

ESF IMPACT

newsletter

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MANAGING THE HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF DISASTERS



Kjell Brataas' book, [*Managing the Human Dimension of Disasters, caring for the bereaved, survivors and first responders*](#) includes stories that have not previously been widely shared about how people deal with the aftermath of disasters. Kjell joined ESF for an Insight conversation and explained how, after speaking with people worldwide about their involvement in disasters, he came to a very broad definition of first responders - all of whom need to be considered in the aftermath. He stressed that it is so important to have a long-term vision when thinking of supporting people after a disaster because issues often don't surface for many years and how leaders respond in times of crisis can have such an impact on all involved saying they must get amongst those affected immediately.

Shannon Hood drew on his experience as a counsellor deployed with SA fire crews on Black Saturday to share ideas for how organisations could better support people involved in disasters. He suggested involving family in pre incident training and introducing pre-deployment wellbeing checks.

Dr Graham Dwyer from Swinburne University spoke about [a research study](#) he recently did with Prof Leanne Cutcher from University of Sydney in partnership with CFA to understand how emergency management organisations - primarily firefighters - commemorate and remember major events. What they found is that firefighters don't want to be seen as heroes, because calling them heroes overstates their ability

to control fires and downplays the long-term psychological impacts of fighting fires. He stressed the complexity and importance of broad consultation in establishing any sort of memorial so that different memories and perspectives can be incorporated. The Black Saturday memorial at Jindivick in the Baw Baw Shire was provided as an example of where this was well done. The memorial comprises brightly painted bollards, a mosaic, wooden seating, and a post sculpture with a memorial plaque. It is designed as a pause place for quiet reflection beside a walking track.

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[A recording of the conversation with Kjell, Shannon and Graham is available here.](#)

REACTIONS

Fascinating speakers providing real insights. The delayed emotional response to disasters, often not seen for the first year but over subsequent years, shows that support needs to be available for years after a disaster. Speakers covered the risk of hindsight in recovery, the role of the media and journalists, the importance of memorials and some of the great examples in other countries. So much of interest to find out more about.

Tanja Surwald
Emergency Management Victoria

This was another great opportunity to hear from some very well credentialled speakers addressing the issues of post event trauma on our communities, and importantly on our emergency service/management people. Kjell's experiences resonate with those in Australia particularly in the context of community engagement and communication, Shannon's experiences, particularly from the 2009 bushfire event were illuminating, and the findings from Graham Dwyer's research about the place of memory, memorials and the impacts of time was very informative.

Another great session, thank you.
Tony Pearce
Inspector General for Emergency Management

I thoroughly enjoyed the points made by all three speakers especially in relation to engaging with the community about developing memorials. The idea of pre deployment wellbeing checks resonated through my experience and it should be the way of the future and we must train those in charge to do that sort of check.

Lex de Man
CEO Victoria Police Legacy and CFA
Volunteer with 47 years' experience