

Latter-day Saint Women Act for Bushfire Victims

MELBOURNE, Australia — After witnessing the devastating effects of wildfires on thousands of families earlier this year, one Melbourne woman expressed what many were thinking: “Our hearts are aching — what can we do?”

Within days, this woman joined with hundreds of other women, all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in an effort to gather hygiene items and other personal supplies for those who had lost their homes or who had been displaced for other reasons.

“Women have great compassion and strengths,” said Julie Chmielewski, a leader in the Church’s women’s organization, the [Relief Society](#). “There is an increasing need to support our community during difficult times.”

Letters were sent to all of the Latter-day Saint congregations in the eastern suburbs of Bayswater, Blackburn, Doncaster, Mooroolbark, Wantirna, Waverly and Yarra Valley, seeking support. The Mormon women’s groups were asked to prepare ‘essential items kits’ for men, women, and children. Donations of tins of baby formula were also requested.

The response was overwhelming. From one Sunday to the next, and with much love and sacrifice, the items were collected and stacked in Julie Chmielewski’s living room. There were 288 kits and 57 tins of baby formula.

Word was received that the Department of Human Services would be delivering caravans to families after their properties had been cleared, where their burned-out homes once stood.

Permission was given to put a kit for each member of the family in each of the caravans prior to delivery. Each kit came with a note that read: “A small gift of love, sharing our hope for a brighter future. This gift was lovingly put together by women from the congregations (listed above) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

“These kits will provide the families with some welcome basic requirements and make settling into unfamiliar surroundings a little easier,” said DHS spokesman, Bram Alexander.

“The work of the Relief Society in putting these packs together is a wonderful expression of care and sensitivity.”

The tins of baby formula will be delivered to maternal child health centres in the communities nearest the bushfire areas.



*Photo: Sisters Mamouny, Fordham, Truman, Bignell and Hull
(Photo by Desiree Stefanac of the Stake Public Affairs committee)*