

## Muslim mates 'adopted' by small community, after making 10-hour round trips to cook for bushfire victims

Luisa Rubbo, *ABC News*, 18 December 2019

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-12-18/muslim-mates-drive-from-sydney-to-cook-bbq-for-bushfire-victims/11802674>



**PHOTO:** Belal Shmait, Talal Kanj, Jawad Nabouche, Huseyin Jasli came back to cook at the Willawarrin Fair. (*ABC News: Luisa Rubbo*)

### Four Muslim men have driven from Sydney to northern New South Wales for a second time to put on a barbecue for bushfire victims.

The builders by trade travelled about six hours from their homes in Auburn in Western Sydney to be at the first get-together for the community of Willawarrin, which has been devastated by the recent fires.

After the fires hit, the men surprised Kempsey locals by just turning up at the evacuation centre with the barbecue, but this time they were happy to come back to cook for Willawarrin's fair.

Leaving just before six o'clock in the morning, Jawad Nabouche and his mates drove north on the Pacific Highway with a ute loaded with about 30 kilos of sausages and 30 boxes of water and all the utensils and equipment they needed to cook a barbecue.

"It's the least we can do, to try help the community and help everybody up here and put a smile on everybody's faces," Mr Nabouche said.



**PHOTO:** Jawad Nabouche and his friends brought 30 kilos of sausages to cook. (*ABC News: Luisa Rubbo*)

### **'Our adopted people'**

Kempsey Shire Council Mayor Liz Campbell recalled how the men "just arrived" one Saturday morning.

"At that stage, the roads were cut but we had to wait to be able to get through and we came up to the pub and they put on this fabulous barbecue and became part of the Willawarrin community," Cr Campbell said.

She said that support meant "everything to us now".

"When you're down you need that support to keep you up," Cr Campbell said.

"They've become part of Willawarrin, they're our adopted people."



**PHOTO:** *The builders by trade downed tools for the day to be at the Willawarrin Fair. (ABC News: Luisa Rubbo)*

### **Locals 'gobsmacked'**

Maree Tyme, who lost fences in the fires but not her home, said it was "amazing" the amount of people who have come to support the fire victims at Willawarrin.

"You see it in other places with different things that happen in life but to happen in your own little hometown that I grew up in, born and bred here, it's just amazing to get support from outside communities," Ms Tyme said.



**PHOTO:** *Local Maree Tyme says it's amazing to get support from outside communities. (ABC News: Luisa Rubbo)*

"It's a beautiful gift to give to our little village and there are lots of fire-affected people here and around us who have lost their home."

The Mayor said many residents were in need of a morale boost like this.

"We've got families in Willawarrin with children who have lost everything, they've lost their home, they've lost all their childhood stuff and that's hard for kids," Cr Campbell said.



**PHOTO:** *The men brought everything the needed to cook up a barbecue for locals. (ABC News: Luisa Rubbo)*

Jamie Zaia, whose house was one of the first to be lost, described the men's first visit as "unbelievable".

"It's been daunting and mind-blowing the amount of support that I've got from all the community. It's been great, really."

Tania and her husband, who married a week before the devastating fires, stayed and fought the fire.

Their house was saved but their property was burnt all the way around.



**PHOTO:** *Tania's property just outside Willawarrin was affected by the fire. (ABC News: Luisa Rubbo)*

"Whoever said dirt can't burn, hasn't seen dirt burn," she said.

She appreciated the support from the out-of-towners.

**'Proud to be an Aussie'**

Tania said the generosity of people was amazing.

"We had some people from the Central Coast, they brought up three trailer loads full of donations, fridges, washing machines, clothes, toys," she said.

"They've actually got a list of all the kids in the Willawarrin area and they're bringing Christmas presents back up for them.

"That's the beauty about Willawarrin, this community is such a tight community and everybody is the first to put their hand up to help anybody around here, they really do, and that's what keeps us smiling."



**PHOTO:** *"You got to help, I can't fight a fire but we can put food on, we can fund the barbecue and we're happy to do it," Mr Nabouche says. (ABC News: Luisa Rubbo)*

CEO of the veteran-led organisation Team Rubicon Australia Geoffrey Evans said they first saw the Muslim community helping out in Tathra.

He said that experience set Team Rubicon volunteers up in good stead and what they found was they "got adopted by the community".

"You see it first in the community, whenever we turn up to a house. No matter how badly devastated that person is the first thing they will say is 'There must be people who need help more than we do'.

"We look at them and say 'But you've lost everything', and then the top lip starts to go and there's an outpouring of grief and then we start helping them but then broader Australia will start to come in."



**PHOTO:** *The abaya was given to a local after the barbecue. (Supplied)*