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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Mother and son volunteers protect Kinglake 10 years after Black Saturday**

Kinglake's Linda Craske was just a trainee volunteer firefighter during the Black Saturday fires but her nursing background meant she played a vital role.

Her teenage son, Ayden Matthews, was holidaying in Rye at the time, unable to contact his mum and worried that she had died in the inferno.

Ten years later, Linda and Ayden stand side-by-side as committed volunteers in the Kinglake Fire Brigade.

For Linda, Black Saturday was, as many people have told her, literally a baptism of fire.

"I'd just joined and started training to see if I wanted to do it," she said.

As the brigade's only nurse, she led first aid support during the fires. Seeing the volunteer response to the disaster was enough to convince her to continue.

"When the fire came through, my first thought was that people weren't going to survive it. There were some pretty bad injuries but fortunately there weren't as many as I'd expected. You either died or you survived OK."

Linda is now the brigade's community safety coordinator, fourth lieutenant and is involved with recruitment and fire equipment maintenance and is a strong advocate of CFA volunteers.

"I'm very passionate about it," she said. "Volunteerism is dying within a lot of organisations, but it's important. When you're being paid it's a job; when you're a volunteer you're doing it for the community."

"My mum lives here, my kids live here; I'm looking after my family and my community."

Linda is also proud of Ayden's contribution.

During Black Saturday he was with his father and younger sister in Rye. "I found out later they thought I'd died because they couldn't ring me," Linda said "It was more than 24 hours later that I could contact them."

Ayden joined as soon as he was old enough. He wanted to help the community, but he was also inspired by what his mother did during Black Saturday and in the years that followed.

"What she did was impressive to say the least," he said.

The brigade's communications officer, 23, had his own baptism of fire, his first turn out was part of an overnight strike team to Violet Town.

"I went out in brand new gear; when I came back it had turned from yellow to black from the soot."

As one of the brigade's younger members, he encourages more young people to join. "It's incredibly important to have a fire brigade because we're such a fire-prone area, and it's a good way to meet new people" he said.

Kinglake Fire Brigade is entirely manned by volunteers who turn out anytime, day or night, to help protect the community.

Volunteer fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford said volunteers are vital to outer metro regions and across the state.

"As one of the most fire-prone places in the world, Victoria needs our professionally trained and equipped volunteers who are able to step up and respond anywhere in the state in times of disaster," Mr Ford said.

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