

ESF IMPACT

newsletter

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Tony's Incredible Trek Underway

After 18 months of planning and training Tony Pearce, Chair of the ESF is off on his incredible Trek. Leaving from the State Control Centre in East Melbourne on 10 March the Trek will travel to Mallacoota, over the Alpine Range to Mt Hotham, on to Wodonga and home through towns along the Hume Highway. The Trek will conclude at a celebratory luncheon at the MCG on 10 May.

Walking at a steady pace of 5.5km per hour Tony is taking one step at a time to promote the need to support the mental health of Victoria's emergency management community and raise funds to enable ESF to introduce innovative new ways to help prevent serious mental injury. Tony, a former paramedic, CFA volunteer and more recently Inspector General for Emergency Management, is inspired to do the Trek through his own lived experience.

"Over the course of my career, I have seen how emergencies, such as Victoria's Black Summer Fires, so deeply affect our emergency workers and volunteers. Way too many people experience trauma because of simply showing up to do the work they must do, to help their community in a crisis. Some suffer mentally long after their work is done, others have seen no other way, and taken their own lives."

Tony's Trek will travel through many areas affected by Victoria's 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires acknowledging the mental health impacts that those fires had, and continue to have, on emergency personnel and community members alike. Despite considerable investment in mental health treatment programs and services, there is still much work required to help prevent mental injury.

"ESF seeks to get ahead of the mental harm and injury threat that currently pervades the sector – that's why our focus is on prevention and early intervention. The two initiatives ESF is fundraising for will herald a new era in prevention for emergency service people in Victoria by helping to reduce the stigma associated with acknowledging help is required before it is too late, and to help people feeling wobbly not progress to serious mental injury."



Along the way Tony and ESF has been overwhelmed by the support from local emergency service people, Municipal Councils and local businesses. They have provided everything from a comfy bed and shower to a coffee and cake, a much needed massage and words of encouragement and company on the road where many stories of mental health struggles have been shared.

RESPONSES

ESF is all about improving mental health of emergency service workers. Rotary is about the wellbeing of the community, so it is a natural partnership. It is great to see Rotarians come out all through Gippsland to support Tony and his goals.

Paul Mee, Rotary District Governor

Listening to Tony speak about what he has gone through himself and that he is now helping others is just so inspiring.

It has been such a great experience supporting this event to raise awareness and funds. It should demonstrate hope for the many people affected by mental health conditions.

Maureen Russell, Sale SES Unit

Lots of laughs. Lots of inspiring moments. Lots of new friends. Lots of teamwork and lots of great memories. It has been so uplifting seeing everyone working together from all parts of Victoria and all walks of life in order to help Tony and his amazing team at ESF during Tony's Trek.

Jo Algie AV Drouin Team Manager

This event highlights the importance of mental health awareness and how it effects everyone at different times and that there is no need to feel lonely because there is support for us if we need it. We were honoured to have Tony choose Nar Nar Goon to spend the night.

Justin Seddon, CFA Captain Nar Nar Goon

I just enjoyed meeting and bonding with people, everyone has a story to tell. Every time I go down this road, I will remember this day of driving Tony's support vehicle.

Wendy Russell, Sale SES Unit

To find out more, donate or follow Tony's Trek go to www.esf.com.au