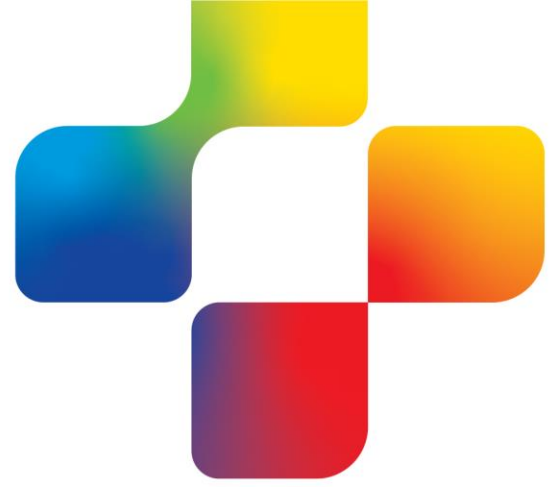


# ESF IMPACT

## newsletter



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### BEHIND THE MASK: *frontline stories*



ESF recently invited renowned Age journalist **John Silvester**, to speak with four people well placed to provide insight into how COVID has impacted frontline emergency service workers. As we went to air protesters were marching through the CBD in the wake of construction industry lockdowns. John commented that under normal circumstances this week we'd expect the city to be upbeat and alive with the colours of AFL grand final teams and joyful crowds. Instead, today, it was full of police with racing hearts and sweaty palms facing a mob of angry people. This is just an example of what COVID times have meant for emergency service workers.

Acting Assistant Commissioner **Deb Robertson** who led the Victoria Police COVID response for three months this year said this new business as usual has made people stop and reflect, "Is this what I signed up to do?" She commented that for Police their number one tool is the ability to communicate well and most of what they've had to do behind a mask was bring people in line who may have never previously had anything to do with the police and the law.

Communication challenges was a sentiment **Jess McGowan** Ambulance Victoria Paramedic and Area Manager in Melbourne's west agreed with. For paramedics who rely on building immediate rapport with a patient, not being able to see a smile or a twinkle in the eye makes it so hard to connect as you start to reduce their anxiety. "People come to work with their own personal COVID challenges which means their bucket is often depleted before they start work dealing with the problems of others".

**Shaun Caulfield** volunteer Unit Controller at SES Lilydale dealt with over 1100 requests for assistance in the first 24 hours of the June storm event and his team found themselves dealing with a disaster with a COVID overlay. Shaun spoke of the satisfaction of the job as a volunteer and how little expressions of gratitude make him proud of what he does and builds his resilience to go into situations others run from.

**Joe Park** Field Logistics Officer at Red Cross was in the thick of the COVID response in Shepparton with a focus on getting food and other urgent supplies to isolated people. Having come from humanitarian roles in Africa he said it was unthinkable to see a town in Victoria so quickly crippled by the spread of the COVID as people from all walks of life could not play their usual part in the community.



*better together*

[Listen to a recording of the conversation here.](#)

### REACTIONS

The event today really brought home the hardship our emergency services workers need to face and deal with in doing their jobs. Facing these challenges during Covid has been amplified and brought new risks to them and their families. My takeaway is the amazing resilience they have and how ESF and their respective emergency services continually focus on improving their wellbeing. A great session that reminded me lucky how we are to have these people dedicate their lives to the various emergency services we rely on.

**Carlos Gouveia, Data#3**

It was so beneficial to hear directly from the emergency services frontline and the challenges they face every day. To hear their passion in what they do to protect us is truly inspiring! Having the added challenge to connect with people they deal with behind a mask and the resilience and strength they show was admirable.

**Michelle Klobas, Gallagher Bassett**

Having had first-hand help from Ambulance Victoria in a very stressful situation this year it was great to hear from our first responders both paid and voluntary what they do for the community. It also really brought to life the challenges they are facing during COVID and the impact this has had on them personally and professionally.

**Sam Henderson, Telstra**

The stories of our emergency workers are inspiring. Everyday humans doing extraordinary things in very difficult circumstances. The message about filling up your cup so that you can best help others absolutely resonates in these COVID times. I am inspired by the commitment of these emergency services organisations on protecting the mental health and wellbeing of their members on the frontline.

**Rebecca Marshall, WorkSafe**

Wow, I just have to say, what a great insight that was, not only into how the current climate is affecting the sector but also into what we do to help. I'm feeling quite emotional after that, filled with both empathy and pride.

**Naomi Watt, ESF**