

How to Better Support Emergency Service Volunteers' Transition to Retirement

in Victoria, Australia



BY:

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WPI

How to Better Support Emergency Service Volunteers' Transition to Retirement

in Victoria, Australia

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BY:

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REPORT SUBMITTED TO:

SPONSOR ORGANISATION:

The Emergency Services Foundation
Siusan MacKenzie, CEO



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WPI

This report represents work of WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review. For more information about the projects program at WPI, see <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Projects>.

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AUTHORSHIP

OUR TEAM

Our team split up different sections of the introduction, background, methodology, findings, and recommendations for individual team members to complete. Every team member edited the entire report collaboratively and made additional contributions to each section. The team advisors and sponsor also provided feedback, which was taken into account when editing.

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this project was to understand the retirement perspectives of emergency service volunteers in Victoria, Australia. By interviewing agency managers, active and retired volunteers, and experts, it was found that although agencies recognize the need for transition to retirement programs, they have none in place to support the wellbeing of their volunteers. Volunteering contributes to a person's sense of wellbeing and can be helped or hindered depending on how the transition to retirement is approached. This project produced five recommendations for the Emergency Services Foundation and its agencies that point to the need for a formal approach to preparing volunteers for retirement as a means of supporting their wellbeing.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Victoria, Australia, the emergency services sector is extremely reliant on the commitment of their volunteers, who make up about 80% of emergency response (Emergency Services Foundation, 2020). These organizations rely deeply on volunteers to have the amount of personnel they do right now who respond to all different types of emergencies within Australia. Those include life savers, medical responders, firefighters, community recovery teams, flood response teams, road accident responders, search and rescue teams and emergency call responders.

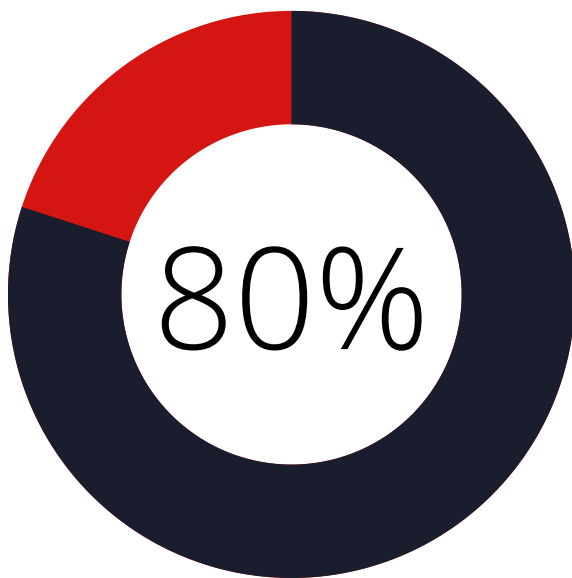


Figure 1: Percentage of Emergency Service Volunteers in Victoria, Australia (Emergency Services Foundation, 2020)

The Emergency Services Foundation (ESF), is a small-nonprofit organization based in Victoria that connects the different agencies within the Victorian emergency services sector and supports mental health sector-wide. They work with 14 agencies, 8 of the agencies containing a volunteer base. ESF was able to detect a pattern amongst emergency service agencies, that no agencies truly supported the transition to retirement for their volunteers.

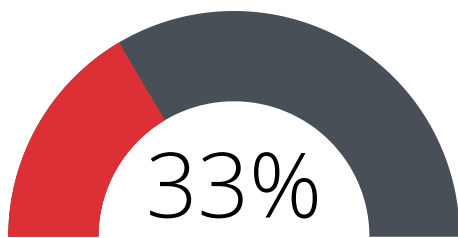
Agency
Ambulance Victoria (AV)
Australian Red Cross
St. John Ambulance
VCC Emergencies Ministry
Victorian State Emergency Service (SES)
Country Fire Authority (CFA)
Life Saving Victoria (LSV)
EMV (Coast Guard)

Table 1: The 8 Agencies with Volunteers in Victoria

Why do people choose to volunteer?

Volunteer work fills someone with pride, a sense of self and admiration from their community, and giving up that work can be hard. Studies have shown that volunteering can have positive mental, and in some cases physical, effects on an individual (Benefits of Volunteering, 2019; Casiday et al., 2008).

In comparison to the positivity provided by volunteering, there is a high incidence of mental health problems across the emergency services sector, concluded by a study done by Beyond Blue, a mental health organization in Australia. The study reported that in Australia's general population, 1 in 8 people experience psychological distress whereas 1 in 3 emergency service personnel experience psychological distress (Beyond Blue Ltd, 2018).



Emergency Service Personnel



Australia's General Population

Our project investigated the experiences of the emergency service volunteers in Victoria across all of the different agencies sector-wide to further understand their transition to retirement and identify their mental health support needs. There was an abundant need to investigate volunteer retirement and raise awareness to their experiences because almost **no work or conversation** is currently being held in this area.

To fulfill our goals and create successful and relevant recommendations, our team developed methods for gathering data. We then established the following four objectives to complete within the seven week project term that could be managed virtually.

The methodology objectives were the following:

1. **Establish what agencies do to help their volunteers retire**
2. **Gather insights from experts in the field of emergency services, mental health and volunteering**
3. **Investigate retirement perspectives from active and retired volunteers**
4. **Document stories of volunteers**

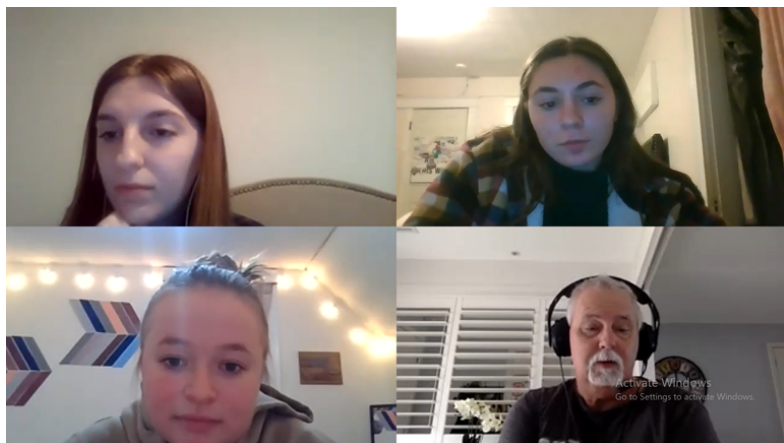
Figure 2: Psychological Distress Reports between Emergency Service Personnel and the General Public (Beyond Blue Ltd, 2018)

We were able to complete interviews with 9 managers, 4 experts and 26 volunteers.

The managers and volunteers were members of the following seven agencies:



These conversations were held primarily through Zoom in order to facilitate face-to-face conversations despite the distance.



The chart below details the experts. We deemed them experts in terms of our project within the fields of emergency service volunteering, mental health and retirement programming.

	Role
David Lawrence	Co-Author of "Answering the Call"
Nancy Carbone	Founder of Friends of Firefighters
Faye Bendrups	President of the SES Volunteer Association
Paul King	CFA Manager, Alumni Program Founder

Table 2: Experts and their roles

Through completing these methods, we classified our qualitative data into a series of findings within four categories.

Our Finding Categories:

1. Volunteer Motivations
2. Differing Views About Retirement
3. Volunteer Opportunities During Retirement
4. Retirement Programming

Volunteer Motivations

Through our conversations with volunteers, we learned about the **similar motivations behind volunteer work**. Many volunteers agreed that they enjoy volunteering so much because they can give back to their communities, it gives them a sense of pride, it keeps them busy and it gives them a great support system. In addition and above all else, volunteers continue to volunteer because they want to help people and know they are making a positive impact on their friends, neighbors and society.



Differing Views About Retirement

Although volunteers often reported similar volunteer motivations, they differed in some views about retirement. Some managers and volunteers alike reported that **volunteers can resist retirement because they fear the future**. A lot of pride comes with wearing the uniform and people can fear what comes next.

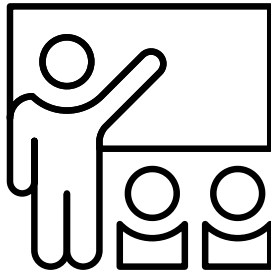
Along those lines, we found a distinguishable **difference between men and women's views on retirement**. Women can get better at socializing or networking as they get older and retire. In contrast, men often withdraw during retirement, because they value their position and work so highly, and can lose friends and motivations.

In some cases, we also heard stories of **older volunteers being pushed out of their agencies**. There seems to be a lack of respect between younger, new volunteers and older ones, which can result in ageism. These scenarios can have a harmful affect on wellbeing, so it is important to foster a positive and mutually beneficial relationship between young and old volunteers.

Volunteer Opportunities During Retirement

We learned that some agencies have **less-physical roles** that older volunteers can transition into when physical roles get too challenging, and this is a huge help in making the adjustment to retirement. Older volunteers do not want to lose that connection or contact with their agencies, so providing less physical roles is important to help them transition to retirement and lessens the likelihood of having to force someone to step down because they are not willing to admit they are no longer physically capable. However, less physical opportunities are not available in every organization.

One way older volunteers could be utilized is also through **mentorship programs**. Mentorship is a great way to keep volunteers feeling valued and important within their agencies, as well as educate young volunteers about good standards of practice within agencies. We found some agencies informally support mentorship, but it is limited and not a sector-wide practice.



Retirement Programming

Through our conversations we learned that there are **no agencies that hold programs to support volunteers transition to retirement**. A lot of managers recognized the need for this support, but admitted to us that their agency does not currently do any work in that area.

Additionally, **agencies do not offer their mental health support to their volunteers after they retire**. Trauma can sometimes arise long after exposure to traumatic events and last into retirement. Volunteers who committed a life of service to their agencies deserve to have access to the same mental health support they were provided when they were active volunteers.

We learned that there is huge value in social support among emergency service volunteers, especially because people do not want to bring the burden and trauma of fieldwork home to their families and friends. **Social support programs or groups for retired volunteers is inconsistent across the sector**, and needs to be a more uniform practice.

We recognize there is a real need to focus on volunteers and their experiences once they stop volunteering. Retirement programming and education should be available, mental health programs should be accessible to retirees and social support should be encouraged across the sector for older volunteers.



From these findings, a series of recommendations were drawn and proposed for ESF to share to the agencies across the Victorian sector. These recommendations could be useful to volunteers before, during the transition or after retirement. If implemented, hopefully they will have a positive impact on the wellbeing of emergency service volunteers during their transition to retirement.

BEFORE DURING & AFTER RETIREMENT

The recommendations are the following:

- 1. There is a need to prepare volunteers for retirement**
- 2. Agencies need to consider how to keep volunteers engaged through less physical roles**
- 3. Utilize the knowledge of older volunteers to train and support emerging leaders within agencies**
- 4. Establish alumni programs for retired volunteers**
- 5. Access to mental health support for volunteers after retirement**



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INTRODUCTION

Volunteering in Victoria, Australia is a common practice. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), nearly one third of Australians over the age of 15 participate in volunteering. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) stated that on average, the amount of volunteer work per year equates to \$43 billion dollars. According to data provided by the Emergency Services Foundation, an estimated 80% of the Victorian emergency services sector is made up of volunteers (Emergency Services Foundation, 2020). Although

volunteering can have a positive impact on one's mental health, emergency service personnel can experience traumatic events, along with their physically challenging jobs and demanding schedules, which can lead to a decline in mental health. When these issues are not talked about and faced, they can lead to various mental health conditions such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse and suicide (Kelley, 2016).



In Victoria, little is done to help emergency service volunteers retire from their role as active volunteers. Volunteers need more assistance when retiring because studies have shown that mental health can decline for many emergency service retirees (Kragt, 2019).

The Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) works with 14 emergency service agencies in Victoria to support and improve their wellbeing. Eight of those agencies have a volunteer base. Through this project, ESF sought to understand the perspectives and experiences of volunteer members in Victoria's emergency services sector about their transition to retirement. ESF provided our team with contacts and connections of Victorian agencies that have volunteers, allowing us to speak with managers, active volunteers and retired volunteers. We also reached out to experts who have done work in either mental health, retirement programming, emergency service volunteering, or a combination of the three.

The goal of this report is to present the results from our investigation of retirement perspectives from active volunteers, retired volunteers, experts and managers. In addition, we have been able to raise public awareness about the dedication of Victoria's emergency service volunteers through an engaging documentary. Interviewing these people allowed us to determine major themes across interviews and help us provide ESF and its member agencies with recommendations as to what will help the mental health of volunteers through their retirement.

To achieve our goals, we completed the following objectives:

1. Establish what agencies do to help their volunteers retire
2. Gather insights from experts in the field of emergency service volunteering, mental health and retirement programming
3. Investigate retirement perspectives from active and retired volunteers
4. Document stories of volunteers





BACKGROUND

We began by identifying key factors that contribute to the mental health of emergency service personnel in Victoria, the importance of volunteering, both in the state of Victoria as a whole and in the emergency services sector, and the positive impact it has on mental health. We found that volunteering within Victoria is a unique and highly valued practice in the community. We also found that volunteering has been shown to have a positive impact on wellbeing. ESF's mission is to improve mental health outcomes for workers and volunteers across the entire sector. Studying best practices and case studies that focus on both retirement and mental health provided a foundation of understanding of Victorian volunteer experiences and initial ideas of programs that could aid the retirement process.

EMERGENCY SERVICE WORK EFFECTS MENTAL HEALTH

Emergency service personnel, workers and volunteers alike, can often experience traumatic events in their time in the field. In addition, emergency service personnel have demanding schedules and physically challenging job requirements. These factors are known to lead to various mental health conditions such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and substance abuse (Kelley, 2016). Due to the nature of their jobs, emergency service personnel are more at risk for developing these mental illnesses than the general population. In a BeyondBlue study, 1 in 3 emergency service personnel experience psychological distress, whereas only 1 in 8 people in the general population in Australia experience it. (Beyond Blue Ltd, 2018).



Emergency Service Personnel



Australia's General Population

*Figure 3: Psychological Distress Reports Between
Emergency Service Personnel and the General Public
(Beyond Blue Ltd, 2018)*



Widespread stigmas around discussing mental health in work environments are a major reason why emergency service personnel do not seek help. Many emergency service personnel fear that speaking about their mental health could make them look weak or vulnerable and their coworkers will not want to work with them. Although, it is found that many first responders perceive their colleagues to be more judgmental than they really are (Addressing Suicide, 2019). Emergency service personnel are assumed to personify bravery and toughness, so they may think that talking about one's own mental health and struggles is selfish because they are not putting others, the people who they serve to protect, first.

Mental health conditions can follow emergency service personnel into retirement, leading retirees to continue to feel emotionally drained and hold on to the upsetting thoughts, images or experiences from incidents that occurred in the field. The study, “Life after emergency services: An exploration study of wellbeing and quality of life in emergency service retirees,” found that nine out of ten retired emergency service workers still experience mental health difficulties due to incidents they witnessed in the field during retirement (Bracken-Scally et al., 2014). Reliving these experiences can hinder retirees from having happy and healthy retirements.

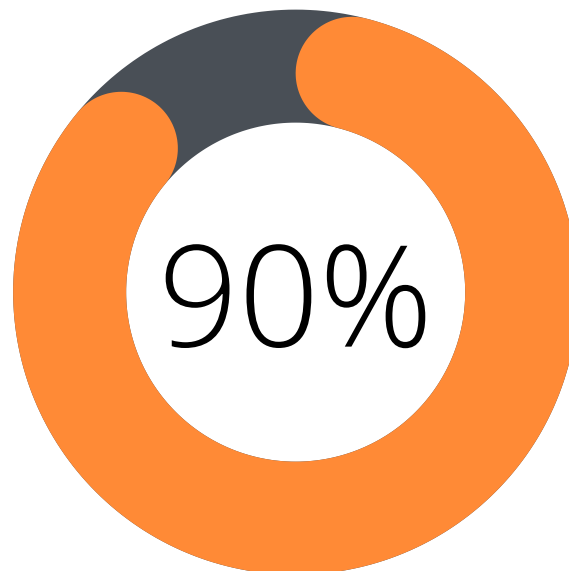


Figure 4: Percentage of Emergency Service Retirees Still Struggling with their Mental Health (Bracken-Scally et al., 2014)

EMERGENCY SERVICE SECTOR IN VICTORIA

Each of the six states in Australia has their own emergency management sector that is responsible for coordinating emergency preparedness, response and recovery throughout their own jurisdiction. There are 14 individual agencies within Victoria that actively respond to crisis and support the community. Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) coordinates and organizes

Victorian agencies to ensure that all of the emergency service agencies respond to emergencies in a unified fashion (Emergency Management Victoria, 2020). Victorian emergency services respond to a wide range of different threats, such as tornadoes, floods, brush fires, cyclones, earthquakes, medical emergencies, public hazards and crime reports (Australian Disasters, 2020).

VOLUNTEERING IS ESSENTIAL IN VICTORIA'S EMERGENCY SERVICES

It is estimated that out of the 125,000 emergency personnel in Victoria, 100,000 of them are volunteers, a

staggering 80% working across eight agencies (Emergency Services Foundation, 2020).

Agency	Volunteers
Ambulance Victoria (AV)	1,500
Australian Red Cross	1,000
St. John Ambulance	2,500
VCC Emergencies Ministry	1,600
Victorian State Emergency Service (SES)	5,000
Country Fire Authority (CFA)	50,000
Life Saving Victoria (LSV)	37,000
EMV (Coast Guard)	800

Table 3: Number of Volunteers in Victorian Emergency Service Agencies

An example of how the emergency services rely on their volunteers year round, and especially during fire season, can be seen from the events of the “Black Summer”. The 2019/2020 Australian fire season was given the name Black Summer after the season of “record-breaking” fires (Filkov et al., 2020). During this time, in 2019, there were approximately 152,800 volunteer firefighters in Australia (Hinton, 2020). In the same year, there were approximately only 15,800 paid firefighters in Australia, which includes part-time and full-time employees (Richards & Brew, 2020).

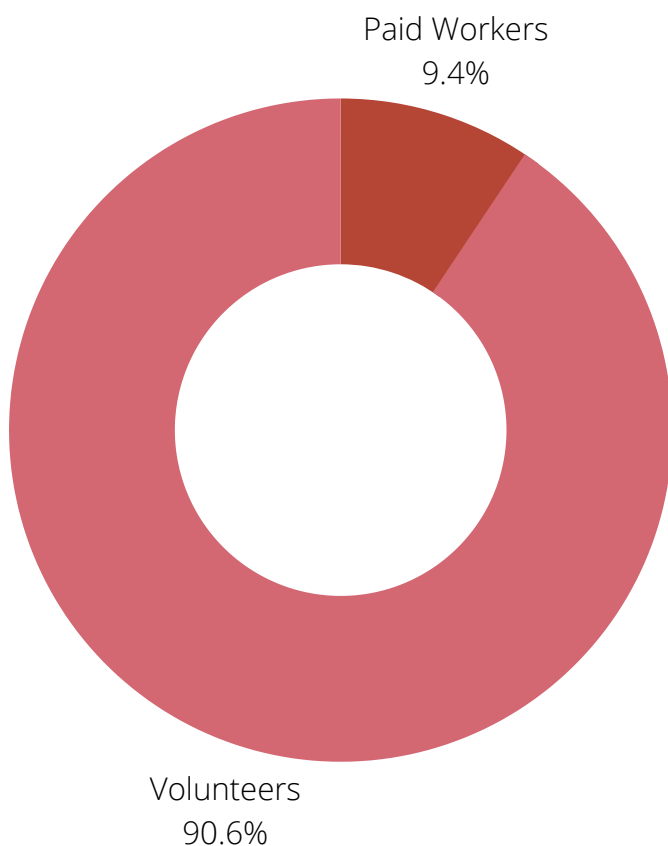


Figure 5: Response to 2019/2020 Australian Fire Season (Hinton, 2020)

The New York Times stated that this 90% ratio of the volunteer firefighters is “a ratio unmatched in any other developed country where wildfires rage”, emphasizing why the culture of volunteerism is so unique to Australia (Cave et al., 2020).

During unpredictable times, such as these fires and other natural disasters, emergency service volunteers are heavily relied on in Victoria. Australians have created an annual celebratory week to acknowledge their work, called National Volunteer Week. On Wednesday of that week, all Australians are encouraged to wear orange, the color worn by state emergency service volunteers, to show their support and gratitude (Wear Orange Wednesday, n.d).

Although this day recognizes emergency service volunteers, that appreciation may not spread wide enough. A previous IQP report, “More than a Thank You,” was also conducted through the Emergency Services Foundation and focused on volunteer recognition in Victoria. Through completing their report, the team of students spoke to 54 volunteers who in total spent 700+ hours per week volunteering during the off season (Connors et al., 2020). They learned that although volunteers commit this many hours of service, they often feel they lack proper recognition from both their organizations and the community. This report identified the need to improve volunteer recognition within Victoria.

VOLUNTEERING IS COMMON IN VICTORIA

In order to truly understand the contribution volunteers make to society, specifically in the state of Victoria, the Department of Planning and Community Development commissioned a report titled “The Economic Value of Volunteering in Victoria” through the Victorian government. This report placed a monetary value on volunteering in order to quantify the impact of the volunteers of Victoria. The report studied both wage and volunteer growth from 1992-2006 to create accurate estimations for volunteering value. It concluded that in Victoria, 180.2 million hours of organized and 331.2 million hours of unorganized volunteering was completed in 2006, adding up to a gross value of \$16.2 billion dollars (Volunteering Australia, 2012).

180.2

**million hours of organized
volunteering**

331.2

**million hours of unorganized
volunteering**

\$16.2 BILLION

gross value of volunteering in Victoria in 2006

VOLUNTEERING HAS POSITIVE HEALTH IMPACTS

Volunteerism is a highly-regarded and common practice among many citizens in Australia. Many volunteer because of the positive effects that it can have on one's life and health.

Volunteering opens a person up to many opportunities, such as ways to help their community, meet new people, share their skills and learn new ones.

Volunteering has been shown to increase life satisfaction and social support and to decrease stress and loneliness (Benefits of Volunteering, 2019; Casiday et al., 2008).

Thus, it can have a significant impact on mental, and in some cases, physical health.



Volunteering is common among the older generation and has been shown to have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. In the study “The Effects

of Volunteering on the Physical and Mental Health of Older People” by Terry Lum and Elizabeth Lightfoot, the correlations between volunteering and health among older people were compared. Based on the results of this survey, volunteers in the older age demographic have higher levels of self-reported health and lower levels of depression. Based on this connection, Lum and Lightfoot theorized that

“volunteering may increase an older person’s social and psychological resources necessary to cope with the onset of such a medical condition.”

The benefits of volunteering are far reaching, and its positive psychological impacts can have lasting effects on an individual’s wellbeing, help them cope with physical ailments later in life and even decrease mortality likelihood (Casiday, et al., 2008; Lum, et al., 2005).

VOLUNTEERS UNDERGO UNIQUE TRANSITIONS TO RETIREMENT

The process of retirement can be difficult, as many people are unprepared for the change retirement brings. The emergency service volunteers in Victoria often have a two-fold experience with retiring: first when they retire from their paying day-job and a second experience when they decide to leave their emergency service volunteer roles. With the unpredictable and dangerous nature of emergency service work, it is important to remember that injury or trauma can sometimes force someone to retire earlier than they were expecting or before they had time to prepare. Retirees often report that their mental health conditions have worsened since their retirement, and they experience a

decrease in their moods and increased irritability (Kragt, 2019).

Organizational support and readiness programs are key to a successful retirement experience that promotes good mental wellbeing. Initiating these programs throughout the entirety of emergency service volunteers' participation in an agency is a key consideration, since retirement is contingent upon the unpredictable nature of their field. Furthermore, because volunteers have such a vital impact on the community in Victoria, the conversation of how to support their wellbeing as they transition into retirement from service deserves to be held sector-wide.

Emergency Service Volunteers undergo... 2 Retirements

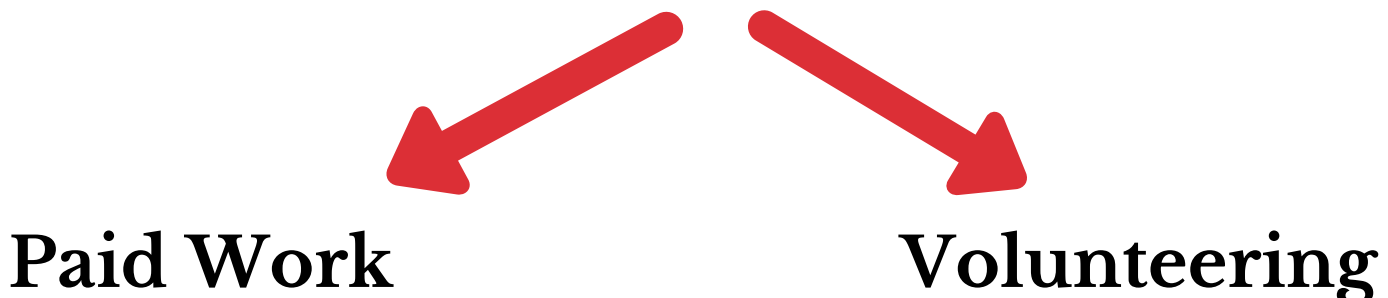


Figure 6: Retirement Breakdown for Emergency Service Volunteers

THE DEVELOPING MISSION OF ESF



better together

The Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) is a small-nonprofit organization based in Victoria, Australia. ESF was created in 1987 to provide relief and assistance to emergency service workers and their families who were injured or killed as a result of tragedy faced in the field, fund research and studies to advance relief methods, and improve the field experience of emergency service workers (Emergency Services Foundation, 2020).

In 2018, BeyondBlue, a highly regarded mental health organization in Australia released the report *Answering the Call*. This report outlined the clear connection between emergency service work and mental health issues. This study influenced the new strategic direction ESF recently established. The organisation saw a shift in mission in the recent years to focus on improving mental health outcomes across the emergency service sector.

To achieve its purpose, ESF aims to bring people together to collaborate, drive research, foster innovation, and form strategic partnerships. It is hoped this research project will foster necessary conversation in the way volunteers are supported as they retire, while protecting their wellbeing.



Bring People Together



Drive Research



Foster Innovation



Form Strategic Partnerships



METHODOLOGY

Our project goal was to investigate perspectives about retirement among active and retired volunteers in order to understand what could help and hinder their mental wellbeing during their transition to retirement. Additionally, it was important to document and share the stories of volunteers to highlight their passion and dedication towards their communities. To achieve that goal, we set the following objectives:

1. Establish what agencies do to help their volunteers retire
2. Gather insights from experts in the field of emergency service volunteers, mental health and retirement programming
3. Investigate retirement perspectives from active and retired volunteers
4. Document the stories of volunteers

In completion of these methods, we interviewed **9** agency managers, **4** experts and **26** volunteers.

Establish what Victorian emergency service agencies do to help their volunteers retire

Our first objective was to determine if the emergency service agencies of Victoria provide any support to their volunteers as they transition to retire. Through speaking to 9 agency managers, we learned more about volunteer statistics and roles, as well as how prioritized the retirement of volunteers was within the manager level. These conversations were important because we established that agencies did little to support volunteer retirement, even though they recognized the need for programming or focus in this area.

To determine the current programs in place at the emergency service agencies in Australia, we interviewed the managers or program directors of agencies in Victoria which rely on volunteers. These interviews were conducted through the online video chat platform Zoom. Each participant provided verbal consent prior to the interview that confirmed their willingness to be recorded and participate in our project. They also provided their preference to be named as either their specific title, a manager of their agency, or to be referred to as anonymous. Participants were informed that they may skip any question, ask clarifying questions, and stop the interview at any point.

The questions we asked agency managers can be seen in Appendix A, although we conducted semi-structured interviews in order to add remarks as they came up or ask for clarity on topics of further interest. The interview structure we developed throughout this project was:



Facilitator

- Ask questions to interviewee
- Ask follow-up questions
- Ask other team members at the end of interview if they have any other questions



Notetaker

- Take detailed notes of interviewee responses in shared document



Introducer and Recorder

- Provide interviewee with details about project
- Obtain consent from interviewee
- Record interview

After the manager interviews, we conducted content analysis when analyzing their responses. This form of analysis placed participants' answers into different categories, allowing their qualitative answer to be quantitatively analyzed when preparing our recommendations (Columbia, 2019). These categories were determined through common themes we saw within responses. For example, if many of the managers said that they had programs to aid the mental health of volunteers, "mental health programs" was assessed as a category and potential theme.

Gather insights from experts in the field of emergency services, mental health and volunteering

To better understand what helps and hinders retirement of emergency service volunteers, we needed to establish an understanding of volunteering in Australia, the mental health of people in the emergency services and the process of transitioning to retirement.

By speaking to 4 experts in all three of these areas, we built a deeper understanding of the volunteers we wished to aid.

We deemed each of these experts in the field due to their experience with emergency service volunteers, experience with retirees, or experience with emergency service personnel and their mental health. Their conversations gave us immense insights. The below chart lists these experts and their positions.

Questions asked were specific to the interviewee's experience and expertise. For example, Nancy Carbone, the founder of a nonprofit organization that aids the mental wellbeing of retired firefighters in New York, was asked questions related to the programs her organization provides and their usefulness. During these interviews, we also had a notetaker, recorder, and facilitator, allowing the interviews to go smoothly and ensure one member of the team didn't speak at the same time as or interrupt the other.

Expert	Role
David Lawrence	Co-Author of "Answering the Call"
Nancy Carbone	Founder of Friends of Firefighters
Faye Bendrups	President of the SES Volunteer Association
Paul King	CFA Manager, Alumni Program Founder

Table 4: Experts and their roles

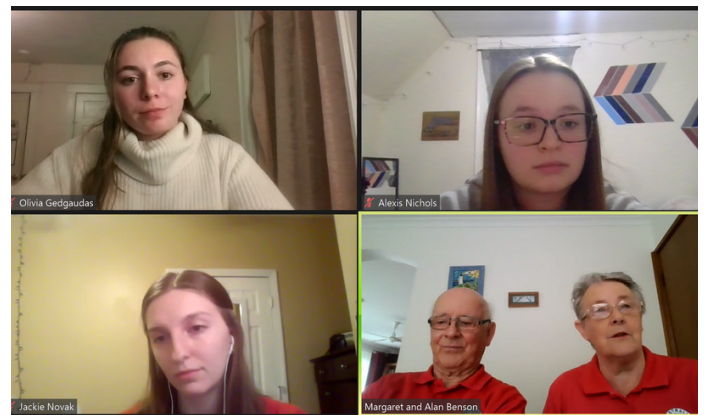
After all the interviews were completed, we manually sorted through interview responses and found common themes among them. This contributed to our understanding of retirement and emergency service volunteers, along with providing insight into what we later recommended to our sponsor.

Investigate retirement perspectives from active and retired volunteers

Our third objective was to investigate the retirement perspectives of active and retired volunteers in order to provide insightful recommendations. It was important to hear ideas, fears and hopes from the demographic who could actually be affected by the recommendations we made. The retired volunteers were able to explain to us how retirement had affected their mental health, how their agency supported their transition to retirement and what helped or hindered their experience when retiring from volunteering. For longtime volunteers approaching retirement, we learned what they expect from retirement, their concerns surrounding retirement, and what retirement support they think would be beneficial.

The conversations from these interviews formed our recommendations for agencies that are specific to Victorian emergency service volunteers.

We conducted **26** interviews with retired volunteers and active volunteers approaching retirement, whose contacts were provided by managers within the different agencies across the sector. These interviews took place over Zoom, and with consent, we recorded those interviews.



Their preference to be referred to as either a volunteer from their agency, a retired volunteer from their agency or as anonymous was obtained. The interviewees were also informed that they may skip any question if they do not feel comfortable answering, ask any clarifying questions and stop the interview at any point. Questions for active volunteers about preparing for retirement and what they expect from the transition can be seen in Appendix B.

The interviews with retired volunteers focused on their transition to retirement with questions about their mental health before and after retirement, which can be seen in Appendix C. The style of the interviews were semi-structured, which allowed us to ask our preplanned questions, along with on-the-spot questions that pertained to the participants' responses. These methods were then analyzed through coding and grounded-theory, meaning we searched for similarities and frequencies within the responses (Mod•U, 2016). The analysis of coding was done manually by the team, where we found common opinions or statements that informed us with common themes of what helped or hindered retirees' transition to retirement and what active volunteers expect from retirement.

Document the stories of volunteers

Our final objective was to document the stories of older, lifelong emergency service volunteers and to raise public awareness of volunteer commitment within Victoria. We decided to do this as a documentary which should be posted on the Emergency Services Foundation's website.

To create this video documenting the stories of older active and retired emergency service volunteers, we worked with Cody Mathieson-Lowe, a film major and current intern who was employed with our sponsor, ESF. Due to his experience in film, he completed the technical aspects of the creation process. By sharing with him our ideas and goals, he edited the documentary using his own software and tools.



Technical Aspects

- Filming
- Combining Clips
- Adding effects
- Editing
- More

After conducting personal interviews with volunteers, those who expressed willingness to share their stories were asked to participate in further interviews for the film. To prepare us for producing a film, something we had not previously had experience with as a group, we conducted preparatory research on design principles and interview strategies to guide the creation of our documentary.

Before recording the interviewee, the participants had to consent to participating in a documentary that would be shared on a public platform. This consent allowed us to record our conversation for both the documentary and sharing purposes. These interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom, which allowed us to have recordings of the Zoom room that focused on the participant speaking, as well as gallery view to view all who were on the call. In addition, if it was feasible and if the participants were willing, the documentary filming had an in-person component where Cody traveled to their homes. He filmed from an outside perspective, while we asked our questions over Zoom, which allowed for three different perspectives of the interview.



In-Person
View



Gallery
View



Speaker
View

When discussing sensitive topics such as mental health, we had to be vigilant about how we asked our questions and how we responded to interviewee answers. Getting to know the interviewee and creating a relatively informal setting prior to the documentary interview helped build a more comfortable setting before initiating conversations about sensitive topics (Dempsey et al., 2016). During these interviews, we asked the emergency service volunteers to share their stories about why they volunteer, how it affects them personally, and any additional experiences they were comfortable with sharing. The questions asked in these interviews were sent to them prior to filming and can be found in Appendix D. Although we prepared questions, if the interviewee continued to share their experiences without us having to ask specific questions, we refrained from asking more questions and let the conversation flow casually. We used a pause technique, making use of pauses to engage and allow the interviewee to speak more, to help facilitate engaging stories (Bone, 2020).

Through our partnership with Cody, we produced an engaging video documenting the stories of older, lifelong emergency service volunteers that captured the public's eyes and emphasized the importance and dedication of these volunteers which could be shared on the Emergency Services Foundation website.



FINDINGS

In this section, we discuss our findings from our **39** interviews with **9** agency managers, **4** experts, and **26** emergency service volunteers in Victoria. A number of themes emerged in the course of our interviews with Victorian emergency service volunteers to understand their perspectives and experience of transition to retirement. This chapter goes into detail about these themes.

VOLUNTEERS HAVE SIMILAR MOTIVATIONS

1. Volunteers Reported Similar Motivations for Beginning and Continuing Volunteer Work

When interviewing active and retired volunteers, we asked them why they began to volunteer and why they continued to volunteer. Overwhelmingly, the most common answer was to give back to their community and help others. A volunteer explained by saying,

“When you compare volunteering to working, volunteering has more of an impact because we are giving back. We are giving back to society, and we are really excited about what we do. When you see the gratitude people give you, it makes you feel really good.”

Many volunteers expressed their increased interest in helping the community after the Black Saturday bushfires that burned across their home state of Victoria in 2009. For example, one of the volunteers we interviewed told us a

story about how she provided psychological first aid (PFA) to victims of the 2009 fires. During the time, she provided PFA to a family whose home burnt down. The happiness and warmth she found in just listening and talking to them was astounding. The joy she got from helping those who needed it most was why she volunteered.



When speaking to another volunteer, he talked about how seeing the difference he can make in someone’s life and how much you can do for someone is why he volunteers. This theme of making a difference and helping others was shown throughout every interview with volunteers.

Others started to volunteer because their family was a part of it. We spoke to a volunteer that mentioned his father was a founding volunteer within his agency and because of his father, he joined when he was sixteen. He is now 73 and has volunteered for 57 years. The tradition continued when that volunteer's son joined and then later his two granddaughters.

Due to the fact that our interviews were within the older demographic of volunteers, a common answer for why they continue to volunteer was to stay busy and keep their mind and body active. Many volunteers explained that being involved with their agency gave them something to fill their days with because they had already retired from their paying jobs. When retiring from their paying jobs, they relied on volunteering to keep them active, both physically and mentally.

Others explained that giving back to society gave them a sense of importance and pride. Many volunteers emphasized that they do not do the work for the praise, but the affirmation from the communities and individuals they serve helps to motivate them to keep pushing forward during the harder times, that can innately come with volunteering in emergency services. They expressed that the difficult times they witness are outweighed by helping friends and neighbors. One story that had a significant impact on one CFA volunteer firefighter's experience was when he was leaving a community after disastrous bushfires, and the townspeople left their homes to stand outside and clap for the entire brigade. He said these moments motivate him to continue volunteering his time to fight fires because of the impact you make and the reassurance that you are doing something both good and necessary.



VOLUNTEERS HAVE DIFFERING VIEWS ON RETIREMENT

2. Some Volunteers Resist Retirement

Volunteering is an important and valued commitment in volunteers' lives. Emergency service work is exhilarating and honorable. A 20-year retiring volunteer described it as an experience similar to a dedicated sports player saying, "when you've done it [volunteer] for 20 years, it's a ridiculous thing, it gets in your blood." Giving up a lifelong commitment that brings so much pride and joy into one's life is scary and intimidating for these volunteers, which is why some volunteers resist retirement.

Nancy Carbone explained that retiring firefighters have described leaving the firehouse as

"a death-like experience"

because of the loss of connections and purpose. Agency managers told us they have seen volunteers resist retirement due to the fear of losing the camaraderie and want to maintain physical roles within their organizations for too long. Many volunteers had stories of older volunteers within their organizations that have had 40+ years of experience in the emergency services and are not willing to give it up yet.

Others worry that their peers won't have anything to consume their time or stimulate their mind during retirement, so they keep holding on and finding other ways to keep themselves in their agencies. This fear of losing status or identity and losing relationships were found to be common reasons why volunteers resist retirement.

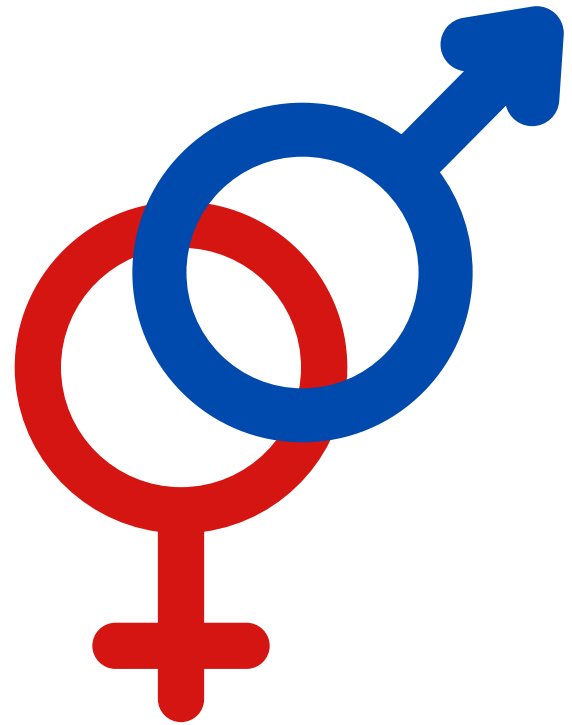
3. Men and Women Have Different Retirement Perspectives

Our study revealed that men and women undergo different experiences as they approach retirement and once they leave their active roles within their organizations. One manager specifically said that many of the male volunteers associate their identity with the uniform, so taking it off may make them lose a sense of who they are. Another manager stated that women seem to be generally happier than men throughout their entire life, while men lose a lot of self-esteem because of how tied to their job they are and how much they associate it with their identity.

A significant story came from a volunteer when we asked their opinion on the difference between male and female experiences when approaching retirement. First, they mentioned they believe that women, in general, are more adaptable and

in tune with themselves so they can discuss things and have more perceptions of their own needs. In contrast, they told us that they have some concern about how a particular member of their unit will cope with retirement after his 40 years of service. This man has made his agency, and his unit in particular, his social circle and responding to emergencies has become his passion. They believe this man's dedication and drive will leave him to remain in the unit longer than he possibly should - which could be dangerous. Finally, they mentioned men rarely admit to needing help and hold onto too much pride, whereas women are more willing to ask and seek out help. On behalf of this volunteer and the many volunteers who struggle with similar commitment to their position and a strong sense of pride, they were glad conversations and hopefully progression was being held in this area.

King told us an interesting pattern he witnessed through his alumni program. Often women get better at socializing or networking as they get older, and retirement has a less detrimental impact on their wellbeing. In contrast, men lose motivation or friends and disconnect. These patterns are important because there is a diminishing effect. Men are proud and often do not want to ask for help, but it was widely suggested that creating accessible programs and providing adequate support to ensure networking and socializing between men, and women, who have retired will hopefully lessen the negative consequences of retiring.



4. Some Older Volunteers Feel Pushed Out of Their Agency

Another common theme among volunteers, noticed by managers and experts, is the divide between old and new volunteers. Bendrups explained how new volunteers can often lack the corporate knowledge of how the Victorian emergency services sector works as a whole. These new volunteers often think that times have changed and leave older volunteers feeling pushed out of their agency. Instead of pushing them out, she believes that the older should mentor the newer. By doing this, all volunteers would have an understanding of how the sector works as a whole, along with a better understanding of how to approach different situations, as older volunteers have more experience that they can pass onto the next generation.

When speaking with a volunteer, they explained the ageism that took place within their unit where the new generation of volunteers would push out the older generation. They would do this in subtle ways, such as eye rolling when someone speaks or whispering about other people. This volunteer's 25+ years in service was not taken into account or respected by the younger volunteers. Due to this treatment, this volunteer and a few more of their colleagues lost the joy their volunteering once brought them, resigned from their positions, and are no longer active volunteers. Their agency then failed to have conversations with these lifelong volunteers as to why they stepped down after 25+ years of dedication and service. They also spoke about how this situation did not just occur within their unit, but it happened more widely in the sector. In the words of our volunteer, human resources and lack of support from the management team "left a sour taste in their mouths".

“These new volunteers think that times have changed and often push out older volunteers.”

Another example of how older volunteers can be pushed out of their position was shown through our CFA managers. Often captain roles will be filled by men who have had experience within the brigade and have the natural leader in them. These leaders are voted in by their brigade members every 2 years and in many cases, older captains especially, do not want to give up their leadership role. One CFA manager explained this situation and said

“often, the older men within leadership roles do not want to relinquish that role... they fear losing that status and position in life... and that can result in them being pushed out in a really awful way.”

The process of being suddenly and unexpectedly pushed out can lead to negative mental health effects that can later cause that older volunteer's transition to retirement to be seen as negative. This can also cause tension within the brigade because there may be a divide.

THERE ARE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES DURING TRANSITION TO RETIREMENT

5. Some Agencies Have an Informal Approach to Keeping Volunteers Engaged in Less Active Roles

When interviewing agency managers, we asked about the roles their agency had that are non-responsive and less physical. We learned that older volunteers or those that are physically unable to be a responsive member can provide administration support such as communications, radio, logistics, support units, transportation of equipment, education and more. This allows older volunteers to remain within their agency when they are no longer physically able to respond to emergencies directly. In some cases, managers told us some volunteers never actually fully retire, so these less physical roles provide ways that volunteers can maintain that community connection without hindering active response teams.

We heard an example of this lifelong commitment when speaking to a retired brigade captain leader. He told us how he has taken a step back in his role, but can never picture a time he will step back from the job completely. His father had a connection with his fire brigade until he died, and he imagines his future will look the same. Since stepping down as captain and no longer physically responds to

fires, he has maintained radio responsibilities, as well as assists with stocking equipment and supplies. He assured us that he will always be able to find a role within his brigade, and if more agencies had these opportunities, volunteers who wished to remain committed to their organizations would.

Many volunteers felt they would need to retire when they became physically unfit. Although many older volunteers we spoke to held non-physical positions, some seemed to not know these non-responsive roles exist or some agencies do not provide these non-active roles. A volunteer told us how saddened she was that she was leaving the organization entirely because there were no non-physical roles within her agency. She told us

“I want to get out of the physical component, when it's 3 o'clock in the morning and my pager is going off, but I don't necessarily want to leave.”

There is a clear inconsistency within agencies. There are many opportunities for older volunteers in some cases, but in others they must leave their agencies completely when they feel that they can no longer respond to emergency calls. The value in

these less physical roles is they allow volunteers to willingly step down from higher positions, instead of eventually being forced out.

6. Older Volunteers' Knowledge Could Be Utilized Through Mentorship Programs

Specifically, when discussing the need for smaller roles in organizations among managers and experts, the idea of utilizing the knowledge of older volunteers through a mentorship program and need for making these programs more uniform and organized was apparent. Paul King of CFA mentioned that some brigades currently have their older members mentor their future captains. These older, lifelong volunteers have valuable experience, especially within their communities and truly understand the terrain and climate of the area they defend. They know and recognize how to fight emergencies from years of experience and hold a high standard of practice for their organization. From our conversation with Faye Bendrups, the President of the SES Volunteer Association, we heard about her visions for a mentorship program through schooling, where older volunteers could train future emergency service volunteers, in order for that corporate knowledge and experience to be passed down throughout all agencies. Bendrups quoted, "Mentorship programs provide an excellent opportunity for these older

volunteers to become teachers and trainers to the next generation of emergency service volunteers. [Mentorship programs are] a great way of recognizing, acknowledging and valuing the work of these older volunteers." Becoming a mentor or educator is an amazing way for older volunteers to relinquish their physical roles within the agencies while still feeling that their years of commitment and service have value. It is also a way to strengthen agencies by allowing their volunteers to have a better understanding of how the emergency services work as a whole in Victoria, along with more knowledge of how to respond to emergencies in the area.



RETIREMENT PROGRAMMING

7. There Is Inconsistent Social and Peer Support for Older Volunteers as They Transition to Retire

We heard that volunteering gives people a strong sense of social connection with colleagues and with the community. Many active volunteers said that they will miss the connection and contact they experience everyday while volunteering with their agency. A manager said that volunteers

“build lifelong friends.”

Other managers mentioned the connections they witness between their volunteers and how it feels much like a family.

Lawrence explained that volunteers rely a lot on the social support that is provided through their colleagues. Working in the emergency services is taxing, and a lot of individuals do not want to bring home those stressors or burdens to their friends or families. Maintaining contact with peers that they can confide in is an important key in improving mental health. Nancy Carbone, another expert, told us that the most utilized programs for retired volunteers were their On-the-Arm Breakfasts and Firehouse Kitchen Talks. Both of these programs allow firefighters to feel at home, reconnect with each other, and share their experiences.



Paul King worked to create an alumni group that connects retired volunteers. This group consists of members who have 30+ years of commitment to the CFA, and social events are held every 3-4 months where members gather and often brought in is a guest speaker. He says these events foster some of the passions and motivations of retired volunteers who can lose the morale, they once had, in retirement. This program, however great it is, is only available to his division within the CFA. Whilst there has been no formal evaluation of this program, there appears to be real benefits for the mental health of these older, retired firefighters as explained by one volunteer we spoke to who is actually apart of the alumni in the program. He told us that there is a lot of value in the anticipation that comes from guest speakers and the opportunities to reconnect with friends you would not normally be able to communicate with apart from organizational events.

8. No Formal Retirement Programs for Volunteers

During interviews with all managers, they told us that there are no formal retirement programs for volunteers. The managers recognized the need for supporting their older volunteers through retirement but mentioned that there was currently no work being done in this area. A Red Cross Manager said

“For their retirement out of the emergency services, we have no program in place, no support.”

Volunteers affirmed that their organizations had no programs and did not foster conversations about retiring from their volunteering. From one volunteer we heard a suggestion she has on how to facilitate retirement conversation. In her organization, every two years a peer support program comes into a unit and educates members on how to deal with death or trauma in the field and mental health impacts. She believes that these programs could also foster conversations about the transition to retirement - how to approach it and prepare people for what issues could result from leaving volunteer work. Volunteers and managers alike both thanked us for facilitating these conversations and for conducting this research, because they saw the value in volunteer transition to retirement to become a more focal issue within their agencies.



9. Mental Health Programs Are Not Offered to Retired Volunteers

All agencies interviewed have some mental health support for their active volunteers. The agencies in Victoria acknowledge that volunteers can be affected by traumatic events. Examples of mental health support throughout the Victorian agencies are CFA's welfare programs and SES's peer support. Through our interview with David Lawrence, we found that providing mental health support to volunteers in the emergency services directly after traumatic events, rather than later when the mental health problems get too much

to handle is important in longtime wellbeing. Lawrence explained that early mental health intervention will help emergency service personnel not get to the point where their mental health interferes drastically with their everyday life. What could maybe be resolved in a few counseling sessions could turn into an issue that can affect a person for months or years. When trauma happens, it needs to be dealt with at the time to prevent long-term impacts. Agencies realize this and offer programs to those who reach out for help, but unfortunately emergency service personnel often believe that they are the ones that should be helping others and that they should not be asking for help for themselves. Those that are struggling after a traumatic call and don't ask for help can easily have their mental health worsen over the years and then when they lose their social support of coworkers their mental health can decline even more.

We found that availability of mental health support stops once volunteers take a step back from their agencies and into retirement. Only one agency we spoke to offered their mental health support to retirees. Trauma exposure can leave lasting impacts on overall wellbeing, and sometimes the transition to retirement and no longer being distracted or occupied by the job or work can leave people to dwell. In these cases, the support programs that agencies once provided are no longer available to them. A volunteer has seen the positive impact psychological first aid (PFA), the support RedCross volunteers provides to people

after they struggle from emergencies, has on individuals and families. She suggested that

“We need PFA help for retiring volunteers - we need support during that transition time to retirement”

The process of retiring is intimidating and can leave lasting mental health effects. Leaving the emergency services is daunting and mental health during retirement has been seen to decline. The same levels of support that were once available while volunteers were active within their agencies should be available after retirement.





RECOMMENDATIONS

After hearing the hopes and fears of volunteers, suggestions from experts, and having conversations about the current state of volunteers with agency managers, we concluded that there is much room for improvement in how the wellbeing of volunteers is supported as they transition to retirement. Based on our findings we made five recommendations for agencies in Victoria organized into the following three categories:

PRE-RETIREMENT

DURING-THE-TRANSITION TO RETIREMENT

POST-RETIREMENT

PRE-RETIREMENT

There is a need to prepare volunteers for retirement

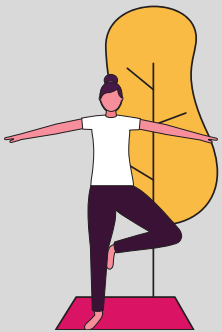
Currently, there are no preparatory programs or conversations in place to help volunteers retire from their services. We believe that agencies sector-wide can consider how to better support their older volunteers who are committed to their volunteer work. These conversations and programs could include how to maintain an active mind and body, resources to reach out to if volunteers ever need help and what to expect when making that transition. If volunteers were better prepared with how to occupy their time and minds during retirement, their wellbeing would be less negatively affected once they stop volunteering.



KEEPING AN
ACTIVE MIND



RETIREMENT
CONVERSATIONS



KEEPING AN
ACTIVE BODY



MENTAL HEALTH
RESOURCES



OCCUPYING
TIME

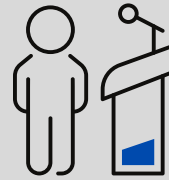


OTHER AVAILABLE
RESOURCES

DURING-THE-TRANSITION TO RETIREMENT

Agencies need to consider how to keep volunteers engaged through less physical roles

Next, agencies should consider how to implement more less physical roles that volunteers could hold when they can no longer continue their physical roles but still seek involvement and are not ready to leave their agency entirely. These roles could include radio, fundraising, transportation, etc. CFA is an agency that seems to do this well, and older volunteers are able to step back from physically responding to fires but can still support or work within the brigade in other ways. Every agency has jobs that are necessary behind the scenes to keep an emergency response team running smoothly, and older volunteers who want to help could be better utilized. By implementing a formal process outlined in this recommendation, the option of stepping down may be easier for those in leadership roles.



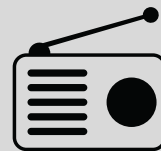
TRAINING AND EDUCATION



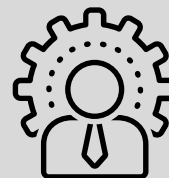
SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT



LOGISTICS



RADIO AND COMMUNICATIONS



ADMINISTRATION

Utilize the knowledge of older volunteers to train and support emerging leaders within agencies

There are no formal mentorship programs where the experience and wisdom of older volunteers is harnessed. Mentorship programs would benefit both older volunteers' wellbeing, their transition to retirement and the agency as a whole. They will not feel pushed out because they can no longer respond to emergencies, but they will feel honored that their agency sees them as valuable, which will lessen the negative effects on their mental health. Younger volunteers will also learn how to maintain good standards of practice and be better prepared to respond to emergencies through mentorship education.

POST-RETIREMENT

Establish alumni programs for retired volunteers

Agencies should consider hosting social support programs and events for the older volunteers within their agency and encourage attendance from both active and retired volunteers. Volunteers have stated they fear missing the camaraderie and connections they formed in the field over years of service. We have heard firsthand that these types of events can be successful, through conversations about Friends of Firefighters breakfasts and Paul King's CFA alumni events. Facilitating events where they can reconnect and reminisce will ease that fear of losing connection with their role entirely and also provide an opportunity to provide peer support.



Access to mental health support for volunteers after retirement

Lastly, agencies should consider how volunteers can have continued access to mental health support. When active, the busy schedules and lifestyles of the job can mask potential mental health issues and once retirement hits, so can mental health concerns. Many agencies said that the programs they offer, like peer and welfare support, are only offered to active volunteers. Offering wellbeing support would be a way to give recognition and appreciation to the roles and sacrifices volunteers made within the agency and community.





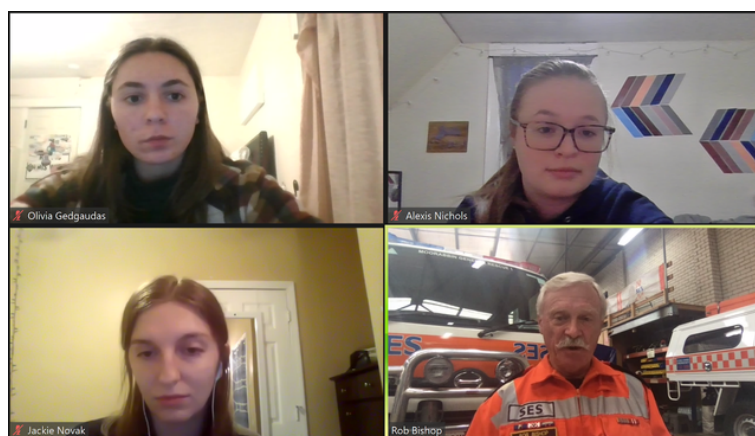
OUR REFLECTION

As a team, we were grateful for the opportunity to work on such an engaging project despite not being able to physically be in Melbourne. Overall, we hope our project will facilitate a conversation about retirement and in some way aid **the helping hands of Victoria** who devote their time to help their communities every day.

Over the past two months we were able to interview **39** people from Victoria, Australia to collect data for our project. Through this report, our team developed an understanding of the struggles emergency service volunteers go through, not only during their active service, but also during retirement. Having to produce our project remotely was a new challenge, but we are grateful that we were still able to hold conversations about retirement and get to know so many volunteers. We had a unique project that allowed us to still have lots of interaction with the people of Australia virtually. We had insightful conversations about the reality of volunteer work and got a glimpse into their lives through the stories they shared, and were even introduced to their families and pets! Learning about the time they dedicate and the work they do for their communities has opened our eyes to how much passion they put into helping others.

Another significant aspect of this project was that from both managers and volunteers alike we were thanked for producing our research. As we have mentioned, currently little work is done in the area of volunteer retirement, so we were thanked for facilitating meaningful conversation in this area and we hope the conversation we initiated will continue.

We have turned some of our conversations from volunteers into a short documentary that can be found on ESF's website, that we hope will properly share their stories and experiences to the Australian public in a way that allows the community to understand and appreciate how volunteering affects their lives and families. Below is a screen grab of our documentary, where we collaborated via Zoom because of COVID-19 restrictions banning our travel, but we were still able to facilitate meaningful conversations.



We believe that because of the good work and commitment the volunteers offer to their agencies, those agencies could give back to them by supporting their transition to retirement by making it a formal process and continue to support them afterwards as well. We believe that this will allow them to have a happier and healthier wellbeing through retirement, which is well-deserved!

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questions for Managers

1. How many volunteers does your agency have?
2. How many of those volunteers would be 50 plus years of age?
3. What is the average length of time that people volunteer with your organisation?
4. What is the main volunteering task?
5. Do you do anything to help volunteers adjust when they retire from active service – given it has been such a big part of their life?
6. Has there been any discussion about the impact retirement has on volunteer wellbeing?
7. Do you have any plans to do work in this area?
8. Do you find that volunteers resist retirement? Tell us about that.
9. What else could volunteers do if they are too old / physically unable to do response work?
10. Finishing Question: The next part of our study is to speak with volunteers in the 50+ age group. We need to speak with some who are still active and some who have retired – partially or completely. Perhaps there are a few “old legends” in your organisation we might speak with. Can you please connect us with some of these volunteers? They will need to be online!

Appendix B: Interviews for Active Volunteers

1. Please tell us a little about yourself. What part of Victoria do you live – remember we are not familiar with Victoria – are you in a city or a regional community?
2. About how many people would live in your city or town?
3. For this study we are concentrating on older volunteers. Can we ask what age range you are in please? 50 – 60, 60 – 70 or 70 +
4. Please tell us about your volunteer role at (name of agency)?
5. Why did you begin volunteering with (name of agency)?
6. Do you volunteer with any other organisations?
7. How many hours a week on average do you volunteer with (name of agency)?
8. Would you say volunteering has played a big part in your life?
9. Do you think volunteering has been good for your wellbeing? How has it helped your wellbeing?
10. Have you thought about when you will retire from volunteering altogether?
11. What do you think will be the reason you decide to retire?
12. Will you miss volunteering? WHY?
13. You have given so much of your life to (name of agency) - what do you think will help you adjust to life after volunteering?
14. MAYBE QUESTION: We are looking to talk to people who have volunteered that have interesting stories about how volunteering has impacted their life. Do you yourself have something you believe is worth sharing in depth or maybe have someone in mind, someone who has been volunteering for most of their life possibly?

Appendix C: Interviews for Retired Volunteers

1. Please tell us a little about yourself. What part of Victoria do you live in, in a city or a regional community?
2. For this study we are concentrating on older volunteers. Can we ask what age range you are in please? 50 – 60, 60 – 70 or 70 +
3. Please tell us about what your volunteer role was at (name of agency)?
4. Why did you begin volunteering with (name of agency)?
5. Did you volunteer with any other organisations?
6. How many hours a week on average did you spend volunteering with (name of agency) and how many years did you dedicate to volunteering at (name of agency)?
7. Would you say volunteering had played a big part in your life?
8. What was the reason you decided to retire?
9. Did you feel prepared for retirement or was it sudden?
10. Do you miss volunteering? WHY?
11. Did your agency do anything to assist you when you chose to transition to retirement?
12. Do you think your agency or any programs/specific support could have helped your transition to retirement?
13. Do you think volunteering was good for your wellbeing? How did it help your wellbeing?
14. Do you think even after retirement the effects on your wellbeing from volunteering have been long lasting? Have those effects been positive or negative?
15. Do you maintain any connections with your agency / fellow volunteers or coworkers?
16. **MAYBE QUESTION:** We are looking to talk to people who have volunteered that have interesting stories about how volunteering has impacted their life. Do you yourself have something you believe is worth sharing in depth or maybe have someone in mind, someone who has been volunteering for most of their life possibly?

Appendix D: Documentary Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a volunteer? What did that involve exactly?
2. Why did you become a volunteer?
3. Tell me a story about the most memorable time you have had as a volunteer.
4. What about your wellbeing? I guess it has been rewarding and challenging at times...
5. Was there a time you felt your volunteering had a significant impact on your wellbeing? What about your family?
6. Have you thought about what life would be like without your volunteer? What could help you adjust to that situation?
7. Do you feel the people understand how much volunteers give to the community?



Appendix E: Exemplary Programs Research

In this section, we describe how organizations implement programs that support mental health during the transition to retirement. These programs informed our thinking in making recommendations for the agencies in Victoria.



THE CODE GREEN CAMPAIGN

The Code Green Campaign is a nonprofit organization in Washington, USA, that was founded in 2014 by a group of EMS professionals to combat the high rates of PTSD and suicide of first responders. Their campaign hopes to foster discussion and awareness, end the stigmas around both mental health and suicide, and provide resources and education for emergency service personnel. One of the most engaging aspects of Code Green's campaign is their storytelling project. The founders of this project decided that first responders should have an outlet where they can share their stories, anonymously if they prefer, to start a conversation about mental health in the emergency service field. As described on their website, CodeGreenCampaign.org, since its

founding, Code Green posts the stories of many men and women in emergency services three times a week on their website and social media platforms (Code Green, 2020). Sharing stories and facilitating a conversation amongst peers or strangers who are going through similar experiences is an outlet to ease mental stressors.



The Police Treatment Centres

In the United Kingdom, The Police Treatment Centres, is a charity that supports the wellbeing of both service and retired police officers. The organization has two treatment centers which provide policemen and women services such as physiotherapy and stress-related support. Their Psychological Wellbeing Program focuses on coping with anxiety and depression through various methods and strategies. Currently, about 4,000 active and retired police officers' benefit from these programs every year by seeking help and focusing on their mental wellbeing after their exposure to the high-pressure situations from the field.

The Police Treatment Centres offer group sessions that include workshops and classes on coping, relaxation, stress and mindfulness strategies, as well as individual counselling. Small changes in nutrition, exercise routines and sleep cycles can have a very positive impact on someone’s mental wellbeing (The Police Treatment Centres, 2020).



Wellness



Relaxation

Sleep



Yoga

Exercise



Friends of Firefighters is a nonprofit organization that supports active and retired New York City (FDNY) firefighters and their families. The organization began days after the collapse of the World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001 and has continued to grow since. Friends of Firefighters recognize the traumatic events witnessed by first responders in the field. Their hope is to provide a safe space where people can communicate and connect with others. The organization has programs for mental health, wellness and peer support. The wellness sector consists of physical forms of treatment including acupuncture, strengthening yoga, meditations and “HeartMath”, a biofeedback technique proven to help regulate one’s emotions and behaviors. Breakfasts for firefighters and their families are hosted monthly, as well as “Firehouse Kitchen Talks”, where



firefighters can share their stories and struggles with peers over dinner. One-on-one, online and group peer support programs are also available through this organization. Additionally, every year they provide scholarships to children of FDNY firefighters in order to ease the burden of paying for college tuition (Friends of Firefighters, 2020). In 2019, they provided 1,690 counseling sessions, provided 119 low-cost acupuncture sessions, made 545 firehouse visits, connected with 11,000 members and more (Friends of Firefighters, 2020). Providing different outlets for firefighters and all emergency service

personnel, and their families, can make a lasting impact on mental health and wellbeing.

Mental health and social support programs will certainly help emergency service personnel, whether they are active or retired, maintain an overall better wellbeing. Reducing the stigma around mental health and facilitating discussions about trauma should become common practice in emergency service agencies. These agencies also need to provide supportive programs for both their workers and volunteers to smooth the process of retirement.