

# Management of Donated Goods Following a Disaster



Australian Government  
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Government  
of South Australia





# Management of Donated Goods Following a Disaster

**Project funded by Emergency Management Capability  
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## **Disclaimer**

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## Table of Contents

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<b>1</b>	<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
	2.1 Issue .....	6
	2.2 Outline of Project .....	6
	2.3 Funding .....	7
<b>3</b>	<b>Project Activities .....</b>	<b>8</b>
	3.1 Working Group.....	8
	3.2 Reference Group and Consultations .....	8
	3.3 Research/Literature Review .....	8
	3.4 Focus Groups .....	9
<b>4</b>	<b>Project Findings .....</b>	<b>10</b>
	4.1 Excessive, Unneeded and Unusable Goods .....	10
	4.2 New Versus Used Donated Goods .....	12
	4.3 Administration, Storage, Sorting and Distribution of Goods.....	13
	4.4 The Impact on Disaster Affected People and Communities .....	15
	4.5 The Donors.....	20
	4.6 Communication and the Role of the Media.....	25
<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>29</b>
	Appendix 1: Working Group .....	33
	Appendix 2: Reference Group .....	34
	Appendix 3: Australian Government Disaster Recovery Committee, Not-For-Profit Advisory Group .....	35
	Appendix 4: Summary of Issues from Stakeholders .....	36
	Appendix 5: Summary of Issues from Recipients.....	39
	Appendix 6: Literature and Research.....	55

# 1 Executive Summary

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## Introduction

The effect of unsolicited donated goods following a disaster has been of concern to recovery authorities for a long time. As early as 1957 it was discussed in detail by Fritz and Mathewson who provided a comprehensive look at what they termed 'convergence' of donated goods or 'unsolicited donations'.

"The spontaneous generosity and outpourings of unsolicited aid to disaster stricken populations can be documented in every peacetime disaster. The value of such aid in facilitating both material and psychological recuperation cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless this spontaneous generosity often has negative consequences which are unanticipated by both the donors and the recipient population."<sup>1</sup>

Despite its relatively early recognition most countries today still report the problems occasioned by this influx of what are often unwanted and useless goods after disasters. Australia suffers from the same issues and the 2009 bushfires in Victoria illustrate this well.

The Victorian Bushfires resulted in the donation of in excess of 40,000 pallets of goods from across Australia that took up more than 50,000 square metres of storage space. The costs for managing these donations i.e. 3 central warehouses, 5 regional distribution points, approximately 35 paid staff, material handling equipment and transport costs to distribute the material aid, has amounted to over eight million dollars. In addition volunteer numbers reached 1500 during the first three months provided through over 40 store fronts. Resources in the fire affected areas immediately after the event were severely stretched as a result of material aid arriving without warning and without adequate resources to sort, store, handle and distribute<sup>2</sup>.

Experience from this and other disasters indicates that a large proportion of what was donated may be either unwanted or unusable and eventually have to be disposed of, causing further expenditure and possible outrage from the public<sup>3</sup>.

## Outline of Project

In order to investigate the phenomenon of unsolicited donations a national project was undertaken by the State Recovery Office, Department for Families and Communities, South Australia in 2009/2010. The project explored:

- Issues in relation to unsolicited goods
- Issues in relation to management of these goods if they are donated
- Issues in relation to education of the public and the media
- Issues in relation to corporate donations.
- Understanding the views and attitudes of recipients of donated goods.

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<sup>1</sup> "Convergence Behaviour in Disasters – A Problem in social control" Charles E Fritz and J H Mathewson. 1957

<sup>2</sup> Information from a spokesperson at VBRRA and from the Salvation Army

<sup>3</sup> Herald Sun 18/12/2009



This report details the findings from the project and provides recommendations for the improved management of donated goods in the future.

## **Funding**

This project has been possible thanks to the Emergency Management Capability Development Branch of the Attorney General's Department as a "Natural Disaster Resilience Project", under the Australian Emergency Management Committee's National Projects 2009-2010 grant program.

## **Project Activities**

A Working Group that consisted of representatives from both the Government and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) was established. The members of the Working Group and meeting dates are listed in Appendix 1.

Consultations have also occurred with a reference group, largely consisting of members of the Disaster Recovery Sub Committee of the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC), and with a range of other people and organisations all of whom have interest in the topic.

Focus Groups were held with three different groups of disaster affected people who were recipients of donated goods. These are:

Canberra (ACT) 2003 Bushfire survivors

Eyre Peninsula (SA) 2005 Bushfire survivors

Emerald (Queensland) 2008 Flood survivors

A research and literature review has been completed and a summary of findings included in the appendices.

## **Summary of Findings**

The management of unsolicited donated goods creates major problems after a disaster. A large proportion of what is donated is unusable but recovery managers are still required to put significant efforts into administration of these goods i.e. unpacking, sorting, storing and distribution. Disposal at the end of the recovery program also requires major effort. Administration of unsolicited donated goods diverts resources away from supporting disaster affected people.

Donation of unsolicited goods takes on a life of its own and public figures such as politicians and community leaders, disaster spokespersons, recovery staff and volunteers all find it very difficult to say 'no'. Some of the effort expended is about finding ways to keep the donors happy and has very little to do with the needs of the recipients. Recipients expressed strong concerns and commented that they felt the pressure to be grateful for even very sub-standard goods. Second hand clothing is very rarely seen as a useful donation but these items are usually the bulk of what is donated.

A successful recovery process identifies the needs of the disaster affected people and communities as early as possible after the disaster. Where existing arrangements are unable to meet the identified needs a range of options need to be explored. It may be possible to create lists of likely requirements and negotiate with corporate donors to assist in provision of these goods, by prior arrangements. Another option may be through targeted appeals.

There is an opportunity for the media to play a positive role by delivering appropriate donated goods messages. The media currently plays a big role in encouraging unsolicited donations and sets up 'heroes' as role models. These 'heroes' are seen as rescuers of the those affected by the disaster, and they spontaneously go around collecting donations so they can drive them or have them delivered to the disaster sites. The culture that this seems to encourage is that if you have lost everything you will be happy with anything. This is insulting and degrading to recipients as it implies that they have no choices in the matter. It is the opposite of what recovery experts say is required for survivors, who need to be assisted by the recovery efforts to become strong and resilient.

The current system needs to change in order to undertake best practice activities in recovery and get individuals and communities back onto their own feet in the least possible time.

## **Recommendations**

- Recommendation 1** That National Guidelines be developed which will provide all States and Territories with best practice methods of managing donated goods.
- Recommendation 2** That the proposed National Guidelines inform development of state and territory and regional emergency management plans.
- Recommendation 3** That the Guidelines are included in the National Recovery Manual and embedded in Emergency Management training packages.
- Recommendation 4** That philosophical support for the need to fund management of donated goods is given by each State and Territory Government. Discretion may be applied in circumstances whereby an appeal is launched independent of government advice and support.
- Recommendation 5** That a communication strategy be developed that informs politicians, community leaders media, emergency management networks, NGOs and the general public about donated goods. This communication strategy should be incorporated into state and territory emergency management plans.
- Recommendation 6** That recovery managers should regularly and formally access feedback from recipients of donated goods so that their opinions, needs and wishes are considered in any future planning.
- Recommendation 7** That a strategy be developed to encourage corporate donors to work in partnership with governments and NGOs and to incorporate disaster needs in their Corporate Social Responsibility Policies.

## 2 Introduction

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### 2.1 Issue

The effect of unsolicited donated goods following a disaster has been of concern to recovery authorities for a considerable length of time. As early as 1957 it was discussed in detail by Fritz and Mathewson who provided a comprehensive look at what they termed ‘convergence’ of donated goods or ‘unsolicited donations’.

“The spontaneous generosity and outpourings of unsolicited aid to disaster stricken populations can be documented in every peacetime disaster. The value of such aid in facilitating both material and psychological recuperation cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless this spontaneous generosity often has negative consequences which are unanticipated by both the donors and the recipient population.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite its relatively early recognition most countries today still report the problems occasioned by this influx of what are often unwanted and useless goods after disasters.

Australia suffers from the same issues and the Victorian Bushfires resulted in the donation of in excess of 40,000 pallets of goods from across Australia that took up more than 50,000 square metres of storage space. The costs for managing these donations i.e. 3 central warehouses, 5 regional distribution points, approximately 35 paid staff, material handling equipment and transport costs to distribute the material aid, has amounted to over eight million dollars. In addition volunteer numbers reached 1500 during the first three months provided through over 40 store fronts. Resources in the fire affected areas immediately after the event were severely stretched as a result of material aid arriving without warning and without adequate resources to sort, store, handle and distribute<sup>5</sup>.

Experience from other disasters indicates that a large proportion of what was donated may eventually have to be disposed of, causing further expenditure and potential outrage from the public<sup>6</sup>.

### 2.2 Outline of Project

In order to investigate the phenomenon of unsolicited donations a national project was undertaken in 2009/2010 by the State Recovery Office in the Department for Families and Communities. The project explored:

- Issues in relation to unsolicited goods
- Issues in relation to management of these goods if they are donated
- Issues in relation to education of the public and the media
- Issues in relation to corporate donations
- Understanding the views and attitudes of recipients of donated goods

This report details the findings from the project and provides recommendations for the better management of donated goods in the future.

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<sup>4</sup> “Convergence Behaviour in Disasters – A Problem in social control” Charles E Fritz and J H Mathewson.1957

<sup>5</sup> Information from a spokesperson at VBRRA and from the Salvation Army

<sup>6</sup> Herald Sun 18/12/2009



## 2.3 Funding

This project has been possible thanks to the Emergency Management Capability Development Branch of the Attorney General's Department as a "Natural Disaster Resilience Project", under the Australian Emergency Management Committee's National Projects 2009-2010 grant program.

## 3 Project Activities

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### 3.1 Working Group

A Working Group that consisted of representatives from Government and NGOs was established. The members of the Working Group are listed in Appendix 1. This Group assisted with setting the parameters of the investigation and offered suggestions about areas for exploration and possible solutions to the issues. Members of the Group have been involved in crafting the final paper and in devising the recommendations.

### 3.2 Reference Group and Consultations

A Reference Group was also established, consisting of members of CDSMAC Disaster Recovery Sub-Committee and other individuals. The members of the reference group are listed in Appendix 2.

Other Consultations have occurred with:

- The Disaster Recovery Sub-Committee to identify some possible avenues of research
- The Australian Government Disaster Recovery Not-For-Profit Advisory Group (AGDRC NFPAG) (see Appendix 3)
- The South Australian State Recovery Committee
- Business SA
- The Australian Chamber of Commerce
- The Victorian Employer Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Philanthropy Australia
- The Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority
- Rotary Club of Walkerville, South Australia
- Central Highlands Regional Council, Emerald QLD

### 3.3 Research/Literature Review

A summary paper of the literature and research that was accessed during this investigation has been prepared. It is apparent that there has been little research done on this particular topic and most references are anecdotal. The similarities of experiences from a number of countries and in most of the papers, leads to the conclusion, that unsolicited donated goods create serious operational and policy problems for any jurisdiction. The paper is detailed in Appendix 6.

## 3.4 Focus Groups

Given that the major purpose of donated goods is to provide assistance to those affected by disasters it was considered essential that recipients of these goods had the opportunity to provide comment. The writer was unable to access any research that had previously been undertaken with recipients. It was agreed that information would be gathered by running Focus Groups with willing recipients. The following groups were run.

### 2003 Canberra Bushfires Survivors

On 18<sup>th</sup> January 2003, the Australian Capital Territory experienced an unprecedented fire disaster, causing the deaths of four people, hundreds of injuries, the loss of 488 homes and over 90 community, educational, commercial and farm buildings. Many other homes and businesses were damaged and there was widespread destruction of the local environment. The total financial cost of the fires was estimated at about \$350m. The cost to the individuals affected was immeasurable.

On 28<sup>th</sup> January 2010, a group of seven disaster affected people took part in a focus group to discuss their experiences of the material assistance offered to them after the fires.

### 2005 Eyre Peninsula (South Australia) Bushfire Survivors

Lower Eyre Peninsula was devastated by a bushfire on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2005. 9 lives were lost, over 100 homes were destroyed or severely damaged, 324 farms received extensive damage and 139 vehicles were destroyed. Additionally 46,500 animals (mostly sheep), died or had to be destroyed. Damage was estimated to be in excess of \$100m.

On 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009 a group of seven disaster-affected people agreed to take part in a focus group to discuss their experiences of the material assistance offered to them after the fires.

### 2008 Emerald (Queensland) Floods Survivors

In the second week of January 2008, the largest rainfall event recorded in the hundred and six year history of the former Emerald Shire occurred causing widespread major flooding and inundation. Many towns and rural communities were severely affected, with major losses and disruption to communities, industry and businesses.

During the flood 3,160 residents were pre-registered for evacuation. Some were accommodated with friends, relatives, neighbours or at one of the three evacuation shelters. 166 Houses, 73 units and 10 uncompleted buildings had serious damage plus an additional 80 homes in the Emerald township received water damage. Mines in the area also had their operations disrupted, ranging from staff unable to get to work, to severe inundation. Dozens of properties in the Gemfields area were affected.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> February 2010, a group of 4 disaster-affected people agreed to take part in a focus group to discuss their experiences of the material assistance offered to them.

**The reports from each of these focus groups can be found in Appendix 5.**

## 4 Project Findings

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### 4.1 Excessive, Unneeded and Unusable Goods

Almost every disaster tells the same story. What most organisers report is that within days of the disaster (sometimes within 24 hours) container loads of goods start to arrive. These are rarely sorted and organised ready for distribution. Good quality and poor quality are jumbled together.



Donations, Noble Park and Clayton (Victorian Bushfires) photo courtesy of VBRRA

Right and left shoes may arrive in separate trucks, new and old are mixed together, furniture and clothing are usually muddled. The problem can reach overwhelming proportions. The administrative costs associated with managing these goods are immense and the effort required to organise and distribute the goods consumes many staff and volunteers.

“15 trucks arrived yesterday, following 25 that arrived on Friday. Each one was packed directly to the floors, without pallets, meaning that forklifts could not be used. Every bag and box had to be unloaded by hand...”<sup>7</sup> (after the 9/11 attacks).

“On Saturday evening (15 January) word was received that seven forty-foot containers were arriving the following morning from the Channel (xxx) appeal, Adelaide. This news presented huge logistical concerns for receiving the goods – let alone the storage, sorting and distributions of these goods.”<sup>8</sup> (Eyre Peninsula Bush Fires)

Organisers seem to be consistently unprepared for the massive quantities of goods that arrive. This may be due to lack of previous experience in managing donations in a disaster (as disasters do not occur everyday, staff turnover reduces the number of people with experience) or purely because people just do not believe it is going to happen again, even when they have previously experienced it. Additionally most emergency managers are focused on management of the needs of the survivors rather than on how to manage the huge influx of goods.

There are often political imperatives for accepting rather than refusing the goods donated by the general public. Most organisations and many politicians have concerns about offending the donating public as they feel the majority of the donations are motivated by compassion.

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<sup>7</sup> After the Attacks: Donations; Donated Goods Deluge the City and Sit Unused” by Jim Dwyer 16/9/2001

<sup>8</sup> 2005 Eyre Peninsula Bush Fire “The Salvation Army Response and Recovery – An Evaluation” Pg 45

New Zealand has developed guidelines to manage unsolicited household goods. The guidelines suggest a 70/30 rule which means that they consider 70% of the goods to be 'junk', 15% usable immediately and 15% usable at some time in the future. "Unwanted and unasked for 'gifts' are often a burden that drags down recovery efforts"<sup>9</sup>.

A local charity in South Australia reported recently in the media that "eighty per cent of what is donated goes to landfill because it is not salvageable"<sup>10</sup>. The article referred to donations made generally to the charity but accurately reflects what is donated by the public in used clothing and household goods after disasters.

The biggest offender is used and soiled clothing. Most people seem to agree that there is only a limited amount of used clothing that is worth having; usually a fraction of what is actually received. Much of what is received is in very poor condition and really only usable as cleaning rags. Organisers also report that many items that are donated are completely inappropriate for the circumstances, for example winter coats sent to tropical areas.

The final report by the Salvation Army, following the Eyre Peninsula Bushfires in 2005 stated "It was exasperating for the deployed personnel and volunteers to continually unload household goods in extremely poor condition, clothing suitable only as rags, and other goods that were inappropriate (too many bicycles and too many baby prams/strollers and all in poor condition) when they were acutely aware of the desperate need of victims who had literally lost everything"<sup>11</sup>.

At closing down of recovery activities the recovery managers are faced with a further issue of how to dispose of the unusable and unwanted leftovers. The Salvation Army after the Port Lincoln fires, sent items to local charity depots, sent two semi trailers full of clothing for rags to a rag dealer, recycled aluminium and scrap metal at the local dump, and sent two semi trailers and one forty foot container of mixed clothing to Adelaide for use in the 'Family Stores'. Even after that there were still substantial quantities of clothing and household goods that needed to be disposed of<sup>12</sup>.

From the perspective of the operational relief organisers and those affected by the event the impact of these donations on the recipients are rarely of much value to the recovery process. One recipient commented:

"I did feel overwhelmed by the amount people were giving us (and often strongly did not want) but felt we should always accept and be grateful because we were grateful for their generosity and caring, if not the goods...I felt also that we were often expected to be grateful and even "lucky" as a couple of people said out of misguided kindness.

The generosity of people was hugely important in our recovery but I personally did not want 'stuff'... So I think the key is to be given encouragement and choice."<sup>13</sup>

This group of recipients did feel quite pressured to accept second hand goods even when they didn't want them.

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<sup>9</sup> Donated Goods Management Planning: Civil Defence Emergency Management BEST PRACTICE GUIDE (BPG2/06)

<sup>10</sup> Port Lincoln Times, Nov 10<sup>th</sup> 2009

<sup>11</sup> 2005 Eyre Peninsula Bush Fire The Salvation Army Response & Recovery – An Evaluation by Major Anne Farquharson March 2005 Pg 47

<sup>12</sup> 2005 Eyre Peninsula Bush Fire The Salvation Army Response & Recovery – An Evaluation by Major Anne Farquharson March 2005 Pg 47

<sup>13</sup> "Recipients views of donated goods" Pauline Cole 2010

## Key Issues: Excessive, Unneeded and Unusable Goods

- Huge quantities of second hand clothing and household goods are donated.
- Recovery managers seem to be consistently unprepared for the influx of goods.
- The costs can be very high and are rarely justified simply by the value of the goods.
- Many of the donations are unsuitable or damaged and do not meet basic Australian standards (a particular problem with electrical items).
- Advice on goods that are required needs to be clearly communicated to donors prior to dispatch.
- Certain household goods should be discouraged e.g. clothing, electrical, foodstuffs.
- Recipients feel pressured to accept items whether or not they are needed.
- At the end of the recovery program there are huge quantities of unused and often unusable items which need to be disposed of.
- Disposal of unwanted and unusable goods is expensive and attracts negative media attention which can result in public outrage.

## 4.2 New Versus Used Donated Goods

Corporate donations of goods are generally more acceptable to the recipients. The items are new, usually fairly modern and useful to the survivors. Where donors are seeking to rid themselves of excess stock this can sometimes not be particularly useful to recipients and for many there is still an issue of choice which can be a problem. Corporate donations can however cause difficulties for the usual local suppliers of such items (who may also be impacted by the disaster) so a balance is always needed.

During focus groups recipients were very concerned about the donations made by the general public. Most commented that they had received many items that they immediately had to dispose of because of the poor condition. These items came both from public donations and from 'well meaning' neighbours and friends. Several recipients commented that they lost friends because of the donations they were given, which were insulting. Recipients felt that it was easy to see how much donors considered they were worth when they sent soiled, torn, outdated and unwanted items.<sup>14</sup>

This does have a serious impact on recovery as seen following the Peruvian earthquake and mud slides in 1972:

"...survivors who received inappropriate or "less than good" donations suffered mental stress for six months to a year longer than survivors who were appropriately helped."<sup>15</sup>

In the recent Victorian bushfire experience 2 pallets of men's g-strings and a pallet of blue hair dye were received which clearly would not assist fire affected communities<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> "Recipients views of donated goods" Pauline Cole 2010

<sup>15</sup> "Clothing donations: The trouble with trousers" by Jim Ketcham Disaster News Network, Baltimore MD 20/5/99

<sup>16</sup> Information from VBRRRA spokesperson

It is much more likely that survivors will continue to see themselves as victims when they consistently receive poor quality and second hand goods. This is again well illustrated below:

“I pulled up with about 300 new T-shirts donated by a printer in Pennsylvania. I said “I don’t suppose you want any clothes” and they said “No”, but then I said, “They’re new”, and the leader got tears in her eyes and said “Who would send us new stuff?” It turns out they had been receiving donations that included bars of used motel soap.”<sup>17</sup>

“There are also mistaken assumptions or myths that disaster victims are helpless; that they would accept any form of assistance (no matter how undignifying or insulting);” writes Alan McLean in his article “Problems and Solutions”<sup>18</sup> and this myth is very familiar in Australia. Much of the donating public seems to have the attitude that if you have nothing you will be happy with anything, irrespective of its quality.

### **Key Issues: New Versus Used Donated Goods**

- Survivors’ dignity is seriously impacted by poor quality and inappropriate items.
- Restricted choice results in disempowerment of survivors.
- Corporate donations are usually more welcome to the recipients.

## **4.3 Administration, Storage, Sorting and Distribution of Goods**

The work of sorting, distributing etc takes large chunks of time away from looking after and assisting those recovering. “Clothing usually comes in small quantities, making it hard to distribute effectively. When it comes in a semi truck, it takes 20 people three whole days to unload, sort and prepare.”<sup>19</sup>

Finding storage facilities is particularly difficult in areas where local buildings have been burnt out, flooded or destroyed. Goods then have to be ferried from wherever storage is found to the site where they are required which adds congestion to already overtaxed roads and requires even more volunteers. The cost of transporting from the donation point to the storage site is often borne by the volunteer organisations which spend much time trying to organise people to donate trucks and drivers to get items to where they can be effectively accessed.

New Zealand has a very clear view about the waste of time and effort that goes into the donations:

“Unsolicited donated goods and services cause many problems, largely related to the excessive logistics and administrative overheads needed to manage them. New Zealand experience to date, has indicated this far outweighs their true value.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> “Unwanted donations are ‘second disaster’ by Susan Kim Disaster News Network, Baltimore MD 5/4/99

<sup>18</sup> “The Things we Give – A Critical Look at Donations in Kind” By Sue Faulkner, Alan McLean, Mohamed Othman-Chande, Ali Hassan Quoreshi, Juan Alvaro Ruiz, Alan Taylor, Anton Wenger

<sup>19</sup> “Clothing donations: The trouble with trousers” by Jim Ketcham Disaster News Network, Baltimore MD 20/5/99

<sup>20</sup> Donated Goods Management Planning: Civil Defence Emergency Management BEST PRACTICE GUIDE (BPG2/06)

### 4.3.1 Use of Volunteers

Volunteers in this context are those people who provide their time free to assist those who are affected by the disaster.



FEMA News photo of volunteers sorting

Finding volunteers when these are needed to assist with the huge task of sorting, distributing and ongoing management of donations can sometimes be relatively simple because 'spontaneous volunteers' 'converge' and want to be helpful. However, just because there are people wanting to volunteer does not mean that they are all useful. One volunteer organiser has commented that she had far more volunteers than were needed to do the work and spent much of her time trying to find meaningful things for them to do. Additionally the motives for volunteering can be complex

including anxiety, curiosity and exploitation<sup>21</sup>. Organisers have the task of trying to weed out those who are likely to cause difficulties. Most organisations prefer to use volunteers who are familiar with the work and do not require excessive amounts of training. A service philosophy needs to be disseminated to ensure all material aid centres provide a standard of service consistent with such principles as respect, dignity, self determination, empowerment, and non-judgemental attitudes.

Of interest/relevance to this report is a project currently being undertaken by the Australian Red Cross to set up a 'National framework for the management and utilisation of spontaneous volunteers in an emergency' so these issues are being examined separately. This project is being funded by FaHCSIA.

At other times finding volunteers can be impossible. During devastating floods in Grand Forks Nevada, "the second day a 747 arrived at the Grand Forks airport. It had 19 containers of donated goods from Minneapolis. When we opened the first two containers, they were loaded with clothes, food, tools etc. -- all unsorted. Only one motel was open at the time, and volunteers had to drive 60 miles because of the expanse of the flooding. Thus we had no volunteers so we had no choice but to send the 747 back to Minneapolis with the message of what items were most needed, that the donors need to sort the materials into groups, and how donations should be sent."<sup>22</sup>

The armies of volunteers who are recruited need to be well organised, given worthwhile activity and be looked after to ensure their ongoing well-being. Dependent on the emergency, what can also happen is that accommodation and meals need to be organised for the volunteers, and this is often in a geographical area where much of the infrastructure has been destroyed and the primary consideration is finding ongoing accommodation and food for those who have been affected by the disaster.

While NGOs have established material aid distribution points and procedures these are not always located conveniently next to the event, however the structures and procedures are transferable and scaleable. State and Territory Governments generally do not have pre-existing administrative processes that focus on donated goods.

<sup>21</sup> "Rebel Food...Renegade Supplies: Convergence after the World Trade Centre Attack" James M. Kendra and Tricia Wachtendorf

<sup>22</sup> "Who sent the used false teeth" Susan Kim Disaster News Network Baltimore MD, 28/11/2004

## Key Issues: Administration, Storage, Sorting and Distribution of Goods

- Large numbers of staff and volunteers have to be recruited to sort, organise, distribute and maintain these donations.
- Sorting requires suitable personnel, space and transport.
- Extra accommodation and meals may need to be provided for volunteers in an area where accommodation and food is possibly quite scarce and competes with needs of survivors.
- There are NGOs, churches and private enterprises that have the expertise to manage donated goods. State and Territory Governments need pre-existing arrangements that include funding which can be measured to the scale of the event.
- The administration of the goods takes time away from working with survivors as organisers are heavily committed to the personnel undertaking these tasks.
- Storage and organising facilities are required immediately, the facility often needs to be immense, and can be very costly.
- Receiving organisations often carry the cost of transporting to the storage area either by paying the actual costs or by spending time to source suitable transport and drivers.

## 4.4 The Impact on Disaster Affected People and Communities

### 4.4.1 The Recipients of Donated Goods

Personal recovery requires disaster affected people to become resilient, resourceful and confident. To reach this stage they need to feel in control of what is happening in their lives. As a disaster affected person, to be given to, without any real choice, does not encourage any of those skills. Being the object of charitable intent may actively discourage the building of the strength that is required to survive in a very changed world. Being the recipient of donated goods can create dependency, can be disrespectful to the recipient (where goods are poor quality) and can interfere with recovery and resilience<sup>23</sup>. This is supported by discussions with recipients, comments from the Working Group and threaded through a number of articles.

Those who donate goods to disaster affected people after events are inclined to view them as helpless individuals unable to make decisions. This myth needs to be destroyed as the reality is very different. Disaster affected people are rarely helpless; although they may be in shock initially they still have decided opinions and expectations. They often put their initial energy into trying to assist others alongside them, who may also be affected, and this does not fit the image of someone who is helpless.

Recipients who gave feedback have voiced that it is hard to accept donated goods, particularly when the items are poor quality. Older people did not like receiving charity and almost all felt diminished by the experience. A number of recipients felt upset about lack of control (having to accept what was given rather than having the option of choice) and talked about the burden of the need to be grateful. One illustrated this effectively by talking about collecting a caravan which was donated.

The caravan was in very poor condition and virtually unusable and it had cost considerable time and money to collect. There was a note inside from a child, who had obviously used this as a

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<sup>23</sup> "Clothing donations: The trouble with trousers" by Jim Ketcham Disaster News Network, Baltimore MD 20/5/99

cubby house, wishing the new owner well and hoping it would make a good home.<sup>24</sup> The note denied the recipients their right to be annoyed about the cost and time wasted.

Recipients talked of many examples of this feeling that the survivors needed to accept responsibility for making sure the donors felt OK. One survivor was told by a helper to accept with good grace the unusable items donated because it “helped the donor to heal”.<sup>25</sup> Others have talked about feeling resentful about poor quality particularly when expected to be grateful. Although it is clear that communities also need to heal it seems to be inappropriate to allow this to be achieved at the cost of the survivors of the disaster.

However there is a positive side to donations which cannot be underestimated in its impact on the wellbeing of the survivors. This is about the uplifting effect of the knowledge and demonstrated evidence that people are thinking of them and trying to help. This support does not manifest itself in donations of money but comes through strongly when people donate goods with thoughtfulness.

A Canberra bushfire survivor commented:

“Some of our most treasured items are the ones that were made, with love, by complete strangers.”<sup>26</sup>



A group of survivors in Port Lincoln talk about “shoe boxes of love”<sup>27</sup> which were delivered to all the survivors. These contained luxury items such as aromatherapy, perfume, and bath salts. Several commented that they had not realised how stressed they had become until they had the opportunity to use some of these items. They all felt buoyed by the thoughtfulness and caring of the strangers who selected the items and made the effort to fill the shoeboxes. Similarly Canberra bushfire survivors were offered beautifully handmade quilts and rugs in a very moving ceremony. One of those survivors said that the feeling of

“warmth and love”<sup>28</sup> in the room during this presentation was “wonderful” and those who received the items treasure them.

“At times, despite everything, I felt buoyed by the support of all these people, by knowing they cared. And now, six years on, I still feel an enormous faith in the human spirit, our ability to survive, and the compassion and generosity we can offer each other.”<sup>29</sup>

So clearly not all donations are bad for survivors. Recipients have strongly expressed gratitude for the support and caring of the public in assisting them after their trauma.

What appears to be most important is the thoughtfulness that goes with the donations, concern expressed through providing helpful items, and care in making and giving items that require time from the donors. The latter items are particularly treasured and give encouragement and support for many years.

<sup>24</sup> “Recipients views of donated goods” Pauline Cole 2010

<sup>25</sup> “Recipients views of donated goods” Pauline Cole 2010

<sup>26</sup> “Needed donations can change lives” by Susan Kim Disaster News Network, Salisbury PA 14/4/2000

<sup>27</sup> “Recipients views of donated goods” Pauline Cole 2010

<sup>28</sup> “Recipients views of donated goods” Pauline Cole 2010

<sup>29</sup> “Canberra bushfire victim’s tips for a great relief” by Liz Tilley 11/2/09

## Key Issues: The Impact on the Recipients of Donated Goods

- For recovery to be successful all activities with survivors need to be focussed toward developing resilient, purposeful people who are able to move forward with their lives.
- Recipients feel they have limited control and limited choice because of the way donations are imposed upon them.
- Donation of poor quality items is perceived as disrespectful, even sometimes insulting, and may put survivors back into the “victim” role.
- Recipients are made to feel responsible for the feelings of donors.
- Donations that are handmade and perceived as being given with thoughtful consideration are very valuable.
- The empathy of the donor is important to the recipient.
- Some caring donations can have a long-term positive impact on the life of the survivor and support the recovery process immensely.

### 4.4.2 Demographics

There are a range of different needs across the demographic makeup of any groups such as for age, gender, ethnicity, cultural norms etc. For example:

Research undertaken by Klein with Tsunami survivors<sup>30</sup> gives very strong indications that teenagers are often the forgotten group in recovery processes. Goods are rarely targeted at that age group. She comments that given the diminished sense of self that comes with loss of possessions “it seems that aiding the repossession process of adolescents should be a priority after basic needs have been met.” Klein comments, that teenagers are particularly vulnerable, because of their stage of development i.e. establishment of identity. Possessions are an important part of identity which means loss of possessions may create unforeseen problems.

The lack of suitable items has been confirmed by parents of teenagers who were recipients of donated goods. Additionally there seems to be anecdotal evidence from their comments that a significant group of teenagers who go through disasters may have severe emotional trauma to deal with several years later. The Red Cross says that:

“Young people are considered to be at the highest risk for emotional reactions and difficulties after a disaster.”<sup>31</sup>

Arguments can be raised for other groups of people, and recipients in particular have noted that not much is offered to men. More attention does need to be paid to the differing demographic groups so that future trauma may be minimised.

### Key Issues: Demographics

- More attention needs to be paid to the needs of different demographic groups.

<sup>30</sup> “Don’t forget the bushfire teen survivors” by Jill Klein Uni of Melbourne

<sup>31</sup> “The Masters of Disaster In the Aftermath” by the American Red Cross

### 4.4.3 The Communities

Disasters affect more than those who lose their homes and livelihoods. Communities themselves feel the impact when part of the community is affected. The already established connections mean that almost all members of the community will be touched in some way by what the survivors are going through. The most common response to this is to give, and some kinds of giving are always going to be helpful e.g. cash. Other kinds of donations such as second hand clothing can be quite detrimental and it is important that the public is educated about the issues, but also that they have alternative ways to assist. It is recognised that lower socio-economic groups may have little choice other than to offer second-hand goods, and this provides challenges to recovery managers to be creative about alternative ways for such people to contribute. Communities that contribute to the rebuilding and resupply of those affected by a disaster are taking an active role in the recovery process but it must be done in a way that assists the survivors. This can help the community to deal with the sense of loss they feel on seeing the disaster and may reduce subsequent disaster<sup>32</sup>.

#### **Farming communities**

It is important also to remember that communities are made up of more than homes and businesses in towns. In rural areas farming can be equally as devastated by fire or flood. Although not investigated in any depth the issue of donations to assist the farming community to re-establish their farms is important. The participants of the Focus Group held in Port Lincoln made a number of comments about donations of this type. For example, water and fodder for stock, agistment, tools, and fence posts were vital after the bushfire. Unfortunately in the same way that unsatisfactory or inappropriate household goods or second-hand clothing donations are made, inappropriate donations of these items were made in some instances.

The same rules apply however to these donations as apply to other donated goods. The donations must be based on the needs of the disaster affected person, be of good quality, and a structure established to appropriately manage the distribution.

#### **Economic Impact**

Sue Faulkner in her article “A Kindness that can have Devastating Effects”<sup>33</sup> about the impact of donations on communities in international disasters quotes from one of the organisers “If goods can be made locally, maintained locally and bought locally, they should be. Imports depress the local market and raise expectations which can’t be met in the future”. This is a principle which needs to be considered in the disasters that happen in Australia. In most instances it is preferable that any profit or benefit from providing goods to disaster affected populations goes to the local economy. Imports of donations from large external corporations may assist individuals but depress the business activity of local companies.

Communities that have been impacted have the task of rebuilding. Local economies only recover when local residents are able to spend their money to get supplies and services within their neighbourhood. Oversupply of donated goods interferes with this process. It reduces the circulation of money locally, meaning that businesses are slower to get back to normal activity and in extreme situations it can destroy businesses. Many relief organisers comment on the number of people who can become dependent on the supply of donations. The dependency culture that grows contributes to depression of the economy. It drags down the community and

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<sup>32</sup> “Summary of issues from stakeholders”

<sup>33</sup> “The Things we Give – A Critical Look at Donations in Kind” by Sue Faulkner, Alan McLean, Mohamed Othman-Chande, Ali Hassan Quoreshi, Juan Alvaro Ruiz, Alan Taylor, Anton Wenger

slows the process of reclaiming lives and neighbourhoods. Individuals who get caught in this trap can resist recovery and require considerable assistance to learn to operate differently.

Charitable organisations in the USA continue to struggle with the right way to tell the public “...don’t send stuff, send cash. The reasons, researched by years of field work, are many and repeatedly proven: if goods can be purchased locally, they boost an economy weakened by disaster, they get to disaster survivors faster, and they are directed towards specific and priority needs.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Key Issues: The Impact on the Communities**

- Supply of donated goods can interfere with the rebuilding and sustainability of local businesses.
- Uncontrolled and long term donation can create expectations and dependency in some disaster affected people.
- Local economies suffer as there is no need to buy anything locally.
- Farming communities have different needs to be considered when planning is undertaken but good quality and local provision are still important.
- Having a proportion of the population dependent on donations drags down the recovery process for the whole community.

### **Insurance**

The working group gave some consideration to the role of insurance following a disaster and whether there are links to the issue of donated goods.

A range of views were tabled however it is considered that a recommendation regarding insurance is outside the scope of this project.

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<sup>34</sup> “Who sent the used false teeth” Susan Kim Disaster News Network Baltimore MD, 28/11/2004

## 4.5 The Donors

### 4.5.1 The General Public

The public is strongly impacted by news stories about disasters. The media is powerful in invoking profound feelings and connections to survivors. It has been suggested this may be to the stage that viewers/listeners begin to feel like survivors themselves<sup>35</sup>. The intensity of this experience pushes people into wanting to do something, which is often around donating goods. This relieves some of the guilt about watching the tragedy unfold and being helpless to either stop it or assist. Goods owned by donors carry stronger connections. Money is impersonal, particularly as much of it happens through credit card donations. Therefore there is some attraction in donating goods. However it is likely that the main focus of this activity is to relieve the feelings of the donor, not look after the needs of the recipient.

The fact that so little attention has been paid to the feelings of the recipients is an indication that donation of goods has a life of its own. The public give for their own often complex reasons, donor organisations manage it all because it is the function of their organisation, and organisers go on accepting mountains of goods which are unusable. Governments are then forced to set up structures to support the administration of these goods. Although the recipients may be the original reason for the appeal it quickly transfers into looking after the donors. This attitude stems partly from politicians and community leaders who often set the tone and do not want to offend the general public. Anyone writing about these issues does so in diplomatic terms which can cloud the issues. One would have to assume that this is in an attempt to protect the source because people are seen to give out of kindness. The reality of the situation though is probably much more mixed. Some, but definitely not all, may give out of kindness, and whether they put themselves in the position of the recipients may be questionable. The diverse range and often poor quality of donations is an indication that this may be so.

Wenger<sup>36</sup> comments that the donor organisation with which he was associated had the attitude that “we know better” and saw themselves as experts on what was required by recipients. He felt that the donation of goods had become institutionalised and says “The collection and sorting of used clothing, for example, provides meaning and justification for the existence of many salaried employees and volunteer helpers...Dismantling a system which is ostensibly good would require the finding of alternative activities for individuals who, in a very real sense, are the organisation...For these reasons institutional momentum is difficult to stop.”

Wenger was talking about the Red Cross and this organisation has made huge strides in the intervening years to change their ideology i.e. the organisation no longer accepts donated second hand goods and encourages monetary donations, so change is possible. Consultations indicate that other organisations have become disenchanted with goods donations in disasters because of the excessive work load and costs associated with administration, so it is less likely now that any major organisation would be consciously encouraging this practice. What is apparent from our consultations, however, is that from public figures such as politicians to the volunteer working with donated goods, people find it very difficult to say ‘no’.

Wenger also felt that donations provided “a useful ideological function. Essentially, they help ordinary people...to cope psychologically with the recognition of the suffering which exists in other parts of the world. Given the ethical imperative to do something...relief and development

<sup>35</sup> “Coping with Disaster: How Media Audiences Process Grief” by Frances Ford Plude

<sup>36</sup> “The Things we Give – A Critical Look at Donations in Kind” by Sue Faulkner, Alan McLean, Mohamed Othman-Chande, Ali Hassan Quoreshi, Juan Alvaro Ruiz, Alan Taylor, Anton Wenger

organisations are supposed to provide the solution. The assistance of these organisations lets the concerned donors off the psychological hook; they then do not have to worry too much because the situation can be thought of as being under control, or at least in hand.”<sup>37</sup>

Several authors suggest the solution lies in providing long term donor education, both to donor organisations and the general public. This probably needs extension to politicians and those involved in the organisation of services for disaster affected people. Providing alternative suggestions about turning goods into money (e.g. garage sales) and donating the money seems to be one way forward but only works when people are willing to put time and effort into such activities.

What has been observed time and again is that the donors by their activities, manage the needs of recipients, and by default, create challenges for the policy makers. Donors need to be educated to understand that they have responsibilities and that they are not necessarily the ‘heroes’ or ‘rescuers’ of this situation. Unfortunately the media is inclined to push the notion of ‘heroes’ and many spokespersons for the disasters also make comments supporting this notion, as there is reluctance to offend the public.

It is important that the focus returns to the recipients and that all people within the recovery system understand and support the plans which will assist them. This does mean from time to time that donors may be offended but this has to be managed by explaining the purpose behind the policy and doing some prior education of the public.

### **Key Issues: The Donors – the General Public**

- There are currently no pre-determined messages or Government policies in relation to the notion of donating material aid.
- The public are powerfully affected by disasters which results in a need for them to want to do something.
- Current donor activity seems to occur to relieve the feelings invoked by the disaster.
- Politicians, organisers, volunteers are reluctant to offend the public by saying no because their donations are seen to be compassionately based.
- Many large donor organisations have become disenchanted with the current system of public donation of household goods.
- The huge quantities of goods drives the whole system and dictates the needs of the recipients.
- Donor education is a crucial part of the way forward but this needs to be done in a way that encourages the motivation to continue to give, donations just need to be more appropriate e.g. cash or donations as specifically requested.

<sup>37</sup> “The Things we Give – A Critical Look at Donations in Kind” by Sue Faulkner, Alan McLean, Mohamed Othman-Chande, Ali Hassan Quoreshi, Juan Alvaro Ruiz, Alan Taylor, Anton Wenger

## 4.5.2 Corporate Donors

Corporate donations have become a mainstay of disaster relief worldwide and many multinational companies now provide donations as a matter of course.

“Many companies provide non-financial support, such as knowledge and expertise, in addition to cash or in-kind donations. In a few cases, they also focus their efforts on longer-term disaster mitigation and prevention. In other words they are focusing on taking an active stance rather than being reactive.”

The majority of what is donated tends to be cash but a significant amount is in service and goods. A research report undertaken by The Conference Board Mission<sup>38</sup> found that many companies are taking a new approach through developing partnerships with humanitarian organisations. When these are successful they have the potential to:

- “Deliver fast effective support during a crisis
- Help build capacity between disasters
- Foster the exchange of ideas and best practices that benefit both businesses and humanitarian organizations.”

It is seen to be good for business as it enhances reputations, helps the company to become an employer of choice and in most instances provides tax incentives.

The World Economic Forum 2003<sup>39</sup> advised:

“The best companies set up pre-planned scalable support arrangements that can kick into place when needed, and which continue when a disaster is no longer front page news.”

They also comment that participation in disaster relief provides ongoing benefits to the company including:

- Employees feel good about working for such an organisation
- Important strategic relationships can be forged
- In an increasingly global economy disasters in other parts of the world have the potential to disrupt any business.

There are corporations that use disasters as opportunities to increase market shares and establish themselves in new communities, there are also a small number of businesses that ‘dump’ unwanted or out of date goods for the tax incentives and cause significant problems. Most companies accept donation as a corporate social responsibility and work alongside disaster managers to provide best outcomes for the survivors and their communities. The system seems to be well established in America and Europe where a number of research studies have been undertaken. Internationally businesses are starting to move into disaster mitigation, so there is a good understanding of the issues.

In Australia many corporations do have Corporate Social Responsibility plans (CSR) and these are usually targeted at specific charities that they support on a regular basis. From CSR reports, money is probably the most common donation to their partnership charities but one large company contributed 10,000 backpacks filled with blanket, towel, toiletries etc to be given to disadvantaged people serviced by 10 welfare charities.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> “Corporate Responses to Humanitarian Disasters” The Conference Board Mission Research Report R-1415-08-WG

<sup>39</sup> “The corporate role in disaster relief efforts” 2003 World Economic Forum

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.bunnings.com.au/Files/WESF\\_11880%20SRO8%20www.pdf](http://www.bunnings.com.au/Files/WESF_11880%20SRO8%20www.pdf)

This kind of donation would be of great value for survivors of disasters on their first night after the event. It is unclear whether many corporations would include disasters in their CSR planning, but it is very clear that when a significant disaster occurs such as the 2009 Victorian Bushfires they donate over and above what they normally provide to try to alleviate some of the difficulties for those affected by the disaster. Many donated money, but a large group also offered goods and services.<sup>41</sup>

A couple of Australia's most recent examples stem from the 2009 Port Lincoln fires and the 2009 Victorian bushfires. In the Port Lincoln fires, local businesses donated vouchers to survivors that they could spend in the stores and this proved to be a very satisfactory outcome for recipients as they retained choice and their dignity was maintained.<sup>42</sup>

The flood of donations to survivors of the 2009 Victorian bushfires overwhelmed the charitable organisations. A range of large companies offered goods or services to individuals and the communities. This seems to indicate that at present corporate donations are triggered by the same stimuli as is the general public i.e. often media coverage. The Department for Planning and Community Development was eventually appointed to undertake a coordinating role in relation to these offers and a database was established to record everything. It has been Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority's (VBRRA) role to match these donations to need and negotiate the most effective use of what is offered. There have been three distinct groupings identified in relation to motivation for providing the donations:

- The first and largest group are companies who recognised the bushfire as the most significant disaster to hit Australia in recent years and felt because they were in a position to do something, they should do so. They were not looking for recognition in any way, they just wanted to assist.
- A second group seem motivated to gain some marketing advantage and have wanted to know exactly how items are going to be used. They can be insistent on things being done the way they want. Sometimes these companies' goods have been politely declined as needs could either not be matched or the expectations from the company were not useful for the ongoing recovery process.
- The third group, which is much smaller, usually have excess items they wish to get rid of and consider this is a good opportunity as it also provides tax incentives. These donations are only useful when they match need.

The method in which the offers of support and donated goods were accepted resulted in a major logistical exercise. By accepting goods without establishing the need in the community, VBRRA has been tasked with trying to distribute goods that are not required. This process, although common, appears to be the wrong way around and the need should be established before accepting material donations. Prior negotiations with corporate donors, who may be able to meet such needs, will make the process more efficient. If a panel of endorsed donors was developed prior to the disaster this would also assist.<sup>43</sup> This suggestion is supported by the research done by the Conference Board (a not-for-profit global, independent membership organisation that conducts research, convenes conferences, assesses trends etc and works to help business strengthen their performance and better serve society) which comments:

"In-kind donations should be based on demand, specified either by the government of the affected country or by a recognised humanitarian organization with existing operations in the disaster area, and not on what companies can supply."

<sup>41</sup> Information from a spokesperson at the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

<sup>42</sup> Information from a spokesperson in the recovery effort (2009 Port Lincoln bushfire)

<sup>43</sup> "Summary of issues from Stakeholders" Appendix 4

The Board justify this by saying that mistakes hold up relief efforts and cause needless expenditure. They quote a situation in the Eritrean war (1989) where unwanted donations of “seven truckloads of expired aspirin, took six months to burn.”<sup>44</sup>

The Center for International Disaster Information<sup>45</sup> has developed guidelines for corporate donations some of which are as follows:

Monetary donations are almost always the best response, but if donating goods/services you should only do so when:

- It has been authorised by the affected country
- There is a specific request from a recognised humanitarian organisation
- The specific need has been evaluated for cultural and economic impact
- Technical assistance does not over-ride local expertise and management
- The quantity will not adversely impact the viability of local business
- The material or service is not a solicitation for future business
- Transport, warehousing, storage and handling costs are paid by the donor.

It seems that although there will always be unscrupulous businesses that seek to gain advantage or choose to get rid of out of date or unwanted items so that tax benefits can be realised, the general message in the business world is that it is good for business to get involved in donating to disaster events. The issues seem to be about ensuring appropriate communication to achieve the best for impacted communities. Setting up strategic ongoing partnerships appears to be an acceptable way forward, allows time for development of agreements that are mutually beneficial, and prevents the build up of problems that occur when everything is done ‘on the run’.

### **Key Issues: Corporate Donors**

- Corporate donations are a crucial part of what can be offered to survivors and impacted communities.
- Corporate donations currently seem to be triggered by the same stimuli as public giving.
- There are some well established principles for corporate giving in international circles which could be adopted by companies in Australia.
- Needs assessment of the local community and affected individuals is an essential first step.
- Strategic partnerships and pre-endorsed companies are a possible way forward.
- The more restrictions a company stipulates, the harder it is to make use of the donation.
- Donations need to balance needs of the recipients against what a corporation has available.

<sup>44</sup> “Corporate Responses to Humanitarian Disasters” The Conference Board Research Report R-1415-08-WG

<sup>45</sup> Guidelines for Effective Private Sector International Disaster Assistance by Corporate Business Center for International Disaster Information

## 4.6 Communication and the Role of the Media

All types of media have the potential to be extremely helpful or an extreme hindrance in the aftermath of disasters. It is clear from the literature that trying to change media response to disasters is difficult. Some media may be interested in providing stories to the public that have entertainment value. Different outlets compete with each other to get the best story from the same incidents. This leads to bias in what is discussed or viewed such as only concentrating on the area of the disaster, no matter how small, and ignoring everything that was not impacted. It gives an exciting story but a distorted image to audiences about how serious and extensive a disaster might be. The reporting shapes the responses of the public and when not entirely truthful, leads to exaggerated consequences.

Auf der Heide comments that it is often the media that perpetuates disaster myths such as panic flights by survivors (which is most unlikely to happen) or stories of looting (which rarely occurs). He claims that "The entertainment aspect of news broadcasts focuses on the dramatic and unique aspects of disasters, favouring the reporting of the unusual versus the typical or representative events."<sup>46</sup> They also, importantly for this topic, perpetrate the myth of the local 'hero' who goes around the neighbourhood collecting goods and driving them to the scene of the disaster. With encouragement such as this it is hardly surprising that the public responds by giving more and more in the way of goods.

The media has become a strong influencer in people's lives. People believe what they hear on the television and radio to the extent that other forms of communication may not have the same level of impact:

"...people often react to warning sirens with disbelief until ... confirmation (*via media*) is received."<sup>47</sup>

"Exaggerated media coverage has been suggested as contributing to the inundation of inquiries by anxious loved ones. It has also been blamed for the over-response of resources that typify disasters, complicating their management."<sup>48</sup>

The media response to disasters has been complicated by the increasing use of the new media. Social networking such as Facebook, Twitter etc now generates significant interest in event response and public donations. These sources reflect community interest and may have no relationship to formal media structures. As an example the recovery discussion groups established in areas affected by the Victorian Bushfires became a key source for community outrage and need. Applications are now common for immediate giving of donations using mobile phones. More sophisticated versions of these that map donors and recipient needs are in consideration<sup>49</sup>.

Matthew Clarke and Simon Feeny have carried out research<sup>50</sup> which indicates that how the Australian public responds to public appeals is positively associated with:

- a) The number of people affected
- b) The extent of media coverage
- c) The extent of political and civil freedom in the affected country

<sup>46</sup> Quarantelli 1981, Larson 1980 quoted in "Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination" by Erik Auf der Heide

<sup>47</sup> Kreps 1980 quoted in "Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination" by Erik Auf der Heide

<sup>48</sup> Wenger 1985, Quarantelli 1983, FEMA 1984, Scanlon 1985 discussed in "Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination" by Erik Auf der Heide

<sup>49</sup> Summary of Issues from stakeholders Appendix 4

<sup>50</sup> "Unleashed – Scales of Suffering" by Matthew Clarke and Simon Feeny 16/2/09

They say that a 10% increase in people killed results in more than 3 times greater level of donations and that a 10% increase in media coverage results in a 10% increase in public donations. They also found that “Australians don’t suffer from ‘donor fatigue’ and will keep giving” even if there are only small intervals between different campaigns.

They conclude with comments about organisations needing to work closely with the media in reporting disasters and that the media needs to understand their potential influence on generosity.

Anyone could be forgiven for assuming that the media does not in fact understand what impact their announcements about donated goods can have on the general public. There are a myriad of examples of an appeal being made and within hours the organisers have been inundated by mountains of used clothing. One organiser talks about trying to stop an appeal because they were already overwhelmed with goods but being totally unsuccessful. It seems that the media becomes a ‘monster’ in some of these situations.

Francis Plude comments that although we share disasters with the whole world we each have a unique response which is based on our own experiences. In her collaboration with Lifton they agreed that “there is an intensification of simultaneous worldwide sharing going on. He (Lifton) noted that probably all of this is occurring at a psychological level of severe intensity for most of us and, to some extent, viewers do become survivors”.<sup>51</sup> What this tells us is that media audiences become participatory in any disasters that they view or hear about and the overload of emotion associated with this has to find some outlet. For many this outlet seems to be expressed in donations of all types.

Given that media is a part of life which has an intense impact it becomes crucial that we find ways to better work with journalists or others who are going to influence what goes to air. Several articles talk about the need to understand the differences in the ways that journalists work and to plan around this. Suggestions from the literature and stakeholders about ways to manage these difficulties are as follows:

- Have designated spokespersons at the highest levels in the hierarchy and ensure those individuals understand the issues so that unambiguous, helpful messages go out to the public. If the message is ‘don’t donate second hand goods’ this may lead to some adverse publicity initially but will save considerable later aggravation when tons of goods have to be disposed of.
- Have a media plan which ensures that media becomes a partner in recovery activity.
- Keep providing appropriate and interesting stories for the media to get involved in.
- Provide first hand experience for the media, of the chaos and cost associated with uncontained donations. It is recommended that this can be best achieved by experiential learning i.e. by being conducted through warehouses and giving them the facts about what needs to be disposed of. This may be able to be done in a virtual way using a DVD. Briefings for public figures such as politicians and community leaders may also be required.
- Involve media personnel in the whole regime of disaster planning not just in the aftermath so that they have better understanding of the full picture.
- Recognise the differences in how metropolitan and regional media operate and learn to exploit this. An example of how this works well is in Canada where “The (regional) media

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<sup>51</sup>“Coping with Disaster: How Media Audiences Process Grief” by Frances Ford Plude

has been plugged right into the disaster response and served as a liaison between the Emergency Operations Center and the outside media.”<sup>52</sup> This means that the regional media, working alongside the recovery organisers, is able to control information flow to metropolitan and international outlets. However this is already compromised with the advent of mobile phones etc. which are used to get information (including photographs) out to a diverse range of others in the wider community.

- Provide appropriate and thorough briefing, have pre-written scripts if necessary.
- Make sure all messages to the public, through whatever forum, are clear, informative and consistent. There is no value in influencing reporters to say donations of goods are not needed if organisations then respond to contacts by taking anything that is donated.

It is clear that the current cultural belief is that anything and everything that can be offered is useful in the aftermath of disaster. Every message that goes to the public has to consistently counter this. The belief needs to be replaced with a new norm that donating money is good and if specific items are needed at a particular time, this will be communicated at that time; it will however be the exception rather than the rule. To support this change anyone who is responding to calls from the public needs to understand the issues, be given a consistent script to work from and be trained to say ‘no’.

One option for managing the communities desire to donate is to establish a Hotline phone /website and registry. At this point of contact very clear scripts should be used that include the following key messages:

- Thanking people for their concern and offer of assistance.
- The best way to assist is to provide cash donations.
- Advice about what is not required e.g. individual donations of food, second-hand clothing and furniture, tents etc.
- If people register their contact details and offer of donation, they will only be contacted if there is an identified need for the offer they have made.
- Other community options for the donation of second hand goods, such as local charities.

This strategy provides a means for the community to express their concern and desire to support a disaster affected community, without resulting in the unwanted consequence of warehouses of unusable donated goods.

This strategy was successfully trialled in New South Wales in response to the Victorian Bushfires. While it did initially result in a some negative media through talk back radio from disgruntled donors whose offers of second hand goods had not been taken up, this was minor and short lived and much less of a consequence for government than if a collection strategy for all offers of donated goods had been implemented.

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<sup>52</sup> Scanlon 1985 quoted in “Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination” by Erik Auf der Heide

## Key Issues: Communication and the Role of the Media

- The media is critical in establishing cultural norms in society.
- The media have their own vested interests, and ways need to be found to get good outcomes from their involvement, and still meet their needs.
- All types of media are very powerful in appeals.
- New and uncontrolled online media types may generate considerable donor interest.
- Media need to be involved in all stages of disaster response and recovery in order to get a better understanding of helpful and unhelpful responses.
- Experiential learning may be a helpful way forward in educating the media.
- Messages from everyone need to be consistent and learning to say no is an essential first step.
- Keeping the public informed of the situation is important, including information about whether or not goods are required and the reasons for this.
- Ideally all formal offers need to be registered and responded to.
- Emergency management manuals need to be updated with key messages to media including appropriate material about donated goods.

## 5 Recommendations

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It was agreed by the Working Group that any system that is set up in relation to donated goods has to:

- Be based on the National Principles for Disaster Recovery
- Operate to the advantage of the individuals and communities affected by the disaster
- Be based on the needs of the affected individual and the affected community.

### **Recommendation 1**

**That National Guidelines be developed which will provide all States and Territories with best practice methods of managing donated goods.**

#### Rationale

There seem to be no dissenting voices in relation to the fact that Australia needs to develop National Guidelines about donated goods that can be implemented across Australia. The reasons this is seen as important are that the current system:

- Does not operate to the advantage of the affected individuals and can do harm
- Can create dependency
- Creates significant amounts of unnecessary work and drain on resources
- Results in significant cost for the organisers during and after the disaster response
- Increases the labour force - volunteers and paid workers
- Negatively impacts the economic recovery of the affected community
- Works against the National Principles for Disaster Recovery
- Can cause unnecessary negative publicity by the media
- By default creates government and NGO policy

The incidence and severity of large scale disasters is increasing and it is likely that this may continue. Large disasters quickly become multi-jurisdictional as everyone wants to help. Ideally the Guidelines need to be applied consistently across all states and territories.

Some of the issues that need to be addressed in the Guidelines are:

- Donations to be based on assessed need
- Preference for cash
- Preferred particular donations:
  - can be generically predicted according to disaster type
  - can be documented
  - donors can be matched to the material needs lists
- Alternative ways to donate
- Management of unwanted donations

- Any required referral arrangements
- Corporate donations
- Communication and media

### **Recommendation 2**

**That the proposed National Guidelines inform development of State and Territory and regional emergency management plans.**

#### Rationale

State and regional plans should address:

- Authority, structure and procedures in relation to donated goods and the key people who have responsibility
- Deterrence of donated second hand goods by consistent messages
- Plans for diverting goods so they are not delivered to inappropriate locations e.g. establishment of a registry, referral on to charity shops etc.
- Disposal of unusable donations which have not been diverted
- A plan for management of the media and scripts that will be used regularly in media broadcasts.

### **Recommendation 3**

**That the Guidelines are included in the National Recovery Manual and embedded in Emergency Management training packages.**

#### Rationale

History shows that despite knowledge of the chaos that can be created by unsolicited donated goods, jurisdictions continue to make the same mistakes and seem consistently unprepared for the consequences. These issues need to be established in the corporate memory. Because disasters do not occur all the time, turnover of staff results in loss of this corporate knowledge.

### **Recommendation 4**

**That philosophical support for the need to fund management of donated goods is given by each State and Territory Government. Discretion may be applied in circumstances whereby an appeal is launched independent of government advice and support.**

#### Rationale

In a disaster a prompt flow of funds for material aid management will improve the speed of delivery of aid to disaster affected people and also save costs over the long term.

The amount of funds released should be scaled according to the magnitude of the disaster.

### **Recommendation 5**

**That a communication strategy be developed that informs politicians, community leaders media, emergency management networks, NGOs and the general public about donated goods. This communication strategy should be incorporated into state and territory emergency management plans.**

#### Rationale

People who work within recovery may have some knowledge of the issues in relation to unsolicited and uncontrolled donation of goods but only a small group seem to be currently aware of the extent and seriousness of the problems. Many still consider that donated second hand goods are acceptable for the survivors and are concerned about offending the public by refusing to accept these items. It is important that awareness is raised right across the sector as well as with the public. To change cultural norms everyone needs to be speaking the same language about the topic. The Government and the media will need to be specifically targeted as their role is so powerful in appeals.

The communication strategy could include a range of information including draft media messages, an education kit, a DVD and frequently asked questions. Experiential learning is recommended for media personnel i.e. conducting people through warehouses, giving them the facts, showing what needs to be disposed of. This may be able to be done in a virtual way using a DVD. Briefings for Ministers and other politicians may also be required.

### **Recommendation 6**

**That recovery managers should regularly and formally access feedback from recipients of donated goods so that their opinions, needs and wishes are considered in any future planning.**

#### Rationale

Historically the recipients have rarely been approached for their opinions on the impact of goods donated to them. Sometimes assumptions are made, which if they were clarified would be found to be incorrect. It is important to regularly review feelings and concerns to ensure that donations to recipients are meeting needs as they perceive them. This will be of particular concern as the system changes.

### **Recommendation 7**

**That a strategy be developed to encourage corporate donors to work in partnership with governments and NGOs and to incorporate disaster needs in their Corporate Social Responsibility Policies.**

#### Rationale

Current use of corporate donations seems to be very ad hoc. Corporate donations are made after significant disasters but this does not happen in any planned way and creates considerable extra work. There is certainly a willingness in the corporate world to assist the community in times of extreme need.



Recovery activities for individuals and communities would be greatly enhanced by providing better structures to ensure needs are more appropriately attended to.

This strategy could include:

- Possible development of Memorandums of Understanding at National and State level
- Support Government, NGO and corporate donor partnerships where appropriate and in accordance with regional, state and federal emergency management plans
- State and territories accept responsibility for development of standard lists of needs for survivors at the key points in recovery i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> night, 1<sup>st</sup> week, 1<sup>st</sup> month etc.
- Possible development of a panel of appropriate preferred providers who will be approached to assist with donations at specific times dependent on pre-organised agreements
- Development of preferred pathways for giving so donors know where to go.

## Appendix 1: Working Group

Ronnie Faggotter	Director State Recovery Office Department for Families and Communities South Australia
Paul Thorn	Project Manager Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) Victoria
Frank Staebe	Financial Controller Salvos Stores Mount Waverley, Victoria
David Barker	Bushfire Recovery Manager Salvation Army Victoria
Jason Collins	Senior Project Officer Planning and Operations Emergency Management NSW
Michael Taarnby	Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Director Property & Operational Services Saint Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn Central Council
Jill Peters	Acting Senior Service Support Officer, Community Recovery Unit Department of Communities Queensland
Pauline Cole	Project Officer State Recovery Office Department for Families and Communities South Australia

## Appendix 2: Reference Group

Kerry Webb	Manager Community Recovery and Emergency Planning Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services ACT
Kevin O’Loughlin	Senior Planning Consultant, Department of Health and Human Services Tasmania
Kim Dean	Manager Emergency Services Department for Child Protection Western Australia
Catherine Freriks	Emergency Management Coordinator Department for Families and Communities South Australia
Betsy Harrington	Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) Victoria
Collene Bremner	Welfare Recovery Coordinator Department of Health and Families Northern Territory
Dina Bellwood,	Assistant Section Manager, Disaster Preparedness Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Branch, FaHCSIA
Hori Howard	<a href="mailto:h2howard@bigpond.com">h2howard@bigpond.com</a> 02 4267 3043 (H) or 0401 996 374
Ross Pagram	National Consultant Disaster Recovery State Recovery Office Department for Families and Communities South Australia

## Appendix 3: Australian Government Disaster Recovery Committee, Not-For-Profit Advisory Group

### **Terms of Reference**

Members will represent their respective organisations to:

- Enhance the understanding of the complementary roles that the Australian Government and not-for-profit sector play in both building community capacity and helping manage and recover from critical events and disasters.
- Facilitate the exchange of information on community recovery policy and planning.
- Contribute to Australian Government policy development by providing advice on issues impacting on the not-for-profit sector's ability to respond in disaster recovery situations.
- Harness the expertise of the not-for-profit sector in emergency management to enhance recovery outcomes for communities, and actively engage with NFPAG members to increase community preparedness, capacity and resilience.

### **Membership**

The NFPAG is chaired by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and comprises the following member organisations:

- Adventist Development and Relief Agency
- Anglicare
- Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum
- Australian Red Cross
- Catholic Social Services Australia
- DRSC
- Lifeline
- Mission Australia
- Uniting Care Australia
- Smith Family
- St John Ambulance Australia
- St Vincent De Paul Society
- The Benevolent Society
- The Salvation Army
- Volunteering Australia
- Co-opted members from other departments, agencies or non-government organisations.

## Appendix 4: Summary of Issues from Stakeholders

Following is a summary of information gleaned from all stakeholders through meetings or individual consultations.

### The Recipients

- Assessment of needs of the community is crucial and should occur immediately to specifically identify donations required.
- A voucher system helps to reduce fraud, ensure equity and accurate targeting.
- Discouraging dependency is a high priority as it drags down recovery.
- Supporting local economies (goods and services) makes best sense for survivors and the community.
- Those underinsured or not insured do require the assistance of donated goods and others want/need donated goods so that they can spend grant money on other things.
- “Newly made, thoughtful goods” – e.g. quilts and teddy bears are valued by recipients.
- Management of donated goods diverts resources away from the recipients and slows down the delivery of essential items.
- Disasters affect more than those who lose their homes and livelihoods. The already established connections in communities mean that almost all members of the community will be touched in some way by what the survivors are going through. Giving is one way to deal with the sense of loss. Therefore if the current giving is not considered appropriate it may be necessary to find alternative activities that will help the whole community to heal.

### The Donors

- Expectations of donors need to be managed and alternatives offered (e.g. garage sales), the need is for everyone to slow down and be thoughtful about what may be useful. Currently the way the issue unfolds reflects that the donor is managing the need. ‘Conditions’ placed on donations are not manageable.
- It is impossible to stop all donations and therefore systems such as registries need to be set up for all disasters, this also discourages ‘dumping’. Donors need to be assisted to understand their responsibilities when donating e.g. goods not meeting Australian standards.
- Would like to see some research done on what motivates people to donate?
- There are difficulties for corporate donors in claiming tax deductions unless the donation is made to a particular category of charity (deductible gift recipient or DGR).
- Corporate donations are a resource that is under utilised and could be better organised. There are a number of activities that need to be pursued to start that process e.g.:
  - how the appeal is set up will have an impact on the outcomes
  - there is a need to be sure that people can flexibly donate
  - need to investigate changing the Taxation Act so that it can comprehend the needs of such appeals and which can be invoked whenever a disaster occurs.
- VBRRRA Donations Management Team were set up in locations. They worked out need, and then targeted the corporates to try and get the need met. A formal contract needs to be put in place so that everyone is clear about the conditions and what will happen if anything goes wrong.
- A useful first step would be to ensure that we have a list developed of what items are required at what stages in recovery so that items required could be pre-negotiated with companies able to provide them.

- It was felt that each state should have a data base of corporate donors who could be accessed when the need arose.
- It may be useful to provide potential corporate donors with current thinking and principles they may need to be aware of if they wish to make donations.

### Policy and Procedures

- National Guidelines need to be developed which look at:
  - best practice management of donated goods
  - roles and responsibilities e.g. who manages when donations are going to a different state
  - distribution and equity issues
  - OHS&W issues associated with management of the goods.
- The EMA Recovery Manual which is currently being re-written needs to contain a section on management of donated goods.
- State Recovery Plans should include scheduled/managed methods of organising donated goods and include disposal plans, reallocation of resources and management of media backlash. Any national and state policies need to be flexible for adaptability at local level.
- Procedures covering all organisations should be pre-written and pre-trained so that the system operates efficiently from day one and mistakes do not continually get repeated. Corporate memories have to be put in place.
- Any agency leading the donations system has to:
  - be well prepared for the immensity of the issue
  - have appropriate advisors when circumstances are unfamiliar
  - set up on the first day of any disaster
  - make strong points to the public
  - be given a budget to empower decision making (need to work out formula e.g. x lost houses = y storage space = z funding)
  - set up other organisations to manage different categories of goods
  - have a good system for sorting/inventory/storage (maybe needs matching – database)
  - work with corporates to get best outcomes for survivors.
- The ideal would be to also set up an office for donation of goods which is:
  - appropriately resourced
  - responsible for pre-educating the public, the media and community organisations
  - responsible for negotiating prior contracts with corporate entities and maybe set up a panel of accredited corporate donors who will provide items as needed and understand that decision making rests with the organisers not the company

### Communication

- Media management needs to be embedded at the highest level in Departments and Premiers need to be assisted to understand the issues so that firm, consistent messages are provided. A little early pain will save a lot of later pain.
- The media exaggerates the need, often causes overload and criticises those trying to manage the overload but also is an essential partner in getting needs met. Communication through the media has to be well managed and continuous (keep providing appropriate stories).

- How to manage the media is complex, even when media people have received extensive education they still slip into asking for donations of goods (Victorian experience). Talk-back programs magnify the issues raised by disgruntled listeners, rarely understand the systems of management, and can be demanding and unreasonable. A media plan is essential
- It is necessary to understand how the media operates both in city and regional areas. Appropriate briefing and understanding of implications is essential for both media and those accessing it.
- Communication about timing of donations is crucial to avoid storage problems e.g. recipients not yet ready to receive goods – no home, but washing machine donated.
- Administration costs need to be discussed openly.
- Messages to the public have to be very clear and consistent and initially only about cash donations, responders must be able to say ‘no’ and may need scripts to work from.
- Public education needs to find ways to change cultural norms which is currently about giving goods not money.
- New South Wales set up:
  - a website which gave good messages
  - a Hotline which thanked offers of assistance and indicated that if required would get back to caller who was asked to leave contact details
  - provided a script about why you should donate money.
 They had 3 days of bad media – then it was OK (Versus many warehouses full of inappropriate donations).
- New media, i.e. internet (Twitter etc), mobile phone traffic etc need to be taken into account.

### Education Issues

- Donated goods needs to be part of the fabric of any relief/recovery management training. Training should be:
  - targeted at high level managers and local government
  - available in DVD format and provided to key community leaders.
- Community organisations need education. There are major issues associated with disaster donations because donations are a business arm for NGOs and a disaster outcome is loss of donations to ongoing charities. Lots of organisations set up collections without going through the major organisers.
- Experiential learning for media and community organisations would be a good method of education (i.e. take people through warehouses).

### Insurance Issues

There was considerable discussion about the need for home and personal property insurance to be compulsorily insured in the same way that Medicare is used for health. This would contribute to the overall resilience of communities, and reduce the range of donations which may be required.

It was agreed that although the topic of insurance should be noted because of its significant impact, it was not within the scope of the project to act any further on this particular item.

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## Appendix 5: Summary of Issues from Recipients

### **THEMES**

- Receiving charity is not pleasant for anyone and is a particular problem for elderly people.
  - Some second-hand items are OK but they still have to be good quality and look attractive. What is offered gives messages about how donors perceive the recipients.
  - Being able to make choices is a constant theme that kept re-emerging in the discussions.
  - Having to feel grateful and be responsible for not offending donors is an added and unnecessary burden when the problems that have to be tackled are immense.
  - Poor quality is offensive (people feel both offended and indignant).
  - Being in control of your own recovery is a crucial part of building resilience and confidence.
  - Some donated goods are very important e.g. first night packs (new).
  - Farmers need good quality hay, fencing, water and agistment for stock.
  - Cleaning gear, tools, boots, gloves are always useful.
  - The best donation is to work alongside the survivors when this does not add further burdens.
  - Empathy and sensitivity are needed from the helpers. The attitude of some shop assistants was also very unhelpful and demeaning to the survivors.
  - People need to know up front if there are any strings attached to donations e.g. deducting the value of donated items from later grants. Many would choose not to accept the goods under these circumstances as they see the donations only as a resource to be used until they are able to buy the things they would choose.
  - The lack of thoughtfulness from people was very hurtful to most of the participants.
  - Money was the best donation for most recipients but even then there was some constraint as people felt the need to use this very carefully because it had been donated.
  - Own accommodation was also felt to be on the top of the priority list.
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## Recipients Views of Donated Goods

### **Information from Canberra Recipients Focus Group**

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#### **Introduction**

The meeting was held on 28 January 2010 and seven people attended. The Manager, Community Recovery and Emergency Planning, ACT was also present.

All participants were women and the age range was from 47 to 65 plus.

All had been recipients of donated goods because of losses in the fire. All lost their homes and personal possessions.

Participants responded to a pre-prepared survey but the exercise could not be run because of time constraints.

#### **Pre-Prepared Survey**

The group responded to pre-prepared survey. The questions were as follows:

1. What was the worst thing you received from donations?
  2. What was the best thing you received from the donations?
  3. What did it feel like to be recipients?
  4. What were the most necessary items on the first day?
  5. What do you need after the first week?
  6. What is needed one month later?
  7. What are your needs one year later?
  8. What was needed specifically for the farm?
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Some initial comments received from attendees were:

- Jane said that her first experience of the recovery effort was that she and her husband were met by an 'angel' as they pulled up outside the recovery centre and that person conducted them through everything they needed to do. They felt completely dazed by everything that had happened and this was the best thing that could have happened to them.
- Cheryl noted that materials weren't really that important when it really got down to it and those recipients of donated goods felt that they had to accept whatever was given to them because it made the donor "feel" better and so that they can "heal".
- Christina said that she had read a report where food was delivered to a disaster-struck area and the people didn't know how to cook it. The intention of donated goods is usually good, however, due to cultural, dates on foods etc, it becomes more of burden. It can often be a "publicity seeking" donation as well.
- Tineke advised that babies were very well catered for at the evacuation centres in Canberra and that most people were generally well-catered for.

- Jane found that it is women who really held things together and that men don't seem to want to be involved.

### **Question One – What was the worst thing you were offered?**

- Jane said a broken desk chair was given to her by a lady who asked her to travel to collect it from her home and she wasn't aware it was broken until she got it home. Jane also received a suitcase of clothes that were unsuitable. Jane said that she felt too traumatised to be meeting strangers to collect goods from them.
- Christina was given a car boot full of clothes by one of her friends. The friend clearly felt that she was doing something special by giving her these items and showed her every item and told her a story that was attached to it. The clothes were all in small sizes and Christina quite obviously would not have fitted into any of them.
- Chandani said she went to stay at her brother's house and overnight people left bags of clothing outside the front door. The clothes were stained, torn and dirty. Her children couldn't understand why someone would have given such items. Chandani found that she discovered who her "real" friends were from what she did/didn't receive. A friend said she had some lovely jumpers for her and there wasn't one which didn't have a stain or a hole in it. She also received a set of old saucepans. She said that you began to understand what people thought you were worth.
- Cheryl received a "rag bag" of clothing as well and she was told that she must accept them. She found it deeply offensive.
- Christina noted that you don't realise how vulnerable you are in a situation like that.
- Cheryl also received some bigger, plus sized clothing – however it was white and unironed. Since this clothing was intended for people who were dirty from ashes and had no power, it seemed like a ridiculous donation.
- Karen received a truckload of clothes that were dirty and unfashionable. She resented having to feel grateful and she noted that none of her close friends did anything like that to her.
- Tineke had no bad experiences to report. She was able to choose the clothes that she wanted and she also received vouchers and cash. The only odd thing she received was crocheted coat hangers but she never received old clothes.
- Peta was given vouchers to spend at xxx store. However, it was mid-January and most of the summer clothes had sold out. She was told that the vouchers had to be spent in one go and she couldn't find one item of clothing in her size. Her daughter was very distressed by the experience. Peta felt very angry and resentful and she didn't want to shop at the time. Chandani agreed and said that the store/s she visited treated her in the same way and not as an individual.
- Jane had a different experience at xxx store. When she went to the store, the manager arranged for more money to be allocated to them to spend. Jane had always regarded it as a "cheap" shop but found items she liked and she changed her attitude after that experience.
- Christina was given xxx store "winter warmer" vouchers and then after she had chosen all of her clothing/items, when she approached the service desk, she was told she couldn't use the voucher at all, even though the Recovery Centre had explained to xxx that they were allowed to use them. People were getting angry in the queue behind her and Christina made a very loud comment that she had lost everything in the bushfires. The people in the queue looked very embarrassed, but the vouchers made her feel as though she was "poor".
- Chandani thought that Canberra didn't "know" what to do as the city had never experienced anything like that. She found that many of the clothes in the stores she was allowed to use her vouchers in, weren't suited to her tastes and she still hasn't got her wardrobe back to how it was before the fires.

All but one of the participants was given poor quality or unsuitable clothing. All felt insulted and diminished by the experience. Several lost friends because of the attitude that anything would be OK.

All expressed a level of resentment about being expected to be grateful for being given items that they then had to dispose of, because they were so unsuitable or in such poor condition. The attitude of some shop assistants was also very unhelpful and demeaning to the survivors.

The lack of thoughtfulness from people was very hurtful to most of the participants. One person was told that she needed to accept the 'donations' with good grace because "it helped the donor to heal".

### **Question Two – What was the best thing you were offered?**

- Cheryl said that money was the best thing. She had donations transferred straight into her bank account. She also received a washing basket filled with useful items such as a little washing line, pegs, pens, pencils, a diary etc. She also received a \$500 gift voucher for clothes.
- Friends that Karen and her family regularly camped with donated money for replacement camping gear in time for their usual March weekend away. Her boss also lent her good work pants and new pyjamas.
- Tineke received a house only 4 weeks after the fires. She said for the first year she "wasn't really me" and it was good to have a base because it grounded her.
- Peta had a friend who didn't really enjoy cooking but made her a batch of food, in containers that could be placed straight into the microwave. She was very touched by this gift. She also received red velvet cushions and a beautiful print for her wall. She said it was uplifting to receive something beautiful. Her brother offered to buy them a new couch.
- Jane said that little things such as toothbrush and toothpaste made a big difference. She received some beautiful fabric and a little ornament which reminded her that there would be a future and gave her hope. A friend organised a kitchen tea and friends brought kitchen items for her and also gave her recipes that they had received from their mothers and grandmothers. She also had some photos that she had sent to other people returned to her, which was a lovely gift as she thought she wouldn't be able to replace the photos.
- Cheryl received a kitchen 'second drawer' containing very useful kitchen items.
- Christina's hobby was knitting and after the fire, she was given knitting and craft items. Knitted rugs and quilts were presented to survivors at Parliament House which Christina found very moving. She said that the love and warmth in the room was incredible. A friend also painted a picture for her but she offered an exchange by knitting a scarf and it was nice to be able to barter for something, rather than just receive a gift. Christina was also given a holiday to Port Macquarie by the local council.
- Chandani said that many of her friends had also lost their homes. She had previously belonged in a craft group and received a washing basket filled with hand made Christmas decorations which was given to her in the September after the fires. She was given some recipes and a gift box filled with useful items such as hankies, nail clippers, nail files etc. She was also given a 'second drawer'. She commented that she hasn't been able to get back to doing her craft work since the fire. She felt overall though that they were very blessed.
- Jane received massage/pedicure vouchers. She felt it was lovely to know that someone who was far away knew about the fires and cared enough to send something. She also

commented that one day when she was in a shop and had to mention that she had lost everything in the bushfire, someone who was also in the shop overheard and ran after her as she left. She gave her a scratchy she had just bought. She felt there was overwhelming kindness everywhere.

The group was very eager to say that they received kindness and compassion from a huge range of people. Thoughtful gifts that came with love and warmth were uplifting and helped people to cope. “Total strangers gave without expecting anything in return. There is no way you can thank people enough.”

Pauline asked what kind of gifts men received.

- Chandani said her husband received tools and an esky.
- Cheryl said that men liked to receive stubby holders and caps.

### **Question Three – How did you feel about receiving the donated goods?**

- Cheryl said that she felt guilty at first and then she felt appreciation – Australia loved them!
- Peta said she found it hard to accept big donations (e.g. over \$500) and overwhelming. She had to learn how to receive. She felt both physically and emotionally depleted. She had no energy. It was delightful getting good things but physically taxing receiving rubbish. Peta said she didn't want people to know that she had lost a house and just wanted to be normal – not a victim. It did give her a sense of self as she became a survivor.
- Cheryl said she got sick of all the buying afterwards and always felt that she had to spend any money on only worthwhile things. It is only after this length of time that she gets a bit excited when she buys something special or goes shopping. It was years before she felt she could buy something special for herself. Peta said she felt that she couldn't buy anything frivolous with the money/vouchers she had received.
- Jane said it was very difficult and she and her husband weren't good at accepting help. Accepting gifts was hard and emotionally taxing. People gave without expecting any thanks but they now feel that they want to pay back in some way. She and her husband volunteered to work at the Wolgan community and still do that now. She felt the experiences were all good learning for the future.
- Christina said she felt changeable. She didn't receive what she had expected from a friend and one of her friends got angry with her because she hadn't contacted her to let her know she was OK. She said she lost friendships because they were unable to provide what was needed. Christina said that strangers helped her to grow through the experience. She found she started to feel entitled to certain things such as discounts from stores and got very angry if she had to prove she was actually in the bushfire, despite her showing her card of proof.
- Chandani did find it easier to accept help as she was already a giver. The bushfires had given her much more empathy for other people's suffering.
- Tineke found it very hard to accept help in the beginning, but she took what was offered. People seemed to always be coming around and it was overwhelming. Once the “four seasons” of grief had passed, she stopped going to the Recovery Centre as she didn't feel that she was a victim anymore, but a survivor and the person at the Recovery Centre got upset with her.
- Chandani said that her case worker from the Recovery Centre told then she was there to help with anything that needed to be done. Chandani said she needed help with filling out passport forms. The worker came back to her with all the paperwork and told her all the things she needed to do but didn't help with completing the forms. For her this

wasn't supportive at all. The case worker became a burden, as she felt that whenever she wanted to visit, Chandani had to 'clean the house and bake a cake'.

Most of the group found it difficult and emotionally taxing to accept but one person said eventually she got to the stage where she understood "Australia loved us". People, however, clearly wanted to be independent and not relying on being given things because this made them feel stronger and more in control.

Even where cash was given it was also clear that it was hard for survivors to spend it on anything that was not essential. They felt constrained by their own expectations and what they thought others would expect of them (whether or not this was true).

#### **Question Four – What do you need in the first day?**

- Medicines (not able to get them without doctor's approval) and chemist wasn't sure what to do
- A hug
- Comb, toothbrush, face washer, box of tissues
- Cash donation/emergency money (money gives you choice)
- Battery-operated torches (when no power available)
- Human and pet food
- Petrol for car/transport
- Place to sleep/roof overhead
- Mobile phone (In Canberra, Telstra gave out mobile phones and diverted home numbers to mobile phones so family/friends could reach affected people). It was important for children to have easy access to their parents.
- Having somewhere for the children to go to get away from it all.
- First aid items
- A roof over their heads.

#### **Question Five – What do you need in the first week?**

- Money – to contribute to where you are staying or for accommodation
- Choice of free groceries was good but cash was better than being given groceries because you can choose what you want
- Cash is good for the city but might not be good for country regions if the shops have been burned down
- Basic desk – diary, pen, calculator, hole puncher etc
- Little briefcase/bags/cases
- Stationery supplies and stamps
- Children's entertainment items (teenagers tended to get left out)
- Movie tickets for children/teenagers
- Rent Play stations/vouchers for kids to go to bookstores
- New underwear
- Plastic boxes to store things (ones with wheels would be better) or any kind of storage equipment
- Generator or gas stove to heat water
- Bottled water
- Visit recovery centres (networking)
- People to take care of pets
- Prepared meals (to remind you to eat, as often didn't feel hungry until food placed in front of them).

### **Question Six – What do you need in the first month?**

- A home
- Wanted to return to old home
- Recovery Centre (with medical staff available) – then only had to tell story once
- Revision of accommodation/where they were staying (needing their own space)
- No cooking (hospitality and eating takeaway was preferred)
- Regrieving (getting over it)
- Realisation that things wouldn't be the same
- Getting back to some "routine" and normality
- Getting the children ready for school/taking care of the children
- Household items such as washing machines and someone to assist with purchasing these items
- Schools gave lots of items, provided clothing for kids and helped to create a focus
- Enough "things" to be able to cook a meal and look after the kids
- Location of new home important for kids in terms of schools etc
- New saucepans and knives
- Garden/digging up what was left in the garden
- Protecting what was left of your home
- Coping with tourists/sightseers
- Saving precious plants and organising working bees.

### **Question Seven – What do you need in the first year?**

- Need to reach the stage where you are a survivor – not a victim
- Working – still needing to go back and visit old neighbourhood once a month
- Back on track, managing, determined to carry on
- Bitter and twisted, hated the government. Not rebuilding quickly enough as the government kept changing their minds and "did me over" several times
- Where would I be located eventually/looking for permanency
- No acknowledgement that on the day nothing could have been done – didn't attend first anniversary because felt so bad about this
- Angry there were no warnings for people
- Anger for some time
- Resentful – farms were saved and houses were not
- No water available for houses as Elders had used the supply
- Recovery Centre was still the anchor – there was no judgement for expression of emotion. The Recovery Centre definitely needs to remain open for 18 months after an event.
- The public were no longer sympathetic expect you to be over it
- Children were showing signs of stress and needed more emotional support
- Numbness was wearing off by the second/third year and underlying issues flared up
- Services had dropped off and the community support was no longer available.

It was interesting that almost all comments for the 12 month stage were related to emotional well-being rather than possessions and may mean that a second wave of emotional support could be required at around 12 months.

## Recipients Views of Donated Goods

### **Information from Port Lincoln Recipients Focus Group**

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#### **Introduction**

The meeting was held on 16 November 2009 and 7 people attended.

The participants had been involved in an ongoing support group following the 2005 Eyre Peninsula Bush Fires though this had ceased meeting at the time of the focus group.

All participants were women and the age range was from 47 to 65 plus.

6 out of 7 of the group had been recipients of donated goods because of losses in the fire. 3 out of 7 had losses related to their farms, 1 had loss of home and 2 had losses related to both farm and home.

Two activities were undertaken – participants responded to a pre-prepared survey, and then undertook an exercise on extremes.

#### **Pre-Prepared Survey**

The group responded to pre-prepared survey. The questions were as follows:

1. What was the worst thing you received from donations?
2. What was the best thing you received from the donations?
3. What did it feel like to be recipients?
4. What were the most necessary items on the first day?
5. What do you need after the first week?
6. What is needed one month later?
7. What are your needs one year later?
8. What was needed specifically for the farm?

#### **Exercise**

The group was then divided into two smaller groups and asked to spend some time developing a list for one or other of the following:

*What works about donated goods?*

*What doesn't work?*

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## Responses to Questions

### What was the Worst Thing you Received from Donations?

- Men were offended by thin and short fencing posts which were basically useless for securing animals; lots of these have since been stockpiled.
- Electrical items generally were in very poor condition.
- People were given baskets of toiletries, some received 3 or 4 of these and others did not get anything. They often went to those who least needed them. Most toiletries were already used e.g. half lipstick, half bottle of perfume or talcum powder.
- Pets were forgotten.
- People who lost everything were too overwhelmed to ask for things at the centres, they needed a 'buddy' to look after them and make sure their needs were met.
- Someone was given a caravan in very poor condition and almost unusable. It cost a lot of money and time to collect but the recipient felt that it was necessary for them to be grateful as it would hurt the donor's feelings if they were not (it was believed that the caravan had previously been used as a cubby house by a small child who left a note in the van, wishing the recipient well in their new home).
- There was lots of ill feeling and upset about whitegoods when they arrived. The cost of these items was deducted from grants when they were made available. People did not know this and if they had money would have chosen quite different items. Some chose to return the goods and receive the cash instead.
- Boxes of goods were hand delivered to property but there was no way to know what was inside and people just had to accept them without seeing anything. People felt obliged to take them whether or not they wanted them.
- There was a strong sense that if you were in the appropriate networks you heard about all kinds of extra things and could get most things you needed, but if not you missed out.

The over whelming feeling from participants was that they had lost their right to choose:

- They could not say whether or not they wanted something
- They could not choose to be upset about poor quality because it was expected that they would be grateful even though poor quality was offensive
- People also needed to know if there were strings attached to any of the donations prior to accepting them because not knowing limited their options
- There was a feeling of unfairness about the process i.e. you needed to be 'in the know' to get a lot of things

One participant commented "I did feel overwhelmed by the amount people were giving us (and often strongly did not want) but felt we should always accept and be grateful because we were grateful for their generosity and caring if not the goods ...I felt also that we were often expected to be grateful and even "lucky" as a couple of people said out of misguided kindness. The generosity of people was hugely important in our recovery but I personally did not want "stuff". I found it quite liberating (for a short while!) to be free of stuff and wanted to rebuild slowly and thoughtfully rather than accumulate things I did not want. So I think the key is to be given encouragement and choice."

### What was the Best Thing you Received from Donations?

- Anything for the farm, i.e. good quality hay, tools, work clothes, work gloves and boots, tool sheds, good agistment etc. These items were often only advertised by word of mouth and many missed out.

- Home items like linen (good quality second hand was OK), cooking utensils e.g. casserole dishes and pots and pans, packs for cleaning were really useful. One community group was given a donation of \$10,000 and made up the cleaning packs.
- Items that had sentimental value. One participant had owned some white slacks which she lost and on the first day managed to find an identical pair in the same size. This meant a lot to her.
- Water for washing, drinking, cleaning was desperately needed and gratefully accepted as most of the water pipes had melted and it was some time before water was again available.
- Sleeping bags and mattresses were provided new, these were really useful.
- Whitegoods were happily received until people discovered that the value was deducted from their later payments.
- There were a number of comments about items given but the cost then deducted from later payments.
- Generators arrived early and were essential for re-establishing normal patterns of life
- Telstra donated mobile phones.
- Money was gratefully received and gave freedom of choice.

Participants were clearly very happy with a number of things they received (mostly new items) and very grateful for the generosity and support of the larger community.

“I am aware that I am still affected by the Wangary fire ... but at the same time it has given me the opportunity to appreciate the incredible generosity of our local community and friends and family, and that is worth so much more than stuff!”

The sense of injustice related to deductions from later payments continued to be a theme.

### **What did it Feel Like to be Recipients?**

- Most said it felt horrible, some felt guilty as once their insurance became available they would be able to pay for anything required.
- Older people did not want to accept charity.
- People felt they had to be grateful even if they did not want something. Because items were donated people felt reluctant to dispose of them even if they were ‘junk’.
- It was easier to accept farming equipment as long as it was good quality.
- People felt a strong need to be in control of what they received.
- Many said it was also awful when they had to deal with continuous phone calls from well wishers and people wanting to help. Participants felt they needed time to process what had happened before they dealt with the aftermath.

It was clearly very difficult for all the participants to be on the receiving end of donations. It only added insult to injury when they were obliged to accept items that they did not consider to be reasonable. There was also a perception that they were not given enough space to deal with their trauma but had to be bright and accepting and always grateful for everything they received. It took a while for some to feel strong enough to deal with what was happening.

### **What Were the Most Necessary Items on the First Day?**

- Accommodation.
- Water for drinking, washing and cleaning.
- Food, where it can be managed preferably hot, as there was no electricity or gas. Failing that, a small camping stove to heat hot water for tea and coffee and warm soup etc.
- Lighting: candles, torches, batteries someone dragged in all their solar lights from outside and used these. Provision of solar lighting would be useful.
- New toiletries (some said if absolutely essential could manage with second-hand toiletries for the first shower, but after that needed new), change of clothes, second hand clothes to use for cleaning up, boots were especially important for farmers. Recipients felt this could be dealt with much more efficiently by providing a disaster pack which can be delivered within 24 hours. This needs to consist of:
  - New toiletries (including tooth brushes, toothpaste, soap, deodorant, sanitary napkins etc) and towels
  - Night wear (new) and change of clothes (could be second hand as doing lots of clearing up)
  - Medication like antiseptic lotions, bandages, throat pastilles, saline solution, goggles, cotton wool, and pain killers as most people had suffered minor cuts and abrasions plus sore eyes from smoke.
  - Tea and coffee supplies
  - Variety of gloves for cleaning and clearing up
- Soft toys for kids.

### **What do you Need After the First Week?**

- Money.
- Water in larger quantities.
- Food, and this needs to be enough to feed volunteers working there as well.
- Hay, for stock.
- A power source e.g. generator.
- Portaloo (can manage for a while without but eventually this becomes essential).
- Furniture (second-hand OK), which is needed to tide people over until their insurance money becomes available and they can buy their own. What is required is dependent on where people manage to find accommodation.
- Good condition second-hand linen is OK at this time.
- Rags are very useful for cleaning so second hand clothing and old towels can be used for this.
- New pillows.
- Some kind of lockable storage (e.g. shipping containers for farm equipment, smaller for household goods).

### **What do you Need one Month Later?**

- Good clothes for work/uni/school.
- Money.
- Writing paper, pens, envelopes, stamps so that people can start to sort out personal affairs.
- 'Shoebboxes of love' were delivered at this stage and most gratefully received, but need similar for men. Survivors are just starting to recognise their levels of stress and these help considerably.
- Sewing kits.
- Recipe books

### **What are your Needs one Year Later?**

- People who have rebuilt are moving into new homes but those who were not insured may be in a much worse situation and either needed household items earlier or need influx of cash and furniture at this time.
- People who moved away from the area are often the forgotten ones and need a lot of help as they move back.
- Most people will already have been accumulating items for their new homes.
- At about 9 months lots of plants and fruit trees were donated and this was really positive. People nurtured these until ready to move into new homes and they became a symbol of new life and moving forward.
- Needs are very individual and specific now so assessment is required.

### **What was Specifically Needed for Farms?**

- Farmers needed to do an inventory of what is left.
  - Lots of traumatised animals need to be destroyed and ammunition is required plus earth moving equipment to dig pits for carcasses.
  - Water is a big issue and need tanks, with water delivered to fill these up. Often the piping needed to be completely replaced.
  - Whatever medication, treatment, food, water is needed to keep stock alive.
  - Agistment for animals and an immediate safe place.
  - Fencing posts, wire etc.
  - Tools.
  - Shipping containers or lockable storage
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## Recipients Views of Donated Goods

### Information from Emerald Recipients Focus Group

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#### **Introduction**

The meeting was held on 16 February 2010 and 4 people attended

3 participants were women and one was male. The age range was from 36 to 55.

All sustained serious damage to their homes and lost personal possessions

Participants needed the space and time to make comment about their experiences in the floods. There was considerable frustration and some anger expressed about the lack of services provided and what was seen to be very poor management of the situation. The meeting therefore did not address all the questions in the pre-prepared survey as used in previous groups, although responses were gleaned from the conversations that occurred.

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#### General Comments about Donated Goods

- St Vincent De Paul was flooded with donations (far more than they could accommodate) and it was all shifted to a shed at the showgrounds. Someone then volunteered to look after this and be involved with distribution. People were concerned about how decisions were made in relation to distribution
- Karen said that she visited the shed in Emerald packed full of donated goods and not many people were taking anything from it.

#### **Question One – What was the worst thing you were offered?**

- Peter advised that at the Gemfields people were arriving with bedding just after the flood which was pointless because there was nowhere to put a mattress. Yes, people need donations of goods but not always in the direct aftermath of the disaster.
- Some donations such as a washing machine/double bed won't fit into a caravan
- Attendees said that if they had a negative experience when they first asked for help, that they probably wouldn't ask again (e.g. not receiving the appropriate help or enough assistance).
- Jodi said that sometimes people beat themselves up because they didn't ask for the fridge when it was first offered or get help for their kids directly after the event and yet help isn't there when you finally accept that you need it.

#### **Question Two – What was the best thing you were offered?**

- One woman who had a furnished house for rent offered the furniture to several families. This was very good quality furniture and probably better than the families had previously owned. Everyone agreed that good quality donations are accepted with much joy and gratefulness.
- Someone else offered to fit out a teenager's bedroom and did everything including buying curtains and bedding to match. This was a wonderful gift.

- Laine thought the best donation was someone offering to look after her daughter for the day and knowing she was in a safe place.

There was a sense that people were able to get things if they happened to have the right contacts but otherwise they missed out. There were strong themes of inequality generally, e.g. if you were a bushfire victim people donated more, if you lived in a different area you got a better service.

### **Question Three – How did you feel about receiving the donated goods?**

- Karen felt like it was a huge burden being expected to take the donated goods. She felt she was carrying a huge debt of charity.
- Laine felt she had to repay people for minding her child at a later date and was worried about how she would find the time to repay the favour.
- Peter said he wouldn't take a hand out because he wasn't ready to do that. He felt pathetic asking for a pillow or a blanket so chose not to.
- Karen said that she felt she should be helping others rather than accepting help herself.
- Karen said that they were initially loaned a caravan which had to be returned by Easter. She spent 3 days cleaning it up to return it but then she and her family (husband and 5 children) had only a shed to live in. They are still there now, waiting for work to be completed on their house. People don't realise how long it may take to get back on their feet so a short-term loan isn't always practical.
- Laine felt being given things such as time, became a debt and she didn't even know some of the people that offered their time and then felt she couldn't thank them.
- Karen agreed that she wasn't able to thank people enough and felt guilty. Karen said that you need people to constantly remind you that it is OK to accept and you don't need to keep saying thank you.
- Laine volunteered to the Red Cross for 5 days and she felt this was her thank you. She had friends who rang her a month later and said they didn't call earlier because they thought she would have many people to assist her. In fact she managed everything by herself and help would have been good.
- Karen's sister took her children to look after and she felt anxious about how she could repay that favour. She knew her sister had a house full of kids already.
- Jodi thought it was easier to do some things herself, rather than feel she owed someone a favour. Jodi felt uncomfortable accepting from the church/charity as she would usually "give" to the church, rather than take.
- Peter felt that there was always someone worse off than himself and felt uncomfortable about accepting charity. He was helping others while his wife and children had to manage his home. Peter reminded everyone that Australia is an ageing community and this may be a big factor in future events.
- Peter said that it didn't matter how much had been lost because all his family members were still alive.
- Peter felt it was easier to approach people as an SES representative because then people don't feel they owe "him". Karen agreed that people find it easier to accept charity from the Salvation Army etc rather than a stranger.
- Karen and Jodi said there was a man going around offering his help but he appeared to just want to get his name/photo in the paper. He was a burden on the families and really only wanted to talk, not do what was needed.
- Karen had a group of volunteers that wanted to help but she had no one to direct them to and it felt more stressful for her having to organise the volunteers.

- Karen said that one survivor had a group of volunteers helping him, who threw out all his stuff, without permission. He was very upset about this and felt there was stuff he could have saved.
- Jodi said that groups should be available for men. They don't talk much but feel really bad. They should be able to talk to each other about being providers for their families and the need to accept help.

All of the recipients felt bad about having to accept help and people they were in contact with similarly. They could understand that they did need this but were used to looking after themselves and there seemed to be a strong culture of independence. There was also a strong culture of pride particularly amongst the people at the Gemfields.

#### **Question Four – What are the most necessary items on the first day?**

- Accommodation (own preferably). It's very social living with others, but impossible to talk privately.
- Food.
- Radio (battery operated),
- Toys for children,
- Accommodation for pets.
- Assistance with looking after children (too dangerous, no power, snakes).
- Medicine.
- People may be unable to get to an evacuation centre especially in a flood.
- Needed to know that there was route to the hospital (in a flood). Fear of something happening to the kids and not being able to reach help.
- Bottled water/water supplies – rainwater tanks ran out.
- Govt needs to plan for water supplies being available in a disaster. Also being able to move the water supplies as well e.g. to remote locations.
- Bar fridge.
- Essential package – what to do, what gloves to use etc.

#### **Question Five – What do you need after the first week?**

- Water.
- Toilet/Portaloo.
- Money to compensate for loss of wages.
- Schoolbooks/school clothes.
- Phone and internet (for work purposes).
- Plumbing supplies/gas supplies.
- Second-hand kitchen.
- Washing machine.
- Information from insurance companies.
- Cash.
- Petrol.
- Tarpaulins.
- Accommodation for large families (not many people have the room).
- Power (contacting power supply company for assistance).
- Skips (wouldn't bring them out because road not able to handle weight of skip delivery trucks) but needed somewhere to put rubbish.
- Massage (after moving heavy items, sore backs, muscles etc).
- Work boots, clothes and gloves.
- Tradesmen.

- Karen noted that cupboards are needed and it was difficult to find cupboards for storage (especially mice-proof cupboards).

#### **Question Six – What do you need after the first month?**

- A second skip is usually required by this time.
- Information on how to flood-proof your home.
- Meeting with architects to design new home, draw up plans.
- Financial advice about the lost equity in your home (30% less value).
  
- Advice and assistance about rebuilding, insurance and legal issues.
- A coordinating team to assist with rebuild from start to finish (not just bring personnel in for a week).
- The opportunity to be involved in emergency management committees and receive required information directly.
- Information had to be sourced by victims themselves, not offered to them. For example, Telstra didn't advertise the fact landlines can be diverted to mobiles when landlines are unavailable. However, this couldn't be backdated if the customer didn't advise Telstra as soon as they could and therefore people had racked up huge mobile phone bills! (Yet in Canberra bushfires, Telstra did this automatically).
- Karen said that she was concerned about her children's school books etc as school was due to go back the week after the flood. She felt schools should offer assistance by providing books and uniforms.
- Corporate donors could help by donating bedding (Sheridan), whitegoods (Westinghouse) etc.

#### **Question Seven – What do you need after the first year?**

- Karen said that donations are often needed 12 months after the disaster because people will have their new home by then and need goods and supplies to furnish and live in their home. However, it is often too late then because the donations have dried up.
- More assistance from local schools for the flood affected children. Laine felt her children's school was very insensitive about the impacts on the children and put down unusual behaviour to other things. All the parents reported *they* had to tell the school and let them know what went on, not the other way around.
- Several people commented that they had only recently checked through their saved possessions, and found much had been destroyed by mice. For some this might mean the need for donations of other items, for others that the items were not of much value if they hadn't been needed anyway.

This group had very different issues to previous focus groups. The disaster was still very close for them and their frustration and anger about a perceived lack of support and unfairness overrode other issues. They had major concerns about the area's ability to survive another flood and were seriously concerned about getting things organised for the next time. Donated goods hardly registered in their thoughts about what had happened.

## Appendix 6: Literature and Research

### **Summary of Issues from Research**

The problem we face in Australia is the same as many other countries face. Even though efforts have been made to stem the avalanche of donated goods by developing guidelines for management of donated goods, in USA it appears not to be particularly successful. It remains to be seen whether that will also be the situation in New Zealand.

The worst burden seems to be created by mountains of clothing, much of which is often in poor condition, of limited use, and the majority needs to be disposed of at the end of recovery programs. The unsuitability of what is donated only adds to the difficulties. The fact that most donated goods arrive unsorted and jumbled together creates an overwhelming problem.

The management and administration of these donations adds huge burdens to volunteer and other staff and slows down services to the survivors. The costs associated with the work are very high and often more than the value of the goods. Additionally, finding warehouse space is very difficult and takes further time away from the central work. Multiple donors arriving with goods, causes congestion on roads and makes refusal much harder. Organisers continue to be unprepared for the quantities donated and it seems essential that ways are found to build knowledge of the difficulties into the corporate memory of all organisations undertaking the work.

Oversupply of donations impacts on local businesses who are also trying to recover from the disasters. It also creates a welfare mentality amongst certain groups which drags down the recovery of some communities.

Corporate donors who operate ethically have the potential to do much good and the corporate sector is relied on heavily to supplement government aid. Unethical activity by corporate organisations has the potential to create huge problems. Working productively with corporate entities needs further exploration and development of strategic partnerships that will create mutual benefits.

Donors are seen as important and one of the reasons that the system is not just stopped seems to be because of reluctance to offend the public. This operates at all levels from politicians to volunteers. The donation system often is given greater importance than the needs of recipients who are viewed as helpless and unable to express opinions about what they need and how they can best be helped.

The reasons for making donations are complex and it is unlikely that just telling the public not to send goods will be effective. However doing that would still be a useful exercise as at present there is not a lot of evidence to suggest that the message is getting out or being heard. Further exploration on this topic would be useful in understanding reasons for the way people donate. We can only surmise answers to that question, but without answers, strategies are unlikely to be entirely successful. The focus does seem to be more on keeping donors happy than on providing appropriate services to the survivors of disasters and this emphasis has to change if we are to provide the best recovery services.

There is a prevailing view that recipients will be happy with anything if they currently have nothing. Recipients who have been asked about their views on this topic indicate that they feel that the donation system takes over. They feel that choices are removed and they often feel diminished by the processes that occur.



There is also a sense of support and caring that comes from thoughtful and relevant donations. What the recipients have to say has the potential to provide powerful arguments that will be persuasive in changing the situation.

Literature also suggests that organisers don't necessarily look out for all age ranges when providing goods e.g. the research done by Jill Klein indicates a great need for different responses to teenagers.

The media has the potential to be extremely helpful or extremely destructive. They are very powerful in shaping responses of the public and not always truthful about the reality of situations. Good ongoing partnerships need to be developed so that when needed the appropriate media services can be provided.

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# Summary of Research, Books and Articles re Donated Goods

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## **Introduction**

The most notable thing about research done on this topic is that there is very little. There are some exceptions, e.g. the notion of 'convergence' as described and researched by Fritz and Mathewson (1957) and later Kendra and Wachtendorf in relation to the 9/11 bombings. This does seem to be an issue which has drawn great academic interest over the years but most of the work centres on volunteer convergence rather than convergence of goods.

There are many articles in local or national media, such as Disaster Journals, and the themes that run through these are similar. They mostly describe the devastating impact of uncontrolled donations of goods and it is clear that all jurisdictions in the world face similar issues.

The United States and New Zealand have developed very clear guidelines about what is acceptable in donations but given that many of the articles written are about American disasters and come out of USA it seems that the guidelines, at least in America, are only partially effective. The effectiveness of the New Zealand Guidelines is still to be tested as they have not had an event of significant size since the guidelines were written.

## **Themes**

### **Convergence**

Some of the answers to why inappropriate donations continue despite guidelines may be discovered through better examination of 'convergence' which seems to be a natural phenomenon which happens whenever any kind of disaster occurs.

Fritz and Mathewson who provided the earliest comprehensive look at 'convergence' identified three types of 'convergence'. These are convergence of information, convergence of people (known in Australia as 'spontaneous volunteers') and convergence of donated goods (unsolicited donations). "The spontaneous generosity and outpourings of unsolicited aid to disaster stricken populations can be documented in every peacetime disaster. The value of such aid in facilitating both material and psychological recuperation cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless this spontaneous generosity often has negative consequences which are unanticipated by both the donors and the recipient population."<sup>53</sup>

It seems that because of the character of most disasters, people are emotionally touched in some way. This leads to a need to do something, and for many donating money does not satisfy the need. People have a strong sense that the disaster has to be contained, relieved or managed and 'convergence' seems to be the way that people manage their feelings about it. This can be both positive and negative as is discussed later in this paper.

Fritz and Mathewson concluded that the phenomenon of 'convergence' created a social control problem and the ways to deal with it include pre-planning that assumes it will happen, trying to educate the public to provide helpful rather than unhelpful items (via the media) and having everything in place to handle the issues as they arise.

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<sup>53</sup> "Convergence Behaviour in Disasters – A Problem in social control" Charles E Fritz and J H Mathewson.1957

The Fritz and Mathewson book was written in 1957 and fifty-three years later we are struggling with exactly the same difficulties so it is clear that we are talking about a complex problem which will not respond to simplistic solutions.

Kendra and Wachtendorf also examined the phenomenon in the World Trade Center Attack in 2001 and made the comment:

“...many well documented studies describe how excessive and inappropriate donations impeded the management of other major disasters”<sup>54</sup>

They discussed how thousands of people converged on the area and the donations made were piled up in streets because there was not enough storage space to contain everything.

There have been myriad attempts to manage this situation over many years and the spectacular lack of success so far indicates that it may have to be approached from a quite different angle for there to be any effective and lasting change. Most previous solutions seem to have concentrated on education of the public and the media. Either the education undertaken has not been comprehensive enough or something more needs to be included in any planning to solve this problem.

The difficulties which ensue from ‘convergence’ fall into several categories:

1. Excessive and overwhelming quantities of donated goods
2. Unneeded and unusable items
3. Numerous workers required to undertake sorting, distributing and management of donated goods
4. Additional congestion on the road and in the area of the disaster
5. Can be damaging to local economies

Each of these issues is dealt with below.

### Excessive and Overwhelming Quantities of Donated Goods

What most organisers report is that within days of the disaster (sometimes within 24 hours) container loads of goods start to arrive. These are rarely sorted and organised ready for distribution. Good quality and poor quality are jumbled together. Right and left shoes may arrive in separate trucks, new and old are mixed together, furniture and clothing are usually muddled. “15 trucks arrived yesterday, following 25 that arrived on Friday. Each one was packed directly to the floors, without pallets, meaning that forklifts could not be used. Every bag and box had to be unloaded by hand...”<sup>55</sup> (after the 9/11 attacks). The logistical nightmare that this creates for organisers is only outmatched by the numbers of volunteers required to start sorting through this mess.

“On Saturday evening (15 January) word was received that seven forty-foot containers were arriving the following morning from the Channel ... appeal, Adelaide. This news presented huge

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<sup>54</sup> “Rebel Food...Renegade Supplies: Convergence after the World Trade Center Attack James M. Kendra & Tricia Wachtendorf

<sup>55</sup> After the Attacks: Donations; Donated Goods Deluge the City and Sit Unused” by Jim Dwyer 16/9/2001

logistical concerns for receiving the goods – let alone the storage, sorting and distributions of these goods.”<sup>56</sup> (Eyre Peninsula Bush Fires).

Organisers seem to be consistently unprepared for the massive quantities of goods that arrive. This may be due to lack of previous experience in managing donations in a disaster (as disasters do not occur everyday, staff turnover takes out anyone who does have this experience) or purely because people just do not believe it is going to happen again, even when they have previously experienced it.

Finding storage facilities is just one more problem to overcome, particularly in areas where local buildings have been burnt out, flooded or destroyed. This creates further difficulties because goods then have to be ferried from wherever storage is found to the site where they are required. This adds to congestion on often already overtaxed roads (see below) and requires even more volunteers.

The cost of transporting from the donation point to the storage site is often borne by the volunteer organisations and they spend much time trying to organise people to donate trucks and drivers to get items to where they can be effectively accessed.

There are often political imperatives for accepting rather than refusing the goods and most organisations have concerns about offending the donating public as they feel the majority of what is sent comes with compassion and care.

### Unneeded and Unusable Items

New Zealand operates on a 70/30 rule which means that they consider 70% of the goods to be ‘junk’, 15% usable immediately and 15% usable at some time in the future. “Unwanted and unasked for ‘gifts’ are often a burden that drags down recovery efforts”<sup>57</sup>.

A local charity in Port Lincoln, South Australia reported recently in the media that “eighty per cent of what is donated goes to landfill because it is not salvageable”<sup>58</sup>. The article referred to donations made generally to the charity.

The biggest offender is used clothing. Most people seem to agree that there is only a limited amount of used clothing that is worth having and this usually amounts to a fraction of what is actually received. Much of what is received is in very poor condition and really only usable as cleaning rags. Organisers usually report that many items that are donated are completely inappropriate for the circumstances. They receive useless clothing (heavy winter coats in tropical climate, formal evening dresses and high heeled dress shoes); electrical items that are faulty; food in domestic rather than commercial quantities so that temporary cooking facilities set up to feed large numbers of people cannot use them; perishable foods “such as semis full of bananas...”, so there was the added burden of distributing these items in a timely manner.”<sup>59</sup> (1993 floods in Kansas).

The final report by the Salvation Army, following the Eyre Peninsula Bushfires in 2005 stated “It was exasperating for the deployed personnel and volunteers to continually unload household goods in extremely poor condition, clothing suitable only as rags, and other goods that were inappropriate (too many bicycles and too many baby prams/strollers and all in poor condition)

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<sup>56</sup> 2005 Eyre Peninsula Bush Fire “The Salvation Army Response and Recovery – An Evaluation” Pg 45

<sup>57</sup> Donated Goods Management Planning: Civil Defence Emergency Management BEST PRACTICE GUIDE (BPG2/06)

<sup>58</sup> Port Lincoln Times, Nov 10<sup>th</sup> 2009

<sup>59</sup> “Donation Overload” Emergency Management Nov 14 2006 by Corinne Stofle

when they were acutely aware of the desperate need of victims who had literally lost everything”<sup>60</sup>.

When making overseas donations the western world is regularly criticised for sending culturally inappropriate items, often clothing which is rejected by disaster affected populations and subsequently dumped by roadsides, food which local population cannot or will not eat, medicines that are out of date or are unlikely to be used in the current situation.

“In certain instances, the cultural preferences of disaster victims make the donated aid useless (i.e. citizens of some nations will not consume food or use goods which may be deemed inedible or undesirable because of the prevalent culture and religious practices). In other situations, the climate of disaster-stricken nations makes aid inappropriate (i.e. wool blankets are of no use in tropical areas).”<sup>61</sup>

At closing down of recovery activity the organisers are then faced with a further nightmare of how to dispose of the unusable and unwanted leftovers. The Salvation Army after the Port Lincoln fires sent items to local charity depots, sold off electrical goods to another charity store, two semi trailers full of clothing for rags were sent to a rag dealer, aluminium and scrap metal was recycled at the local dump, two semi trailers and one forty foot container of mixed clothing were returned to Adelaide for use in the ‘Family Stores’ and there were still huge quantities of clothing and household goods that needed to be disposed of<sup>62</sup>.

There is considerable cost associated with dumping in landfill, and many items will not in fact be accepted because of their dangerous or contaminating properties. Much effort has to go into disposing of unwanted items. Most organisers indicate that the usable goods are not worth the time, money and effort that goes into administration of all the donations.

“Unsolicited donated goods and services cause many problems, largely related to the excessive logistics and administrative overheads needed to manage them. New Zealand experience to date, has indicated this far outweighs their true value.”<sup>63</sup>

### Numerous Workers Required to Undertake Sorting, Distributing and Management of Donated Goods

Finding volunteers to assist with the huge task of sorting, distributing and ongoing management can sometimes be relatively simple because spontaneous volunteers ‘converge’ and want to be helpful. However, just because there are people wanting to volunteer does not mean that they are all useful. One volunteer organiser has commented that she had far more volunteers than were needed to do the work and spent much of her time trying to find meaningful things for them to do. The same clothes sometimes got sorted 3 or 4 times. Additionally the motives for volunteering can be complex including anxiety, curiosity and exploitation<sup>64</sup>. Organisers do then have the task of trying to weed out those who are likely to cause difficulties. Most organisations

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<sup>60</sup> 2005 Eyre Peninsula Bush Fire The Salvation Army Response & Recovery – An Evaluation by Major Anne Farquharson March 2005 Pg 47

<sup>61</sup> “Reflecting on the weaknesses of the international community during the IDNDR: Some implications for research and its application” David A McEntire

<sup>62</sup> 2005 Eyre Peninsula Bush Fire The Salvation Army Response & Recovery – An Evaluation by Major Anne Farquharson March 2005 Pg 47

<sup>63</sup> Donated Goods Management Planning: Civil Defence Emergency Management BEST PRACTICE GUIDE (BPG2/06)

<sup>64</sup> “Convergence Behaviour in Disasters – A Problem in social control” Charles E Fritz and J H Mathewson.1957

prefer to use volunteers who are familiar with the work and do not require excessive amounts of training.

At other times finding volunteers can be impossible. During devastating floods in Grand Forks Nevada, “the second day a 747 arrived at the Grand Forks airport. It had 19 containers of donated goods from Minneapolis. When we opened the first two containers, they were loaded with clothes, food, tools etc. -- all unsorted. Only one motel was open at the time, and volunteers had to drive 60 miles because of the expanse of the flooding. Thus we had no volunteers so we had no choice but to send the 747 back to Minneapolis with the message of what items were most needed, that the donors need to sort the materials into groups, and how donations should be sent.”<sup>65</sup>

The armies of volunteers who are recruited need to be well organised, given worthwhile activity and be looked after to ensure their ongoing well-being and this takes time away from organisers. Dependent on the emergency, what can also happen is that accommodation and meals need to be organised for the volunteers, and this is often in a geographical area where much of the infrastructure has been destroyed and the primary consideration is finding ongoing accommodation for those who have been affected by the disaster.

Doing all of this work of sorting, distributing etc takes large chunks of time away from looking after and assisting those recovering. “Clothing usually comes in small quantities, making it hard to distribute effectively. When it comes in a semi truck, it takes 20 people three whole days to unload, sort and prepare.”<sup>66</sup>

#### Additional Congestion on the Road and in the Area of the Disaster

Particularly where ongoing fires are burning or where there is extensive flooding, access to disaster areas can be severely restricted. Getting goods into the sites to assist disaster affected people needs very careful coordination. When goods come in trucks, vans, and private cars they only add to the chaos already existing and can interfere with other essential work that is being carried out.

“After Hurricane Hugo in 1989, a convoy of huge semis was sent from the Atlantic City Area to South Carolina,” with spontaneously donated goods”. There was a really intensive heat wave and Highway 17 in South Carolina was down from four lanes to a lane and a half the whole length of the state. There were boats washed up on the road and electric lines down. Power company workers were literally camped out along the side of the road, trying to get power back. When the convoy came along and clogged the road, emergency equipment couldn’t get through and power workers couldn’t continue their vital work. Everything in that convoy had to be dumped along the side of the road: clothing, frozen hot dogs, everything. It all became garbage.”<sup>67</sup>

Clogging of the roads slows down the distribution of goods to those who are in desperate need. Roads are already congested by the numbers of emergency workers needing to get on with their vital work. Resources are taken up trying to find places that trucks can unload, and given that many of the warehouses available may already be impacted by the disaster this is no easy task and takes away much valuable time.

#### Can be Damaging to the Recovery of Local Economies

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<sup>65</sup> “Who sent the used false teeth” Susan Kim Disaster News Network Baltimore MD, 28/11/2004

<sup>66</sup> “Clothing donations: The trouble with trousers” by Jim Ketcham Disaster News Network, Baltimore MD 20/5/99

<sup>67</sup> “Clothing donations: The trouble with trousers” by Jim Ketcham Disaster News Network, Baltimore MD 20/5/99

Many organisers make comments about the need for items to be bought within the local community so that local shopkeepers, who are often also impacted by the disaster, have a chance to rebuild their own businesses and thus contribute to the rebuilding of the community.

Sue Faulkner in her article “A Kindness that can have Devastating Effects”<sup>68</sup> discussed donations to international disasters but the principles can apply equally well to local disasters. She quotes from one of the organisers “If goods can be made locally, maintained locally and bought locally, they should be. Imports depress the local market and raise expectations which can’t be met in the future”.

An issue noticed by many organisers is the number of people who become quite dependent on the supply of donations. This adds to the obstacles for local businesses, and makes recovery so much slower in the local economy. It also creates further problems for those individuals caught in the dependency trap, who resist recovery because it requires more effort. Any local area with a number of those individuals will be impacted adversely and it requires considerable work to assist them to operate differently.

Charitable organisations in USA continue to struggle with the right way to tell the public “...don’t send stuff send cash. The reasons, researched by years of field work, are many and repeatedly proven: if goods can be purchased locally, they boost an economy weakened by disaster, they get to disaster survivors faster, and they are directed towards specific and priority needs.”<sup>69</sup>

## **Recipients**

It is unfortunate that there is so little research available that provides direct comments about the feelings and concerns of recipients. Some conclusions can be drawn from the writers of papers and articles but mostly what is available is supposition.

The impact on disaster affected populations of donated goods seems to vary considerably but there are some themes which run through a number of disasters.

The first theme is around the quality of what is offered to survivors and it does appear to have an impact on how people view themselves and the confidence with which they face the task of rebuilding.

“...survivors who received inappropriate or “less than good” donations suffered mental stress for six months to a year longer than survivors who were appropriately helped”<sup>70</sup> (from follow up work done with Peruvian victims of the earthquake and massive mudslides in 1972)

“I pulled up with about 300 new T-shirts donated by a printer in Pennsylvania. I said “I don’t suppose you want any clothes” and they said “no”, but then I said, “they’re new”, and the leader got tears in her eyes and said “who would send us new stuff?” It turns out they had been receiving donations that included bars of used motel soap.”<sup>71</sup>

Overseas donations suffer from similar trials. “There are also mistaken assumptions or myths that disaster victims are helpless; that they would accept any form of assistance (no matter how

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<sup>68</sup> “The Things we Give – A Critical Look at Donations in Kind” By Sue Faulkner, Alan McLean, Mohamed Othman-Chande, Ali Hassan Quoreshi, Juan Alvaro Ruiz, Alan Taylor, Anton Wenger

<sup>69</sup> “Who sent the used false teeth” Susan Kim Disaster News Network Baltimore MD, 28/11/2004

<sup>70</sup> “Clothing donations: The trouble with trousers” by Jim Ketcham Disaster News Network, Baltimore MD 20/5/99

<sup>71</sup> “Unwanted donations are ‘second disaster’ by Susan Kim Disaster News Network, Baltimore MD 5/4/99

undignifying or insulting);” writes Alan McLean in his article “Problems and Solutions”<sup>72</sup> and this myth is just as familiar in Australia. Many of the donating public do seem to have the attitude that if you have nothing you will be happy with anything, no matter how inferior.

There is another theme expressed around the need for survivors to know that people are thinking of them and trying to help. This support does not manifest itself in donations of money but comes through strongly when people donate goods. One helper, from observations, was able to comment:

“...when people receive goods they know have been donated, it gives them physical and spiritual encouragement.”<sup>73</sup>

An article has been written by a Canberra bushfire survivor as a list of recommendations to those assisting in the Victorian bushfires. She comments:

“Some of our most treasured items are the ones that were made, with love, by complete strangers.”<sup>74</sup>

A group of survivors in Port Lincoln talk about “shoe boxes of love”<sup>75</sup> which were delivered to all the survivors. These contained luxury items such as aromatherapy, perfume, bath salts etc. Several commented that they had not realised how stressed they had become until they had the opportunity to use some of these items. They all felt buoyed by the thoughtfulness and caring of the strangers who selected the items and made the effort to fill the shoeboxes.

The third theme in relation to recipients is how the excessive overload of donations impedes the ability of helpers to get to the survivors with essential items and support:

“The influx of donations quickly exceeded the distribution and warehouse system. Thus response officials, depleted scarce resources to handle the onslaught of unneeded donations rather than dealing directly with the victims’ needs. For example, officials mobilised efforts to locate other warehouses and transport goods to them. ...As a result, the ability of relief organisations to distribute necessary goods to victims diminished.”<sup>76</sup> (after Hurricane Andrew)

The fourth theme which needs further exploration is around how survivors feel about being recipients of charitable donations. What impact does this have on their autonomy, confidence and ability to adapt to new circumstances?

From recently held focus groups of survivors it was clear that all felt bad about being recipients. Older people did not like receiving charity and everyone felt diminished by the experience. One recipient commented “I did feel overwhelmed by the amount people were giving us (and often strongly did not want) but felt we should always accept and be grateful because we were grateful for their generosity and caring, if not the goods...I felt also that we were often expected to be grateful and even “lucky” as a couple of people said out of misguided kindness. The generosity of people was hugely important in our recovery but I personally did not want ‘stuff’... So I think the key is to be given encouragement and choice.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> “The Things we Give – A Critical Look at Donations in Kind” By Sue Faulkner, Alan McLean, Mohamed Othman-Chande, Ali Hassan Quoreshi, Juan Alvaro Ruiz, Alan Taylor, Anton Wenger

<sup>73</sup> “Needed donations can change lives” by Susan Kim Disaster News Network, Salisbury PA 14/4/2000

<sup>74</sup> “Needed donations can change lives” by Susan Kim Disaster News Network, Salisbury PA 14/4/2000

<sup>75</sup> “Recipients views of donated goods” Pauline Cole 2010

<sup>76</sup> “The consequences of Excessive Unrequested Donations: The Case of Hurricane Andrew” by D.M. Neal

<sup>77</sup> “Recipients views of donated goods” Pauline Cole 2010

Another woman felt that she was taking on a huge debt that she would never be able to repay.<sup>78</sup>

A number of recipients in the group voiced that they felt upset about lack of control (having to accept what was given rather than having the option of choice) and talked about the burden of the need to be grateful. One illustrated this beautifully by talking about collecting a caravan which was donated. The caravan was in very poor condition and virtually unusable and it had cost considerable time and money to collect. There was a note inside from a child, who had obviously used this as a cubby house, wishing the new owner well and hoping it would make a good home.<sup>79</sup> The note denied the survivors their right to be annoyed about the cost and time associated with an item which was virtually useless. The group talked of many examples of this feeling that the survivors needed to accept responsibility for making sure the donors felt OK.

In his article “Donations Must be Based on Victims’ Priorities”<sup>80</sup> Anton Wenger states “If asked, beneficiaries would often articulate their needs in a different manner than if this assessment were done by the donors or their local intermediaries.” Several writers have commented about the myth that survivors are helpless individuals with no individuality or reason to make choices. Whilst the myth continues to be perpetuated the public will continue to assume that they know best in these circumstances.

### **Positive Aspects of Donated Goods**

There is no doubt that donated goods do have some positive impacts, not the least being the messages it gives to those affected by disasters.

“At times, despite everything, I felt buoyed by the support of all these people, by knowing they cared. And now, six years on, I still feel an enormous faith in the human spirit, our ability to survive, and the compassion and generosity we can offer each other.”<sup>81</sup>

One disaster affected woman still “remembers the most meaningful donations she received after her home was levelled by a tornado last summer: a brand new wagon; a used swing set; and a voucher for a new wooden play set for her children; a fruit trailer truck to store the family’s salvageable furniture and appliances; new pillows and blankets; beautiful handmade Christmas ornaments from the Mennonite Central Committee.”<sup>82</sup>

Some items that are donated are more than gratefully received e.g. new plants for devastated gardens seem to be universally seen as positive. Tools, gloves for working and any kinds of working clothes are equally welcome as are cleaning kits and good quality second hand furniture which can tide people over until they are in a position to purchase anything needed. The concerns organisers have are more to do with the quantity, quality, timeliness and categories of what is donated.

The psychological impact on recipients can also not be under estimated. For many this is a visible expression of the concern that is felt by the general population for the trauma that has affected them. Money does not carry the same personal message.

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<sup>78</sup> Recipients views of donated goods” Pauline Cole 2010

<sup>79</sup> Recipients views of donated goods” Pauline Cole 2010

<sup>80</sup> “The Things we Give – A Critical Look at Donations in Kind” By Sue Faulkner, Alan McLean, Mohamed Othman-Chande, Ali Hassan Quoreshi, Juan Alvaro Ruiz, Alan Taylor, Anton Wenger

<sup>81</sup> “Canberra bushfire victim’s tips for a great relief” by Liz Tilley 11/2/09

<sup>82</sup> “Needed donations can change lives” by Susan Kim Disaster News Network, Salisbury PA 14/4/2000

## **Donors**

The fact that so little attention has been paid to the feelings of the recipients is an indication that donation of goods has a life of its own. The public give for their own often complex reasons, donor organisations manage it all because it is the function of their organisation, and organisers go on accepting mountains of goods which are unusable.

Although the recipients may be the original reason for the appeal it quickly transfers into looking after the donors. This attitude stems partly from politicians who often set the tone and do not want to offend the general public. Anyone writing about these issues does so in diplomatic terms which can cloud the issues. One would have to assume that this is in an attempt to protect the source because people are seen to give out of kindness.

This does deny the reality of the situation which is much more mixed, i.e. some give out of kindness and some give because it is a good opportunity to get rid of a whole lot of 'junk' for which those individuals have no use. What is also quite clear is that donors do not regularly put themselves in the position of the recipients. If they did why would they send winter coats to tropical areas; formal evening dresses and high heels to disaster sites; items they would not use themselves but which are considered good enough for others?

Wenger<sup>83</sup> comments that the donor organisation with which he was associated had the attitude that "we know better" and saw themselves as experts on what was required by recipients. He felt that the donation of goods had become institutionalised and says "The collection and sorting of used clothing, for example, provides meaning and justification for the existence of many salaried employees and volunteer helpers...Dismantling a system which is ostensibly good would require the finding of alternative activities for individuals who, in a very real sense, are the organisation...For these reasons institutional momentum is difficult to stop."

Wenger was talking about the International Red Cross and clearly this organisation has made huge strides in the intervening years to change their ideology, so change is possible. Other organisations have become disenchanted with goods donations in disasters because of the excessive work load and costs associated with administration so it is less likely now that any major organisation would be consciously encouraging this practice. What is apparent however is that from politicians to the volunteer no-one is good at saying no.

Wenger also felt that donations provided "a useful ideological function. Essentially, they help ordinary people...to cope psychologically with the recognition of the suffering which exists in other parts of the world. Given the ethical imperative to do something...relief and development organisations are supposed to provide the solution. The assistance of these organisations lets the concerned donors off the psychological hook; they then do not have to worry too much because the situation can then be thought of as being under control, or at least in hand."

Wenger feels the solution lies in providing long term donor education, both to donor organisations and the general public. This probably needs extension to politicians and others involved in the organisation of services for the survivors. Providing alternative suggestions about turning goods into money and donating the money seems to be one way forward but only works when people are willing to put time and effort into such activities.

It is clear that donors have much more of a personal connection to goods that they donate than to money. Money very quickly becomes depersonalised whereas goods retain their connections and for many people therefore go with love and caring. This is something that seems to be felt

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<sup>83</sup> "The Things we Give – A Critical Look at Donations in Kind" By Sue Faulkner, Alan McLean, Mohamed Othman-Chande, Ali Hassan Quoreshi, Juan Alvaro Ruiz, Alan Taylor, Anton Wenger

by the recipients as well. Psychologically therefore there does seem to be a particular reason why many people choose to donate things and why it is so hard to change the public's response to appeals. Additionally there is a level of cynicism about how money is used and many resent the idea that administrative costs may come out of the donations. The fact that this may not be true does not lessen its impact as another myth.

Information to inform the public about the costs of organisation and about the negative impact on recipients may help the public to understand this problem better.

### **Corporate Donations**

There is no doubt that the world has come to rely heavily on the donations that come from the corporate sector. The majority of what is donated tends to be cash but a significant amount is in service and goods. In a research report done by The Conference Board Mission<sup>84</sup> the findings for corporate bodies were as follows:

“Many companies provide non-financial support, such as knowledge and expertise, in addition to cash or in-kind donations. In a few cases, they also focus their efforts on longer-term disaster mitigation and prevention. In other words they are focusing on taking an active stance rather than being reactive.”

Many companies are taking a new approach through developing partnerships with humanitarian organisations. When these are successful they have the potential to:

- “Deliver fast effective support during a crisis
- Help build capacity between disasters
- Foster the exchange of ideas and best practices that benefit both businesses and humanitarian organizations.”

They also make the recommendation that:

“In-kind donations should be based on demand, specified either by the government of the affected country or by a recognised humanitarian organization with existing operations in the disaster area, and not on what companies can supply.”

And justify this by saying that mistakes hold up relief efforts and cause needless expenditure. They quote a situation in the Eritrean war (1989) where unwanted donations of “seven truckloads of expired aspirin, took six months to burn.”

They also say that it is in the interests of corporate bodies to donate as it:

- Enhances a company's corporate citizenship reputation
- Unites employees around a common cause (*often making it a more desirable place to work – an important advantage in a time when companies are struggling to attract, recruit and retain high quality employees*)
- Increases sales and customer loyalty
- Identifies possible future business opportunities
- Encourages growth and investment

The Center for International Disaster Information<sup>85</sup> has developed guidelines for corporate donations some of which are as follows.

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<sup>84</sup> “Corporate Responses to Humanitarian Disasters” The Conference Board Research Report R-1415-08-WG

<sup>85</sup> Guidelines for Effective Private Sector International Disaster Assistance by Corporate Business Center for International Disaster Information

Monetary donations are almost always the best response but if donating goods/services you should only do so when:

- It has been authorised by the affected country
- There is a specific request from a recognised humanitarian organisation
- The specific need has been evaluated for cultural and economic impact
- Technical assistance does not over-ride local expertise and management
- The quantity will not adversely impact the viability of local business
- The material or service is not a solicitation for future business
- Transport, warehousing, storage and handling costs are paid by the donor.

The World Economic Forum 2003<sup>86</sup> recommended:

“The best companies set up pre-planned scaleable support arrangements that can kick into place when needed, and which continue when a disaster is no longer front page news. That is precisely when business involvement is most essential, as it is private enterprise that provides the jobs, goods and services that are needed for long term economic reconstruction and recovery.”

They also comment that participation in disaster relief provides ongoing benefits to the company including:

- Employees feel good about working for such an organisation
- Important strategic relationships can be forged
- In an increasingly global economy disasters in other parts of the world have the potential to disrupt any business

It seems that although there will always be unscrupulous businesses that will get rid of out of date or unwanted items so that tax benefits can be realised, the general message in the business world is that it is good for business to get involved in donating to disaster events. The issues seem to be about ensuring appropriate communication to achieve the best for impacted communities. Setting up strategic ongoing partnerships appears to be an acceptable way forward and allows time for development of agreements that are mutually beneficial, and prevent the build up of problems that occur when everything is done on the run.

### **Specific Issues of interest**

#### Teenagers

Jill Klein talks about a survey<sup>87</sup> done in Thailand after the tsunami in relation to the needs of adolescents. Adults seem to be well catered for and small children receive massive donations of soft toys, cars, bikes etc but teenagers get forgotten by most donors.

She talks about the five lessons learnt from the Tsunami survivors and these are as follows:

- Lesson 1** Find out what the teenagers need, this can be anything from items which brought comfort such as soft toys, to items which help to pass the time or help interaction with others.
- Lesson 2** Relief efforts can undermine adolescent self confidence. Poor quality goods were not good enough for donors but were good enough for survivors. “When

<sup>86</sup> “The corporate role in disaster relief efforts” 2003 World Economic Forum

<sup>87</sup> “Don’t forget the bushfire teen survivors” by Jill Klein Uni of Melbourne

they came to give us things it was nice, but never things we wanted. It was things they wanted us to have.”

**Lesson 3** Teenagers want to help in the relief efforts. “The few who were able to offer some help reported that this was beneficial to them and that they wanted to do more.”

**Lesson 4** We need to find better ways to combine emergency responses with rapid participatory assessment. Klein comments that given the diminished sense of self that comes with loss of possessions “it seems that aiding the repossession process of adolescents should be a priority after basic needs have been met.”

**Lesson 5** Teens must be interviewed and asked about the possessions they lost that were meaningful and whether they consider any of these objects replaceable or partly replaceable. Klein feels that a few key objects could then be procured for each adolescent.

The lessons discussed above could translate into principles for assistance to all disaster survivors.

### **The Role of the Media**

It seems to be a general opinion that the media causes many of the problems associated with donated goods but also can do great amounts of good work.

The media has become a strong influencer in people’s lives. People believe what they hear on the television and radio to the extent that other forms of communication may not have the same level of impact.

“...people often react to warning sirens with disbelief until ... confirmation (*via media*) is received.”<sup>88</sup>

Auf der Heide comments that it is often the media that perpetuates disaster myths such as: panic flights by survivors (which is most unlikely to happen), or stories of looting (which rarely occurs). He claims that “The entertainment aspect of news broadcasts focuses on the dramatic and unique aspects of disasters, favouring the reporting of the unusual versus the typical or representative events.”<sup>89</sup> Another result of this tendency is that the media also exaggerate the disaster impact “News films and photographs focus on scenes of destruction, but not upon the surrounding undamaged areas. The audience is often lead to believe that the whole community lies in ruins on the basis of intense coverage of damage which may, in reality, be limited to a few buildings or blocks.”<sup>90</sup> He adds:

“Exaggerated media coverage has been suggested as contributing to the inundation of inquiries by anxious loved ones. It has also been blamed for the over-response of resources that typify disasters, complicating their management.”<sup>91</sup>

Matthew Clarke and Simon Feeny have done research<sup>92</sup> that indicates that how the Australian public responds to public appeals is positively associated with:

- The number of people affected
- The extent of media coverage

<sup>88</sup> Kreps 1980 quoted in “Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination” by Erik Auf der Heide

<sup>89</sup> Quarantelli 1981, Larson 1980 quoted in “Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination” by Erik Auf der Heide

<sup>90</sup> “Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination” by Erik Auf der Heide

<sup>91</sup> Wenger 1985, Quarantelli 1983, FEMA 1984, Scanlon 1985 discussed in “Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination” by Erik Auf der Heide

<sup>92</sup> “Unleashed – Scales of Suffering” by Matthew Clarke and Simon Feeny 16/2/09

- The extent of political and civil freedom in the affected country

They say that a 10% increase in people killed results in more than three times greater level of donations and that a 10% increase in media coverage results in a 10% increase in public donations. They also found that “Australians don’t suffer from ‘donor fatigue’ and will keep giving” even if there are only small intervals between different campaigns.

They conclude with comments about organisations needing to work closely with the media in reporting disasters and that the media needs to understand their potential influence on generosity.

Anyone could be forgiven for assuming that the media does not in fact understand what impact their announcements about donated goods can have on the general public. There are a myriad of examples of an appeal being made and within hours the organisers have been inundated by mountains of used clothing. One organiser talks about trying to stop an appeal because they were already overwhelmed with goods but being totally unsuccessful. It seems that the media becomes a ‘monster’ in some of these situations.

In an article by Frances Ford Plude, about the issue of how media reporting impacts on the grief process of the people watching or listening, she comments:

“Stories are the organizing principle of television as a medium and these stories seem to represent a purposeful grasp at meaning for all of us in the global audience. Media stories help us process our life choices.”<sup>93</sup>

She also comments that although we share disasters with the whole world we each have a unique response which is based on our own experiences. She discusses her collaboration with Lifton and they agreed that “there is an intensification of simultaneous worldwide sharing going on. He noted that probably all of this is occurring at a psychological level of severe intensity for most of us and, to some extent, viewers do become survivors”.<sup>94</sup> What this tells us is that media audiences do become participatory in any disasters that they view or hear about and the overload of emotion associated with this needs to find some outlet. For many this outlet seems to be expressed in donations.

Given that media is a part of life which has an intense impact it becomes crucial that we find ways to better work with journalists or others who are going to influence what goes to air. Several articles talk about the need to understand the differences in the ways that journalists work and to plan around this. They recommend developing prior relationships with specific journalists so that there is a commitment on both sides to keep the business relationship going. That way a journalist is more likely to be sympathetic to the needs of organisers given that it might give better access in the future to appropriate stories. Education is also seen as an important process, “As in the case of disaster response organizations, media function is best carried out when the participants have an adequate disaster knowledge base. Education can help to reduce inaccurate news reporting.”<sup>95</sup> Experiential learning is recommended, allowing the media to see first hand what their reporting has created.

Other recommendations include having media personnel involved in disaster planning and to ensure that you “plug the media into all stages of the disaster planning process.”<sup>96</sup> Participation in media relations for local media has worked effectively in Canada. “The media has been

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<sup>93</sup> “Coping with Disaster: How Media Audiences Process Grief” by Frances Ford Plude

<sup>94</sup> “Coping with Disaster: How Media Audiences Process Grief” by Frances Ford Plude

<sup>95</sup> “Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination” by Erik Auf der Heide

<sup>96</sup> “Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination” by Erik Auf der Heide



plugged right into the disaster response and served as a liaison between the Emergency Operations Center and the outside media.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Scanlon 1985 quoted in “Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination” by Erik Auf der Heide

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