



**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**2 July 2021**

## **Heroes of black summer brought to life in children's picture book**

Children and families in fire-affected regions will benefit from a children's picture book telling the stories of 'heroes' who helped protect East Gippsland during and after the region's terrifying 2019-20 summer of bushfire.

*Heroes of Black Summer* was written by Kylie Miller and Craig Sheather to help children process the trauma they experienced during the fires. It was illustrated by Karen Erasmus and published by Australian Geographic.

The book was published with support from a One Good Community Wellbeing Grant through the Gippsland Primary Health Network.

The authors hope *Heroes of Black Summer* will promote resilience in children, while strengthening the connection between children and adults as they read and heal together.

More than 58 per cent of East Gippsland was burnt in the fires, which raged for three months and has had a devastating and long-lasting impact on the community.

The pair was inspired to write the book after Craig met Kylie at her burnt Wairewa property while covering the fires for *Australian Geographic* magazine.

"I had written a children's picture book, *The Incredible True Story of Sparky the Wonder Puppy*, about a puppy's miracle survival during the fires in Victoria's north-east," Craig said. "I suggested Kylie share similar positive stories about East Gippsland using the stories I was covering for the magazine."

*Heroes of Black Summer* captures moments such as:

- the rescue of endangered species by experts from DELWP and other agencies
- a Royal Australian Navy operation to rescue people from the beach at Mallacoota
- Bairnsdale police officers saving an injured kangaroo from the flames
- a Mallacoota man rescuing stranded hikers in his boat
- a pay-it-forward scheme set up by Nowa Nowa General Store to share donations
- volunteers preparing meals in Sarsfield using food donated by local business
- a Bruthen wildlife carer who took in burnt and homeless wildlife
- a young hunter who rescued injured and hungry koalas in Mallacoota
- two Sarsfield brothers who lost their home then built fences as Blaze Aid volunteers
- Canadian firefighters who helped repair damage at Buchan
- Parks Victoria habitat experts who surveyed the damage by air
- TV stars who helped with construction projects at Mallacoota.

Kylie's own experience of receiving a lime tree donated through the pay-it-forward scheme and planting it in her burnt-out Wairewa orchard is also included.

Kylie said the most challenging thing was reducing the number of heroes they could include.

“It was impossible to include everyone who gave so much to our community during that awful time,” Kylie said.

“From the CFA firefighters and volunteers who were out there day-in-day-out for months, police, emergency workers, charities and service organisations, government agencies, and all the generous people and businesses who donated.

“Many of them had been impacted by fire themselves and their generosity was overwhelming. By writing this book, we hope to say thank you and give something back ourselves.”

Gippsland Primary Health Network Chief Executive Officer, Amanda Proposch, said books could be important resources to help children to deal with trauma, including the experience of bushfire.

“We were delighted to support this project through a One Good Community Wellbeing Grant and hope *Heroes of Black Summer* will provide our communities with a helpful resource to manage stress, anxiety and depression to support healing and recovery,” she said.

The authors are donating 500 copies of the book to children and communities impacted by bushfires across the region, and 25 per cent of proceeds from sales will be donated to the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund.

*Heroes of Black Summer* is available at all good bookshops or online at major book retailers.

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