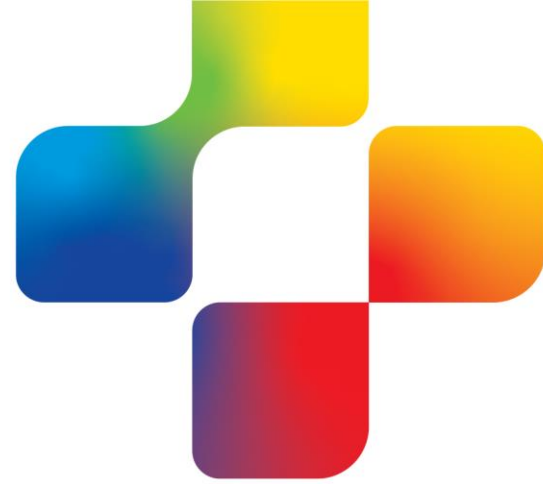


ESF IMPACT

newsletter

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STORIES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE



ESF brought the sector and many of its supporters together in the lead up to the 2022 AFL Emergency Services Match. The match is a Hawthorn Football Club initiative to celebrate the contribution Victorian emergency service workers make to our community.

ESF CEO Siusan MacKenzie reminded the gathering that while we celebrate, we must also acknowledge the terrible mental toll emergency work can have. Whether they are preparing for, responding to, or helping our community recover from disasters, people can be harmed by what they experience. 'For too long the focus has been on treating sick people and that is obviously very important, but as a sector we must give more attention upstream to prevent serious and debilitating mental illness,' she said.

Age journalist John Silvester spoke with four people from the sector who bravely shared heartfelt stories of being profoundly affected by the job and how their journey to recovery invariably involved a strong support crew. They each described a different personal experience that created a ripple effect to impact those around them. These stories illustrated how important it is to recognise the signs and symptoms of distress and to get help early.

Through the event and [Tony's Trek](#) ESF is raising funds to establish two pioneering prevention programs. A Lived Experience Program to train emergency workers to safely share their stories of mental health injury and recovery. Hearing from others 'just like me' has been shown to reduce stigma and promote early help seeking which is so important for recovery.



A Residential Wellbeing Pilot Program will emulate a program established in Canada by the BC Professional Firefighters' Association and two trauma specialists. It will provide emergency workers who are not seriously unwell, the opportunity to develop skills to reduce the cumulative effect of trauma and the risk of developing serious mental health injury.

REACTIONS

It was a fantastic luncheon. Bringing all the of the emergency services agencies together in one room was inspired. The stories that truly explained the hardship faced by workers and volunteers was eye opening and I hope that everyone will consider their mental health and those around them because of today. Great range of speakers and an amazing vibe in the room. Congratulations!

Sophie Szabo
Hawthorn Football Club

This event felt like a watershed moment for the sector when we all came together to acknowledge the mental toll the job can take no matter what role you have.

Garry Cook, Acting Chief Officer
CFA

I was very grateful to be a part of the lunch yesterday and to be able to hear the honest and touching stories from the speakers. They really brought home the individual and family toll that emergency services can demand. But ultimately their stories contained humour and hope and demonstrated the power of the right support – whether that has two legs or four!

Suzanne Leckie, Organisational Wellbeing Manager CFA

Listen to [ESFs latest podcast](#), with **Captain Steve Farina from the BC (Canada) Professional Firefighters' Association**, who discusses how a residential program in Canada has transformed lives.