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MEDIA RELEASE

CFA VOLUNTEER SUPPORTS HER PEERS

CFA volunteer Lesley Read might turn out to incidents without a fire truck, but her role supports people on another front.

The Hilldene Fire Brigade member and District 12 peer support coordinator has been awarded a prestigious Outstanding Service Medal for her contribution to the CFA.

Mrs Read joined in 2002 and has been involved in the peer support program since 2006, where she assists volunteer and career firefighters and their families.

“We’re always there to listen,” Mrs Read said. “We turn out without a big red truck; we’re like the quiet achievers, but we’re always there to support the firefighters and their families.”

Volunteering with the CFA is a family tradition. Her husband Geoff is captain of Hilldene, a small rural brigade near Seymour. His father Chester was one of the founding members of Somers Fire Brigade and went on to become a career firefighter. Her daughter Sheryl Batrouney and her husband Michael are also active firefighters in Axe Creek.

“I know Chester would be very proud of all of us,” she said.

Mrs Read said the friendships and ability to help people in need fuelled her passion for volunteering. “Hilldene is a very inclusive brigade; that’s what I love about it,” she said. “Hilldene has several active female members and everyone is well supported.”

Mrs Read started as an active firefighter – and still maintains her skills - but after being asked to join the peer program she knew that was what she wanted to do.

“We train to support volunteers and career firefighters,” she said. “We’re not counsellors; we’re like first responders to issues going on with people in their brigade or on the fire ground. It could be anything from attending a fatal motor vehicle accident to personal issues in their lives.

“We often refer them to mental health professionals or counsellors, but it could be as simple as having a coffee with someone and listening to what’s going on in their lives.”

Mrs Read recently spent five days in south-west Victoria after the St Patrick's Day fires.

"The peer program in the CFA is second to none," she said. "We're all volunteers when we meet it's like coming together with family we haven't seen for a couple of months.

"If it gets in your blood, it's difficult to get it out."

The Outstanding Service Medal recognises prolonged service distinguished by exceptional performance. It is CFA's most prestigious internal award outside valor and bravery listings.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford said the peer support program was a shining example of volunteers looking after the community.

"It's this type of professionalism of volunteers that makes them a vital, caring part of every regional Victorian community," he said.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
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