

ESF IMPACT

newsletter

ISSUE 29, 15 AUGUST 2022



Mental Health Matters - a program for volunteers and their partners

With support from the Victorian State Government through Emergency Management Victoria's Valuing Volunteers Program, the Emergency Services Foundations (ESF) is delivering a Mental Health Matters (MHM) program to volunteers and their partners/ significant other.

While many volunteers report having good mental health and wellbeing and high levels of resilience, we know that emergency service work can be high risk because of exposure to trauma as well as the usual workplace factors. When that trauma involves people in your own community it can be especially hard.

The 2022 Mental Health Matters program has evolved from the program first presented by ESF in 2021 and an online version where partners were invited to participate. Based on feedback and evaluation from volunteers, the 2022 program has been designed for greater accessibility. This means a brigade or unit registers their interest, suggesting a time and place that suits them best to learn about how to help protect themselves and support others avoid mental ill-health. The most successful sessions have involved local agencies coming together as a community to participate recognising that all agencies and volunteers share and often struggle with the same concerns

With growing appreciation of the vital role partners and significant others have in supporting Victoria's 102,000 emergency service volunteers, this program offers a unique opportunity for partners to be supported themselves.

According to ESFs CEO Siusan MacKenzie, "It was volunteers who told us how valuable the program would be for their partners, so we opened it up to them and would welcome seeing more take up the opportunity to attend."



So far in 2022 this free 2.5 hour program has been delivered in all corners of the state from Port Campbell to Cobram helping people to recognise early indicators of distress, what resources they can draw on and understand why it is so important to seek help early for the best chance of recovery.

RESPONSE

"We were very fortunate to have Emergency Services Foundation facilitator, Shannon Hood who is a current CFA and former SES Volunteer, guide us through the workshop. The workshop gave us the opportunity to openly discuss mental health challenges both in our volunteer work and our everyday lives. We discussed mental wellbeing, how we go about looking after ourselves, be able to recognise signs and symptoms in ourselves and help others. The night also gave us the confidence to create conversations about mental health with those around us and break down the stigma of mental health."
Katy Millard, Captain Port Campbell CFA



"The aim of this program is to be the help at the top of the mountain, not the ambulance at the bottom. Starting the conversating and breaking down the stigma is key to mentally healthy emergency service people. We want to provide you with pratical tools to identify the start of ill mental health."
Shannon Hood
MHM Program Facilitator

[Register here to host a Mental Health Matters workshop in your community.](#)