

**Bushfire Resilience Inc.**

**Kids and bushfire plans**

**Interview with Rob Gordon OAM, Clinical Psychologist**

**Interviewer: Malcolm Hackett OAM**



**Malcolm**

I'm Malcolm Hackett and I'm here with Rob Gordon an eminent psychologist working in the bushfire and disaster area. I first met Rob after the 2009 bushfires when he was a very important in our community overcoming its grief and understanding of what had happened.

And I'm very grateful for Robert Gordon to talk with us today. We're going to have a talk about planning and the contribution that children and young people can make to a family plan but also what many of us believe is the importance of them participating in that plan.

But before we do that I'd like to ask Rob a little bit about his history in this disaster area. I know that goes way back to Ash Wednesday.

**Rob**

Yes, hi Malcolm, it's really good to be able to talk about the preparedness side of things. I often am coming in from the other end, the recovery. But my experience started in 1983 when I was asked to be part of a Children's Hospital team working in the Macedon area after Ash Wednesday. I'd been working at the Children's Hospital for about eight or nine years, and I can actually remember, although I loved working there but I remember in that January thinking if I go on like this I can start to get a little bit bored just working in the hospital. And lo and behold in a month or so I was sent to travel out and do something that nobody knew what to do. And this was really an interesting journey because very little research had been done on children and disasters. And no one was there really to give us guidance. We had to feel our way and as a result of that it became pretty obvious when you're working in the field what worked and what didn't and what people needed and what they didn't.

We had to realize most of the people were not our usual clients, if you like or patients in the hospital who came because they had already a significant disorder. They were ordinary people who had had something happened to them, and that's a very different perspective than somebody whose life circumstances have caused them to have a problem. So, there were several other events and the upshot of that was I realized this was one of the few areas where we can start to think about doing pioneering work. So I started to put together ideas and discuss with people in the health department at the time and eventually they found some funding and asked me to take a role as a consultant. And I've really had that role ever since, just a small role of being able to participate in planning and training and then of course when an event happens to go out and work in communities.

And then in my private practice I usually get some referrals of people who have had the misfortune to go through traumatic events. So that gives me the more in-depth individual perspective.

**Malcolm**

So to children and adolescents and their involvement in planning. Is there a rationale for why they should be? Would you like to go into that?

**Rob**

Yes. We are I think realizing more and more now that one of the best ways of helping children to feel confident and in control is to engage them to participate as members of the family which gives them a clear role and a clear place and their own thoughts and their own perspectives. Gives a contribution to what's being planned and prepared for. I remember speaking to a researcher from Queensland at a

conference a long time ago now, probably in the 90s. And she had specialized in trying to work out of the various age groups, which ones take up disaster preparedness information. And the group that most reliably take it up are primary school children. They're kind of almost the only ones that really take it in. Adults are too busy, teenagers got more important things to worry about.

And I can just tell this story of a woman that I worked with in Ash Wednesday who tells the story of sitting on that hot Wednesday afternoon by the pool after work in a bikini, I like to imagine her drinking a martini or something. And it's really hot and her kids she notices out of the corner of her eye trotting back and forth to the car carrying stuff. And they're wearing their jeans and their long sleeve shirts and so on and as they trot back and forth she says, "What are you doing?" And they said "We're putting all our precious things in the car because there's a fire over the hill, that's what we were told. We had to do it." She said, "Don't worry about it". "No no, we're going to do it because the teacher said we have to do this'.

Literally 10 minutes later she's driving them out with flames all around them and she arrives in the evacuation centre with her bikini, that's the only thing she retrieved. Whereas the kids had put their teddys and their favorite books and their precious toys and they had all their protective clothing on. I think that that sort of anecdote says it all. Because the problem with us adults is we rely so heavily on our assumptions of past experience and if we haven't been through a fire we can't really imagine what it's going to be like, we can't believe it. The kids will accept it.

So having said that I think we also need to be aware that children, particularly some children will be very inclined to be frightened of large natural forces. So, I think we can help children to cope with danger by familiarizing ourselves with it and by pairing the information about the danger with information about what to do to protect the danger. After all that's what we do with snakes and traffic. It's very early in a child's life we teach them if they run onto the road without looking they'll probably get killed, but they can be perfectly safe as long as they look left look right look, left again, you know etc. The same with drowning in swimming pools or the sea, or snakes and long grass. You don't run around in long grass in bare feet in the summer and so on and so forth, there are a lot of dangers.

Now I think we need to understand that natural disasters fire, flood, wind. There are situations that can kill us. But if we understand them and know what to do we can actually protect ourselves. So I think it's a mistake for parents to try and protect children by denying or downplaying the danger, we want to actually state the danger because children must be in reality. But then we have to give them the confidence that they have the power to protect themselves.

### **Malcolm**

And so participation in the plan and understanding is part of that

### **Rob**

From the beginning.

### **Malcolm**

It occurs to me that there could be a couple of reasons that parents may not be attuned to engaging with their children in a plan. One would be possibly the notion that well they won't understand it or we're doing something more sophisticated than children can understand. And the other might be their actual own fears of that catastrophic event and their inability to then.

### **Rob**

Yes. It's so important that as parents or as adults we be familiar with and understand so that we can talk about it easily. Like all the other threats we talk about with them and from a position of having made decisions and prioritizing the safety. So, I think children become scared. I've worked with children all my career and I know that quite often children if you have them in a room quietly talking to you and they trust you they will tell you that they don't think their parents are necessarily doing the right thing. So, if you've got parents who don't want to think about it who just shut it out of their mind

you've got to think that their primary school children are being taught by people who are saying climate change, fire threats, floods, talking about what to do and they give a lot of trust to their teachers. When they come home they think they're going to have to think which one's right. But of course they're going to see that there's a whole group of kids here that are going along with the teacher. And so they're going to actually have this perspective of "Well my mum and dad don't believe in that" or "My mum's not talking about it. My dad's not thinking about it, where everyone else is doing fire preparation and we're not".

And they don't feel they can say it. Some kids will say it, but they'll just become very uneasy. So I think the confidence will come from when they feel their parents are accepting and engaging and doing something. And that's then when the conversation can start. "This is what we're doing. This is why we're doing it and these are the steps."

### **Malcolm**

Is it possible that you could overreact? Do too much talking, too much expectation that it could be too overwhelming then. There must be a right way to talk about this?

### **Rob**

Absolutely and I think that touches on one of the key points that we don't need children to take responsibility before their age. So very young children will have what I think of as a narrow horizon, just immediate circumstances. As they get older and they start to see things on a larger and larger scale. And that's where I think parents need to think what do I need my children to understand at a particular age in order to be able to participate in dealing with the fire and not be overwhelmed by all the possibilities that I as an adult have to take into account.

And so that doesn't mean we treat them as adults. We give them a part to play in the process. And the more we do that beforehand the easier it'll be for the children. We need children to understand simple things at any age, that fire will be transmitted by fuel and wind and so on. So we go to this is where the wind comes from and we've got to make sure that we don't drop stuff around the house and so on and so forth, just those simple things. And then I think the next stage is to actually talk about what we will do, and I guess it'd be really important to work on the basic assumption that if it's a really really dangerous day that might produce a fire that we can't manage, we're not going to be here. And we're going to prepare our house so that we should be able to go and leave it and it'll be safe.

But if we are going to be here this is what we're going to do and that's where I think we convey to the children why we think it's safe to stay. Because of course what they're going to see on television all the time is 40-foot flames coming out of forests and so on. And therefore I think to share that reasoning process with the children and then what we will do. And then I think understanding the actions, what we are going to do with pumps and hoses and so on. And I think it's very important we don't make too many assumptions about children when the fire comes. We might for instance want to say we don't want the kids to be exposed directly to the flame so we're going to put them inside, but to give them something to do, to look after the dog or the cat, to look after each other.

But as soon as we do that I think that raises a very important factor. And that is that we know that the most important thing in child development is the attachment that the child has with its parents or its caretakers. When we feel attached, securely attached, we feel as a child empowered, confident, able to think, able to manage their emotions because I don't have to deal with it all myself, I know my parent or carer is there to do that with me. Therefore, in the event, as long as the attachment is maintained the child will be empowered to be an active participant and use the knowledge they've got. The moment the attachment is uncertain they will become anxious and then they'll start to disorganize as we adults will.

## Malcolm

So, there's that checking back in. Parents coming in. I can imagine kids making sure that the parents or carers are drinking enough water or something, there's another job and you have a quick debrief and so that maintains the connection.

## Rob

So one of the features that I think is essential for the fire plan is to give attention to the communication arrangements. I remember I didn't meet this person, but somebody told me about somebody in a fire who had organized a fantastic fire plan. They lived in a very exposed area. They had a pump on each corner, four corners of their house. They had a couple of grown children and the wife and so on, they had a plan that they would each go to their pump and start their pump when the fire came, and they would each fight.

This man told my colleague that when the fire came the smoke was so thick and the noise was so great he had no idea whether he was completely alone, and the rest of the family had been burned up or whatever, no idea at all. And he couldn't leave his spot, it was just too dangerous and too much happening. And he said that was the most traumatic experience to have this sense of "I have no idea what's happening." They hadn't been able to think about the sensory environment, the noise and the loss of vision and he said that "We will never fight another fire. We were successful there, but I'll never go through that again, we will always evacuate. I'd much rather lose my house".

I think all they probably would have needed is a few \$25 walkie talkies that they knew how to use and you'd only know how to use them if you use them regularly wouldn't you? Unlike my wife and I who had one here on Black Saturday, but we hadn't used them much. And she came to sit on the veranda here and watch spot fires in the front while I was out the back. And she put it in her hip pocket and sat on it which turns it off, and she couldn't work out how to turn it on, so, we might as well have not had it.

So in terms of children, I think the communication is the relationship. The communication or link. So, they have to think about how do we preserve that link. Now it doesn't have to be continuous, but it has to be that the child know the parent will come in on a regular basis. And I can tell a story of the 12-year-old girl who was asked to watch her younger siblings inside while her parents managed the fire outside. And they're probably out there for three or four hours and they didn't think to check in. 12-year-old girl. Kid's not too young, they should be fine. But actually, she went through this terrible time of not knowing whether her parents were alive or dead and she was very very angry at them having been put in that dangerous situation. And all they would have needed to do was to keep 10 minutes, every 10 minutes, I'll come back every 10 minutes. And she could be in there watching the clock, "It's five minutes, it's eight minutes, she'll be in in a minute, it's 10 minutes she's not in. Ah, here she is It's okay." And you get this constant reducing of the anxiety from uncertainty.

So those would be the sorts of things to think about, preserving that linkage. And I think giving the children responsibilities and a role, so they feel effective and valuable. And I can think of a young boy, well, he was probably very early teenage years, I'd worked with him for some years. He had a whole series of problems, he had a lot of anxieties and so on. He and his father stayed at home to protect the house while the rest of the family left in a fire. And the father was very good, he said "I want you to do this, you stand down you do that, you take care of this bit, I'll be doing this bit." and he was a changed boy when he came out of it. He had gained a degree of confidence in himself that he never had before, he was like I've become a man, me and my dad have saved the house.

Now I think that happens if like with all experiences with children we set the situation up so that they have a carefully planned positive experience and I think we need to use that same principle. So, it's the education and information about the basics of fire, then involving them in discussions and developing the plans and why we're going to do this and what it will mean. Then rehearsing it because we will never be able to do it if we don't rehearse it. So actually going through the motions, starting the pumps and pulling the hoses and so on. So that children are doing something they're familiar with.

## **Malcolm**

The theme of rehearsal has come up time and time again in our webinars. And it seems to me that people underestimate the importance of it for themselves. But you're working as a team and certainly with working in your family with your children that as you said before about your walkie talkies, if you don't do those things on a lot of occasions then you will forget things or you'll forget how something works and just being shown isn't enough, you've really got to do it.

## **Rob**

Just adding to this question Malcolm. You asked about how do we talk with children about it? Just want to say that parents will know their children very well, they often don't have all the theory about it but they know their child is very anxious. I think if you've got a child that's very vulnerable and anxious and maybe struggling with other problems, trying to make friends or struggling with schoolwork, any other big problem in life means that life is really hard. For those children I think it's very important that we make the judgment. We don't want to put on top of that their struggles with fires. And so, the plan is that mum will take them away.

However, we've got to make good preparations about that because we know that separation from a loved one is a very hazardous process. The Melbourne University research into Black Saturday showed that any degree of separation at the time of the fire between family members was related to poorer mental health in the long run, even years later. But I think you can counteract that by regular updates and all the things that we've talked about. But I think when there's a vulnerable child - and you'll find that out when you start talking about the preparation and they say I don't want to do this or they'll cry or they'll just avoid it or something, then I think parents should really take that into account. We don't want to push children beyond their capacity to deal with it. But if we give them a role and give them action and help them feel competent then maybe they can do a bit.

## **Malcolm**

Rob I'm imagining that most parents won't want to put their children in danger. But of course, there's different sorts of fires. There's those television fires you were talking about before and there can be a local burn that starts that's not a massive conflagration and so there can be different reasons for why children will be in the home. What sort of research or evidence is there that those preparations or that planning that engagement with children, will be beneficial after they've been through that incident?

## **Rob**

I think anything that reduces the completely unexpectedness or familiar quality of the danger reduces its impact. So if something's very sudden and we didn't have any idea what's going to happen then we just suddenly go into this disorganizing peak of arousal. And if it's very dangerous and I don't know how to limit the danger. So, it would be very important I think in a way that doesn't alarm the children to help them understand that the temperature is hot, the wind's from the right angle, this is a fire danger day, the fire dangerous is high. So, we're all going to keep our eyes open for any smoke and we're going to listen for the radio and so on. So they just become aware that that becomes part of the routine once it gets above 40 degrees or so.

The second thing I think is I think it's very helpful for children to have some exposure to fire, to light a bonfire and actually help them feel how hot it is. Because after all we know don't we that radiant heat is probably the most dangerous thing that people tend to die of before they die of flame. So, to help them understand how close you need to be and how you need to put layers of clothing and so on and you can't expect that to be a concept that you talk about around the kitchen table. That's something that I think we need to show children that they can manage fire if they understand how it works.

And then I think that the sort of idea that if there's another Black Summer or Black Saturday where there's a catastrophic fire risk and you live in a very dangerous zone then I think it's very important that parents accept the reality is this probably is not going to be a fire that you can fight and the CFA will be not coming to all the houses they'll be just doing strategic work. And therefore you make a decision

about "What are we going to do in our family? Where will we go? How we protect ourselves." And that but we're not going to be here if that happens, but you can never tell. There might be a lightning strike out here and it might happen so quickly we don't have a chance to go. There might be a quite mild day in which, I don't know, something goes wrong, and a fire starts and you might have to be.

So, you just have all options there so the children know "Okay there's no time to leave or it's actually a small fire - it's a grass fire - we should be able to manage this, we go into action." And then if of course if the children are too panicky, and that happens, you make some decisions around that. One of the things that research shows is that it's the intensity of the exposure that really predicts the traumatic disturbance in children. Intensity of exposure. That is really another word for saying how dangerous they they feel it is. So as parents if we're going to stay and fight we need to keep explaining to them why we think we can manage this. And keep saying "Look what's happening, we've got that out, we're going to do this." Keep a kind of verbal commentary on what's going on with the children.

### **Malcolm**

That sense of the parent telegraphing their own fears and anxieties to children I presume is fundamental

### **Rob:**

es. Again, research on a lot of this has been done in the United States on hurricanes and things of that sort. But what becomes very evident is that it's the parental distress that predicts child distress. I can tell you various stories about even for adults if a leader of any sort remains calm and confident that radiates to everybody else. I had a colleague who once as a psychiatrist looking after a lifeboat of people that survived the sinking of a merchant ship. They were there for a very long time. I can't remember a month or so they were in this boat. And afterwards when he interviewed them the crew said the captain was confident so we knew we'd be found, we just trusted that it would be alright eventually. And they asked the captain he said "No I thought we were absolutely going to die. I thought there was no reason why anyone would come down here and look for us. I thought we were absolutely dead but I'm not going to tell the crew."

And those sorts of examples and this translates also into families. So that I think it's very important for parents to pay a lot of attention to managing their own state and between the parents so that they don't get agitated and start yelling at each other. Or worse still swearing at each other, because anxiety flips into anger very very easily when as soon as you have frustration. Not able to do what I **do**, flips into anger. So, I think again amongst the parents you're protecting your children if you rehearse how you will just keep calm and keep methodically working things through. "No sorry dear. I meant don't sit on the walkie talkie, here let me show you once again". Rather than that sort of thing we say in other circumstances.

### **Malcolm**

So a family go through a fire and the children have been exposed to it. When they come out the other side what are the consequences for the family that has prepared their children and maintained the engagement and communication? What's the consequences for the family that haven't? What sorts of consequences for those different?

### **Rob**

Often children will react differently. That will be partly about their personality type and partly about their age. Of the two-personality type's the more important, sometimes you'll have an older child, a teenager who's extremely emotional and anxious and frightened and overwhelmed and you'll have a younger child that's calmer, they just have a calmer nervous system. They'll be more trusting of adults and so on. Now I think what brings that together is that opening up conversation about it. Talking about what did happen, why it happened, what we were all doing, why I was outside for a while, and you were scared and what I was doing. And most importantly what I was doing to protect myself.

Now this sometimes happens when you have let's say dad left at home looking after the house and mom and the kids have gone away. Now what do the children imagine? They'll see all this stuff on television, they'll imagine dad surrounded by flames and they won't be able to imagine how he got out of it. So what we want him to do is when they reunite he says "Let me tell you what I was doing and let me tell you how I took care of myself. How when the flames flared up here I went behind the shed. Soon as they calmed down I went out because it wasn't too hot" and so on and so forth. So that the children can replace nebulous emotional vague frightening ideas with images. Because when we become frightened or disturbed we go into that part of our brain that we deal with things in sensory images and emotions and if the image is dangerous it's going to kick up a frightening emotion and if I don't have a real image I'll imagine something, I'll produce it out of my imagination. And that's of course then going to be coloured by the fears I have as a child.

So, we can damp those down by putting in images of what dad described what he was doing, how his taking care of himself, how he made sure that "I'm going to get back to my kids and this is what I'm going to do and tell that story". And that really means it can't all be done at once. It has to be done in bits and pieces. That means keep the conversation going and you'll find with children, and same with us as adults, but the children will have some things on their mind straightaway. And then if you deal with those later on, a few days later a week later, they'll have some other ideas. Then they'll go back to school, and they'll hear other people's stories and then they'll start to think "Well wonder if that was happening to my dad?" or "What would have happened if that had happened to us?" And you keep talking it over.

In working with children with all sorts of traumas I've come to the conclusion you can't entirely resolve it in one period because it's one age. Now every time a child matures their perspective and their understanding mature and they see things more broadly. And what they had one story when they were younger.

### **Malcolm**

They accept an earlier explanation but then "Hang on this doesn't sound right. I want to know the detail of this."

### **Rob**

That's right. Well, they see something new or they hear somebody else's story. So I think that one of the greatest assets we can have is for the parents to model an easy revisiting and talking it over. And one thing I'd want to emphasize too is that I think what parents get very worried about is when their children get emotional. And there's a fear, even with us as adults there's a fear that talking about something that makes somebody emotional will re-traumatize them. No, it won't, it's not expressed emotion that's the problem, its unexpressed emotion. What will traumatize people is to allow to open up all the frightening feelings that they had and do nothing with them. If those frightening feelings come the first thing we can do is check them against reality because there's a tendency for us always to remember most vividly the most dangerous parts, whether we're children or adults or whatever. And if you listen to the story what you'll find is the story will get interrupted at a certain point and people go into their emotions. That's when they'll start crying or they'll get angry at the fire brigade not being there. And if you ask what's that point where the narrative breaks down it's the most dangerous point. And what we need to do is to ask what happened next? What happened then? Why didn't that happen? And in that way we take the story right through to the resolution. This is what we have to do when we're talking with kids afterwards. Don't just hang on to the most dangerous moment, follow it through. Why did they survive? Why did the parents survive? How did they get out? What was the benefit of their training and their preparation? And it's that holistic story. Now when the children express fears and tears and anxiety just calmly keep going with the story and you'll see they'll settle down and come out the other side. If you stop at that moment then everyone becomes very frightened about going into it and that sort of leaves it unresolved.

**Malcolm**

So, you've been working in this field for a very long time now and you've experienced the aftermath of many of these disasters? Are we getting any better at preparing children for disaster?

**Rob**

I think we are and go back to the role of schools there. I think they're very important. And actually we have to slowly normalize disaster don't we. They're not frequent but they are regular. They're not necessarily repeated in a particular area, but I think the more we accept that I think culturally the whole world is struggling to come to grips with that. And so the more as a government system and as education department right down to within the family we make the acknowledgement of these events a part of life that has to be dealt with the more they will reduce the traumatic nature of them, But there's still a long way to go. Still a long way to go. And that's why we're of course having this conversation.

**Malcolm**

Absolutely. And perhaps on that note we'll finish. Unless there are any things that you'd want to talk about that we haven't mentioned?

**Rob**

I think it was just one point I wanted to emphasize from experience that while there is a lot of focus on the event of the fire itself. And there's no doubt that some children will come out of an unexpected exposure to something like that with symptoms of trauma which is a fear of anything like that happening again, a trigger effect and so on. I think we need to understand that if a family is unfortunate enough to be severely impacted and lose property there's going to be quite an extended period of rebuilding or reorganizing or a lot of extra work.

Now, the tendency we see over and over again is that parents sort of buckle down and get on with it and their self-respect is often focused on getting control and fixing things up. But they had all the rest of the life going on anyway. So now they've got two jobs haven't they? They've got managing the rest of their life and replacing the loss of the fire. What's going to go? Something's going to have to go. And what we'll find goes is all the casual time of just hanging around doing nothing, relaxing and so on. And what I've understood is all of that time is the real point of creating what we could call the fabric of family life. What you'll remember when you're an old grandfather is not making the bed and doing the washing up but sitting around chatting at the table or having a cup of tea in the sun in the afternoon and the quality of the banter.

And I remember when I went to Christchurch many times after the earthquake there. You could see the effect on people's lives of living in these broken houses with all the repairs and all the disruption that was happening in every part of their lives. And the effect on the families was so very tangible for many of them. And I tried to think about how can I give a very simple guideline to protect from the destructive effects of the recovery? It's as some people call it the second disaster. And that's when relationships come under pressure and break down. And if we're not careful children step out of their normal developmental processes and they hold all that back, they don't ask to go and play with their friends because they can see mum and dad are so unhappy.

And I think the piece of advice I eventually came to is just give your children your absolute full and undivided attention as often as you can and for as long as you can. It won't be very long, it won't be very often to begin with. But don't go very long without just hanging out with them. Because if you do that that's the point at which their emotions will come to the surface or they'll ask questions. Or you will open up that space of talking about the event and going back or going forward and I'd say really think about protecting the supports to a child's development - which is play, interaction with peers, family time for security which is on their terms. And that means parents have to understand they have to prioritize this and put aside some of the jobs they want to do because so often the problems don't show up for some time and then there's a lot of work to re-establish things.



I can tell a little story just to finish up with. A family I worked with after a fire. Probably way back in the 80s. And this little boy several years after the fire had really fallen off his developmental pathway, he was so anxious, he had a lot of trouble going to school, he didn't want to play with his friends. He wasn't exploring, he wasn't doing anything, he was just clinging on. And when we actually had conversations with all the various people, and I talked to this little boy he said the whole family had been in the fire station, the father was in the fire brigade. And they went to the fire station and the mother was doing comms and the dad was out on the trucks and the kids were helping out in the fire station. And a call came in from the father's truck, "We've been caught, the fire's going to go over us, I love you darling," sort of thing. And then they didn't hear from him for three hours, but it was too busy to even talk about it.

Now this little boy told me a couple of years later that every night he had the same nightmare which was he and his dad were out in the bush, the fire was coming, the father went forward to fight the fire. The fire was too big for him and he started to backup. And boy could see there was a wombat hole behind him and he yelled at his dad to look out for the wombat hole, but he didn't hear him and he fell into the wombat hole and the fire came up and the boy woke up crying. Now that happened every night. He'd never told it to anyone until I inquired how he was sleeping. And what this boy has done is he's taken his imagination of what was going on during those three hours and it's got caught up in his childhood imagination and his relationship with his dad and he came out of it feeling somehow he failed to warn his dad, it was his fault that his dad died in the dream.

And so this gets tangled up with all the ordinary family relationships which we know get sorted out if you give them time and space. So it's very important for the father to tell a story of what happened in the truck and how they took care of themselves and why they were out of contact and what they did and so on so he could slowly replace that. And you could just see that this boy's anxiety just dropped quite smartly. And in fact his big brother was teasing him because he thought he had turned into a wimp. Tough country teenage boy. Once the brother heard about this he was so compassionate and supportive and this boy's school life was being bullied at school, when the big brother said, "You tell me here and I'll come and I'll fix them up for you". And the whole thing just rapidly turned around.

So it took coming to see a professional to open that up but you could do that if you just hung out with the kids and chatted. And when they wake up at night "What are you dreaming?" You don't have to be a psychologist to interpret dreams when they're their traumatic dreams like that. So, we find so often that most families have the capacity to deal with things. They need to give themselves the time and the priority. That's exactly the thing that we take for granted in normal life, but we have to plan that during recovery.

### **Malcolm**

One of the things I'll take away is that notion that you need to debrief but you need to do it often. And you might need to do it over a number of years in order to come to grips with those things

### **Rob**

Yes. A number of years. Yes.

### **Malcolm**

Well thank you Rob. It's been really interesting and as I said at the start I think my community owes you a debt and I'm sure many others across the country do. It's been a pleasure to get you on film here.

### **Rob**

Good.

### **Malcolm**

Thank you.

**Rob**

My pleasure. Thank you.