

Strong drive to feed survivors

Kensington-based charity Second Bite has been playing a huge role in the aftermath of Australia's worst natural disaster. With support from the Yarraville Foodbank and the Melbourne markets, the charity has undertaken daily 'food runs' to devastated bush communities. Reporter EUGENE BENSON rode along with Second Bite food program manager Russell Shields last Thursday.

AT Second Bite's home base, word had come through from Whittlesea that clean-up crews and hundreds of suddenly homeless families wanted bacon and sports drinks.

Second Bite had bacon, 75 kilograms of the stuff, which was loaded into a freezer van from storage in quick time.

Two pallets of fresh fruit and vegetables were taken to the Yarraville-based VicRelief Foodbank to be swapped for sports drinks. The swap was done and we were on our way.

Our driver, Russell Shields, said it was staggering how many people had been lending a hand since the deadly fires took so much away.

"There's just so much help up there. You back up the truck and then watch 20 blokes come and help you unload it — it's phenomenal."

When the road to Kinglake was reopened last week, Mr Shields was among the first to deliver fresh fruit and vegetables.

"When everyone turned up, [the

people who had remained there] were like, 'thank God'. The people up there hadn't had TV and didn't really know about all the support and all the trucks heading up.

"They had basically been trapped on the mountain."

When we arrived at Whittlesea, volunteer hands came from everywhere to direct the van and start unloading the bacon and drink.

A trip to take supplies to Flowerdale was, however, shelved as the road to the small town was re-closed by police.

Then word got out that crews in Kinglake were running low on milk, essential for the thousands of cups of tea and coffee helping to keep that town going.

As Second Bite had the perfect-size freezer van for a small 'shuttle-run', we were reloaded with milk crates and took off for the mountain.

Just as we were leaving the service base, a little hatchback drove into our path flashing its lights and beeping the

horn. A man got out of the car and came running over.

Lucky he did — we might have had milk, but the message had now come through that they also needed coffee cups. An obvious need that was almost overlooked.

We wound slowly up through the blackened forest to Kinglake.

The milk was dropped off and word quickly spread. The line at the coffee tent doubled in no time.

It was now getting well into the afternoon and Australia's cricketers were soon expected in town. The Second Bite van headed back to Kensington.

■ As well as helping those devastated by bushfires, Second Bite continued to get food to thousands of underprivileged families across Melbourne and deal with more than 70 charity agencies.

To supply food or to volunteer, or for more information on Second Bite, call 93763800.



Fresh food: A sign on the main street of Kinglake asking residents to help themselves to donated fruit and vegetables. Pictures: Eugene Benson