



# PR experts offer their services in times of need

**By Kanchan Dutt**  
Business Reporter

A range of Canberra's leading public relations experts has agreed to donate their time to community groups during emergencies.

Counselling service Lifeline Canberra and the ACT's branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society are the first two organisations to sign up to the new scheme.

One of those behind the project, public relations firm director Bob Crawshaw, said the volunteers would allow community organisations to focus on their most pressing tasks in times of crisis.

"The 2003 bushfires showed the vital role that the ACT's community sector plays in disaster relief," he said.

"In a crisis the community organisations that provide emergency support can quickly become overwhelmed by requests for information from the public, the media and others. Now we are putting out the call for volunteers in Canberra's

communications and marketing networks and professional bodies."

The Communicators Supporting Community Program was launched yesterday and created after a meeting of the ACT Disaster Recovery Committee last month.

It is modelled on a United States partnership between the Public Relations Society of America and the American Red Cross which was established after the September 11 terrorist attacks and first used during Hurricane Katrina.

The manager of telephone counselling for Lifeline Canberra, Amanda Tobler, said it would find the equivalent cost of having to hire public relations experts during emergencies prohibitive.

"Any expertise people can provide in times of emergency is always welcome," she said.

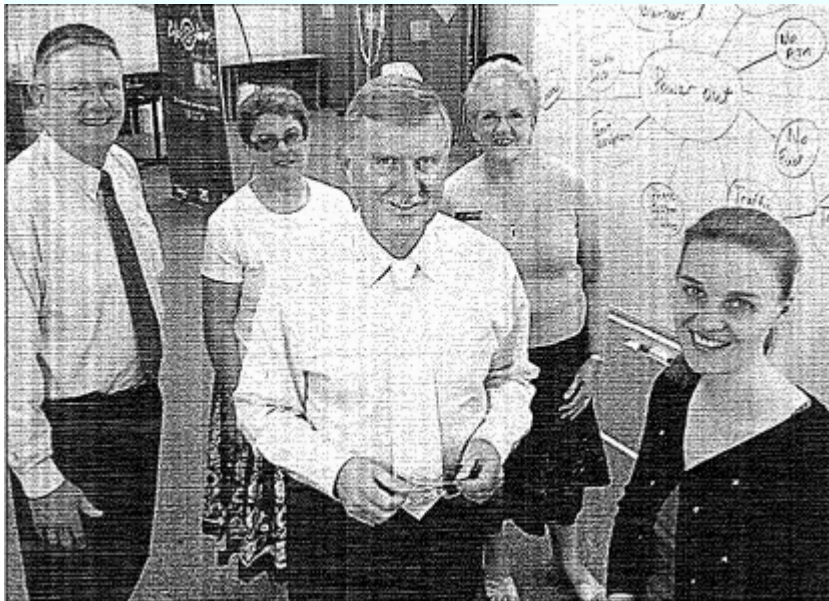
"One of the areas where we are short of expertise is public relations so if people can help then it would be

great. Our work means we can be involved in everything from bushfires to helping people in situations overseas so we hope there will be some professionals out there who are ready, willing and able to support us in getting our message to the right people."

Under the partnership, two volunteers will be available to each of the community groups that have relief roles under the ACT's disaster recovery arrangements.

The partnership was welcomed by the deputy chief executive of St Vincent de Paul for Canberra and Goulburn, Michael Taarnby, who said history had taught him of the need for clear communication. "Our experience during the 2003 bushfires was that we had three teams deployed at evacuation centres and things were a bit hectic," he said.

To volunteer for the scheme, email Mr Crawshaw at [bob.crawshaw@mainstreet.com.au](mailto:bob.crawshaw@mainstreet.com.au).



**HELPING HANDS:** Public relations experts, from left, Michael Taarnby, Helen Weldon, Bob Crawshaw, Lorraine Higgins and Amanda Tobler at yesterday's launch.