

# ESF IMPACT

## newsletter

ISSUE 10, 14 DECEMBER 2020



### VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION REVIEW

Volunteers are integral to the social fabric of the Victorian community, but a recent review found that there is much room for improvement in how their contribution is recognised.

Research shows that recognition is critical for the wellbeing of emergency service volunteers who often work in conditions that are demanding and stressful. Working with ESF, a team of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the United States conducted interviews with volunteer managers and 54 active volunteers from across eight Victorian emergency service agencies to understand how volunteers are currently recognised and what they would find meaningful. Collectively those 54 volunteers had contributed an astounding 700 hours in the past week. Key findings from this study were:

- the families of volunteers who give so much need recognition too
- be careful not to forget the quiet achievers in the background
- team leaders need to understand the value of recognition and be trained to give it
- pins and certificates are good but informal recognition is highly valued
- we work as one so recognition should be consistent
- the community does not understand the year-round contribution of volunteers and more stories need to be told
- more needs to be done to recognise locally where people serve



This study led to a series of recommendations for improvement at agency, sector, and government levels to support the wellbeing of volunteers.

[The full report is available here.](#)

Working with WPI is a wonderful partnership which enables ESF to deliver mental health and wellbeing initiatives that are evidence informed.



### REACTIONS

After last summer's terrible and tragic fires, it is more important than ever to support our volunteers and sustain a volunteer workforce to protect our communities. Our volunteers give so much and the WPI student team has shown that we do not always show appropriate recognition for all their hard work and commitment. The student team from WPI have identified some valuable strategies to ensure that we are better able to communicate our thanks to our volunteers for all they do to keep our communities safe.

**Prof David Lawrence, Principal Research Fellow UWA Answering the Call**



**WPI student researchers Dan Di Vecchia, Karen Ho and Dylan Connors**

Absolutely fantastic that this research has been done, especially including our Volunteers in discussions about what we currently do and how to improve. We are always looking at ways to recognise the outstanding work and contributions our volunteers make to assist their communities in their time of need.

**Priscilla Grimme, VicSES Volunteer Coordinator**

The presentation provided great insights, experiences and ideas coming straight from volunteers across the sector. This will not only provide opportunities to recognise our emergency service volunteers in a holistic manner across all organisations but will ensure the volunteer voice is heard in the development of future recognition activities at CFA. For me the take home message was 'Design WITH Volunteers - rather than FOR volunteers'

**Raelene Williams, CFA Volunteer Sustainability Manager**