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MEDIA RELEASE

NEW RECRUIT WINS SWAN HILL FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Fifteen months ago, volunteering to fight fires was the last thing on Kylie Burney's mind.

Today Swan Hill Fire Brigade's first female firefighter of the year is encouraging others to follow her life-changing footsteps.

Kylie volunteered after her daughter Monique Bruton joined the junior brigade. "They needed a junior leader so I did my wildfire training course," Kylie said.

Captain Dennis Turner suggested that because she'd trained she could become an active firefighter.

"I'd never really seen myself as a firefighter but I thought I'd give it a go," Kylie said. "The first fire call was that night at 2.40am for a house fire and I've been hooked ever since."

Kylie attributes her fast ascension to the professional training system and support from experienced volunteers.

"The training is amazing and our senior volunteers help you through everything," she said. "I've looked up to them the whole time. To win fireman of the year and be on the same board as them is an incredible experience and achievement."

Kylie responded to 125 incidents for the financial year but says that's only part of it. "Being a volunteer is not just for turn-outs; it's to help our community which is incredibly rewarding."

Along with being a junior leader, Kylie is part of the senior competition team, even travelling as far as New Zealand to compete.

"You can't do it without support from your workplace and home," Kylie said. "I'm a manager at Coles and work 40 hours a week. When you're leaving to defend someone else's house or land and you've got family at home and a workplace behind you."

Monique was the second busiest firefighter for the year with 115 turn-outs, while Kylie's younger daughter Kadisha, 16, has completed her wildfire training. "It has become a family thing and I'm trying to get more people involved," Kylie said.

"I'd never thought of being a firefighter and I'm not from a firefighting background and now look where I am 12 months later. Anyone can do it.

"The Swan Hill Brigade made me feel so welcome and treated me like family and volunteering is such a wonderful achievement."

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford said Kylie's achievement reflected the changing face of CFA volunteerism.

"Kylie is a great example of how anyone can change their lives for the better while performing an important volunteer role in their local community and beyond when needed," Mr Ford said.

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