

Dezi tried to shoot another officer

Mark Buttler

Victorian high country killer Dezi Freeman tried to shoot a fourth police officer during his murderous outburst.

Freeman pointed his weapon, reportedly a homemade shotgun, at that cop and pulled the trigger. It did not discharge, potentially saving the officer's life. Freeman had already shot three of their colleagues as they tried to search a bus in which he was living.

Senior constables Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart died at the Porepunkah scene and a third officer was wounded but survived.

Freeman had been banned from owning guns, but his folk singer wife Amalia was licensed and owned firearms.

Investigators seized those weapons from her soon after the Freeman manhunt began in August, possibly fearing he would try to get his hands on them. They remain in police possession.

Officers are still visiting locals and checking vacant accommodation and other structures in the area where a wanted man might hide.

Freeman has not been seen since fleeing into the bush on the morning of the shooting.

While the search for any trace of the dangerous fugitive remains active, the idea that he could be dead is gaining increasing traction.

Cadaver dogs were used in the area in the clearest sign yet that this is viewed as a strong possibility. Weeks of searching bushland, buildings and old mines, along with patrols from the sky in choppers equipped with gear to detect body heat, have turned up nothing.

Some in Freeman's family have come to believe he is dead, probably at his own hand. One local said there were people comparing Freeman with 1880s bushranger Ned Kelly.

"He's not Ned Kelly – he's a f—k-wit. On top of everything, (the police) were around there with a warrant for child sex offences," that man said. A \$1m reward is in place for anyone who helps police catch Freeman.



Dezi Freeman



Paul Richards with his son Mason, who loves using the TeachingBlox program and below, Emily Segal and her son Elliot. Picture: Luis Enrique Ascu

Making fun of learning

AI can tailor a program to the student

Zoe Smith

Like many parents, Paul Richards and his wife found themselves in need of help when their sporty son Mason found himself struggling with maths and science.

They initially considered a private tutor for him before a colleague recommended TeachingBlox, an AI-powered teaching program that taps into a student's interests to boost engagement and help them with their studies.

Mr Richards said the program had been "life-changing" for his 12-year-old son, a student at Melbourne's Yarra Valley Grammar.



Ross Paraskevas

The learning platform initially asks the participant a series of questions to gauge their interests and then keeps students engaged by offering personalised lessons, games and challenges that tie in with their hobbies – in Mason's case, a passion for AFL and cricket.

Mr Richards has been stunned by how quickly his son's maths skills have improved, particularly his ability to work out equations without a calculator.

"I got the shock of my life the other day," Mr Richards said. "One of the questions was about cricket – in four innings, he hit 110, 135, 127 and 240."

"He just starts working it out in front of me on the screen and then the program said 'Mason you're amazing'."

"It relates everything to what he's interested in, he's a very sporty boy," Mr Richards said.

"Mason said to me 'I know most of my maths questions now',

which is what he was struggling with before we got him on to this."

"I don't think a home tutor would actually do a better job than what this has done for him."

Melbourne mother Emily Segal said it has improved the maths skills of her son, Elliot, 11, a student at Bialik College, by offering challenges and questions that tie in with his love of cars.

"I got my son to start playing the games on the website and he absolutely loved it because it's all about games and getting points," she said.

"His teachers told me three months later in his parent-teacher interview that he's improved in his maths."

The program is being used by students all over Australia and is the brainchild of founder and AI expert Ross Paraskevas, a father of two who is a board member of Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar in Melbourne's northeast.

Several major global tech giants have shown significant interest in partnering with TeachingBlox to incorporate it into their platforms.

"TeachingBlox doesn't just teach content – it learns the child first. Every lesson adapts to who they are, how they feel,



and how they learn best," Mr Paraskevas said.

"It 'gamifies' the journey – as you're levelling up, you're earning points, you're making mistakes and failing."

"And all of a sudden you get to level 2, but to get to the level 2 and tackle level 2, you need the knowledge and the skill sets, the confidence."

"Through that process, you are earning points. But it's doing something even more special. As you're learning, it's identifying knowledge gaps. It's identifying skills gaps."

The learning platform has attracted huge interest in India as well as the United Arab Emirates, where a study is looking at 200 students across five schools over a three-month period.

"Half of the students will engage with TeachingBlox, while the other half will form a control group, enabling comparative insights," the UAE's

Department of Education said.

"The study will explore how personalisation and gamification affect student motivation, enjoyment, and engagement in learning, while also observing early indications of knowledge and skills gained."

And it's not just for kids – adults seeking self-improvement are also using the platform to up their skills.

Engineer Alex El-Kazzi, 32, from Sydney's southwest, uses TeachingBlox to help with language and marketing.

He said the platform helped him retain knowledge and he wished there had been a similar program when he was growing up.

"It would have saved a lot of time and money – my parents put me in tutoring at a very young age and I just watched how much they struggled to pay the tutor for an hour session," he said.

Frequent flyer hassle

Millions of Australians don't think frequent flyer points are worth collecting.

Fifty-seven per cent – equivalent to 12.2 million people – don't see value in Australia's two dominant frequent flyer programs, according to a survey by Finder.

Almost one in three (31 per cent) believe Qantas Frequent Flyer points are worthwhile, compared with

one in four (26 per cent) who say Virgin Velocity points are worth the chase.

Finder head of consumer research Graham Cooke said there was an art to earning and using frequent flyer points.

"Once you've earned your points, don't waste them. Flights and upgrades will get you much better value than using them to shop or pay for fees," he said.



Influencer Abbie Chatfield.

Chatfield defamed ex-friend

Alexandra Feiam

Influencer and former reality TV contestant Abbie Chatfield has lost a defamation suit and has been ordered to pay \$79,000 in damages for defaming one of her former friends on social media.

The failed Bachelor cast member was sued by her former friend of 10 years, Heath Kelley, after posting defamatory remarks about him on her

social media on May 7. A court has ordered Chatfield to pay \$79,000, as well as Mr Kelley's legal fees, which are estimated to cost \$30,000.

In a series of posts on her Instagram Story, where she has about 550,000 followers, she accused Mr Kelley of supporting "genocide", the "slaughter of children" and the "killing of gay men" and women in Gaza.

It came after she took offence to a post Mr Kelley made

about former Greens leader Adam Bandt losing his seat.

"Delusional gen*cide supporter now weirdly trolling me about a PROGRESSIVE AND KIND politician narrowly losing his seat," Chatfield wrote.

"Really revolting stuff and shows his level of intelligence and empathy... anyway if anyone works with him or knows him personally know that he supports the slaughtering of children."