

Hero parents fail to rescue girl, 2

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Holly Lloyd-McDonald

October 03, 2007 12:00am

HEROIC parents braved huge flames in frantic attempts to rescue their two-year-old daughter from their burning home.

After plucking their four-year-old son Zac to safety, Grant and Jodie Wakefield repeatedly re-entered the inferno to try to reach his younger sister Sofia.

The nightmare began for the Wakefield family about 9.20pm on Monday when a fire started in the bedroom where Sofia was sleeping.

The blaze quickly spread throughout their house in King St, Swan Hill.

After saving Zac and putting him on the nature strip, Mr Wakefield, 28, and Ms Wakefield, 24, tried desperately to reach their toddler daughter.

As they repeatedly tried to rescue Sophie, the couple were repelled by the heat and flames seared their bodies.

Neighbour Tom Smith called 000 and took blankets to the Wakefields.

It is believed emergency crews had to physically stop the seriously injured but frantic parents from re-entering the house.

Swan Hill CFA duty manager, Bill Johnstone said: "The fire was well alight when we arrived and had penetrated into the roof.

"The occupants of the house were outside and we were told their child was inside."

While watching the firefight, the couple collapsed unconscious on the nature strip from life-threatening burns.

They were taken to the Swan Hill hospital.

Soon afterwards, a burns team from the Alfred flew in to stabilise the pair before they were flown to the Alfred.

Ms Wakefield was last night in a critical condition in the Alfred's burns unit with 60 per cent burns to her body.

Mr Wakefield, an engineer, sustained 25 per cent burns to his back, chest and hands and was in a stable condition.

Mr Johnstone said Zac, who is being cared for by friends, was doing remarkably well.

"But he was certainly overwhelmed, it's a bit for a four-year-old -- for anyone really," he said.

Mr Johnstone said it was another hit to the tight-knit Swan Hill community, already stricken by the drought.

The tragedy has shaken the Exclusive Brethren Christian sect to which Mr Wakefield belongs.

Members gathered outside the family home yesterday.

Acting Det-Sgt Adam Henry, of the arson squad, said: "The parents have tried to rescue the child. It is just tragic."

Swan Hill Rural City Council mayor Gary Norton yesterday said: "We will help where we can. The whole community would be quite devastated, especially because a small child has been lost.

"Our feelings go out to the whole family. They are a very close family."

Police do not believe the fire is suspicious.

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