**Simon:** My name is Simon Ellis and I'm a community leader in the La Trobe Valley, Gippsland, in Morwell. The Hazelwood mine fire started on the ninth of February. Because it hadn't gotten to the mine, it wasn't sort of a worry at first, but when we saw it creep across and that's when you saw it get bigger and bigger is when you started to worry. They had a press conference which basically said, "Just close your doors and windows, turn off your air-conditioners and you'll be fine".

**Lauren:**﻿My name is Lauren Hilbert and I studied a Bachelor of Journalism at La Trobe University in Bundoora. The fire started in February and it was started by a grass-fire that managed to get into the Hazelwood coal-mine and that sent smoke and ash into the air. Now, the fire burnt for forty-five days and during that time the community was covered in smoke and ash so it created a huge impact for the residents of Morwell.

**Simon:** The scariest part was watching the smoke come in, but you don't realise what was in it until a bit later, so it was like; too late, you've already been breathing it, type thing.

**Lauren:**﻿It was really easy to see just why all these residents were so concerned. So they were really upset and they basically just wanted help. Giving it the state-wide attention that we were able to give it made the government stand up and say, "Right, we're going to have to go out there and fix this".

**Simon:** Finding that there was, I think, twenty-six different chemicals in the actual dust itself, which can affect your immune system. To find that you're breathing that in you're sort of like, you know, hang on, you're saying the smoke is safe but it's not really safe, is it.

**Lauren:**﻿When you arrive in a community, you want to do justice to their story, you want to give them the voice that they feel they don't have. You want to see that the work you're doing is making a change. When it was time to choose my course, I looked around and I found that La Trobe had really practical elements which was what attracted me to the course and I applied and I was lucky enough to get in.

**Simon:** I had a phone call from my Mum in the UK who got the daily mail newspaper with my picture, which I took, on it. It wasn't just a lone-town by themselves now, it was the whole of the world getting involved saying "Hey, something should be done about this". If it wasn't for Lauren doing what she did and getting involved and putting the word out there...it was an amazing response.

**END**