



## **Boroondara Cares**

In support of the Shire of Moira

**A report to the board of the Rotary Club of Camberwell  
and District Governor 9800, John Davis  
from the Boroondara Cares Committee  
of the Rotary Club of Camberwell.**

*This report was requested by District Governor John Davis during his visit to the Rotary Club of Camberwell on Wednesday 24 October. At that time DG John expressed interest in a wider discussion on the Boroondara Cares (BC hereafter) program at District 9800. The report will also have use for others seeking to understand this promising and apparently rapidly growing community service program.*

### **Genesis**

The BC program had its beginnings in a notion of Councillor Phillip Healey, Mayor of the City of Boroondara. Moved by an article in the Melbourne Herald Sun newspaper about the plight of the Shire of Moira caused by the severe drought, Councillor Healey contacted his Moira counterpart, Mayor Frank Malcolm to explore what might be done to support the Moira Shire.

The magnitude of challenges facing farmers in Moira and elsewhere due to the drought was of such magnitude that it seemed that only federal and state governments could make significant improvements through water policies, funding and other major government support solutions. These resources were clearly beyond the scope of even a comparatively wealthy city like Boroondara or its peer metropolitan municipalities. Ultimately the only single solution to the country crisis would be a hoped for return to normal rainfall patterns. Meanwhile, significant financial support was a matter for governments beyond the local level.

While finance, farm debt, bankruptcies and related business pressures were at the centre of the rural drought crisis, the flow on effects of these were being manifested more widely in an erosion of 'social capital'. Families were under severe stress as income dried up and debt loads became unsustainable. Traditionally proud, independent and private farmers were now isolated and

generally unqualified to deal with the dual crises of business and family. The consequences of these included marriage break-ups, mental health issues and suicides. The stresses in the farm community were spread throughout country towns. These depended largely upon farm income for their economic health. City officials too were stretched beyond their available resources as they endeavoured to provide support.

A particular concern in country communities was a perceived lack of concern about their plight in the cities. It seemed to them that the populations of Melbourne and other major cities believed they were suffering because they could not water their gardens at will. City people seemed to have little perception of or feelings for 'the crisis in the bush'. The recent decision by the Victorian government to fill Melbourne dams with water 'stolen' from the country did nothing to allay the feelings of country people.

## **Enter Rotary**

Against the background described above, it seemed to Councillor Healey that support for a useful program could be gathered from a partnership between the City of Boroondara, Rotary Clubs and other community resources within its boundaries. He made contact with a long time business associate, Rotarian Peter Allen of the Rotary Club of Camberwell.

An interim discussion group was formed comprised of members of the Rotary Club of Camberwell and Phillip Healey. The group comprised –

Councillor Phillip Healey  
Past District Governor Don Jago  
Warwick Heil  
Peter Allen

After a number of informal meetings, decisions were taken and actions mounted that promised to lead on to a support program for the Moira Shire. These were –

### **1. Why Moira?**

The actions of Moira Mayor Frank Malcolm in bringing the problems in his shire to the attention of a wide audience and to the mayor of Boroondara had led to this early structure and ideas for a program. While it was true that there were approximately twenty shires under extreme stress, the Moira case was the one before us and in Rotary parlance provided "an (immediate) opportunity for service". The contacts between Phillip Healey and Frank Malcolm made the possibility of "twinning" between Boroondara and Moira much more feasible. It was agreed to focus the BC program on Moira Shire.

It was noted however that there would be opportunities for other metropolitan municipalities and their contained Rotary clubs to adopt the BC model now under development in Moira. The BC program could therefore be seen as an example for wider actions by other cities and shires. In this context the BC program for Moira could be seen as an incubator and as work in progress for a potentially state-wide or national Rotary program.

## **2. A single community focus.**

There were known to be several Rotary Clubs involved in support programs for country people. Each of these was valuable. However most if not all of these were one-off projects. The BC intention however was to provide for an ongoing support program with meaningful and various levels of services "until it rains" in Moira, or until the drought was over. These services would not impinge on programs already in place unless that was the wish of the managing Rotary Clubs.

By focusing all of the gathered community resources of the relatively affluent, large City of Boroondara and applying these upon a single country shire, Moira, meaningful levels of service would be provided. The prospect of nine Rotary clubs of Boroondara plus four Moira clubs working together was most promising. The potential for formal City to Shire programs subject to the approval of the two councils was also noted.

## **3. The first visit to Moira**

It was decided that the new committee should visit Moira Shire to be 'on the ground' and to learn how BC might be of service.

The BC Committee members were guests of the Moira Shire in a meeting hosted by Mayor, Frank Malcolm at Cobram. Also in attendance were councillors, police, ambulance, farm and other community. The meeting was invaluable in exposing the BC members to the realities of the cause that they were entering. The briefing was harrowing, emotional and informative. It reinforced the commitment of the committee to move from theory to actions on the ground in Moira. The passion and commitment of the local attendees was more than impressive.

It was decided on the recommendation of the Moira people that notwithstanding programs that might come later, the immediate need was for a demonstration of concern for and solidarity with the Moira Community. This would be achieved by the mounting of a community event, a free barbecue, for the community. This event to be mounted by a joint effort between the Rotary Club of Camberwell and the four Rotary

Clubs of Moira Shire would be attended by delegates from all the Rotary Clubs of Boroondara. There would be celebrity speakers and opportunities for Rotarians to mingle with local farmers and to "talk with their ears" to learn more about the dimensions of the issues and to frame ideas for services.

#### **4. Rotary ownership and structures.**

While based upon well meaning but loose ideas and interim structures, it was necessary to provide for sustainable management and administrative structures for the Boroondara Cares program. As Rotary International was structured to act as a service organisation through its member clubs, it would be relatively simple to "own" the BC program in a Rotary Club. By this means governance resources statutory matters and other concerns like public risks would be covered. It was agreed that as the Rotary Club of Camberwell had provided the initial impetus and resources for this program that "Boroondara Cares", as a program of support for Moira Shire would be a program of the Rotary Club of Camberwell (subject to the approval of the Club board which was anticipated.)

Noting that the BC program, in addition to its promise as a support program for Moira Shire, was also an incubator for wider applications and a work in progress it seemed likely that other cities and their contained Rotary Clubs would wish to emulate the BC model. This would hopefully see a proliferation of the BC programs under new titles like "Yarra Cares", "Stonnington Cares" and "Monash Cares". To provide for this progression a second committee was notionally provided.

To be known as "\*Sharing Communities", this governance committee, to be led by PDG Don Jago would be responsible for the standardisation, documentation and promulgation of the BC principles. It would contain a Rotarian member from each "X Cares" program.

*\*"Sharing Communities" is a business name to be owned by the Rotary Club of Camberwell.*

#### **5. What services... and how?**

The essence of the BC program lies in the matching of Boroondara community resources with their counterparts in Moira Shire. Examples of these proposed linkages are listed below. The list is not comprehensive. It is proposed that each of these linkages will form a sub-program of BC. Once in place the parties to these arrangements would develop their own programs of support and sharing.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Responsible</u>	<u>Progress</u>
Mayor to Mayor	Phillip Healy/Frank Malcolm	Established
Council to Council	Phillip Healy/Frank Malcolm	Under discussion
School to School	Rotary Club	To be assigned
Church to church	Rotary Club	To be assigned
Probus to Probus	Rotary Club	To be assigned
Sports Club to Sports Club	Rotary Club	To be assigned
Other communities to other communities	Rotary Club	To be assigned

In addition to these proposed linkages, there would be other programs to be developed by Rotary Clubs. These might include for example –

Holidays for children at Rotary assets (Cape Getaway etc.)

Use of holiday houses owned by Rotarians and others.

Visits to Moira farmers by Boroondara Rotarians

Christmas puddings (or cakes) for all Moira farmers.

Financial support for Food Bank (e.g. Rice and pasta)

Funding to be raised from high net worth individuals in Boroondara

Funding Rotary membership fees/meals for new Moira Rotarians.

## **6. The Katunga barbecue event.**

The community barbecue was held on Wednesday 31 October, 2007 at the Katunga Sports Reserve a few kilometres north of Numurkah in the Moira Shire. The event was a cooperative effort between the Rotary Club of Camberwell which substantially funded the event and the four Rotary Clubs of Moira Shire who ran most of the event. The Shire was well represented with the mayor, councillors and management in attendance.

Fifty-three Rotarians and partners representing ten Rotary Clubs – eight from the City of Boroondara and two from Stonnington travelled to and from the event by Ventura bus. (The bus was heavily subsidised by Ventura Bus Lines who are regular supporters of the Rotary Club of Camberwell.) Approximately ten others travelled to Katunga by car in part because the bus was over subscribed.

All visitors were briefed on the purpose of the visit and advised to 'talk through their ears'. The aim of the visit was to listen and learn but not to prescribe solutions. The event was to be the start of a journey and not an end in itself.

Admission was free as also were food and some drinks. The attendance was difficult to gauge accurately but 'around four hundred' seemed close to the mark. There were games for children and a generous ice cream vendor.

The key speaker was former Premier, Beyond Blue leader, Hawthorn Football Club President and Boroondara resident Jeff Kennett, who flew in from a luncheon event at Mildura. Using football as the lead in to his subject, Mr. Kennett was successful in commanding the attention of the rural audience. Along the way he committed the Hawthorn Football Club to support for the Boroondara Cares program.

Many Rotarians spent time with farmers, local business people and others and gained a feel for the dimensions of the problems faced by Moira residents. A collateral benefit was the fellowship enjoyed by Rotarians and their partners from a total of fourteen Clubs. Fellowship was not a primary aim for the day but it was clearly achieved.

The return bus trip to Melbourne was a hive of motivated discussions about 'what next'. The impromptu 'team' on the bus was highly motivated and enthusiastic to move forward. Generally, it was agreed to maintain the momentum by organising a meeting of Rotarians and others as soon as possible to set the agenda and to promptly "get some rubber on the road".

## **7. Committee debriefing – 2 November.**

The BC committee met on 2 November to debrief on the events of the past few days and specifically the Katunga event. The aim was to move the BC project forward. It was agreed to mount a major workshop involving representatives from all Boroondara Rotary Clubs, City of Boroondara, Shire of Moira and Moira based Rotary Clubs. All parties

would be contacted and invited to attend this pivotal function to be hosted by Boroondara Mayor, Phillip Healey and professionally facilitated by former Mayor Councillor Jack Wegman who had attended the Katunga event. The workshop would be held from 1 PM to 4 PM on Friday 9 November, 2007.

Wednesday, 7 November 2007