



Royal Flying Doctor Service  
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# AirDoctor



THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA & NORTHERN TERRITORY | ISSUE 278 | MAY 24



# From the Chair & Chief Executive >



**PETER DE CURE AM** Chair  
**TONY VAUGHAN ASM** Chief Executive

**FROM ALFRED TRAEGER'S game-changing pedal radio in the 1920s to introducing the world's first purpose-built aeromedical jet to our fleet in recent years, the RFDS has always been at the forefront of new technologies and ideas.**

Last month, we brought another Flying Doctor innovation to life, launching an Australian-first virtual emergency centre that will enable 24/7 emergency medical care with no health professionals physically in the room.

The new site in the outback town of William Creek will revolutionise health care for residents, neighbouring stations and the thousands who travel through Far North South Australia for generations to come (page 8).

This year, we are also celebrating the first anniversary of the RFDS Electronic Health Record (EHR) which, since integration, has enhanced the quality of medical documentation, patient handover and in-flight planning.

Above all, the digital application has afforded our clinicians more valuable time to focus on the direct care needs of our patients.

From emergency retrievals to essential primary health care, in this edition you will hear from patients who have generously shared their stories, highlighting our life-saving and life-changing impact (pages 3-7).

Whether it be projects like the EHR, William Creek or our recently launched Patient Transfer Facility in the Riverland, more than ever we rely on our generous supporters to dig deep to help us generate amazing outcomes for rural and remote Australians.

In March, our inaugural RFDS SA/NT Giving Day, 'Double Up for the Doc Day', to raise funds for the medical fit out of our new aircraft arriving in 2025 was a soaring success.

While our goal was to raise \$300,000, you and our dollar-matching partners helped us go above and beyond to achieve a whopping \$425,000.

It has also been a busy time of year recognising the contributions of our diverse workforce, through national and global initiatives such as National Doctors Day (30 March) and International Nurses Day (10 May).

In the wake of World Pilots Day (26 April), we invite you to keep flicking through to meet some of our high-flying aviation team (page 13).

Testament to our dedicated workforce, patients, donors, supporters, partners and volunteers, the RFDS was proud to be named Australia's "Most Reputable Charity" for the 12th time.

Thank you. Your trust is at the heart of everything we do and it enables us to deliver the finest care to the furthest corner.

*Peter de Cure* *Tony Vaughan*

**PETER DE CURE AM** Chair  
**TONY VAUGHAN ASM** Chief Executive

**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.*

Cover: Rural Generalist Dr Brett Goodsall performs a check-up on young patient, Lex, during a fly-in clinic at Kalamurina Wildlife Sanctuary (more on page 6).

# Paramedic turned patient >



Sonia being transferred onto a PC-12 aircraft.

**FOR EXPERIENCED paramedic Sonia Strong, finding herself in the back of an ambulance was an unnerving role reversal.**

Not only was she battered and bruised on the side of a road, but she was on the remote Oodnadatta Track more than 700 kilometres from the nearest major hospital.

An avid adventurer, Sonia has enjoyed years of motorcycling across the country, including trips through the Eyre Peninsula and Flinders Ranges.

But in April 2023, while heading up the Oodnadatta Track to Coober Pedy, her ride took a nosedive. A precarious patch of road pitched Sonia through her windshield.

"We had already covered hundreds of kilometres that morning and then the road suddenly turned into this deep, loose marby stuff and the front end of the bike ploughed in at about 90km/h," Sonia said.

"I was trying to do all the things you're told to do, but I knew I was going to lose control. I don't remember a great deal after that."

Sonia was riding ahead of her ambulance workmates Jarrod and Daz, who saw her thrown onto the road, where she landed on her head and was knocked unconscious.

The pair kicked into first response mode.



Sonia in Marree, SA before her horrific accident.

"By the time we got to her, she had that blank stare to her – just looking straight through us," Jarrod said.

"She had that waxy colour and I remember Daz and I pushing her back and checking her spine. We knew something wasn't quite right.

"We had a first aid kit with some fluids and pain relief, but nowhere near what Sonia needed. And while we had an emergency beacon, we had no phone reception, which added to the debacle."

With help from a coincidentally passing car, the group got Sonia to a nearby camping area and contacted the RFDS.

Just over 100 kilometres away, the team from the RFDS Marree Community Health Clinic was dispatched to meet the group.

**I was worried about my spine. I could move everything, but I'd just landed on my head at 90km/h. — Sonia Strong**

"I'm aware from my work that things go wrong that aren't currently presenting," Sonia said.

"I was calculating how long it was to hospital... there were definitely thoughts in my mind of what else might be going on with me and how far I was from help."

Sonia was provided with emergency pain relief and carefully loaded into the RFDS Ambulance and safely transported another 70 kilometres to William Creek Airstrip.

She was stabilised by an RFDS aeromedical crew comprising a doctor, flight nurse and pilot and evacuated to Adelaide. As a flying intensive care unit, the crew is able to provide the same care as a city emergency department.

"It was very surreal being in an ambulance and an aircraft as a patient," Sonia said.

"Everything about the flight was so professional – it was a super slick operation and I just felt like I was in the best hands."

Sonia's severe concussion caused vertigo and cognitive issues for weeks. The accident also left her with four broken ribs, a damaged AC joint on her shoulder, and a large haematoma on her hip and leg.

But Sonia knows it could've been so much worse. "I'm doing okay now," Sonia said.

"I definitely thought about what the alternative would've been if it wasn't for the Flying Doctor and it would've been horrible.

"I would've needed a car to somehow get me to Coober Pedy, which would've been a very bumpy three-hour trip by road with no guarantee they'd have everything for the scans and treatment I needed.

"I'm hugely grateful for the RFDS. There's a whole bunch of the population that wouldn't have access to emergency care without them."

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





Clockwise from top: Richard and Colleen with Remote Area Nurse Jack King; Colleen and Richard embrace at their home; view over the outback opal mining town of Andamooka.



# Brought back to life ... twice >

**RICHARD ELLIOTT thought he'd lost the love of his life when his partner Colleen Pickering's heart stopped not once, but twice, in the middle of the night – in the middle of the outback.**

Three years ago, Richard and Colleen opted for a reverse sea change – moving from the regional hub of Murray Bridge to the quirky desert town of Andamooka, 600 kilometres north of Adelaide.

The couple continued to run their electrical business while enjoying their new lifestyle off the beaten track, and in doing so, embraced Andamooka's harsh outback environment and extreme climatic conditions.

But as it happens with life's unpredictability, it was an innocuous day of work around the house that proved near fatal for Colleen.

"We were shifting furniture to get some carpet replaced – it was dusty and given my asthma, I was probably going over and above," Colleen said.

"That night, I thought I felt okay. I went into the bedroom for a rest, but it was a feeling that didn't go away."

When Richard came to check on Colleen, she was struggling to breathe and deteriorating rapidly.

Despite being an isolated outback town, Andamooka is fortunate to have an RFDS Community Health Clinic, available on-call 24/7 for medical emergencies.

"I called the RFDS and it hit me that it was really bad when Colleen started saying her goodbyes, 'Tell my kids, my mum and dad that I love them dearly,'" Richard said.

"We hugged and she tried to give me a kiss, but she passed out on the bed.

"I didn't notice it straight away, but she was actually blue and had a purple colour to her lips. I went straight to give mouth-to-mouth, but I couldn't because she was so rigid.

"So I started CPR on her – I didn't get any more than half-a-dozen compressions in when I heard a bang on the door."

Richard was so consumed, he hadn't heard the RFDS Ambulance pull up at their home.

With time of the essence, the RFDS Andamooka Clinic team led by Remote Area Nurse Jack King ran straight to Colleen.

Meanwhile, the team had the on-call RFDS Doctor on the phone providing further guidance.

"I got to Colleen and she was unconscious, not breathing, grey, blue and rigid – I did a very quick assessment and she was totally unresponsive," Jack said.

"Immediately, I suctioned her airway but noticed just how swollen her tongue and the inside of her mouth was. It was plainly obvious with the clinical picture I had that anaphylaxis was the cause.

"I was almost certain she had passed, so we started resuscitating her – and after a few minutes of effective CPR, we were able to attach the defibrillator and emergency oxygen.

"I couldn't get intravenous (into a vein) access because she was completely shut down and I couldn't risk failing with the intraosseous (into bone marrow) needle.

"So, I made the decision with our on-call doctor to administer intramuscular (into a muscle) adrenaline."

**I knew we had to do something else other than CPR, but we had limited hands. — Jack King** 🗣️

Within a minute, Colleen's complexion went from lifeless blue to gaining colour and she began to breathe again on her own.

But she was far from out of the woods.

"Usually, scenarios stop there. But that's when the real job started for us," Jack said.

"When Colleen got circulation again it was very difficult, because we had to continuously give her adrenaline and intravenous magnesium, and I had to constantly cannulate her in different areas.

"We finally got her in the back of the ambulance, but she was barely breathing."

Colleen urgently needed treatment at a major hospital, which meant getting her to the nearest airstrip 40 kilometres away.

When the ambulance had made it just halfway to the airstrip, Colleen's heart stopped for the second time.

In the back of the ambulance in the pitch dark with his patient, Jack described the scene as the toughest moment of his career.

"She arrested again and we'd already been fighting for hours," Jack said.

"I had a syringe of adrenaline hooked up to Colleen's cannula and after speaking to the doctor via radio, I went ahead and administered more straight away while doing compressions.

"It took a few excruciating minutes...but her heart restarted and she began breathing for herself again."

A revived Colleen was handed over to an RFDS aeromedical team comprising a doctor, nurse and pilot bound for Adelaide.

Richard had anxiously tailed the ambulance to the airstrip – at this stage, he wasn't sure if he'd see his soulmate again.

"I cuddled her some more when she was on the gurney. She was in and out of consciousness, but she kept saying 'I love you,'" Richard said.

Following a sleepless night, at 11am the next morning Richard received a call from the hospital.

The medical report confirmed Colleen had suffered severe anaphylactic shock due to dust and allergens disturbed during the furniture reshuffle.

Without the emergency care provided by the RFDS, Richard is certain he would've lost Colleen.

"I'm speechless in thinking if the RFDS wasn't here, what things would look like not just for us, but the township itself." Richard said.

Three days in ICU and a week in hospital later, the couple were finally reunited in the flesh.

"To me the RFDS is everything. They're my heroes. If I didn't have them, I'd be gone," Colleen said.

"It's unbelievable that I'm here today – I actually died twice."



Scan to watch the video >



# Protecting a special pocket of Australia >



Clockwise from left: Rural Generalist Dr Brett Goodsall performs a check-up on patient Lex at the Kalamurina Airstrip; Dr Brett Goodsall with patient Annemarie; Lex, Annemarie and Luke; View over the Kalamurina homestead.

## STATIONED AT the intersection of Australia's three central deserts, the challenges of accessing health care loom large for Kalamurina Wildlife Sanctuary managers, couple Luke Playford and Dr Annemarie van Doorn.

The Sanctuary is one of more than 30 across the country co-managed by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) – an integral line of work given Australia has the worst mammal extinction record of any developed country in the world.

Kalamurina, at a whopping 1.7 million acres of land, remains a stronghold for several threatened and declining species including the Crest-tailed Mulgara, a small carnivorous marsupial.

"We have many roles out here – aside from maintaining infrastructure and supporting our visiting science teams, a big part of our job is land management," Annemarie said.

"One of the big problems we have is feral animals, particularly foxes and cats, which prey directly on native wildlife. Conserving our native wildlife is vital for the future of Australia and the whole balance of our ecosystem."

Maintaining a very large conservation property like Kalamurina requires having workers like Annemarie and Luke living on-site full time.

More than 900 kilometres north of Adelaide, with an annual average rainfall of less than 170mm and

temperatures regularly exceeding 45 degrees, it's no secret that life for Annemarie, Luke and their son Lex can be challenging.

Annemarie said having access to the RFDS's regular primary health fly-in clinics, or 'bush runs' as they're colloquially known, is essential for their family.

"The biggest challenge is the remoteness. For me, I have an underlying chronic health issue and there are times when I need to see a doctor," Annemarie said.

"When the RFDS flies in once a month on the bush runs, it means that I can see a health specialist and get my scripts filled, which then get delivered by plane.

"Without the RFDS, I would have to take a day and a half each way to drive to Adelaide – using precious time, finding accommodation. It takes time away from work and leaves Luke alone to manage the large property."

## When you're really sick, the last thing you want to do is drive all the way to Adelaide.

— Annemarie van Doorn 

For Kalamurina, the RFDS is also an emergency safety net for the many visitors they welcome to

the sanctuary – throughout the year, groups can stay for weeks to survey the fauna and flora.

"We have science teams who come here with volunteers. It's peace of mind knowing if something does happen, we can call the RFDS. Without that, we wouldn't be able to run these programs," Annemarie said.

Given Kalamurina's vulnerability to floods, it's also about having access to RFDS clinicians via telehealth – over the phone or video call.

"If we get any more than 10mm of rain we probably can't move anywhere for about a week. So essentially in those situations we stay put," Luke said.

"To me, the RFDS is an essential life-support system for people living in remote Australia. Their services save lives, make people's lives a lot more comfortable, and without them I don't know how we'd survive out here.

"By enabling us to stay on location doing our jobs, the RFDS is contributing to conservation throughout Australia."



Scan to watch the video >



# William Creek pioneers virtual emergency centre >

**THE RFDS has opened a state-of-the-art health hub in the South Australian outback tourism town of William Creek that provides 24/7 emergency medical care with no health professionals physically in the room.**

In the event of a medical emergency, an intercom on the side of the building enables community members and tourists passing along the Oodnadatta Track to contact the RFDS and access the virtual emergency centre at all times of day and night.

The RFDS virtual emergency centre houses innovative digital health technology, including a telehealth unit with video conferencing and a comprehensive range of interchangeable diagnostic medical devices, connecting patients and their companions with an immediate RFDS doctor consultation and essential first responder advice.

“Kicking into action after a single emergency telephone call, the virtual emergency centre enables telehealth consultation, diagnosis and treatment with no health professionals physically in the room, 24/7,” RFDS SA/NT Chair Peter de Cure AM said.

“In the event of an emergency, first responders will be able to use telehealth technology to instantly contact on-call RFDS doctors. With an on-site AED and remote RFDS Medical Chest, the on-call doctor can advise the local medical chest custodian of immediate life-saving medications and care, while patients wait in a safe and secure treatment room for an RFDS aeromedical crew to arrive.

“The real innovation here is creating a system that facilitates the Chain of Survival and links patients with immediate hospital-grade medical treatment.”

The centre’s portable telehealth unit includes a fingertip oxygen monitor, blood pressure monitor and electrocardiography leads to help the RFDS with diagnosis.

It also has a comprehensive range of interchangeable medical devices that can transmit high quality

images for the on-call RFDS doctor, such as wound assessments, dermatology imaging, and throat and dental examinations – future attachments may also include an ultrasound probe.

In addition to emergency care, the new RFDS William Creek Community Health Service provides a multi-functional patient care space for the RFDS to conduct its fortnightly fly-in community health clinics, while increasing capability to introduce oral health and other allied health services to the town.

“Historically, RFDS teams have consulted with patients at the William Creek Hotel or in the attached tourist accommodation where there are no fixed medical provisions,” Mr de Cure said.

“We now have a fit-for-purpose space where our doctors, nurses and even our oral health team, physiotherapist and other allied health clinicians can set up full-scale clinics.”

**This will revolutionise health care for residents of William Creek, neighbouring stations and the tens of thousands of tourists who make their way along the remote Oodnadatta Track. — Peter de Cure AM**

As the closest town to Lake Eyre North and the gateway to the Simpson Desert, William Creek is a hub for nearby station communities and welcomes more than 26,000 tourists a year.

In response to a call for support from the local community, SA’s Outback Communities Authority (OCA), through the Federal Government’s Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, kickstarted the project with a \$1 million funding injection matched by RFDS fundraising to offset the total cost.

Extending the partnership between the RFDS and OCA, the RFDS William Creek Community Health Service will also benefit from high-speed internet capability through Starlink and Fortinet technology, which is being rolled out by the OCA across towns in outback South Australia as part of its Town Internet Ignition project.

“The OCA’s investment in this fantastic facility and our exciting new Town Internet Ignition project, also being delivered in partnership with the RFDS, will enable the RFDS to deliver an improved patient experience,” OCA Chair Jan Ferguson OAM said.

“The OCA is committed to supporting remote residents and the essential services needed to live and work in the bush. Together with the RFDS, we continue to work to meet the needs of remote communities such as William Creek.”

Federal Health and Aged Care Minister Mark Butler said the importance of having access to healthcare facilities in the region could not be overstated.

“Your postcode shouldn’t determine whether you have access to health care, which is why I’m proud that the Albanese Government is investing \$1 million towards this vital RFDS project in remote South Australia,” he said.

“These enhanced services, to be delivered by the RFDS, will provide an added level of comfort to the William Creek community, and will also play a key role in providing confidence to thousands of tourists that visit the local area each year.”

Member for Stuart, Geoff Brock, said the clinic would fill a gap in services in the remote and increasingly busy location.

“With the nearest towns some 200 kilometres away in either direction along the track, having this dedicated facility will provide comfort to locals and surrounding pastoralists.

“The new clinic also offers a round-the-clock lifeline in an area surrounded by dirt roads, which are increasingly used by visitors unfamiliar with the region.”

## A virtual emergency centre and community health clinic under one roof – in the heart of outback SA.



**DIRECT ACCESS** to William Creek Airstrip for RFDS aeromedical retrieval crews.



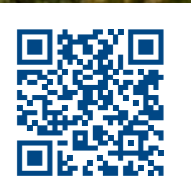
**TWO MULTI-FUNCTIONAL PATIENT CARE SPACES** for the RFDS’s regular fly-in GP, mental health and allied health consultations, including oral health.



**A VIRTUAL EMERGENCY CENTRE** with telehealth connectivity, diagnostic technology and treatment beds, available to community members and tourists in medical emergencies.



**A COMMUNITY SPACE** including a waiting area and accessible toilet.



Scan to watch the video >





The facility was officially opened by Federal Health & Aged Care Minister Mark Butler alongside Arabana Traditional Owners Jeffrey Warren and Kennethia Dadleh, community members and RFDS stakeholders at an event in William Creek.



# From the ground up >

Andy Newton and Ashleigh Mickan of the RFDS with APY Lands General Manager Richard King.

**IF you have been out and about during South Australia's festival season, you may have spotted the RFDS team, our Road Ambulances and our distinctive red RFDS medical tent at various events.**

In the past few months, the RFDS team has provided medical support at the 2024 Tour Down Under, RADL GRVL group ride, selected A-League matches, Norwood Food & Wine Festival and further afield at the Adelaide Fringe's Kulilaya Festival in the APY Lands.

"Our Road Ambulance team travelled more than 1,400 kilometres to the community of Umuwa to provide medical support at the Kulilaya Festival, held to honour the historic 40th anniversary of the APY Lands Rights Act," RFDS SA/NT Operations Manager, Ambulance Services Nicola Medlycott said.

"While not the simplest location to establish a temporary medical facility, the RFDS wanted to ensure the 1,500 attendees were well cared for on this iconic cultural occasion.

"Our involvement in these events is another example of the Flying Doctor's extension of care and desire to contribute more broadly to health care in South Australia."

**Whether it's care in the air or on the road, we're trying to find the opportunities where the RFDS can do more to help the health system and wider community. — Nicola Medlycott**

To complement the Flying Doctor's longstanding aeromedical service, the RFDS launched its Road Ambulance Service out of Adelaide in late 2021.

Today, the RFDS Road Ambulance team conducts around 500 patient transfers a year – from the Clare to the Riverland and South East.

With a roster of 30 paramedics and ambulance officers, the RFDS is also on hand to support and respond to non-emergency ambulance transport requests from public and private health service organisations.

"By transporting patients from hospitals to homes, aged care facilities, and respite centres, the RFDS can assist in creating more capacity in the health system for ambulance crews to attend life-threatening emergencies," Ms Medlycott said.

"It also means fewer delays for patients, especially those who need to go from a major hospital to their home in a regional or rural town.

"It is part of our ongoing commitment to support SA Ambulance Service, SA Health and the private hospital system to ensure patients receive the best possible care, no matter where they live, work or play."

The RFDS Road Ambulance Service out of Adelaide will welcome two new vehicles in the coming months, bringing its total ambulance fleet to four.

# What keeps our pilots flying >



**ON 26 APRIL, we celebrated World Pilots Day – an important opportunity to highlight the valuable contributions pilots make to the work of the Flying Doctor.**

Each year our pilots at RFDS SA/NT fly more than 6.5 million kilometres collectively, equivalent to 162 laps of the Earth's circumference. In doing so, they assist our medical crews to safely airlift more than 9,000 patients across South Australia and the Northern Territory each year.

To mark the occasion, we asked four of our pilots what their job means to them. Here's what they said...

RFDS pilots Ellie Gray, Jessica Dettmer, Laura Koerbin and Heather Ford.



**Ellie Gray**  
Pilot, Alice Springs

"I'm passionate about service to the community, especially rural and remote communities, and I love flying. The RFDS brings everything together in a strong and professional organisation, with an inspiring legacy. I'm proud to serve my community as part of the RFDS."



**Derek Alvarez**  
Pilot, Adelaide

"The values of compassion and respect, courage and kindness are at the heart of our national identity, and they remain the foundation of our national success. I truly believe that the work we do here at the RFDS reflects these values of what it means to be Australian. It is a privilege to be a part of this team and represent Australians through my love of flying."



**Kellie Job**  
Pilot, Alice Springs

"I've been an aeromedical pilot for six years and am still privileged to be a part of people's stories. We only see people for a small part of what in many cases is a long journey to recovery, but being part of an amazing team that puts so much into caring for our patients for that brief period of time is what being part of the RFDS means to me."



**Jessica Dettmer**  
Pilot, Adelaide

"It's been my childhood dream to join the RFDS and I am extremely grateful to now work alongside such dedicated, knowledgeable, and experienced flight and medical crews. Each day I am part of a team that improves care and enhances the lives of those who need it most, and that's incredibly fulfilling."





 Crafted in Switzerland

PC-24



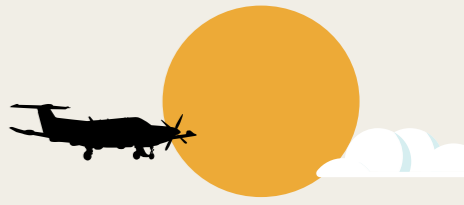
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## Spot the difference >



Put your eagle eyes to the test.

Can you circle the 10 differences between these two pictures of an RFDS PC-12 aircraft flying over Central Australia?



Scan to view answers >





# Double Up for the Doc >



ON 7 MARCH we held our inaugural Double Up for the Doc Day with the goal to raise \$300,000 on a single day to fit out the newest aircraft due to join our aeromedical fleet.

Just as our crews answer the call without hesitation, you rose to the occasion – and together we raised a remarkable \$425,000.

Double Up for the Doc Day wouldn't have been possible without our generous dollar-matching partners — Elders, S. Kidman & Co, Adelaide Airport and MGA Whittles Group of Companies.

Thanks to your wonderful support, this aircraft will be able to take to the sky with life-saving medical equipment.



All the equipment required to medically fit out an RFDS 'flying intensive care unit'.

Our dollar-matching partners >



S. Kidman & Co Pty Ltd



## Fuel up and give back >

Did you know whenever you fill up at an OTR, you can give back to the RFDS?

The RFDS is proud to be one of the six national charities backed by OTRGive. In the OTR mobile app, you can choose the RFDS as your charity of choice for when you scan your app in-store.



## Bottling up funds >

IN ALICE SPRINGS, Gary and Chris Bastin have been recycling 10-cent containers to raise funds for the RFDS for many years.

With help from other local supporters, the pair have raised around \$185,000 for the RFDS since 2018.

"No one knows when they may need the Flying Doctor and it has long been an ethos in remote areas that all should contribute to this important service. Recycling containers for cash reduces the amount of waste going to landfill and helps keep our streets and footpaths cleaner."



## Back with a bang >

FOLLOWING a five-year hiatus, the RFDS Port Augusta Auxiliary Ball returned with gusto in March, with more than 250 guests gathering in the transformed hangar to wine, dine and dance the night away.

A big thanks to the RFDS Port Augusta Auxiliary, RFDS staff and local community members and businesses who made the event happen and helped raise close to \$40,000 for the Flying Doctor.



## IGA and friends >

IGA OPERATOR Metcash recently handed over a \$40,000 donation, courtesy of their Supplier of the Month campaign throughout 2023.

A huge thanks to all the local suppliers for helping to keep the Flying Doctor flying.







Royal Flying  
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SOUTH AUSTRALIA &  
NORTHERN TERRITORY



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