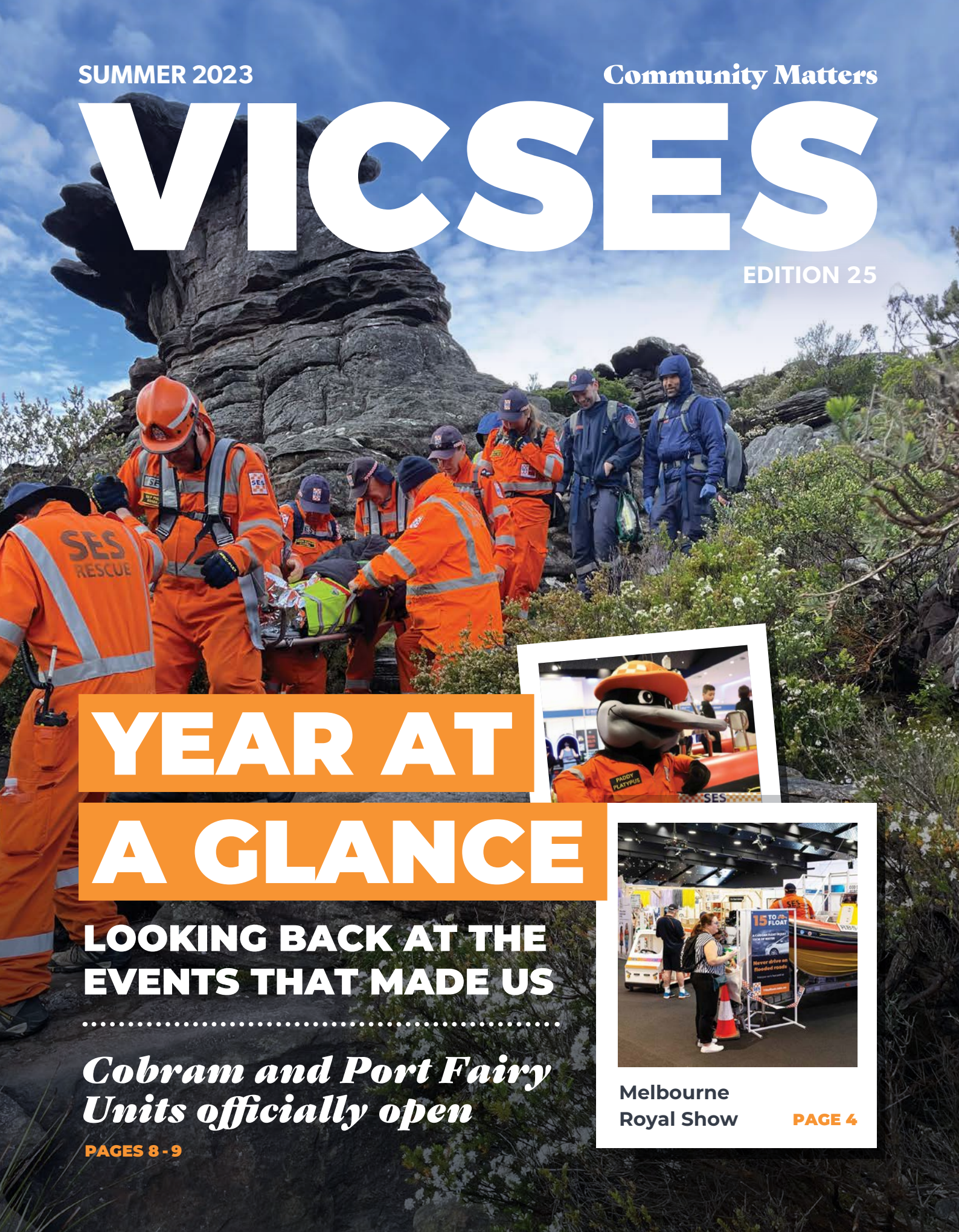


SUMMER 2023

Community Matters

VICSES

EDITION 25



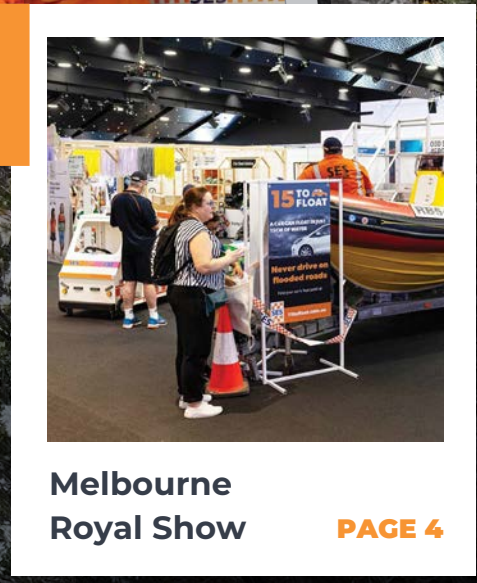
YEAR AT A GLANCE

LOOKING BACK AT THE
EVENTS THAT MADE US

.....

*Cobram and Port Fairy
Units officially open*

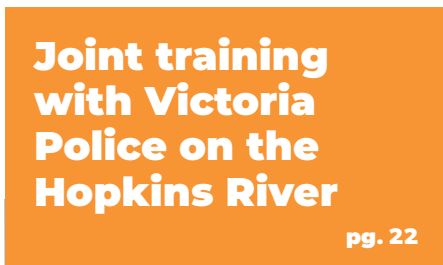
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Melbourne
Royal Show **PAGE 4**

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Front Cover:
Members from the VICSES Stawell and Ararat Units carry an injured hiker on a stretcher in the Grampians.



Interested in contributing?

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



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

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Welcome to the final edition of *Community Matters* for 2023.

As we come to the end of another year, I would like to take the opportunity to reflect on the incredible achievements of VICSES volunteers across Victoria. The past 12 months has seen the response to widespread flooding, interstate deployments, milestone unit openings, and much more. VICSES volunteers have responded to more than 18,000 calls for assistance since January 2023, including more than 8,100 for trees down and 2,900 for building damage. The sacrifices you and your families continue to make to support your communities is inspirational, and I am immensely proud to represent you all.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Rick Nugent APM, the new Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner. Rick started in September 2023 and is a highly skilled emergency management leader, with a distinguished 35-year career with Victoria Police. I am looking forward to working closely with Rick to ensure we are supporting VICSES volunteers across the state.

I'd also like to welcome VICSES' new CEO, Greg Leach AFSM. Greg brings considerable emergency management expertise to the



role, including his time serving as Queensland's Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner. I look forward to working with Greg, and I sincerely thank Stephen Griffin for his outstanding leadership and hard work over the last decade.

I was delighted to take part in the official opening of the VICSES Cobram Unit and was represented at the Port Fairy Unit opening by the Member for Western Victoria, Jacinta Ermacora MP. The delivery of two new state-of-the-art facilities is a huge boost to our regions and we're proud to be supporting our volunteers to carry out their pivotal role in keeping the community safe.

I also had the pleasure of visiting the VICSES interactive display during the 2023 Melbourne Royal Show. It was brilliant to see such a strong demonstration of community engagement to ensure our communities are prepared for emergencies. Congratulations on winning silver for best indoor exhibitor - a well-deserved accomplishment.

We know the summer season ahead presents many challenges for our community. Your dedication to keep the community safe, while also trying to spend time with loved ones, does not go unnoticed. Once again, I would like to thank you all for your incredible service throughout such a busy year. I hope that you stay safe and have many opportunities to spend time with family and friends this holiday season.

Jaclyn Symes MP
Minister for
Emergency Services



Welcome

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

As 2023 draws to a close, I'd like to acknowledge the incredible efforts of our volunteers. From January 2023, our volunteers have responded to over 18,000 requests for assistance - a remarkable effort, and a testament to your dedication to the service and helping others in times of need. Thank you.

I am pleased to welcome Mr. Greg Leach AFSM who will be joining VICSES as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), commencing on 4 December 2023. Greg is highly experienced in emergency management, having worked across the sector for over 30 years including in his most recent role as the Commissioner of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES). Greg has a deep respect for volunteers and is looking forward to joining VICSES and working with all members, to ensure we are a progressive and agile leader in emergency preparedness and response into the future. I wish him all the very best as CEO and look forward to watching VICSES continue to grow.

In early October parts of Victoria experienced heavy rainfall and flooding, with our busiest units including Emerald, Frankston and Lilydale. Thank you to all our members who supported this event on the ground and in incident, regional, and state control centres to ensure our

communities were prepared and stayed safe. You can read about the recent flooding in Wangaratta on page 13.

This past year has seen a number of unit opening celebrations, including most recently for the VICSES Cobram and Port Fairy Units. I was pleased to be able to attend the Cobram Unit opening event and be shown through the fantastic new facility, which will ensure our service delivery now and into the future. You can read more about the Cobram and Port Fairy Unit openings on pages 8-9.

As my final CEO message, I am extremely proud to have served as part of VICSES for the past 10 years, and thank you all for your support along the way. I have seen our members respond during some of our states most significant emergency events, and am in awe of your resilience and unwavering dedication. I will always look back on my time at VICSES with pride, respect, and admiration for your contributions to our sector and the wider community.

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

Kind regards,

Stephen Griffin
CEO Victoria State
Emergency Service

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FEATURE



VICSES wins silver at the Melbourne Royal Show!

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

When September school holidays roll around, that usually means one thing... the Melbourne Royal Show. And this year was one for the ages!

The Melbourne Royal Show opened its gates for 2023, celebrating 175 years since the first ever agricultural show was held in 1848. 11 epic days of fun, smiles, and excitement in a family-filled environment.

Each year, VICSES joins the festivities with an interactive stall, smiling cheek-to-cheek and engaging with the community. The Port Phillip Unit's search and rescue boat was a hit this year, providing children with an opportunity to sit behind the steering wheel while their parents snapped a selfie capturing a moment of pure joy. A staple at the show was the kids' rescue truck, proving to be a crowd favourite yet again.

Importantly, the stall allowed for our volunteers to directly engage with community members, sparking conversations about flood and storm preparedness and response. It also gave volunteers the opportunity to informally educate the community about VICSES and how we help during an emergency event.

Of course, the icing on the cake was a silver award for best indoor exhibitor! A special thank you to our volunteers for making this year's show so memorable. Looking forward to doing it all again in 2024. ■



Minister for Emergency Services
The Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP visiting the VICSES stall





2022 - 2023

Year at a glance

By Krystal Buckle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

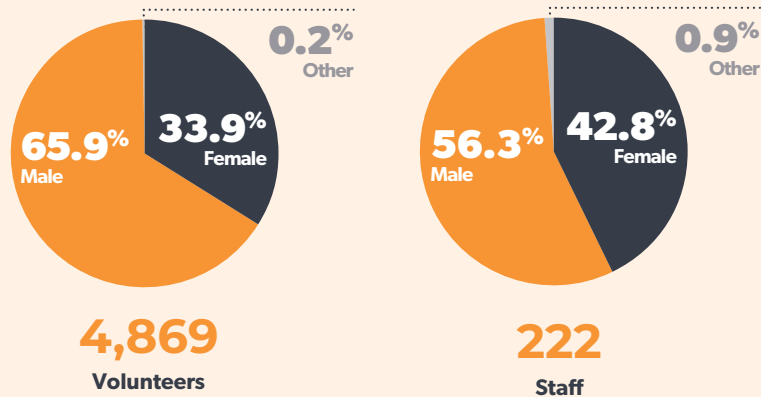
2022-23 marked another extremely busy financial year for our members, seeing some of our states most significant emergency events.

On the back of the 2022 Victorian Floods, flood incidents increased by 130% compared to 2021-22. Our volunteers and staff have contributed

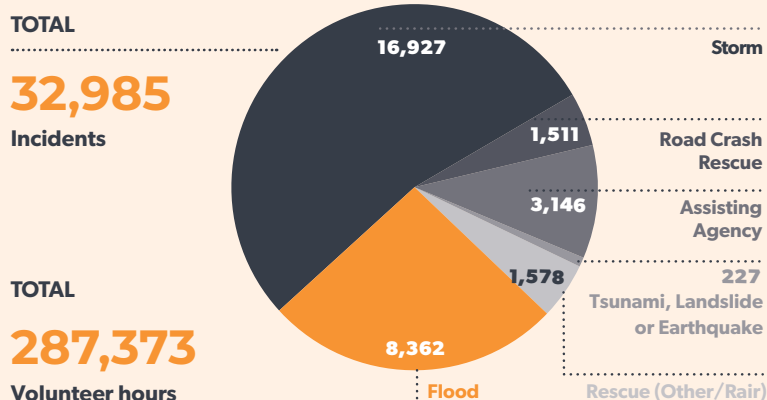
extensive hours in support of Victorian communities throughout the year, as well as communities interstate. Here's a wrap-up of the 2022-2023 year at a glance! ■

150 Units
104 Road crash rescue accredited units
15 Permanently staffed offices

OUR PEOPLE



THE 2022-23 FINANCIAL YEAR



Snapshot: Operations of significance

JULY 2022

New South Wales (NSW) Deployments

NSW experienced significant rainfall in July, VICSES deployed 72 members to support.

AUGUST 2022

Severe Weather

A strong cold front moved over eastern Victoria, VICSES received approximately 500 requests for assistance.

OCTOBER 2022 - JANUARY 2023

Victorian Statewide Flooding Event

In October 2022, a low-pressure system travelled east over Australia, bringing heavy rainfall and storms. Over 1.3 million sandbags were laid, 372 emergency warnings issued and 147 VICSES units deployed.

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2023

Western Australia Deployments

Western Australia experienced significant flooding, 18 VICSES volunteers and staff provided Incident Management resources.

MAY 2023

Bus Accident Eynesbury

A truck collided with a bus carrying 45 children in Eynesbury. Two regional command staff members were deployed and 20 volunteers in total.

Earthquake

A 4.0 magnitude earthquake struck 3km deep in the north-western suburb of Sunbury. There were 27,124 felt reports.



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GENERAL NEWS



Volunteer Neil Para walks 1000km for a fair go



By Krystal Buckle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

Fleeing war and persecution in Sri Lanka, Neil Para, his two young daughters, and his pregnant wife made the perilous boat journey to Australia in 2012.



Eventually settling in Ballarat, their bridging visas were revoked after four months - leaving them in limbo. With no right to work, no Medicare, and no study rights, it was the Ballarat community who rallied around the family and paid their bills and rent.

In February 2016 Neil joined VICSES, with very limited English skills and a determination to learn. "It was really hard for me to understand at the beginning but with the support of unit members and trainers, I got through my training" he said.

"Now I'm a Crew Leader! It's a big milestone for me and I'm very proud."

In August, Neil embarked on a 40-day, 1,000km walk from Ballarat to the Prime Minister's office in

Sydney to deliver a petition and raise awareness of the 10,000 asylum seekers currently living in uncertainty in Australia. On day 15, VICSES Wodonga Unit even provided an escort into Wodonga!

As Neil arrived in Sydney, his family were granted permanent visas. He credits VICSES Ballarat Unit members with helping him to become part of the community and get through what was an incredibly difficult time. "I never knew about VICSES before I started, but until I die, I'll be at Ballarat Unit" he said.



My blood is orange." ■

A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMISSIONER



In July, Rick Nugent was appointed as Victoria's new Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC). Below, Rick pens a message for our members ahead of another potentially busy summer season.

It's been great catching up and meeting many of you during my first month as Emergency Management Commissioner, as I gain a deeper understanding of all the work that goes on in the sector.

As we approach the highest-risk weather season, we have already seen concurrent and converging emergencies – including floods and fires. Your dedication to keeping the community safe is clear and I'd like to thank you for your ongoing support and commitment - whether that's conducting rescues or assisting with evacuations – alongside all uniforms that make up our big emergency management team in Victoria.

Even as the risk of flooding reduces over the coming months, and the Australian Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for spring indicated a higher potential for fires in some parts of the state, storms will remain a risk over the coming months.

You do this so well already, but it's important to keep supporting and educating your communities on how they can best prepare for

the highest-risk weather period. Community is at the core of what we do in emergency management, and that has been a theme and priority throughout my career.

Having worked closely with Victorian communities in regional areas for many years, I know just how important our SES volunteers are. Volunteers are at the heart of our communities and each and every day you're out keeping people safe. In my role, I have a legislative responsibility in relation to supporting volunteers and I take that very seriously. Thank you for what you do to keep your community safe.

Remember to take the time to look after yourselves too, and ensure you are well-rested by doing activities you enjoy. Personally, I enjoy running and cycling, and travelling around this great state and country with my four-wheel drive and a swag, enjoying everything the bush has to offer.

Thank you to all VICSES members for welcoming me into this role, and I look forward to meeting and working with you over the coming weeks, months, and years.

Take care,
Rick. ■

YOUR SHOT:

**Tegan Raeburn,
VICSES Stawell Unit**

**Who doesn't love a furry friend
you can share your lunch with?!**

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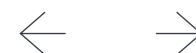
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CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS



Open for business! VICSES Cobram Unit official opening

By Luke Herezo, VICSES Cobram Deputy Controller, Eastern Region

Did you know that until recently, VICSES Cobram Unit was the only VICSES unit located in New South Wales? Since 1975, operating out of Tocumwal across the border served the unit and community well.



Fast forward to today, due to population growth and a number of emergency events that threatened to separate the unit from the township (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), it was decided VICSES Cobram Unit needed a new location and home in the township itself. To cover the needs of members until

construction was completed, equipment was stored at members' houses and in rented storage sheds.

Minister for Emergency Services and Member for Northern Victoria Jaclyn Symes MP attended the official opening, alongside VICSES CEO Stephen Griffin, Unit Controller Wendy Tucknott, in addition to unit and local

community members to unveil the plaque.

Words can't describe how thrilled our members are. The high tech, modern facility will allow us to expand our membership base and operational capabilities, helping our members to serve the great Cobram community the way it should - now, and into the future. ■





Severe weather opens Port Fairy Unit early

By Max Kelly, Port Fairy Unit Deputy Controller Operations, Western Region

VICSES Port Fairy Unit was very proud to announce the official opening of our new facility on 10 October 2023. Having left our former base in 2021, we were temporarily using the Country Fire Authority (CFA) Koroit and Toolong stations to house our operational equipment and fleet of vehicles.

The move to our new state-of-the-art facility is a huge boost to the unit and our members.

Maybe lesser known is the story of our unofficial opening! Wild weather swept across the south-west of Victoria on the morning of 8 September. Port Fairy Unit was in the process of handing over the Unit Controller position from Stephen McDowell to Hannah Morris, and enthusiastically preparing to move

into the new facility which was to become officially operational on Monday 12 September. The weather, however, had other ideas!

With 24 requests for assistance received by 8:00am, it became apparent that this was going to be a big day. Although the new building was not yet operational, it did have a fully functional communications room. The decision was made to coordinate the weather event from there. Our

first challenge was a complete lack of material (beyond the computers and building itself)! Our CFA colleagues came to the rescue with paper and pens, and we quickly worked out how to operate lights, the new kitchen, and even the computers. By 9:00am we were fully up and running.

We managed 65 requests for assistance over the course of the day, including substantial storm damage, trees down and

many trampoline frisbees (who doesn't love those!). Crews were delighted to have a dry, warm, comfortable space to be fed and watered between jobs.

After the last jobs were cleared and a hot cuppa was made by 8:00pm, we toasted to a rather dramatic, unofficial building launch and the bright future of the Port Fairy Unit. The new facility was then officially opened on Saturday 10 October. ■

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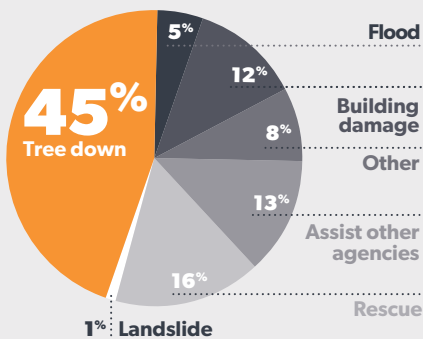


2,432

Volunteers

2,395

Requests for assistance



Chiltern Unit domestic rescue tools training

By Helen Eames, VICSES Chiltern Unit Controller, Eastern Region

A couple of times each year, Chiltern Unit organises training nights for our domestic rescue tools. The purpose of these tools is for things like cutting rings off hands, kids getting their fingers stuck in drains, and any body part that is stuck in very tight spots.

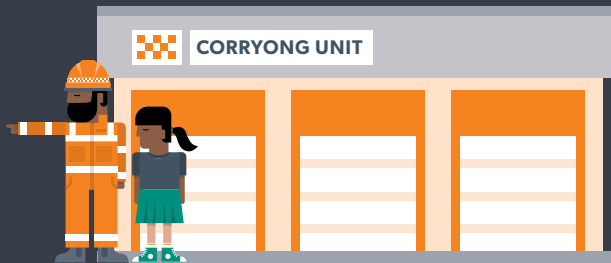
We practice with rings on members' fingers (no personal rings were harmed in this!) using dental floss or string, the manual ring cutter, and the powered ring cutter. We use a variety of things like drains, mesh, and rings to make sure everyone gets a go and is comfortable with using the provided tools.

These nights are very important to our members as they can assist other emergency services and community members in some very upsetting situations.

It's also a good way to ensure that all the equipment is in perfect working order. ■



A bright future ahead for Corryong Unit



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By Tarryn Firman, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

A picturesque town located in the foothills of the Australian Alps, Corryong is a small agricultural community with a rich rural heritage. With approximately 1,300 tight-knit residents, the town's SES membership began to decline from the effects of the 2019-20 bushfires and COVID-19 isolation.

Following the resignation of the long serving VICSES Corryong Unit Controller and Deputy Controller, the future of the unit became uncertain, and plans were put in place to review response sustainability into the future.

The recruitment drive was initially scheduled just for the month of May, with a series of intensive recruitment activities. This included unit members and regional staff attending the local farmers market, hosting the local trivia night (which booked out), several static displays outside the local IGA and visiting businesses in town, all in hopes of getting locals to attend a unit open night. The Corryong Courier supported with several front-page articles, and Sandra Moon from ABC Goulburn Murray with a radio interview.

After all these efforts to engage and inspire the local community, not a single new member walked through the door during our open night. The Unit Support Team and Corryong members were extremely deflated, but we were not deterred! Still concerned for the community and the future of the service, plan B – a community meeting, was activated.

With the support of other Corryong Emergency Service representatives, the community meeting explored what the absence of an SES response

would mean for the community and to the other response agencies. After some great discussion and exploration, to our absolute delight, 21 membership applications were received.

We are overjoyed to see the VICSES Corryong Unit go from strength to strength and continue serving their community in times of need. Residents of the Upper Murray have really shown their resilience and spirit during this time, their commitment to ensuring their friends, family and neighbours remain safe with local response is a testament to their strength and will be vital to their often-isolated community. ■



EASTERN REGION



Latrobe City Children's Expo

By Ola Salako, Community Resilience
Coordinator, Eastern Region

In October, VICSES Gippsland Regional Unit and other emergency services participated in the Latrobe City Council's National Children's Day event, the Latrobe City Children's Expo 2023.



This free and fun not-for-profit event is popular among families in the Latrobe City Council area, providing an opportunity for thousands of people to learn about local services for children and families.

During the event, emergency services were able to connect and discuss how they support their communities. VICSES members were present to talk about their role during emergencies and engage families in conversations about emergency preparedness.

They discussed what emergency preparedness looks like in their community and shared information about past emergency events in the region.

Volunteers also shared information about flood preparedness, local flood guides, sandbagging procedures, and the VicEmergency app. Overall, the event was a great opportunity to enhance resilience and engage with the community members. We are looking forward to attending this event again next year. ■



Yogi's Angels

By Jessica Zuber, VICSES Wangaratta Unit Controller, Eastern Region



A severe weather warning was issued on 2 October 2023 for damaging winds and heavy rainfall for most of north-east Victoria.

This event saw significant rainfall totalling over 200mm in the high-country flow down and impact the Wangaratta community, with Ovens and King Rivers predicted to reach major flooding. A proactive approach by Hume Region staff was taken and a call was put out across the state for volunteers to assist.

Thankfully, only moderate flooding occurred, with the Ovens River peaking at 12.62m which saw water up to Yogi's eyes. During this event, the Wangaratta Unit received 16 requests for assistance for trees down and building damage.

For those unfamiliar with the Wangaratta area, Yogi is our official flood gauge located on the banks

of the Ovens River in Apex Park. Community and VICSES continually monitor water levels surrounding Yogi to assess flooding situations, and the Bureau of Meteorology use him in official warnings! Our local unit even have t-shirts promoting us as 'Yogi's Heros'.

We were grateful for the support of other volunteers across the state from VICSES Ballarat, Bannockburn, Chiltern, Fawkner, Mansfield, Myrtleford, Numurkah, Rutherglen, South Barwon and Whittlesea Units as well as Shepparton Search and Rescue, who came and helped local volunteers with anticipated impacts.

Yogi was in safe hands, and we appreciate the support other units contributed. ■

Eastern Metro Units join forces for Eastlink search

By Daniel Cooksley, VICSES Greater Dandenong Unit Deputy Controller - Operations, Eastern Region

Towards the end of October, crews from VICSES Chelsea, Greater Dandenong, Glen Eira, Monash and Whitehorse Units assisted Victoria Police with a cold case search along the side of the Eastlink freeway at Rowville.

A great turnout and effort from all members who came down to help! ■



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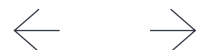
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Monash medical students visit Bairnsdale Unit

By Bob Carter, VICSES Bairnsdale Unit Deputy Controller Community Engagement, Eastern Region

In September, 20 second-year Monash University medical students based at the Bairnsdale and Sale Monash Rural Health campuses visited VICSES Bairnsdale Unit and Ambulance Victoria.

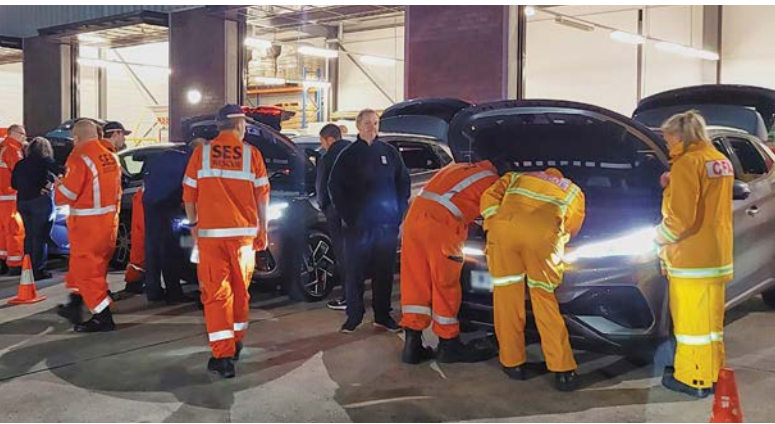
The session was designed to expose students to the challenges of operating in remote and rural areas, and to encourage the students to consider working in these communities.

VICSES Bairnsdale Deputy Controller, Frank Carter is honoured that the unit has been a part of the program for the last few years and believes it is important that medical students have knowledge of the realities of remote rescue, including the experience of the person being rescued. "It has to be in everyone's interest," said Frank.

Bairnsdale Unit values the ability to work alongside local Ambulance Victoria paramedics and specialised wilderness paramedics, while appreciating the trusted opportunity provided to the unit from Monash University. The program

is set to continue with annual visits from Monash medical students, and will continue to develop and share the knowledge, training, and work of our regional and rural volunteers. ■





Electric vehicle training night at Pakenham Unit

By Steve Monro, VICSES Pakenham Unit IT and Communications Officer, Eastern Region

The Melbourne Electric Vehicle (EV) Show was held in September - one of the largest consumer EV shows in the southern hemisphere.

On the Sunday morning of the expo before doors opened to the public, various industry specialists were treated with a special tour around the exhibits by Emma and Dan from EVFireSafe. It was decided at a local level that we should do some specific EV training due to our high number of road crash rescue events annually.

After a few phone calls to local units, it was deemed that this topic was of great interest to rescue units around. The evening was a huge success with people coming from across the region to expand their EV knowledge and learn best practices when

encountering them during emergency events, such as fires and vehicle incidents.

Attendees learnt about battery construction, scene and vehicle approach, specific safety practices, battery thermal runaway, the disabling of high and low voltage systems, as well as many of the 'no-cut zones' which are more specific to EVs rather than regular internal combustion engines.

Some of the essential things that rescuers were taught to look out for specifically with EVs was the identification of EVs, some of the many types of high voltage battery immobilizers such as pull fuses,

cut loops and manual service disconnects, and the different non-standard locations that manufacturers place them.

Rescuers were encouraged to use the Moditech Crash Recovery System (CRS) and the ANCAP apps as part of their rescue plans to help identify EV components and no-go zones.

The evening hosted a multitude of EVs including BYD, Hyundai, Kia, MG, Polestar, and Tesla. Rod from PT Rescue also came down to showcase the latest in state-of-the-art extrication equipment including some newly introduced resources specific to EVs.

Our surrounding neighbours who attended included VICSES Emerald and Frankston Units, FRV Pakenham Station 93, Langwarrin CFA, Loch CFA, and Nar Nar Goon CFA. It was a great night with VICSES members, fire services, rescuers, and EV car owners all going away having learnt a great deal. ■

Patient transport along the George Bass Coastal Walk

By David Murphy, Media Advisor, VHO

In October, VICSES San Remo and Wonthaggi Unit members responded to a request for assistance from Ambulance Victoria on the George Bass Coastal Walk. Located between Kilcunda and San Remo, paramedics required an all-terrain carrier or 'mule' to assist them with transporting the patient.

The walk winds for seven kilometers along the coast, with the unsealed path often slippery and uneven. Great work to all involved! ■



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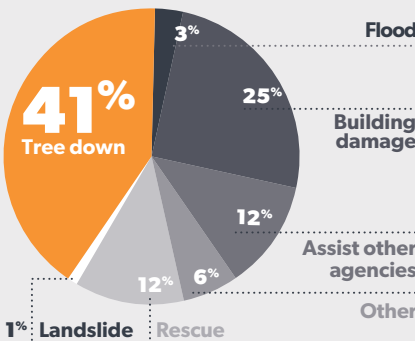


2,389

Volunteers

2,511

Requests for assistance



VICSES Swan Hill Unit a 'second family' for refugee Rohullah Hussaini

By Krystal Buckle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

Rohullah Hussaini speaks five languages and takes pride in being a liaison between emergency services and Hazara refugees in his hometown of Swan Hill, as a member of the VICSES Swan Hill Unit.

Rohullah fled Afghanistan and reached Australia by boat in 2012, spending time in detention in Darwin and Perth, before moving to Swan Hill in 2013.

He has been a member of the VICSES Swan Hill Unit since 2016, a town home to migrant communities from Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. When floods devastated the region last year, Rohullah worked through Christmas and the New Year to provide flood assistance and information to the local refugee community. "This is a second family" he told SBS News in a recent interview.

"With this limbo life I've been through for 11 years, waiting to get a permanent visa, if I didn't have the SES around me, I might not be here right now."

VICSES Swan Hill Unit Controller Damian Howison remembers the first night Rohullah showed up to volunteer. "He introduced himself and said he was keen to be involved" Damian said.

"I think everyone took a liking to him. He had that larrikinism about him, that sense of humour that everybody enjoyed, so yeah, he fit right into our unit."

While Rohullah has been granted a permanent visa, he continues to wait for a visa allowing his wife and daughter to join him.



More information



Check out Rohullah's full story, which was published on SBS News, via the QR code. ■



Plane crash in Connewarre

By Alex Suwitra, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

With clear blue skies, it should have been a perfect day for a skydive. However, just after 8:00am on 20 October, VICSES South Barwon Unit responded to reports of an aircraft accident in Barwon Heads.



What was initially reported as an aircraft running off the runway, was quickly revised to an aircraft crash on the edge of Lake Connewarre near Leopold, with 17 people on board.

South Barwon Unit, along with regional staff were deployed. Recognising there may be access issues, the unit sent a 4x4 twin cab ute in addition to their rescue appliance,

with additional 4x4 capacity provided by responding staff.

Using vehicles and a mule, volunteers assisted paramedics with patient care and transportation to awaiting air ambulance helicopters and an ambulance staging area. VICSES crews also assisted police in managing the scene.

"This incident demonstrated the close working relationship VICSES has with our partner agencies in what was a significant multi-agency

response," said VICSES Regional Agency Commander Chris Longmore.

"Early calls on resource needs and a strong focus by crews on patient care resulted in innovative solutions to ensure a timely transfer to hospital. It is a credit to everyone involved and really reinforces the 'We Work As One' mantra."

A fantastic effort by everyone involved in responding to this event. ■

Vale Peter Tew

VICSES Hamilton Unit are saddened at the loss of long serving member Peter Tew, or 'Tewy' as everyone knew him. Peter was a founding member of the unit and dedicated 54 years to serving his community. He will be sadly missed, but fondly remembered by many past and present members of the Hamilton Unit.



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WESTERN REGION

Gloomy weather on the Pinnacle Track



By Jenny Rooke, VICSES Stawell Unit Duty Officer, Western Region

On a wet and windy day in the middle of October, VICSES Stawell and Ararat Units were called to assist Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police in an incident on the iconic Pinnacle Track in the Grampians.

It took crews 45-minutes to reach the injured hiker, Fiona, who had broken her ankle in three places. Due to weather conditions, the helicopter couldn't fly in, and we were faced with a slow and tricky one-and-a-half-hour carry-

out back to the 4WD track and waiting ambulance.

Fortunately, Fiona is recovering well and called Stawell Unit to pass on her thanks along with a generous donation. Check out the lovely comment she left on our Facebook page! ■

f **Fiona**

It takes a special kind of person to put themselves at risk to help someone else. That's exactly what you guys & girls did for me on Sunday. I know it was no easy feat to assemble a team to safely effect my rescue and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. It was great to see your teamwork and the obvious concern you had for each other during this precarious operation. I was left with no doubt that Stawell and Ararat have an amazing, strong community spirit which is really the backbone of our country. Thank you so much & thank you Leigh for regularly checking in with me. ♥

Heart 2 Heart Walk



By Jamie Macri, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

The Heart 2 Heart Walk is a long distance walk to raise awareness around First Responder mental health and wellbeing, including suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, and premature mortality.

Beginning in July 2023 from the border between the Northern Territory and South Australia (Heart of Country), and ending in September at Parliament House in Canberra (Heart of Nation), the walk was supported by current and former first responders in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Northern Territory and Victoria.

Throughout the journey, walkers participated in gatherings in towns along the route. They engaged with current and former first responders and their families, including with VICSES Mildura, Swan Hill and Kerang Unit members.

This is a fantastic initiative and achievement for mental health and wellbeing. More than just a walk, there will always be a need to ensure we provide better support for all Australian first responders. ■



Robinvale Lantern Festival

By Jamie Macri, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

Hundreds of lanterns hung in the main street for the 2023 Robinvale Euston Lantern Festival in September!

Lit up at night, the lanterns created a wonderful atmosphere alongside a variety of exotic food stalls with delicious wafting smells. Robinvale districts' rich cultural diversity was on full display amid music and cultural performances, all adding to the celebratory nature of the community.

VICSES Robinvale Unit had their truck on display and provided a road crash rescue demonstration for attendees. Many young families were keeping Paddy the Platypus busy with selfies - he was a huge hit with the crowd! ■

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Dartmoor Unit spotlight



By Mary Spencer, VICSES Dartmoor Unit member, Western Region

The small township of Dartmoor is situated on the Glenelg River, incorporating the lower Glenelg National Park and the Limestone Coast.

The main industry in the area is the growing, harvesting, milling and transportation of softwood pine trees. Dartmoor is the last town on the busy Princes Highway before the South Australian border.

Twice a month unit members meet to train, focusing mainly on road crash rescue, flood rescue and land search. We are a diverse group of people ranging from farmers, bakers, electricians, car salesmen, aged carers, shop assistants and a couple of valued retired members.

This small diverse group of around 10 people come together with a common goal to rescue and help. We are all trusting and comfortable in one another's company and capabilities as a team. The camaraderie within the team is unique. Maybe it's due to the small number of members, but there is no competition with vying for recognition or status within the group, which produces positive outcomes. Any concerns big or small can be discussed so no one is left feeling isolated or impacted by the jobs we do.



We are always looking for new members to bring their unique abilities and be part of this successful unit.



If you'd like to join, get in contact through the QR code. ■



VICSES Hobsons Bay Unit turns 40



By David Murphy, Media Advisor, VHO

An anniversary celebration was held on 21 October for the VICSES Hobsons Bay Unit to celebrate 40 years of continuous operation.

To mark the occasion, the unit held a dinner and awards ceremony with a number of unit members receiving citations for their service.

Among the invited guests was the Deputy Chief Officer for Western Region, Simon White, past and present members of the unit, as well as representatives from VICSES Fawkner, Footscray, Melton and Wyndham Units.

Also in attendance were Bendigo Bank staff, who have generously supported the unit through a grants scheme and regular donations amounting to \$10,594 over the past year.

Among the members honoured were Long Service Award recipients:

10 YEARS OF SERVICE

Kane Ivory
Luke Monahan

15 YEARS OF SERVICE

David Brae

35 YEARS OF SERVICE

Alfred Pelns
Peter Tester

40 YEARS OF SERVICE

Craig McCallum
Leigh Hardinge
(as founding members)

NATIONAL MEDAL

David Brae

UNIT LIFE MEMBERSHIP AWARD

Alfred Pelns
Craig MacCallum
Leigh Hardinge
Merridee Hardinge
Peter Tester

Congratulations to our wonderful VICSES Hobsons Bay Unit members for all of their accomplishments. ■



Shanleigh joins the 2023 Victorian Women's Honor Roll

By Ross Evans, VICSES Gisborne Unit Controller, Western Region

On 11 October, VICSES Gisborne Unit member Shanleigh Meldrum was inducted into the 2023 Victorian Women's Honour Roll.

A member of VICSES Gisborne Unit since 2017, Shanleigh has been involved in community engagement, media, event planning and social media management – as well as being an active member and undertaking a wide variety of training. She also introduced unit members to Auslan, helping the unit to operate in emergency situations with the deaf and hard of hearing community. The program helped members recognise and communicate with casualties to reduce stress in emergency situations through clear communication and understanding.

Shanleigh's contributions to the unit have been a positive experience in challenging how we treat people with disabilities, especially hearing loss or hearing difficulties in general.

She also works with young deaf and hard of hearing communities in regional areas and has established youth programs across regional Victoria, as part of Deaf Hub Bendigo, in Gisborne, Echuca, Shepparton and Bendigo.

Congratulations Shanleigh! ■

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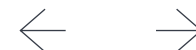
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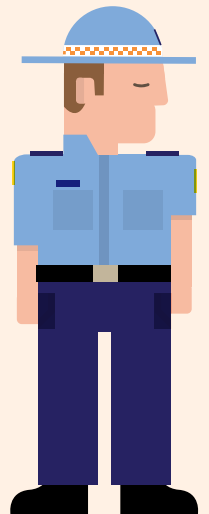


Joint training with Victoria Police on the Hopkins River

By Jackson Bell, Assistant Chief Officer Regional Learning and Development, Western Region



In late August, members from the VICSES Camperdown, Port Fairy and Warrnambool Units participated in a training exercise on the Hopkins River with Victoria Police.



South Barwon Unit 'show and tell' for ESTA staff

By Erin Mason, Operations Officer – Operational Communications Projects, VHO

In October, the VICSES Operational Communications team took members from the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) Enhancements Project team to VICSES South Barwon Unit for a show and tell!

We are currently working with our ESTA partners on improvements in the ESTA dispatch environment, and were keen to provide their members with insight into our operations and the roles of our volunteers.

VICSES South Barwon Unit kindly said yes to our request to visit them, taking time out of their day to show everyone around the unit and its resources, including a walk-through of various pieces of equipment used in road crash rescue, land-based swift water rescue, and general storm and flood events. It is important that ESTA personnel can understand the viewpoint of our

volunteers when responding to events, to best support our community.

A huge thank you to unit members Lisa Keys, Andy Walters, Tim Hutton, and Anne Moreillon for answering all the questions posed to them and helping us further educate our ESTA partners on the important role of VICSES. ■



The exercise consisted of a scenario involving two missing kayakers over several hours, with the Forward Operations Vehicle used as a base by volunteer members to establish an incident management structure.

On the night, volunteer members had the opportunity to perform multiple functions including land search, lighting, incident management roles, rescue boat crewperson, and coxswain.

The Warrnambool Standard was also invited, providing an opportunity to demonstrate the strong working relationship between volunteer units and Victoria Police.

The same exercise was replicated in late-September with members from VICSES Bacchus Marsh, Ballarat, Footscray, Hobsons Bay, Whittlesea, and Wyndham Units. The exercise has now seen over 60 members participate from across the western region. Thank you all for being involved! ■

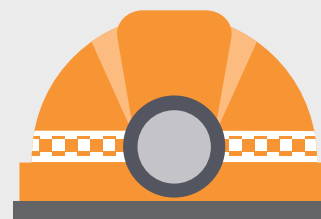


REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

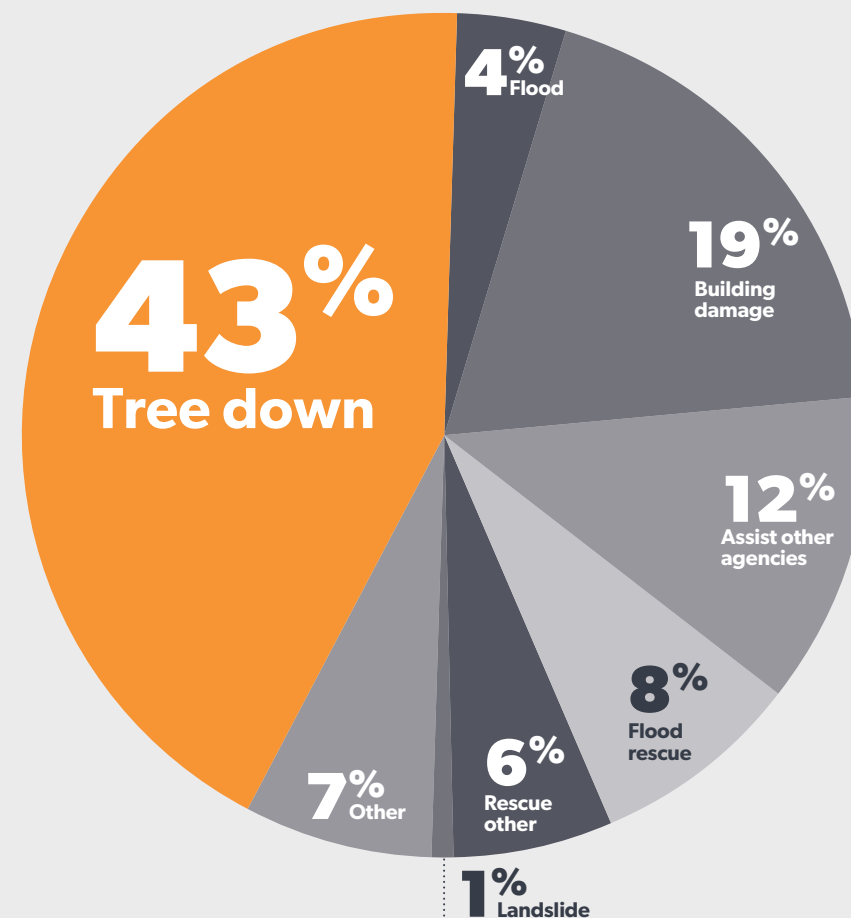
1 July – 30 September 2023

Total

4,910



Breakdown



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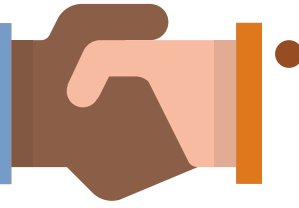
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PROJECTS – WHAT'S NEW



Launch of the Volunteer Leadership Program

By Keni Ramsay-Samrai, Organisational Development Coordinator, VHO

The rumblings are true! The People, Culture and Development (PCD) team are excited to announce that the Volunteer Leadership Development Program is ready to roll out.

In response to requests for more leadership training from our volunteer leaders, the PCD team consulted with volunteers in 2022 to identify the key knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be a successful volunteer leader.

Excitingly, in December 2022 we piloted the first version of the Volunteer Leadership Development Program with 17 leaders from 16 different units across the state. Thanks to the feedback from those leaders, a second updated program was piloted in July and August 2023 with the Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Hastings, Monash, Moorabbin, Narre Warren and Port Phillip Units. Both pilots received highly positive feedback, with 100% of leaders agreeing

that the materials were useful and that they will apply the knowledge gained in the future.

Fast forward to today, we have finalised a tailored and unique program suited for our volunteer leaders that is based around the framework of 'Leading Self, Leading Others, and Leading Teams'. This two-day program with a half-day

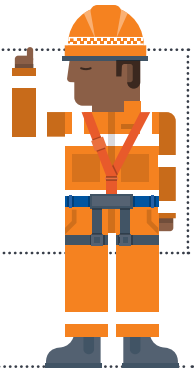
follow-up group coaching session is designed to cultivate the development of flexible and emotionally intelligent leaders, who can support and promote the wellbeing of their unit members.

As part of the program, participants engage in activities, learn leadership theory and effective communication frameworks, construct targeted action plans, and take practical skills back to their units and members. Topics include building self-awareness, succession planning, the power of language, supporting member welfare and performance, and conflict management. Facilitated by our own VICSES consultants who have tangible industry experience and leadership expertise, the Volunteer Leadership Development Program looks to provide a new lens for learning and continuous up-skilling of volunteer leaders across the service.



If you're interested and curious to know more, feel free to reach out to either:

- The Leadership Program at leadershipprogram@ses.vic.gov.au
- VICSES Organisational Development Coordinator at keni.ramsay-samrai@ses.vic.gov.au



Testimonials from pilot participants:

Really great course, I would recommend it to anyone in a leadership position at VICSES. I hope it can continue to upskill the leaders within our service!"

Amazing for not death by PowerPoint. The content was presented in such a great manner. Thank you for letting us drive our learning through conversation!"

This should be a pre-rec course for unit management and Controllers."

I cannot recommend this course enough!"

Launch of the national Physical Fitness for Role Program

By John Bates, Trainer and Advisor – Fitness for Role Project, VHO

In September we officially launched the Physical Fitness for Role Program, a nationally agreed approach across all SES agencies to ensure our members have the minimum level of fitness that is required to safely undertake their operational activities.



The Physical Fitness for Role Program is a joint initiative between the Australian Council of SES, the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Natural Hazards Research Australia, Human Performance Science, the National SES Volunteer Association, and SES agencies in every state and territory.

We want our people to be safe and return home well after training and every call-out they attend, every day.

The program has developed minimum physical fitness assessments for the following 13 agreed national skill sets:



There are nine activities that assess physical fitness across the 13 national skill sets, including:

1. Lift and shift
2. Haul
3. Power swim and rescue
4. Carry
5. Hold
6. In-water safety
7. Ladder climb and lift
8. Drag
9. Hike

Importantly, the physical fitness assessments don't require members to be athletes to complete them. If you're able to lift equipment and move tree branches today, it's very likely you'll be able to perform the assessments.

Implementation of the program in Victoria has already commenced, with volunteers from our Bright, Essendon, Footscray and Myrtleford Units participating in evaluating our roll-out approach.

The Victorian implementation plan is currently being finalised, with the following key milestones identified in the draft plan:

NOVEMBER 2023:

Commencement of opt-in phase for volunteers and staff.

Roll-out of a 'get-ready' window for volunteers and staff to provide an opportunity to learn more about the program and assess personal fitness.

APRIL 2024:

Start of 14-month roll-out across all units, for roles that are covered under the program.

JUNE 2025:

All members in roles covered by the program will be required to have completed their assessments.



Further information

A dedicated Physical Fitness for Role Hub page has been established, which includes further information such as assessment guides, posters, and program research. You can access these resources via the QR code. ■



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WELLBEING, HEALTH & SAFETY

Morwell Unit



Step It Up 2023 winners Melton Unit taking part in a team activity



Moorabbin Unit

Step It Up 2023 Round Up

By Alison Wright, Health & Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

As the September sunshine smiled down, 800+ participants from 82 teams set out to participate in Step It Up once again.

Each year, teams compete across four weeks to achieve VICSES' highest average step count. With weekly challenges to take part in and prizes on offer, who could resist? This year members were competing not only for their teams, but also for the pride of their region. Who would turn out the most active – East, West or State?

to our traditional Step It Up fun and camaraderie, while 'Animal Magic' week lit up the Health and Wellbeing Facebook page as our furry (and feathered) friends took centre stage.

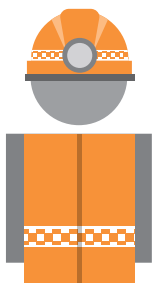
Congratulations to everyone who took part, we're already looking forward to 2024! ■

Over the four-week period, the average step count steadily increased resulting in our highest step count ever:

258 million steps!

That's nearly five laps of the earth or halfway to the moon, and an increase of 17% from Step It Up 2022.

Photo bingo, park runs, and team activities all contributed



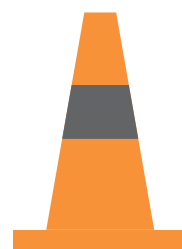
Workplace inspections

October 2021 –
September 2022

266

October 2022 –
September 2023

232



Hazards & near miss reports

October 2021 –
September 2022

353

October 2022 –
September 2023

358



Leongatha Unit – Squad Nemo



SDOD Dreamers



Leongatha Unit taking their mascot out for a walk



Brimbank Unit



Sorrento Unit making the most of the great weather



Fawkner Unit

TOP 5 WINNERS



Step It Up 2023

SMALL TEAMS 2-5

1. **NAWA Stormtroopers (Narre Warren)**
2. **Bare Blue Bear (Woodend)**
3. **Brimbank**
4. **B-Steppin (Beechworth)**
5. **Alpine Avengers (Myrtleford)**

MEDIUM TEAMS 6-15

1. **Team Melton 23**
2. **Moorabbin Movers**
3. **Healthwatch Hurricanes**
4. **Corio Steppers**
5. **Noobie (Whitehorse)**

LARGE TEAMS 16+

1. **Shallow Earth Shufflers (Nillumbik)**
2. **The One and Only Benalla Unit**
3. **Heidelberg Pacemakers**
4. **Sunbury Earth Trotters**
5. **Lilydale Holy Walkamolies**

BIGGEST STEPPERS

1. **Sylvio Seeboruth: 1,232,977**
2. **Liam Wickham: 1,156,381**
3. **Kevin Mcnair: 1,014,739**
4. **Claudelle Dagleish: 876,210**
5. **Emily Darlison: 857,852**

For a full list of teams, MVPs, most improved, and biggest steppers, please check out the Health and Wellbeing Hub page. ■

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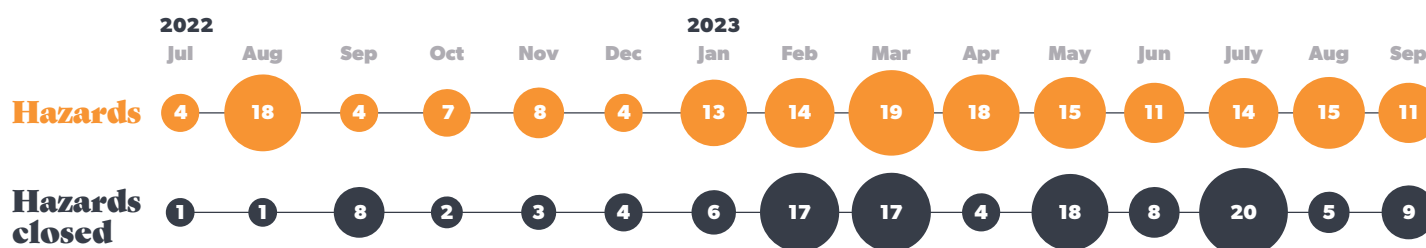
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YEAR AT A GLANCE



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Driver Reviver community engagement vans are on the road

By Susan Davie, Community Connections Manager, VHO

VICSES is in the process of rolling out our six new Driver Reviver community engagement vans, made possible with grant funding from the Federal Department of Road Safety.

We're excited to have the vans located across the state for use by VICSES members to activate Driver Reviver sites. They are also an exciting new resource for our Community Engagement Facilitators to get out into the community and deliver our important disaster risk reduction messages. They will help us to gain attention so that we can meet with and talk to community members about the key actions they can take to prepare for emergency situations.

The vans are fully self-contained, including a generator for

power and even Wi-Fi! Not only will we be able to provide a much-needed cuppa for those on long journeys, we will also be able to utilise equipment like a large screen and bank of iPads to facilitate interactive emergency preparedness engagement.

Each of our new vans can be booked for upcoming events. If you have any questions or want to find out more, get in touch with your Unit Support Team. ■



New Community Resilience Coordinator: Layton Miller



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

The role of a Community Resilience Coordinator (CRC) is often a misunderstood one.

Most volunteers know that the CRC position is one of four staff roles that make up a Unit Support Team (UST), but what many don't fully understand is what a CRC can do for a unit and the communities they serve.

Layton Miller is a CRC for the Loddon Mallee Region, based out of the Bendigo Office. While he may be one of the newest CRCs to join the VICSES cohort, his experience in this space spans many years. We asked him a few questions...

What do you see as the role of a CRC?

The way I see it, my role ultimately supports the end user, this being the community.

My role has many facets, from supporting units with recruitment campaigns, to volunteer retention, training and support of unit Community Engagement Facilitators (CEFs), supporting units and VICSES with community engagement programs,

reviewing and creating Local Flood Guides, media campaigns, and being an active support to units in our area. The CRC role is what you make it!

What makes a good CRC?

The individual. You must have a passion for the community and helping others. I have worked in several community engagement roles in emergency services for a number of years, and I have seen firsthand the results of engagement with the community both at events and in declared operational activities.

How does a CRC provide support to units?

The CRC role directly supports units in recruiting and retention of volunteers so that they are sustainable into the future. We also support unit engagement activities, as well as training and guidance for unit CEFs. We listen, and guide units going forward in both an operational and non-operational capacity.

How does a CRC support the community?

The CRC role supports the community in awareness, preparation and planning for emergency situations that may occur in their local area, as well as advice and guidance to the travelling community.

What is your favourite thing about being a CRC?

Being part of the UST that supports the Loddon Region and being able to have an impact on the safety of the community, as well as seeing the actions and results of my work. We all play a part in supporting one another. Community matters (pardon the pun)! ■



CEF spotlight

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

We asked Rachael White, a volunteer from the VICSES Sunbury Unit, about her time as a Community Engagement Facilitator (CEF).

What do you like most about being a CEF?

I like having the option of being able to go out on jobs as well as organising community visits, market stalls and demonstrations. Some of my favourite community engagement events include Bunnings BBQ's, Good Friday Appeals, primary school visits, fundraising, tin rattles, and most recently the Sunbury Halloween Spookfest!

What learnings did you gain from doing the CEF course?

I learnt how to appropriately communicate with adults. When I took on the role as a CEF I was only 19, so learning how to communicate with an older demographic has helped me better understand their needs when it comes to emergency preparedness.

How do you think the community benefits from having CEFs?

I think the community is more prepared and has more knowledge and understanding about VICSES because we actively engage with them. The more CEFs we have, the more people in orange we see out and about in the community discussing emergency preparedness that directly benefits them.

What would you say to a member that was contemplating undertaking the CEF course?

100% do it! The CEF course takes you through all the steps needed to undertake community engagement, and it's hands-on. In terms of the CEF role, at the start I was scared that I couldn't be professional enough and that people wouldn't take me seriously. But the more I engaged with the community, the more confident I became. ■

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MEDIA

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30 September 2023

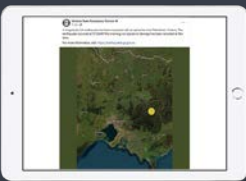
Campaigns and events:

- NAIDOC Week
- Emergency Services Blood Challenge
- 15 to Float
- R U OK Day
- Melbourne Royal Show

Media releases:

- 3 July – Mammoth multi-agency rescue as car plunges from cliff top
- 15 July – New VICSES facility opens at Fawkner
- 29 August – VICSES Beechworth volunteers recognised for service to community
- 4 September – Father of three reunited with rescuers
- 22 September – Four months of calls in a day for Terang volunteers

Social media post highlights (state accounts):



f FACEBOOK

Engagement: **93,740** Impressions: **411,528**

05/07/23: A magnitude 2.4 earthquake was recorded near Pakenham, Victoria.



X (Formerly Twitter)

Engagement: **452** Impressions: **10,177**

11/08/23: Volunteers from VICSES Malvern Unit provide lighting assistance on the Monash Freeway following a truck rollover.



Instagram

Engagement: **388** Impressions: **5,765**

07/09/23: Buckle up Victoria, severe weather is on its way.

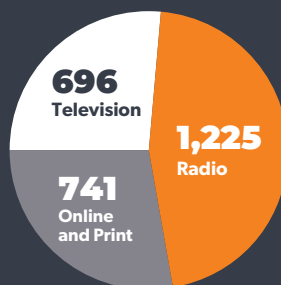


in LINKEDIN

Engagement: **559** Impressions: **3,569**

03/07/2023: Congratulations to the SES crew who participated at the ARCC!

Mentions of VICSES in the news:



Keeping the media informed:

A day in the life of an SMDO

By Jasmine Lewkowicz and David Murphy, State Media Duty Officers, VHO

It's 6:01am and the phone rings. An eager journalist is on the line poised with questions about a severe weather event. "How many calls for help did you receive overnight?" "How high is the river expected to peak?" "Can we set up an interview with a VICSES spokesperson for 6:40am on ABC News Breakfast?"

Managing media enquiries is a big part of the role of State Media Duty Officer (SMDO). A team of SMDOs are rostered every day of the year. We respond to incoming calls from reporters, journalists, or producers for information. In addition to drafting attributable statements, social media posts, and key messaging, we arrange interviews, and coach VICSES spokespeople.

During large-scale emergencies, the State Control Centre can be activated with the SMDO line diverted to the centre, and requests for interviews with the VICSES State Duty Officer, State Agency Commander, or State Response Controller come rushing in. The SMDO can add value to the action messages the public are receiving, by working in tandem with media to complement public information and warnings.

The role of the SMDO is dynamic. Providing on-call media support for VICSES Duty Officers and keeping the media informed enables our agency to work towards achieving safer communities, together. ■

INFORMATION SYSTEMS (IS) UPDATE



OUT IN THE FIELD

Manager Information Technology Naveen Subbiah visits our Maffra and Lochsport Units, to complete safety workshop sessions.



Tips for staying safe online

By Toby Köberle, Manager Information Security and Governance, VHO

In today's digital age, the internet has become an integral part of our lives. While it brings convenience and opportunities, it also comes with certain risks.

To help you navigate the online world safely, here are some simple tips to follow:

- Use **strong, unique passwords** for your online accounts. Combine letters, numbers, and special characters, and avoid using easily guessable information like birthdays or names.
- Consider using a **password manager to keep track of your passwords** securely.
- Enable **two-factor authentication** whenever possible. It adds an extra layer of security by requiring a code from your phone or email in addition to your password.
- Be cautious of **emails or messages asking for personal information**. Verify the sender's identity and don't click on suspicious links or download attachments from unknown sources.
- Adjust **your privacy settings** on social media and other online accounts. Limit the amount of personal information visible to the public.
- Avoid conducting sensitive transactions on **public Wi-Fi networks**. If you must use them, consider using a virtual private network (VPN) to encrypt your data.
- When shopping online, ensure the **website is secure** (look for "https" in the URL), and only buy from reputable sources.
- Regularly **back up your important files**. This can be a lifesaver if your device is compromised or lost.

Remember, online safety is a shared responsibility. By following these tips, you can protect yourself and your loved ones from online threats. Be cautious, stay informed, and enjoy the internet safely! ■



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ses.vic.gov.au