
“You can’t be selfish in the country”

Motivating, recruiting and retaining volunteer fire fighters in rural communities in New Zealand

**Research Report for
New Zealand Fire Service Commission
Whakaratonga Iwi**

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Executive summary

This research aimed to find out about what motivates people to join and remain a member of the Volunteer Rural Fire Forces (VRFF) in New Zealand. The research was conducted through a literature review, a survey of 354 volunteer fire fighters in 10 Regional Fire Authorities (RFAs) across New Zealand and case studies in seven rural fire forces.

Why volunteer?

The literature on volunteering shows that generally people volunteer for altruistic reasons to give back to their community or protect their community; for social reasons because they like the social contact and the sense of belonging; and for personal reasons in that it is either of personal interest to them or for personal development. This holds for those who volunteer in fire and emergency services with the addition that they like the added excitement and challenge that comes with volunteering in this sector. Volunteers in the VRFF give up their time to recruit others, train, practise, fundraise, maintain equipment and attend call outs. For most of them this is an addition to their everyday working lives.

Why join the VRFF?

In the survey all the volunteers said they joined because they wanted to 'contribute to their community' with almost all saying they also wanted to 'protect people and property'. These reasons were closely followed by 'knew someone in force' and 'gain new knowledge and skills'. Respondents were least likely to be motivated by thinking they could 'educate others' or that joining the VRFF would help them with their career. Of interest in these findings is that 91% said that knowing someone was a motivator for joining. This is in keeping with other findings that people joined because of family or being shoulder-tapped by current members.

My husband and myself are the only original members still active after 30+ years and our adult children are members now. Farm owners change. The local forestry camp is closed. Someone needs to do it for our community.

There are motivational differences by age and gender for joining the VRFF. Notably, people in older age groups are less likely to be motivated by, 'physical challenge' 'personal development', 'excitement' and 'career development'. Or put another way, people in the youngest age group have stronger personal motivations than the older age group. Women are less motivated than men by 'interest in fighting fires', 'excitement and challenge' and in being able to 'educate others'. This latter point is the most marked, with only 39% of women as opposed to 65% of men saying this was a motivating factor.

While there are motivational differences between the volunteers in the North and South Islands this is likely to have been influenced by age as the respondents in the South Island are, on average, younger than those in the North Island. Three factors that motivate South Islanders more than North Islanders are also those that motivate those in the younger age groups namely, 'physical challenge' 'personal development' and 'excitement'. Rurality,

population stability, economic profile, and length of service profiles of the units are all factors that could also contribute to these results.

Why stay in the VRFF?

'Contributing to community' and 'protecting people and property' remain the top two motivators for staying, as they were for joining. High ratings were also given to 'family support' (for staying involved) and 'getting the right training'. The lowest rating was given to 'helping with career'. At the case study sites, the majority of volunteers were either farmers, self-employed or retired. Given this and the large percentage of survey respondents who were in the older age group it is perhaps not surprising that 'career development' was not a great motivator for staying in the VRFF.

What I'm doing – keeping a rural fire station open and available, looking after the fire station and trying to increase crews from the local area – where most are too busy with their jobs or seeking jobs and have to move on.

As with the motivations for joining, age also made a difference to the volunteers' motivation for staying. Those in the youngest age group are motivated by just about everything that being a member of the VRFF has to offer! The older people are, the less likely they are to be motivated by 'physical challenge', 'recognition and reward', 'excitement', or the idea that being a volunteer fire fighter will help them with their career.

I'm excited by being a volunteer. I get excited by seeing the pager go off. ... I think about it even when I'm out shopping or out with my family ... when it goes off I know someone needs help ...

However of equal note is the inclusion in the older age group's motivation for staying, 'gaining new knowledge and skills', their 'interest in fire and emergency services', 'personal development' and because they believe they are 'getting the right training'.

In terms of gender, there was little difference between the motivations for men and women apart from women being less likely than men to say that 'educating others' was a motivation for staying.

Regional differences also surface again. As with the reasons for joining, three factors that motivate South Islanders more than North Islanders are also those that motivate those in the younger age groups namely, 'physical challenge', 'excitement' and 'helping with career'.

Survey respondents supplied other motivations for staying and these included that the numbers in their forces were low and that they need to stay so they wouldn't be letting the team or community down, having the time available so they can commit to the VRFF and the enjoyment of it.

At the case study sites there was a strong sense that people stayed because it was rewarding, social and there is an element of excitement, "a controlled adrenalin rush" related to the work. However, the latter was not a common occurrence given the small number of incidents that most of the fire services attended, with 73% of the survey respondents saying they had only attended between 1-10 incidents in the previous year. This in turn creates

challenges for Principal Rural Fire Officers (PRFOs) and Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) in terms of how to maintain the interest levels of the forces.

It is rewarding ... at the end of the day it's about the best you can do with the equipment, training and knowledge and seeing the result of the fire out or the first aid [administered]."

We've gone from old gear to a nationally recognised fleet of plant and equipment – the boys like the shiny toys and new equipment, whether it's new or redeveloped - they appreciate that.

While not stated as a retention issue, age emerges as something that RFAs might need to start considering given 31% of respondents were over the age of 55. This may mean finding differing roles for people within units and/or looking for mechanisms to recruit younger members.

Do motivations change over time?

Data from the survey shows there are three areas of difference in the motivations for joining and staying. 'Social contact, 'interest in fire fighting and emergency services' and 'being able to educate others' all increase as people stay. There are small motivational changes by age group and gender. Most notably for gender, 'social contact' increases more for women than it does for men, as does 'educating others' and 'interest in fire fighting and emergency services'.

Why leave the VRFF?

Survey respondents said the most likely reasons for their leaving would be if they were to 'leave the area', followed by 'work and family commitments'. Issues that are within the control of the VRFF such as leadership and training rate lowly as reasons for leaving. As with the motivations for joining and staying there were differences by age, with those from the youngest age group saying they are less likely to leave because of 'family' or 'other volunteering commitments', if they 'change jobs' or if they are not 'recognised or rewarded' for the work they do in the VRFF.

The only difference found by gender was that a greater percentage of women than men said that 'moving out of the area' would be a reason for them to leave. The only difference found by region was that more volunteers in the North Island than in the South Island said that changing jobs would be a reason for them to leave. Again, though, this factor may be accounted for by age.

The same themes came through at the case study sites although there were examples of when volunteers moved from one area they joined a fire force in the area they move to.

The case study sites also highlighted issues in relation to training associated with unit standards and the dissatisfaction and annoyance this has caused among some of those who stay and reportedly has led to a number of volunteers leaving their forces.

So what does this mean for recruitment and retention in the VRFF?

The research has found the main motivations for becoming a volunteer fire fighter are a combination of the desire to give to or serve the community, the sense of responsibility people have towards their community, and to meet personal needs for knowledge and social contact. These can be viewed as intrinsic motivators and are perhaps best worked on at the local level, where personal networks and sense of community are strongest. We found, for example, that the majority of those spoken to at the case study sites came into the forces through being shoulder-tapped or because family members were already in the force.

Recruitment was not an issue at all of the case study sites. There was a mix of approaches from “*taking pretty much whoever we can and find roles for them*”, through to shoulder-tapping those known to members, through to the more urban site where people just “*walked through the door*”. However the shrinking pool of recruits to draw on is an issue for many rural communities as is the age of their volunteer fire forces. These are factors that need to be taken into account by the NRFA, PRFOs and CFOs in relation to future recruitment. There are opportunities in communities to look beyond the current VRFF demographic and target younger people, women, or those in ethnically diverse communities who might not know about what the VRFF has to offer. That said, there are “*only so many people to go round*” in the community and a range of volunteer services that need to be staffed, often by the same people. It was not unusual at the case study sites to find that partners of those in VRFF were volunteers in the local Civil Defence unit.

What did become obvious at some case study sites was the proximity of the VRFFs to forestry blocks and/or Department of Conservation (DOC) land, both of which have trained fire fighting staff. It could well be time to consider more collaborative approaches with these organisations to help support the work of the VRFF.

Keeping volunteers does not appear to be overly problematic. The support they receive from families and employers helps volunteers to stay, as does a continued sense of personal enjoyment from the social contact and the personal development from gaining new knowledge and skills. Leadership also contributes to volunteers deciding whether to stay.

There is a mix of the struggling and humming along. Those who struggle have problems with self-management and a lot of this is related to leadership. Some also have issues with Civil Defence.

There are two factors that emerge as retention issues: maintaining the interest of volunteers who only get to attend a few incidents on an annual basis and the training associated with unit standard requirements. In relation to the former, PRFOs and CFOs have developed creative training and practice exercises that maintain interest. There are also regional competitions that keep people interested and motivated.

The resistance or negative stance towards unit standards is more challenging given the forces are made up of volunteers, many of whom do not see the need for credentialing for the VRFF through a qualifications process. Therefore, there needs to be strategic messaging on the purpose of the unit standards and the importance of the NRFA’s Minimum Training Standard. Secondly it needs to be made clear that it is unit standard “assessment” rather than

unit standard “training” and the knowledge is required by volunteers so they can fight fires, correctly, safely and efficiently. And thirdly how the assessment is undertaken needs to be rethought. Evidence of competence can be collected in a variety of ways including through oral or practical assessments that can be undertaken as part of routine practice and training sessions.

Leadership by PRFOs and CFOs is key to managing training and training expectations and there were examples at the case study sites where PRFOs and CFOs were making the training for unit standards work well.

Recommendations for recruitment and retention

Changing land use, fewer people on farms and in rural communities in New Zealand are a fact of life. As a result, attracting and keeping people in the VRFFs is a challenge for some forces and likely to become a greater one for others in the future given the aging demographic.

What this research has shown is that the people in the VRFF are, for the most part, in good heart, driven by a sense of community pride, community responsibility and community resilience. The forces operate on the good will of the volunteers and their passion and interest in protecting their communities. They are also enabled by the champions and stalwarts who have an ongoing commitment to the VRFF work. This is exhibited through continued membership, assuming leadership responsibilities and a drive for continuous improvement of fire station housing and equipment.

Overall the literature, the survey and the case studies found people volunteer for altruistic reasons to give back to their community or protect their community; for social reasons because they like the social contact and the sense of belonging; and for personal reasons in that it is either of personal interest to them or for personal development. These findings provide a useful basis for informing recruitment and retention strategies by the NRFA.

We recommend the NRFA consider the following strategies to support the recruitment of volunteers:

- Develop a national data base to understand the demographic of each region and fire force
- Use information on the motivations of population groups to develop targeted strategies to recruit younger people, women and those from more ethnically diverse communities
- Promote the work of the VRFF through community newsletters and newspapers
- Collaborate with forestry and/or DOC services to tap into or leverage off their resources.

We recommend the NRFA consider the following strategies to support the retention of volunteers:

- Provide material for VRFFs to use to promote the importance of the work they do with local employers

- Support PRFOs and CFOs so they can provide more “real” training opportunities to maintain volunteers’ interest
- Reshape how training for unit standards is messaged and assessed.

The VRFFs are part of New Zealand’s rural landscape. They, along with other emergency services, are key to preserving long held traditions of self-reliance and resilience in rural communities. As one of the volunteers said,

- *[The] community needs people like us ... and young blood to follow up in our footsteps ... to carry on, to be recognised and follow our lead in rural fire fighting.*

Introduction

In New Zealand there are 193 registered Volunteer Rural Fire Forces (VRFF) with approximately 3,500 volunteers. These forces respond to varying numbers of callouts, support their near-by urban forces, assist with road-related incidents and be the front-line response to protect property and life for over 96% of New Zealand's land area¹.

The VRFFs work through a network of Rural Fire Authorities (RFAs). These RFAs have responsibility for managing fires in their regions and for recruiting and training volunteers to respond to fires in their region. The National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA) provides leadership, co-ordination and support to RFAs. It also sets standards, and monitors and audits the RFAs performance to ensure there is a national consistency to the way volunteers are trained and respond to fires².

A number of VRFFs have been in existence since the late 1980s when with the demise of the New Zealand Forest Service, the structure of managing rural fire in New Zealand changed to be more inclusive of Local Territorial Authorities taking responsibility for managing rural fire within their jurisdictional areas. Since then the number and resourcing capability of VRFFs around the country has increased, with small and isolated rural communities becoming more reliant on self-protection. While there is some idea of the numbers of volunteers little is known about what motivates people to become a member of the VRFF or what keeps them there.

As part of the Contestable Research Fund the New Zealand Fire Service Commission (NZFS) commissioned this research to find out about what motivates and drives people to become volunteer fire fighters and then to provide RFAs with this information so they can better understand how to recruit and retain volunteers.

In order to do this it was necessary to look at the international literature on volunteering generally and volunteering for fire and emergency services. This was then followed by gathering the views of volunteers themselves on the internal and external factors that motivated them to join and stay in the VRFF.

Volunteers

For the purposes of this research we are using the definition that volunteers are 'Those who, of their own free will, undertake unpaid work outside of their immediate household, to benefit the common good,' (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). Overall the literature shows, people volunteer for altruistic reasons in that they want to give back to their community or protect their community; for social reasons in that they like the social contact and the sense of belonging; and for personal reasons in that it is either of personal interest to them or for personal development. The literature also shows there is very little difference in the motivations for volunteering as a firefighter as compared to volunteering generally, with the

¹ <http://www.nrfa.org.nz/OurPeopleAndOrganisation/Pages/About-the-NRFA.aspx>

² *ibid*

only significant difference being the sense of challenge and excitement that perhaps comes when dealing with emergency situations.

The Report

This report is structured into five sections: Motivations for joining; Motivations for staying; Motivations for leaving; Recruitment and retention – the issues and solutions; and Conclusion and recommendations.

The research approach

The purpose of this research is to provide evidence-based advice to the NZFS, the NRFA and the VRFFs on the motivators or drivers for people wanting to become and remain rural volunteer fire fighters so that they can better understand how to recruit and retain these volunteers. The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine NZFS and other existing research that identifies the motivations and drivers for people engaging in volunteering.
2. Consider the current demographic profile of the existing VRFFs, their motivations for volunteering and remaining in the VRFF.
3. Recommend strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of the VRFFs.

This research was conducted in three stages, a literature review; a paper-based survey³ of 354 volunteer fire fighters in 10 RFAs; and case studies of seven VRFFs in four RFAs (Hastings, Tararua, Waitaki and South Canterbury). The case studies involved observations, interviews and focus groups with a range of people including Principal Rural Fire Officers (PRFOs), Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) and volunteers. Information from the literature review was used to inform the surveys and case study questionnaires. High-level findings from the survey were also used to inform the case study questionnaires. Further information on the methodology can be found in Appendix One.

Who took part in the survey and case studies?

The survey respondents came from 50 VRFFs in 10 RFAs across New Zealand. Appendix Two provides a map of these locations. Of the 354 respondents 304 were male, 46 were female⁴. Fifty-eight percent were aged 45 years and over⁵. The respondents had been members of the VRFF for varying lengths of time with 12% having been members for between 16-20 years and 43% being members for between 1-5 years. Twenty percent said they held leadership roles, 77% held crew roles and 3% had administrative roles. In relation

³ The decision to use a paper-based survey was made in consultation with PRFOs.

⁴ Four respondents did not answer the gender question.

⁵ The margin of error for the sample of 354 is 4.94% at the 95% confidence level. However, as there is no national data base of volunteers in the VRFFs we are not able to ascertain the extent to which the respondents are representative of the population. Therefore when the analysis is broken into subgroups we report these as patterns and trends.

to the latter, women made up nine of the 10 who said they had this role. Seventy-three percent said they had attended between 1-10 incidents in the previous year.

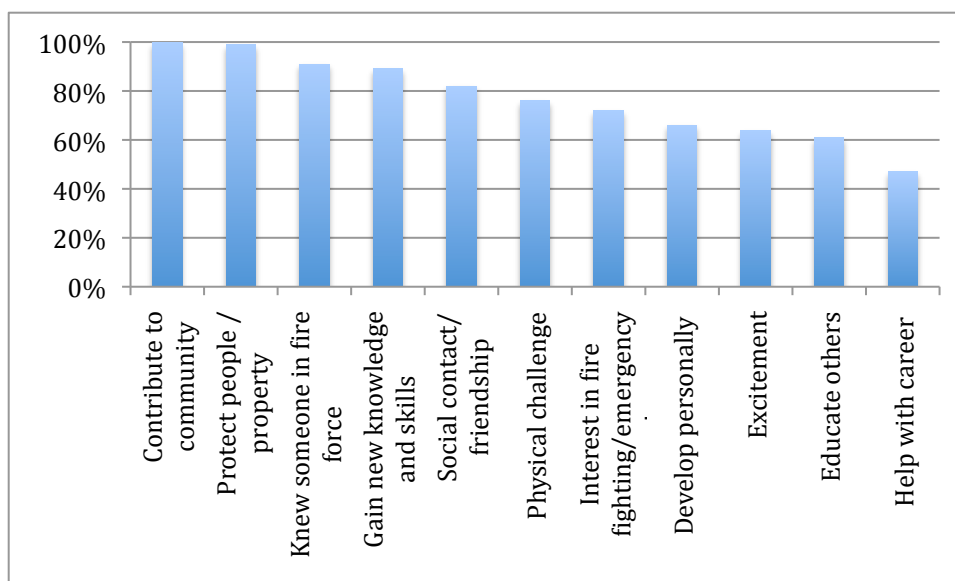
Across the seven case study sites we spoke to 38 people including PRFOs, CFOs and volunteers. The CFOs and volunteers were mainly farmers, but those who lived in small settlements or lived close to an urban centre worked in a variety of trades and professional roles. There was a mix of self-employed and employed people. They ranged in age from the early 20s through to the early 80s and had been with their forces for varying amounts of time.

Section One: Why join the VRFF?

The first question in the survey asked the volunteers about what motivated them to join. They were given a series of statements based on the literature about volunteering and then asked whether they 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' with these statements. They were able to supplement their responses through an open-ended response. For readability purposes 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed' have been combined in the figures and tables in this report.

The figure below shows the strongest motivators for joining the VRFF are 'contributing to community' and 'protecting people and property' with almost 100% saying this was the case. These reasons were closely followed by 'knew someone in force' and 'gain new knowledge and skills'. Respondents were least likely to be motivated by thinking they could 'educate others' or that joining the VRFF would 'help them with their career'. Of interest in these findings is that 91% said that knowing someone was a motivator for joining. This is in keeping with other findings in the case studies that people joined because of family or being shoulder-tapped by current members.

Figure One: Motivations for joining (N=354)



Age makes a difference

There are some motivational differences according to age. Notably, people in the older age group are less likely to be motivated by, 'physical challenge' 'personal development', 'excitement' and 'career development'. None of these factors are likely to be surprising. Or put another way, people in the youngest age group have stronger personal motivations than the older age group. McLennan and Birch (2008) also noted this in their survey of 455 Country Fire Authority volunteers, finding that younger volunteers are more likely to be motivated by self-oriented perceived benefits from volunteering compared with older volunteers. However, of interest is the fact that volunteers of all ages are equally motivated by gaining 'new knowledge and skills'.

Table One: Motivations for joining by age (n=348⁶)

	18-24yrs (n=20)	25-34yrs (n=47)	35-44yrs (n=81)	45-54 yrs (n=91)	55+yrs (n=109)
Contribute to community	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Protect people / property	100%	98%	99%	99%	100%
Gain new knowledge and skills	100%	91%	91%	90%	92%
Social contact/friendship	90%	91%	82%	84%	80%
Knew someone in fire force	90%	81%	82%	83%	76%
Physical challenge	95%	89%	85%	71%	64%
Interest in fire fighting/emergency services	100%	79%	64%	70%	72%
Develop personally	95%	74%	63%	70%	55%
Excitement	95%	87%	71%	62%	44%
Educate others	80%	70%	53%	57%	64%
Help with career	90%	68%	44%	38%	38%

When motivations for joining are analysed by length of time that the respondents have been in the VRFF, the results are similar to those outlined in the table above.

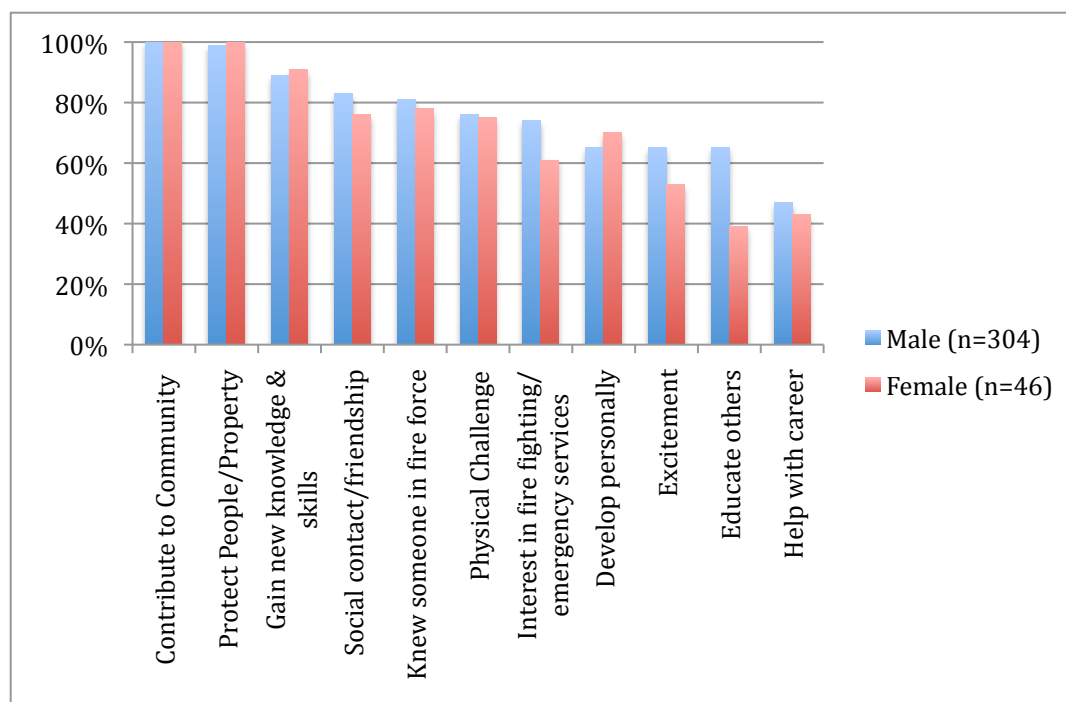
⁶ Note: six respondents did not supply their age.

Gender makes a difference

Women appear to be less motivated by 'interest in fighting fires', 'excitement and challenge' and in being able to 'educate others' than men. This latter point is the most marked with only 39% of women as opposed to 65% of men saying this was a motivating factor. These differences were also observed in the case study interviews where the women appeared to be valued for, and value themselves for, different attributes than the men. For example, maintaining the social cohesion of the unit, and a stronger willingness to contribute to important back-up and support tasks⁷. However, having said this all but one of the women at the case study sites participated fully in fire fighting activities and one of them was the CFO.

At the same time, the survey shows that women value the opportunity to gain new knowledge and to develop physically and personally. Branch-Smith and Pooley (2010) also noted this in their qualitative study of 12 women from eight volunteer brigades, which provided insight into how women perceive themselves as fire fighters. In general, the women who gained a sense of personal achievement and confidence as a result of their ability to perform the tasks required saw brigade life as positive.

Figure Two: Motivations for joining by gender (n=350)



Region makes a difference

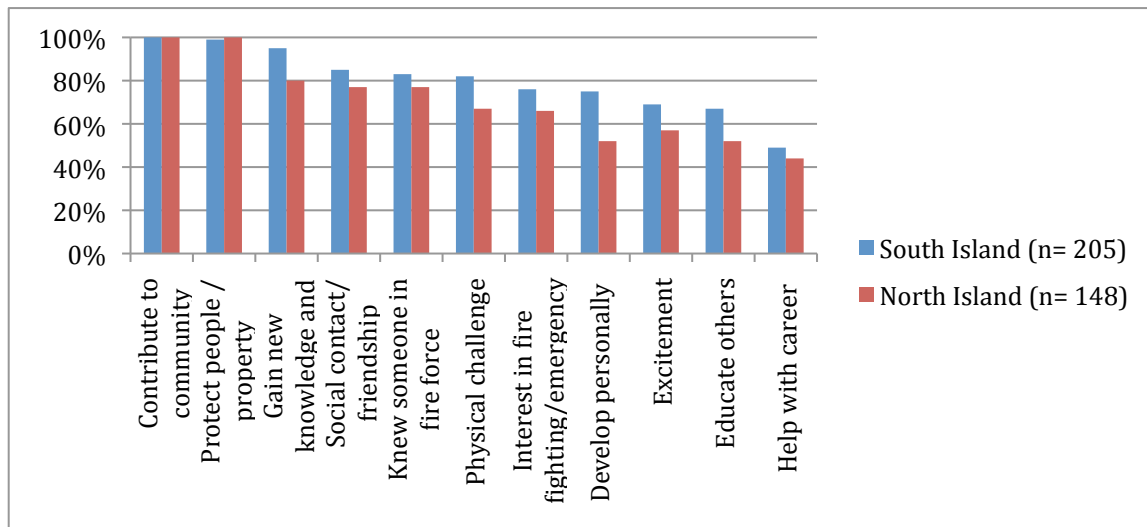
The most marked difference in motivational factors for joining is shown in the comparison between rural fire fighters in the North and South Islands. As the figure below shows, South Islanders are more motivated by five of the motivational factors than their North Island counterparts, namely:

⁷ See Turner, M.M. (2012), *The Kakanui Rural Fire Brigade – A History* for the personal stories of several women fire fighters.

- Gaining new knowledge and skills
- Physical challenge
- Personal development
- Excitement
- Being able to educate others.

It is difficult to fully ascribe reasons for these differences without having access to either a detailed demographic picture of the rural fire service as a whole, or to in-depth demographic information about the communities and regions from which the units that were surveyed were drawn. However, as the South Island respondents are proportionally younger than those in the North Island this is likely to have been a factor. There are three shared motivational factors between those in the younger age group and those in the South Island, namely, 'physical challenge' 'personal development' and 'excitement'. But rurality, population stability, economic profile, and length of service profiles of the units are all factors that could also contribute to these results.

Figure Three: Motivations for joining by North and South Island (n=353⁸)



Other motivations

Survey respondents were asked if they had any other motivations for joining. In keeping with what some of them had already said in the survey, 'supporting and giving back to the community' was mentioned by just over a quarter of the 92 responses. The themes within this concerned wanting to give something to the community, to help the community, and helping to maintain the service in the community.

- *I live in the local area and it's something that needs doing.*
- *We are a band of like-minded individuals who protect our community and got supported by our community.*
- *Because we may have lost our local rural station.*
- *Limited in rural areas so we help one and all. That's what rural people do.*

⁸ Note: One respondent did not supply a fire force so was unable to be identified as coming from either the North or South Island.

Family is another strong driver for people's motivation to join, with 11 respondents saying they joined as it was part of what their families did in the communities.

- *My husband and myself are the only original members still active after 30+ years and our adult children are members now. Farm owners change. The local forestry camp is closed. Someone needs to do it for our community.*
- *My brother was in it. Firemen are legends.*

Six respondents said they were already fire fighters. Another motivator was being asked to join, with six saying this was the case, and one said s/he responded to an advertisement through his/her work.

Other reasons varied from wanting to assist with emergency management, seeing it as an extension to the work they do in forestry or councils, wanting to extend their skills, having received the services of volunteer fire services, and the general challenge and excitement or interest in an activity that allows them to do what they wouldn't otherwise get a chance to do.

- *Being able to operate fire fighting and emergency equipment confidently.*
- *To drive a truck and use the siren.*
- *I have always wanted to be a career fire fighter.*
- *We had a fire at our place and then [I] asked to join.*

At the case study sites people were similarly motivated by wanting to do something for the community, by being asked to join, particularly those who were new to regions, or because it was part of what they did in their families.

- *You can't be selfish in the country.*
- *[L] stopped me as I was going down the road [and asked me to join].*
- *My father-in-law is head of rural fire in [X].*

Hastings Rural Fire Authority

The Hastings Rural Fire Authority has 14 rural volunteer fire forces with around 180 volunteers. While this is considerably fewer than the 300 there used to be, this was not seen as an issue for them. The PRFO and deputy thought the main motivation for volunteers to join was to protect the community. People joined the force either by "*putting their hands up*" or being asked to join, "*We don't advertise as there are a lot of people we don't want as volunteers ... [people] need to fit. They are part of the team and when working under high stress situations you need to have people you can trust*". Selection of members is done at the local level. The PRFO was interested in finding out what more could be done to encourage more women to join. Currently the women are either in the younger or older age groups.

At one of the urban fire forces the CFO had volunteered as he had come from a forestry background, "*Where fire was part and parcel of what went with the job.*" The CFO said that most people had asked if they could join. As part of the selection process he talks to them one-to-one, asks them why they want to be a fire fighter and what they hope to get out of it. New people undertake the training and go on probation for three months. After this the CFO talks to them again. "*I can be picky. It is good to have a person who can get on with*

everyone. We have enough volunteers for what is needed at the moment.”

The other force in the region also had no issue with recruitment. They described themselves as a close-knit group and thought there would be a problem if there were too many in their crew.

Kakanui Rural Fire Force

One of the six Rural Fire Units (RFUs) across the Waitaki region, the Kakanui unit was formed in 1969. One of the longest serving members (27 years) explained: *“There was no fire service here – to service the town really. It started off as a little fire party on its own. It wasn’t even under the County Council when they first started, just a group of people fighting fires in the district - we like to think we’re helping when people need help”*.

The unit is a very tight-knit group of people, with a distinct ‘family’ atmosphere. This may be helped by the fact that there are a husband and wife, two father and daughter combinations, and an engaged couple amongst the members. The sense of camaraderie was evident, with much good-natured teasing and laughter. The unit practices every second week, but members get together most weeks: *“We’re quite social!”*

The members are mostly either self-employed or retired: *“The fire group is getting very old now!”* There are six women in the group of 16 fire fighters; the newest recruit is the daughter of a current rural fire fighter: *“He’s been doing it since before I was born, I’ve always known that when the fire siren goes, Dad goes”*.

There is a strong sense of community service, with everyone ‘doing their bit for the community’. There is also a degree of reciprocity with the local community; for example, the wider community maintains the fire station gardens and RFU fundraising efforts are well supported. When the Deputy Fire Chief was killed in a car accident recently (which was attended by the Rural Fire Unit), many from the community gathered at the fire station and the Fire Chief arranged counselling for those who felt the need.

Discussion on joining

The findings from the survey and the case studies align with themes in the literature. Corydon Consultants Ltd, (2008) reported the motivations for volunteering of 100 volunteer fire fighters and 20 PRFOs and found the most common motivating factor was the “wish to contribute to community”, (p.59). The NZIER (2008), found the “public good/altruism” motivation appears to be foremost for emergency services volunteers, who are driven by a strong sense of community (p.i). PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2009) also found similar motivation in that there was interweaving of altruistic, rational and social motivations for volunteering.

“VFFs join and continue to volunteer in voluntary fire brigades for three primary reasons according to those interviewed for this study. First, they have a strong sense of responsibility for protecting people and property. Associated with this, secondly, is their

desire to give back to the community and help preserve the quality of life they enjoy. Thirdly, the brigade is a community in itself, and in addition to its other functions, it is a social club that the volunteers can be a part of and belong to.” (p.38).

The clear pattern that emerges from the literature, the survey and the case studies is that the two strongest motivations for joining are to ‘contribute to community’ and to ‘protect property and people’. Almost 100% of the respondents agreed these were their motivations. This was strongly followed by, ‘knowing someone in the VRFF’, ‘gain new knowledge and skills’, and ‘social contact’.

Several motivational differences related to age, gender and region emerge from the survey findings. Apart from age, however, these differences are more usefully thought of as differences of emphasis, rather than as distinct motivational profiles. However, they are worth the NRFA’s consideration in relation to recruiting at the regional level.

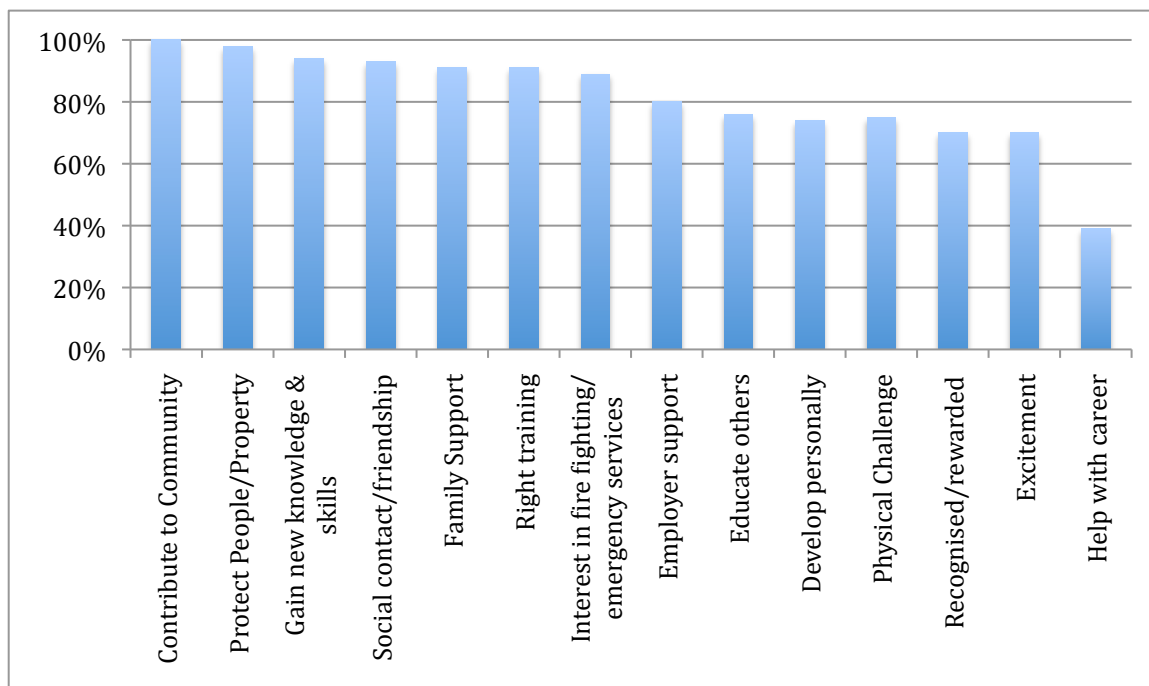
Section Two: Why stay in the VRFF?

The research also looked to explore the volunteers’ motivation for staying in the VRFF to assess the extent to which their reasons for staying remained the same as the reasons for joining. In the survey respondents were given a series of statements based on the literature about volunteering and then asked whether they ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly Disagree’ with them. They were able to supplement their responses through an open-ended response.

When ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree’ are combined ‘contributing to community’ and ‘protecting people and property’ remain the top two motivators for staying as they were for joining. Of note in the motivations for staying is the high rating given to ‘family support’ and the ‘right training’. The latter is of particular interest given the number of negative comments made about training for unit standards at the case study sites. This is discussed later in this report. The same can be said about the lower rating given to getting ‘recognised or rewarded’ as getting service medals surfaced as being quite important at some of the case study sites.

The most stand-out result from the survey is the lowest motivation for staying being ‘helping with career’. At the case study sites, it was evident the majority of volunteers were either farmers, self-employed or retired. Given this and the large percentage of survey respondents who were in the older age group it is perhaps not surprising that ‘career’ development is not a strongly motivating factor.

Figure Four: Motivations for staying (n=353)



Age makes a difference

When comparisons are made between the age groups there are some differences worth noting. As the table below shows, the older people are the less likely they are to be motivated by ‘physical challenge’, ‘recognition and reward’, ‘excitement’, or the idea that being a volunteer fire fighter will help them with their career. However of equal note is high agreement rating in the older age group’s motivation for staying being, ‘gain new knowledge and skills’, ‘interest in fire and emergency services’, ‘personal development’ and because they believe they are ‘getting the right training’.

This table also shows the younger age group is motivated to stay by practically everything that the VRFF has to offer with their lowest ratings going to ‘educating others’ and ‘career development’.

Table Two: Motivation for staying by age (n=348)

Motivation	18-24yrs (n=20)	25-34yrs (n=47)	35-44yrs (n=81)	45-54yrs (n=91)	55+yrs (n=109)
Contribute to community	100%	100%	99%	100%	100%
Protect people / property	100%	98%	96%	99%	99%
Gain new knowledge and skills	100%	96%	96%	92%	92%
Social contact/friendship	100%	98%	86%	93%	95%
Family support	100%	94%	89%	94%	88%
Right training	100%	89%	89%	91%	91%
Interest in fire fighting/emergency services	100%	94%	86%	86%	90%
Employer support	80%	79%	89%	79%	73%
Educate others	75%	85%	68%	75%	79%
Develop personally	100%	87%	72%	71%	66%
Physical challenge	95%	91%	75%	70%	67%
Recognised/rewarded	100%	81%	81%	63%	58%

When motivations for staying are analysed by length of time that the respondents have been in the VRFF, the results are similar to those outlined in the table above.

In relation to gender the only difference found was that females were less likely to say that 'educating others' was a motivation for staying, 59% as opposed to 78% of males.

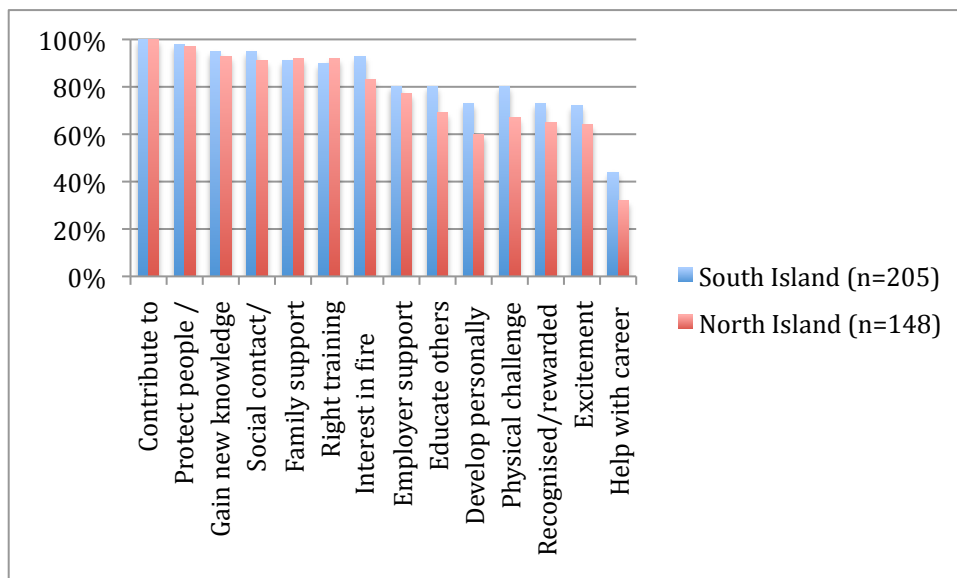
Region makes a difference

As with the motivation for joining, differences were found between the responses given by the volunteer rural fire fighters in the South and North Islands. As the figure below shows South Islanders are more motivated by five of the motivational factors than their North Island counterparts, namely:

- Educating others
- Personal development
- The physical challenge
- Excitement
- Helping with career.

As with the motivations for joining, it is difficult to ascribe reasons for these differences in motivations for staying without having access to either a detailed demographic picture of the rural fire service as a whole, or to in-depth demographic information about the communities and regions from which the units that were surveyed were drawn. However, as with the motivations for joining there are three shared motivational factors between those in the younger age group and those in the South Island (who are proportionally younger than those in the North Island), namely, 'physical challenge', 'excitement' and 'helping with career'.

Figure Five: Motivations for staying South and North Island (n=353)



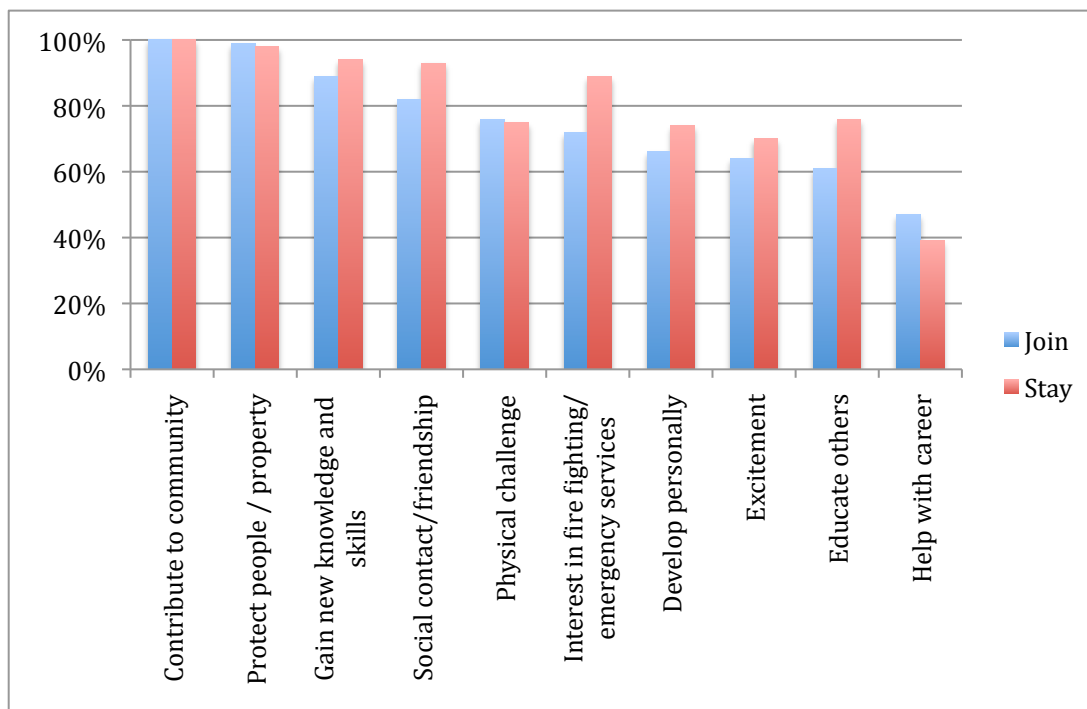
Comparison between motivators for joining and staying

When the motivations for joining and staying are compared there are three areas where motivations change. There are increases in motivations relating to:

- Social contact
- Interest in fire fighting and emergency services
- Being able to educate others⁹.

⁹ 'Personal development' increases as a motivation and 'helping with career' decreases, but as these changes fall within the margin of error.

Figure Six: Differences in motivation for joining and staying (n=353)



The motivations for joining and staying show some differences by age group, as shown in the table below. The points of change include:

- ‘Help with career’ decreases for 18-24 year olds. However this did start higher for this age group than others. Also it may not be as relevant to older age groups as it is to this group.
- Interest in fire fighting and emergency services increases for all but the 18-24 year olds
- Being able to educate others increases for all but the 18-24 year olds
- Personal development increases for 25-34 year olds
- Social contact increases for the 33-45 year olds and 55+ year olds.

Table Three: Joining and staying - motivational differences by age

Motivation	18-24yrs (n=20)		25-34yrs (n=47)		35-44yrs (n=81)		45-54 yrs (n=91)		55+ yrs (n=103)		
	Join	Stay	Join	Stay	Join	Stay	Join	Stay	Join	Stay	
Contribute to community	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Protect people / property	100%	100%	98%	98%	99%	96%	99%	99%	100%	99%	99%
Gain new knowledge and skills	100%	100%	92%	96%	91%	96%	90%	92%	92%	92%	92%
Social contact/friendship	90%	100%	91%	98%	82%	86%	84%	93%	80%	95%	95%
Physical challenge	95%	95%	89%	91%	85%	75%	71%	70%	64%	67%	67%
Interest in fire fighting/emergency services	100%	100%	79%	94%	64%	86%	70%	86%	72%	90%	90%
Develop personally	95%	100%	74%	87%	63%	72%	70%	71%	55%	66%	66%
Excitement	95%	100%	87%	84%	71%	74%	62%	68%	44%	55%	55%
Educate others	80%	75%	70%	85%	53%	68%	57%	75%	64%	79%	79%
Help with career	90%	70%	68%	59%	44%	39%	38%	30%	38%	34%	34%

In relation to motivational differences by gender there are some differences of note. ‘Social contact’ as a motivating factor increases more for women than it does for men, as does ‘educating others’ and ‘interest in fire fighting and emergency services’.

Table Four: Joining and staying - motivational differences by gender

Motivation	Male (n=304)		Female (n=46)	
	Join	Stay	Join	Stay
Contribute to community	100%	100%	100%	100%
Protect people / property	99%	98%	100%	100%
Gain new knowledge and skills	89%	94%	91%	96%
Social contact/friendship	83%	94%	76%	91%
Physical challenge	76%	75%	75%	71%
Interest in fire fighting/emergency services	74%	90%	61%	84%
Develop personally	65%	73%	70%	76%
Excitement	65%	71%	53%	62%
Educate others	65%	78%	39%	59%
Help with career	47%	39%	43%	40%

Other reasons for staying

In the survey 53 respondents gave additional reasons for why they stay in the force. Their reasons included: the forces having low numbers or feeling that they needed to stay so they weren't letting the team or community down (15); the general friendship and camaraderie (11); having the time and being available (5); enjoyment (3). Other reasons included the leadership, connection to their jobs, ensuring the existence of native bush, and the ability to help out in a range of emergency situations.

- *To make our [X] fire force able to attend fire and accidents ...*
- *What I'm doing – keeping a rural fire station open and available, looking after the fire station and trying to increase crews from the local area – where most are too busy with their jobs or seeking jobs and have to move on.*
- *I've got more to give, my bit isn't done yet.*
- *[The] community needs people like us ... and young blood to follow up in our footsteps ... to carry on, to be recognised and follow our lead in rural fire fighting ...*

It's social ...

At the case study sites similar reasons to those given in the survey came through. There were those who thought people stayed as a social thing;

- *We keep them through camaraderie.*
- *Social stuff is important - the nucleus of it.*
- *We always have a beer afterwards and put the world to rights ... we're quite a social crew.*

In several of the case study sites, the socialising after training was commented on as being important and something to be looked forward to. As one of the PRFOs said, "*There is no pub in the area and no other meeting place. The conversations at this time of year will be about lambing and calving.*"

The importance of the 'social glue' also comes out in the literature. McLennan et al., (2009) found higher levels of volunteer satisfaction, and thus intention to remain, were associated strongly with being a member of a well-led, inclusive, and harmonious brigade.

A good brigade climate is a source of positive experiences and promotes commitment to remaining a fire service volunteer in spite of the discomforts, frustrations, and stresses which are the inevitable lot of volunteers on occasions (p.45).

It's exciting

Other themes that came through as motivations for staying included the general excitement and "*controlled adrenalin rush*" of fighting fires, as one volunteer commented,"

I'm excited by being a volunteer. I get excited by seeing the pager go off. ... I think about it even when I'm out shopping or out with my family ... when it goes off I know someone needs help ...

The urban group thought the number of fires that the forces attended also kept their interest up. "*The town guys get more calls as they back everybody up.*" However, maintaining interest came through as a challenge for many of the fire forces, especially when there are not many fires to fight and some thought it was harder to maintain the interest of the younger ones as opposed to the older ones as a result of this.

- *There are not enough call outs so we are seen as irrelevant by the community ... People are more fire conscious [now].*
- *More call outs make it easier to keep staff, than having nothing to do - it's hard to keep people motivated if they don't actually get to go to fires.*

The small number of incidents attended is attested to in the survey responses where 73% (n= 335) said that in the last year they had attended between 1-10 incidents.

You get to operate big equipment...

The importance of the equipment available to the fire fighters was a strong theme at two of the case study sites. One region has a comprehensive programme of renewing equipment and volunteers have appreciated the development of equipment and resources to a professional level.

We've gone from old gear to a nationally recognised fleet of plant and equipment – the boys like the shiny toys and new equipment, whether it's new or redeveloped - they appreciate that.

A sense of pride in the equipment and the contribution volunteers had made towards its purchase and upkeep also came through strongly. For example at one site the CFO has organised a fund-raising event every year and used the funds to build a generator that he said is an asset for the fire force and for the district. This same CFO has also built a smoke chaser and a water tanker. The water tanker is also used to fund raise through the summer by taking tanks of water to farmers.

Conversely, members of another unit expressed a sense of frustration at the lack of resourcing for their unit. While they acknowledged the PRFO has a tight budget, there were concerns both about the lack of protective gear available, and the age of the some the items.

[He] gets a ridiculously low budget to try and do seven units but when it comes to the volunteer rural units that don't get many call outs, we don't get much money towards us...so that's one thing that really upsets a lot of people...'cos it's a matter of 'do we feel safe out there in the gear we have'?

It's useful

The increased interest in educating others was explored in the case studies and this mainly occurred in incidental and informal ways in the community, for example, a volunteer who works as a contractor with farmers will take the opportunity to talk to them about controlled burn offs or fire permits. One of the CFOs commented he also talked to famers along the lines of "... if you are going to do this again you should ...". Other volunteers who live at a coastal settlement tell people who light fires on the beach to make sure they put them out properly before they leave. Volunteers who have been involved in installing smoke alarms see this as an opportunity to talk to residents about fires.

Fire forces at two of the case study sites connect with the local schools and kindergartens. Here children either visit fire stations to see the equipment or are taken for rides in the fire truck, "*Even though the kids and their mothers were expecting a big red truck, not a little yellow one!*"

However there were also examples of more planned approaches to education with communities. For example in one region there was increasing concern about the growing number of life style blocks and the lack of knowledge people have about how to manage their properties. The PRFO saw the need for rural fire forces and Civil Defence to work

together to build resilient communities who are better able to take care of themselves. To this end the PRFO was about to have a meeting with life style block owners.

Waitaki Rural Fire Authority

Once people have been recruited into the rural fire units in the Waitaki region, they tend to stay, unless they move from the area (in which case they will often join up with the unit in their new locality). The change in the nature of incidents attended has had an impact. A degree of resistance to turning out to medical emergencies from some members was noted, “*We didn't join up to be ambos*”. At the same time, too few incidents or too many false alarms are seen as demotivating factors.

The cost to volunteers both in terms of time commitments and lost income were also noted. The Waitaki District Council have put fire service volunteers on a payroll, so if they have to turn out during the working week, they receive payment. The Volunteer Fire Brigade put the names of businesses who release employees on fire trucks and fire stations, an initiative called ‘employer recognition’.

But for many volunteers, appreciation and a simple ‘thank you’ is sufficient reward. As the PRFO said, “*Probably all that people really need, is to feel that they have been valued...when our guys are out and about, and we're about ready to head home, I always say 'thank you, hey thanks for coming', if nothing else, you can say thank you – it does keep most people really happy.*”

What the volunteers like the most

In addition to being asked about their motivations for staying, survey respondents and case study participants were asked what they liked most about being a member of the VRFF. In the survey there were 201 responses that are in line with their motivations for joining and staying. Some respondents gave more than one answer.

It's helpful and social

The two strongest themes are again, the service ethos of wanting to help and contribute to the community (n=109) and secondly the social theme of being part of a team and the social contact and camaraderie (n=60) that go with being a member of the VRFF.

It's exciting

These themes were followed by what can be described as the challenge and adrenalin theme where respondents commented that call-outs, challenge, or excitement (n=25) were the things they liked best.

It's rewarding

The fourth most commented on category related to the sense of personal satisfaction that came from seeing a job well done and knowing they had made a contribution to this (n=12).

- *The personal satisfaction of a job well done and worth doing.*
- *Satisfaction of helping others in times of need.*

- *The challenge of attending a call out and know you're doing the best to your ability of helping out.*

The same themes came through in the case study sites where people commented on the feeling of satisfaction they get from feeling they have done something useful for the community.

- *It's the satisfaction of going to a place and 'saving the day for them'. After a fire people are grateful. We don't have to be a hero – we have that drummed into us.*
- *It is rewarding ... at the end of the day it's about the best you can do with the equipment, training and knowledge and seeing the result of the fire out or the first aid [administered]."*

The sense of comradeship and being part of a team also came through at the case study sites. Within this concept of comradeship came the importance of "fitting in" with the other volunteers

It's important to fit in. There needs to be lots of give and take as you have to rely on each other.

And while this is a strength, it is also a weakness in that it may not cater for diversity or for people who bring different views and approaches to the crews. There was recognition in one of the forces that fit was not always possible and that the small size of the community precluded too much exclusivity.

In the rural areas we tend to take pretty much who ever we can and find roles for them, rather than have them fit into our role.

Discussion on staying

It is clear from the survey and the case studies that volunteers stay because of the 'contribution to community', the desire to 'protect people and community', the fact they 'gain new knowledge and skills', and the 'social contact'. There was certainly a sense of enjoyment at the case study sites where at meetings and training we witnessed good-natured banter and connections being made around matters in the volunteers' working lives. In addition it is worth noting they are enabled to stay through outside factors such as family and employer support, with family support rated more highly than employer support.

Similar themes also surfaced in the literature where Aitken (1999) found the main reason people stayed was because they enjoy it, with the things they enjoy most being, firefighting, helping the community, social activities and physical training. However, McLennan, Birch, Cowlinshaw and Hayes (2009) found there was a need for agencies to balance the demands on volunteers, and their work and family life commitments.

One of the challenges that arose in the discussions at the case study sites was the difficulty of maintaining interest and therefore getting people to stay, with the small number of incidents that the volunteers attend. In order to deal with this PRFOs and CFOs had a

number of strategies for maintaining the interest of their crews. There were examples of crews being involved with competitions, scenario-based exercises, and being involved in “real exercises”, for example one of the crews had recently been invited to a live burn of an old house. The volunteers found the latter exciting, saw it as being of service to the community and also a practice opportunity.

You can keep people interested through exercises such as burning down a house. You can't just walk away and leave the fire forces on their own. You have to keep providing stimulation, but this is hard to do because of the size of the area and the travel required.

On the surface it seems that that keeping people in the VRFF is not an issue. Nonetheless two things need to be taken into consideration. Firstly the aging demographic of the survey respondents, 31% of whom were over 55. This means that over the next 10 years the NRFA is going to need to think about ways to engage and recruit a younger and more diverse demographic. Secondly the fact that 43% of the survey respondents said they had been volunteers for 0-5 years which may, amongst other factors, suggest a high turnover of volunteers.

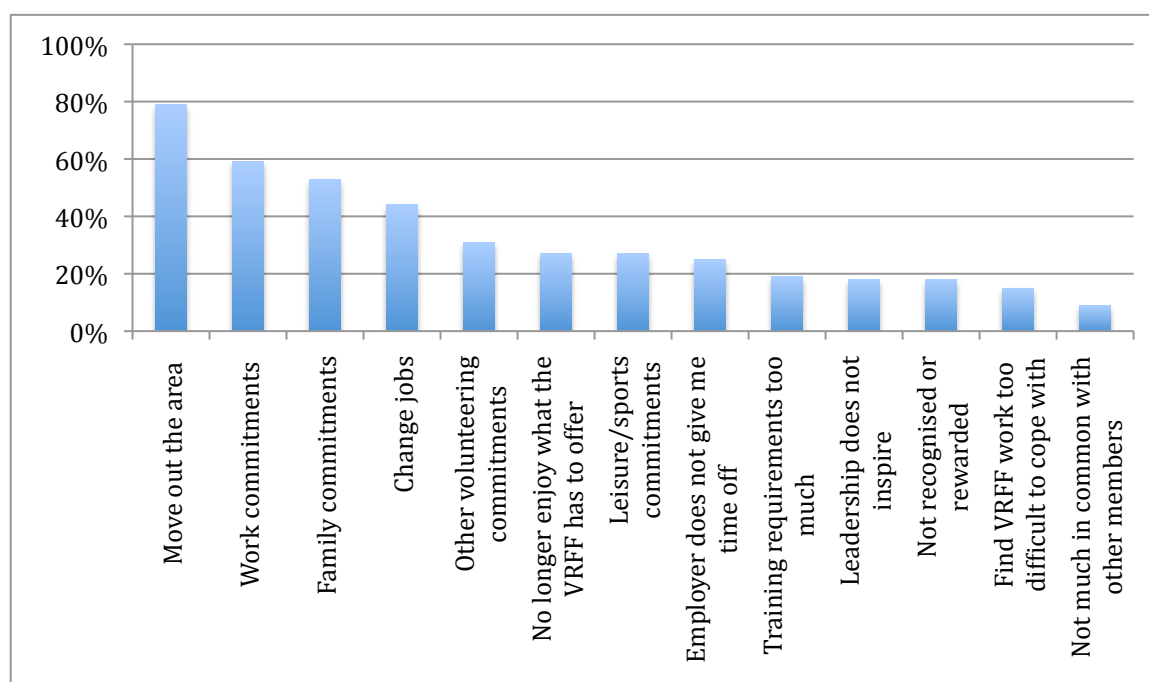
Section Three: Why leave the VRFF?

As with the previous questions survey respondents were given a series of statements based on the literature about volunteering and then asked whether they ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly Disagree’ with them. They were able to supplement their responses through an open-ended response.

When the ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree’ are combined it can be seen that the mostly likely reason respondents would consider leaving is if they ‘leave the area’, followed by work and family commitments. These are all factors external to the VRFF itself. Issues that are within the control of the VRFF such as leadership and training rate lowly as reasons for leaving. That said, the VRFF’s can maintain awareness of how training / meetings and other non-emergency activities are planned to minimise negative impacts on volunteers’ work and family commitments. As one volunteer commented,

[It] Inhibits your life e.g., your time, relationship-work-social life but you can work in with all of this if you have to ... family, ... put them first if possible.

Figure Eight: Reasons for leaving in the VRFF



There are variations in the reasons for leaving by age as the table below shows. This is not surprising given the stages of life and the commitments people have. Interestingly, those in the youngest age group say they are less likely to leave because of family and other volunteering commitments, if they change jobs, or if they are not rewarded or recognised for the work they do in the VRFF.

Table Five: Motivations for leaving by age (n=338)

	18-24yrs (n=20)	25-34yrs (n=47)	35-44yrs (n=78)	45-54 yrs (n=90)	55+yrs (n=103)
Move out the area	80%	83%	78%	78%	79%
Work commitments	45%	51%	64%	66%	56%
Family commitments	32%	58%	55%	52%	55%
Change jobs	30%	45%	42%	47%	46%
Other volunteering commitments	10%	26%	31%	35%	33%
No longer enjoy what the VRFF has to offer	15%	26%	24%	33%	28%
Leisure/sports commitments	15%	28%	23%	30%	30%

Employer does not give me time off	30%	21%	24%	29%	24%
Training requirements too much	10%	11%	15%	19%	27%
Leadership does not inspire	10%	21%	13%	23%	19%
Not recognised or rewarded	5%	17%	10%	25%	19%
Find VRFF work too difficult to cope with	10%	11%	10%	15%	22%
Not much in common with other members	5%	9%	10%	10%	8%

When analysed by length of service we found those who had been in the VRFF for 21+ years said they were more likely to leave if:

- work commitments called on their time
- their employer did not give them time off to attend incidents
- the work in the VRFF became too difficult to cope with
- the training requirements were too much for them.

There was a correlation between these factors and age as might be expected.

The only difference found by gender was that more females than males said that moving out of the area would be a reason for them to leave, 91% as opposed to 77% of males.

The only difference found by region was that more volunteers in the North Island (53%) said that changing jobs would be a reason for them to leave, as opposed to 40% of those in the South Island.

The same themes came through at the case study sites. However, as mentioned previously, if volunteers move out of the area they were likely to join another fire force.

I joined up in [O] then got nailed by [B] when I moved to Geraldine.

There was also a sense at the case study sites that the people had already left because of new requirements for training.

- *When we started doing unit standards a few years ago, the ones that weren't happy – well I suppose they're not there anymore!*
- *Have had lots come and go. I think this is because of the rules and regulations. In the old days everyone just turned up.*

What volunteers like the least

Survey respondents were asked what they liked least about being a member of the VRFF and 159 provided comments. Others either did not answer the question or said there was nothing they did not like. While there was a correlation between what the respondents 'like the most' and their reasons for staying in the VRFF, this was not the case in relation to their reasons for leaving and what they 'like the least'.

The strongest theme in the response to what volunteers liked the least related to a range of compliance and administration issues (n=35). Just over half of the comments related to paper work with none of respondents saying why they did not like it. Just under half the other comments related to bureaucracy and rules and here a few of the respondents were quite firm in their opinions.

- *At times the admin side can be somewhat onerous.*
- *Creeping "professionalism" aka "requirements".*
- *The excessive rules and regulations.*
- *NZFS interference.*
- *NZFS management.*

The next strongest theme was related to training (n=30). However the comments were varied.

- Ten thought that the unit standards were an issue
- Six thought there wasn't enough training or that there was a need for more practical training
- Two thought there was too much training
- Two didn't like training when it was raining.

Others commented on the lack of organisation in relation to training, the need for repeated training as unit standard information had been lost, and that training was a bit repetitive and not challenging enough or did not cover all that was required for them to do their jobs.

- *Re-sitting unit standards that I have already gained twice over in 25 years of service.*
- *The lack of first aid training given - as [it's] medical where I'm mainly interested.*
- *The qualifications compliance requirements are a heavy burden on my time - excessively so.*
- *Attending training that is not organised. Normal training nights and do nothing but maybe go and drive the trucks etc.*
- *The lack of ability to remove those who do not meet the RFF's minimum training. Would like to see one record keeping system for all VRFFs nationally.*

The third strongest theme in what respondents liked least about their roles related to callouts (n=24). Here there were a range of things respondents referred to: timing, for example, call outs in the middle of the night; those that interrupt family events; or those that are difficult to get to quickly during work time. Concern was also expressed about the nature of call outs e.g., those that were for not very much and those that were to motor vehicle accidents.

- *Call outs just as we have family events organized.*
- *Getting dragged out of bed for bugger all.*
- *Getting a call out on a cold frosty night.*
- *The unpredictable nature of callouts causing stress at home.*
- *Seeing the damage done to property that people work hard on and the fatalities.*
- *... we take our huge fire truck to a simple call out to an asthma attack - seems ridiculous.*

Funding was an issue for 20 of the respondents. Here they commented on the lack of funding or resources, the need to fund raise for some of the equipment, the fact they did not get paid, and the actual cost to them of being a volunteer.

- *Not enough money for the things we do.*
- *Having to fundraise for essential equipment.*
- *Having not been given what I need to fight fires, boots, overall, unit standards, driving lessons, getting frustrated.*
- *No payment or recognition.*
- *Sometimes the demand and costs of being a volunteer is not realistic as people need to look after their full time jobs ... fire service/rural and St John's Ambulance should be permanent full time paid seeing as we are under the user pays system it's time we moved ahead like other countries - back to paid jobs - careers in these types of volunteer work where you have to have the health and safety and qualifications that is expected of you.*

Leadership was an issue for nine of the respondents:

- *The organisation's apparent lack of communication and organisation.*
- *Being subjected to unprofessional leadership of our fire authority.*
- *Not getting the support of higher authorities.*
- *Observing the bungling of bureaucratic chains of command.*

Other comments made by fewer respondents included, the lack of recognition or appreciation and lack of commitment from some of the members (6):

- *Lack of commitment from some members. I think procedure needs to be put in place to remove members who continually don't attend incidents/training. Best to have fewer, but more highly training members.*
- *It's always the same people who turn up for practice - no young people interested in joining up and we're getting only 60+ years.*

At the case study sites similar themes emerged. The strongest of these related to training, in particular the requirement for unit standards which many volunteers thought were an imposition and unnecessary.

- *I've been around for 32 years and this year our leader showed me how to 'put out a fire with water' and gave me a unit standard for it, for Christ sake. All of a sudden you've got to have a piece of paper that says you can do it!*

- *What's annoying? All the bloody paperwork ... and there's all the unit standards. [but] as a team we've achieved quite a few of them actually.*
- *Just want to help put out fires ... Don't want a qualification ... Farmers know what to do operating pumps, operating machines, getting water to places ... It's common sense.*

There was also concern voiced that the unit standard requirements were putting people off joining and or staying in the rural fire forces. One of volunteers commented he knew of “25 aggrieved farmers” who wanted to join but don't because of the unit standards. Another talked about how people just left when unit standards were introduced.

We used to have one rural fire unit that was 100% farmers and as soon as we said, “Look we're going to have to get you to do Unit Standard 3285” ... “nah, not interested”. Went from 10 to none over night.

One of the PRFOs recognised the issue was not the unit standards themselves, rather it was the paper-based assessment method.

They are quite happy to train for example with pumps and putting pumps in the creek. Their attitude is, ‘we know what we are doing so why do we have to write it down’? It is not what we're training in, it is how we are assessing.

However there were differing views put forward with some volunteers recognising unit standards were part of what needs to be done in today's world.

You've gotta do all these unit standards. Most of them are pretty good to get you involved anyway, teach you, (even if you don't stay in the brigade) a lot about fires ... I think they're very practical, most of them. Maybe a wee bit of overkill. Unfortunately that's the way society is heading.

Discussion on leaving

The main reasons for leaving the VRFF given by the survey respondents and those at the case study sites were consistent with those found in the literature. Work or family commitments were the reasons found by UMR (2001) and McLennan et al (2009) and leaving the area, age or ill health, and dissatisfaction with the volunteer role were found by McLennan et al., (2009). Increasing time commitments and greater responsibility burdens in the Fire Service were also identified as reasons for leaving by UMR (2001).

Cowlishaw, Evans and McLennan (2008) suggest family issues play a role in many volunteer resignations and could be contributing to declining volunteer numbers. They identify the lack of research in this area and suggest research is vital if ‘volunteer-based rural fire agencies are to develop policies to better support the families of their volunteers’ (p.17).

Birch (2011) found around 25 percent of volunteers leave for reasons of dissatisfaction owing to:

- the perceived bureaucratic nature of the fire service
- the increased complexity of fire service activities

- the increased time commitments required by the fire service.

These latter reasons did not come through strongly in this research. However there are points made about these factors when the volunteers commented on what they liked the least about being in the VRFF.

Overall the main reasons for leaving are external to the VRFF with over half of the respondents aged over 25 in the survey commenting that work and family commitments would be a reason for leaving. While this is something beyond the direct control of the NRFA, it may be worth considering how families and workplaces could be better supported to enable volunteers to stay in the VRFF. Birch (2011) confirmed that continued volunteer service could be enhanced if the volunteers' role was better explained to employers, perhaps by providing a sample agreement regarding taking time off work.

What didn't come through in the literature but came through strongly in the case studies is that unit standards requirements are either putting people off joining or have led to them leave. This is at odds with the motivators for staying where 91% of the survey respondents said that the 'right training' was a motivator for staying.

Section Four: Recruitment and Retention

So what does this information mean for the New Zealand Fire Service in terms of recruitment and retention in the VRFF?

Recruitment to the VRFF

The literature, the survey and the case studies are consistent in identifying the main motivations for becoming a volunteer fire fighter are a combination of the desire to give or serve the community, a sense of responsibility towards the community, and to meet personal needs for knowledge and social contact.

These can be viewed as intrinsic motivators and are best utilised at the local level, where personal networks and sense of community are strongest. We found, for example, the majority of those spoken to at the case study sites came into the forces through being shoulder-tapped or because family members were already in the force. The volunteers were people who felt a sense of responsibility for their community, wanted someone there if they themselves were in need, and knew if they did not participate or contribute that there was no one else who would. This can best be described as a preparedness to be self-reliant and a commitment to community resilience, and this is clearly the approach promoted by the PRFOs and the way in which they work with their fire forces.

Advertising for members was only mentioned at one of the sites. Many of those spoken to felt active recruitment at the local level acted as a filter that perhaps prevented "unsuitable" people who might be attracted during an open recruitment drive. As one CFO commented, "*I can be picky. It's good to have a person who can get on with everyone*". In relation to this the 'fit' was seen as being important with some of the forces because of the need to work together as a team and be able to trust others in what can be highly stressful situations. Ultimately, though, the small pool of people available precludes too much exclusivity:

In the rural areas, we tend to take pretty much who ever we can and find roles for them, rather than them having to fit into our role”.

The literature also showed word-of-mouth was the most practiced form of recruitment. In a UMR study (2001), 80% of volunteers and 84% of volunteer chiefs thought this was an effective mechanism.

Word-of-mouth is a valued form of recruitment because it offers current members control over the development of their brigade or force. Volunteer fire fighters said they approach individuals they feel would fit in well with the rest of the team. When they do approach potential recruits, volunteers said, they do not do so lightly. New recruits’ performances reflect on those who recruited them. Fire fighters also want to be sure new volunteers are individuals they will be able to trust in life or death situations (UMR, 2001, p.20).

However, there are two inter-related dangers inherent in relying on ‘word of mouth’ or the ‘mobilising of personal relationships’ as the main method of recruitment (Baker-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009). First, there is a well-documented decline in the pool of people who may be available to volunteer, resulting from far-reaching demographic, economic and societal changes in rural areas (e.g. UMR, 2001, Birch, 2011, New Zealand Fire Service Commission Statement of Intent 2012/2015), meaning there are potentially fewer ‘suitable’ people to ‘shoulder-tap’. Second, recruiting ‘like’ people may discourage diversity; a narrow focus on ‘individuals who would fit in well with the rest of the team’ may blinker consideration of a range of people who could bring new skills and attributes to the team.

The survey showed 43% of volunteers had been members for between 1-5 years which suggests that recruitment is possibly not an issue. These volunteers came from across the age ranges.

Across the case study sites there was mixed experience of both difficulties and ease of recruitment. The drivers behind this concerned the changing nature of rural communities driven by the changing nature of land use in these communities. For example farmland converted to forestry blocks, small farms converted into larger farms, fewer workers being required on farms, and some diary farm workers who don’t stay long in each area.

Kakanui Rural Fire Force

The shrinking pool of potential recruits is clearly an issue. Across the region (and New Zealand) community infrastructures have changed. For example, banks and post offices have closed, and people who used to volunteer during the day are no longer available. Employers in some case may also be less willing to release volunteers.

The change in the nature of farming structures has also made it harder for people to be released for rural fire fighting. For example, with some farms moving to corporate structures, the local connection can be lost: *“It’s harder to deal with the managers - they’re no longer someone who was on the primary school committee and the local hall committee...”*.

Many of the current rural firefighters are farmers or share-milkers and a proportion of the rural workforce moves on each season, on ‘Gypsy Day’ to new farms. There is an

understandable reluctance to train and equip people who may move after a short time.

The ageing firefighting force is also of great concern, with the average age of fire fighters in the region being 50 plus. It has been difficult getting young people involved; many move out of the district for tertiary education and lack of employment opportunities can prevent them from returning. There is also a sense that some young people do not have a strong volunteering ethic.

At some of the case study sites relationships with other community groups, for example the local rugby club, was seen as helpful, both to identify potential recruits but also as a 'workforce' that can be drawn on for specific events, like civil defence emergencies.

The fire forces closer to urban regions did not have the same issues recruiting as those in more rural settings. Here the PRFO and CFO commented they had "*people coming through the door*".

Increasing diversity in the VRFF

VRFFs could look to attract more women. Only 13% of the survey respondents were women and in the case study forces the numbers of women ranged from what was described as reasonable numbers, six out of sixteen members, through to the more urban unit with no female members. There are likely to be a range of reasons for the small numbers of women in the VRFF, with recruiting through 'shoulder-tapping' of like-minded people likely to be a contributor. The women spoken to at the case study sites were positive and enthusiastic about the VRFF and what it offers them and what they can contribute.

Female Fire Fighters

[**Sue**¹⁰] volunteered as a "community service thing". She is new to the area, new to the fire force and the only female member. She felt she was able to join as she is a single parent and her children are now over 14. Her kids think "Mum's cool" for being a volunteer fire fighter.

She enjoys everything about being part of the unit except, "*The bright yellow uniform and getting in and out of the truck!*" She loves the social contact and thinks there is scope for more social activity, particularly with other units. [Sue] thinks she would only leave the unit if she got a full time job.

Her enthusiasm for being part of the VRFF was infectious. "*You should join! Go on! No reason why you can't! I tell every woman I meet: Join!*"

[**Pam**] started the rural fire force in 1997 after it took too long for a fire brigade to get to a house fire in the district. She is the CFO and the only female in the force. In her role she participates fully in fire fighting, organises the force, recruits new members, undertakes fund raising, sets up the hall for meetings and bakes for meeting smokos. She tries to get more people involved and thinks people join because they have pride in the district.

¹⁰ Real names have not been used.

[Pam's] dedication to the force is highlighted by the ongoing commitment she has to improving the equipment. At the time of the case study she was organising a major fundraising event to get funds for a mannequin for the crew to use when practising with the defibrillator, also purchased through previous fund raising.

[Pam] can be described as a community champion and stalwart. She said she was involved with six other volunteer groups, "*I'm into everything!*"

The findings from the literature, (McLennan & Birch, 2006a; 2006b), show women report very positively on their training experiences, though lack of opportunities for advancement and leadership were seen as barriers faced by approximately 25 percent of women, with many indicating they were told by at least one man in the brigade that women do not belong in the fire service and/or are not capable of the work. McLennan et al. (2007) also found women within volunteer fire services experienced specific gender-related challenges and issues. These issues included intimidation at training and dissatisfaction with opportunities for leadership and advancement.

While the issues found in the literature were not discussed at the case study sites it appears at these locations the availability of women may be an underlying factor given male volunteers referred to their partners having responsibility for looking after farms and families while fires were being fought. In other cases female partners were volunteers of other community emergency services such as civil defence units. The physical aspect of belonging to a rural fire force does not appear to be an issue in light of the comments made about the lighter hoses than in volunteer fire brigades.

When all things are considered women in many instances may be enablers for male volunteers. In the survey 'family support' was a key reason for people being able to stay in the VRFF and there were also comments from two case study sites that the thing the men liked the least was that it was tough on wives and partners when they had to race away to fires.

The fire force members at the case study sites were not ethnically diverse, but there was an example where one region was attempting to change this through reaching out as part of wider community networks.

Waitaki Rural Fire Authority

The Waitaki region is less ethnically diverse than some areas in New Zealand. The Waitaki Rural Fire team has had some connection with a group of Filipino dairy farm workers, being part of a presentation to them about community groups, including the fire service. There is a perception that the Filipino community (and other ethnic groups in the area) keep to themselves, but a recognition that a 'champion' in any group could change the perception of community voluntary involvement: "It only takes one in a community to start things!"

The third factor relating to recruiting a more diverse group is to actively look for younger members, which may not always be possible in small rural communities. Information from

the survey and the literature (Burns et al., 2008) shows younger people are motivated by altruistic reasons and for personal reasons such as gaining new knowledge and skills and career development.

Tell new volunteers what it is all about

An important component of recruitment noted in two regions was the need to make expectations and requirements explicit right from the start, including the requirement for formal unit standard-based training and the breadth of role, which may include medical calls and motor vehicle accidents. At one case study site the CFO was very clear about making the training expectations clear at the start, “Unit standard training is not an issue ... they know this has to happen when they start ... are told that this is the case if you want to be part of this”.

What the literature suggests

A number of the studies discussed ideas to facilitate recruitment from their research. A selection of these factors, drawn from the most relevant studies, are shown in the following table:

Factor	Aitken, 1999	UMR, 2001	Birch, 2011
Information dissemination and awareness-raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure local communities are involved in recognition and reward events • Hold local open days where volunteers can demonstrate their skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of volunteer fire fighter’s role - tell the volunteers’ stories through a variety of local and national media sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information sessions about volunteering with the fire service • Publicise intake dates for new volunteers
Altruistic motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the local community and the opportunity to serve the local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise that many communities rely on volunteer fire brigades solely to provide fire fighting services and other emergency service work. 	
Improvement of human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on learning new skills • Praise the technical competence of existing volunteers 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help recruits develop skills that would be useful in other parts of their life • Help them get qualifications that could help their career
‘Selective incentive’ (e.g. prestige or social contact)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress the interesting and challenging work the volunteers do • Foster the exclusivity of belonging to the brigade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise the professionalism of the fire service • Emphasise the social aspects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them to get started by introducing me to other brigade members • Invite them personally to volunteer
Managing expectations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise commitment required • Emphasise the excitement and be honest about the hard work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show them how things work around the brigade

Retention in the VRFF

This research shows the main motivators for staying are the same as those for joining, that is to support community and the local place and people. Of note however is the high rating of 'family support' that enables members to stay and the fact volunteers said they got the 'right training'. The latter point is interesting given the largely negative comments made about unit standard requirements in the survey and at the case study sites.

There's a lot of training going on...

The comments about training were usually unprompted and often came early in the case study interviews. However, it is important to take care with the definition of 'training' and to ensure the groups of activities that are undertaken under this banner are separated out for analysis and discussion. In short, these training activities can be summed up as practice; training for competitions; role-based or episodic training; formal training (credentialed but not necessarily leading to a qualification); and training for unit standard assessments.

Practice

This is where the practical and physical aspects of fire fighting are rehearsed and refined, so they become second nature when an incident occurs. Some units may train with controlled burns, for example, so members learn how to use the equipment and become familiar with the sensations of being on the 'fire ground'. A lot of work is done with the pumping equipment: "...sometimes we head down to the beach and practice with the pumps". Practice was generally viewed as a positive and necessary experience.

Training for competitions

This type of training was mentioned by a number of the units, often with a great deal of pride. Competitions, at a regional or national level, are viewed as both an important means of honing skills and showcasing excellence, and as an enjoyable social experience, building camaraderie within units and between units locally, regionally and nationally.

Role-based or episodic training

The types of training included in this category are things like communications - operating the radio; traffic management (increasingly important as more motor vehicle incidents are attended); and leadership training. This type of training is sometimes used as an entrée into the unit and to build confidence. It may also be an important vehicle to encourage and support a more diverse range of people joining the unit and a way to recognise varying skill sets and abilities.

Formal training

A range of formal training opportunities (that did not necessarily lead to qualifications) was mentioned during the case studies. The most commonly mentioned areas were first aid and heavy motor vehicle licenses. Both of these areas were highly valued by the volunteers. One of the Rural Fire Authorities offers community-based first aid training for fire fighters and their

partners, which is greatly appreciated and extends the benefits of belonging to a unit to partners and families: "...getting the wives on board has been a cunning strategy". Gaining a heavy vehicle licence is necessary to drive the fire truck but may also be useful for the volunteer's work or family life. Some units acknowledge the value of other training that compliments the volunteers' work/life: "a lot of our people are farmers, so they probably need health and safety, riding ATVs, working chainsaws".

Training for Unit Standards

The NRFA has a Minimum Training Standard (the Standard) that specifies the unit standard requirements for fire ground entry, firefighters, pump operators and crew leaders¹¹. The unit standards attest to volunteers' knowledge and competency and are used for audit purposes. Untrained fire fighters pose a significant reputational risk to the RFA: "If something goes wrong – 'are these guys trained, qualified? No they're not..."

As has been discussed already it is this training that is problematic for the volunteers. One PRFO explained the attitude in terms of what the fire fighters may say:

We're just here to look after my patch and my neighbour's patch - I don't want to be going 200 kilometres away to look after someone else's patch! And I'm blown if I'm going to be doing exams; I'm past that!

In general, the fire fighters are happy to do the practical training but are resistant to 'book work' or formal learning and assessment: "They're practical people – some of them were at school 40 or 50 years ago, they're just not into this learning stuff".

The resistance to training for unit standards has a very real impact on retention of fire fighters. Insistence on achieving mandatory unit standards is high-risk: "You run the risk of losing a whole bloody fire force!" One PRFO cited an example of this.

We used to have one RFU that was 100% farmers and as soon we said 'look we're going to have to get you to do Unit Standard 3285...'nah, not interested', went from 10 to none, overnight. We just want to fight our fires...

While most of the comments about training for unit standards were negative there were examples of RFAs where the PRFOs were overcoming the negative attitudes by taking a positive and proactive stance towards all training, including training for unit standards.

Kakanui Rural Fire Force

Training quickly emerged as an issue. While there is a recognition of the need for training: "We train once a fortnight; it's part of being together, so we know what's going on", there is a disdain for formal training, particularly when it is seen as the 'rubber-stamping' of existing skills and experience.

¹¹ Unit Standard requirements include: 3285 *Demonstrate knowledge of protection of personal safety at vegetation* (for fireground entry); 3285, 3286 *Control vegetation fires using dry fire fighting techniques*, 3287 *Suppress vegetation fires with water and water with additives* (for firefighters); 3285, 3286, 3287, 3270 *Establish and deliver water supplies for fire fighting*, 21417 *Operate light portable pumps for firefighting*, 20836 *Operate portable pumps for firefighting* (for pump operators). Crew leaders are required to have an additional 10 unit standards. EMQUAL is the standards setting body.

I've been around for 32 years, and this year our leader showed me how to 'put a fire out with water' and gave me a standard for it, for Christ's sake! All of a sudden you've got to have a piece of paper that says you can do it!

Approximately 70 per cent of the training is done in-house, via the regular practice nights. The group valued first aid training, including learning to use the Fire Authority's defibrillator.

Training for unit standards is referred to as 'off-station' training and four or five courses are run a year. Not everyone partakes of this training (some because of time constraints), but there are minimum standards required and unit standard training is seen as a way to 'climb the ladder'. Training for unit standards was also seen as a threat, in two ways. First, it was seen as putting off potential recruits or pushing out existing members.

I came from another rural fire unit, so it wasn't hard to transfer, but the more they're pushing, the more they're pushing with qualifications, which a lot of the guys who come into the service, they're not into that side of things, so it gets to the stage where they're thinking why bother? It's getting harder and harder and harder...

Secondly, there was a fear that possible changes in the structure of fire services could push standards (both training and physical fitness) to higher levels than these members would feel comfortable with.

Nonetheless the Chief is positive about training and provides a supportive environment for training to occur. There are three main motivations for this: the regulatory requirements, the desire for the Unit to look and act in a professional manner, and most importantly, so the job at hand can be done efficiently and safely.

Training serves three purposes; one is to give us the skills to alter the situation, the other is to know when we're in danger, and the third thing is that it lets you know how good the person beside you is.

While the training to complete unit standards is seen as formal and at one site was described as "exams" there was an example at one case study site where the training for the unit standard assessment was being managed in a less formal way.

Te Uri Rural Fire force

On a rainy Sunday afternoon all the members of the fire force turned out to the local community hall for unit standard training. While this force usually trains once a month this was additional training, required because of a change that had been made to Unit Standard 20386, *Operate portable pumps for fire fighting*. The PRFO led the training, which was a discussion of the various points of knowledge required for the standard. It was clear from the discussion that the volunteers knew the answers. At the completion of the discussion the individual members completed a written assessment and the PRFO then checked they could apply this knowledge in a practical, hands-on session with the portable pump.

It is clear the use of unit standards within a training programme is an issue for many of the volunteers. However, what three of the case studies show is there are ways to work with this. Firstly to make it clear this is the expectation, secondly provide a clear rationale for why

unit standards are required and their benefits, and thirdly provide a supportive and nonthreatening environment in which this learning and training takes place. Leadership by PRFOs and CFOs is key to managing training and training expectations.

Leaving the fire force

The survey found the main reasons for leaving VRFF were 'moving out of the area' and 'work commitments', followed by 'family commitments' and 'changing jobs'. These are not factors the NRFA has any direct control over. However, as suggested above there is scope for supporting or influencing these factors through the provision of information or support so families and workplaces are better placed to support volunteers to stay in the VRFF and by being conscious of these issues when planning events and training.

In the UMR (2001) research volunteers themselves made the following recommendations to ease turnover within the volunteer fire fighter ranks:

- Raise public awareness of volunteer fire fighters' existence and acknowledge their contribution to their communities and New Zealand.
- Ease conflicts between fire fighting responsibilities and work and family responsibilities.
 - Reach out to employers of volunteer fire fighters.
 - Reach out to families of volunteer fire fighters.
- Ease the burden of non-emergency work volunteers feel is taking more and more of their time.
 - Provide more administrative support for volunteer chiefs and senior officers.
 - Decrease need for volunteers to battle for funding and equipment.
- Provide financial incentives, like tax breaks, to offset the costs incurred by volunteering.
- Open lines of communication between national management and individual brigades or forces.
 - Have high-ranking officers visit local brigades.
 - Promote presence of former volunteers who are now national managers (pp.13-14).

The financial cost of being a volunteer came through in the survey and was also discussed by one CFO in the case studies. He suggested options to be considered could be reimbursement for petrol, volunteers being able to register their cars under the fire system and tax relief to businesses who are required to reduce services or shut down to fight fires. As another case study shows there is flexibility in relation to cost reimbursement with volunteers being paid for their time off work.

Aspects of how the NRFA work, namely training, leadership and recognition and reward did not come through strongly as reasons for volunteers leaving the VRFF. These are factors that RFAs should continue to consider as 'hygiene' factors that help maintain volunteers and also given the attitudes expressed at case study sites toward training for unit standards.

Community links

At the case study sites we found the volunteers had limited links to other volunteer

community groups. In most cases the VRFF was the only community group that members had joined. There were however strong connections between the VRFF and civil defence and other emergency services, especially in some instance where there are shared stations. At some of the sites the fire fighters have spouses/partners who are in the civil defence and at others they are the same people.

There's places where you have 15 fire services volunteers, 15 rural volunteers, five St. John volunteers and 10 SAR members ... but they're all the same people!" You can't turn the whole lot out – 'cos they're the same people!"

Section Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

Changing land use, fewer people on farms and in rural communities in New Zealand are a fact of life. As a result, attracting and keeping people in the VRFF is a challenge for some forces and likely to become a greater one for others in the future given the aging demographic.

What this research has shown is that the people in the VRFF are, for the most part, in good heart, driven by a sense of community pride, community responsibility and community resilience. The forces operate on the good will of the volunteers and their passion and interest in protecting their communities. They are also enabled by the champions and stalwarts who have an ongoing commitment to the VRFF work. This is exhibited through continued membership, assuming leadership responsibilities and a drive for continuous improvement of fire station housing and equipment.

Overall the literature, the survey and the case studies show people volunteer for altruistic reasons to give back to their community or protect their community; for social reasons as they like the social contact and the sense of belonging; and for personal reasons driven either from personal interest or for personal development. These motivations therefore need to inform recruitment and retention strategies by the NRFA.

We recommend the NRFA consider the following strategies to support the recruitment of volunteers:

- Develop a national data base to understand the demographic of each region and fire force
- Use information on the motivations of population groups to develop targeted strategies to recruit younger people, women and those from more ethnically diverse communities
- Promote the work of the VRFF through community newsletters and newspapers
- Collaborate with forestry and/or DOC services to tap into or leverage off their resources.

We recommend the NRFA consider the following strategies to support the retention of volunteers:

- Provide material for VRFFs to use to promote the importance of the work they do with local employers

- Support PRFOs and CFOs so they can provide more “real” training opportunities to maintain volunteers’ interest
- Reshape how training for unit standards is messaged and assessed.

The VRFFs are part of New Zealand’s rural landscape. They, along with other emergency services, are key to preserving long held traditions of self-reliance and resilience in rural communities. As one of the volunteers said,

[The] community needs people like us ... and young blood to follow up in our footsteps ... to carry on, to be recognised and follow our lead in rural fire fighting.

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Appendix One: Methodology

Objectives and research questions

The specific objectives of this research were to:

1. Examine NZFS and other existing research that identifies the motivations and drivers for people engaging in volunteering.
2. Consider the current demographic profile of the existing VRFFs, their motivations for volunteering and remaining in the VRFF.
3. Recommend strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of the VRFFs.

The table below includes the research questions that were developed and a summary of the methods that were used to obtain the answers to the questions.

Questions	Data sources			
	<i>NZ Fire Service documentation</i>	<i>Literature review</i>	<i>Survey</i>	<i>Case study interviews and focus groups</i>
1. What is the demographic profile of the current VRFFS?	✓		✓	
2. What are the motivators and drivers for people engaging in volunteering?		✓		
3. What motivated the VRFFs members to join the services?		✓	✓	✓
4. What factors contribute to the VRFFs members remaining in the service?		✓	✓	✓
5. What factors contribute to the VRFFs members leaving the service?		✓	✓	✓
6. How do the VRFFs connect with stakeholders and other community groups?				✓
7. What can be done to increase the recruitment and retention in the		✓		✓

VRFFs?				
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Research methods

Literature review

The literature review included material drawn from a range of perspectives e.g., research in rural communities on volunteering and volunteering for fire fighting, volunteering motivations and drivers more generally and volunteering amongst younger-middle aged adults. This approach allowed us to compare the literature on volunteering for fire services with other literature in the volunteer field. The literature included research reports, journal articles, papers, and media releases, which could be sourced electronically. It was limited to material that has been written since 2000¹² and to the geographic regions of New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United States.

Key word searches using Google Scholar were used. The key words include: volunteer(ing); rural; fire fighters; rural communities; motivation; recruitment; retention; age; women. The search sourced 50 items of literature.

Survey

The themes from the literature were used to inform the second stage of the research, the survey. This was set up in Survey Monkey and, piloted with PRFOs in the 12 regions that had been selected for the survey. The selection of regions in the North and South Island was made in conjunction with the staff from the NRFA. The selection was made to ensure there was a sample of VRFFs close to urban areas and those who were rural.

Following this a letter was sent out to PRFOs from the National Rural Fire Officer encouraging them to support the research by allowing time in meetings for the volunteers to complete the survey.

On the advice of PRFOs paper-based surveys were sent out in July 2103, along with the option of providing responses electronically. Surveys were sent to PRFOs in labelled envelopes that were then to be sent on to the CFOs in each of the VRFFs. Reply paid envelopes were provided for the return of the surveys.

A reminder email and phone call was made to each of the PRFOs in an attempt to encourage a high return rate. In total 1052 surveys were sent out and 354 volunteers from 50 VRFFs in 10 regions responded (see the map on the following page), giving a response rate of 34%. The margin of error for the sample of 354 is 4.94% at the 95% confidence level.

The survey asked about:

- Motivations for joining the VRFF
- Motivations for staying in the VRFF
- Considerations for leaving the VRFF

¹² Note – a paper presented at the 4th Annual Emergency Services Forum, Volunteers in Emergency Service, July 1999 has been included because of the salience of its material and because it was published in 2000.

- What they liked most about the VRFF
- What they liked least about the VRFF
- The number of incidents attended in the previous year
- Their length of service in the VRFF
- Demographic data

As a thank you for participating in the survey, respondents could go into a draw for a \$100 voucher for a contribution towards a social event for the unit.

The survey data was analysed firstly as a whole data set and then cross-tabulated by age, gender, length of service in the VRFF, and region in order to explore the extent to which there were any differences or correlation between groups.

A key limitation of the survey is that as there is no national database of the demographics of VRFFs we are not able to ascertain the extent to which the respondents are a representative sample of the population. This means that we cannot be completely confident that the margin of error is plus or minus 4.94%. Therefore when the analysis is broken into subgroups we report these as patterns and trends.

While the Fire Service was able to provide data on the number of volunteers and the number of incidents attended by rural fire forces, the data was incomplete and not able to be used to inform the research.

Case Studies

Four case study regions were selected to give a mix of the urban and rural experiences. These four regions were Tararua and Hastings in the North Island and Waitaki and South Canterbury in the South Island. The data collection methods included:

- Observations of training
- Focus group discussions
- Face-to-face interviews with PRFOs and CFOs
- Phone interviews

Information from the surveys was used to inform the case study questionnaires. It also provided the opportunity to explore some of the points of difference that had emerged in the first high-level analysis of the survey findings.

The case studies were analysed through an inductive approach whereby two researchers undertook multiple readings of the data to ascertain the key themes and points of difference. These findings were then compared with the findings from the literature and the survey.

Appendix Two: Map of Survey Respondent RFAs



KAITIA

PAHIA

OPUNOHU

WHANGAREI

KAIWAKA

NEWMARKET

COROMANDEL

AUCKLAND

MANGERE

MANUKAU

THAMES

PAEROA

MORRINSVILLE

TURANGA

HAMILTON

WHAKATANE

ROTORUA

TAUPO

GISBORNE

NEW PLYMOUTH

TAUNARUNI

WAIROA

OPUNAKE

STRATFORD

NAPIER

HASTINGS

PALMERSTON NORTH

WIRARAPA

DANNEVIKKE

NELSON

BLLENHEIM

LOWER HUTT

TAHUNANUI

PICTON

WELLINGTON

MASTERTON

WESTPORT

GREYMOUTH

HOKITIKA

ROSSI

WIRAIU

KAIKOURA

FRANZ JOSEF

WHATAROA

CHRISTCHURCH

ASHBURTON

FAIRLIE

TIMARU

OMARAMA

WIRAKA

LAAROWTOWN

QUEENSTOWN

ALANDRI

OMARU

TE ANAU DOWNS

TE ANAU

DUNEDIN

ORAWAI

INVERCARGILL

BALCUTHA