



**FUNDRAISERS:** Wagga Multicultural Council CEO Belinda Crain with members of Wagga's Yazidi refugee community Khedder Sharkan and Shab Mahmood.

## Refugees raise thousands for fire recovery

BY CATIE MCLEOD

MEMBERS of Wagga's refugee community have pitched in to raise funds for a community project in Batlow after a devastating bushfire tore through the small town earlier in the year.

The group raised just shy of \$14,000 for Batlow Rotary, which will go towards the construction of an Men's Shed to provide locals with a space to connect with one another.

Snowy Valleys Shire councillor and Batlow Rotary secretary Margaret Isselmann said the project would encourage emotional well-being among members of the community, many of whom lost their sheds and tools to the flames.

Cr Isselmann said the project was still in its "early stages" and the Rotary was deciding between five possible sites to pitch to the

council. "It will be a great opportunity for us to do some working bees once we finally get the chance to get back together again," she said.

Cr Isselmann said the shed was still about 12 months away, coronavirus permitting, and upon completion it would be taken into the care of the Australian Men's Shed Association.

The Batlow shed will join more than 1000 of its kind around the country, though it will have an innovative twist - it's being constructed with straw panels in its walls.

Architect John Glassford will design the building, which will have the highest possible bushfire safety accreditation of BAL FZ.

"We hope it'll help the people of Batlow because this is part of what Rotary does. This is our contribution to the bushfire relief," Mr Glassford said.

Wagga Multicultural Council chief executive officer Belinda Crain told *The Daily Advertiser* she had been inundated with offers of help from different refugee communities in Wagga at the beginning of the year.

"People in these communities from refugee backgrounds started just bringing me in money ... I become a collection point for that money," Ms Crain said.

As the money started to build, the Multicultural Council and refugee communities looked for a specific project they could contribute to and were directed to the Batlow Rotary Club.

"For me, for them to go off their own bat and donate money, when I looked at how many people we had of different backgrounds ... The kindness and generosity in our new and establishing communities was just amazing," she said.

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