

## The unique BSAR approach to Peer Support

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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



2



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

3

## 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.



5

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

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



6

## 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



## 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)

