

R O U N D U P



The RFDS full-motion flight simulator in Bundaberg, Qld.

BIG DRY 'FLYDAY'

An incredible new facility that trains RFDS pilots, a water tank for a family living through drought, therapy sessions for remote children with disabilities and a school program building mental-health tools – these are some of the beneficiaries of last year’s Big Dry Friday, which is coming up this year on June 13.

Launched in 2018 by Morgans Financial Limited, Big Dry Friday is a fundraiser aimed at city people, in which they forego drinks or an expensive lunch and donate the funds to rural projects. It has raised more than \$7.8 million for organisations such as Outback Futures, Rural Aid, Schools Plus and the RFDS.

Sheep and chicken farmer Mark Dunne, from Moorabool, Vic, received a new 22,000L water tank thanks to the scheme, which will provide drinking water for the family. “It’s been pretty dry down here – we had a dry winter and a pretty dry summer,” he says. “I think it was the second driest year on record. We rely 100% on tank water, and the old concrete tank was leaking.”

Mark says Rural Aid made the process easy, and they received 50mm of rain a week after the tank was installed. “It’s still pretty dry – we’re looking for an autumn break.”

In Bundaberg, Qld, money from Big Dry Friday went towards the new RFDS

Aeromedical Training Academy – which has a \$19 million full-motion flight simulator for training for catastrophic events such as dual engine failure. “It’s the only one of its kind outside the US,” says Heather Stott, the RFDS’s senior manager of major relationships. “It is so lifelike and real that you can legally train to fly one of our aircraft in that simulator and then get in an aircraft for the first time and take off. When you’re inside you believe that you’re flying.”

On Inverleigh station, near Normanton, Qld, Allison Heslin is extremely grateful for the Big Dry Friday funds that enabled her, through Outback Futures, to access speech and occupational therapy sessions for 2 of her children. The fortnightly sessions are available via a multidisciplinary therapy team in Cloncurry (3 hours away), as opposed to having to travel 5 hours to Mount Isa or up to 10 to Cairns.

One son, in particular, has benefited enormously. He was struggling to control his emotions, making it difficult for governesses or anyone to teach him through Mount Isa School of the Air. “The sessions have made such a large difference to their learning abilities, and to all our lives,” she says. “You couldn’t get through to him. He would completely shut down. But now his grades have changed from almost failing to

being an A-grade student.”

In SA, students at the 140-student Renmark North School are benefiting from full access to The Resilience Project. According to year 5/6 teacher and wellbeing for learning leader Jack Rucioch, the funding has allowed them not only to do the program, but to provide extra resources to families and send teachers away to Melbourne for a Resilience Training conference. “Being a small school you don’t always get those opportunities,” he says.

According to Emma Mullin, who has 2 children at the school and is on the governing council, the school community has gone through a lot in recent years, with a flooding in 2022. “Without this sort of funding, it doesn’t allow us to explore anything outside the curriculum and give our kids the best shot,” she says. “The outcomes we see from it are immeasurable.”

School captains Indy Taylor and Lucy Ekonomopoulos easily recite the 4 aspects of the program they are learning: gratitude, empathy, mindfulness and emotional literacy. “I think it’s a really great program that should continue,” Indy says. “My favourite element is mindfulness, because it’s calm and helped me relax more,” Lucy adds.

To donate or find out more about Big Dry Friday, see bigdryfriday.com.au.