

My name is [REDACTED], I live in CFA volunteer area in the Dandenong Ranges.

In 2009 I was trapped at the Kenloydon property in Buxton and spent the following week delivery portable power packs and lighting as a charitable gesture from my place of employment with Narva. During this time I witnessed a great many acts of volunteerism.

The above mentioned experience led me to apply for membership with the Warrandyte CFA as I was residing with my wife and children in Blackburn at the time. However upon application it was advised that my place of work (Knoxfield) and residence were too far from the station. I then applied for and joined the Nunawading branch of the SES.

During my time with the SES I was frustrated with the slow pace of training which I had to accept as a symptom of a volunteer organisation. Training was limited to about 60 minutes each Monday night of which some nights were more productive than others.

In 2011 I applied for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. The process to gain employment as a Professional Fire Fighter took 4 years despite passing all stages of testing. The study and effort put into pass each test, group interview and final interview was immense. Upon starting the recruit course on Aug 1<sup>st</sup> I then completed 68 days training of 10 hours each across 19 weeks, graduating on December 10<sup>th</sup> 2015.

What I find striking about my two experiences in both volunteer and professional emergency service organisations are,

1. **Training** – With the MFB, I left the college with 612 active training hours, very structured, very disciplined and highly productive. 68 days x 10 hours less an hour for lunch. With the SES, It was at best 90 minutes on the Monday weeknights that I was able to attend.
2. **Accountability** – With a professional service, a response is 100% guaranteed in a short period of time. Regardless of circumstances we go, its our job. With the SES, I did not always respond to calls in the middle of the night and when I did, it was rare to get 100% of the required crew. During 2016-17 I have at times been rostered at Fire Station 26, Croydon. During this time I noted that at a number of calls into CFA area the attending trucks were not always fully manned. At times, the crew were not BA qualified and could not assist in the roles required at the call out. This was especially prevalent during early AM times and during work hours.
3. **Turn Out Times** – Being in station, professional turn outs are instant and without delay. As a volunteer I had to first, be available, and second make my way to the depot and await a full crew before turning out.

## Reform Effects on Volunteers.

As the population density of Melbourne increases so does the demand of Emergency Services. In 2008 Volunteering Australia Inc published research by Sean Cowlshaw, Jim McLennan and Lynette Evans titled '*Volunteer Firefighting and Family Life*'. A copy of the findings are attached to this submission.

The research investigation sought an organisational perspective on conflicts between firefighting and family life through interviews with managers of Victorian volunteer firefighters. Notable findings from the research are as follows,

- McLennan and Birch (2005) describe a number of social and demographic changes implicated in declining emergency services volunteer numbers, especially changes in the economics of work and an ageing population. Pp21
- .....review highlights the potential time demands on rural fire service volunteers, such as training, responding to emergencies, especially if they accept positions of responsibility (e.g. Captain, Brigade Secretary), or are members of brigades that respond to a high volume of call-outs to incidents, including motor vehicle accidents. Pp22
- In the context of volunteer firefighting, work-type role experiences inducing stress may result from the nature of the volunteering task, for example irregular call-outs, prolonged and unpredictable absences, interference with annual vacations (CFA Corporate 1998), as well as more severe psychological stressors, such as attending motor vehicle accidents involving injuries or fatalities, that impact on volunteers' mood at home (for extended discussion see Cowlshaw et al. 2008). Pp22
- Several participants suggested that this tendency to prioritise brigade demands was a source of frustration for many family members.....reasons for some volunteers being inclined to prioritise their brigade ahead of their family, including: the excitement and thrill associated with responding to emergencies. Pp24
- Several participants discussed a theme of changes in volunteers' mood and behaviour following so-called 'critical' or traumatic incidents. More specifically, interviewees described volunteers manifesting stress symptoms in the home environment, often in the form of withdrawing, not talking, and sleeping badly. The most common type of critical incident participants discussed were motor vehicle accidents (MVAs). Pp25
- A final primary theme concerned financial pressures on volunteers and their families resulting from leaving work to respond to emergencies. This was described as a salient issue for both volunteers who took leave without pay to attend incidents, and also for self-employed volunteers who did not generate an income during this time. Furthermore, some volunteers incurred costs responding to incidents (e.g. fuel driving to the fire station). Two specific sub-themes related to this issue: (6a.) the risk of permanently losing employment if volunteers left work without permission from their employer; and (6b.) volunteers operating rural farms sometimes incurring costs paying casual workers to manage the farm while they are away with their brigade. Pp26

- More specifically, 27% of the volunteers surveyed indicated experiencing mild to severe levels of psychological distress following events, while 17% and 9% reported significant and extreme levels of post-traumatic stress, respectively. Previous research (Regehr 2005; Regehr et al. 2005) suggests that families of emergency service workers are sensitive to a range of difficulties following such traumatic incidents, especially relating to: partners being disengaged and emotionally distant; a tendency to withdraw from family; pp27
- given that volunteers do not receive remuneration for their time and efforts, the possibility of volunteers prioritising the brigade ahead of family raises questions about why volunteering may generate a high level of salience. The current findings provide some possible reasons for this: the excitement and thrill of emergency service work; Pp27

Although published in 2008, the paper opens with the comments '*Declining volunteer numbers have forced emergency service agencies to consider factors impacting adversely on volunteer retention*'. As Victoria becomes more multi-cultural and young people move into growth corridor areas in the hope to find affordable housing, the issue of declining volunteer numbers will only increase.

For myself, we were renting in 2009 in Blackburn and could not afford to move to Warrandyte where the average home prices was in excess of \$640,000 and now stands at \$930,000 (<https://www.realestate.com.au/neighbourhoods/warrandyte-3113-vic>). Hence, as a young family we moved further away to a less densely populated area. For people taking up such large mortgages, this leaves them time poor and unable to dedicate time to community volunteerism.

According to the 2016 Census, the number of vehicles on Victorian roads grew by 2.5% in 2016 (<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/9309.0>). This amounts to around 2000 extra vehicles on Victorian Roads every week.

In a 2013 report by the 'Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development' (also attached to this submission) the average Victorian commute distance was 14.6km. The report does not reference average speed but does state that the Private Vehicle commute for Sydney was 14km with an average speed of 33kmh (pp22). As the roads become more congested these factors will only worsen further effecting the ability of emergency services volunteers to respond to incidents.

The issues of Volunteer retention, response times, family stress and financial stress can only get worse with time. It is therefore imperative that a professional fire service be available to respond to all densely populated areas in the Melbourne metro region. Area's such as Springvale for example are still responded to by volunteers, the work load placed on such volunteers must be immense and unreasonable. As the findings by Cowlshaw, McLennan and Evans show much of the motivation for participation is the excitement of response, yet the cost is great.

There is also the cost to the public to consider. It's a mathematical equation that bodies in a station within 30 metres of their appliance will always respond faster than those at home or in their place of work. This is immensely important when considering EMR (emergency medical response) and house fires where mere seconds are critical.

There is also the issue of training. Despite all the best intentions it simply isn't possible for a volunteer to gain the amount of training that a professional is put through. The cited research would also suggest that a volunteers best intentions to train more only have a detrimental effect on life outside of their service.

PTSD is also a serious concern, however the screening process of the professional services is extremely rigorous. This process simply does not exist for volunteer services.

Where the population density or turn out volume reaches a critical point, an immediate and highly trained response should be in place for the Victorian public. Where this is not the case and volunteers service the area further mechanism should be put into place as part of this review to ensure all measure are taken to reduce the stress place on responding volunteers and their families.

Kind Regards,

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