

# Otway Complex Fires Recovery Newsletter

Issue 8 – 29 June 2026

# Thank you

On Thursday 11 June residents and volunteers gathered to say goodbye and thank you to Blaze Aid.

Since February, over 120 volunteers helped fire impacted residents rebuild burned fences. This included people not only from afar but also from the local community and Rotary.

Echidna House in Kawarren generously hosted Blaze Aid by providing a well-equipped home base with kitchen and amenities for meals and meetings and the surrounding campgrounds for accommodation.

Peter and Sandy Philippzig, who hail from Walpeup, were the last of the coordinators and lead workers to wrap up the campsite. They preceded Steve Matthews who ran the camp prior, and Max and Judy who set the camp up from the beginning. Peter and Sandy were chuffed to see so many join them to say thanks.

Bruce Beale, president of Kawarren Recreation Reserve, addressed the incredible achievements. "There were 30 properties that registered, over 1,300 volunteer days, over 22 kilometres of fencing completed, over 11 kilometres fencing cleared, 85 strainers put in, 24 gates installed, 706 pickets, 7 trees removed, 30 trees planted and 7 creek crossings built."

Locals stepped up to provide 890 meals. Anne Hennessy led the roster with some of her family favourites including stews, sweet'n'sour pork, sausage onions and gravy, much-



Blaze Aid volunteer coordinators Sandy and Peter Philippzig.

loved meat pies and chilli con carne. She said, "It was really nice to feed people who were doing so much for our community."

The Blaze Aid volunteers showed real dedication. Some were on leave from work, others were retirees and we had backpackers join in too. Many had never built a fence before and just came in and gave it a go."

Lorna Jemmett and her son Aiden Burnie did a weekly dinner with

dishes such as pork roast, butter chicken, slow cooked brisket and Osso Bucco. Cliveen, Lee, Louise and Merrilyn also contributed their culinary skills. Lorna added, "It was nice meeting all the workers and volunteers, letting them know how much we appreciated them for coming in to help."

Blaze Aid is a volunteer organisation that assists in rebuilding rural communities after natural disasters. Visit [blazeaid.com.au](http://blazeaid.com.au).



**CELEBRATION:** Thank you to BlazeAid and their dedicated volunteers for supporting Colac Otway communities devastated by the January bushfires. Your hard work has made a real difference, with 30 properties supported, more than 1,300 volunteer days contributed, over 22 kilometres of fencing completed and 11 kilometres cleared, 85 strainers installed, 24 gates put in place, 706 pickets driven, 7 trees removed, 30 trees planted and 7 creek crossings built.





## Introducing Lawrence Maskill

Rural Aid is pleased to welcome Lawrence Maskill as a local counsellor and community representative for Colac and nearby areas.

Rural Aid is here to support farmers and their families with practical help, mental health and wellbeing support, and by backing strong, connected communities, especially through tough times.

Lawrence will be out and about across the region, offering a down-to-earth, easy-to-access counselling service and getting to know locals along the way. Whether you feel like stopping for a chat, sharing what's been going on, or just having someone listen, she's here for that.

Lawrence is really looking



forward to meeting people, hearing their stories, and working alongside the community to keep things strong now and into the future.

If you're a farmer or part of a farming family, feel free to reach out or just drop in for a chat - no pressure, just support when you need it. Call Rural Aid on 1300 327 624 or visit [www.ruralaid.org.au](http://www.ruralaid.org.au)



## Focus on healthy habits

Regular exercise, eating well and getting a good night's sleep are all key to our physical and mental wellbeing.

But they're also usually the first things to fall away during times of stress, especially if we're focused on taking care of others.

If it's hard to find time to yourself, you could suggest going for a walk or a bike ride together as a family, or ask your children to help you prepare dinners for the week ahead.

Giving your children the opportunity to make choices and feel like they're helping can have a positive impact on their own mental health.

And if you're feeling overwhelmed, remember that even small changes can make a big difference to your energy levels and mood.

Contact the Emergency Recovery Support Program (ERSP) delivered by Colac Area Health for free, practical support to help you get back on track. Call 5232 5325 and ask for the Emergency Recovery Support Team.





## Help with your insurance claim

### What about insurance?

#### Check you are properly insured.

Having the right insurance can make life easier if something goes wrong. Most people don't have enough cover.

Visit [areyoucovered.vic.gov.au](http://areyoucovered.vic.gov.au) to help you identify your risks and the steps to take to have financial peace of mind.

#### Claiming on your insurance after an emergency.

If your home is insured, contact your insurance company even if you don't know the full extent of the damage.

Take photos and make a list of everything that is damaged.

Emergency Recovery Victoria has more information about what to expect and who can support you as you rebuild, repair or sell your home after a bushfire.

Visit: [vic.gov.au/rebuild-repair-home-disaster](http://vic.gov.au/rebuild-repair-home-disaster)

### Recovery Team is here for support

#### The Recovery Team is here to support your community's journey after disaster.

We work alongside a number of agencies and services to provide support.

We help you access the resources and services you need.

Visit the Community Recovery Hub at Gellibrand or reach out to George O'Dwyer on 0400 978 356 or [George.ODwyer@colacotway.vic.gov.au](mailto:George.ODwyer@colacotway.vic.gov.au) and Bridie Walsh on 0477 642 079 or email [Bridie.Walsh@colacotway.vic.gov.au](mailto:Bridie.Walsh@colacotway.vic.gov.au).

The Gellibrand Recovery Hub is open on Monday (10am-4pm), Wednesday afternoon and Thursday (10am-4pm).

No appointment is necessary.



### Save the date! Small Business Bus visits Otways

Put Monday 20 July in your calendar and make sure you attend the Small Business Bus visit to Gellibrand.

The bus will be parked outside of Gellibrand Neighbourhood House 1 Old Main Road, Gellibrand.

They will run 45-minute workshop on marketing and sales. Plus there will be access to business advisory.

### Get behind local businesses.

While businesses in the region survived the fires, they didn't escape the downturn in customers.

Some are reporting up to 50% in losses right across the region.

We're encouraging people to remember your local. Keep shopping in the region and show your love for local produce, cafes, restaurants and retailers.

Tell us your favourite local business and we'll make sure we feature them in future editions of this newsletter.

Email Bridie at [bridie.walsh@colacotway.vic.gov.au](mailto:bridie.walsh@colacotway.vic.gov.au).

### Get new threads

Thread Together provide brand-new, unworn clothing sourced from leading fashion brands and retailers.

They provide everyday basics, workwear, warm coat or jacket or footwear and accessories for free.

Ask Kyla at Gellibrand Neighbourhood House to register you for free quality clothing from Thread Together.

Email [coordinator@gellihouse.org.au](mailto:coordinator@gellihouse.org.au) or drop into GelliHouse at 1 Old Main Road, Gellibrand.

