



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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AWARD FOR KIDS' PROGRAM

A VFBV-supported project for secondary students has won the Education Award at this year's Fire Awareness Awards, thanks to local CFA volunteers and the Maryborough Education Centre.

The Emergency Services Journey takes Year 9 students to their local brigade, Police and ambulance station to see how each service operates and learn practical skills.

What began as a Brigades in Schools program run by Maryborough Fire Brigade volunteers in 2004, has been developed into an innovative course at the Maryborough Education Centre by teacher and CFA volunteer Samantha Rothman.

There's a camp in the Mallee, sessions at a surf life saving club, activities like open water swimming and fire brigade competition events, and the students achieve certificates in Life Saving skills and First Aid.

The Fire Awareness Award judges said the project goes beyond the basics in building resilience, with a range of partner organisations and reaching great numbers; over 40 students participate each year, and several have become CFA volunteers.

Principal David Sutton says the school is proud of the Emergency Services Journey program and students for doing so well, and particularly Samantha Rothman for her work in developing and championing the program.

Pictured: VFBV's Andrew Ford, Maryborough CFA Captain Darryl Wagstaff AFSM, teacher and CFA volunteer Samantha Rothman, and Maryborough Education Centre Principal David Sutton at the Fire Awareness Awards.



Since its creation by the urban Brigades association in 1913, the VFBV Welfare Fund has helped 1079 volunteers in need, with more than \$1.4 million in small assistance grants.

VFBV Welfare Fund grants are financed by Brigade subscriptions and the interest earned on the Fund's invested capital, which provides the income necessary to pay grants and at the same time maintain the Fund's asset capital base to ensure it can provide support to CFA volunteers in need for generations to come.

VFBV funds all operating and administrative costs of the Fund – so every dollar earned by the Fund's investments and subscriptions goes to assisting volunteers in need. Typical cases involve volunteers who are facing significant financial difficulty because of prolonged illness

Welfare Fund helps 1000

or a sudden death in the family. An average individual grant from the Fund is just under \$3,500.

The VFBV Welfare Fund is run as a government-approved charity by a VFBV Committee of Management under Australian Taxation Office rules, with its books independently audited every year.

Individual volunteer applications are considered by their Brigade before an application is made to the VFBV Welfare Fund Committee of Management, and over the past five years 92.5% of applications have been approved. VFBV has also negotiated discounts on some of the volunteers' bills, worked with their Brigades to monitor the situation in case the family

needs additional assistance, and referred volunteers to sources of financial planning.

For more information, visit Member Services at www.vfbv.com.au

VFBV SUPPORT TO BRIGADES

Newly arrived at VFBV is Support Officer Peter Sharman.

Peter is an experienced volunteer who will work with District Councils, Brigades and volunteers in Districts, 4, 5, 6 and 7 to facilitate strong VFBV engagement with volunteers, assist District Councils with issues resolution at the local level, and support ongoing consultation with volunteers on all matters affecting them.

Peter has been a CFA volunteer since 1987. He is an ex-Captain and a currently serving Group Officer, and has served as a VFBV State Councillor, and on the VFBV/CFA Joint Volunteerism Committee and the Joint Communications and Technology Committee.

You can contact Peter Sharman on 0428 751 652 or at p.sharman@vfbv.org.au

Reflecting on a challenging year

By Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

As we look back on 2016, I am sure most people will agree it has been a very challenging year. And this year, more than most, I am looking forward to Christmas and focussing on the important things of family, friends, neighbours and enjoying the community I live in.

I want to take this opportunity to wish all of our members, friends and supporters a very happy and safe Christmas.

As always I wish for a quiet Christmas and summer but we only need to reflect on this time last year to know how unpredictable things can be. And as always I know that this is a good time of the year to remember why volunteers do what they do, how incredibly valuable that is for our communities and how good it feels to focus on why we joined CFA rather than the frustrations.

So I am not going to talk much about the latest developments in the CFA and UFU ongoing industrial dispute, other than to say it seems to be far from resolved.

CFA is seeking to have the proposed EBA considered by the Fair Work Commission under the amended Fair Work Act, and the UFU is pushing to stop this from happening.

For CFA volunteers one of the great successes of 2016 came in the form of the changes to the Federal Fair Work Act that now provide a truly fair umpire and clear respect and protections for volunteers.

We have said all along that volunteers and VFBV have no interest in paid firefighters' pay increase negotiations, so it can only be hoped that in addition to the recent pay increases announced by CFA, any further matters that are still outstanding can be agreed quickly.

By now CFA Brigades right across Victoria are well into gearing up and preparing for summer so, from a VFBV perspective, let's keep this and protecting our communities as the big CFA focus for now.

Once again thanks for the tremendous activity and support over the past year. From any turmoil there is often



good to emerge and it has been extremely pleasing to see the exponential growth in the numbers of volunteers who are now deeply connected and active within VFBV.

Brigades across Victoria are more connected with VFBV than ever; our VFBV State, District and Brigade delegates are more informed and active than ever and doing a great job. We have made great progress in establishing our VFBV Multi-Agency Youth Network and we have substantially raised the profile of volunteer issues. Thank you!

Our VFBV affiliation levels for this year are at a new record high, with just under 95% of Brigades affiliated with VFBV and 90% of Brigades subscribing to the VFBV Welfare Fund.

On a sadder note, the year saw the departure of some very respected people and I want to recognise and thank once again those who suffered the consequences of standing firm on their principles; Emergency Services Minister Jane Garrett, CFA Board Members, CFA CEO Lucinda Nolan and CFA Chief Officer Joe Buffone, others including MFB Chief Officer Peter Rau, and many other senior CFA volunteer and paid personnel.

To all CFA volunteers and the paid staff who work with, and in support of us; to our families, employers and supporters, thank you, well done for what you do and have a safe and happy Christmas. I am going to head into Christmas looking forward to next year and hopefully a rethink by some who need to stop and think about just how good the CFA can be if everyone is respected and respectful.

FISKVILLE REPORT

The State Government has responded to the Fiskville Inquiry's final report, endorsing all recommendations either fully or in part – see www.vfbv.com.au for a copy.

VFBV now hopes it will be the trigger for urgent Government and CFA action on replacing Fiskville's vital training capacity, ensuring properly monitored water quality standards for all CFA training sites, and maintaining ongoing support to all of those affected by exposure at the Fiskville site.

The announcement follows years of work from VFBV since the issue was first raised in the media in December 2011. VFBV has consistently called for urgent remedial action at the site, independent, expert monitoring, ongoing support for everyone affected, and the urgent replacement of Fiskville's lost training capacity.

The closure of the site came in 2015 after the surprising discovery that water quality problems were persisting in spite of the reassurances of WorkSafe, the EPA, technical experts and CFA.

The State Government's response to the Inquiry is not the end of the issue, but a cue for action to resolve the problems left in Fiskville's wake.

10,000 SCANNERS

The Digital Scanner subsidy program advocated by VFBV and run in partnership with CFA is an overwhelming success, with 10,478 digital scanners delivered to Brigades and Groups so far.

The savings to members represent over \$3 million.

More than 970 Brigades and 80 Groups have received their Tier 1 & 2 orders, and CFA is still accepting Tier 3 orders, from Brigades, Groups and individual members.

Tier 3 units are available at cost price, which has been significantly reduced due to the bulk orders placed during the subsidy program. Members can order units for \$446.75 plus postage and handling, while stocks last.

For an order form, visit www.vfbv.com.au

Fundraising important

VFBV's work to defend the volunteer based and fully integrated CFA continues, and VFBV is still actively fundraising.

The new Federal Legislation has changed the legal ground rules to protect fire and emergency service volunteers from industrial interference, but it must be supported in the Fair Work Commission and possibly Federal courts, so we still look to the public for their support.

The public, corporate donors, community organisations and volunteers can donate to the VFBV Valuing Volunteers Fund, BSB 633 000, Account number 157 728 221, send a cheque to the Valuing Volunteers Fund, PO Box 453, Mt Waverley 3149, or make a donation by visiting www.mycase.com.au/cfa

Note that VFBV is a non-party political organisation: it does not accept donations from political parties.

REVIEW EXTENDED

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) Review into CFA and MFB has been extended to 18 December 2016, looking into workplace culture, and discrimination (including bullying) and sexual harassment.

VFBV has been assisting the Review, supporting members taking part, and facilitating VEOHRC's attendance at State and District Council meetings.

You can take the survey confidentially and anonymously at www.victorianhumanrightscommission.com/EDR/ request a paper copy or a confidential interview on (03) 9032 3464 or email independentreview@veohrc.vic.gov.au The Review will report in mid-2017.

VALE BARRY PYKE

We were sad to learn of the recent passing of former VRFBA District 12 State Councillor and VFBV Life Member Barry Pyke.

Barry was a 50 year CFA volunteer and a long time member of the Whanregarwen Fire Brigade. He served volunteers and the community for many years, and was an active participant in the creation of a single association in District 12 as part of the move towards the creation of VFBV.

Our sympathy goes out to Barry's family, friends and fellow volunteers.

CANCER LAW

In the last edition of FireWise, we urged volunteers to remind their local Members of Parliament of the commitment the Government made to Victorian volunteers and paid firefighters two years ago.

Sadly, nothing has happened since then, Parliament has closed until February 2017, and this important issue for all firefighters remains unresolved.

Labor's commitment just before it took power in 2014, said "Victorian legislation for career and volunteer firefighters will reflect the cancers covered and timeframes for duty of service as in the Tasmanian legislation." Importantly, this promise explicitly contained no reference to unequal treatment or extra eligibility requirements for volunteers. The Government has since hinted at imposing a discriminatory extra requirement for volunteers to prove an arbitrary number of turnouts before they become eligible for compensation and VFBV will be extremely disappointed if this eventuates.

Your local MPs need to know volunteers won't accept second best just because they are not paid. For information, type Cancer Law into the search box at www.vfbv.com.au

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