

Royal Flying Doctor Service The furthest corner. The finest care.

## AirDoctor

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE



SOUTH AUSTRALIA & NORTHERN TERRITORY | ISSUE 276 | MAY 23

### From the Chairman & Chief Executive >



PETER DE CURE AM Chairman

**TONY VAUGHAN ASM** Chief Executive

### TOGETHER WITH OUR COMMUNITY of supporters, the Flying Doctor is celebrating 95 years of saving lives in rural and remote Australia.

From its first flight in 1928, the RFDS has grown to become one of the world's largest aeromedical organisations with a national service footprint of 7.69 million square kilometres and a patient interaction every two minutes.

In this edition, you will hear from our patients and their families on the impact of this care: an NT cattle ringer who had a freak accident in one of the most remote areas of the country (pages 4-5), and a farming family on the Eyre Peninsula whose young son has been airlifted multiple times (page 12).

So far this year, our aeromedical teams in SA/ NT have airlifted more than 3,200 patients including a remote highway landing to rescue a motorist on the Nullarbor.

As we reflect on our 95-year history. we continue to forge ahead with vital developments and innovations to enhance health outcomes for Australians, no matter where they live, work play.

Modern care will meet the outback with a new health hub earmarked for Far North SA that will transform the Flying Doctor's capability to help local station communities and thousands of travellers (page 11).

Meanwhile, two RFDS Patient Transfer Facilities will be completed this year, providing an airside medical space for our crews and service delivery partners at some of our most frequented airstrips in the central corridor of the country.

Behind the scenes, the RFDS is made up of hundreds of individuals dedicated to delivering the finest care to the furthest corner.

These efforts have been recognised in the public sphere, with an RFDS nursing duo named finalists at the SA Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards for going above and beyond (page 13).

The RFDS was also proud to be named Australia's "Most Reputable Charity" for the 11th time, which is testament to our dedicated workforce, patients, donors, supporters, partners and volunteers.

With a new year comes a new national partnership - we welcomed aboard Viva Energy as the RFDS's fuel supply partner across the country. This, along with a wealth of other incredible initiatives, are all helping to keep the Flying Doctor flying.

Finally, to help celebrate our 95th birthday, we're asking you to tell us what the Flying Doctor means to you (page 8). For history buffs, we even have a special guiz in this edition for you to wind back the clock and test vour knowledge.

While we take time to reminisce, we continue to look to you, our community-minded supporters, for your loyal dedication and generous contributions to our crucial work.

We offer our heartfelt thanks and hope you eniov this edition of AirDoctor.

Fit al Com Tom Vare

PETER DE CURE AM Chairman

TONY VAUGHAN ASM Chief Executive

### Cover: RFDS PC-12 takes off from Kings Creek, NT.

### AirDoctor is the official magazine of the Royal Flying Doctor Service South Australia & Northern Territory.

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The RFDS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to Elders past, present and emerging.

## Highway landing >



IN LATE MARCH, local police and emergency services closed the Eyre Highway on the Nullarbor for the Flying Doctor to land and airlift a motorist with life-threatening injuries to Adelaide.

The patient, a 53-year-old Adelaide resident, had rolled his four-wheel-drive, and was discovered by a passer-by who raised the alarm.

After being trapped in his car for hours, local medical and emergency services crews, along with other travellers and community members, arrived at the scene to provide immediate support and safely extract the man from his vehicle.

Police and emergency services then secured the highway, temporarily blocking traffic at both ends of the designated 1,200-metre highway landing strip, for the RFDS aeromedical retrieval team from Port Augusta to land.

"We live in such a vast country and the RFDS relies on a team of amazing outback Australians coming together to make these things happen," said RFDS Executive General Manager, Medical and Retrieval Services. Dr Mardi Steere.

"It took a truckie to find the man in his vehicle and alert 000 – SA Ambulance then worked with our Operations Control Centre who coordinated the

flight logistics, while local first responders attended the scene before our critical care team arrived."

The RFDS performed life-saving procedures on the ground to stabilise the patient before departing for Adelaide from Chadwick Roadstrip - around 100 kilometres east of the SA-WA border.

"Whether it's roadside, in an ambulance, or in an aircraft, we essentially provide the same care that you would receive in a city emergency department, making sure patients are safe to fly for further treatment at a major hospital." Dr Steere said.

We thank everyone who helped every step of the way to get this patient to safety, including local commuters for their cooperation and patience with the road closure. - Dr Mardi Steere 🕥

The RFDS wishes the patient the very best with his journey to recovery.

For 24-hour emergency assistance, remember to dial 000.





## In hot water: Louis' story >

When a quiet day out on an outback lake went terribly wrong, Louis was left clutching his lifeless leg, calling out to mates for help.

LOUIS ORR, a young city slicker-turnedcattle ringer, was enjoying a day off from his job at a station in the remote Barkly Region in the Northern Territory when it took a life-threatening turn.

The 21-year-old and his mates had set off waterskiing at the station's local watering hole – a popular spot for workers wanting to cool off from the Territory's extreme heat.

On his fifth run for the day, Louis came off second best, falling into the water. When he swam back to his mates and tried pulling himself up onto the jet ski, he realised he couldn't move his left leg.

"I knew something was wrong as soon as I picked my leg up out of the water – it was completely poking out, flopping around and I had no feeling in my ankle," he said.

"I didn't know how bad it was, but it wasn't good."

Minutes after the accident, the adrenaline evaporated, and the pain kicked in.

Clutching his unresponsive leg, Louis was bundled into the back of a vehicle and raced to the station's clinic – a small shed with limited medical supplies.

Hundreds of kilometres via dirt road from the nearest hospital, the immediate thought was to call the Flying Doctor.

"Sitting in the clinic, my leg was still very unstable - moving in and out of place," he said

"As much pain as I was in, I just thought it was broken or dislocated. I never imagined that it was a life-threatening situation."

After being alerted of Louis' emergency, an RFDS team with a specialist from the Medical Retrieval Consultation Centre (MRaCC) was dispatched from the RFDS Alice Springs Base.

"We headed to the airstrip and were greeted by a smiling flight nurse, doctor and pilot. I was quickly put on a stretcher with a splint that went around both my legs – I'd never seen anything like it. As soon as I was in it, my pain went from an 'eight' to a 'five'," Louis said. "The RFDS was really reassuring – they were friendly, calming and I never felt I was in any danger." RFDS Flight Nurse Chantelle King was part of the aeromedical retrieval team tasked to airlift Louis.

"When we landed, we met Louis in the back of a four-wheel drive being cared for by mates – he was clearly in excruciating pain.

"He had a known injury to the limb, but at that point we didn't actually know whether there was more going on – so the doctor and I worked quickly to get him out of the vehicle, immobilise his leg and package him up safely to get him to a hospital as soon as we could."

Louis was airlifted to the nearest major hospital, Alice Springs, where scans confirmed the worst.

With a broken tibia, a severed nerve, three ruptured ligaments in his knee, and no blood flow to his lower leg due to a crushed artery, Louis had only a matter of hours to undergo emergency surgery at the Royal Darwin Hospital for a chance to save his limb.

Louis was again airlifted by the RFDS from Alice Springs to Darwin, where on arrival, he had one of the hardest conversations of his life.

"In the pre-op room my surgeon told me, 'Look I've seen plenty of people your age lose their leg from conditions like this and gone on to live long lives.'

"I'm just lying there thinking, 'Wait, I'm actually going to lose my leg here?' That's when I started to break down a bit."

More than 2,000 kilometres away, Louis' parents Mel and Stuart were holidaying in Queensland when they received the late-night call.

Mel described it as a "parent's worst nightmare."

"You get a phone call in the middle of the night, and you try to visualise life for your son without a limb," Mel said.

"You can imagine how hard that is – we couldn't think straight, we didn't know what to do, or how to react.

"You don't realise how much shock you go into in a situation like that."

After a gruelling eight hours in the operating theatre, Louis still couldn't feel his ankle.

But the remarkable news – his leg had been saved, just in time.

"I've grown up in big cities my entire life where everything is at your fingertips. Never in a million years did I think I'd come into contact with the RFDS, and yet suddenly it's for our son in the most unimaginable situation, where time was so critical," Mel said.

"Every second, every minute, every hour. We were literally counting on our fingers how long Louis had. "We're so grateful to the RFDS for their assistance."

Louis underwent two more operations, spending six weeks in hospital before flying to NSW to be surrounded by family as he prepares for more reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation.

Currently relying on a wheelchair, crutches and a post-op knee brace, the journey ahead is long. Yet, Louis still considers himself lucky.

"Isolation is obviously one of the hardest things of being on a cattle station – where I'm based we have to drive at least 200 kilometres to get phone service let alone a chicken burger," Louis said.

"There's no way I would've been driving 11 hours on rough roads to Darwin – the only place in the NT where they could treat me."

"If it wasn't for the RFDS and their quick response, I wouldn't have my leg today, and it possibly could've been a more life-threatening situation."



Watch the video to meet Louis and his family.



rehabilitation journey; Louis with dad Stuart, mum Mel and sister Ruby; Louis the Royal Darwin Hospital; The local watering hole in the Barkly Region, NT.







"As much pain as I was in, I just thought it was broken or dislocated. I never imagined that it was a life-threatening situation." - Louis Orr

Clockwise from Chantelle Williams with daughters Bonnie and Gracie; Oral Health Services will be available in William Creek for the first time: New clinic will provide crews with direct access to airport; Chantelle and Matt Williams.

### Last call for shots at the pub >

"South Australia's smallest town", surrounded by the world's largest pastora station, will soon be home to a permanent RFDS healthcare clinic.





### WHEN YOUNG BONNIE Williams needs a vaccination, she will no longer have to roll up her sleeve at the local pub.

Soon, the four-year-old will be one of many locals, workers and travellers who will benefit from the permanent RFDS healthcare clinic, to be built at William Creek in Far North SA.

Bonnie's parents. Chantelle and Matt Williams. manage the nearby 2.36 million-hectare Anna Creek Station - the world's largest cattle station.

Surrounded by an empty horizon that stretches for what seems forever, they know just how hard it can be to access medical help from their outback home.

"It's always hard to get health services in remote areas - I'm a mother of three, so my family's health is really important to me." Chantelle said.

"My family and I have been looked after by the RFDS for many years. At Anna Creek Station, we've had a number of incidents where they've had to help us."

The RFDS lands in William Creek around 30 times a vear to conduct fly-in community health clinics and airlift critically ill patients to major hospitals at all hours of the day and night.

However, with no health infrastructure within 200 kilometres of the town, RFDS teams currently have to consult with patients, like the Williams family, at the local hotel where there are no fixed medical provisions.

"We've had situations where a patient is being cared for in a hotel bedroom, and while that's all been going on, there's been a tourist in the hotel having a heart attack. It can get guite intense." Chantelle said.

"Bush people are generally really open, but I've had a lot of young station staff saying it's guite confronting having an appointment in the hotel. The RFDS always do it with a smile on their face and never make patients feel awkward, but it'll be amazing to have this clinic here."

As the closest town to Lake Evre North and the gateway to the Simpson Desert, William Creek is a hub for nearby stations and welcomes more than 26,000 tourists a year travelling the Oodnadatta Track.

"The William Creek Community Health Service will not only provide a medically-equipped hub for our regular fly-in RFDS clinics, but also a devoted area the community can access in medical emergencies to contact the RFDS directly." said RFDS SA/NT Chief Executive Tony Vaughan ASM.

"In the event of an emergency, first responders will be able to use telehealth technology to instantly contact on-call RFDS doctors, while patients wait in a safe and secure environment for an RFDS crew to arrive.

This modern facility will revolutionise health care for residents of William Creek. neighbouring stations and the thousands of travellers who make their way along the remote Oodnadatta Track. - Tony Vaughan ASM 🕥

SA's Outback Communities Authority, through the Federal Government's Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, has kickstarted the project with a \$1 million funding injection. The RFDS Board has endorsed the use of fundraising and community donations to offset the remainder of the project cost.

"Your postcode shouldn't determine whether you have access to health care, which is why I'm proud that the Government is investing \$1 million towards this vital RFDS project in remote South Australia," said Federal Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories, Kristy McBain.

The new RFDS William Creek Community Health Service will use a cost-effective modular and prefabricated construction to create a purposedesigned health clinic, featuring:

- > a multi-functional patient care space for the RFDS's monthly fly-in GP, mental health, and allied health consultations including oral health;
- > an emergency space with telehealth communication technology, available to community members in medical emergencies to contact the RFDS;
- > a community space including a waiting area and accessible toilet, and:
- > direct access to the William Creek Airport for RFDS aeromedical retrieval crews.



### Airside hubs incoming >

TWO PATIENT TRANSFER FACILITIES (PTFs) in key landing locations will be fully functional by the end of the year supporting patients, crews and service delivery partners during emergency aeromedical tasks.

The Northern Territory's first PTF will launch later this year in Tennant Creek, while a similar facility at Renmark in South Australia's Riverland is currently under construction.

The RFDS lands in both locations at least once a day to provide the finest care to people in need of life-saving or specialist treatment.

Both facilities will provide a well-lit, undercover area for patients to be stabilised before and after their RFDS flights. Under current conditions, patients are transferred outdoors on the tarmac in all weather conditions.



Find out more about hese exciting new

# OF THE FLYING DOCTOR

## In May 1928, the Flying Doctor embarked on its first mission.

Thanks to your support, we are still delivering our life-saving services 95 years on.

To celebrate this special anniversary, we asked South Australians and Territorians what the RFDS means to them.

Here's what they had to say >

A couple of weeks into a camping trip, I contracted pneumonia and passed out in our caravan. I was flown to Darwin and somehow they managed to bring me back from the brink. I will be forever grateful to the RFDS for being there when I needed them most.

- Theresia, Milang

To me, the RFDS means the difference between dying on the road and surviving a bout of tetanus that was very nearly fatal.

- Elaine, Bordertown

Living in a place like Wudinna means we are at least a six-hour drive to Adelaide. In emergencies, being able to be flown and cared for means the difference between life and death.

- Janet, Wudinna

My cousin became sick while travelling on the Birdsville Track — if it wasn't for the Flying Doctor, he wouldn't have made it.

- Tina, Birdsville

## The RFDS is the reason I have two beautiful kids today. It's been 16 years since they flew me for life-saving surgery and I will never be able to thank them enough.

- Belinda, Minnipa

I cut my right ankle open in an accident and the Flying Doctor flew to Pinnaroo to pick me up. Within 35 minutes, I was in hospital being treated.

- Ian, Geranium

Out here, when any serious accident or illness strikes, you have just one single thought; the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

- Amber, Elkedra

## What's your Flying Doctor story?



### Tell us what the RFDS means to you.

Your show of support will help keep the Flying Doctor flying for so many Australians that see more than just a plane passing the sky.

## Harvesting kindness >

#### AT JUST TWO DAYS OLD, Ziggy Seal experienced his first aeromedical flight from his home in Kimba, SA.

The now seven-year-old, who lives with a brain injury, is an inspiration to his young family - so much so that his dad, Brook, has penned a new children's book dedicated to his son.

Illustrated by fellow Eyre Peninsula local Lain Montgomerie, Just Like You, Only A Little More *Different*, is a heartwarming tale that aims to increase awareness about living with disability, sharing great lessons about inclusion and kindness.

Ziggy goes to Kimba Area School, where the book has become a helpful educational tool – and it is has since started reaching other communities.

"Many friends from different towns are buying copies and putting them in their schools and kindies - we've had lots of grandparents buying it for their grandkids," Brook said.

"Kids can enjoy the illustrations while it stimulates important conversations about being different and that it's okay to be different."

Brook said the book is also an important way of giving back, with all proceeds donated to the Flying Doctor. In just months, thousands of copies have been sold to readers both across the country and overseas - as far as Canada and Japan.

"The RFDS is a service dear to us, as well as many across regional areas." he said.

"When Ziggy was younger, we used the Flying Doctor four to five times. If we don't have the RFDS there to get us to a major hospital, it can be the difference between life and death at times."

"I wanted to use the book to just say thank you to everyone in the community who has helped us and has embraced Ziggy, and loves him just as much as we do. We've been overwhelmed by the response."



I want all of you to know that your message of love and acceptance is being heard around the world. I am sharing it with my family who live all across Canada, and a few spots overseas.

like YOU, ....

📰 different

\*

I just read Ziggy's book to my class for the first time and when I finished they started clapping to give him a round of applause.

From left: Ziggy (centre) with his family;

Author Brook Seal with his new book.

Photo: Brooke Neindorf / ABC Evre Peninsula

Their response was so beautiful I started crying. This book was the perfect Harmony Day story.

(\*

Nurses fly high > CONGRATULATIONS to RFDS employees

Keirstie Bull and Barb White, who have been named finalists in the 2023 SA Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards.

The Awards, hosted annually in May on International Nurses Day, recognise and celebrate the significant contribution nurses and midwives make to the healthcare outcomes of the broader South Australian community.

### Keirstie Bull, RFDS Retrieval Nursing Director Finalist, Excellence in Leadership and Governance

Keirstie credits an early stint supporting aged care residents for inspiring her to pursue a career in nursina.

After spending more than 20 years in emergency departments, Keirstie joined the RFDS as Retrieval Nursing Director in 2020, where she leads a team of more than 70 nurses across South Australia and the Northern Territory, who care for around 25 airlifted patients every day.

"It was actually my grandmother who inspired me to start working in aged care and eventually become a nurse. Then, I did one of my placements in an emergency department and never looked back," she said.

"People who work within the emergency and retrieval environment are a highly motivated group of individuals with the same goal, and this drives me to be the best leader I can be."

Keirstie's award nomination recognises her efforts in implementing new RFDS leadership and clinical governance frameworks and her work at the helm to ensure best-practice care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'm amazed at what our nurses and midwives do each and every day," she said.

"I feel that the award is definitely recognition of what our team has achieved at the RFDS in recent years - implementing a new vision, reflecting on our values and making vital changes to enhance outcomes for our patients."

#### Barb White, RFDS Flight Nurse Manager Finalist, Excellence in Practice – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurse/Midwife (Mary

Buckskin Award)

A nurse since 1973. Barb's career has taken her across Australia from Far North Queensland to Tasmania, where she has honed her skills in rural and remote care.

After joining the RFDS more than two decades ago, Barb has become a respected leader with an unwavering passion for mentoring the next generation of flight nurses.

"One of the best parts of my role is watching nurses grow and go on to having amazing careers - just to be there to guide them through something, direct them into what study they need to do, or help them identify their strengths," Barb said.

Barb's award nomination acknowledges her pivotal role in growing culturally sensitive patient care – from forging strong relationships with community leaders to her work with the RFDS Reconciliation Action Plan Committee.

"The RFDS is listening to and advocating for Aboriginal patients. We're learning from communities - and the more we learn, the more we realise we don't know. A lot of the people we care for are very good at reading body language, so a lot of the time it's not what you say, it's what you do," she said.

A patient's journey is not always about trauma - it can be returning to community after recovering or going back home to be on country for the last part of their life - and in providing that care, we're the face they trust, the organisation they trust. – Barb White





tie Bull, RFDS Retrieval Nursing Director







## Going the distance >

THE FLYING DOCTOR was proud to be chosen by Australian global logistics business, Northline, as its 40th year charity partner.

As part of its celebrations, the entire team across Australia raised \$40,000, which was presented at an event in Adelaide in March. The company hopes to present another \$40,000 cheque in Darwin at the end of May.

Founded in 1983, family-owned business Northline began servicing the NT, including remote communities throughout the central corridor of Australia - highlighting its parallels to the work of the RFDS.

Northline employee Erin Foster holds the Flying Doctor dearly after her first-hand experience in 2019.

Erin was admitted to the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide to have her daughter, Brooklyn - who arrived one month early weighing 1.7 kilograms.

As a result, Brooklyn had to stay in hospital until her weight increased, putting great pressure on the young mum, who at the time, lived almost 500 kilometres from Adelaide.



Erin Foster with her daughte

"Without the RFDS and the amazing service they provide. I would not have been able to get Brooklyn home safely until she reached 2.5 kilograms and was able to travel in a car, which would have been another two to three weeks," Erin said.

The RFDS will always hold a special place in my heart. - Erin Foster 🕥



### Having a ball >

THIS YEAR'S ANZ Community Ball was hosted by the RFDS at the Adelaide Oval, raising more than \$330,000 for its seven selected charity partners, including the Flying Doctor.



### **Pedals for** purpose >

THE UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN annual staged mountain race, Simpson Desert Bike Challenge, last year raised \$26,450 for the Flying Doctor.

The RFDS has been the event's nominated charity for more than a decade and the team will once again be raising funds this year.

The five-day challenge staged across the Australian Simpson Desert is truly one for the bucket list. Visit desertchallenge.org to register as a rider, support crew or race official for the September 2023 event.



### Golfing for good >

LAST YEAR marked the 42nd anniversary of the Petroleum Exploration Society/Society of Petroleum Engineers (SA Branches) Golf Tournament - over the past 24 years, almost \$430.000 has been raised.

The 2022 edition was held at Flagstaff Hill Golf and Country Club, raising more than \$18,000 for the Flvina Doctor.



Fundraise for the RFDS > Find out how you can get involved.



### **Fuelling the** finest care >

THE RFDS recently welcomed the team from Viva Energy Australia at its Adelaide Base to launch an exciting new partnership.

The new partnership will see Viva Energy become the national fuel supply partner of the RFDS, both for its aircraft and on-the-ground transport such as road ambulances.

As one of Australia's largest fuel suppliers, Viva Energy has resources stationed at some of the country's most remote airstrips. This access is crucial in enabling RFDS crews to swiftly transport patients to the health care they need.

The RFDS is honoured to partner with another proud Australian organisation with a long history of supporting people reach their destinations safely.



## 2023 GALA BALL

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SOLD OUT

ANOTHER SOLD-OUT EVENT THANKS TO OUR AMAZING SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

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