



# The *BlazeAid* POST

MAR 2026- ISSUE 20

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

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## Aden Gilding Uniting Koroit for Bushfire Recovery



At just 15 years old, Aden is already proving that leadership and compassion can make a powerful difference in rural communities.

Motivated by the impact bushfires have on farming families, Aden recently organised a community fundraiser called “Koroit Cares.” The event aimed to bring people together while raising funds to support recovery efforts for those affected by fire.

Held in the heart of the small country town of Koroit, the fundraiser became a true community effort. Local businesses, volunteers, families and community groups all played a part in making the day a success. The event featured a community BBQ, raffle prizes, children’s activities and face painting, creating a welcoming and family-friendly atmosphere. For Aden, the event was about more than just fundraising. It was also about showing that young people in regional communities can step up and create meaningful change.

“I wanted to show that even in a small country town, young people can make a difference,” Aden said.

The funds raised were directed to BlazeAid and Need for Feed. Having seen firsthand the challenges rural communities face after fires, Aden felt strongly about supporting an organisation that delivers practical, on-the-ground assistance.

Aden still clearly remembers the St Patrick’s Day Fires, which burned across parts of southwest Victoria in 2018 and burnt out homes and farms in the region.

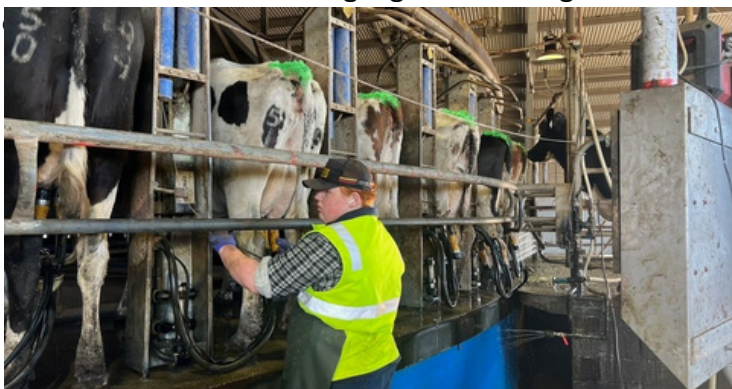
“I remember it clearly,” Aden said. “I was eight years old and seeing the glow of the fires lighting up the sky was pretty scary. It’s something that has stayed with me ever since.”

“I’ve seen how important community support is in rural areas, especially after fires. I wanted to do something practical that could genuinely help,” Aden explained.

The success of the Koroit Cares fundraiser reflected the strong community spirit that defines many regional towns. Residents and businesses rallied behind the initiative, demonstrating what can be achieved when people come together for a shared cause. For Aden, the experience has been both inspiring and empowering.

“The day showed me how powerful local support can be when everyone works together,” Aden said.

Events like Koroit Cares highlight the strength of rural communities and the impact that determined young leaders



# BLAZE AID VOLUNTEERS NOT FORGOTTEN IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT

The door into the Bullioh Basecamp swings open and first thing through is a large box of lollies and chocolates being held out by an outstretched hand. Following closely behind is a tall man with a lovely smile, Graeme Scorrige, with either Janeko (Jan) Batawalage from SES or Robert O'Connor from CFA Mt Beauty. The three are working as a multi-agency peer support team.

After greeting everyone individually they start bringing in bottles of water from their vehicle to add to our constantly diminishing reserves. Functioning in 40+ degree days is tiring and thirsty work, and as we know we need to keep drinking.

A chat and enquiry after our welfare; How are we holding up? Is there anything we need? Not only once have we seen them, but over numerous visits.

Graeme is a special person - quiet and gentle, but strong in conviction of the goodness in mankind. He is the Lead Chaplain of Psychological Services for Fire Rescue Victoria, so why visit us and not concentrate on the emergency personnel? He recognises we play an integral part in the ongoing welfare and recovery of the farmers and their families, properties and animals; therefore, we're also personally effected by what we see and hear.

During one chat Graeme starts naming different groups he is seeing out in the field as he travels around, all contributing their expertise in the attack and recovery stages of the huge and ferocious Walwa fires. There's the CFA, SA CFS, ACT RFS, NSW Rural Fire Service and International fire fighters from British Columbia Canada and New Zealand, along with Queensland Fire Rescue and NSW Fire Rescue. Then there's the SES, Fire Rescue Victoria, Vic Pol, Ambulance Victoria, LifeAid Emergency Care and St Johns Ambulance. DEECA (Dep. Of Energy, Environment and Climate Action), FFMV, (Forest Fire Management Victoria), BlazeAid, Downer Group, Active Tree services, VicRoads and AusNet. These are only the ones that come to mind and Graeme apologises for others he has missed. The bushfire started on 5 January, 27 km west of Walwa, North East Victoria, in the Mt Lawson State Park.



The Parks Victoria website describes the Park as ‘.. a haven of wilderness. The unique environment makes it a vital conservation site, home to rare species of plant and animal life.’ Add in the stock the farmers have raised with care and attention – some were saved whilst others lost. Less than a month later the fire has consumed approx. 121,500 hectares and spread into the Wabba Wilderness Park.

Road closures were implemented due to falling trees, smoke hazards and movement of emergency vehicles, and whilst it's an inconvenience having to go the long way from Tallangatta to Corryong as the Murray Valley Highway was closed, we are extremely indebted to those firefighters, tree fellers and other groups putting their lives at risk to protect us. So, putting it into perspective, just how inconvenient was it? Evacuation centres opened as safe havens for people fleeing the inferno. Whilst I tucked up at night in my comfy bed with clean linen and fluffy pillow, others laid their head down not knowing if their home would be standing when they returned.

Just like Graeme with Jan or Robert, teamwork is the name of the game for the BlazeAid family. Working together with a common goal and supporting each other to reach it. There are the long and hot days, the exposure to the raw emotions that come from a natural disaster, and the many challengers to our lateral thinking abilities, however it's important the team sticks together. The volunteers are the heart and soul of this very special family, and they go above and beyond to care for others. Don't forget to care for yourself as well.

To Rhonda Butler who laid the seed to help others after she and husband Kevin received help in 2009 after their farm fences needed replacing due to the Black Saturday fires, I take my hat off to you. By Dianne Lewis (Bullioh Camp)





# Around the Grounds



## Goomalibee VIC

Goomalibee is in its' final days – with expected closure the second week of March, having completed 34 properties and 52km of clearance/fencing. The average stay of volunteers in camp has been 9.7 Days. Thanks to Richard Benson who has taken up the reins of 2IC at Goomalibee, enabling Stu to move to a more salubrious camp at Alexandra. The Goomalibee locals have been extremely supportive of us and although it is sad to leave them, our job will be done!



## Alexandra VIC

Alexandra Camp a revolving door of diverse and enthusiastic volunteers. There are so many heartwarming stories that come back from the field about how we are helping the farmers to 'get on with things'. It really is a process of not just rebuilding fences, but also about helping to rebuild lives. "Thank you so much to the incredible BlazeAid Team. Your all hero's in Fluro capes", said one of the farmers we recently assisted.

A commitment to set up camp by Simon Hardy and his diligent work with locals to source our wonderful venue at the Alexandra Football Clubrooms has truly paid off. So many valuable contacts have been made with the locals of Alexandra who have been so welcoming and helpful to ensure that we have everything we need. A big thanks go out to Simon and Helen - our first tag team in Alex.

The camp is now into its' second month with Stuart Opie taking on the reigns with Cheryle Foster coordinating our volunteers and Manon Holtrop organising our farms/fencing teams.

Our numbers are steadily increasing, with 268 people making enquiries/registering to volunteer. Our farm registrations are now at 350 with 4% started and 1,488km of fencing completed. Our volunteer numbers are steadily increasing with upwards of 35-40 in camp each day, with the hope of this continuing to build. A good flow of backpackers are registering, who are all keen to get out and help the community. It's not just about ticking off their days for their Visa's – they are wanting to be a part of the recovery process.

Considering the number of properties registered and the estimated amount of fencing needing to be replaced, Alexandra is here for the long haul.

As well as our Alexandra Camp we have set up a satellite Camp at Caveat to ensure that we are able to more readily assist with the Highlands properties. Thanks to a wonderful local farmer who has donated the use of his house – we have a group of dedicated volunteers putting their skills to good use.

Susie Dittloff our amazing cook – a long term BlazeAider continues to serve up her legendary meals. Recipes with cheese, cheese and more cheese have been a regular menu item with half a pallet of grated cheese being donated. Susie's off on a well-earned break for a couple of weeks. Chris Mann is diligently stepping up to try and fill her shoes – a big ask, but I'm sure he'll succeed.





# Around the Grounds



## Gellibrand VIC

Gellibrand Camp Coordinators Max and Judy sent out the first team after just 5 days of camp opening at the start of March. Our volunteers Geoff & Adrian traveled down from Torquay and Melbourne to join the BlazeAid community. Gellibrand Camp Senior Volunteer Grahame Robb out on the fence line. At 84 years young Grahame holds his own with fellow volunteers Peter and John. It goes to show how important our older community members are - they have so much to offer.



## Bullioh VIC

The camp commenced in January 2026, located at the Bullioh Football and Netball Club approximately 30km east of Tallangatta. Probably due to its remoteness, volunteer numbers have been low. We have only had a maximum of 2 teams out a day, some days only one. We have 10 volunteers from the local area who assist on odd days each week which makes job planning difficult. We have engaged in extensive social media posts to attract more volunteers. To date there are 18 properties registered and we have cleared 9.6km and fenced 12.5km. Being in the “high” country the teams are working on some extremely steep and challenging land, and the type of fencing is totally different to other areas. Despite our challenges there is excellent “esprit de corps” in the camp. One of our farmers made a very generous donation of a significant sum in IGA gift cards. We presented them with a Certificate of Appreciation at a dinner to recognise them. Due to the football season commencing, we need to relocate the camp to the Tallangatta Showgrounds by the end of March. Hopefully we can attract more volunteers there.



## Boddington WA

Boddington Camp was set up to initially help the farmers who were affected by the fire that caused the town to be evacuated on Christmas day. However, Mother Nature had other ideas and after a 10-minute thunderstorm that sprouted hundreds of lightning strikes, 19 fires were started within minutes, changed all that.

It provided a unique look into just what occurs during a fire emergency, and we were in the middle of it. We pitched in and did some cooking for the firefighters on the first day, until DFES could set up a command post and arrange a portable kitchen.

For the duration of the fires, we pitched in and packed hundreds of snack packs each day for the firies, until everything was under control again. Our very short list of affected farms grew , we became involved in getting data for a local mine, which is donating funds to help those without insurance and have also contacted a land care group to help the farmers who lived along the local Hotham River to see if we could get them some funding to help with material costs.

We are also packing trailers and arranging everything for the new Camp which will start in a weeks time at Warradarge



# Around the Grounds



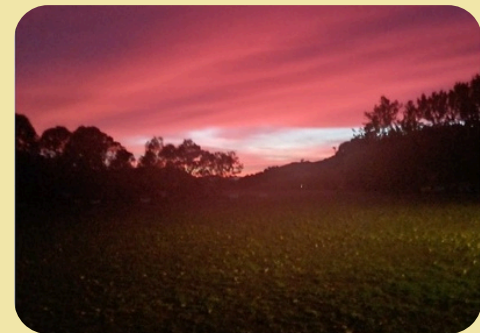
## Walwa VIC

The Walwa camp commenced on Australia Day, although we didn't get out on the "fence line" until 5<sup>th</sup> February. The community has been very helpful and supportive; the facilities at the Walwa recreation ground are first class. Walwa is the "outback" of Victoria being the most northerly and easterly camp in Victoria, which has impacted the number of volunteers enquiring.

Nevertheless, we have received 55 volunteer enquiries and have completed 229 fencing days, maximum volunteers in camp have been 14. We also have several local farmers that BlazeAid helped in the 2019/20 fires, they are keen to "give back" and come in several times weekly and provide much welcomed knowhow and local knowledge.

Patricia Taylor Lewis and Susan Pearl, both first time coordinators have bumbled through setting up and establishing the camp, with many humorous and embarrassing moments along the way. Patricia's "kitchen rules" are worthy of a Master Chef grand finale with a three-course main meal each evening. No matter how much physical energy is expended all volunteers have gained kilograms.

The fire effected country is undulating to very steep with most properties sharing a boundary with forests or national parks, this has slowed BlazeAid's ability to start fencing as there are many assessments to be undertaken before we can commence. Our volunteers have been an enthusiastic bunch with many a joke at mealtimes. Our evening games selection is legendary.



## Skipton VIC

Skipton kicked off on the 19th of January and has been going strong since that day. So many people to thank in terms of our volunteers, farmers and of course from within BlazeAid. We have had 234 Volunteers through the camp and each one has contributed significantly to both the camp and assisting the farmers. The totals so far are clearing almost 300km of burned fences and rebuilding about 90km of new fences - a truly significant effort - 47 property's are requiring assistance. The farms are very big here and huge amounts of fencing is required for some properties - ie up to 100+ kms. We are incredibly proud of the quality of work being offered to our farmers. Straight well constructed fences, clearing of fence lines and friendly, caring relationships with farmers and their employees, is a mark of the quality of BlazeAid and their volunteers. The Skipton fire reached across 4 shires taking in mainly Corangamite, Pyrenees, Ararat and Golden Plains. A huge area and of course this adds up to many kilometers of lost fencing, out buildings and tragically homes. The damage extends deeper than that too, with the loss of vehicles, farm machinery, tools and of course sentimental bits and bobs that mean so much. These things are not necessarily valuable in dollar terms but way beyond monetary value in sentiment.

The golf club here in Skipton is quite the social hub of the district. Their most recent event was a "drag" bingo night. Proud to say our volunteers represented BlazeAid admirably cleaning up on many prizes. Bingo is monthly and the next event is Easter Bunny themed. Great fun. Finally I would like to thank Tony Stewart for his unyielding support of BlazeAid. His generosity is amazing and we are so lucky to have him. We have also had amazing support from the Marcus Oldham Ag College in Waurin Ponds. Young, energetic, hardworking and so respectful it has been a pleasure to meet and work with these students. Life in Skipton is pretty damn good. Wishing all the camps everything good and I am hopeful the Easter Bunny will find you all have been good so he leaves some eggs for you. Take care all!

Regards from the Skipton Crew.





# Around the Grounds



## Clermont QLD

The Clermont camp opened on the 25<sup>th</sup> February, with Equipment and Kitchen Trailers arriving on 27<sup>th</sup> Feb from storage at Warwick. The camp has been established in the Stock Sale, Showground and Rodeo ground with access to the kitchen, pavilion and camping area, provided by the local Isaac Regional Council. Ground staff have been extremely helpful in providing daily help and local knowledge where needed.

The council has also provided information regarding farmers and other landholders requiring assistance.

CWA has also aided through local businesses allowing fencing materials to be available as required.

The camp started with three volunteers and has slowly risen to 11 volunteers including 2 local residents helping as required. Due to ongoing wet conditions in the past week finding suitable dry work areas is proving to be a challenge. The team has been fortunate to have 2 extremely experienced members of the Australian Special Air Service Association Queensland Branch here with us for the past 10 days together with 5 returning Blaze Aid volunteers giving us an excellent working team.

The past couple of days has seen this team blitz properties on a daily farm by farm basis leaving happy landholders with work completed very quickly.

We do still have a reasonable list of larger properties requiring assistance once country dries out to allow access to longer larger fence lines.

Present indications should see us able to be close to finishing here by mid-May 2026



## Longwood VIC

Our camp at the Euroa Showgrounds has a great community that keeps us well supplied with local home baked goodies, and we're able to pay it forward by delivering to some of our farmers too! We are certainly in a privileged position to be trusted to help Disaster Affected communities. Approximately 150 people attended our Farmers night and the Euroa tennis club cooked the BBQ, It was such a relaxing night for all who attended and we even had a paper plane competition! Earlier this month the Rapid Relief Team held a community event and donated Fencing supplies to over 200 property owners, it was such a positive uplifting event that raised community well being as many of our farmers are financially struggling. Here's some of our latest stats: Farmers / Properties Registered: 226, Fencing Cleared 266 KM, Fencing Completed: 107.91 KM. With over 350,000 hectares of fire ground we think this camp along with Alexandra is likely to go for another 6 months at least, so please come and join us we'd love to have your company.

It's not all about the fencing BlazeAid Longwood camp 'angels' Patricia Dillon and Claude Delafontaine. It takes a team to run a BlazeAid camp and couple Claude and Trish are a vital part of our camp back up team.

Claude has been our tool, trailer, handyman, transport driver and just about everything else in camp. He sees the coordinator coming with yet another request, but always has a can do attitude and willingness to do whatever he can.

Trish has been leading the kitchen for several weeks organising a team of community volunteers and liaising with our wonderful community who prepare home made goodies. Together, they have represented BlazeAid at community presentations and been great advocates for the work we do. Thankyou Claude and Trish we will miss you both, but we are so glad you had some time to support the Longwood camp and this community.



Trish and Claude

# Around the Grounds

## Harcourt VIC

We are so lucky to be able to have the use of the Derby Hill camp in Maldon. It was a school-camp in a previous life and now it is home to a different age group who are enjoying the relaxing surrounds. To be offered such a well set out complex was a god send. We are so blessed that people put their heads together and thought of Blaze Aid. We can't thank the community enough, and will do our bit to support the local area.

We are a Blaze Aid camp that has learnt that there is a place for us in the local community. We know that we are here to offer our services (if and when required) to the Maldon organisations, if we have spare time. As I keep my volunteers out of the paddocks on days of Total Fire Ban, we have spent time cleaning sheds at the Maldon Museum and weeding gardens at the local cemetery. These activities are a way of introducing volunteers to the locals, so it is not only building fences for landowners that benefits small towns.

But yes, we, like other camps are getting the runs on the board by pulling that wire across our fine lands and ramming those posts into the hard soil.

Our volunteers are a happy lot as they sit and laugh with each other at the end of the day. They share the stories about the properties that they have been working on, or the landowner that they have been working with.

It is this camaraderie that forms long time friendships and brings the continents of the world so much closer.

Blaze Aid is known for creating long lasting friendships amongst young and old .

So it is not only fencing but there are many facets of Blaze Aid to keep people coming back.



## Nabiac/Bulahdelah NSW

Nabiac Camp moved to Bulahdelah on the 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2026 this will be the fourth camp for BlazeAid to assist the Farmers in the Mid North Coast area of NSW after the May 2025 floods and the Bulahdelah and Nabiac January 2026 fires. In the weeks leading up to the move to Bulahdelah we intensified our work north of Taree to reduce time and costs, we are still working the Taree and surrounding areas. To date we have had over 269 volunteers through the camps completed 82 properties with the clearing of 200km of fencing and rebuilt 223 km.



## Natimuk VIC

Driving into a BlazeAid camp can be intimidating, but in Natimuk that feeling didn't last too long. Within the first day or two, I'd already found a rhythm. The camp runs smoothly without feeling rigid, and the people made it easy to slot in. There's a lot of quiet competence, mixed with a bit of cheek, and it doesn't take much before you feel like you belong there. What's stuck with me is how closely this place reflects how BlazeAid actually started. After the Black Saturday fires in 2009, Kevin and Rhonda Butler had their own fencing rebuilt by volunteers in about a week, and that same energy has carried through to now. Being here, it doesn't feel like a big operation, it still feels like that original idea. Just people turning up to help because someone needs it.

I've really noticed that in the locals, especially the volunteers from Natimuk and the ones who make the trip from Horsham. I've worked alongside a few of them now, and there's nothing showy about it. They just arrive, grab their gear, and get into it. No complaints, no fuss. Watching them go about it has made me think a lot more about what BlazeAid is at its core. Neighbours helping neighbours. It strips it back to something simple and genuine and being around that has informed my whole BlazeAid experience. So far, we've registered 30 farmers , clearing 46.83 km of fencing and rebuilding 44.04 km. When you're out there day to day, every fence feels important, and hearing how happy the farmers are with their new fencing makes it feel even better. The camp itself is set up at the Natimuk Showgrounds, and we've felt the support from the town the whole time. Donations just keep appearing, home-cooked food, local produce, even people just checking in. Those are the things that keep a BlazeAid camp running, and I can't thank the community members enough for their generosity, hospitality and general good vibes. The work out on the fenceline is rewarding, and our more experienced fencers have been great at teaching everyone who has come through the camp. We've had a few people be trained up to be team leaders, and many who have now taken their new skills to other BlazeAid camps.

# Coordinator of the Quarter

## Amanda Wyllie

### Meet Amanda Wyllie – A Helping Hand at Longwood Camp

Amanda Wyllie is one of the dedicated faces currently supporting the Longwood BlazeAid camp, bringing with her not only a strong work ethic but a genuine passion for helping others in times of need.

Having previously been involved with camps at Adelong in 2019 and Walwa in 2020, Amanda is no stranger to the BlazeAid community. Her return to lend a hand once again speaks volumes about her commitment to supporting regional communities, especially during challenging times like the current bushfires affecting her local area.

Outside of BlazeAid, Amanda leads a full and active life. She is a proud mum to four sons, all in their twenties, and treasures spending quality time with her family. She also enjoys travelling, hiking, and training in Muay Thai, keeping both physically active and mentally strong.

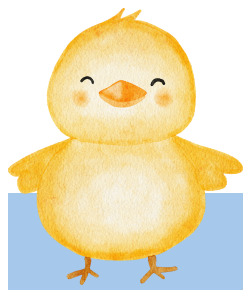
Professionally, Amanda has an impressive and diverse background. Over the past 30 years, she has owned and operated several businesses, including a floor sanding company, hotels, and two Bakers Delight stores. Today, she continues to stay busy working in administration and accounts for an arboriculture company, while also providing bookkeeping services for another private business.

Amanda first discovered BlazeAid through social media, but it's the organisation's "mates helping mates" attitude that truly resonates with her. "It's about rolling up our sleeves and giving a hand to those who need it," she says, a philosophy she clearly lives by.

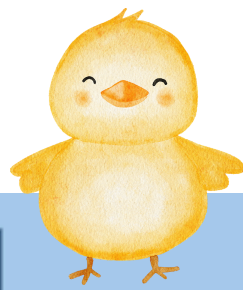
A typical day for Amanda usually starts early with gym training, followed by work and afternoon walks or other interests. However, since stepping into the Longwood camp, her routine has shifted. From Monday to Thursday, much of her time outside regular work hours is now devoted to supporting the camp and ensuring things run smoothly.

Amanda's dedication, experience, and willingness to step up make her an invaluable part of the BlazeAid team. We're incredibly grateful to have her on board and thank her for the energy and care she brings to the community.





# ROTARY RAFFLE



## COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE RAFFLE

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\$500 voucher from Wilson's Ballarat

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# Delightful Donna

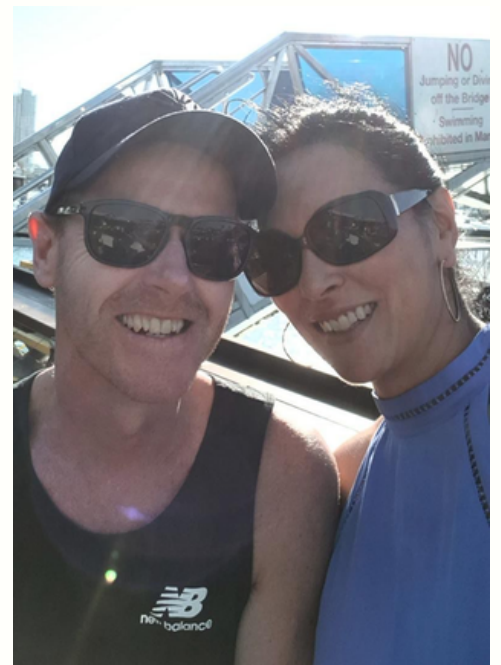
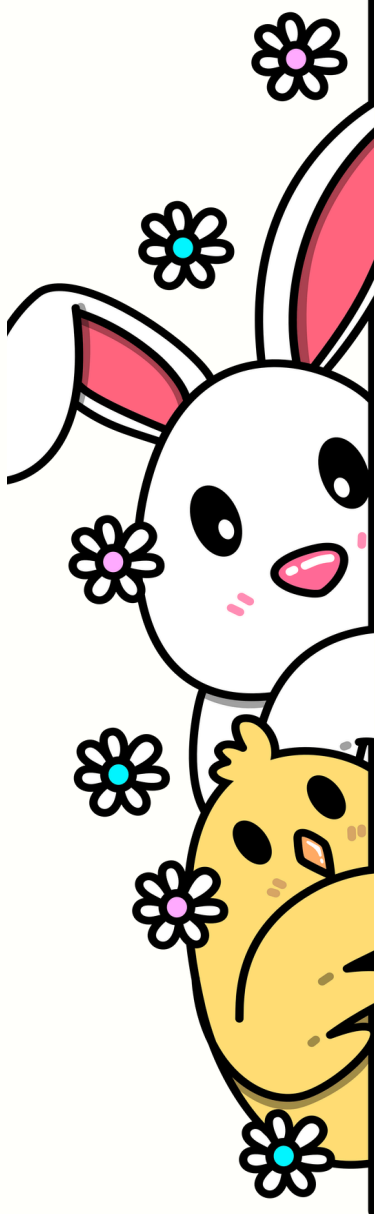
*If you call BlazeAid HQ on a Thursday, you may be fortunate enough to catch, Donna, BlazeAid's delightful admin assistant on the other end of the phone! Donna dedicates at least one day per week to helping things run smoothly in the Kilmore office along side Debbie!*

Donna has been a part of the BlazeAid Team since Feb 2020. Donna was drawn to the organization through Deb Buttler. Donna's husband and Deb's husband used to play cricket together at Kilmore, and he would see Deb at the cricket watching with her laptop and working, and he said, "you should speak to my wife, she loves paperwork," and thus the relationship began. It was really rewarding for Donna to work for BlazeAid at this time when it was going through the crazy time of COVID. It showed her that there are still good people in the world who care and want to help others.

Donna's typical day at BlazeAid does not exist, as she helps Melissa and Deb when things are a little crazy in the office. Most of the time she assists with asset movement with the vehicle and trailers, helps with the newsletter, emails, phones and generally anything they need her for.

There is no one moment for Donna that stands out; it's the whole BlazeAid story that stays with her. Consistently speaking with Co-Ordinators and Volunteers and hearing their stories about the farmers they have helped or how the community has gotten behind them every time to support them—the generosity is amazing. Donna's unwind time when she's not working at BlazeAid is going to the gym (she's not happy unless she has her workout), walking her dog Bonnie and enjoying cooking. She still watches her hubby (Ben) play cricket.

Fun facts about Donna are that she is a WA girl with two sisters and a brother she is very close with, who still live in WA. She married a Victorian and drove over the border to live in Kilmore! She has now been living in Kilmore for 20 years. She is also an Essendon supporter (not as crazy about them as Deb ).



# BlazeAid Supporter of the Quarter: Trigger Brothers

BlazeAid is proud to recognise Phil Trigger and the team at Trigger Brothers as our Supporter of the Quarter.

A true icon of Australia's surf culture, Trigger Brothers has been part of the Victorian coastal community for decades—built on passion, craftsmanship, and a deep connection to the locals. That same community spirit has been on full display through their recent support of BlazeAid.

Through the donation and sale of three AFL-signed surfboards, Phil and his team have helped generate meaningful support for BlazeAid's work assisting rural communities to recover and rebuild. It's a gesture that reflects not only generosity, but a commitment to backing Australians in times of need.

Trigger Brothers represents the best of a 'local' business. Their support helps BlazeAid continue its on-the-ground efforts, bringing volunteers and communities together to rebuild fences, restore properties, and provide much-needed relief after natural disasters.

We extend our sincere thanks to Phil and the entire Trigger Brothers team for their contribution and ongoing support.

