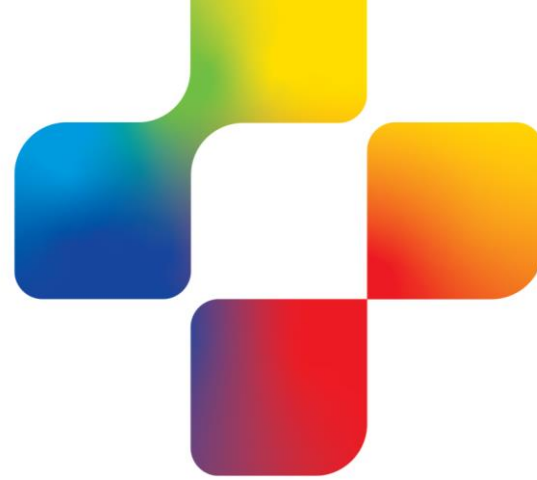


# ESF IMPACT

## newsletter

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## Residential Wellbeing Programs

ESF recently invited people leading residential wellbeing and resilience programs in Canada and New Zealand to share their experience in a conversation with local sector stakeholders.

**Steve Farina**, Engine Captain and VP British Columbia Professional Firefighters Association, and his colleagues were deeply affected by a series of suicides amongst firefighters in British Columbia. They were determined that something needed to be done to effectively support people who were suffering in silence. They found Adjunct Prof **Duncan Shields** a trauma specialist from the Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia who had a wealth of experience working with military veterans. In collaboration they developed the First Responder Resiliency Program, a four-day residential program held in the mountains where small groups of people are led through a unique mental fitness model to build resiliency practices to help manage trauma, organisational and domestic stressors. To date it has helped 250 people including firefighters, paramedics, and police and according to Steve, it was one of the hardest things he has ever done but it absolutely transforms lives.

**Rebecca Nelson** from the Ti Kiwi Maia Charitable Trust in New Zealand shared how her organisation established solely to deliver intensive residential programs to support military and emergency service workers it is forging ahead. The NZ Wrap Around is a six-day program with a holistic focus on mind, body, and soul. A recent participant described it as a 'game changer' for him and his family.

Given we have so many emergency workers the value of working with such small groups was a question for the panel. They were adamant that the value of working with a small group face to face in a safe and natural environment is so powerful. According to Dr Shields what is proving so interesting is that even though the program is delivered to small groups of people it is having a far-reaching impact in terms of culture and changing the mental health dialogue. He said, 'If we can have a greater impact on the general well-being of people by "going deep" with a few members of an agency, rather than going wide but on the surface with many, it is better stewardship of resources to deliver the more targeted and strategic intervention. The idea that we can only benefit members by serving them directly is misleading and not borne out in the evidence or in practice. There are many examples of how we invest in peer leads and trainers with the expectation that that will benefit their peers.'

In discussing clinical risk Steve said, 'With anything there is risk but think of it like disaster preparedness. The biggest risk is the risk of doing nothing to help people prepare for the hazard that is emergency service work.'

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### RESPONSES

These programs sound positive and unique and well worth looking at for Victorian emergency workers because they are much more preventative than anything we have now.

**Danny Hill**  
Victorian Ambulance Union

If this program happens, I will be the first to put my hand up to participate!

**Allie Guegan**  
CFA Volunteer

It is clear the validation for both programs from the boots on the ground is massive and it was also great to see how participants become culture change champions in their organisations.

**Greg Dean**  
Victoria Police

This was a such an inspiring and informative event.

**Deb Parkin**  
IGEM

The thing that really stuck with me was how Duncan said resilience is something we have to work hard at just like going to the gym to build physical fitness we need to build our capacity for resilience. Sometimes we need help and that is why programs like this are so important.

**Erin Smith**  
ESF Mental Health Advisory Group

Professor Shields' perspective of the 'stoic' service culture combined with Steve and Rebecca's practical experience were inspiring and great examples of collaboration of science, with a practical approach and passion to improve wellbeing.

**Emma Hosking**  
Gallagher Bassel

**A video about the Canadian First Responder Resiliency Program is [available here](#)**

**A discussion with Prof Duncan Shields is [available here](#).**