



The BlazeAid POST

JUN 2025- ISSUE 17

A Quarterly Insight into the BlazeAid Organisation and its efforts
to Rebuild Communities Affected by Natural Disasters

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AN OPEN LETTER TO BLAZE AID VOLUNTEERS

Dear BlazeAid Volunteers,

As we reflect on the incredible journey since BlazeAid was founded in 2009, we find ourselves humbled and deeply grateful for the unwavering dedication of every volunteer who has stood beside us in times of crisis. From the rolling fields of Victoria to the remote corners of Australia, your hands have rebuilt what disaster has torn apart, and your hearts have lifted the spirits of those who needed it most.

Together, 38,520 volunteers have given an astounding 425,790 volunteer days, working tirelessly across 14,000 properties to clear 18,626 kilometers of fencing and rebuild 18,442 kilometers, each fence line a testament to resilience, each property a symbol of hope restored.

These numbers, while remarkable, only tell part of the story. Behind every statistic lies the sweat, compassion, and determination of individuals who put aside their own lives to help others rebuild theirs. You have not only repaired fences, you have mended lives, rekindled spirits, and forged friendships that will last a lifetime.

In the face of fires, floods, and devastation, you have proven that fellow Australians with great values and even bigger hearts, team up with likeminded others to do extraordinary things, can change the world. Your generosity, selflessness, and tireless work embody the very essence of community and kindness. As we look ahead, we know that challenges will come again, but we also know that the BlazeAid spirit will endure, because of you. Thank you for being part of this incredible movement and for proving, time and time again, that when disaster strikes, Australia stands together.

With deepest gratitude,
Kevin and Rhonda Butler
Founders, BlazeAid



Stuart Opie

Co-Ordinator of the Quarter

Introducing Stuart Opie – BlazeAid Coordinator

Stuart Opie served as a highly valued BlazeAid Coordinator at the Willaura basecamp in the Grampians region of Victoria, where he played a vital role in the community’s recovery following the devastating bushfires. During his time at Willaura, volunteers appreciated Stuart’s fair and organised leadership style, along with his caring and welcoming nature, which helped create a strong sense of purpose and camaraderie within the camp.

Stuart, 61, was born and raised in Mordialloc, Victoria. After spending 16 years living abroad, he returned to Australia and now resides in the coastal town of Inverloch, in South Gippsland, Victoria.

Outside of his time with BlazeAid, Stuart maintained an active lifestyle, enjoying hiking, cycling, and kayaking among other interests. He began his career as an apprentice tradesman in a local sheet metal factory before joining the Williamstown Dockyard in Melbourne, contributing to the Anzac-class frigate project. Initially responsible for outfitting ship compartments as a sheet metal worker, he later transitioned into a planning role, coordinating teams and ensuring that compartments were completed to Royal Australian Navy standards. After more than a decade in the shipbuilding industry, Stuart moved overseas to take on the role of Planning Manager in Dubai, overseeing construction costs and scheduling for offshore platforms and infrastructure projects in the oil and gas sector.

He later served as Project Controls Manager in Qatar, leading a two-year subsea cable project. Following his retirement from the industry, Stuart joined his wife full-time in building and managing their homewares business, growing it to 40 stores and 120 staff across the Middle East. Upon permanently returning to Australia and touring the country extensively, Stuart sought a renewed sense of purpose and an opportunity to give back. This led him to volunteer at BlazeAid’s Lockington/Echuca basecamp in response to the 2022 floods, assisting in the clearing, repair, and replacement of damaged fencing. Since then, he has continued to volunteer at multiple BlazeAid camps supporting both flood and bushfire recovery efforts in work at Murrabit, Taralga, Kerang and Yinnar basecamps, before stepping into the coordinator role at Willaura in Victoria.

This experience proved to be one of the most memorable and rewarding of his volunteer journey.

Stuart reflects on one of the most meaningful aspects of BlazeAid service; “Witnessing the transformation in the farmers they assist. While some landholders are initially hesitant to accept help, they are often deeply moved by the volunteers’ skill, dedication, and positive spirit.

Everyone works toward a shared goal, and the sense of camaraderie is unmistakable.

At its core, BlazeAid is about far more than rebuilding fences, it’s about restoring hope, dignity, and connection.”

For Stuart, volunteering has offered not only a way to give back, but also a way to stay active, maintain a sense of routine, and be part of a strong, purpose-driven community.

Thank you for your passion, empathy and strong leadership, Stu - you are deeply appreciated!



Volunteer in the Spotlight

Frank Longbottom

Frank Longbottom is a widely treasured member of the BlazeAid community, having been involved since 2017.

His volunteer journey began at the Ravensthorpe camp, where his early experience sparked a lasting commitment to the cause. Since then, Frank has brought his dedication and work ethic to numerous camps across Western Australia, including Katanning, Wooroloo, Bridgetown, Corrigin, and Kulin.

Most recently, he completed a long stint at the Wagin camp with Coordinator Kerrie Bennett, assisting with recovery efforts following the devastating fires that tore through the area.

Now retired and based in Rockingham, Western Australia, 69-year-old Frank enjoys family life with his wife, their two children, and two grandchildren.

When Frank isn't lending a hand to family and friends, he's dedicating his time to BlazeAid. Volunteering has always come naturally to him. With a strong background in community service through organisations such as Apex and junior sporting associations, his commitment to helping others runs deep.

At BlazeAid, a typical day sees Frank liaising with property owners to understand the scope of damage, discuss expectations, and ensure the rebuilding process reflects the owners' needs. He recognises that many of those affected by disaster may be experiencing trauma and may find it difficult to express their needs or engage with unfamiliar faces. With empathy and patience, Frank bridges that gap.

He also takes care to ensure team members are well-equipped for the day ahead, verifying they have the appropriate protective gear and a clear understanding of any field-related health considerations, such as allergies to grasses, insects, or other environmental triggers. His attention to both people and detail plays a vital role in ensuring that each day runs safely and smoothly.

Frank joined Kerrie's team at the Kulin Camp in 2024, committing several weeks to the recovery efforts. While he returned home on some weekends, he consistently made his way back by Sunday afternoon, ready to contribute. Despite



managing daily pain, Frank showed unwavering determination, rising each morning prepared to support his team and the community with resilience and purpose.

When the Wagin fire struck, Frank was the first to reach out to Kerrie, ready to mobilise support. He had already compiled a foolscap page of former volunteers and their contact details, and had proactively reconnected with several of them. He attended the community information night and was present when BlazeAid was offered a stall at WOOLORAMA, Wagin's major annual festival.

From the outset, Frank was hands-on—helping transport utes, trailers, and kitchen equipment as the camp was being established. He then turned his attention to the field, inspecting affected farms and liaising with landholders to assess the work required.

Frank was appointed as the camp's first team leader and remained in that role for the majority of the deployment. His patience in teaching new volunteers fencing techniques was exceptional, and his humour and laughter around the dining table each evening brought warmth and camaraderie to the camp.

Frank's friendship, leadership, and unwavering commitment are qualities BlazeAid will always value and remember with deep appreciation.

Around the Grounds

Willaura VIC

The Willaura camp has now officially closed, with 71 properties completed.

With 201 kms of fencing cleared, and a further 204km of new fencing rebuilt, we take our hats off to the amazing volunteers who have contributed to this effort! Our amazing kitchen crew prepared 4,954 meals for volunteers (not including breakfast, lunches or 'seconds'). Susie, our previous cook sadly left us on 1st April after an amazing 2.5 month stint, and chef extraordinaire, Russ Anderson of BlazeAid Grey Nomads Facebook group fame, took over from Susie, staying until the camp's closure in the last week of May 2025.

Volunteer numbers remained high throughout the camp, with several veteran BlazeAiders and WHV volunteers staying longer than they originally planned (maybe due to the kitchen crew's culinary delights or perhaps it was the camp's friendly inclusive atmosphere!). Plenty of musical nights were enjoyed, with entertainment provided by Russ Anderson, Ian Coombs, David Andrews, Peter Ross and our energetic backpackers, movie nights and the local bakery even held a AFL clinic for us all to join in.

300 unique volunteers have graced the Willaura walls, giving an average of 13 days per stay. It was lovely to see that some of our International volunteers headed north to South West QLD BlazeAid camps, which sure will be a totally different experience from Willaura and the surrounding local areas.

The camp has been well supported by the community, and with the rec reserve bar opening on Friday nights, it gave the locals a chance, not only to catch up with each other, but also meet our crews and listen to the muster which included daily statistics and achievements.

I felt very privileged to have carried out the role of camp coordinator, not only in regard to the support I've received but also having the pleasure of meeting some fantastic farmers and like-minded volunteers, both young and older. It was certainly a sad day when the camp closed, as it has been a great experience.

Stuart

BlazeAid Camp Coordinator Willaura



Quilpie QLD

Following the devastating floods that swept through much of regional Queensland in March 2025, BlazeAid established a camp in Quilpie; the first of the four camps set up within the state. Quilpie officially opened to volunteers on the 19th of April, initially led by Coordinators John Lilloco and Christopher Siva Chance. John has now relocated to Longreach to assist property owners in the area, replacing Lisa and Bob.

The Quilpie camp has already welcomed over 150 volunteers since opening, and more are needed. Due to the expansive distances, we have set up a couple of dedicated teams stationed at satellite camps around Adavale and Eromanga, helping to extend BlazeAid's reach to some of the more remote properties in the region. We have also shifted from our original location at "The Lakes", to "Greenmulla" Station, around 15 minutes out of town. A big thanks to both hosts for having us stay on their properties!

Thus far, volunteers have cleared approximately 109kms kilometres of flood-damaged fencing and repaired nearly 118 kilometres. As the weeks unfold, the Quilpie camp is expected to steadily grow in both size and capacity, providing much-needed support to property owners and communities around the area.

Chance

BlazeAid Camp Coordinator



Around the Grounds

Nhill VIC

Here in Nhill, we are so lucky to have a very supportive and appreciative community. Our recent Community BBQ night was well attended with Farmers and representatives from the Hindmarsh Shire Council, Lions, Rotary, Uniting church, Probus, Lowana (a local community craft shop), Luv A Duck, Nhill Agricultural Society, Koren community and many others. A day doesn't go by without someone from the community donating garden produce or home baked goodies! Many thanks go to the Lions club and council for their support in cooking the BBQ and donating meat supplies. We relocated from Goroke late March and moved to the Nhill Agricultural Showgrounds where every van has access to power. So far, we have had a total of 189 volunteers, served 2767 evening meals, cleared over 124km fencing debris and completed 89km of fencing and we still have more to go. Our farmers are doing it pretty tough now trying to get their seeding program done, worries about insurance, fence supplies and they are hoping for rain. Queensland, please send some rain our way!

Leigh Halse and I have been alternating coordinating the camp which allows us to have a break away. But it's not all about fencing, as every BlazeAider knows and we have been supported by the very able Kim on admin work, a Kitchen team currently led by the lovely Jonathon and a team of very willing cleaners. Campfire chatter, Aussie slang nights and an accordion band have provided some much enjoyed entertainment.

Debra Ong

BlazeAid Camp Coordinator Nhill



Wagin WA

Wagin a small community in the southern wheatbelt of WA suffered a devastating fire in January of this year. 80+km/hr winds drove the fire through 11000ha in a matter of a few hours. Three homes were lost in these fires.

I arrived in Wagin on day 3 of the fire while it was still an active fire ground. I was greeted by the shire CEO who arranged for me to be driven around to scope the damage by one of the Fire Control Officers. I met a number of the farmers on the roads that day, which helped me to understand the needs of the community. The council then arranged an information night, where we met most of the farmers and their families for registration when we set up the camp.

The town hosts a large festival called Woolorama in early March, and we were given a boot in a great area. We met many of the town folk who offered assistance. One lovely elderly ex farmer donated \$1000 to our work in Wagin.

We set up camp on 12th March and as often is the case, our volunteers quickly impressed the farmers with their skills and workmanship, more in need signed up for assistance.

All up, with the best bunch of VOLLIES a camp could have, we rebuilt 61km of fences. The townsfolk, treated us like royalty, so it was with regret, but hearts filled, we finalised all work and said goodbye.

A number of my amazing team had followed me from other camps, and I can't thank them enough for their faith in me and their exceptional work ethic and ingenuity, including making lives better with their invented twitch cutter!

Cheers,

Kerrie

BlazeAid Camp Coordinator

NB: BlazeAid is grateful to now have Kerrie running our Jundah camp in SW Qld



Around the Grounds

Jundah QLD

Hello from Jundah,

Our camp was welcomed into the community on the 1st April and we sure have had experiences that are unique to the outback, with requests for help cleaning out homes, sheds, donga's and other outbuildings on Stations.

One of our earliest requests came from a property owner who had opened their home in an effort to dry out the building, including the floors and floor coverings. Unfortunately, a passing mob of kangaroos took the opportunity to move in—leaving behind an unexpected and chaotic mess! Undeterred, our tireless volunteers rose to the challenge. With determination and care, they worked to clean and restore the space as much as possible. Their efforts not only addressed a difficult and unusual situation but also exceeded the expectations of the grateful property owner.

The reaction of the property owners is always one of surprise at what our volunteers achieve daily. We pride ourselves on the work ethic of the volunteers in trying circumstances, as we juggle the tyranny of distance with the work that needs completion.

The flies here beggar belief - a sun hat regaled with a fly net is part of the uniform we dress ourselves in daily. A liberal smothering of insect repellent and sunscreen complete our sartorial look, but we are not 'slaves to fashion' out here!

Cool mornings of 16 to glorious days of 28 degrees makes me wonder why more of you aren't ambling out here to the outback. The season is phenomenal, lots of green grass and big skies are making this a unique experience. Some lucky volunteers also get the opportunity to stay on the Sheep/Cattle stations staying in the shearer's quarters. Mixing with the farmers in this environment is a rare opportunity but incredibly eye opening.

Chris Male

BlazeAid Camp Coordinator



Cunnamulla QLD

Camp Cunnamulla opened on 15/5/25 to help after the devastation of floods in Western Queensland. Properties in this area are quite remote, so travelling long distances to help farmers is a must. With more properties coming in daily to help, we have cleared 5550 meters of fencing, 6030 meters of new fencing completed and lots of hard work. We also had a couple help clearing and cleaning out a farm house at Thargomindah that went under water by 3 foot. A great camp set up in the Showgrounds with new kitchen, dining hall, bathrooms and a great crew that enjoy a camp fire nightly with lots of laughs.

Helen Banfield

BlazeAid Volunteer



Longreach QLD

BlazeAid's Longreach Camp officially opened on 26 May 2025 in response to the recent floods. Coordinators Bob and Lisa were the first to welcome volunteers from across the country, setting the tone for a warm and productive camp environment.

With 37 volunteers currently on site—an impressive 85% of whom are new to BlazeAid—the camp has quickly become a hub of energy and enthusiasm. To date, the team has cleared 81kms of fencing and rebuilt 53kms, a remarkable achievement in such a short time.

Despite the fast pace and long days, the atmosphere remains upbeat and rewarding. The camp is buzzing with camaraderie, and the sense of purpose is shared by all—including us as coordinators, who, although run off our feet, are thrilled to see new volunteers thriving and enjoying the experience.

Lisa and Bob Abdo

Camp Coordinators



Supporter of the Quarter



BOSCH

BlazeAid is proud to announce our partnership with Bosch, a company that shares our commitment to strengthening rural communities across Australia. In a generous show of support, Bosch has donated a range of high-quality tools for use in our combat-ready trailers—equipment that is now being put to work by volunteers on the fence line in disaster-affected areas. In addition, Bosch has provided three specialised workshop trailers to assist with the repair and maintenance of essential assets at BlazeAid camps nationwide. This partnership not only enhances our operational capacity but also reinforces the shared values of resilience, innovation, and community support.

Bosch Power Tools have become indispensable on Australian worksites and in DIY workshops, prized for their quality, durability, and innovative technology. This strong presence is rooted in their unwavering commitment to reliable performance, consistent quality, and sustainable solutions: Bosch's core values since the company's founding in 1886. These values translate into robust power tools engineered to endure demanding environments, from scorching outback heat to the rigorous workload of a bustling Sydney construction site. From heavy-duty angle grinders and powerful hammer drills to precise measuring tools and flexible cordless solutions, Bosch Power Tools consistently strives to enhance job efficiency and effectiveness. Bosch Power Tool Australia's partnership with BlazeAid was sparked by their Regional Sales Manager, Peter Bosevski. This support extends beyond mere financial donations, it embodies Bosch's commitment to community responsibility and safety. Recognizing the challenging and hazardous conditions BlazeAid volunteers face rebuilding vital infrastructure, Bosch's generous donation provides durable and reliable power tools to aid their work. These tools are not just implements; they represent enhanced safety, reliability and efficiency during critical rebuilding efforts.



This partnership is a testament to Bosch's commitment to supporting the communities they serve and prioritizing safety in demanding environments.

Bosch aim to evolve their partnership with BlazeAid, providing ongoing tool support and maintenance, while also exploring potential opportunities towards volunteering future disaster relief missions and training sessions to ensure volunteers are using their tools safely and effectively. Measuring impact goes beyond just tool donations; Bosch hopes this ongoing support will help speed up repairs, rebuilding properties faster, restoring livelihoods for those who need it most.

Brand Communications Marketing Manager, Claudia Kowalski, emphasizes that while Bosch is an



international company, supporting causes close to home like BlazeAid carry a special significance. Bosch believes this partnership embodies their core values, reaffirming their dedication to supporting Australian communities during times of crisis.

"When you get behind something so close to home, there is definitely a greater level of excitement and meaning," says Claudia. "I really look forward to growing relationships with those involved at BlazeAid so we can truly start to help in a way that makes a difference."

Witnessing BlazeAid's dedication firsthand has reinforced Bosch's commitment to community responsibility. Looking ahead, Bosch aims to engage directly with BlazeAid through ongoing tool support, maintenance, and safety training. This is just the beginning of their support: Bosch envisions a future that actively involves employees and customers through fundraising initiatives and volunteer opportunities, fostering a spirit of giving back within the Bosch community. Witnessing BlazeAid's dedication firsthand has reinforced Bosch's commitment to community responsibility, solidifying this partnership as a testament to Bosch's core values and dedication to supporting Australian communities in times of crisis.

Our First Time

By Dan and Bec Harford

Having spent our Easter holidays for the last decade with our children camping and hiking in the Grampians, we were incredibly saddened to see the extent of the fires moving through the region in December 2024. Earlier that year, we had travelled through Pomonal and seen the affects of the fires in February - two significant events in the space of 12 months having a tremendous impact on the livelihoods of families just like ours, we felt compelled to find a way to help, but how?

Fortuitously, the answer came quite quickly when we saw a BlazeAid post reshared by Fitzmedia Productions; 'No experience required' it said. Anyone that know us is aware that we are far from handy - we're city kids, have desk jobs and have never worked a day on the land! That said, we are fit and strong and not afraid of a bit of physical work, this seemed like the opportunity for us to give back.

We arrived at Willaura camp on Sunday 5th of January and the following few days were the most rewarding days we've had this year. The first night we didn't get much sleep, mostly because we both had dreams that we slept through our alarm clock and missed muster! Needless to say, we were among the first in the mess ready and raring to go, although one hiccup... the new city kids had forgotten to pack coats, and it was cold and raining... rookie's error! Within minutes however, the BlazeAider's had us sorted loaning us coats of their own and we were away.

We are both so grateful to the wonderful people we met at camp, to the members of our crew that taught us so much. Who knew the way to get a stubborn stake out of the ground was to hit it with a sledgehammer to drive it further into the ground and then try and lever it back out??? And there was no chance we were ever going to know how to use a strainer or the twitch to re-wire the fence without a couple of days "Blazeaid-ing"!

Mealtimes were a highlight thanks to the hard working team in the kitchen, ever entertaining end of day team reports and excellent banter around the tables except, of course, Allen...Bombers supporter... we could have done without that!

To connect with people from all walks of life, and at all different stages, was just as rewarding as seeing the gratitude on the farmers faces after a day spent supporting them in their time of need.

Special thanks to Simon, Jenny and our crew captains Greg (Snooze) and Anthony. We look forward to helping again and learning more at our next BlazeAid camp.



Volunteer Pins

Beginning in 2025, BlazeAid will introduce a unique commemorative pin for each camp, gifted to volunteers as a gesture of appreciation and recognition. Each pin is thoughtfully designed to reflect a distinctive feature of the local area or camp, capturing the essence of the community the basecamp is situated in.

Far more than a keepsake, we hope that these pins will serve as a proud symbol of each volunteer's contribution and dedication. Worn with pride, we hope they will spark stories of shared experiences around the campfire, challenges overcome, and friendships formed through teamwork and compassion.

Though small in size, this initiative carries significant meaning, honouring the impact of every volunteer and celebrating the enduring connections forged through service.

Here are a few of our recent pins representing camps:

