

FEBRUARY 2020

FrontierNews

Keeping spirits high
and bringing
welcome
relief



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



A message from Jannine

Hang in there. You're not alone.
There are people who care.

This summer has challenged us all. There has been so much devastation around our country. Whether you live inland or along the coast there was no escape.

Homes have been lost. Livelihoods destroyed. And families displaced.

Fires have raged in every state and territory, adding pressure to communities already struggling with drought. But there have been rays of hope.

I was heartened by stories of people rallying behind those who lost everything to bushfire. And over Christmas and parts of January the heavens opened up, giving some of our farmers and firefighters much-needed reprieve.

I pray for the rains to continue, to quench our parched lands and quell the flames.

Where to next?

Thanks to your response to our bushfire appeal, we are bringing in extra resources



so trauma counselling and emergency relief is available to families who have lost their homes. But much work still needs to be done.

As I write this message to you, many fires still burn in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. We are working with our Bush Chaplains and other agencies to understand where and how else we can be of service.

Over the coming months, we will need additional volunteers to help with recovery efforts and to respond to calls for support from our remote communities. If you would like to lend a hand, please visit frontierservices.org/ volunteer to submit your expression of interest.

With your support, together, we can make a difference.

Jannine Jackson
National Director



"It's refreshing and uplifting knowing that people from the cities are prepared to donate their time to help us."

Michelle and Howard Weber (pictured centre) with volunteers Paul Gray and Heather McKenzie.

Bring friendship, helping hands and hope to people in the bush

- Volunteer with Outback Links! Register your expression of interest at frontierservices.org/volunteer
- Help us spread the word. Share our volunteer stories and the above link with your friends and networks.
- Make a tax-deductible gift by completing the self-sealing envelope at the centre of your magazine.



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Published by
Frontier Services
PO Box 3424
Parramatta NSW 2124

Suite 53 / 2 O'Connell St
Parramatta NSW 2150

T 1300 787 247
E enquiries@frontierservices.org
W www.frontierservices.org

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Editor Felipe Beltran
Contributors
Lisa Sampson | Martin Shields | Rev Rowena Harris
Front Cover Howard Weber, Tottenham

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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.

Volunteers respond to farmer's bushfire emergency

In July last year, Ken and Joyce Dever started a journey around Australia with their caravan. Little did they know that in a few short months, they would be bringing practical care and much-needed respite to an exhausted farmer battling bushfires.

"We were visiting family in Brisbane and planned to continue our travels when we felt this call to help people doing it tough," Ken said. "Searching online, we found Outback Links."

So eager were the couple to get started that within a week of registering as volunteers, they were on their first placement at a station just north of Charleville, in west Queensland. There, they worked with the owners to repair storm damage and looked after their two young children. Joyce said it was a wonderful start.

"When you first meet someone you wonder 'will we work well together?'" she said. "But we did. And the family told us we're always welcome back."

Communities across our Barwon Remote Area in New South Wales

have suffered extensive drought. And towards the end of 2019, some faced devastating bushfires.

"Here he was helping others and he's nearly lost his own house to bushfire."

Ken

One of our farmers, Glen Dwyer*, was frantically fighting fires north of Armidale and desperately needed someone to look after his animals while he was away. We were so grateful that Ken and Joyce answered our call for help.

Upon arriving, they discovered fire had already swept through part of Glen's property. Fencing was burned to the ground. Only the wiring remained.

Over the week, Ken and Joyce did fencing work to create a 40-acre paddock, while feeding and watering the cattle and sheep. They described how tough conditions were for farmers in the area.

"Even with all the fencing burnt to ash, the animals never ventured far from water," Ken said. "The drought's been that bad. They were too weak to wonder."

Some much needed rest

For most of their placement, Ken and Joyce barely saw Glen. He often left to fight fires after a quick morning cuppa, returning as late as 2am that evening.

We can only imagine how exhausting this was for Glen. Yet he struggled to get enough sleep as he had no curtains to shut out the morning sun. Enter "Angel Joyce"...

"Joyce asked me if I could have one wish, what I would want," Glen said. "I told her 'bedroom curtains' so I could get a little sleep-in, which has been impossible."

"So guess what?

'Angel Joyce' got to working on the sewing machine and I now have some great curtains. I have never slept this long before!"

Since becoming Outback Links volunteers, Ken and Joyce have made new friendships and brought much-needed care to people in the bush.

"It was great making new connections and spending time to understand their way of life," Joyce said. "We came away from both placements on such a high."

"We've already recommended volunteering to people we know."

Over the coming months, we will be working with all our Bush Chaplains across Australia to understand where and how we can be of service in their respective Remote Areas. We anticipate mobilising volunteers to help with community recovery projects. If you would like to help, please visit frontierservices.org/volunteer to complete our volunteer expression of interest form.

**Name has been changed for confidentiality*



Oodnadatta welcomes our new Bush Chaplain

In November last year, Pastor Julia Lennon joined our team of Bush Chaplains. Based in Oodnadatta, she is working to foster relationships between First and Second Peoples, and create a space for healing.

'Oodnadatta' is believed to be an adaptation of the local Arrernte word 'utnadatta', which means 'blossom of the mulga'. The country surrounding this inland town has been inhabited by Aboriginal people for more than 30,000 years. It is also where Flynn's first nursing home was established, and the land from which some of our early Bush Chaplains set off to bring practical, pastoral and spiritual care to people in remote Australia.

Growing up in and around the Oodnadatta community, Julia is our first ever female Aboriginal Bush Chaplain. She said she hopes to bring First and Second Peoples together, and told us about what it means to be a Frontier Services Bush Chaplain.

"For me, it means we are finally being heard," she said. "It's about learning to walk alongside people in different communities, reaching out and letting people know that we're here to care."

A church in the open air

In town 'stands' a church with no walls. The worship community meets in the open air, on land where a slab of concrete is all that remains of the Oodnadatta Children's Home built in 1924 by missionaries from the United Aborigines Mission.

Pastor Julia Lennon on the day of her induction.



It felt surreal to be standing there in the openness and reflect on the history of those grounds. While talking about her ministry, Julia shared with us her dream for the open-air church.

"The dream is to build a structure of some sort and a garden," she said. "My hope is to give people who were taken from their families a space for healing."

"We're excited to open the Oodnadatta Remote Area and for Julia to join our team of incredible Bush Chaplains," said Jannine Jackson, our National Director. "We look forward to building connections with Traditional Owners right in the very heart of Australia."

"With Julia, I believe we have a strong foundation to work with First Peoples as we continue on our journey of Reconciliation."

You can bring practical, pastoral and spiritual care to people in remote communities like Oodnadatta by giving a gift in support of Julia and our Bush Chaplains. Simply complete the enclosed, self-sealing envelope in the centre of this magazine. Thank you.

Our Bush Chaplains Rev Sunny Kadaparambil and Pastor Julia Lennon with National Director Jannine Jackson and Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress President Rev Garry Dronfield on the day of Julia's induction.



Rev Felicity Amery (left), General Secretary of UCA South Australia Synod sits with lay leader Maxine Marks at Oodnadatta's open-air church. Photo credit: New Times, Oct/Nov 2019

New friendships forged over New Years

Muriel and Alan Hunt's farm on the Eyre Peninsula has been hit hard by drought. Simply keeping their 400 sheep alive is a daily challenge. But an extraordinary visit from a Sydney family brought some unexpected joy and welcome relief.



The Smiths typically volunteer as a whole family, closing down their audio-visual business for two weeks over the Christmas break. This time around, Sarah and her husband Matthew were joined by sons Bradden and Jolyon, their daughter Juliet and her partner Enoch, and family friend Ian.

With such a large group, Sarah told us about an old 1956 bus they rebuilt and fitted it out for the journey. Juliet and Enoch followed by car.

Their first placement: Sarah and the whole family on their way to Belombre Station, west of Quilpie.



Lending a hand with tasks on the 'waiting list'

Our incredible group of volunteers completed a range of jobs that had built up over time and desperately needed doing on the farm. This included repairing the tractor and welding a piece of machinery to help with feeding.

They also cleared out the shearing shed, ensured the safety of the flooring and fixed the gates so they were functional. They even helped with mustering sheep in time for shearing on New Year's Day! Plenty of fun times and laughter were shared, reflected Sarah and Muriel.

"The sheep dog wasn't very good at being a sheep dog," said Sarah, laughing. "We have actual footage of one of the lambs rounding him up!"

"Yes, Dusty our sheep dog thinks he's a sheep and Wozza the sheep thinks he's a dog!" added Muriel. She later mentioned Wozza was a ram but is now a wether.

Story continued on page 10...



While the rest of the family were on the farm, daughter Juliet accompanied Enoch at the town medical centre, where he worked as the locum doctor. On the first day alone, they saw 23 patients! This was a boon for the locals. Many would not have been able to access a doctor for a month or more had he not been in Cowell.

A welcome friendship

Muriel's one small worry for the family was the extreme weather in the region, including massive temperatures in the high 40s and huge, strong winds. As it turned out, her fears were not unfounded.

On day two, the Smiths' tent was torn apart by strong winds. Thankfully, they

were able to bunk in a couple of spare bedrooms at Muriel and Alan's homestead for the rest of their visit.

Muriel told us how much she valued the company of their guests, saying even though they were close to town, being in their 70s makes the trip quite an effort after a long day looking after the sheep. Joining in board games, singing together



and playing a neighbour's borrowed guitar made for some very entertaining times and brought them a lot of joy.

"The best thing about Outback Links is that it's not just talking, but talking and action," says Muriel. "You're getting physical and mental health benefits without even realising it."

Muriel even encouraged her neighbour to avail himself of our volunteers, with the Smiths repairing a shade cloth structure then building a second one, welding the front-end loader of his tractor and replacing the posts and beams for the carport.



"It's a really uplifting experience," Muriel said. "You look around at all the jobs that've been piling up that you haven't been able to do for a while, then realise they're all done."

Story continued on page 12...



A rewarding experience

Muriel told us how she sees Outback Links as a mutually rewarding experience for farmers and volunteers alike.

"It gives them a whole new perspective on what it's like living in the bush," she said. "You don't know until you come and experience it first hand, and this is the perfect opportunity."

"One of the best things that's happened has been meeting new people. Everyone was so wonderful. They all bring different skills."

Looking back on their experience, Sarah told us their biggest challenge was the dust and the blazing heat. It made the family appreciate what they have a whole lot more.

"I don't know how they do it," she said. "Out here, people need to be very

resourceful as they might not have all the materials nor the money to pay for things on the farm."

"For those thinking about volunteering, yes there are some challenges, but you won't regret it. The joy and love you bring to these people far outweighs any hurdles you come across. You experience the country and community in ways you'd never dream of."

On the way home: (from left to right) Ian, Sarah, Juliet, Matt and Enoch take a break in Broken Hill.



If you or someone you know would like to have the experience of a lifetime while lending a hand to people out bush, please visit **frontierservices.org/volunteer** for more information or to complete our Expression of Interest form.

You can also call our Outback Links team on **1300 787 247**.



Leaving a legacy for people in the bush

A proud Australian and patron of Frontier Services, Tim Fischer AC served his country throughout his distinguished life. He understood the importance of Bush Chaplains in remote Australia and advocated for people battling mental health and depression in the Outback.

After his defence force service, Tim settled into farming life on his property at Boree Creek in the New South Wales Riverina region. Furthering his interest in supporting people in rural and remote areas, Tim became a member of the Country Party (now the National Party of Australia). He would go on to become leader of the federal Nationals between 1990 and 1999, eventually serving as deputy prime minister to John Howard's government.



Always concerned for the welfare of people in the bush, he said at a 2018 event about drought and youth mental health, "There are many crossroads in life, from teenager to adulthood, from student to workplace and so forth. For country people, these crossroads become even harder to traverse in periods of intense drought and other climate wildcards."

In August last year, we said farewell to Tim as he passed at the age of 73. But his empathy for people in the bush will live on as he left a provision for Frontier Services in his Will.

"Tim Fischer was a man respected by the entire country," said National Director, Jannine Jackson. "We're so blessed to receive this gift, which will help build resilience in rural and remote communities."

If you would like to know more about leaving a bequest to Frontier Services, please contact our Donor Relations Officer, Martin Shields on **1300 787 247** or email martinS@frontierservices.org.

The Hon. Timothy Andrew Fischer AC
3 May 1946 - 22 August 2019

Have the experience of a lifetime while lending a hand to people out bush. Register your interest in becoming an Outback Links volunteer – visit **frontierservices.org/volunteer**



What I did on my summer 'vacation'

Our Bush Chaplain, Rev Rowena Harris recounts her days spent on the beach at Mallacoota where she and 4,000 others were cut off from the rest of the world by fire. These are her words.

Some folk have peaceful Christmases and joyous New Years. I usually do. But not this time. And so the story of *my* Christmas adventures? It was unusual, scary, and weird. What more can I say?

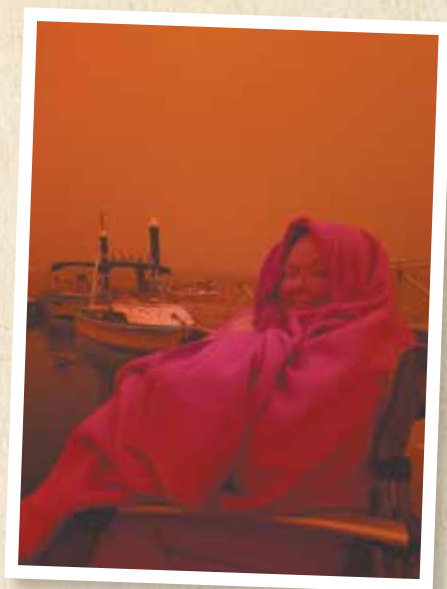
As minister at Swifts Creek Uniting, we had decided not to have a service on the 25th as too many folk were away, and so I accepted my friends' invitation to their farm in Mallacoota. When we were advised to vacate Swifts Creek because of fire, on the 20th, it made sense that I flee to them, early. I had a suitcase packed, so the 15 minute timeline authorities gave seemed ok by me. It was scary, but exciting. And so, I fled.

Christmas was great - friends, children, puppies, bunnies, presents, good wine and prawns! We were concerned about the situation at Swifts, but things were stable.

Preparing for evacuation

On New Year's Eve, my host who was also an ex-cop, came to the breakfast table with bad news. The local fire situation wasn't good. And the only road in and out would be closed shortly.

He knew how to keep us safe and we were ok in town. We filled the trailer and our three cars with packed suitcases, blankets, food and water, and special family treasures. We discussed the town plan; to go to the beachfront and stay as long as needed, to take blankets to shelter under water, while keeping heads above, for protection from flaming, flying embers. We were as calm as possible, what with my hosts' children and our own fears.





At lunch, we heard that flames were due in about 10pm. We sat, waited, told jokes, ate Christmas cake, and worried. Then at 4pm, our phones rang simultaneously, the emergency voice telling us to...

“...go to the beach RIGHT NOW.”

I was the first to leave the farm, along with Miss 11, a puppy, a rabbit, eight guinea pigs and four goldfish. Miss 11 put her hand over mine on the steering wheel and held it tight. She informed me in a tiny voice that clearly I was frightened and holding her hand would make me feel better.

We joined 500 cars parked on the cement foreshore area, and found the other two cars from the farm. We unpacked and ordered pizza. It was a bit like camping.

At dusk, we sorted out which car we would sleep in. The police report said the fires were now due in the morning, but nobody was allowed out of the beach car park.

Cate and I slept in my car. Years since either of us had had a sleepover, we giggled and told secrets. We slept on and off, and waited for dawn...

...but dawn never came

Some time the next morning, we woke up in darkness. It was cold. There were no birdsongs. It was eerie.

We expected the sun at some point, but we never saw it. Breakfast was rushed. As we were finishing sirens went on loudly. It was a sign to take blankets and other necessities down to the shore, to sit and wait for the fire. And so we did.



Mind you, we had time enough for my hosts to slip over for coffee from the cafe just before it closed. It was a welcome, warming, normal thing.

We had not long to wait until the sky changed colour...and we saw a wall of red rush towards the town. It was starting.

Our family group sat together. My host Mark checked that we knew what to do; if flaming embers blew down over us we get in the water and under the blankets. Cate asked me to give a first aid class about my asthma. Then we wrapped ourselves in blankets up against the chill. And then we watched.

“We watched in horror.”

The red wall moved closer. Sirens wailed. Winds howled. And the sky varied between shades of red and black. Then a collective gasp as the first explosions rang out - gas bottles in homes. With each explosion, flames went high as houses blew up. We watched in horror.

Some of us realised that the children were beginning to freak out, as indeed were the adults, so we played ‘eye spy’ with red and black objects. We did ‘peak-a-boo’ with a little girl. We discussed theology. Do goldfish have souls? (We think they do).

Occasionally, Cate’s hand reached for mine or little Jess moved close to us, explaining that we felt less afraid if she was near. A kind lady gave us cold spaghetti sandwiches, which was weirdly welcome in that cold, red atmosphere. We looked sad, she thought, and deserved a treat. Mark shared out water bottles. And we watched as the red wall grew closer and higher.

Safe but afraid

Two fire engines stayed with us in the car park, and more drove in and out to a big pump down by the sea wall, replenishing water. Police cars drove round us. We were warned to not go back to the cars, in case they exploded.

In many ways we knew in our heads that we were safe, but my heart was afraid. I remember thinking at one stage that, of course, my faith was strong. I prayed aloud and silently, but jeez, I was scared.

It was a long day watching the red wall, wrapped in blankets and wondering what the worst would be. Occasionally, folk would cry out as they realised the likelihood of their homes going.

But we laughed a bit too. Silly, black humour jokes; someone's birthday; a reminder that it was NYE; a wallet that fell out of a pocket at the jetty and its funny rescue.

But there was always the wind, the sky, the explosions, and the red flames. By about 3pm, the sky turned a milder pink. We were told we could return to our cars for a rest, that there were no burning embers. We were thankful. Cars meant a more comfortable rest and quieter chats. And that children could sleep.

By 5pm they let us go. The fire was burning but it had gone on through town, to the hills beyond. The police worked out the best way to deal with 500 cars and 5,000 people. My hosts left before myself and the children as they wanted to see their home as soon as possible.

The aftermath

The kids and I drove up the main street. No damage there. But then, when we turned the corner, we shared a collective gasp of horror. This was not the Mallacoota we knew. We cried all the way home.

So, how do I finish? Well, no deaths or injuries, and that was a blessing. My hosts' farm minimally damaged but both liveable



and repairable. Their big animals survived the flames. Trees, fences and grass were gone, but around 100 homes were burnt.

Much of the park was gone. All that infrastructure. No water for a day. No power for weeks. The only road in and out cut-off. Some help arrived via a random boat out at sea, then the arrival of more of the usual help. And then the armed forces.

My asthma was well-behaved but qualified me for a medical evacuation. Two weeks after that terrible Tuesday, I flew out in a Chinook helicopter to Sale. It was exciting enough but due to a seat miscount, I was the only passenger, so it felt super-exciting.

There are signs of traumatic stress. But there was also the camaraderie, the hugs and the shared giggles. Meaningful relationships that matter.

“...we had looked at the very face of hell, and survived.”

And so now, almost a month later, I am on special paid leave in Melbourne, staying with friends. My car enjoys an extended vacation in Mallacoota as roads are cut, but it may be set free later this week. I will see a church counsellor to make sure I am coping ok. Mostly, I am.

The goldfish died, stuck in my car. Jess was so sad. I guess it is easier to cry for fish, than to cry for the enormity of loss in Mallacoota.

And then I remember folk shouting out that they would not let the fire win. That they would beat the bastard, and the town would be reborn! And we did, and it will.

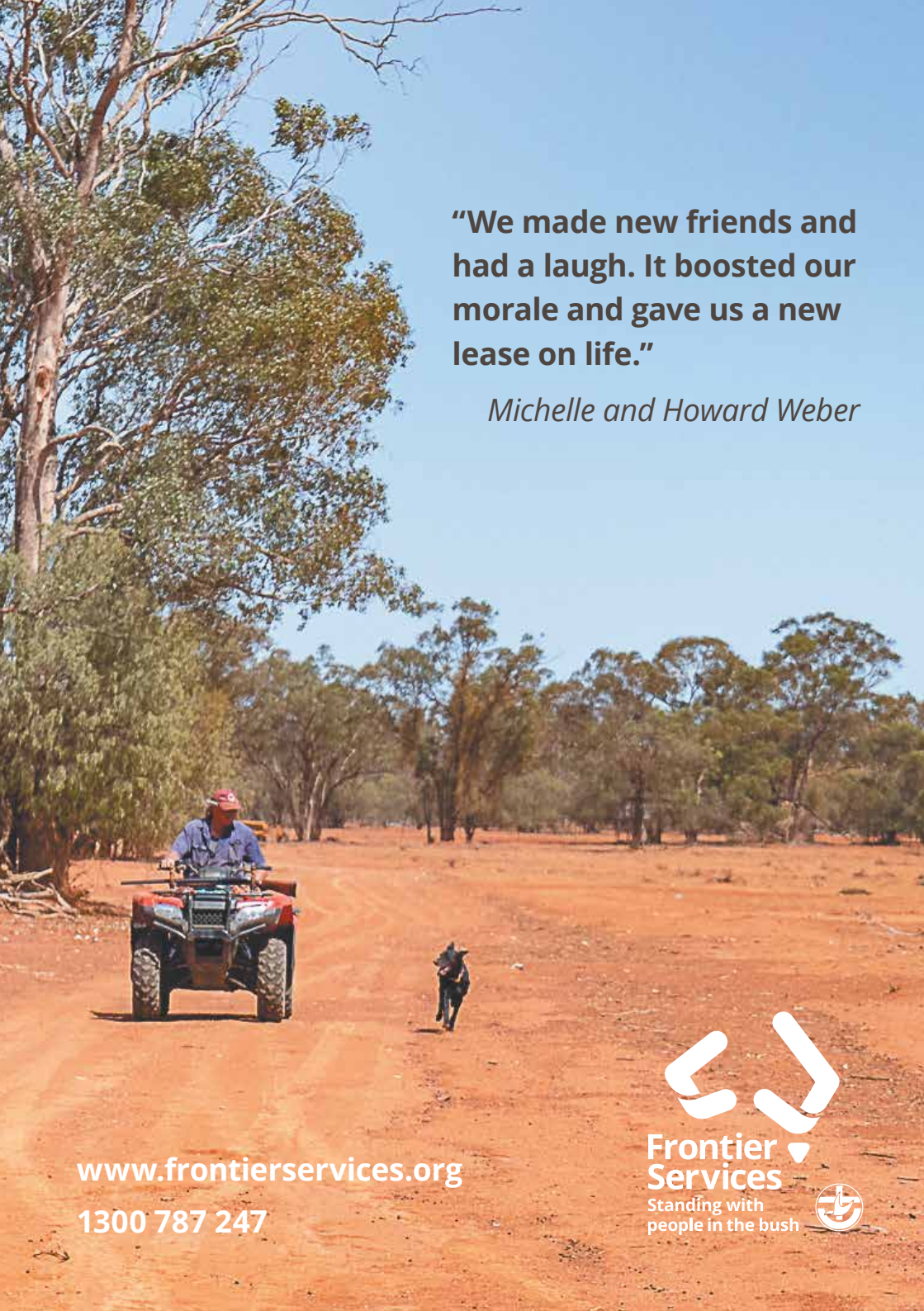
I remember thinking that God was with us, and that we had looked into the very face of hell, and survived. We survived! We can do anything.

And I believe those goldfish went to heaven, because Jess and I decided this was most likely. In the midst of hell, we held hands and believed that God loves all things like us...and goldfish.

Rev Rowen Harris

Bush Chaplain, High Country Remote Area
Minister, Swifts Creek Uniting Church

We are grateful for those who responded to our Bushfire Appeal. Your support brings trauma counselling and emergency relief to families who have lost their homes. Thank you.



**"We made new friends and
had a laugh. It boosted our
morale and gave us a new
lease on life."**

Michelle and Howard Weber

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