

Hinterland Treasure

Jared Ashcroft

Small towns are renowned for their eclectic mix of intriguing characters and Maleny is no exception. With storm season now upon us, we met with one such cove, tireless SES worker, Jared Ashcroft. He's loud, he's brash – qualities that are only eclipsed by a genuinely caring nature. Helping other people is firmly implanted in his DNA.



by JUDY
FREDRIKSEN

The eldest of three children, Jared's start to life was not easy. At around age eight, his parents divorced, the unhappy circumstances leaving Jared and his siblings in the care of his grandparents, Nan and Grandad Ellis.

"They (Jared's parents) each went their own way and we decided to stay with our grandparents because of schooling and other issues," says Jared.

"Nan and Grandad have done a wonderful job of raising us," he says, sadly noting that his grandfather has recently passed away. His fondness for the old chap was clear as he turned away to suppress some tears.

After graduating from Maleny High School, Jared started work at Maleny Mitre 10 where he still works. But by then, he was already ensconced with the Maleny SES, having become involved in 2005.

"I was approached by Lloyd Larney (Group Leader of the Maleny SES) in the day to join as a younger member and see what it was like. I was hooked within the first night, and I've not looked back since.

"I would have been 16–17 years of age at the time. And then I joined the Rural Fire Service about two or



◀ Jared Ashcroft - SES Volunteer

three months after and I was told by my dad 'never to join the Rural Fire Service because it wouldn't be something you'd like'. And I've proved him wrong in many ways!"

While at high school, Jared, like most teenage boys, took an interest in girls and had girlfriends, but something deep inside him just "didn't feel right". With no one to turn to for help, he kept his feelings to himself.

Sometime around year eleven or twelve, he realised he was attracted to other males.

"Then I went, okay, this is not right, something's going on here. It just twigged straight away."

Although Jared realised he was gay, living in a small country town meant he found it extremely hard to come out, because there weren't the same levels of support that there are today. Interestingly, he admits he wasn't teased or bullied, but in a more distressing way, he persecuted himself.

"I was holding my feelings at ransom instead of being out there and being joyful, because I didn't know how it was going to react with people knowing who I was back then.

"Before I knew that support was there, I found it extremely hard and when I came out it was a big relief off my shoulders.



▲ Jared at a Bunnings fundraiser with Maleny SES members and Olin - Emergency Service Cadet Member



Jared fighting fire ▶

"But there were times that I didn't feel comfortable doing that and it just made me miserable and when I came out it was the best feeling – the relief, and I knew that I had that support from other members in the community that felt that same way."

Happily, Jared and his partner Chris have now been in a committed relationship for ten years.

In demonstrating the typical generosity of his nature, Jared has since started to help others to come out, supporting friends by being present when they nervously announce their sexuality to their family.

"In that role now I've done a course with the LGBTIQ Community and become an 'ally', so I'm also a person that someone can come up to and talk about what's going on. And I can actually relate to them and say, right, we're here to help you, and do things like that.

"I've now also got that qualification through Fire Services and SES and I will always be there to help someone if that's necessary."

With such a soft side, it's not surprising that Jared loves kids and would dearly love to have his own one day. In the meantime, he and Chris are devoted 'uncles' to a friend's toddlers who are just growing up too quickly.

"We want them to stay that bundle of joy!" he exclaims.

In another extension of his caring side and born through his self-confessed love of 'blood and guts', this quirky character runs his own first aid business and helps out at sporting events.

"I look after all the sporting events wherever or whoever requires services. I've got advanced care and patient care. I've learnt most of that through Rural Fires and SES and some external paths."

When it comes to patient care, Jared has further ambitions to develop his skills and maybe fulfil one of his teenage desires to work as a paramedic or in a hospital, but that plan is still in progress.

In the meantime, it is reassuring to many hinterland residents and businesses to have someone like Jared around, because he serves like an informal security guard, alerting property owners to a broken window, a blocked drain, a dangerous overhanging tree.

These qualities of responsibility and consideration towards civic duty are valued by fellow community members, so in closing, it's no surprise that he has some sensible advice on surviving the storm season.

Jared – you are a treasured member of our community.

If you require SES assistance, phone 132500. If you require fire assistance or you are in a life threatening situation, call 000.