**Women's Strengths**

Good organisers, caretakers and advocates: women are often already in the community volunteering; women are the lifeline of family and community - organisers of accommodation, food, food, & clothes; arranging & chaining up contracts; dealing with bureaucracy - figure out forms for everything; managing the accounts & books; making contacts with support services and following up details; women picking up the pieces and making things happen - like community events - makes all the difference.

People had too much on their minds ... we'd just make a phone call for them ... get onto the shine or someone else ... just keep following the line until you fixed it.

Making life as normal as possible: Women are often the 'rock', getting on with making life as normal as possible; doing what it is needed to be done, as smoothly as possible; repairing the damage; organising for people to turn up; replanting the garden and vineyard; men are also up to their eyeballs in getting it done.

We just normalise everything ... You know, the clothes get washed and ironed, and we vacuum the carpet and the halls in the fridge ... We carry on with the day to day routine ... Yeah.

Good networkers: between us ... women in the valley know of most families; usually know who might need help and who can help; women are central to making telephone trees & UHF network work.

Last Sunday for the first time initiated new UHF fire this season, mixed two people, thought might practise every Sunday. Thought might use for everyday communication for alert to get everyone using the system.

**Kids & family: Kids: First, staying strong for others, mental strength, more cautious and aware, being strong for family, leave themselves to the last; when the 'rock' collapses, sometimes initial resentment before others start picking up the slack**

Putting the expectation on yourself that you had to keep going when really what you wanted to do was just go and lie down and have a good cry. And you couldn't do that. I mean if I started crying in front of my husband he would call a shrunk. I'm not kidding, I'm not a clear and sometimes that's what I felt like doing. So I would ring a friend who was outside the fire and talk.

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**'He just dealt with it differently'**

A lot of blockes just got busy. Not necessarily logically, they just went and did stuff.

After the event men tended to leave the house for long hours to mend fences, get things right again - women left in house on their own. So much work to do which resulted in men working long hours for a long time so family didn't have much time together.

One man came up to our place and helped at our place. He could not cope with his own place, but he could go and help someone else. I think that's how it is in some ways men cope - by helping each other. Whereas we have the routine of the family to look after: even the routine of shopping helped.

Not giving yourself permission to show weaknesses or vulnerability men brave, physical strength, heroes. Higher risk of the routine, don't have to show emotion.

**Different responsibilities:**

Different things are important — men fire fighting and trucks, women care roles and communication.

Teamwork - different responsibilities, diversity of tasks/job/abilities, across all men and women.

Women still have the children, nursing role. Physical factors make a difference, women not as strong although "I am pretty physically capable."

We get back to normal family routines, whereas I think the men, maybe, they go to their job but it's not there to do ... it's all gone.

Talking & doing: He forgot a bit of it - his way of managing, had to get on with business.

He was very focused on documenting everything afterwards. It was his way of coping. Then when the court case came up, we decided we would go to the class action, we wanted to move on. We had another opportunity to get into that later & I think he was ready then, more mentally prepared.

But he needed people, so I made myself available which was part of being in the CWA. I was quite worried about him because he was part of the government teams after Ash Wednesday. So I was worried about past trauma, coming back and helping him. But it turns out he was actually OK. He just dealt with it differently.

My husband still hasn't done the paperwork. I think that is the overwhelming thing, he doesn't want to do paperwork, just doesn't touch it.

Women often need to "talk" to deal with emotions, men need to be 'seen to be doing' - we talk a lot more, the blockes don't; they keep it to themselves ... they might say it eventually but they keep it to themselves.

After 2009 fires he was really busy, went to sit on a log in the back paddock for a few hours on his own, then came back down and got on with it.

Lots of men would rather listen to what Rob said rather than counselling. Like a lot of the guys that came to the Savoy Club said that really made a big difference. Even of Mudgegong in the beginning, I was talking to some men afterwards and they were very emotional about what he said and how he had said it.

Women got to the point where they needed to talk about their experiences, worked if they had a preferred listener who helped make sense of problems and help in the process of making sense of how they were feeling.

Women still need all the support and all the things to go back next to their experiences.

Women are more prepared to cry in public while men seem to be afraid to break down which means they then don't seek help; women are more prepared to look for help, they will pick up the phone & seek out help.

My partner went to state for work soon after fires and not one of them asked him how he was, he was chased by the fires on the tractor one of the days. It shook him up more than he admitted to for quite some time ... Anyway they keep it to themselves.

Women communicate face-to-face, men communicate shoulder-to-shoulder (Men's Shed saying)

Sheeds development helps connect men with others; support men 'by default' e.g. cooking, men's sheds, sport.

Men often do not accept they have been affected by the experiences, now agencies are observing men are being affected by odd illnesses.