

The National

Firefighter

VOL 4 EDITION 1

Summer Edition

INSIDE

Working Within

**First Responders
PTSD Rates**

**Leadership In
Action**

**PRIMARY
PRODUCER
BRIGADES IN
QUEENSLAND**

Tactical Yoga

**EVERYONE
LOVES A HERO**



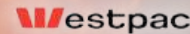
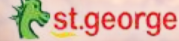
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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE

2 Leigh Leonard, TNF Editor

NEWS AND VIEWS

- 4 Climbing For A Cause
- 6 WOW: Working Within
- 8 Leadership In Action
- 9 Beyond The Frontline
- 10 Addressing Trauma & Mental Health
- 13 Challenge Coins
- 14 AAIC
- 18 Horses Helping The Helpers
- 22 First Responder PTSD Rates
- 24 Think Set Go
- 29 When Life Becomes The Lesson
- 32 Primary Producer Brigades In Queensland
- 35 Tactical Yoga
- 36 Peter Derges - My Little Museum
- 38 Post-Fire Recovery
- 40 Corporate Driver Training Australia
- 42 The Money Collective
- 45 MacKillop Seasons
- 46 Greyhounds As Mates
- 47 Men's Mental Health And Suicide Prevention
- 48 When Girls Roar, The World Listens
- 50 Everyone Loves A Hero



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EDITORIAL BOARD

An Editorial Board is in place for the magazine. The Board includes a number of experienced Fire Fighters who offer expertise in various areas of Fire Fighting. The Board's role will be to oversee articles to ensure the content and information is accurate and timely, and to provide advice on direction for the journal.

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The opinions presented in our magazine are those of the authors of the articles. We enjoy the opportunity to present a variety of viewpoints but do not necessarily endorse them.

ABOUT US

The National Firefighter is a journal delivered to Firefighters and selected universities across Australia. Our mission is to support Firefighters through the sharing of knowledge and information from across Australia, and at the same time aid Firefighters through delivering current information from recognised leaders in the field. We are independent from any employer, associations or groups and our aim is simply to provide current, relevant information to Australian Firefighters.

The National Firefighter will evolve over time with feedback and review from readers and industry peers. The aim of The National Firefighter is to share knowledge and commentary from experts in the field, as well as provide background information.



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Editor's Note



Welcome to this edition of The National Firefighter. We hope you all enjoy the articles, and that they prove educative, interesting and helpful!

You may have noticed that TNF heavily focuses of late on mental health.

Good mental health is critical for Australian Firefighters due to their exposure to traumatic events, high stress environments and the risk of burn out. Poor mental health can lead to conditions like PTSD anxiety and depression, and impact their ability to perform their job effectively, while also increasing the risk of suicide. Supporting mental wellbeing is essential to firefighters personal health, and their capacity to serve their communities.

Key reasons why mental health is vital:

EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA

Firefighters regularly witness and experience distressing and life-threatening situations, which can significant psychological consequences.

HIGH STRESS ENVIRONMENT

Their work involves vigilance

- *Risk of burnout
- *Impact on job performance
- *Higher risk of suicide

Mental health support is crucial for all firefighters, including volunteers, who often do not receive the same level of support as paid staff, despite facing

similar traumatic experiences.

One of the biggest ways in which firefighters can protect themselves is by practicing self-care. In the world of today it can be said that this is something we ALL should be practicing. Firefighters need to look after themselves as well as they look after their fire equipment!

It is important that all firefighters have a plan at what they will do to look after themselves after a difficult day. Simple acts such as calling a loved one or a friend, taking time out for a quiet coffee/beer or a few minutes to stretch sore muscles can have a nurturing effect on the mind and body.

In today's world, self-care is just so important for ALL of us. Self-care is not something I grew up with, and it is something I have had to learn, and am STILL learning.

As conditions become more challenging, first responders must consider their own wellbeing, and the actions they can take to care and look after themselves.

Above all, it is important to remember that reaching out for support is always 100% ok

In fact, it is a real act of resilience that will keep you healthy and in the fight. Men are getting better at recognizing and seeking support for their mental health, but we know that many still do not reach out for help. Statistically,

only 37% of men and boys reach out for support when they need it. We need to change this. Early support can make all the difference.

Personally, I have never been good at reaching out for support/help, but it is now something I now DO when needed, and my life is better for it. It was explained to me that mental health is like any other medical condition, such as a broken limb. It is an analogy I understand.

We need to change our mindsets toward mental health, and we need to change the stigma that STILL surrounds it.

Thankfully there are a plethora of mental health charities that are trying to do exactly THAT-one life at a time.

Quote for this edition (unknown)

A firefighter's courage lights the way even in the darkest of flames." "True bravery is running towards a fire when everyone else is running away"

Our thanks, as always go out to all the TNF supporters and to the wonderful writers and the work they do.

We wish you all Good Mental Health!

Leigh M Leonard
Editor
The National Firefighter



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Climbing for a Cause: Firefighters Raise \$1.1 Million for Mental Health

Each year, firefighters and emergency service personnel from across Australia lace up their boots and take on the Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb (MFSC) – a gruelling yet inspiring challenge that transforms physical effort into life-changing support for those who serve our communities.

In 2025, the event reached unprecedented heights, raising \$1.1 million for mental health initiatives through the 000 Foundation. This record-breaking achievement reflects not only the generosity of the Australian public but also the determination of our first responders to look after their own – both on and off the job.

While first responders are the first to arrive when others are in crisis, they are often the last to reach out when struggling themselves. Studies continue to show that emergency service personnel face significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress, with around one in three reporting symptoms consistent with mental health conditions. Tragically, suicide remains a leading cause of death among serving and retired responders – a stark reminder that bravery on the fireground must be matched by courage to seek help.

The 000 Foundation exists for that very reason – to ensure that no firefighter, paramedic, police officer, or volunteer responder ever faces hardship alone. Whether through mental health grants, family support in times of tragedy, or funding vital research into occupational cancers that disproportionately affect firefighters, the Foundation is committed to the wellbeing of those who dedicate their lives to protecting others.

And now, there's even more reason to get excited. For the first time ever, the

Emergency Services Stair Climb will be held in Sydney on 28 March 2026. This historic event will unite firefighters, paramedics, police, and emergency services personnel from across the nation in one monumental show of solidarity and strength. Keep your eyes peeled – registrations will open soon, and it's shaping up to be one of the most sought-after events on the emergency services calendar.

When the sirens fade and the smoke clears, our first responders deserve the same level of care they give every day. Together, through the 000 Foundation and initiatives like the Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb and Sydney Emergency Services Stair Climb, we can ensure that help is always available – for those who spend their lives helping others.

To learn more or to support the Foundation's work, visit www.000foundation.org.au.

"While first responders are first to arrive in crisis, they're often the last to reach out for help."

By Chris May OAM, Director – 000 Foundation



**FREE
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ARE THEY TRIPLE OK?

An R U OK? conversation guide for
family and friends of police and emergency
services workers and volunteers

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A New Era for Kids and Parents' Wellbeing: The WOW Online Portal

As conversations around youth mental health grow louder across Australia, a groundbreaking new tool is set to change the way families support their children's wellbeing. The WOW Online Portal, created by Mildura's own Don Carrazza and Jimmy Hadfield—affectionately known as the WOW Boys—is bringing a decade of face-to-face success directly into homes, schools, and communities.

Why the Portal Matters Now

The statistics paint a sobering picture. Recent national studies show that one in four children report feeling depressed, while anxiety, anger, and behavioural challenges are becoming increasingly common in young people as young as eight. These struggles don't just affect children—parents are also reporting that more than half are “just coping” or worse. The need for effective, family-friendly support has never been more urgent.

The WOW Boys have seen this reality

firsthand through their workshops delivered across Victoria, South Australia, and New South Wales. Their solution? Transforming their proven, values-based program into a safe, interactive online space that children and parents can access anytime, anywhere.

What Families Can Expect

The WOW Online Portal isn't just another educational website—it's an immersive Learning Management System designed to spark real growth in children aged 5 to 15.

Inside the portal, families will discover:

- Ten powerful modules built around themes that matter most: respect, confidence, anger, trust, fear, persistence, cultural awareness, leadership, bullying, and self-reflection.
- Pixar-style animations featuring original WOW characters, each representing a different life skill.

- Interactive games and quizzes that make learning fun while checking for understanding.

- Personalised video messages from Don and Jimmy to encourage, guide, and inspire.

- A built-in journal feature where kids can reflect on their progress and families can track growth together.

This self-contained portal is completely free of spam, secure for children, and designed to strengthen the connection between parents and kids.

A Family-First Design

What makes the WOW Portal stand out is its focus on the family dynamic. Don and Jimmy have shaped the modules to encourage conversations at home, bridging the gap between what kids learn online and how they live day to day. Parents purchase access once, and children gain unlimited entry into a safe, engaging environment that promotes resilience, confidence, and respect.



“Life throws challenges at all of us,” says Don. “The WOW Online Portal will give parents and children the tools to rise above—building the skills they need to navigate whatever comes their way.”

From Workshops to Worldwide Access

The WOW Boys’ journey began in Mildura, where their shared childhood experiences of bullying and cultural challenges gave rise to a lifelong mission: helping kids find strength, courage, and kindness from within. For years, they delivered workshops face-to-face, teaching thousands of students across regional Australia.

Now, through the portal, they can scale that impact far beyond the classroom. Feedback from early focus groups has been overwhelmingly positive, with children describing the characters as “cute” and parents calling the modules “a lifesaver at home.”

More Than a Portal—A Movement

The team is also preparing to extend the WOW brand with merchandise, including plush “WOW Buddies” that bring the portal’s animated characters to life. These companions will allow children to hold a physical reminder of the values they’re learning online, making the experience both digital and tangible.

“The goal is clear: to create a global movement where families everywhere can “work on within,” building respect, resilience, and emotional strength together”. says Jimmy.

Accessible and Cost-Effective

Details of pricing are still being finalised, but the WOW Boys are committed to keeping the portal affordable. Families will pay a one-off fee for full access to all modules, while schools will be offered tailored packages based on their size and needs.

Launching Soon

The WOW Online Portal is currently in its final stages of testing and is expected to launch later this year, just in time for Christmas. For parents searching for tools to support their children’s mental health and build stronger family bonds, this could be the most valuable gift of all. Take a look on the website and see what all the fuss is about.

Don Carrazza
Founder/Facilitator

Jimmy Hadfield
Founder/Facilitator

To learn more and register your interest, visit
www.wowprogram.com.au





LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

INSIGHT INTO A THREE-DAY INTENSIVE



Three days...
Countless lessons...
One powerful truth...

Real leadership is forged not in comfort, but in the moments that test your courage, stretch your thinking, and connect you to something bigger than yourself

Over the past three days, I've had the privilege of taking part in an intensive leadership workshop with Disaster Relief Australia as part of the 6 month Sir John Monash Leadership Scholarship I'm undertaking. It was a powerful experience that pushed me to grow as a leader.

Throughout the workshop, we refined our strategic thinking, project management, resilience, emotional intelligence and decision-making under pressure, while delivering leadership presentations to the group and on camera. Each session pushed me beyond my comfort zone and sharpened the skills needed to lead when it matters

One of the most meaningful moments took place outside the conference room — where we stepped away from the slides and strategies to engage in mindfulness, role plays and reflection. This allowed us to pause, reset and truly embody the principles we were learning

A highlight was being nominated to read The Ode beneath a lone pine descendant grown from a cone collected on the Gallipoli battlefield 100 years ago — a powerful reminder that leadership is built on responsibility, growth and service to something greater than ourselves

Adding to the human element was 'Ike', an assistance dog who joined us — grounding the space with his calm presence. Ike reminded me leadership isn't only about strategy — it's also about humanity, empathy, connection and the small gestures that make people feel safe, valued and seen

Key Takeaways:

This workshop stretched my leadership thinking in unexpected ways. Some of the most powerful lessons I'm taking forward include:

- The importance of slowing down to think strategically — creating space for clarity, intent and stronger decisions under pressure
- How self-awareness and emotional intelligence build trust, influence and authentic leadership
- The need to create psychological safety — where people feel safe to speak up, share ideas, and make mistakes to unlock performance, innovation and resilience

- Effective leadership starts with mastering our emotions so we can truly connect with others

- True leadership means having the courage to show vulnerability — through honesty and openness, trust, empathy and genuine connection are built

- Ultimately, this experience reminded me that true leadership is not defined by titles or decisions — it's measured by the lives we touch, the strength we build in others and the legacy we leave behind in a world made stronger, safer, and more resilient than we found it

I leave this program with a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of myself — more confident in my abilities, more aware of my impact and more committed than ever to leading with authenticity, empathy, and courage

Caleb Geppart

Leading Firefighter | Licensed Plumber & Gasfitter | Sir John Monash Leadership Scholar

BBus & Commerce (Monash University)

Master of Emergency Management (currently studying)



BEYOND THE FRONTLINE: REFLECTIONS ON TRANSITIONING FROM RESPONSE TO RECOVERY



In emergency services, we often operate on the edge of crisis—fires, rescues, and critical incidents. As a Firefighter with Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) this environment is familiar.

But a recent volunteer deployment to Northern NSW with Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) offered a new view—one focused not on immediate response but on sustained recovery.

Serving in the Incident Management Team (IMT) as Operations Officer, I navigated the complexities of post-flood recovery. The role required shifting from urgency to coordination—highlighting the transition from response to recovery and the handover from control agencies.

Information flow was critical. Damage assessments, community needs and logistics had to be triaged into recovery strategies. Coordinating strike team deployments demanded structure, adaptability, intelligence and empathy.

On the ground, I saw the human face of recovery: families searching wreckage for irreplaceable items—photos, military medals, wedding albums. These weren't just objects; they were ties to memory, identity and hope.

Some scenes I can't describe—especially those involving animals: dogs, cattle, horses left behind in rising floodwaters. Unable to escape, their cries were described to me by owners with tear-filled eyes. The heartbreak was real. Yet the resilience was incredible—a quiet strength that reminded us why we serve

Volunteers gave their all. Agencies came together. Slowly, communities began to rebuild, though healing would take longer. Beyond the sirens and smoke, I witnessed the quiet power of coordinated recovery

We slept in a cold, drafty hall—our base, kitchen and sleeping space. No luxuries. Decontamination was a kids' shell pool filled with cold, questionable water. Toilets and showers were muddy and basic

But we weren't after comfort. We wanted to share the experience of those who'd lost their homes—living without privacy or certainty. Even in a small way, we wanted to understand what it meant to lose everything.

Still, it wasn't the conditions that defined the experience—it was the people—diverse in background, united in purpose

This deployment deepened my understanding of AIIMS and the complexity of disaster recovery. It reinforced a mindset I carry into every challenge: seeing obstacles as opportunities—a chance to lead, learn and lift others

Each night ended not just in exhaustion, but in shared insight—reflections by the fire and the unity of the Ode under the stars.

This experience reshaped my view of leadership—not just as a title, but as a mindset grounded in empathy, adaptability, and resilience

I return stronger—not only as a Firefighter, but as someone attuned to the full lifecycle of an emergency. I'm more inspired than ever to continue my pursuit of leadership within Fire Rescue Victoria—resolute, empathetic and informed

Leading Firefighter **Caleb Geppert**
Fire Rescue Victoria
Disaster Relief Australia



Breaking Stigma, Supporting Strength: Addressing Trauma and Mental Health in Firefighting

Introduction

Firefighting is one of the most respected and demanding professions on earth. The public sees the courage, the heroism, and the resilience. What is less visible, though, is the mental toll that years of exposure to danger, trauma, and community crises can have. Behind every dramatic rescue or bushfire containment line are crews who have witnessed devastating loss, worked until exhaustion, and carried the weight of decisions made in seconds that can alter lives forever.

The stresses are not only during the emergency. Firefighters face the afterburn of mental strain: sleepless nights replaying what could have been done differently, the cumulative pressure of responding to repeated fatal incidents, and the guilt of tragedies they simply could not prevent.

Add to this the day to day occupational pressures, long shifts, irregular

patterns, separation from family, and the ever present need to remain “fit” and “ready” and the psychological load becomes heavy. Feelings of anxiety, hyper alertness, depression, or post traumatic stress are not rare; they are recognised occupational risks of firefighting worldwide.

Yet within many brigades there remains an unspoken culture of stoicism. Mental health challenges are still too often framed as a weakness rather than what they really are: a human response to extraordinary stress.

The “hero” image that the public projects onto firefighters can amplify internal pressures: if you are expected to be fearless and strong all the time, how can you admit that you are struggling inside? This stigma discourages open conversation, leaving too many firefighters to cope silently.

That silence is dangerous. Just as a smouldering ember can reignite into a blaze, unaddressed psychological stress can grow into burnout, breakdowns, or tragic loss. Talking about the cumulative impact of trauma, operational stress, and organisational culture is not just a wellbeing issue, it is a safety imperative. A crew that is mentally healthy is more alert, more decisive,

and ultimately more effective in protecting the communities they serve.

This article explores how stigma and trauma intersect in firefighting, why changing the cultural script is essential, and what practical measures we can take to support our firefighters. As part of that commitment, we are offering free mental health awareness training for firefighters worldwide, peer champion training designed by firefighters themselves, and a platform for anonymous honesty so experiences can be shared without fear of judgement.

Because mental health isn't separate from the job, it is part of the job. Speaking openly about it does not weaken courage: it deepens it.



Stigma in the Fire Service

“Stigma is more than awkwardness: it is recognised within Australia's WHS framework as a psychosocial hazard that employers must manage. Under the WHS Act 2011, employers have a duty

to protect psychological health, and the Safe Work Australia Model Code of Practice on Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work (2022) identifies stigma and discrimination as harmful aspects of poor workplace relationships and behaviours. While not always listed as a standalone hazard, stigma is also acknowledged in international standards such as ISO 45003 and WHO guidance as a negative outcome of bullying, exclusion, or failure to support workers' mental health. Employers therefore have a clear responsibility to prevent and address stigma as part of managing psychosocial risks at work

In firefighting, it manifests in different forms:

- Public Stigma: Colleagues or even the public labelling someone as “unreliable” if they admit to PTSD, anxiety, or burnout.
- Self-Stigma: A firefighter internalising the message that admitting stress makes them “less tough,” leading to shame and silence.
- Structural Stigma: A lack of support structures in some brigades or fear that disclosure will affect promotion, deployment, or reputation.

Research shows that 69% of Australian workers with a psychological injury believe they will be treated differently if they return to work (Safe Work Australia, 2022). For firefighters, that fear can be multiplied by the “hero” image of the role.

The result? Hazards like bullying, exhaustion, or trauma often go unreported, and mental struggles remain invisible until they can no longer be ignored.



Trauma: The Hidden Cost of the Fireground

Every firefighter knows the scenes that linger long after the turnout: the family you couldn't save, the crash that ended in tragedy, the mates you've seen injured. These experiences are not just “part of the job”, they are cumulative traumas.

Studies repeatedly show that firefighters and first responders face higher rates of PTSD, depression, and anxiety than the general population. Yet stigma and culture often mean these symptoms are hidden or dismissed until they escalate (BETA, 2021).

The Mental Health Coordinating Council (2022) stresses that trauma-informed care is essential. Instead of asking “What's wrong with you?” we must ask: “What have you been through, and how can we walk alongside you?”



Firefighters: Courage on the Outside, Silence on the Inside

Firefighters embody resilience, but the very culture that holds teams together, bravery, stoicism, never leaving a mate behind, can make mental health harder to talk about.

A firefighter may spot the signs in a colleague, sleepless nights, rising irritability, withdrawing from the crew, but stigma still stops conversations. “I don't want to be a burden” or “Others have seen worse” are common inner voices.

But silence is the true risk. Left unspoken, trauma festers. And if there's one thing every firefighter knows from long experience: leaving a small spark unattended can lead to bigger fires down the line.



Best Practices for Fire Services

The good news is that change is possible and it's happening. Around the world, brigades and unions are pushing to make mental health as much a part of safety culture as breathing apparatus checks. Research and successful initiatives highlight six clear practices:

1. Strong Leadership Sets the Tone

Officers and managers who openly discuss mental health normalise it for their crews. When leaders ask “Are you okay?” and mean it, stigma breaks down.

2. Firefighter-Focused Awareness and Training

General programs are useful, but tailored training hits home. By offering free firefighter-specific awareness training worldwide, we ensure that mental health isn't abstract – it's practical, relevant, and tied directly to the fireground.



3. Mental Health Champions

Firefighters often turn first to a peer, not a professional. That's why we are also providing free access to mental health champion training – designed by firefighters for firefighters. Champions are trained station peers who listen without judgement, support honestly, and point to further help when needed.

4. Anonymous Honesty

To understand challenges properly, leaders need honest feedback. That's why we're offering a free anonymous survey for firefighters, a safe way to raise issues and get a true picture of what crews are experiencing.

5. Policies that Protect, Not Punish

Stations need clear, supportive policies on leave, privacy, adjustments, and wellbeing. No firefighter should feel a career is at risk by speaking up.

6. Sharing Lived Experience

Perhaps most powerful are stories from within the firefighting family. Mates sharing their journeys with trauma or recovery help others realise: "If they can speak up, so can I."

Our Commitment to Firefighters

Firefighters stand on the frontline for communities every day. Now, we must stand on the frontline for them.

That is why we are offering:

- Free mental health awareness training for all firefighters worldwide
- Free mental health champion training, written by and designed for firefighters
- A free anonymous survey tool to empower honesty and drive cultural change

These resources are built on one fundamental principle: it's good to talk, it's good to listen, and it's normal to need support.

Conclusion

Stigma and trauma are not abstract ideas for firefighters; they are lived experiences on and off the fireground. We plan every rescue, we plan every hazard reduction – it's time to plan for mental health safety the same way.

Addressing mental health doesn't take away from courage; it amplifies it. It strengthens our teams, keeps more firefighters safe, and allows us to serve

our communities with resilience and pride.

For those who fight fires every day, know that you don't need to fight stigma and trauma alone. With awareness, champions, and anonymous voices, we can create a fire service culture where looking after your mental health is just another part of being operationally ready.

Because opening up is not weakness. It's the ultimate act of strength.

References

- Safe Work Australia (2022) – Model Code of Practice
- Safe Work Australia (2022) – Return to Work Survey Report
- BETA (2021) – National Survey on Stigma
- SANE (2020) – National Stigma Report Card
- MHCC (2022) – Trauma-informed care

Darryl Johnson | Director
Mental Health Journey Australia

0418 833 326

www.mhja.net.au

**SA Volunteer Fire Fighters Museum
challenge Coins For Sale: \$30 + postage.**



What is a challenge coin you may ask?

A brief history:

Challenge coins have a rich history dating back to ancient Rome and have evolved into a significant military tradition, symbolizing membership, achievement and camaraderie.

The concept traces back to the Roman empire where soldiers were rewarded with special coins for bravery and achievements in battle. These coins often bore an insignia of the soldier's legion, serving as a mark of honor.

The modern tradition of challenge coins is believed to have started during World War 1. A wealthy lieutenant ordered bronze medallions for his unit, which they carried as mementos.

One story involves a pilot who, after being shot down and captured, used his coin to prove his identity to the French soldiers, saving his life. This incident popularized the practice of carrying coin as a symbol of pride and identity.

The tradition of a "challenge" is connection to the history of the coins, and is used as a way to prove identification or affiliation through presenting the necessary coin. There are no formal rules of how a challenge may occur nor punishment for not being able to present a coin. The challenge usually occurred in bars. Anyone being challenged must produce the coin for their organization and usual

punishment for failing to do so is to buy the next round of drinks for the challenger and anyone else who has their challenge coin.

Over the decades the coins have become a staple in military culture serving as tokens of recognition for service members. They are often awarded for special achievement, commemorative events or as a gesture of gratitude.

Challenge coins are more than just collectibles, they carry a rich history of honor, loyalty and teamwork. From their ancient origins to modern day significance these coins continue to play an important part in military and civilian life serving as reminders of experiences and achievements.

In modern times:

Challenge coins have evolved into sought after collectibles each telling its own story. These tokens celebrate community, service and unique journeys.

Firefighter Challenge Coins: tokens of bravery and mateship.

Firefighter challenge coins are more than just metal and enamel; they are emblems of courage, unity, and sacrifice. Each coin tells a story of blazing infernos conquered and lives saved, a testament to the bravery of those who face danger head-on. These coins often feature symbols of fire service - axes, helmets, ladders - mingling with the flames they battle.

Carrying a firefighter challenge coin is not just about membership

in a particular fire service; it's about belonging to a league that knows no bounds, where every member is ready to lay it all on the line for the safety of others.

The SA Volunteer Fire Fighters Museum challenge coin came about by a group of young firefighters visiting the museum. The coin concept came up in discussion. The men shared the history and concept with our Chairperson. Some many months later the local regional officer arrived with a package to present to Alan Hall, Chairperson. The young firefighters had all chipped in and arranged for a number of the coins to be minted. The coin depicts on old blitz on the back surrounded by fire. The front of the coin is symbolic of the SA Volunteer Fire Fighters Museum logo CFS logo combines.

These coins have been very popular and sold fairly quickly to those whom were aware of them.

A second shipment have been ordered and arrived earlier this year in time for the annual memorial service giving recognition to fallen firefighters. If you would like one of our challenge coins to add to your collection, please make contact with the museum. They retail at \$30 each plus postage.

Unfortunately our new website is still under construction following the collapse of our original website. We anticipate it will be up and running soon.

You can find us on facebook or email
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You can protect your organisation from the devastation caused by the drug ICE.

The extent of Ice use in Australia

The scale of methamphetamine (Ice) consumption in Australia is alarming. Australians collectively inject, ingest, or smoke over \$24 million worth of Ice every single day making us among, if not the highest per capita users of ice in the world.

The latest National Wastewater Samples published in August 2025 show a 20% increase in Ice consumption compared to the previous year resulting in the highest reported usage since the inception of the wastewater sampling program in Australia.

The methylamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA and heroin consumed had an estimated street value of \$11.5 billion, with methylamphetamine accounting for 78% of this (\$8.9 billion).

IMPACTS OF ICE USE

The impact of Ice use on our

communities is devastating. Australians in high stress environments are more likely to experiment with Ice and face a higher risk of developing problematic use. Beyond individual harm, Ice use significantly affects Australians in other ways:

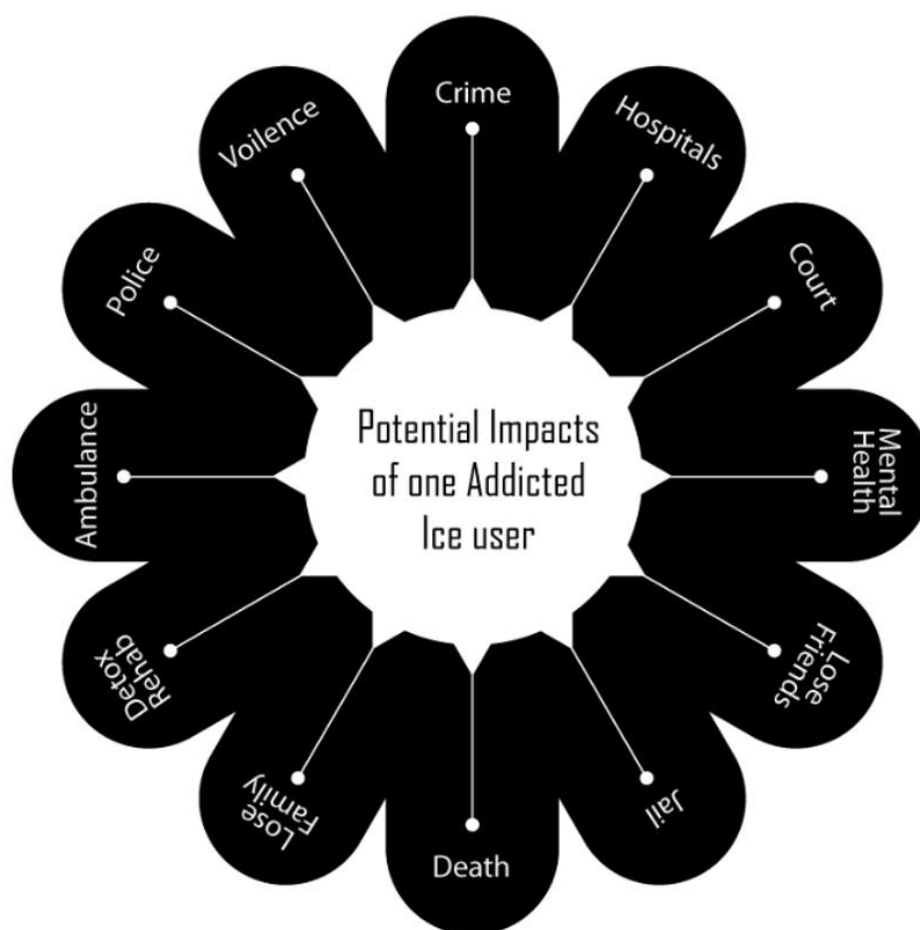
1. Ice is more likely to cause dependence than other drugs, and has a very long withdrawal and recovery phase.
2. Relapse is understandably common.
3. Unlike cannabis and heroin, ice is an extremely powerful stimulant. For some people, it can trigger psychological disturbances or violent and aggressive behaviour.
4. Long term use may damage the brain and cause impaired attention, memory loss and motor skills deterioration.
5. The distress ice causes for individuals, families, communities and frontline

workers is disproportionate to that caused by other drugs.

The enormous damage to individuals, families, communities and frontline workers are well known and include impacting the following (see diagram on next page):

The impacts on young Australians is highlighted by the following:

- The 2018 Parliamentary Committee inquiry into methamphetamine (ice) found that "Young people are more likely to use Ice and are at higher risk of problematic use".
- A major University of South Australia study found brain wave and physical movement patterns similar to early onset Parkinson's Disease in teenagers who had used Ice only 5 or 6 times.
- The rate of removal of children, including newborn babies from Ice



addicted parents is alarming, with many of these children suffering from neglect and witnessing domestic violence prior to removal from their parents.

- The American Addiction Centre reported the following potential impacts on unborn babies and pregnant mothers:
- Higher rates of preterm births;
- Placental abruption. This can decrease or block the baby's supply of oxygen and nutrients and cause heavy bleeding in the mother;
- Cardiac abnormalities in babies;
- Smaller head circumference;
- Foetal distress;
- Foetal growth restriction.

AAIC BACKGROUND AND MISSION

The Australian Anti Ice Campaign Limited (AAIC) is a Public Benevolent Institution registered with the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC).

AAIC was founded in 2015 by Andre'a Simmons, after Andre'a had recovered from a two-year Ice addiction.

With a background in film and television, Andre'a began with the intention of developing and implementing a mass media campaign to create awareness and to educate Australians about the dangers of touching Ice.

The AAIC plan evolved, after Andre'a was invited to speak to a group of children engaged with the Queensland Youth Justice System and to speak in several high schools, into an organisation based around people with lived experience in Ice addiction, in

long term recovery from that addiction and who are trained to educate others on the real dangers associated with ice & other drugs.

AAIC's purpose is to see the reduction of the use of Ice in the Australian population through:

Education Workshops in high schools, prisons and workplace settings presented by people with lived experience (Workshop Presenters).

Workshop Presenters filling a second role (Lived Experience Buddies) assisting people struggling with Ice addiction to find pathways into recovery. This includes providing support and guidance to family members who have a loved one struggling with Ice Addiction.



THE WORKSHOP PRESENTATION.

The AAIC NEO Education Workshops provide information, and engages participants in a 90 minute interactive multi media presentation about:

- A. The short and long-term effects associated with Ice use.
- B. The danger and toxicity of the ingredients in Ice.
- C. The mechanism of Ice addiction.
- D. The effects on the brain, body, relationships, and community.
- E. The risks of trying Ice even once.
- F. Risks of abusing alcohol and other drugs.
- G. Strategies for:

I. Communicating the risks of using Ice to their peers.

II. Acting to prevent Ice use by their peers.

III. Providing pathways to recovery for those struggling with addiction.

FOLLOW UP WORKSHOPS

Support from the Australian Anti Ice Campaign continues after the workshop, with follow up 'Dual Diagnosis' Training provided for workplace representatives. Its a 2 day

advanced workshop that will train and allow representatives to understand:

- The underlying issues behind addictions as well as holistic intervention.
- The neurophysiology of addictions and brain development.
- Neuroplasticity & Psychopharmacology in relation to addiction
- The Cycle of Addiction & Stages of Change
- The Grief Cycle & Anger / Hatred
- Brief & Early Intervention, treatment matching, pharmacotherapies & motivational interviewing
- Working with treatment resistant clients

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

- "The seminar provided an understanding of the issue that made sense of its importance."
- "I personally enjoyed the workshop as it felt very real. The people running it were former addicts."
- "The message was from the heart."
- "I was interested and shocked to find out some of the ingredients of ice. But I also found it really helpful and necessary, especially hearing from

people that have experience with it."

- "I've learned more about how to help people who may be affected by ice."
- "The anti-ice campaign was extremely helpful and taught me a lot about ice I wasn't aware of. The presenters communicated the message clearly and I think it really put a perspective on how bad the drug is and how common it is in our lifestyles."
- "I found Michelle amazing. We had a chat after the talk and she helped me out with a few things."

To book the AAIC NEO workshop in your Business or Organisation, please go to our website:

www.australianantiicecampaign.org.au, call us on **(07) 5665 6063**, or email **education@australianantiicecampaign.org.au**

WHAT DOES ICE LOOK LIKE AND HOW IS IT TAKEN?

ICE looks like crystal that can range from large rocks / shards to a fine powder.

It can come in an array of colours but more commonly resembles clear or dirty ice or salt.

ICE is usually smoked or injected but it can be ingested, snorted through the nose, or inserted anally.

OTHER NAMES FOR ICE

Coconutice
Crack
Batu Shards
Yaba
Rock Crystal
Tweak Tins
SeaShells
Crank Fire Glass
TikChalk
Meth Clear
StrawberryQuick

HOW CAN I RECOGNISE IF SOMEONE IS ON ICE?

- Change in activities and friends
- Increased energy / alertness, obsessive / compulsive behaviour
- Hard to contact, unreliable and often late
- Changes in appearance, skin tone, excessive sweating
- Picking at skin causing sores
- Dramatic weight loss due to reduced appetite
- Awake for prolonged periods, followed by excessive sleeping with extreme hunger
- Confusion or restlessness
- Constantly losing or damaging things
- Sudden interest in gambling
- Promiscuous behaviour
- Aggressive and agitated, temper outbursts, secretive
- Loss of employment, skipping work or school
- Money issues, selling goods, asking for money, stealing
- Engaging in risky behaviour
- Sugar cravings
- Posting on social media all hours of the night

WE CAN HELP

1800 NO TO ICE
1800 66 86 423

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

SHORT TERM

- Increased heart / breath rate
- Hypertension
- Trembling hands and fingers
- Constricted blood vessels
- Psychosis
- Irregular body temperature, excessive sweating / overheating
- Hallucinations, paranoia, panic attacks
- Out of control aggression
- Difficulty sleeping
- Skin lesions, highly dehydrated
- Problems with teeth and gums
- Blurred vision
- Chesty cough, chest infections
- Loss of appetite
- Dizziness
- Bad headaches

LONG TERM

- Aged appearance
- Heart problems
- Dental problems
- Greater risk of stroke
- Exposure to blood-borne viruses
- Cognitive impairment
- Decreased lung function
- Depression or anxiety
- Psychosis or paranoia
- Increased risk of kidney problems

POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS OF AN OVERDOSE

- Chest pains
- Extreme delusional or aggressive behaviour
- Convulsions
- Coma
- Seizures
- High fever
- Spots in fields of vision
- Arrhythmia of the heart
- Loss of muscle control
- Sudden increase in blood pressure
- Severe stomach pains

IS SOMEONE
YOU CARE
ABOUT ON ICE?

1800 NO TO ICE
1800 66 86 423

NEED SUPPORT?

1800 NO TO ICE
1800 66 86 423

FAMILY SUPPORT
0481 844 555

EMERGENCY SERVICE
000

LIFELINE
13 11 14

SUICIDE CALL BACK
1300 659 467



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ICE

ICE is a highly addictive drug that comes from the Amphetamine family of illegal drugs. It is known by many names on the street and comes in various strengths and purity.

Because the making of ICE is unregulated, it is impossible to know exactly what is in it, but it is usually a combination of highly toxic and flammable substances.

ICE triggers the release of dopamine (known as the feel-good response in the brain) up to 1000 times above normal level. It also affects the levels of noradrenaline and serotonin, which regulates a person's fight or flight response, sleep, moods, appetite, and impulse control.

ICE can make people extremely violent and when coming off the drug the body is unable to restore dopamine levels.



Horses Helping the Helpers:

How Horse Aid is Changing Lives for Firefighters

The smoke clears, the flames are doused, but for many firefighters and first responders, the battle doesn't end when the sirens are switched off. Trauma lingers. Anxiety shadows quiet moments. For some, the weight becomes unbearable.

That's where Horse Aid steps in. Founded by former NSW Mounted Police officer and equestrian trainer Scott Brodie, the model uses equine-assisted healing programs to help serving and ex-serving defence personnel and first responders deal with PTSD, depression, and the scars of service trauma.

For retired firefighter William "Billy Mac" McLean, walking into the arena with a horse was like stepping into another world. "It just felt like home. We connected straight away—I felt at ease with everyone there," he recalls of his first session. What began with curiosity has become a lifeline.

THE NEED

The toll of service is often hidden. According to recent research, around

one in three Australian firefighters will experience high psychological distress at some stage of their career, with PTSD rates estimated to be twice as high as the general population. Behind the statistics are real people—men and women who spend their days running toward danger, and their nights lying awake replaying what they have seen. For many, stigma and the old "harden up" mindset remain barriers to reaching out.

"We're soldiers, we're firies—we don't get hurt," Billy Mac says, reflecting on the culture he absorbed in the Defence Forces and then over 24 years in Fire & Rescue NSW. "That's our mindset. We help others, then we go back to the station, have a cup of tea, and act like we're fine. But that's not really what happens."

Horse Aid steps into that gap. It offers a different kind of recovery—one not rooted in paperwork or therapy rooms but in paddocks, dust, and quiet moments with a thousand-pound animal. As founder Scott Brodie has often explained, "Horses mirror our emotions. They give immediate feedback, but without judgment. That's

why they're so powerful in helping people reconnect with themselves."

For Billy Mac, this rings true. "You can't lie to a horse. If you're angry or closed off, they'll sense it straight away. But if you relax, they relax. That's the gift—they keep you honest, and in doing so, they teach you how to breathe again."

SCOTT BRODIE'S VISION

Scott Brodie knows the toll trauma takes. After years in the NSW Mounted Police, he experienced PTSD himself in a near death experience in Surf Life Saving. Horses helped him recover—and he realised they could help others too.

In 2016, he founded Horse Aid with a simple belief: both humans and horses deserve a second chance. The program retrains ex-racehorses—often animals discarded after their careers end—and pairs them with people navigating their own post-service struggles.

Participants take part in one-day or five-day programs. No prior horse experience



is required. Through guided groundwork, observation, and trust-building, they learn to communicate with the animals. At the same time, they discover strategies to manage their own anxiety, stress, and trauma.

Scott often says, “We’re not creating miracles here.” But for Billy Mac, that understatement doesn’t hold. “Don’t say you’re not creating miracles—because you are,” he insists. “I walked into that ring with nothing, and I walked out feeling like my heart was going to explode.”

BILLY MAC’S STORY

Billy Mac’s path to Horse Aid began unexpectedly. After over two decades as a firefighter, he was medically retired. He kept busy teaching first aid, but like many ex-firies, he carried invisible wounds.

One day while teaching at Broadmeadow, a participant named Betty handed him a flyer. He tucked it away. Months later, an email reminder landed. He decided to give the one-day Horse Aid program a try.

It was a long drive from the Central Coast to Sutton Forest, but worth every kilometre. “I just went, you know what? I’ve got nothing on. I’ll do it. And when I

got there, it just felt right.”

Billy Mac recalls his first connection with a horse. Within three laps of the ring, something shifted. “The horse stopped, turned, and looked me straight in the eyes. I put my head down, walked towards him, scratched his nose, and when I turned away, he followed me. Next thing I knew, his head was over my shoulder. That stunned me. The connection was so strong—it was in my heart.”

The calm he felt with the horse reminded him of the rare calm he experienced inside a burning building. “It’s the only time I’ve felt that kind of steadiness—on a fireground and with a horse. Not even a hint of anxiety or fear, just complete focus and peace.”

Billy Mac’s honesty is striking. He doesn’t shy away from the darkest chapters—multiple hospital admissions, close calls with suicide, battles with hypervigilance. But the horses gave him a new toolset. “Now, I’ve got things I do automatically—breathing techniques, mindfulness. It’s like my photography. When I’m lining up the shot, I’m not thinking about anything else. The horses are the same. They pull me into the present.”

A SHARED LANGUAGE OF SERVICE

One of the most remarkable aspects of Horse Aid is the mix of participants. At any given course, there might be firefighters, police officers, paramedics, veterans, and even corrections staff. Each comes with a unique story, but all carry the weight of service trauma.

“The amazing part,” Billy Mac said, “is realising we all tell the same story. Different uniforms, different incidents—but the feelings are the same. The anxiety. The hypervigilance. The sleepless nights. Sitting in a group like that, you don’t have to explain yourself. Everyone just gets it.”

This shared understanding becomes fertile ground for connection. Conversations that might never happen in a psychologist’s office start to flow by the campfire or after a session in the round yard. Bonds are formed that outlast the program itself. Many participants leave with phone numbers swapped, friendships built, and a sense that they are no longer walking alone.

LESSONS IN RESILIENCE

Horse Aid isn’t about “curing” PTSD or wiping away memories. Instead, it



“You can’t lie to a horse. If you’re angry, they’ll know. If you relax, they relax. That’s the gift—they keep you honest.”

provides practical tools for resilience—grounding techniques, mindfulness, and learning to manage stress through the discipline of working with horses.

Billy Mac recalls one powerful moment: “Scotty put me in with a horse that was stubborn as hell. At first, I tried too hard to make it happen, and nothing worked. Then I relaxed. I stopped forcing it. That’s when the horse finally connected. It hit me—recovery is the same. You can’t force it. You have to do the work, but you also have to let it unfold.”

For firefighters, this lesson resonates. In the field, control is often an illusion—flames shift, winds change, conditions deteriorate. The discipline comes not from forcing outcomes, but from adapting and staying steady under pressure. Working with horses reinforces that truth in a visceral way.

THE HORSES’ SECOND LIFE

Just as firefighters struggle to find purpose post-service, so too do many racehorses after their racing careers end. Horse Aid takes in thoroughbreds and retrain them for new lives—trail riding, dressage, eventing or simply trusted companions. Thoroughbreds are incredibly flexible in the equestrian world.

Billy Mac sees the parallel clearly. “We’re both learning how to live again. They get another chance, and so do we.”

The horses are not just tools but partners. Each has its own temperament, quirks, and lessons to teach. Some participants connect instantly; others wrestle with more headstrong animals. But that

challenge reflects life. “You can’t make it happen. You’ve got to earn it,” Billy Mac says.

LASTING IMPACT

The statistics speak volumes: Horse Aid runs around 15 programs annually, rotating four horses through the programs at a time. Roughly 80% of participants are first responders. Many report improved emotional regulation, reduced anxiety, and stronger peer support networks after attending.

Billy Mac’s testimony brings those numbers to life. He meets regularly with fellow firefighters for coffee. He uses breathing exercises before stepping outside when anxiety rises. And he’s found himself opening up more—to people, to opportunities, and to the idea of giving back.

“Betty’s asked me to help facilitate a program to be held in the Hunter Valley. I was like, ‘Why me?’ And she said, ‘Because you connect. You love the horses. You’re a great communicator.’ I thought, fair enough—and hey, I get a free T-shirt!” he laughs.

LOOKING AHEAD

Billy Mac isn’t stopping there. He’s already plotting a golf day fundraiser for Horse Aid at Cypress Lakes. He’s recruiting celebrity players and rallying mates. “I don’t ask people if I can do stuff. I tell them we’re doing it,” he grins.

His message to fellow firefighters is simple and emphatic. “Absolutely do it. Even if you’re scared of horses, just being around

people in that setting—not clinical, not sitting across from a psychologist—it’s different. It helps. It really does.”

For years, Billy Mac ran into burning buildings. Today, he steps into a ring with a horse and finds the same focus, the same calm, the same sense of purpose.

Horse Aid is proof that healing can come from unexpected places. For the men and women who run towards danger while others flee, these horses are helping guide them back to themselves.

“PTSD is like being an alcoholic—you’re never cured. You just learn how to live with it,” Billy says. “Horse Aid teaches you how to live with it. And I’ll tell every firefighter, every cop, every soldier—just do it.”

As Horse Aid expands its reach—now having participants come from across Australia—the call for more support is growing. Courses are free for participants, thanks to donations and community fundraising. But the demand far outstrips resources. For every firefighter or veteran who finds their way to the paddock, many more are still struggling in silence.

Billy Mac, now stepping into a volunteer role, sees the future clearly: “If I can help one other firefighter feel the way I felt walking out of that ring, then it’s worth it. I want people to know—it’s not weak to seek help. It’s actually bloody strong. And if horses can be part of that journey, then let’s saddle up.”

By Tanya Nellestein

For more information or to register, visit www.horseaid.org.au.

Fire fighter connects with his kids through The Fathering Project

Firefighter Adam Murphy experienced the benefits of The Fathering Project program in his child's school.

"Because of the shift work involved in firefighting, I've had the privilege to regularly attend the program at Oatley, my kids' school.", said Murphy.

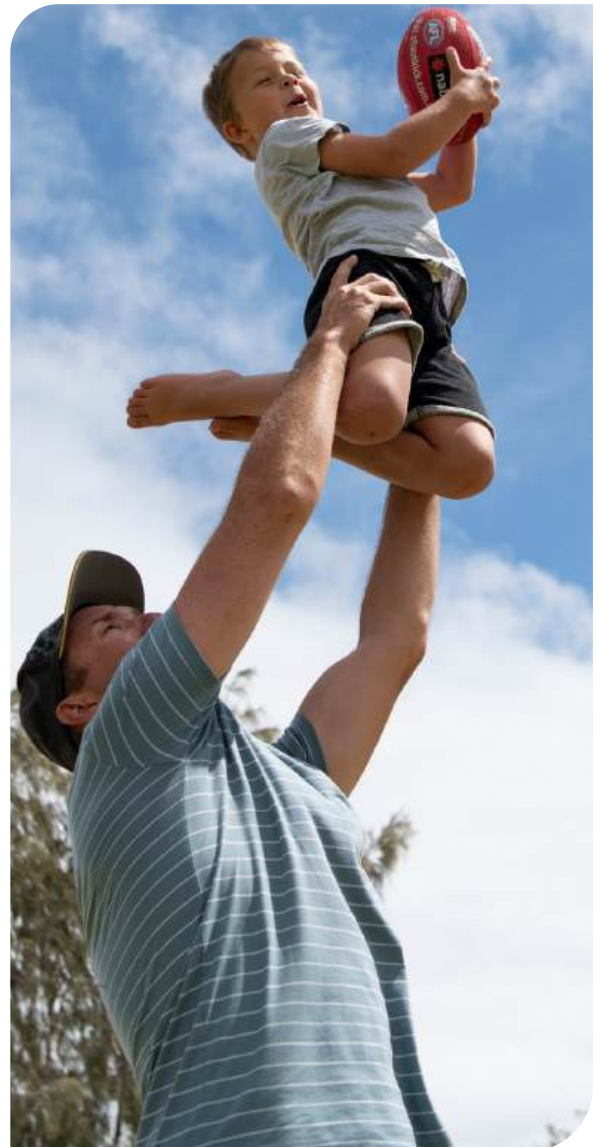
"Changing children's lives" is an outcome and vision The Fathering Project seeks to achieve.

"I talk to Dads at school pick up, who have never been on on the school grounds, and not experienced the connections I've been given with my kids through The Fathering Project", Murphy said ruefully .

"I can see my kids more confidently connected to school and their challenges, partly because I've engaged closely with their experiences."

Oatley Public School in Sydney's southwest hold regular events for Dads and Kids. **At their Term 1 activity, 200 Dads and kids connected over Paper Planes and Pizza.** Principal Debbie Hunter commented that with the growing numbers of engaged Dads on campus, there are also more Dads attending parent-teacher nights, with more kids better engaged with their learning.

Though he's yet to experience The Fathering Project's Corporate Program, Murphy can see the opportunity for a supported, interactive professional development program in Fire Services units.



Check out what other dads have to say about The Fathering Project at their child's school! Scan the QR code to listen.

About The Fathering Project

The Fathering Project is a secular not-for-profit organisation, operating nationally. Our mission is to educate, connect and empower fathers and father figures across Australia to prevent long term social, emotional and cognitive difficulties and create the conditions for children to thrive. Through resources, programs, events and community intervention programs we ensure all dads are best equipped to care for their children as they need.



To learn more, visit thefatheringproject.org or scan the QR code to view a variety of program offerings in early learning centres, schools and workplaces!





First responder PTSD rates are higher than ever. What happens now?

Research from Black Dog Institute has revealed that global rates of PTSD among first responders are at record highs, with around 12% of firefighters affected as a result of routine duties. Now more than ever, evidence-based support is needed to help first responders recover and thrive.

PTSD rates in first responders are rising worldwide

Global rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among emergency service workers are now higher than ever before, according to a landmark new study from Black Dog Institute. Called 'Global PTSD prevalence among active first responders and trends over recent years: A systematic review and meta-analysis', the study provides the most comprehensive snapshot to date of first responder PTSD between 2008 and now.

The research shows that around 14% of all first responders have probable

PTSD as a result of routine duties, a figure substantially higher than previous estimates of 10%. Around 8% have probable PTSD specifically related to responding to disasters. Among firefighters, those figures are 12% and 9% respectively, with professional firefighters at greater risk of PTSD than volunteers.

PTSD is a mental health condition that develops in response to experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. It is diagnosed based on one of four types of symptoms that last for over a month. These include intrusive symptoms (e.g., involuntary and distressing memories, nightmares or flashbacks), avoidance of reminders of the event, negative changes in thoughts and feelings about yourself or the world, and feeling hyper-alert (e.g., easy to anger or startle, difficulty sleeping).

Among first responders, PTSD is associated not only with serious

impacts on quality of life but also high levels of burnout and incapacity that can deplete this vital workforce.

"One of the most concerning findings is that rates of PTSD have worsened for a majority of first responders, despite significant international investment into the occupational mental health of this population," says Dr Andrew Arena, a postdoctoral research fellow at Black Dog Institute and the study's lead author.

Increasing access to evidence-based care

Previous research from Black Dog Institute and other organisations has identified trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT) and eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) as the gold-standard treatments for first responder populations.

At Black Dog Institute's National

MENTAL HEALTH

Emergency Worker Support Service, clinicians have delivered gold-standard treatment specifically designed to meet the unique needs of

first responders, including firefighters. This approach has achieved long-term PTSD recovery rates of 70–80%, a figure double the recovery rates of some other specialised treatments.

However, despite the success of this approach, similar treatments are not broadly available. As an international leader in the field of first responder mental health, Black Dog Institute is now calling for improved access to evidence-based care for first responder communities.

“Right now, the mental health services available to this vital community are stretched very thin,” says Dr Arena.

“There is an urgent need to increase the

availability of evidence-based support that can reduce trauma-related harm among these essential workers.”

Failing to deliver this support risks worsening the mental health outlook of first responders globally. According to Dr Arena, these professionals are already grappling with ongoing stigma around help-seeking, as well as the impacts of accumulated stress resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing natural disasters.

Supporting first responders in Australia and beyond

Black Dog Institute’s world-leading work in first responder mental health also has implications for global policy, providing important insights into how other countries can start adopting similar treatment PTSD approaches. This is particularly important in low- and middle-income countries where

first responders are more vulnerable to PTSD.

First responder mental health remains a pressing global issue, and Black Dog Institute remains focused on research and innovation that makes a difference to this vital population. Connecting first responders to trauma-informed, evidence-based care matters not only for individuals but for their employers, colleagues, friends, families and the broader community.

“The public relies on first responders during times of crisis. We need to make sure they have access to the support they need, so that in turn, they can continue to support the communities they serve,” Dr Arena says.

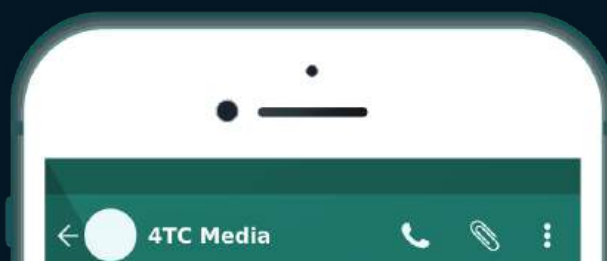


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More than a school visit: How Firefighters can ignite mindset and motivation in the next generation

Written by Lauren Munday, Founder of Think Set Go

Every time you walk into a school in uniform, students don't just see a firefighter, they see a symbol of courage, leadership and strength. You become someone they look up to, someone they'll remember long after the sirens fade.

But here's the powerful part: beyond sharing safety tips and stories, you have the chance to shape how young people think about themselves, their goals and their ability to handle challenges. You can ignite more than curiosity, you can ignite a mindset that sets them up for life.

As the Founder of Think Set Go, I partner with schools, sporting clubs and community leaders to help young people build the inner skills they need to thrive. Through a mindset and goal-pursuit educational program, I teach young people how to manage self-doubt, set meaningful goals and take confident action.

When Firefighters share this content, the message lands even stronger. Why? Because you're already living proof

of what discipline, teamwork and resilience look like in action.

How Firefighters can help young people Think, Set and Go

THINK: Help students reflect on the way they see themselves and the world. Many kids have limiting beliefs like "I'm not smart enough" or "I'll never be confident at" When you share how mindset plays a role in staying calm under pressure or staying focused on the job even when it's hard, you help break the myth that confidence is something you're born with - it's built through persistence.

SET: Guide students to set goals the same way your team plans for high-stakes situations. Show how preparation, routines and setting clear intentions make a difference. Ask questions like "What would you like to get better at this year?" and "What habits will help you stay on track?" These small moments can spark reflection and motivation.

GO: Demonstrate that taking action

is the most powerful step, even if it's not perfect. Encourage students to just begin with one small action, to try something new even if they're nervous, or to share an idea even if they are fearful of judgement. Reinforce that sometimes we can only get better by being out of our comfort zone.

Mindset tips for adults too

Mindset education isn't just for young people. As a Firefighter (or parent) you face intense pressure, emotional demands and moments that require split-second decisions. An adaptive mindset isn't optional, it's part of the job. Here are three mindset tools you can use daily and also model to the next generation:

1. Practise a reset routine.

After a tough callout or a stressful day, take a moment to reset your nervous system. This could be deep breathing, a walk, checking in with a teammate or taking note of what's going well in life. Resetting your state helps clear mental noise and improves decision-making.

2. Use powerful self-talk.

Replace “This is too much” with “One step at a time.” In high-pressure roles, what you say to yourself matters. Use short, clear affirmations to stay focused and grounded in the moment. When under pressure, keep your thoughts simple and specific.

3. Celebrate effort, not just outcome.

It’s easy to measure success in results, but resilience is built in the process. Recognise your effort, persistence and the way you show up. When you model this mindset, it creates a ripple effect for your crew, and for the young people watching you. Demonstrate that the ‘process’ is the important part, not just the result.

It’s very likely that you do these techniques unintentionally already, but by putting your attention on daily routines and responses, you can bring your self-awareness to the next level, making it easier to then teach these concepts to young people.

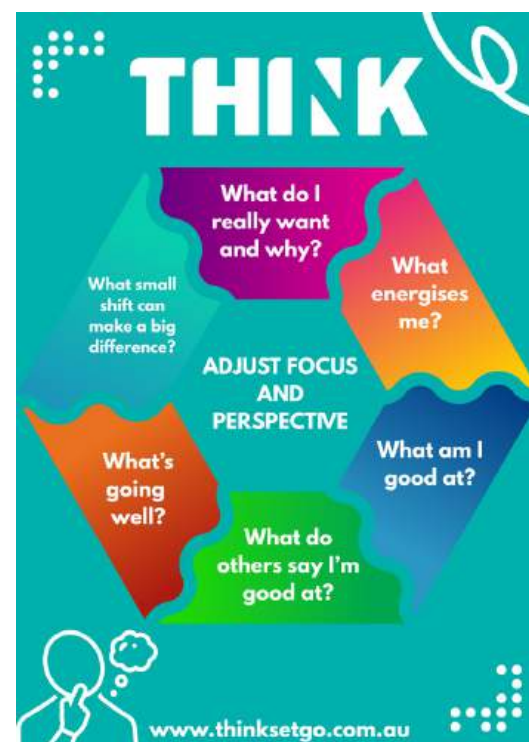
A Lasting Impact

When firefighters step into schools, it’s more than a safety lesson. It’s a chance to plant the seeds of courage, discipline and belief in young people who may never have heard mindset messages before - and when they hear it from someone who walks toward danger to keep others safe, they listen.

To connect with me or to learn more about Think Set Go Mindset Education content and programs contact Lauren Munday: info@thinksetgo.com.au or check out the website www.thinksetgo.com.au

THINK SET GO

Adapt your mind to get the edge



ThriveShift

From Pressure to Performance



UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL TO THRIVE AND FLOURISH

In today's demanding world, having practical tools to thrive is essential. Whether you're leading a business, serving in emergency services, managing family commitments, or navigating daily life, **ThriveShift** delivers impactful results.

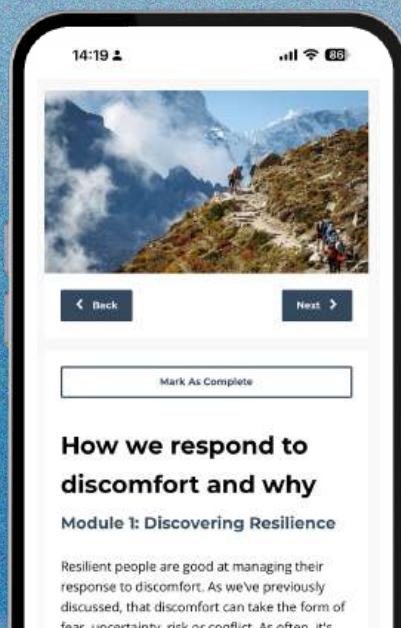
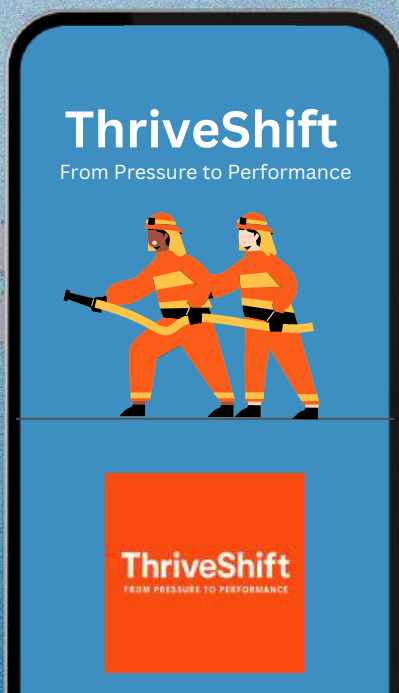
How ThriveShift will benefit you

- INCREASE RESILIENCE BY **20%**
- **REDUCE STRESS & ANXIETY**
- IMPROVED ABILITY TO PERFORM **UNDER PRESSURE**
- ENHANCED **PRODUCTIVITY, FOCUS, AND CONNECTION**

ThriveShift WORKS

Drawing from elite sport and corporate expertise, our proven programs significantly boost resilience and performance.

This program alone drove a remarkable **20% behaviour shift** within **Victoria Police**, while our interactive workshops consistently deliver **meaningful change**.



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RESILIENCE
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1300 001 606



Bush Fire Support Service

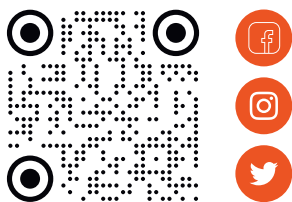
Feeling worried about bush fire season?

Australia's emergency service workers keep our communities safe. Encountering unprecedented levels of stress when responding to crises is part of the job, so it's understandable that you may be feeling stressed or anxious. It's important to note, that mental health challenges following stressful or traumatic events are normal, common and treatable.

The Bush Fire Support Service has been designed to provide free and confidential mental health support for Australia's emergency service workers and their families.

Get help now:

- One-on-one psychological mental health care sessions available free of charge via Telehealth
- Access a quick and confidential mental health assessment to check-in on how you're feeling
- Information and resources on managing your symptoms



**Black Dog
Institute**

Visit blackdoginstitute.org.au or email bushfiresupport@blackdog.org.au



When Life Becomes the Question: What Suicide Teaches Us About Resilience

On world mental health day in October 2015, I stood before a sea of faces at North Bondi Surf Lifesaving Club in Sydney. I was launching my book, about losing my brother to suicide. What struck me wasn't just the number of people there - it was the six fire trucks parked outside and the firefighters who listened intently as I shared my story of grief and healing.

They were there because suicide touches every fire service. We know that for every suicide death, up to 135 people are directly impacted. Within our organisations, the numbers are likely far higher. The nature of our close-knit relationships with our colleagues means that when another firefighter dies by suicide the ripple effects are profound.

When Our Purpose Meets Its Opposite

As firefighters, our identity is built on saving lives. As one of the participants in my research said "we are the rescuers, never the rescued". So what happens when someone intentionally ends the very thing we are sworn to protect?

In 2009, I attended a suicide scene where a young man had taken his own life using the same means as my brother. Though not ostensibly traumatic, I had a visceral reaction. I wanted to vomit. Back at station, embarrassed by how it had rocked me, I tried to push it down, to just

move on, but I couldn't. 21 years after my brother's death I could no longer run from the impact his death had had on me. Ultimately that innocuous job launched me on a journey of therapy, healing, and eventually my PhD research which explored how firefighters experience suicide. My aim was to use the findings not only to offer better support to firefighters, in the aftermath of suicide, but also as a means to enhance suicide prevention.

Over 12 years as a peer support officer, I heard countless firefighters struggling with the same questions: Why did they do it? Could I have prevented it? What if one of my family members does it? And what does this mean for me?

The Research: Listening to Our Stories

My PhD was based on narrative inquiry which is a way of understanding human experiences through story. I interviewed 20 firefighters, of different ranks and gender, supporting them to share their experiences of suicide, whether through personal loss, the loss of a colleague or turning out to a job involving suicide. Some interviews lasted for up to 2.5 hours.

As one firefighter said, "When else do you get the chance to sit down and talk about suicide for 2 hours?" You don't. That's the thing about suicide - it's unspoken. It makes people uncomfortable. The stigma elicits silencing - people don't know what

to say, so they say nothing, or they avoid it and you, like the plague. All too often, when a death by suicide is reported in the media, there is simply a reference to call lifeline at the end of the story. We are left to join the dots. The implicit message remains. It's not ok to talk about suicide. So when are we ever given space and time to explore what suicide means for us? To help us to understand our own experiences?

Research has shown that asking someone if they are having thoughts of suicide does not put the idea in their head. Rather it opens up a space to talk and to connect. It can save someone's life, if we feel equipped with the skills to know how to respond. I spent nearly twenty years as an operational firefighter and I know that I contributed to saving more people's lives through asking them about suicide than I did through pulling them out of fires.

At the end of my PhD interviews where we talked about suicide firefighters invariably said they felt better. I hadn't "fixed" anything or offered peer support in the way that I had been trained to do - I'd just listened deeply with compassionate curiosity. There's profound power in creating safe, non-judgmental spaces for people to narrate their own stories. It enables them to understand and make sense of their experiences and their lives and to rescript a new narrative and possible pathways to growth.



Four Truths About How Suicide Affects Us

My research revealed four key themes in how firefighters experience suicide:

1. Conflicting Truths: "What I Thought I Knew" Suicide creates incomprehensible conflicts between our rational, ordered worldview and an act that defies logic. It disrupts core beliefs about life, relationships, and trust. As one firefighter said to me when talking about the death of a close friend and colleague - "I thought you would have told me, mate."

There was a sense of betrayal in his voice. As firefighters the bonds we form with each other can be stronger than they are with our own families. We entrust our lives to our colleagues, we share experiences that most will never understand, and if we are a permanent firefighter we live with our colleagues. For this reason, the loss of a fellow firefighter to suicide can be experienced as a betrayal of trust, an abandonment, or rejection and a profound loss that is not publicly acknowledged. Firefighters aren't 'allowed' to grieve, or to cry.

We are strong. We rescue people. We reason with ourselves that we are not

family, our job is to support them, not to allow ourselves to feel, or to express our grief. Sometimes it morphs into anger which for many firefighters is a more culturally acceptable emotion. Underneath anger often lies profound sadness, grief or deep fear.

2. The Liminal Space: Living in "Not Knowing" The unanswered "why" of suicide creates a liminal space - a space of uncertainty and 'not knowing' that is deeply uncomfortable for firefighters, who live and breathe command and control. As one firefighter told me: "If you can't control it, how do you know?" This not-knowing reverberates across time and into all aspects of our lives. We can start to question everything we thought we knew about ourselves, our lives and our relationships.

3. Fears for the Future: "It Could Be Me" Suicide threatens our sense of safety and security. We start questioning: "Am I okay? Are my kids okay? What if I can't protect them?" It projects us into imagined futures filled with fear.

4. Reflection on the Past: "Could I Have?" We interpret suicide as a failure to protect life - a threat to our identity as rescuers. It thrusts us out of the present and into painful questioning of

the past. 'Could I have done something to prevent that death', 'what if I had done or said something differently?'

The Paradox of Growth

What might seem contradictory is how these disruptions, that shatter our assumptions about life, ourselves and our relationships can become catalysts for profound growth. My brother's death obliterated my life. It left a deep scar but it also led me to uncover strength I never knew I had and to find rich meaning and purpose. I wrote and published my book about grief and suicide, I cycled across Australia raising over \$20,000 for Lifeline and I completed my PhD. All three came about, not in spite of what happened, but because of it. The things that challenge us most deeply can also take us on a journey of growth.

It is the struggle with intensely difficult experiences, not the event itself, that builds resilience and drives growth. In that liminal space of questioning is an opportunity to make meaning so that we can emerge stronger - not despite the pain, but because we've wrestled with it and in that struggle, found strength, new possibilities, deeper relationships, a deepening sense of spirituality, and a greater appreciation for life. This is the journey of post traumatic growth.

What This Means for Our Services

Postvention IS Prevention How we respond after a suicide matters enormously. Quality postvention - supporting individuals and communities impacted by suicide - actually prevents future deaths. We need upstream, whole-of-organisation responses driven by systemic change.

Culture Shapes Everything Our hierarchical, command-and-control culture shapes how we understand

ourselves and suicide. While this structure serves us on the incident ground, extending it into all aspects of organisational life can harm wellbeing. We need cultures of care where command and control stays where it belongs.

The Power of Deep Listening The most powerful intervention isn't always fixing - it's creating space for authentic connection. Deep listening allows people to feel seen, heard, understood, and cared for. This is fundamental to fostering post-traumatic growth and resilience. It's about holding safe, non-judgmental space where people can tell their stories and make sense of them in their own way.

Moving Beyond Consultation to Co-Creation Too often, programs are developed by researchers who then ask firefighters what they think. This isn't co-design - it's consultation. True co-creation means firefighters with lived experience of suicide and mental health challenges are embedded in designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating all policies and procedures. Nothing about us without us.

Towards an integrated, holistic approach

Mental health and suicide prevention can't be siloed in health and safety departments. We need integrated approaches recognising that humans are relational beings operating at personal, interpersonal, and community levels. This includes attention to:

- Safety and security
- Bonds, networks, and communities
- Justice and dignity
- Roles and identity
- Existential meaning and purpose

All training and support must be trauma-informed, person-centred,

and culturally responsive to firefighting contexts.

The Work Continues

In December 2023, a well-respected Fire and Rescue NSW inspector took his own life. This work matters. Every story matters. Every firefighter struggling to make sense of suicide deserves support that meets their needs, and meets them where they are.

Whilst we cannot prevent all suicides, we can create environments where firefighters feel safe to struggle, to question, and to seek help. We can build cultures where vulnerability isn't weakness, its courage, where reaching out for help is an act of resilience. We can transform how we respond to suicide from reactive crisis management to proactive, compassionate care.

The sea of faces at my book launch taught me something profound: firefighters want to have authentic conversations about suicide, loss, and healing. When we create space for these conversations - really listening deeply to each other's stories - we don't just survive these experiences. We can grow from them individually and collectively.

That growth, born from our deepest challenges, might just be the most powerful prevention tool we have.



Tara is a former firefighter and peer support officer with Fire and Rescue NSW. She was medically discharged in 2024. Tara was awarded the

Chancellors medal for her doctoral research and was awarded an Australian Fire Service Medal in 2022 for her work in mental health and suicide prevention. She now works as the emergency services lived experience and strategic engagement lead at Black Dog Institute.

If you are having thoughts of suicide and need immediate assistance call:

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

This service also offers support to people caring for someone who is experiencing thoughts of suicide and for people bereaved by suicide.

If you are current or former serving an emergency service worker and would like access to free confidential support head to the Black Dog Institute National Emergency Worker Support Service



Wasp Creek RFB fireboat

Primary Producer Brigades in Queensland.

All Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland are the same in legislation.

The 1,400 brigades are classified internally as one of 5 different categories, but in reality, there are only 2 categories: truck or non-truck brigades (Primary Producer Brigades, PPBs).

60% of Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland do not have a state supplied fire truck, and most of these PPBs don't want one. This is something that weirds out other fire services in Australia and many of the newly hired staff in the Queensland Fire Department or those from non-rural backgrounds.

Primary producer brigades operate in the necessity of supporting your neighbor in their time of need. The gear used is often dual purpose and has a valuable link to everyday life such as watering stock or maintaining crops. Often the 'Fire Brigade' is another

cog of the many community groups in the small communities making up Queensland.

Why?

Across Australia, irrespective of your state or territory, over the last 100+ years people have chosen to come together and form volunteer fire brigades. These brigades were formed out of community need and desire and not by direction of a central authority.

These brigades, while geographically different and facing differing risk types, all produced models of self-governance that looked remarkably similar, and these brigades were well supported by their communities.

The contract that these groups of people had with the 'state' was that the volunteers would defend their communities and the 'state' would provide workers compensation support and enabling legislation.

For many brigades this simple contract still defines how they choose to structure their brigades and their relationship with the 'state'.

Who

PPBs use fire proactively in their land use and have excellent skills in back burning to manage an unwanted fire. Water is to assist with mopping up rather than the primary tool of extinguishment, a significant difference between city and country.

Primary Producer Brigades come in 3 subsets –

Cane Brigades - brigades based in cane production areas much like other PPB'S have access to specialised equipment that's designed for working in the "long grass". Modified tractors to operate above the height of cane and large water tenders make the difference when working a cane fire. Often local arrangements between the RFSQ Area



2,000L firefighting trailer

Office and the brigade can enhance these specialised assets to work amongst the cane fields where typical fire appliances won't go or pose a risk of getting caught.

Through generations of knowledge on how to handle fire when working amongst the fields proves beneficial not only in the harvesting process but also when an emergency arises. The skilled ability of members comes to light when they can work a going fire in a paddock and keep it contained all the while amongst others ready for harvest. Most times the "trash" that used to be burnt regularly is now a vital asset to the farmer and as such not something to be lost.

Broadacre - members in these areas typically manage large cropping operations and have a diversity of farm-based gear. Often members have access to well suited machinery such as spray rigs and various ploughs and implements. These tools are well suited for combatting fires in this landscape, facing challenges such as large crop fires and protecting other infrastructure.

Grazing - often working in a variety of land types such as the large country in the north and west, right through to the steep ranges in the east for some parts of the state. Ideal equipment varies and often needs to be beneficial for

many purposes, a variety of firefighting equipment based on utes, trucks to support earthmoving (graders, dozers) all the while using the key tool - fire.

For a great understanding of fighting desert grass fires using the Brompton Rat and grader, go

to this video on the RFBAQ YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spGb4706P9I>

Weight of attack and speed of response

There are over 3,800 slip on units and 400+ fire trailers in service across Queensland.

It can be common to see PPBs with 4 to 6 slip on units or fire trailers, and these will be spread not only across the properties in the brigade area but also pre-positioned in areas prone to fire or that are easily accessible to all brigade members.

This results in not only a very quick response from the landholders, but also 4 - 6 vehicles on the fire ground.

If the fire service was to replace the 4 to 6 slip on units or fire trailers in the brigade with 1 fire truck, the number of hoses, firefighters and water on the fireground would significantly decrease and the state cost of supporting the vehicle would exponentially increase.

PPB Cost

The fire service provides 'tune up kits' free of charge to brigades for their fire trailer and slip on units.

The fire service also swaps out pump/engine combinations where necessary and supplies PPE and training to PPB members.

The vehicles that are used on the fire ground are the property of the brigade members and can be either registered or unregistered but in a roadworthy like condition.

The Fire Service holds a comprehensive motor vehicle insurance policy which covers rural fire brigade appliances and privately-owned vehicles made available to brigades during a bona fide brigade activity.

With limitations and conditions, the Fire Service also provides reimbursement for some private equipment and machinery which is damaged, lost or stolen during attendance at a bona fide brigade activity.

To give each of these PPB brigades a fire truck, put a shed around it, service it, fuel it and replace it every 20 years is not only financially and administratively unachievable, but it would also result in a decrease in the community's ability to defend itself.

Fire Service Act 1990

152B Use of unregistered vehicle on road

(1) This section applies if—

(a) an unregistered vehicle (the vehicle) is being used on a

road—

(i) by a rural fire brigade or a fire service officer assigned to RFSQ—

(A) for carrying persons or equipment for the purpose of preventing, controlling or extinguishing a fire; or

(B) for the purpose of training relating to fire fighting or fire prevention; or



L-R, 800L slip on with speedloader, 1,000L firefighting trailer, 500L slip on with speedloader



5,000L skid to go on body truck or tipper

(C) for another purpose authorised in writing by the commissioner; or

(ii) by a person, and for a purpose, prescribed by regulation for this subparagraph; and

(b) the vehicle is clearly identified as a vehicle of a rural fire brigade; and

(c) an insurance policy of the kind mentioned in the Motor Accident Insurance Act 1994, section 23(1) is in force for the vehicle.

(2) A regulation under subsection (1)(a) (ii) may specify the types of unregistered vehicles that the person may use on the road for a prescribed purpose.

(3) The provisions of the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995 that prohibit the use on a road of an unregistered vehicle, unless the use is authorised by a permit under that Act, do not apply in relation to the vehicle.

Conclusion

Queensland is the most decentralised state in Australia.

'Rural Fire' in Queensland is a broad church; from a cane brigade that has 100% membership of all adults over 18 years old in the brigade area and

holds 1 meeting a year that is also the Christmas Party through to multi truck brigades that fund, train and undertake large animal rescue or have a fire boat.

While our model of Primary Producer Brigades is being questioned within the QFD, news reports from NSW show that the NSW Government is trying to re-engage with landholders who want to help themselves and their neighbours - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-01/incentive-helps-farmers-register-firefighting-vehicles/105838510>

This diversity of brigade type reflects the diverse communities and land use, and is something to celebrate and encourage.

Justin Choveaux, RFBAQ General Manager, gm@rfbaq.org



Greenbank RFB large animal rescue



Cane trailer to be towed by a tractor

After the Call: How Firefighters Can Reset Mind and Body

The fire's out, you're back at the station. Hoses rolled, truck restocked, tanks topped up. Helmet and boots lined up, ready for the next call. Everything in its place — just like you've been trained to do.

THE HIDDEN IMPACTS

But what about your body and your mind? Have you ever been trained to process the work you do in a way that minimises the long-term impact — not just physically, but mentally and emotionally too?

Our minds don't just switch off. All the times you think you're putting it aside, your brain is quietly filing it away, building a library of memories whether you want it to or not.

As a former NSW Police Officer — and someone who's lived with PTSD, anxiety, and depression — I know how this story plays out for many first responders. And firefighters certainly aren't exempt.

The hidden impacts of firefighting can be subtle — or not. Racing thoughts, trouble sleeping, a shorter fuse, or a body that feels permanently “on” are common. I noticed it in myself: being short with my kids, struggling with anxiety, and even having nightmares. Everyone experiences it differently — some may notice little, others feel it all.

After trying to manage on my own for a couple of years, I discovered breathwork and yoga. Unable to take medication, I needed something that actually worked — and it did. So much so that I retrained as a Breathwork Instructor and Yoga Teacher, to help other first responders get the same benefits I have.



Breathwork and yoga give Fire Fighters practical tools to recover and perform at their best. Breathwork can calm the nervous system after a call, improve focus in high-pressure situations, and support better sleep between shifts. Yoga helps with mobility and chronic pain, releases tension stored in the body, and builds mental resilience so you can stay present, calm, and alert both on and off the job.

A SIMPLE TOOL FOR YOU TO USE

If I could share one simple tool, it would be learning how to calm your nervous system anytime, anywhere. A favourite of mine is the extended exhale — inhale through your nose for four seconds, then exhale for six or more. This activates the parasympathetic nervous system, lowering heart rate and easing the stress response. Even a few minutes can make a real difference after a tough shift.

Firefighting demands so much more than physical strength — it asks for resilience of the body, mind, and heart. Tools like breathwork and yoga won't take away the challenges of the job, but they can give you the ability to meet

them with clarity, calm, and a little more ease. It's why I created a program especially for first responders, to share the same techniques that helped me. Because looking after yourself isn't just about being ready for the next call — it's about being ready for the long run.

Rosie Skene is a former NSW Police Officer and the founder of Tactical Yoga Australia. She works with first responders and veterans, teaching simple, practical tools like yoga and breathwork to help them stay resilient on the job and at home.



Tacticalyogaaustralia.com





Peter Derges and my little museum

My name is Peter Derges, I am a full-time urban firefighter in Queensland, Australia. This is a small article about me and my little museum.

As with every agency or organisation there is a past, where we came from... if this is not captured, before it's too late, it will be gone forever.

Queensland has a rather unusual fire history when compared to other places. It was made up of individual Fire Brigade Boards, with fulltime, part time and volunteer members, spread right across the state. Each of the brigades, could and did, have their own uniform which led to all of them basically being different. These differences make documenting the insignia quite a challenge. Making this challenge even more difficult was in the early 1990's the brigades were amalgamated and all previous history disposed of.

My dedication, or obsession, to the capturing of this history began in the mid 1980's. As a sixteen-year-old, and coming from a fire family, I began to "collect" a few bits and pieces of Queensland related fire insignia items. At a slow and steady pace items began to trickle in and so it all began. Talking with people, obtaining bits and pieces

and gathering the most valuable item of all... knowledge.

With a growing passion for information, I then started to realise the complexity and amount of uniform and insignia differences used throughout Queensland over the many years and evolutions. It was at this time, 1987, I joined the fire service and my collecting began to become more personal. The hunt then began with the older stuff being the first on my list. Travelling to all areas I began to collect information and of particular interest were pictures of firemen in uniform from each of the old fire brigades which became invaluable reference pieces.

As time moves on and uniforms change so does the insignia worn. These changes also provide for different manufacturers and suppliers, each of these changes require adding and preserving. I have always tried to achieve completeness and collate each of these into the specific time periods for use as reference for the years to come.

With the progress of time my once small collection has turned into a stockpile of Queensland fire uniforms and insignia. I now realise that I am no longer a collector but a curator of a large and quite comprehensive database spanning from the late 1800's to current. When I started this hobby,

I never realised that one day I would have my own uniform museum, something that I am proud of achieving.

My museum contains many thousands of items, all of which are electronically databased, will continue to grow as more insignia is produced for current issue and older items are found and added. Currently I am in the process of putting my information into electronic booklets to cover all eras, this is an ongoing project and to date there are well over 700 pages of reference material on the uniforms worn.

I could not even begin to think how to achieve what I have if I was to start now. Time has taken the older firemen and the stories that I was privileged to hear, the information from those who were there and did it. Every day that passes the new becomes old and history, capture it today for those who follow.

Peter Derges



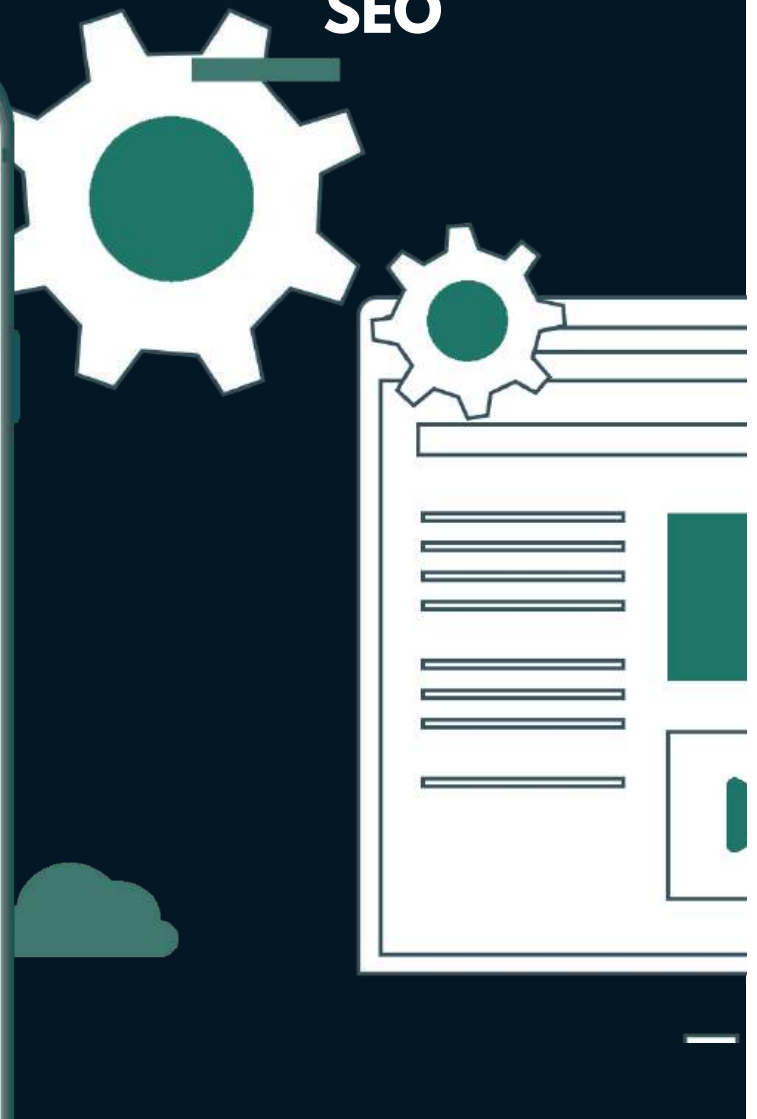
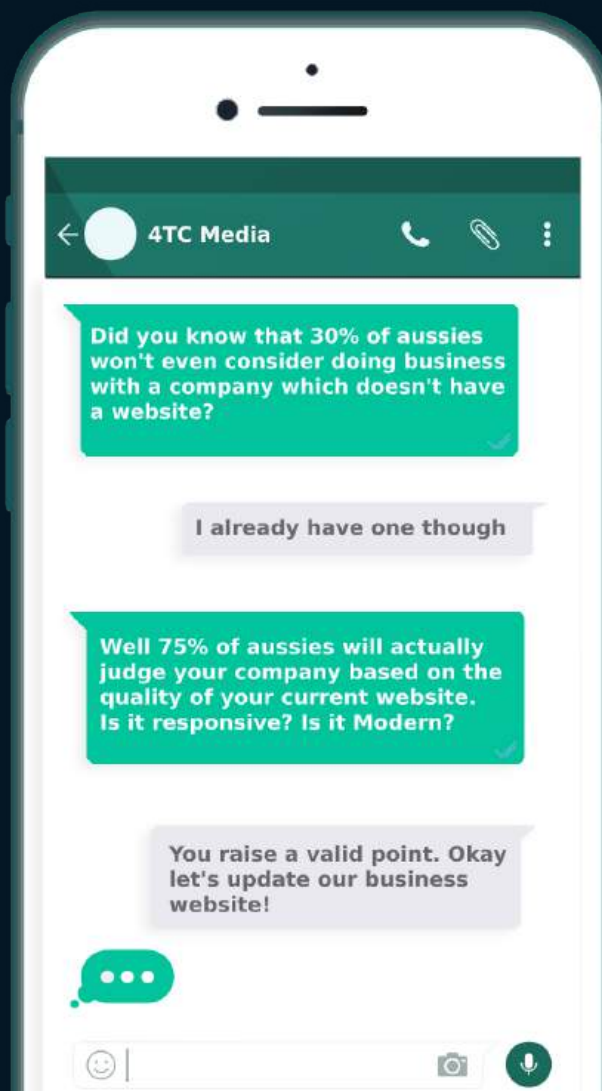


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POST-FIRE RECOVERY:

Large Forest Owls in the Richmond and Clarence Valleys.

This year marks the 70th birthday of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC). The peak body for environment groups and a voice for nature throughout NSW, the NCC has a long history of environmental advocacy. One arm of the NCC is the Healthy Ecosystems Program, responsible for the on-ground conservation projects. Among these is the Large Forest Owls project, established in 2019 under the NSW Governments Saving Our Species Program.

The project was initiated to monitor and conserve Barking Owls, Powerful Owls, and Masked Owls in the coastal lowlands on Bundjalung, Yaegl and Gumbaynggirr Country in Northern New South Wales. Considered an important stronghold for the Barking Owl and one of the few landscapes in NSW with a healthy population.

Fire forces a new direction

The initial focus of the program was the establishment of a long-term acoustic monitoring program, working with private landholders to set up acoustic recorders, one of the ways in which the ecologists can determine if the targeted species are present in the area. The

landholders had previous connections due to their environment in Hotspots Fire Project workshops, a joint program delivered by NCC and the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS). However, the project quickly pivoted its approach after the study area was impacted by the 2019–20 Black Summer fires, now regarded as the largest fire event in living memory.

The bush fires burnt hot and fast through the project area, causing devastating impacts to the forest. Nearly a quarter of the remaining large hollow-bearing trees were destroyed, including centuries-old giants that provided critical habitat for owls, gliders, and countless other native species — including the loss and abandonment of several Barking Owl nest trees, only identified months earlier.

The destruction of crucial habitat through fire, compounded by the long-term impacts of land clearing and logging in the region, required an immediate triage response. The project continued, but with a new emphasis on post-fire recovery. Thanks to a crowdfunded nest box program, 'Gimme Shelter', and funding from the NSW

Environmental Trust for the Barking Owls of the Bungawalbin Catchment (BOBCat) project (2022–24), the team were able to act swiftly. They installed 300 nest boxes to provide essential artificial habitat for the arboreal mammals which are, in turn, a vital food source for the Large Forest Owls.

In 2023, the Large Forest Owls project received a major grant from the NSW Environmental Trust for the Safe Havens project. Twenty-two properties covering 6,500 hectares of sclerophyll forests and wetlands, enabled work to extend across a broader area. The Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) program also grew to include over 50 sites, and a further 450 nest boxes were purchased to expand the network of artificial hollows.

Additional funding allowed the team to grow, creating capacity for nocturnal surveys and increasing engagement with the private landholders. The willingness of landholders to support the project and host nest boxes has been a major foundation for the project's success. While historic survey efforts had focused on National Parks and State Forests, this project offered



a unique opportunity to fill a research gap regarding owl presence on private land.

Knock, knock... who's there?

Over the last six years, the team have collected and analysed thousands of hours of acoustic data, mapped the critical habitat and locations of the owls, completed nocturnal surveys of arboreal mammals (gliders and possums), and conducted numerous rounds of nest box monitoring. Identifying all of this helps the team reveal the pace of post-fire recovery and tease out what is going on in the landscape.

Monitoring in 2023 and 2024 showed Barking Owls have re-established their presence across much of the range where they were recorded in 2019, a promising finding considering critical nest trees were lost and consequentially two years of breeding. Powerful Owls appear to be less impacted by the bush fires, with detection rates increasing annually. This was the most frequently recorded of the Large Forest Owls, detected at up to 93% of sites in Richmond and Clarence Valley over the winter of 2024. Detection of Masked Owls has been low, showing a decline in activity post-fire, with limited evidence of recovery to date.

Although observed during nocturnal field surveys, Masked Owls are known to prey on ground-dwelling species, and the dense understorey regrowth that has established following the high-intensity bush fires has altered the forest structure. Reduced open grassy areas may be restricting their ability to hunt, discouraging them from using these areas.

In addition to large forest owls, the acoustic monitoring has recorded the presence of other

hollow-dependent species. For example, showing the effect of the fires on large gliders such as the Yellow-bellied glider. Before the fires, Yellow-bellied gliders were detected at six monitoring sites; since then, they have not been detected in either PAM or nocturnal surveys of the area. The scarcity of records of this threatened species is of concern, and it appears the population in the northern project area is not recovering as well as other smaller gliders such as the Squirrel glider, which is commonly recorded during surveys and readily occupies nest boxes.

Overall, two rounds of nest box monitoring in Spring 2024 and Autumn 2025 demonstrated an overall usage rate of 76 and 64 per cent respectively, where boxes were either occupied or had evidence of use, such as the presence of a leaf nest. Some of the landholder properties had an occupancy of 100 per cent, clear evidence of the demand for homes in what can only be called a wildlife housing crisis. Squirrel gliders were the most common occupants, but the boxes also hosted brushtail, short-eared and ringtail possums, sugar and feathertail gliders, antechinus, phascogales, microbats, and even some reptiles and frogs.

Looking ahead

Protecting the existing hollow-bearing trees on private property and

supporting landholders to manage their critical habitat have become paramount for the future of these species. Alongside the surveys, ongoing monitoring and active management to reduce fuel load around the base of trees is key. Landholders receive Large Forest Owl management and conservation guides as well as individual map-based property plans, which include species records, mapped vegetation type and habitat features including hollow-bearing trees. They are also shown practical tips on how to protect critical habitat from fire. The current funding for the project finishes in early 2026 and we are looking to continue our monitoring and habitat restoration work by expanding the nest box network. When the acoustic monitoring commenced in 2019, it was hoped that this would form the basis of a long-term monitoring program that can provide valuable insight into the occupancy trends of large forest owls, and a range of other nocturnal species, over decades to come.

The Large Forest Owls team would like to thank all the participating landholders and delivery team as well as support from the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust and Saving Our Species programs.

This article was written by Campbell Goff with the Nature Conservation Council.

Driving Change

How CDTA is Raising the Standard of Corporate Road Safety



In a fast-moving world where company vehicles are often mobile workplaces, road safety has become more than just a compliance requirement – it's a corporate responsibility. Corporate Driver Training Australia (CDTA) is leading the way in transforming the way businesses view and manage driving risks. Through advanced training and tailored risk-reduction programs, CDTA is empowering Australian organisations to create safer, smarter, and more responsible drivers across every level of the workforce.

Road crashes are one of the leading causes of work-related injury and fatality in Australia. According to Safe Work Australia, vehicles are involved in more than 30% of all workplace deaths. Beyond the human toll, the economic impact is staggering – costs related to insurance premiums, vehicle

downtime, lost productivity, legal liability, and reputational damage can quickly escalate when safety isn't prioritised.

That's where CDTA steps in – offering more than just driving instruction. The organisation provides a comprehensive, proactive approach to driver safety, designed specifically for the needs of modern businesses, fleets, and government agencies.

CDTA is proudly Australian-owned with a nationwide footprint, delivering consistent, high-quality training across every state and territory. From regional mining companies and logistics fleets to corporate sales teams and executives, CDTA's programs are as diverse as the industries they serve. Every trainer in the CDTA network is a qualified, experienced professional, trained not

only in defensive driving, but also in adult learning and behavioural coaching. This ensures a consistent standard of excellence – no matter where your team is based.

CDTA's success lies in its ability to customise training programs to suit individual clients and their unique driving risks. Programs can be delivered on-site, online, or at dedicated training facilities – with options that include:

- Defensive driving and collision-avoidance training
- Trailer towing and vehicle handling under load
- Emergency vehicle driver training for ambulance, fire, and police personnel
- Fleet safety programs to reduce incidents and operating costs
- 4WD and remote-area training for field teams

- Eco-driving for fuel efficiency and emissions reduction
- Post-incident driver assessments and retraining
- Fatigue management and distraction awareness
- Community transport and disability transport driver training

Importantly, CDTA's training isn't just about what drivers shouldn't do — it focuses on practical, actionable skills that improve confidence, concentration, and hazard perception under real-world conditions.

In today's regulatory environment, businesses must prove due diligence in protecting staff on the road. CDTA provides comprehensive reporting and digital certification, giving employers peace of mind and evidence of compliance with WHS obligations.

Clients consistently report improvements in:

- Driver awareness and performance
- Reduced crash and incident rates
- Lower insurance claims and premiums
- Improved fuel efficiency and reduced fleet costs
- Greater employee satisfaction and retention

These measurable outcomes make CDTA not just a training provider — but a strategic safety partner.

From large-scale construction firms to local councils and transport providers, CDTA has supported hundreds of organisations in building safer driving cultures. One recent case saw a logistics company reduce preventable vehicle incidents by 46% in under 12 months, following the rollout of a tailored fleet

safety training and review program.

In another example, a regional council implemented CDTA's community transport training and reported increased confidence and safety among drivers transporting elderly and NDIS participants.

As the transport landscape shifts with the rise of electric vehicles, automation, and remote workforces, the need for comprehensive driver safety solutions has never been greater. CDTA is committed to remaining at the forefront — not only responding to trends but actively shaping the future of safe driving practices in Australian workplaces.

The organisation's vision is simple yet powerful: every business deserves safe, confident, and capable drivers behind the wheel.

"Driver safety is not just a compliance checkbox — it's a strategic advantage," says Ronak Shah, CEO at CDTA. "When employees feel confident and prepared behind the wheel, they perform better, stay safer, and become ambassadors for your brand on the road."

To learn more about how CDTA can support your team with tailored corporate driver training, visit:

www.corporatedrivertrainingaustralia.com.au
info@corporatedrivertrainingaustralia.com.au
1300 898 969

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*Empowering Corporate Success Nationwide
with Expert Driver Training*



UPLIFT YOUR FINANCIAL WELLBEING

By The Money Collective



Firefighters face challenges in maintaining balance across all areas of wellbeing—physical, mental, and financial. As Australia's cost of living continues to rise, more workplaces are recognising that financial wellbeing plays a critical role in overall health, focus, and resilience.

Data from the Gallagher Workforce Wellbeing Index shows that financial wellbeing is now the number one wellbeing priority for Australian employees. With the rising cost of living and mortgage stress affecting families nationwide, it is time to recognise that true wellbeing at work means more than just physical and psychological safety—it also means financial security.



What is Financial Wellbeing?

Financial wellbeing means having the ability to meet everyday expenses with money left over, while feeling in control of your financial future.

It's about understanding your money, being able to talk openly about it, setting clear goals, and knowing you're prepared for what's ahead.

For firefighters, which might mean:

- Feeling confident managing income and overtime cycles
- Knowing how to make home loan repayments work harder for you.

- Having a plan in place for the unexpected
- Setting financial goals for the life you want beyond your career.

Often overlooked, financial wellbeing is the missing piece of the wellbeing puzzle—it goes hand in hand with mental, social, and physical health, shaping how confident, connected, and supported we feel in everyday life.



Why It Matters for Firefighters

An ASIC and Beyond Blue report found that financial stress doubles the likelihood of experiencing mental health challenges such as anxiety or depression. In the fire service—where the work environment is already demanding—reducing financial pressure can play a key role in supporting overall wellbeing.

Financial wellbeing programs help people understand their money, make informed financial decisions, and take meaningful action to reduce financial stress. The result?

- More focus at work
- Less absenteeism
- Better sleep and family relationships
- Stronger resilience—on and off the job

NEWS AND VIEWS



- More focus at work
- Less absenteeism
- Better sleep and family relationships
- Stronger resilience—on and off the job

Building Financial Wellbeing with The Money Collective

Financial wellbeing is how we feel about money—our sense of confidence, control, and security both now and in the future. Our 12-Step Financial

Wellbeing Framework helps people shift from worry to action by focusing on the two key drivers of change: financial capability and financial resilience.

Capability is about understanding your beliefs and behaviours around money and developing practical skills like budgeting and planning. Resilience means setting clear goals, saving deliberately toward them, and creating banking systems that support progress. When we align our money with our values, we balance enjoying life today with building for tomorrow. Having structure builds confidence and optimism—key ingredients for lasting financial wellbeing.

These steps help participants move from awareness to action, covering:

1. Understanding your money mindset and story
2. Clarifying values, purpose, and goals
3. Reviewing spending and building a plan
4. Creating a bank structure that supports your goals.
5. Tracking progress to stay on course

the money collective. 12 step framework

Self-Assessment	Purpose and Vision	Financial Education
Money Personality	Spending Review	New Budget
Money Story	Financial Position	Banking Structure
Values	Goals and Priorities	Track and Review

These steps help participants move from awareness to action, covering:

1. Understanding your money mindset and story
2. Clarifying values, purpose, and goals

Financial Wellbeing by the Numbers

Financial Wellbeing statistics are compelling across all demographics.

The Money Collective has gathered valuable insights into how people feel and behave around money. The data shows that financial stress is common across industries and income levels—driven more by uncertainty and lack of structure than by earnings themselves.

Key Findings:

- 90.9% of participants experience some level of stress about money.
- 81.8% are unsure how to change the way they feel about their finances.
- 68.2% think about their personal financial situation during a normal working day.
- 63.7% have less than three months of income accessible for emergencies.
- 77.3% do not have a written plan for their money.

These findings highlight the importance of building financial capability and resilience—helping people understand their money, create structure, and feel more confident about the future.

Most importantly, no one is alone in feeling financial stress. Talking about money openly—with family, friends, and work colleagues—helps break down the stigma, normalises the conversation, and creates a stronger culture of support and shared learning.

Financial wellbeing programs help people understand their money, make informed financial decisions, and take meaningful action to reduce financial stress. The result?

3. Reviewing spending and building a plan
4. Creating a bank structure that supports your goals.
5. Tracking progress to stay on course

Founded by finance and wellbeing experts Darlene Neu and Melissa Pearce, The Money Collective delivers 12-month Financial Resilience Programs to organisations and Financial Wellbeing services to individuals. Their programs empower people to take control of their money and feel more confident about their future.

Programs include:

- **Financial Wellbeing Workshops:** 90-minute, interactive educational sessions with practical tools and take-home plans
- **Dedicated Financial Wellbeing Days:** Full day, on site or online events designed for employees, to book and have dedicated time for 1 on 1 financial wellbeing coaching calls.
- **Financial Wellbeing Calls** Personalised sessions providing guidance and support to help people implement what they have learned and stay accountable.

• **Home Loan Advice Sessions:** Independent home loan education and optimisation—helping participants understand their mortgage, make informed choices, and find ways to save time and money.

• **Online Learning:** On-demand videos, templates, and personal spending plans

Participants leave with clarity about their financial position, a personal plan, and strategies to build lasting confidence.



Take the First Step

The Money Collective's mission is to educate over 10,000 Australians about financial wellbeing in 2025.

To learn more about financial wellbeing programs or to access resources, visit

themoneycollective.com.au

or listen to the Financial Wellbeing with The Money Collective podcast on Spotify or Apple Podcasts.



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MacKillop Seasons

Support for Disaster Resilience



BUSHFIRES, FLOODS, CYCLONES, MOUSE PLAGUES, AND DROUGHT - natural disasters are diverse, unpredictable and frequently devastating. Rural and regional communities are no stranger to such events and often among the most impacted, with livelihoods tied to the land. It is frequently the strong community spirit and tenacity that helps get communities through. For many years MacKillop Seasons, a not-for-profit provider of training and programs, has been working with communities to buoy existing networks, offering education and resources to assist communities in their recovery efforts and bolster their capacity for ongoing resilience.

From 2021 to 2024, government funding allowed MacKillop Seasons to strengthen community capacity in disaster affected areas in northern, southern, and central NSW, and East Gippsland in Victoria. One aspect of this process was creating opportunities for individuals to access fully funded training in the Seasons for Growth suite of educational programs. First developed by Distinguished Professor Anne Graham AO (Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University) almost 30 years ago, the programs offer education to support children, young people and adults to learn about and grow, through

change, loss and grief. The suite includes Stormbirds, an educational program specifically designed to support children following natural disaster, alongside other loss programs for young people and adults, including First Nations adults. Each of the programs takes a small-group approach; creating a safe, strengths-based space to

move forward by building relationships, emotional literacy, resilience and wellbeing.

The impact of these programs on community resilience has been recognised by numerous awards. In 2024, Lismore South Public School won the Resilient Australia National School Award for the way they prioritised student recovery, mental health and wellbeing, following the devastating floods in the Northern Rivers in February and March 2022. With three quarters of students having lost their homes and possessions, and the school building badly damaged, Assistant Principal, Gaye Titcume, described, "The children had lost almost everything that was normal to them... we needed to sit with the children after the flood and just 'be' with them."

At the time, fully funded training and mentoring in the Stormbirds program offered a framework for supporting the learning and wellbeing needs of students and staff. Staff delivered multiple groups per week, ensuring any student had the opportunity to take part and experience the supportive, healing benefits of being heard, valued and cared for. The Principal, Larissa Polak, shared, "Stormbirds builds resilience in our children, is a safe place to be and has brought them great joy...and it has brought us great joy" to

accompany them through the program. One of the students explained they learnt, "how to work out a plan when I feel upset."

In the South of NSW, similar work has benefited the Mogo Primary School community, who experienced the Black Summer bushfires of 2019 and 2020, as well as major flooding, along with pandemic restrictions. Given the passage of time since some of the disasters and the extent of the secondary losses and disruption stemming from the events, the school trained in the broader Seasons for Growth program, funded by a donation from Schools Plus to the NSW Department of Education. Attending the group sessions, some children reported that it was the first opportunity they had to speak about the effects on them, following the Black Summer bushfires many years previously.

As a result of such positive and sustainable impacts for communities, MacKillop Seasons has been granted further government funding to provide support in other disaster impacted communities in NSW, Victoria, and Queensland. The new initiative will support community learning, offer fully funded training in programs and help communities forge locally-relevant resilience pathways.



Email resilience@mackillop.org.au for details about how to access supports from MacKillop Seasons.





Greyhounds as Mates: A Lifelong Bond Born from Compassion

GREYHOUNDS AS MATES brings together two groups who understand loyalty better than most — South Australia's emergency service workers and retired racing greyhounds.

Launched through a partnership between Greyhound Racing SA (GRSA), Greyhounds Australasia (GA), the Police Association of South Australia (PASA), and the United Firefighters Union of South Australia (UFUSA), the program provides police and firefighter union members with priority access to GRSA's Greyhounds as Pets (GAP SA) adoption program. Adoption fees are fully covered, ensuring these everyday heroes can be quickly matched with a loving new companion — free of charge.

Each adopted greyhound comes desexed, vaccinated, microchipped and dental and health checks, along with three months of premium dry food and veterinary support, giving every new partnership the best possible start. The initiative not only celebrates the dedication of emergency service workers but also creates life-changing outcomes for greyhounds ready to begin their next chapter.

This program builds upon GRSA's longstanding commitment to preparing greyhounds for life after racing — a journey supported in part by the GAP SA Prison Program, one of the most successful initiatives of its kind in the world.

Since its beginnings at the Adelaide Women's Prison in 2013, the program has paired inmates with retired greyhounds to teach basic obedience, socialisation, and lead training. With a second facility added at Mobilong Prison in 2018, it now houses up to 24 dogs at a time. The results have been remarkable — greyhounds leave the program calm, confident, and well-adjusted, while inmates gain valuable skills, responsibility, and emotional growth through the process.

The mutual transformation was captured powerfully in the documentary *Prisoners and Pups* and later in Miriam Margolyes' *Australia Unmasked*. Both highlighted how compassion, purpose, and second chances connect the handlers and their canine trainees.

Together, Greyhounds as Mates and the

GAP SA Prison Program showcase the spirit of partnership that underpins GRSA's mission — creating meaningful connections and giving both people and greyhounds the opportunity to thrive.

Because when it comes to loyalty, no one understands it quite like a greyhound — or those who dedicate their lives to helping others.

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Breaking the Silence: Men's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Firefighting



Every firefighter knows what it feels like to carry weight. The weight of the gear. The weight of responsibility. The weight of lives hanging in the balance. What we don't talk about enough is the invisible weight, the mental and emotional load that comes with serving on the front line.

At The Next Step Australia (TNSA), we've built our charity on lived experience. Our directors have walked through the darkest moments of suicide bereavement and suicide attempts themselves. We know firsthand that silence can be deadly and we also know that conversation, connection, and the right tools can save lives.

Firefighters across Australia face unique pressures: the trauma of emergencies, the strain on family life, the relentless demand to be strong. These challenges don't vanish when the siren stops. They come home with you, sit in the back of your mind, and sometimes grow heavier with time. And when "toughing it out" feels like the only option, too many of our brothers and sisters in uniform are left carrying that weight alone.

That's why TNSA is committed to breaking stigma around mental health and suicide. Our mission is simple but ambitious: to train and empower every Australian in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). We believe suicide prevention is not just a specialist's job, it's a skill every community, workplace, and frontline service can carry.

For fire services, this means equipping teams with the confidence to recognise warning signs, start real conversations, and walk alongside someone until safety is restored. Just as every firefighter is trained to use a hose or defibrillator, we would love to see every firefighter trained in ASIST to use the skills that save lives in moments of mental health crisis.

TNSA is already delivering men's groups, cold water therapy, and community education sessions across South Australia. But our vision is national: to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with organisations like yours, so that no firefighter, no man, woman, or family, feels they have to fight these battles alone or in silence.

We're inviting fire services and unions across Australia to partner with us. Together, we can make mental health support as normal and accessible as putting on your boots before a shift.

Because behind the uniform, you're still a human. And it's okay to need support. In fact, it's a sign of strength to reach out and take the next step.

The Next Step Australia (TNSA)

Normalising conversations. Reducing stigma. Saving lives.

admin@thenextstepaustralia.com.au

<https://thenextstepaustralia.com.au/>

@the.next.step.australia

www.facebook.com/the.next.step.australia/



When Girls Roar, the World Listens

*Embrace the unique. Build confidence.
Become resilient.*

A wellbeing program redefining what it means to be a kind, courageous and confident teen today.

In every community, there are quiet battles happening behind the scenes, especially for our teenage girls. In a world that too often measures girls by impossible standards, it's easy for them to lose sight of who they are.

The teenage years are often a time of exploration, but they can also be a time of quiet self-doubt. Girls start to internalise messages that tell them to be quieter, smaller, and less themselves and limiting beliefs start to creep in (I'm not enough. I don't belong. I shouldn't speak up) around their identities, lovability, and capabilities. At Girls Who Roar, we believe it's time to change that, and we know communities like yours can help lead the way.

Firefighters and emergency services are known for courage, leadership, and service, values we are passionate about sharing and teaching every day

through Girls Who Roar. We know that whether you're on the front lines or involved in community safety and outreach, you're deeply invested in helping people feel safe, strong, and supported. That's what we want for our girls, too.

We help girls build meaningful relationships rooted in honesty, respect, and empathy. We show them what it means to lead with courage and embrace their strengths, all while building a strong sense of self. We believe every girl deserves a space where she feels safe, seen, and supported.

Our mission is simple but powerful: that girls EVERYWHERE would hear a new and inspiring message that brings them confidence to be themselves and courage to have real and healthy relationships.

A Program with a Purpose

Girls Who Roar is a 6 week self paced

online program designed to engage, inspire, and empower teenage girls. Each girl begins their journey with a beautifully boxed Welcome Pack complete with a custom GWR journal, items the girls use throughout the program and a gift to set the tone of belonging and remind them that they are valued.

Over the course of the program, conversational video sessions cover:

- Uniqueness & Strengths
- Resilience
- Kindness
- Friendships
- Boundaries & Consent
- Gratitude & Dreaming Big

These messages aren't just afterthoughts or extras in a girl's life, they are life skills that can change the trajectory of a young persons' future, equip girls to navigate challenges with strength and integrity.



- And so much more!

From the Fire Station
to the Frontline of
Youth Wellbeing

To date, we've proudly
partnered with PCYC
branches, schools, and
youth centres to reach
girls from all walks of
life.

Why It Matters More Than Ever

Girls Who Roar was born, not just to educate, but to empower. The need has never been greater. As the founder of GWR I have worked in school wellbeing for many years and I've witnessed firsthand the gaps in support for young people. Right now, the reality is stark: waitlists for psychologists and external mental health services are growing longer by the day. Many families are waiting months for professional help, while their daughters struggle in silence.

Girls Who Roar offers an immediate and meaningful alternative - a powerful, positive intervention that can be accessed right away. While it's not a replacement for clinical support, it provides a crucial bridge in the interim, equipping girls with practical tools, emotional support, and a sense of connection when they need it most.

Kindness, Courage, Confidence

aren't just words on a wall. They're the backbone of every module, every conversation, every connection.

We hope that at the end of the program, girls will benefit in a number of ways, including:

- Increased mental and emotional wellbeing
- Improved decision making skills
- Clearer communication skills
- Stronger friendships

These partnerships

provide girls the opportunity to complete Girls Who Roar, reinforcing the values our community heroes model every day, respect, courage, and care for others.

Whether you're involved in community engagement, youth support, or just passionate about seeing young people thrive, you have a role to play.

Our Sponsorship Program

Understanding that cost can be a barrier, our sponsorship initiative allows businesses, community leaders, and everyday Australians to fund a girl's place in the program, giving her access to the full 6 week program with no expense.

We believe every girl deserves to know her worth and feel confident, no matter her circumstances.

Let's Roar Together

Whether you're a firefighter, first responder, business owner, community leader or a parent, we invite you to stand with us and champion our girls today. Your support will help us build stronger girls, and in turn, stronger communities. Together, we will build a future where the dreams of every girl are within reach.



Enrol. Partner with us. Share our story.

Because when girls roar, the world listens.

www.girlswhoroar.com.au

[@girls.who.roar](https://www.instagram.com/girls.who.roar)

Kindness. Courage. Confidence.





EVERYONE LOVES A HERO

EVERYONE LOVES SUPERMAN, the inscrutable hero who puts his life at risk to rescue ordinary people in distress and then, unphased, returns to being an ordinary human being. He asks nothing for himself and is untouched by the danger he has faced and survived.

This is the image the world has of firefighters, both men and women and many of these aspects are true. Firefighters are brave, they do put their lives at risk to protect others and respond courageously when called upon. But what if they are not different from others when it comes to the personal cost they bear in doing so?

THE PRICE OF COURAGE

Australian mental health statistics are telling, with 40% of professional firefighters experiencing clinically significant levels of anxiety and depression, over 10% identifying clinically significant Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and 17% reporting symptoms that meet criteria for a psychological disorder in the past

year. Firefighters also report the highest incidence of suicidal thoughts of any emergency services workers.

WHAT IS PTSD?

PTSD is not a reflection of character but a consequence of exposure to trauma. Certain groups are more vulnerable than others including people experiencing homelessness, refugees, those exposed to family and domestic violence, LGBTIQ+ people, young people in out-of-home care or under youth justice supervision and workers in emergency services, the armed forces, and veterans.

It is the consequence of witnessing or being involved in an extremely stressful or terrifying event resulting in symptoms that last more than a month. These vary between people and include intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions causing major difficulties in social or work situations and

affecting relationships with family and friends. What Puts a Person at Risk?

While research is ongoing to explain why some people experience mental health symptoms in response to stressors and others do not, external relational and social factors play a key role both in the development and resolution of symptoms. Difficulties in the workplace, relationship issues or drug and alcohol misuse all increase the risk of developing symptoms. Moral injury caused by witnessing or failing to prevent acts that are against a person's conscience or moral code are also significant.

WHAT HELPS ON THE OUTSIDE?

A key variable in both the development and resolution of mental health symptoms is the world of the person, with recovery strongly predicted by the level of social and emotional support from friends and family. When a person has been attempting to 'manage alone,' shamed by their feeling of 'weakness,' they have often developed unhelpful coping strategies that have hurt those closest to them. This may then result in arguing and overt conflict or a distancing and

bower(place)

Broadening the definition of where the problem lies beyond the individual to include those closest to them at home and work is both challenging and helpful

bower(place)

Including all who are part of the person's world from their work mates to family, friends and wider community powerfully supports recovery

bower(place)

PTSD is not a reflection of character but a consequence of exposure to trauma

isolation as a way of avoiding trouble.

Stressful events at work may occur at a time when the firefighter and their family are already experiencing relational stress. Personal, financial and time resources may be stretched

resulting in conflict between the couple which can then reflect in child behaviour and emotional difficulties. Where a partner believes work is the cause of all their difficulties and is angry about the toll it is taking on the family it will be difficult to turn to them for support. Lack of sleep, shift work and use of drugs and alcohol to manage, escalate the difficulties both within a person and between them and those who they would usually turn to, narrowing their social network and the resources it can offer.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

While individual therapy is important, ignoring the healing value of family and friends is unwise.

Broadening the definition of where the problem lies beyond the individual to include those closest to them at home and work is both challenging and helpful. Partners may never

have been given the opportunity to speak freely about their experience of living with a distressed person who is both frightening in their anger and frightened and threatening self-harm.

Couple or family therapy provides a safe place where all family members can speak and begin to make sense of themselves and their current situation. It is an opportunity to challenge an

idea that one person must be strong and invulnerable and create a fairer more reciprocal set of relationships that can both address the hurt a person has sustained and create fairer arrangements. Strengthening the couple relationship provides a platform to broaden the social world and address difficulties that may predate work injury. This may include difficulties with family of origin, children, friends, and colleagues. It allows a richer understanding of both the conditions that failed to protect and create opportunities for better solutions to be discovered.

IN CONCLUSION

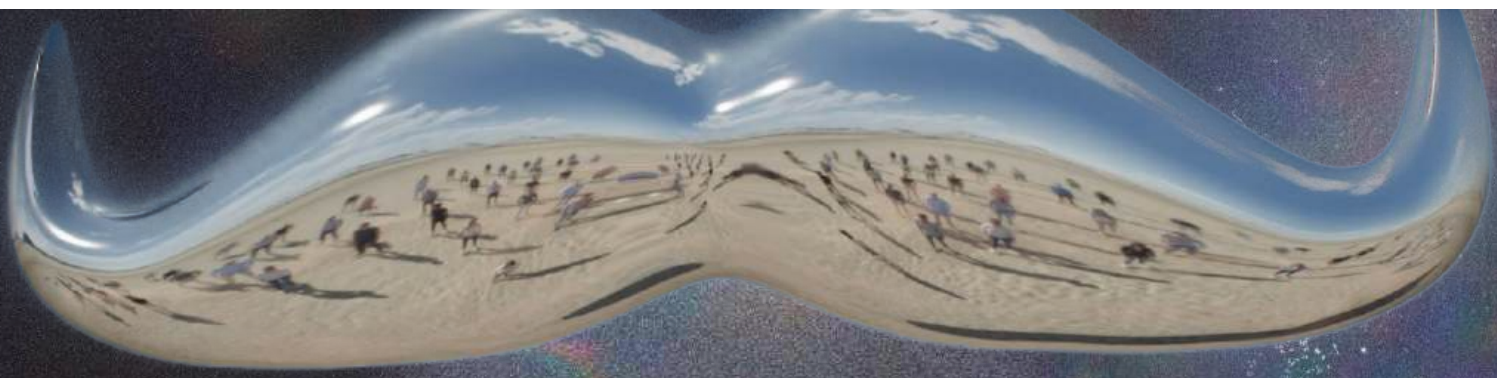
Those who work in dangerous and unpredictable occupations are at risk for becoming overwhelmed and

developing symptoms. Understanding that this is not an individual weakness but the result of multiple stressors that carry a risk of isolation which exacerbate the difficulties allows a different response. Including all who are part of the person's world from their work mates to family, friends and wider community powerfully supports recovery.



Catherine Sanders

Catherine Sanders is a Clinical Psychologist, Family Therapist, and Director of Bower Place (est. 1986) which is a psychology, psychiatry, mental health social work, mediation, training, corporate advisory, and knowledge development organisation with expertise in complexity and crisis.



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