

# **Documenting the key recruitment and sustainability issues related to emergency response volunteers in Tasmania**

## **Final Report**

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## ***Dedication***

This work is dedicated to the emergency response volunteers in Tasmania who tirelessly dedicate their time to keeping their local communities safe and well, and to creating strong bonds in these communities through the work they do. We acknowledge the immense contribution they make to the Tasmanian emergency management landscape.

We also acknowledge Regan Dwyer for the time that she volunteered to this project.

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Table 1: List of Acronyms

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| AT    | Ambulance Tasmania                                  |
| DPFEM | Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management |
| SES   | State Emergency Service                             |
| SLST  | Surf Life Saving Tasmania                           |
| TFS   | Tasmanian Fire Service                              |
| TILES | Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies      |
| UTas  | University of Tasmania                              |

Please Note: For clarity, in this report, we use the term 'emergency response volunteers' to refer to members of emergency management volunteer organisations around Tasmania, but we also at times use the terms 'volunteers' and 'members'. We also use the following acronyms to refer to each organisation: SLST (Surf Lifesaving Tasmania); AT (Ambulance Tasmania); RC (Red Cross); SES (Tasmania State Emergency Service); and TFS (Tasmania Fire Service). When we are referring to a focus group with more than one person, we use the abbreviation FG (focus group), and when we are referring to an individual interview, we use the abbreviation INT (interview).

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## Executive Summary

Emergency response volunteers play a pivotal role in essential services provision throughout Australia. Through giving their time, volunteers sustain communities and save lives. Australia relies heavily on their assistance, especially in times of disaster as their contribution significantly supports community resilience (Remenyi et al., 2016). In this research, we sought to document the key issues present around motivation, retention, and sustainability of emergency response volunteers across key government and non-government volunteer agencies in Tasmania. These issues have been documented in other research around Australia (Esmond 2009; Handmer et al. 2017; McLennan and Birch 2005; Stirling 2007; Stirling and Bull 2011; Stirling, Kilpatrick and Orpin 2011) and internationally (Clukey, 2010; Hamilton 2005; O'Meara et al. 2016; Pardess 2005; Timmons and Vernon-Evans 2013), but not specifically in a Tasmanian context where we have so many competing factors that may influence the emergency response volunteering sector.

Tasmania constitutes a unique emergency management context where geography and other factors mean that sometimes a single person can sometimes find themselves doing multiple emergency response volunteer roles in one local community. Our population is small, it is ageing, it is significantly dispersed, and the emergency management sector is heavily reliant upon volunteers in rural and regional areas of Tasmania. There are also similarities and differences across paid and volunteer experiences. Most significantly, how individuals manage mental-health issues (such as complex traumas and PTSD) as a result of volunteering, managing time commitments in a rapidly changing workforce, education and training barriers, and issues of poor leadership and organisational mismanagement. As such, this landscape presents unique issues that may influence motivation, retention, and sustainability of emergency response volunteering in Tasmania's rural environment as personal and organisational barriers are amplified within this contextualised landscape. This research conducted consultations and interviews with stakeholders from five key emergency management services in Tasmania, specifically the Tasmanian State Emergency Service, Tasmanian Fire Service, Ambulance Tasmania, and non-government services including The Red Cross and Surf-Lifesaving Tasmania.

Having asked emergency response volunteers about their best and worst days, it is unsurprising that their best days emerge in the form of situations where they save lives and make a difference, and their worst days focused on fatalities. Interestingly, although we deliberately avoided questions that focused on the barriers that worked against the

retention of emergency response volunteers, our data reflected a large number of themes about issues that significantly frustrated emergency response volunteers in Tasmania. Two key barriers to recruiting new volunteers were identified in the discussion, these being: lack of time and workplace flexibility; and misinformation about emergency response volunteering and incorrect media messaging. Discussion about factors influencing recruitment was outweighed by those factors the volunteers thought of as influencing retention of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania. Considering we asked no explicit questions seeking information about these barriers, the importance of these issues for volunteers in our study is well evidenced in the degree to which these themes dominated the discussion. The issues included:

- Lack of training opportunities due to lack of trainers and assessors;
- Length of time invested in training;
- Lack of recognition of existing training/skills;
- Lack of recognition of changing capabilities;
- A rift between volunteer vs career workers, and the attitudes towards volunteers from paid workers;
- Intractable operational issues;
- Old boys club dynamics; and
- Being taken for granted and ignoring local knowledge.

All these issues were discussed at some length and considerable frustration and anger were associated with them in the everyday experiences of volunteers. Volunteers felt that, at times, these issues were needlessly leading to the deaths of community members in Tasmania.

These barriers were balanced out to some extent by factors that motivated emergency response volunteers to stay, but these were limited, including: gratitude and recognition from the community; and psychological support post-incident. Discussion about barriers, however, was also balanced out with discussion of the motivations for doing emergency response volunteering. Participants in our study discussed a vast range of intrinsic, personal motivations and extrinsic, external motivations that facilitated the retention of the volunteers with emergency management volunteer organisations in Tasmania.

Intrinsic, personal motivators took the form of the rewarding, fun nature of the volunteering work, the thrill and excitement of this work, the satisfaction of practicing learned skills in real incidents, and fostering personal growth and career development amongst younger volunteers and clubs. Extrinsic motivations emerged from doing good through helping people in their local communities and making a difference, friendship and belonging in the extended volunteer 'family', and creating safety and security in these communities.

Derived from the discussions in this project, we have developed a set of strategies that emergency management volunteer organisations in Tasmania might adopt to address some of the issues discussed in the report below.

It is acknowledged that the relationship between volunteers and the hosting organisation needs to be based on command and control in the context of a critical incident. However, the organisation/volunteer relationship encompasses many more elements and in these lie opportunities to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of both the relationship and the experience for both the organisations and the individual and groups of volunteers.

It is possible to identify from the research a number of principles that are fundamental to creating an environment for a healthy emergency management volunteer sector to be achieved. An awareness of these principles will assist in the development and maintenance of positive volunteer experiences. It is recommended that these principles be considered when developing strategies to enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteers. These principles include:

1. The Volunteer Experience
2. Trust
3. Cross-pollination
4. Voice/agents of change
5. Local knowledge and context; and
6. Consistency and quality.

By combining the knowledge gained from the research findings with the principles identified above, it is possible to suggest some strategies that could be implemented in emergency management sector organisations to enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteers. These strategies are organised in relation to a number of key areas that feed into each other and, when linked together, offer an implementation framework that is based on a process of continuous improvement. These include:

1. Communication;
2. Maximising local knowledge and organisational intelligence/expertise;
3. Education/training and skills maintenance;
4. Representations in the public domain; and
5. Trust/Positive relationships.

The process that has been represented above provides a framework for the identification of potential strategies that can be further developed in collaborative workshops involving the various organisations and their volunteers. It is recommended that these strategies be reviewed, and additional strategies relevant to each organisation be identified in future work undertaken by the organisations.

## Introduction

This research report documents the key issues around motivation, retention, and sustainability of emergency response volunteers across key government and non-government volunteer agencies in Tasmania. There is clear evidence that the emergency management sector broadly is totally reliant on volunteers, especially in regional and rural Australia, and it is therefore crucial to have an up to date understanding of the needs of these volunteers. As noted in the *National Emergency Management Volunteer Action Plan, 2012* (Australian Government, 2012, p. 6), “[w]ithout dedicated, well prepared, resourced and equipped volunteers the ability of Australian communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters would be catastrophically reduced”. It is also known that emergency management volunteers can be exposed to distressing and traumatic incidents that lead to issues such as PTSD (Jaffe et al., 2012).

The stressors on the volunteer sector generally, as well as specific issues related to the emergency response context, pose a significant threat to the sustainability of the voluntary sector and the success of emergency service responses to incidents. As such, understanding the context specific motivation, retention, and sustainability of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania is vital. This includes understanding of a range of issues such as: why volunteers keep volunteering; how the voices of the volunteer sector can be heard; what satisfaction looks like for volunteers; when costs incurred outweigh the motivation to volunteer; what volunteer resilience looks like in response to changing stressors; what impact emergency response volunteering has on regional communities; and what needs to be changed. In short, what are their needs and why do people volunteer, why do they stay volunteers, and why do they discontinue volunteering across these different emergency response organisations?

This project aimed to document the key issues influencing motivation, retention, and sustainability of emergency response volunteers by consulting with and interviewing key stakeholders, key staff, potential volunteers, existing volunteers, and discontinued volunteers with five emergency response volunteer organisations in Tasmania. The key objectives of the project included:

- 1) To consult and build connections with key stakeholders about emergency response volunteering in Tasmania;
- 2) To gain ethical approval to conduct interviews;

- 3) To conduct interviews with emergency response volunteers (about their experiences) and key stakeholders (about the issues impacting emergency response volunteering) and analyse the interview data;
- 4) To inform emergency response organisations across Tasmania about the key issues in workshops with participating organisations that will shape policy and practice.

It included both government and non-government organisations that facilitate the volunteering of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania to ensure as many issues as possible were captured. The emergency response organisations that collaborated in this project are: Ambulance Tasmania, Tasmania Fire Service, Tasmania State Emergency Service, Red Cross, and Surf Life Saving Tasmania.

The data and analysis presented in this report will be used as a basis for a series of strategic policy workshops with ER stakeholders and volunteers to generate applied policy outcomes to inform ER volunteer practice and management in Tasmania. A focus on the unique rural and regional landscape of Tasmania, where ER is almost entirely reliant upon volunteers, is important because this may not be sustainable in the long term due to aspects specific to the Tasmanian context such as an ageing, small, and dispersed population, and limited resources in the event of significant natural disaster.

## **Literature review: what we know about emergency response volunteers**

Previous literature highlights that whilst there are clear and positive reasons for members to become volunteers, there are also significant personal and operational barriers which threaten the retention and sustainability of service. Volunteers are a distinct group from paid employees as they do not receive payment in return for their labour, making their motivation and retention is unique. Within the context of emergency service organisations, skill acquisition and training programs offer volunteers practical engagement with community and their own altruistic urges (Fahey et al., 2002; Fallon and Rice, 2015). Consequently, volunteers cannot participate within their organisation in the same way as their paid counterparts, with financial incentive replaced by personal passions, values, social motivation, and situational opportunities (Carpenter and Myers, 2010; Fallon and Rice 2015; Marx 1999; Ramalingam et al., 2019). This context is even more complex with emergency response volunteers that have unique experiences, such as managing various illnesses, injuries, and fatalities, responding to crises, and being part of major international events (Ranse and Carter, 2010), and then managing the often personal mental health issues that subsequently develop as a result of exposure to trauma (Jaffe et al., 2012). Emergency response volunteering is inherently exciting and personally rewarding, and often develops professional pathways that draw people to volunteer (Phung et al., 2018). Therefore, sustainability and retention rates need to be considered from a person-centric viewpoint, and because some Tasmanian emergency management volunteer organisations are state based and others federal, volunteer experiences and motivations vary in terms of operation, resource allocation, and rural and regional needs.

### *Poor retention rates*

Poor retention rates of volunteers are a significant loss to communities and future volunteer opportunities within the emergency services given the higher rates of illness, preventable disease, and shorter life expectancy in Australia's rural and remote areas (Moon et al., 2018). Poor retention rates of volunteers are a loss to communities and emergency services, as the Australian fire service holds roughly 220,000 volunteers alone (McLennan et al., 2009). Disadvantaged communities rely more on sworn emergency response volunteers when paid first responders are under-resourced (Malega and Garner, 2019), but Australia relies most heavily on volunteer participation in the health sector, with often more volunteer than paid paramedics on duty, and most road crash rescue work being done by volunteers. Retaining these volunteers is crucial, even if they can be underequipped and insufficiently trained, because they are on-call as first

responders responsible for providing life-saving support in underfunded communities (Stirling et al., 2007). Reasons volunteers disengage from organisations include: lack of personal time; regional and geographical constraints; poor leadership and management; the rise of professionalism; risk to personal safety; health and wellbeing; and diminished sense of gratification (Cicognani et al., 2009; Cowman et al., 2004; Hayes et al., 2004; Jaffe et al., 2012; Moir, 2018; Phung et al., 2018). Being on call 24 hours a day is also a significant barrier for recruitment, sustainability, and retention (Esmond, 2009). Volunteers are now 'time sensitive' and 'weigh up' the time they can give with their daily competing demands (Noble, 2000). All emergency services experience unique crisis situations, yet overall they share similar barriers which contribute to poor retention rates, and these issues can be exacerbated within rural and remote areas.

### *Rural and remote areas*

The context of emergency response volunteering in Australia is marked by a specific context influenced by rural and regional geography (Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace, 2009; Stirling et al., 2007; The Council of Ambulance Authorities, 2011). In rural areas, the population is small, it is ageing, it is dispersed, and the emergency management sector is heavily reliant upon volunteers (O'Meara et al., 2012a). However, due to inadequate resource allocation and low education in remote areas, effective training may only be found through practical experience. Kulik (2017) found young people were motivated to volunteer for solidarity and empowerment. This might be challenging to sustain, however, when 40% of emergency response volunteers typically have not completed any formal education beyond year 10 (Hayes et al., 2004). Emergency response volunteering therefore provides rural communities with engaging, new forms of learning through a familiar community context, most significantly for locations with low education rates, and credit for furthering their future career (Friedland and Morimoto, 2005). These educational opportunities for emergency response volunteers in regional areas can be jeopardised, however, by the simple fact that these areas are consistently underfunded, with their skills therefore threatening to become outdated or obsolete (Hayes et al., 2004, Phung et al., 2018). This is concerning given they attend highly stressful events that require unique forms of training (Folwell and Kauer, 2018), and without feeling capable to respond, volunteers may disengage from service.

### *Leadership and management*

Effective support from other volunteers, supervisors, and a positive workplace culture, all contribute to retention. Given that volunteers are unpaid, recognition for a job well done takes on an added importance to determining their ongoing participation and relationship with an organisation. Positive feedback and recognition is essentially a form

of 'symbolic payment' that volunteers receive for their assistance (Fallon and Rice, 2015; Farmer and Fedor, 1999). For many ambulance and paramedic volunteers, receiving a 'pat on the back' for their hard work greatly increases their motivation to stay with the organisation. As Stirling et al. (2007) explain, volunteers appreciate having 'back-up' on significant emergency cases through support by supervisors and highly trained professionals. This builds confidence and releases the burden of responsibility. Similarly, McLennan et al. (2009) claim that a major contributor to volunteer dissatisfaction within the fire service, is poor leadership and brigade management. Cohesive social networks, social support, and effective leadership are essential to positive volunteer experiences (Rice and Fallon, 2011). As a result, the volunteer experience becomes more enjoyable and satisfying, contributing to their overall satisfaction, sustainability, and ensuring their retention.

#### *Professionalisation and the volunteer/career (paid) divide*

Professionalisation of the workforce has impacted all forms of emergency services. As the push for tertiary education increases, so too does the notion of professionalism. This has led to schisms within traditional volunteer services, such as Surf Lifesaving, where one is a volunteer and another is a more qualified, paid professional Lifeguard (Brawley, 2001). This can lead to conflict between paid and volunteer staff. On-call, paramedic volunteers can feel frustrated when not utilised, especially when ambulance services are already stretched, fostering feelings of mistrust between groups (Phung et al., 2018). Volunteer labour is discriminated against under organisational employability structures, pushing them away from resource allocation and professional decision making, leaving them to be 'wonderful community helpers' without a sense of power (Fahey, 2005), yet we know that integration of these volunteers into the organisations is crucial (O'Meara et al., 2012b). Not only has the lack of effective management and professional relationships directly contributed to a decrease in volunteers motivation to contribute (Simsa et al., 2019), but it is also dangerous in emergency situations. As Kowalski-Trakofler et al. (2003) explain, team communication and trust is critical in maintaining safe work practices for the volunteers, but also essential to managing stress in hazardous environments often present in emergency situations.

#### *Health and wellness*

Previous research demonstrates that emergency volunteers experience a range of positive outcomes from their involvement such as task satisfaction, well-being, and health (Marx, 1999; St-Louis et al., 2016). However, we also know that emergency response volunteers can be exposed to distressing and traumatic incidents that lead to issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Adams, 2007; Jaffe et al., 2012; Mitchell

et al., 2004; Pardess, 2005). Disaster relief and crisis situations which call on both government and non-government funded bodies, such as The Red Cross and State Emergency Services, can be highly stressful and demanding. As a result, some volunteers may return home with depleted physical and mental health, particularly in conflict zones which cause a greater risk of PTSD (St-Louis et al., 2016). Medical and fire service volunteers are often first on scene and alone, meaning greater responsibility for their efforts, contributing to heightened stress and anxiety (Phung et al., 2018). Crisis situations involve long hours of repetitive physical work and high emotional strain (Cicognani et al., 2009; Cowman et al., 2004; Simsa et al., 2019), and while their 'physiological' needs are met by free food and drink (Hall and Innes, 2008), these volunteers often seek out their own external training to cope with sensitive areas (Folwell and Kauer, 2018). Each emergency service volunteer is subjected to different types of health-related issues depending on their department, but all experience risk associated with safety, health and wellbeing, and absences from families and work. The consequence of this can be lack of retention of these volunteers because the risks can outweigh the pleasure of doing something good for the community, and this greatly impacts the functionality of the emergency service as a whole (Ranse and Carter, 2010).

### *Gratification*

Further research must examine whether the gratification experienced through emergency response volunteering is significant enough for retention. Esmond (2009) observed that traditional forms of service medals (found in fire and medical services) are not as effective as they once were, meaning that there is a deeper need for creative ways for emergency response volunteers to be awarded appropriate and deserving recognition for their contributions to emergency services and positive impact for the community. In contrast, Surf Lifesaving clubs foster deeply authentic experiences for volunteers due to their beach lifestyle and social contribution, meaning any income-based extrinsic rewards are simply not relevant (Hall and Innes, 2008). The contrasting research on gratification emphasises the fact that each individual experiences volunteer services differently and how to sustain their involvement is individually unique. Therefore, any research which aims to investigate the experiences of emergency service volunteers must include a contextual analysis of individual experience and how issues of retention, for example, may differ from one emergency service to another. Most importantly, we need to explore whether altruism alone is strong enough to overcome negative experiences and the personal barriers present in emergency services.

### *Conclusion*

The existing research demonstrates that stressors on the volunteer sector generally, as well as specific issues related to the emergency response context, pose a significant threat to the sustainability of the emergency response volunteer sector and the success of emergency responses to incidents. Most significantly, volunteers experience less assistance and resource allocation due to their volunteer status. This means that emergency response volunteers are less likely to effectively manage their mental health, especially traumatic experiences which occur as a result of their volunteer work. Whilst it is evident that volunteering with state and non-government services develops much needed education for people within regional areas, there still remains evidence of significant lack of training for members who are first-responders, which in turn increases pressure to perform with inadequate training. Issues surrounding poor leadership and organisational mismanagement appear as a substantial barrier for retention. With this knowledge in mind, the evidence exists to suggest that there is a need for further research into emergency response volunteers' experiences specifically in Tasmania to explore how to address these issues. This is of especial importance as rapidly changing workforces are creating new and diverse experiences which were not experienced in the past, such as time management burdens and small areas simply lack people to recruit to emergency response volunteer roles. Further research is required specifically in the unique rural and regional landscape of Tasmania, as personal and organisational barriers are amplified within rural landscapes.

## Methodology

In light of the gaps in existing knowledge, our project sought to document the key issues influencing motivation, retention, and sustainability of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania by consulting with and interviewing volunteers and key stakeholders, with five emergency management volunteer organisations in Tasmania. We focused on government and non-government organisations that train and manage the work of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania to ensure we capture as many issues as possible across a range of emergency response volunteer sectors. The key objectives of this project were therefore:

- 1) To consult and build connections with key stakeholders about emergency response volunteering in Tasmania
- 2) To gain ethical approval to conduct interviews
- 3) To conduct interviews with emergency response volunteers (about their experiences) and key stakeholders (about the issues impacting emergency response volunteering) and analyse the interview data
- 4) To inform emergency response organisations across Tasmania about the key issues in workshops with participating organisations that will shape policy and practice

To address these aims, this project used a qualitative approach to collect data from emergency response volunteers, and emergency response key stakeholders, to better understand the motivation, retention, and sustainability of the emergency response volunteer sector in Tasmania. Data was collected in three stages, with each stage informing the next.

The first stage of the methodological process involved extensive connection building and consultation with key emergency response volunteers and stakeholders. Aligning with discussion in the National Emergency Management Volunteer Action Plan, 2012 (Australian Government, 2012, p. 17), community awareness-raising must begin in localised contexts. As such, the research team sought to inform stakeholders about the methodological arrangement of the research project, and to gather feedback on this approach, through consultation. We negotiated the date and location of the consultations based on advice from the five organisations, and we worked to align with already scheduled events and meetings, so the research did not impose burdensome requirements on the capacity of the organisation. The consultation process discussed what stakeholders believed were the key areas of concern (for instance, around motivations, barriers to sustainability) and this shaped the methodological approach for the project and the development of the interview question used in the second stage of

the research. The ethical clearance documentation was developed upon completion of this consultation process.

The second stage of the project involved seeking ethical clearance for the study and conducting semi-structured individual and focus group interviews with emergency response volunteers and key stakeholders (for instance, TFS brigade chief). Ethical clearance was granted by the Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Tasmania. Once this was approved, the research team worked with the five participating organisations to organise focus groups and individual interviews. The key research assistant worked with emergency response volunteer organisations to find times where volunteers and other stakeholders were already coming together as a group so that focus groups might be organised to align with these gatherings. The focus groups and individual interviews were semi-structured using questions that emerged out of the consultation process. They involved existing volunteers, potential volunteers, and people that discontinued their volunteering with the five participating organisations in Tasmania. These focus groups and interviews explored, in localised, specific ways the issues generated from consultation, in addition to issues identified in existing literature.

The third stage of the research process focused on the analysis of project data and the dissemination of the research results to the organisations that participated and to the community via a series of engagement and development activities. The recordings of focus groups were initially transcribed using a real time, automated transcription service called Otter, and the recordings were then used to edit the initial Otter transcripts. The analysis of the data then proceeded in a series of data analysis workshops involving the research team. Each team member was involved in reading through and coding the transcripts for initial codes. This ensured we implemented inter-coder reliability so each member of the team was interpreting the data in similar ways. We followed a process of thematic coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2012) and analysed in terms of key issues that emerged from the data, rather than approaching the data with any set preconceived ideas about what the data would say. After these workshops, two members of the research team recoded all the data and discussed the themes and sub-themes that emerged. When the analysis was complete, the research team developed community engagement workshops (to be convened regionally) wherein the team presented the research findings to key stakeholders in Ambulance Tasmania, Tasmania Fire Service, State Emergency Service, Red Cross, and Surf Life Saving Tasmania around the state. These included stakeholders involved in the original consultation process so the research project process 'closed the loop' to ensure that research outcomes directly informed policy and practice in the participating

organisations. The workshops were focused on regional-specific policy strategies for developing the capacity of emergency management volunteer organisations to support and sustain their emergency response volunteer base.

## Participants

The number of volunteers interviewed in this research aimed to reflect the proportion of volunteers in each organisation. The final sample of volunteers who participated was also influenced by the availability and willingness of participants. However, every effort was made to ensure the participants reflected the diversity of volunteer experiences in Tasmania. In order to achieve this:

- each area of the state was represented;
- views from all roles, ranks and positions in the volunteer arm of each organisation were included; and.
- while the gender representation differed across the organisations, a cross section of views was collected.

The total number of volunteers interviewed in both focus groups and interviews was approximately 185 people. Tables 2 – 5 (below) provide details of the participants in terms of organisational membership, age, gender, years of service.

Table 2: Volunteers involved by organisation

| Organisation           | Numbers of people interviewed |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Tasmanian Fire Service | 63                            |
| SES                    | 56                            |
| Ambulance Tasmania     | 43                            |
| Surf Life Saving       | < 20                          |
| Red Cross              | < 10                          |

Table 3: Volunteers involved by age

| Years | Number of people |
|-------|------------------|
| 17-25 | 37               |
| 26-40 | 59               |
| 41-60 | 75               |
| 60 +  | 18               |

Table 4: Volunteers involved by gender

| Gender | Number of people |
|--------|------------------|
| Male   | 103              |
| Female | 82               |

Table 5: Volunteers involved by years of volunteering service \*

| Years of service | Number of people |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1-3              | 23               |
| 4-10             | 68               |
| 11-25            | 65               |
| 25-40            | 28               |
| 40+              | 5                |

\*In some cases, years of service exceeds the duration of involvement over time, as it includes the contribution of 'multiple hatters' who have worked for multiple organisations, either simultaneously or at separate times.

## Data Collection

We used focus groups and interviews with the organisations that we did the research with. The interviews we did were face to face and they were conducted with one person, such as with SLST volunteers (e.g. SLST INT1). Where possible, we conducted focus groups and timed these around the 'natural' gatherings that volunteers had in the field in their local communities, so for instance our focus group would be timed to occur when a recognition ceremony was happening or when a training session was being conducted. Our focus groups were very productive with lots of discussion and involved anywhere from just two people all the way to groups of eleven people. This meant there were points where participants were talking over each other, were difficult to hear because there were so many voices in the room, and consequently this meant that we were unable to discern between the different voices in play. As such, we have noted when voices change in the transcripts of the focus groups, but we cannot attribute specific statements to specific people. We focused our analysis on the content of what volunteers had to say instead of how the different volunteers voices worked together as a narrative. We have also deliberately used gender neutral language throughout the report to further anonymise the data. The only exception to this is when participants have used gendered pronouns (she/her/hers; he/him/his) in their quotes.

One of the most interesting characteristics of Tasmanian emergency response volunteers we found in our study is what we called 'double hatters'. These volunteers did this type of work for more than one emergency management volunteer organisation in Tasmania. Sometimes they worked these roles at different times of their lives, but most commonly they did these roles simultaneously. These volunteers donated substantial amounts of time to the organisations they worked with and they had a unique position in the data in how they could see the challenges and opportunities across the two organisations that they worked for. For instance, they might talk about how a system is particularly challenging for them in their volunteer role in one organisation, and then go on to

describe how the other organisation they volunteered for had a much better system that functioned more seamlessly. In some instances, this meant that the volunteers could see the improvements required with relative ease, but it is also meant they experienced substantial frustration, especially when the organisation they worked for with the challenging process did not seek to improve the process and the volunteer was fully aware of how easily this might be fixed from their experiences in the other organisation.

## Research Findings

Our analysis of the data in this project revealed dominant thematic areas in the discussion of the issues with interview and focus group participants. These included themes around key questions that we asked in the interviewing processes, such as about their best and worst days as emergency response volunteers. For the most part, however, the discussion about their emergency response volunteering roles in Tasmania focused around four overarching themes:

1. Motivations for doing these forms of volunteering (why emergency response volunteers do their work);
2. Barriers to recruiting emergency response volunteers (what stops people from seeking recruitment to do this volunteering in the first instance);
3. Barriers influencing retention of emergency response volunteers (what stops the organisations from keeping emergency response volunteers engaged); and
4. Factors supporting retention of emergency response volunteers (what keeps emergency response volunteers doing their work).

It was clear from the discussions of participants in our study that being an emergency response volunteer was incredibly challenging, but also incredibly rewarding. They truly loved the work that they did in their roles. There were many issues that created significant frustration for these volunteers and at times these frustrations seemed to outweigh the reward and gratitude. Most importantly, however, the comments from our participants make it abundantly clear what the issues are and how emergency management volunteer organisations across Tasmania might be able to respond to ensure their volunteers are being appropriately supported, rewarded, and are receiving gratitude in ways that will outweigh the challenges and sustain their volunteering. This is incredibly important given the hugely complex landscape influencing their experiences. For instance, we had many volunteers that were 'double hatters' (where they do more than one volunteering role), had been volunteering for many years (quite a few upwards of 50 years!), and were (reluctantly) considering retirement from volunteering – and this retirement seems to happen much later than their retirement from paid work! These are considerable issues currently colliding in the emergency response volunteering landscape. Emergency management volunteer organisations will need to manage this in the near future as this will mean a significant loss of institutional memory and richly skilled and qualified people. Most importantly, loss of these volunteers will be shaped by factors such as how they live in small communities that can barely sustain themselves and therefore lack new recruits simply because people do not move there or stay there, and this is happening in areas where volunteers are the *only* responders within substantial distances around them.

## **Best and worst days for emergency response volunteers**

One of the key questions we asked of emergency response volunteers in our study was about their best and worst days in doing their role. Although at the time we did not attribute huge significance to this question, it was clear discussion about this was enormously significant for articulating the things they find incredibly challenging, and that they believe subsequently influence volunteer attrition if there is not enough support provided by the organisations. This question also provided clarity around the things they find most rewarding, and perhaps influence volunteer retention. The points raised by participants in our study definitely link with how they experience these best and worst days.

In terms of the worst day, some people mentioned things like how, in incidents they went to, it was troubling to see that “[t]he plight of the people was paramount...but the plight of the wildlife was nil...the number of wildlife, there were mountains of them” (RC FG1). However, overall discussion about the volunteers worst days followed a single, overarching theme: exposure to fatalities. This was not just about seeing fatalities of strangers (TFS FG1) – it was about losing members of the local communities that they were tasked to protect and that they clearly cherished greatly, in addition to losing people they knew: “Small town, you know everyone” (SES FG1). Experiencing the death of a community member was by far the worst experience for emergency response volunteers in Tasmania:

At the end of the day, when you know that you're coming back with a fatality. Yeah. So, you know, I've been involved in numerous search's where, unfortunately, we've come across, you know, deceased bodies. And you know that you're not bringing someone back to their family (SLST INT1).

Coming across a fatality that's a pretty big downer (TFS FG3).

Someone dying in your arms (AT FG1).

Not being able to return community members to their families was incredibly challenging for emergency response volunteers, and this was talked about as their worst days even when they were only involved in the search for these fatalities:

I've been in a lot of searches for fatalities, but I've never actually come upon a fatality. And I think we are probably luckier than other organisations like volunteer ambulance and the volunteer firies, in that we don't get exposed to that as much, not nearly as much (SLST INT4).

For this volunteer, there was a certain buffer that came from being at a distance from fatalities, but they recognised the fact that emergency response volunteers in other organisations would not have that buffer. Nonetheless, if a search for possible fatalities is experienced as challenging for this volunteer, we suspect that other emergency response volunteers, like SES and AT, most certainly require ongoing, intensive counselling support (discussed further below) after incidents where fatalities are involved, especially given the frequency with which they may be encountering these circumstances.

In terms of the best day, this varied a little, but volunteers mostly relayed similar themes in their discussion. Some volunteers simply said their best day was focused on the excitement of doing the role: "when you are out in the bush doing a reduction burn and its hot and intense" (TFS FG2). They most often outlined examples to demonstrate the context of how they were considered their best days and we have included one example from each organisation below to demonstrate. There was one example that was very significant – the first time that women were allowed to be part of the fire brigades in Tasmania:

My husband was he actually started in the fire brigade when we moved to Carrick where I live. We moved here in '89 in the October and they come and saw him just before Christmas. You know, we're looking for the new members. So we go in March the following year. They had extensions to the station so the wives were invited along to the afternoon tea, so there was four of us. Well I think the secretary was, she already there, but she was just secretary. Three of those wives, 'Well why can't females do these jobs?', 'You can't do this and you can't do that', 'Now, that's not exactly right'. Anyway, we joined, four of us females joined and there's actually two of us still there. There's five females in the brigade now, but for two of us, it's thirty years in March we've been there (RC FG1).

This was a huge moment for these women in the brigades. This, however, was an exception to the main theme in these discussions which was most definitely putting into practice the skills and knowledge they had been provided with by the emergency management volunteer organisations they worked for. Being able to bring all their experience together with skills represented a significant achievement, especially when it led to people surviving. A key theme in these discussions is again the local communities they do the volunteer work for. Even when their best day did not involve emergencies, and instead involved lolly drops, it was being able to engage with the community which really mattered for emergency response volunteers:

There was a case where it wasn't looking at good, but we actually did get a very positive outcome in terms of the rescue. So, where it did look like, 'Shit,

this is not going to be a positive ending'. Yeah, it actually did turn out. The whole team gelled together in terms of the emergency response teams...we did find that, 'Shit, yes, we've got that person okay', and you bring them back home. I think that's when you turn around and think this is what it's all about. When it didn't look good, we've managed to pull it off and yeah, come back to their family (SLST INT1).

My best experience was during the deployment to Townsville in the floods. Myself and one other volunteer were sent to Julia Creek and Julia Creek was pretty devastated during the floods. We heard on the grapevine during the incident that there was a farmer who had a mental illness and the townspeople were concerned because they hadn't heard from him. There wasn't any effort made by the other services because we hadn't reached that stage of activation. But there was one other, a psychiatrist from the Queensland Government who happened to be on the premises at the time and we talked to him about that and we were encouraged to go and find him, to be proactive, so we just took it upon ourselves to make the effort to go and find him. So we contacted his wife, she told us about his situation. Eventually we got out there, we did what we could. We found that he wasn't as bad as people thought, but it was just the concern of the community, and we found that there were so many people isolated by this flood, and so much concern, and it was really an amazing feeling of community (RC FG1).

Deployment. We went up to [suburb name] and the community was just destroyed and usually you're coming together with all of these units, working with these people. It was just incredible. We were just thrown in all different teams. We all just helped out the community, put rooves back on (SES FG3).

Best experience would be the lolly drop at end of the year and I've organized it for 10 years. It's just good. It's a really big community thing. Yeah. The community gets involved. You see the parents getting involved and see the children getting involved, and then you see the brigades getting involved as well. Yeah. And you could say some members and some members put their hands up and there's always a joke about who's going to wear the Santa. Yeah. And in the end of the day, everyone's has a great day, we finished up at 12, and everyone's just feeling on a high (TFS FG3).

The central message in all these examples is that emergency response volunteers' best days come out of community. It's about bringing a community member safely home to their families, being immersed in a sense of community, giving back to the community, and helping the community to recover from disaster. Finally, their best days emerge out of engaging community in different ways that put into practice all the skills and development that have been made possible by the emergency management volunteer organisations they volunteer for.

## **Motivations for being an emergency response volunteer**

A core part of the research focus was documenting the motivations for emergency response volunteering amongst volunteers in Tasmania. Discussion focused on the motivations for doing this type of work and where these motivations emerged from in the first instance – and sometimes these were simple: “I believe if you are physically and emotionally capable to volunteer your time for a community organisation, then I think you should” (AT FG1). Some people did the role because they had “a particular passion for emergency management” (SES FG3) and some just did it to avoid becoming “brain dead”, with their motivations therefore “partly altruistic and partly selfish” (AT FG1). They noted that there were people that “do it just for the uniform and the kudos and only that...it’s definitely ego” (SES FG3). There were also people that had a serious love of the gear they got to use, such as the trucks in SES: “ask him a question about trucks and he’ll answer” (SES FG3); and others got so much out of practicing the skills they learned: “Every kid wants to go out and cut a car up” (SES FG3). At other times, the motivations of volunteers were related to more structural issues such as how they did not trust the systems set up to help people in need. They talked about how they joined because the only thing they could trust was the direct assistance they could offer people on the ground:

When I see particularly disasters and emergencies going on around the place and you feel like you need to help in whatever way you can, and you go through the various things you know. Can I give financial help? Can I send something, blanket, toy, whatever else? And I could not find the confidence to send anything, be it money or anything else, and and know for certain that it was actually going to reach the person on the ground. So I decided that the only thing that I can give, that I can be sure will be received, is whatever I can offer myself (RC FG1).

I know that if I was not right there, right then, they would have lost the house. It was as simple as that (TFS FG1).

For these volunteers, the motivation to do emergency response volunteering emerged out of what might be labelled a lack of trust in assistance systems set up to help those that require aid in the event of emergencies and disasters. Thus, the best way to ensure that people received the support that they wanted to provide was to provide it directly themselves to people in need on the ground. The motivation for these volunteers differed from motivations of most volunteers in our research, with discussion about motivations to do this work falling into two key themes: motivation as a result of intrinsic, personal reward; and motivation emerging out of extrinsic reward external to the volunteer, and linked with people around them and the wider community.

### *Personal, intrinsic reward and thrill motivate emergency response volunteering*

There was no doubt that emergency response volunteers in our study derived great enjoyment and satisfaction from the work that they did in their communities: "I love a good emergency [laughing]. When I'm having a good time, it's because somebody else is having a bad day" (RC FG1). They joined because they wanted to feel the satisfaction that came with deepening their knowledge and increasing their skill levels: "I was getting older and I wanted to become more medically aware and get some basic skills" (AT FG2). They described volunteering work as incredibly enjoyable (AT FG2) and rewarding precisely because they "like working with people" (AT FG1), because they "get a bit out of it, you learn a bit" (SES FG2), and they appreciated being able to do this while they were "helping the community" (TFS FG3; TFS FG1). They derived great value from knowing that very small, remote town communities in Tasmania know "that we are there to cover those awful hours when there is no doctor available and there is ambulance coverage" (AT FG1). Reward did not just emerge out of emergencies – it also came out of seeing young people learn about and prepare for emergencies: "It's such a rewarding thing to work with these young kids who are only eight and 12 years old, suddenly they're seeing the light come on and they understand what's going on" (RC FG1). Some volunteers even described these forms of volunteer work as a stress relief: "I find it's a great stress reliever going out on an ambulance job" (AT FG2).

The rewarding nature of this work sustained their emergency response volunteering – they only spoke of discontinuing when "I'm not fulfilled by doing it anymore" (TFS FG3) because "when you lose the fun, it's time to go" (SLS INT1). They expressed time and time again that, provided they were physically and psychologically able, they would continue doing it "forever" (SLST INT4) – in the words of one volunteer firefighter: "Until I croak it" (TFS FG2). A Red Cross volunteer stated they would volunteer "as long as I'm physically capable of doing it, I can't see any reason why I wouldn't" (RC FG1) and a volunteer lifesaver said they would happily do it for "most of my life" (SLST INT2). For volunteers we spoke to, community work like this did not have an expiry date: "I don't think there's a cut-off date for being involved in the community" (AT FG2). The discussion elaborated how this was personal and very much internal to the volunteer – they were intrinsically motivated to do the work that they did. For some people, emergency response volunteering enabled them to just keep doing life every day:

Look I've got heart issues, I've got heart disease, I've had a couple stints and shit, I've had couple of angina attacks that come and go, but if it wasn't for

what I do, I'd be dead. For me, it's a purpose for getting out of bed each day (RC FG1).

For this participant, volunteering literally sustains their life. Their motivation for getting out of bed is to help people that need assistance. Others reiterated this in Red Cross, saying that despite the issues people were experiencing personally, they continued to volunteer, and this was a significant factor that influenced their own personal motivation to continue volunteering:

You've got someone over here who's dying of cancer, who's doing some kind of rehab, someone over here who's got a major physical disability, and someone over here who's got another. They're all suffering you know personal disabilities, but they're all there and willing to put up and put in in whatever capacity that they can. I think that's bloody awesome (RC FG1).

Many volunteers experienced issues which impacted their overall wellbeing, but they continued to volunteer, and it was their dedication to this role despite the issues that this particular volunteer found so motivating. It is witnessing other people's dedication to volunteering in the face of significant personal adversity that sustained their own dedication to volunteering.

Other volunteers articulated how they were motivated by the "thrill" (SES FG1) of attending events. For some, "they join for the action" (TFS FG5), the "excitement" (SLST INT3), and the "buzz" (SLST INT1) – "it's that adrenaline thing" (TFS FG5). They "get a bit of a high when you're put under a stressful situation and you can perform and achieve something. It does get the adrenalin going" (SES FG3). This is what they referred to as "the rush of a volunteer that's not a career firefighter. They didn't have to go through years of training. They can get behind the wheel with the lights and sirens and go to a fire, and it's just this rush" (TFS FG5). People talked about how they still had the rush, even after doing the role for some time: "I think it is still exciting, an adrenaline rush, when dealing with pretty large-scale incidents, and don't take that the wrong way. I think you know what I mean. You certainly you get a buzz from that and dealing with that" (SLST INT1). The buzz was a bit more complex for some people though and was very much focused on the thrill of developing skills and seeing how the emergency management processes really worked: "I'm part of the incident management system in [suburb name]. I really enjoy that side" (SES FG3). For instance, the motivation of one young volunteer with SLST was supported when they were engaged in things that they were genuinely interested in and passionate about:

I was a volunteer for Falls [Festival]. I was actually the Surf Lifesaving Tas Falls Festival Emergency Response Captain...Went to meetings with the SES and

Counterterrorism and Tas Fire and Ambulance Tas and Tas Police and so that was really cool. I sat through these meetings and we like workshopped bushfires scenarios for the Falls Festival, like 'Oh at 10am, the winds are westerly. What do we do?' That sort of thing. It was cool because it was the Falls Festival stakeholders meeting and I was there at the stakeholders meeting...so I was in there for all these like really important meetings. I was there. Just learning really, I just, I didn't say much. They sometimes asked my opinion on beach safety things, but I was really happy to be there just learning...I realised that everyone that was there with you, they're only human like, you just have to make calls, decisions, and things...I just sort of realised how important these people were, and how much responsibility they had, and then realised how much responsibility I had (SLST INT3).

For this young person, learning about new things and the responsibility they had was incredibly motivating and rewarding. For others, motivation was anchored somewhat to the age of the volunteer and they acknowledged there was not so much 'buzz' when you had been doing the role for a long time:

Well, it depends on your age. You'll find that some of the younger ones are a bit more. Yeah, the older ones, it's almost zero. Especially once you've been there a while, that falls away a little bit, but in the early stages yeah – sometimes people just want that thrill (TFS FG5).

While age shaped the extent to which the thrill of volunteering was present, this did not dampen the motivation for emergency response work. However, volunteers acknowledged that their motivations changed "as life changes" (SLST INT4).

While the thrill and helping the community were motivations when they were younger, for some long term volunteers, the motivation now was about the practice of skills at a later stage of a volunteering experience: "some jobs you turn up and you just go, 'It was a waste of my time', but others you can actually use what you learn in training...actually achieve something" (SES FG3). There were such a vast range of skills that volunteers learned and practiced, including being "aware of your own falliability" and being "self-reliant" (RC FG1). Some volunteers talked about how they have learned the skills and they experience excitement in anticipation of putting these skills into practice at an event: "when a disaster happens, that's when all the cogs click into place, and you go off and do what you're trained to do" (RC FG1). Volunteers talked about "the eagerness to actually have an opportunity like that to kind of see everything coming together and see everything through after an extended amount of time" (SES FG3). This was a key form of personal motivation:

Several candidates that have been through have actually been put in real life situations where they, from what they've learned from the development

programme, they've actually put this into practice and whether that be on the beach between the flags or whether it be in everyday life (SLST INT1).

I was in Bruny Island. I was swimming with my friends and one of them got caught in a very bad rip and was dragged out to sea, and to cut a long story short, the fact that I was able to save her and bring her back to shore safely, and it was a very scary situation. It was a very dire situation. There had been people on kayaks who'd been rescued by police out there previously...I was able to rescue someone and bring them safely back to shore...This particular person had gotten swept in and swirled around and sucked under the water and was actually on the bottom of the sea and I managed to grab her and she had a sort of floatation thing with her and I sort of put her on it and we'd been swept out to sea about two hundred metres probably, which was a long way and then yeah, we managed to get back to shore eventually...she would have actually died (SLS INT4).

You do all of this training, like what we did today, and really you anticipate eagerly an event, just so you can put it into practice and actually make the difference, cos you can't make the difference until you're making the difference. And it's when you go to an event and all of this that you've learnt kicks in and you're nervous as all hell cos you really don't know whether you're going to stuff it up or, and then you get into this role and you do it and you fall into the routine of it all, and on it goes and it is such a satisfying thing. And you go home thinking, 'Oh wow that was great'. You know, what you went to, and the devastation and disaster and the catastrophic life changing event that it was, yeah that was there, but geez I had a great time doing it you know what I mean? You feel that everything is justified. You've done all this work and you can now go and use it all. I'd hate to not get deployed and do all this training and not actually use it. I'd pull out if I didn't have an opportunity to actually do something (RC FG1).

The anticipation of using the skills they have developed was a significant intrinsic motivational factor for some volunteers. They looked forward to an event so they could experience the end result of substantial amounts of training and development activity. One volunteer described this well in SES FG1 where the motivation emerged out of putting their diverse skill set into action: as a qualified rigger that worked in a circus, they enjoyed intertwining these skills with their volunteer role in SES: "the roof top stuff, the knot tying, that all is second nature to me from that [circus], so I enjoy intertwining, connecting those kind of skills and that knowledge" (SES FG1). It is clear that volunteers derived great satisfaction out of bringing together the range of skills they had and seeing these put into action in real life emergency situations.

The motivation of skills development was not just about the thrill of using these skills – motivation also came from how "seeing others learn from the skills that you teach them is rewarding" (SLST INT1). Motivation was now derived from "help[ing] other people have those skills to help the community because I can see such value in doing that" (SLST INT4) and "just seeing that development and seeing the organisation grow" (SLST INT1): "I actually really enjoy watching the people come up and go through the ranks

and try and help them progress as best as they can" (TFS FG3). Although this motivation was directed at other people, this still featured in the discussion as an intrinsic, personal motivation for the volunteers: "you can just see them blossom and you can help them to enrich their lives and do something that they really love" (SLST INT4). A crucial part of this was mentoring: "I've mentored up somebody who will be taking over the next camp and the succession plans are in place" (SLST INT1). Skills development amongst others was very satisfying when a volunteer got to see the product of that skills development actually sustain the life of the organisation:

My ideal thing would be really that I'm here helping all the time, but it's actually completely sustaining training and assessing and everything without me, and I feel like that's where I've been heading with getting other people trained and mentored in order to do that, and my aspiration would be for other people to get as much enjoyment out of volunteering as I do. And I think that's why I go through all of those extra things of becoming trainer and assessors and all that's a facilitator of as well so I can enable other people to have as good of a chance and as good of opportunities of getting that enjoyment as I do (SLST INT4).

Getting to the point where "the club sustains itself" (SLST INT4) was a huge intrinsic motivator for this volunteer. There was significant personal satisfaction to be gained from watching others be trained to the point that the organisation they volunteered for was able to sustain itself long term.

Closely linked to this was the motivation that emerged out of opportunities for developing skills in ways that offered career pathways and support to young people around future careers. Ultimately, volunteers we interviewed suggested that emergency response volunteering work "gives you so many skills that you can then enact in everyday life...all the skills you learn are so transferable to any job you get" (SLST INT4). Some emergency response volunteer groups engaged with these processes quite strategically to keep their volunteers interested and engaged: "we make sure younger people have a pathway to get into...once they've had a couple of years being a driver, to come into those roles in more emergency management and Swiftwater training because that keeps them involved and gives them interesting things to do" (SLST INT4). Others noted that these types of pathways were simply inspired by the nature of the emergency response work itself: "We've had lots of people come through and do other things. They've just come in to volunteer for what a year, maybe two, and then all of a sudden, they're in the police force" (TFS INT3). This was a core theme of discussion amongst volunteers involved with Surf Life Saving in Tasmania. It is evident there are many skills development opportunities that inspire young people to move into different careers: "it builds who you are as a person and can open multiple doors" (SLST INT2). There were

clear benefits that emerged from doing this type of volunteering that linked strongly with the development of young people from volunteering to different types of careers:

We've had at least a dozen people go into nursing, paramedics, medicine, and teaching...So many people go into teaching because they help out with nippers, or people who are sort of 13 to 15 watching their confidence grow dealing with different challenging aspects of children and working out ways to engage other people not themselves, problem solving (SLST INT4).

[A] lot of the candidates have gone on to do more in the medical sort of field, paramedics, fire, or doctors. So that's very much shaped their future when they weren't sure. All of a sudden they've come out and gone, 'Nope I'm going to do para-medicine. I'm going to do something in the emergency services' (SLST INT1).

There are many pathways that volunteers end up moving into within SLST and it is motivating to be part of that decision making for volunteers. Further motivation was definitely derived from being the person that supported these young people when they made decisions about their career paths. For instance, providing referee support for a young volunteer was a significant motivator because it was part of seeing that young person reach their potential:

I've been a referee for about 1 million kids here who've put me down because at 16 you don't have many other opportunities to have people who can talk about you and it's lovely to say to a potential employer that this person gives up 80 hours of their time at 17 years of age to patrol the beach and in doing that they engage with the public regularly, have got great communication skills, they also turn up on time. You've got all these different aspects of it. Like that doesn't come in your CPR qualifications, but it comes from doing all that and being involved in something where you have to be punctual, you have to follow routine. But all those other life skills come from the involvement. I think I also love to see that, I love to see people develop and become themselves and reach their best potential (SLST INT4).

I love being able to foster someone's development and being able to say that through training, but also young people in the Nippers programme being able to see their confidence levels change...messages have been sent to the state and then passed on to me or some of the other trainers just saying that, 'My child's found the purpose in life' and things like that' (SLST INT2).

For volunteers with SLST, the motivation emerged out of watching these young people develop over time, "ready to change the world" (SLST INT1) after going to development camps, and seeing the outcomes of investing in their lives while they volunteered. Interviewees discussed deriving motivation from witnessing these forms of development unfold:

I love to see when people start with training and they feel really insecure and they don't know what they're doing, say someone who started in the club as a young person, and then you can now see them in five years on and they're really confident in delivering stuff and that pathway they take and you can just see them blossom and you can help them to enrich their lives and do something that they really love (SLST INT4).

The development of young people is a significant intrinsic motivating factor for emergency response volunteers, and particularly those in SLST. They derive great satisfaction and enjoyment from seeing other people develop and grow and move into careers as they get older. It is evident that watching this form of development unfold is a significant factor that sustains the motivation of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania and suggests the importance of fostering these practices across *all* emergency management volunteer organisations.

### *Doing good as an extrinsic reward motivating emergency response volunteering*

The overwhelming focus of discussion around motivations to do emergency response volunteering was not about the volunteers personally or what they could do for the organisation, but doing good for local communities: "the underlying motivation for most of us is community mindedness" (SES FG2). Doing something good was incredibly satisfying: "what a great feeling you get from helping other people" (SLST FG4) especially "when you do a good job and it's a good feeling to know that you have helped someone get out of a pickle" (SES FG2). Doing good referred to many things. Volunteers' most commonly expressed motivation to do good through volunteering was "to help people...It's more if someone's in a car crash, I want to help them get out. When someone's had their roof blown off, I want to sort something out so they feel comfortable and safe" (SES FG3). "I have always liked to help people in trouble" (SES FG2) and they talked about how it felt good to be part of "getting them out, getting them to safety" (SES FG1). Helping people (SES FG1) was core to this motivation and this came up repeatedly in the data: "I just like helping people. I get enjoyment at seeing other people's joy" (SLST FG4). Doing good was also about the contribution they could make, and in particular, their motivation was because they "wanted to contribute to the community" (AT FG2): "we contribute a lot to our wider community as well, just in terms of being there, having barbeques, and things like that, just brings people together" (SLST FG3). They gleaned great satisfaction from these forms of community contribution.

A key facet of this motivation was being able to make a difference in the lives of people in their communities. "Giving back to the community" (SLST FG1) was "very satisfying

knowing that you can actually make a change, make a difference in people's lives" (RC FG1). It provided them with the opportunity to experience "a cheesy sense of self-worth purposed kind of thingy" (TFS FG 2). This was considered especially "rewarding when you help people and you can tell when you do make a difference" (SES FG3). For some volunteers, doing good took the form of providing people with security, "stability and safety" (TFS FG3), in their local communities: surf lifesaver volunteers ensure that people can "visit the beach with a sense of security" (SLST INT2); fire volunteers can "keep it [the community] from burning and staying alive" (TFS FG2); and ambulance volunteers focus on "saving people's lives" (AT FG1). It was about "turning up for people's worst days and making it better" (AT FG1). Volunteers created a "safe and emergency accessible community for my niece and nephew" (SES FG3) – "it's people volunteering in their community for their community" (SES FG3). "Community mindedness" (SES FG2) was a significant motivational carrot for these volunteers: "I just love doing it. The fire brigade aspect of it. The community as a group. And then on the side of that is helping the community as well" (TFS FG3). The connection with community was incredibly important in the face of frustrations at times when doing emergency response volunteering. As one respondent noted, the community side of emergency response volunteering literally kept them motivated to keep doing the work: "there's a lot of frustrations on the other side as well that would make you feel like you want to leave. If it wasn't for the community, I would have left" (SES FG2).

The motivations for being an emergency response volunteer were not just about what they could do for their local communities they lived in. It was also about the sense of belonging and connection (SLST INT 2 and 3, TFS FG5, SES FG1), friendship (AT FG1, SES FG1), and "becoming part of something" (SLST FG2) that volunteers derived from being part of a community of emergency response volunteers within their local community: "they want to belong to something" (TFS FG5). "It's a good group of individuals to be around and forming good friendships as well" (SLST INT1) – this volunteer later phrased this dynamic in relation to how people call a place a second home, saying that the surf life saving club was his "first home" (SLS INT1). These processes enabled emergency response volunteers "to grow as a person and meet people" (SLST FG2) through activities like training where they would "go along and do it and reconnect with all the other volunteers and have a great old day" (RC FG1). Doing good was about contributing to the bigger picture and deriving belonging from this process: "I think there's definitely a sense of belonging, you join our club and you're part of something bigger" (SLST FG3) – you come to be "such a close mob" (SLST INT2), "extremely close" (SLST INT1; TFS FG3) to other emergency response volunteers. Belonging came from "the group support that we get for being part of the brigade" (TFS

FG1). This was both localised and something they experienced with “meeting new people from right around Australia” (SLST INT1) and around the world and the dynamic was described as “a second family” (SES FG1):

[W]e’re family. It’s like Red Cross and the family. It’s like when my husband died going into the chapel thingamajig. Sat in the front seat and the coffin’s up there, I’m looking around. I looked behind me and the whole set behind me was just blue uniforms, Fire Brigade and I thought, ‘I’m going to be okay’. Yeah, and I looked down the back and I could see all the Red Cross emergency service and the staff, plus some blue uniforms from guys in town and stuff like that. And I knew I was going to be okay. And that’s what it becomes (RC FG1).

For this person, volunteering provided a sense of belonging and community at one of the most isolating times in a person’s life: death of a spouse. It is a broader support network of volunteers that surround them and provide them with comfort that they will not be on their own. This connection was repeatedly talked about as “being part of that family” (SLST INT2): “We’re all family here and then when you go to a training course, it’s like a family reunion with aunts and uncles” (SES FG3). But this sense of connection went even further than this – it was not just about a social connection, but also a strong team connection that focused on doing the work as a collective to ease the workload:

You feel a little bit obligated to probably stay and keep being active because you know you’re a team and it’d be like playing basketball and then just not turning up one night – then the team’s a player short. You work as a group and you all work together and working with each other and trying to all go to as many jobs as you can because it makes the job easier. So when the pager goes off at 3am and you think, ‘Oh no, I wanna stay in bed’. Then you think, ‘Nah them other poor buggers are getting outta bed’ (SES FG2).

For this volunteer, it is about doing the work as a collective and this is what makes it more rewarding and eases the workload burden for them as a group. The social and team connection motivated them to continue to do this work – it created the impetus to continue in the form of a team-like obligation.

Belonging extended much further beyond that of just local communities. Emergency response volunteering was challenging and traumatic, but emergency response is done in a way that brings these tough activities into collective relief: volunteers are grouped together, and they do the work together, with other volunteers, and they do this across the country and across the world. This was identified as a significant motivating factor for a lot of volunteers. One respondent from Red Cross (FG1) summarised this well:

When I went to [cyclone], I met a whole swag of Red Cross volunteers from all around the country and then I didn’t hear from them again because everybody

goes back to their lives. Then when I went to Townsville. They were all there again and I tell you, it was like we hadn't parted each others' company. It was like good old buddies and you make these very close relationships with these people simply because I think you are all on the same wave and you're trying to do the best you can and that's a very rewarding feeling you know. I think it's that sort of camaraderie and the contribution that you can make that could actually inspire many people to want to become volunteers in any of the areas (RC FG1).

This respondent makes it clear that emergency response volunteering, in this case, involves a national network of people that know each other and they do the work together. Doing the challenging work of emergency response volunteering within this wider community network makes the work highly rewarding for these volunteers in the long term. Volunteers also noted that this type of relational work should be expanded so that connections between organisations could continue to be strengthened: "I think the whole sharing of information with all the other brigades and social interaction with all the other brigades is really, really important" (TFS FG3).

## **Barriers to recruiting emergency response volunteers in Tasmania**

Participants in our study discussed key issues they thought influenced recruitment of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania. These issues were considered key influences that might stop people from wanting to be recruited. This discussion was informed heavily by their own experiences and what they could see about the types of things they did in their roles as emergency response volunteers, and the organisational issues, that might stop people from seeking recruitment. At times, these things were as simple as the age of the volunteers:

We stopped at Junior Programme quite deliberately three, four years ago for the simple fact that it brings a lot of time and effort and nobody stays...We target people in my demographic that have potentially lived in the valley before, moved back, they've got kids, are settling down, and bought a house. These are the people in the 30s and 40s that you want to attract (TFS INT5).

Age of volunteers was significant, and they discussed how they needed to target their recruitment strategies towards those that were 'settling down': "someone from the age of 18 to 25 is not going to do something for nothing" (TFS FG4). They also mentioned things like "having new facilities will help with retention and recruitment as well because when we get a lot of people in here, it's really hard to train" (SES FG1). These comments, however, seem to be outweighed by more substantive issues that volunteers believed were influencing recruitment in the longer term. There was some overlap in

these issues with the barriers they believed were influencing retention of existing volunteers. For example, the time it takes to become qualified in some of the emergency management volunteer organisations was considered a key influence not only for recruitment, but also for retention. This is discussed at length in the section below on factors influencing retention – one SES volunteer talked about how long the training took and how frustrating it would be for new recruits when this process takes so long and they come into the organisation “really excited” (SES FG2). However, volunteers did stipulate two key factors they believed to be influencing whether people would even express interest in emergency response volunteering in the first instance. These included: lack of time and workplace flexibility to volunteer; and misinformation about emergency response volunteer roles and incorrect media messaging about what volunteers do. Both these factors had been experienced by emergency response volunteers in Tasmania and were considered the key concerns to try and overcome in order to foster the recruitment of new volunteers in future.

### *Lack of time and workplace flexibility to volunteer*

One of the key issues noted as impacting whether or not new emergency response volunteers would join was the lack of time to volunteer. In the context of a discussion about recruitment, participants in our study made it clear that life was so busy and challenging that people would be unlikely to want to become a volunteer for an emergency management volunteer organisation. They talked about the challenges related to this in reference to their own experiences:

Respondent: Most of us work as well, like that’s a lot, you’re giving away your entire weekend. And for us, we are shift focused so half the time we haven't got a weekend.

Respondent: [Name] is fairly shift orientated on the trucks. [Name] works himself, what six days a week? I’m always working and so is [Name] on the farm.

Respondent: [Name] has got six kids.

...

Respondent: The worst thing now, that I find to 20 years ago, is everyone’s life’s got so much busier. Like generally you haven’t got time to bloody scratch yourself and you’re busy when the pager goes off, you’re busy when your pager hasn’t gone off. Somewhere in between being busy and the pager going off you gotta find time to actually go and do it. And sometimes, you just think ‘Oh shit, I haven’t got time to do this’ (SES FG2).

I was putting my hand up for everything when I first started, but now I’m a bit more selective, and because things have changed at home now, I’ve got young kids, well, I’d rather not go on a land search, because now I’ve done a few I know that they can go, well I know they will go on generally all day, and then

multiple days. It's sorta time I can't really afford because I've got other things going on with the business and home life. With car crashes, they're kinda nice in a way cos within a couple of hours you're back at the unit and you're on your way again. I had a lot more free time when I joined (SES FG3).

Lack of time to do volunteer work was a big issue for these volunteers: "I think I'd be pushed to join again because I just don't have the time" (SES FG2). They did not think the organisation they volunteered for could adequately continue to intake new recruits simply because life was too busy – and it was their own experience that evidenced this: "I've seen things comes up on my emails, 'I've gotta work that weekend, gotta work that week, I can't make that, so if I had to join again, it would be two or three years before I could line everything up". The incidents they attended often took up lots of their time and at some times of the year they would be called out to "at least one job a day" (SES FG2), but "normally it would be one a week for SES on average" (SES FG2):

Respondent: Even jobs where trucks rolled over the top end of the Great Lake and I'll spend the whole day there and you know nothing happens at work because I work by myself.

Respondent: Yeah you can easy burn up a day at anything. A fatal you'll be out there for five hours or so. Vegetation fire will see me out there all day until it's burnt out (SES FG2).

Incidents took up a lot of their time. Sometimes this could even be facilitated by technology, with SES volunteers talking about how they had less fatalities in road crashes now because "cars have become a lot safer" because "they crumple up more", but this unfortunately had the knock on impact of taking more time because "they need cutting out of them...often the car's folded up around them" (SES FG2). Finding and making the time to respond to incidents was challenging for emergency response volunteers, and this was something compounded by the lack of flexibility in work in particular.

One of the other factors that the participants in our study linked with lacking time was a lack of workplace flexibility required to respond to an emergency: that is, their job was of a nature that they did have the capacity to leave, but their bosses would not allow them to, or they did not have a workplace with the type of flexibility that would enable them to leave work (for instance, hospital work). This lack of workplace flexibility impinged upon the time that volunteers could dedicate to their volunteering work:

Governments and businesses recognise the fact that they have to be prepared to release their staff. People know the organisation they work for will quite

happily release them, right, continue to pay them...They'd probably be more inclined to put their hand up because at the moment a lot of people are saying, 'Well, there's no way of knowing they'll let me go'. There are bosses that just go, 'No, if you want to go, go, but don't come back'...There are a lot of people whose businesses disappeared (RC FG1).

The industry that I am in allows me to have leeway. So yeah, I'm working the IT industry. My standard role can see me starting at six o'clock in the morning and then finishing at 12 o'clock at night. And then my work doesn't manage hours. So it's up to me to personally manage my hours (TFS FG3).

I'm a business owner [surveying and engineering] so I can decide what I do, but if I've got clients lined up, I can't really just leave (SES FG3).

The reality was for some volunteers, though, that they did not have any workplace flexibility and this was a sustained issue that varied greatly amongst these workers:

Respondent: I can't leave and [Name] also can't leave.

Respondent: I have had two previous employers where it is both okay to leave when I needed to.

Respondent: Actually, I'm surprised that [Name] can't leave.

Respondent: I used to work for a bloke for nine years while I was in SES and Fire and he wouldn't let me go.

Respondent: My first job wouldn't let me go as an apprentice (SES FG2).

In some instances, this was not a huge concern because they had a critical mass of volunteers in their local community and there was always someone there who could respond. However, in other circumstances, the number of volunteers was significantly low in a community and this produced substantial anxiety for volunteers in that location: "so if there's something in that direction [suburb name], you will be doing the response with them [TFS], and if it's down [suburb name] way, you'll do it on your own" (SES FG3). SES volunteers spoke about this, with people noting how they kept volunteering with SES because discontinuing this work would mean a burden on other volunteers they worked with:

Respondent: I would feel like I've let everyone else down in this room if I left too cos it means that the burden is now on their shoulders because there is just one less person here because there's less people walking through the door all the time (SES FG2).

...

Respondent: The problem is that there's not much work around town. You've only got people like me and [Name] and [Name] and [Name] and [Name] who are, but [Name] can't leave the hospital to go on the job, but I can. A sign can function by itself without me there. So you do probably feel a little bit of an

obligation, you know when you are in a unit, that you do respond to jobs if you are the only ones in town (SES FG2).

...

Respondent: It's better than no one going.

Respondent: It's especially not ideal for me because I can barely pick up the phone (SES FG2).

Comments from volunteers demonstrate well the pressure created by remote and regional circumstances where there are not enough people to recruit because they do not physically live in the vicinity of the club/group/brigade of the emergency management volunteer organisation.

These comments led to an exchange that hinted at how stretched SES was with volunteers. This did not mean that they necessarily did not have the numbers in the organisation already – it was more related to the lack of flexibility in choosing *not* to volunteer because the remote location meant there were not enough people to be volunteers: “if we all leave and everyone goes and tells people, they're not going to get any new members out here” (SES FG2). These towns could not actually sustain people in terms of work and other imperatives in the long term and this meant fewer people to recruit in the first instance. SES volunteers spoke about how challenging it would be if any one of them walked away from volunteering in their area. The remoteness of the location shaped these experiences significantly, with even the distance they would have to travel to attend incidents situated as a challenge in this respect:

The town has changed a lot. In the last probably 15 years the town's gone from supporting itself and the people that lived in it to now just being merely a commuter town. There's only a couple in this room that actually can support themselves and feed their family from what the town offers them. [Name's] got his business here. [Name] works. [Name] and [Name] have got their farms here. The rest of us, except for [Name], we all have to sort of travel for work (SES FG2).

It is clear that volunteers considered the lack of time and workplace flexibility they experienced were going to work as significant barriers to recruiting new volunteers. This situation, they argued, would undoubtedly be compounded in some areas of Tasmania where towns could not sustain people's lives in the long term – as noted above, there were no people moving there to recruit to volunteer: “as we get older you feel that you can't go because there's no one else to take your place” (SES FG2). This placed a huge burden of responsibility on existing volunteers who felt like they could not walk away from these roles simply because there would be no one there to respond to incidents: “If we had copious amounts of members, we would probably be a lot happier. That's

because it takes the pressure off us because the workload would be less" (SES FG2). Significantly, emergency response volunteers in TFS raised issues that would substantially compound these anxieties. They noted in their conversations how the organisation was telling the public that there were 5,000 active volunteer firefighters in Tasmania, but this was not supported by the numbers that volunteers encountered in their roles with the organisation:

There is not 5000 active volunteers, I can tell you that right now...I used to take people off the system. I know there are people listed that I took off 15 years ago...why do you think they have to keep pulling people in from the mainland because we don't have enough (TFS FG1).

This discussion was extensive, and given the low numbers of volunteers in some parts of Tasmania, it is likely that this form of public media messaging about emergency response volunteers would be generating significant anxiety amongst volunteers. This makes the burden, mentioned above by SES volunteers, even more important to address. Emergency response volunteers clearly experience intense pressure to continue when numbers of possible recruits are limited, if any, in smaller Tasmanian areas, and this would arguably be exacerbated by the challenges with recording accurate data of numbers of these volunteers.

### ***Misinformation from the media and public about what emergency management volunteers do***

Another key issue that participants in our study noted as influencing the motivations of people to become emergency response volunteers was public messaging about the emergency management volunteer organisations in the media and disseminated in local communities. "I don't grind my teeth and I don't get cranky about it, but we're known as firefighters out in our big overalls and so there is this lack of understanding" (SES FG1). Volunteers expressed especial frustration with this when they worked so hard to contribute to their local communities via their volunteering work, yet many people in those local communities had profound misunderstanding of what they actually did as volunteers: "I had a guy say 'Oh yeah paramedics, you just bandage people up don't you?', and I said 'Well you go to university to do a bit more than apply a bandaid'" (AT FG1). This theme emerged across nearly every emergency response volunteer organisation. The interviewee in SLST interview four notes that, for surf lifesaving, "it's still a lot of work for us to be recognised as a major emergency service because I don't think we are at the moment". Ambulance volunteers noted: "[A] lot of people have the perception that paramedics just go out with a box of bandaids or bandages...They don't really understand that paramedics are there for emergency situations, rather than, 'I

can't be bothered going to the doctor'" (AT FG1). Red Cross (FG1) volunteers also noted how the public had an image of Red Cross volunteers as "just the blood bank or delivering first aid", but most importantly, the public image of donation collectors:

Respondent: In [cyclone name] in the aftermath, we were wandering around with our tabbards on, people were just wanting to give us money. They consider us to be a collecting organisation you know looking for donations.

Respondent: Yeah they think we're out there collecting.

Respondent: We actually noticed that people would avoid us. There were four of us who spent a bit of time in front of a supermarket and we just happened to be standing there having coffee. What we were actively trying to do, we were trying to engage with the community. People who were coming into the supermarket, obviously to get whatever they can and as we stood there, we noticed that people would park their cars, and actively avoid us, and those that didn't avoid us would walk up to us and 'Here's five dollars'...It was really just the feeling of stay out of my way so we went to a market that was happening in that suburb and instead of being a big huddled group, we walked around in pairs and we talked to the stall holders and found out what they thought about the recovery process after the floods and we found out from them that certain people were still in distress and were not willing to ask for help you know, rather than just those that were asking for help and didn't need it you know, but the initial perception was that Red Cross is there to gather donations. And we thought, that's not a very good thing and people ask me, 'What do you do at Red Cross, and what's Red Cross?', and you start to explain to them and it's all new stuff, they've got no idea (RC FG1).

Red Cross volunteers note how the image that the public has of them and the role they fulfil actually impedes their capacity to assist the public and engage with them in meaningful ways. The public do not know a lot about what Red Cross actually do and correcting this misinformation was crucial because "[i]t would enable us to help them better in time of emergency. They would be more aware of what we are there for". Most importantly, correcting the public messaging about what Red Cross does would mean the public "wouldn't try to avoid...they would be more inclined to engage...We listen and we're are trained in psychological first aid to actually deal with people that have a psychological problem because of the disaster, be it at the event or three months after" (RC FG1). The provision of psychological first aid is vital during and post disaster and this service cannot be provided by Red Cross volunteers if the public does not understand that this is their role. The misperception that Red Cross are there to collect donations means the public will not approach them when they are experiencing psychological distress related to emergencies and disasters. This has been perpetuated by an apparent lack of media coverage about the role of the Red Cross and what they do, or even encouraging recruitment: "on all the media I've watched, there's been no effort by the government politicians or anybody to try and encourage people to become volunteers" (RC FG1).

The ramifications of misinformation circulating amongst other volunteer organisations and members of the public about what the SES does in Tasmania were demonstrated well by the discussion in SES focus groups. SES, they argued, had a particular image amongst members of the public, and other emergency management volunteer organisations, that the volunteers considered a serious mismatch with what their actual role was. Volunteers talked about how when they are at a community event and they're "sitting here with our tent and our trucks and our table of stuff at a show for example and the fireies are behind us and it's 'Ooo go and see the firetrucks!!' and they walk straight past us" (SES FG1). There was a lot of discussion about how they were thought about as "the sandwich eating society" (SES FG2) – "It's misunderstood. We hand out cups of tea in [suburb name] on long weekends and driver reviver stations". TFS members refer to SES "as the Sandy Jammies...they joke around about it. They think it's great" (SES FG3). Another respondent recounted: "I've actually been on a job where a career fireman came out to a Launceston job and said 'Have you blokes brought lunch? Have you blokes brought sandwiches?' He's lucky he didn't get punched in the face" (SES FG2). This misinformation about what SES did was significant as SES is tasked with many things (e.g. fallen trees, storm related rescues), but one thing that sets SES Tasmania apart from their counterparts in mainland Australia is that they do road crash rescue – they cut people out of vehicles involved in road crashes, and about "70-80 percent" of these are tourists (SES FG2) and "a lot of the ones we go to are inattention" (SES FG2). This is the image of SES that volunteers stated the public did not have an awareness of at all: "We're there when the shit hits the fan...I reckon 50% of the town know we exist" (SES FG2). The lack of awareness about what SES did was immensely frustrating as they were aware that the type of road crash work they did could not be publicised widely in the media because of the challenging imagery involved:

Respondent: We need a run of better publicity to get our names out there.

Respondent: It is hard though cos [person name] actually had run into issues with publicity with the Facebook posts. All the good work we do usually contains the blood and guts and stuff like that, and we can't talk about it.

Respondent: So you can't talk about it.

Respondent: The thing that craps me off about that. It's okay for the media to put pictures up there on the front page about it and it's alright to put it up on your 64 inch tv, but we can't say we've attended an accident when you've done the job and got them out (SES FG2).

SES volunteers said they would appreciate being able to showcase the work they do, but they recognise they are limited with doing this because it is graphic and traumatic work:

“people don’t know that we do in RCR [road crash rescue]. Like with social media, that’s not allowed to be posted, which is fine” (SES FG1). However, they expressed frustration with how the television and print media could print pictures of these incidents without ramifications, yet SES could not do this. For the volunteers, it was not about showing the public the serious nature of what they do (i.e. focus on the ‘blood and guts’) – it was about the public simply knowing that SES volunteers had attended and assisted. It was also about getting the message out there about what SES does specifically in Tasmania because this was vastly different to what they did in mainland Australia:

Respondent: People don't get to see the SES because if you go into a road crash, which is basically what this unit does, you go the back streets down here, come out by the BP, turn right out onto the highway. So the folks in town don't see SES and don't understand what they do. When I came here, I joined the TFS and [Name] said ‘Oh come and join the SES’, and I went, ‘Oh shit I don’t want to do that. Why would I climb on a roof to save insurers money? Why would I do that?’

Respondent: That’s what people think.

Respondent: See that’s what they do on the mainland in the SES. Young kids who probably wouldn't have the exposure to know what SES does here either if they're not publicised in the media, that they do car crashes, how would kids know growing up that that’s what they do? But the majority of your work here is car accidents (SES FG2).

Volunteers with the SES believed the image of SES responding to road crashes was vastly unknown in even their local community. These volunteers made it clear that it was important that young people knew about what they did – this may motivate more young people to volunteer in these roles in future. They were incredibly frustrated with the lack of exposure and therefore a lack of knowledge about what SES does in comparison with the exposure that TFS got because it enabled “charm engagement over lots of years. The TFS station is on the main drag into town and the trucks have to go through town mostly to get to where they’re going so TFS gets lots of very good exposure” (SES FG2). The lack of these forms of ‘charm engagement’ meant that what SES did was typically unknown to the public because “we’re the forgotten service and at the end of the day, if we never turned up, they don’t get out of the car. The ambulance could be there, the police could be there, and the fire could be there, but if we do not turn up, nothing happens” (SES FG2). Given the significant thanks that volunteers received from their local communities, and the notable lack of gratitude coming from the organisations they volunteered for (see further discussion below), the lack of community knowledge was a considerable concern for SES volunteers:

I've noticed over the years, and it's been a fair few years, that when the media talk about an accident or anything like that, we don't get a mention...Even that [Name] crashed his car into a creek and I cut him out of his car and they had a write up in the paper, and they thanked the police, the fire, and the ambulance... we never got acknowledged (SES FG2).

Being 'forgotten' in this way was significant. Not only did volunteers note how this meant that SES was not on the radar of young people who might volunteer with them, but it also led to substantial consequences for these volunteers which were uncomfortable and demoralising. They suggested that, like TFS, SES needed to work through similar forms of "charm engagement by handing out easter eggs for most of the year or having a fire truck and an SES truck handing out lollies at Christmas time" (SES FG2) and that these processes may assist with raising the profile of SES volunteering roles.

While these things may appear trivial, misinformation about the role of SES, and the image that other emergency response volunteers had of SES, had far reaching implications for SES volunteers. Speaking about "a pretty nasty rescue job" they did with TFS, they noted how TFS "rock up in their truck and say, 'Oh, where's lunch?'" (SES FG2). A very emotional recount of an incident from one respondent in this focus group made this abundantly clear:

I swear to god I had this happen to me, I had a young bloke drown in the morning and we were pulling his body out overnight. SES came and they set up and they put on the kettle and then they got the body stretcher out and they put it in front of this kid's parents. It was just terrible. But first they had to sort out the kettle. People need to be fed and provisioned there is no doubt about that, but you don't need to make it the centre of what you do. That said, we probably don't need the shock and awe of car crashes either. We need to allude to them, but we need to allude to them softly. You know, we'll be there for you in your time of need, right, cos that's what we are. Whether the time of need is a tarpaulin, a cup of tea, or some cutters and spreaders, it doesn't matter. But because the road crash rescue units have grown up as tough country people - if a job comes up, you can rely on us. There's just a divide - we don't represent ourselves as a service 'we're here to help when you need us'. Everybody knows what fires' for - fires' here to put out fires. Bush or structure doesn't matter. Nobody knows that we're here for them (SES FG2).

This respondent suggests that the image that SES has in the wider public, as a service that brings tea and food, is one that even informs the actions of the volunteers, and this can lead to situations that are needlessly traumatic for everyone involved, even those that the volunteers are seeking to support. Volunteers suggested educating the public via the media in ways that 'allude' to what they do and how they respond when the community needs them.

## **Barriers influencing retention of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania**

A core discussion point in this research for participants was barriers that impacted the capacity and retention of those members involved in emergency management volunteer organisations. However, these factors did not just impact individual members – volunteers made it clear that they seriously impacted the future sustainability of the organisations. Factors ranged from those that did impact the individual to those that were systemically embedded in the established operational structures and processes of the organisation. Individual barriers included things like an emergency management volunteer organisation not sending out a uniform or boots to a volunteer for a long period (AT FG2), and therefore they were unable to fulfil their role for that period. Systemic operational barriers were more challenging and were associated with substantial frustration, such as the lack of assessors and trainers to ensure that volunteer membership was consistently refreshed, current volunteers avoided burnout, and the long term sustainability of the organisation was maintained. Barriers could also be cultural – where significant cultural change was required to change how things were actioned in an emergency management volunteer organisation (TFS INT5, SLS INT4).

The following examines the key barriers identified by emergency response volunteer participants in our study: lack of training opportunities due to lack of trainers and assessors; length of time invested in training; lack of recognition of existing training and skills; lack of recognition of changing capabilities; the volunteer vs career rift; intractable operational issues; 'old boys club' dynamics; lack of organisational gratitude and being taken for granted; and local knowledge being unused by emergency management volunteer organisations. Ultimately, participants in our study demonstrated the very real impacts of emergency management volunteer organisations not ameliorating these types of issues for their volunteers: "if you do not support your volunteers with training and equipment and the whole box and dice, they won't be there when you need them" (TFS FG1). Given Tasmania relies so heavily on emergency response volunteers in regional area, the following sections demonstrate the significant ramifications of these issues if left unchecked.

### *Lack of training opportunities due to lack of trainers and assessors*

Many focus group respondents focused their discussion on the lack of training opportunities. The regularity of training was a considerable issue for emergency response volunteers because, without training, they were rendered operationally redundant by the emergency management volunteer organisations they worked for (TFS

FG1, FG4). Regular training courses were absolutely vital according to one respondent in SES who noted that “you’re supposed to have your core road rescue skills”, to which another participant replied “it hasn’t happened for 12 months” (SES FG3). At times, it appeared to be structural issues within emergency management volunteer organisations that influenced the availability of training courses. For instance, in SES, volunteers noted the lack of courses being run and suggested this emerged out of a lack of funding:

I just missed it and I had to wait twelve months. So that’s really the crux of it. It doesn’t come up often enough, and there’s not enough funding for that training to be repetitive so that somewhere you’ll be able to slot into one of those courses (SES FG2).

In other organisations, the lack of training opportunities stemmed from changes made by the organisation to when this was offered:

We used to do training every fortnight, but now Tas Ambulance have changed it to once a month and it’s not enough when you’ve gotta go through all these modules that you have to do, and it’s only 12 a year and we are probably doing 20 modules. I don’t know how many we are doing. It’s just not enough (AT FG1).

Although this situation emerged out of structural changes to training availabilities, sometimes the emergency management volunteer organisations just did not make training regular enough in the first instance to cover off the demand for this training: “we can only get days like this two days a year and we only get a driving course two times a year”, followed by another respondent noting “and even then we lose one of the instructors for half a day” (AT FG1). This meant that volunteers were only partly trained and could not perform required operational skills simply because they could not do the courses they needed:

I’m at a course just this next weekend which I started in October last year. It’s a two day course. I’ve done the first day twice because the second day’s been cancelled and hopefully it won’t be cancelled and that will give me the authority to drive a truck under lights and sirens, which I’ve been doing anyway” (TFS FG1).

These were very challenging circumstances to work in and at times the outcomes of the lack of training opportunities led to quite absurd situations for the volunteers including some SES volunteers being encouraged to attend a “rescue comp down in Hobart” and when they got there realising they had never been trained to use the equipment they were required to use in the competition: “We had never touched it and we had to use it in a comp!” (SES FG3). While this situation is troubling, it was clear that the lack of action around this situation was more troubling than anything else: “I think with the

training issues and lack of...you could go to a unit managers meeting and say it til you're blue in the face. Nothing will get done about it, so even our like our unit managers aren't changing" (SES FG3).

Interestingly, comments about the reasons for the lack of training opportunities being available, and about changes being made to the offerings of training opportunities, were limited amongst our participants. By far, the dominant theme in the discussion around training, and the issue which most influenced the availability of training opportunities, was the lack of trainers and assessors, something mentioned across a number of focus groups with SLST, AT, and SES in particular. In emergency volunteer organisations, people with these skills were considered key workers who had the capacity to sustain the life of the organisation into the future. Volunteers that participated in our study noted this as a crucial barrier in this respect: if you did not have trainers and assessors to continue to train up a new volunteer base, and refresh the knowledge of the existing volunteer base, the operational work of the emergency management volunteer organisation just stops. Most importantly, participants clearly linked the lack of trainers and assessors with attrition of emergency response volunteers: "one of the selling points they tell people to come and volunteer is because you get trained to work with different skills" (SES FG3). As the participant noted in interview two with SLST, "people are just dropping out because it's too hard to keep the qualifications up-to-date". There were many factors influencing the lack of trainers and assessors and these often varied depending on the organisation that volunteers were aligned with.

A key factor identified as influencing the availability of trainers and assessors was how difficult it was for members to actually do the qualifications (AT FG1). This dynamic was relayed repeatedly in different focus groups and across different emergency management volunteer organisations (AT, TFS, SES, SLST). Discussion in focus group four with SLST demonstrates this well. Respondents noted how "it's so hard to get the qualifications to do it" and this means that new assessors and trainers are not being created. This has a flow on effect, where the lack of newly qualified people means a lack of trainers and assessors overall and a huge burden placed on the very small numbers of already qualified trainers and assessors. They highlighted how this led to a loss of volunteers and potential future trainers, simply because the 'train the trainer' programmes were not running and "sometimes it's not a slow drain either" (SLST INT4). Most importantly, though, not having regular training meant losing social connections, one of the key reasons why people volunteered and continued to do so over such extended periods: "the other advantage of having that regular training when you first

start is that you mingle...because it's held as a region so you actually get to know a lot of the other people in the other units which does come in handy" (SES FG3).

It is clear that at times there was a lack of trainers that was influencing the lack of assessors and trainers in emergency management volunteer organisations in Tasmania. This issue was well evidenced amongst SES volunteers, but only in specific areas of the state:

Respondent: I don't know whether the South had more than one trainer.

Respondent: I think we've just got one trainer...

Respondent: I think in our region, we've just got the one trainer and due to, I guess, jobs and sickness and all that type of thing, it all backs up and there's no-one really to step in.

Respondent: I think they could integrate better into the other regions and say, 'Well I've done all these hours and can't do it. Can you get the [suburb name] trainer to come and do it?'

Respondent: ...and when he was rostered on for 12 months and he hasn't been able to do it, they should be able to get someone else to do it (SES FG3).

The lack of trainers in specific parts of the state definitely shaped these issues and they noted this impacted "on the younger members more so" (SES FG3). Sometimes funding was mentioned as an influencing factor (TFS FG1, FG4), but this was also countered in the discussion: "I'm not convinced it is a funding thing because you go to other parts of the state and they have better training than we have here. I think it is more about how the [region of Tasmania] is run" (SES FG3). However, crucially, more often than not the organisation did have trainers and assessors, but they were just not physically available to run training and assess. This was something raised in focus groups across SES, TFS, and AT.

Trainers and assessors across Tasmania were often too 'active' – meaning they were rostered on too often or called in to respond to a fire campaign, for instance (TFS FG1). This happened with such regularity that they were unable to fulfil their duties as trainers and assessors: "our January training was cancelled because we were all too busy in town so it just didn't happen" (AT FG1):

Since the change in management in TFS, the courses aren't coming up now because the paid trainer that takes the courses gets called out on TFS duties during fire season, banks up a huge amount of overtime. And then it's like 'well I need to take that off. I've done too many hours'...and so they just stopped running courses for volunteers (SES FG3).

[T]he girls and guys that are supposed to do it are usually diverted to ambulance jobs...So as much as they are training officers, training comes secondary to ambulance work when you're in a service that is chronically understaffed (AT FG1).

While ambulance volunteers here note that it is the lack of ambulance trainers that matters, it is notably the lack of trainers in TFS causing the back up of training in the SES in the comments above, something that TFS volunteers mentioned too (TFS FG1, FG4). Either way, this meant courses to gain qualifications were never scheduled, or if they were scheduled, they were typically cancelled at the last minute or they have to leave in the middle of conducting training:

This morning one of the guys that ran our course had to leave because, 'Oh sorry there's no one else' (AT FG1).

The person in [region of Tasmania] that takes care of training for the [region of Tasmania], they get taken off while on TFS duties over the fire period, massive amounts of overtime, and then have to take leave so therefore...you lose them for six months. Their position's still there but SES is like 'well he's got that position so we're not going to fund another temporary position for training' (SES FG3).

To have training scheduled and then to be cancelled on or close to the day of the training was exasperating for the volunteers. They could see that it informed many problems in the emergency management volunteer organisations and in their eyes definitely led to loss of volunteers over time.

These issues were felt substantially by members in regional areas. They recounted situations where they would often go months, and sometimes years, without any training being scheduled and conducted simply because an organisation lacked trainers and assessors to conduct this work: "the course that used to come up every year, like land search and rescue. I don't know when the last time that was ran. We've had people trying to get road crash rescue accreditation. It took two years" (SES FG3). Another respondent followed this comment: "The other fundamental area is storm damage. I've been down three years and there's never been a storm damage [training course] the whole time. There's still storms" (SES FG3). One volunteer in TFS noted that this issue is so chronic that they may not survive to see change happen in this area: "they have to look at another way that we train people, but how long is it going to take? I think I'll be dead and gone before it changes" (TFS FG1).

The lack of trainers and assessors were discussed not only as substantial forms of frustration for current volunteers, but as a critical issue that would impact the

sustainability of the organisation in the long term because this situation led to attrition of potential future trainers and assessors from the emergency management volunteer organisations. This situation primarily impacted on the motivations for new volunteers to stay: "they do want to see action. They want to be involved with that and that is a challenge in itself of keeping them excited enough to stay involved and continue with their training" (SLST INT1). Respondents noted how these organisations are also "losing trainers and assessors" (SLST INT4) precisely because, when they cannot get the qualifications to become a trainer or assessor in the first instance, they become frustrated with the lack of action about this, and consequently, they leave the organisation (SLST INT4). Having potential trainers and assessors leave emergency management volunteer organisations because they were frustrated and unable to qualify as a trainer or assessor was a crucial barrier experienced by participants in our study. More importantly, the volunteers recognised the sizeable burden placed upon existing trainers in the systems that were in place because they did not have enough people to sustain the current burden of training demanded by the volunteer workforce: "You're really relying on four people which is not sustainable and it's something where a lot of people have the capacity to do that job. If you had it as a rolling roster of eight or ten people, then you're not burning those people out" (SLST INT4). There was no doubt that volunteers saw this as an urgent issue to be addressed given that the "slow drain" (SLST INT4) from an organisation like this would mean less volunteers to respond to an emergency.

Volunteers were additionally frustrated by the lack of training availability when they were double hatters (meaning they did emergency response volunteering for more than one organisation in Tasmania) and could see successful models of training in other emergency management volunteer organisations that were timely and sustained the interest of new volunteers. Participants in focus group two in SES had an extensive discussion about this as many of the volunteers in SES were double hatters. They argued that SES needed to devolve "a little bit more responsibility in teaching because I'd like to take him down to the yard and show him how each tool works" (SES FG2). They suggested that under the current model in SES, this was not a possibility, but TFS had a system of training like this in place that was effective for getting newly recruited volunteers out "on the tools" (SES FG2) sooner. Moreover, this TFS system was identified as a more ethical approach that might be used in SES to ease a new volunteer into the role because it enabled them to limit exposure to incidents early on and ease them into the more challenging parts of this work over time:

Respondent: I would like to be able to take him and show him each tool, what the tools are called, what the tool does, what the tool capacities are and then let him come out on the road and not use the tools in the job, but he knows what the tools' called. If one of us says, 'Can you get the spreader?', he can go get it, he can hand it to us, he can get the pump, he can hook it up, he can drive the pump. We can show him all that. We don't necessarily want to throw him in and say 'Cut that person out of that car', but he can stand there and watch [Name] cut that door off and hold that bit of protection there and actually go, 'Oh I can see how that's done', because you know a job's different to training and you learn more by watching.

...

Respondent: [Name's] description there matches the TFS's system nearly to a tee. Give them the basics so that they don't get killed, training at the station sorta thing, so they get to know the crew and the way everything works, get them to come out on the road. Always supervise like you always have a mentor with them and something like that so that they are learning hands on the tools and then send them off to do their course.

Respondent: Give them a bit of on the job training.

Respondent: And it would actually save them money because if you did that, they would get to know you, they would work out whether they want to do this job, whether they'd want to work with you as part of the team, the you don't have to send them for training, you go, 'Look this doesn't suit you, we don't suit you'.

Respondent: Well otherwise if someone goes to training, say [Name] goes to training, does all this training, and then comes out on the road and sees one prang and goes, 'Ah I'm out of here, nup', and that's understandable.

Respondent: And that's happened in the past. We've had a couple of members come up and we've had a fatality or something like that and they've just thought, yeah it doesn't sit real well with them, so they go.

This model they have seen in TFS is a different one to that offered by SES and, given that so many of the volunteers in this focus group are double hatters, they all perceived it is a better model for getting new volunteers out 'on the tools'. For them, it is a more ethical, staged integrative approach that works with the level of comfort of the new volunteer: "If you're uncomfortable with using the tools on the car, you know there's plenty other jobs you can do. They need to feel their own way" (SES FG2). Most importantly, this slower integrative approach means more people stay – volunteers are less likely to leave when they are being mentored, supported, and integrated into incidents in ways that support their comfort levels in those early stages of volunteering in emergency response.

#### *Length of time invested in training*

Another issue related to training emerged in the time spent doing the training.

Volunteers from a number of emergency management volunteer organisations talked

about how long it takes to actually do the training and how this impacted on the number of volunteers willing to join the organisation:

They come to the front door and they're keen as mustard and they rock up in their pyjamas...If you don't get any satisfaction and get on the road and actually start doing what you want to do within twelve months, then it's going to be hard to keep you going (SES FG2).

Volunteers suggested that the frustration of not getting out and "doing what you want to do" influenced the number of volunteers that joined the organisation and stayed. One respondent with TFS discussed this in relation to a particular brigade station, noting that they would like get "20-30 people a year" that joined TFS at that station, but "within three months, they just leave" because it takes so long to access the basic training (TFS FG5). They said volunteers leave "pretty much [because] you want to be able to get on a truck...get out and do some call outs" (TFS FG5). Frustration around this was evident in some comments: "We can't control the fact that it takes so long to do a basics course...we want you to be a level one for a year before you get on a truck" (TFS FG5). This frustration was shared amongst participants in SES focus group two and they expanded on the time spent training:

Respondent: It takes six months to get qualified and get on the road

Respondent: And a lot of weekends. I've lost, the amount of weekends, so many weekends [laughing]

Respondent:... And because most of us work as well, like that's a lot, you're giving away your entire weekend. And for us, we are shift focused so half the time we haven't got a weekend (SES FG2).

With lots of weekends invested and six months to get qualified and be involved, members noted that "it's so hard to get volunteers. You spend so much time doing the training, giving up your weekends" (SES FG2). They acknowledged that this time spent in training was undoubtedly valuable, but also argued that it would act as a substantial deterrent for motivating new volunteers:

Yeah you can get an ad put out and get 20 people walk through that door tomorrow if we really wanted to if we talked it up, but when they get in and realise 'Oh, its going to be a good year or so before I get all my courses done and a fair bit of weekend work, mucking around like that', it sort of takes the shine off it pretty quick (SES FG2).

'The shine' being referred to here is the original motivation to become a volunteer, which participants often talked about emerging out of an event that their community was involved in or in response to a recruitment drive. For volunteers, it is crucial to harness

this 'shine' as quickly as possible so that recruitment drives, for instance, are not fruitless exercises: motivated people walk in, learn about how long it takes, and they choose not to continue based on that. As one TFS volunteer put it: "three to six months, they should be riding the truck with a ticket to ride" (TFS FG4). For some organisations, these things had been happening for a very long time:

We have two volunteers at our station, and we train every week only because we want to, but they were both doing their nursing, and they both finished their nursing, and they are still not signed off by AT as volunteers level 1. It's been going for 13 years...it's so hard for them to get through once they've done their training and essential skills (AT FG1).

Poor [Name] has been here three years and done three, four jobs. [Name] has had a hell of a good run because we put the wind up 'em in [suburb name] and they've been able to slot him in on a few courses sorta thing, but it was two years I sat around here just coming to training every Thursday night before I was allowed to go on the road. So a lot of people are saying, they just don't give a shit anymore (SES FG2).

Participants commented that situations like this have been happening for many years in some organisations so they talked about this as "a big issue" (TFS FG4) requiring urgent attention. Skilled, keen potential volunteers appear to be languishing because the organisational processes are not progressing their sign off in a timely manner.

There was never any suggestion from volunteers that they thought they did not need training – they spoke passionately about the need for this in the work they did. However, they did think there were other ways of doing it available that were not being utilised that would mean that these processes were less protracted and frustrating, and would therefore lead to less volunteer and potential volunteer attrition. Some participants in SES focus groups discussed an older system where people "just come along and learnt by doing the jobs" (SES FG2) and how this was more effective for maintaining the motivation for people to join and volunteer because it got people involved quicker: "we've got the apprenticeship system where you go off with the crew and they get you in on the training nights" (SES FG2). Ultimately, for SES volunteers "it's more about who can attend in an incident. We don't really care what qualification they've got...if you go out on a job, as long as there are people in that group that are qualified, then it doesn't really matter" (SES FG3) – "they can't exactly learn if they're not allowed to go along to a job" (SES FG3). They recognised there were other more senior, experienced volunteers around the new volunteers that could assist the new ones, mentor them, and support them through the process.

Importantly, SES volunteers experienced frustration with how they felt SES as an organisation did not trust the leadership capacities of experienced, long-term volunteers to support new volunteers into the role. They were angry that SES instead insisted new volunteers do all the training before being called out to incidents and they felt their own skills and leadership being devalued by these processes. For instance, some participants talked about how they might reduce the length of training and just ease the volunteer into certain parts of the roles and not others based on the level of training they had, and again they talked about this in terms of how they had experienced this in the past themselves. In SES focus group two, one young respondent said that the “[f]irst three fatalities I had to stand up on the road, wasn’t allowed down near the cars, to shelter you from seeing that up front, to bring you into it steadily”, to which two older, more experienced volunteers replied respectively, “That’s because we look after each other”, and that “you’re not going to throw someone in there who you think potentially could struggle with it, but they’re not needing to be there. You know, limit the exposure, limit the damage”. Most importantly, they noted that “everyone has the best of intentions, but this whole fixation on keeping people safe and trained and insured almost creates different problems...it feels like there is an unfortunate lack of trust in the brigades or the units themselves” (SES FG2). This type of dynamic was also mentioned by volunteers in another SES focus group:

We were always taught here, in our unit, like half the room would be team leaders..we would always bounce ideas off each other. Whereas when these guys went to do a course in town, they’d be told there’s one leader that has control and that’s it. Whereas when we go to a job, we’re all equally now inputting stuff. If someone sees something, it’s all got the same weight. Everyone’s opinions have got the same weighted value whereas [Name] might’ve been taught that his opinion and weight isn’t the same as what the team leader is. He might tell the team leader that he’s seen a powerline that’s looking a bit dicky, whereas out here if he makes that call, we all stop and have a look at it. We all treat each other like we’ve got common sense and leadership skills here (SES FG2).

What is evidenced here is a dynamic produced out of multiple factors colliding at once. Volunteers suggest that SES insists *all* training must be done before getting new volunteers out to an incident. Doing this sometimes means new volunteers are waiting 12 months or longer to attend their first incident. Experienced volunteers feel their high level of skills are being devalued in this insistence because everyone is a leader in the SES units. They are clearly fostering a different type of leadership model in the units locally to that which is being imparted by trainers working for the organisation centrally. All of this comes together to produce a situation where they have a lack of volunteers in the first instance because they are discouraged by how long it takes to train, new volunteers do not stay because it takes so long to complete all the training, and

experienced volunteers with significant leadership skills feel devalued by the organisation that they donate their time to. This evidently amounts to quite a challenging context with less new volunteers and, importantly, unhappy experienced volunteers:

It sort of turns into distrust of us. We have managed our unit really well over many, many years and yeah there seems to be this lack of understanding and trust. Like we've been here a long time and there's this lack of trust in us to even be able to make decisions, you know like disrespect (SES FG2).

Volunteers here are expressing what they experience as an acute sense of institutionalised distrust, and therefore institutionalised disrespect, of their knowledge, skills, and capacity, something which then undermines the relationship between the volunteer and the organisation they donate their time to.

### *Lack of recognition of existing training and skills*

A very significant barrier raised by participants in our study was the lack of recognition of different types of training that emergency response volunteers had already accumulated: "they are very insular with accepting outside qualifications" (AT FG1). This was a key issue raised by volunteers in a number of emergency management volunteer organisations in our study (AT, TFS, SES). Some of examples of this were dubbed "terribly embarrassing" (TFS FG1) by volunteers: "there's one guy who had 15 years [experience] and he had to do a basics course...no recognition of prior learning" (TFS FG1). Volunteers made their frustration around this abundantly clear and their statements seemed to indicate that, by not utilising the existing skills that volunteers had, the organisations they volunteered for were showing their lack of care for these volunteers: "the other thing that this organisation doesn't take any interest in is the skills that the volunteers bring to the organisation" (TFS FG4). The organisation collected details about the skills and qualifications that volunteers had when recruited, but these skills and qualifications were not utilised in any way:

I think maybe they should look at their human resources databases and maybe flag and develop them so there is a bit of a history with the volunteers. So they can go, 'Okay, we've got a job in [suburb name] or [suburb name]. We've got an RN [registered nurse] there. We can send her' (AT FG2).

Issues like the non-utilisation of existing skills, largely because they were not considered in the processes of calling volunteers to an incident, were experienced as annoying and frustrating for emergency response volunteers. In a focus group with TFS volunteers, the interviewer mentioned that they had been told by others about a form that you can fill out online to record this information, to which the same participant immediately

responded: "You send it in, they wipe their arse on it, and they throw it in the bin" (TFS FG4). A similar form process was mentioned amongst SES volunteers that was populated with information about existing volunteer skills and qualifications at the point of recruitment, but then these were not actually drawn upon by their organisation at all:

You do fill in what your career is, what your training is, all your certificates, all of that, but what happens to it? Nothing. They don't actually use it. When I filled it in, I thought, 'Oh this is great, they can see what I've done' you know (SES FG2).

Frustration was clearly linked with taking the time to provide this information to an emergency management volunteer organisation only to have them ignore it. This, however, was classified as a simple frustration in comparison with the sizeable implications that could emerge from the lack of recognition of skills training more broadly.

There were many examples in the discussion of where the skills the participants had were not recognised by the emergency management volunteer organisation they worked for. For example, one volunteer firefighter held the same skills as a career firefighter because they were once a paid firefighter for Parks and Wildlife – they held "nationally recognised, current competency training...but they won't recognise that" (TFS FG4). Another volunteer then immediately added: "This is the only state where a volunteer applying for a job in the career service is not given any credibility for what he or she has done as a volunteer" (TFS FG4). A third volunteer noted with evident frustration: "In my earlier days, I wrote the whole chemical training...I applied to the fire service to deliver it, I have a certificate to deliver it, and I'm not good enough to do it, yet I'm the bloody mug who wrote it!" [sound of hand hitting table] (TFS FG4). The participants in our study made it clear that the lack of recognition of already acquired skills was a major issue with dire consequences. This was a very strong theme in the data and featured across AT, SES, and TFS and the discussion was protracted and angry. One discussion with a particular respondent in AT focus group one demonstrates this well:

Ambulance Tas will recognise a qualified firefighter even if you are a volunteer as a qualified emergency driver. However, if I then the next day put my ambulance volunteer hat on and go to wherever and it's myself and a paramedic, and there's backup available, and we need a patient who requires a paramedic in the back because they've got more skills than we do, and we need to get to hospital fast, I can drive – I just can't drive under lights and sirens. Oh well we can put lights and sirens on, but effectively we can't break any road rules. So if we pull up to a set of lights and people are pulling out of our way then we can't technically go, and it creates confusion. But like so that is a classic example, so like people who are qualified as emergency drivers through Tas Fire get really frustrated with it... a qualified paramedic in our

brigade TFS, was not recognised as a first aid person under the TFS banner... it's even worse. Some of the nationally recognised qualifications they still don't recognise. Through St Johns, I got a cert III in patient assessment, but it means nothing to them, unless it's got an AT slant on it. Legally they sort of have to do an RTA [road traffic accident] – they can't say that they don't recognize it, but they don't recognize it. So unless they do that same level of skill with an AT slant on it, and get one of their training bosses to tick it off and say 'Yep we've seen you do it', then you haven't got it (AT FG1).

This example demonstrates well how key skills that volunteers already have are not being recognised by the emergency management volunteer organisation they are volunteering for: "we've got people with the training qualifications, we've got people with all the functions that are required, but for some reason that's not recognised" (SES FG2). The comments made it abundantly clear that these processes were experienced in a way that was demoralising and demotivating:

I was in the fire brigade and like got out of it. I left here for a little while and sorta lost interest for a bit. I thought, I miss the fire brigade. I went back, spoke to the chief at that stage. I drive a truck around most of Australia. I've got two trailers behind me full of cattle. And I said to the chief, 'I'd like to come back', and he said to me well you have to do a truck driving course. So straight away I thought, bullshit. That's what I'm saying. You're just trodding people down before they're even get a go at it (SES FG2).

Not so long ago, a qualified paramedic in our brigade at TFS was not recognised as a first aid person under the TFS banner, so the two just don't gel properly together...some of the nationally recognised qualifications they still don't recognise (AT FG1).

Morale was lowered substantially when requirements like these inhibited their aspirations to be a volunteer for emergency management volunteer organisations, but the issues extended far beyond lowered morale within this theme.

Participants in our study told us how they felt that the lack of recognition of skills was dangerous for the community. Experiences were recounted where people had qualifications to assist from other areas of their work experience, but because these qualifications were not recognised, for instance because they did not have an 'AT slant', the volunteers were stopped from assisting people. At times, they were also stopped from assisting because they did not have the training they needed to assist, stemming from the issues noted above about the lack of trainers and assessors. Volunteers often had to make snap decisions about what they were going to do in a situation where they had been called out to rescue a community member that was drowning, for example, but they were being told by people on the phone from other parts of the organisation that they could not assist because a decision had been made that it was swiftwater rather than floodwater – and the training they had was determined inadequate:

We are having to make decisions on the hop and we're getting more and more pressure from above to, yes for instance, not use someone who is not trained to do it a certain way, and really, that just doesn't work. Most of the jobs we go to, it's yes you can follow up certain criteria and ways of doing things. But, you know, sometimes someone's drowning and you need to get them out and you need to keep yourself safe. You can see a safe way to do it, but you've got someone from town on the phone going, 'No sorry you can't do that because you're not trained'. Um, what are you going to do let them drown? That's pretty much how it works...you try to follow policy and procedure, but you're not always going to (SES FG2).

[I]t's like sporting team. We are all on the same side fighting the fires. We just want to play and there are all these officials running around saying you don't have the right shoes on, or 'Have you gone and signed off here before you go out and get on the game?' (TFS FG1).

Most of us would do it because it's in our blood, but we would take the precautions as you would. You wouldn't just go straight for a red light because everyone would stop. But it's just in your blood. If someone was pregnant and there were really bad complications, you'd do your best to get them there safely. At the end of the day, we'd just cop it on the chin, the speeding fine (AT FG1).

There are circumstances where lack of recognition of training, and lack of certified training, meant that people's lives were in jeopardy and their actions could be deemed illegal, even though those people assisting had the skills required to assist. They were just not recognised by the organisation they volunteered for or their skills were determined as inadequate by new policy decisions about the higher levels of training required to do their role. The volunteers understood that the organisations were just "trying to keep us safe" and they were perhaps also "covering their arse" (SES FG2), but the frustration and potential fatalities that they considered emerged out of these situations were very stressful. Ambulance Tasmania volunteers had incredibly challenging situations like this emerge in their experiences too (AT FG1):

Respondent: At some point, everyone that volunteers is going to be placed in a position where there isn't a backup crew coming. It's either you drive and break the law or your patient will die.

Respondent: And that's the stupid thing about it. You're not actually breaking the law. You're actually legally allowed to do it – you're not allowed to do it by AT policy, that's the problem.

Respondent: And they will sack you. They will sack you as a volunteer if you are caught.

...

Respondent: And no one is saying this because we all want to get in that truck and drive out. With the ramping, this is going to happen.

Respondent: And AT's response to this is, 'Oh no this doesn't happen because there is back up coming'. However, the reality is that the backup is still 50 mins away and this person is having a heart attack and will be dead in 25 mins and the hospital is 30 mins away if we drive under normal lights. That person's dead - end of story. Cool we will dawdle into the hospital. It's just pathetic - they just have no interest in addressing this issue because it's brought up all the time and they just go, 'Oh yeah, we are looking into it', and that's just the end, the response you get all the time and that's just frustrating.

Respondent: Yeah nothing will change until it comes up in an inquest too.

Respondent: Nothing will change until someone dies because no one was able to drive, and that probably won't happen for a long way down the line because in reality that will be prevented by the volunteer sticking their neck out and driving to the hospital.

Volunteer comments show they are experiencing stress related to these issues and they emphasised that these issues needed to be attended to as a matter of urgency. One respondent highlighted how "the stress of actually going to a case and getting there and realising that I'm probably not going to get back up...and this is well and truly more stress than I am required to have", with another saying, "[s]omething needs to be done before it happens, not wait until it happens and we have another victim" (AT FG1). Loss of life was the key outcome they sought to avoid, but other outcomes were also mentioned, including again the drain of volunteers from the organisations because "if the situation keeps happening, then volunteers will not volunteer anymore because we are too much at risk" (AT FG1). They also highlighted untenable outcomes – being in a situation where you are doing things they viewed as unreasonable, illogical, and therefore "stupid" (AT FG1) because of the policies in place:

Respondent: Again on the driving one, this is the bit that's absolutely absurd. They've said we are not legally breaking the law - we are just breaking AT's policy. So here's the stupid part: paramedic John Smith, and myself as a volunteer paramedic. John Smith can turn to you as a citizen on the street and they are within the law and allowed to authorise you, who's never even been in an ambulance before, to turn the lights and sirens on and drive as fast and as safely as possible to the hospital, and that actually falls completely within the law (AT FG1).

It seems the lack of recognition of training was leading to some situations where paths forward were absurd in the literal sense – they are unreasonable, illogical, and inappropriate, and evidently impose significant strain upon volunteers. These situations are not only forcing them to make decisions that they said break the law, break policy, and risk their volunteer roles: as one SES volunteer put it, "always better to beg for forgiveness than ask for permission" (SES FG2). They perceived the policy decisions to be risking people's lives, the very thing that volunteers are trained to protect and what

emergency management volunteer organisations around the world are tasked with. Importantly, the trust volunteers had in their organisation was deeply unsettled because there was an apparent lack of action on these issues: "if the ramping problem is not changing, why the hell are they going to focus on this? The ramping makes the news all the time and they are still not even changing it" (AT FG1).

*"I'm not physically able now": Lack of recognition of changing capabilities*

For some emergency response volunteers in our study who had been volunteering for very long periods of time (including people that had been volunteering for Red Cross and Tasmania Fire Service for more than 50 years!), a key worry for them was the lack of recognition of their changing capabilities. Discussion focused on physical capabilities in particular and concern about how this might sideline them from volunteering:

Keep plugging along, especially with Red Cross because yeah look the physical side is a lot less obviously demanding than the fire service side. So even with fire service, I probably don't go out on the fire ground as much as what I used to because we got some younger guys in there. I won't go out on the night now cos we got younger guys here that can do the nightshift if we get called out during the night (RC FG1).

I think some people wouldn't be able to achieve the bronze medallion because their body doesn't allow them to (SLST INT2).

I've learnt my limitations physically, having recently had a heart attack, but I'm all clear and am still wanting to be involved...I'm not as happy because I'm not as physically able...but I'm still proud that I'm putting in and doing what my health allows me to (AT FG2).

I can't sustain the effort needed to do campaign fire anymore. Like if I got out for one day, 14 hours, I need two days off. And plus I'm leaving my wife at home on her own, with a dodgy knee in the house on her own. Who knows what could happen to her while I'm away (TFS FG4).

Although they recognised their capabilities limited what they could do, their desire to continue volunteering is evidenced well. They were not keen on the idea of not volunteering at all, and while different roles might not make them "as happy because I'm not as physically able", they definitely experienced pride in what they were able to do.

Discussions about these issues demonstrated that volunteers thought that sidelining was unnecessary: "there's always something they can do" (SES FG3). They focused on a strengths approach around this issue: "We don't recruit for the jobs that we need. This unit needs someone to do the paperwork. [Name] has been doing it forever" (SES FG2). The key theme was capability – the different units and brigades with the emergency

management volunteer organisations focused on capability and supporting what people *could* do rather than what they *could not* do. This appeared to be at the level of the units and brigades rather than at the level of the broader organisations:

I'm getting a bit older, I can't do that physical component anymore, where can I help and I don't think that enthusiasm is being nurtured as such. I want to get the experiences of those old people and then transfer that across to the new people...There is a part of the brigade that I've only just heard of called the Logistics Brigade, which is made up of retired firefighters, and they go out there and they're not so much firefighting, but they still want to be involved with the fire service, but help out setting things up and whatnot, as opposed to actually physically firefighting (TFS FG3).

[I]f it is just allowing them to do their CPR or even just a radio operator, then they can actually access the job and they can still access uniform. But they don't have to do the bronze (SLST INT2).

We've got some people that don't want to be activated to the incidents, but they're happy to be the independent wellbeing people and make the phone calls. And we need those people (RC FG1).

While people may have expectations that, if they no longer have that physical capability, volunteers should discontinue this aspect of the work, it was abundantly clear that doing so was not easy at all. One Ambulance volunteer talked at length about this type of change in their life and capabilities, and that now they had moved from frontline incident response to "the other supporting end" (AT FG2), they felt "that guilt when you do cut down and start to pull back. I can't get over the guilt" (AT FG2). Given the nature of this work and the extended volunteering family they were part of in their local communities, ceasing volunteering for people in these organisations also raised the possibility of ceasing regular contact with these friends, and this was not considered an option for these volunteers: "you've got an extended family...I'm getting older, I don't want to be doing this forever, and at the same time I can't say I'm not doing this anymore because I've got mates as well and their part of my family now" (AT FG2). They expressed the view that they wanted different roles to fulfil in the emergency management volunteer organisations they volunteered for so they could continue to contribute to their local communities and sustain their friendships and sense of belonging that they derived from being involved in emergency response volunteering. These roles needed to align with their capabilities so their volunteering work could be sustained because ultimately, "you're still part of the team" (AT FG2). Different units, clubs, groups, and brigades where volunteers worked made every effort to do this and keep experienced volunteers by retasking them based on what they *could* do (such as servicing equipment, driver reviver, mentoring – SES FG3) because that was "the opposite of someone feeling useless because of their age" (SES FG3). They did this bearing in mind that volunteers

needed be mindful that people were not acting “outside their capabilities” (SES FG3). Finally, they noted the imperative need for throughcare in this respect – the need for emergency management volunteer organisations to be “looking after your members after they leave” (TFS FG4) so that they can maintain that strong social sense of belonging generated by involvement in emergency response volunteering.

### *Volunteer vs career: Attitudes towards volunteers from paid workers*

A key tension that negatively influenced the experiences of emergency response volunteers in our study was played out between volunteers and what volunteers called career workers: that is, people who were paid to do the same role as the volunteers. These tensions were an issue for AT and TFS in particular in our study and were confounding for our participants: “The whole idea of TFS is they are a volunteer organisation supported by career [firefighters]. It is not a career organisation supported by volunteers. They actually need to support the volunteers” (TFS FG1). Interestingly, this was not about volunteers wanting to be paid for their roles – they already had paid work and the work they did as volunteers would become something else if it was paid. They stated that “I don’t want to get paid. What I do want is the gear so I know that, when I get on the truck, I’m going to go home at the end of it” (TFS FG4). Ultimately, in the case of TFS, the volunteers were getting the message that the organisation they volunteered for “value them [firefighters] more if they’re paid” (TFS FG4). This message was reinforced by the actions of the organisations in some circumstances, such as new helmets being distributed to career firefighters first, and then distributed to the volunteers sometimes months later, even though the career workers and the volunteers were physically close in proximity. For these TFS volunteers, this would commonly be experienced in negative ways, something also reflected in the discussion of AT volunteers. They made a point about age being significant in these situations: “the older ones are absolutely tremendous to work with” (AT FG2).

Generally, there was discontent with the attitudes and behaviours that some career workers demonstrated towards volunteers, particularly in TFS. When discussing how the volunteers had been called in to assist with a large fire campaign, they recounted being “yelled at by the guy on site about people [volunteers] turning up when they’re not asked for, abused to the point where they were about to pack up and walk home” (TFS FG1) – and when the interviewer asked who yelled at them, multiple voices replied in unison: “paid workers” (TFS FG1). Others described career TFS workers as “real pricks and arrogant”, but working alongside them were other career TFS workers that were “really good to deal with...it’s a funny political dynamic. Ambulance never had a problem

with them. Never had a problem with police. It's just this funny thing between SES and TFS" (SES FG3).

Others noted how these issues filtered right from the top paid people in the volunteer emergency management volunteer organisation they volunteered their time for: "I don't believe the top brass understand the volunteers" (TFS FG4), with this immediately followed by another volunteer saying "but what is sad is that the guy at the top was a volunteer" (TFS FG4). They were deeply dissatisfied with their treatment by a now career firefighter who was at one point a volunteer: "it bloody hurts knowing that he was a volunteer firefighter for a lot of years before he joined the service as a career firefighter and he forgot where he come from" (TFS FG4). They spoke at length about the level of disrespect being very impactful: "It's the us and them thing. We're so much better than you because we've had twelve weeks flat out in Hobart" (TFS FG4). TFS volunteers noted how career firefighters in the past had specific "perceptions of volunteer brigades" focused around volunteers being unskilled: "we're just seen as volunteers and we didn't know what to do" (TFS FG3). One of the volunteers even noted that at a public talk given by a person in the most senior management position of TFS discussing SES volunteers, that are now under the banner of TFS: "he referred to the SES as their gophers" (SES FG3). Assuming volunteers had less skills was a tenuous position and a key ethical concern for emergency response volunteers because ultimately, as one 'double hatter' (see explanation in demographics section) from TFS noted in the focus group with AT:

When you're out in the field on fire ground, you've got all these guys around you...You don't know who these people are. You don't know what their background is. You could have a young guy straight out of Kentucky Fried Chicken...We had the head of pharmacology at the Royal Hobart Hospital. We had tradesmen, businessmen, and just general blokes, all wearing the same yellow overall. You couldn't tell what their background was (AT FG2).

Disrespect for knowledge directed at volunteers by career workers could be misplaced when career workers were not aware of the backgrounds of the volunteers. Volunteers acknowledged that this had improved with time as, in the past, a "career fire fighter would have spit on the ground every time you said volunteer. This mentality has changed, don't get me wrong, but there's definitely still a rift there" (TFS FG5).

Participants acknowledged that in recent times, TFS have been "maturing" by working on "changing their perceptions of volunteer brigades", but they noted this was "quite hard" because in the past "it was all about turf" (TFS FG3) and now they can still be considered "the poor cousins" (TFS FG5). It was not about the fact that the volunteers

did not get paid for what the paid career people did – it was manifested as an attitude from the career people towards the volunteers. Some volunteers noted how it was different levels of training that might be contributing to this. For instance, in TFS, all firefighters – career and volunteer – “did exactly the same training...you still get that little divide occasionally, but not as much” (AT FG2). Importantly, this volunteer was a ‘double hatter’ – they volunteered for TFS and AT – and this meant they could clearly see that within TFS, the career/volunteer divide was “a lot better than it used to be”, but “I’m yet to be convinced that the divide is now narrowing down in the ambulance service. I think it’s still quite wide” (AT FG2).

Regardless of the reason for this perceived differential treatment of volunteers, it was very clear that it was crucial for it to be resolved. The culture that this rift was sustained by, and perhaps perpetuating, was articulated in some comments in our study: “You hear it constantly, the lack of respect for their own organisation and it’s really sad that they [career paramedics] speak of it in front of the volunteers” (AT FG2). This meant that volunteers felt devalued and generated a lot of negativity in their experience with their volunteering role:

I wonder if it stems from you know everyone wants to feel a sense of importance, but sometimes people get a bit carried away with it. The paid paramedic I mean they have wonderful knowledge there is no doubt about it, but in the initial assessment of the patient, we do exactly the same thing. And mechanically we can do what they can do, we have excellent training, and we need to know our limitations, but they also need to know our strengths, and that yes their capabilities beat ours, but they shouldn’t make assumptions about how clever we are or aren’t (AT FG2).

Indeed, there was so much concern amongst ambulance volunteers about this division that they felt challenged ethically when it came time to hand over patients to career paramedics at an incident:

Sometimes you sort of feel guilty handing over your patient who you’ve been kind to and talked to, and reassured all the way to where you meet them...and they shove them in the back of their truck and they sort of think, ‘I wish the volunteer was in the back and the paramedic was driving’ (AT FG2).

This particular volunteer suggests that even the patients can pick up on the career/volunteer divide that plays out in the space of incidents they attend together. It is clear that guilt about lost rapport with these patients is something troubling ambulance volunteers in Tasmania.

The career/volunteer tensions often related to non-recognition by the career workers of the skills that volunteers had. Volunteers in the study gave examples to illustrate this. For instance, an ambulance volunteer might be called out to a scene, be the first to arrive, and begin working to treat the people at the scene. Then the career/paid paramedics arrive and, from the volunteer's perspective, they push the volunteer out of the way and tell them to go home. Volunteers felt there was an apparent lack of disregard for the skills of the volunteers in situations like this:

I think in terms of recognition too there is a vast difference between organisations like Ambulance Tasmania and Tas Fire who've career arms, and then other organisations like Surf or Red Cross that are fully volunteer. So we've already got that tension...I mean we went through hell in the fire service years ago and I have to say it but I think a similar thing is happening already in Ambulance Tasmania and it's that constant tension between career and volunteer, and I think it's a cultural thing and really I think it boils down to in my experience the ones at the top. They've got to drill down and change that culture. So you've gotta have that recognition that at the end of the day we are all members of the same team, whether we're a volunteer or whether we're a fully career paramedic. We've gotta be able to recognise people's skills and not put anyone down (AT FG2).

We're both extremely skilled at what we do, but we just do different jobs. We know that if we get a three story house while we're not going to be in our element trying to put their damn thing out. But we know full well that if people put career staff in a major vegetation fire, they're more of a hindrance than they are actually benefit to us, and I mean we've still got instances from a couple of years ago of career staff turning up on the fire ground and saying, 'I'm now the second command for this so I'm bringing in a career brigade for this and this'. [You - referring to second command] have no idea where you are, you don't know the location of where you are. You've got people that have been in this area as a brigade for 30 years and you tell them to go home? Seriously (TFS FG5).

These types of situations were experienced as demoralising by the volunteers when they felt that career paramedics devalued the volunteers' skills. They said they could often discern if a career paramedic had actually been a volunteer in the past by how the career paramedic interacted with the volunteer paramedics on scene:

That's why I can always tell the difference between paramedics who have come up through the volunteer ranks as opposed to the ones who are strictly career operated. They are automated, they never say, 'Oh good job guys. Thanks for coming all the way out to god knows where'. But it has improved, because we're snapping back at them. We have to stick up for ourselves more now, whereas earlier on we would just pander to whatever they were saying. And then there are the paramedics who say, 'Gee thanks for coming out you did a really good job' (AT FG2).

Volunteers also described situations where career paramedics were openly challenging the qualifications and skills of the volunteers at the scene:

I had one paramedic say to me one night, 'Are you qualified to do that'? I was cleaning up wounds all over this poor woman's body, that had fallen off her motor chair into the road and he asked me the question. And I didn't hear it, I'd already done the stuff and I was too involved in what I was doing and he came and was rattling off about all this stuff. There was so many things to clean and patch up and I was in my element you know...He was in the rig when he commented and I didn't pick up on it I was too busy (AT FG2).

In this example, the career paramedic distinctly questions the skills of the volunteer when they were doing the job and working with a member of the public. The volunteer did not allow this to move them away from their task of assisting the member of the public, but it was clear the career paramedic was challenging their qualifications in this situation. While this could have been a situation where the career paramedic was ignorant about volunteer qualifications generally, the situation would nonetheless be a significant morale dampener for this volunteer.

The volunteers did make suggestions about how this issue might be overcome, and perhaps in terms of cross pollination, this approach may also assist with the issues around the lack of training and trainers:

I think with that bit of a tension between TFS and us, I think if they trained with us and they did a bit of training together, they'd realise that we're not useless and we do know what we're doing. And if they're stuck, they can say, 'Do this for me', and have the confidence that we're going to do it well, even though we might not be full-time paid (SES FG3).

Volunteers we interviewed suggested that collaborative training in the future may be a space to foster mutual learning and understanding between career and volunteer workers. Most importantly, it may reduce the cultural divide between volunteers and career workers and facilitate cultural change.

### *"A difficult ship to turn around": intractable operational issues*

Another significant challenge for emergency response volunteers was intractable operational issues within the organisations they volunteered for. Our research showed that small structural changes could help volunteers immensely in doing their role, such as the phone app they use in SES: "you can look at it and go, 'Oh shit, it's only me and someone else', or you can look at it and go, 'Oh, we got a good crew'" (SES FG2). However, positive comments about operational structures and processes were decidedly rare in our study, with these instead situated as a consistently intractable point of contention across a number of emergency management volunteer organisations: "it's a black hole" (TFS FG1). There were very demoralising instances revolving around the

inability for some organisations to update the information they collected about their volunteers: "I've seen the older books and there are literally dead members listed" (TFS FG1). In contrast to the positive discussion about an app in SES, TFS volunteers were disallowed from using a similar app to facilitate communication, and also stopped from using pagers to do this type of communication in a brigade, so they ended up all purchasing access to an app external to the organisation using their own resources in order to facilitate communication: "We are using [app name] which we all pay for ourselves which is unauthorised and not really supported by the organisation" (TFS FG1). TFS volunteers concluded "there is just zero communication with the volunteers" (TFS FG1) and the app assisted their communication amongst themselves in brigades. The intractable nature of these issues particularly heightened frustrations experienced by volunteers who had been doing their roles for many years, and for more than one organisation, and they could see how operational changes in different times across different organisations impacted their work: "it was the SES that took over the administration [from TFS] and my god it was a lot better then" (SES FG2); and "since changing to TFS, we've definitely noticed that TFS are more likely to use us now too" (SES FG3).

The discussion around operational matters sometimes focused on minor administrative and structural changes needed (such as the implementation of an email system so they could be informed about upcoming training – SES FG3). This was important because sometimes small things, caused by wider structural issues (such as funding and resourcing), led to bigger problems that volunteers felt compelled to address themselves:

[T]he first time we got a bit of rain our windscreen wipers fell off it and we couldn't drive the vehicle anymore and eventually they had to grab [name's] credit card and had to drive to [suburb name] because we couldn't get any service support for the vehicle, our fog lights are still not working (TFS FG1).

Failing to provide resources in this instance meant that volunteering had to stop and volunteers had to delve into their own resources so they could keep doing the work. Sometimes discussion focused on more major administrative issues that needed to be addressed to ensure the smooth operations of the organisation they volunteered for:

Respondent: For five years we've heard that they are going to redo the logbooks. The logbooks are a ridiculous waste of time, so you come to training all the time and you don't advance. The log books don't make any sense and you just kinda go, 'Seriously someone in Australia must have a good system that we could just steal'. Let's not waste time recreating something that's already there.

Respondent: The fire service has got a fabulous logbook system (AT FG2).

According to the volunteers above, if AT and TFS cross-pollinated about logbooks and shared knowledge about those systems, they may well fix a sizeable administrative issue that is clearly producing significant tension for volunteers. Other issues mentioned included being an SES volunteer and seeing how "police have a ridiculous number of questions they have to ask the caller, and so they often don't get to the point of calling SES until they're 15 minutes into it" (SES FG2).

While smaller operational issues represented annoyances for the volunteers, others were quite substantial and sometimes these influenced who was called out to incidents and whether or not anyone attended. We were told that in AT and TFS, volunteers are paged and notified about an incident that they need volunteers to attend and sometimes volunteers fail to receive the page:

We have the occasional issue where we aren't even paged. We will drive along the road and there's the ambulance...that young boy that died on an ATV [all terrain vehicle] not long ago, they obviously knew where he was, and we normally get paged to that area, two of us...We were probably five minutes away from that accident and two of us were on private doing other things and we could have maybe made that difference. AT have told there are some cases where we don't page you and this and that, but we had an old man die over here last week and he fell over and hurt himself and we weren't paged. We had a guy along the road who was also in the TFS who had a heart issue and we weren't paged (AT FG1).

[E]ven going back to the simple [issue of] pagers advising us when there's going to be a total fire ban day. I found the news had it, the paper had it, and everyone else in the public knew before I even got a pager call about a total fire ban (TFS FG1).

For emergency response volunteers in our study, administrative issues like these meant wasted time and resources, but they recognised this was not malicious: "it's not an institutional bias against you or anything it's just a stuff up" (AT FG1). Sometimes it was needless loss of life, as exemplified by the example above. Other times it was the lack of clear cut communication pathways that led to wasted time on call outs that should not have been actioned: "you get a page job and you get there and its nothing, and you shouldn't have even been called, and you think what a waste of time that was" (SES FG2) – "why am I here for a toothache" (AT FG1). Getting called out for no reason, or getting called out on the basis of incorrect information, generated immense frustration and anger amongst these volunteers:

It used to be Tas Ambulance used to get paged and then wait for Tas Ambulance crews to arrive on scene for finding out who needs rescuing or not...they put a stop to that because by the time Ambulance drives from [suburb name] to [suburb name] or up [suburb name] or something like that, they've wasted half an hour and we've gotta waste another half hour in that hour of criticalness for the patient survival and then you're buggered then. You might as well not go (SES FG2).

...

Respondent: The trouble is you've got people driving in the middle of the night. They don't even know where they are half the time. They could be from anywhere. It would be like me having a crash halfway between here and Hobart. I wouldn't know where I was. If you travelled the road everyday you might.

Respondent: Christmas Hills is a classic example. There's a Christmas Hills here and there's a Christmas Hills in Smithton, and they're both on the Bass Highway. They're a bit far apart when you're responding from Smithton!...Then they send you another page – wrong Christmas Hills (SES FG2).

...

We've turned up to jobs and the paramedics said, 'How come you're here?', and we go, 'Well, because we were paged'. And he goes, 'Well we don't need ya'. And you've got out of bed at one o'clock in the morning and busted your arse to get there...and you get stood down (AT FG1).

Wasted time because processes did not function adequately was attached to feelings of resentment for emergency response volunteers: "Although that time was free, it was very valuable for us, and I don't believe that the organisation recognises that anymore" (TFS FG1). The frustration with operational systems that led them to be needlessly called out, or called out in a way that jeopardised patient safety, was evidenced well in the discussions of our participants. This was deeply troubling for volunteers when these circumstances led to the death of someone in the community and the organisation they volunteered for did not address this: "they've gone, 'Actually, we've screwed up, but we are not going to admit it, but we'll move on and sweep it under the rug'" (AT FG1). There were many moments where time was wasted because of misinformation being distributed through a basic process, but the lack of organisational response when the situation led to serious consequences meant volunteers were questioning their trust for the organisation they worked for. Most importantly, this led to decisions to discontinue volunteering for these organisations as a result: "No, I'm not wasting any more time over here" (TFS FG1).

Frustration was particularly compounded when the participants volunteered for more than one emergency management volunteer organisation. Sometimes (AT FG2) they could see very clearly how other systems in place in other emergency management volunteer organisations (such as the logbook system in TFS) were considered to be

better than those they were experiencing (in AT): "this is a no brainer - let someone get in there, stop wasting time and just get in there and fix the bloody thing" (AT FG2). At other times, the operational issues were protracted and they discussed at length the time and resources being expended because issues were not addressed:

[A] frustration is wasted time...they're not actually doing the work and so, it was like when sort of like the little rats at the bottom doing all the work. Yeah. And wasting a lot of people's time. And that's like an ongoing frustration. I know last season at least eight dropped out around the state because they were giving up...it's just the compliance that we have to go through and you can sympathise with people who are walking away (SLST INT2).

This was an ongoing experience and this frustration was substantially deepened when volunteers provided feedback to the organisations, but they do not act on this: "the frustration is when you feedback and nothing changes. The salary guys and girls probably think the same thing. Why do they keep doing it?" (AT FG2). Participants noted how they "bury my head in the sand" (AT FG2) – they're here to do a job and try to ignore politics: "I'm here for the patient. I'm here to do what I have to do on that shift with my mates and in some sense you become a bit of an ostrich" (AT FG2).

One of the key reasons operational issues were experienced as a significant concern linked with how volunteers believed that resolving these issues might possibly facilitate culture change in an organisation, even if this was at a superficial level:

I feel a sense that the new head honcho dude is really trying hard to change the culture, but I think the culture has been so dreadful for so long that I think it's a difficult ship to turn around...You know it's a little bit like any organisation - there are some things that you don't pass down the line and I guess in some respects the volunteers are the bottom of the pile. But I think in any organisation you shouldn't treat the lowest paid workers as if they don't matter because everybody is important in the team so there is nothing that you don't share with your juniors for example, like you keep some of that cultural stuff in house and you fake it until you make it kind of thing and that's not a really bad thing. I think administratively they're an absolute basket case (AT FG2).

These comments demonstrate that there is an ingrained culture within AT that there are lots of operational issues and the volunteers are the last to know or have their issues addressed in any way – they feel like they are being treated like they "don't matter" by workers higher up in the hierarchy. Later, the same respondent acknowledged the "head honchos" were working to make change as best they could, but they were not going to be able to make change happen with administrative issues because they "need administrative support as well so all the uniforms are sorted. All the little things that I imagine most people in their lunch break could've dealt with" (AT FG2). Volunteers in

other organisations acknowledged that cultural change like this was absolutely vital for retaining volunteers – unaddressed administrative issues generated an environment where “experienced, skilled volunteers that have been doing it for a long, long time, in their 30s and in their 40s, you can’t lose these people” (TFS FG5). Most importantly, when organisations did not hear the concerns of their volunteers and seek to ameliorate the issues they raised with them, they stopped volunteering: “it was hugely disappointing if I’m honest, in terms of wasted time, probably the worst I’ve ever seen. I stopped volunteering...two days you’ve given up work, you’re under heaps of pressure – do you give any more days up from work?”; and later in the discussion: “the organisation keeps promising stuff and not delivering it” (TFS FG1).

### *Short term positions*

Compounding all of the operational issues noted above was the apparent lack of consistency in positions of the people that worked in the operations of the emergency management volunteer organisations. This was profoundly frustrating for the volunteers because “they put them in their position for a year or two and then they’ve got to reapply for it” (AT FG2):

Respondent: They procrastinate and put people in positions for six months...and they say, ‘Oh, I’m only going to be here for six months’. What’s the point?

Respondent: we all turn up for training at [suburb name] and we sit there for a half hour waiting till they get there, and then another half hour for them to get the whiteboard working, and it’s always a different person - there is no continuity, so they don’t know what we know they don’t know what we’ve done (AT FG2).

[I]t’s that inconsistency of position, it must do their head in. It not only wastes their resources, but it also wastes overall, like imagine how much money they spend on recruitment and induction into new positions and this one comes in and another one goes out and that one comes in. It’s constant and the amount of emails that we get about staff change is ridiculous and you just think that culturally is very bad for an organisation and it filters down (AT FG2).

[T]hey’ve had people over there when they’ve been running well and then they’ve moved, and so they move somewhere else and so somebody else comes in and they start all over again (TFS FG1).

The high turnover of people in operational roles meant complex layers of inconsistency in administration and structures in emergency management volunteer organisations. These issues were discussed in some depth in relation to training in particular as volunteers believed that issues with training were linked somewhat to the short term nature of the operational positions. Volunteers concluded there needed to be more

consistency in operational positions that were tasked with managing the organisation and scheduling of training, and that emergency management volunteer organisations “should put on more courses until everybody gets trained up” (TFS FG1). If this was not actioned, the eventual outcome would be that “we wouldn’t have a fire service anymore” (TFS FG1). As highlighted by volunteers in TFS: “they need some dedicated people...that are handling the training. I'm not talking about the people doing the training or the training officers. I’m talking about the admin support. It keeps getting changed all the time” (TFS FG1). This led to situations where there was “no continuity” in important areas such as training provision, as the quotes above demonstrate.

Further to this, there was evidence short term positions had significant ripple effects across the organisations when people who were employed on short contracts lacked relevant knowledge related to their role, and again this was raised around trainers lacking understanding of volunteer protocols for instance (AT FG2). The short term nature of these type of positions meant that the knowledge trainers had was sometimes not fit for purpose: “You’re training us but you don’t understand our protocol. The people are lovely. It’s AT that did the wrong thing by sending us new people. How do you train a volunteer if you don’t understand the volunteer protocol?” (AT FG2). This sense of frustration was expressed in other organisations too:

Respondent: Well you know the trouble is with some of these trainers you’re talking about, they have probably never even done a job. All they’ve done is worked on a car that’s parked in the bloody yard with no one in it.

Respondent: That’s what I was saying. They’re being trained by people that have done it for two or three years.

Respondent: It’s a whole different ball game when you’ve got someone stuck in a car that’s dying (SES FG2).

The frustration with short term positions is clearly evidenced here. The lack of consistency in trainers themselves, due to short term positions, meant that trainers lacked knowledge and hands on experience. Furthermore, volunteers expressed frustration with the ongoing nature of unresolved operational issues. They relayed how this had other significant ramifications for volunteers personally even with simple things like trying to navigate the web presence of their emergency management volunteer organisations:

I’m the second officer, I’m the secretary, I’m the treasurer...but there’s not admin, training, supervision, of how the organisation is supposed to work. If you ever go on the intranet and try and find a form...you can’t find it. You

cannot find it. I've tried. I can't even become self-reliant and say, 'You know what? I'll just do it myself' (TFS FG1).

Volunteers expressed how their own self-reliance goals were being undermined by ongoing operational issues.

### *"Old boys clubs": Limiting membership and skills of emergency management volunteer organisations*

A key barrier discussed by participants in this study was what was colloquially called the 'old boys club' and 'the old guard'. While in other contexts, the 'old boys' refers typically to sexism and how male participants in a process exclude female participation, something often raised in organisations like police in relation to barriers faced by female officers. Interestingly, in our study, the 'old boys club' was a bit different. This phrase was used more to discuss how people would choose particular people for particular roles simply because they had more longevity in their role as opposed to having the right type of experience: "they're sort of stuck in the culture of this is the way we used to do it" (SLST INT4). It was about sustaining "the group they've always had there" and blocking "the younger ones coming through". Volunteers also noted how, when the 'old boys' moved through an organisation, culture change was facilitated for the better: "some of the changes that have been made since we came under the police department is that the culture with the fire department is changing for the better...it was an old boys club" (TFS FG1).

While some acknowledged that having "the old guard [move] to the new guard" is a significant loss in terms of "corporate knowledge" (SLST FG1), most volunteers suggested it was more problematic that the 'old boys' network would overlook those who had the right experience for the role and instead favour those with more longevity. It was really important that "people with the stubbornness have gone through the ranks" (TFS FG3). A discussion of drone training in focus group one with SLST evidenced this dynamic:

Drones are a good example. We had the ability to do drone training, but the only people who did drone training aren't, only two are actually involved in search and rescue and the demographic of the people who went for the training wasn't really the demographic of people who are best equipped...the people who actually attended the training - that wasn't put out to everybody to see who's the best candidate to do this kind of training. When they ran the drone training, it was chosen who went to it exclusively, but there are other people within the organisation who would've had a much greater skill set to bring to the drone training and be able to use it and everything (SLST INT1).

Although there were people that were collectively thought of as having a skill set that was a better fit for drone training, the 'old boys' dynamic meant that other people 'that have always been' there were chosen over them – and this was perceived as non-negotiable. The broader membership appeared to be denied any role in the decision making process and the person was chosen exclusively by a group of people 'that have always been' there. This meant that "people being chosen to do these sort of trainings, that is the pathway forward, aren't probably the correct ones" (SLST FG1).

Importantly, this 'old boys' dynamic was not just seen as a frustration – it was situated by participants as a key barrier to the future sustainability of the organisations that emergency response volunteers engaged with. These types of decision making were variously described as a 'dead wall' (in the example below), a 'blockage from higher up', a 'barrier', and a 'bottleneck'. It thwarted smart future planning within the organisation, including succession planning, and they surmised that it contributed to burn out and attrition amongst the volunteers: "A lot of people in the training and assessing world are feeling that their needs aren't really being supported and their feedback isn't really being listened to, especially when that's going to the top of the chain" (SLST INT2). SLST demonstrated key examples of this type of decision making and a number of members colloquially called this process a system of 'old boys'. In SLST interview four, the respondent noted:

I know we joke about the boys club at surf and it is actually still alive and kicking, that is very frustrating because when you're at a club and it is very dynamic and you want positive change and you want things to happen and you can see the great achievement that could happen if you all work together and you can do all these sorts of things and then you have this dead wall (SLST INT4).

The 'dead wall' referred to here was the crucial reason why 'old boys' was considered a barrier. This stopped the organisation from functioning better and blocked these organisations from effective succession planning. The interviewee in SLST interview four explained this in some detail:

That's what I was saying before about who gets chosen to do drone training, to do Swiftwater. It's based on this old boys club thing which is really bad because there's so much potential out there, so many amazing people...one of the committees I used to be on in the lifesaving executive was so toxic I just had to leave because of the toxicity of it...there was these amazing people having great ideas on how to change things and nothing would happen...They think that order does work well when you have an emergency because you need to follow things, but in the background before that *emergency* happens, you need a much more free-flowing communication chain. You need much more listening to other people's voices (SLST INT4).

This interviewee has captured well the dynamics of 'old boys' ways of doing emergency response volunteering as it was perceived by the study participants: great ideas will be thwarted and unheard because the same voices continue to be heard and new "amazing" ones are unheard; and that contributes to "a slow drain" of "these amazing people" (SLST INT4). Leadership was considered absolutely crucial in sustaining this dynamic. As the interviewee in SLST interview two suggested:

They just need some new blood, and where people feel like they have use and are actually listened to, and they can and do make changes, and Tasmania isn't going to be left behind... I think those people won't step up and grow if these people are still in leadership positions (SLST INT4).

Not enabling and supporting 'new blood' to come up through the ranks and to be heard in their suggestions related to the surf clubs they volunteered with, this "makes them feel like they're not supported in their role or roles in future. And why would they bother?" (SLST INT2). The dangers of this approach were acknowledged in terms of sustainability in particular: "it limits the sustainability and it is also because sometimes you're putting all your eggs in one basket with people who have already been down there and trained that way, rather than trying to bring people up and through" (SLST INT4).

This is a considerable barrier because these dynamics mean that "nothing would happen" – change is blocked and the future sustainability of the organisation is not protected:

We can't grow and also people aren't upgrading their qualifications because they're saying, 'What's the point? It's too hard'. And there's people out there like [Name] that just love training assessing and are so knowledgeable. And all I want to do is train and help young people and they've walked away. So sad (SLST INT2).

Even things like what we talked about with the training and assessing things. They are really hard problems, but they are not hard enough that they can't be solved like with the right person. Find the organisations to help and put the money into it. You're losing people because you can't train and assess them and there comes a point where it becomes too hard. You've had that big period with none and you're burning out the people who can do it and without having a succession plan or bringing any new blood through (SLST INT4).

Furthermore, again from the interviewee in SLST interview four, it meant that younger volunteers lacked a visible "pathway" that would act as a "driver to come into those roles in more emergency management and Swiftwater training because that keeps them involved and gives them interesting things to do" (SLST INT4). The younger members "being encouraged to go down that path" cannot see that path being available to them

because 'old boys' barriers are being sustained. This, they argued, "actually decreases the retention of people because they don't have a pathway that can be seen as an interesting pathway, and it's a bit exclusive sometimes" (SLST INT4). Even for those young people who have ambitions with moving through organisations like SLST, it is the lack of vision of a pathway into training that volunteers perceive to be leading to a significant 'slow drain' on volunteers as they leave and a lack of culture change in the organisation more broadly. They suggested that it was imperative to find alternative ways to move this situation forward, especially strategies like "listening to what people's voices are and acting on what we hear. That sort of high-level stuff that is above our club in the hierarchy of things, but we feel a bit powerless to do something about" (SLST INT4).

### *Lack of organisational gratitude: volunteers being taken for granted*

One of the core barriers to sustaining the interest of emergency response volunteers was being taken for granted and not receiving thanks for the time they invested volunteering for the organisations they worked for. This was a key concern for volunteers interviewed in our study, with many suggesting this lack of recognition substantially eroded their commitment to volunteering and sometimes outweighed the positive motivational factors completely:

When I transferred from [suburb name] when I was leading firefighter to [brigade name]...I was reported in the system as being probational. Now I had been a firefighter at that stage for 13 years and I was put on probation. What does that say about the way the organisation values our work? (TFS FG1).

These types of experiences were evidenced across all organisations in our study in some way and much of the discussion above demonstrates these experiences. At times, this was subtle, with volunteers feeling like they are not valued by the organisations they work for because they fail to action change in these organisations: they fail to change culture when people block them from moving into leadership roles (SLST); they fail to provide the skills training they need and stop them from doing the role when they are not trained (SES, AT, RC); and they fail to fix administrative issues that mean volunteers are called out when they're not needed (AT, SES). All these things amounted to feeling like volunteers were being taken for granted by the organisations they worked for. However, sometimes this was more obviously evidenced in how these volunteers did not feel appreciated at all by the organisations they worked for because they did not reward them for what they did in any way:

It's nice to just be probably appreciated. And I don't think they appreciate, like I'm talking about the regional staff, sometimes they don't properly appreciate you as much as they probably should. And that can be a matter of just giving you new gear or, buying you a new truck or a new station or getting new curtains. Sometimes you just feel like you bust your arse and really you're just getting kicked (SES FG2).

The lack of gratitude being expressed towards volunteers by the emergency management volunteer organisations may seem trivial, but these volunteers believed this was having a significant ripple effect that impacted sustainability and volunteer attrition. They felt that a lack of gratitude and feeling like they were being taken for granted meant volunteers would leave:

It's nice to get that pat on the back, and sometimes I think they don't get the chance enough to say thank you and I think that's why you lose volunteers sometimes too because there's not that thank you or the recognition of what you can do and what we do...a thank you would be nice (AT FG2).

I've been in for 10 years and I am just about ready to give up because I'm sick of the organisation, and I feel like giving up. I'm a second officer and I'm second in charge of my brigade and I am just about ready to say 'Stuff you officer'...There's the pager, the pager goes off and then someone can tell me what to do...lower care factor...The care factor is not about my community or being a volunteer. It's about my displeasure with the organisation and willingness to give up my time for the organisation (TFS FG1).

They take us for granted. And that's how I feel – they take us for granted. And they don't understand that if we don't – if they keep treating us like that and we don't turn up, they're not going to get out of their office chair and come and do it (SES FG2).

These volunteers felt that not receiving gratitude from emergency management volunteer organisations meant that, at some point, volunteers would not be there to respond. This is a crucial and problematic outcome from feeling taken for granted as these volunteers are often 'double hatters' (as noted above). In addition, they are often in small towns that cannot sustain themselves where they have no capacity to just go out and bring in new volunteers – if these volunteers "don't turn up", there will be no one to respond to emergencies and the negative consequences for community members will be significant.

Interestingly, volunteers felt that this lack of recognition and thanks was predominantly from the emergency management volunteer organisations. It seems volunteers did receive gratitude and "appreciation of the small community" (SLST INT3) from members of the community when they were involved in different types of activities and this motivated them to keep doing the work:

[T]he majority of schools just put the whole school in [first aid training] because they don't ever get that education and the principals were really thankful...the teachers included because they don't do first aid. We did basic first aid with them and they came up at the end going, 'Oh my gosh, thank you' (SLST INT2).

99% of the interaction we got from our Facebook page was all positive things. 'Good job and thanks for your help boys. Hope the people are okay' (SES FG2).

Demonstrations of public gratitude from their local communities really mattered, but thanks also needed to come from the organisations themselves. For these volunteers, gratitude needed to be demonstrated through more than just badges for each achievement – for instance, TFS volunteers noted they had a lot of badges and medallions: "You're starting to look like a bloody jockey with badges all over your bloody shirt" (TFS FG4). In one instance, the badge was not even received by the volunteer for some time: "I've been doing this for nine and a half years, but I only got my five year badge today though" (AT FG2). It is evident that they were seeking other forms of recognition from these organisations that made them feel valued. They mentioned the Country Fire Association well developed "honours and awards system. They're all state awards, but still people are getting things much more frequently than what they receive within Tasmania" (TFS FG4). While some volunteers were definitely seeking thanks and hoping this would eventuate, others were not at all convinced this would happen and instead championed creating a culture within volunteer groups where the thanks and recognition was generated amongst the volunteers themselves: "I think we need to do that with each other...we have a commonality of respect and duty to each other before we can start to give it out there" (AT FG2).

A key theme in this discussion was the idea that the emergency management volunteer organisations that volunteers worked for did not understand volunteers and what their needs were: "I just don't think the police department is dealing well with the fact that the organisation under their umbrella are volunteers" (TFS FG1). This was compounded by how the volunteers felt that the organisations did not actually want to know what their needs were and did not demonstrate any attempt to find out. This demonstrated to them a lack of care about volunteers and a devaluation of their skills that they brought to the organisation they worked with:

It's the disconnection between people who are being paid and the other people who are actually on the ground doing the work. There's a lack of care in a sense (SES FG3).

The frustrating thing for me is that I don't think that TFS actually really understands its volunteer base. And I don't think it really understands what they're capable of or why they are there (TFS FG5).

Wanting to know about and understand the capabilities of emergency response volunteers was an expectation that volunteers had of the organisations they volunteered for. There were many moments when they felt their knowledge, skills, and capabilities were not being utilised in ways that assisted the organisations and they felt that this was happening because the organisations did not care.

### *Unused local community knowledge of emergency management volunteers*

From the perspective of volunteers, emergency management volunteer organisations demonstrated their disregard of volunteers capabilities most keenly when they ignored the local knowledge that volunteers had in the event of an emergency. Local knowledge was described by TFS volunteers in elaborating on the tensions between career and volunteer firefighters in Tasmania:

Respondent: Careers spend their life in vehicle rescue, houses, multistory buildings, and all that's very important. But when they come out they don't recognise that the volunteers have lived there for years. They know ever track, every nook, every cranny, the funny way the wind behaves, the whole thing. In this situation, they [career firefighters] don't have bushfire knowledge.

Respondent: They had the [suburb name] boys on at the station each day over the period of that fire, and on one occasion they picked the whole lot up and set them down in [suburb name] somewhere to support something, when in fact they needed them at [suburb name] or [suburb name] or [suburb name] because that area where's the fire was, those blokes all had the local knowledge. They sent them off somewhere where they knew nothing about where they were.

Respondent: They wouldn't know the roads (TFS FG1).

Participants said that this knowledge was being repeatedly ignored by the organisations: "Sometimes they just pull people in. They don't often have local area knowledge" and this meant that "the local knowledge sat unused" (TFS FG1). Furthermore, they were knowledgeable about how continuing to ignore local knowledge was a significant issue raised repeatedly in reports about past fire campaigns for example: "you go back through Australian history of all the past bushfires. The one thing that comes out in all of the major report is make more use of locals" (TFS FG1). Discussion about the tension between career and volunteer workers hinted at this above and part of one quote warrants noting again: "You've got people that have been in this area as a brigade for 30 years and you tell them to go home? Seriously" (TFS FG5). Overlooking local knowledge

and understanding that volunteers had this came up in the data repeatedly. This was especially linked with volunteers not being heard by their organisations – their local knowledge was known by the organisation, but this was not utilised, and this made them feel unheard:

They don't listen to us most of the time, like we live here, we know the community, and we know what other recourses are available...and sometimes you're made to feel as though you don't know anything (AT FG2).

...

Actually knowing the areas, like it's pretty hard for Tassie because we've got so many areas and every area's different you know, and we are very lucky because we've got good doctors and we go to get an assessment. Now we get a job and the [suburb name] paramedics will be sent or the [suburb name] paramedics will be sent if [suburb name] is busy and they come down and you know it's a waste of resources for the paramedic to come down just to make sure and other times we have cardiac arrest oh where are the doctors. But at [suburb name] it's different, so it must be hard for them in one respect because every little area is different so one plan wouldn't work. But they don't listen to us (AT FG2).

Volunteers make it clear here that they have knowledge and understanding that could be drawn upon to make emergency management volunteer organisations and processes better and more efficient. They have knowledge of the local community and the geography that the organisations do not, yet they felt this knowledge continues to be overlooked and devalued by the organisations. They also suggested the organisations needed to shift how they thought about the value of their volunteers' knowledge, skills, and capabilities to facilitate sustained changes to this thinking: "it may be as simple as changing the budget reporting figures...actually counting volunteer hours in that and saying, 'We have 30 million dollars in volunteer hours and we need the resources to fund that' and it doesn't mean paying us" (TFS FG1).

## **Factors supporting retention of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania**

Emergency response volunteers mentioned a number of factors that clearly supported the retention of these volunteers in emergency management volunteer organisations in Tasmania. These factors were identified as supporting them to stay on as volunteers. Broadly, we could argue that the issues outlined above in the section on motivations for volunteering are also applicable here. There is no doubt that the intrinsic personal motivators, elaborated in the sections above (helping, excitement, using their skills, as well as belonging, trust and contributing to the community,) all support and encourage

these volunteers to continue donating their time to their local communities. This argument would also include the extrinsic motivators explored above, including doing good by helping the community and making a difference, creating safe and secure public spaces, using their skills, fostering personal and career development amongst young volunteers, and forging belonging and friendships with the extended volunteer 'family'. All of these issues evidently support emergency response volunteers to continue volunteering long into later life. The additional issues discussed below are ones that bolstered these factors in the experiences of volunteers in our study. They related specifically to different forms of post-incident support and gratitude and recognition from emergency management volunteer organisations and members of the public.

### *Gratitude and recognition make emergency response volunteers stay*

One of the key positive themes in the discussion that influenced the retention of emergency response volunteers was gratitude and recognition. Gratitude was about how volunteers' local communities, and their emergency management volunteer organisations, demonstrated thanks, recognised the work of volunteers, and showed their appreciation for this, and this was evidenced through demonstrations of returned kindness. For instance, TFS volunteers talked about some of their greatest moments being those involving the annual Christmas lolly drop with their local communities. They derived great enjoyment and satisfaction from being able to generate such joy amongst children in their communities. Most importantly, though, as they drove around on their fire trucks, they could visibly see the gratitude and recognition from local community members: "you just see the respect from the community there" (TFS FG3). There were also examples where volunteers were publicly (on their Facebook pages for instance) thanked by members of the public after being involved in an incident. This gratitude was also experienced more directly on a one-to-one, face-to-face, basis:

The other week I responded to a three year old at 1:45 who was sick and they were 200m from my house and I didn't actually know them but I had seen them walking their dog past my house and two days later they bring me a box of chocolates and they said thank you (AT FG1).

Respondent: People would rock up to this station during this big event, tray loads of food with eskies full of soft drink and beer, and a lot of them realise we don't get paid. The brigade people had to accept it because to not accept it would be insulting.

Respondent: They are thanking a person who is a volunteer. The thanks from the organisation is a medal – the medallion is the only thing we get for the fires. Every other thing was from the community. We live off that. We don't ask for it or expect it, but the response from the organisation was to stomp on it (TFS FG1).

Some emergency management volunteer organisations were incredibly good at acknowledging their volunteers and they worked hard to ensure their volunteers felt rewarded and the volunteers derived great satisfaction out of this:

I love Red Cross for what it is. They acknowledge. The reward and recognition is great. That's another part of the committee I sit on. The state awards committee and we encourage people to be nominated for the awards. I'm a life member of Red Cross and it is one of the highest awards you can get in Australia. January last year I got an Order of Australia Medal (RC FG1).

Reward and recognition like this coming from the emergency management volunteer organisations appeared to be rare in the discussion amongst the volunteers that we interviewed. As noted in the sections above, many felt disappointed by the lack of gratitude demonstrated by the organisations they volunteered for: "You don't even get a thank you – just don't forget to bring your uniform back" (TFS FG4). In contrast to this statement, TFS volunteers talked about an end of year social dinner in their specific location in Tasmania that involved emergency response volunteers across all organisations. In the past, this was organised by the emergency management volunteer organisations, but they discontinued this and now volunteers across organisations in this local area organise it for themselves each year. This process did attract the demonstration of gratitude from the local council, for instance: "we do get a bit of appreciation out of our council. They give us the hall don't they...For me that's the biggest recognition we get" (TFS FG4). Many also noted that recognition does come directly from the communities they support, as noted in the sections above, but this was mediated by whether or not public messaging about the emergency management volunteer organisations, and the volunteer roles, was widely known. As noted above, SES volunteers mentioned the lack of acknowledgement from both the organisation and from their communities because the public are rarely informed of the work that SES volunteers do, attending road crashes for instance (SES FG1, FG2). This makes receiving gratitude and recognition quite a complex area with tenuous outcomes and suggests the need for emergency management volunteer organisations to consult with their volunteers to better understand their needs in this respect.

### *Psychological support post incident makes emergency response volunteers stay*

As noted earlier in this report, emergency response volunteering can be incredibly traumatic. The trauma after a significant incident was challenging for volunteers to navigate: "the trauma after that I suppose. Going out to another crash and dreading it. You don't sleep. You don't eat. You keep checking because you don't know...there's no

way to know if they survived or lived" (SES FG1). At some points in time over a year, some organisations can be called out on a daily basis to very serious incidents involving confronting scenes and fatalities. The core reason that emergency response volunteers indicated that they needed psychological support for, was dealing with the often very protracted "fallout" (TFS FG3) from these incidents. Volunteers in our study made it clear that, unlike other volunteering roles, emergency response volunteers needed extensive support over long periods of time:

[D]ealing with that in the brigade as well is, that's tough, really tough. Really, really tough because lots of people because you start getting to the people and their emotions and how they react and all that type of jazz...But the hardest part of that is that it's not just it's not like a normal incident where you go to it and you go straight back to your day to day. The fallout of that can be six to eight weeks. Yeah, just in talking and then it can be months and months afterwards (TFS FG3).

Like other first responders, volunteers are not immune to the impact of the trauma of fatalities. Volunteers expressed the imperative not just for aftercare following an event of this nature, but also longer term throughcare support so that they could be assisted with dealing with "the fallout". Sometimes this extended for months after an incident especially when there was unfinished business related to an incident – where the volunteer did not know about the outcome for the people involved and whether or not they were okay (SES FG1). Working through this without support was identified as a significant risk for the people involved.

Emergency management volunteer organisations are fairly well prepared to address some of these issues and they do offer counselling and support as a vital service for their volunteers. In SES focus group one, participants talked about CISM (critical incident stress management) that volunteers could call after an incident involving a fatality as a way of supporting their mental health, but they suggested that "it doesn't stop there...It keeps going. You can have a chat to someone on the phone, but then you're also thinking about it later, 'Did they make it? Did they not make it?' It's a snowball effect that one phone call won't fix" (SES FG1). Some organisations did this very well and the volunteers spoke about how incredibly helpful this was for them:

One of the things that I think Red Cross is really good at is looking after people, their 'vollies', you know this whole wellbeing checks, the post event telephone call. When we go off to a disaster, an event, they look after us, they give us information, they prepare us so we are ready psychologically as well as physically, they give us accommodation the best kind that they can...They made sure that you had a bed to sleep on and food to eat and water to drink, and I think most volunteers, that's all you want. That's all you want. We can get some kip when we want it and we get something to drink, even just water

and we get a feed. And they do that, it's a good feeling when you come back and you feel, 'Wow I got looked after', and then suddenly, when you think it's all over, you get a telephone call. 'How you going?' Oh wow, you know (RC FG1).

Comments describing positive support experiences like this coming from emergency management volunteer organisations were rare in our study. For the most part, post-incident support seemed to be either quite limited, or at least inconsistent in its delivery, according to the accounts of our participants:

Sometimes I think there could be a little more support or a lot more support for the volunteers and particularly in critical incidents we need a lot more support, you know follow up, and that day or the next day not a week later, but you know sometimes there's no follow up from Tas Ambulance to see how you're going. But I did have a job a little while ago where they rang the next day which I was a little bit stunned about, positively stunned. But we had a cardiac arrest a few weeks ago and I haven't heard anything back since then (AT FG2).

The discussion about incidents like this was very much couched in terms of volunteers feeling that they needed more support and that not doing this would lead to significant outcomes: "I've been diagnosed with PTSD, but I've got the support mechanisms around me. But a lot of people out there wouldn't even know they've got PTSD and they don't even know about the support mechanisms, and that's sad because generally, what does it lead to? It leads to suicide" (TFS FG4). A lot of the support around confronting incidents seemed to happen informally between the volunteers themselves. They talked a bit about how they would be "on your way from the hospital and you have a little chat about it in the truck on the way back. We've never really talked about it outside, mostly just in the truck on the way back" (AT FG1). However, others noted how they struggled sometimes to actually draw on their colleagues for this support: "I knew that I could go talk to them, but I felt like I couldn't being the only female on the team...I think a lot of people struggled with that one. We didn't say anything. We didn't talk" (SES FG1).

Red Cross was identified by volunteers as one organisation that did provide this form of support for community people *and* volunteers talked at length about the very supportive environment they worked in and how they did what they called independent wellbeing checks with other emergency response volunteers across the country:

[I]t is a role that we can play by supporting our mainland counterparts by doing the independent wellbeing checks. So every Red Cross volunteer that gets deployed, when they get home, they get a wellbeing check. So if they get deployed four or five times, they might get four or five calls just to make sure they are travelling okay, was there any problems with the systems, did they get their hot debriefs, handovers, all those sorts of things (RC FG1).

This account certainly suggests that cross-pollination might see improvements in support for emergency response volunteers more broadly by way of drawing on support made available by Red Cross independent wellbeing checks. Further to this, though, some volunteers extended this out past their life as a volunteer. TFS volunteers, for example, noted the historical program that was in place with national service: "if he's got some disability that can be attributed to his service, then he can end up on a pension. The government looks after those people. What I'm getting at is, I've spent 50 years in...but at the end of the time when you get out...why isn't there a pension system or a bloody rewards system or a look after me system" (TFS FG4). Participants in our study argued that support for emergency response volunteers should extend beyond their life as a volunteer. They suggested ongoing supports, like pensions, were deserved by these volunteers when they had contributed so much to support their organisations and local communities.

## **Framework and Strategies for Positive Volunteer Experiences and Sustainability**

This report has provided a comprehensive discussion of the factors that are significant when considering the recruitment and retention of volunteers in Tasmania. The interviews and focus groups with volunteers provided a wealth of detailed information about the facilitators and barriers to volunteering from the perspectives of the volunteers themselves. While the research has identified common themes across the five emergency management organisations, the ways in which these are developed into strategies to enhance recruitment and retention will in part depend on the characteristics and context of each organisation.

Therefore, rather than listing a set of specific recommendations, the next section draws on these research findings to outline a framework and some suggested strategies that could be adopted to encourage positive volunteer experiences and maximise the effectiveness of the organisations. Some of these strategies may already be in existence. Overall, however, the findings indicate that to ensure organisational health it is prudent to adopt a continuous improvement model that is grounded in the organisation/volunteer relationship. In practice, this means taking into account the volunteers' experiences and perceptions of observed gaps in the supports provided to them and ensuring that strategies implemented are relevant to the volunteers.

### **Framework**

#### ***Desired Outcomes***

The project had three desired outcomes:

1. To better understand the factors that influence motivation and experiences of satisfaction among emergency management volunteers;
2. To acquire knowledge about the factors that influence the recruitment and retention of volunteers;
3. To further understand what positively influences sustainability in the emergency management volunteer sector.

These outcomes might differ slightly in different organisations and different settings but the need to address all three is similar. A focus on these three outcomes can serve as a way to strategically align the organisation's core business with facilitating a volunteer experience that is fulfilling and relevant, and therefore sustainable.

The first of these desired outcomes has been addressed comprehensively in this research and discussed in the previous sections of this report. It is clear that understanding the factors influencing motivation and satisfaction *as experienced by volunteers* is paramount to the sustainability of the organisation. It goes without saying that volunteers give time willingly to serve the community and the most important currency for them is the satisfaction that they have done this to the best of their ability. It is clear from the research findings that when a sense of satisfaction in being able to fulfil their job is elusive, volunteers disengage and/or leave.

The second desired outcome relates directly to retention and recruitment. Recruitment is an important mechanism for renewal. It is crucial in order to replace the natural attrition of volunteers who are ending their volunteer careers, and backstopping the proportion of volunteers who may take a break during busier chapters in their personal lives (for example, those related to family/children, careers or health related breaks).

In some ways, even more important is the retention of volunteers. The loss of volunteers' knowledge - encompassing technical and local knowledge as well as networks and relationships - is a loss to the organisation and the volunteer family they belong to. There is always some level of expected turnover but ensuring these losses are unavoidable, and not a product of dissatisfaction and frustration, is important. Ongoing dialogue with volunteers and with other clubs/brigades can minimise losses and therefore conserve the human resources required to retrain replacement volunteers. Of all the elements that emerged from the data analysis, skill development was central to ensuring satisfaction among volunteers and therefore is a key factor in enhancing retention and, ultimately, the sustainability of the volunteer sector.

The factors that influence motivation and satisfaction among volunteers, together with the factors that contribute to the recruitment and retention of volunteers, feed directly into the third desired outcome; that is, to further understand what positively influences sustainability in the emergency management volunteer sector. A sustainable volunteer sector is dependent upon the quality and consistency of the volunteer experience and is predicated on an awareness of the power of connection, belonging and community as core elements of this experience.

## *Principles and prerequisites*

It is acknowledged that the relationship between volunteers and the hosting organisation needs to be based on command and control in the context of a critical incident. However, the organisation/volunteer relationship encompasses many more elements and in these lie opportunities to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of both the relationship and the experience for both the organisations and the individual and groups of volunteers.

It is possible to identify from the research a number of principles that are fundamental to creating an environment for a healthy emergency management volunteer sector to be achieved. An awareness of these principles will assist in the development and maintenance of positive volunteer experiences. It is recommended that these principles be considered when developing strategies to enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteers. These principles are listed in Table 6 and briefly elaborated below.

**Table 6: Principles and prerequisites for a sustainable emergency management volunteer sector**

| <b>Principles</b>        | <b>Description</b>   |
|--------------------------|--|
| The Volunteer Experience | An understanding of the volunteer experience, especially in relation to motivation and satisfaction  |
| Trust                    | An active understanding that an environment of trust strengthens support and reduces complexities in all the elements of the organisation's and volunteers' experience                                       |
| Cross pollination        | 1.A two-way relationship between the organisation and the volunteers is important<br>2.Exchange and collaboration between organisations is valuable  |
| Voice /Agents of Change  | Appreciation that both organisations and volunteers need their voice heard and to act as agents of change  |
| Local Knowledge/Context  | Appreciation that local knowledge and context is also held in the volunteer sectors of an organisation and that active harvesting of the intelligence for incident and non-incident purposes is advantageous |
| Consistency and Quality  | Understanding the benefits of policies, procedures and communication channels that enhance consistency and quality in the volunteer experience and therefore maximise the volunteer contribution             |
|                          |  |

## The Volunteer Experience

*An understanding of the volunteer experience, especially in relation to motivation and satisfaction*

The research found that volunteers are 'powered' by a few core drivers:

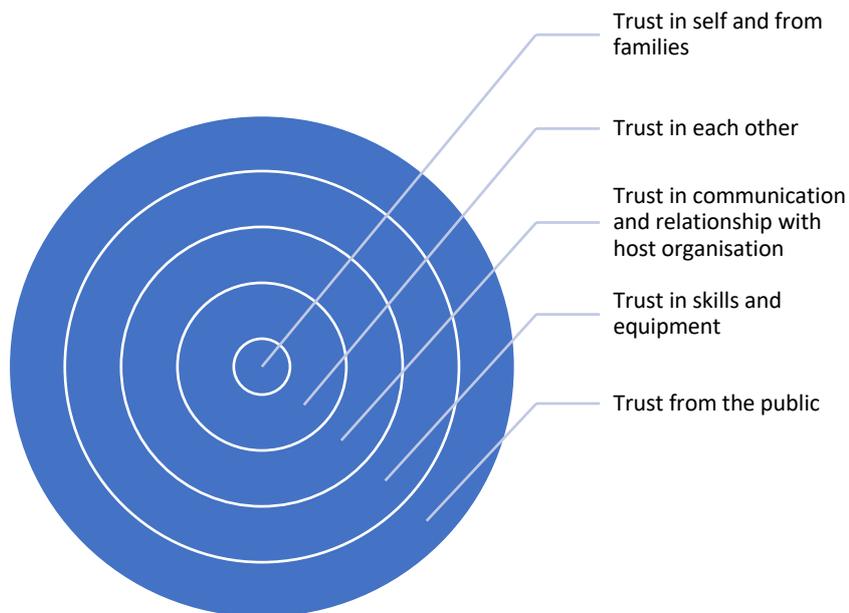
1. contributing to the wider community;
2. building confidence;
3. challenging oneself and personal growth;
4. assisting the development of others;
5. mentoring others; and
6. a commitment to come home safe.

Volunteering is about social and community connection and belonging – it is about the family first/teamwork/leadership/community. Everything else rests on this foundation.

## Trust

*An active understanding that an environment of trust strengthens support and reduces complexities in all the elements of the organisation's and volunteers' experience*

Diagram 1: Elements of trust in the emergency management volunteer experience



It was clear from the data that trust played a significant role in the volunteer experience. It was referred to in the following domains with each needing to be present to ensure a healthy volunteer experience.

1. Trust in self and from families: to trust that you have the skills and confidence to do what is needed and to be able to promise your family that because of that, you will come home safely.
2. Trust from/in each other: to trust that your colleagues 'have your back' both in incidents but across all situations and contexts. Trust that colleagues you have not met until in an incident situation are prepared and have confidence in their associated training, procedures and communication.
3. Trust in lines of communications: this includes consistency, competency, technology, detail, timeliness, cross pollination with local knowledge so volunteers can make informed decisions.
4. Trust in skills and equipment: to trust that the right amount/type and functionality of equipment are assured through checks and that responses to any limitations are addressed where possible to match the outcomes expected. Trust in the level, detail and relevancy of skills training and certifications, including the processes for accessing and acquiring these.
5. Trust from public: to trust that the public have a well rounded but realistic image of what volunteers can and cannot do. This will enhance respect for the volunteers and encourage the public to follow directions when given. Trust that the positive portrayal of volunteers will result in the sustainability of the volunteer workforce.

### **Voice/Agents for change**

*Appreciation that both organisations and volunteers need their voice heard and to act as agents of change*

Both organisations and volunteers need their voices to be heard and to feel empowered to act as agents of change. An environment that enables both parties to act as agents of change is one that has mechanisms in place to allow for clear communication about suggested improvements, and a culture that supports the necessary evolution to be undertaken without volunteers feeling reluctant to share their experiences or perceiving that they have limited opportunities to do so.

## **Cross Pollination**

- 1. A two-way relationship between the organisation and the volunteers is important*
- 2. Exchange and collaboration between organisations is valuable*

An environment that supports a sustainable emergency management volunteer sector is one in which there is a healthy two-way relationship between the organisation and the volunteers and, where possible, also has an intention to create more cross pollination opportunities. The research also identified that exchange and collaboration between organisations is invaluable to the volunteer sector for reasons ranging from enhancing morale to skills exchange.

## **Local Knowledge/Context**

*Appreciation that local knowledge and context is also held in the volunteer sectors of an organisation and that active harvesting of the intelligence for incident and non-incident purposes is advantageous*

The research has demonstrated the importance of the local and contextual knowledge that is held in the volunteer sector of an organisation. The findings indicate that actively harvesting this intelligence for both incident and non-incident purposes is advantageous and valuable. Volunteer satisfaction increases when this local knowledge is valued by the organisation. It follows that creating feedback processes that build respect, knowledge and connections are beneficial as a way of recognising and enhancing the value of local knowledge.

## **Consistency and Quality**

*Understanding the benefits of policies, procedures and communication channels that enhance consistency and quality in the volunteer experience and therefore maximise the volunteer contribution*

The research has highlighted the important role of operational policies and procedures, as well as communication channels, in enhancing consistency and quality in the volunteer experience. Addressing the operational issues identified in the research will therefore maximise the volunteer contribution to the organisation and their community.

### *Overarching strategies and implementation framework*

By combining the knowledge gained from the research findings with the principles identified above, it is possible to suggest some strategies that could be implemented in emergency management sector organisations to enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteers. These strategies are organised in relation to a number of key areas that feed into each other and, when linked together, offer an implementation framework that is based on a process of continuous improvement. This iterative process is represented in Diagram 2 (below). The process is underpinned by the understanding that maximising the emergency management organisational effectiveness and the volunteer experience are equally important.

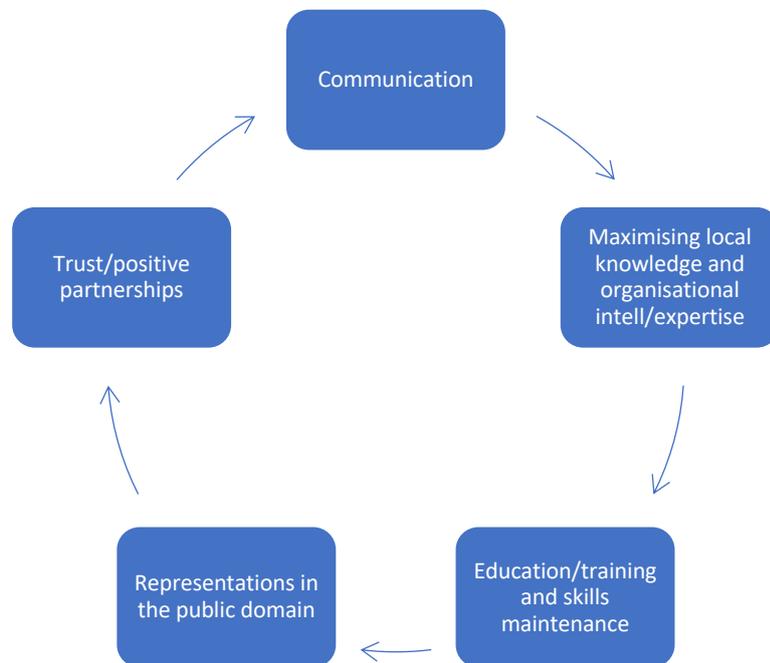


Diagram 2: Overarching process for a sustainable volunteer sector in emergency management

*Key strategies*

The process that has been represented above provides a framework for the identification of potential strategies that can be further developed in collaborative workshops involving the various organisations and their volunteers. The strategies listed below are drawn directly from the research findings and refer to the themes identified that are relevant to all the participating organisations. It is recommended that these strategies be reviewed, and additional strategies relevant to each organisation be identified in future work undertaken by the organisations.

Table 7: Key strategies for a sustainable volunteer sector in emergency management

| <b>Overarching strategies</b>                   | <b>Key strategies</b>   | <b>Primary site/s</b>   |
|---|---|---|
| Communication                                   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clear and consistent communication</li> <li>2. Technology considerations during incidents to ensure consistent access to information</li> <li>3. Communicating the contribution made by volunteers (e.g. hours) within organisations to boost motivation and satisfaction</li> <li>4. Compliance regimes and simplifying reporting work beyond the actual volunteering</li> <li>5. Communicating the needs of volunteers</li> </ol>   | <p>Organisations</p> <p>Organisations</p> <p>Organisations with volunteer input</p> <p>Organisations with volunteer input</p> <p>Club/brigade</p>   |
| Local knowledge and organisational intelligence | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Acknowledgement that the strength of the organisational knowledge and intelligence lies with both the paid and volunteer sectors of an organisation</li> <li>2. Explore ways in which the local field and community knowledge of volunteers is integrated into the organisations (including during incidents)</li> <li>3. Use local knowledge in regions and age-related recruitment strategies as current volunteers are the sector's best promotion</li> <li>4. Explore cross pollination opportunities between clubs/brigades and between organisations to strengthen knowledge and connections</li> <li>5. Implement throughcare support, especially to address direct experiences of trauma but also problems arising from accumulative stress. This needs to be available outside the club/brigade and inside through training certain volunteers to be able to recognise and communicate with colleagues who may need support</li> </ol> | <p>Organisations and volunteers</p> <p>Organisations with volunteer input</p> <p>All parties</p> <p>4, 5 &amp; 6</p> <p>Organisations with volunteer input</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Club/brigade</p> |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | 6. Post volunteering support: Help for clubs/brigades to look after and include members after they leave  |  |
| Education, training/skills maintenance | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access to timely, consistent and quality training</li> <li>2. Recognising leadership and creating consistent and clear pathways to leadership</li> <li>3. Explore 'out on the tools' pathways that adhere to skill levels but promote development, confidence and motivation. Link with possible mentoring relationships and a more ethical, staged integrative approach reflecting the level of comfort of the new volunteer</li> <li>4. Cross pollination through training opportunities that involve both formal and informal practice (e.g. first aid training with SLS clubs and TFS local brigades)</li> <li>5. Opportunities for young/new people to train together on occasion</li> </ol> | <p>Organisations with volunteer input</p> <p>2, 3, 4 &amp; 5<br/>Organisations with volunteer input<br/>AND<br/>Club/brigade</p> |
| Representation in the public domain    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen the images of EM volunteers with all the diversity of people and roles involved</li> <li>2. Increase the images of working 'beyond the flags' and other organisational equivalents that are not well known by the public</li> <li>3. Incident follow up to highlight the work of volunteers in incidents and, where appropriate, stimulate publicity so that the community understands what volunteers do</li> <li>4. Important that young people know about what EM volunteers do as this may motivate more young people to volunteer in these roles in future</li> </ol>   | <p>Organisations AND Public Domain</p> <p>Organisations</p> <p>Organisations with volunteer input<br/>AND<br/>Club/brigade</p>   |
| Trust /positive relationships          | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support the environment for volunteering to foster community, social connection, relationships and belonging – it is about the family first/ teamwork/ leadership/emergency response community/ broader community engagement</li> <li>2. Understand and foster meaning and connection in the volunteer experience as not being about a career path; rather, it is perceived as a choice (i.e. a way to spend 'free' time)</li> <li>3. Harmonising the actual and perceived tensions between paid and volunteer staff in organisations</li> <li>4. Relational opportunities should be expanded so that connections between organisations</li> </ol>  | <p>All parties</p> <p>All parties</p> <p>All parties</p> <p>All parties</p>  |



## **Conclusion: Recruitment and sustainability**

This report has documented the key issues around motivation, retention, and sustainability of emergency response volunteers across key government and non-government volunteer agencies in Tasmania. Based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with approximately 185 volunteers across five organisations (Ambulance Tasmania, Tasmanian Fires Service, Tasmanian State Emergency Service, Red Cross, Surf Life Saving Tasmania), extensive data were collected on the volunteers' experiences. This has enabled a comprehensive picture to emerge of the key recruitment and sustainability issues related to emergency response volunteers in Tasmania. The report has discussed these in detail by organising them around the following key themes:

1. Motivations for doing these forms of volunteering (why emergency response volunteers do their work);
2. Barriers to recruiting emergency response volunteers (what stops people from seeking recruitment to do this volunteering in the first instance);
3. Barriers influencing retention of emergency response volunteers (what stops the organisations from keeping emergency response volunteers engaged); and
4. Factors supporting retention of emergency response volunteers (what keeps emergency response volunteers doing their work).

Overall, there is a clear sense that emergency response volunteers love the work that they do. They find volunteering incredibly challenging but equally rewarding.

Community lies at the centre of this experience: it's about bringing a community member safely home to their families, being immersed in a sense of community, giving back to the community, and helping the community to recover from disaster. At the same time, volunteers also identified issues that led to feelings of significant frustration which, at times, could outweigh the rewards they experienced. This report has focused on the challenges arising from these experiences for the recruitment and retention of emergency response volunteers in Tasmania.

Emergency response volunteers are motivated by both personal, intrinsic rewards as well as extrinsic rewards. Personally, this included the anticipation of using the skills they have acquired in these roles and, particularly for younger volunteers, the thrill of volunteering in critical incidents and disasters. However, the overwhelming focus of discussion around motivations to do emergency response volunteering was not about the volunteers personally or what they could do for the organisation, but about doing good for local communities. It was also about the sense of belonging and connection and the friendships that developed which became 'a second family'. This sense of belonging

extended much further than their local communities; it could involve a national network of people who knew each other and worked together. Volunteers suggested that fostering the connections between emergency response volunteer organisations in Tasmania and nationally would have benefits for both recruitment and retention.

The report identifies a range of barriers to recruiting emergency response volunteers. Two key factors were a lack of time and workplace flexibility to volunteer, and misinformation about emergency response volunteer roles and limited or misleading media messaging about what volunteers actually do. The latter, in particular, was considered likely to influence the motivations of young people – if young people could see what they could contribute to the organisation, and the opportunities and pathways they could take to gain skills and training, they would be more likely to join and stay. This suggests the need to develop varied recruitment strategies to target a diversity of age groups whose motivations may differ slightly (for example, young people; people in their 30s and 40s who have lived in the area, moved back, and are 'settling down'; older people who have retired and wish to 'give back' the community). Taking the opportunity to interact with community members, and to provide information about volunteering through 'charm engagement' activities such as distributing Easter eggs or lollies at Christmas time, were also seen as valuable ways to communicate informally about the realities of volunteering.

The factors influencing the retention of emergency response volunteers ranged from those that impacted the individual to those that were systemically embedded in the established operational structures and processes of the organisation. These were considered to be extremely serious as they had a significant influence on individuals' levels of motivation and satisfaction but, perhaps even more importantly, the loss of volunteers. They acknowledged this had a direct impact on all aspects of the volunteering experience (i.e. operational matters as well as experience of connection, community, and belonging) and therefore on the sustainability of the organisations themselves. The main barriers identified in this research are discussed in detail in this report. They were felt most substantially by volunteers in regional areas and included: lack of training opportunities due to lack of trainers and assessors; length of time invested in training; lack of recognition of existing training and skills; lack of recognition of changing capabilities; the volunteer vs career rift; intractable operational issues; 'old boys club' dynamics; lack of organisational gratitude and being taken for granted; and local knowledge being unused by emergency management volunteer organisations.

Of all these barriers, issues related to skills training were predominant. These included limited access to formal training, lack of assessors who could sign off on training, inadequate 'sharing' of trainers and assessors between regions, burn out of existing assessors and trainers, unwillingness to adopt training models existing in other emergency response volunteer organisations, unwillingness to adopt 'on the job' training that would enable the learning of important tacit knowledge and critical team work skills, lack of recognition of previous training and existing skills (including nationally and internationally recognised training), lack of recognition of local knowledge, lack of recognition of the changing capabilities of ageing volunteers (including the inability to identify their value in alternative volunteering roles), lack of ongoing psychological support for volunteers beyond initial post-incident support, and the extended length of training that delayed opportunities for new volunteers to contribute as they had hoped when they decided to join. Missing the opportunity to harness this 'shine' was considered a significant problem reducing recruitment and retention of emergency response volunteers.

These findings suggest a mismatch between the organisation's leadership model (and how training fits within that) compared with the way volunteers see leadership and the training that they see as central to developing leaders at all levels who can be trusted, especially during critical incidents. This tension is exacerbated by the perceived differential treatment of volunteers and career workers that appears to be underpinned by an operational and administrative model that supports career workers. Crucially, many of the frustrations felt by volunteers appear to arise from an organisational model that is not structured around the motivations, attitudes, and experiences of volunteers but is focused on the regulations, restrictions, and compliance regimes that are required in the employment of career workers in the emergency management sector. Managing – and overcoming – this tension is crucial to the recruitment and retention of emergency response volunteers and the sustainability of the emergency response volunteer sector.

The findings in this report demonstrate that the recruitment and retention of emergency response volunteers is a challenge that needs to be addressed at both a structural and interpersonal level. Doing so will also drive cultural change that contributes to making the sector more sustainable. For example, current training appears to be focused on the formal delivery of specialist skills and the accreditation associated with this model. This contributes to a lack of recognition and perceived under-valuing of the generalist skills and local knowledge of volunteers, and a non-recognition of the social interaction patterns, teamwork, and commitment to community that also lie at the core of good emergency management work. Volunteers have an abundance of these knowledges and

skills. It may be valuable to acknowledge these as worthy of public recognition and in need of incorporation into training and accreditation for both volunteers and career workers. Exploring such avenues is important as this report has shown that the recruitment and retention of volunteers is highly dependent upon first, recognising the value of volunteering to the broad spectrum of work undertaken in the emergency management sector, and second, providing a basis for engaging in the difficult work of creating structural changes in the organisation. Listening to the voices of volunteers has been the first step in this change process.

#### *Where to from here?*

Through their willingness to be involved in this research, the five organisations that participated have demonstrated that they recognise the importance of volunteers to the emergency management sector and acknowledge that a problem in recruiting and retaining volunteers is a significant threat to the sustainability of the sector. This is already an indication that they recognise the value of volunteers to their organisations. The fact that this report draws on the volunteers' voices, experiences, ideas, and perspectives is also an acknowledgement that they have valuable knowledge, that they are the ones with the deepest knowledge of the volunteer sector, and that they need to be involved in suggesting, developing and implementing solutions to the problems impacting sustainability.

The way forward is to continue demonstrating this respect for the crucial role that volunteers play and acknowledging the value of their knowledge and perspectives through collaborative strategies (for example, workshops) that will lead to positive structural and cultural change. Adopting this approach will serve to underpin the long-term sustainability of the emergency response volunteer sector.

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