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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **HAMILTON TEAMS TO COMPETE IN JUNIOR FIRE BRIGADE CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Bryce Lewis knows first-hand how joining a junior fire brigade can turn into a life-long affiliation with volunteer firefighting.

Bryce started his connection with the Hamilton Fire Brigade when he was 11 and started coaching the junior team five years ago when he was 16.

This year he will lead Hamilton's two under 14 teams and an under 17 team at the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) State Urban Junior Championships in Warrnambool on February 24-25. Sixty eight teams from across Victoria will take part in the annual event.

Although facing strong competition, Bryce says the local junior teams have been preparing strongly.

"We've been to Horsham and Stawell for local competitions and train each Tuesday and Thursday evening at the running track next to the Melville Road," he said. "We've got a few new kids this year and they've come a long way. Their level of competition looks pretty good."

Bryce followed his father and older brother into the junior brigade and volunteer firefighting and says it's a great way to contribute to the local community.

"I think being in the junior brigade teaches good values pretty early in life and lets them see what's involved from a young age," he said.

"You get to learn about team work and cooperation. You'll realise you can't get the job done on your own; you've got to work as part of a team like you do when fighting fires."

Being a junior competitor has also inspired hundreds of young people, like Bryce, to continue on and train to become active senior firefighting volunteers.

"I started when I was 11 and I've never left. I became a firefighter as well and get out on the truck as much as possible," he said.

This year Bryce is being supported by first-time assistant coach Rachel Hitchcock, who has also progressed through the junior ranks before joining the senior team this year.

The championships are run by Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) in conjunction with the CFA.

VFBV CEO Andrew Ford said junior brigades and the championships were the best way for young people to become engaged and learn practical skills before being old enough to attend fires.

“The VFBV State Urban Junior Championships can set young people on a pathway to serve their communities,” Mr Ford said.

“They encourage family participation and help to instil a sense of community service and volunteerism in young people while raising the importance of local fire brigades,” Mr Ford said.

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