link in with Community Renewal/Development workers  
- Referrals of clients to services/practitioners completed | SBS Team/Manager | June 30 | Y |
<p>| | | Team/Red Cross/SNCC, Catholic Care | July 15 | Y |
| | | Anne to oversee | July 30 | Y |
| | | | June 30 | Y |
| | | | June 30 | Y |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>BY WHOM</th>
<th>BY WHEN</th>
<th>COMPLETED (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2a) Reports – statistical client information, qualitative data are completed and accessible | 2a)  
- All client details are entered on database.  
- All client cases are closed on database  
- All client case-notes are entered  
- All statistical data handed to MPES  
- SBS final report forwarded to MPES Executive  
- Funding acquittal provided to MPES  
- Funding acquittal and brief service report provided to Blaxland Uniting Church | SBS Team  
SBS Team  
Anne  
Anne  
GFS Financial Manager  
GFS Financial Manager and Anne | August 30 2014  
September 15 | Y  
Y |
| 3a) All fire affected households have access to information about the phased exit of Step by Step and know where to access information and services within the Community that will support their recovery in the medium –long term. | 3a)  
- Step by Step ‘Recovery Tips’ cards to be mailed out monthly to all bushfire affected households. The June-July mail-outs will include information about SBS closure and key contact numbers for Council and other recovery services. Current key contacts list to be abbreviated and made more ‘visual’  
- Formal closure with SBS clients  
- Fortnightly articles included in the BMCC Recovery website- key topics, self-care, relationship maintenance, effects on children and young people, isolation for older residents, and info about SBS exit.  
- SBS – thank you cards sent to all clients upon closure – with Council bushfire recovery contact number.  
- Information about SBS phased exit on Blue Mtns Council Recovery website | Bianca, Elle  
SBS Team  
Bianca, Anne, Elle  
Bianca, Elle to oversee | June  
June-August  
June-August | June  
Y |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>BY WHOM</th>
<th>BY WHEN</th>
<th>COMPLETED (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3b) The Blue Mtns Community have access to information about the phased exit of Step by Step and know where to access information, activities, services that will support community renewal in the medium- long term | 3b)  
- Fortnightly articles in the Blue Mtns re  
- Information included on Blue Mtns Council Recovery website  
- Information included in all schools newsletters  
- Information included on all Neighbourhood Centre websites and Gateway’s website  
- Coordinate message from Mayor to be included on  
- Council website and in media.  
- SBS intake number to be diverted to Council (?)  
- Emails/letters to go out to service partners including, Red Cross, Catholic Care, Mental Health Team, Rose Glassock, School Principals, Uniting Church, Springwood Baps, Habitat, Legal Aid, MCRN, Child & Family Forum, MOCS, Medicare Local, Women’s Health Service etc | Bianca, Elle to oversee  
Bianca/Elle  
Bianca/Elle  
Bianca/Elle  
Bianca/Elle  
Bianca/Anne  
Anne/MPES/GFS  
Bianca/Elle | June-August  
July  
Mid July  
July  
August 22  
June-July | Y|
| 4a) All Step by Step IT resources to be decommissioned and will be absorbed into GFS IT and communications resources (i.e. mobile phones, notebooks). | 4a)  
- Client data entry completed and database moved to GFS  
- Phones de-commissioned and moved to GFS  
- Notebooks de-commissioned and moved to GFS | SBS Team  
SBS/GFS  
SBS/GFS | August 30 | Y|
| 5a) SBS Service outlets decommissioned | 5a)  
- Winmalee N.C. given 4 weeks notice of SBS departure. SBS resources moved to GFS. Certificate of appreciation given to Manager  
- MYST – given 2 weeks notice of SBS departure. SBS resources moved to GFS. Certificate of appreciation given to Manager | SBS Team/Elle to oversee  
Anne/SBS Team  
Anne/SBS Team | Early July  
Mid-July | Y|
| 6a) SBS Team closure | 6a)  
- Continue with monthly supervision with Manager – last supervision in August  
- Continue with monthly Clinical Supervision – last supervision in August  
- Continue with weekly team meetings – last team meeting in August before conclusion of project  
- Review wellbeing of team- provide information about ATAPS, vicarious trauma, self-care | Anne/SBS Team  
SBS/Michael D  
Elle/SBS Team  
Anne/Elle/SBS Team | August 30 | Y|
Step by Step Communications
Introducing Step by Step

In the earliest phases of recovery impacted residents were able to visit the Blue Mountains recovery website to access up to date information about recovery goods/services and operations. The transition of recovery operations management from MPES to Blue Mountains City Council, created an interruption in the flow of communications to the impacted community. In response, the Step by Step team strengthened our online capacity to enable continuity in recovery communications to impacted residents. 420 residents were provided with information and updates in the first round of emails distributed by Step by Step.

Step by Step’s first bulk client email was sent 1/4/14.

Hi….we hope you are travelling well

This is Step by Step Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service. We are a personalised mobile service (we can come out and meet with you wherever you are most comfortable), we have been assisting those people affected by the October bushfires with information, decision making and recovery resources. As you may be aware we have relocated as of the end of March 2014 from the bushfire recovery centre to the Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre until 30th June 2014. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or need assistance on 0474 229 845. Please find attached some information about recovery and a services contact sheet for both the lower and upper mountains.

UPDATE - sent 1/4/14

The Salvos are currently offering Phase 2 Support for those who have confirmed total loss of property in the bushfires back in October. This round of support involves larger grants. Application forms available from Friday 4th April. Applicants will need to complete the application form and then return it to The Salvation Army Bushfire Recovery Centre.

The Salvation Army Bushfire Recovery Centre have now relocated to Shop 4, 7-9 Raymond Road Springwood NSW 2777

Phone: 4751 7964  Mobile: 0407 567 826 Opening Hours: Tuesday: 9am - 5pm Wednesday: 9am - 5pm

Thursday: 1pm - 7:30pm  Friday: 9am - 5pm

* See Attachments for contacts and recovery materials
Getting the word out about Step by Step

A key element of Step by Step’s communication strategy was to frame recovery messages in simple language with an empathetic and future focused flavour. Emphasis was placed on the mobile outreach aspects of service delivery demonstrated in the catch-phrase “WE COME TO YOU”.

E-brochure 1 (Distributed – Jan-Feb 2014)
**e-brochure 2 for the Blue Mountain Gazette**

**Step by Step...**
Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service

Phone 0474 229 845

- WE COME TO YOU -

We can help you move Step by Step towards...
- Getting the right information
- Working out your next steps...and how to get there
- Getting connected with the right services for your needs

Email us at stepbystep@gatewayfamilyservices.org.au

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**e-brochure 3 notice of service closure**

**Step by Step...**
Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service

Phone 0474 229 845

- WE COME TO YOU -

Step by Step will continue to offer support and provide up to date information that will assist you in the recovery process, until the 29th of August 2014, after that the Blue Mountains City council 4723 5000 will be the point of contact for your recovery needs.

- WE COME TO YOU -

We can help you move Step by Step towards...
- Getting the right information
- Working out your next steps...and how to get there
- Getting connected with the right services for your needs

Email us at stepbystep@gatewayfamilyservices.org.au

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Both Post and Email were used to distribute updates and information to residents. In total there were three large postal mail outs which included the following information:

- Brochures from Step by Step, Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre, Legal Aid, Salvation Army, Mayoral Relief Fund, Gateway Family Services, counselling services, emergency relief services, Blue Mountains City Council etc.
- Blue Mountains Services Contact list (created by step by step).
- Helpful tips for recovery (adapted from presentations/talks/literature from Dr Rob Gordon/Beyond Blue/Australian Psychological Society (APS).
- Notice of Service closure letters.
- Invitation to clients to participate in evaluation of Step by Step

*see Attachments for contact lists and Helpful tips

**Final round of Contacts**

Prior to service closure Step by Step made several rounds of contacts to clients, agencies and local businesses, to make them aware of our closing date and to link them up to Catholic Care Social Services for continued follow up “check-in” calls. (*see attachments - letters)

**EMAIL SENT: 14/7/14**

**IMPORTANT NOTICE - Step by Step final date of service**

Hi all,

Hope you are travelling well.

It has been a while since my last email. At current Step by Step is in the midst of winding down and transitioning recovery information and links to goods and services to the Blue Mountains City Council’s recovery team. Please find attached a letter outlining the details of Step by Step’s final date of service, which is the 29th of August 2014.

Step by Step will continue to provide information, support and referrals until this date. If you have any queries regarding the recovery services available after Step by Step close, please contact us on 0474 229 845. I encourage you to start thinking about any needs or questions you or your family may have before our closing date so we can get you linked up with the appropriate goods and services.

Please reply to this email or call Step by Step if you would like to receive a courtesy call from the Springwood Drop In Centre support staff, in the coming months to check in on your recovery needs and keep you updated with any of the latest services available.

*We look forward to hearing from you soon. Wishing you and your family all the best for the future.”*
EMAIL SENT: 18/8/14
Step by Step towards Hope

Hi all,

Hope you and your family are well. Please find attached a simple activity called Step by Step towards Hope, which explores your levels of hope while you continue your journey towards recovery and renewal. Some people who have done this exercise with a SBS worker have found that it has increased their sense of optimism for the future. We “hope” that it will be beneficial for you and your family too.

If you would like to share your experience with a SBS worker prior to our closing date 29th August please feel free to give us a call on 0474 229 845. For any ongoing support post Step by Step please contact the Blue Mountains City Council Recovery team on 4723 5000.

Wishing you and your family all the very best now and in the future.”

EMAIL SENT: 28/08/14
Final Email

Hi all,

Hope you are well.

This will be Step by Step’s final email update. We would like to thank everyone for allowing us to walk along side of you and your family in your recovery journey. If you have found receiving regular email updates, and/or follow up calls helpful and would like to continue receiving them.

Please register your email address with council 4723 5000 or via email on council@bmcc.nsw.gov.au to receive email updates.

- Please register your contact number with Catholic Care 9933 0222 or 0418 986 561 for a follow up phone call.

We wish you and your family all the best for the future.”

Step by Step Articles - Blue Mountains Gazette and Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) Recovery website and e-Newsletter

The following are a selection of articles that Step by Step had published in both the Blue Mountains Gazette and Blue Mountains City Council Recovery e-Newsletter and website.
Keeping Relationships Strong during bushfire recovery

People impacted by the October 2013 bushfires are gradually making the transition from meeting essential needs to looking further ahead and making plans for the future. During this time they may be experiencing increased feelings of tiredness and fatigue, at a physical, emotional and psychological level. This is a common experience for many people and often happens at a time when they are needing to make important decisions about their future.

The Step by Step team have assisted more than 180 bushfire affected households to access practical, financial and emotional supports, talk through the challenges they are facing and the next steps they need to take. Step by Step meet with people from all walks of life, at different locations ranging from local cafés to online via Step by Step’s face book page. The team never cease to be amazed at the capacity and resilience of people as they work towards reshaping their future.

Step by Step team member Peter Worboys, recently caught up with one of his clients, Daniel over the phone and chatted with him about his family’s experiences over the past few weeks. Daniel, his wife Angela and their two children lost their home in the October bushfires. When Peter and Daniel first met, Peter provided information and support that helped Daniel and his family to replace documents lost in the fires, negotiate with their insurance company, and access financial support and goods that would help the family get through Christmas and prepare for the new year. Daniel and Angela are trying to decide whether to rebuild on their block, buy a new property or move to another area. Daniel shared with Peter that this potentially life-changing decision was the cause of many sleepless nights and worry.

Daniel mentioned that he and Angela had been arguing a lot more, “even about the small stuff that normally wouldn’t bother us”. Daniel told Peter that he felt constantly under pressure. “I just can’t seem to get on top of everything, even though I’m running myself ragged to get us a new home and get our lives back to normal as quickly as possible”. As Peter explained “after the bushfires, lots of people are experiencing many different feelings like anger, guilt, frustration and sadness. This is a pretty normal response to significant loss and change and is part and parcel of the recovery process. It’s natural that people (particularly men) may feel responsible for getting life back to normal as soon as possible, but this can take a real toll on your health and the relationships with the people most important to you. Sometimes it helps to take a step back from the hectic day to day to take some time for yourself and for reconnecting with family and friends. After-all it’s the connections with partners, family and friends that help us to keep going through challenging times so we need to invest some energy into keeping those relationships strong”.

Peter and Daniel discussed options for Daniel and Angela to get some support with managing stress and strengthening their relationship with each other and their children. Peter also encouraged Daniel to reconnect with his touch footy team to give him the opportunity for some time out to hang out with his mates, get fit and have some fun.

Anne Crestani - Manager of Step by Step says that “rebuilding a future after the bushfires is going to take time and energy (it’s a marathon not a sprint). If people can remember to look after themselves and to try and stay connected with family and friends and the hobbies, groups and activities that they have always enjoyed, they will fare much better over the longer term”.

Step by Step is a personalised mobile service assisting people affected by the Blue Mountains Bushfires with information, decision-making and recovery. We come to you – Contact us on 0474 229 845 or email: stepbystep@gatewayfamilyservices.org.au Like us on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Step-by-Step/1494810527411871

Rebuilding after bushfires

This month marks seven months since the Blue Mountains Bushfires and although it may seem to be a long time ago, the effects still linger. The rebuilding of lives towards a “new normal” for many is only just the beginning. One of the biggest decisions many households are now facing, is whether or not to rebuild. While some Development Applications are now being approved or assessed by Council, many people are facing rebuilding their lives in new locations with new communities. This can lead to people feeling “homesick” for the comfort and familiarity of their home and neighbourhood.

For many people, returning to their block can be a challenging and confronting experience, particularly when faced with the physical reality of their loss. Rebuilding may bring about different responses ranging from; sadness at the loss of everyday connections with neighbours and friends to feeling excited about new possibilities. Many people that Step by Step have met with are beginning to reflect on the new skills they have had to develop which has helped them to move forward. During this time it is important that you seek assistance if you are finding things too challenging.

Step by Step has been privileged to have worked alongside many people affected by the October fires. We will continue to offer support and provide up to date information that will assist you in the recovery process. We are located at the Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre if you want to come in for a chat or we can come to you. Call us on 0474 229 845, stepbystep@gatewayfamilyservices.org.au For all rebuilding enquiries please contact the Blue Mountains City Council 4723 5000.
Blue Mountains residents recovering from the October bushfires are showing amazing resilience, according to a support service helping them through the recovery process.

Step by Step Bushfire Support Service is a local service that assists people with information, support and links to recovery services and resources and is a partnership between Blue Mountains Gateway Family Services and the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services (MPES). It is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments.

According to Step by Step manager Anne Crestani: “When we ask people that we meet... 'how do you keep going?' we get a real insight into the strengths and resilience that people are able to tap into —within themselves, their families, neighbourhood, and community”.

Margaret Gogh sustained significant damage to her Mount Victoria home in the October fires. She said her challenges have been an “everyday thing... temporary housing... sifting through the aftermath and all the while the native animals kept on coming in”.

Mrs Gogh is a carer who looks after sick and injured native wildlife which has helped to keep her focused — “much as having a family to care for... there is always the next meal to prepare”.

Vince and Marg Sibbald were at home when the fires destroyed their Winmalee home where they had lived for 42 years and raised their family. “We’ve had each other to get through this,” said Mrs Sibbald. The couple have also felt overwhelmed by the huge amount of support offered by the community around them.

“The love and support offered from the community has been wonderful, we’ve been offered so many places to stay since the fires, and people we don’t even know well have given us their numbers and said ‘call us if you need anything’,” said Mrs Sibbald.

The Sibbalds meet regularly with Eleanor Mann from Step by Step and have found it helpful to have someone listen to their experiences and talk through next steps. “Life doesn’t begin and end with the fires, and we’ve been able to talk about everything here. Step by Step gives support that covers the whole lot. And even if it doesn’t get fixed immediately, at least someone is listening, while we figure out what’s next,” said Mr Sibbald.

Step by Step support workers Faizah Kaye and Eleanor Mann said they are humbled and inspired on a daily basis by the resilience of the people they meet with.

Ms Crestani said, “there is still a long way to travel through the stages of recovery and people may feel that getting back on track is a ‘three steps forward six steps back’ process. So it’s important for them to be armed with the right information at the right time and to have easier access to services that can help.

“Step by Step workers can walk alongside people as they take those next steps, whether it be making decisions about rebuilding, dealing with insurers, getting support with managing stress and stressed family relationships, legal and financial matters,” she said.

“In the Blue Mountains, we have a variety of wonderful health, community and school-based services that are here to support people over the long haul and Step by Step is here to link people with those services and supports”.

Step by Step is a mobile service with bases at Winmalee and Blackheath Neighbourhood Centres. People can contact Step by Step by calling 0474 229 845, email stepbystep@gatewayfamilyservices.org.au or visit the Bushfire Information and Support Centre located at The Legacy Centre, Raymond Lane, Springwood.
Step by Step closure date and transition to BMCC Recovery Team - Blue Mountains Gazette feature

Step by Step Bushfire Support Service Closing
Friday 29th August 2014

Step by Step’s last day of delivering support service to bushfire affected households will be FRIDAY AUGUST 29.

Blue Mountains City Council Bushfire Recovery Team will continue to offer support and provide up to date information to bushfire affected residents via their website and regular e-newsletters.

For more information contact: BMCC Bushfire Recovery Team 0247805000 or email recovery@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

City of Blue Mountains
It takes a village……to rebuild a village  A twist on this saying best describes the collaborative approach of Blue Mountains bushfire recovery services in supporting people as they take their next steps towards renewal. The Mayor, Cr Mark Greenhill, recently met up with the workers from Step by Step Bushfire Support Service as they completed the wind up of their project. The Manager Anne Crestani said "Step by Step could not have provided the high level of assistance to people impacted by the bushfires, without the collaborative efforts of the local bushfire recovery services network. We have been fortunate to have worked closely with the local health, education, emergency services and welfare sectors to ensure that people have had access to the full range of high quality practical, financial and emotional supports that are available in the Mountains".

The Mayor, Cr Mark Greenhill, said "The step by step Bushfire Support Service has been an invaluable asset to the bushfire recovery and bushfire affected communities in the Blue Mountains. The Step by Step team have provided an exceptional standard of service, offering highly personalised and professional support, and for that, I thank them on behalf of bushfire affected residents, the Recovery Committee and the broader Blue Mountains community.

The success of Step by Step is due, in no small part, to the relationship between the many allied community services in the Blue Mountains that has developed and strengthened over time. Combined with the experience, skill and dedication of the Step by Step team, which was drawn from our local community sector, we were fortunate to have the capacity to deal with the recovery needs of the community, close at hand. I am confident that our community is better able to deal with disaster recovery needs in the future, thanks to the work of the Step by Step team. The Council, through the Local Recovery Team and supporting agencies, will continue the good work of Step by Step in providing ongoing support to our bushfire affected communities".

People wanting to access bushfire recovery information and links to goods and services can contact Council on 4780 5000.
Team takes final steps

Made a difference: Roza Sage MP with the Step by Step team of Eleanor Mann, Teresa Klynhout, Ruth Myers, Anne Crestani, Nicki Horton, Blanca Sobhani, Rachel Hannan and Faizah Kaye.

The Step by Step Blue Mountains bushfire support service team has spoken of its admiration for the community’s strength, having helped 526 households through the aftermath of the devastating bushfires.

Step by Step was set up following the fires, with funding from the NSW and Commonwealth governments, to assist affected residents with information, decision-making, recovery resources and emotional support.

The 10-month operation of the service will come to an end this Friday, with assistance continuing to be available through Blue Mountains City Council’s recovery team.

Step by Step manager Anne Crestani said the recovery work had been a life-shaping experience for the seven-strong team.

“Our work has brought us into contact with so many amazing people who, in the face of devastating loss, have been able to maintain their optimism and hope for the future,” said Ms Crestani.

“The team have been reminded daily of the sheer gutsiness, resourcefulness and resilience that is inherent within the Blue Mountains community.

“Step by Step would like to thank everyone we have connected with for allowing us to walk alongside you for a small but significant part of your journey.”

The team met with Blue Mountains MP Roza Sage last week to share their experiences. Mrs Sage congratulated them on their efforts.

“Those terrible bushfires took a heavy toll on the entire community, including all those who provided the desperately needed assistance during the recovery,” said Mrs Sage.

“I imagine there were times when the Step by Step team saw their task as insurmountable but they have persevered with their vital work and without doubt have made this journey significantly smoother for the people they have assisted.

“Speaking to each of the team members reinforces the emotional investment they have in this recovery and I cannot thank them enough.”
Step by Step found social media to be an effective way to link in and communicate with affected residents and the broader community. In total Step by Step had 169 likes on our Facebook page. The Facebook site went live 30 January and was shut down on 3 September 2014.

Step by Step Facebook posts reached between 100 - 1500 people across the social network.
Step by Step - Facebook Analytics

Step by Step found that information regarding recovery services received on average 100+ hits. Events including community gatherings or activities received up to 1500 hits. More direct messages about recovery often sparked responses from those affected by the bushfires or had been shared by followers.
INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES

Good afternoon everyone,

Latest Updates:
The Salvation Army Bushfire Recovery Centre Shop is now located at 4, 7-9 Raymond Road Springwood NSW 2777 Phone: 4751 7964

Salvos are offering Phase 2 financial assistance. This round of support involves larger grants and is only available for those who have continued total loss of home. Application forms should be available for Friday 4th April. Applicants will need to complete the application form and then return it to the Salvation Army Bushfire Recovery Centre.

For more details contact salvos / step by step

534 people reached

Like · Comment · Share · 2 · 3 · 1

The council has a regular recovery e-newsletter that is getting distributed to those affected by the bushfires. If you wish to subscribe to the e-newsletter please visit their website


The Recovery Team are after details of businesses that have been directly or indirectly affected by the fires, especially home based small businesses to make sure they are getting the information relevant to them. Email details to recovery@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

380 people reached

Like · Comment · Share · 1

Hi All,

We have recently been conveyed new information about the DA fee, as there has been some confusion around the Lions club offering $500.00 off the DA fee. So just to clarify this is true however, there is a process which means that you will still need to pay the DA fee to council, then the council on behalf of the lions club will reimburse you the money via cheque after a few months. If you have any further enquiries please contact council on 4723 0000.

In addition, The Lions Club have a program of providing vouchers for equipment hire for bushfire affected people (both partial and total destruction of properties). This includes tools such as chainsaws, brushcutters, saws spades etc. Stan the Lion's Club rep is at the equipment hire shop from 10.30am - 12.30pm, next to the BP petrol station at Valley Heights on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month (excluding Easter Saturday). This program will continue until the end of 2016.

440 people reached

Like · Comment · Share · 1
ATAPS BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PROGRAM

ATAPS bushfire recovery program is designed to assist those affected by the Blue Mountain bushfires in October 2013. The ATAPS scheme will offer up to 12 sessions. Talk to your GP about how to access ATAPS.
COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Upcoming Community Program
Building readiness and resilience. Using technology to help prepare for and cope with bushfire and other emergencies.
Classes will be held: Springwood Court, 103 Macquarie Rd Springwood
Tuesdays 2 – 4 pm From 13th May to 17th June
To register or for more information:
Phone Springwood Neighbourhood Centre on 4751 3033
If you need help with transport to the class venue, please mention this when registering.

1,506 people reached

Like Comment Share 2 3

During school holidays, the Springwood Uniting Church along with Community Support Groups has brought a Free Kids Holiday Program to the community in support of, not only those affected by the October bushfire but the community as a whole. The Program has proved to be very successful and a fun time for the children plus time-out for the parents.

FREE INFANTS & PRIMARY KIDS’ HOLIDAY PROGRAM
Werrinna Public School Hall 17th & 18th Sept
Hours 9am – 3pm
Food and drinks supplied

17 Post Clicks
13 Photo Views 0 Link Clicks 4 Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK
0 Hate Post 0 Hate All Posts
0 Report as spam 0 Unlike Page
**RECOVERY MESSAGES**

**Step by Step**
February 7

After a disaster there are a lot of mixed feelings, anxiety and tension about the next steps to take commonly arise making it sometimes difficult to cope with the many things that need to be done. Taking time for yourself through exercise, relaxation, increased sleep patterns and talking to others may help you deal with what you are going through. It's important to remember that you are not alone during this time, here at Step by Step our workers walking alongside you to help you work out your needs to make the next steps. If you are experiencing ongoing stress which is affecting your everyday routines you can contact Lifeline on 131 114 or Step by Step on 0474 229 845.

101 people reached

Like · Comment · Share · 05 2

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**Step by Step**
March 10

Helpful tips for recovery
It's important to keep in mind that events such as bushfire disasters take time to process and recover from, here are some helpful tips that may reduce stress and help with your family's recovery:
1. Keep communicating—talk about what is happening, try to share what you are feeling with others.
2. Schedule time for enjoyment. Regular family fun nights, sharing a cuppa with a friend or date nights with your partner can often relieve stress.
3. Don't let serious issues develop, be active—tackle problems, seek help & information when needed.
4. Reflect on your family's experience, how you have grown and things that have changed for better or worse.
5. Maintain your physical wellbeing—eat well, sleep well, be active every day (walking, gardening etc).
6. Get back into everyday activities work, school, volunteering. Stay connected to your social group & activities — (sports, arts & crafts, clubs).
7. Know when to seek help - when things seem stuck, relationships are breaking down, your family's health is suffering.

442 people reached

Like · Comment · Share · 11 3

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**Step by Step**
February 29

As the process of recovery continues there are still many things that will challenge our capacity to move forward, that whole feeling of one step forward three steps back will take awhile to accept and master.
Experiencing such an event means that it usually takes time to heal and move towards recovery.
During disasters or any type of traumatic event we each grieve differently some vent to others openly while others tend to become reclusive.
Many feelings arise from anger to guilt, during this time it's important to remember that you are not alone and there are many services out there that are here to help make the transition of recovery less challenging.
Communication and identifying your needs is key to helping with the process.
Time for yourself and family by getting away from everyday living will help maintain the family bond.
Getting back into the community connecting with social groups and support networks will also be helpful.

235 people reached

Like · Comment · Share · 7 1
Step by Step completes their bushfire support work- August 29th

As people continue their journey towards reshaping their future after the bushfires, different services and agencies begin the process of phasing out or transitioning their recovery work to other services.

Gateway Family Services was tasked (in November 2013) by the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services with setting up and managing Step by Step Bushfire Support Service. Since the establishment of Step by Step, we have reached out and provided assistance and support to over 320 households impacted by the October 2013 bushfires.

The Step by Step team has been privileged to walk alongside people as they have taken the first steps on their pathway to rebuilding and renewal. During this time the team have been reminded daily of the courage, fortitude and resilience that is inherent within us all and within the Blue Mountains community. Step by Step is moving towards completion of our work as part of the larger, ongoing bushfire recovery response.

Step by Step's last day of delivering support services to bushfire affected households will be Friday August 28. Blue Mountains City Council will continue to offer support and provide up to date information to bushfire affected residents via their website and regular E-newsletters. The friendly staff at Council can also link you to local services and organisations that can provide you with financial, practical and emotional assistance. Please call Council staff on 4733 6000. You can find out more about the services that Gateway Family Services provides by going to Gateway’s website www.gatewayfamilyservices.org.au or calling Gateway on 4733 5963.

Step by Step would like to send our deep appreciation and gratitude to all of the amazing people we have connected with over the past 10 months. Your courage in the face of great adversity has served as a continual inspiration and we have learned much from you. Step by Step also extends our sincere thanks and respect to all of the organisations and services that we have worked alongside as part of the bushfire recovery response. In particular we would like to thank Platform Youth Services, Warmalee, Springwood and Blackheath Neighbourhood Centres, Blue Mountains City Council Recovery Team, Mountian Youth Services Team (MYST), Catholic Care Social Services, Red Cross, the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, Rotary, The Lions Club, Habitat, Janice Freeston (Springwood Uniting Church), Uniting Church Disaster Relief Committee, and the members of the Wellbeing Recovery Sub-Committee/Working Party for your ongoing support, collaboration and wisdom. We wish everyone all the best for the journey ahead.
Step by Step found that simple picture messages sparked numerous responses from people.
The Step by Step team would like to thank our manager Anne.

The professional and personal journey encountered by us all at Step by Step was made possible with the support and leadership of our manager Anne Crestani. Anne has been an inspiration to us all; an example of dedication, perseverance and above all, a belief in the rights and strength of those affected by the bushfires. We have been very privileged to have Anne’s direction and support so that we could walk alongside the journey of so many in the Blue Mountains.

Thanks Anne!
Services Contact Flyers/Cards
Services Contact Card designed for Blue Mountains City Council Recovery Team and Council’s front-desk staff.

Quick Contact Services List For Blue Mountains

Food Relief
- Yaroomba Neighbourhood Centre: 4781 1117
- Lithgow Neighbourhood Centre: 6352 2077
- Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre: 4787 7770
- Blue Mountains Family Support: 4722 1659
- Gateway Family Services Blaxland: 4739 5965
- Salvation Army: 1300 551 000
- Salvation Army bushfire recovery: 4715 7961
- St Vincent De Paul: 1358 12

Financial Assistance (bills/loans)
- Financial Planning (pro-bono): 1300 632 200
- Lions Club - Stan Planko: 0415 475 897
- Rotary Club - Laurie Watson: 0415 184 312
- Rebuilding Recovery Service: 1300 697 737
- Workcover: 1300 133 608
- Blue Mountains City Council (Disaster): 4713 5000
- Elizabeth Swash Legal: 0410 383 479
- Legal Aid (bushfire related): 9219 5737
- NSW Ombudsman: 1300 451 524

Rebuilding/Legal issues
- Community Health Centre: 1300 222 406
- Relationships Australia: 4728 4800
- Blue Mountains Women’s Health Co-op: 4722 3133
- Blue Mountains Family Support: 4739 2023
- Gateway Family Services: 4739 5963
- Life Line 13 11 14: 1800 551 800
- Domestic Violence Hotline: 1800 737 737
- Local GP: ATAPS scheme
- Department of Immigration: 131 361
- Births Deaths & Marriages: 13 77 88
- Passport Services: 131 332
- Centrelink: 136 330, Medicare: 1800 102 222
- Insurance Council of Australia: 9235 5100
- Wentworth Community Housing: 4777 8000

Counselling/Family Support
- Human Rights Commission: 1300 363 642
- Christian Care: 1300 363 642
- Family Resource Centre: 1300 363 642
- Mental Health Services: 1300 266 464
- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467
- Mental Health Refuge: 1300 266 464
- Counselling Link: 1300 659 467
- Domestic Violence Support: 1300 659 467

Other Support
- Salvation Army: 4721 7964 / 0407687626
- St Vincent De Paul: 13 18 12 / 1800 606 724
- Wulgun Neighbourhood Centre: 4754 4050
- Blue Mountains Family Support: 4722 1555
- Gateway Family Services (Lower - Mid-Mt): 4739 5963
- Money Smart: 1300 180 360
- Financial Planning (pro-bono): 1300 626 193
- Salvation Army bushfire recovery: 4715 7964
- Lions Club - Stan Planko: 0415 475 897
- Rotary Club - Laurie Watson: 0415 284 332

Goods & Services
- Brumbies Access: 1300 551 000
- Salvation Army: 1300 551 000
- Blue Mountains Family Support: 4722 1555
- Gateway Family Services (Lower - Mid-Mt): 4739 5963
- Money Smart: 1300 180 360
- Financial Planning (pro-bono): 1300 626 193
- Salvation Army bushfire recovery: 4715 7964
- Lions Club - Stan Planko: 0415 475 897
- Rotary Club - Laurie Watson: 0415 284 332

Building & Rebuilding
- Salvos Recovery: 1300 697 737
- Dept of Fair Trading: 13 12 20
- Legal Aid: 4722 3077 (Penrith)
- Legal Aid Bushfire related: 9219 5273

Lower Mountains Wellbeing Services
- Counselling Link: 1300 659 467
- Mental Health Support: 1300 659 467
- Family Planning: 1300 659 467
- Domestic Violence Support: 1300 659 467

Counselling/Family Support
- Local GP: ATAPS scheme
- Community Health Centre: 1300 222 406
- Gateway Family Services: 4739 5963
- Relationships Australia: 4728 4800
- Blue Mountains Family Support: 4739 2023
- Salvation Army: 4721 7964
- Life Line 13 11 14: 1800 551 800
- Headspace Penrith: 1800 656 438
- Domestic Violence Hotline: 1800 737 737
- Counselling Link: 1300 659 467
- Habitat for Humanity (small projects): 9915 7023

Gardening
- Legal Aid: 1300 688 529
- Legal Aid: 4732 3077 (Penrith)
- Legal Aid Bushfire related: 9219 5273
- Insurance Council of Australia: 1800 734 621

Step by Step...
Blue Mountains Bushfire Support Service
Phone 0474 229 845
stepbystep@gatewayfamilyservices.org.au
facebook.com/stepbystep.bmbfs
HANDY SERVICE CONTACTS CARD

This card was posted and emailed out to all residents along with the Step by Step ‘hope-scale’ (see attachments – Helpful Recovery tips).

## Blue Mountains Wellbeing Services

**For any ongoing information contact Blue Mountains City Council 4723 500**

### Lower Mountains

**Food Relief Goods & Services**
- Warrinlee NC – 4754 4590
- Springwood NC – 4761 5625
- Blue Mts Family Support – 4762 1555
- Gateway Family Services – 4759 5963

**Financial Assistance (bills/loans)**
- Warrinlee NC – 4754 4590
- Springwood NC – 4761 5625
- Blue Mts Family Support – 4762 1555
- Gateway Family Services – 4759 5963
- MoneySmart – 1300 989 630
- Financial Planning – 1300 628 783
- Salvation Army Recovery – 4751 7904
- Blue Mts NILS (Loans) – 1300 509 994

### Upper Mountains

**Food Relief Goods & Services**
- Katoomba NC – 4782 1117
- Lithgow NC – 6962 2007
- Blackheath NC – 4787 7770
- Blue Mts Family Support – 4762 1555
- Gateway Family Services – 4759 5963

**Financial Assistance (bills/loans)**
- Salvation Army Recovery – 4751 7904
- Financial Planning – 4782 1117
- Blue Mts Family Support – 4762 1555
- Gateway Family Services – 4759 5963

**Rebuilding/Legal issues**
- Elizabeth Bruzzi Legal Ctr Katoomba – 4782 4155

### General Enquiries

**Goods & Services**
- Salvation Army – 4751 7904
- Gateway Family Services – 4759 5963
- Neighbourhood Centres – 4751 7904
- Rebuilding Recovery – 1300 909 777
- Legal Aid – 1300 655 333
- Blue Mountains Council – 4723 5000
- YOUTH – 133 299
- NSW Emergency – 1300 655 333

**Building & Rebuilding**
- Legal Aid Enquiries – 1300 655 333
- Council of Social Service – 1300 737 322

**Financial Assistance (bills/loans)**
- Blue Mts Family Support – 4762 1555
- Gateway Family Services – 4759 5963
- MoneySmart – 1300 989 630
- Financial Planning – 1300 628 783

**Counselling/Family Support**
- Local GP for ATIS schemes
- Anglicare Free Counselling – 1300 655 728
- Anglicare Counselling – 1300 655 728
- Local GP (ATIS) schemes
- CatholicCare – 9933 0022
- Gateway Family Services – 4750 5000

**Counselling/Family Support**
- Blue Mts Women’s Health Centre – 4782 5225
- Blue Mts Family Support – 4762 1555
- Anglicare Counselling – 1300 655 728
- Local GP (ATIS) schemes
- CatholicCare – 9933 0022
- Gateway Family Services – 4759 5963

**other support**
- Department of Immigration – 131 883
- Homeless Services – 137 7788
- 1800 Homeless – 132 352
- Carerslink – 1300 240
- Healthwise – 532 088
- Financial Housing – 4777 6000
Helpful recovery tips

Pocket size Helpful Tips Card

Helpful tips for recovery

It’s important to keep in mind that events such as bushfire disasters take time to process and recover from, here are some helpful tips that may reduce stress and help with you/your family’s recovery.

1. **Keep communicating**—talk about what is happening, try to share what you are feeling with others.

2. **Schedule time for enjoyment**. Regular family fun nights, sharing a cuppa with a friend or date nights with your partner can often relieve stress.

3. **Don’t let serious issues develop**, be active—tackle problems, seek help & information when needed.

4. **Reflect** on you/your family’s experience, how you have grown and things that have changed for better or worse.

5. **Maintain your physical wellbeing**—eat well, sleep well, be active every day (walking, gardening etc).

6. **Get back into everyday activities** work, school, volunteering. Stay connected to your social group & activities – (sports, arts and crafts, clubs).

7. **Know when to seek help** – when things seem stuck, relationships are breaking down, you/your family’s health is suffering.
Helpful Tips for Recovery
It’s important to keep in mind that events such as natural disasters take time to process and recover from, here are some helpful tips that may reduce stress and help with you/your family’s recovery.
1. Keep communicating—talk about what is happening, try to share what you are feeling with others.
2. Schedule time for enjoyment. Regular family fun nights, sharing a cuppa with a friend or date nights with your partner can often provide respite from stress.
3. Don’t let serious issues develop, be active—tackle problems early on, seek help & information when needed.
4. Reflect on your family’s experience, how you have grown and things that have changed for better or worse.
5. Maintain your physical wellbeing—eat well, sleep well, be active every day (walking, gardening etc).
6. Get back into everyday activities work, study, volunteering. Stay connected to your social group & activities – (sports, arts and crafts, clubs).
7. Know when to seek help – when things seem stuck, relationships are stressed, your family’s health is suffering (physical/emotional/psychological).

Helpful Tips for Parents
Families and relationships are often under extra pressure after a disaster event. While parents take on the responsibility of finances and rebuilding, children and teenagers have pressures of school and changes at home. Here are some helpful tips to reduce family stress.
1. Listen—encourage your children to share their experiences and feelings with you. Listen with understanding, try to see things from your child’s point of view.
2. Encourage independence – support children to face and work through problems, support their resilience and reassure them when they are anxious, frustrated, sad, angry, confused.
3. Encourage children to face fears – sometimes children try to avoid people & places that remind them of the disaster event. Help them to cope by listening to their fears and helping them to remember how they have successfully managed their fears in the past.
4. Re-establish routines—help your child to stay connected to their usual social/recreational groups & activities.
5. Find a way to manage your own worries & stresses looking after your own needs is as important as taking care of your children’s needs. Schedule regular “self-care” times every day or every week.
6. Work on building family resilience – use encouraging statements like “you can do it”. Focus on what works for your family. Celebrate small victories, and steps forward. Reflect on what you do well as a family (i.e., “we make sure we spend regular time together”).
7. Be Prepared – Review your family’s preparedness for natural disasters and put in place plans that your family can enact if needed. Go to www.fires.nsw.gov.au or www.redcross.org.au

Building Resilience
The ability to recover and move forward from challenging life events is called Resilience. Coming to terms with the significant changes in life is a journey of many ups and downs. Here are some tips that can help make the journey easier.
1. Deter major life decisions for at least 6 months if possible—give yourself time to acknowledge what has been lost so that you can begin to think about the future.
2. Keep a journal and express your thoughts—Journals can be a good resource for healing as you are able to reflect on your experiences and see how far you have come.
3. Develop your own rituals—find a quiet place to think, listen to music, get that massage you have been putting off or go for a jog to release built up tension and stress.
4. Allow people to help you—asking for or accepting help can sometimes feel challenging—try to work through what is getting in the way of you being able to reach out (i.e. pride, feelings of guilt, feeling embarrassed etc).

HELPFUL WEBSITES
Disaster Recovery & Preparedness www.redcross.org.au
www.bluemountainsbushfirerecovery.com
recovery@bmcc.nsw.gov.au 4723 5624
Counselling & Support (individual/relationships) www.beyondblue.org.au
www.youthbeyondblue.org.au
www.tidyhelp.com.au
www.mensline.org.au
The **Hope Scale** was a Solution Focused activity that invited residents to reflect on the strengths and resources they utilised that would help them to take their first (and next) steps towards recovery.

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**Step by Step towards... HOPE**

THEN...On a scale of 0 to 10, (where 0 is the least hopeful, and 10 is the most hopeful), how hopeful would you say you were in the days and weeks after the October 2013 bushfires?

Take some time to think about where you have placed yourself on the hope scale. Think back to what was happening at that time that helped you to get to where you were on the hope scale (who and what helped)? Ask yourself...how did I get to this level of hope (i.e. "how come I was at a 2 on the hope scale, not a 1 or 0")?

NOW...Where are you today on the hope scale?

Take some time to think about where your level of hope is today. Has it changed? How has your level of hope come to be at this number? What is happening now that has got you to this level of hope?

Ask...where would you like your level of hope to be tomorrow—next week—next year? How will you get there? Who and what will help you to move up the Hope scale—even if just a little bit?

How has it been for you to think about hope? If you have found this simple (but powerful) activity helpful...why not **"pay it forward"**. **Share it with family, friends, neighbours.** Read it together, chat about it over a cuppa or a meal, e/mail it to someone you know who would like to feel just a little bit more hopeful.
This activity was an adaptation of a specific technique used in Solution Focused Brief Therapy (the “Miracle Question”) to invite residents to reflect on their preferred future in relation to this specific milestone period.

Step by Step towards...

Anniversaries

As most people will be well aware, the anniversary of the October 2013 bushfires is approaching.

You may find yourself thinking about what you might be doing around that time, to remember, commemorate (or even forget!) about the bushfires.

When deciding what is best for you and your family you might like to consider;

Once the anniversary has passed, how will we know that what we did was helpful?

What will be happening? What will I/we be thinking?

How will I/we be feeling?

For example: “I (“we”) will know that it was helpful because I will take some time out to do something I enjoy so I will be feeling relaxed” or “I (“we”) will know it’s been helpful because I will spend time with people I care about and who will listen to me if I need to talk” Remember...there are no right or wrong answers and everyone will have different ideas about how they want to approach the anniversary. If you have children, give them opportunities to contribute their ideas and suggestions.

If you or members of your family would like to discuss any issues arising from the Bushfires and/or the upcoming anniversary please contact one of the services listed below: (ATAPS - Local GP, Relationships Australia- 4728 4800, Catholic Care- 9933 0222, Anglicare Counselling: 1300 651 728, LIFELINE 13 11 14).
Step by Step Client Thank You Card

Helpful Tips
As time moves on it’s important to keep in mind that events such as bushfires, disasters take time to process and recover from.

1. **Communication is key** talk about what is happening, try to share what you are feeling with others.
2. **Schedule time for enjoyment.** Regular family fun nights, sharing a cuppa with a friend or date nights with your partner.
3. **Don’t let serious issues develop.** Tackle problems, seek help & information when needed.
4. **Reflect on you, your family’s experience, how you have grown and how have things changed. Use the hope scale activity.**
5. **Maintain your physical wellbeing.** Eat well, sleep well, be active every day (walking, gardening etc).
6. **Get back into everyday activities.** Stay connected to your social group & activities.
7. **Know when to seek help -** when things seem stuck, relationships are breaking down, you, your family’s health is suffering.

For more tips visit the after emergency website scroll down for Robert Gordon podcasts.

Dear Resident,
The Step by Step team would like to offer our appreciation to you and your family for allowing us to come into your lives at such a difficult time, for welcoming us into your homes and for sharing your experiences.

For future information please contact the Blue Mountains City Council on 4738 3900. Wishing you and your family the very best in the future.

Yours Sincerely,
The Step by Step Team


The Recovery Team are here to help you

thank you
Closure letters were sent out to residents, local services, schools, preschools and agencies via post and Email.
Step by Step Closure Flyer notification flyers were also sent out with the letters via post and email. In addition, posters were adapted from this flyer for display in public libraries across the Blue Mountains.
Step by Step Bushfire Support Service
Service User Evaluation

Dear Step by Step Client,

A small research team will be carrying out a study over the next few months to find out whether Step by Step was helpful for individuals and families in their recovery journey after the bushfires in October. The Research Team is from the University of Newcastle. The researchers will be conducting interviews over the telephone of some of the clients who have used our service. They will also be interviewing some workers and other service providers for their perspectives. It is hoped that the information that is collected will help develop support services like Step by Step after other disasters in NSW in the future. All interviews will be confidential and no names will be used in writing up the study.

You may therefore be contacted by mail inviting you to participate in the study. The researchers will not have access to your names and addresses - these can only be provided to the researchers by the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services, which has funded Step by Step. The invitation letter will spell out exactly what is entailed and it will be your decision as to whether you want to be involved. We at Step by Step will not have any access to the interview data.

Step by Step would encourage you to participate in the research as we consider that your feedback and input will be invaluable in helping to set up future effective disaster recovery services in other parts of NSW.

Thank you!

Anne Chewton
Manager – Step by Step
Phone: 0417 298 832
Email: annec@gatewayfamilyservices.org.au

Gateway Family Services
NSW Ministry for Police & Emergency Services