

WOOROLOO BUSHFIRE RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

DEC 2022



MESSAGE FROM THE A/ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER PAUL CARR

Since taking on the role of State Recovery Coordinator, it has been inspiring to see those impacted by the 2021 Wooroloo bushfire making continuous and encouraging progress in their recovery journey, which can be largely attributed to the remarkable collaboration and resilience shown by all involved. While many impacted residents have moved forward their recovery, it is important to acknowledge that recovery is a long road, and everyone is on their own journey.

There have been many significant recovery milestones achieved this year, which I believe are important to reflect upon. The most noticeable

being the strong social connections and valuable partnerships created. This has enabled recovery activities, once facilitated by local government and support agencies to help connect the community, transition to community-led activities facilitated by well-connected community members. It's also been fantastic to see new community groups established, and existing community groups and networks grow.

Supported by the Department of Communities and Australian Red Cross, the City of Swan and Shire of Mundaring continue to do a remarkable job of supporting impacted communities. As do the many organisations, community groups, businesses and individuals supporting community recovery initiatives. With the recovery programs established under the joint Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DFRA) either complete or well underway, the State Recovery team will continue working in partnership with all levels of government, organisations, and community to ensure individuals and communities receive the support needed to further build resilience and support recovery.

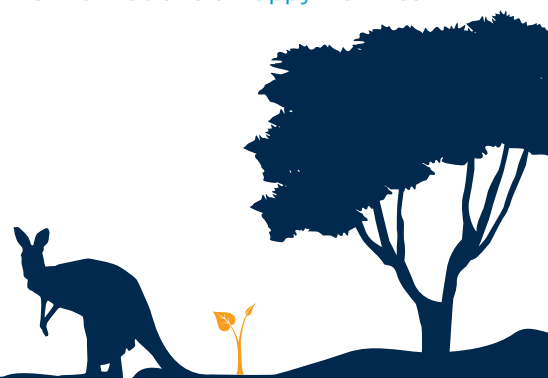
With the festive season underway, I understand this can be a difficult time for some individuals and families. With incidents of bushfires also increasing, some residents may find this time of year triggering and difficult to experience. While this is an understandable response, I

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encourage residents to reach out and seek support, if required, to help navigate through this time. The Bushfire Recovery Team, as well as the Department of Communities and Australian Red Cross, will be available during normal operating hours at the Gidgegannup Place Office / Recovery Centre over the festive period (except for weekends and public holidays). They will also be open from Wednesday 28 December to Friday 30 December (inclusive) from 9am to 4pm.

I hope you can take some time to enjoy family and friends this holiday season. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.





A CUPPA CAN CHANGE A LIFE: A CHAT WITH LAUREN, ANDREW AND AUDREY

Australian Red Cross Community Recovery Officers (CRO) have played an essential role in providing those impacted by the February 2021 bushfire with psychosocial wellbeing support, assisting individuals in their recovery process and helping to develop resilience across the communities.

Throughout the bushfire recovery effort, Australian Red Cross CRO's Andrew Maytom, Lauren Holmes and Audrey Bell have embedded themselves into the fire-impacted communities, established positive relationships and circulated valuable information. With one position funded through the Community Recovery and Outreach Program* and a second funded through the Australian Red Cross, two Australian Red Cross CRO's have consistently worked alongside Local and State government CROs to provide the community with recovery support tailored to the needs of individuals and the wider community.

Working on the ground from the very beginning, Lauren Holmes once aspired to become a Lawyer, but while studying her degree she questioned whether she'd find fulfillment in this field. With her sights set on a very different future, Lauren journeyed to rural Mongolia for a four-month Community Development internship, and never looked back. While she participated in various disaster-

focussed programs when abroad, the most impactful was designing flood mitigation structures for a community that experienced annual flash flooding from water pipes cracking during the freezing winter temperatures.

Fascinated by the critical and creative thinking involved in the protection of community members, housing and local assets and when back on home soil she completely immersed herself into the world of disaster management.

"When I arrived home I started my thesis on the impact of dual disasters on communities, joined the SES, the Darling Range volunteer bushfire brigade and, of course, the Red Cross emergency volunteer service, so I've covered a few bases," Lauren said.

"The experience I gained from working in countries like Nepal and Fiji was incredibly eye opening and rewarding, but there's something extra special about making a difference to the lives of fellow West Australians."

When reflecting on her time working with those impacted by the Wooroloo bushfire, Lauren feels incredibly privileged to have been able to support people when they were at their most vulnerable, and to have been a confidant to many.

"People have let us into their lives in such intimate ways, sharing their greatest griefs, lowest lows, and

highest highs," she said.

"It is incredibly rewarding seeing individuals or households that I've supported throughout the recovery start the healing process, but I feel most proud of the role I've played when I see these same people advocating for the community's needs and becoming a source of support for their fellow community members."

Andrew Maytom's smile is one that very few people in the Wooroloo and Gidgegannup communities will forget. Before taking on a National role with the Australian Red Cross earlier this year, Andrew was also on the ground engaging with impacted community members from the very beginning.

Andrew had been volunteering with Red Cross and other community development organisations when the opportunity arose to take on the Recovery Officer role with Red Cross.

"My volunteering roles provided a bit of a steppingstone, but I was so strongly compelled to take on this role that I relocated myself and my family from Darwin to undertake it," Andrew said.

"I have always been drawn to jobs and positions that are challenging but also those which positively contribute to community and humanity, and when I saw the devastation the bushfire caused to these communities, I knew that was where I needed to be."



Lauren (second from left) and Audrey (far right) with fellow Recovery Officers Ian Robinson, Ioannis Dimopoulos and Rachael Edwards.

“Although they were going through an ordeal unimaginable to me, the communities welcomed me with such kindness, and I feel honoured that I was able to support them and to have them share their journeys with me.”

With the departure of Andrew, Audrey Bell was welcomed to the team in August and brought with her a wealth of local knowledge and recovery experience. Audrey's Community Development work in Local Government and not-for-profit organisations has seen her travel the State to connect with and assist communities in need of support, for various reasons.

“Having lived and worked in the Perth Hills and the South-West for many years, I'm no stranger to bushfire emergencies and the havoc that can be caused to the communities affected,” Audrey explained.

“I was managing Community Development at the Shire of Toodyay when a major bushfire impacted the town in 2009—it was devastating for so many of the locals, and a difficult time for the wider region.

“However, what really comes to mind when I think about that time is the solidarity, fortitude and compassion that the hardship nurtured within much of the community—it was incredible to be there to support their long-term recovery, from the very

beginning.”

Although Audrey was introduced to the communities later in the Recovery, she feels fortunate to have the opportunity to connect with the locals and give them the tools and encouragement they need to feel empowered to continue their recovery journey.

“Everyone is at a different point in their journey, but in just a few months I have witnessed the communities go from strength to strength towards resilience,” Audrey said.

“More and more people have started proactively tackling new challenges, like adopting events previously managed by the CROs or Local Governments and continuing them to support their fellow community members.

“The ongoing enthusiasm and uptake of support programs I am a part of, including psychological first aid and the community morning teas has been really encouraging, and this speaks to the determination and resilience of the communities.”

A theme that was threaded through the conversations with Lauren, Andrew and Audrey was the powerful impact the simple act of sharing a cup of tea and a chat can have on someone.

If you or someone you know would

benefit from a cuppa and a chat, or need help finding support, please contact the Red Cross team by calling or texting Lauren on 0416 142 603 or Audrey on 0415 645 990.

** Jointly funded through the Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA; Category C Community Recovery Fund)*



Andrew getting festive with Recovery Officer Ioannis Dimopoulos for Christmas last year.

DISASTER FUNDING EXTENDED FOR APPRENTICES AND BUILDERS

Financial assistance available to employers, apprentices, and trainees involved in rebuilding properties damaged by the Wooroloo Bushfire has been extended until the end of June 2025.

The State Government's \$3.5 million Construction Training Fund (CTF) Disaster Recovery Grant program was announced last year.

Employers with apprentices and trainees working in the affected regions can claim up to \$3,000 annually until June 2025. This is in addition to other CTF grants for which they may be eligible, including the

standard CTF base grants and wage subsidies for employing apprentices.

Apprentices or trainees can claim up to \$1,000 annually until June 2025 to cover costs such as travel and accommodation.

Construction Training Fund Chief Executive Officer, Tiffany Allen says that one of the aims of the grant is to build capacity in the local building industry.

“This grant is targeted at supporting the local construction industries and their apprentices, allowing them to learn some new skills that can remain in the region so, if another event came

through, you've got local skills that can be used straight away,” Ms Allen said.

“The extra funding has helped battle a few costs of living and fuel pressures that we are all feeling in the area right now and is one of the construction hurdles our clients have faced with their recovery and rebuild.” she said.

If you're a construction business or know someone who is a business owner helping to rebuild properties, the full details of eligibility can be found at www.ctf.gov.au/disaster-recovery-grant, which remains open until 30 June 2025.

A RESILIENT REBUILD: 'EVERY DAY IS A NEW DAY'

It was over a year ago that we met with Walter Kleszcz to hear his story of resilience and rebuilding. He is no stranger to adversity, but his optimistic perspective on life and loss is incredibly encouraging and impacts the community around him.

When Walter Kleszcz started thinking about how to rebuild, he put pencil to paper.

"I drew a picture of the house I wanted," said Walter, 73, a long-time Gidgegannup resident, who lost his 40-year-old cedar house to the Wooroloo Bushfire.

"[The new house] had to be brick with double-glazed windows and a steel roof, so I can no longer have my timber house. I didn't want to go crazy, I wanted a house that looks more like a shed."

The builder's architect did the rest, working closely with Walter to improve on the initial design.

Walter drove one of his four beloved hot rods out of the fire, saving it from the fate of the others and everything on his property except a solitary water tank. The rebuild of his property gave him the opportunity to put additional safety measures in place, add a new shed and a fully enclosed garage for his prized

possessions, instead of a carport.

"I lost three cars but saved one, and once the house and shed are done I've pretty much got everything I want. I am lucky. I was well and truly covered and I know a lot of people are underinsured."

As a Vietnam veteran and someone who has experienced loss in his life, Walter knows how it feels to rebuild and recover physically and emotionally. To him recovery is about appreciating what he has in his life and taking a step forward every day.

"Every day is a new day because I've still got my life. You lose a lot of personal things, but my life is more important than my house and my cars. I lost every photograph, but I'll get photos from my kids, have them enlarged and put them back on the walls."

A week before Christmas, Walter was getting ready to move into his new house and having his grandkids up for lunch. The lights outside the house were working, the floor tiles were being laid, and new furniture was arriving, ready to be put in place.

"I'm excited for my new house, but my home is my blood and my soul."



Walter Kleszcz on his property in Gidgegannup in December 2021, a week before moving into his new house. Photo: Rebecca De Vries

If you have questions about the rebuild process, your local recovery officers can help connect you with the local government planning and building teams.

[Bushfire Recovery Team](#)
(City of Swan) –
0438 242 356

[Wooroloo Bushfire Recovery](#)
(Shire of Mundaring) –
0448 245 086

To access other recovery support, please contact one of the below organisations or hotlines:

[Department of Communities](#)
Rachael (0476 573 884)
or Ioannis (0472 872 453)

[Australian Red Cross](#)
Audrey (0415 645 990)
or Lauren (0416 142 603)

[Lifeline](#) – 13 43 57

[Kids Help Line](#) – 1800 551 800

[Beyondblue](#) – 1300 224 636

COORDINATED RESIDENTIAL CLEAN UP PROGRAM

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

 **135** properties cleared and completion certificates issued


 Over **70%** of all waste recycled

Total waste tally:

				
8,891m²	1,133t	3,227t	3,288t	189t
Rubble recycled	Metal recycled	General waste	Asbestos waste*	Other hazardous waste*

*including soils

WHAT DID SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAY ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

 Overall, there was a high degree of satisfaction with the Program and praise for the personnel involved.

92%
agreed or
strongly agreed
that it met their
individual needs

97%
agreed or
strongly agreed
that it met their
expectations

94%
were satisfied or
very satisfied
overall with it

 All forms of communication were rated as effective by most, signifying that diverse communication methods were essential and effective.

