

FEBRUARY 2022

FrontierNews

*"Hope is
never lost"*



WELCOME
HOME
CLEO



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



Frontier Services is an agency
of Uniting Church in Australia

A message from Jannine



With the new year finally here and widespread lockdowns thankfully behind us, I hope like me you're enjoying the return to the warm hug of your family and catching up with friends. I can tell you, that first simple meal in the company of my loved ones tasted like pure joy to me!

Renewal and reconnection have become the hope for all of us after a terrible 18 months of fires, floods, cyclones and an epic mouse plague destroying harvests and homes, topped off with a global pandemic. The heartbreak that started with the Black Summer just seemed to carry on forever.

While everyone has struggled, for our friends in rural and remote Australia, the burden of loneliness and isolation has been relentless.

Thinking of their struggles, my eyes well up with tears as I write this to you.

The chaos and trauma from back-to-back disasters and emergencies have pushed people in the bush to their limits. After everything they've been through, understandably it's taken a heavy toll on their mental health.

But there is hope.

Through it all, I'm constantly amazed by the courage and spirit of mateship I see

across our country. Supported by our wonderful donors, our Bush Chaplains continue their vital work with people living in isolation and those who are suffering from hardships. Our wonderful Outback Links volunteers keep lending their helping hands within state borders, doing what they can when they can. I couldn't be more proud!

While we bring mateship to those living in the bush, we're also working together with government agencies to identify gaps in disaster preparedness we can help fill. We continue to place more Bush Chaplains on the ground so that people and communities in rural and remote areas always have someone to turn to, in the face of adversity. I assure you our Outback Links volunteer team is steadily growing in numbers, as travel plans start to return.

I want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for helping change the lives of so many people in the bush who will need our support in 2022.

Without 'you', there is no 'us'.

Jannine Jackson
National Director

Bush Chaplain tribute: Rev. Rowena Harris

Frontier Services bids a fond farewell to Bush Chaplain Rev. Rowena Harris, who announced her retirement late last year. We, along with our friends and supporters, wish her the very best heading into the new year. Rowena will be remembered for her unfailing support and commitment to the people in and around the High Country Remote Area of Victoria.

Rowena was a pillar of strength to the community during the devastating bushfires that tore through parts of Victoria in 2014 and 2019-20. As people slowly started to pick up the pieces of their lives upended by the raging fires, she continued to provide emotional support and trauma counselling to those who lost their homes.



Best known for her strength of character and her ability to touch the lives of others, Rowena will be missed at Frontier Services.

How you can help bush communities 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/outback-links and to check out our current volunteering opportunities in areas of most need.



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February 2022 Edition 124 Vol 1

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Front Cover Picture Peter de Kruijff

Circulation 10,500

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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.

A community's heartache and joy

By Jannine Jackson

This story is every parent's worst nightmare. Little Cleo Smith's disappearance sent shockwaves around Australia and the world. As a mother, I was personally feeling the anguish of not knowing where poor Cleo was.

We all breathed a sigh of relief when she was returned to her family but the 18 long days she was missing were excruciating, especially for Cleo's tiny and tightknit community. Our Bush Chaplain John Tomkins was at the frontline in Carnarvon WA, providing support as people struggled with their sadness and shock.

Speaking with John about his role, his matter-of-fact words are humbling. He remembers the morning of October 16, 2021 as "just another Saturday morning in Carnarvon". Then he overheard people at a local growers' market talking about a missing child.

The child was four-year-old Cleo who, unbelievably, was snatched from her parents' tent in the middle of the night at a campsite outside Carnarvon. John's first instinct was to spring into action. He knew he needed to help the community come to terms with the distress that had quickly started to spread.



Police search one of the shacks at the Blowholes campsite. Picture Phoebe Pin

John, who is also the Police Chaplain for Carnarvon, says, "At the local officer-in-charge's request, I went up straight to the camping ground. I made myself available at the local Blowholes from where Cleo had gone missing. I also briefly met her parents."

"Everyone was in shock. It's a small town and we all know each other. Those who are close to the family were really emotional. In the crisis we all just needed to pitch in and help. The presence of a Bush Chaplain can be very reassuring to people that are looking for a chat or simply some help to deal with their emotions."

Over the next few weeks, John extended significant crisis support to all those on the ground looking for Cleo. There were countless members of the public, the police, members of the State Emergency Service (SES) and ambulance staff at the scene.

"The incredible wave of relief when little Cleo was found not only alive but well was something the whole town celebrated," John adds. "We could feel in Carnarvon how much the country rejoiced in that moment. It was only then I let myself feel the exhaustion."

This was one of those times where it's easy to see the necessity of having Bush Chaplains in remote communities. They are so critical to the health and wellbeing of those around them.

John, who has spent many years in Carnarvon, tells me that feelings of isolation go hand-in-hand with living in remote corners of the country. He



Our Bush Chaplain in Carnarvon, John Tomkins

explains, "It is very important that we are available to those who seek our help, and to build connections with the community."

"People regard Bush Chaplains as someone they can trust when tragedies and hardships inevitably arise. Sometimes people are forced to think the worst under trying circumstances but hope is never lost."

To keep just one Bush Chaplain on the road for 12 months, we need to raise an average of \$130,000 per year. This provides them with a safe vehicle, fuel, rent and a basic salary. A gift from you today will support our Bush Chaplains as they continue to provide practical, pastoral and spiritual care to people in the most remote parts of Australia. Use the envelope inside this magazine to give or visit frontierservices.org/donate



Volunteering: Geoff's going strong at 84

For veteran Outback Links volunteer Geoff, using his skills gained working on the land to help people in outback Australia is a true labour of love. At 84, Geoff has clocked up a staggering total of 1,577 hours of voluntary work in the bush. Most recently, he returned from a property in Gravesend, helping ease mounting pressure on a farming family undergoing a medical crisis.

Geoff's (volunteer) presence meant that travel to urgent medical surgery was possible for Geoff (farmer) and his family. It meant they could leave the property

with some peace of mind knowing that their animals were tended to and their property was taken care of. Life on the farm is a 24/7 job and someone still needs to tend to those important duties.

For our farmers, volunteers like Geoff allow them to take part in life's important milestones, surgeries, weddings, funerals and other significant life events.

With his wife Roz, Geoff joined Outback Links in 2008 to share their life skills with those on the land who needed an extra pair of hands.

"I grew up in the country and have always been aware of Frontier Services' work across outback Australia," Geoff says. "Once I retired, I had the time to volunteer with Outback Links."

From property minding, maintenance jobs and looking after farm animals to gardening and painting, there's very little Geoff can't turn his hand to. The handy octogenarian tells us it was working on a hobby farm near Renmark, SA, growing grapes and apricots, and later rearing sheep, that taught him and his wife a thing or two about working on the land and with animals.

It's 13 years ago now but Geoff remembers his first time with the Outback Links like it was yesterday. Leafing through his diary, Geoff recounts how a scheduled visit to a 120,000-acre property, approx 200kms from Quilpie in South West Queensland, translated into a friendship for life.

"Initially we were meant to just help run the sheep and cattle on the property but ended up helping Ross and Wendy in many other ways. Because of the remote location of the farm and their slim contact with the outside world, the family felt extremely isolated. Living with them in their house, sharing our meals with them and lending them an ear – we came away feeling fulfilled." And that bond between the families has stayed strong.

Geoff tells us the power of human connection inspires him to keep going. "Growing up in the outskirts of Clare, 130 kms north of Adelaide, I very quickly got familiar with the vast difference in the standard of living for people in remote areas compared to city folk. I enjoy good health and I am fortunate to be able to contribute to the community through



Geoff with his wife Roz and our National Fundraising Manager, Michelle McLeod

Outback Links. I have made life-long connections in the bush."

It's not surprising that in 2014 Geoff was named the NSW Senior Volunteer of the Year and the NSW Mid North Coast's Volunteer of the Year. In 2019, he was honoured as the Mid North Coast Senior Volunteer of the Year.

"It has been a humbling experience," he says, adding, "I encourage aspiring Outback Links volunteers to walk the path that Rev. John Flynn once took. I want to reassure them that there has not once been a situation where I have felt uncomfortable. Every experience is rewarding and they leave a lasting impression in our minds and hearts."

If you want to change lives and make lasting friendships at the same time, get in touch with our friendly Outback Links team online at frontierservices.org/volunteering-to-change-lives or give us a call on 1300 787 247. Your help would make a difference to people in remote areas who are doing it tough.

On the road with Lindsay Ginn



The road to Laverton from Kalgoorlie, where Frontier Services Bush Chaplain Lindsay Ginn is based, stretches over 760 kms. Every week Lindsay gets behind the wheel to make this lonely trip to (as he calls it) “the edge of No Man’s Land”. Laverton is a small town nestled in the far Northern Goldfields of Western Australia, and it’s the last port of call before the terrain blends onto the Great Victoria Desert.

Lindsay visits schools in the area and meets with staff, teachers and children to provide pastoral and spiritual support to these communities in need.

The burden of isolation is just one of many challenges in this remote area which lacks the services of cities, and it casts a shadow on people’s mental health. With a high density of Fly-In-Fly-Out (FIFO) workers and the disruptions of COVID-19, Lindsay says the community’s wellbeing has been severely impacted.

“It is very lonely out there. For many, a simple cup of tea with a friend is the highlight of their day and quite often the saving grace!”

For two years now, Lindsay has been supporting people across Kalgoorlie, Laverton, Coolgardie, Menzies and Esperance, walking with the lonely and helping anyone who needs it. Like our other Bush Chaplains across rural and remote Australia, he is a welcome presence, providing practical and pastoral care as well as spiritual guidance. With big hearts and kind words, our Bush Chaplains are always there to extend a helping hand and give comfort in times of grief and hardship.

For Lindsay, his musical talents have also opened doors into the community and helped him reach out to people he might not have connected with otherwise. He says, "I know many of the people who live there personally. I believe I am bringing the gift of music and hope to people. Music has changed my life and it has seen me through a lot of tough times. Music is powerful and reinforces faith in people's hearts."

Lindsay's impact is not just music, his music is improving school attendance, behavioural issues and ensuring marginalised kids are getting an education. His students are getting excited about coming to school!

Talking about the school children he meets and gives music lessons to every week, Lindsay says it helps set a routine in their lives. "Sometimes without proper guidance from home, they can develop behavioural problems. If my music benefits even one child at a school, it will be worth it."

Having performed musical concerts at Trinity North and Guildford Uniting Churches in Perth in October helping raise crucial funds for his work, our multi-talented Bush Chaplain says, "There are often people from the audience who come up to ask for help. I look forward to playing a key role in offering support to those who are struggling at the moment. Let there always be hope in our hearts."

The road ahead may be long and sometimes bleak with solitude and uncertainty, but Lindsay draws encouragement from remembering Rev. John Flynn, the founder of what today is known as Frontier Services.

"My time on the road is spent in thoughts and reflections. To answer questions that come to mind, I ask myself what would John Flynn do? What would Jesus do?"

The Sound of Music

An accomplished vocalist, Lindsay plays the piano, melodica, guitar and the ukulele and teaches students how to play the Boom Whackers. Lindsay also ran the 2021 Carols by Candlelight event in Kalgoorlie.



Recovering after Cyclone Seroja





Erika used to be a credit analyst, number crunching all day while she dreamed of an idyllic life on the land. But when she finally moved to a sheep farm an hour out of Geraldton, WA in February 2021, her dreams were shattered by disaster.

The WA-based farmer tells us that when Cyclone Seroja made landfall in April last year, it carved a path of destruction all the way from Carnarvon to Geraldton. And that included Erika's 120-hectare property. Erika felt the wonderful future she'd imagined for so long was crumbling around her. As she describes it, the devastation was far-reaching and in moments all the hard work she had put into her property was swept away. Facing a \$450,000 damage bill, Erika was overwhelmed in darkness and she couldn't see any way out.

That was before our Outback Links volunteer Rob turned up at Erika's doorstep and his help brought a beautiful ray of hope.

For decades, Outback Links has been connecting generous volunteers with people in remote Australia undergoing hardships and challenges. Our volunteers can turn a person's life around by showing they care. It takes just one pair of helping hands to make a huge difference.

Erika tells us, "Frontier Services literally saved my life! The help and support I received will never be forgotten. Looking at the damage the cyclone left behind on my home and property, I went into deep shock. Everything had been smashed and there was a fire hazard. I couldn't eat and I was an emotional wreck. My friends feared for my life. But when Rob arrived, it was a lifesaving moment. I was new to farming, new to fencing. Little by little, we started to rebuild what was lost."



Volunteer Rob helping out on Erika's farm

Continued...

"Frontier Services literally saved my life! Little by little, we started to rebuild what was lost."



Erika (centre) with Sean and Lowenna



Soon, Erika received her next set of volunteers – Sean and Lowenna, who continued to help her with the many jobs that needed to be done on the property. Erika says, "It was quite some rough weather when they arrived, and it came in the way of their work. But they didn't give up. They helped with the clearing, helped fix the dog kennel, and even helped me fix the windmill on the farm."

As we go to print, our volunteers Ron and Gwen are making their way back home after spending a week lending their helping hands to Erika, to assist in rebuilding her life. Talking about the impact of Outback Links on her situation, Erika's gratitude shines through.

"After the cyclone, people were staring down the barrel of significant damage bills and the enormity of the situation. I know many who sold up and left town. Without the help of Frontier Services, I would have been one of them."

Erika has a message for everyone out there who wants to give volunteering a go. She says, "If any of the volunteers are looking for a place to go camping, they have got somewhere to come to for life! Any help, however small, goes a long way, and friendships are made that last forever."

We couldn't agree more, Erika!

Use the self-sealing envelope to donate if you'd like to help farmers who need a hand.

2022: Shout Out for Volunteers

We all know how the last few years have been fraught with challenges at every turn. Cyclones have lashed farms and properties, bushfires have ravaged everything in their way, floods have swept away people's livelihood and the horrific hordes of mice have taken over people's homes, pantries, stores and cars. And to top it all, COVID-19 refuses to go away.

The chaos and confusion that has resulted from the never-ending struggles on the land have pushed so many of our farmers into the darkness, with no ray of hope in sight. As recovery and repair bills continue to stack up, they have very little help to turn to. As we continue to battle some of nature's extreme fury, we also look forward to 2022 full of hope and optimism. Our Outback Links team continues to put a call-out for volunteers to help farmers and local communities to rebuild after the devastation and the loss.

We are immensely grateful to all our volunteers who have answered the call and travelled the distance to provide care and support where it was needed. Your help and assistance is so critical for our farmers and those who live on the land. We are doing all we can to relieve them of some of the pressure that they are going through and as quickly as we can. Any help from our committed

and caring volunteers will make such a huge difference to the lives of so many farmers who live and work beyond the farthest fence.

And from what our amazing volunteers have been telling us, this could very well become your very own life-changing experience!

In our bid to stand alongside so many farms and properties across NSW after the mouse plague, we will soon head out with our partner, the NRMA and a team of volunteers to attend to the many cries for help. Our supporters like you can help so many farmers in WA like Erika (you can read her story on Page 10) that have lost everything to Cyclone Seroja. Coming up in 2022, we will take an Outback Links volunteer team and travel to the heart of the country – to Oodnadatta, a small, remote outback town in SA where our Bush Chaplain Julia Lennon resides, to make a big difference in the lives of the indigenous community there.

Are you ready to join us and embark on your very own life changing experience in 2022?

If you, or anyone you know, could help simply drop us an email at outbacklinks@frontierservices.org or call us 1300 787 247.



Joy's beautiful gift

Growing up in country towns made Joy all too familiar with the facilities she was missing out on that people in cities and large towns could take for granted.

Now 85 and settled in Adelaide, Joy says she's still keenly aware of the challenges faced daily by people who live in rural and remote Australia. Ironically, her sympathy springs from memories of her greatest comfort from childhood – her well-established social network, which included friends at the church she and her family attended.

"Even though I lived away from the city, fortunately I still had access to my friends," she says. "But when I compared my life to those who lived on the stations, I realised how hard it was to be isolated from your loved ones."

Joy's association with Frontier Services began early in her life too, following in the footsteps of her parents. She tells us they were active supporters of the Methodist Church's overseas and home missions. "I was always aware of the wonderful work that was being done," she says. "It gave me an insight into the challenges being faced by the outback communities. And that is what prompted me to support Frontier Services ever since I could."

After such a long friendship with us, it was a natural choice for Joy to include a gift in her Will to Frontier Services.

When times get tough in the bush, as they are right now, feelings of loneliness and isolation increase. Nearly every day, we hear of people's struggles to stay on the land, pay their bills, feed their families and keep their homes.

Helped by generous people like Joy, our Bush Chaplains can travel far and wide to provide practical, pastoral and spiritual care to those who are suffering. Our remarkable group of Outback Links volunteers offer their time, compassion and commitment to help people living and working on the land through their hardships and challenges.


Joy explains that this spirit of giving and sharing inspired her to leave a gift to us.

Looking back to her younger days, she wishes she'd been brave enough to travel herself as an Outback Links volunteer and she urges anyone who's interested now to take the leap and not wait.

Joy really can't stress enough the importance of outback communities continuing to receive support. "The Outback Links volunteers and the Bush Chaplains do such an impressive job supporting people in the bush through all the good times and especially in the not-so-good times," she says. "I want to continue to give a gift of hope to those who live in rural and remote communities even after I leave this world."

Making a Will, or leaving a bequest, is one of the most important decisions you can make in your life. It ensures your wishes are carried out and the values you hold most dear continue to live on through the work of others – such as Frontier Services.

We want to thank you Joy for deciding to leave behind this wonderful legacy in support of what we do.



"The volunteers and the Bush Chaplains do such an impressive job supporting people in the bush through all the good times and especially in the not-so-good times."

How can I leave a gift in my Will?

Even if you feel you're just an ordinary person, you can do something amazing. Choosing to include a gift in your Will to a charity like Frontier Services changes people's lives for many years to come.

Find out more at frontierservices.org/how-can-you-help/bequest/

Meet our newest Bush Chaplain, Peter Harvey



We recently welcomed our newest Bush Chaplain, Rev. Deacon Peter Harvey in the East Gippsland Remote Area of Victoria. Having worked across rural and remote corners of the country over many years, Peter feels most at home when he is traversing through the rugged terrain of remote Australia to connect with people in the region. We share some highlights of our conversation with him and find out more about his motto in life – looking forward rather than looking back.

What does this very special role mean to you?

I am here to support people whose lives were impacted by the Black Summer bushfires in East Gippsland. Since starting this role in September, I am standing alongside them in their continued recovery. It is a very remote area – sparsely populated and predominantly bushland, on the edge of the Snowy Mountains. The impact of the fires has been so far-reaching. Beyond even the loss of property, many people have lost focus and hope. Many families have still not been able to move back into their homes because of fire safety and security hazards. Their lives have been further challenged by the agonising impact of COVID-19. Mental health is suffering. And I have been able to make myself available to people wherever they are. I want to help them find the next chapter in their life and add to their recovery journey in a holistic way.

What are the predominant challenges in your patch?

The biggest challenge has been to establish the connection with people and gain their trust. People in this region have been leading very isolated lives. In the more isolated areas, there

has been lack of services available to help them in their recovery. But we look forward rather than looking back. Personally, I am still learning about the area, the geography and the stories. It is a pretty mountainous region, and it takes a lot of time to access people in remote areas, and there are still plenty of reminders around this area of the devastation that came through here. But you can see the signs of life in the bush again, and we find hope in this process of renewal and rebirth.

What are your plans for the New Year?

I am looking forward to becoming more a part of people's lives here in the communities of East Gippsland as a Frontier Services Bush Chaplain. I am looking at different ways to partner with people and help them find the answers they are looking for. The New Year heralds a new beginning. We learn from what's happened before, and take a new step towards the future.

We've been able to place three new Bush Chaplains this financial year because of our supporters, and our goal is to increase our current team from 17 to 22 so more people have someone to turn to in their darkest times.

As we go to print, we have a new Bush Chaplain, Veronica Bradley, who has been placed in the brand new Prom Country Remote Area in Victoria. You can expect to hear more about her and her work in the next edition of Frontier News.



Grill for good

As if Aussies were not going through enough hardships and challenges already, COVID-19 struck again, just as ruthlessly as last time. The impact was felt deep across all walks of life, with the hospitality sector and small businesses hit hardest. Farmers across the country were already crying out for help, reeling under the effects of the longstanding drought, devastating bushfires, raging floods and an epic mouse plague. While we have been doing absolutely everything that we can to provide relief to our farmers, COVID restrictions impacted our 2021 Great Outback BBQ in a huge way. Cancellations after cancellations hit us, as restrictions spread through the cities and the regions.

But with 2022 here and the easing of restrictions across the country, we know you are as excited to catch up with friends and family as we are! So if you are getting together with your near and dear ones this season, we urge you to please consider hosting a Great Outback BBQ. The money raised from our annual event goes straight into helping our farmers, who have been bearing the brunt of back-to-back challenges. Our farmers need all the help and support that we can whip up. The recent spate of rough weather and torrential rainfall has further added to the hardships faced by those who live on the land. Wherever you are, we need your help.

At Wesley Chapel Uniting Church Ladies Guild's Great Outback BBQ, Bush Chaplain Pastor Lindsay Ginn spoke and sang to the congregation.

A few words from our supporters

"Lindsay (Ginn) did a great job entertaining everyone in the chapel after the feast! Everyone had such a great time, even the kitchen staff! These BBQ events are crucial in rallying support for our farmers, and those that live across rural and remote Australia."
Kay – Wesley Chapel Uniting Church, Guildford WA

"We had a sausage sizzle before our Bible study to raise some funds towards our church's donation to Frontier Services. We had a lovely evening. We are so aware of the struggles faced by our outback families at this time. We keep our Aussie farmers and their families in our prayers."
Christine – Ipswich Uniting Church

"Being able to support our farmers through a virtual ticket was an amazing idea! It felt good to be able to do this remotely, and also share the event with my friends through social media."
Lori – Wollongong resident

"We had 26 men gather for our Great Outback BBQ event. The food was delicious, and there were plenty of stories told. It is important that all of us do our bit to alleviate the constant struggles that people in the outback face year-round."
Glenn – Arana Hills Men's Shed



Please get together and host a party. If you are looking to arrange a barbeque, please call us, and we can help you put together a fabulous event. And a big shout out to all of you who have hosted your own Great Outback BBQ and helped our Aussie farmers. Thank you!



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people in the bush

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1300 787 247

*Erika stands where her shearing shed extended
to until it was destroyed by Cyclone Seroja
Picture Shannon Verhagen*