

# The unique BSAR approach to Peer Support

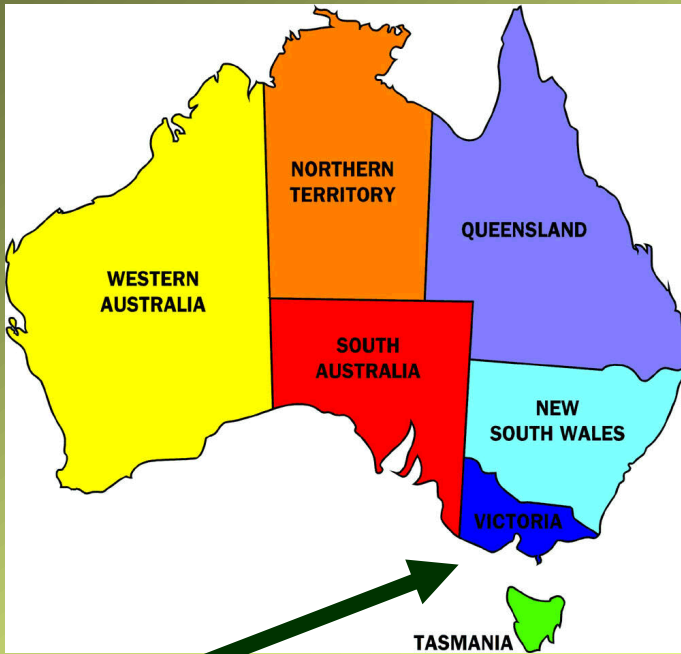
**Rik Head**

**BSAR Peer Support Coordinator**



Psychological First Aid is now well recognised as a small but important part in the overall management of every search & rescue event





Bush Search and Rescue Victoria (BSAR) assist Victoria Police with search and rescue for persons missing in bushland and alpine areas within Victoria

# BSAR Structure

## Administratively:

- A Convener with a Management Committee & an Executive

## Operational Structure:

- Police Liaison Officers
- Field Organisers
- Group Leaders and Searchers

## Operations:

- Search in groups of 2 or more
- Work with other emergency services groups
- Group of steep snow and ice trained specialists
- Every search has a different mix of personnel
- Peer support (PS) activated for all involved



# BSAR Members

- BSAR trained members (~200) are volunteers drawn from the wider bushwalking community and are spread right across Victoria.
- BSAR members rarely meet together as a group
- The only time many of the members may ever meet is on a specific search.



# Question: How to deliver peer support to members scattered all across Victoria?

- What Model would work?
- Sought specialist professional advice
- Developed a workable solution



# The PS Model

Following a search, use one-on-one telephone contact by trained peer supporters and, if required, arrange access to mental health professionals



# Peer Support Group

- PS Coordinators (3)
- PS Team Leaders
- PS Team Members (~20)
- Procedures and processes
- Selection of Peers
- PS-specific initial and ongoing training
- Support from Phoenix Australia

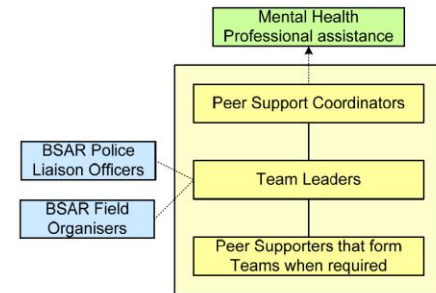
## Peer Support Group Roles & Responsibilities



This document outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various participants in the peer support process for the BSAR Peer Support Group.

It must be stressed at the onset the importance of confidentiality in all aspects of peer support.

### PEER SUPPORT GROUP STRUCTURE



Information and documentation for Peer Supporters can be found on the web at [www.bsar.org/peersupport](http://www.bsar.org/peersupport).

An informal PS Committee is formed with the PS Coordinators and other committee members as required by the members.



# PS Activation Process

For each activation:

- a specific PS Team
- await searchers return home
- allow searcher physical recovery time
- make telephone contact
- if appropriate, further follow up
- Mental health professional support, if required
- Internal (confidential) PS activation report
- Confirm PS activation complete to BSAR

*A searcher cannot also be a peer supporter for a given search*

# Phone Contact

- One-on-one
- Convenient time
- Confidential
- Personal not operational issues
- Normal responses to critical incident stress
- Coping strategies
- Further contact, if required



*Personal circumstances and the impact  
of critical incident stress*

# Ongoing Admin Challenges

- Not able to contact a searcher
- Timeliness of peer support delivery
- Having sufficient Peer Supporters for large searches
- Refreshing peer supporters skills
- Ongoing PS education of all BSAR personnel
- Ongoing periodic reviews



# Peer Support

- Well accepted by members who appreciate being called
- As changes in post traumatic stress management and PS occur it is important to maintain ongoing best practice

**A unique solution that continues to meet the specific BSAR need**

[www.bsar.org](http://www.bsar.org)

