

AUTUMN 2021

Community Matters

VICSES

EDITION 14

HONOURS FOR VICSES VOLUNTEERS



*This year's VICSES
Emergency Service
Medal and Citizen
of The Year recipients*



*Remembering
the 2010-2011
Victorian floods*

*Exciting
new chapter
with AAMI*



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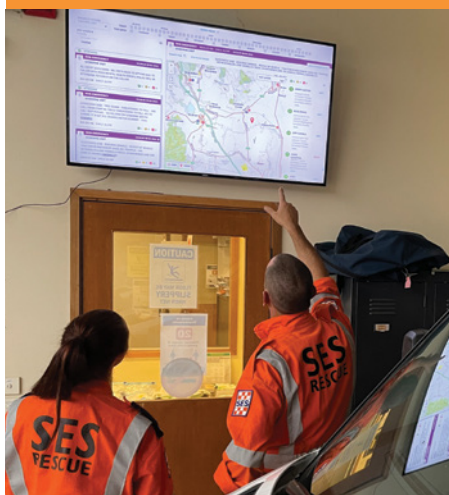
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Front Cover:

Portraits of Strength:
Monash Unit Officer,
David Michalowsky



The Victoria State Emergency Service respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING MINISTER FOR POLICE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Welcome to the first edition of *Community Matters* for 2021.

A warm hello to each of you in what is my first *Community Matters* welcome message as acting Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I have long admired the remarkable efforts of our emergency services and first responders, and am looking forward to working with and supporting the many hardworking, dedicated volunteers in the Victorian State Emergency Service (VICSES) this year.

While the state has so far avoided major fires, many Victorians were caught by heavy rains and flash flooding while holidaying early in the New Year, and VICSES volunteers played a crucial role attending to hundreds of callouts across the state.

South-west Victoria was hit particularly hard, where VICSES crews around Warrnambool dealt with a once in 50-year storm that pummelled the area on Saturday, 2 January.

More than 50mm of rain fell in the region over 30 minutes and local crews responded to over 90 requests for help in six hours that day.

The deluge continued over the next few days, with VICSES crews called to attend serious incidents including a large landslide that hit a major road in Geelong and several flash flooding incidents – including one at a popular caravan park on the Great Ocean Road which left up to 15 vehicles trapped in flood water and many holiday makers' plans disrupted.

Over the first two months of summer, Victorians called upon our trusted volunteers more than 6,400 times, with VICSES crews in December and January responding to 616 flood and storm incidents, 3,512 tree down incidents, 989 building damage

reports, 599 requests to assist other agencies, 532 rescue incidents, 28 calls for assistance due to landslides, 81 due to earthquakes and 62 other incidents.

VICSES volunteers have also supported Victoria Police at checkpoints across the state during road and border closures to help stop the spread of coronavirus.

The onset of La Niña and heavy rain and flash flooding events this summer is a poignant reminder for many volunteers reflecting on the 10-year anniversary of the devastating floods of 2010-11. Large areas of Victoria experienced record flooding or storm damage between September 2010 and February 2011 under La Niña-generated weather patterns.

It was a natural disaster that took a huge toll on communities across the state. In response, over the past decade VICSES and the emergency services sector have been at the forefront of advancements in emergency flood response, designed to keep at-risk communities safe.

Funding for VICSES essential maintenance, building safety and facility upgrades continues to be a priority with the Victorian Government investing more than \$54 million in VICSES facilities over the past three State Budgets.

This year's budget delivered more than \$3 million to upgrade the VICSES head office, plus a further \$4.7 million for essential facility upgrades under the Emergency Services Refurbishment Fund.

This is all part of our commitment to equipping the state's emergency services volunteers with the resources they need to tackle challenges now and into the future.

To all VICSES volunteers who have gone above and beyond this summer, your efforts are invaluable – thank you.

Danny Pearson MP
Acting Minister for Police and
Emergency Services



Welcome

Hello everyone, and welcome to the autumn edition of *Community* *Matters*, our first for 2021.

Firstly, I'd like to congratulate VICSES Whittlesea Unit Controller Gary Doorbar and Wodonga Unit Deputy Controller and Peer Support Team Leader Lisa Wise, who were both honoured with the prestigious Emergency Services Medal on Tuesday 26 January. Both Gary and Lisa have dedicated much of their lives to supporting VICSES and their communities, and I could not be more proud of their achievements. Several of our members also received Citizen of the Year awards in their local areas, which is a testament to their contributions individually, and as VICSES volunteers. You can read more about these honours on page 4.

Monday the 8th of March marked International Women's Day (IWD) - a day to celebrate the incredible achievements of women across all communities. As a Male Champion of Change, I am proud to #ChooseToChallenge – the theme for this year's IWD. As an organisation, we strive to raise awareness against bias, and take action for equality and inclusivity every day. To all the women of VICSES – thank you for your ongoing contributions and service. We celebrate *your* achievements.

In January, we announced a new agreement with our Principal Community Partner AAMI. 2021 is the final year of the AAMI Equipment Handovers, with a shift towards making communities safer by funding projects that directly engage the community. I cannot thank AAMI enough for their support for the equipment program in the past, and look forward to working together on our new community program. You can read more about the history of the AAMI Equipment Handovers on page 9, or visit the Hub for more info.

Last but not least, thank you to all of our members who have continued to provide assistance during the ongoing pandemic. Your hard work and adaptability does not go unnoticed, and continues to contribute greatly to safety of all Victorians.

I hope you all enjoy this edition of *Community Matters*, and stay safe.

Kind regards,

Stephen Griffin
CEO Victoria State Emergency Service



FEATURES

VICSES volunteers honoured with Emergency Service Medal and Citizen of the Year awards

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

On January 26, VICSES volunteers were honoured across Victoria for their contributions to their communities and the emergency management sector. Here's a look at this year's VICSES Emergency Service Medal (ESM) and local Citizen of the Year award recipients.



Emergency Service Medal

Australia has a system of honours and awards so its citizens can be recognised for excellence, achievement or meritorious service and contributions to our society. The ESM recognises distinguished service by members of emergency service organisations across Australia and people who are involved in emergency management, training or education. Only 86 Victorians have received this prestigious award to date.



Gary Doorbar

Gary joined VICSES in 2008, first volunteering with Broadmeadows Unit and then moving to the then newly established Whittlesea Unit in 2014 as Unit Controller. During this time, Gary was instrumental in the expansion of the unit, which has since grown from 10 members to nearly 90 members today. Gary's perseverance in building relationships with local government and emergency service agencies cemented the unit's positive reputation in the community, and ability to respond 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Aside from his incredible leadership of the Whittlesea Unit, Gary has also undertaken many leadership roles across a diverse range of large-scale emergency events. This includes assisting the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, positioned Crew Leader in the search for Jill Meagher in 2011, deployment to Queensland to support the storm response for Cyclone Yasi in 2011, and many more events since. Notably in 2015, Gary earned Whittlesea Unit a citation from the Victoria Police Local Area Commander for the unit's outstanding contributions in the search for the remains of a deceased person.

"The members at Whittlesea Unit describe Gary as a fantastic leader who is always supporting them and enriching the experience of being a VICSES volunteer," said Central Region Manager Ray Jasper, who nominated Gary for the award.

"As is evident with numerous emergency events where Gary has played an important leadership role, he has displayed exemplified leadership, direction, emotional guidance and support to others. Gary's continual sacrifice of personal time to help the community is over and above what is expected of any volunteer."



Lisa Wise

Lisa first joined VICSES in 1989, dedicating over 30 years of service. Beginning her volunteer journey with VICSES Wodonga Unit, Lisa went on to become Deputy Controller in 2004 and has been positioned in the role ever since. In 2006, Lisa recognised that her experience in responding to road crash rescue events as a volunteer would benefit the then newly established VICSES Peer Support program, and decided to jump on board.

Since joining Peer Support, Lisa has become a Team Leader in the North East Region, covering 25 VICSES units. Lisa's role often involves travelling long distances and late nights at short notice, to be there as soon as possible for units who have attended a traumatic event. Championing the services provided by Peer Support, Lisa has also assisted in the development of training and awareness materials for members, and the overall accessibility of mental health and wellbeing services for all VICSES volunteers.

As a prime example of her dedication, during the 2020 bushfires Lisa gave up her holidays and volunteered to be deployed to East Gippsland to provide critical incident stress support for volunteers and their families impacted by the fires. Lisa quickly distinguished herself and built strong relationships with volunteers, staff and families from the community and across many different agencies, offering significant support to those traumatised by the devastating events.

"I can think of no other member that demonstrates our VICSES Values as consistently as Lisa," said North East Operations Officer Neil Payn, who nominated Lisa for the award.

"Lisa is highly respected by all those who have worked with her or benefited from her services, and is an outstanding volunteer whose commitment to VICSES and the community of Victoria is of the highest order." ■

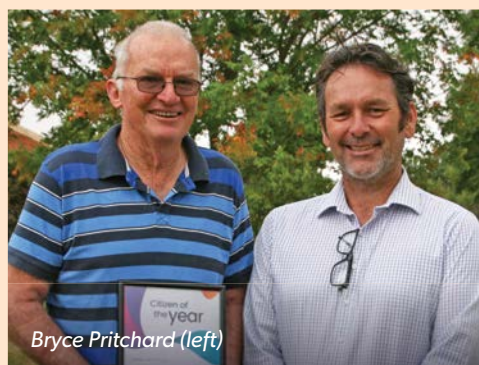
Citizen of the Year awards

Across Victoria, VICSES volunteers were also awarded local Citizen of the Year awards in recognition of their contributions to their community. Here are this year's VICSES recipients:



Jesse Wright

- **Jesse Wright, Maryborough Unit:** Central Goldfields City Citizen of the Year.
- **Bryce Pritchard, Murrayville Unit:** Mildura Rural City Citizen of the Year.
- **Leo op den Brouw, Mallacoota Unit:** East Gippsland Shire Citizen of the Year.
- **John Simpson, Kilmore Unit:** Mitchell Shire Citizen of the Year.
- **Chris Rogers, Pakenham Unit:** Cardinia Shire Citizen of the Year. ■



Bryce Pritchard (left)



John Simpson



Leo op den Brouw (right)



Chris Rogers

MANY THANKS

Congratulations to all of our 2021 award recipients, and thank you for your ongoing dedication to VICSES and the community.



Remembering the 2010-2011 Victorian floods

By Kathleen Jessop, Media Officer, VHO

Ten years after the devastating 2010-2011 floods, we reflect on the impacts and those who responded.

Between September 2010 and February 2011, a declared La Niña caused severe flooding and storm damage to 70 out of 79 local government areas across Victoria. This included over 1,500 flood watches and warnings, 34,000 requests for assistance to VICSES, and \$1.3 billion dollars in damage.

Rainfall of 100-300mm was recorded between 9 and 15 January 2011, affecting two-thirds of the state. Areas in North East and Central Region saw significant flood events between September and December 2010, while Melbourne and the Mallee were impacted most in February of 2011. During this period some towns experienced widespread flooding up to four times in less than four months, including Charlton, Echuca, Horsham, and Kerang.

The severity of the event took its toll on many Victorians, with over 56,791 insurance claims.

Rochester Unit Controller Judith Gledhill, who responded during the floods, remembers the severe impacts that the event had in her local community.

"I was new to VICSES a decade ago, and the experience of the 2010-2011 floods will stay with me forever," said Judith.

"I remember the phones ringing off the hook; the town of Rochester was split in half by floodwater, and nobody had the use of their showers or toilets in that time."

Although the impacts of the floods affected so many, it also highlighted the strength and resilience of communities across Victoria.

"Communities across the state banded together during what was a devastating time for thousands of locals, farmers, and businesses. In addition to emergency services, it was residents who made an enormous difference," said North

East Regional Manager Keith O'Brien, who was positioned as an Incident Controller during the event.

Ten years on, the 2010-2011 floods have shaped the way we plan and respond to floods today.

"VICSES has learned so much from that event," said Mid West Regional Manager Stephen Warren, who also undertook the role of Incident Controller during the floods.

"Giving affected communities adequate warnings and involving them in decisions that will impact their properties are critical things

that we apply during serious incidents to this very day." ■



Do you need support?

Major incidents can have an impact on our mental health and wellbeing. If you need support, volunteers can contact Peer Support on **1800 899 927**, and staff can contact our Employee Assistance Program on **1800 687 327**.



Shaping the way we work during COVID-19

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

Together, we have faced many challenges in the way that we work and respond to emergencies during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Although the impacts of COVID-19 have been difficult, it has also highlighted some great accomplishments across our organisation in the way our members have adapted to a new working environment.

One of the biggest changes was the adoption of Webex, enabling our members to be more connected than ever before. Prior to COVID-19, members still preferred face-to-face meetings and training, with Webex used only as a back-up. With additional training and learning the balance of video conferencing and other communication devices, our members have been able to maintain relationships and undertake training from almost any location.

While COVID-19 restrictions meant less face-to-face activities and more time spent at home, health and wellbeing at VICSES hasn't taken a back seat. The Wellbeing, Health and Safety team switched to online sessions, holding Healthwatch @ Home, online healthy cooking classes, weekly mindfulness events and more, all through online video conferencing. The team also launched the MindFit podcast, aiming to spread the word of good health to our members across the state. The annual *Step It Up* campaign was the biggest yet, with more than 850 participants and 200 million steps logged, proving that our members were keen to keep their fitness up more than ever despite the pandemic.

Another huge change to our working environment was the switch from face-to-face to online training. The Learning and Development team acted quickly to increase the development of online content via the Training Portal, fast-tracking the release of training programs and COVID-19 content to support the VICSES Pandemic Plan. New skill programs and COVID-19 specific training included:

- First Aid Refresher
- Emergency Vehicle Response Driving
- Crew Member Supervised
- Mental Health Awareness
- Responding During COVID-19
- Working Remotely, and more.

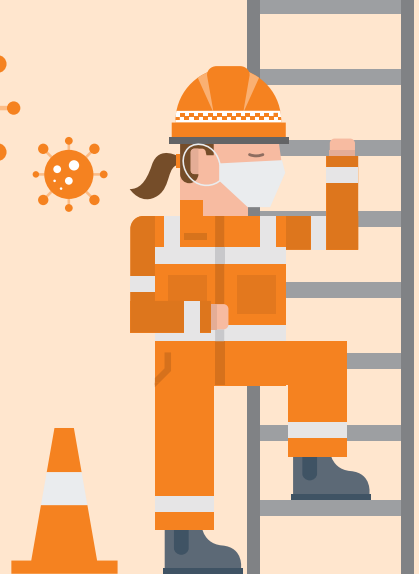
Between 1 March and 31 December 2020, there were 18,520 online learning programs completed, doubling the numbers from 2019.

Finally, although we couldn't gather in-person to support our annual campaigns and events, we were still able to celebrate across social media and reach even larger audiences. Our 2020 *Wear Orange Wednesday* campaign saw a 532% increase in impressions across all social media platforms

compared to 2019, and our *Neighbour Day* campaign saw our average impressions per post increase from approximately 44,000 to 198,765 in 2020. Our efforts to increase community engagement via social media are working and proving their worth in every post, so thank you to our members for sharing great content with us.

Although restrictions have eased and we have been able to gradually get back to face-to-face activities, the learnings gained by adapting to a new working environment have strengthened our ability to be adaptable with how we respond to emergencies, engage with the community, and look after each other.

Thank you all, for your ongoing support to keep our communities safe through the most challenging times. ■



Stepping back in time...



There's more than one way to cross a creek! Back in 1984, Northcote Unit held a training session along Melbourne's Merri Creek, which is still prone to flooding during heavy rainfall today. One of the many exercises included using a ladder as an alternative way to cross a section of the creek's rapid water (pictured). ■



Share with us

Do you have a photo that you'd like to share as part of our 'Stepping back in time' feature? Email your submission along with a caption to publications@ses.vic.gov.au

CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS



International Women's Day

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

On March 8, we celebrated International Women's Day (IWD) in recognition of the incredible contributions of women across VICSES and our communities.

This year's theme was 'choose to challenge', encouraging people to challenge gender stereotypes and bias. To highlight the theme and to help celebrate women across Victoria's emergency management sector, the Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) hosted three separate IWD events in Bairnsdale (27 February), Wangaratta (14 March), and Melbourne (16 March). Each event featured inspirational stories, presentations and panel discussions from women who are industry leaders within the sector, as well as

networking opportunities for all those in attendance.

In addition to these events, the women of VICSES were also proudly celebrated across multiple media publications, including Bendigo Unit Deputy Controller Natalie Stanway featured on the cover of The Age, as well as other member features in The Australian, Gippsland Times, and Wangaratta Chronicle.

"It's such a privilege to work for an organisation that proactively celebrates an inclusive and diverse workforce," said VICSES Community Resilience and Communications Director

Kate White, reflecting on our own organisations commitment to gender equality.

"With more than 5,000 volunteers, we are extremely proud that 33% of VICSES volunteers are female and 27% are represented in our unit leadership teams, as well as a strong representation of women on our board, and in our senior leadership group. Our strong investment in organisational Values is a key driver for an empowering work environment that acknowledges, respects, and values the diversity, abilities and contributions of our volunteers and staff." ■



Launch of Emergency Management Pride Network Victoria

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

On Friday 4 December 2020, the Emergency Management Pride Network Victoria (EMPNV) hosted the network's official launch, virtually.

The EMPNV is a new network that has been founded to raise awareness and visibility of the LGBTIQ community and allies from Victoria's emergency

Exciting new chapter with AAMI

By Amy Miles, Event and Project Officer, VHO



Our long-standing partnership with our Principal Community Partner AAMI has spanned over 18 years, and has seen AAMI generously donate over **\$9 million** in contributions to support the incredible work of our volunteers.

As part of our new partnership agreement, AAMI has chosen to focus on making communities safer by funding projects that directly engage with the community. As such, the existing annual AAMI Equipment Program will conclude in 2021.

Initiatives that AAMI will be proudly supporting through this new partnership include our *15 to Float* campaign. This will include providing funding for a refreshed campaign look and feel, alongside the development of augmented reality capability to improve the impact and effectiveness of the

campaign and help change driver behaviour on our roads, creating safer communities – together.

“Our community investment strategy focuses on making a positive impact on the most material social issues facing the Suncorp Group, specifically

financial resilience, social resilience and natural hazard resilience,” said Head of AAMI, Joshua Kelland.

“We hope our partnership with VICSES continues to increase the connectedness, inclusion and preparedness of our community to respond to natural disasters, which reduces the physical and psychosocial impact, enabling them to recover more quickly.”

Over the past 18 years, some key highlights of the partnership have included:

- Annual joint launch events for the AAMI Equipment Handovers across the state.
- 20,197 pieces of equipment distributed as part of the AAMI Equipment Program since 2008.
- Launch and delivery of campaigns featuring AAMI including *15 to Float*, *Bag it, block it, lift it and leave*, *Safer Communities*, *StormSafe*, *FloodSafe*, *Neighbour Day* and the *Driver Reviver* program.
- Events for community engagement and volunteer development, both internally and with other agencies.

“I cannot thank AAMI enough for their support through the equipment program over the years, and look forward to bringing our new community program to the state, together,” said VICSES CEO Stephen Griffin of the partnership.

One thing is for sure: Lucky we're with AAMI! ■



management sector, aiming to create a more inclusive and collaborative environment.

The network attended the Midsumma Festival at the beginning of 2020 to host its ‘soft launch’. With the group now fully established and comprising of representatives from across Victoria’s emergency management sector, the network was excited to finally host the official launch via Zoom (due to COVID-19).

The event, which was open to all emergency management

sector members and the community, featured speakers including the Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality, Ro Allen, and Emergency Management Commissioner, Andrew Crisp. The panel discussion included our very own Sabrina Canfield from VICSES Pakenham Unit, as well as agency representatives from Victoria Police, St John Ambulance and the Country Fire Authority. The event also included a series of virtual break-out rooms for robust discussion, and a highlight reel of messages of support from key agency leaders

including our VICSES CEO, Stephen Griffin.

“Our organisation is proud to support the launch of the Emergency Management Pride Network Victoria,” said Stephen.

“Our support of this network reflects our commitment to eradicating discriminatory behaviours, and endorsing an inclusive culture within VICSES, and the wider emergency management sector.”

Want to show your support? You can follow the network on Twitter at [@EMPrideVictoria](#) and on Facebook at [@EMPNV](#). ■





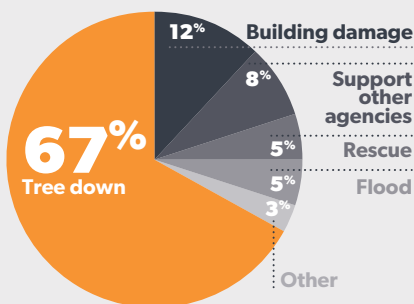
CENTRAL

1 October – 31 December



2,023
Volunteers

5,453
Requests for assistance



VICSES Chaps and Chainsaws return to Bunyip State Forest

By Phil Wall, Chelsea Unit Deputy Controller, Central Region

Chaps and Chainsaws is an initiative that was set up by VICSES in 2009 following the devastating 2009 Victorian Bushfires. The idea was for crews to go into fire affected areas and assist property owners to clear trees and logs that had come down during the disaster.

For the next 10 years, crews continued to go back to areas like Kinglake, Kinglake West and surrounding locations as the need arose. In early March 2019, a fire in the Bunyip State Park, about 65 kilometres east of Melbourne, burned through more than 15,000 hectares after several smaller fires merged. The fire destroyed 29 homes around Bunyip North, Garfield North and Tonimbuk, as well as 67 outbuildings and sheds. This event saw the reintroduction of the *Chaps and Chainsaws* concept in an effort to assist the local community. In September 2019, the first crews went

to the area and promised to be back in 2020. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping across the globe soon after the fires, all plans were sadly forced to be put on hold.

Fast forward to 2021, in January 35 VICSES volunteers (including 30 Central Region volunteers), travelled back to Bunyip over two weekends to fulfil our promise to assist four properties in the Tonimbuk and Garfield North areas.

"The last thing we wanted was for the people from this community to feel forgotten by us. That's why we're here, and that's why we will keep coming back until the job

is done," said Chelsea Unit Controller Ron Fitch.

On their return to the fire ravaged community, the locals couldn't have been happier to have our volunteers back.

"It's like some days you've got to climb Mount Everest, and some days you can't even reach base camp. A day like today is not just about the physical support from VICSES. In a lot of ways, it's more about the emotional support," said local property owner, Ingrid Green.

"Just knowing someone cares, and that there is someone willing to help you reach your own summit. At Mount Everest they had Sherpas, but today, thanks to VICSES, we had angels in orange." ■



VICSES units that returned to Bunyip in 2021 include:

- Chelsea Unit
- Essendon Unit
- Footscray Unit
- Frankston Unit
- Glen Eira Unit
- Greater Dandenong Unit
- Hastings Unit
- Hobsons Bay Unit
- Malvern Unit
- Northcote Unit
- Narre Warren Unit
- Pakenham Unit
- Whitehorse Unit

VICSES features in Melbourne's 'Portraits of Strength' exhibition

By Kath Jessop, Media Officer, VHO

February, VICSES was fortunate enough to be asked to feature as part of Melbourne's *Portraits of Strength* exhibition on the Crown Riverside, celebrating the Lunar New Year and extraordinary people who embody the spirit of the ox.

Monash Unit Officer David Michalowsky was one of five people chosen to have their portraits displayed on the iconic fire towers along the Yarra River, photographed by Sam Wong.

David was deployed in a support role during the 2019-2020 bushfire season at the Traralgon Regional Control Centre to help coordinate resources, and has responded to numerous other critical incidents over the past 12

months – all while undertaking his day-job as a primary school teacher, and dealing with a devastating personal loss during this time.

The exhibition stood proudly in representation of the Chinese zodiac of 2021 - the ox. This animal personifies strength, diligence, reliability, honesty and commitment, which are all characteristics that David embodies in his role as a VICSES volunteer and leader in his community. ■



Chris Rogers receives local Citizen of the Year award

By Shayne Honey, Pakenham Unit, Central Region

On January 26, VICSES Pakenham Unit volunteer Chris Rogers was the recipient of the 2021 Cardinia Shire Citizen of the Year award – a deserving achievement for an incredible guy.

Chris has volunteered with Pakenham Unit for over 36 years, going above and beyond to support the unit and his community. This not only includes responding to local requests for assistance (RFAs), but also assisting in other parts of Victoria, and even interstate. Passionate about all things road crash rescue (RCR), Chris often attends RCR forums, and even gives up his Sunday mornings to train unit members on RCR. This level of dedication ensures that all unit members are up-to-date with the latest RCR techniques and skills, and that the Cardinia Shire area has enough competent members to respond all year-round. During COVID-19, Chris has continued to respond to RFAs and host RCR training, even managing to miraculously make reading training books enjoyable!

Since mid-2009, Chris has attended around 1,100 requests for assistance. This includes responding to 487 RCR incidents, helping to secure over 150 residents houses due to storm

damage, clearing 300 fallen trees, assisting police at over 30 crime scene operations, and attending six aircraft incidents. There is no doubt that you could potentially triple these numbers if we had records dating back to the beginning of Chris' VICSES volunteer journey in 1984.

Chris is a much valued volunteer at Pakenham Unit, and we are so proud of his achievements. On behalf of the unit we'd also like to give a big thanks to Chris' family, who have so generously supported Chris and his invaluable contributions to community. Congratulations Chris and thank you for all that you do for our unit! ■





EAST

1 October – 31 December

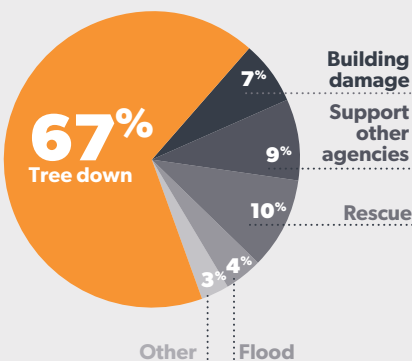


664

Volunteers

763

Requests for assistance



Building additional emergency response capability for East Gippsland

By Merryn Henderson, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region

VICSES East Region and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) have joined forces to provide an enhanced emergency response capability in Steep and High Angle Technical Rescue for the eastern side of Gippsland.

Steep and High Angle Technical Rescue was identified in the South East Victoria Technical Rescue Plan as an emergency response gap in East Gippsland. With mountainous terrain and regular requests for assistance for steep and high angle rescue in the area, everyone would agree that this response capability is highly valuable and necessary.

Initiated by the VICSES East Region, Operations Officer Vin Bigham and CFA Commander Aaron Worcester identified volunteers from both agencies that were willing to formulate a team and undergo extensive training and development to form the technical response team.

The first combined training session for VICSES and CFA personnel took place in July 2018, with the final sign-off occurring in December 2020 after the team performed an independent capability assessment and received endorsement to activate a response in this capability.

Based out of VICSES Bairnsdale Unit and Lakes Entrance CFA, and supported by surrounding units and brigades, the team continues to meet for regular training sessions for skills maintenance and accreditation currency.

The region now has 10 trained High Angle personnel and 28 trained Steep Angle personnel, with all endorsed in Low Angle. The area in which this team responds to spans from the New South Wales border to across Central and South Gippsland.

Thanks to this group of highly trained members, we now have the ability to better respond to the residents of East Gippsland and keep our communities safe – together. ■

Are you REALLY ready to go bush?

By Jane Fontana, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region

VICSES East Region, in partnership with Ambulance Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Parks Victoria and Victoria

RediPlan Emergency Planning Workshop – Cape Paterson

By Jane Fontana, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region

On January 9, VICSES East Region participated in a community emergency planning workshop for the community of Cape Paterson.

The event was hosted by the Bass Coast Shire Council and the Residents and Ratepayers Association as a recommendation from the report into the freak hailstorm that occurred in Cape Paterson in May 2019, which cause widespread damage to buildings, infrastructure, as well as severe coastal erosion.

VICSES, Ambulance Victoria, Country Fire Authority and Bass Coast Shire provided short, relevant presentations regarding local risk, followed by Red Cross facilitating an emergency planning session with the RediPlan and Get Prepared apps.

24 community members attended the COVIDSafe session, with 18 participating in some evaluation feedback. Of the 18 respondents:

- 100% found the content relevant.
- 17 found the content comprehensive and easy to understand.
- Each presentation was rated excellent or very good.
- 16 of the respondents said they would complete their individual RediPlan.
- 100% would recommend completing a RediPlan to neighbours.

The Red Cross is now undertaking some follow-up assistance and evaluation for those who attended the session, which will be provided in due course to VICSES and Bass Coast Shire to assist with shaping future engagement opportunities with the Cape Paterson community. ■



Police, embarked on a local campaign across Gippsland before the Christmas/New Year holiday period, to get holiday makers thinking about their preparation before heading to bushland areas.

The campaign was initiated by the growing number of emergency calls being received by agencies from people getting into trouble when heading

out camping, four wheel driving, bushwalking and other outdoor activities.

A flyer was created in the form of a checklist, accompanied by a media release, which was distributed far and wide across Gippsland. Posters and flyers were also distributed to key locations at the entry points to many popular bushland locations. WIN News Gippsland

presented a comprehensive news story, and a couple of local radio stations ran a story as well to further drive community awareness.

It's fantastic to have all our local agencies so well connected in Gippsland, and to be able to undertake these sorts of local need initiatives in such a short space of time. ■

TIFFANNY MOORE

Erica Unit welcomes new Unit Controller

By Jane Fontana, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region

In late 2020, Erica Unit welcomed Tiffany Moore on board as the unit's new Controller.

Tiff is an energetic and community minded local mother of two young children, who has extensive local connections in the area and has already hit the ground running in the leadership role.

"I never thought I would be leading the unit," said Tiff.

"Sometimes you have to take a leap of faith, and I'm so glad I did."

The unit already has a fresh new approach to training, social media, recruitment and community involvement, supported by the enthusiasm and energy that Tiff has brought with her.

"Even though we live in a small community, I am excited to be a part of the unit, and how rewarding it is to volunteer here. I want to give my members every opportunity to learn new things and be the best they can be, for themselves and the service that we provide to our community," said Tiff.

Congratulations Tiff, from everyone at East Region! ■





MID WEST

1 October – 31 December

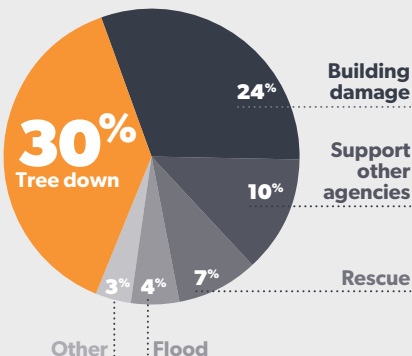


408

Volunteers

608

Requests for assistance



Supporting border protection during COVID-19

By Gordon Hicks, VICSES Ballarat Unit Controller, Mid West Region



On the Tuesday afternoon of December 29, VICSES Ballarat Unit sent three of our volunteers to help with the border protection efforts because of continuing COVID-19 outbreaks across New South Wales.

Our task was to assist Victoria Police to ensure that local residents could travel between the border towns (the border bubble), and check the travel permits for non-locals.

were from a non-affected area (a green zone), and had a current travel permit.

We worked four very challenging, yet rewarding afternoon shifts alongside

an incredible team of Victoria Police and VICSES members, demonstrating our commitment to keeping the community, and the state safe during the pandemic. ■

We were assigned with Victoria Police on an afternoon shift at the Lincoln Causeway between Albury and Wodonga, and our shift was joined by another member from VICSES Wodonga Unit.

We checked licences and ID's of travellers and ascertained if they had been outside the travel bubble for that area. We also ensured that travellers from outside the travel bubble



Horsham tornado hits hard

By Jane Patton, Community Resilience Coordinator, Mid West Region

At 1:00am on Monday 7 December 2020, while the residents of Horsham were sleeping, a fierce tornado blew strong winds through the northern suburbs of Horsham. The force of the winds snapped branches, moved tree trunks from their base, and lifted sheets of iron and tiles from house roofs. Debris was also scattered across properties, including parts of building structures, outdoor play equipment and furniture.

According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the tornado wind blew strengths between 138 and 177kph. This resulted in around 3,200 residents losing power until mid-morning, and damaging more than 70 homes and properties in the northern part of Horsham. The damage was so bad that some homes became uninhabitable.

VICSES Horsham Unit received over 100 requests for assistance for this event, responded to by the incredible efforts of over 50 VICSES crews from across Victoria who came to assist. Victoria Police, Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria, the Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning and local government also rallied together to support the recovery effort.

Horsham Unit demonstrated outstanding professionalism and commitment in responding to the event, having a great sense of comradery working alongside their fellow VICSES volunteers and emergency service colleagues. A big thank you to everyone involved in this effort. ■



Hot day for hot rods!

By Dylan West and Linda Hardingham, VICSES Ararat Unit – Community Engagement Team, Mid West Region

On Saturday January 23, VICSES Ararat Unit had a fantastic time at their first community engagement event of the year at the *Great Western Show and Shine*, an annual event held by the Great Western Hotel.

The day was hot, the cars were hotter, and the community was enjoying every minute of it. Our focus of the day was all about raising awareness of VICSES by allowing our

community to see who we are, how we respond to requests for assistance, and to hopefully recruit new members.

SES Steve (our unit mannequin) attracted a lot of attention,

with many people stopping for a chat and a look over our rescue vehicles, which included our Ford Ranger all-purpose support vehicle and our Ford Transit general rescue support truck. Both were a hot item, with members of the public asking many questions about each vehicle's specific use, and how they are utilised in various rescue situations.

The day went by fast and before we knew it, the event came to an end and we were all heading home; hot, happy, and already planning our next event! ■

Lifting Horsham's spirits

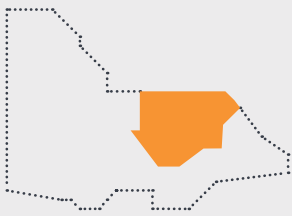
By Jane Patton, Community Resilience Coordinator, Mid West Region

In December 2020, VICSES Horsham Unit Controller Crystal Sanders and Horsham Country Fire Authority (CFA) Captain John St Clair joined their crews together to spread some festive cheer through the northern streets of Horsham.

The lift in community spirit was greatly needed, with some families facing many hardships after the tornado event, that occurred only a few weeks prior to Christmas.

There was a warm reception from the Horsham residents as the CFA and VICSES rescue trucks drove down the local streets, greeting the locals as they passed by and wishing everyone a very, Merry Christmas. ■





NORTH EAST

1 October – 31 December

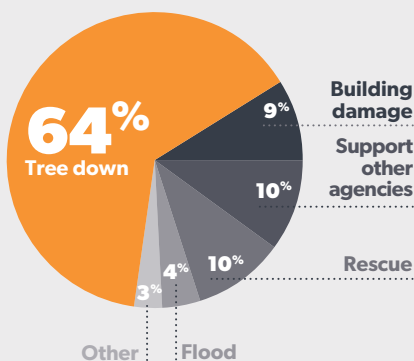


714

Volunteers

827

Requests for assistance



North East Region farewells Rob Johnstone



By Liz Frazer, Community Resilience Coordinator, North East Region

After 34 years of service with VICSES, North East Region has said farewell to the one and only Rob Johnstone, Regional Officer - Training. 'Robbie J' joined the VICSES Benalla Unit in 1986, building crucial volunteer experience and taking up Unit Officer and Deputy Controller roles, as well as responding to the disastrous 1993 flood event.

Since 1996, Robbie has worked tirelessly to train, mentor, and support VICSES volunteers to hone specialist skills and respond to emergencies around Victoria. Mid West Regional Officer - Emergency Management, Gavin Kelly, reflects fondly on the time spent working alongside Robbie.

"Robbie took to the Training Officer role with absolute passion, and very quickly endeared himself to all units and members. He was quiet by nature, but a happy and jovial character, who was always willing to go above and beyond what was required," said Gavin.

Robbie has taught many of us the way of the rescue boat and the path to the top of the

mountain, and his contribution is deeply appreciated by members in the North East who have expressed their sadness at Robbie's departure, sharing well wishes for his future.

Robbie, we wish you all the best in your adventures after VICSES, and we thank you for your passion and patience. The orange doors will always be open to you! ■



"Rob has been a much loved and vital fixture of our North East Regional staff and regional training team, delivering the whole gamut of training, particularly focusing his skills in rescue boat and alpine search and survival."

**Brendan Corboy, Manager
Regional Operations -
Readiness, North East Region**

"Rob always made time for everybody. If ever there was a cool, calm and collected person during a major operation, it was Rob."

**Sue Sheldrick,
Community Resilience
Coordinator, North East Region**

"Robbie leaves a big pair of shoes to fill. I'll miss a great work buddy and his smiling and happy personality."

**Carolann Miller,
Volunteer Support Officer,
North East Region**

"Rob will be very much missed by the Alexandra Unit and North East Region units as a whole. He was dedicated to the job with broad knowledge, and was always friendly and helpful in any way that he could be. He went above and beyond to help us achieve our goals as a unit. We wish him all the best in his life after VICSES - maybe he'll keep his foot in the door!"

**Peter Weeks,
Alexandra Unit**



Pic: North Central Review

CELEBRATING JOHN SIMPSON:

Mitchell Shire Council Citizen of the Year

**By Justin Brumley and Steve Caddies, Kilmore Unit Deputy Controllers,
North East Region**

John Simpson's outstanding and ongoing contribution to his community was duly recognised and celebrated on Australia Day when he was named the Mitchell Shire Citizen of the Year.

John's many community roles include nearly 38 years in orange at VICSES and 39 years in yellow at the Country Fire Authority (CFA), as well as other roles as a scout leader, school teacher and driving instructor.

Described by some as the rock of VICSES Kilmore Unit, John is a quiet achiever who just keeps showing up and getting things done. John has given much of himself to the service and his community by taking on important unit roles, including time spent as Unit Controller, Deputy Controller, and as 'Member Ordinary' as the need arises.

Although as the members at Kilmore Unit report, there's nothing ordinary about John Simpson.

"John conducts himself in an inspiring way. He leads by example, and is a mentor for new members. John's contribution is constant, and when the unit has had tough times, John's provided stability and steadfastness. He is always around to support his fellow members and undertake whatever role is needed," said Kilmore Unit Deputy Controller, Steve Caddies.

"The Mitchell Shire Citizen of the Year award reflects John's reputation within the community. He's really fostered the relationship with our CFA brothers and sisters, who we have a great relationship with. This means the local CFA is more than happy to come out and help when we activate

for storms and floods. John has really elevated the unit's standing in the community by fostering relationships with our emergency service colleagues, the Shire, Rotary, and the Returned Services League."

Kilmore Unit Controller John Koutras also acknowledged John's achievement and service.

"John's recognition from the community this Australia Day is very well-deserved, and I wish him my biggest congratulations," said John (Koutras). ■



Read more

You can also read more about North East Region member Lisa Wise and her recent Emergency Service Medal honours on page 4.



NORTH WEST

1 October – 31 December

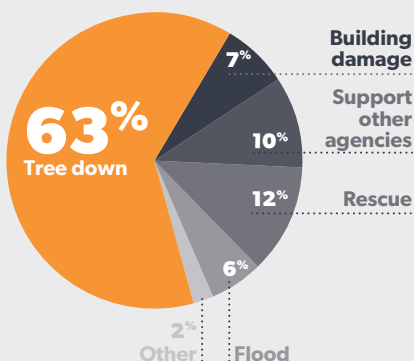


597

Volunteers

706

Requests for assistance



Women of the North West

By Karen Dunstan, Community Resilience Coordinator, North West Region

To celebrate International Women's Day, in this edition of *Community Matters* we are shining a light on VICSES women in the North West, acknowledging the contributions they make to both their unit and their community.

In North West Region, we are working with units to support and empower female members to take on leadership positions. Across more than a quarter of the region's units, women occupy over 60% of all leadership positions, and overall, women make up almost 40% of our region's unit leadership teams. Of all the North West Region VICSES volunteers that hold Incident Management Team (IMT) roles, women account for 50%, with the majority of those roles in operations and planning cells.

We are working towards increasing the number of women undertaking IMT

roles even more, as well as other support roles such as Staging Area Managers (SAMs), where currently more than 30% of endorsed SAMs are women. There is still some work to be done to build up numbers in senior unit positions, but what is exciting and a sign of optimism for the future of gender diversity in the region, is that more than 40% of Unit Officers are women.

Building gender diversity doesn't happen overnight, and where we are now is the result of a conscious effort by units and the region to ensure our membership reflects our communities. This includes a review of our recruitment strategy to ensure

that we foster practices that support gender diversity.

With women joining the service in ever greater numbers, our capacity is building where we were previously seeing a decline in numbers and units struggling to attend requests for assistance. This is particularly reflected in some of our smaller towns.

Being able to demonstrate that VICSES is a volunteer organisation of choice, one that is progressive and respectful, and that welcomes members from all walks of life, is critical to our ability to continue to serve our communities into the future. While there is still a long way to go regarding gender diversity (particularly in emergency services where it can be a generational change), here in the North West we have our eye firmly on the benefits of our membership reflecting the communities in which we live and serve. ■



PROFILE:

**Bridget Burke –
Echuca Deputy
Controller**

I have been Deputy Controller of the Echuca Unit for about three years, after being encouraged to take on the role when our previous Deputy retired. Being in a leadership role is beneficial in many ways, and it has significantly boosted my understanding and patience when working with people.

PROFILE:

Michelle Singleton – Swan Hill Deputy Controller

My journey with VICSES started in 2008. I was looking for a way to make a difference in the community, and something particularly within the emergency services sector.

It wasn't really my intention to be a part of the leadership team at Swan Hill Unit, however when I was approached to take on the role of Deputy Controller, I reconsidered. Although hesitant at the start, I soon realised I could actually make a difference. I have had a lot of support from the more experienced members, and now seven years down the track, I have seen and implemented lots of new initiatives.

Swan Hill Unit is very community minded, and we work very closely with all other emergency service agencies in the Swan Hill area. I am one of the members responsible for managing our social media page, and we are very involved in all community events within the Swan Hill district.

Our unit is a very family orientated unit as well, and being a mother of

three daughters, it has been beneficial for them to see other members (both male and female) make such a difference within the community.

My day job is as a Business Manager at a specialist school, which has taught me several strategies and has helped me in dealing with some high stress situations. I recently completed the Business Managers in Victorian State Schools Program Certificate IV in Business, which has also helped me with my role at VICSES.

I would definitely encourage other female members to take on any of the leadership team positions as part of VICSES. It's always a learning experience, and very rewarding with many new opportunities for personal development. ■



My husband and I own a local pizza shop in town, and through that we sponsor a lot of local sporting teams, fundraisers and schools. I am also a volunteer for the Echuca Country Fire Authority, and involved in local social groups.

My involvement in all of these areas and groups, including VICSES, means that I can tap into a broad range of networks in the Echuca community. This opens up a lot more opportunities to connect with people and groups who can help to bring a different perspective or life skills. There's also a strong network among other

VICSES units that I can tap into, especially when I'm seeking help or advice.

I'm not sure if my gender plays any specific beneficial role, but having greater diversity within our unit and as part of our leadership team demonstrates the importance in providing opportunities for people

Gender equity in emergency management

**By Karen Dunstan, Community Resilience
Coordinator, North West Region**

VICSES North West Region has recently joined the Greater Bendigo Gender Equity Coalition. The coalition is a diverse collective of public, private and community sector groups dedicated to advancing gender equity and the prevention of violence against women.

Coalition members collectively employ over 8,000 staff in Greater Bendigo, and have direct and regular contact with the community through the delivery of programs, services and facilities.

The coalition's vision is to see *"a community where all people are respected, safe to participate in all aspects of community life and have equitable access to the resources they need to succeed in achieving their aspirations, whilst living in a community that is free from violence against women."*

Action groups have been organised to focus on achieving positive social change across six key areas, including emergency management.

As a member of the 'Gender Equity and Emergency Management Action Group', together with our emergency management partners, we will work together to increase the participation of women in emergency management, with a focus on areas where women are traditionally underrepresented.

We will also implement practices that consider the needs and experiences of women in the delivery of emergency services. This could include activities such as ensuring access to appropriate services for women during recovery, and exploring the intersection of family violence and emergencies.

We look forward to making a change in our community and the emergency services sector as part of this great initiative. ■

based on their skills and knowledge.

For other women who are interested in taking on a leadership role,

I would say go for it! As long as you're willing to learn and put in the effort, there is nothing stopping you from doing it. ■



SOUTH WEST

1 October – 31 December

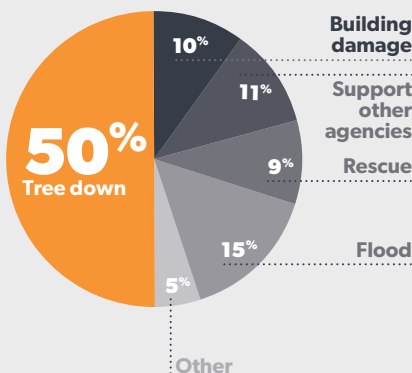


642

Volunteers

873

Requests for assistance



Community engagement is back and running in South West!

By Ysabel Cronin-Guss, Community Resilience Coordinator, South West Region



Face-to-face community engagement has restarted in the South West Region, with our members engaging with the community in a COVIDSafe manner as we gradually move towards a 'COVID normal' world.

Although all public relations, fundraising and community engagement are to remain contactless, Warrnambool, Port Fairy, Camperdown, Hamilton, Portland and Corio Units have all started getting back into the community with various events, with a number of other South West Region units starting to book in future events.

Hamilton Unit kicked things off with a static display at Bunnings, with the aim of educating the community on sandbagging and supporting a fundraiser for Motor Neuron Disease (MND).

Camperdown Unit recently marshalled and fundraised at the Saul Pasque Memorial Bike Race, an event that is

run by the Camperdown Cycling Club. They have been attending the event since 2006 and were thrilled to be able to attend in 2021, although in a slightly different capacity due to COVID-19 restrictions. The race is held in memory of Saul Pasque, a local rider and Camperdown Club president who died as a result of a traffic accident during a training ride near Geelong in 2005. The original connection came about because of a friendship between one of the Camperdown Unit members and Saul's family. Being a small community during a time of need, they pulled together and the relationship between the club and unit was born.

Camperdown Unit member Kylie Warren has been a volunteer for two years, and positioned as the unit's

Community Engagement Facilitator for the past 12 months. Although it has been a challenging year to take on a new role, Kylie has taken it in her stride. As part of her role, Kylie most enjoys the support from the community and meeting new people from all walks of life. Kylie can be credited for driving the unit's social media presence, as well as the unit's involvement in recent community engagement events including the bike race.

"Events like this are important to expose newer members to real life experiences, like situational awareness and radio communications, without the pressures of a time-critical emergency. This helps to build a better foundation for future responses," said Kylie.

Well done to the units that have been out in orange and engaging with their local communities. We look forward to sharing many more community engagement activities in 2021, and to make up for what was lost in 2020! ■

Wet and wild weather hits Warrnambool

By Ysabel Cronin-Guss, Community Resilience Coordinator, South West Region

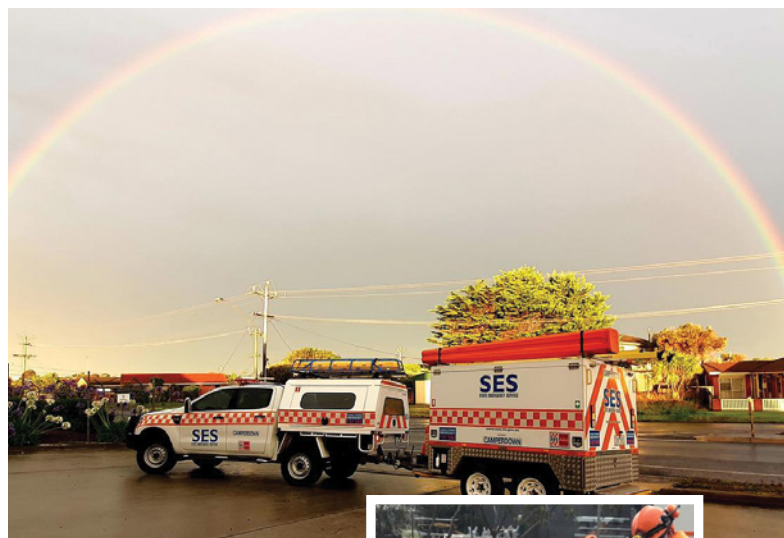
Over the weekend of 2-3 January, Warrnambool experienced a large amount of rain and subsequent flash flooding. The Bureau of Meteorology referred to the heavy rainfall and flooding as a 1-in-50-year event, meaning that there is a 2% chance of a flood the same size occurring in any given year. An incredible 50 millimetres of rain fell in town within a 30-minute period just after 2pm on Saturday. Between 6pm on the Friday and 6pm on the Sunday, Warrnambool and surrounding units received a total of 387 requests for assistance (RFAs), including:

- 143 flood.
- 118 tree down.
- 68 building damage (likely due to flood).

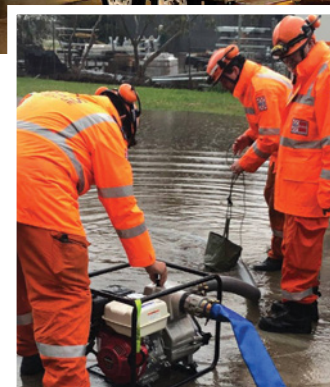
The primary zone (Warrnambool) had 97 RFAs within a 6-hour period on Saturday. Many surrounding VICSES units and other emergency services assisted the Warrnambool Unit, proving that we really do #workasone.

"We knew a storm was coming from all the warnings, but what we didn't know was how quickly and with what intensity. The whole unit came together, and with support from some neighbouring units, we were able to respond to all RFAs," said Warrnambool Unit Controller Giorgio Palmeri.

"By the end of the day, even when we knew the worst had passed, we made sure every household had been checked and that the occupants were okay."



Nearing the end of the weather event on Sunday, there was a light at the end of the tunnel for the community, as a spectacular rainbow appeared to lift everyone's spirits. Thank you to all of our units and other emergency services involved that helped over the weekend to ensure the safety of the community. ■

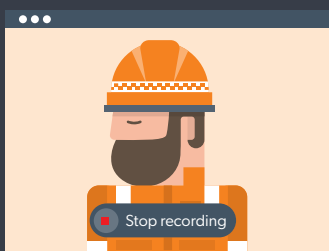


'2020, it's a wrap' video production for South West Region

By Rachel Vella, Torquay Unit Controller, South West Region

During December, eight members from South West Region shared some of their experiences on camera from the year 2020.

2020 is a year that will be remembered in history for incredible hardship and loss, but also a time where communities came together. It also brought a sudden change to the way we dealt with training and operations. As time passes, it is often the little things that we can forget. This video was a way of capturing those memories; to both reflect on the year, as well as providing



a way for future generations to get some insight into our lived experiences.

The project was lead and filmed by volunteers, who developed a list of open-ended questions that could be asked to members speaking on camera as prompts. From hearing everyone's stories, the biggest thing that shone through was that although 2020 was an extremely tough year for everyone in different ways, throughout it all, members were there to help and support each other no matter what happened.



Here are just some of the reflections from our volunteers:

"While the pandemic was really bad for a lot of people, there were also good things to come out of it. I think the community has learnt a lot about resilience and helping each other, and demonstrating that when we work together we can better support each other." **Rachel Vella, Torquay Unit.**

"We had to move the classroom to the shed, with 2 metres between each chair so we wouldn't come too close to each other. We couldn't use people, we had to use the dummies as casualties and clean everything that we touched." **Majd Eskeif, Bellarine Unit.**

"I was given a lot more responsibility in a really encouraging atmosphere, and I learnt a lot of skills really quickly too." **Tilly Jansen, Torquay Unit.**

"We had to adapt everything basically. The way you respond, learn and communicate - all of that had to change. People have had to be much more attentive to emails, careful about cleaning, mindful of what they touch, and who they are coming in contact with." **Catherine Cloutier, Bellarine Unit.**



Watch it now

You can check out the video at www.vimeo.com by searching **VICSES South West Region - 2020 wrap**.

Thank you to the members who shared their stories with us, and also to the VICSES Media and Communications team for their advice and organising the editing and release of the video. ■

OPERATIONAL UPDATES

Supplementary Alerting System wallboard

By Aaron White, Operations Officer – Operational Communication, VHO

In January 2021, the Supplementary Alerting System (SAS) saw the added addition of wallboard display accounts for each unit across the state.

Based on feedback received from members, these wallboard unit accounts were established to allow for units to display the dashboard view of SAS within their headquarters, allowing for real time

display of information for members responding to events.

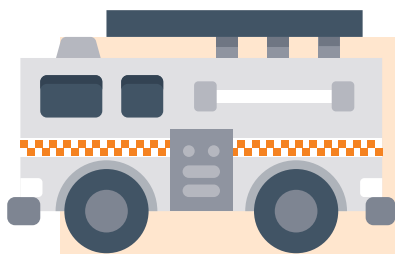
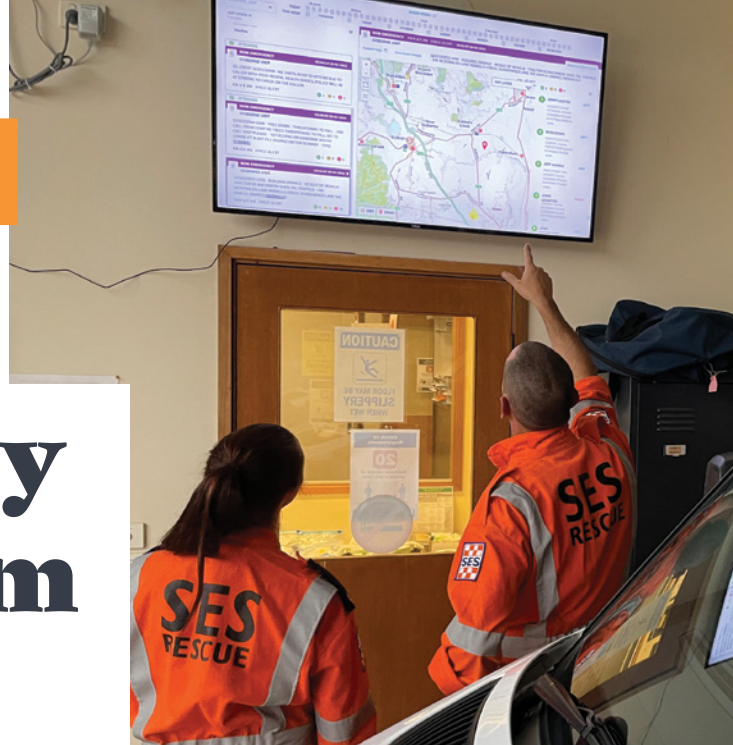
The display allows for members to see where the request for assistance (RFA) is, a map of the event's location, as well as a listing

of members who are responding to the event. This enables decisions to be made on crew numbers, and further response to RFAs. The display also automatically updates every 30 seconds, placing the most recent Emergency Alerting

System (EAS) message to the top of the list and populating the map for that event.

Should members need to activate an earlier event, they are able to do so by selecting the event on the EAS display on screen.

The wallboard display is able to be presented by logging into sas.em.vic.gov.au and using the wallboard user details that



VICSES supports with border closures during COVID-19

By Jessie Schleibs, Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

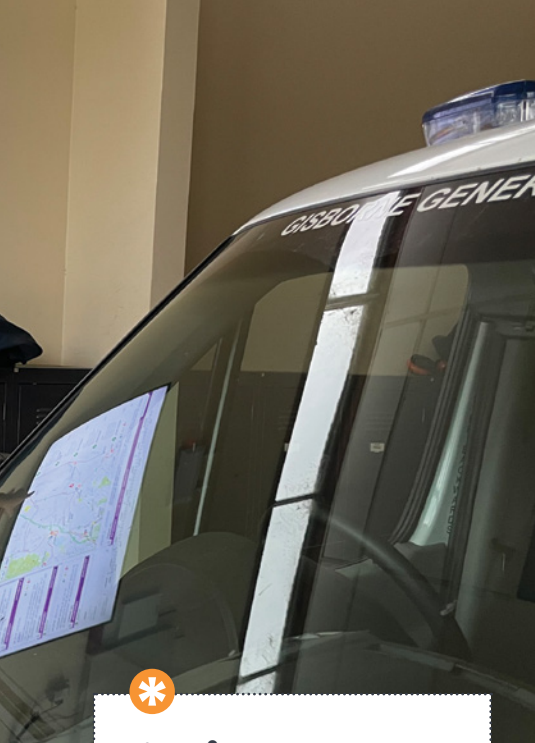
On Sunday 20 December 2020, Premier Daniel Andrews advised that areas of Greater Sydney and the Central Coast were to be designated as a 'red zone' due to COVID-19. This meant that people living in these communities, or had visited these communities since 11 December 2020, could not enter Victoria.

As a result of these restrictions being put in place, a request was made by Victoria Police to VICSES on Monday 21 December for assistance at rapidly established Traffic Management Points along the Victorian and New South Wales border.

From Tuesday 22 December 2020 to Saturday 2 January 2021,

VICSES deployed resources to 7 sites across the border region. These locations included:

- Sturt Highway, Mildura.
- Sea Lake, Swan Hill Road, Swan Hill.
- Northern Highway, Echuca.
- Belmore Street, Yarrowonga.
- Lincoln Causeway, Wodonga.



Assistance

If you need any assistance with your wallboard account or are after some advice on the best way to display this within your unit, please contact the Ops Comms team at comms@ses.vic.gov.au.

were sent to each Unit Controller for use within their unit.

The wallboard can be displayed using a smart TV, or by linking a monitor to a PC in order to display the dashboard view. ■

- Hume Freeway, Wodonga.
- Goulburn Valley Highway, Koonoomoo.

A total of 82 members from 29 units from the North East, North West, South West, Mid West and Central Regions were deployed across these sites to support Victoria Police. In addition to this, VICES chairs, tables, marquees and lighting trailers were sent to support with the operations. Additional volunteer members from Central Region were also deployed to assist as Base Camp Managers at Cann River.

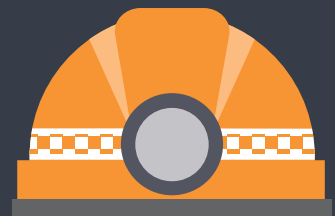
Thank you to all those members who gave up their time to support these border operations, particularly over the traditional family festive season. ■

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

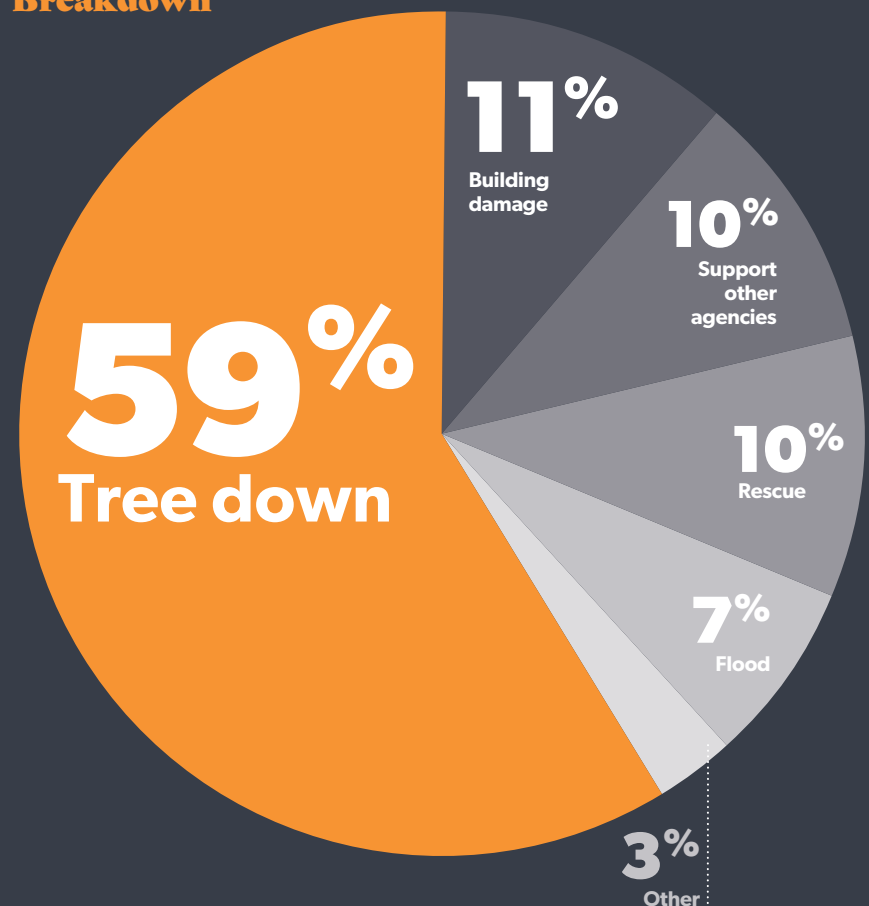
1 October – 31 December 2021

Total

3,790



Breakdown



PROJECTS – WHAT'S NEW

Sunbury Training Room and Emergency Vehicle Garage Extension Project



By Maz Howley, Manager Facilities and Capital Works, VHO

In 2018-19, Sunbury Unit received a *Pick My Project* grant totalling \$181,773 for a relocatable training room. However, the unit needed to construct a new motor vehicle garage to accommodate the vehicle and equipment, which was to be relocated to make way to accommodate the new Medium Rescue 2WD Trucks.

A public tender was the awarded to Raysnett Constructions to complete the Sunbury Training Room and Emergency Vehicle Garage Extension Project. The project consisted of an extension to the unit's emergency vehicle motor room, installation of a prefabricated building as a training room with concrete apron, and external site works to account for poor soil conditions, roof access, and a pedestrian fire escape.

The project was completed in early December 2020, with the project value for the additional works totalling to \$433,799. On 13 December 2020, the Mayor of Hume City Council Joseph Haweil and local member Josh Bull MP officially opened the new facilities, with local media, Central Regional Manager Ray Jasper, and unit members in attendance. ■





Wangaratta Unit move into new facility

By Jamie Devenish, Manager Media and Communications, VHO

Just before Christmas, volunteers at VICSES Wangaratta Unit were delighted to move into their new facility at 36 Handley Street.

The Wangaratta local headquarters is the first start-to-finish build led by the Emergency Services Infrastructure Authority (ESIA), and is the first of the modern designed 'Units of the Future' for VICSES.

Funded by a \$1.6 million allocation to relocate as part of the 2017-18 State Budget, the move takes the Wangaratta Unit from Millard Street where they had been since 2009, to Handley Street where they will form part of an emergency services precinct.

The 'Unit of the Future' design journey started in 2018 with construction commencing in June 2020, and completed in just six months. An official opening event is being planned for March 2021.

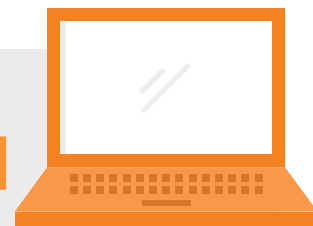
"It's great to see Wangaratta as the first unit in the state to have this type of modern designed facility. Good facilities are so important to retaining and attracting volunteers, and it just gives us a great credibility in the community. The Wangaratta Unit members are really

excited to train and respond out of such modern facilities," said North East Regional Manager, Keith O'Brien.



It's pleasing to see it form part of an emergency services precinct with Victoria Police across the road and Fire Rescue Victoria close by. Talks are also underway with Country Fire Authority about joint shared use of the divisional command facility." ■

LATEST UPDATE:



Windows Refresh Project

By Peter Gaull, Project Manager, VHO

The roll-out of devices as part of the Windows Refresh Project is well underway, distributing laptops to units and staff who registered for the 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) install option. This was the result of a successful roll-out pilot, which commenced in December 2020. Before laptops are shipped, the base software suite is installed and any additional software specific to your role. The laptops are then deployed in batches and delivered to an agreed address, with the recipient undertaking an online session with Data#3 to confirm the laptop has been setup correctly and that all data has been migrated successfully.

For those who did not register for the DIY option, the new devices will be rolled out with Data#3 visiting units, offices and facilities (in-person white glove method). This will occur after the DIY install is complete. We are currently planning dates, working within the constraints of COVID-19.

For any further questions or support, visit the Windows Refresh Project page on the Hub under **Library > Projects > Windows Refresh Project**, or contact laptopprinterrollout@ses.vic.gov.au. ■

Managing wellbeing during disasters: 2019-20 Victorian bushfires



By Paul Fitzgerald, Psychologist, VHO

One year on from the devastating 2019-20 Victorian bushfires, Port Phillip Deputy Controller George Katris reflects on his deployment to Cann River and mental health and wellbeing during operations.

Hi George, can you tell us about your deployment to Cann River and your experiences?

My role was to lead the VICSES team Task Force Alpha stationed at Cann River to help defend the township from fire, as well as supporting local and state police, performing welfare checks, and boat evacuations. During our deployment we lost power and telecommunications, relying completely on generators. One morning was a particularly scary moment, being woken up at 4am to evacuate to the school as the fire rapidly made its way towards us. We drenched the school in water to protect against

the heat, and were instructed to shield behind a brick wall from the fire if things worsened. Luckily, we were spared.

Was the town always appreciative of the work you were undertaking?

We received full support from the local families and services who understood we were doing our best under the circumstances. We aimed to be fully transparent at all times to avoid misinformation spreading. There was one resident who was particularly upset, but thankfully I was able to resolve the issue by remaining calm, compassionate, listening, and finding common ground.

It's important to understand how people cope differently during disasters.

What got you through those moments of 'survival mode'?

The 'you've got this' encouragement from my personal and VICSES networks, and speaking with a VICSES psychologist to combat my own self-doubt to address all of the 'what if' scenarios. I found it hard to justify taking breaks for myself, but learnt that self-care needs to be prioritised, especially during these kinds of events.

How do you stay resilient?

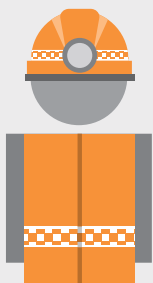
Nobody is perfect, and it's often easier said than done. I try to eat nutritious foods, exercise, listen to music, and stay in contact with family and friends. I stay refreshed by camping, and reducing my screen time. It's important to remember that the world will not stop turning if you take time off work.

What advice do you have for those who are struggling with their everyday life?

Pick up the phone and speak to others, and tap into the wellbeing support provided by VICSES such as Peer Support. Mental health is important, and even a quick check in is worth the chat. ■

VICSES webinar: Preparing mentally for the bushfire season

Events such as bushfires can be traumatic, and the effects can be felt long afterwards. The VICSES Wellbeing team have put together a special webinar on dealing with trauma and coping tips for the bushfire season. You can access the webinar on the Hub under **My State > Health and Wellbeing > Mind Fit > Looking after you – volunteers**, and located under the heading 'Webinars'.



Workplace inspections

July 2019 –
January 2020

94

July 2020 –
January 2021

118



Injuries

July 2019 –
January 2020

71

July 2020 –
January 2021

51

VICSES MindFit Podcast: The importance of sleep

By Alison Wright, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

In our latest episode of the MindFit podcast, we chatted with renowned sleep specialist Dr David Cunningham.

One of the keys to maintaining a healthy sleep pattern is to give your internal body clock an anchor point by getting up at the same time every day.

Lack of sleep is one of the key lifestyle factors that causes fatigue, and can have a profound impact on our overall health, safety and sense of wellbeing. This podcast provides many fantastic tips on how to improve your relationship with sleep, including:

- Sleep maths: Ending your nightly negotiation with how much sleep you have left.

- What to do to wind down from a late night call out.
- How polyphasic sleep can help with shift work.
- The impact of chronic partial sleep deprivation on your wellbeing and safety.
- How alcohol impacts our sleep.
- Prioritising sleep: The minimum amount of time we need to set aside.
- Planning sleep around schedules, and the importance of learning to switch off.

For more information on risks, causes and management of fatigue, visit our Health and Wellbeing Hub page on fatigue under **My State >**

Health and Wellbeing > Events > Fatigue, or book in a Healthwatch visit. ■

Next Month: The VICSES MindFit podcast team talk to comedian, actor and writer Rachel Berger. As one of Australia's favourite stand-up comedians, Rachel talks about the transformative power of laughter and how it can help to people to shift perspective and move forward from trauma. Her stand-up comedy workshops help participants to take control of their story.

Scan this QR code to listen to our podcast!



VICSES Movember comes to its hairy end!



By Paul Fitzgerald, Psychologist, VHO

Congratulations to all the VICSES MoBros and MoSisters who participated as part of Movember 2020, who together raised \$4,785 to change the face of men's health throughout November. Truly an incredible effort!

Here's the stats:

Winning team:

Corio Unit: \$1,225.

Top three fundraisers:

Matt Gilchrist – \$1,255.

Christian Molinia – \$715.

Joel Vermaas – \$600.

Thank you to everyone who took part in the VICSES Movember campaign, and please thank your donors and supporters for helping to ensure that all men live longer, healthier and happier lives. ■

WIN!

WIN: Subscribe to the MindFit podcast, listen to the latest episode and answer a few quick questions to go into the draw to **win a Garmin Vivosmart 4**, which provides some of the best sleep insights around.

ENTER

Enter the sleep competition on the Hub under **My State > Health and Wellbeing > Fatigue**, or email Health&Safety@ses.vic.gov.au for competition details.

FIND US

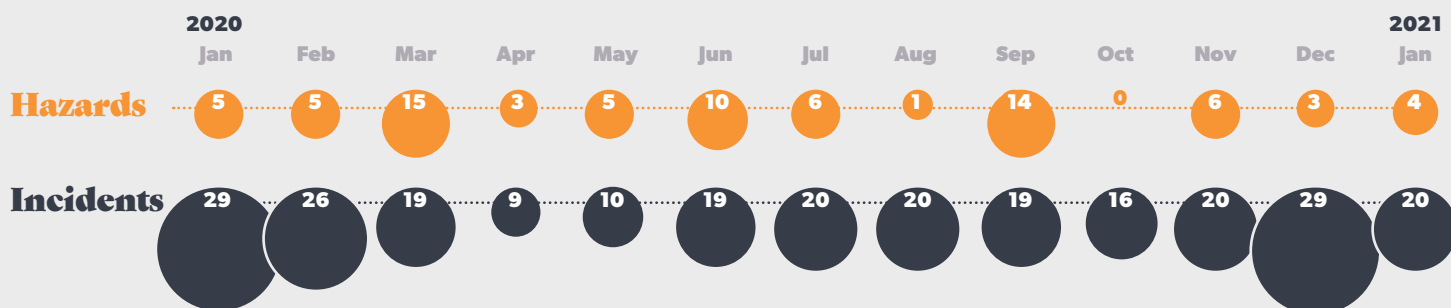
You can find our podcast on the Spotify or Podbean apps, or via the MindFit Hub page under **My State > Health and Wellbeing > MindFit**. Don't forget to bookmark the links to your browser for easy access, and give the page a follow!

MANY THANKS



Top VICSES Movember fundraiser, Matt Gilchrist.

YEAR AT A GLANCE



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Bag it, block it, lift it and leave – new short and sharp video series

By Hannah Macdougall, Senior Advisor Community Programs and Campaigns, VHO



In the previous edition of *Community Matters*, we introduced the regional Bag it, block it, lift it, and leave (BIBILIL) animation with a catchy jingle. Since then we have expanded BIBILIL to include an urban animation, as well as also developing a series of short videos.

BIBILIL is the result of collaborations with a flood affected community over the past ten years. After the destructive floods of 2010-11, VICSES sought to rebuild trust with local communities and develop simple calls to action for flood preparedness. These actions now include how to sandbag your home (bag it), blocking toilets and drains (block it), lifting valuables up high (lift it), and when to leave.

After the success of the regional BIBILIL animation, evaluation through a leading research and analytics organisation was conducted. Through the evaluation processes, we realised that not only did we need an urban version to connect with our children in metro Melbourne, but also that other communication products were needed to help spread the key message and calls to action when flooding may be imminent. As a result, a series of short and sharp videos are now available for units to share via their social media channels.

So whether you need a fun and catchy animation, or a more serious tone for flood preparedness, we now have you covered!

Members now have access to a whole suite of BIBILIL collateral, including:

- Member series guide.
- New live video series (with and without subtitles).
- Rural animations (with and without subtitles).
- Urban animation (with and without subtitles).
- Social tiles.
- Poster.
- PowerPoint presentation (multiple file sizes).
- Teacher notes (Word document and PDF).
- Music sheet.

For any further information or support, contact the **Community Connections team** at engagement@ses.vic.gov.au ■

Collaborating with the Victorian Multicultural Commission

By Hannah Macdougall, Senior Advisor Community Programs and Campaigns, VHO



During 2020, VICSES connected and strengthened our collaboration with the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC).

Through the VMC, our Community Resilience Coordinators have been able to establish networks with the VMC's Regional Advisory Councils, so that engagement can occur with our culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

As part of our collaborations with VMC, contacts to support emergency response messaging for multicultural communities have been established. At this stage, over 65 individuals have expressed interest in translating and recording emergency response messages, as well as engagement with their communities. Languages include Greek, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Sinhalese, Japanese, Swahili, Polish, Dari, German, Italian, Mandarin, Aslan, Arabic, Yoruba, Hebrew, Khmer, and Cantonese – just to name a few.

Clear processes and procedures for accessing the VMC network of volunteers are being developed by the Community Resilience and Communications directorate at our Victorian Head Office. At VICSES, we acknowledge that there is no 'one-size-fits all' approach. We are looking forward to fostering our partnership with VMC and using trusted community sources to help communicate our key messages within different multicultural communities across the state. ■

MEDIA

October - December 2020

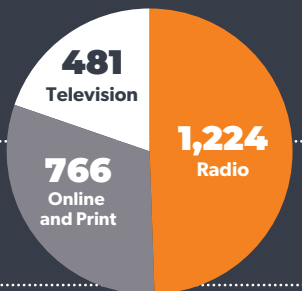
Campaigns and events:

- Your family, our family.
- Holiday season emergency kit campaign: Build your own emergency kit.
- Movember.
- Bag it, block it, lift it and leave.

Media releases:

- Melbourne VICSES crew fly to Horsham for tornado clean-up.
- VICSES' newest unit receives community cash grant.
- Critical rescue equipment stolen from VICSES Upper Yarra Unit.

- Gusts of 124 km/h lash Victoria keep VICSES busy.
- Family in the spotlight after VICSES Deputy Controller's serious diagnosis.
- VICSES' Bendoc Unit Controller praises family that helped save town.
- Simple steps to Get Flood Ready in the Mid West Region.
- North East Region tests control centre 'split' to get flood ready.
- Brand new VICSES vessels to hit the water over weekend.



Mentions of VICSES in the news:

Social media post highlights:

f FACEBOOK

Reach:
221,487

Post clicks:
19,232

Reactions, comments and shares:
4,897

3.1 magnitude earthquake felt in Wedderburn – the most powerful tremor for Victoria in 2020.

t TWITTER

Impressions:
93,874

Total engagements:
1,424

Likes, retweets and clicks:
227

Promoting 'Bag it, block it, lift it and leave' ahead of predicted heavy rainfall.

in LINKEDIN

Impressions:
3,951

Clicks:
123

Reactions, comments and shares:
117

VICSES celebrates International Volunteer Day.

@ INSTAGRAM

Impressions:
5,802

Reach:
5,763

Comments, likes and saves:
249

Chelsea Unit free a family of ducklings that were trapped in a drain using a makeshift ramp.

Media Liaison Officer spotlight – Matthew Stagg

Hi Matthew! What first got you interested in becoming a Media Liaison Officer (MLO) for VICSES?

I've always had an interest in using media to tell a story, having studied 'Arts - Sound Engineering' at university after Year 12. I've always been a bit of a 'tech-enthusiast', so I love any opportunity to play around with media and tech and see what can be created. More recently I've been doing publicity duties for a local Agricultural Society in Sale, and assisting with multimedia creation in my day job at Southern Rural Water. So when the opportunity arose to be an MLO with Sale Unit, I jumped at it.

What do you enjoy the most about the role?

I enjoy the involvement with the Unit Management Team, being a part of the planning of our unit's activities (when COVID-19 doesn't get in the way), and the opportunity to put my

skills with multimedia applications to use to create some interesting engagement pieces to generate public interaction with our unit. The support provided by the state and regional media officers, including the regular media packs, has been a great help too.

Are there any challenges that you've faced as an MLO during an emergency event?

I'm yet to be thrust in front of a camera, but I've been put on the spot by radio stations as an MLO. This is not something un-familiar to me, but always a bit of a challenge as you're often given little time to prepare.

What importance do you think the media plays for our units and volunteers?

Engaging with the public by giving them the opportunity to know what we're doing, why our service is important, and to comment and ask questions (as well as generating membership enquiries). It also helps in raising the profile of our unit and VICSES through meaningful,



engaging media. We want people to trust us and know that they can rely on us. We do this by creating posts on the training we undertake and the skills we acquire, the specialised equipment we have available to us, as well as the diversity of our members skillsets from outside the service.

Finally, would you recommend the MLO role to other members, and why?

Absolutely, it's a great opportunity to bring engagement to your unit. It's well supported, and there is a host of tools available to you on the Hub. Why not give it a crack? ■

INFORMATION SERVICES (IS) UPDATE

Passwords and your security

By Ross Elford, Manager Information Security and Governance, VHO

Like a large set of keys, passwords can be a hindrance, an inconvenience, and a general nightmare to try and manage. But as we move more and more of our personal and working lives into the digital sphere, good passwords and good password management becomes a necessity.

Passwords are commonly referred to as the keys to our digital world. Like keys, passwords don't always guarantee that you won't get broken into. In fact, there are some common mistakes to managing passwords that may mean the information you hope to be protecting is left vulnerable.

Simple or expected passwords

Simple or expected passwords are those that can be worked out without a great deal of effort. Using the names or birthdates of family members, pet names, logical sequences such as '1234567', using the name of the system or application you applied the password to, or even using the word 'password' are all common mistakes.

Insecurely stored passwords

Storing passwords on a sticky note, desk pad or notebook near your computer is an invitation for your own information, and that of the organisation, to be accessed inappropriately.

Shared accounts and passwords

Every individual logging into a system should have their own individual log-in credentials, which should not be shared with anyone else. Imagine what that other person who you shared your credentials with could be doing and accessing in your name.

Reused passwords

It may be convenient, but by reusing passwords across multiple systems you're essentially

making all of those systems vulnerable if that single password becomes known.

Saving passwords to a computer's browser

Don't save your password to a computer's browser - this simply isn't secure. Instead, rely on a strong password that you can remember, or have it stored in a dependable password management program. Similarly, don't provide your password to a website you have accessed by following a link in an email - it may be a phishing trap.

Communicating passwords

Don't provide your password in response to a phone call or email, regardless of how legitimate it may seem.

What can go wrong?

If your password has been captured, stolen or guessed, an attacker can potentially:

- Send emails from your accounts.
- Access and change files on your computer and across the VICSES network.
- Steal your identity and others.

Storing passwords

If remembering passwords is proving difficult, there are some secure options for members:

- If you're a staff member, store passwords securely in your 'Personal Folder' (PF) in HPE Records Manager. These folders are locked down securely to each individual staff member.



**MEET THE
IS TEAM:**

**MILAD
METETY**

**Hi Milad! Can you tell us a bit
about your role as an IT Support
Officer with VICSES?**

I joined the VICSES Information Services (IS) team around a year ago. As an IT Support Officer I am the first point of contact for all information and communications technology problems and queries. I normally get all the support calls between 9am to 5pm, and my goal is to provide help and advice to all staff about our services and software.

**What do you enjoy the most
about your role?**

I love my job in general because people care about me as a person and about my professional growth. There is a genuine spirit of cooperation and shared goals, all revolving around helping the staff and volunteers that I have not found at other work places.

**What challenges have you faced in
your role during COVID-19, and how
have you adapted?**

It was quite hard to start working from home as an IT Support Officer. While some issues can be resolved remotely, there are also on-site technical problems that require me to be physically at a location to resolve them. However, everything has worked out and I have adapted some new ways to resolve all issues remotely as much as I can!

**Outside of your work with VICSES, how
do you like to unwind?**

Relaxing and traveling with my family and friends to discover new places across our beautiful state of Victoria! ■

- IS is currently assessing password management programs to endorse for member use.

Further support:

If you think your password may have been compromised, change it immediately and contact the IS Service Desk on **1300 737 101**. ■

#ThankyouSES



WEDNESDAY 19 MAY