

AUTUMN 2024

Community Matters

VICSES

EDITION 26

VOLUNTEERS

HELP OUT DURING

BALLARAT SEARCH

AND RESCUE OPERATION

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VICSES members deployed to Queensland

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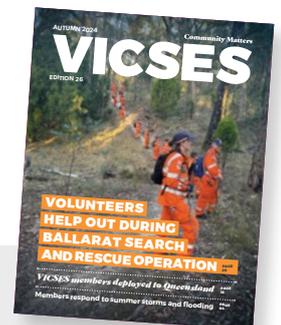
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Front Cover:

Volunteers during the search and rescue operation in Ballarat, February 2024.



Interested in contributing?

Submit your article here: publications@ses.vic.gov.au



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

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

I would like to begin by thanking those VICSES members who provided critical support to impacted communities during the severe storms which occurred on 13 February 2024.

This event saw significant damage to trees, buildings, and essential infrastructure, and sadly the loss of one life. The support you have provided to those in need across the state during this event and the severe weather events that followed has been phenomenal, showcasing the integral role that VICSES plays as part of our state's emergency services. The storm event on 13 February followed a busy summer period, with storms and flooding experienced throughout December 2023 and into January 2024. VICSES volunteers continued to provide significant support to local communities during these challenges and also contributed to interstate deployments to storm affected communities in Queensland.

On 10 January I joined the Australian Prime Minister, Hon. Anthony Albanese MP and the Victorian Deputy Premier, the Hon. Ben Carroll MP at the Victoria



State Control Centre, to be briefed on the severe weather impacts during this period and our state-wide response. It was terrific to meet with key leaders and members in our sector and acknowledge the incredible efforts by VICSES and our emergency service agencies during this time.

On 29 December I was also pleased to attend one of the fantastic Driver Reviver sites, alongside the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, the Hon. Melissa Horne MP, to view one of the six new Driver Reviver vans in-person ahead of the New Year public holiday.

Driver Reviver is an incredibly important road safety initiative led by volunteers. A big thank you to those VICSES volunteers who gave up their time to support 21 activated Driver Reviver sites during this period.

Once again, thank you all for your continued contributions and dedication to emergency services across Victoria and interstate. I know the upcoming Easter period can be another busy season and I hope you are all able to take some time to rest and relax over the coming weeks.

Jaclyn Symes MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Emergency Services

Welcome

Hello everyone,

As my first CEO message for *Community Matters*, I am delighted to launch this edition and share the significant contributions of our VICSES members across the state over what has been a particularly busy period.

On Tuesday 13 February we saw severe storms impact communities across Victoria, causing widespread damage and power outages. During this period our volunteers have responded to almost 7,000 requests for assistance (RFAs), including over 4,990 trees down and over 907 instances of building damage. Monash Unit has received significant demand, responding to over 1,000 RFAs. In addition, our Emerald Unit received 568 RFAs while our Greater Dandenong Unit received 372. Thank you to all our members who have provided crucial assistance for our local communities during this time.

Victoria experienced heavy rainfall and thunderstorms over Christmas, with our volunteers responding to over 1,500 requests for assistance between 24-27 December 2023. Soon after, our communities were impacted from 7 January 2024, with widespread flooding and storm damage. During this period our volunteers responded to over 1,800 requests for assistance – an incredible effort, and a testament to the dedication of our people both on-the-ground, as part of Incident Management, Regional and State Teams. You can read more about our flood and storm response on pages 4-7.

In addition to our response here in Victoria, our members have also deployed interstate to Queensland to support those affected by severe storms and Tropical Cyclone Kirrily. Our members have received high-praise from our Queensland-counterparts for their efforts, and you can read more on pages 22-23.

I would like to congratulate our 2024 Emergency Service Medal recipient, Sue Sheldrick, whose distinguished service has been recognised in this year's Australia Day Honours. During Sue's 14 years as a Community Resilience Coordinator with VICSES, Sue has demonstrated an outstanding commitment in emergency management to VICSES operations, training, community education and engagement. Read more about Sue's achievements on page 8.

In January, I was thrilled to be able to join with our members for the *Force of Nature – The Dry 2* movie premiere, which featured our volunteers as part of a land search and rescue. You can view the photos from the red carpet on page 10.

I have greatly admired the contributions and achievements of our members over my first months with VICSES, in particular those who have given up time with loved ones to help those in need over the summer holiday period.

I continue to look forward to opportunities to meet with our people across the state, including my visits with VICSES volunteers in recently flood affected areas such as Bendigo, Shepparton, and Rochester, one-on-one meetings with our Board members and key leaders from across the sector, and visits to our State Fleet Centre. I am also looking forward to my upcoming tour of south-west Victoria to meet with more of our dedicated volunteers and staff.

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

Kind regards,

Greg Leach
CEO Victoria State
Emergency Service



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SUMMER FLOOD AND STORM RESPONSE

Holiday season brings widespread flooding

By Jessie Schliebs, Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

During December 2023 and January 2024 Victoria was hit by two severe weather events, causing widespread flooding, and certainly dampening the holiday season.



Over the Christmas period in December 2023, a Severe Weather Warning was issued for heavy rainfall, flooding, large hail, and damaging winds. As communities were impacted, our volunteers were called away from their Christmas celebrations to support those in need, responding to over 1,500 requests for assistance (RFAs) across the state.

Coming into the new year, Victorians were impacted

once again with heavy rainfall from 7 January, seeing the commencement of another state-wide flood response. Our volunteers responded to over 1,800 RFAs, including 849 for flood-related incidents, 498 for trees down, and 248 for building damage. Our busiest units included Bendigo (201 RFAs), Kilmore (119 RFAs), and Pakenham (83 RFAs).

Flood impacts from this event were widespread and included some properties that were impacted above floor level. The hardest hit areas included Ballarat, Bendigo, Euroa, Kilmore, Rochester, Seymour, and Shepparton.

Several relief centres were opened in impacted areas with VICSES



members undertaking door knocking across various townships in the Loddon Mallee and Hume Regions over the duration of the event. Community meetings were also held with VICSES members in attendance to support local councils and partner agencies with dissemination of information. Numerous roads and major arterials had to be closed during this event.

To ensure communities were kept safe and up to date with the current situation, warnings were issued via VicEmergency channels around the clock. During the event there were 219 Advice and 4 Community Information messages issued, along with 77 Watch and Act (including 3 Warnings for the landslide event), and 17 Emergency Warnings.

Incident Control Points, Incident Control Centres, Regional Control Centres, and the State Control Centre were all activated to support more than 50% of the state which had been impacted.

A major incident that occurred on 9 January due to the heavy rainfall included a landslide at Mount Dandenong Tourist Road in Ferry

Creek, which was around 40 metres wide and 70 metres long. The road remained closed with traffic management points in place. An Incident Management Team supported with the operations out of the Ferntree Gully Incident Control Centre, and worked extensively with partner agencies to ensure the area was deemed safe to reopen the road.

We cannot thank the contributions of our members enough during this time, particularly across the holiday season.

The positive feedback received by the community, partner agencies, and government leaders is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our members in keeping our communities safe. ■



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Severe storms draw dedicated response from VICSES members

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

On Tuesday 13 February a Severe Thunderstorm Warning was issued for parts of the state, accompanied by Catastrophic and Extreme Fire Danger Ratings due to hot and windy conditions.

Damaging winds and large hailstones first impacted areas including Geelong and Bendigo. The cells that impacted the west of the state then built in momentum as they crossed Port Phillip Bay seeing the Eastern and South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne being impacted heavily into Tuesday afternoon. The fast moving storms kept their intensity as they crossed West and South Gippsland later in the evening, seeing

significant damage in our more rural locations such as Mirboo North and Thorpdale.

Storm impacts were widespread, including substantial power outages affecting more than 530,000 customers across the state. This is the most power outages ever recorded in Victoria from a single storm event.

On the ground, our volunteers worked day and night to provide much needed support for



those affected communities, who had been completely devastated by its impacts. From 13 - 25 February, our volunteers responded to almost 7,000 requests for assistance, including over 4,990 trees down, and more than 907 counts of building damage.

Our busiest units included Monash (1,075), Emerald (568), and Greater Dandenong (372). In Gippsland, areas around Mirboo North, Warragul and Thorpdale were hardest hit, with Leongatha Unit seeing the highest number of RFAs in the area (414) followed by Warragul (111) and Bairnsdale (110).

VICSES provided a number of Incident Management Team roles at state, regional, and local tiers, in addition to Divisional and Sector Commanders, Field Operation Vehicle operators, staging area support, taskforces, Community Liaisons Officers, and more.

Many of our units were supported by their local communities, who donated much needed





Knox Unit



Knox Unit



Greater Dandenong Unit



Castlemaine Mirboo Unit



Monash Unit

fuel in the way of food and hydration for those volunteers working around the clock. Thank you for your incredibly generous donations.

The Victorian Premier, Jacinta Allen, and the Minister for Emergency Services, Jaclyn Symes each visited our units and impacted locations in regional and metro areas including Emerald, Mirboo North, Monash and Knox to thank volunteers their contributions.

We are incredibly grateful to all of our VICSES members who played a leading role in our state's response to this event, and acknowledge those volunteers who travelled to support other units and their impacted communities. Our members have once again demonstrated our dedication, skills, leadership, and resilience in working as one to keep our communities safe. Thank you. ■

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GENERAL NEWS

Sue Sheldrick receives 2024 Emergency Service Medal

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

Congratulations to Mrs Susan Sheldrick ESM, who was the recipient of the Emergency Service Medal as part of this year's Australia Day Honour's.

Awarded by the Governor-General, the Emergency Services Medal was instituted in 1999 to recognise distinguished service as a member of an Australian emergency service. It also recognises people who are involved in emergency management, training, or education.

During Sue's 14 years as a Community Resilience Coordinator (CRC) with VICSES, she has demonstrated outstanding commitment in emergency management to VICSES operations, training, community education and engagement.

Sue has been a leader in the training and coordination, as a facilitator, of the multi-agency Public Information Officer training

suite (including warnings, media and community liaison), and the VICSES Community Engagement Facilitator course for more than 14 years.

Community engagement is an important function at VICSES. A community that is well prepared for flood, storms and other emergency situations, can reduce the impacts and lessen the consequences of an emergency, saving lives and property.

This is why Sue's passion is to share her knowledge and experience in operational settings, to coach and mentor staff and volunteers as they support the community in preparedness, response, and recovery messaging during and after emergency events.

Sue works closely with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and Joint Public Information Committees to ensure that, across the whole agency, our messaging is delivered in a consistent way.

Sue has been a pivotal figure in cultural awareness training at VICSES and more broadly, throughout the sector. Much of the material we use today at VICSES, to support CALD and wider communities, was developed and enhanced by Sue, who has worked to develop and refine the material over several years.

Sue has been a go-to for community engagement and public information personnel around the state, providing ongoing leadership - and mentoring - for volunteers and staff entering the emergency management sector.

Sue has even been honoured before. As the first female Captain of a Country Fire Authority brigade, a street at a Victorian Emergency Training Centre has been named for her.

Sue's will to show up for her community when needed is one of the strongest in the emergency management sector; the Victorian community is unquestionably safer for her tireless work. ■



Image: Sue Sheldrick receives 2024 Emergency Service Medal



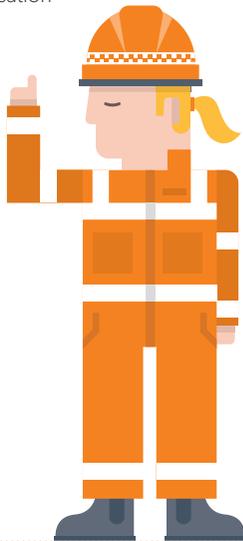
International Women's Day

Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

This year's International Women's Day theme is Inspire Inclusion, prompting us to reflect on the importance of having women from a diverse array of backgrounds represented here at VICSES.

We are excited to take this opportunity to highlight the extensive contributions made by women to our organisation and the community.

We are committed to promoting diversity and working toward a more gender-balanced workplace. Currently, women make up 34% of our members. Three of the five members of the VICSES executive team are women in addition to five of the seven members of the VICSES Board.



Mandy Chancellor

Volunteer, VICSES San Remo Unit

Mandy moved to Phillip Island when she turned 60 expecting a sea change but found herself busier than ever supporting her local VICSES unit.

"I have come into my own; I'm not someone's mother or wife, it's really given me an identity I've never experienced before."

She was driven by a desire to support her local community and the unit benefitted from her experience as registrar at the Coroner's Court and Victoria Police. Mandy began acting as San Remo's Unit Controller in 2022.

"We now have more members than we have had in the last decade. We have 21 members now at the VICSES San Remo Unit. I've also just introduced a young adults development programme, based on the fact that a large percentage of our members are under 25. Some skills sets we focus on are working as a team, engaging with community, administration, and conflict resolution whether internal or external.

The course is designed to help them understand where they fit, not only with VICSES but also within the community."

Mandy enjoys working with volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and spanning all ages. She talks to volunteers about what their aspirations are and addresses these to ensure they are fulfilled in their roles.



Bella Do

Volunteer, VICSES Monash Unit

Bella joined VICSES in 2018. It's given her multiple opportunities to learn, grow and expand herself.

"Why wouldn't it benefit you? If you have the time, drive, and commitment it gives way more back than you put in."

I'm an operational volunteer, I also help with uniforms. The jobs can be so different, especially with how we are rostered. We assist agencies and other units, and Safe Working At Heights (SWAHS).

I was deployed to Queensland over the New Year as part of a multi-agency taskforce. It was awesome. Because of the level of damage in the area, we did a lot of tapping with SWAHS as a backup."

Bella's day job in marketing is very different to the SES. She says "The SES can be very exciting, you get exposed to the emergency service sector, working with Victoria Police and the Ambulance Victoria."

Bella has found a strong sense of community and belonging as a VICSES volunteer. She enjoys playing a role in challenging stereotypes around who works in emergency services.

"I have lifelong friends at SES. It sounds so lame but when I'm out on a job and hauling away some branches, and I see a little girl looking at me, I hope they see me and think they can do whatever they want. Breaking boundaries of what you expect an emergency service person to be and showing that something else is possible." ■



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CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS

VICSES members shine in *Force of Nature* movie



By Tracey White, Senior Advisor, Events, Publicity and Partnerships, VHO

S240199999 Assist Agency – Assist Police – Giralang Ranges:
Assist Police with search for missing female, Alice Russell believed to be police informant and missing under suspicious circumstances. Report to Federal Police Agent, Aaron Faulk on arrival. All responding members to be advised search is in steep terrain and in inclement weather. Appropriate PPE and level of fitness required.

This may be what a job would look like if it were paged out from the new film – *Force of Nature: The Dry 2*.

In 2022, around 30 of our dedicated VICSES members were called in to act as extras in the film, directed by Robert Connolly and starring Eric Bana. Our members,

along with their vehicles and equipment, played a crucial role in bringing this cinematic venture to life.

The filming took place in challenging conditions, mirroring the rough terrain and unpredictable weather of our real-life emergency responses.

Our members, representing 15 units, embraced the opportunity to showcase their skills in a different setting.

The excitement didn't end with the filming!

As a sign of appreciation, participating members along with their family and friends, were

treated to an exclusive private screening of *Force of Nature - The Dry 2* on 30 January. To make things even more special, a small group of lucky VICSES members had the opportunity to attend the Australian premiere of the film and a Q&A session with the talented actors and the director. Members got a firsthand look at the behind-the-scenes magic and shared moments with the stars of the film.

This unique experience not only showcased the versatility of our VICSES members, but also highlighted the strong community spirit that binds us together. We are proud of our members who not only excel in emergency response but also shine on the silver screen! ■

VICSES bounce into last Melbourne United game of the season

By Tracey White, Senior Advisor, Events, Publicity and Partnerships, VHO

In a heartwarming gesture of appreciation and recognition, VICSES members were invited to attend the final Melbourne United Basketball game of the regular season against the Illawarra Hawks on 18 February.



This invitation serves as a heartfelt thank you to the dedicated VICSES volunteers for their unwavering commitment and tireless efforts throughout recent years, particularly in response to the widespread flooding across the state of Victoria.

The invitation to attend the basketball game is a testament to the invaluable contribution of VICSES members in safeguarding communities and assisting individuals during times of crisis - from rescuing stranded residents, to providing vital assistance in flood-affected areas.

VICSES members gathered at John Cain Arena to enjoy a cliff hanger match which saw our home team take home the win. Volunteers were treated to a special recognition of their service. A VICSES

video was showcased on the giant Jumbo Tron screen, highlighting our organisation's crucial role in emergency response and community support while the announcer thanked the attending volunteers to a roar of the crowd.

In addition to the video presentation, an activation outside the arena showcased one of VICSES' new Driver Reviver vans and promote our 'Join Us' recruitment campaign. These vans play a pivotal role in promoting road safety by providing weary drivers with a place to rest and refresh, ultimately reducing the risk of fatigue-related accidents on Victorian roads. The activation serves as an opportunity to showcase VICSES's ongoing commitment to enhancing community safety and wellbeing through innovative initiatives and collaborative partnerships. ■



VICSES takes pride in 10th year at Midsumma

By Tracey White, Senior Advisor, Events, Publicity and Partnerships, VHO

In a resounding celebration of diversity and inclusion, VICSES made a triumphant return to the 2024 Midsumma Pride March, marking a decade of active involvement in the iconic event. What began as a modest representation, primarily by the VICSES Brimbank Unit, has blossomed into a remarkable display of solidarity and support, with over 60 enthusiastic participants proudly walking the parade route.

The initial foray into the Midsumma Pride March a decade ago saw a small contingent of approximately eight members, an enthusiastic group determined to highlight our commitment to fostering an inclusive and diverse environment. However, the journey was not without its challenges, as resistance from certain quarters within the agency tested the resolve of those early participants.

Fast forward to 2024, and the transformation is nothing short of extraordinary. VICSES' presence at the Midsumma Pride March has swelled to over 60 marchers, a diverse representation that included our CEO Greg Leach, Assistant Chief Officers, state and regional staff, and volunteers representing over 30 units across Victoria. The exponential growth in participation is a testament to

VICSES' evolving ethos, embracing the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

VICSES members were joined by their fellow first responders and emergency service organisations including; the Country Fire Authority, Emergency Management Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria, Life Saving Victoria, and St Johns Ambulance.

VICSES marching proudly through the heart of St Kilda at the 2024 Midsumma Pride March not only reflects a decade of involvement, but also signals a promising future of continued support for the LGBTQIA+ community.

The evolution from a handful of determined individuals to a vibrant and diverse collective marching in unison mirrors the broader societal shift towards acceptance

and celebration of differences. In the face of challenges, VICSES has emerged as a beacon of inclusivity, embodying the spirit of unity and support that events like the Midsumma Pride March epitomise. ■



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EASTERN REGION

1 October – 31 December 2023

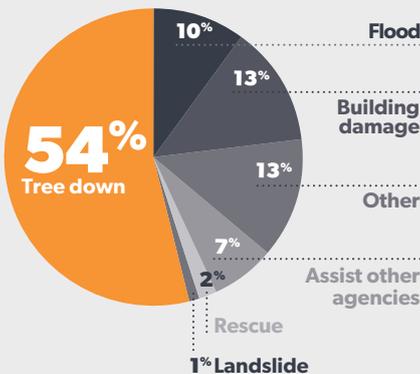


2,604

Volunteers

5,291

Requests for assistance



Leongatha volunteer Ben Graham joins the Queensland deployments

By Rachel Rogers, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

On 30 December 2023, VICSES Leongatha Unit volunteer Ben Graham took up the call for volunteers to be a part of Taskforce Alpha and travel to Pimpama, Queensland to provide support after storms and flooding ravaged parts of Queensland on Boxing Day 2023.



Ben’s family were travelling for the Christmas and New Year’s period. With time off from work, Ben said it was an easy decision to spend time doing something helpful alongside his orange family.

Ben was joined by three other VICSES volunteers; Pat Barnes (Sale), Paul Russell (Warragul) and Jason Haugh (Bendigo) on the deployment, before being allocated to Team 8 alongside five Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers.

“The ease of interagency co-operation was amazing. We learnt a lot of skills from each other” Ben says, referencing the cohesion within the team.



Land Based Swift Water Rescue training at Eildon



Over six weekends from 10 February to 17 March, members gathered in Eildon to take part in Skills Maintenance and New Competency training in Land Based Swift Water Rescue (LBSWR).

Members from a range of approved LBSWR specialist VICSES Units joined participants from Victoria Police, Life Saving Victoria and Air Ambulance Victoria. ■

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Ben encourages any volunteer to take up the opportunity for a deployment and use their skills outside of their normal response area.



The people you meet, and the friendships and memories you make along the way are awesome” says Ben.

Team 8 was allocated the areas of Coomera, Helensvale, Hope Island, Oxenford, Pacific Pines, Sanctuary Cove and Willow Vale – an area that is renowned for parks, resorts, and tourism attractions. Despite the area being known for family fun, Team 8 forwent the New Year’s Eve countdown and instead got themselves ready for more hard work tarping roofs, cutting and removing trees from roofs and roads, and exercising navigation and communication skills to help those communities recover.

Team 8 put on morale building, storm-themed music while en-route to tasks, took a candid photo opportunity at the aptly named, *Wet ‘n Wild* theme park which received the accolade of ‘Best Deployment Photo’, found time off-duty to rescue a possum from a bin causing a lot of laughs, and eventually took out the title of Best Team of the Deployment, which saw Crew Leader, Pat Barnes take home the coveted crown. ■





**EASTERN
REGION**

Image: VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit volunteers Sanne, Ashika, and Michael at Government House, 19 December 2023

VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit volunteers recognised

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

Congratulations to our VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit members, Sanne, Michael, and Ashika, who went to Government House in December 2023 to receive the Multicultural Excellence Award for Emergency Services.

The award was presented to VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit at Government House by Her Excellency, Prof. Margaret Gardner. Our VICSES volunteers were joined by VICSES Chief Executive Officer, Greg Leach. The award recognised the wide range of initiatives VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit has put in place to increase participation and inclusion of Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups.

These include:

- Installing change rooms for members to change into Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in a setting that accords with their customs.
- Translating flood safety brochures into 12 different languages.
- Utilising over 30 languages spoken at VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit to communicate with community in their first language when responding to requests for assistance.
- Providing culturally appropriate food at all unit events.
- Visiting faith centres to provide community safety messaging in a familiar environment.

This is a terrific achievement for the VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit which they will no doubt continue to build upon.

We are delighted for our VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit volunteers who have worked hard to be inclusive of the whole community that they serve. ■



My vision is that VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit will be the go-to agency for our diverse community, in times of emergency and disaster” said Unit Controller, Michael Prior.

Greater Dandenong Unit highly commended for diversity and inclusion initiatives

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

Congratulations to the Greater Dandenong VICSES Unit who have achieved a Highly Commended Award for Diversity and Inclusion. The award was presented at the Melbourne Arts Centre as part of the Emergency Services Foundation's International Women's Day 'Inspire Inclusion' conference on 7 March.

Unit Controller Michael Prior said "although this award recognised a range of diversity and inclusion initiatives, gender diversity was identified as a key barrier. The Unit Management Team committed to achieving a 50:50 gender balance in leadership roles. Since this was achieved, the unit membership has trended almost 50:50."

Member of the Greater Dandenong Unit Management Team Cyndi Scholes appreciates the welcoming and encouraging leadership provided at her unit and the efforts made to include members identifying as women.

She said "as a female member joining VICSES at the Greater Dandenong Unit, I wouldn't be completely honest if I said that I had no reservations about joining what I assumed was a male-dominated environment. I had little knowledge or skillset in power tools and wasn't sure how I could assist my community, but I was eager to learn so I tried to approach everything with an open mind.

The leadership team at Greater Dandenong made it known to the entire unit that they were making improvements to become a more gender-inclusive unit and myself and other female members were asked for our input. Allowing the women in the unit to be involved in the discussion on change was a powerful declaration that leadership valued its female members."

Some of the changes made to promote a gender inclusive environment involve:

- Actively including women in discussions and decision making around gender inclusive change.
- Feminine hygiene products made available within the unit and on all operational vehicles.
- Private change rooms located near member lockers.
- Women's events held outside the unit.

Michael and the Greater Dandenong Unit leadership team are committed to facilitating an inclusive environment for all members.

He said "a co-located emergency management facility in Keysborough between Greater Dandenong VICSES and Keysborough Country Fire Authority is still the major goal for us to achieve in the short term. This will allow us to include culturally diverse members through provision of facilities such as a prayer space and personal wash facilities. I will continue to work with our elected Members of Parliament and other stakeholders to turn this vision into a reality."

It is wonderful to see the tremendous work of the Greater Dandenong leadership team and wider membership continue to be recognised in the public domain. ■



Newly Arrived Australians do the 72 Hour Program

By Liz Frazer Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

Undertaking my role as a Community Resilience Coordinator with VICSES, in February I joined with 50 newly arrived Australians settled in Kialla, Mooropna and Shepparton to undertake the 72-Hour Program in Arabic language.

People from Syria and Turkey took time to practice how to call for help on Triple Zero and 132 500, and to hear warnings information in Arabic language on the VicEmergency Hotline, call 1300 226 226.

Participants also took time to understand and plan for emergencies in Australia, including floods and storms, making use of our SES Emergency Grab Bags and Triple Zero Victoria's Arabic Language Factsheets to make sure their families can stay safe and get the help they need, when they need it.

Importantly, participants became familiar with the different kinds of emergency services in Victoria, concepts of volunteerism, and expressed interest in joining their local Shepparton Search and Rescue Squad to help their new communities.

The 72 Hour Program is an 'open source' multi-agency approved preparedness initiative with four simple steps to being ready for emergencies, including an accessible brochure and written plan template.



More information

Email liz.frazer@ses.vic.gov.au for more info. ■

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EASTERN REGION

Monash Unit volunteers provide critical support during storms

By Raman Sanjayan, Monash Unit Media Coordinator, Eastern Region

Units across Victoria's east were hit hard by a supercell storm event that only lasted around 10-20 minutes, occurring on Tuesday 13 February.

The Monash Unit received the highest demand for support with over 1,000 requests for assistance (RFAs) across five days following the event, and more than 400 on the first night alone. We had three crews out already completing a couple of RFAs when the storm hit, sheltering in vehicles until the first rescue came in. With traffic lights out everywhere, peak hour traffic, no internet SAS or OIMS, flooding and trees down on most major roads, crews went back to basics to navigate



through the chaos to attend multiple rescues. Crews worked late into the night to clear entire trees off major roads. However, the extent of the storm's destruction became more evident the next day with debris everywhere, not to mention the hundreds of RFAs continuing to stream in.

We had close to 40 volunteers from our Unit crewing our six response vehicles on the first night, with multiple crews continuing to turn up daily over the following days.

In total, it is likely more than 75% of the unit assisted in some capacity during this four day event, whether that be on the trucks, at the Incident Control Point (ICP), or supplies and logistics.

The recovery from this storm event locally was a combined multi-agency effort, coordinated by the Monash Unit. We had much needed assistance from other SES units, both locally and from as far as Chiltern, as well as the Country Fire Authority (CFA) crews, Forest Fire Management



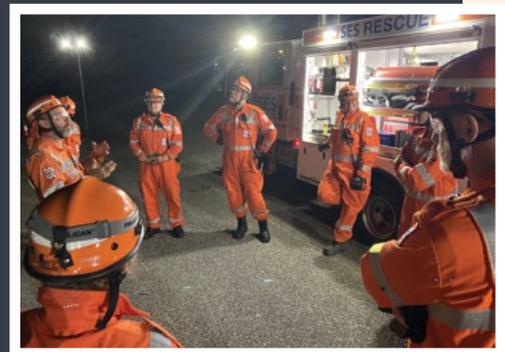
Corryong Unit builds on foundational skills

By Lucinda Leverett, VSO and Acting Corryong Unit Controller, Eastern Region

After an extensive community recruitment effort, Corryong's new volunteers are working diligently to build their skills and complete Crew Member training to get the unit back up and running.

The Unit has implemented a strong and enthusiastic Unit Management Team with David Yule having recently been appointed as the Unit Controller.

The new crew has been committing to weekly training. Recently, several members completed their Crew Member Supervised Practical Stands.



It was a hot and humid night with the additional challenges including an influx of beetles testing the integrity of our Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment.

VICSES and the Corryong community are grateful for the dedication and contributions of all our vital new members.

Keep up the great work Corryong! ■



Victoria (FFMV) crews and their machinery, and Fire Rescue Victoria's (FRV) Impact Assessment team. The City of Monash council was instrumental in this response too, in addition to United Energy Power. Without the assistance of everyone who helped, it would have been an insurmountable task to clear everything ourselves, and we are beyond grateful for their assistance.

Many of our volunteers have committed themselves everyday throughout this storm event, sacrificing work and family obligations to do so. Without this, we would not have been able to respond in the way that we did, and it helped dramatically to have so many members turn out on that first night to gain control of the situation. Not just the members on the trucks, but those who jumped into the ICP and stayed back to prepare chainsaws and equipment to bring some order to the chaos unfolding.

We're very proud with our efforts, in what has become the second largest storm event in our unit's history, having been pushed to the limits but bouncing back each day to serve our community with relentless passion. ■

Manningham Unit engages local scout groups

By Jen Selmore, Manningham Unit Deputy Controller - Members and Community Engagement, Eastern Region



On 12 February, Manningham Unit hosted a community open night for local scouts, council members, and supporters from the public.

Our unit had so many requests for visits from scout groups at the end of last year that we thought it would be a great opportunity to get everyone together on the one night. Three local groups, their parents and leaders came down to the unit to find out more about what we do, storm preparation, boating, safe working at heights (SWAHs) and of course, take a look through our truck.

The scouts were even able to earn their SES scout badge by the end of the night.

With our equipment set up and members managing the stands, it was also a good

opportunity to invite interested new VICSES recruits down for an info session, while seeing first hand what we do.

Also present on the night were Manningham councillors Deirdre Diamante, Anna Chen, Michelle Kleinert and Mayor Carli Lange plus members of the Thunderball committee, other council contacts, and invited community supporters.

Everyone was treated to a free sausage sizzle donated and cooked by our local Doncaster Bunnings, and ended the night entertained with a scout casualty handling obstacle race. ■



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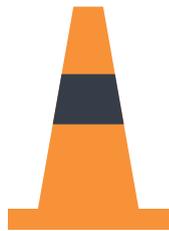
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EASTERN REGION

East Gippsland Flood Class Level Review Project



By **Merryn Henderson**, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

Stage one of the East Gippsland Flood Class Level Review Project went into full-force from 2023.

East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (EGCMA), East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC), and VICSES Gippsland have worked very hard to review the flood warning system across the East Gippsland landscape. Together, we have evaluated the accuracy and consistency of impacts felt at Minor, Moderate and Major flood levels, and adjustments have been made to line up to the National Standard.

Those involved in the review attended a community pop-up event in Orbost with the region’s Driver Reviver van as the central meeting point. This was an opportunity for people who live and farm on the Snowy to come by and ask questions about the changes to the Flood Class Levels.

Communications around these changes will be ongoing for the affected communities in Buchan, Bairnsdale Genoa and Orbost. It will take time for everyone to adjust to the new normal.

Local Flood Guides have been developed to support each of the communities in the associated impacts at each flood class level.

The team continues to work towards the Stage two roll-out, with aspirations to launch in June 2024.

Stage two will consist of new Flood Class Levels being added to several existing East Gippsland gauging stations, in addition to enhancing community preparedness and risk mitigation. ■



Image: Community pop up in Orbost with the region’s Driver Reviver Van.



WESTERN REGION

1 October – 31 December 2023

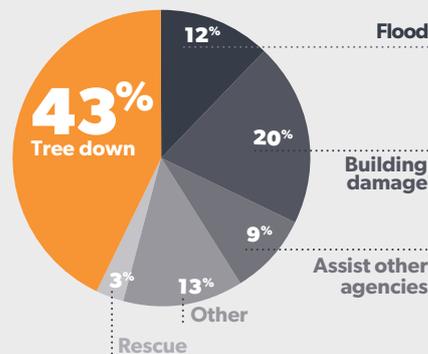


2,397

Volunteers

3,866

Requests for assistance



Barwon South West Regional Unit at work across the state

By Alex Suwitra, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

In early January 2024, members of the Barwon South West Regional Unit were deployed to assist with the flood response in north-east Victoria.



Unit Controller Mel and Unit Officers Ash and Sarah were sent to Shepparton, forming a team with other VICSES volunteers and staff alongside Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers. The team were tasked with door-knocking 300+ residents to provide flood information and check on people's welfare.

The Shepparton community was heavily affected by the floods in 2022, and some of the people the team visited were living in temporary accommodation following damage to their homes during 2022. Many community members were understandably nervous about what would happen as the rivers rose.



It was amazing to see the community get together and support each other” said Unit Controller Mel.

“Residents were so welcoming and greatly appreciated the effort we were taking to visit them”, said Unit Officer Ash. “Many expressed relief that this flood wouldn’t be as bad (as 2022), and others were totally across the situation, current water levels, and knew all the lingo! We received lovely gestures and offers of water, sunscreen and a rest while walking in the heat”.

While the deployment was challenging, the team members agreed that they were fortunate

to play a valuable role in the flood response, and gain an understanding of how resilient the Shepparton community is.

There are eight VICSES Regional Units across the Victoria, with one situated in each Emergency Management Region. These units play an important role alongside operational response units, undertaking incident management roles during emergencies and supporting community engagement activities.



More information

Does this sound like an opportunity for you? Visit the VICSES website to find out more: www.ses.vic.gov.au/join-us. ■



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WESTERN REGION

Members assist Ballarat search and rescue operation

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

In early February, VICSES members supported Victoria Police in the land search for Ballarat East woman Samantha Murphy. Over 200 volunteers from 23 of our units were involved in the search across six days. Units were located in Loddon Mallee, North West Metro, Barwon South and the Grampians area.

The terrain at the search location was arduous, with bushland and sparse shrubbery sloping down into canopied parts that open out on to large paddocks. Volunteers experienced varied weather ranging from hot, dry conditions to being cold and rainy.

Our volunteers were supported by a Forward Operating Vehicle, which relayed operational communications to an Incident Commander on site, in addition to a VICSES staff member based at the Buninyong Police Station, to coordinate with Victoria Police.

This operation was a multi-agency effort, with VICSES volunteers and staff also working together with volunteers from organisations



such as the Country Fire Authority and Search and Rescue Dogs Australia. They were also joined by members of the community who arrived in hundreds to support Victoria Police.

Community Resilience Coordinator Jane Patton said, "As the Grampians Regional Duty Officer during the search, I was overwhelmed and so proud of the volunteers' dedication, many across several days. It was truly an amazing response".

Our thoughts are with Samantha's family, friends and community. We thank our dedicated volunteers for their time. ■



James Boler completes Electrical Vehicle Training interstate

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

From 9 – 11 February, James Boler (VICSES Regional Trainer) attended the Everything Electric Australia show in Sydney, undertaking training of the rescue components of electric vehicles (EVs) and their potential hazards.

In Australia there have only been six EV fires, with three of those occurring because the building around them had ignited. This means there are fewer fires involving EVs than those

with a traditional combustion engine, which James found surprising. Additionally, 7% of all new cars purchased in Australia in 2023 were EVs – doubling the 3.3% from 2022.

With the fire risk lowered and the number of vehicles on the road doubling, as Victoria's largest road rescue provider, VICSES is likely to come across a road accident before we come across a fire. In fact, most firefighters will never attend an EV fire in their career.



New Unit Controller for Kerang Unit

By Jamie Macri, Volunteer Recruitment Advisor (Western), VHO

Mark Gardiner joined the VICSES Kerang Unit in 1989 under then Controller, Colin Campbell.

After holding a number of roles, in 2023 he was approached to take on the role of Controller for a six-month period to help get the unit back on its feet. Since this time, the unit has responded to three significant flood events in the town after the deluges on Christmas day and the subsequent downpours. This has been keeping them busy with the current handful of members.

Mark has many fond memories during his time with the unit. Some of the most memorable times he can recall include being the leader of the Red Team at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, and some great times on the old Regional Exercises in places like the Wyperfeld National Park,

Koondrook Forest and other out of the way places.

In addition to his role with VICSES, Mark works as an Ambulance Community Officer with Ambulance Victoria, a Firearms Safety Officer for the Licensing and Regulation Division of Victoria Police, plays the Last Post each year for ANZAC Day functions (for far longer than he would like to think about), has been involved with the local Apex and Rotaract clubs, and many local sporting groups.

Mark's goals for the improvement of the unit include:

- Running a membership drive for new members.
- Getting the training program back on track.
- Getting members more involved in the management process of the unit.
- Raising the profile of VICSES in the community including awareness of our roles in the community. ■

James enjoyed the opportunity to meet likeminded people interstate and is looking forward to sharing his learnings across VICSES units.

"It was incredible to catch up with members from our NSW counterparts, along with the Rural and Metropolitan fire services. Although we all had different logos and different states in our names, it was clear we all wanted one thing: Our people to be safe. Together, we were able to share some really incredible ideas."

"As both a Regional Trainer and volunteer with Numurkah Unit, I have been delivering a small Working Safely around Electric Vehicles training program where I show a Tesla Model 3 and walk

around the safety aspects of responding to these vehicles," continued James.

James is looking forward to applying his new learnings to upcoming trainings sessions.

"Since joining VICSES in as a volunteer 2016, the service has supported me with a huge amount of opportunities, from getting my truck licence to getting my Certificate 4 in Training and Assessment. Becoming a staff member in 2022 was a dream come true for me. I am one of the lucky ones who gets to do what they love for a living. I also really want to thank Operations Officer - Lead Trainer, Troy Milner and Operations Manager, Brendan Corboy for their work in approving this training and their hard work to make sure I was able to go" said James.



Image (L-R): Jessica Moore, Em Hooke, Jesse Wright, Ron Duncan and Jhi Hem

Maryborough members excel at awards event

By Em Hooke, Deputy Controller of Admin Maryborough Unit, Western Region

In late 2023, Maryborough Unit held an awards presentation event for their members.

Congratulations to the following award winners:

- **Jesse Wright:** 45 years of service
- **Ron Duncan:** 20 years of service
- **Jesse Moore:** 5 years of service
- **Em Hooke:** 5 years of service

75 years of service collectively is quite the achievement!

Additionally, Jhi Hem received the Controllers Award for 2023. His dedication and commitment has been massive since joining the unit in 2022. We can't thank him enough for his contributions to the unit and the wider community.

It was terrific to see the dedicated team at Maryborough Unit recognised for their service at this event - well done all! ■

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OPERATIONAL UPDATES

VICSES members deployed to Queensland

By Jessie Schleibs, Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

VICSES plays an integral role in our emergency response here in Victoria, and at times interstate. Throughout 2023 and into 2024, our members have been deployed to support our partner agencies in Queensland, for those impacted by severe storm and fire events.

In October 2023, Queensland Fire Emergency Services (QFES) formally requested support via the Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner for fire strike teams and Incident Management Teams (IMT) across four rotations. VICSES members, including volunteers and staff, were deployed as part of a Victorian multi-agency contingent. In total, VICSES

sent 11 IMT members to support these fire events.

One contingent of VICSES members joined a multi-agency fire IMT which was made up of 50% volunteer members. Most positions were filled by our female members performing key functional IMT roles. One of these members was a volunteer Unit Controller on an IMT accreditation pathway, and her deployment provided her the

valuable final evidence to become the first volunteer VICSES member to achieve Level 3 Operations Officer Accreditation!

Later in December 2023, our support was requested again when Southeast Queensland was impacted by severe storms and flooding. VICSES members were deployed in two taskforces (Alpha and Charlie) as part of a Victorian multi-agency contingent with Country Fire Authority (CFA) members.

The following taskforces were deployed from Victoria to Queensland for this event:

- Taskforce Alpha which consisted of 45 VICSES members (both staff and volunteers) who undertook storm response tasks including

safe working at heights and chainsaw roles.

- Taskforce Bravo which comprised of a Command Vehicle and 10 Medium Rescue Trucks. They drove in convoy from Victoria to Queensland.
- Taskforce Charlie which consisted of 27 VICSES members (both staff and volunteers).

VICSES also provided two Jurisdictional Liaison Officers (JLOs) on two rotations to Queensland Fire and Emergency Service (QFES) Headquarters in Brisbane to manage and support the entire Victorian emergency management contingent.

VICSES received high praise from community members in





Queensland for the support VICSES has contributed during this deployment, including the following letter from QFES Acting Commissioner, Steve Smith.

“Queenslanders have faced several extreme weather events in the past six months, with volatile bushfires in the west, unpredictable storms in the south east and two cyclones in the northern parts of the state.

The critical support provided by VICSES to their Queensland colleagues during these difficult times is sincerely appreciated. It is through the strength of our collective efforts and the camaraderie between emergency service colleagues, that we successfully navigated this challenging period and continued to deliver frontline and behind-the-scenes services to those Queensland communities needing assistance.

Thank you also to your families for their support, flexibility and understanding to enable those who deployed interstate to provide additional capacity and give much needed relief to our crews. On behalf of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, Thank you.”

Lastly, in anticipation for Tropical Cyclone Kirrily, VICSES members again lent a hand to QFES. This included four VICSES staff who joined IMTs working out of Mackay, and as a JLO at QFES headquarters in Brisbane.

Thank you to all members who have dedicated time away from family, friends and workplaces to support those affected by severe weather events in Queensland. Your dedication to our community, both locally and interstate is admirable. ■

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

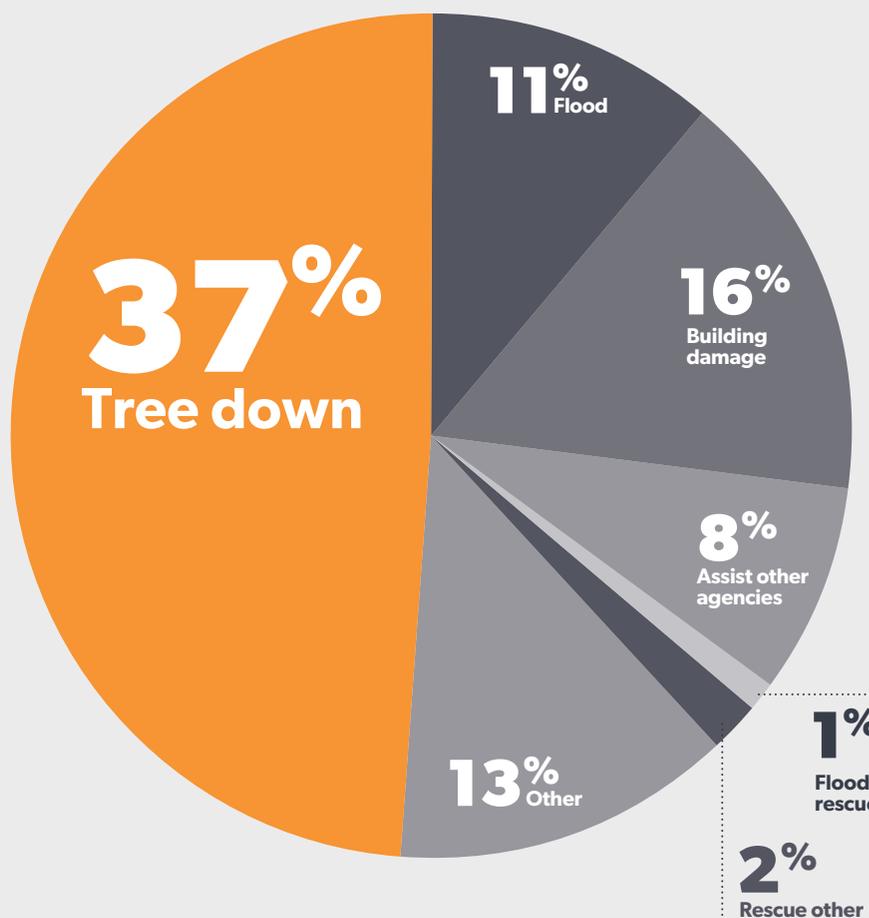
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Total

9,167



Breakdown



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PROJECTS - WHAT'S NEW

New Unit Establishment Program

By Susan Davie, New Unit
Commissioning Project Manager, VHO



The New Unit Establishment program is in full swing, with five new units coming online in the first half of 2024, including:

- **Aintree**
- **Cranbourne**
- **Officer**
- **Point Cook**
- **Skye** (Satellite of Frankston Unit)

These locations have been identified to ensure that VICSES is able to meet current and future expectations on frontline service delivery to the Victorian community. Understanding and managing the growth areas in Victoria is key for VICSES to be able to meet growing demands.

Inaugural Unit Controllers have now been appointed. We congratulate these leaders on taking on the important establishing role and building the respective volunteer teams.

- **Micah Spedding** – Aintree Unit
- **Brian McMannis** – Cranbourne Unit
- **Jess Rice** – Officer Unit
- **Laurie Russel** – Point Cook Unit

The new units are in the final stages of being built, and will be greatly appreciated by both our new recruits and the communities that they serve.

Once completed, the buildings will be handed over to VICSES to complete the Operational Readiness Program to ensure the building is stress tested and operational from a response,

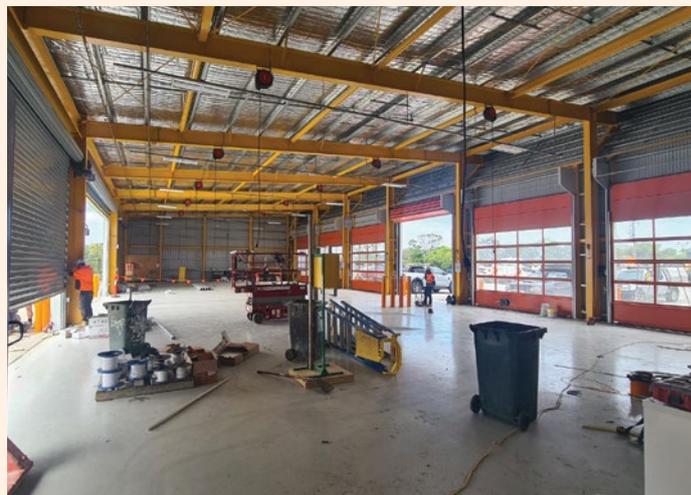
training, and administration perspective. This program ensures that any issues are ironed out prior to being handed over to the New Unit Establishment Program team, who will ensure that the new units are equipped with everything that they need to be operational, including vehicles and all equipment required for the unit to operate efficiently and safely.

While the building works have been in progress, there has been a lot of activity recruiting and onboarding new volunteers, ordering equipment, and fitting out vehicles in preparation for the handover to the new volunteer teams. Training programs have been planned and we are looking forward to these new units becoming fully operational to support their communities. ■

AINTREE:



CRANBOURNE:





VICSES UNIT



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OFFICER:



New-look Victorian Headquarters

Our state headquarters has undergone a face-lift, proudly featuring Monash Unit volunteer David Michalowsky as the hero image.

The new-look decal has even provided a great backdrop for news crews covering VICSES-related events for state-wide television broadcasts. ■



POINT COOK:



SKYE: *(Satellite of Frankston Unit)*



WELLBEING, HEALTH & SAFETY

What's new in 2024

Health Checks

This year our health checks are being updated to include a test for balance and grip strength - both good indicators of general health and both easy to improve with practice.

Body Mass Index (height/weight) has been replaced with a Waist to Hip ratio measurement, which will give a much better indication of abdominal fat distribution and provide a more useful indicator of overall health.

Wellbeing Sessions

New sessions include:

- **Relax, Reset, Refocus:** How to Train Your Brain. Learn techniques to help manage stress, increase focus and improve overall wellbeing
- **Physical Fit for Role Familiarisation:** Did you know that familiarisation and practice

of the physical movements required for the assessments will help you to prepare and feel confident about the process? Our Healthwatch crew will take you through the key movements and assessments required for the Level 1 Crew Member.

Did you know?

In 2023, our Healthwatch team visited 70 units, 33 metro and 37 regional. 782 health checks and had 943 members attend a wellbeing session. ■



THANK YOU

Healthwatch

By Alison Wright, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

Our Healthwatch team is an eclectic group with expertise in many areas including osteopathy, physiotherapy, nutrition, dietetics, nursing, yoga, pilates, and even dancing! Chances are if you have a question about something related to health and wellbeing, they will be able to set you on the right track.

Congratulations to our Healthwatch Facilitators Megan Kennedy, Melanie Cooper and Penny Armes, who have

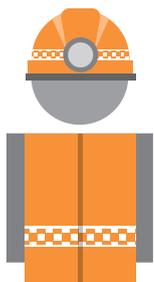
recently clocked up their 5-year service awards.

Since its introduction 14 years ago, the Healthwatch sessions have transformed to focus on Health and Wellbeing issues relevant to VICSES members. While not everyone may want a health check, all members are encouraged to join in for dinner and our interactive wellbeing sessions. Topics are updated regularly, and the focus is on making small, achievable changes to habits that will add up to a positive impact on your health and wellbeing. ■



Bookings

Our Healthwatch bookings are now integrated into the training calendar. This means that dates for Healthwatch will be automatically scheduled every two years. If you do not have a session booked or would like a yearly visit, please book using the QR code or email wellbeing@ses.vic.gov.au. ■



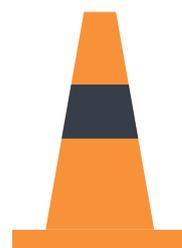
Workplace inspections

January 2022 – December 2022

266

January 2023 – December 2023

232



Hazards & near miss reports

January 2022 – December 2022

353

January 2023 – December 2023

358

Safety Drives our Decisions workshops

By Jennifer Smith, Health and Safety Manager (Eastern), VHO

So many members have been involved and sharing stories in our **Safety Drives Our Decisions (SDOD) workshops**.

From the start of October 2023 and now continuing in early 2024, workshops have been held, or will be soon, in all of our units and offices across the state.

What a great effort from all showing that together, we can make safety drive our decisions. We've put together some of the key areas we are working on, that you will see implemented in 2024 to improve safety outcomes. **Your voices are making a difference!** ■



How your voice is making a difference

127

Units held Keep Stop Start Sessions over 2 months

36

Senior leaders attended units across the state

9 themes we've heard so far:

Fit for Purpose: PPC, equipment and facilities, Operation of IMT roles, Funding challenges, Training, SafeGate, HS Delegate engagement, Volunteer focus

OUTCOMES FROM SDOD WORKSHOPS

SACOs have initiated Delegates meetings in both East and West.

Every member will be entitled to 2 pairs of general rescue gloves. If a member is part of an RCR Accredited unit they will be eligible for RCR glove.

All members will receive 2 sets of PPC&E on commencement.

Each unit facility will undergo a Building Condition Assessment.

New Trainer cache being designed to provide extra PPE consumables.

Accommodation for training will be provided for travel >90min and assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Raise awareness that active members PPC&E can be re-ordered to replace wear & tear.

Review commenced to identify fit for purpose general issue boots.

Working through urgent facility safety risks – eg: Chiltern driveway repaired.

Improved internet connection for Rosedale.

Peer recruitment drive for Western Region.



YEAR AT A GLANCE



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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Variety Kids' Xmas Party 2023

By Jasmine Lewkowicz, Senior Advisor
Community Engagement and Programs, VHO



In December each year, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre opens its doors to the annual Variety Kids' Xmas Party. Since 1986 the annual Variety Kids' Xmas Party has been spreading the joy of Christmas and touching the lives of kids in need right across Victoria.

Each year, the party welcomes up to 5,000 children through the doors, accompanied by 3,000 carers and 500 volunteers.



Last year, our VICSES team were there with bells on, bringing smiles to kids as they hopped on board the water search and rescue boat. Paddy made friends as he always does, spreading love to kids and parents.

Special thanks to members of the VICSES Castlemaine, Chelsea, Essendon, Hobsons Bay and Port Philip Units for spreading the cheer. ■



Driver Reviver Summer Campaign

By Ashley Pittard, National Manager
Driver Reviver, VHO



Driver Reviver Australia (DRA) activated 21 sites across Victoria throughout summer over the school holiday, Christmas and New Year period, to provide the ideal location for drivers to take a break, have a free cup of coffee or tea and stretch their legs, before continuing their journey.

Excitingly, there will be 27 sites activating across Victoria over the 2024 Easter, April school holiday and ANZAC Day period too, which is a busy time on Victorian roads. Many of these will be operated by VICSES and some will interact with Transport Accident Commission (TAC) Pause Stop activities.

VICSES attends around 1,400 road crash rescues every year, and we're often in need on long weekends. Fatigue kills, and we would much

prefer to serve the community a free Bushells cuppa and Arnott's Biscuits than have to cut them out of a car. Through this close partnership with our volunteer organisations and DRA, we have helped to promote road safety and served many motorists across the state with a friendly smile.

The production and delivery of the fleet of six Driver Reviver engagement vans, funded by the Commonwealth Government to support Victorian Driver Reviver activation and promotion in conjunction with VICSES, have commenced activation over the Spring and Summer period. The six vans have been delivered to their home units – Ballarat, Benalla, Bendigo, Chiltern, Geelong and Morwell. Key features of the new vehicles include

Fletch's story of resilience and determination

By Jasmine Lewkowicz, Senior Advisor Community Engagement and Programs, VHO

Every member has their own unique story as to why they choose to become a Community Engagement Facilitator (CEF). Most people who choose the CEF pathway can talk VICSES all day long and love interacting with their community.

M eet Fletcher (Fletch) Same - a member of the Eastern Metro Regional Unit (EMRU), with a story of resilience and determination to find a role within the VICSES community.

In November 2021, Fletch joined the EMRU having spent a number of years as a coast guard and Country Fire Authority dual member. In February 2022, Fletch was involved in a motor vehicle accident in inner city Melbourne that left him with post-concussion, memory loss and chronic migraines. His desire to don the

orange uniform was put on hold due to his extensive recovery.

When Fletch was able to join the service again, he was keen to find a role that wasn't operational but fulfilled his desire to assist communities in need. His first deployment was to Echuca in November 2022 to assist the Unit Controller at the Incident Control Centre (ICC). Fletch saw firsthand how he can contribute to providing help to communities and it was in that moment Fletch felt motivated to sign up to the CEF course in Bruthen to expand his knowledge of community engagement.



When asked why he loves community engagement, Fletch said "It's incredible to see how communities band together in the face of a flood. It's their emotion that keeps me wanting to do more to help. I'm looking forward to supporting VICSES and the wider community in my new

role as Section Leader and CEF and am keen to collaborate with other VICSES units."

If you're interested in signing up to become a CEF, speak to your Unit Support Team (UST) for more information about upcoming courses. ■



coffee and tea facilities at the back, visual and interactive displays, and space for tables, chairs, and awnings.

It was great to have Minister for Emergency Services Jaelyn Symes, and Minister for Roads, Melissa Horne MP, along with TAC join us on Friday 29 December to check out one of our new Driver Reviver vans!

We are thrilled to have VICSES/DRA activations on the calendar at events like the Southern 80, Melbourne United Basketball, Melbourne F1 Grand Prix, Bunnings Sunbury Easter family event, SES training activities across Victoria, Echuca Race on the River, Camp Quality, Pako Festa (Geelong), Foster Show, Orbost Agriculture Show, Sale Air Show, school visits/fun days, markets, and more, so watch this space!

A massive shoutout and a heartfelt thank you to our incredible stock sponsors – Bushells Tea, Bushells Coffee, Arnott's Biscuits and Sunshine Sugar, our distribution partner Shell V-Power, and Co-Principal Partner AAMI. Thanks to their generous support, DRA has been able to serve over 23 million free teas and coffees and over

28 million snacks throughout our history (since 1989), ensuring there is always a treat ready for our visitors to stop, rest, revive, and survive across Victoria and Australia. ■



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1 October –
31 December 2023

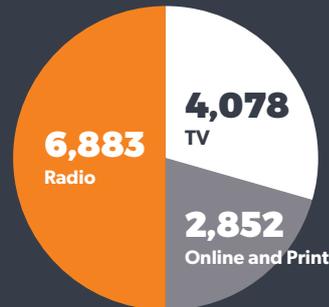
Campaigns and events:

- Australasian Women in Emergencies Day
- Port Fairy Unit Opening
- Do 1 Thing
- International Day of People with Disability

Media releases:

- 6 October - Appointment of VICSES Chief Executive Officer
- 1 November - Victorian emergency services to support Queensland bushfire response
- 20 December - VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit volunteers recognised
- 29 December - Biggest VICSES interstate deployment this year underway

Mentions of VICSES in the news:



Social media post highlights (state accounts):

f FACEBOOK Impressions: **5,386,414**
Engagement: **294,342**
30/12/23: VICSES heads north to lend a helping hand to Queensland



X (FORMERLY TWITTER) Impressions: **966,245** Engagement: **13,458**
31/12/23: VICSES gets ready for Halloween



in LINKEDIN Impressions: **29,042**
Engagement: **2,669**
20/12/23: VICSES Greater Dandenong Members receive award at Government House



Instagram Impressions: **63,521** Engagement: **2,470**
14/12/23: VICSES attends the 2023 Variety Kids' Xmas Party



INTRODUCTION:

Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor

Hil My name's Lauren and I am the new Corporate Communications Advisor in the Community and Communications team. In my role, I look after a range of pieces including Community Matters, The Bulletin and social media.

I come from a background in government, public health and non-profit communications and I am excited to be taking on the challenge of working in the emergency management

sector. I really admire the work that VICSES members do for our communities and it is a privilege to be in a position to share your stories both internally and externally.

Outside of work, I can be found with my nose in a good book, with a paintbrush in hand, or cultivating some inner peace in a yoga studio.

I am looking forward meeting with and learning from our members right across the state! ■

INFORMATION SYSTEMS (IS) UPDATE



Navigating the world of AI: Traditional vs generative and everyday applications

By Toby Köberle, Manager Information Security and Governance, VHO

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of our daily lives, shaping the way we interact with technology and enhancing various aspects of our routines. Many members have had questions about what AI is and its impacts.

There are two main categories of AI: traditional and generative. Traditional AI relies on predefined rules and structured data to perform specific tasks. This type of AI is excellent for solving well-defined problems and is commonly found in applications like voice assistants, recommendation systems, and image recognition. For instance, when your virtual assistant recognises your voice commands or suggests movies based on your viewing history it is leveraging traditional AI algorithms.

On the other hand, generative AI is more advanced and capable of creating content on its own. Instead of relying on explicit programming, it learns from patterns and generates new content. This

type of AI is making waves in creative fields such as art and music generation. Many of us are familiar with the text-generating application ChatGPT. Another notable example is Microsoft Copilot, a tool that uses generative AI to assist users in the Office365 space by helping with tasks such as writing, formatting presentations, creating graphs and analysing trends.

Every day we encounter a myriad of AI applications that seamlessly integrate into our routines. Social media platforms utilise AI algorithms to curate personalised content on our feeds, adapting to our preferences and behaviours. E-commerce sites employ recommendation systems to suggest products based on our past purchases and browsing history,

making online shopping a tailored experience.

Smart home devices, from thermostats to security cameras leverage AI for improved automation and customisation. These devices learn our habits and preferences over time, adjusting settings to create a more comfortable and secure environment.

Whether it's the convenience of a voice-activated assistant or the personalised recommendations on your favourite streaming platform, AI has become a ubiquitous presence in our lives. As technology continues to evolve, the integration of both traditional and generative AI promises even more exciting developments, making our interactions with machines more intuitive and adaptive than ever before. ■



Welcome Patrick Riedacher

Patrick has recently joined the VICSES IS team. We asked him some questions to get to know him better and his role at VICSES!

Hi Patrick! Can you tell us about your role at VICSES?

Supporting critical information systems infrastructure, and being the voice and face to assist volunteers and staff with information systems enquires at VICSES.

What does your professional background look like prior to VICSES?

I have had a career as a Support Analyst, moving from software support in healthcare with MediSecure and Minfos to Helpdesk support in retail with Total Tools, and now IS Support at VICSES.

What are you most looking forward to in your role at VICSES?

I am most looking forward to working with a supportive team, both inside the IS team and in the broader VICSES organisation to improve experiences for volunteers and staff at VICSES.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I enjoy baking, gardening, 3D printing and hiking.

What are three words you would use to describe yourself?

Empathetic, gregarious and authentic! ■



Messages

From CEO

From Minister for Emergency Services

Summer flood and storm response

General news

Campaigns & events

Eastern region

Western region

Operational updates

Projects - what's new

Wellbeing, health & safety

Community engagement

Media

Information Services (IS) update



Volunteer Service Desk Hours

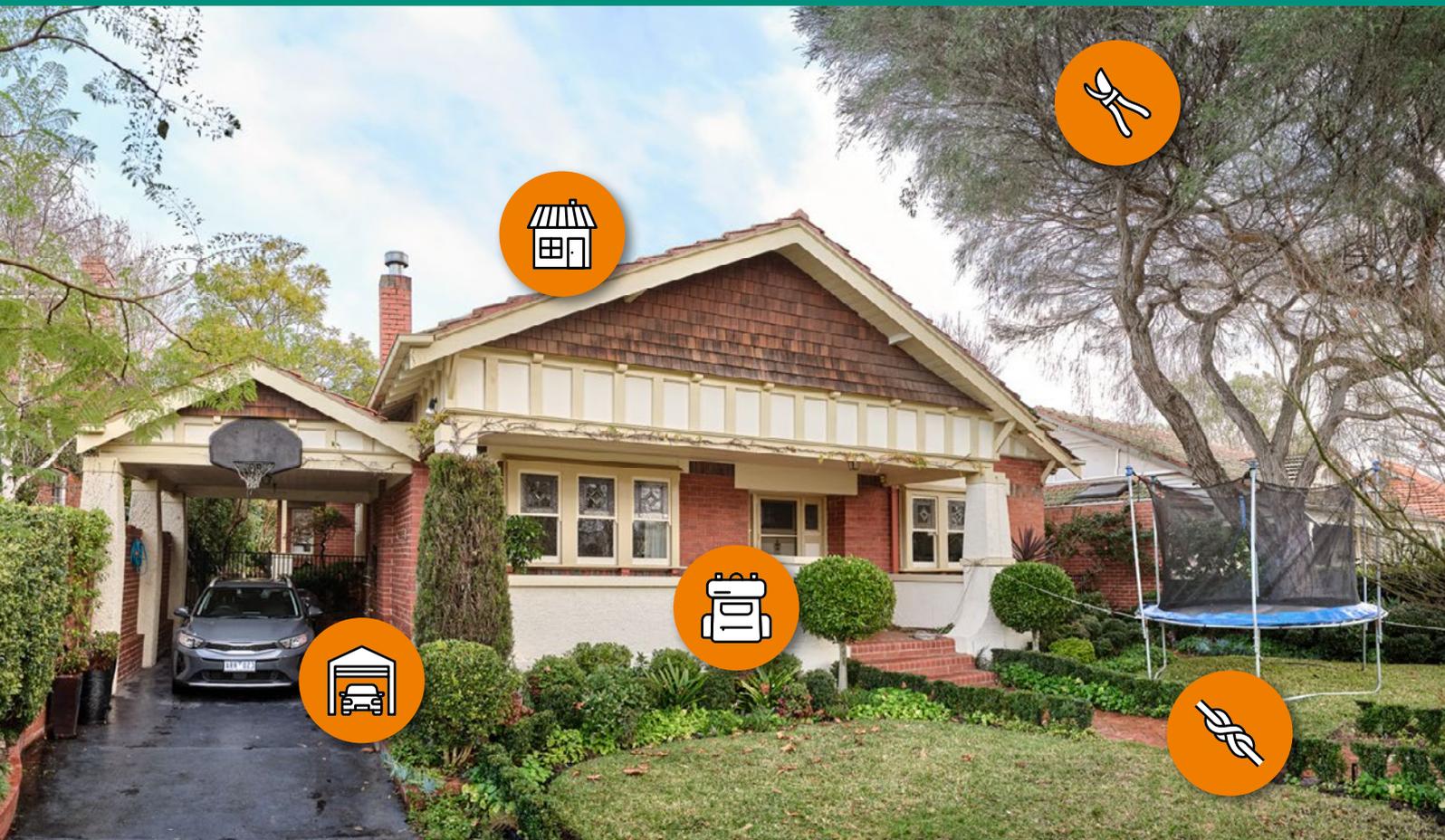
Need support?

Volunteers can email the IS service desk at ictservicedesk@ses.vic.gov.au and we will take it from there.

Volunteers have extended IS service support until **9:00pm**, Monday to Thursday, and Saturdays **10:00am – 3:00pm**, excluding public holidays.



Do your best to prepare for the worst



Are you storm ready?

It might be one day, one week or one month away. But a storm will come. The best thing you can do to protect yourself and your property is to prepare for the worst. **There's always a storm coming. Are you storm ready?**



Keep trees and branches away from your home.



Park your car undercover.



Keep gutters, downpipes and drains clean.



Secure outdoor furniture and trampolines.



Prepare an emergency kit with essential items.

Stay informed. Know your risk. Search Storm Ready Victoria.
For more advice visit ses.vic.gov.au

Authorised by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne

