

FEBRUARY 2021

FrontierNews

When a new heart brings new love



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



A message from Jannine

I know that many of us were looking towards this summer with hope.



After facing relentless challenges throughout 2020, we were all in need of a chance to rest and take stock. With bushfires, floods and COVID-19, it certainly feels like there is heartbreak all around us.

For my friends in the bush, it's been an incredible struggle. Families have been separated, trade has slowed down and loneliness has set in.

But through it all, I have been inspired by the amount of resilience. Communities have found ways to connect virtually, farmers have learnt new skills and families have adjusted to the massive changes in their lives.

We've been so proud to stand beside them every step of the way. Our amazing Outback Links volunteers have adapted to placements within their own state borders, our Bush Chaplains have found new and innovative ways to connect with their communities and I've been heartened by the generosity of our supporters.

What does 2021 look like for us?

So many of our farmers are still facing the harsh reality of drought. The harsh conditions constantly being faced means that your support is needed now more than ever.

During the year ahead, we will continue to send Outback Links volunteers on placements within their home states. And our Bush Chaplains have big plans to venture beyond the furthest fences, providing much needed emotional, spiritual and pastoral care to those living in the Outback.

As we continue to bring relief to those in the bush, we are asking for your help. Are you able to join the ranks of our incredible volunteers and spend some time on an Outback Links placement? Can you give generously to support our tireless Bush Chaplains? Read on to find out more about the enormous difference you can make for those living in the bush.

Thank you for standing with us.

Jannine Jackson
National Director



Support vital services in the bush

- If you know someone who might be interested in **volunteering** with us and having the experience of a lifetime, please visit frontierservices.org/volunteer



Frontier Services
Standing with people in the bush

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

February 2021 Vol 123 NO 1
Registered by Print Post - PP255 003/01721
ISSN 1033 - 2235

Editors Adam Giles and Zoë Victoria
Front Cover Volunteers Phil Henry and David Radcliff on an Outback Links placement.



Frontier Services is an agency of Uniting Church in Australia

Circulation 10,500

Copyright notice Frontier News is the quarterly newsletter of the Uniting Church Frontier Services. Copyright in this publication is owned by Frontier Services. Congregations or fellowships wishing to reproduce material contained in Frontier News, may do so without permission providing that material is attributed to Frontier Services.

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.

An anonymous donor creates a forever Valentine

Are you ready for the greatest love story the Aussie bush has ever seen? Well listen up because this is one that's sure to make you melt. And the the most amazing part is that our Cunnamulla-Burke & Wills Remote Area Bush Chaplain, Cain Hartigan had the privilege of bearing witness to it all unfold.

On a gorgeous, sunny day in October last year, Cain officiated the wedding of a couple whose incredible story is a testament to the resilience of people living in the bush and the power of love.

The happy couple, affectionately known as 'Hamo' and 'Budgie' first met at the Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane in 2007. Hamo was on the waiting list for a heart transplant and was in the hospital for treatment.

On the 14th of February 2008, Hamo's wait for a donor heart was over. While others were celebrating Valentine's Day, he was wheeled into a hospital theatre to receive a lifesaving heart transplant.



As he recovered, Hamo continued to visit the hospital for checkups. At his 6-month checkup, one miracle turned into another when he finally plucked up the courage to ask Budgie - the nurse who had caught his eye - out on a coffee date. She said yes!

As Hamo continued his recovery, Budgie became his constant companion. The two of them would sit by the hospital pool, sharing a packet of hot chips and a bottle of red wine.

The rest, as Cain told guests at the wedding, is history. In a touching addition to their wedding ceremony, Hamo and Budgie shared a prayer for the donor whose heart was the beginning of their love story.

Thank you my friend, whoever you are. I am here today because you gave me the ultimate gift of life. I am healthy and thankful to you that I may live today. Today I give my heart away to my love and our two hearts are filled with love and thanks for your gift.



"To officiate the wedding of Hamo and Budgie was an absolute honour. The fact he went under the knife for a heart transplant, on Valentine's Day... you couldn't make this stuff up!"

Cunnamulla-Burke & Wills Bush Chaplain,
Cain Hartigan

Friendships forged in fire keep farmers connected

When RFS volunteer Ruth Ranger was called out to a house fire last year, little did she know that it was not just another routine callout. It was the home of her good friend, Fee Coulsen that was burning to the ground!

"When we arrived, smoke was billowing out of the house from underneath the eaves," Ruth told us. The smell of the smoke was horrific and as Ruth and her three person crew got out the big hoses to fight the blaze, she knew that the stakes were high. "We really fought for it," she told us.

Luckily, Fee and her son who were inside the house at the time narrowly escaped being engulfed by the scorching flames. But not everything could be saved. Once the flames were out, they clawed through the wreckage only to realise that the kitchen and living room had been completely destroyed. Precious family photographs and treasured possessions had been burnt to ashes. "It really gets Fee down that she lost all of that," Ruth told us. We can only imagine the heartbreak of having irreplaceable memories destroyed by fire and watching the devastating suffering of one your dear friends.

Ruth was so moved by the magnitude of Fee's loss that the day after the fire, she was back at Fee's place to begin helping with the cleanup. The smell of smoke still clung to the unwashed laundry so

Ruth put on a load of washing and began helping Fee to put her life back together.

"I knew I needed to show up because I've been through the experience of recovering from a house fire too," Ruth revealed to us. "More than 20 years ago, when my children were still small, we had an electrical fire in our ceiling that burnt the house down." The trauma and devastation of that experience has inspired Ruth to be there for her friend as she recovers.

Just imagine facing yet another hurdle just as you're beginning to get back on your feet.

"Going through the insurance process is brutal," Ruth explained to us. "You have to stand there and account for every half-packet of food in your pantry for the assessor." Ruth has bonded with Fee over the difficulties of dealing with insurance in the months since the fire. It's a tedious, time-consuming process when all that Fee wants to do is be able to move on with her life. Luckily, Ruth is there for her friend when nobody else is.

"Friendship and fellowship is so important when you live in a rural community," Ruth tells us. Together with Fee, she meets

Ruth Ranger and husband Lyle

up with other women from the area at the local pub for a meal and a chat. Being able to connect with each other and share their joys and frustrations is enormously helpful for the women.

Ruth saw so much value in that friendship that when she hosted Outback Links volunteers in November, she invited them along. "It's really important to do things with the volunteers when they're here as they work so hard," she told us. She took them out for a pamper day along with women from the local community. The day provided some welcome relief from the hardship and devastation that they face on a daily basis. The farmers share with the volunteers that the support of Outback Links volunteers is an absolute ray of light that makes a real difference in their lives.

If you want to change lives and make some incredible friends at the same time, get in touch with our Outback Links team via our website frontierservices.org/ volunteer or give them a call on 1300 787 247

'A journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step'

Back in 2014, our farmers John and Yenda were struggling immensely. Managing a 3000-acre farm operation in Yeoval with a considerable number of equipment and infrastructure items requiring repair was all becoming too much. Coupled with the added responsibility of raising their two young sons, Tom and Will, and you can begin to imagine how much juggling was required just to keep the place afloat.

Throw in years upon years of drought and you can now begin to understand the desperation that both John and Yenda were feeling. In fact, life became so hard at one point that Farmer John was forced to grain feed his livestock three times a day, just in order to keep them alive!

Life still wasn't getting any easier for Farmer John and Yenda which meant having to ask the boys to pull their weight on the farm. Jobs that would normally be requested of someone double their age, the boys simply had to 'muck in' and help. Farmer John and Yenda explain that the kids didn't get weekends when there's farm work to be done. On school days, "They get up early, eat, do some farm work, go to school, come back from school, do more work, eat and sleep."

Farmer John and Yenda needed help. But who was going to put up their hand to assist? What possible resource could they tap into to lift their young family unit out of this rut?

Enter John Bestel. John B. had heard about our Outback Links program and wanted to find a way to give back to the community. He contacted us at Frontier Services and we organised for John B. to visit Farmer John and Yenda. Put it down to namesake, but let's just say this became figuratively a match made in heaven.

Fast forward to 2021 and Farmer John and Yenda, along with their two sons are incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity of John B. visit the farm upwards of 5 or 6 times. "We couldn't have got to where we are today without



the kind spirit and grace from John over all these years" Yenda mentioned.

John B. recalls the first time he volunteered, signing up to our Outback Links program to 'fix an issue with the pipes' on the Yeoval property. Once the plumbing was all sorted, John B explains to us that he then tried his hand at all sorts of things. "I've repaired pianos and piano accordions, fixed the boys' bikes, built cubby houses and even go-karts!"

When John B. visits he tries to bring some fun to their lives. "They largely have to keep themselves entertained so I try and do something different." Simply having someone new around helps to break up the routine in order to keep farming families going.

"I go with Yenda when she takes the boys to Little Athletics," John B. tells us. He helps her out on the BBQ and gets to meet other people from the area. "You get to know what other people in the community are facing as well." For the community, knowing that there are people out there like John Bestel who care and are willing to be there to listen and help out is a massive boost.

Not only does the relentless struggle through the drought take a toll on the children but on the adults as well. John B. tells us that for Farmer John, having someone to talk to relieves the pressure that he feels. "They have a lack of social activities compared to people living in the



city so it's nice to be able to be there for him."

John B. explains "Because we've been friends for so long now, whenever I visit the farm I get my own bedroom and have the full wander of the house. I even have open access to the fridge!" It's the kind of goodwill and hospitality that Outback Links volunteers like John Bestel encounter in rural towns across Australia.

Just a few weeks ago, John B. headed up to Yeoval again to deliver 1000 books to local schools and pre-schools. He proudly shows us the cards and photographs he received from the children as a thank you. John B's affection not just for Farmer John's family but for the whole community is obvious. He tells us, "Because of my Outback Links experiences, I've seen a life, met people and done things that I never would have if I hadn't been volunteering with this incredible organisation."

And would you believe it, he's about to embark on another amazing journey for Frontier Services! John Bestel is one of four Frontier Services supporters participating in a joint project with Charity TV Global. This ground-breaking project's mission is to use entertainment as a vehicle to steer global audiences into 'giving back'. Joining John Bestel on the adventure are Lynne Charge, Derek Green and Bob Delaney. We are delighted to have them all on board as Frontier Services Ambassadors raising much needed funds for those doing it tough in the bush.

To support our Charity TV ambassadors head to <https://frontierservicesfundraiser.raisely.com/> to make a donation.

Never a dull moment!

Volunteering with Outback Links is always an exciting and unpredictable experience. For volunteer Bernie, this meant looking after heavily pregnant cows and having a stand-off with a rooster!



Last year we got a call from our farmers Bronwyn and Gordon in a state of panic when they suddenly realised they weren't going to be able to make their very own son's wedding. Relying on friends and family wasn't an option and there was no-one they could think of trustworthy enough to look after their farm whilst they were away for an extra-long weekend. They had come to the resolution that it just wouldn't be possible to see their son wed his new bride on his special day.

When all seemed lost, Bronwyn and Gordon suddenly had a brainwave to contact our Outback Links team on the off-chance that the amazing lady who had volunteered previously on their farm would be available to once again assist in this hour of need. Lo and behold the volunteer in question, Bernie Reed was available! So guess who answered the call and made their way out to ensure Bronwyn and Gordon didn't have to miss their son's big day?

There was only one catch to the whole plan going off without a hitch. As the wedding day was fast approaching, it became apparent that up to 25 cows were going to be calving, smack

bang in the middle of the wedding! How was one person going to make sure every calf was safely born without a major catastrophe occurring?

Fortunately, Bernie had been raised on a cattle station and told us she would be more than OK looking after the property on her own. Coupled with the fact she had already volunteered and met Bronwyn and Gordon meant she was familiar with the property and her surroundings.

Bernie told us she knew what to do if anything major occurred, "I had the names and numbers of neighbours who could get there in under half an hour if anything went drastically wrong." But Gordon was certain that the property was in good hands. As he and Bronwyn headed off he told Bernie, "We don't have to worry about anything, we know you'll do what you need to."



We are always in need of volunteers for our Outback Links program. To get involved, please visit frontierservices.org/volunteer for more information. You can also call our Outback Links team on 1300 787 247

And he was right. Whilst Bronwyn and Gordon were away enjoying their son's special day, a number of calves were born in what Bernie affectionately dubbed 'the maternity ward'. And while the calving went off without a hitch, Bernie still managed to have quite an adventure while she looked after the farm. Feeding the animals one morning, she entered the chook pen to find one of the roosters wasn't happy about her unexpected visit. Thinking he could rule the roost, Bernie tells us that he went for her leg and wouldn't let go. "I eventually had to show him who was boss," she chuckles. "After that he certainly didn't give me any more trouble!"

When we ask Bernie what keeps her coming back to Frontier Services to volunteer she tells us of her own experience living on a cattle station whilst in drought. The memories of what that was like are what motivate her to give back to those doing it tough in the bush. "I remember having no money," she tells us, "I remember the absolute despair." She recalls seeing her Dad have to shoot the cattle because they were so poorly. Bernie tells us that with that experience, she knows she can help those who are in the same situation. "You see the change in the farmers when you show up as an Outback Links volunteer," she told us, "It's so nice to see them happy."

Outback Links connects the city with the country

When our Outback Links volunteers head out to help farmers, they don't always know what to expect. Living and working in the city can be so vastly different to life in a rural town. For one group of volunteers who recently headed out to Walgett, the experience was a wonderful opportunity to learn about a different way of life.

Friends Kath and Phil Henry, David and Jane Radcliff and Ranford and Julia Elsey recently had a unique experience, heading out on an Outback Links placement as a group. They travelled together to Walgett in Northern NSW to help local couple, Steve and Margaret.

On arriving, Steve told the group that his son Haydon and his partner Bron who live nearby were in greater need of assistance. So the group set off to Haydon's property to assess the situation. Ranford told us that when they got there, they discovered that "It was a beautiful old house, but it was in serious need of attention."

"It was a beautiful old house, but it was in serious need of attention."



Kath Henry trying her hand at using the power tools during her Outback Links placement.



The massive amount of work to be done meant that most days, the group worked from early in the morning until after dark. Ranford told us that for the first few days, as they did some demolition work, Haydon and Bron were coming home to more and more mess on the property. "They must have been a bit scared by what the place looked like!"

But as the days went on, the renovations began to come together. The list of jobs that the Outback Links volunteers completed just grew longer as they demolished old walls and ceilings, installed framing, doors and skirting boards and rewired faulty light switches.

We spoke to Kath about what it was like to volunteer as part of a group. She told

us that aside from the massive amount of work they were able to get done, the genuine connection between the Outback Links volunteers and the farmers made the experience a worthwhile one.

"On the weekend, Haydon and Bron both helped us with demolition and some construction tasks," Ranford told us. "Stephen and Margaret also came down on several occasions and assisted."

Kath told us that she and her friends hadn't been expecting the family to get involved with the building work that they were there to do. "But having a group of volunteers there must have been an encouragement for them to join in."

The best part of the experience, Kath told us, was the opportunity to get to know the

family who they were helping. She and her husband Phil stayed in Haydon and Bron's guest room and Kath told us that it was lovely to be able to get to know them. "We would eat our evening meals with them and we really enjoyed spending that time in conversation with them."

One of the most rewarding parts of the experience, Kath told us, was watching the men in the group being so open to learning from Steve and his son Haydon about living and working in such a remote area.

She admitted that she was initially worried, "City men can sometimes treat country people in a different way."

Despite that Ranford told us, "We all got on well together, often enjoying a beer after work and having lunches and dinners together."

Kath was pleasantly surprised at the outcome, telling us, "I watched them become students again, eager to learn what they didn't know."

"I hadn't really understood farm life before I started volunteering with Frontier Services."

Speaking about the farming family, Kath told us, "I think it was really brave of them to have us there. They were so open to teaching us about the choices that farmers make on a daily basis."

Ranford and his wife Julia agreed. Julia told us, "I hadn't really understood farm life before I started volunteering with Frontier Services."

Ranford added, "It's only by living and working with farmers that you can truly appreciate the physical and emotional toll it takes, particularly in times of drought."



Julia Elsey getting the job done.

He was also quick to point out that volunteers don't need building or trade expertise to make a difference.

"There are so many more things that can be done to help out on a farm; feeding livestock, making meals, painting, gardening, minding the children or just giving the farmers a break."

And as for the farmers, Ranford told us the group left, they were already asking: "How do we organise for you to come back?"



Phil Henry hard at work.

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**.

"Angels from heaven" arrive at the perfect time

The last couple of years have been really tough on Lou Higgins and her family. Their property on the border between New South Wales and Queensland has been hit hard by the drought. But recent rain means that Lou considers her family one of the lucky ones.



Before the rain, the family was feeding their livestock for about 18 months through the drought, deciding to keep their 400 breeders rather than destocking. "It was a gamble," Lou tells us, "I did the calculations not long ago and we would have spent over \$200,000 on feed to keep the stock."

But it was a gamble that didn't pay off. The family were eventually forced to destock and now have just 60 breeders on their property.

The most difficult part for Lou was the knowledge that their property is on what she calls 'good country'. She told Frontier Services, "We've owned the property since 2003 and only had to feed one winter."

Before destocking they were on track to pay off the property in just a few years.

But now the future is uncertain.

To generate some income to allow them to pay the bills, Lou has started a small business called Made by a Farmer. "It was too much to put together a website," she tells us, "so we just exist on Facebook." She sells unique handmade products from grazing platters to gift box sets to lip balm. As their only source of income, Lou is hoping that the business will carry them through the unpredictable road ahead.

In amongst all of the hard work that Lou is putting into Made by a Farmer, she still has to maintain her property. Recently, she contacted Frontier Services for some help to take down a fence on the farm. We put the call-out to our Outback Links volunteers in the hopes that we could find some Queensland-based volunteers to help out.

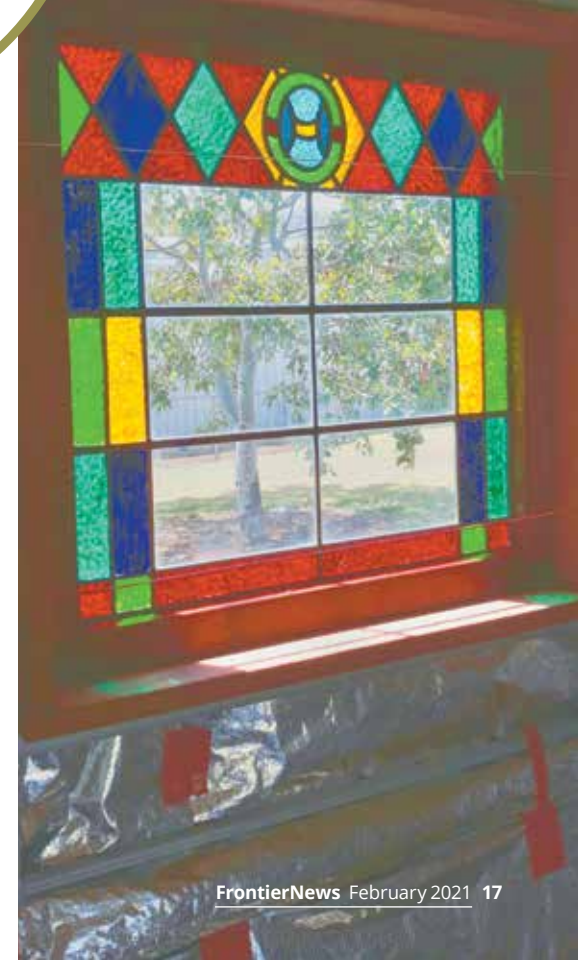
Recently, Lou contacted Frontier Services for some help to take down a fence on the farm.

We put the call-out to our Outback Links volunteers in the hopes that we could find some Queensland-based volunteers to help out.

Enter "angels from heaven", Mary and Roger Duckworth. Having volunteered with Frontier Services before, the Duckworths knew that they could take on the task of pulling down the fence. But knowing that sometimes farmers don't like to ask for help they began the placement open to the possibility of additional work.

During that first week, Lou asked Roger, a retired builder for his input on some renovations she was planning to do on the shed she was using as the Made by a Farmer workshop. She told us that she was expecting to get a few tips and tricks that would be helpful.

What she didn't expect was for Roger to say "Leave it with me," only to come back with some fully formed plans and an offer





for he and Mary to stay longer and help out with the renovation themselves.

Lou had been struggling with working in the old shed which could be freezing cold in the winter and boiling hot in the summer. She told Frontier Services that when she was working in the shed last summer it was getting over 45 degrees inside!

But with Roger and Mary's help she was able to redo the roof of the shed, insulate it and install some beautiful stained glass windows. The Duckworths told us that it was a delight to be given such a creative task to do. When we spoke to her, Lou had nothing but praise for the Outback Links volunteers. "They were just the

most amazing people! They were phenomenal."

Now Lou is able to work comfortably in the shed and has been busy keeping up with all the orders that she has coming in.

Roger and Mary told us that the most rewarding part of the time that they spent with Lou's family was being able to give back to someone else. Mary recalled that Lou had told her, "I'm so used to giving to other people that I find it difficult to receive."

**If you live or work
in rural or remote Australia
and would like some
practical assistance from our
Outback Links volunteers,
get in touch via our website
frontierservices.org/
volunteer or call our
Outback Links team
on 1300 787 247**



A PO Box 3424, Parramatta NSW 2124 Australia
E fsfundraising@frontierservices.org
T 1300 787 247
W www.frontierservices.org
F www.facebook.com/FrontierServices