

SUMMER 2021

Community Matters

VICSES

EDITION 17

GONE WITH THE WIND:

RESPONSE

TO VICTORIAN

STORMS

*VICSES awarded as part of the
2021 Resilient Australia Awards*

New female fit personal protective clothing



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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 MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

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

As we head into the Christmas and New Year period, it's a chance to look back on a year that has asked a great deal of us, especially our emergency services workers and frontline healthcare workers. Taking on this portfolio, I've had the opportunity to see firsthand the dedication and skill you bring to your roles as VICSES volunteers and I'm immensely proud of you.

The community is feeling the strain of a second year of the COVID-19 pandemic and experiencing emergencies on top of this – especially considering this year's high number of severe weather events and storms - can compound the stress. I'm mindful of the impact this has on our volunteers, and these past few months have been a reminder of the care and patience you show your community.

In September, VICSES volunteers rolled up their sleeves to support Ambulance Victoria as drivers to assist with increased demand for patient transport due to rising COVID-19 cases. Our volunteers were on board to help out where they could, to reduce delays, get people the medical care they needed and save lives.

The pace didn't let up and on September 22, Victoria experienced its most significant earthquake on record. Tremors were felt as far as Sydney and Launceston before social media platforms lit up with news and the calls began rolling in. Our volunteers responded to a total of 180 calls for assistance, as well as providing vital support to other agencies.



Higher than average rainfall across the state saw plenty of rainy days, storm activity and wet roads.

Following heavy rain and storms over one week in late October and early November, almost every single unit in Victoria had a hand in responding to close to 10,000 callouts related to storm damage and flooding. We also welcomed 46 NSW SES members who were flown in to assist in relief efforts in some of the hardest hit bayside areas of the southern metro area. It was a privilege to meet these crews, who worked tirelessly to help their communities back on their feet.

I also had the pleasure of spending time with VICSES volunteers at the opening of the brand-new Wangaratta hub in November, a brilliant state-of-the-art facility that meets the needs of the local unit and surrounds and will attract new members to the crew.

So far, across this year VICSES volunteers have responded to over 25,600 trees down, more than 2,300 flooding incidents, over 5,800 call-outs for building damage, and approximately 2,400 rescues.

Despite the wet year the fire risk is still high, and as the temperature warms up I want to thank you in advance for your commitment over the coming fire season.

This has been a busy and challenging time and a reminder of the need to work together. The safety and wellbeing of our volunteers is our highest priority, which is why the Victorian Government has invested more than \$125 million in infrastructure and resources for VICSES this year.

I wish you and your families a wonderful Christmas and all the best for 2022. With the easing of restrictions, I'm delighted we can look forward to long awaited time with loved ones and a well-deserved rest.

Thank you for your continued dedication to keeping Victorians safe.

**The Hon. Jaclyn Symes,
Minister for Emergency Services**



Welcome

Hello everyone, and welcome to the summer edition of *Community Matters*.

Firstly, I'd like to give a huge thank you to our members for your dedication throughout another busy and challenging year. The recent months have been particularly significant, combining efforts across several major events.

In September, Victoria was rocked by a 5.9 earthquake – the largest in our state's history. Felt far and wide across our communities and even interstate, as always, our members demonstrated a high level of skill, professionalism, and leadership as the control agency. Read more about our response on page 7.

On October 29, our state was hit with severe weather and damaging winds, causing widespread destruction and power outages. Despite the volume of calls to 132 500 and the mammoth number of requests for assistance in the days after, our members worked diligently to triage incoming jobs and ensure the safety of our communities. A truly incredible effort, that highlighted the selflessness and dedication of our people. You can read more on pages 4-5.

As part of our ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion, this quarter we have fast tracked the roll-out of new female fit personal protective clothing (PPC) for all eligible members. It was clear through the feedback from members during the PPC Redesign Project workshops that a solution for PPC that better fit the female form needed to be introduced as soon as practicable. With the support of the Executive team, we had over 720 members order this new PPC, with roll-out to commence in April 2022. You can read more about this new uniform, and see what it will look like, on page 25.

As we celebrate the easing of lockdown restrictions, we cannot forget the increased demand on our healthcare system, and the extra support being provided by our volunteers to help save lives. Over 40 of our VICSES volunteers have now completed ambulance familiarisation training to support our Ambulance Victoria colleagues. Victorian paramedics have been doing an incredible job throughout the pandemic, and partnerships like this demonstrate that we really do work as one.

With above-average rain expected across this summer and into the New Year, the support provided by our members will be crucial as ever. I look forward to the opportunities that lay ahead for our organisation in creating safer communities – together. Stay safe.

**Stephen Griffin
CEO Victoria State Emergency Service**

FEATURES

Gone with the wind: Response to Victorian storms

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

In October, Victoria was rocked by severe weather that caused widespread damage and destruction, recording one of the busiest response periods that our organisation has ever seen.

In the evening of Thursday the 28th of October, damaging winds lashed the state throughout the night and into the next morning, with many Victorians waking up to see their properties and communities completely devastated by the impacting winds. This included trees down, building damage, and hundreds of thousands of people without power.

Our volunteers were quick to respond, working tirelessly throughout the days and nights that followed the event to attend to the thousands of requests for assistance.

In the seven-day period from the 28th of October to the 4th of November, our VICSES volunteers responded to a total of 9,897 requests for assistance (RFAs). This included over 7,000 RFAs for fallen trees, more than 2,000 counts of building damage, and around 200 calls for assistance for the impacts of flooding with the rain that also ensued.

The State Control Centre was activated to help manage the event, alongside Incident Control Centres located in Dandenong, Ferntree Gully and Geelong, and an Incident Control Point in Ballarat. VICSES members were deployed across a range of Incident Management Team roles, including operations, public information, logistics, media and more.

Although the damaging winds had passed by midday on the 29th of October, heavy rainfall forecast for the 3rd of November added further impacts and RFAs, creating flash flooding in St Arnaud, Wedderburn and Castlemaine.

The calls to our 132 500 number were never-ending, as our volunteers worked to triage jobs and respond as fast as they could despite the ongoing weather conditions.

Further assistance was deployed through the New South Wales (NSW) SES, sending 46 of their members to support our volunteers in the hardest hit areas, including





Frankston, Red Hill, and Chelsea. The two NSW SES strike teams utilised their specialist rooftop skills to help clear the remaining jobs, and provided much needed relief for our local VICSES crews.

Assistance was also provided by our Victorian emergency service colleagues across a range of response roles, including the Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria, Forest Fire Management

Victoria, as well as local councils and contractors.

A huge thank you to our volunteers and staff, as well as supporting agencies and stakeholders, in responding to this challenging event. As always, our members demonstrated true dedication, determination, and resilience in ensuring the safety of our communities. Thank you all. ■



Our busiest units*:

Frankston Unit

882 RFAS

Whitehorse Unit

428 RFAS

Sorrento Unit

586 RFAS

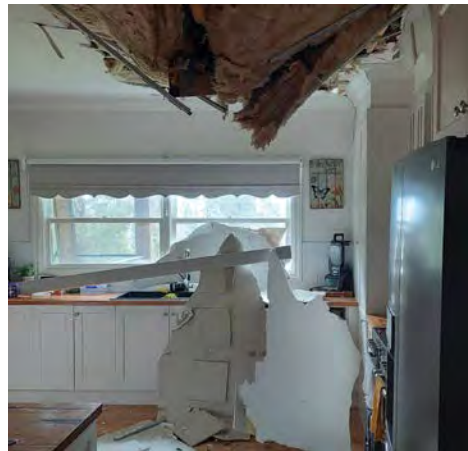
Hastings Unit

377 RFAS

Narre Warren Unit

492 RFAS

* 28 October – 4 November 2021



GENERAL NEWS



Bringing diversity to Australia's emergency services:

A STUDY BY SENIOR RESEARCHER TRISH PRENTICE

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

In a recent essay published by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, titled *'To Serve and Protect: Bringing diversity to Australia's emergency services'*, author and Senior Researcher Trish Prentice explored the experiences of people within our emergency services sector that are from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit volunteer Zulfi Hydari shared his story as part of the study, and the impact that joining VICSES has had on his life.

Moving to Australia after experiencing war in Afghanistan, Zulfi was keen to say thank-you to his new community in Greater Dandenong and the opportunities that moving to Australia had granted him. So, he joined his local VICSES unit.

Since joining, Zulfi has responded to numerous requests for assistance, including road crash rescues, supporting the 2019-20 Victorian Bushfires, flood and

storm events, and searches for missing persons.

"I've done a lot of missing person searches. Sometimes the outcomes are not so great, but when you get a good outcome it's fantastic. I've had times when I've found someone, and the family have come and hugged me. In those times I feel like I've done something for the country. I've helped someone from here," says Zulfi in the study.



Exploring the diversity of our members, the study also highlights that VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit is "one of the most diverse in the state", with 16 different languages spoken across the units 45 members. The unit utilises their members diversity to its advantage, reaching out to community members in their own language to encourage recruitment.

"When we are speaking in their language, they ask, 'How did you get into that? What do you do?' They are interested in how I am giving back to the community... If they see someone like me, they see an idol, they want to be like me," says Zulfi in the study on communicating with fellow Afghans in their native language.

Developing new skills and expanding his social group, Zulfi shares that joining VICSES has had a huge positive impact on his life, especially the opportunity to give back to the community.

At VICSES, diversity is key to our success, and a reflection of the communities that we serve. Zulfi's

story is just one example of how important it is to celebrate the diversity of all of our members, and the skills and contributions that all people bring to our service. It's about creating safer communities – together. ■



More information

If you would like to read Zulfi's full story, alongside others from across our emergency services sector, visit the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute website at: scanloninstitute.org.au.

Read about other diversity and inclusion initiatives at VICSES on the Hub:

[My State > Membership > Diversity and Inclusion](#)

VICSES awarded as part of the 2021 Resilient Australia Awards



By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

In October, VICSES was recognised as part of the 2021 Resilient Australia Awards, announced as winners across two award categories including Government and Photography.

The awards, sponsored by the Australian Government and managed by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, were open to all Australians to recognise outstanding contributions in each state or territory across six award categories.

VICSES members in the North West region of Victoria, including VICSES Rochester Unit in collaboration with the Rochester community, Campaspe Shire

Council, and the North Central Catchment Management Authority, won the Government Award for their joint work as part of the Resilient Rochester project.

The project was designed to help residents living in Rochester to better understand their flood risk through a series of videos, while also celebrating the local community. You can read more about this initiative on page 18.

VICSES Monash Unit volunteer Jacqueline Quaine was announced as the winner of the Photography Award, for her submission titled 'Just another Monday night'.

The photograph (above) captures unit members undertaking Safe Working at Heights

(SWAH) training together on a rainy Monday night.



As individuals, we build our resilience by taking steps that consistently challenge us just enough so that when disaster strikes, we have a bank of skills ready to put into practice. We make our community more resilient by helping those that don't have the means to help themselves in that moment, by creating a bridge between an emergency event and when their own coping systems can kick into gear," explained Jacqueline on her award winning submission.

"It's all made possible by these volunteer emergency responders, standing in the rain in a council carpark on just another cold, wet, Monday training night. In developing their individual resilience and demonstrating the resilience of the unit, they contribute to the resilience of the community they serve, and the service they represent," continues Jacqueline.

Congratulations to our members on being recognised as part of this year's awards and contributing to the resilience of our communities across Victoria.

You can read more about all of this year's winners via the Emergency Management Victoria website at www.emv.com.au. ■

The quake that stopped the state

By Jessie Schleibs, Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

On Wednesday the 22nd September at 9:21am, a magnitude 5.9 earthquake occurred just outside of Mansfield. The event was declared the largest earthquake to have occurred in Victoria since European settlement.

41,500 felt reports were recorded across the event – not only in Victoria, but as also as far as New South Wales, South Australia, Canberra and Tasmania.

While thankfully there were no injuries or deaths, some structural damage did occur in metropolitan Melbourne, including collapsed buildings.

State, Regional and Incident Control Centre's were soon activated, with operational staff onsite following COVID-19 safety directions. VICSES responded to a total of 180 requests for assistance for the event, with 120 of those requests for minor building damage to infrastructure such as chimneys, and facades of older buildings.

The earthquake also caused temporary power losses, with more than 35,000 people without power across metropolitan Melbourne and some regional areas.

In the aftermath, a total of 15 aftershocks of notable size were



felt between a magnitude 2.4 to 4.1 in the following days.

On the ground, our members demonstrated a high level of skill and confidence in responding to requests for assistance. Social media also played an integral role in providing information and key messages to the community, with our state social media platforms reaching over 4.4 million people.

How to stay safe during an earthquake
Using a wheelchair

Brake

Cover

Hold on

SES Safer Communities – Together

As the state's largest earthquake on record, this event provided great learnings for future earthquake events, and increased community and agency knowledge and preparedness around earthquake safety.

Thank you to everyone involved in responding to this historic event. ■

CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS

Behind the Mask:

Stories from the emergency services frontline

By David Murphy, Media Officer, VHO

In October, the Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) brought *The Age* journalist John Silvester together with four emergency responders to discuss mental injury during a crisis, as part of an online panel discussion event titled 'Behind the Mask: Stories from the emergency services frontline'.



The panel of emergency responders included VICSES Lilydale Unit Controller

Shaun Caulfield, Victoria Police Acting Assistant Commissioner Deb Robertson, Ambulance Victoria Area Manager Jess McGowen, and Australian Red Cross volunteer Joe Park, who each gave an intergenerational perspective on some of the most memorable events of our lifetimes.

Representing the third of four generations in his family of VICSES (formerly Civil Defence) volunteers, Shaun watched his dad and uncle fight the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983.

"My dad was part of the first cadre of paid staff, then went to Victoria Police for eight or nine years, so yes - there were always pagers going off and people leaving in the middle of the night. I suppose it was the same for my son, growing up the same way," he says.

"At the time of the Ash Wednesday fires, we lived in Kilsyth right at the base of the Dandenongs, so we could see the mountain on fire. It was quite surreal as a 12-year-old. We weren't right in the middle of it but, because of that, it was very real to us. Later on, I watched apocalyptic movies with similar scenes," says Shaun.

Speaking on more recent events, Shaun also reflected on his unit's response during the severe storms in June of this year, which devastated parts of their local and surrounding communities. "I was on Mount Dandenong the first night, and it's probably the scariest thing I've done in more than thirty years of work," says Shaun.

"It was like a cyclone, but outside the tropics. For some reason it didn't garner a lot of media coverage; people weren't able to take a quick photo and upload it on to Facebook to show the level of the devastation."

Shaun continued to speak about the event, including building resilience and the little expressions of gratitude that make him proud of being a volunteer.

"There were a lot of stories of people losing livelihoods," says Shaun. "We had a job we responded to with Emerald Unit, of someone trapped under their house in the height of the storm. We cut our way through all the trees across the road and escorted the ambulance down the mountain, which took nearly three hours."

"I had the opportunity to speak to the family of that individual and to hear their gratitude, questioning 'why would you deliberately come up here to help us when it was so dangerous?'"

In the aftermath of the storm event, volunteers set up a relief centre at Kalorama Oval, including a small supermarket. "Those are the things that help fill you back up again," said Shaun of the community coming together.

"There are good things to be had out of bad situations sometimes. You can't always avoid mental injury, but equipping people before there's a problem and giving them access to help when they need it is something VICSES does very well," says Shaun.

"When that adrenaline had worn off, we had a lot of our members talk about stopping and having a conversation with people, being that listening ear. Our members are trained in that psychological first aid - it's another role we can add to the response that we provide," Shaun continued.

Alongside Shaun, the panel provided a great insight into how emergency service personnel are able to manage the impacts to mental health by focusing on the good, despite the confronting and challenging events at hand. ■



More information

To view the full panel discussion, visit www.esf.com.au/events/behind-the-mask/

Your family Our family

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

On the weekend of 13-14 November, we celebrated our annual *Your family, our family* campaign.

The *Your family, our family* campaign aims to say thank you to the family, friends and employers that have supported our amazing volunteers throughout another challenging year.

This year's campaign focused on employers, who allow our volunteers to work flexible shifts to respond as part of their VICSES unit.

Our members were encouraged to get involved by posting to social media, sending a digital thank-you card to families, friends and employers, or arranging a small thank-you gift to show their appreciation.

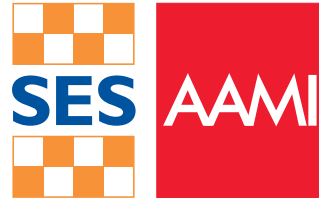
Thanks to our Principal Community Partner AAMI, we were able to say 'thanks a bunch' to some special people who were nominated by our volunteers as supporting them in their role with VICSES, delivering some beautiful bouquets of flowers to their doorstep.

On social media, we shared the story of Dee Azzopardi – VICSES Pakenham Unit Officer, and First Aid nurse at Carwatha College in Noble Park. The college is flexible when she needs to respond to the pager going off, and has demonstrated their flexibility and support by training another staff member to cover the first aid office when she's called out. Since joining VICSES two years ago, she's attended over 200 jobs and been on four deployments.

Many other volunteers came forward to share stories of how their employer has supported them, including Brimbank Unit Controller, Bernie Thatcher.

Like Dee, Bernie also works at a school. When asked what it meant to have a VICSES member in the team at the school, Sunshine College Principal Tim Blunt said that "Two of the school's values are wellbeing and relationships, which aligns with VICSES. VICSES obviously has a high priority on looking after the wellbeing of the community, so we are in sync with that, and no organisation can flourish without building strong relationships within the organisation and with those in the community. Community growth and wellbeing are so very important to both organisations. Teamwork is always critical to a well-run organisation, and staff at Sunshine College always step up and help when required. Supporting Bernie, supports the community".

Whittlesea Unit Controller, Gary Doorbar works as a Project Maintenance Officer with the Hume City Council, installing handrails, steps, ramps, and other home modifications for elderly and disability clients. Most recently, Gary has played an integral role as a VICSES volunteer in supporting Ambulance Victoria by driving ambulance vehicles. Hume City Council provided Gary with two-



Thank you to our Principal Community Partner AAMI for supporting this campaign.



weeks paid leave to undertake training for the role.

"Hume City Council supports any employees that are involved in an emergency service organisation. Employees can access emergency service leave, which is paid leave that is separate from regular annual leave. Gary is very accomplished and dedicated in his role with VICSES, and as his Team Leader I was really keen to support any extension of that," said Gary's Team Leader at Hume City Council, Naomi Thornhill.

"Gary already has great communications skills with our elderly and disability service clients, but this training will provide next-level skills for difficult situations and challenging conversations within his current role. He is an asset to the team, and

I am really happy to support him. We are very proud of you, Gary."

It's because of these people that our volunteers are able to continue responding 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. So, if you support our volunteers, we say thank YOU!

Read more about other member supporters on our website: www.ses.vic.gov.au/news-and-media/campaigns/your-family-our-family ■



Read more

Read more about Gary's role in supporting our paramedics on page 11.



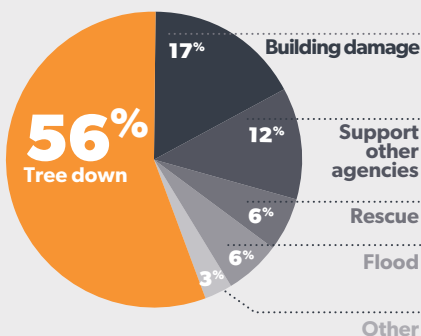
CENTRAL

1 July – 30 September



1,683
Volunteers

3,023
Requests for assistance



Scouts-SES awareness badge program set to roll out across the state



By Tracey White, Community Resilience Coordinator, Central Region

In 2017, West Australian Scout Leader and SES volunteer Sarah Hamilton, developed the SES Awareness Badge. The badge program is designed to increase Scout youth members' awareness of the SES and disaster resilience. The badge has since become nationally recognised, and received the national *Resilient Australia Award* in 2019.

The program is structured in a way that Scout members across all sections can earn the badge - from five-year-old 'Joey's', through to adult-aged 'Rovers'.

After receiving a number of requests from different Scout groups, the state Community Connections team began work with Scouts Victoria to work

on the requirements of how it could be adopted by VICSES.

This led to a number of units throughout the state trialling different versions of the program in various formats. In collaboration with these units, the Central Region Community Resilience team have combined the various formats of the programs being delivered and have now created a streamlined version. Specific acknowledgements go out to VICSES Gisborne, Narre Warren, Hastings, and Sunbury Units for their valuable input.

The SES Awareness badge program now includes a PowerPoint presentation that has flexible delivery options. This means it can be used as a fully online presentation, or

as an introduction for Scout groups visiting VICSES units, in order to meet the demands of scouting groups, units, and COVID-19 restrictions. The program also includes explanatory notes to help units that are new to the program to understand the requirements for the Scouts, in addition to an easy matrix that outlines the specific steps required in order to achieve the badge.

This exciting new package is in its final stages, and a pilot of the program was delivered recently by the VICSES Sunbury Unit to Cubs, Scouts, and Venturer sections, and was very well received by all.

The SES Awareness Badge will be available to all units in the very-near future, so stay tuned! ■

Kicking goals at VICSES Healesville Unit

By Michelle Zwagerman, VICSES Healesville Unit volunteer, Central Region

In September, the VICSES Healesville Unit came to the rescue of the local Auskick group, who had their awards ceremony cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Matt Hart, the local Auskick organiser, was instructed to instead mail the awards to each of the participating kids. However, Matt had the idea to do something a little more special. Knowing the kids 'loved sirens', he asked around the local emergency services, and the VICSES Healesville Unit jumped at the opportunity to get involved.

Unit Controller Andrew Worely alongside unit members Louise Andrews, Paul Saleeba,

Simone Thomas and myself (Michelle Zwagerman), volunteered to deliver the medals, certificates and lollies in an innovative COVIDSafe way. We used our traffic control paddles to hand out the prizes, and also as a target for a hand-ball competition, with gold coin donations going to the VICSES.

The event was organised in collaboration with the kid's parents, so each child was surprised to see the SES rescue truck arrive at their door with lights flashing and a blast of our siren. With big eyes and even bigger smiles, the kids received their medals, practiced their handballs, and posed for photos.

We work as one

STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINE SUPPORTING AMBULANCE VICTORIA

By Sarah Stephen, Community Resilience Coordinator, Central Region

Over the past months, Central Region volunteers have been supporting Ambulance Victoria in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, by being deployed to drive ambulance vehicles. Here's some insight into their personal experiences in undertaking this vital role.



It took us all day, driving over 140kms to visit 40 homes and hand out 50 medals, but it was very rewarding to put the smiles on all those little faces. We received feedback via Facebook that the kids wore their medals all day (some even sleeping with it), and that they were excited to be visited by the unit. We've even been invited to attend next year's presentation, and we're looking forward to seeing everyone together next time around! ■



LOUISE ANDREWS, VICSES LILYDALE DEPUTY UNIT CONTROLLER – OPERATIONS

"When it was announced that VICSES would be supporting Ambulance Victoria, my first thought was that as I was available, and that if I could help people out there during this time, that's what I wanted to do. I didn't want to sit around, while other people like our paramedics were running on empty.

So far, I've completed over six shifts. You could say I'm like a gofer Uber driver – my role is to try and make life easier for the paramedics. The paramedics are awesome and are all so welcoming – it's all about them and the patients.

I had a shift back in October that really showcased how much we are needed. We were called to a Code 1 job and were 45 kms away, but we were the only free ambulance. Unfortunately, this demonstrated just how stretched our paramedics are at the moment.

The training we've received from Ambulance Victoria can better support our VICSES volunteer roles in many ways. If I were to attend a job now and paramedics were on-scene and needed support, I'd know where all the equipment is on

the ambulance to quickly grab it for them if they needed.

The clinical side of things like manual handling and providing oxygen, are all different skills that can help us in our roles as VICSES volunteers as well. In particular, being able to assist Ambulance Victoria on scene at a road crash rescue if they are short on paramedics – even after the COVID-19 pandemic, and well into the future.

If anyone is thinking about supporting our paramedics to assist them in saving lives, go for it. It's hard work, but well worth it."

GARY DOORBAR, VICSES WHITTLESEA CONTROLLER

"One of our unit's members sons is a paramedic, and I'd recently talked with him about the stress and strain they were under, and I really wanted to jump in and help.

Before we could be deployed, we had to undertake training. This included in-person training, as well as a 25-hour online component. In-person training started off with two hours of theory and eight hours of driving the ambulance – no equipment, just eight hours of solid driving. It's completely different to driving an SES vehicle, even if it is Code 1.

Then we had two days of clinical training, which included advanced CPR, high performance CPR, and manual handling. We learnt how to use a series

of different equipment, such as wheelchairs that go downstairs, defibrillators, blood pressure and electrocardiogram (ECG) machines, and more. The ambulance vehicles are all mobile data terminals, so everything works at the press of a button.

Paramedics work three types of shifts – 10, 12, and 14-hour shifts. Our shifts are capped at 12 hours, plus travel. A typical shift starts with logging into the branch, and checking over the ambulance to ensure it's set-up. Usually within five minutes you press a button to signal you are ready to go, and are off on a job.

So far, I've worked all over the place, including Melton, Campbellfield, and Westmeadows

branches. Working out of the Westmeadows branch, I ended up in Taylors Lakes, Footscray hospital, and St Albans, and back again to Westmeadows.

A lot of the jobs we respond to involve respiratory issues, joint injuries, and mental health calls. It's a real eye opener at the hospital, where they have marquees set-up and everyone walking around in full personal protective clothing. You have to wear a plastic apron, and within five minutes you can feel the heat and sweat, as well as glasses fogging up. It's like something out of a movie.

The paramedics have been nothing but appreciative of our support, wanting to buy us a coffee and a donut when they have a break. They really have a gift, doing what they do." ■



EAST

1 July – 30 September

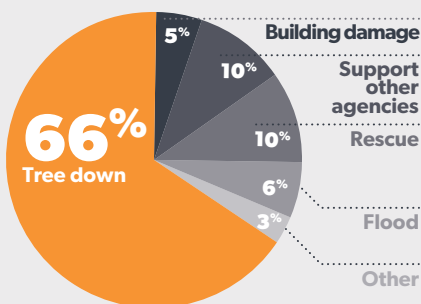


552

Volunteers

657

Requests for assistance



Mallacoota fundraising group exceeds expectations

By Merryn Henderson, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region

Following the devastating 2019-20 bushfires which ravaged the township of Mallacoota, community members Mariska and Martin Ascher, the founders of the Mallacoota Fundraising Group, resolved to allocate a massive \$120,000 to the VICSES Mallacoota Unit.

The funds were donated to assist with the purchase of a new Toyota Hilux, a welcomed new vehicle to replace the unit's aging Nissan Patrol. The unit plans to purchase a generator trailer to support the unit operationally with the left-over funds.

Mariska and Martin were simply astounded to witness the efforts from the VICSES Mallacoota Unit before, during, and after the devastation that occurred on New Year's Eve of 2019.

For the past seven years, Martin and Mariska have been selling calendars on behalf of the Mallacoota Fundraising Group, raising an astounding

\$443,000. All proceeds raised are donated to emergency organisations located within Mallacoota.

Beneficiaries of their amazing fundraising efforts over the past seven years have included the Country Fire Authority, Mallacoota Medical Clinic, Ambulance Victoria and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

Both Mariska and Martin are passionate about supporting

those who give up their time to support their community.

"It brings tears to our eyes with how happy it makes us, to be able to donate this money to heroes in our community. Because that's what they are, heroes," said Mariska.

"Leo Op Den Brouw and all the guys and girls with the VICSES Mallacoota Unit are absolutely fantastic, selfless, and amazing human beings." ■



More information

To view the 2022 calendar produced by Mallacoota Fundraising Group, visit: www.mallacootafundraisinggroup.com.au

Road Crash Rescue capability ready to roll for VICSES Moe Unit

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

In September, VICSES Moe Unit was officially activated as VICSES' newest road crash rescue accredited unit.

This addition brings the total number of VICSES accredited road rescue provider units to a whopping 104 across the state.

The road rescue capability follows a lengthy process, designed to ensure that VICSES Moe Unit volunteers receive the latest equipment and training, to perform this vital new role and support their community.

With 35 active members, and 11 trained and accredited in road crash rescue response,

one of the reasons for the VICSES Moe Unit's expanded capability is the result of growth in the Gippsland region. In the last 10 years, VICSES volunteers responded to almost fifteen thousand road rescue callouts across the state!

"Not only are we celebrating 50 years of service to the community this year, but we are now officially accredited as a road crash rescue provider," said VICSES Moe Unit Controller, Bradley Henry.

"This will enhance the service we can provide to our community. Our volunteers have worked very hard to undertake all the required technical training for this to happen, and we are very proud of them."

This new capability for our VICSES Moe Unit volunteers will further bolster the state's capability to respond and rescue those involved in a road crash incident. Congratulations team! ■



**WELCOMING
BEN WAIN
TO THE EAST
REGION TEAM**

By Merryn Henderson, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region

The East Region Management team are pleased to introduce Ben Wain, who has been successful in securing the role of Volunteer Support Officer for a period of 3-months, based out of the Moe Office.

Prior to joining VICSES, Ben has built up knowledge and skills through employment as an advance medic, logistician, and communications officer with a large branded national organisation.

Ben has supported planning and logistical operations at large scale events (40,000 people in attendance), including Tough Mudder, Rainbow Serpent Festival, and Listen Out Festival in Melbourne.

Outside of work, Ben volunteers with the Country Fire Authority, and is a trained wildfire firefighter, AAIMS logistics officer, and fire photographer.

Ben brings with him an understanding and experience in planning, logistics, project management, emergency management, event management, risk management and public safety.

"I am glad to be part of such a dynamic and knowledgeable team out in the East Region. All the volunteers and staff members have been fantastic so far, and I look forward to sharing some of my experiences with the team and working closely with our members on the ground to help them deliver high-quality services to the Gippsland community," said Ben regarding his new role.

Congratulations Ben, and welcome to the team! We look forward to you becoming an integral part of the East Region, and know your knowledge and skills will only enhance the great work we continue to achieve across Gippsland. ■



MID

WEST

1 July – 30 September

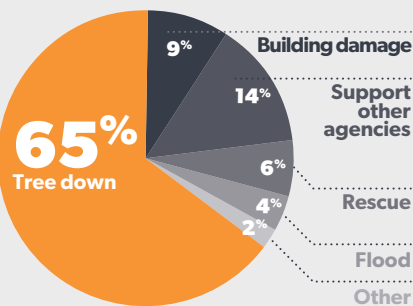


322

Volunteers

338

Requests for assistance



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Facilitators sparks connection

By Jane Patton, Community Resilience Coordinator, Mid West Region

The community engagement space for VICSES members has experienced its challenges over the last two years due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Being able to stay in touch with the community has given VICSES members the opportunity to think outside the box, and implement innovative ideas to maintain connection and to promote safer communities.

Exploring the tools of the digital world and utilising different online platforms has been fantastic, and a great learning curve. Community Engagement Facilitator (CEF) members have been building upon their local relationships with key stakeholders and networks in the community, which is rewarding and

does emphasis that we can work as one!

Mid West Region CEF's have reunited the community engagement advisory group and are meeting quarterly across the calendar year, sharing and networking together. This has sparked motivation amongst the CEF members in the Mid West Region to create ideas and support each other. A sense of excitement is surfacing as lockdown restrictions begin to ease, and as face-to-face community engagement activities and events begin to open.

Mid West Region was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to deliver the new CEF course twice in October this year across the region. It was great to see members connecting face-to-face,

to share experiences, and to learn about the Community Engagement Program Framework.

Congratulations to the 12 Mid West CEF members who completed the two-day CEF workshop in Ballarat and Stawell during October 2021. The members who participated in the courses were from our VICSES Ballarat, Hepburn Shire, Ararat, Bacchus Marsh, Horsham, Stawell, Warracknabeal and Dunmunkle Units.

We are embarking on a new era for community engagement for VICSES, and with the wonderful motivated CEF members in Mid West Region, fellow Community Resilience Coordinator Clare Mintern and myself are looking forward to seeing what the future will hold! ■



Bushwalker safety at the Grampians

By Jane Patton, Community Resilience Coordinator, Mid West Region

VICSES Stawell Unit are actively promoting bush walking key safety messages for visitors to the Grampians National Park, to try and reduce the number of requests for assistance to the unit.

On average the unit responds to approximately 180 requests for assistance per year, and a large number of these requests are within the Grampians National Park. Most of these callouts involve carrying out people injured or missing when bushwalking.

With the combination of easing COVID-19 restrictions and the Grampians National Park Peaks Trail opening, this is likely to lead to an increase in demand on Stawell Unit volunteers, as well as other emergency service agencies in the region.

While it's fantastic that people are getting back into the outdoors, people need to be prepared if something goes wrong. Location information challenges are particularly difficult for open space locations, with no set addresses such as beaches, parks, or trails.

"We are excited that more tourists will be visiting our region, but we want people to actively think about their safety before they go bush walking by making sure they've got appropriate footwear, food and water before they go," said Stawell Unit Controller Alan Blight.

To improve bushwalker safety and preparedness, we encourage people to:

- Let friends or family know where you are going before you leave.
- Take food and water with you.
- Wear appropriate footwear and clothes for the conditions.
- Have a fully charged phone and important phone numbers with you.
- Check the weather forecasts and fire danger ratings.

"We also encourage all bushwalkers to be familiar with emergency markers along

bushwalking tracks throughout the Grampians National Park," continued Alan.

"They are designed to pinpoint your exact location during an emergency in public open spaces or a hard to define places. They display three letters and three numbers which gives us an exact location of where the markers are."

The VICSES website has recently been updated to include key messages for people planning on hiking or bushwalking. You can view more information at www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/on-holidays. ■



New flood information helps the VICSES St Arnaud Unit prepare for flooding

By Jane Patton, Community Resilience Coordinator, Mid West Region

Members of VICSES St Arnaud Unit are excited that the St Arnaud Flood Study has recently been completed by the Northern Grampians Shire Council and Water Technology.

St Arnaud is frequently impacted by flooding, being located in the upper Lexel Creek Catchment. St Arnaud Creek, a tributary of Lexel Creek, flows through the centre of St Arnaud and often causes

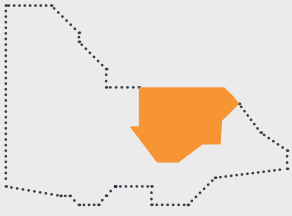
significant flood damage. Three recent significant flood events that impacted St Arnaud include September 2010, January 2011, and November 2018. During the 2018 flood event, 50mm of rainfall was recorded in just one hour, causing significant damages to buildings and roads across the local area.

"During the 2018 flood event, there was very little warning time due to the very high rainfall



intensity. Having access to flood maps is critical to guiding where sandbagging is needed, and for communicating with the community where the flood water will go before the flood arrives," said St Arnaud Unit Controller, Matthew Decker.

Matthew thanked the Northern Grampians Shire Council and Water Technology for completing the St Arnaud Flood Study, which will be an invaluable tool for VICSES and increase awareness around the local flood risk and resilience within the community. ■



NORTH

EAST

1 July – 30 September

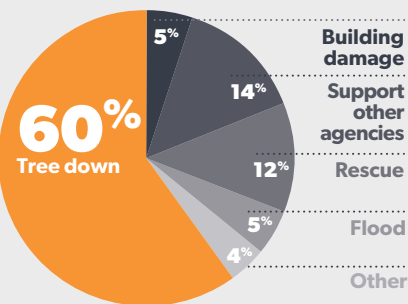


626

Volunteers

562

Requests for assistance



AT THE EPICENTRE:

VICSES Mansfield Unit's response to Victoria's largest earthquake

By Roslyn Fauvel, VICSES Mansfield Unit Officer, North East Region

The morning of Tuesday 28 September started out like any other day. I was on the way to our Mansfield Unit Local Headquarters (LHQ) for a training meeting to get our new members through their Crew Member Supervised training. As I drove along, I remember my radio started acting a bit strange, but I thought nothing of it.

A few minutes later, my husband rang my phone:

"Did you feel that! The whole house shook...it went on for so long!"

An earthquake? What was he talking about - I hadn't noticed a thing!

By the time I arrived at the unit, it was announced that there had been a 5.9 magnitude earthquake, occurring right near Mansfield. Our members at the unit were rightfully concerned about the impacts of such a large earthquake, with all of us trying to find out what had happened, where the epicentre was, and if there

were any casualties. Our phones were running hot with family and friends ringing and sending text messages to see if we were all okay. I had to send out messages the next day, apologising for not being able to respond to their concerns.

Without hesitation, several members commenced patrolling the local area for any signs of damage. We were then promptly informed by the North East Region Duty Officer, that the Benalla Incident Control Centre (ICC) was being activated, and that the Mansfield LHQ would be a Sector Command Point (SCP).

At first, I thought "Oh no! What does that mean? What

do I have to do?" Thankfully, VICSES is a very supportive organisation that ensures everyone has the support they need. Our Mansfield members that are trained as Sector Commanders were unavailable, so we gained the expertise and skills of Peter Weeks, neighbouring VICSES Alexandra Unit Controller as Sector Commander.

Our first tasks were to survey the local areas to identify any damages or issues, photograph them and record the images on *Snap, Send, Solve*, and of course assist the community where needed. The Benalla ICC arranged for additional crews from

Benalla, Alexandra, and Chiltern to support with the process of intelligence gathering.

And of course, I can't forget the media requests! I was so glad to have the support of my fellow members and neighbouring crews, including media talking points from the ICC and an experienced media speaker as our Sector Commander. I really learnt a lot that day!

We also had members working at Mount Buller, who were able to check around the village for damage or issues. Another member checked all of Mansfield's main infrastructure, speaking to people at the council, power substation, hospital, and more. Rumours suggested that the Ambulance Victoria building had been damaged, but this was incorrect. So far so good!

Speaking to a Team Leader from Goulburn Murray Water, their meters suggested that a mains pipe may have been damaged near Jamieson, and they were heading out to check. Goulburn Murray Water also assessed the Lake Eildon Dam wall for damage.

Our crews headed off to investigate the areas of Merrijig and Jamieson and beyond, checking roads, bridges, and buildings, as well as speaking with many locals. Photos were taken and messages radioed back to the SCP, to assist with understanding the impacts of the event. We also checked in with local police members, who were assisting in assessing their local areas.

It was amazing that there were no casualties and minimal damage. Several chimneys had suffered a good shaking with reports of bricks coming loose, and a water tank in Gough Bay had burst. There were also minor landslides, some trees uprooted, and minor building damage. Items fell off the shelves in the local real estate agent's offices, and cracks appeared in brick walls, but not enough to make them structurally unsafe.

I suppose that the biggest impact of the earthquake was to

people. Many people told stories about how scared they were, and how they couldn't work out what was happening. An earthquake was not their first thought - some thought their hot water services had exploded. I was told by one plumber that he was working under a house at the time of the earthquake. He raced to get out, while other tradies on site shut off the electricity, thinking that he had been electrocuted. Luckily, he was safe and unharmed.

I believe that during the earthquake there were several people working under ground in the A1 mine. I can't imagine what they must have been thinking! One of our Mansfield members was working near a new housing estate, and watched on as tradies on the roofs managed to avoid falling. People in Mansfield and surrounds are still talking about that day!

I wish that we had been able to prepare our local kinder kids for the event - we had visits planned for 2021, but unfortunately COVID-19 got in the way. The kids love visiting our unit and meeting our members. We will certainly be including the 'Drop, cover and hold on' messaging in 2022 - I can imagine the children having lots of fun with that drill!

Overall, this earthquake event included a mammoth effort by our VICES members, the ICC, and all stakeholders. Nothing seemed too big of a task or request, and everyone worked together to make what appeared to be a daunting task, into something even I felt comfortable being a part of. VICES is such a fantastic organisation - in my current position as Acting Unit Controller, I've found that I'm encouraged to ask questions, and am always listened to.

Last but not least, I'd like to give a special thank you to all the people involved in our taskforce in responding to this event. Our community appreciates your support. ■

MANY THANKS

NORTH EAST REGION SAYS

Farewell to John Hennessy ESM

By Sara-Jane Bowering, Community Resilience Coordinator, North East Region

In October, North East Region said farewell to Myrtleford Unit volunteer John Hennessy, who enters retirement after 32 years of service with VICES.

John commenced his service with VICES in 1989, and went on to establish the North East Regional Support Unit, where he was positioned as the Unit Controller from 2004 to 2005. In 2016 John joined Myrtleford Unit, and has volunteered as an operational member right up until his retirement this year.

Among his many achievements include being recognised as part of the 2020 Queens Birthday Honours, where John was awarded an Emergency Services Medal for his significant contributions across the

emergency services sector and the community.

His most memorable moments with VICES include a vertical rescue at Mount Pilot in 2004, supporting the response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, and much more.

"For over 30 years I have been proud to say that I am a VICES volunteer, as the Values and standards of our organisation determine who I am today in so many ways," said John.

On behalf of the North East Region, we'd like to thank John for his service and acknowledge the incredible legacy that he has left behind. We wish John all the best, hoping he can enjoy more time with loved-ones and on his many hobbies. ■



NORTH

WEST

1 July – 30 September

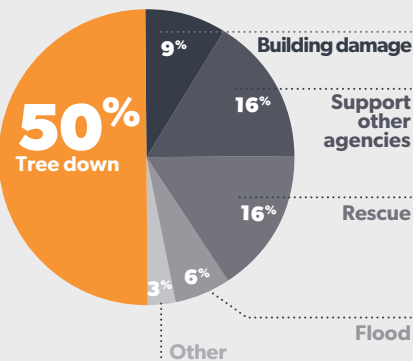


567

Volunteers

343

Requests for assistance



Resilient Rochy takes home award



By Rebecca McDonald, Regional Officer – Emergency Management, North West Region

The *Resilient Rochester Project* has been formally acknowledged at the *2021 Resilient Australia Awards*, which recognise collaboration and innovative thinking that builds and contributes to safer and more resilient communities.

At an online ceremony on the 4th of October, Victoria’s Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp announced three winners and three highly commended awards from a total of 20 award applications.

VICSES was announced as the recipients of the Government Award for the *Resilient Rochester Project* - a collaboration between the Rochester community, VICSES North West Region, VICSES

Rochester Unit, Campaspe Shire Council, and the North Central Catchment Management Authority.

The project includes engaging local residents and volunteers to work together on their local flood risks by using technology to develop their own solutions, and being better positioned to make informed decisions about their flood risk now, and in the future.

VICSES Rochester Unit volunteer Judith Gledhill said that the effectiveness of the project was due to a winning combination of interventions.

“The personalised property packs, flood markers, flood information signs, videos, school program, and the detailed flood pre-plans we have at the unit, are all pieces of the larger puzzle. Residents can now understand what it means and how they should respond.”

VICSES North West Regional Manager Sharon Unthank said that the project team was deserving of recognition, and has set the standard for community-driven, collaborative projects going forward.

“The VICSES Rochester Unit volunteers, together with our project partners, have not only delivered incredible outcomes for their local community, but given us all a blueprint for how to successfully engage with residents and get real results. We have a lot to be proud of in Rochester, and so does the community.”

As it has been just over a year since the project concluded, residents are now reviewing their flood plans to continue flood preparedness and safety.

Thank you to everyone who was involved in contributing to this award-winning project. ■

Auslan in emergencies

By Shanleigh Meldrum, VICSES Gisborne Unit volunteer, North West Region

Within our volunteer roles, we engage with a range of different people with many diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. One of the minority communities that is often forgotten in community engagement is the Deaf and hard of hearing community.

Australian Sign Language (Auslan) is the primary language used by the Deaf community here in Australia. As an emergency service, effective communication is always important in every area of the work we do. After a successful Deaf awareness and Auslan training program in 2019, it seemed appropriate for us to revisit it again.

On Monday 13 September, VICSES Gisborne Unit had its first of four two-hour sessions on Deaf awareness and basic Auslan. Deaf native Auslan users Darren and Briana Beath from ‘Auslan in the West’ delivered the training program online, due to lockdown restrictions at the time.



VICSES Heathcote Unit awarded as part of local community grants program

By Sally Duncan, Heathcote Unit Officer, North West Region

VICSES Heathcote Unit was recently awarded over \$24,000 in funding across two projects through the Heathcote and District Community Bank’s 2021 Community Grants program.

VICSES Heathcote Unit Controller Darren O’Connor said the unit were thrilled to hear of their success.

“I have been a VICSES volunteer for just on 20 years. When I first joined, I was amazed at all the different

ways we helped out people in our community, but also a bit shocked at the amount of fundraising we had to do to provide that service,” said Darren.

“This is where awesome organisations like the Community Bank step in to help. Their

The program covers how to communicate with Deaf and hard of hearing people, assistive technology, Deaf culture, and basic Auslan. The Auslan taught in the program comprises of the alphabet, numbers, colours, COVID-19, basic conversation, as well as emergency specific signs we would commonly use if we were interacting with a deaf person at community engagement events, during storm and flood response, or road crash rescue jobs.

We are currently working with ‘Auslan in the West’ to create cards to be placed in our overall pockets with the Auslan alphabet and important VICSES related emergency signs, that can be used as a quick reference guide if we encounter a Deaf or hard of hearing person at an incident. With our unit having now completed the training, we hope this will increase our ability to understand and meet the needs of the community. ■

generosity will improve our operational response, expand our training capability, and greatly improve the safety of our volunteers,” continued Darren.

VICSES Heathcote Unit volunteer Sally Duncan who led the bid team, said that the key to a strong application included good planning and involvement of all members - everyone at the unit had an opportunity to provide input to the annual Unit Business Plan.

“We held a leadership workshop in April to identify the areas where we wanted to improve, and then everyone got involved in identifying the details. The plan was expansive, but did include a considerable amount of technology upgrades,” said Sally.

To improve safety at night-time call-outs where head lamps and handheld torches are critical pieces of personal protective equipment, the unit applied for new lighting equipment to the tune of \$9,347 – dubbed *Project Illumination*. Each member will now be equipped with a high-quality head lamp for their helmet, plus spares for new members in future years. The project also includes a quantity of handheld, rechargeable and durable torches, which will be stored in each vehicle and are critical for searches and road crash rescues.

Sally said that by having key information about future projects already outlined in the Unit Business Plan, they were able to apply for the

grants faster, and without too much additional work.

“If you put the effort in early, you can make incredible gains – just make sure you have a story ready to tell and show how it all fits into the big picture,” said Sally.

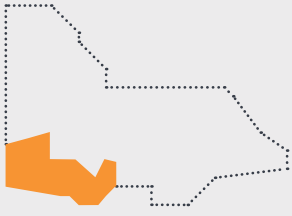
The second project, focused on upgrading the unit’s local headquarters (LHQ) and vehicles with appropriate technology, was also successful. The unit received \$14,822 towards the purchase of iPads, laptops, display screens, and other key items to improve emergency response and the communications between members out on jobs and at the unit’s LHQ.

The new equipment will improve unit efficiency when an Incident Control Point is established, as well as facilitating online training opportunities for all volunteers.

“Our previous technology was old and outdated, so this grant will allow us to significantly upgrade our equipment, and then we can ensure all members are trained to take advantage of the systems and information that’s available,” said Sally.

“Because we put the time in to develop a detailed plan, it helped to make the application process relatively straight forward. We knew what our priorities for 2021 were, and we had a good story to back up why we needed these things.”

The unit are in the process of acquiring the various components, and will soon begin installation and training. ■



SOUTH

WEST

1 July – 30 September

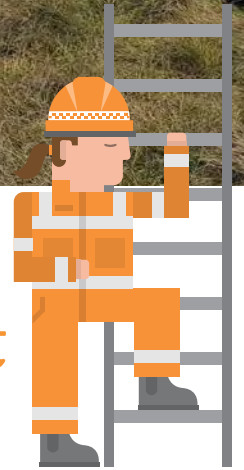
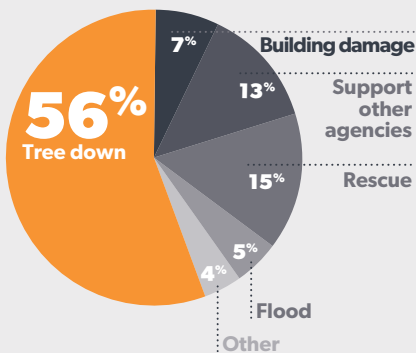


576

Volunteers

506

Requests for assistance



ABC Backroads visits VICSES Port Campbell Unit

By Bess Krause, Community Resilience Coordinator, South West Region

The ABC Backroads crew recently visited the Port Campbell area to shine a spotlight on its dedicated volunteer community, both past and present.

Many are unfamiliar with the unique history of the VICSES Port Campbell Unit and its origin. First founded in 1878 as a group of community volunteers who came together to rescue people who were shipwrecked, in 1963 they adapted their services to provide cliff rescue, and in 1992 united with VICSES.

The unit still proudly specialises in steep and high angle rescue, and had the opportunity to demonstrate their skills for the ABC Backroads film crew at a well-known stop along

the Great Ocean Road, called Gibson Steps.

With the breathtaking Shipwreck Coast in the background, the team assembled the rescue system and conducted safety checks. The mission for the exercise was to descend a rescuer from the top of the cliff, and retrieve a 'patient' (a training dummy in this case) from the beach approximately 70 meters below.

The rescue crew demonstrated their specialist skills as the rescuer was safely lowered down the cliff face, the patient strapped into the specialised stretcher, and both were lifted

back up the immense wall of rock.

The VICSES Port Campbell Unit provide a vital service to the community. They are called to assist with steep and high angle rescues several times a year, ranging from cliff rescues as demonstrated on this day, to vehicles which have rolled down an embankment and assistance in accessing or removing the patient is required.

The training involved in high angle rescue is rigorous, and includes a weighted pack hike to ensure members are capable of the physical tasks of carrying heavy equipment to remote rescue scenes, and manually hauling the rescuer and patient up the cliff face.

This episode of Backroads is due to air on ABC TV at 8PM on Monday 7 February, and will highlight the amazing contributions of volunteers in the Port Campbell community. ■

Three 'Pawesome' rescues

By Bess Krause, Community Resilience Coordinator,
South West Region

October was seemingly a month for animals getting into trouble and requiring the services of our VICSES volunteers across the South West Region.

First up, the VICSES Warrnambool Unit attended a call-out for a kitten that could be heard meowing in the wall of a home. After locating the kitten using the borescope, aka 'snake camera', and attempting to reach the kitten via the roof space, the crew finally ended up accessing the tiny mischief-maker by cutting an access point in the plaster wall – with the owner's permission of course! The kitten was unharmed and returned to its owner.

The second rescue resulted from an exploring dog getting stuck on an 11-metre cliff at Aireys Inlet on the Surf Coast. The owner attempted to rescue the pup himself, but had also become stuck. VICSES Lorne and Torquay Units attended the scene, and supported Victoria Police and Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) to determine the best access point to reach the stranded pair. With only two hours before the tide cut off their beach access, a rescue was successfully conducted involving a member of

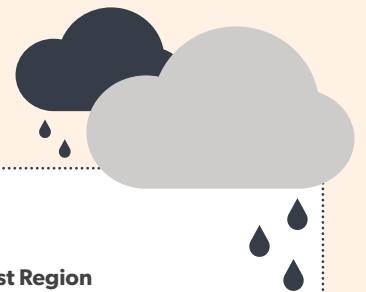


FRV abseiling down, retrieving the dog and bringing it down safely, while the man descended the ladder to the beach.

Two weeks later, VICSES Torquay Unit were called to another dog rescue at Bells Beach, where an 8-month-old Kelpie had strayed onto a cliff face and become stuck. This time the local Country Fire Authority and VICSES knew exactly what approach could be taken for the rescue, as they had been involved in the rescue of a dog

from the exact same spot a couple of years prior. When FRV arrived on scene, volunteers were able to provide local knowledge and support the successful retrieval of the pet pooch.

A 'pawesome' job by everyone involved! ■



October hailstorm hits hard

By Bess Krause, Community Resilience Coordinator, South West Region

In mid-October, Lara and the northern suburbs of Geelong were hit by a storm cell which brought rain and large amounts of hail, and resulted in over 20 calls for assistance to VICSES within an hour.

The majority of calls were received between 9:30pm and 10:00pm, and were for water coming through the ceiling of residences. The hail that had fallen had

compacted down into gutters and downpipes, which resulted in the accompanying rain overflowing and causing the flooding.

With the majority of the damage occurring in the Corio area, VICSES Geelong and Bannockburn Units came to the assistance of the VICSES Corio Unit, and between them they worked to clear the built-up hail using water, tools,

and gloved hands, to prevent further flooding.

In a joint effort, the crews were able to clear all the jobs by just after midnight that night. This was a terrific display of teamwork and a great demonstration of one of our VICSES Values, 'Together we are VICSES'.

Well done to all involved, working together to help our community. ■



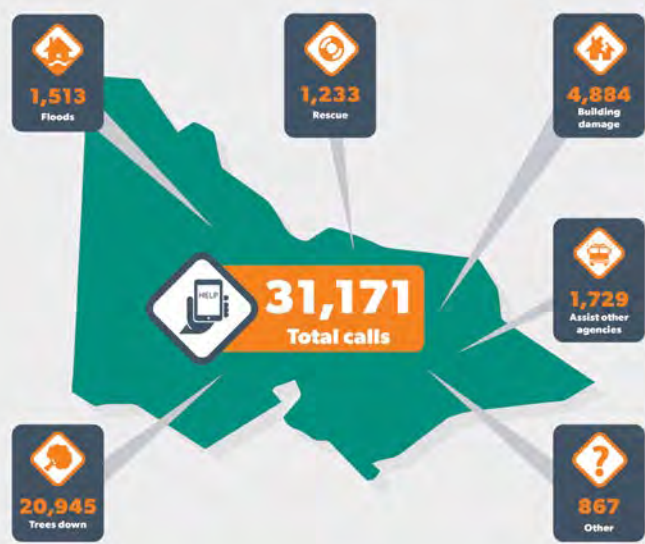
OPERATIONAL UPDATES

Busiest winter and spring on record

On the back of several major weather events over the past months, VICSES has recorded our busiest winter and spring operational periods on record.

From 1 July to 30 November, VICSES received a total of 31,171 requests for assistance, exceeding the 2010-2011 years which saw devastating floods throughout the state.

A massive thank you to our members for your dedication as part of VICSES, and our communities. What a year! ■



Requests for emergency assistance
1 June to 30 November 2021

VICSES supports Ambulance Victoria response during COVID-19

By **Jessie Schleibs**, Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

Over the past months Victoria saw a high increase in COVID-19 cases, bringing on a surge of Triple Zero (000) calls and a high-than-average demand for assistance from Ambulance Victoria members and paramedics.

VICSES was approached by Ambulance Victoria for support from our members, to ensure they could maintain capability during this challenging response period and continue to provide life-saving assistance. Support included VICSES volunteers undertaking ambulance familiarisation training, and pairing up

with paramedics to drive ambulance vehicles.

VICSES members needed to meet certain criteria to be able to undertake this support role, which included:

- Both doses of a COVID-19 and annual flu vaccination (proof of vaccinations required).



- Emergency Vehicle Status (EVS)/Code 1 VICSES endorsement (current).
- First Aid accredited (current).
- Are not considered part of an 'at-risk group' during the pandemic.

In addition to these requirements, before being deployed, VICSES members received an online WebEx briefing, followed by two in-person training sessions, as well as clinical observation trials.

Our first members were deployed on the 8th of October to support Ambulance Victoria operations within Central Region, with 42 VICSES members finalising their training and being made available to be deployed.

While Ambulance Victoria paramedics will always be responsible for a patient's care, partnerships like this with our volunteers are crucial for the safety and wellbeing of our communities, and if needed can be deployed immediately.

Our Victorian paramedics have been doing an incredible job across the past months in their response, and we are always ready to support our emergency management partners where required.

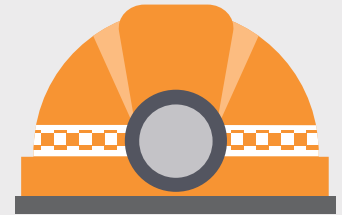
A big thank you to our volunteers who put their hand up to support this opportunity, and for your ongoing assistance #weworkasone. ■

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

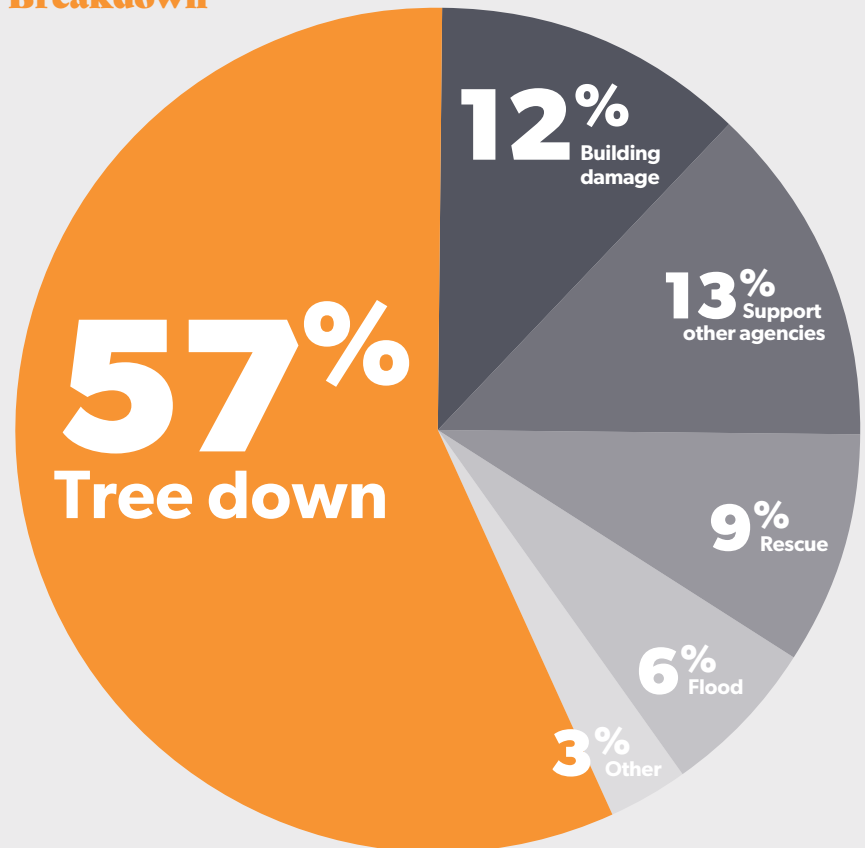
1 July – 30 September

Total

5,436



Breakdown



PROJECTS – WHAT'S NEW



Brand new state of the art facility for VICSES Knox Unit volunteers

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

A big congratulations to members of the VICSES Knox Unit, who recently moved into their new address at 607 Burwood Highway, Knoxfield, as part of a \$6 million investment from the Victorian Government.

With 50 active members, volunteers from the VICSES Knox Unit are among the most active in Victoria, responding to 1,200 requests for assistance from July 2020 to June 2021 inclusive.

As Victoria's largest road crash rescue provider in the state, volunteers from the unit also responded to almost 60 calls for help in relation to road crash rescue incidents in the last financial year alone (2020/21).



The new VICSES Knox facility is an important development for the community who count on the great work of our volunteers on a daily basis.

The new site will enable the VICSES Knox Unit to continue to respond effectively to the local community during floods and storms, and assist Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, and fire services throughout the state.

The new fit-for-purpose facility is co-located with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DEWLP) local

headquarters, and reflects VICSES' commitment and dedication to the local community and will enable an expansion of local services, while supporting the retention and recruitment of new volunteers.

Funding for the new unit is part of the government's \$125 million investment in VICSES capital works, ensuring the state's emergency services volunteers are equipped with the resources needed to support Victorian communities. These projects are delivered on behalf of the government by the Community Safety Building Authority. ■

Interim Female Fit PPC and Personal Protective Clothing & Equipment (PPC&E) Redesign Project

By Chloe Jeffers, Senior Advisor Corporate Communications and Brand, VHO

In December 2019, VICSES commenced the Personal Protective Clothing & Equipment (PPC&E) Redesign Project. A key outcome of this project is to modernise and improve the uniform design of personal protective clothing (PPC) for our volunteers and ensure that it is fit for task.

The project gained momentum despite the COVID-19 restrictions. During the project workshops and feedback collation, it became evident that prioritisation needed to be given to a female fit PPC offering, well before the planned timeline of the release of updated PPC for VICSES, slated for 2023. A final PPC design workshop was held over the last weekend of November 2021. Additional workshops for Alpine, High Angle and Boating activities will be held in early 2022.

VICSES wants all of our members to feel supported, safe, and enabled to represent our organisation. Across our volunteer workforce, we are proud to have 1,700 female volunteers (33 per cent). It is clear that our female members need to have PPC that is functional and designed for the female shape. The VICSES Executive agreed that this part of the project needed to be fast-tracked, with the implementation of an interim range of female fit PPC available for all active* female volunteers (and those more comfortable in the female fit) in early 2022.

This change is significant, and will enable our female members to feel comfortable in clothing that is designed with their shape in mind. VICSES has partnered with the Workwear Group (WWG), as the preferred supplier. WWG has been chosen as the preferred supplier due to their superior product offerings for the female fit designs and other factors, including the ability to meet production capacity and timeframes.

WWG have demonstrated extensive experience in developing female uniforms across several emergency services agencies, such as the Australian Defence Force, Fire Rescue New South Wales, and Queensland Ambulance. They have also undertaken considerable development work on female fitting garments to ensure that the uniforms worn enable performance on the job through fit and function.

All eligible members were able to place their order via the WWG order portal, and orders for the first drop have closed. If you change your mind and wish to order the new PPC, please email Irena Jurisic at Assets@ses.vic.gov.au.

*Attended incident since 1 July 2019 onwards.

VICSES Interim female fit personal protective clothing concepts



S/S Tee
SES001

L/S Tee
SES002



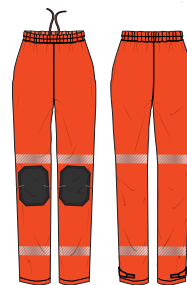
Work Shirt
SES003



Work Pant
SES004



Wet Weather Jacket
SES006



Wet Weather Overtrouser
SES007 - Option 1



Operational Utility Belt
SES008

WELLBEING, HEALTH & SAFETY

Step It Up 2021 round up



By Alison Wright, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

Step it Up 2021 saw us out-stepping 2020 by an incredible 50 million steps, with a grand total of 250 million steps. That's 4.7 laps of the earth, or nearly halfway to the moon!

With over 950 members registering, 78 teams, and 22 households, we walked, cycled, cooked, and danced our way through the four weeks.

We're excited to announce that our new *Step It Up* Champions for 2021 are VICSES Nillumbik Unit, with a total average of 135,090 steps per participant! Congratulations to the unit on this huge effort, and to our following top five teams:

1. **Nillumbik Unit:** 135,090
2. **Benalla Unit:** 134,653
3. **Brimbank Unit:** 110,467
4. **Ballarat Unit:** 107,643
5. **Phillip Island Unit:** 105,731

Stephen Blood from the VICSES Ballarat Unit was our biggest stepper overall, with an astonishing 1.1 million steps. Competition was so fierce, that we had six steppers make it into the one million step club – more than any other year!

We also had our *Step It Up* Most Valuable Player, who is nominated as a participant who has made the most effort, the biggest changes

to their fitness, or who has kept up their team spirit week after week.

This year it was awarded to Ken Mudie from VICSES Broadmeadows Unit!

Ken told us that he had recently gained back 12kg of the 18kg that he had lost prior to the pandemic.

"I didn't realise that I had lapsed into a sedentary lifestyle until I looked back. I checked on a health app and found that my average daily steps were sitting at about 1,200 steps per day," says Ken.

"This year I decided to go all out and put in at least a reasonable effort as part of *Step It Up*. The first couple of days were quite hard and I contemplated doing less steps, but I decided that I couldn't let the 'Broady' team down," continued Ken.

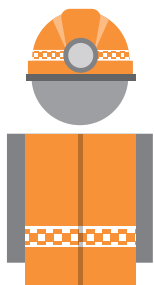
Ken went from less than 10,000 steps a day to over 70,000 steps in his first week, keeping the momentum going and increasing

his fitness levels and really feeling the benefit.

"Since starting the *Step It Up* challenge, I noticed that I have been able to do more and not get breathless, which I realised had been happening recently. An increase in activity is definitely going to continue, as I have found that it gets easier to maintain your fitness when you are given a good base to start from."

Congratulations Ken on being a well-deserving winner of this year's *Step it Up* program.

Of course, *Step It Up* isn't just about the steps – it's also about trying something new, having fun, and making some positive changes in your life. This year we scheduled lots of different activities, including Zumba, mindfulness, nutrition challenges, and even disco yoga! We were even fortunate to have Steve 'Commando' Willis run a fitness challenge and speak with us on our VICSES Mindfit Podcast.



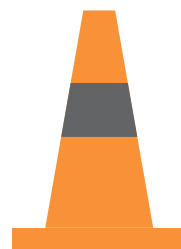
Workplace inspections

October 2019 – September 2020

197

October 2020 – September 2021

203



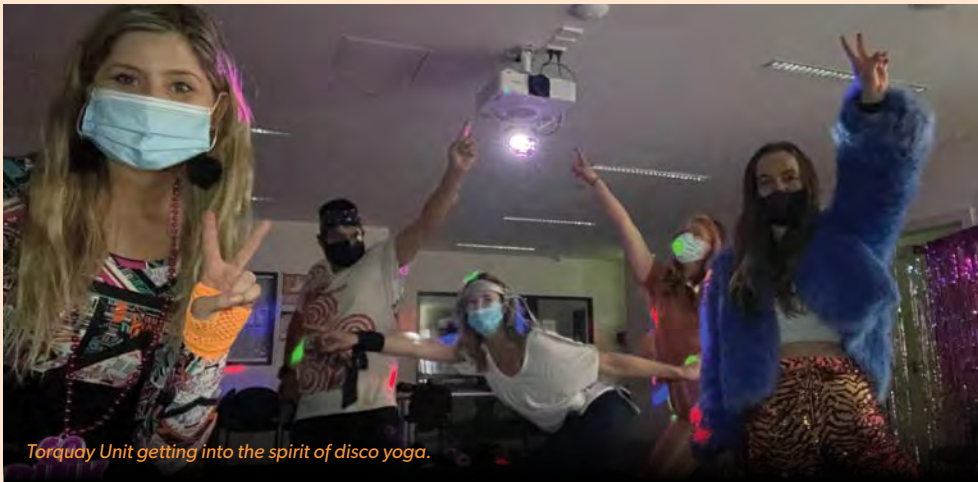
Injuries

October 2019 – September 2020

92

October 2020 – September 2021

127



Torqudy Unit getting into the spirit of disco yoga.

A Step It Up Story

By Alison Wright, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

Lisa Psaila and her fiancé Andrew Hart from the VICSES Sunbury Unit took part in their first *Step It Up* this year, and have made the commitment to keep up their steps now the challenge is finished.

Having struggled with motivation during the many extended lockdowns, *Step It Up* gave them the nudge they both needed to increase their movement. Lisa says they have “made a commitment to get a minimum of 70,000 steps in a week, and support each other in getting there.”

Lisa is also part of our state Wellbeing, Health and Safety team, and has initiated walking meetings for all of us twice a week. The walking meetings started during *Step It Up*, and are continuing well after the challenge. It’s a great way of encouraging the whole team to incorporate extra activity into the working week.

Just 30 minutes of moderate activity every day can help us to maintain our health, so it’s worth finding opportunities to keep stepping it up! ■

Congratulations to everyone who took part in this year’s *Step It Up* challenge and committed to increasing their movement, and thank you all for participating as part of our biggest year yet.

For full results, please check out the *Step It Up* page on the Hub under:

My State > Health and Wellbeing > Events > Step it Up.

VICSES MindFit Podcast

By Alison Wright, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

The VICSES Mindfit podcast covers health, nutrition, science, psychology, wellbeing, performance, resilience and post-traumatic growth.

We talk to industry leaders and experts with lived experiences, to spread the word of good health and wellbeing to our members, as well as the families and friends of those on the front line serving our community.

One of our latest guests includes Steve ‘Commando’ Willis, who dropped into our VICSES MindFit headquarters to talk about health and wellbeing, as well as his recent experience with Buddhist practises.



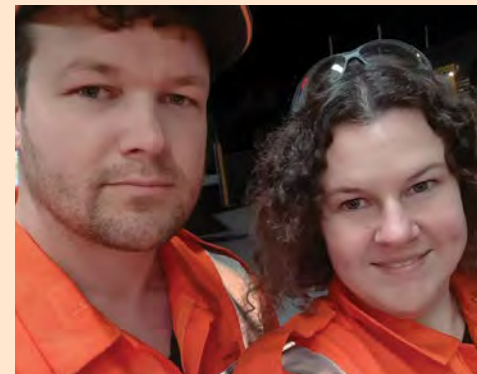
“It’s not one size fits all... you have to tap into things that people enjoy”

Our guest **Steve ‘Commando’ Willis**
TV personality / Fitness Expert

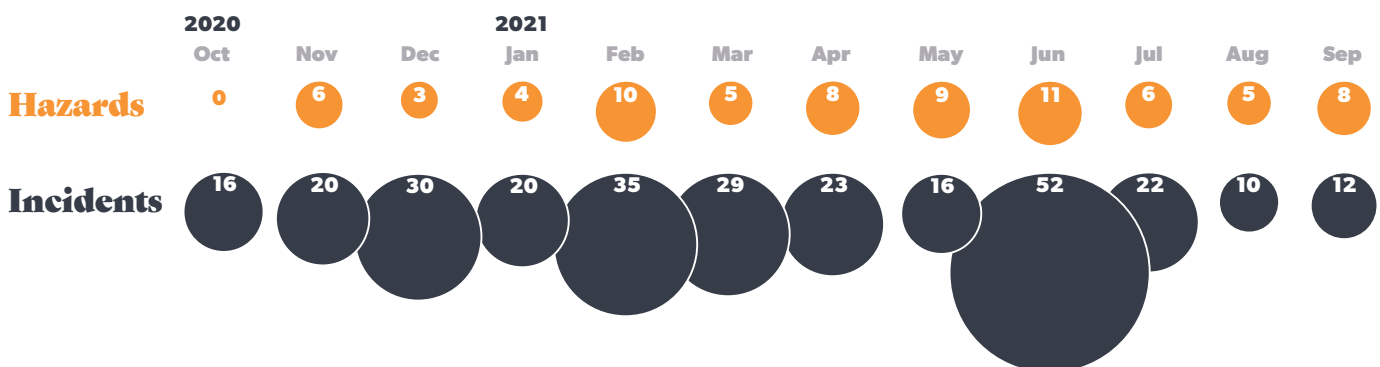
Best known from Channel 10’s ‘The Biggest Loser’ and more recently ‘Australia Survivor: Champions vs Contenders’, Steve leaves the military tough talk at the door and shows us his compassionate side, along with sharing tips on finding an exercise regime that is right for you.

Coming up on the pod, we chat with Osher Gunsberg on mental health, Professor Dan Lubman on addiction, and PTSD survivor Rob Atkins on Jimmy, his incredible therapy dog.

To listen to our latest episodes, simply search ‘VICSES Mindfit’ on the Spotify or Podbean apps. Don’t forget to subscribe! ■



YEAR AT A GLANCE



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Driver Reviver vans: Coming to a pop-up site near you in 2022

By Susan Davies, Manager Community Connections, VHO

In June 2021, VICSES was awarded a Road Safety Grant from the Australian Government to purchase six purpose-built vans for the national *Driver Reviver* program. The vans will be used across the state to support current *Driver Reviver* sites, as well as introduce pop-up *Driver Reviver* sites.

The vans can be used for more than *Driver Reviver* activations, and will be a key asset to being able to deliver contemporary community engagement programs, which is exciting for our Community Engagement Facilitators.

The bespoke vans will carry everything required to provide tea, coffee, and biscuits to the community. The vans will also have community engagement resources including digital tools and

large pull-out flat screens, to enhance engagement with the community.

The vans enable VICSES to roll into 2022 by:

- Being independently powered.
- Reduce our requirements of paper collateral and increase our approach to sustainability.
- Flexible key community engagement safety messaging.

Preliminary design work is currently being worked on and we are looking forward to these vans being fitted out and on the road next year. ■



State Controllers Seminar

After many changes due to COVID-19, we are pleased to announce that the dates for the 2022 State Controllers Seminar have been confirmed:

WEST:

28 May 2022

EAST:

18 June 2022

Official communications will be coming soon, so stay tuned!



Bag it, block it, lift it and leave goes to AFAC!

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

Previous editions of *Community Matters* have included articles on our community engagement flood preparedness program and campaign 'Bag it, block it, lift it and leave' (BLL). BLL looks to provide a simple key message based on calls to action for householders to take when a flood is on the way.

BLL was recently presented at the Australian Fire and Emergency Services Conference (AFAC), which was held virtually this year given the ongoing pandemic. The 30-minute presentation told the BLL story - a story with strong community foundations and a key message that was developed by the community, for the community.

While the session was pre-recorded, it was interactive through playing the BLL animation and jingle, and requesting written reflections on the conference and presentation. The session was well received by the audience and received good feedback.

Gaining a speaking slot to present at the AFAC conference was a big honour, especially given the calibre of other presentations and topics. We encourage our members to submit an abstract next year to help amplify the amazing work we all do. ■



MEDIA

1 July -
30 September 2021

Campaigns and events:

- Emergency Services Blood Challenge.
- International Youth Day.
- Are they Triple OK?

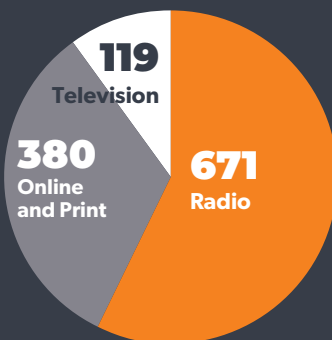
Media releases:

- Windy, wet and cold lockdown weekend ahead for Victorians.
- VICSES swift water specialists rescue stranded man.
- Critical equipment stolen from VICSES Emerald Unit.
- Car fire proves to be no trouble for VICSES Brimbank Unit.
- School trips provoke slew of snow rescues.
- Lysterfield search ends in applause for VICSES volunteers.
- VICSES recognises model dad Anthony White for Father's Day.
- Over 35,000 felt reports following Victorian earthquake.
- Road Crash Rescue capability ready to roll for VICSES Moe Unit.

Ministerial events:

- Nil

Mentions of VICSES in the news:



Social media highlights:

FACEBOOK



Impressions:
448,899

Post clicks:
21,047

Reactions,
comments
and shares:
11,357

22 September: Earthquake key messages - drop, cover and hold on!

TWITTER



Impressions:
1,509,088

Total
engagements:
127,760

Likes, retweets
and clicks:
19,758

22 September: Magnitude 5.9 earthquake hits Victoria.

INSTAGRAM

Impressions: **8,057** Reach: **7,199**



Comments,
likes and
saves:
371

25 July: Portland pup rescue.

LINKEDIN



Impressions:
10,254

Clicks:
1,191

Reactions,
comments and
shares:
280

17 September: New VICSES Knox Unit build.



MEDIA LIAISON OFFICER SPOTLIGHT: NATALIE STANWAY

Hi Natalie! Can you tell us how you first decided to become involved as a Media Liaison Officer (MLO)?

I felt I could speak clearly and confidently and pass on relevant messaging capably. I saw the benefit of giving our community accurate and timely information, and felt I could contribute that way.

What do you enjoy the most about the role?

Contributing to the safety of our community, as well as uploading a positive image of our service and promoting our capabilities. I like thinking on my feet, and responding professionally and calmly to questions.

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

Yes certainly - we've had several high profile incidents when media (usually not local media, who we consciously build and maintain a positive relationship with), have tried to force an issue or get a 'grab' for their coverage. In one instance I heard the comment to a colleague from another service along the lines of "I can see your name on your uniform - if you refuse to give me a quote I can use, I'm just going to make something up and attribute it to you". Ruthless!

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

Media can help raise our profile, help us engage at a local and broader level, improve the preparedness and knowledge of our community, increase our reach to assist with recruitment, and engagement with other emergency service organisations and authorities. Building relationships with media improves our connectedness with our community, and supports our organisational Value of being a part of our community.

What would you say to other VICSES members considering becoming a MLO?

Give it a go - you have nothing to lose! It helps with self-confidence, builds your knowledge of the service and the sector, and you can contribute to making where you live safer in a way other than a physical response. ■

INFORMATION SERVICES (IS) UPDATE

It's been another huge year for our organisation and our communities. Through it all, our members have demonstrated our key Value 'Together we are VICSES', time and time again.

As we begin to wrap-up another year of dedicated work achieved by our members, on behalf of the IS team I would like to thank you all for your contributions as we continue to strive to improve our team's services.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to remind our members of some of the latest updates and additions to our provided services, to better support our valued volunteers:

1. Service Desk after-hours support for volunteers: Trial underway

Currently running until 17 December 2021, the IS team is providing

after-hours support to all volunteers from Monday to Thursday, until 9:30 pm.

Please take advantage of this service. Once the trial has been completed, we will be presenting the detailed results to understand the results and next steps.

2. Fully supported laptops, including operating system updates

Units are now able to procure additional laptops from our IS team and receive full support, including connection to the network.

Not only will volunteers receive customer support for troubleshooting PC devices, but we will also issue automatic patches and

security updates on a regular basis to keep them safe and secure. This is provided at no extra cost.

You can view more information on the Hub under **My State > Information Services > Technology Deals**.

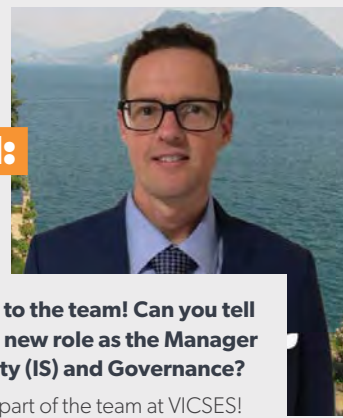
The document provided on the Hub page above will give you a working calculation of the costs of the laptop, accessories and some software, as well as providing you a list of those items which will not be charged.

Once you are happy with everything, send the form to our team. We'll take care of the order, receipt, setup, deployment, and connection, then invoice you directly.

If you want to know more about this offer, feel free to contact the Service Desk on 1300 737 101 or by emailing ictservicedesk@ses.vic.gov.au, and we will work with you. ■

MEET THE TEAM:

Toby Köberle



Hi Toby – welcome to the team! Can you tell us a bit about your new role as the Manager Information Security (IS) and Governance?

I'm very happy to be part of the team at VICSES! My role oversees three functions: Information Technology security, information management, and privacy/freedom of information. These are a bit like a car engine – most people don't want to get into too much detail about how it works, but they do want it to be reliable, safe, and performing well. I will also be involved in Information Communication Technology project work - or should I say, modifying parts of the engine!

What are you most looking forward to in the role?

Meeting new people and building up the team after several vacancies. I also really enjoy project work, and there are some great things going on in the IS area which I'm keen to be a part of.

Are there any challenges that you've identified, or opportunities for improvement?

I'd like to help facilitate a shift to empower staff to collaborate and be more confident in accessing, using, and sharing information. A challenge for me is learning all the acronyms I encounter every day – it's harder than learning Spanish!

Outside of VICSES, how do you like to enjoy your spare time?

I enjoy time with family, classical music and the arts in general, travel, gardening, archery and spending time in nature. I'm keen to get back into some decent hiking now that lockdown restrictions are easing. ■

Protect yourself from phishing

By Toby Köberle, Manager Information Security and Governance, VHO

Phishing is a type of cybersecurity attack, where a hacker sends an email with a link or document that looks legitimate but is designed to steal information.

A phishing email looks as though it's from a trusted source

such as a bank or business, but there some things to look out for. For example, does the email demand urgent action? Suspicious attachments? Contain bad grammar, spelling mistakes, or an unfamiliar greeting?

Despite our best efforts, we may still fall victim to phishing attacks by clicking a link, opening an attachment, or entering confidential details. If the attack was on your VICSES email account, contact the IS Service Desk immediately to report the

issue, and don't reply or forward the email. If the attack was on your personal email, delete the email, run your anti-malware software, and contact the relevant institution – for example, if you entered your bank details, contact your bank. ■



Come rain hail or shine, our volunteers are always there to support our communities.

Thank you all!