

Chalk one up for teachers on front

December 08, 2019

Members of the public education community have reached out to assist those in need during the current bushfire season in a range of ways

With bushfires the topic of discussion in many classrooms in recent weeks, schools and TAFEs have coordinated activities to make a positive contribution during dire times.

Reports include Delungra Public School collecting donations for the Rescue Collective, to assist with the care of injured animals. Somerton Public School thanked Gunnedah Fire and Rescue crew members with letters and snacks. Wodonga TAFE staff supported the delivery of donated feed to fireaffected farmers in Walcha.

A bucket collection at Federation's November Council raised more than \$3000, including a large donation from members at Dension College of Secondary Education (Kelso campus).



NSW Rural Fire Service's volunteer ranks include many teachers.

Blacksmiths Public School teacher Robyn Hellier is a volunteer firefighter with 15 years' experience. On some days of forecast catastrophic fire danger she's been on standby in the Wallarah Brigade's shed, dressed in firefighting gear and ready to go.

But her ongoing service with the brigade also includes incidents like hopping on a bulk water tanker before dawn to supply other teams with more water to deal with a truck fire on the M1 highway.

Robyn said her volunteer work with the brigade is a good way to interact with the community on a different level.

"The jobs can be exciting and quite frightening but you get a sense of fulfilment, helping the community," she said.

Even teachers from abroad have offered their support. New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa and the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association Te Wehengarua wrote a joint letter to Federation stating:

"We know educators will be facing additional challenges in supporting their students and schools at this time and our thoughts and aroha [sympathy] are with them."

Teachers are among those dealing with personal losses and helping family, friends, colleagues, students and their families and their wider community deal with the disaster. Damage to Department of Education property included Wyaliba and Bobin public schools. Federation continues to work closely with the Department to

support members and communities.

Kerri Carr is a staff writer

EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

Members suffering financial hardship can apply for an exemption of up to six months from their contributions to the union. Written applications need to be made by the individual member, explaining their circumstances. In addition, on application, individual members can apply for an ex-gratia payment of up to \$1000 to cover those teaching resources lost in the fire that are not covered by other forms of general insurance. This too is by individual application to Federation. Information about the Emergency Relief Fund and the application form can be found [here](#).

SUPPORT FROM TEACHER SERVICES ORGANISATIONS

TEACHERS HEALTH

In unity with Federation, Teachers Health has announced an assistance package to support members who have been directly impacted by the fires. Teachers Health members who have been adversely and directly impacted by the bushfires may be eligible to receive up to six months' contribution relief on their health fund membership. For more information, or to determine your eligibility for assistance, please email Jane Stower,

bushfireassistance@teachershealth.com.au.

TEACHERS MUTUAL BANK

Teachers Mutual Bank is aware that there may be a number of public school teachers affected by the crisis. A significant number of our members reside in the affected areas and we are committed to supporting our members in these areas as well as the wider education sector. More information can be obtained directly from Teachers Mutual Bank on 131221.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Federation's Professional Support section via (02) 9217 2100 or 1300 654 369

Department's Employee Assistance Program 1800 060 650

Beyond Blue support service 1300 22 4636; beyondblue.org.au has a booklet entitled "Emotional responses after a disaster" and a booklet "Looking after yourself and your family after a disaster"

Lifeline 13 11 14

rfs.nsw.gov.au/ for information and updates from the NSW Rural Fire Service

headspace.org.au has articles including "How to cope with the stress of natural disasters" and a help sheet titled "Mental health support for Australian students, teachers, and schools following large-scale incidents"

kidshelpline.com.au for information about the free and confidential counselling service for young people

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[Advice to assist parents, teachers and students following recent fires](#)

[Staff support package](#)

Employee Assistance Program 1800 060 650

[Special leave provisions](#) for teachers who have volunteered to support the fire fighting efforts

WIRES 1300 094 737

Staffing entitlement maintenance for 2020 is available to schools that may have had enrolments decline due to the bushfires