

# ESF IMPACT

## newsletter

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### RESPONSES

This was a brilliant piece of work, and I am very thankful to WPI for collating this knowledge for ESF. **Kate O'Connor, Chair ESF Mental Health Advisory Group**

So wonderful ESF is drawing attention and conducting some research on the impacts the job has on children. Lots of great ideas came out of it so it is just a matter of pulling them all together and reaching the young people and getting them to engage. A big step in the right direction!

**Martine Gilliot, Consultant**

Firstly, thank you for inviting me to take part in the meeting today. A fantastic study and presentation and a powerful realisation that we don't often think about how the career choice we made, might be affecting our children, family and loved ones.

**Michelle Lawton, Peer Support Officer VicPol**

Great study! I am grateful that my children were able to participate in this study and found the findings very interesting. I look forward to sharing with colleagues as VicForests employees would benefit greatly from this.

**Lisa Conte, General Forester DEECA**

[A comprehensive report of the student's work and a video created to bring awareness to the unique challenges children of emergency service workers face are available here.](#)

This work together with previous studies will inform a family support strategy developed by ESF.

## How the job impact kids

**Four students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI)** have worked with ESF to understand how the nature of emergency service work in Victoria may inadvertently impact children of emergency service workers. This study developed the findings of previous work undertaken by ESF which looked at families more broadly and recommended that children required special attention.

The study involved a literature review and an environmental scan of the sector to understand what is currently being done to support the children of emergency service workers. Discussions were held with academics with expertise on families of emergency service workers, as well as with WorkCover agents and mental health professionals. In addition, discussion groups were undertaken with twenty-three children aged 15 – 22 years who had a parent working with the first responder agencies to hear firsthand the lived experiences of such children.

Key findings from this study include that, like their parents, stigma deters children from seeking help, they do not understand the support options available to them, they are often confused about behaviour they witness and would rather speak with people who fully understand their situation. It became clear in presenting these findings that parents were not fully aware of the ways in which the job impacts their children. The discussion groups highlighted how beneficial connection with other children of emergency service workers could be. This led to recommendations for supporting children that includes a range of options that will improve the wellbeing of these children: increasing awareness of the issues they face, providing the children age-appropriate opportunities to connect with other children of emergency service workers, and educating both children and parents of the mental health challenges they may face.

Coinciding with this work a study by Everymind with NSW paramedics found that the families of first responders experience mental ill-health at twice the rate of the general population.