

MAY 2018

FrontierNews

A refreshed
look, but the
same vision



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



From the Director

A refreshed look, but the same vision.

Hello and welcome to your new-look Frontier News.

Frontier Services have come a long way since Rev John Flynn founded the Australian Inland Mission in 1912. Throughout our history, we have evolved in response to the ever-changing demands across remote Australia and the refreshed brand you now see is part of that evolution.

We have adopted the beautiful colours of the Outback to represent our unity with people in the bush. Our logo is an abstract visual of Australia, made up of two arms holding the centre of the country like an embrace. It represents the practical, pastoral and spiritual care we provide.

It is this care, our 'Mantle of Safety' that is needed now more than ever by those living and working in rural and remote parts of the country.

A study published in March, about the impact *fly-in-fly-out* (FIFO) work has on the mental health and well-being of workers and their families, highlighted the struggle for me. It is difficult for workers to adjust between their "on-shift and off-shift lives", and cope with the psychological distance that develops when they are away from their families¹. There is a need for better support services on-site.

I was saddened by the fact this research faced some fierce online commentary with one of the co-authors telling ABC News the backlash confirmed what the study participants already felt; that they have no right to speak up because they chose the FIFO lifestyle².

It is a shame that when people need our help and understanding, they're judged and made to feel even more vulnerable.

There are more than half a million

Australians living in remote areas³. We believe that all people, regardless of where they live, deserve to live a fulfilled life and have access to health care and support when they need it.

One of the ways we bridge the gap for those living in isolation is through our Remote Area Ministry.

Rev John Dihm, one of our Bush Chaplains, works closely with FIFO workers. He told me that since joining the Pilbara Remote Area in 2013 he has attended 27 deaths on different sites; some from accidents and illnesses but many from suicides.

At our brand unveiling event, he told a captivated room of our committed supporters and partners that despite these tragedies, many more lives have been saved because their generosity meant he and our Bush Chaplains were there when people needed someone to listen to them, to care.

We are with Farmers, First Peoples and Miners. For over a century, we have been there to lend an ear, give a helping hand and be of service to people in the Outback.

In reflection, I am so honoured to be given the chance to evolve our brand. Thank you for being part of our history. We invite you, our valued readers, loyal donors and wonderful volunteers to come on the next part of our journey as we look towards the future.

Join us in *standing with people in the bush*.

Jannine Jackson
National Director

¹ Gardner B, Alfrey K, Vandelanotte C et al, 'Mental health and well-being concerns of fly-in fly-out workers and their partners in Australia: a qualitative study', BMJ Open 2018;8:e019516. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2017-019516

² 'FIFO mental health study sparks social media backlash', 19 March 2018, ABC News [accessed online]

³ National Rural Health Alliance (2016, May 13), 'The health of people living in remote Australia', Retrieved from <http://ruralhealth.org.au/factsheets/thumbs>



*Unveiling the new brand:
(from left to right) Revs
Sunny and John with Jannine*

*"...many more lives have been
saved because...our Bush
Chaplains were there when
people needed someone to
listen to them, to care."*

Join us in standing with people in the bush

- If you know someone who'd enjoy reading Frontier News, please invite them to subscribe or share this issue with them after you've finished reading it.
- If any of our stories inspire you to give, please call us on **1300 787 247** or visit our website to make a donation. For as little as \$25 you can give the gift of a cuppa and a chat.



Frontier Services
Standing with people in the bush



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Front Cover Wendy and Ross Groves, Coniston;
(inset) Andrew Binsiar and grandson, Meekatharra

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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.

Outback Links Keeping us standing with graziers



Wendy and Ross Groves have been part of the Outback Links program since its inception. With two properties to run, totalling 190,000 acres, they value the much needed support, friendship and respite our volunteers provide.

The daily tasks of looking after the homes, watering the gardens, feeding the dogs, chooks and sometimes up to 800 cattle or a couple of thousand ewes, on their properties as well as making sure the animals have access to sufficient drinking water every day often mean some things around the home and property are put on the 'waiting list'.

Wendy recalls a time when they needed to repaint the exterior of one of the homes but simply didn't have the time, or the expertise, so they called out to Frontier Services. "Jim must've really loved painting because he didn't stop smiling and working the entire two weeks, and along with Carol transformed the house with a new coat of paint."

The isolation of remote living can also take its toll spiritually. Wendy said there was a point where she felt so disconnected from her faith it was like holding her breath.

"Being Christian, living remotely without regular church or fellowship, had me feeling really spiritually dry," she said. "We're over 300km from the nearest church and I longed for Bible Study."





"I was so grateful for the friendship we made that year."

Fortunately for Wendy in 2007, Outback Links volunteer couple Rod and Judy Green shared in her faith. While Rod was out on the property with Ross, Judy and Wendy worked together to prepare a scrapbook of photos for Ross' 50th birthday.

"It was during this time that Judy and I shared different bible verses and prayed together, and I was being refreshed spiritually," Wendy said. "I was so grateful for the friendship we made that year."

Managing two properties

For Ross, property life runs deep through his veins. Two of his brothers and late father were all graziers. It was this passion that lead him to purchase the second property in 2011. Outback Links volunteers were there again, this time to build a deck, paint some of the rooms, replace broken doors and fly screens, help in the garden, and general maintenance.

With the challenge of managing two properties 70km apart, the south-west Queensland couple often find they barely have time to spend together, so they value the respite our volunteers provide.

"It's not easy for us to be away for longer than 24 hours because of the day to day needs," Wendy said. "So we feel really blessed to get help from Frontier Services when we need it."





Making a dream come true

This year, with a special birthday looming, Wendy made a call to Outback Links for volunteers to look after the properties so she and Ross could spend some time with her son, who flies helicopters in Broome.

"When I spoke with Michelle at Frontier Services about Outback Links I told her 'this isn't an emergency, just a dream'," she said. "A dream to go to Broome for the first time and be with my son to celebrate my 60th."

Fortunately, we were able to make her dream come true, with volunteer couple James and Kerrie driving all the way from the Blue Mountains to look after Clifton and Coniston Stations. Not only did they care take both properties, it rained while they were there which was welcomed with great joy.

"From our perspective, we get so much from the volunteers," Wendy said. "We've had help with mustering, fencing,

gardening, building the 'Number One Chook Pen', replacing the Shearers' Quarters yard, painting, care-taking, and numerous other tasks too many to name."

"Some of the yarns around the dinner table relating new experiences, fresh scenery and outback adventures make for hearty laughter as friendships are forged."

"It speaks volumes about people's generosity of spirit. It's an amazing gift, just to give your time and friendship."

"It would be impossible to name all the Outback Links Volunteers who have given so much to us since our first placement, Bruce and Lorraine and Frank and Wendy, Melbourne; through Geoff and Roz, Port Macquarie; Alan and Lorraine, McLaren Vale; Kevin and Margaret, Sunshine Coast; Keith, Daisy Hill, who was here during flooding; Greg, Mudgeeraba; Ron and Gwen, Lismore. We are ever grateful for their generosity, hard work, friendship and also for keeping in touch. We trust you have been blessed by your participation in the Outback Links program as much as we've been honoured to have your help."

Outback Links volunteers bring hope and resources to those living in remote Australia. They are passionate people whose impact can last long after their placement.

If you would like to volunteer for the Outback Links program or are a farmer in need of a helping hand, please call Michelle at Frontier Services on **1300 787 247**.

Outback Links

Bringing hope and resources to those living in remote Australia.



Want to
take the trip of a
lifetime and help
someone in need?
Sign up to volunteer
today. Visit
outbacklinks.com.au



Frontier Flashback

Among miners in the Murchison

Between 1997 and 2002, Allan Mackenzie stood among miners and First Peoples as Frontier Services' Bush Chaplain in the Murchison Remote Area.



◀ Allan atop one of the mining pits of Meekatharra

Allan talking with miners at the St Barbara Mines.

Meekatharra, the largest centre in the Murchison, is rich in both pastoral and mining history since gold was first discovered in the 1890s.

Here are some photos we wanted to share with you of Allan's time in the Murchison (credits: Allan and Diane Mackenzie). They appear in our 100-year commemorative book 'at the Very Heart' (Walton, S – Wakefield Press, 2012).

Allan's ministry was conducted via plane and 4WD among the stations and mining sites of the day. His work is carried on by Rev Mitch Fialkowski (story opposite) who arrived in Meekatharra in 2012.



▲ Allan rollerblading with the children of Meekatharra. He and Diane helped establish a rink and held roller skating and disco every Saturday night.

Working with First Peoples in the Murchison



In the last issue of *Frontier News*, you may have noticed from the Director's update a picture of Jannine and Rev Mitch Fialkowski in Meekatharra. In listening to Jannine's stories from her trip, she spoke of Mitch's strength and resilience, bringing hope to the people and community of Meekatharra. In this article, we reflect on his work with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to foster collaboration and create brighter futures for Aboriginal youth.

In the mid-90s, cattle prices dropped significantly in Australia and though it recovered in the early 2000s it has been on a steady decline ever since[^]. Rev Mitch believes this has contributed to Indigenous unemployment in Meekatharra.

"When you ask their grandfathers what they did, they say they were on the stations," Mitch explained.

"My hunch is that with the dropping price of cattle, families on the stations turned inward to get jobs done because they couldn't afford the extra help."

"What's really sad is that you've got these grandfathers who have the knowledge but can't pass it on. You can teach someone how to ride a horse and to muster, but no station will take them, so they go 'why teach someone skills they can't use?'"

According to the 2016 Census, the town's population of 708 experiences an unemployment rate higher than the national average (7.3 percent compared to 5.5 percent). Andrew Binsiar, a youth worker and Meekatharra's first Aboriginal councillor, said the hard times have hit multiple generations within the Indigenous community.



Jannine and Mitch at Meeka Lookout

"We've gone through three generations here where no one's worked," he said. "Back in the 90s everyone worked on the stations and in the mines, but things have changed and we've gone way too long without regular employment."

"There are some families with no background (in employment), so they aren't being taught 'you have to go to work.'"

Complicating matters is the conflict between local clans. The crime and dysfunction makes it difficult for them to come together to resolve the issues their community face, including domestic violence, drugs, alcohol and unemployment.

Building trust in the community

But this is where Frontier Services is lending a helping hand. Rev Mitch has been fostering collaboration between clans by attending meetings with the Meekatharra Aboriginal Reference Group (MARG). MARG brings together elders from each clan, with the aim of finding common ground in order for them to develop solutions together.

Building trust within the Indigenous community, Mitch is one of few non-Aboriginal people invited to attend. National Director, Jannine Jackson was also invited to attend during her recent trip to Meekatharra.

"It's really important that representatives feel confident in voicing their opinions because there's some angst that non-Aboriginal people might talk over them," he explained. "When I attend, I listen and offer advice rather than telling them what to do."

Working with youth to build confidence

In an effort to help break the cycle of unemployment, Rev Mitch has been working with the local school, youth centre and community radio to engage the young people of Meekatharra. They organise barbecues for the kids and invite everyone from all cultural backgrounds to join, which encourages community participation.

They also ask the children to come up with ideas for a spot on the radio station and present them together. Mitch hopes that over time, this will help to build their confidence.

"The kids are more confident at speaking on the radio than the adults," Mitch said.

"The idea is to start building their confidence while they're young with the hope that they'll take it into adulthood so we can effect positive change in the community."

Other groups like community services, the police and local business are invited to come to the station and discuss their programs to get others involved.

Rev Mitch said there is still a way to go, but he is optimistic after seeing the efforts of locals like Andrew to make a change (read the next article to learn more).

"They will need our support but I'm determined to make a change," he said. "I leave the door open so they know they can always come to me for help and guidance."

"We're here working with the clans and they're realising 'hey, we have to do this ourselves.' It's taken a while but I'm seeing things starting to sink in."

Our Bush Chaplains like Rev Mitch are often on the frontline in remote communities, providing practical, pastoral and spiritual care where it is needed the most. If you would like to support their work, please call us on **1300 787 247**, complete the centre envelope of this magazine or visit our website to make a donation.

[^]Matthews, R & Ryan, T - 'The history of Australian cattle prices since 1970' (Meat & Livestock Australia, 2015) [Accessed online: <https://www.mla.com.au>]



Dreaming of making a splash in the place of little water

During a recent visit to Western Australia, Rev Mitch Fialkowski introduced us to Andrew Binsiar, a local councillor and artist with big dreams for the Aboriginal youth of Meekatharra.

Steeped in gold rush history, Meekatharra is a town located 500km inland from Geraldton. It is home to a population of just over 700 people, around a third of whom identify as being of Aboriginal descent.

Andrew lived through the mining boom of the 1980s which provided much of the employment for locals until the growth of fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) work in the mid-90s. He believes tourism can revitalise the area and give people of the local *Buttah Windee* community, just 5km east of Meekatharra, an opportunity to become self-sufficient.

“I’ve been working with a group of 25 youths, male and female, to prepare them for training with TAFE,” he said. “We’ve been working on building their self-confidence as well as developing their numeracy and literacy skills.”

Andrew’s dream is to establish a successful barramundi, fruit and vegetable farm so his community can generate tourism through a year-round food, art and cultural experience.

But for a town whose name means ‘place of little water’ in the local Yamatji tongue, how does someone in Meekatharra even start setting up a barramundi farm?



Andrew said station owners have supported the project by donating their first fish tanks. Testing of the aquarium environment has already begun using goldfish and perch fingerlings before barramundi eggs are brought in.

Yulella, the local community development program, is funding the 9-month training course, which covers the Certificate II in Aquaculture and Certificate II in Hydroponics.



Jannine Jackson and Rev Mitch Fialkowski with Andrew Binsiar

The remoteness of Meekatharra also presents another challenge for the project, with the nearest TAFE being over a staggering 420km away. The training team have addressed this by arranging for the lecturer to drive to and stay in town from Monday to Friday.

Working with Andrew is Bush Chaplain Rev Mitch, who helps to find mentors for the youths to look up to.

"When you've been looked down on all your life, you don't feel much self-worth," Mitch said. "We want to break the cycle and improve their self-esteem."

Andrew is hopeful the project will take Aboriginal youth away from their troubles, while creating skilling and working opportunities for them and Buttah Windee.

"In Meekatharra, we deal with issues related to domestic violence, alcohol and other drugs," he explained. "Our youth are right in the middle of it, but I see this project as a way to equip them with life skills and reconnect them with Aboriginal culture."

"If this project is successful, the people of Buttah Windee can also become self-sufficient through the tourism we generate."

"I see this project as a way to equip them with life skills and reconnect them with Aboriginal culture."

Letting his art do the talking

We learnt that Andrew's passion for art started off at an early age with an interest in tattooing. He later tried mediums such as pencil, charcoal and acrylic paint before developing his unique style of mixing portraits with traditional forms of Aboriginal painting.

He said his works are mainly about Aboriginal people, their struggles in the past and the challenges they face today.

"The youths I work with are between 17 and 29," Andrew explained. "People might wonder about the older age, but we've included them because of the opportunities they missed in earlier life."

"I would like to combine my art, the local Buttah Windee culture and the food this project could potentially grow, to create opportunities for my community through tourism."

Through his work, Andrew has become a positive role model for Aboriginal people in Meekatharra. We pray for his success in achieving this amazing dream.

If you would like to see more of his work, please visit his website (andosartprints.com.au) or follow him on Instagram (@andrew_binsiar_).

Instagram

@andrew_binsiar_



Instagram

@andrew_binsiar_



"We want to break the cycle and improve their self-esteem."

Can you lend a hand to people in the Outback?

For as little as \$20 per month you can ensure people living in isolation receive practical, pastoral and spiritual care when they need it the most.

☒ **YES, I wish to become a regular donor and support the people of remote Australia.**

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Mobile Number _____

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Ceduna Remote Area welcomes returning Bush Chaplain

Gary Ferguson was born and grew up in Port Augusta, spending much of his childhood holidays along the Flinders Ranges, including trips to the Strzelecki and Birdsville Tracks.

After completing secondary school, he gained an apprenticeship in the Commonwealth Railways in 1972, and completed multiple certificates that later lead to a career in the shipping industry for 30 years.

This career saw Gary working in 40-degree heat during what he called “bush trips” to service refrigerated containers for the kangaroo meat industry in South Australia; as well as for up to a month at sea, maintaining refrigerated containers on ships travelling to South-East Asia and Europe.

It was when he travelled to Europe via Cape Town that Gary’s sense of social justice was heightened, after seeing the treatment of black Africans. He also experienced bigoted remarks and behaviour on board container vessels from American and South African officers (who were caucasian) towards sailors and kitchen hands (who were black).

This lead to Gary pursuing theological studies and in 2008 entered into Christian ministry.

From 2014-15, Rev Gary Ferguson served as Bush Chaplain in the Parkin Remote Area, which covered the Oodnadatta, Birdsville and Strzelecki Tracks, Stuart Highway, Marla and Andamooka. After a 3-year absence, he returns to Frontier Services to take on the reins as Bush Chaplain for the Ceduna Remote Area in South Australia.

“In the Ceduna area there is a uniqueness,” Gary said. “I can be called into the remote desert or called to remote coastal towns. I often use the line ‘my area is where the desert meets the sea’.”

Of what it means to be a Bush Chaplain, Gary said, “It’s something that lies deep within my heart - to be available to those in remote areas for that listening ear, a hand shake and a big ‘G’day, how’re you?’”

“I never know where a conversation may lead, but I know that I am there to stand with those in their remoteness.”

Please join us in welcoming Rev Gary Ferguson and we ask you to keep him in your thoughts and prayers as he settles into the Ceduna Remote Area.



Frontier Services

Great Outback BBQ

Bring the outback to your BBQ this September
Sign up to be in with your chance to WIN prizes!

Host your very own Great Outback BBQ and
help those living in Remote Australia

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