



Vernon junior firefighters Braeden Barnard and Dakota Becker have been gaining experience like heli-rides fighting B.C.'s wildfires this summer. (Photo submitted)

## Vernon junior firefighters on front lines

Pair of Vernon Secondary grads have been getting lots of experience fighting wildfires

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As the smoky skies linger in the Vernon area, a couple of former Vernon Secondary School students have been getting first-hand experience in fighting fires.

Dakota Becker and Braeden Barnard began the process of joining the Junior Fire Crew with the BC Wildfire Service back in March. More than 140 students from the Vernon School District applied for 10 positions, where they would participate in approximately eight weeks of training.

In May, the 10 students started their training which included getting familiar with hose lays, setting up pumps, digging guards and getting the S-100 and S-185 certifications, Safety and Fire Entrapment Avoidance, including helicopter safety and much more.

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In June, Becker and Barnard were selected from the 10 students to continue working with BC Wildfire Services on the Fire Stalkers Unit Crew and Vernon Initial Attack crews over the summer. Over the last month and a half, the pair has been at the Vernon base of the Kamloops Fire Centre for what has been called one of the worst fire seasons in B.C.'s history.

"It's been hard. I've been gone for two weeks at a time, living in a tent, at fire camp, but this has been an amazing opportunity," said Becker. "We spent a lot of time training and getting ready for the season. It's the hardest I have ever worked, but I love every minute of it. I really encourage any student to get involved in this great program.

“My favourite experiences so far have been the heli-rides, saving baby eagles from a burning tree in the Kamloops fire earlier this season, and the group mentality that you’re all going through hell but somehow everyone finds a way to stay positive and push each other through. No one is alone in this battle against the fires.”

The two former high school students will continue with BC Fire Services until the end of September.

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Vernon junior firefighters Dakota Becker (pictured) and Braeden Barnard have been gaining experience fighting B.C.'s wildfires this summer. (Photo submitted)