

AUGUST 2021

FrontierNews

*'Sunny, I'm
speechless...'*



**Frontier
Services**
Standing with
people in the bush





A message from Jannine

When Dorothea Mackellar penned her immortal poem, 'My Country', she wrote hauntingly about her love of a sunburnt country...of droughts and flooding rains... and of so much more Australians hold dear about this remarkable land of ours.

Sadly, the people of rural and remote Australia that Frontier Services help, know "of droughts and flooding rains" all too well. Add into this mix 'of bushfires, isolation, and mouse plagues' and that pretty much sums up the relentless crises that have piled up on the doorstep of our farmers, graziers and outback friends in recent years.

How much can they take?

It's just been one disaster after another, and my heart breaks for our friends in the bush. NSW farmer Margaret summed it up best when she said recently: "We just can't catch a break at the moment. It's been one thing after another these past five years – and now the mice plague. It's just devastating."

We know what's happening around the country, because we hear it from our Bush Chaplains who are on the frontline in our remote communities, and we hear it from our Outback Links team members and volunteers.

In response to this latest crisis in the bush, we mobilised our Bush Chaplains and our Outback Links volunteer networks to visit as many properties as possible to lend a hand. But a crisis of this magnitude demands an even bigger response, which is why we launched an advocacy program to lobby government decision makers to take action and to help those impacted by this disgusting mouse plague.

A breath of hope

I am so very grateful to the many Frontier Services supporters who joined in this advocacy by raising their voices and sending messages to the minister. Your voices have been heard! You can read more about the government's response on page 15 of this newsletter.

I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed to our emergency appeal and writing to the Minister. It has lifted spirits and saved lives you are incredible. You are part of making miracles happen.

Thank you for continuing to stand with people in the bush.

Jannine Jackson
National Director

Bush Chaplain tribute:

Sadly, Frontier Services says goodbye to Bush Chaplain, Rev. Phill Matthews after 7 years of servicing the Barwon Remote Area as he heads into his retirement.

Frontier Services, along with those in Phill's remote area are forever grateful for his love of connecting with people. Whether it is hearing people's stories or walking alongside those in need, Phill has a gift of being able to connect with people.



On behalf of the Frontier Services Team, Outback Links and our donors and farmers, we would like to wish Rev. Phill Matthew's and his wife Lyn blessing on their next journey.

How you can help right now:

- ✓ Make a tax-deductible gift by completing the self-sealing envelope in this magazine, or donate online at frontierservices.org/donate
- ✓ Help farmers direct! Register to volunteer at frontierservices.org/volunteer or check current volunteering opportunities in areas of most need.



Frontier Services
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About Frontier Services Frontier Services is a national agency of the Uniting Church in Australia, established to continue the unified work of the Australian Inland Mission, the Methodist Inland Mission, and the inland mission of the Congregational Union, and works with people across 85% of the continent, including Aboriginal communities and isolated properties.

Bushfire recovery continues



In the 2019-2020 bushfire season, more than 500,000 hectares of land burned in the Snowy Monaro region of New South Wales. In the worst bushfire season recorded in NSW history, homes were destroyed and countless lives were upended in just a few months.

The devastation caused heartache right across the region, a lot of residents lost absolutely everything. Recently, Frontier Services and long-term partner, the NRMA, sent out 30 Outback Links volunteers to assist 11 properties over a period of 8 days.

Hats off to them all!

One of our teams spent three days with John, whose property was completely burnt out during the fires. The 70-year-old farmer's property is situated in the village of Cathcart, Bombala, close to the Victorian border.

John, who lives alone with his dog Ned, describes his property as 'a bit like Old McDonald's farm'. An apt description, as John and Ned shared their property with an assortment of mini horses, some sheep, alpacas, pigs, turkeys, ducks and a goose. Sadly, many of John's animals perished in the bushfires and when he fled his property to evacuate, he escaped with only 3 pairs of pants, 4 shirts and the boots he was wearing.

The fires also ravaged everything on his property: cabins, caravans, vehicles, outhouses and water tanks were destroyed. His first thoughts when he surveyed everything burnt to the ground? *"Here we go,"* he said to his faithful dog. *"Ned, old boy, it looks like we have to start from scratch."*

By the time our Outback Links team arrived at the property, John had already begun rebuilding, but it was a mammoth task. John had rolled up his sleeves and started on a project, his new home: a shipping container he was converting into a living space. As the region is known for its cold winters with frequent frost and occasional snow, the biggest task ahead was to insulate and wall the shipping container to provide some much-needed warmth.

Within three days, our volunteers had fully insulated and walled the shipping container. Some of the team members also got cracking on mechanical repairs needed around the property, from servicing trailers and cars to repairing a 15-tonne loader.

John was blown away by the energy of the volunteer team. *"They really mucked in and got a heck of a lot more done than I thought they would,"* he said.

Aside from his gratitude for their manual labour and help with tasks that had been put off, John said he and Ned really appreciated their company. *"They were a cheery bunch,"* he told us, *"and I really enjoyed having a cuppa and a chat with them. Ned sure did enjoy their visit also."*

"I've been praising both Frontier Services and NRMA ever since. Hats off to them all."

It was our privilege, John.



Hope and positivity

In the face of adversity

In the last 18 months or so, we've heard from so many of our farmers that life feels like a never-ending cycle of hardship and disappointment. It's just been one major disaster after another, and nobody appreciates this more than our friend Melissa and her two boys.

Melissa lives in Rockton, a small rural town located in the Snowy Monaro region. While Melissa and her sons were grateful to survive the bushfires, their property and home suffered massive damage.

The bushfires weren't the only thing that tested Melissa's strength. In the span of a year, Melissa's partner left her, bushfires ripped through her town, and she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

After five months of chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, there was a long list of jobs that needed to be done on Melissa's property, and she and her young sons were overwhelmed with the thought of tackling them all.

With open arms, they welcomed our Frontier Services and NRMA Outback Links volunteers to get to work on their list. During the three days we spent with Melissa's family, our volunteer team tackled a lengthy list of tasks, from repairing machinery to clearing out the paddocks.

In addition to the physical work that needed to be done, we leant emotional support to the family. Whether that was a friendly chat over a cup of tea at the



end of a hard day's work or checking in with Melissa to see if they needed additional support moving forward, it was clear that our visit had taken a weight off Melissa's shoulders.

Melissa's mother had travelled up from Victoria because she was concerned about her daughter's isolation, and what she had just endured, but after seeing the difference we made in a few short days, Melissa's mum said she was blown away by the support and care that Frontier Services provided.

When we asked Melissa what the next twelve months look like, she shared a beautiful message that speaks to the very core of why we do what we do.

"I'm feeling a lot more positive," she reported. "The bush is regenerating. The birds and wildlife are returning and we are so thankful for all of the help we have received."

The work we do is about so much more than completing a list of jobs.

While we know that our practical support makes a world of difference in the lives of farmers like Melissa, it's just as much about providing hope and positivity in the face of adversity.

It may have taken a year for the bush to start regenerating after the worst bushfire season in recorded history, but after just 4 days opening her home to us, Melissa and her sons are well on their way to a new beginning.

You make this wonderful work come to life through your support for Frontier Services. On behalf of farmers like John and Melissa, and many more like them. Thank you sincerely.





Volunteering: it's good for the soul

First time Outback Links volunteer, Jackie, says she and her family will remain lifelong friends with the farmers they supported while volunteering at a farm in Tarong, in Queensland's South Burnett Region.

Along with her husband Wayne and their 33-year-old-son Chris, Jackie spent a month at the property of Des, a farmer in his mid-70s who lives with his 90-year-old sister. Des had been rushed to hospital following complications after undergoing six harrowing health related complications in the previous six months.

Des and his sister Gloria had been in desperate need of help while Des was in hospital and later recovering at home. He wanted to ensure someone was around to keep an eye on his elderly sister and to feed their livestock: 22 horses, 18 dogs and an assortment of beloved pets.

Before taking on the volunteer role, Jackie did her homework. She has a background in aged care disability services and her son Christopher has a physical disability. *"I wanted to make sure we could match our skills to the right volunteer project, and to ensure the property would be suitable for Christopher's needs,"* she said.

Working closely with our Outback Links team, the family settled on volunteering at Des and Gloria's farm. Initially intending to stay for just two weeks, Jackie and her family extended their trip to four weeks because they could see that Des and Gloria were in dire need of help.

"My husband, Wayne, is a farmer – born and bred, and he is very knowledgeable about the land, mechanics and animals," Jackie said. "Both Wayne and Chris have a real connection with the land and it was a wonderful opportunity for them to reconnect to the bush."

Chris was often dad's offside on jobs around the farm and he helped Jackie with the twice daily chore of feeding the horses. *"He'd get on his quad bike and help load the hay as well as helping with odd jobs around the property and farmhouse."* Those odd jobs included setting multiple mouse traps every day, in an attempt to control the growing mouse plague.

Meanwhile, Jackie, using the knowledge she gained during her career, and tapping some contacts she had in government, began working with a district nurse to set up some domestic assistance for Des and Gloria. When Des was discharged from hospital, she also arranged for a local district nurse to visit him and establish a care plan.

During their time at the farm, the family became close to some of Des and Gloria's neighbours and friends. *"We have kept in touch with them and some, I have no doubt, will be lifelong friends."*

From Chris' perspective, the volunteer project was a win/win.

"I grew up on a hobby farm and I miss the land, so it was great to be on an outback property," Chris told us.



"Like mum and dad, I also love helping people and it felt good to lend a hand to people who really needed it."

Jackie says the family's volunteering on the farm was a great life experience for them all, and she would encourage others to consider volunteering for Outback Links.

"It's good for the soul, and there is just so much need out there in rural and remote communities."

Jackie is not wrong: there is huge demand for volunteers to work with farmers and communities across the country. To check out current volunteer opportunities, head to [The Farmers' Gate at frontierservices.org/outback-links](https://frontierservices.org/outback-links) or phone our friendly Outback Links team on **1300 787 247**



We're always ready to help

mynrma.com.au



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WA Cyclone recovery: Shout out for volunteers



When Tropical Cyclone Seroja hit the coastline of Western Australia in April, properties and farmland were decimated right across the Geraldton and Northampton areas. Farmers had just come off the back of an intense and unforgiving drought and when they were hit hard by the cyclone, it was devastating and unexpected.

Our Outback Links team quickly put out a call for an army of volunteers to help farmers and local communities to rebuild after the monumental natural disaster. Outback Links volunteers have been on the ground since May, but there remains a huge task ahead.

It is critical for our farmers to take advantage of the recent rain as they enter the sowing season. But for some, clearing their land from all of the rubbish and rubble is too large a task. We are doing all that we can to relieve the pressure and give as much help and assistance

as possible, but we need many more helping hands.

Across the WA resourcing organisations, volunteer numbers have seen a sharp decline since COVID-19 but the need is greater than ever. Our WA farmers really need help.

We are immensely grateful for those who heard our call for volunteers while they were on the road in WA, and rerouted their travel plans to help those in cyclone affected areas. One of the challenges we are faced with cyclone relief is finding the right volunteers to help our farmers - they must have their own accommodation like a caravan or camper, and the ability to drive to remote areas.

The clean-up is far from over, so if you, or anyone you know could help, we would love to hear from you. Simply drop us an email at: outbacklinks@frontierservices.org or call us on 1300 787 247

This is the strength of our Outback Links program: we have the flexibility to quickly respond when we get an emergency call, and to mobilise an army of volunteers. Your continued support helps make this happen. We couldn't do what we do without you. Thank you!

Fire up the BBQ or buy a virtual seat.



The Great Outback BBQ is back – and it's shaping up to be bigger and better than ever!

With COVID restrictions in force last year, we are so excited to add the option to have a virtual BBQ this year. So regardless of lockdowns you can still participate. It is a really fun and easy way to support our Aussie Farmers just buy a ticket for \$20 it can't be easier.

This year, we're ramping up for a host of traditional (COVID-safe) BBQs throughout the nation in September.

This annual Frontier Services event is a great way for the nation to gather 'round the BBQ to show support for Aussie Farmers doing it tough.

Every dollar you raise at your BBQ will go towards Aussie Farmers rebuilding in the wake of the drought, bushfires, floods and now the mice plague.

Register at greatoutbackbbq.com.au



"What a wonderful afternoon lunch we had at Marong Uniting Church supporting Frontier Services. Such a wonderful opportunity to gather with friends for fellowship whilst helping a great cause."
Eaglehawk Uniting Church



"After a morning tea of damper, we all made our way up the hill towards a local farm which kindly offered a BBQ lunch. A great time of fun and fellowship followed, many stories were told and friendships renewed."
Pinjarra Uniting Church



"We were reminded of the resilience of the people of the bush and how tough some were doing. It brought home to us how important the work of Frontier Services is for families, and for workers who are away from their families."
Pinjarra Uniting Church



"I hope congregations will support this cause financially and with their prayers as our farmers are essential to the life of Australia."
Dr Deidre Palmer

A message of hope

Uniting Church congregations throughout Australia are among the most passionate supporters of Frontier Services. Collectively, their contribution of time as volunteers, and generosity through their donations, plays a critical role in enabling us to run our Bush Chaplaincy network and Outback Links programs.

We recently sat down with Dr Deidre Palmer, President of the Uniting Church in Australia, who shared a powerful message of hope for our friends in the outback. She also reflected on the impact of Frontier Services in remote and rural communities.

The following is an excerpt from her special message to Uniting Church congregations, and to all who walk alongside Frontier Services as volunteers and supporters.

"I have taken much inspiration during my tenancy as President of the Uniting Church from the beautiful theme of 'Grace in abundance, Hope liberated'. In the work of Frontier Services, there are amazing signs of hope.

I've visited communities in Western NSW who have worked with Outback Links – and that's amazing ministry: very practical work. Frontier Services works alongside these farmers and people in remote communities, and they can identify with them and lift the burden.



To watch Deidre and Jannine Jackson's full interview head to our YouTube page!



And so you have the mechanics of those who go into the household: it's practical support, but it's also building relationships. Because as we know when we spend time with one another, we hear each others' stories. We can share and compassionately respond to the grief and the loss.

You're talking about people living in drought and being isolated in those conditions. To have someone from Outback Links or our Bush Chaplains walk alongside them and hear their stories...

...these are people among us suffering from terrible drought, then on top of that the bushfires, the plague and restrictions associated with COVID. Those layers and layers of loss and grief have a significant impact on people and on the mental health of people affected. That sometimes requires professional services but it also requires friendship and people's understanding. Outback Links volunteers and Bush Chaplains offer that kind of support and hope."



Mouse Plague update

As we go to print, we are still knee deep in the Mouse Plague disaster.

The mice have devastated rural New South Wales and the Southern Queensland outback: inundating houses and shops, devouring crops and contaminating livestock feed.

They are getting into the electrical wiring of tractors and harvesters and their dead bodies are fouling water tanks and people's homes.

Day in and day out, our Frontier Service Bush Chaplains and Outback Links volunteers are sending in heart-


breaking reports of the loss and devastation.

Mice are invading homes in terrifying numbers. They're getting into walls and roof cavities and eating wiring. Burrowing into couches and nesting in air conditioners. Soiling in cupboards and pantries, and in cars and farm machinery.

It truly is the stuff of nightmares.

Your continued support will enable us to scale up our volunteer relief services to help farmers clean up and restore broken machinery.

It's not too late to donate to our mouse plague fighting fund or to volunteer to help ease the load for our farmers. You can donate using this [donation form](#), or visit frontierservices.org for more information about how you can become an Outback Links volunteer.



*'Sunny, I'm
speechless...'*



Rev Sunil "Sunny" Kadaparambil can't hide his joy when he speaks of his friends in the bush, and the wonderful Outback Links volunteers who roll up their sleeves to help those in need.

Sunny, who joined Frontier Services in 2014 as a Bush Chaplain, has now been serving the Remote Area of Parkin-Sturt in South Australia since 2018. In the years since, he has worked alongside countless volunteers across many projects. He has treasured memories of them all, and he shared this heartwarming report of a recent project in Cowell, a coastal town almost 500 kilometres from Adelaide.

I met Muriel and Alan almost three and a half years ago and they have been going through a tough time. They are both nearing 70 years of age and run a sheep farm.

Their property is around 3000 acres, and they have 350 sheep. They can't handle any more, as Alan's health is not so good and Muriel works part time, so they don't have enough time to handle all the jobs that are piling up.

We arranged a working party to give them some much-needed support. Nine Outback Links volunteers joined me for the 4-day project: it was a wonderful mix of people from all backgrounds and of all ages. Together, we tackled the most urgent jobs including repairs to the ageing homestead and out-buildings. As some of us were working on repairs to the roof, others busied themselves with fencing, plumbing and mechanical jobs. We also did a lot of pruning and garden work. We put in solid workdays, and Alan and Muriel couldn't believe the amount of progress made!

I remember Muriel turning to me at the end of the second day and saying: 'Sunny, I'm speechless! I never imagined you people could make such a difference – and I have no words to express my thanks.'

Her joy was all the thanks we needed: that's for sure.

And as much as we gave, we received in return. Alan's quite the character with a great sense of humour and he kept us all entertained with his jokes. We all took time out to speak with the couple: to share our life stories, and to listen to their struggles. We were like one big family.

On the final day, we all joined in a thank you BBQ – and there were tears all around. Alan and Muriel told the whole Outback Links crew that they would never forget them, and their house would always be open to each of them. 'If you're in the region, please stop by for a cuppa. We'll never forget you,' they told us.

We, in turn, will never forget Alan and Muriel. And it will be my privilege, as their Bush Chaplain, to keep in touch and check in on them regularly.

I am so grateful for our wonderful volunteers, and the kind and generous Australians who support the work of Frontier Services. Without your contributions, we could not do what we do.



Like father, like son



During National Volunteer Week in May, we took the opportunity to celebrate many of our Outback Links' volunteers on our Facebook page among them were two we described as "our incredible father and son volunteer duo, Michael and Alex Ziviani".

We recently caught up with Michael and Alex who were more than happy to share their volunteering experience in the hope that it might inspire others to volunteer for our Outback Links program.



The father and son duo were part of the NRMA volunteer workforce who completed a range of projects on properties in and around Bombala, 80 kilometres south of Cooma. It was Michael's second tour of duty as an Outback Links volunteer, but a first for Alex who is in Year 12.

Michael and Alex spent 3 days on-site working on a cattle farm owned by Helen and Cliff, whose property was devastated by bushfires. Tragically, they lost their home, and their outbuildings and water tanks were severely damaged. When Michael and Alex's 5-person crew arrived, Helen and Cliff, now living in a caravan, only had their power restored three weeks earlier.

Alex admits that it was quite confronting to see the damage caused by the fires and he acknowledged that the remote location was a far cry from his city life in Sydney. But he relished the experience of working alongside his dad and other volunteers while supporting our friends out bush..

"It was good working with dad," Alex says. "It really helped us to bond. I'm currently helping dad on some renovations around our house, so we're used to working together: but this was a very different experience."

Michael is quite the handyman and his skills were in demand during the project. While he currently heads a leading business growth consultancy, in his earlier life, he trained as a mechanic and has a lot of experience in general building repair maintenance. While a qualified NRMA mechanic was on hand to repair farm machinery, Michael pitched in and he and Alex worked on a mix of other jobs from trenching and rebuilding sheds, to installing piping for new water tanks and restoring the gardens.

The volunteer crew worked under challenging conditions (just 2 degrees on some mornings!), but they made short work of a huge schedule of jobs. Helen and Cliff were overwhelmed with joy and gratitude, and Michael said he and Alex were both humbled by the experience.

"Meeting people like Helen and Cliff and seeing their resilience in the face of so much hardship gives you a really different perspective on life," Michael said.

"We also enjoyed meeting and working alongside the NRMA volunteers. They were all lovely, down-to-earth people who had supported farmers through a lot of devastation in their previous work with Outback Links. They had so much empathy for the farmers, and their enthusiasm for getting the job done was infectious."

Michael said he would encourage others to volunteer for Outback Links. ***"It's the human spirit to want to give to others, but in truth, you get back as much or more than you put in."***

Alex agrees. *"It's a good feeling knowing that you've helped someone who really needed it,"* the 17-year-old told us. *"It was really great to see smiles on Helen and Cliff's faces, and to know that they are on the road to restarting their lives after such devastation."*

Thank you, Michael and Alex, and all our Outback Links volunteers. Your kindness and your willingness to go the extra mile is not just helping our country friends to rebuild their lives: it reminds those in the bush that they are not alone in their hour of need.

If you are inspired by Michael and Alex's story and would like more information about volunteering for Outback Links, please call our friendly Outback Links team on 1300 787 247.



2021 Christmas Cards!

Each pack contains 10 cards adorned with photography of Australian landscapes that highlight the beauty of our vast country.

Whether your sending these to friends down the street or family across the seas, these are sure to bring joy to those near and dear to you this festive season.

Stock is limited so please place your order by either visiting our website, calling our team on 1300 787 247 or completing the order form in the centre spread.

