Understanding the Volunteer Journey

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Report to Fire and Emergency New Zealand

Acknowledgements

Research team

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Executive summary

Volunteers at more than 600 stations nationwide currently make up nearly 12,000 of Fire and Emergency New Zealand (Fire and Emergency) personnel. Turnover among these volunteers since 2017 is around 10%. Fire and Emergency recognises the essential role of their volunteers and is committed to an active approach to support and enable them. In 2018, Fire and Emergency commissioned SHORE & Whāriki Research Centre to explore the early experiences of volunteers and understand the key influences on volunteer engagement and retention. Specifically, this research has two key objectives:

- To identify the factors that contribute to successful volunteer engagement, such as group identification, leadership, and organisational support
- To understand how volunteers' early year experiences impact on their wellbeing, and intention to stay with the service

This study took a longitudinal and mixed-methods approach (i.e., collecting both quantitative and qualitative data) and consisted of three volunteer samples:

- **The New Volunteer sample:** Volunteers who joined Fire and Emergency between December 2018 and December 2019 (and who did not opt out of the study) were initially surveyed between January 2019 and April 2020. Follow-up surveys were conducted at 6 months and 18 months after the baseline survey.
- **The Established Volunteer sample:** Volunteers who joined Fire and Emergency between January 2015 and July 2018 were initially interviewed in 2019. Follow-up interviews were conducted 15 months after the first interview. In addition to this, individual interviews with volunteers from seven specific groups were conducted in 2020. These were volunteers who identified as Māori, Pasifika, Asian, volunteers from rural brigades, Composite Brigades and volunteers who undertake Operational Support and Brigade Support duties.
- **The Exited Volunteer sample:** Volunteers who left Fire and Emergency between October 2019 and July 2020 were interviewed in 2020.

In this report, findings from the three volunteer samples are combined and discussed in terms of the individual-level, brigade-level and organisation-level factors that impacted on volunteers' engagement, wellbeing, and length of service (or intention to stay).

Key Findings: Factors related to volunteers' engagement

Individual-level factors

- Most volunteers knew about Fire and Emergency volunteering because they had seen other volunteers in action, or they were directly approached by volunteers. Therefore, word of mouth, recruitment through volunteer networks and greater exposure of volunteers to their community are all important methods for getting more people engaged.

- The ability to serve the community and opportunities for personal development (both in terms of developing new skills and developing new friendships) were identified as the key underpinning factors contributing to volunteers' engagement with Fire and Emergency. These were also key factors for continuing engagement.

- The provision of sufficient information about what was expected from volunteers and how their life might be impacted was important for engagement. In general, Fire and Emergency did well in this regard as volunteers reported they were given sufficient information. One aspect where more information was needed was the amount of training time required.

- In terms of enhancing their engagement, volunteers expressed the importance of being acknowledged and recognised for their contribution, as well as the contribution made by their families/whānau, and/or their employers.

Brigade-level factors

- The attitude of brigade leaders (and the level of communication from them) during the recruitment process was crucial. This either facilitated or impeded volunteers' engagement. Volunteers described the communication techniques adopted by their leaders as either encouraging of their engagement or pushing them away.

- A welcoming and supportive brigade climate and good teamwork and camaraderie among brigade members had a positive impact on volunteers' engagement. On the other hand, a negative brigade climate (e.g., either seeing or experiencing discrimination, bullying, or nepotism) had a negative impact on volunteers' engagement.

- Good brigade training experiences contributed to volunteers staying more engaged. Volunteers' views on the quality of brigade training were mixed. The three main aspects were: the skill and ability of the brigade trainer, the variety of the brigade training content, and participation of fellow members. Unfavourable experiences resulted in volunteers questioning the value of their engagement.

- Timely supply of uniform and gear at the recruitment stage, good brigade facilities, and receiving adequate and up-to-date equipment and appliances were identified as key factors impacting the experiences of volunteers and contributing to their successful engagement.

Organisation-level factors

- The 'prestige' and strong reputation of Fire and Emergency was an important factor in volunteers' ongoing engagement. Volunteers appreciated Fire and Emergency's commitment to addressing their needs, looking for ways to make improvements, and trying to build an integrated fire service.

- The quality of Fire and Emergency's structured training courses was praised by volunteers. Criticisms included not enough courses, they were held too far away, or the waiting times were

too long. These issues were viewed as catalysts for disengagement. Rural volunteers suggested courses be planned to avoid their busiest time and more cross-over with urban brigades. Operational Support volunteers felt there was a lack of courses for them.

- Issues with Fire and Emergency's communication were identified – there was either too much or insufficient information, which caused frustration. Finding a balance presents a challenge for Fire and Emergency because a one-size-fits-all approach is not possible as volunteers differ widely in their communication preferences. Also, communication cannot be completely digital as some stations (and volunteers' homes) lack adequate internet connectivity or equipment (e.g., computer, smart phone).

- During the recruitment process volunteers felt welcomed, supported, and informed. However, three areas where Fire and Emergency could have done better to improve their experience were: (1) better communication, (2) faster recruitment process, and (3) more timely supply of uniforms and equipment. The perceived slowness in communication or provision of necessary equipment were perceived as a lack of engagement or interest by Fire and Emergency.

Key Findings: Factors related to volunteers' wellbeing

Individual-level factors

- Volunteers who experienced negative impacts on their work life due to their volunteering reported lower mental wellbeing and less satisfaction with volunteering. Employers who had received recognition and appreciation from brigades and/or Fire and Emergency were more likely to allow volunteers to respond to incidents during work hours. Building supportive relationships with workplaces and providing good employer recognition programmes was important for Fire and Emergency.

- Volunteers reported their level of satisfaction in their volunteer role, feeling of giving back to the community, and excitement about being part of the action exceeded their expectations. This was a significant predictor for volunteers' wellbeing, especially in terms of a greater sense of community-connectedness.

- Being part of the action and attending call-outs was important. Volunteers expressed frustration with low call-out rates and insufficient experience with fires. This dissatisfaction with low call-out rates was particularly evident among volunteers in Composite Brigades. Call-outs that impacted most adversely on volunteers' psychological and mental wellbeing were those involving children, young people, and fatalities.

Brigade-level factors

- Satisfaction with training received was a significant predictor of better mental wellbeing and greater satisfaction with the volunteering experience. Aspects of brigade training that caused dissatisfaction included: the brigade trainer's lack of skills, lack of practical elements in training sessions, and lack of participation by other brigade members.

- A toxic and negative brigade culture characterised by bullying, discrimination, nepotism, or favouritism had extremely adverse impacts on volunteers' wellbeing. Female volunteers reported discrimination such as inappropriate comments and/or unequal progression opportunities. Volunteers from Operational Support and Composite Brigades described an unspoken hierarchy within their brigade (and the organisation), which made them feel insignificant and unimportant.

- Satisfaction with the level of support received from brigades (from brigade leaders and/or other members) was important for volunteers' wellbeing. Volunteers spoke highly of the level of support they received from their brigade leaders. Volunteers who reported a lack of support from their brigade leaders described this as disheartening and disappointing.

- Volunteers mentioned the negative impact on their wellbeing caused by the absence of an effective brigade rostering system. This was discussed in terms of unfairness and/or unjustness, a lack of equal opportunities, and frustration for volunteers and their families/whānau due to the inability to plan and manage time.

Organisation-level factors

- Volunteers who perceived Fire and Emergency as adhering to the Volunteerism Principles reported greater satisfaction with physical health, better personal relationships, greater sense of community-connectedness, and greater satisfaction with life as a whole. Statistically, this was the most important predictor of volunteers' sense of wellbeing.

- The volunteer support initiatives and support services provided by Fire and Emergency were perceived positively by volunteers and viewed as enhancing their wellbeing. However, awareness of and access to the support initiatives and services varied, suggesting a need for more and better promotion and improved access to them.

- Opportunities for development and progression was an important factor and affected volunteers' sense of wellbeing. Volunteers expressed dissatisfaction when progression was slow or if development opportunities were limited (or cancelled). Specifically, Operational Support volunteers urged for a better national strategy for training and progression pathways.

Key Findings: Factors related to volunteers' length of service

Individual-level factors

- Volunteers who left Fire and Emergency cited relocation or changes in their work/study commitments as the main reasons. Volunteers expressed a willingness to volunteer again once/if their personal circumstances permitted, or they could more effectively balance, manage, and plan their time and commitments.

- Greater time spent in weekly incident responses was a significant predictor of volunteers' intention to stay (for more than 5 years). An issue related to call-outs raised by volunteers was the uncertainty and anxiety experienced by family/whānau members. The degree to which this tension was accepted varied, however it was generally recognised as 'what they signed up for'. Volunteers mentioned how social events and the Availability and Messaging System (AMS) had benefits for their family/whānau and partners.

- Opportunities to build skills and ongoing progression were identified as key factors for retention. The lack of these opportunities had a negative impact on volunteers' intention to stay. Specifically, Operational Support volunteers felt more consultation was needed for their progression pathways and structured training. Along with opportunities to build new skills, volunteers felt more recognition and better utilisation of their prior skills was required.

Brigade-level factors

- Volunteers who had seen or experienced bullying/discrimination in the brigade reported a negative impact on their length of service (or intention to stay). Volunteers expressed a willingness to volunteer again, but only after positive changes were made to the brigade environment. Volunteers suggested a clear process for conflict resolution, and more social interactions and events.

- Poor brigade leadership was viewed as a driver for people leaving. One issue identified was brigade leadership positions were not always held by the most appropriate people. The impact of this was described as a reluctance to embrace and promote change. Another concern identified was family dominance of leadership positions, or the old school mentality held by some brigade leaders.

- Positive training experiences was important to keep volunteers interested and committed. Many suggestions and ideas to improve the quality of brigade training (content, design, and delivery) were offered. Training with career staff, other brigades, or other agencies was seen as potentially beneficial. Cross-over training between urban and rural brigades and more visits from regional trainers were also suggested.

- Provision of up-to-date equipment and replacement of worn-out gear was important. Continued improvement in these areas was regarded by both rural and urban volunteers as a meaningful way to enhance the volunteer experience and prolong their stay. Improving and maintaining group identification was also seen as important. This was discussed mainly in relation to visually identifiable practices such as uniform consistency and an identification card.

Organisation-level factors

- Volunteers who perceived Fire and Emergency as adhering to the Volunteerism Principles were more likely to stay for more than 5 years. Volunteers felt Fire and Emergency is a good organisation and although there is still work to be done and room for improvement, it is moving in the right direction. More visibility, a greater presence, and more face-to-face interaction with Fire and Emergency were also suggested by volunteers as well as an enthusiastic Volunteer Support Officer.

- Personalised and sincere recognition and acknowledgement from Fire and Emergency was important for volunteers' continued commitment. Exiters who had been traumatised by an incident would appreciate aftercare by Fire and Emergency as a way to acknowledge and recognise their contribution.

- Fire and Emergency's slow pace of change had a negative impact on volunteers' perception of (and faith in) the organisation. This affected their intention to stay and their length of service. Speeding up the integration of rural and urban brigades and addressing the 'us and them' divide (between career staff and volunteers, urban and rural, and Operational Support and firefighters) were considered important.

Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider

The following action points were based on the research findings and suggestions made by the volunteers during the data collection period (i.e., between January 2019 and June 2021). A number of actions and initiatives are currently underway within Fire and Emergency (e.g., establishment of the Behavior and Conduct Office (BCO), Positive Workplace Culture programme, ICT rollout, Learning Station upgrades); therefore, the following action points for consideration should be read with this in mind.

Individual-level action points:

- Personalised acknowledgement and recognition
  - Provide personalised acknowledgement throughout the volunteer's journey, especially upon attainment of major service milestones.
  - More feedback on volunteers' contribution and performance, and more face-to-face interactions/visits by Fire and Emergency's senior leadership team – volunteers considered this an important form of recognition and appreciation.
  - Ensure Volunteer Support Officers (VSOs) are enthusiastic, accessible and endorse Volunteerism Principles when providing support and assistance to volunteers.
  - Acknowledge exited volunteers' past service beyond a resignation letter (for example, a phone call or an email after 12 months). This may encourage them to re-join when their circumstances permit.
  - Broaden Volunteer support initiatives to include a greater variety of retail discounts (not just family/whānau-orientated) and a better health insurance plan. Also, investigate the possibility of reducing/waiving fire service levy on insurance.

- Develop better employer recognition programmes so volunteers are allowed to attend call-outs during work hours.[1]

- Support for emotional wellbeing

    - In conjunction with volunteers identify training and support needs and opportunities such as time management strategies, coping skills and techniques, and relationship counselling to help them better manage their time and commitments and to cope with stress.[2]
    - Conduct a review to strengthen and ensure adequate provision and encouragement of counselling, peer support programmes, and critical incident support. A checklist of existing resources and support services for volunteers would be useful.
    - Faster roll out of the Availability and Messaging System (AMS). Volunteers commented on the positive impact of AMS on their families/whānau.
    - Encourage more social events (especially partner groups) may help families/whānau feel included, supported, and acknowledged.
    - Investigate childcare systems for volunteers and support families/whānau with young children to recognise their sacrifice and contribution.
    - Offer aftercare counselling services for exited volunteers traumatised by an incident.

- Opportunities for community service and personal growth

    - Promote community service and self-development in recruitment advertising and marketing to target new volunteers.
    - Explore avenues to help brigades with low call-out rates to find productive activities that enhance volunteers' sense of serving the community.
    - Develop individualised development plans that reflect volunteers' strengths and weaknesses.
    - Establish more structured development pathways for Operational Support volunteers.

Brigade-level action points:

- Improve brigade leadership

    (1) Leadership development
    - Upskill leaders in effective communication methods and people-management skills (coaching, mentoring, delegation, and leading a whole team as opposed to sections).
    - Provide on-going support to brigade leaders to effectively identify, confront and manage unacceptable behaviours (such as bullying and discrimination) and facilitate co-operation between all brigade members.

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[1] In 2020, the Fire and Emergency Proud Employer mark was launched, with 90% of New Zealand employers involved in the first year of this campaign indicating the campaign made a positive difference to releasing volunteers to attend call-outs during work hours (Fire and Emergency, 2021b) – further study and consultation with employers of volunteers as the campaign is rolled out would be beneficial.

[2] In 2020, Fire and Emergency started to run Psychological Wellbeing workshops (Fire and Emergency, 2021b) – the workshops should be evaluated to identify how they could be improved and whether the above suggestions could be incorporated if they have not been already.

- Train leaders in cultural competency, inclusion-based values, and diversity-focused practices to attract and increase retention of a diverse range of volunteers.

(2) Leadership management
- Design specific policy and procedures for the selection of brigade leaders to ensure their suitability. Selection of leaders should include more conversations with brigade members and interviews with candidates.
- Provide more administrative support to brigade leaders so they can focus more on supporting their volunteers and their communities.

- Improved brigade training

(1) Content
- Ensure learning contents and resources are up-to-date, hands-on, realistic, and relevant (e.g., relevant to brigades' location, to what they encountered most, to the equipment they have on hand).
- Provide Operational Support awareness training specific to the local operational support capabilities and capacities to all brigade members to enable better understanding and appreciation of this role.

(2) Design
- Design training according to the percentage of call-out types and review this regularly.
- Improve planning and organisation of training nights. Provide training timetables (or a more detailed training programme) – prominent display of the training schedule in the brigade station will allow members to see what is coming up so they can plan and prepare.
- Provide more flexibility (or more options) around training dates and time, and/or level of commitment, so they can better manage and balance their work and volunteering commitments.

(3) Delivery
- Ensure training sessions are stimulating, interesting, and engaging.
- Train the brigade trainers to keep them up to date with current standard practices and use of new equipment and skills that will enable them to facilitate effective training sessions. Increase awareness and improve the communication around the Station Training Coordinator (STC) roles and brigade training opportunities.
- Review the amount of reading associated with any training activity and where possible reduce the amount of reading required.
- Revise the Portal and Learning Station[3] to improve access (ensure the brigade has adequate internet connection and computer equipment); make login easier; make it easier to navigate; include more videos (e.g., medical, first aid) to assist learning; and ensure the brigade has the same equipment/gear as that used in the training sessions shown on the portal.
- Train the trainers to include Operational Support personnel in brigade training.

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[3] Volunteers tended to talk about the portal and learning station together or interchangeably. There were inconsistency in the terminology used by the volunteers.

- Ensure up-to-date and sufficient/adequate equipment is available for training.

(4) Participation of others
- Encourage full attendance and participation by all brigade members at training nights.
- More frequent visits by regional trainers.

- Enhancing the brigade environment[4]
    - Better monitoring of brigades to end the bullying culture and more haste is required with this process.
    - Implement tighter disciplinary procedures so unacceptable/inappropriate behaviour is addressed and/or corrected immediately.
    - Develop a clear process for conflict resolution (with involvement of Fire and Emergency's higher management team) and/or an independent complaints authority.
    - Provide access to more out-of--brigade external support.
    - Support brigades to design better rostering systems to reduce conflict/tensions that arise from perceived unfairness and/or unjustness.
    - Ensure ongoing and timely delivery of personal gear, uniforms, and ID cards.
    - Speed up provision and replacement of necessary equipment, gear, uniforms, and appliances.
    - Review planning, policy, and priority-setting so brigades are funded for and provided with what they need rather than what Fire and Emergency think they need.

Organisation-level action points:

- Provide clear communication
    - Identify volunteers' communication preferences at recruitment stage and adopt a 'toolbox' approach (a variety of communication methods and tools, including intensity and frequency).
    - Review communication plans and communication channels to ensure volunteers are kept informed about what's going on (especially regarding the provision of equipment/resources and opportunities for further development).
    - Develop a filtering/coding system so volunteers receive only email/information relevant to their roles.
    - Upgrade brigade station computers and/or internet systems and connectivity[5].
    - Upgrade Portal and Learning Station to be more user-friendly.
    - Upgrade Learning Station to an app-based mobile system for easier access.
    - Speed up the roll out of the Availability and Messaging System (AMS) to all brigades, including Operational Support volunteers.

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[4] In 2019, Fire and Emergency launched a positive workplace culture action plan (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2020b). In 2020, Fire and Emergency established a Behaviour and Conduct Office (BCO), and launched a new Policy and a new Code of Behaviour to address bullying, harassment, and victimisation (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2021a). The BCO was only in its development and interim phases during the course of this research, it has now established and addresses many points in this section.

[5] The ICT rollout happened during the course of this research, the Project Reference Group pointed out that all stations now have new devices, and all systems were upgraded with very few exceptions.

- Improvements to structured training courses
  - Increase course availability and time-options for structured training courses.[6]
  - Provide courses at more suitable times for rural volunteers (e.g., to avoid lambing or milking seasons). More consultation with rural volunteers will support the development of suitable training times/schedules.
  - Provide cross-over training or combine urban and rural training.
  - Use the same equipment in structured training courses as in the brigade.
  - More national training centres (one in mid-South Island, renovate the Wellington facility).[7]
  - Reduce the time needed for volunteers to book structured courses (preferably a streamlined online booking system for entering personal details and to prevent bookings getting lost).
  - Avoid cancellation of structured courses (or communicate cancellations well in advance).
  - Develop more national training courses and a better progression pathway for Operational Support volunteers. More consultation with Operational Support volunteers is needed.
  - Enable recognition of structured training courses by other agencies and/or educational qualification authorities. Inform volunteers that a proportion of Fire and Emergency training results in NZQA Unit Standards.

- Striving to be volunteer-focused
  - Help volunteers who have relocated to join their new local brigade.
  - Follow-up with exited volunteers (annually or biannually) in case their circumstances have changed and encourage them to re-join the service.
  - Provide more inter-brigade activities and social events, and more opportunities for engagement and interaction – this may help to reduce the 'us and them' divide between urban/rural and career staff/volunteers.
  - Schedule training with neighbouring brigades (two to three times a year) and/or other agencies (e.g., Police, St John).
  - More advertising and marketing on social media, more open days at the station and increased visibility/presence of Fire and Emergency at community events and schools (especially high school career days).
  - Raise awareness and provide public education about the Operational Support volunteer role (to attract a wider and more diverse group).
  - Develop policy to better utilise volunteers' existing skills, expertise, and experience.
  - Design a 2-year advertising/marketing recruitment plan – findings showed more than 50% of volunteers took up to 2 years to consider joining.

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[6] In the sense-making session, the Project Reference Group mentioned more courses with different time-options and flexibility had already been made available in the past year. A number of activities were reported in the Volunteerism Strategy six-month progress report (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2021a). Therefore, it may be useful to evaluate the uptake of those courses to determine whether or not increased availability and time-options have met volunteers' needs and whether they are aware of these options, or is more promotion and advertising required.

[7] The sense-making session identified that this is already underway. Perhaps better promotion and advertising of these additional centres would be helpful.

- Train career staff to support volunteers in their recruits' courses. Involve career firefighters in brigade training to share their knowledge and experience.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of Operational Support and set into policy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Volunteer motivation has often been conceptualised within the framework of social exchange theory – in order for volunteer efforts to be sustained over time, the rewards to the volunteer must exceed, or at minimum, balance out the costs (Rice & Fallon, 2011). The decision to continue volunteering is typically re-evaluated by the volunteer throughout their volunteering journey, where assessments are made about the relative rewards and costs of their involvement.

The literature on volunteering shows that generally people volunteer for altruistic reasons – to give back to or protect their community. This sense of giving back to the community derives from many factors, ranging from personal responsibility, family tradition, to cultural pressure (Francis & Jones, 2012; Gazzale, 2019; Lantz & Runefors, 2021). Some people are driven by social reasons because they like the social networks and the sense of belonging, and for more personal reasons involving personal interest or perhaps career enhancement (Carpenter & Myers, 2010; Francis & Jones, 2012; McLennan & Birch, 2008; West & Murphy, 2016). These reasons hold for those who volunteer in fire and emergency services, with the addition that some people like the added excitement and challenges that come with volunteering in this sector (Alkema et al., 2013; Lantz & Runefors, 2021).

Besides seeking to understand the motives for becoming a volunteer firefighter, researchers have also examined factors that feed into satisfaction and dissatisfaction among emergency service volunteers. Certainly, some attrition is unavoidable, such as when volunteers leave due to age/health concerns or relocation (McLennan et al., 2009). However, the research literature on emergency service volunteers provides valuable insights relating to potentially manageable factors. Effective leadership and organisational climate are found to be an essential aspect of volunteer satisfaction and have been linked to intention to stay (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009; Gazzale, 2019; Lantz & Runefors, 2021; McLennan et al., 2009). Moreover, high participation efficacy, supervisor support, recognition, interactional justice, and group cohesion are positively related to ongoing commitment to volunteering (Henderson & Sowa, 2019; Rice & Fallon 2011).

New Zealand has always relied heavily on volunteers in the emergency service sector. However, the volunteer sector is undergoing a period of considerable change, both in New Zealand and abroad (Volunteering New Zealand, 2017). A range of societal trends appears to have impacted on the traditional volunteer model. These include:

- Demographic and community changes (e.g., urbanisation, ageing population, more transient populations)
- Changing work-life patterns (e.g., people living busier lives with less spare time, increased rates of working from home)
- Changing lifestyle expectations (e.g., seeking greater reciprocity for their volunteering)
- Changes in industry and businesses (e.g., exiting smaller communities, reduced demand for manual labour).

In July 2017, Fire and Emergency New Zealand (hereafter, Fire and Emergency) was established under legislation to bring together over 40 firefighting organisations around the country and around 14,000 people. Currently, volunteers at more than 600 stations nationwide make up nearly 12,000 of Fire and Emergency personnel. These volunteers, supported by their families/whānau and employers, are often the only local emergency service available to respond to a variety of incidents. In 2017/18 Fire and Emergency volunteers were the first in attendance at 31,254 incidents, an increase of 173% from 1990/1991 figures (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2020). Without these volunteers, many communities would lack a timely emergency response.

There are four different roles volunteers can undertake within Fire and Emergency. They are all essential to ensuring brigades can respond to the needs of their communities. Fire and Emergency train volunteers so they can do their jobs safely and effectively.

- **Operational firefighters:** Volunteer firefighters are often the first on the scene at an emergency. The firefighters are at the frontline, dealing with the emergency at hand, whether it's a fire, medical incident, motor vehicle accident, or some other call for help. All firefighters are trained as medical co-responders. As well as their technical skills, other valuable skills are teamwork and leadership.

- **Operational Support:** Operational Support volunteers play an important role in supporting firefighters at incidents. They carry out tasks to help keep our people and the public safe, for example, controlling traffic, transporting equipment, managing lighting, and providing refreshments. Operational Support volunteers receive relevant training at their stations.

- **Medical first responders:** People who volunteer solely as medical first responders are a very small part of the volunteer workforce – around 10 percent of brigades offer this volunteer role. These volunteers only respond to medical emergencies including motor vehicle accidents. They drive emergency vehicles and are trained to do their jobs safely and effectively.

- **Brigade Support:** Brigade Support volunteers complete administrative tasks and other duties to keep the brigade running smoothly. They may also work with communities to reduce the fire risks in people's homes. Volunteering in Brigade Support may be ideal for someone who wants to be involved but doesn't want a frontline role.

The Fire and Emergency Act 2017 (the Act) recognises the essential role volunteers play in providing fire and emergency services in New Zealand. In line with the Act, Fire and Emergency have committed to an active, integrated, and inclusive approach to supporting and enabling volunteers (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2021a). Specifically, the Act requires Fire and Emergency to:

(a) recognise, respect, and promote the contribution of Fire and Emergency volunteers
(b) consult with Fire and Emergency volunteers and relevant organisations on matters that might reasonably be expected to substantially affect those volunteers

(c)   develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain, and strengthen the capability of Fire and Emergency volunteers.[8]

In May 2019, Fire and Emergency's Volunteerism Strategy 2019-2029 was officially launched (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2020). The Volunteerism Strategy lays out the organisation's commitment to volunteerism and sets the direction for a multi-year work programme to strengthen organisational resilience and performance through improved volunteer support, enhanced workforce capability, and a stronger organisational culture of volunteerism. The Volunteerism Principles in the strategy include three priorities and the corresponding key shifts Fire and Emergency need to make:

- To enable and sustain volunteerism we will
  - Appreciate that volunteering is always a matter of choice
  - Make it easier to be a volunteer
  - Identify, share and grow what works for volunteers
  - Recognise volunteers, their employers and families/whānau, as well as their contributions
- To respect and involve volunteers we will
  - Involve volunteer perspectives in decision making
  - Demonstrate openness, transparency and fairness
  - Operate with mutual trust and respect
- To serve and strengthen volunteerism in communities, we will
  - Be responsive to local needs
  - Be inclusive and embrace difference
  - Build an environment that enables volunteerism to thrive

The Volunteerism Strategy identifies 10 outcome areas where organisational progress is to be monitored against the Strategy. These volunteerism outcome areas are:

1. **Leadership and management:** Leaders and managers actively demonstrate the organisation's commitment to volunteers and community-based volunteerism.
2. **Commitment to volunteers:** Volunteers are consulted with and included in planning and decisions.
3. **Attraction, selection and recruitment:** There are enough skilled and motivated volunteers who reflect their communities and meet its needs, now and into the future.
4. **Support and development:** Volunteers receive ongoing development and support in a manner that respects their individuality and meets community fire and emergency needs.
5. **Community involvement:** Effective local relationships exist through volunteer presence in the community.
6. **Volunteer recognition:** Volunteers, employers and families/whānau feel appreciated, respected and supported.
7. **Safety, health and wellbeing:** Volunteers' safety, health and wellbeing is proactively supported and equitably resourced.
8. **Volunteer roles:** Volunteer roles and progression pathways reflect community needs and respect volunteer choice.
9. **Positive local volunteer environments:** Local brigades are positive, resilient and connected.

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[8] http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2017/0017/latest/whole.html#DLM6719709

10. **Quality management and continuous improvement:** The organisation monitors, reviews and strives to continually improve how it supports volunteers and community-based volunteerism.

In October 2018, Fire and Emergency commissioned SHORE & Whāriki Research Centre, Massey University to explore the early experiences of volunteers and understand the key influences on their decisions to stay or leave the service, particularly in the first five years of service. As shown by previous statistics from Fire and Emergency, holistically, about half of leavers (57%) were departing the service within five years of joining (NZFS data). This has implications for the sustainability of the volunteer workforce, resulting in a higher burden on established and experienced staff, and has implications for team skill levels, the leadership pipeline, and succession planning.

The type of issues explored in the research include:
- Recruitment experience
- Perceptions of the training received
- Perceptions of the support received
- Brigade culture and leadership style
- Impact of volunteering on wellbeing
- Impact of volunteering on family/whānau life and work life
- Perceptions of Fire and Emergency as a whole
- Intention to stay and key factors for continuation

The knowledge gained from the research is anticipated to contribute to attraction, recruitment, training and volunteer support activities, which in turn will potentially reduce attrition. It may also contribute to the ongoing development and implementation of Fire and Emergency's Volunteerism Strategy 2019-2029.

The research has two key objectives:

- To identify the factors that contribute to successful volunteer engagement, such as group identification, leadership, organisational support
- To understand how volunteers' early year experiences impact on their wellbeing, and intention to stay

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1.2 Research design

To further understand the volunteer's journey, this study has taken a longitudinal and mixed-methods approach (i.e., collecting both quantitative and qualitative data). A group of newly joined volunteers initially completed a baseline survey, and were then surveyed at 6 months and 18 months as they progressed through their onboarding, induction, training and development in their chosen roles and progression stages. Also, as most leavers depart the service within five years of volunteering, a group of volunteers who had served for less than 5 years were interviewed and followed-up at 15 months to identify factors that might affect their decision to stay or leave during this crucial time period. Finally,

it is important to understand why some volunteers decided to leave Fire and Emergency within five years of joining. Therefore, volunteers who joined for less than five years and left the service between October 2019 and July 2020 were interviewed.

In summary, this study consists of three different samples of volunteers, namely, New volunteers, Established volunteers, and Exited volunteers (see Figure 1).

1. **The New Volunteer sample:** Volunteers who joined between December 2018 and December 2019 (and who did not opt out of the study) were surveyed between January 2019 and April 2020. Follow-up surveys were conducted at 6 months and 18 months after the baseline survey. This component gathered quantitative data.

2. **The Established Volunteer sample:** Volunteers who had been members for less than 5 years (joined between January 2015 and July 2018) were interviewed in 2019. Follow-up interviews were conducted 15 months after the first interview. In addition to this, individual interviews with volunteers from seven specific groups were conducted in 2020. These were volunteers who identified as Māori, Pasifika, Asian, volunteers from rural brigades, Composite Brigades, and volunteers who undertake Operational Support and Brigade Support. This component gathered qualitative data.

3. **The Exited Volunteer sample:** 25 volunteers who left Fire and Emergency between October 2019 and July 2020 were interviewed in 2020. This component gathered qualitative data.

Figure 1: Research design

Understanding the Volunteer Journey		
New Volunteer sample	**Established Volunteer sample**	**Exited Volunteer sample**
New recruits joined between Dec 2018-2019	Volunteers joined between Jan 2015-Jul 2018	Volunteers left between Oct 2019-Jul 2020
• Baseline survey • 6-month follow-up • 18-month follow-up	• Individual interview • 15-month follow-up interview • Interviews with volunteers from seven specific groups	• Individual interview

Because Fire and Emergency is a predominantly male organisation (with 20.2% female volunteers and 79.8% male volunteers in 2020/21), the samples reflect the organisation's gender (29% female in the

New Volunteer sample, 31% female in the Established Volunteer sample, and 36% female in the Exited Volunteer sample).

1.3 Ethics

This research was conducted under Massey University guidelines, with approval (NOR 18/42) for the research granted by the Northern Human Ethics Committee in September 2018.

Changes to the recruitment and methodology for the Established Volunteer sample were approved by the Chair of the Northern Ethics Committee in April 2019.

Changes to the methodology of the Exited Volunteer sample were approved by the Chair of the Northern Ethics Committee in May 2019.

1.4 Analysing and combining the three samples

The initial analysis of the quantitative (survey) data included descriptive analyses on each of the survey items and the construction of statistical models to explore factors that predicted better personal wellbeing and greater intention to stay. These statistical models took into account the longitudinal nature of the data. (See Appendix 1 for more detail on the methodology and Appendix 2 for detailed survey results).

The initial analysis of the qualitative (interview) data used a general inductive approach to generate main themes. The analysis focused on volunteers as a group, but where applicable, on specificities relating to the seven groups described above. (See Appendix 3 for Established volunteers' interview results and Appendix 4 for Exited volunteers' interview results).

The second stage of analysis focused on synthesising both the quantitative and qualitative findings and exploring factors that address the research aims. These were:

- To identify the factors that contribute to successful volunteer engagement
- To understand how volunteers' early year experiences impact on their wellbeing, and intention to stay with the service

The third stage of analysis involved examining all the factors falling under the research aims and exploring how best to frame the results. It became apparent that factors could be grouped into three main levels: individual-level, brigade-level, and organisation-level.

- **Individual-level**:
  Factors related to the individual person, such as motivations, expectations, perceptions, and impact on family/whānau life and work life.

- **Brigade-level:**
  Factors associated with the brigade, such as brigade leadership, brigade climate, brigade training, and brigade support.

- **Organisation-level:**
  Factors linked to Fire and Emergency at an organisational level, such as volunteerism strategies, Fire and Emergency policy, and Fire and Emergency training and support.

The preliminary findings were presented at a sense-making workshop with the Fire and Emergency Project Reference Group held 10 August, 2021. This session allowed for discussion of the results and a collective sense-making process to further understand the findings.

This report presents findings using the framing – individual-level, brigade-level and organisation-level. In particular, Section 2 focuses on the factors that contribute to successful volunteer **engagement**; Section 3 describes factors that contribute to volunteers' **personal wellbeing**; and Section 4 presents factors that contribute to volunteers' **length of service** (or intention to stay). To respect the participants and ensure the scientific conduct it was decided in some instances not to edit or substitute language in the quotes (including terminology for roles used by volunteers). Also, it is important to note that findings from Established and Exited volunteer interviews cannot be generalised to describe the experiences of all volunteers and exiters of Fire and Emergency given the small number of participants in these two groups.

Section 5 provides a discussion and suggestions to assist Fire and Emergency with developing actions to enhance volunteers' engagement, wellbeing and intention to stay.

2. Factors related to volunteer engagement

This section describes volunteers' early experiences with Fire and Emergency. Factors that contribute to successful volunteer engagement are discussed.

2.1 Individual-level factors

Key messages

Most volunteers knew about Fire and Emergency volunteering through seeing other volunteers in action, having family/whānau members or friends in the service, or being directly approached by volunteers. Therefore, word of mouth, recruitment through volunteer networks, and greater exposure of volunteers to the community are all important methods for getting more people engaged. Also, it took about 1-2 years for volunteers to move from knowing to joining. Therefore, a 2-year advertising/marketing plan for recruitment may be beneficial.

The top two key reasons for volunteers' engagement were the opportunity to serve the community and personal development. These reasons did not change over time and remained the key motivation at follow-ups. Recruitment campaigns and support initiatives could focus more on these two aspects.

Provision of sufficient information about what is expected from volunteers and how their life might be impacted was important for engagement. In general, Fire and Emergency did well in this regard as volunteers reported they were given sufficient information. However, one aspect volunteers felt inadequately informed about was the amount of training time required. This was not perceived negatively and may even have been a good incentive.

Acknowledgement of both volunteers' contribution and the support provided by their families/whānau and employers was seen as an enhancer of volunteer engagement. New volunteers felt they and their family/whānau and/or employer had been sufficiently valued and recognised. However, those who had volunteered for longer (Established and Exited volunteers) felt more should be done.

2.1.1 Exposure to Fire and Emergency volunteering

Exposure to current Fire and Emergency volunteers was important for recruitment. The survey data revealed in the six months before applying to be a volunteer, 72.7% of New volunteers had seen Fire and Emergency volunteers in action, 51.6% had been approached by Fire and Emergency volunteers about becoming a volunteer, and 50.0% had seen or heard stories relating to Fire and Emergency. Volunteers spoke about how increased exposure to Fire and Emergency volunteering and encouragement by other volunteers facilitated their engagement.

Joining Fire and Emergency was not a decision taken lightly, with the decision-making process normally taking a number of months. For those who joined Fire and Emergency between December 2018 and December 2019 (New volunteer sample), the majority (60.7%) had been aware of Fire and Emergency volunteering for more than 5 years. However, two thirds (66.7%) started to consider joining in the past two years.

When asked what Fire and Emergency could do to make it easier for people to get involved, most New volunteers suggested more advertising and better promotion, not only in traditional media (such as TV, newspaper, and radio) but more so on web-based media (websites and various social media platforms). Volunteers remarked on the importance of increasing public awareness of volunteering through more open days at the station and increased presence of Fire and Emergency at community events and high schools. They also expressed the importance of getting the word out to communities that Fire and Emergency needs more volunteers.

> *Maybe more open days, open up stations more and give people a chance to get an idea of what it's all about, some hands-on stuff, do drills so that people can see for themselves what's involved and how it's done.*

> *Go to high schools … When I was in high school it wasn't portrayed to me, if they were advocated more to the end of high schoolers then I would have joined earlier.*

2.1.2 Opportunities for community service and personal development

Volunteers identified serving the community as the key underpinning factor contributing to their engagement with Fire and Emergency – this was also important for their ongoing engagement. This finding was evident for all three volunteer samples (New, Established and Exited volunteers) and in the follow-up surveys/interviews, suggesting this key motive did not change over time.

"To support or contribute to community" was the most prevalent reason New volunteers gave for joining Fire and Emergency (95.1%), followed by "To help protect people, land, and the local environment" (93.0%). This initial motivation for joining Fire and Emergency had not changed at the 6-month follow-up. In fact, volunteers indicated the ability to contribute, help and protect the community was all that was needed to keep them interested and committed.

This sentiment was echoed by both Established and Exited volunteers. The core value of community service was a key factor for their engagement and commitment to volunteering. A sense of pride and purpose in helping their local communities was a strong motivator.

> *… because my primary motivations are about working in the community, as long as there's a community to serve, I'm happy to serve.*

Besides serving the community, volunteers' sense of personal development – both in terms of developing new skills and developing new friendships – was another important factor contributing to volunteer engagement.

"To develop new skills, training or receive on-going learning opportunities" was the third most important reason New volunteers gave for joining Fire and Emergency (88.0%). "Making new friends and enjoying being part of the team" was the fourth most important reason (65.1%). When asked at the 6-month follow-up what was important to keeping them interested and committed, "Continue to build skills and to learn new things" was most frequently mentioned (besides serving the community), suggesting this key motive did not change over time.

This was again echoed by Established volunteers. Learning new skills and building connections with other people were identified as key factors in relation to volunteer engagement. These new skills and friendships were often referred to as additional to what they would otherwise experience in their work and personal lives.

2.1.3 Received sufficient information on the role and impact of volunteering

Being provided sufficient and accurate information about what it means to be a Fire and Emergency volunteer was considered important. Most New volunteers felt they had been given sufficient information about becoming a volunteer and what would be expected of them (85.9%), and about what becoming a volunteer might mean for their family/whānau and employer/business (78.8%) during the recruitment stage.

At the 18-month follow-up, New volunteers were asked to reflect on the information they received at enrolment. Most felt the information they received gave them a good understanding of the activities volunteers undertake (86.5%), the impact on family/whānau life (78.9%), impact on work life (77.8%), and the frequency of call-outs (73.1%).

A bonus positive impact of volunteering for Fire and Emergency was the ability to make their family/whānau proud. At 6-months, the majority of New volunteers (91.2%) felt being a Fire and Emergency volunteer made their family/whānau proud of what they are doing for the community. This had not changed at 18-months. In addition, for some, volunteering helped provide positive role modeling for friends and family/whānau – the skills they learned had practical benefits and provided a sense of pride or 'status' for their family/whānau.

> *The skills that you gain through volunteering also can help your family. … you have greater first aid skills and you can work under pressure better – all these have benefited my family.*

> *The positive side is that the status your family feels when you have been volunteering and you have been contributing to the community and the connections that you make that also benefit your family. … you know your neighbours … just the connections you get through volunteering.*

At 18 months, 36.5% of volunteers felt the information they received during recruitment did not give them a good understanding of the training time required. While 61.5% felt the level of training exceeded expectations, many volunteers enjoyed the higher than expected level of training.

> *… the training is above and beyond what I expected ... I'm loving it.*

2.1.4 Being recognised and acknowledged for contribution

Being recognised, acknowledged, appreciated, and valued for their contribution were important factors contributing to volunteers' engagement. This was evident in all three volunteer samples (New, Established and Exited volunteers).

At 18-months, the majority of New volunteers felt their brigade recognised their contributions (90.5%), and that they were recognised, appreciated, and valued by Fire and Emergency (81.7%). As expressed by Established volunteers, this recognition was important for their engagement.

> … it's just that acknowledgment that you're doing a good job, that little tap on the shoulder saying, you guys did really good there, keeps people engaged and wanting to be there.

Many New volunteers felt Fire and Emergency sufficiently valued and recognised the contributions of their families/whānau. At 18-months, 85.3% felt their families/whānau were valued and supported by their brigades and 73.5% felt their families/whānau were adequately recognised and valued by Fire and Emergency.

Those who volunteered longer (Established and Exited volunteers) felt more should be done by Fire and Emergency to show appreciation to their families/whānau. Volunteers suggested more events be organised by Fire and Emergency (not just by the brigade) to recognise and thank their families/whānau.

> Just the continued support for families of the volunteers, that is always going to be my main challenge, balancing that personal life with the FENZ [Fire and Emergency] responsibilities. So, anything they can do to help out the families of volunteers. That would easily be number one for me.

> … there wasn't really much talk of … thanking the families. … I think a lot of people would appreciate it. There was like the brigade themselves every now and then would do a thing and they'd invite all the family members. But I think that was more the brigade's choice.

At 18-months, 75.6% of New volunteers were aware of the employer recognition scheme, 71.6% felt their employers were recognised and appreciated by Fire and Emergency, and 67.5% felt their employers were recognised by their brigade. Established volunteers suggested a better employers' recognition programme.

> … ways to encourage people to join our brigade … have a really good employer recognition … then an employer would … encourage their employee to join the brigade …

> So we got told about the Employer Recognition Programme, nah they spelt my company name wrong on the signage they put up at the station, we never got the certificates, we never got a letter, we never got the sticker, or any of that kind of stuff. When I pointed out they spelt my company wrong on the appliance, they went oh well, it's up there now.

2.2 Brigade-level factors

Key messages

At brigade level, four aspects that affected engagement were:
- Attitude and communication skills of the brigade leader
- Welcoming and positive brigade climate
- Good quality brigade training
- Timely supply of gear and up-to-date equipment

These four aspects were identified by all three samples (New, Established and Exited volunteers), and also at follow-ups, which suggests the importance of these aspects did not change over time.

Fire and Emergency's commitment to helping brigades manage these four aspects was crucial. If volunteers had concerns regarding any of these four aspects and felt Fire and Emergency was unable to resolve them, they expressed a lesser view of their brigade and of Fire and Emergency at follow-ups (compared to 15 months earlier). This negatively impacted volunteers' engagement as they lost confidence in the ability of their brigade to change and Fire and Emergency's ability to care for volunteers.

2.2.1 Ability of the brigade leader

The attitude and communication skills of the brigade leader were identified as impacting the experiences of volunteers and their successful engagement.

The majority of New volunteers (94.4%) felt welcomed by their brigade leaders during their recruitment process. They appreciated the support and assistance from their brigade leaders, which made the recruitment process much easier. However, for those who did not feel welcomed by their brigade leaders during the recruitment process, the impact on their engagement was detrimental.

> *It was a very disappointing experience at the station … though I was very interested ... I am not sure if I will still continue because I am not sure if it will be worth my time.*

At 18-months after joining Fire and Emergency, 84.3% felt their leaders were effective in managing and supporting volunteers. However, regarding communication, only 69.0% felt they had been given regular and constructive feedback on their effectiveness and performance as a volunteer. Volunteers expressed the need for better and clearer communication from their brigade leader.

> *Communication was frustrating and poor. Set me back quite a bit. Communication saves lives and there was very little.*

Communication was also identified by Established volunteers as a key aspect of good leadership. Volunteers talked about the benefits of clear communication and transparency in decision making. However, insufficient levels of communication or the use of inappropriate communication methods

by brigade leaders were seen by volunteers as evidence of poor leadership. Poor brigade leadership in turn was viewed as a catalyst for disengagement. Concerns about variability in leadership quality were expressed by volunteers in all three samples (New, Established and Exited volunteers). It would appear improvements to leadership styles and communication skills would motivate volunteers to stay more engaged.

... he's always open ... the whole brigade gets an email once a week from him kind of updating us all on all the happenings around, which is quite handy to know, so he's really awesome, actually he's really good at communicating with us, about what's happening.

In our brigade shouting at people is seen to be a legitimate method of communication, when instructions could be given much more clearly if people were less excited.

2.2.2 Welcoming and positive brigade climate

A positive brigade climate (e.g., welcoming, supportive, good teamwork) encouraged volunteers' ongoing engagement. On the other hand, a negative brigade climate (e.g., seeing or experiencing discrimination, bullying, or nepotism) had a damaging effect.

The majority of New volunteers felt welcomed (95.3%) and supported (93.4%) by other brigade members throughout their recruitment process. At their follow-up surveys, 90.1% felt they had been respected by their brigade. Also, 86% felt members of their brigade worked well as a team and their brigade kept them well informed about what was going on (84.7%). A welcoming and supportive brigade climate, and camaraderie and teamwork among brigade members were appreciated and valued by New volunteers.

I initially joined to help people, but now partially motivated by enjoying being part of the brigade family ... where everyone is really supportive and positive, this helps to keep you interested and committed.

This view was echoed by Established volunteers. Volunteers felt their personal and/or cultural views were respected in their brigade and they felt valued and welcomed by their brigade. They particularly appreciated the family/whānau atmosphere in the brigade.

... everybody is inclusive. We have got a wide range of ethnic races within our brigade ... and there is absolutely no sign of any bullying ... everybody is quite supportive of everyone within our brigade. ... it has ... increased my determination to stay ...

... my brigade, we really are a close knit whānau, we actually call each other whānau, and I'm sure each brigade does as well, but yeah, definitely the whānau teamwork and the community.

At 18-months, however, 12.3% of New volunteers reported they had seen discrimination and 6.2% had experienced discrimination at the brigade. This was described as having a damaging impact on volunteers' engagement.

I find that the overall experience with FENZ [Fire and Emergency] is good. But within my own brigade, it is lacking in support, professionalism, and there's a culture of bullying. I would like to continue my volunteer journey but I want to transfer to another brigade.

Seeing or experiencing discrimination was also an issue identified by the Established and Exited volunteer samples. Established volunteers had a lesser view of their brigade (compared to 15 months ago) because of favouritism, nepotism, or an apparent old-school mentality in their brigade. This had a negative impact on volunteers' engagement and a loss of confidence in their brigade.

... get rid of the nepotism out of the brigade, it's not all family members you know, it's about people not about individuals and making them advance because of their name, that is our biggest drawback in our brigade.

I've lost confidence that it can change. I think that FENZ [Fire and Emergency] is doing a pretty good job trying to change attitudes, but in the local brigades there is a stronger force at work and that force builds up over generations.

2.2.3 Good quality brigade training

As previously noted (Section 2.1.2), a key factor contributing to volunteers' engagement with Fire and Emergency was the opportunity to develop new skills, train, or have access to on-going learning. Brigade training experiences either contributed to volunteers staying more engaged or caused them to question the value of their engagement.

At both 6-months and 18-months, most New volunteers felt they had been provided with the training they needed to carry out their volunteer assignments (77.7% and 76.2%) and the brigade training sessions were well delivered (83.1% and 77.7%). The results were not significantly different suggesting there was no change in perceptions of brigade training between 6-months and 18-months. On the whole, volunteers were satisfied with the brigade training they received (78.3%).

Everyone in the station is involved with training the new recruits, and it's hands-on, every training is different.

Most New volunteers (74.6%) felt they could bring new learnings (from the structured training courses) back to their own brigade. This was also the case for Established and Exited volunteers, which increased their sense of engagement. Those who were discouraged from doing so felt disheartened.

I've tried and I've always been talked over, everything I've learned has been corrected by other people ... I've been asked to take the training, and it's sort of been taken over by someone who thinks they know more.

Established volunteers' views on brigade training were mixed. An experienced trainer kept brigade training sessions interesting and stimulating. The training sessions were well-organised and had good

structure and variety. The content was practical, relevant, and up to date. This interactive and practical brigade training enhanced volunteer engagement.

> *Our own regular training that we do, our weekly training that we do, is very well organised and well planned, and appropriate for what we do the most of, so yeah, we have a really good, the guy that runs our training does an awesome job, and we have good training nights, we learn a lot each time.*

In other brigades, training experiences were not always as positive. Volunteers felt the trainers were not organised, had not been trained as a trainer, or were not up to date with new procedures. At times, the sessions lacked structure and were poorly organised. There was too much listening and too few practical elements, or content was inconsistent or out of date. There was annoyance about the lack of participation and/or disengaged fellow brigade members.

> *… we get really sporadic numbers turn up at our training I guess, it's not through lack of trying from the CFO [Chief Fire Officer] or the trainers, and the level of engagement with people using cellphones, and even when you confront them, or not turning up fit for wearing BA [Breathing Apparatus], so they'll turn up with beards or whatever like that and you're just like, really? It's those sort of issues that hold our training back …*

This perception led volunteers to question whether or not it was worth their time, which in turn negatively impacted their engagement. Volunteers suggested more flexibility around training times and/or level of commitment to encourage more engagement.

> *… I guess have an alternate day of the week … we're milkers and … sometimes it doesn't line up with milking, we've sort of got to finish early to make it back to go, or have like an alternative day a fortnight or something that we could go in and learn some stuff that's not a training night or for new recruits.*

2.2.4 Timely supply of gear and up-to-date equipment

When asked what could have been done better to improve their recruitment experience, New volunteers identified the timely supply of uniform and gear as a key factor. This was seen as important because it reflected Fire and Emergency's commitment and ability to provide and care for volunteers.

> *So far it has been great, the only problem is getting hold of the uniforms and equipment, can be hard to know when they are going to arrive. At the moment it is very slow.*

The need for brigades to have adequate and up-to-date equipment was echoed by Established volunteers. It was also felt that more comfortable brigade facilities would enhance their experience and engagement. Slowness in providing and/or replacing necessary equipment, gear, uniforms and appliances by Fire and Emergency had a negative impact on their engagement.

> *I am always proud of what I do as a volunteer, but if we were able to be operating out of a nice station with good facilities, that would certainly increase the motivation and sometimes it is hard to think about going off to train because you are turning up to an old*

shed to do your training. That's not so motivating whereas if we had better facilities, that would make a big difference to me as well.

… in our brigade, the things that we would sort of seek FENZ [Fire and Emergency] support on would be kind of if we had uniform issues or gear issues and things that directly affect us. So, I guess those being responded to kind of timely and communicating well with us, sometimes there can be quite a lot of delays. … it can sometimes feel quite difficult to get things like that sorted. So, I think those … things that we do have direct interaction with … kind of happening clearly and quickly would be kind of an improvement, I guess.

2.3 Organisation-level factors

Key messages

At the organisation level, the reputation of Fire and Emergency, their commitment to fostering a healthy volunteer culture, and their ability to provide high quality structured training courses were identified as having positive impacts on the experiences of volunteers and affecting their ongoing successful engagement.

Finding effective ways to communicate with volunteers was important but not without its challenges. Communication could not be completely digital as some stations (and volunteers' homes) lacked adequate internet connectivity or equipment. Volunteers expressed the need for Fire and Emergency's Information Technology (IT) system to fit well with aspects of their everyday lives (e.g., compatible with their phones). Some volunteers said they received 'too many' emails from Fire and Emergency while others found the amount of information insufficient. Some volunteers wanted to only receive email/information that was directly relevant to them while others preferred to know what's going on around them.

While an ideal or 'best' communication method was not identified or suggested, it was clear a one-size-fits-all communication strategy would not be suitable for such a diverse group with varying communication needs, patterns and preferences. Identifying volunteers' communication preferences during their recruitment and taking a 'toolbox' approach (with a variety of communication methods and tools, including intensity and frequency) is worth exploring.

2.3.1 Fire and Emergency's reputation and commitment

Fire and Emergency's good reputation and commitment to building a healthy volunteer culture was important for volunteers' ongoing engagement.

Established volunteers described the 'prestige' and the strong reputation of Fire and Emergency as an important part of their commitment to being a volunteer.

I'm proud to be part of the organisation and I think it's a really reputable organisation and they do a lot of good work across the country … I think it has got a really strong identity.

I think the overall impression, like firefighters have got the highest respect rating in New Zealand and so to be part of that is awesome and when everyone finds out that you are involved, it is just like, good on you, it's great what you guys do, and that sort of stuff.

Established volunteers appreciated Fire and Emergency's commitment to addressing their needs and seeking ways to make improvements.

I still volunteer for a few other organisations and they have been very non-discussive with its members in terms of changing their structure or any changes to the operations. So, I think FENZ [Fire and Emergency] is doing a reasonably good job at consulting its members on those high-level decisions.

This was echoed by Exited volunteers who felt Fire and Emergency should be given more credit for their commitment to volunteers, to communities, and to New Zealand.

I think FENZ [Fire and Emergency] is an amazing organisation, I think they are always acknowledged for things that go wrong, which isn't very often and never really given enough credit for the things that they do really well and I think that they do quite a ... huge amount of positive things for brigades and for communities and for New Zealand and I do think that they are under-acknowledged for that, so I think they do a really great job.

Established volunteers expressed satisfaction about the organisation's focus on addressing the needs of rural volunteers, as well as seeking to build an integrated fire service incorporating career, urban, and rural services.

We've definitely, going from a local rural fire force to going into FENZ [Fire and Emergency] has gained a lot more access to resources than what we had, and I think nationally that's a really good thing. I've worked with a lot of fire forces around the country, and they've said much the same, able to … use resources and get crews from all over the country to help with jobs, yeah I think it's definitely a step in the right direction.

2.3.2 Availability of structured training courses

The structured training courses provided by Fire and Emergency are separate to the routine/regular trainings provided by the brigade. They are held at other venues such as National Training Centres and can include courses such as Motor Vehicle Accident (MVA) training, First Aid, etc.

The majority of New volunteers expressed satisfaction with the structured training courses they had attended. Volunteers felt these training courses allowed them to perform their roles (90.9%) and the sessions were well delivered (89.2%). Moreover, the quality of the structured training courses had enhanced their experiences and their willingness to engage.

Established volunteers spoke very highly of the Fire and Emergency structured training courses they attended. The courses were well-organised and well-structured, trainers and presenters were very experienced and engaging, and the content was practical, interactive and relevant. The skills learned

were applicable to everyday (personal) life. Positive comments were made about the excellent training facilities and the chance to meet other people in the same role.

> *I think the FENZ [Fire and Emergency] training in terms of the way they deliver courses is great … they were awesome experiences and getting to meet new people, like-minded people, and getting pretty much full immersion in those courses has been really awesome.*

A few critical comments included that weren't enough courses, they were held too far away, or waiting times to attend courses were too long.

> *Probably my latest instance is applying for the Qualified Fire Fighter course and the waiting time from when you do your paperwork to getting on a course. Like, at the moment it is over a year until when you get to do your actual practical course. So, I suppose if you wanted to progress and then you have that big wait to actually do your practical training before you can become your next rank, that's quite a hard thing.*

New volunteers who joined Fire and Emergency between December 2018 and December 2019 also expressed frustration with the limited availability of structured courses and long waiting times. They mentioned course cancellations as affecting their engagement.

> *When I went to join the brigade I had to wait for a long disappointing time to get the training because they were waiting for more people to join so that they could start the training. I guess if they can provide training more faster it will be good.*

> *Training from FENZ [Fire and Emergency] keeps getting cancelled so it's hard to progress.*

Volunteers suggested a better online booking system to reduce the time required to enter personal details and prevent loss of bookings.

> *… you know when I go to Bookabach or Airbnb I can easily do an online form … and book in and know that I've got a confirmed booking … we work in the private sector, if you ring a training organisation in the private sector and book a time then you're booked in, you don't get back and forth, back and forth or your bookings getting lost in the mix. … so, if there were more automated technological solutions for job ticketing, and training booking and the retention of our details … all I really should do is select from a dropdown list ...*

Rural volunteers suggested courses be planned to avoid their busiest times (e.g., lambing season) and more cross-over training with urban brigades.

> *... if you're trying to train a rural brigade, generally a lot of those people are going to be a farmer, or farming based so you've really got to run courses at a time that's more suitable for them … but other than that, their courses and the way they run them are pretty good.*

> *I think now that we're under one entity, like we work very closely with urban crews, so I feel like there should probably be a little bit of crossover … I feel like there needs to be a bridge in between, where we're sort of learning a bit of everybody's different firefighting skills.*

New Operational Support volunteers found that the limited courses for them impacted their level of engagement.

> *There needs to be more training and syllabus around operational support in New Zealand as a whole, they only hold two courses a year for operational support which isn't enough as there is a massive waitlist, there is no standardised progression or rank structure for operational support.*

2.3.3 Communication and IT system

Established volunteers expressed concerns with the levels of communication from Fire and Emergency – too much or insufficient information caused frustration. Finding a balance presents a challenge for Fire and Emergency – because volunteers differ widely in their communication requirements and preferences and thus a one-size-fits-all approach is not possible. However, all volunteers expressed the need for clear and prompt communication from Fire and Emergency in response to their requests and concerns. The slowness in response was perceived as a lack of engagement or interest by Fire and Emergency.

> *I just think the communication is appalling from senior management down it needs to improve greatly really … so we can get a good gauge of engagement and it needs to be done faster than most of what the fire service does. It takes forever to get anything done in the fire service a lot of the time should I say, it takes forever.*

An important aspect of communication was Fire and Emergency's Information Technology (IT) systems. Poor internet connectivity and/or slow internet speed was an issue in some brigade stations (and volunteers' homes). Some brigades had only one computer or computers that were very old/slow, resulting in difficulty accessing information and utilising Fire and Emergency's IT systems. An upgrade of brigade computers and/or internet connections was suggested.

> *I mean we get a hell of a lot of emails … I use my own data in the station because it is too difficult to get onto their wifi … so I can't imagine how difficult it is out in the regions with connectivity.*

> *Back office wise IT is a huge problem … we just use Office, the email system, that's awful, it's absolutely awful, the IT infrastructure that we have at Fire and Emergency, it doesn't work with your everyday life, you can't integrate it into your everyday life, you have got to be very separate, it's a dog to use, can't stand it.*

At 18-months, New volunteers were asked about their use of different IT systems using their Fire and Emergency username and password. While 89.5% said the Information & Communication Technology (ICT) equipment at their brigade was adequate for them to access the Fire and Emergency systems, their actual frequency of usage was very low. Over 70% of volunteers had never used Microsoft Teams or other Office365 applications in the past 18 months; 65.4% had never used MindTools; and 46.5% had never used SMART Tools. The top three Fire and Emergency systems were used by New volunteers

at least once a week were: Station Management System (SMS)/Operational Skills Maintenance (OSM) (32.1%), Outlook webmail (31.3%), and the Portal (28.4%). About 30% used the Learning Station once or twice a month.

When asked if there were any barriers to using Fire and Emergency systems, over a third (38.1%) indicated: slowness in internet/WIFI (i.e., connectivity issues), insufficient training (system hard to navigate), no time (too busy), can't remember password (or don't know how to renew password), not enough computers at the brigade, and incompatibility of the system with their phone. When asked if they used other Fire and Emergency systems not listed in the survey, 81.1% said they used the Availability and Messaging System (AMS) on a daily basis.

2.3.4 Positive experience of the recruitment process

Positive experiences during recruitment (e.g., feeling welcomed, less waiting time, and being sufficiently informed) were important for volunteers to progress from the 'take a look' stage and increase their likelihood of 'sticking around' and becoming fully engaged.

Most New volunteers reported a positive recruitment experience [9] – they felt welcomed and encouraged by the members of the brigade (95.3%); they felt welcomed by the recruiter and the leader of the brigade (94.4%); they were supported by the brigade throughout the recruitment process (93.4%); and they felt the overall recruitment experience was positive (92.1%).

However, when asked what Fire and Emergency could have done better to improve their recruitment experience, three recurring themes were: (1) better communication, (2) speeding up the process, and (3) timely supply of uniform/equipment. This slowness in communication and uniform/equipment provision led volunteers to question the value of their volunteering. Speed of communication and provision of equipment were perceived as a reflection of Fire and Emergency's commitment to enhancing volunteers' engagement and experience.

> *I had a lot of support from the local brigade, I don't feel like FENZ [Fire and Emergency] has supported them in the recruiting process, quite a few systems errors when undergoing my application. My applications were received and then lost and took ages to compute. It doesn't seem to be a streamlined process that supports the local brigade, would have preferred a faster service. People lose interest after feeling their time is being wasted and people get disengaged because of time delays. A lot of that is outside the brigade's control. Most of the process could have been done electronically.*

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[9] Some background to the recruitment process: Applicants wishing to volunteer must complete an online or paper-based application with their Brigade Leader. When applying, two forms of identification are to be shown to the Brigade Leader. Any paper applications are entered into the recruiting system by the Business Support Coordinator. National Headquarters (NHQ) in Wellington processes the medical and police vetting. All applicants are police vetted; it takes 20 working days for the police vetting process to be completed. While awaiting police vetting results, applicants arrange a medical screening with their doctor. The medical centre emails the medical and invoice for screening to NHQ. Applicants who supply an email address are notified when they pass each step, and when their volunteer number is issued. Issuing of the volunteer number indicates completion of the recruiting process and applicants can then be issued with uniform and enrolled in courses by their brigade.

I think they could be a bit more organised. I became an official volunteer in August and haven't received my gear yet (in October). I think they need more help with ordering uniforms and hats cos a lot of people have been joining but yet haven't receive anything.

3. Factors related to volunteers' wellbeing

This section discusses factors that affect volunteers' personal wellbeing. Descriptive statistics and results from statistical analyses of the New Volunteer sample are included (see Appendix 2 for detail).

Volunteers' subjective wellbeing was measured using the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) (International Wellbeing Group, 2013). This commonly used domain-based scale has been found to be a valid and reliable measure of subjective wellbeing (Misajon et al., 2016; Cummins, 2019). In this study, the six wellbeing domains measured were: (1) life as a whole, (2) physical health, (3) mental health, (4) personal relationships, (5) community-connectedness, and (6) volunteering experience with Fire and Emergency.

New volunteers' scores were relatively high for all aspects of the personal wellbeing domains at all three time points (baseline, 6-months and 18-months). The average scores ranged between 78.4 and 86.3 points, higher than the normative range of 70–80 points based on standardised scores from several Western countries (International Wellbeing Group, 2013). This suggests volunteers joining Fire and Emergency experienced good wellbeing and this did not change in the first 18 months of being a volunteer.

Factors shown to predict a high wellbeing score at 18 months are discussed (in Sections 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.2.1 and 3.3.1). This section is supplemented with data from the Established and Exited volunteer interviews.

3.1 Individual-level factors

Key messages

Two variables significantly predicted volunteers' wellbeing at the individual-level. One was impact on work life. In particular, volunteers who experienced negative impacts on their work life as a result of volunteering showed lower mental wellbeing and less satisfaction with volunteering at 18 months. It could therefore be useful for Fire and Emergency to identify volunteers experiencing negative impacts on their work life in the first year and offer additional assistance (such as management training, coping strategies, counselling) as a means of addressing this issue. Also, employers who had been recognised and appreciated by brigades and/or by Fire and Emergency were more likely to allow volunteers to respond to incidents during work hours. Fire and Emergency need to continue building supportive relationships with workplaces and developing good employer recognition programmes. More consultation with employers may provide helpful insights.

The second significant variable predicting volunteers' wellbeing was experiences exceeding expectation. New volunteers felt their level of satisfaction in their volunteer role, level of contributing back to the community, and level of excitement about being part of the action all exceeded their expectation, not only at 6 months, but also at 18 months. This suggests Fire and Emergency is a good place for people to volunteer.

The Established volunteer interviews suggested Composite Brigade volunteers' expectations were not fully met. One key reason was the low call-out rate. The ability to attend call-outs was an important factor as it increased volunteers' sense of contributing. Fire and Emergency could consider consulting with brigades with low call-out rates to explore opportunities to increase or enhance volunteers' sense of contribution.

3.1.1 Ability to manage negative impact on work

New volunteers reported little negative impact on their work life due to volunteering for Fire and Emergency. At 6 months about 5% felt they didn't have enough time to fulfill their responsibilities at work due to time spent on volunteer duty; 3% felt tension and anxiety from their volunteer duties often crept into their work life; and about 2% felt they were often too tired to do what they were supposed to do at work. At 18 months the percentage of volunteers who experienced those negative impacts on work life had dropped slightly to 2%. This suggests that by 18 months volunteers were better at managing any negative impact of their volunteer commitments on their work.

Although the number of volunteers experiencing negative impacts on their work life was low, this was nevertheless a key predictor for poorer mental wellbeing and less satisfaction in their volunteering experience.

Established volunteers also commented on the impacts of volunteering on their work life. Interrupted sleep, emotional impact due to a call-out, and missed work hours or business opportunities had negative impacts on work performance, productivity, and/or business opportunities (for self-employed), which in turn affected their wellbeing. However, this impact was somewhat reduced if their employer was supportive and understanding.

> … you're tired at work, then falling asleep at meetings, I think I had one a couple of weeks ago, where I think we had a call at eleven pm to one am, had sleep for two hours then was up again at like two-three am for the next call which was another three hours or something, I had like two-three hours sleep that night, and then going into work then and being absolutely knackered …

> … the downside of it is that being a volunteer, and also self-employed is a big one … I have to catch up on the projects that I'm managing … I've actually lost business … because they said well if you can't meet the deadlines we are going to look for somebody else … so that had a big impact … if I go to a call out, I've actually got to catch up … and that can be after five pm and I could be working until one-two am to do that catch up.

At 18 months about 80% of New volunteers felt their employers were supportive of their volunteer activities, but only 65.5% were allowed to respond to incidents during work hours. Of those who were allowed to respond to incidents during work hours, 79.7% felt their employers were recognised by their brigade and 74.4% felt Fire and Emergency showed appreciation to their employers. Therefore, recognition of employers is important. More consultation with employers could provide opportunities

to address the discrepancy between a supportive attitude and supportive behaviour (i.e., allowing attendance at call-outs).

3.1.2 Experiences exceeding expectation

Volunteers who reported their experiences exceeded expectations (in terms of level of satisfaction in their volunteer role, level of contributing back to the community, and level of excitement about being part of the action) was a significant predictor for greater sense of community-connectedness.

At 6 months, around 70% of New volunteers reported their level of satisfaction in the volunteer role, the level of contributing back to the community, and the level of excitement about being part of the action all exceeded their expectations. These percentages remained unchanged at 18 months, suggesting volunteers' experience at this time still exceeded their expectations.

In terms of the stressors related to volunteering at 6 months, such as level of time, stress, and physical challenges involved, about 50% of New volunteers said these were similar to what they expected. This indicates volunteers were managing these stressors reasonably well. At 18 months, more volunteers felt their experiences (in relation to stress and challenges) were similar to their expectations. Fewer volunteers felt the level of these stressors was more than they had expected. This was a positive sign, suggesting volunteers were coping well.

Established volunteers reported variations between their expectations of their volunteer role and their experience, both in terms of commitment and scope of the role. Volunteers reported the scope of the role was greater than expected, however this was perceived positively. Others reported their experience was similar to their expectations as they had family/whānau members or friends in the brigade to give them an idea of what to expect.

> *I didn't expect it to be so broad, I didn't expect that I would be doing as much as what I am doing now and in saying that, I am actually quite happy with what I am doing and glad that I joined.*

Fire and Emergency should pay extra attention to Composite Brigade volunteers, as they reported their experience did not meet their expectations. Their disappointment had a negative impact on their wellbeing.

> *It was, it's actually going downhill quite rapidly at the moment, because for what we were and what we know we can do, we've been to courses, we're just not allowed to do it, so the point is … why be trained to do things to help people when you're not allowed to?*

3.1.3 Ability to attend call-outs

Being part of the action and attending call-outs was important for volunteers. It increased their sense of contribution, which was the key motivator for joining Fire and Emergency, and was important for their wellbeing.

When first joining Fire and Emergency, about 50% of New volunteers expected a call-out more than once per week. At 6 months volunteers spent (on average) 2.1 hours per week at an incident response. This dropped significantly to 0.7 hours per week at 18 months. This may be attributable to COVID-19 alert levels and their impact on call-out rates.

Volunteers described being on the truck and attending call-outs as exciting and exhilarating. Alongside this was the deeper benefit of firefighting as a personally rewarding volunteer activity. Volunteering with Fire and Emergency provided opportunities to do something different in their lives. It was a way to switch-off from their life or work pressures and achieve a degree of 'stress release'.

> *If you are stressed out in other parts of life or work, heading down there [to the brigade]*
> *shuts you off from everything else and you just do what you do down there with the group*
> *of people so in a way it's pretty good. Something different.*

Low call-out rates and insufficient experience with fires was a source of frustration. This was particularly the case for Composite Brigade volunteers.

> *I think I find it most challenging that we don't get a lot of experience just being in a*
> *Composite Brigade we don't do a lot of call-outs … for me personally like I've never made*
> *the fire ground once and I've been in for a year and a half so I don't have a lot of exposure*
> *to actually doing the stuff being learned.*

> *… a lot of the time I rush to the station and I don't actually make the truck so the only thing*
> *I find frustrating like I leave what I'm doing and I end up sitting at the station for a wee*
> *while.*

Volunteers' psychological and mental wellbeing were significantly impacted by call-outs involving children, young people and/or fatalities. Volunteers felt well-supported by Fire and Emergency in this regard.

> *… the emotional issues when you deal with motor vehicle accidents and sometimes … you*
> *don't manage to save the people and that can have a few problems. Young people,*
> *especially when they're hurting - that's kind of emotionally a bit difficult.*

> *… when I fell over … I went to my chief and asked for help, I got the help that I needed … I*
> *had two sessions with this guy … he was amazing, the weight that he lifted off my shoulders*
> *enabled me to function and … feel good back on the truck … the fire service has been*
> *absolutely fantastic on that side of things and looking after me …*

3.2 Brigade-level factors

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Key messages

At brigade level, volunteers' satisfaction with the training they received was important for their wellbeing. This was a significant predictor of better mental wellbeing and greater satisfaction with their volunteering experience. Assisting and supporting brigades to deliver quality training is an important area of focus for Fire and Emergency.

Apart from brigade training the quantitative data did not reveal any other brigade-level predictors affecting volunteers' wellbeing. However, the qualitative data highlighted three brigade-level factors volunteers considered important for their wellbeing. These were: brigade culture, brigade support, and brigade systems.

A toxic brigade culture was detrimental to volunteers' wellbeing. While this was not identified by many, those who had seen or experienced discrimination or bullying in their brigade were angry and distressed by those experiences. Fire and Emergency must apply a stronger focus on this issue. Continued training and support for brigade leaders is paramount to ensure unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour (bullying and discrimination) is addressed swiftly and effectively, and to encourage, foster and maintain safe, inclusive, and healthy environments. There are many good examples and models of brigades where this is the norm – Fire and Emergency should identify and use these as exemplars.

In general, volunteers felt they received enough support within their brigade (from brigade leaders and other members). A focus on Operational Support volunteers and Composite Brigade volunteers would ensure they are better supported and acknowledged. Providing brigade leaders with support around people-management training and communication skills and techniques would build their capacity and confidence and enhance brigade culture. Ensuring adequate levels of administration support and resourcing would enable better use of brigade leaders' time and energy.

A well-functioning brigade rostering system was considered important for the wellbeing of volunteers – this was discussed in terms of fairness and equal opportunities. An efficient system would enable volunteers to better manage and plan their time and commitments. This would in turn reduce frustration levels for volunteers and for their families/whānau. A regular review of brigade rosters could help to reduce inequities and tensions and any associated negative impacts on volunteers and their families/whānau.

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3.2.1 Satisfaction with brigade training received

Satisfaction with brigade training was a significant predictor of volunteers' mental wellbeing and greater satisfaction with their volunteering experience.

At 18 months most New recruits were satisfied with the brigade training they received (78.3%), had been given enough support by their brigade trainers or STCs (Station Training Coordinators) in relation

to the learning materials provided (82.2%), were encouraged to talk about their training concerns in their brigades (76.6%), and knew where to get brigade training support when they needed it (87.0%).

This was also true for Established and Exited volunteers who felt they had been given enough support in relation to the learning materials provided and that no extra support was required. For those who felt more support was needed (with accessing information online, comprehending written information), most knew where to get support. Volunteers expressed a dislike of paper-based training.

As mentioned earlier (Section 2.2.3), some aspects of brigade training caused dissatisfaction among Established volunteers. These aspects included brigade trainers' lack of skill or knowledge, a lack of structure or practical elements in the training sessions, and a lack of participation or engagement by fellow brigade members.

> *… you go along on a Tuesday night and pretty much just stand around and talk or clean the station or something. I think brigade training probably needs to be a lot more organised and you need the STCs (Station Training Coordinators) … they need to be updated on the latest training methods.*

> *… the thing that gets annoying is … the following training night you have got to do it all again to catch up that last ten percent … who weren't there that first week. … that can be a bit of a waste of time and a bit frustrating … because it quite often is the same people that are having to catch up.*

3.2.2 Prevent toxic brigade culture

A toxic brigade culture has an adverse impact on volunteers' wellbeing. This was evident in the qualitative data for Established and Exited volunteers. Volunteers who had seen or experienced discrimination reported a significant negative impact on their wellbeing. Bullying was linked to existing nepotism, favouritism, or a culture of cliquishness in their brigade.

> *The whole management team is … they are all part of that little circle that all went to school together and are socially attached outside of the fire brigade so … I think that's where the bullying comes from, it's from trying not only to fit into a volunteer environment, but to fit into a friend circle that has been there for … forty-five years … and if you don't reflect the things that they like to do and act then you just don't fit in.*

> *… my only disappointment is the amount of favouritism in our branch, it does show even though they try not to, you know there's a lot of members that are a wee bit disgruntled but nothing seems to really be done about it.*

Established and Exited volunteers mentioned light-hearted banter and conversations, comments, or brigade practices that may not have been ill intentioned, but which were nonetheless perceived or experienced as demeaning and/or discriminatory.

One guy keeps going on about the age of another guy in lighthearted, and everybody laughs but I don't think it's acceptable really. Once you start going down that road, then other little comments pop up in things like that, so I don't find it funny really …

We … have at our brigade … a monthly administration meeting. There is an award that … is supposed to be a light-hearted reminder of mistakes that we have made that we can learn from … I think it is unacceptable on quite a few levels … I don't need to belong to a fire brigade, to go there and feel bad about myself.

Sexist and racist attitudes and behaviours were highlighted. Female volunteers reported discrimination in the form of inappropriate comments and/or limited progression opportunities.

… it's still a horrendously sexist organisation with, and I dare to say it, horrendously inappropriate comments floating around, that's being addressed, definitely within our team, but it needs to be swifter, and yeah I find that disappointing, there's a lot of poorly hidden racism that still exists …

As a female sometimes I feel a bit overlooked, it's I think a typical male chauvinist culture … I don't know if it's actually discrimination or if it's valid, well probably the best example is, obviously, cos we're ranked and you see the males progress ahead of females, and I'm not saying that they shouldn't, they might be better qualified but not … when it happens time and time again.

Operational Support and Composite Brigade volunteers described an unspoken hierarchy within their brigade and the fostering of a culture that made them feel insignificant. This was perceived as demeaning and discriminating. These volunteers reported being treated as inferior to other volunteers or career firefighters.

There's a bit of a sort of an unspoken hierarchy where operational support … is often at the bottom of the pile … you're not seen as a real firefighter cos I don't wear BA (Breathing Apparatus) and I don't put water on the fire myself, I do support tasks … around the fire ground or the incident scene, so I have detected there is that sort of unwritten perception there. (Operational Support)

The (career) firefighters treat us and the volunteers (firefighters) treat us like we're scum, even though we're actually technically the food chain, we are actually pretty much on par with them, they don't treat us like that, and they don't know what our role is … (one firefighter) doesn't want us op support to touch anything because we are inexperienced etcetera … it's stupid, it's honestly stupid, it's why I actually don't want to be part of that brigade anymore. (Operational Support in a Composite Brigade)

3.2.3 Satisfaction with support received in brigade

Volunteers were satisfied with the level of support they received within the brigade (from brigade leaders and/or other members) and this was important for their wellbeing. Most New volunteers knew

where to get support when needed (88.8%) and felt encouraged to talk about their concerns in their brigade (84.4%).

Established and Exited volunteers gave high praise for the level of support they received from their brigade leaders, who showed respect and understanding and encouraged training, advancement and promotion.

> *I think the support provided by my brigade leader has been of the top standard. It has been an excellent quality … he acknowledges the balance between the family life … when I have been unable to attend any training or brigade activity because of family commitments, he is very understanding of those situations. And there have always been occasions where he has been conscious with my family to acknowledge the role that they play in me being available for brigade activities.*

> *He is really receptive to any new ideas and stuff that come forward … he just takes everything on board and he puts it into practice. He is really supportive, so if we had a rough call-out ... you can just go yarn to him and he will … give you some insight or give you the right numbers to call. We have really good debriefings after … call-outs … he will go out of his way to help you … he knows life gets in the way and it is a volunteer thing and he just wants you to give it what you can and yes, just really appreciative all round.*

Volunteers who reported a lack of support from their brigade leaders described this as disheartening and disappointing. Special attention should be given to volunteers in Operational Support and Composite Brigades because they seem more likely to feel unsupported. Some volunteers from Composite Brigades were unsure who their leader was.

> *We are not supported at all by our brigade leader. He is very hands off, he doesn't run anything and what he does run is really old-fashioned. It's very disappointing really because the brigade should be led from the front, it should be driven from the front – and it's not.*

> *It would help if I knew who my brigade leader actually was … we (composite brigade) go through this person to this person to this person…*

Training for brigade leaders in people-management skills (coaching, mentoring, delegation) would result in positive impacts for volunteers. Reduced administration and paperwork and better resourcing in this area could lessen the pressure on brigade leaders.

> *Maybe we need some more training for our leaders and maybe not so much focused on the practical side of the job, but more focused on … their people management skills essentially and how they manage people.*

> *I think the big one will be, again if FENZ [Fire and Emergency] could give them (leaders) more support for the administration, there's a lot of admin paperwork that I think could and should be done centrally, you know they're volunteers and yeah, the amount of paperwork that they have to do themselves is quite significant.*

3.2.4 Effective brigade system

Established and Exited volunteers mentioned the negative impact on their wellbeing caused by the absence of a good rostering system in the brigade. This was discussed in term of unfairness (regarding unequal opportunities for riding in the truck or taking leave) and unjustness where some volunteers only attended the 'exciting calls', or the roster kept changing for the benefit of a few causing frustration for others.

> … frustrating sometimes … often people are unavailable but all of a sudden oh my goodness they're available cause there's an exciting call comes in or converse to that they're available and don't turn up to the boring calls … I do find that frustrating …

> … they changed the roster … then they changed the roster again, but every time they changed the roster, they made it work for one person rather than for the whole team.

The absence of a good system or schedule impeded volunteers' ability to manage and plan their time, causing further frustration for them and for their families/whānau.

> … we never had a Station Training Officer that actually had a training plan or a schedule, so every night you would go to training and you would spend half an hour going, oh what should we do? … nothing's organised … there is no structure.

> … it was annoying my wife towards the end, that was another reason I ended up leaving … like we couldn't go out for dinner because I was on duty all the time, it got to the point where if we went out, we always took two cars …

Volunteers remarked on the negative impact of a rigid rostering system. They highlighted the need to recognise and address issues created by poor rostering systems.

> … when my daughter's birthday was coming up and so I arranged to have cover … they went oh no you will have to be on shift … you're on roster, you will have to do it …

> … all brigades have different ways that they do rostering for on duty off duty, it was very confusing and if anything was challenged it was the roster system, and that was a reason that many people left the brigade that I was in, and it wasn't even reviewed or recognised by external sort of brigade that there was an issue with the rostering system …

3.3 Organisation-level factors

Key messages

At the organisational level, the perception of Fire and Emergency adhering to the Volunteerism Principles was a significant predictor of volunteers' physical health, personal relationships, community-connectedness, and life as a whole. This was the most statistically significant factor for volunteers' wellbeing.

One aspect of the Volunteerism Principles perceived positively was the volunteer support initiatives introduced in 2019. Other services provided by Fire and Emergency (counselling, peer support programme, critical incident support) were not as widely known about, signalling a need for more publicity about these services and how to access them.

The ability to develop and progress was important for volunteers' sense of wellbeing. To support and encourage progression, Fire and Emergency could consider increasing the availability of training courses. Operational Support volunteers emphasised the need for more training courses and more structured progression pathways for them as well as greater consultation around course design and content. For senior rural volunteers, faster progression and better recognition of their seniority is an issue requiring more attention.

3.3.1 Fire and Emergency adherence to Volunteerism Principles

Volunteers who perceived Fire and Emergency as adhering to the Volunteerism Principles[10] reported greater satisfaction with physical health, better personal relationships, greater community-connectedness (sense of community belonging) and greater satisfaction with life as a whole. Statistically, this was the most important predictor of volunteers' sense of wellbeing.

Only 16.3% of New volunteers (joined Fire and Emergency between December 2018 and December 2019) were aware of the Volunteerism Strategy at 6 months. At 18 months, 48.5% were aware of the Volunteerism Principles that are part of the Volunteerism Strategy.

At 6 months, most New volunteers felt Fire and Emergency as a whole recognises, appreciates and values the role of its volunteers (98.4%); Fire and Emergency respects their volunteers (96.2%); and Fire and Emergency involves and includes volunteer perspectives in decision-making (85.1%).

However, at 18 months, there was a drop in the percentages of those agreeing with the above statements: 81.7% felt Fire and Emergency as a whole recognises, appreciates and values the role of its volunteers; 85.0% felt Fire and Emergency respects their volunteers; and 54.4% felt Fire and Emergency involves and includes volunteer perspectives in decision-making. At 18 months, some New volunteers found the lack of consultation and understanding of volunteers' perspectives in decision-making frustrating.

> *The FENZ [Fire and Emergency] leadership structure sometimes make arbitrary decisions,*
> *they're too removed - need a bit of a reality check now and then … little things such as*

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[10] Statements of the Volunteerism principles included in the regression analysis were: (1) Fire and Emergency as a whole recognises, appreciates and values the role of its volunteers; (2) Fire and Emergency involves and includes volunteer perspectives in decision-making; (3) Fire and Emergency respects their volunteers; (4) Families of Fire and Emergency volunteers are adequately recognised and valued; and (5) Fire and Emergency recognises and shows appreciation to volunteers' employers.

recently the APR [air purifying respirator] smoke mask which is really handy for scrub fires were removed without consultation so volunteers can't help in those incidents …

There's a disconnect sometimes with head office - for example because we didn't have stop sign training we were told our signs would be removed which was stupid. Decision-makers need to visit rural brigades to better understand the conditions and contexts, for example geographical issues within which we perform volunteer duties. We get left out of the loop when it comes to decisions so being included in the loop would be a very good thing …

The need for Fire and Emergency to listen to and understand local brigades' views and issues was also expressed by Established and Exited volunteers. More consultation with local brigades on decisions that might affect them was considered important.

I think there is a lot of frustration when people … and the local community and the local brigades … where decisions have been made that they just don't make sense for that local area and there is just not quite the understanding of local needs …

Kind of the longer I stick around, the more I realise how out of touch some of them are with the brigades … especially at my brigade, we have had quite a lot of change and stuff brought about by Area and Regional management and I don't think they quite realise the impact that they have on the brigade … it's quite annoying. Especially when they are making decisions that are impacting how we work and how we operate …

3.3.2 Volunteer support provided by Fire and Emergency

Volunteer support initiatives and support services provided by Fire and Emergency were perceived positively and viewed by volunteers as an enhancer of their wellbeing.

Almost all New volunteers knew about the annual volunteer reimbursement (98.8%). However, other support initiatives were less well known (66.1% knew about the family/whānau support allowance, 62.4% knew about the volunteer discount, and 55.4% knew about the discounted health insurance).

At 18 months 78.5% of New volunteers took the annual volunteer reimbursement, 21.1% received the family/whānau support allowance, 12.8% had used the volunteer discount, and only 1.2% had applied for the discounted health insurance.

Established volunteers were aware of the annual volunteer reimbursement and volunteer discounts. Some were aware of the family/whānau support allowance, discounted health insurance, and Fire and Emergency discounts. Volunteers felt these benefits are good and viewed them as a gesture of appreciation and recognition and a good morale booster.

I think it's a good thing, I know some people laughed about it being three hundred dollars which obviously is a drop in the ocean if you think about our time, but it's not about that, because we're volunteers, we don't get paid, so I think the fact that it's a small amount that's supposed to cover odd costs here and there that we might have, I think it's good … it's great that we get anything honestly as volunteers.

One frustration expressed by Established volunteers was not being able to access in-store discounts because they had not been issued a Fire and Emergency ID card. A greater variety of retail discounts (not only family/whānau-orientated) was suggested. Some expected a better health insurance plan as Fire and Emergency is a big organisation. Others recommended removal of the tax on the family/whānau support benefit and a waiver of the fire service levy on insurance.

Regarding other support services provided by Fire and Emergency, at 18-months, the majority of New volunteers were aware of the safety, health and wellbeing support provided by Fire and Emergency (92.3%) and most were satisfied with the support they received at Fire and Emergency (87.8% at 6 months and 80.3% at 18 months).

Established volunteers were aware of and had accessed other support services such as counselling, the peer support programme and critical incident support. However, not all volunteers knew about them, signalling a need for more publicity about these services and how to access them. Volunteers suggested a checklist of available resources and services would be helpful.

> *The most useful thing for me is the peer support programme that FENZ [Fire and Emergency] have got because I find that having that support on hand for us is really, really good … it's just opening another avenue for us to go down to seek help if we need the help.*

> *To be honest, I don't always feel like I know what support is available. I feel like in the brigade, I feel well supported by my peers and brigade members, but I am not always aware of the external support that FENZ [Fire and Emergency] offers.*

At 18 months 74.1% of New volunteers were aware of the services provided by UFBA/FRFANZ.[11] In particular, they knew about the service honours (e.g., medals) and the challenges and events (e.g., road crash rescue, drivers, firefighter combat, waterways). The service least known about was the training (e.g., psychological wellbeing, leadership and governance).

3.3.3 Opportunities to develop and progress

Opportunities to develop and progress were considered important and affected volunteers' sense of wellbeing. At 18 months of joining Fire and Emergency, 77.2% of New volunteers knew where to get structured training course support when they needed it while 61.9% felt they had been given enough support from their regional trainers in relation to the learning materials provided.

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[11] Forest and Rural Fire Association NZ (FRFANZ) is a national association that represents people and organisations concerned with fire and fire protection in the forests and rural areas of New Zealand. United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA) is a national association that supports, represents and unites fire brigade personnel throughout New Zealand. In 2019, these Associations merged, keeping the name United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA). They continue to provide support and represent fire brigade personnel throughout New Zealand. Volunteer Brigades can join via an annual subscription – making the brigade a member and all personnel who are part of the brigade UFBA members, or 'enrolled members'. UFBA membership covers over 580 brigades and nearly 14,000 individuals who are part of those brigades.

Established volunteers expressed a desire for more support with progression pathways and development opportunities. They also reported dissatisfaction when progression was slow or if training opportunities were limited (or cancelled).

> *… I'm frustrated that it's harder to get on the courses … I'm an ex-emergency response qualified driver, pump operator, all these other things and would have liked to have seen maybe a re-evaluation, or the ability to get onto those courses, for evaluation faster so that I could be an immediate contribution to the brigade …*

> *I've got a bit of a sore spot for the training because a while back we were invested into a course, me and another guy we were going to do (a) training, and we changed our work schedule, we changed our family schedule, and at the last minute one of the trainers decided that they didn't want us … which really upset us.*

More course availability was especially important for senior rural volunteers. This was because under the new system, they were required to pass the courses in order for their seniority to be recognised.

> *Availability of … courses has been an issue, especially when we were at the point where we were trying to get acknowledgement and recognition … we were told we don't have a pre-requisite but the pre-requisite wasn't gonna happen in the twelve months or something, I think we should have had a bit of flexibility in being able to do them the other way around … in the early days we were told that experience would be recognised and actually it wasn't at all, we had to plough through and get those courses …*

Operational Support volunteers perceived a lack of a national strategy for training, development, and progression. More consultation with Support personnel was suggested – it was also felt the entire organisation (including trainers and career staff) should be trained in the roles and responsibilities undertaken by Operational Support people.

> *… with Operational Support … we're very client, public facing and there is within the new sort of Fire and Emergency strategy it's about the care post the incident as well … but at the moment that's just a lot of talk … our guidelines of operation, it's got two line items there, evacuation support and victim support, but there is absolutely no training for those two vital areas …*

> *{Fire and Emergency) need to have their remit expanded so that … those trainers, firstly receive training in the role and responsibilities and tasks that operational support people do, so that they can then make sure that the full training regime and courses that are run cater for everybody in the organisation …*

> *… there needs to be a national strategy for training and development and the understanding of, a true understanding of what operational support personnel duties are and how to … utilise them in the most effective manner …*

4. Factors related to volunteers' length of service

This section examines factors affecting or influencing volunteers' length of service (or intention to stay) drawing on qualitative data from the Established and Exited volunteer samples.

Over 80% of New volunteers intended to stay for more than 5 years (87.5% at baseline, 83.0% at 6 months and 88.9% at 18 months). This suggests New volunteers were happy in the organisation and intended to stay for long period of time. Two significant predictors of volunteers' intention to stay at 18 months were: (1) incident response, and (2) perception of Fire and Emergency adhering to the Volunteerism Principles. These factors are discussed alongside the qualitative findings in the relevant sections.

Along with New volunteers' intention to stay for more than 5 years remaining unchanged at 18 months, Established volunteers said they would continue to volunteer for as long as they could. This suggests Fire and Emergency is doing well at retaining their volunteers.

4.1 Individual-level factors

Key messages

The main reason Exited volunteers left Fire and Emergency was relocation or changes in work/study load. They expressed a willingness to volunteer again if they moved to another area and/or their personal circumstances allowed. As part of their communication and/or recruitment strategy Fire and Emergency could follow-up Exited volunteers to encourage them to re-join the service.

More time responding to incidents was a significant predictor of New volunteers' intention to stay. Fire and Emergency should explore avenues to help brigades with low call-out rates to find productive activities that enhance volunteers' sense of contribution and intention to stay. One issue related to call-outs was the uncertainty and anxiety experienced by family/whānau members. Volunteers suggested more social events (or partner groups) so families/whānau feel included, supported and acknowledged.

Continuing to build skills and ongoing progression opportunities were widely identified as key factors contributing to volunteers' retention. A review of training opportunities and progression pathways for Operational Support volunteers is needed. Volunteers also suggested recognition and better utilisation of their prior experience, skills and/or expertise. Fire and Emergency should develop a policy to ensure volunteers' existing skills, expertise, and experience are identified and better utilised.

4.1.1 Relocation and change in work/study load

For those who left Fire and Emergency between October 2019 and July 2020 (Exited volunteers), relocation or change of work/study commitments was the main reason.

Volunteers said they would re-join if changes to their personal circumstances allowed (change of work hours or workload, change of location, completion of study, more time).

> I'd love to go back but … it's all about work and if I could … change hours or … be able to get there kind of thing. Yeah that would be the only circumstances like changing my work hours.

This willingness to continue volunteering was echoed by New volunteers in their follow-up surveys, where over 90% indicated they would apply for a transfer to the local brigade if they moved to another area.

Volunteers (in all three samples) reported time pressures and challenges with juggling competing interests or commitments such as family/whānau, work/study and volunteering. Although they struggled to find a balance, the general view was this was what they signed up for and therefore had to be accepted and managed. In their follow-up interviews Established volunteers felt they were getting better at balancing their commitments – this suggests improvement had occurred over time.

It seemed if/when volunteers were better able to balance, manage and plan their time and workload, the more likely they were to remain in the service.

4.1.2 Ability to serve community and manage family/whānau

Greater time spent in weekly incident responses was a significant predictor of New volunteers' intention to stay (for more than 5 years). As mentioned in Section 2.1.2, the core value of serving the community was a key factor for continued commitment to volunteering. A sense of pride and purpose in helping their local communities was a strong motivator for volunteers. Therefore, the ability to serve the community (in terms of call-outs and time spent at incident responses) was one of the key determining factors for New volunteers' intention to stay with Fire and Emergency.

> I think first of all it's giving back to the community … I look at our brigade and they're all volunteers, they all have their own businesses, daily lives, family etcetera, but they drop tools all hours of the day and night to go ahead and attend to fires and incidents, and I just take my hat off to them …

One issue related to call-outs was the uncertainty and anxiety experienced by family/whānau members. At 18 months 26.4% of New volunteers felt being a Fire and Emergency volunteer made their family/whānau members anxious for their safety; 12.9% felt being a Fire and Emergency volunteer had meant more time away from their families/whānau than expected; 4.9% felt it had made them moody, irritable, or depressed at home; and 2.1% felt being a Fire and Emergency volunteer put financial pressure on their family/whānau.

The negative impact of call-outs on family/whānau life was reported by both Established and Exited volunteers. While the degree to which this was accepted varied, it was generally recognised this was 'what they signed up for' and was managed satisfactorily by volunteers and their families/whānau. However, a few found the impacts detrimental, resulting in the termination of their volunteering.

> *I suppose the negative is being away from the family when there is a long duration event. … it's just one of those things that you know when you sign up, that sometimes a call-out could be a whole day or it could be fifteen minutes, it's just one of those things.*

Volunteers talked about the benefit of shared childcare among brigade members during call-outs. Suggestions for Fire and Emergency include: look at ways to reduce the worry/stress of childcare for volunteers; be more supportive of families/whānau with young children; and recognise the sacrifice of their children.

> *… it's about childcare. If I go to a call in the middle of the day, and my children need to be picked up at three pm, and if I need to go on a call-out, I don't have anyone to take care of my children … it's the uncertainty about my children's wellbeing during those hours. If I knew who was taking care of my children it would make my life much easier.*

More social interactions and social events for their families/whānau was important to keep volunteers interested and committed in their volunteering role. They described the negative impact when social interaction at the brigade was stopped.

> *… we don't invite partners to the brigade anymore, the children of brigade members and that whole kind of family environment seems to have been replaced with … the group of people that are all quite close friends getting together and just having a few drinks … the whole environment changed … it's just been horrible … it causes animosity in the home because they feel now it is a secret organisation … it's quite impacting.*

Volunteers commented on the value of the Availability and Messaging System (AMS) for families/whānau as they were notified when volunteers attended an incident. This (to some extent) enabled family/whānau to manage their expectation of when volunteers might return.

> *I suppose from my partner's point of view … I do it for reasons that I enjoy doing it, so I just go and do it. It has probably affected her more than me. But now that FENZ [Fire and Emergency] have introduced AMS (Availability and Messaging System) and that my partner gets a call or a text message when I am out on the road, I think it's a little bit more reassurance for her that she knows that I am on a call.*

4.1.3 Ability to develop new skills and use existing skills

As mentioned earlier, serving communities and personal development were the two key reasons volunteers joined Fire and Emergency. Therefore, continuing to build skills and having pathways for development were key factors contributing to or influencing volunteers' length of service.

At 18 months 77.1% of New volunteers were satisfied with the development opportunities they received at Fire and Emergency. Established and Exited volunteers also emphasised the importance to them (and their appreciation of) the opportunities to learn, develop and progress.

> … the opportunity to progress through different ranks is a real appeal and the training that I would get in order to progress and develop my skills is a big reason why I am keen to stay and keep working … the more opportunities to grow my skills, the more likely I am going to be to stay because I can really see the value that I can get personally from that.

In contrast, volunteers who perceived a lack of development opportunities felt dissatisfied and discontent, which in turn reduced their intention to stay or their length of service. Volunteers expressed a desire for more transparency in decisions relating to development opportunities and plans. The lack of development opportunities was especially marked for Operational Support volunteers, suggesting a review of the organisational structure for Operational Support personnel (see section 3.3.3).

> I think in terms of development I am not being given the opportunities … there is also very little to no transparency around those decisions, around who's going to be developed and what the plan is to develop them and time frames...

> … there is one continuing professional training course for … operational support personnel at the national training centre, no progression above a one single line, there's no specific training for operational support officers … it's quite horrifying really … that this whole group of valued volunteers … been so woefully ignored probably over a number of years …

Besides opportunities to build new skills, volunteers expressed a desire for their prior experience, skills and/or expertise to be recognised and utilised. This would keep them interested in and committed to their volunteering role. They suggested Fire and Emergency develop a policy to enable early identification and better utilisation of the prior skills, knowledge, experience and expertise volunteers bring to their role.

> Keeping me interested would be the ability to … bring in your background and make use of that background … there is a real narrowing and limiting of potential that does occur because there is a lack of recognition of prior learning and experience …

> Prior skills, knowledge, experience, and expertise should be identified at the beginning of the recruit process … this would … expedite the training process … a much more efficient and practical use of volunteers' time and energy.

4.2 Brigade-level factors

Key messages

Witnessing or experiencing discrimination and bullying in the brigade was another reason volunteers left Fire and Emergency between October 2019 and July 2020 (Exited volunteers). Enhancing the

brigade environment by improving brigade leadership was seen as one way to change the bullying culture. Other suggestions included: a clear process for conflict resolution; more inter-brigade activities and social events; and integrated training to foster a more cohesive organisational culture.

Having positive brigade training experiences and provision of sufficient gear/equipment were identified as important factors for keeping volunteers interested and committed. Volunteers talked about the benefits of a training plan that identifies individuals' strengths and weaknesses, as well as the need to update the learning resources and the online portal Learning Station.

4.2.1 Bullying and discrimination in brigade

Another reason for leaving Fire and Emergency between October 2019 and July 2020 (Exited volunteers) was discrimination or bullying. Volunteers who had seen or experienced discrimination or bullying reported a detrimental impact on their wellbeing. There was a concomitant negative impact on their length of service (or intention to stay). However, volunteers who left because of discrimination or bullying expressed a willingness to volunteer again if changes were made at the brigade to provide a safe environment.

> *Bullying actually ... every night there were fights ... not physical but lots of verbal stuff going on, it was almost like two teams, they were working against each other ... I was like that's enough, I can't do this anymore, it's affecting my mental health ...*

> *I would happily go back ... provided that there was a huge shakeup. I don't tolerate bullying in any way, shape or form ... I would go back today if that problem was resolved.*

Many volunteers felt their personal and/or cultural views were respected by others in their brigade. However, those who felt differently reported a negative impact on their intention to stay.

> *... my personal views, no I don't think anybody really cared, nobody ever asked me what my motivation was or why I was doing stuff, nobody actually cared enough.*

Suggestions were made for a clear process for conflict resolution (especially involvement of the higher management team from Fire and Emergency) so issues and concerns could be properly addressed. Others suggested an independent body for complaints (an independent complaints authority) and better monitoring of the brigade.

> *... so the problem they (Fire and Emergency) have is that there is too much insular stuff where they all handle their own issues, what they actually need is somebody independent that you can go to, I mean, that's what I thought the UFBA [United Fire Brigades' Association] were, but it turned out they're all in there together as well. But like St John has got the Employee Assistance Programme, that's completely independent, who can give advice and will step in and help. FENZ [Fire and Emergency] needs something very similar because having an independent body you can go to would be the best way.*

More social interactions and events within and between brigades would strengthen team relationships. In particular, volunteers from Composite Brigades felt more social events might help to bridge the 'us and them' divide between career staff and volunteers. Also, more inter-brigade exposure could increase the camaraderie between volunteer and career brigades, which in turn, could improve career staff attitudes towards volunteers.

> … within brigades I think that … to be able to have some social time together, away from the fire ground, is actually really important in cementing those friendships, and those trusts in people …

> … so for years … there's a bit of an attitude between paid staff that volunteers aren't as well trained or … don't quite have the same capabilities as they do. … they should just expose all the brigades to each other, and get them inter-working to each other, then the attitude will change. … it's very much the case of … you've got this guy that's been there for forty-seven years and never been paid for it, and then you get a guy that's been there for five years and has a high and mighty attitude about himself, if they work together you know, it's surely going to change.

4.2.2 Good brigade leadership

Variability in leadership quality was a concern. When the wrong people were in brigade leadership positions, this caused frustration and dissatisfaction and affected volunteers' intention to stay and their length of service.

Having the wrong people in brigade leadership positions was seen as leading to a reluctance to embrace and promote change. Other concerns were family/whānau dominance of leadership positions and the old school mentality of brigade leaders.

> … in terms of the problem I see is the old school way of doing things has not been addressed. Our chief still sticks to methods from twenty years ago.

> Sometimes within a volunteer brigade structure you can have a clique or family dynasty in senior positions. When issues arise, it can often be the family dynasty's way or the highway.

Poor brigade leadership was characterised by inappropriate communication techniques or an inability to effectively manage unacceptable behaviour, including bullying, and was viewed as a driver for people leaving.

> The thing … that actually drove me away in the end was my chief, I went to him directly and said look, this is what is going on, if something isn't done, like you are going to end up losing everybody, there were five of us that were basically on the verge of walking out and … his attitude was, I don't care, go and speak to HR [Human Resource] …

Conversely, good brigade leadership was a key factor for retention. Attributes of a good brigade leader included: being approachable and supportive; able to lead by example; open and honest; willing to

change; respectful of input and ideas from brigade members; and encouraging of training and advancement.

> *I do appreciate my station officer especially, he always does a welfare check just randomly if he hasn't heard from us for a while. … He is very communicative, he's a very strong leader, he tells you exactly that this is how we're going to do it, this is what we expect from you, and then they train you properly, so it's very good.*

It was suggested brigade leaders be provided with more leadership and management training in: communication skills; conflict resolution; monitoring and delegation; confronting and dealing with brigade issues; and creating and facilitating a healthy and safe brigade environment. A more robust and transparent selection process for brigade leaders and promotions was also suggested.

> *To keep me interested … would be training our brigade leaders … I think that our brigade leaders need to all have a certain standard … as well all brigade trainers … need to have just a basic standard that they uphold for everybody, it's a big one.*

> *… when they do chiefing … they need to have a specific policy to be able to work that out before giving someone the authority. … I reckon you should have almost like an interview with a person and see their personality and have interviews with people within the brigade before you rank up into the higher ranks … you need to have more … extensive look into the people and their behaviours and how they act around people.*

4.2.3 Positive brigade training experiences

Positive training experiences was an important factor for keeping volunteers interested and committed. Volunteers enjoyed training sessions that were practical, hands-on, and realistic. A good balance and variety of training methods (e.g., theory, practical scenarios, pairing up, one-on-one, video) was important to keep volunteers focused and motivated. The benefits of an individualised training plan that identifies volunteers' strengths and weaknesses was highlighted.

> *… finding out peoples' strengths and weaknesses and then pair them together so if someone's very strong at rope tying with the knots and lines and someone's bad with the ladders they sort of need to be paired together and they can learn off each other …*

It is important to continuously update the learning resources in terms of both content and presentation format. The online portal Learning Station needs to be user-friendly and easy to navigate when searching for information.

> *There is a red book and it has all these drills that we can run through, however it is very old school, it is very number one, you do this, it's a very formal way of thinking ... but a new and improved standardised recipe book that offers wide ranging theories of exercises that you can do at your brigade, whether it be on the actual station or … out in the public.*

More organised training (such as training timetables or a more structured training programme) was suggested as a way of making better use of volunteers' time. Volunteers (especially rural) wanted

greater flexibility around training times to enable better manage of their different commitments (family/whānau, work and volunteering).

> *... when you're in there you have to attend a certain amount of brigade training, so like maybe ease it up a little bit for people that have to work. … I could have gone on a lunch break or … an hour's break and gone over there and then go back to work but you have to be there for a certain period of time … so maybe more flexible.*

Training with career staff, other brigades or with other agencies (such as St. John New Zealand, Police) was seen as potentially beneficial. Cross-over training or combined training might help to reduce the 'us and them' divide between urban and rural. More frequent visits to brigades by regional trainers was also suggested.

> *I think particularly more of this training would be really beneficial. So, what I mean by that is like, police in particular because we attend a lot of road accidents. So, it is about having inter-agency training.*

> *Combine the training so that ALL training is available to ALL (Fire and Emergency) people. So, there are urban courses that our (rural) guys want to do, so cut the distinction out...*

4.2.4 Adequate brigade facilities and equipment

A noticeable improvement over time in brigade facilities and equipment was viewed as positive. The provision of better equipment and replacement of ill-fitting or worn-out gear was important. Continued improvement in this area was regarded as a way of enhancing the volunteers' experience that would also likely prolong their engagement.

> *Since rural fire has amalgamated with FENZ [Fire and Emergency], we've probably had a lot more training, the facilities we've got have been upgraded which is really good, we had pretty tatty sort of outfit before, our equipment we get to use … is improving all the time …*

As previously noted (in Section 2.2.4) the speed of responding to provide and/or replace necessary equipment, gear, uniform and appliances by Fire and Emergency was important. Operational Support volunteers particularly expressed the need for more and faster improvement. There was frustration when Fire and Emergency failed to provide and/or replace necessary equipment, gear, uniform or appliances in a timely manner.

> *I think FENZ [Fire and Emergency] are very slow to respond and pick up on brigade members' concerns and I also think that it's pretty abysmal that they have old and outdated equipment and that they're left to continue to use old equipment that could potentially be a hazard …*

> *... operational support people are like the forgotten part of the organisation, we've got crappy uniform, it's not durable and a lot of the helmets that we're issued leak out there in the rain, and I stand out in the rain if I'm directing traffic … it's really quite ridiculous ...*

Improving and maintaining group identification was seen as important. This was mainly discussed in relation to visually identifiable practices such as consistencies in uniform and an identification (ID) card. It was felt progress had been made in these areas. Volunteers from Composite Brigades suggested being equally equipped with essential gear such as PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) may help reduce the perceived division between paid staff and volunteers.

> *… there's still a large felt split between the volunteer staff and paid staff, at the operational level, and I think … a lot of that comes down to the haves and have-nots. … although we may not be seeing the volume that the paid staff see, when it comes back to the haves and have-nots, the fact that we don't get equipped the same and stuff like that, is something that is always a gripe that you hear about … things like PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] and stuff like that, it should be just on parity, kind of like for like, if it's a requirement for a paid staff member, it should be no different to a volunteer member.*

4.3 Organisation-level factors

Key messages

Quantitative analysis indicated the perception of Fire and Emergency's adherence to the Volunteerism Principles was a significant predictor of volunteers' intention to stay. Most volunteers felt Fire and Emergency is a good organisation and while more work and improvement are required, it is moving in the right direction. Volunteers suggested greater visibility and presence and more face-to-face interaction with Fire and Emergency would be beneficial, as well as a more enthusiastic Volunteer Support Officer.

Personalised acknowledgement from Fire and Emergency was important for volunteers' length of service. Exiters would appreciate aftercare for those traumatised by an incident. This would be a good way for Fire and Emergency to acknowledge and recognise their contribution.

At their 15-month follow-up interview, perceptions held by Established volunteers about their brigade and Fire and Emergency remained largely unchanged. They either maintained their positive view, or their perception of their brigade and Fire and Emergency had improved. However, volunteers who were not so positive, the main reason for this was a loss in confidence in Fire and Emergency's ability to change. Speeding up the integration of rural and urban brigades and addressing the 'us and them' divide were also seen as important.

4.3.1 Fire and Emergency adherence to Volunteerism Principles

Quantitative analysis showed volunteers who perceived Fire and Emergency as adhering to their Volunteerism Principles were more likely to stay for more than 5 years. This suggested Fire and Emergency is heading in the right direction as their Volunteerism Principles significantly predicted volunteers' intention to stay.

This feeling of 'moving in the right direction' was also expressed by Established and Exited volunteers. They felt Fire and Emergency is a good organisation and while more work and improvement are required, it is on the right path.

> *My overall thought is that they are a great organisation. … they are a great example of a business in New Zealand. They are a good champion and a good role model; that's the way that I feel at the moment … I wouldn't have said that ten years ago, but I would say that now.*

> *On the whole I see it as a good organisation, but still a lot of work to be done particularly in terms of integration with the rural brigades and also just necessary culture change. But I think that those issues have been identified and I think they are working hard to try and address that, it's just going to be a long process. But I think it is an organisation that I am proud to belong to.*

To better fulfil their Volunteerism Principles, volunteers suggested greater visibility and presence by Fire and Emergency at the brigade level, and more feedback from and face-to-face interaction with Fire and Emergency's senior leadership team. Volunteers considered this an important form of recognition and appreciation.

> *I think the best thing that we find is when management or higher ups actually come to our station and talk with us … the higher ups especially the senior leadership team are out there but it's usually on the special occasions. You know the awards or the presentations … and things like that but that's not really getting down to the grassroots.*

Volunteers also highlighted the importance of having an enthusiastic Volunteer Support Officer, as they are the first point of contact for volunteers when interacting with Fire and Emergency.

> *Get a VSO [Volunteer Support Officer] that actually wants to support us. I will be blunt there, ours doesn't want to be doing the job … and it really shows. … because he is our … first point of call when it comes to interacting with FENZ [Fire and Emergency] the organisation, and if that's the face that we see and the face isn't a happy one, you are like well, are you a good organisation or are you all just like this guy you know?*

4.3.2 Provide acknowledgement and recognition

Fire and Emergency's commitment to acknowledging volunteers, addressing their needs, and looking for ways to make improvements was appreciated. Being acknowledged and recognised for their time and commitment was important to volunteers. This recognition was discussed in both monetary and non-monetary terms. People viewed themselves first and foremost as volunteers, so financial recognition was typically seen as an acknowledgment rather than as a payment for service.

> *… continuing and maintaining the volunteer acknowledgement would be enough to keep me involved. The acknowledgement of the volunteers and their juggling with volunteering with full-time work and with families ... and taking that into account when decisions are made.*

More personalised and sincere appreciation by Fire and Emergency was emphasised by volunteers, especially upon achievement of certain major milestones (such as 5 or 10 years in service). Upon leaving Fire and Emergency, Exited volunteers would have appreciated recognition and appreciation for their service beyond a resignation acknowledgement letter. This could encourage them to rejoin if/when their circumstances allow.

> *... quite frequently you will see on social media, saying hey thanks to all our volunteers, that's all nice and dandy, but I feel like for appreciation to actually have any effect, it needs to be personal. … whether that is … through an email, hey this is your twelfth or thirteenth year, thank you so much, or through major milestones, somehow having this level of personalisation on the appreciation would be really beneficial for some people.*

> *I resigned … and … I got a resignation acknowledgement letter and that was it. … no-one from my brigade had organised any type of exit interview or even asked me why I had left … just felt insignificant.*

Exiters felt Fire and Emergency should acknowledge and recognise their contribution by providing aftercare for those traumatised by an incident during their volunteering.

> *… I think like the RSA [Returned Services Association], something like that is needed for fire service personnel that are out, an avenue for fire service staff that have been traumatised by an incident that has been recorded as a traumatised incident, that there is a little bit of leeway there for some help would be good.*

4.3.3 Ability to change and be unified as one

By their 15 months follow-up, perceptions held by Established volunteers about their brigade and Fire and Emergency had not changed. They either maintained their positive view, or their perception had improved. However, volunteers who held a less positive view attributed this mainly to the slowness in resolving the 'us and them' divide. This resulted in lost confidence in Fire and Emergency's ability to change and a negative impact on their perception of (and faith in) the organisation, which in turn affected their intention to stay.

There was disappointment with the still-apparent divide between rural and urban. The slowness in merging and integrating the services had a detrimental effect. Also, while some rural volunteers appreciated Fire and Emergency updating their equipment and addressing their concerns, some felt they had not been properly informed or consulted. More consultation with rural brigades regarding integration is needed.

> *… the way that the integration and restructure is carrying on at the moment and how slow it has been and how it has affected some people's visions towards what we are all here to do. … I think the process has been too slow and too drawn out and a lot of people are getting despondent and losing the enthusiasm to be involved.*

Another 'us and them' divide is evident between Operational Support volunteers and firefighters. Operational Support volunteers felt more consultation is needed, especially regarding a progression pathway and structured training.

> *There was a lot of 'them and us' feeling … because we were not firefighters, there were some members at the brigade who thought that we shouldn't be there, we weren't qualified, we (Op Support) weren't active, there was no role for us there at all …*

> *… with the organisational re-design process … they put out the view that the sky's the limit … but I don't really see that anyone has thought in particular about operational support and gone out of their way to seek the views of operational support people, in terms of a full range of things, uniform, ranks, and role descriptions, and training …*

Volunteers perceived an 'us and them' divide between themselves and career firefighters. At 18 months 74.5% of New volunteers felt their brigade had good relationships with their neighbouring brigades, while only 43.2% felt their brigades had constructive relationships between career firefighters and volunteers. The perceived 'us and them' divide between career firefighters and volunteers was described by Established volunteers as having a negative impact.

> *… it's just that divide between paid staff and volunteer staff, and I think we've got it bad compared to some brigades … you turn up and they say what are you allowed to do, what can't you do, you can't be the same as us that's ridiculous, it's just an attitude in their thing, I don't think it's their fault directly it's just been handed down to them.*

It was suggested more inter-brigade activities, social events, and/or integrated training may foster a healthier, more cohesive organisational culture. One volunteer suggested career staff be trained to support volunteers in their recruits' courses.

> *Improvement … I think would be more interaction with neighbouring brigades and combining training with them. … we have this feeling that the neighbouring urban brigades … they don't see our work. We have had all sorts of training, but we still don't get attached to the calls that we think are appropriate for our training. … unless it's mentioned that it is going to spread into vegetation.*

> *From the day a career firefighter starts their recruit course … they really need … a module on … how to support volunteers and support your comrades, because as far as I am concerned, we all work for the same company, it's just that eighty percent of us don't get paid.*

5. Discussion and recommendations

This study set out to explore the early experiences of volunteers and, in particular, address the two research aims. Key factors were described and discussed in the previous sections.

- To identify the factors that contribute to successful volunteer **engagement** (Section 2)
- To understand how volunteers' early year experiences impact on their **wellbeing** (Section 3), and **intention to stay/length of service** (Section 4)

5.1 Engagement, wellbeing and length of service

While the research did not specifically focus on the extent to which these three variables affected each other, during the interviews with volunteers, interconnections between engagement, wellbeing, and length of service were apparent. Some factors that improved volunteers' engagement also enhanced volunteers' wellbeing, and vice versa, suggesting a relationship between these two variables (shown with a double-headed arrow in Figure 2). Common factors influencing both **engagement** and **wellbeing** include:

- Opportunity to serve the community (and experience exceeds expectation)
- Ability to attend call-outs
- Ongoing development and progression
- Positive and welcoming brigade climate and the absence of bullying, nepotism, and favouritism
- Satisfaction with good quality brigade training
- Fire and Emergency shows commitment to volunteers

The qualitative data suggests volunteers' level of **engagement** affected their **length of service** (or intention to stay) – the more engaged volunteers are the more likely they will stay in the service longer (represented as a one-way arrow in Figure 2). Common factors affecting both engagement and length of service can be viewed as engagement-related factors that influence volunteers' length of service - these include:

- Opportunities for community service and personal development
- Personalised acknowledgement of contribution
- Brigade leader having good communication skills
- Positive and welcoming brigade climate with a non-toxic brigade culture
- Timely supply and provision of up-to-date equipment
- Fire and Emergency's commitment to volunteers

The qualitative data also suggests volunteers' **wellbeing** affected their **length of service** (or intention to stay) – volunteers who feel positive and satisfied with volunteering are more likely to prolong their service or to stay as long as they can (represented as one-way arrow in Figure 2). Common factors affecting both wellbeing and length of service can be viewed as wellbeing-related factors that influence volunteers' length of service. These include:

- Ability to manage negative impact on work
- Ability to attend call-outs and manage impact on family/whānau

- Ability to develop new skills and better utilise existing skills
- Non-toxic brigade culture (absence of bullying, nepotism, and favouritism)
- Brigade leader provides good support
- Fire and Emergency adhering to Volunteerism Principles

Figure 2: Interconnections between engagement, wellbeing and length of service

Length of service (Intention to stay)

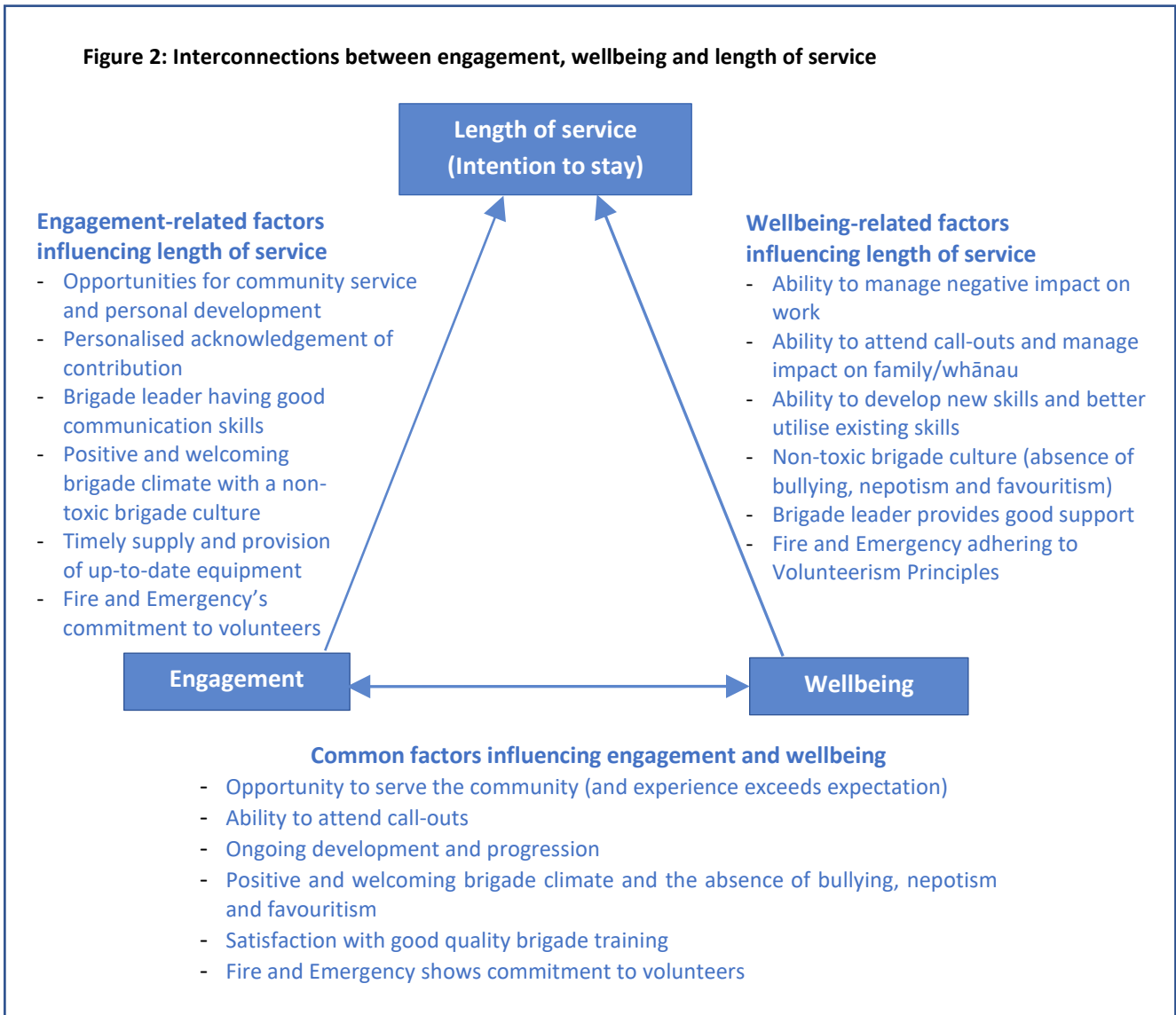**Engagement-related factors influencing length of service**
- Opportunities for community service and personal development
- Personalised acknowledgement of contribution
- Brigade leader having good communication skills
- Positive and welcoming brigade climate with a non-toxic brigade culture
- Timely supply and provision of up-to-date equipment
- Fire and Emergency's commitment to volunteers

Wellbeing-related factors influencing length of service
- Ability to manage negative impact on work
- Ability to attend call-outs and manage impact on family/whānau
- Ability to develop new skills and better utilise existing skills
- Non-toxic brigade culture (absence of bullying, nepotism and favouritism)
- Brigade leader provides good support
- Fire and Emergency adhering to Volunteerism Principles

Engagement ← → **Wellbeing**

Common factors influencing engagement and wellbeing
- Opportunity to serve the community (and experience exceeds expectation)
- Ability to attend call-outs
- Ongoing development and progression
- Positive and welcoming brigade climate and the absence of bullying, nepotism and favouritism
- Satisfaction with good quality brigade training
- Fire and Emergency shows commitment to volunteers

Recommendations in the following sections are based on the research findings and volunteers' suggestions (from interviews held between January 2019 and June 2021). Insights from the sense-making session with the Project Reference Group held on 10 August 2021 are also incorporated.

The recommendations concern improvements to engagement, wellbeing and length of service, which are interconnected (as discussed above). These three aspects are therefore discussed together in this section, and the recommendations are intended to address them collectively (i.e., improvement to volunteers' engagement will enhance their wellbeing (and vice versa) and prolong their length of service. In line with the research findings, these recommendations fall into three levels: individual, brigade, and organisation-level. Recommendations are preceded by a discussion of the role of time in this research (i.e., the longitudinal aspect of this research).

5.2 The role of time

The focus of this research was the experiences of volunteers within the first 5 years of service. This is because statistics from Fire and Emergency indicate about half of the leavers (57%) leave the service within five years.

This research has a quantitative longitudinal component (the New volunteer survey). Volunteers were surveyed when they first joined Fire and Emergency (between December 2018 and December 2019), and then again after 6 months and 18 months. At each time point, over 80% of the volunteers intended to stay for more than 5 years, and they also scored relatively highly on the wellbeing domains at all three time points. This indicates there was little change to volunteers' intention to stay or their wellbeing over the first 18 months.

In fact, our study found volunteers' scores on most of the survey items did not change significantly between 6 months and 18 months. This is why when describing the quantitative data in the preceding sections, the focus is on the factors rather than on changes to the factors due to time. The exception is the overall percentage of volunteers who perceived Fire and Emergency was adhering to Volunteerism Principles, which dropped significantly at 18 months. In particular, only 54.4% felt Fire and Emergency involves and includes volunteer perspectives in decision-making. This aspect requires attention.

This research also has a qualitative longitudinal component, that is, the Established volunteer sample. Established volunteers who joined Fire and Emergency between 1 to 4 years (i.e., between 2015-2018) were interviewed then followed-up after 15 months. Some volunteers were around the 5-year mark.

At the 15 months follow-up volunteers reported they were better at balancing, managing, and planning their time. A significant factor was the introduction of the Availability and Messaging System (AMS), which was perceived as successful. At their initial interviews volunteers suggested better coordination and communication would ensure appropriate response levels to incidents. However, with the introduction of AMS this was no longer an issue. Volunteers also reported a marked difference since the introduction of AMS for their families/whānau (especially partners). Because family/whānau members are also notified by AMS, they were less anxious or worried about volunteers attending call-outs.

No new issues were raised that were not already mentioned in the initial interviews. Therefore, a key issue identified in the follow-up interviews was the speed of getting things done. Volunteers were concerned by Fire and Emergency's bureaucracy and the slowness of processes. Volunteers felt speedier processes are needed around:
- Recruitment
- Providing/replacing brigade gear and equipment
- Bookings of structured training courses
- Addressing bullying issues in the brigade
- Developing training and pathways for Operational Support volunteers
- Resolving the 'us and them' divide between rural and urban, and career staff and volunteers

While volunteers understand processes take time, they felt speedier responses and more frequent updates from Fire and Emergency NZ regarding the status of the process would be helpful and appreciated.

Exited volunteers were interviewed at one point in time (in 2020), therefore the data for this sample is not longitudinal.

5.3 Individual-level recommendations

5.3.1 Personalised acknowledgement and recognition

Acknowledgement and recognition by Fire and Emergency was seen as important for volunteers' continued commitment. Fire and Emergency's commitment to this aspect was appreciated. The volunteer support initiatives were widely viewed as a gesture of recognition and acknowledgement.

Besides the volunteer support initiatives and since the launch of the Volunteerism Strategy 2019-2029, many activities and programmes have been undertaken by Fire and Emergency to acknowledge the contribution of volunteers and their families/whānau and employers (Fire and Emergency New Zealand 2021a, 2021b). In 2019, a national roll-out of the Employer Recognition Programme signage was initiated, resulting in 504 new employers joining the programme and 29% overall growth in the programme since 2018 (Fire and Emergency, 2021a).

A number of actions and initiatives are currently underway within Fire and Emergency; therefore, the following action points for consideration should be read with this in mind.

Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider:

- Provide personalised acknowledgement throughout the volunteer's journey, especially upon attainment of major milestones of service.
- More feedback on volunteers' contribution and performance, and more face-to-face interactions/visits by senior management – volunteers considered this as an important form of recognition and appreciation.
- Ensure Volunteer Support Officers (VSOs) are enthusiastic, accessible, and endorse Volunteerism Principles when providing support and assistance to volunteers.
- Acknowledge exited volunteers' past service beyond a resignation letter. This may encourage them to re-join when their circumstances permit.
- Broaden Volunteer support initiatives to include a greater variety of retail discounts (not just family/whānau-orientated) and a better health insurance plan. Also, investigate the possibility of reducing/waiving the fire service levy on insurance.
- Develop better employer recognition programmes so volunteers are allowed to attend call-outs during work hours. (Note: In 2020, the Fire and Emergency Proud Employer mark was launched, with 90% of New Zealand employers involved in the first year of this campaign indicating this initiative made a positive difference to their releasing of volunteers to attend call-outs during work hours (Fire and Emergency, 2021b) – further study and consultation with volunteers' employers as the campaign is rolled out would be beneficial.)

These action points are in line with the Volunteerism Strategy, in particular with the Volunteerism outcome area of *Volunteer Recognition*.

5.3.2 Support for emotional wellbeing

This study showed attending call-outs had impacts on both volunteers and their family/whānau. This is consistent with previous research, both locally and internationally, which shows volunteering in emergency services has some negative impacts on families/whānau, particularly in terms of worry/anxiety, time away from families/whānau, and restrictions or disruptions to family/whānau plans and mobility (Litmus, 2017; McLennan, et al., 2009; SHORE & Whāriki Research Centre, 2018).

The extent to which volunteers could juggle their family/whānau, work and volunteering commitments varied. At follow-up, volunteers expressed they were getting better at this, suggesting an improvement over time. However, those who were unable to manage their competing commitments left the service (this was the key reason given by Exited volunteers). Therefore, supporting volunteers to achieve a balance between volunteering and their life commitments could prolong their engagement.

Volunteers reported a lack of awareness and understanding of the support services implemented by Fire and Emergency, as also reported in a previous study (SHORE & Whāriki Research Centre, 2018). Effective communication, awareness raising, and training by Fire and Emergency about their support services would improve this.

Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider:

- In conjunction with volunteers, identify training and support needs and opportunities such as options around time management, coping skills, and relationship counselling to help them better manage their time and commitments and to cope with stress. (Note: In 2020, Fire and Emergency started to run Psychological Wellbeing workshops (Fire and Emergency, 2021b) – the workshops should be evaluated to identify how they could be improved and whether the above suggestions could be incorporated if they are not already there).
- Conduct a review to strengthen and to ensure adequate provision and encouragement of counselling, peer support programmes, and critical incident support. A checklist of existing resources and support services for volunteers is suggested.
- Faster roll out of the Availability and Messaging System (AMS). Volunteers reported a positive impact of AMS on their families/whānau.
- Encourage more social events (especially partner groups) for families/whānau to make them feel included, supported, and acknowledged.
- Investigate childcare systems for volunteers and support families/whānau with young children to recognise their sacrifice and contribution.
- Provide an aftercare counselling service for exited volunteers traumatised by an incident.

These action points are in line with the Volunteerism Strategy and relate to the Volunteerism outcome areas – *Safety, Health and Wellbeing* and *Volunteer Recognition*.

5.3.3 Opportunities for community service and personal growth

Volunteers joined Fire and Emergency for two key reasons – to serve the community and for personal development. These two key reasons applied regardless of age or gender. Recent qualitative research by Fire and Emergency on young people also shows serving community and self-development are the key benefits expected by young men and young women from becoming a firefighter (Litmus, 2019a).

This research shows these two key reasons did not change over time. A greater emphasis by Fire and Emergency on these two aspects during recruitment and throughout the early years of volunteers' journey may encourage stronger engagement, better wellbeing, and longer service.

> **Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider:**
>
> - Promote these two aspects (serving the community and self-development) in advertising and marketing for recruiting new volunteers.
> - Explore avenues to help brigades with low call-out rates to find productive activities that enhance volunteers' sense of serving the community.
> - Develop individualised development plans that reflect volunteers' strengths and weaknesses.
> - Create more structured development pathways for Operational Support volunteers.

These action points will strengthen and enhance Fire and Emergency's commitment to the Volunteerism outcome areas – *Attraction, Selection and Recruitment* and *Support and Development.*

5.4 Brigade-level recommendations

5.4.1 Improving brigade leadership

The research showed that quality of brigade leadership is a critical factor and plays an important role in volunteers' engagement, wellbeing, and length of service. This finding supports earlier research identifying brigade leaders as playing a significant role in shaping an inclusive and supportive culture in volunteer brigades (Allen + Clarke, 2016; Shaw, 2019; SHORE & Whāriki Research Centre, 2018).

> **Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider:**
>
> (1) Leadership development
> - Upskill leaders in effective communication methods and people-management skills (coaching, mentoring, delegation, and leading a whole team as opposed to sections).
> - Provide continuous support to brigade leaders to effectively identify, confront, and manage unacceptable and inappropriate behaviours (such as bullying and discrimination) in the brigade and facilitate co-operation between members.

- Train leaders in cultural competency, inclusion-based values, and diversity-focused practices to increase retention and attract a diverse range of people.

(2) Leadership management

- Design robust policy and procedures for the selection of brigade leaders. This should include more conversations with brigade members and interviews with candidates. Only suitable candidates should be considered.
- Provide more administrative support to brigade leaders so they can focus more on supporting their volunteers and their communities.

These action points are in line with the Volunteerism Strategy and relate to the Volunteerism outcome areas – *Leadership and Management* and *Quality Management and Continuous Improvement*.

5.4.2 Improving brigade training

The ability to learn, develop, and progress is important for volunteers. Suggestions to improve the quality of weekly brigade training were around content, design, delivery, and participation. These recommendations are similar to those from a recent qualitative study commissioned by Fire and Emergency to understand firefighters' (including volunteers') engagement with learning technologies and resources (Litmus, 2019b). Therefore, addressing these issues is important and will help Fire and Emergency to improve brigade training.

Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider:

(1) Content

- Ensure learning contents and resources are up-to-date, hands-on, realistic, and relevant (e.g., relevant to brigades' location, to what they encountered most, to the equipment they have on hand).
- Provide Operational Support awareness training specific to the local operational support capabilities and capacities to all brigade members to enable better understanding and appreciation of this role.

(2) Design

- Design training according to the percentage of call-out types and review this regularly.
- Improve planning and organisation of training nights. Provide training timetables (or a more detailed training programme) and prominently display the training schedule in the station so members can see what is coming up and are able to plan and prepare.
- Provide flexibility (or more options for dates) around training time and/or level of commitment, so they can better manage and balance their work and volunteering commitments.

(3) Delivery

- Ensure training sessions are stimulating, interesting, and engaging.
- Train the brigade trainers, keep them up to date with current standard practices and use of new equipment, and provide guidance on how to facilitate a good training session. Increase

awareness and improve the communication around the Station Training Coordinator (STC) roles and brigade training opportunities.

- Review the amount of reading associated with any training activity and where possible reduce the amount of reading required.
- Revise the Portal and Learning Station to:
  - improve access (make sure brigades have good internet connection and enough computer equipment)
  - make login easier
  - make it easier to navigate
  - include more videos (e.g., medical, first aid) to assist learning
  - ensure brigades have the same equipment/gear (as used in the scenarios shown on the portal)
- Train the trainers to include Operational Support personnel in the brigade training.
- Ensure up-to-date and sufficient/adequate equipment for training.

(4) Participation of others

- Encourage full attendance and participation by brigade members at training nights.
- More frequent visits by regional trainers.

These action points are associated with the Volunteerism outcome areas – **Support and Development** and **Commitment to Volunteers.**

5.4.3 Enhancing the brigade environment

Having a positive brigade environment – both in terms of social environment (people) and physical environment (facilities) – was identified by volunteers as affecting their engagement, wellbeing, and length of service.

Volunteers acknowledged Fire and Emergency's efforts to build a positive workplace culture. In 2018, Fire and Emergency commissioned a review of their workplace policies, procedures, and practices to address bullying and harassment (Shaw, 2019). In 2019, Fire and Emergency launched a positive workplace culture action plan (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2020b). In 2020, Fire and Emergency established a Behaviour and Conduct Office (BCO), and launched a new Policy and a new Code of Behaviour to address bullying, harassment, and victimisation (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2021a).

Operating out of pleasant facilities and adequate and up-to-date equipment/gear enhanced volunteers' experience and commitment. Volunteers stressed the need to get uniforms faster. This was not so much about the uniform, but about the timeliness of Fire and Emergency's response to requests for the basic equipment and gear necessary to safely carry out their volunteering duties. Volunteers mentioned head torches, proper fitting uniforms, and replacement of worn-out uniforms. There were comments about the lack of acknowledgement of requests, as well as the slowness of receiving the requested provisions. This slowness in provision made volunteers question the value of

their volunteering. Timely provision was perceived as a commitment by Fire and Emergency to enhance volunteers' engagement and experience.

> **Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider[12]:**
>
> - Better monitoring of brigades to end the bullying culture and more haste with this process.
> - Implement tighter disciplinary procedures so unacceptable behaviour is addressed and/or corrected immediately.
> - Develop a clear process for conflict resolution (with involvement of Fire and Emergency's senior management team) and/or an independent complaints authority.
> - Provide access to more out-of-the-brigade external support.
> - Support brigades to design better rostering systems to reduce conflict/tensions that arise from perceived unfairness.
> - Ensure ongoing timely delivery of personal gear, uniforms and ID cards.
> - Speed up provision and replacement of necessary equipment, gear, uniforms, and appliances.
> - Review planning, policy or priority-setting in regard to funding/providing brigades with what they need rather than what Fire and Emergency think they need.
>
> These action points are associated with the Volunteerism outcome areas – ***Leadership and Management, Positive Local Environment,*** and ***Safety, Health and Wellbeing.***

5.5 Organisation-level recommendations

5.5.1 Provide clear communication

As early as the recruitment stage, volunteers identified the need for faster, clearer communications. This was perceived as a commitment by Fire and Emergency to appreciate volunteers' contribution of time (so they are not kept waiting). Volunteers felt it was extremely important to be kept informed about what's going on, especially regarding their requests and concerns. Volunteers want speedier responses and more frequent updates from Fire and Emergency regarding the status of processing requests.

This study clearly showed the challenges of identifying effective ways to communicate with volunteers. This is because Fire and Emergency volunteers are a diverse group with different communication needs, patterns, and preferences. Also, communication cannot be completely digital as some stations (and volunteers' homes) lack adequate internet connectivity or equipment.

The introduction of Availability and Messaging System (AMS) had a very positive impact and was identified as the Information & Communication Technology (ICT) system most frequently used by volunteers on a daily basis, indicating a useful and successful service.

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[12] The BCO was only in its development and interim phases during the course of this research, it has now established and addresses many points in this section.

Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider:

- Identify volunteers' communication preferences at recruitment stage and adopt a 'toolbox' approach (a variety of communication methods and tools, including intensity and frequency).
- Review communication plans and communication channels to ensure volunteers are kept informed about what's going on (especially regarding the provision of equipment/resources and opportunities for further development).
- Develop a filtering/coding system so volunteers receive only email/information relevant to their roles.
- Upgrade brigade stations' computers and/or internet systems and connectivity[13].
- Upgrade Portal and Learning Station to be more user-friendly.
- Upgrade Learning Station to an app-based mobile system for easier access.
- Speed up the roll out of the Availability and Messaging System (AMS) to all brigades, including Operational Support volunteers.

These action points are linked to the Volunteerism outcome areas – *Quality Management and Continuous Improvement, Support and Development,* and *Commitment to Volunteers.*

5.5.2 Improvements to structured training courses

A sense of self-development (in terms of upskilling and progression) was important for volunteers' engagement, wellbeing, and length of service. Volunteers were very satisfied with the content and quality of the structured training courses provided by Fire and Emergency. The action points below are mainly about the delivery of the courses.

Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider:

- Increase course availability and time-options for structured training courses. (Note: In the sense-making session, the Project Reference Group mentioned more courses with different time-options and flexibility had been made available in the past year. A number of activities were reported in the Volunteerism Strategy six-month progress report (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2021a). Therefore, it may be useful to evaluate the uptake of those courses to determine whether increased availability and time-options have met volunteers' needs and whether they are aware of these options – or is more promotion and advertising required.)
- Running courses at more suitable times for rural volunteers (to avoid lambing or milking seasons). More consultation with rural volunteers is required to identify suitable timings.
- Have more cross-over training or combine urban and rural training.
- Use the same equipment on structured training courses as used in the brigade.
- More national training centres (e.g., one in mid-South Island, renovate Wellington facility). (Note: The sense-making session identified this is already underway. Perhaps better promotion and advertising about these additional centres may help).

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[13] The ICT rollout happened during the course of this research, the Project Reference Group pointed out that all stations now have new devices, and all systems were upgraded with very few exceptions.

- Reduce the time it takes for volunteers to book structured courses (preferably a streamlined online booking system for entering personal details and to prevent loss of bookings).
- Avoid cancellation of structured courses (or at least communicate these well in advance).
- Develop more national training courses and a better progression pathway for Operational Support volunteers. More consultation with Operational Support volunteers is needed.
- Enable recognition of structured training courses by other agencies and/or educational qualification authorities. Inform volunteers that a proportion of Fire and Emergency training results in NZQA Unit Standards.

These action points are associated with the Volunteerism outcome areas - *Support and Development* and *Commitment to Volunteers.*

5.5.3 Striving to be volunteer-focused

This research shows a perception by volunteers that Fire and Emergency is adhering to the Volunteerism Principles – this was the most significant predictor of volunteers' wellbeing and intention to stay. Volunteers appreciated Fire and Emergency's effort and commitment to volunteerism. They also expressed a willingness to volunteer again if they moved to another area and/or their personal circumstances allowed.

Volunteers understand the change and integration process will take time (amalgamation of rural and urban, and resolving the 'us and them' divide between rural and urban and career staff and volunteers), but they would appreciate a speedier process, or at least, more progress updates from Fire and Emergency.

Volunteers suggested Fire and Emergency explore ways to attract diverse volunteers. It was felt more effort should be made to recruit younger generations, however the general population should also be targeted (older people and females). Prior experience, skills and/or expertise should be recognised and more effectively utilised as a way to encourage and promote engagement.

Action points for Fire and Emergency to consider:

- Help volunteers who have relocated to join their new local brigade.
- Follow-up with exited volunteers (annually or biannually) to learn if their circumstances have changed and encourage them to re-join the service.
- Provide more inter-brigade activities and social events, and more opportunities for engagement and interaction to reduce the divide between both urban and rural, and career staff and volunteers.
- Schedule training with neighbouring brigades (two to three times a year) and/or other agencies (e.g., Police, St John).
- More advertising and marketing on social media, more open days at the station, and a greater visibility and presence of Fire and Emergency at community events and schools (especially high school career days).

- Raise awareness and provide public education about the Operational Support volunteer role (to attract a wider and more diverse group).
- Develop a policy to better utilise volunteers' existing skills, expertise, and experience.
- Design a 2-year advertising/marketing recruitment plan as our findings showed more than 50% of volunteers took up to 2 years to consider joining.
- Train career staff to support volunteers in their recruits' courses. Involve career firefighters in brigade training to share their knowledge and experience.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of Operational Support and set into policy.

Volunteers suggested a more volunteer-focused approach is a critical aspect requiring more focus and resource. If Fire and Emergency can create an organisational culture and environment that facilitates recruitment and retention of volunteers this would strengthen the overall organisation.

These action points are linked to the Volunteerism outcome areas – *Quality Management and Continuous Improvement, Support and Development,* and *Commitment to Volunteers.*

5.6 Final comments

This study represents the voices of 850 volunteers who shared experiences from their early years with Fire and Emergency. Factors that affected their engagement, wellbeing, and intention to stay were discussed in detail in Sections 2 – 4, with recommendations about further actions presented in this section. It is important to acknowledge the number of actions and initiatives already underway within Fire and Emergency, with many more planned in the future years (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2020). It is evident Fire and Emergency is proactively addressing volunteers' needs – this effort was noticed and acknowledged by the volunteers who participated in this study.

> *I have grown to admire FENZ more and more. I think they have started to do a good job and I think they are structured. I think they have taken notice of what people want and they are moving along that path. So, I think they are a fairly professional organisation and I am confident in them.*

Volunteers appreciated Fire and Emergency's commitment to addressing their needs, acknowledging their contributions, and seeking ways to make improvements. Volunteers encouraged Fire and Emergency to keep up the good work, and they will continue to volunteer for as long as they can.

> *I really do think that they are trying to make a difference and a lot of people are putting them under the pump … but you know, it's only been three years. I think they really are trying to make a difference and it is just obviously taking as long as it should do with a large organisation. I have got very positive feelings for (Fire and Emergency), very positive.*

> *… as a whole they have got amazing people … all around this country, FENZ have got these amazing volunteers who give up so much for their community and … they are trying to keep their own family safe as well. Yeah from that aspect, it's really, really good. … New Zealand is really lucky to have such a brilliant Fire Service really … so I think it is a great*

organisation, … if you want to do something different and really give back to your community, it's a great thing to join.

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Appendix One: Methodology

An initial meeting was held with Fire and Emergency key stakeholders (on 6 July 2018) to confirm the research design and processes, and to refine the survey topics. In addition, key concerns and ideas relating to the research topic were discussed.

Some changes to the research design were required due to privacy concerns (New volunteer sample) and difficulties recruiting volunteers (Established and Exited volunteer samples). This study was also impacted by changes in COVID-19 alert levels. Fire and Emergency's decision was to pause all surveys and interviews at Alert Levels 3 and 4. Accordingly, surveys and interviews were paused for a total duration of 6 weeks for both New and Established volunteer samples.

All changes were made in consultation with Fire and Emergency representatives. Variations to the contract were agreed and signed on March 2019 and May 2020. The final research design and methods are reported here.

Data collection

New Volunteer Sample

A review of established psychometric measures was undertaken to construct the survey questions. The New volunteer survey was developed by the research team and feedback from Fire and Emergency representatives was incorporated. The baseline survey asked volunteers about their:

- Awareness of Fire and Emergency volunteering
- Reason for volunteering
- Recruitment experience
- Expectations
- Personal wellbeing

The follow-up survey asked volunteers about their:

- Satisfaction with the training and support received
- Brigade climate and leadership
- Personal wellbeing
- Impact on family/whānau life and work life
- Volunteerism Strategy and volunteer support initiatives
- Level of engagement and intention to stay
- IT systems (18-month follow-up survey)
- COVID-19 (18-month follow-up survey)

The New volunteer **baseline survey** commenced in January 2019. Each month during the period January 2019 to January 2020, the research team were given the phone numbers of the previous month's new recruits who had not opted out of the study (i.e., recruits between December 2018 and December 2019). The last set of New volunteers' contact details was received on 15 January 2020. The

majority of the baseline data collection was completed in February 2020. However, 12 volunteers were contacted after the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown (i.e., in April 2020). As mentioned above changes in COVID alert levels impacted this process and surveys were paused in March 2020.

Data were collected using SHORE & Whāriki's in-house computer assisted telephone interviewing system. Thorough interviewer training was provided and standardised interviewing procedures were used to ensure the quality of data collected. A text message was sent out to advise volunteers an interviewer would be calling them from (09) 366 5141. This was to increase the likelihood of people answering the phone. On phoning potential participants, it was made explicit in the survey preamble that their participation was completely voluntary and that individual answers would not be identifiable. The telephone survey took approximately 15-20 minutes.

The **6-month follow-up survey** commenced in July 2019 and finished in September 2020. It was finished later than the originally planned time (i.e., July 2020) due to pausing the survey when the COVID-19 alert level exceeded 2 (in March 2020 and August 2020). The **18-month follow-up survey** commenced in July 2020 and finished 30 June 2021.

In recognition of participants' contribution, ten prize draws for a $200 petrol voucher were undertaken at the completion of the data collection.

Established Volunteer Sample

Volunteers who had been serving for less than 5 years (i.e., joined between January 2015 and July 2018) were invited to participate in the study. It was not possible for the researchers to directly promote and actively recruit Established volunteers. Fire and Emergency promoted the opportunity via their portal page for their Established volunteers to be interviewed as part in the research. To take part, volunteers were required to opt in by email to research@fireandemergency.nz.

An interview schedule was developed with input from Fire and Emergency representatives. Topics covered included:

- Perceptions of the volunteer role
- Perceptions of training and support received
- Brigade culture and leadership style
- Impact of volunteering on family/whānau life and work life
- Perceptions of Fire and Emergency as a whole
- Intention to stay and key factors for continuation
- Impact of COVID -19 (in focused group interview and 15-months follow-up interview)

A total of 45 Established volunteers were interviewed in June 2019 and 39 volunteers participated in the follow-up interviews in September 2020.

In addition, focused group interviews were conducted to identify any aspects that may not have been covered in the individual interviews and to try to ensure a more representative sample of the Established volunteer population was interviewed. Seven groups of volunteers were identified in

consultation with Fire and Emergency. These groups consisted of volunteers who identify as Māori, Pasifika, Asian, volunteers from rural brigades, Composite brigades, and volunteers in Operational Support and Brigade Support roles.

Due to COVID-19 Alert Level restrictions, the planned face-to-face focus group interviews were changed to individual telephone interviews. A total of 48 interviews were conducted during June and August 2020:

- Māori volunteers – 6 people   - Operational Support – 7 people
- Pasifika volunteers – 8 people   - Composite brigades – 8 people
- Asian volunteers – 6 people   - Brigade Support – 7 people
- Rural brigades – 6 people

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Following the interviews, a $50 petrol voucher was given to participants to acknowledge their contribution.

Exited Volunteer Sample

Volunteers who left Fire and Emergency between October 2019 and July 2020 were invited to take part in the study. Fire and Emergency did not have permission to pass on exited volunteers' contact information to the research team, so the Fire and Emergency Volunteer Resilience team phoned and invited them to participate in the study.

An interview schedule was developed and suggestions from Fire and Emergency representatives were incorporated. Topics covered include:
- Perceptions of the volunteer role
- Perceptions of workplace culture/support/respect and inclusion
- Impact of volunteering on personal, family/whānau and work life
- Volunteer benefits
- Training
- Perceptions of Fire and Emergency as a whole
- Impact of COVID -19 (for exiters who left after March 2020)

A total of 25 volunteers interviewed – 13 volunteers who left between October and December 2019 were interviewed in June 2020, and 12 volunteers who left between January and July 2020 were interviewed in November 2020.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Following their interviews, a $50 petrol voucher was given to participants to acknowledge their contribution.

Data analysis

Quantitative data

Descriptive analyses were undertaken for all questions asked in the New volunteer surveys. (See Appendix 2 for detailed survey results.)

Statistical models were used to find variables that predicted high scores for the six personal wellbeing measures: (1) life as a whole, (2) physical health, (3) mental health, (4) personal relationships, (5) sense of community belonging, and (6) volunteering experience with Fire and Emergency. These models took into account the longitudinal nature of the data. A stepwise backwards selection method was used to find the variables that best predicted high personal wellbeing scores while controlling for the effects of age, sex and employment.

Individual statistical models were run to find which variables are significantly related to intention to stay (more than 5 years vs 5 years or less) while controlling for the effects of age, sex, and employment. Variables that were significant at $\alpha < 0.1$ were added together in a final statistical model. A stepwise backwards selection method was used to find the variables that best predicted intention to stay.

Statistical analyses were undertaken using SAS 9.4 and R statistical software. Results were deemed significant at the <0.05 level.

Qualitative data

A general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) was utilised to analyse the raw data produced from interviews with Established and Exited volunteers.

This approach began with transcription of the digital recordings by professional transcribers into written form ending with the creation of a set of categories in NVivo (a qualitative data management software). Both the research aims and the raw data guided the data analysis. Data were analysed primarily at the semantic (surface level). The analysis focused on volunteers as a group, but where applicable, on specificities in relation to the seven focused groups. Results from the analysis are provided in Appendix 3 (Established volunteers sample) and Appendix 4 (Exited volunteers sample).

Appendix Two: New Volunteer sample

Participants

A total of 732 New volunteers took part in the study. The average age was 35.2 years (range between 16- 75). At 6-month follow-up, 453 volunteers agreed to be surveyed. The retention rate was 61.9%. Twenty-three of the volunteers did not fully complete the survey (i.e., partial completes). Analysis of the 6-month follow-up data was based on the 430 fully completed surveys.

At 18-month follow up, 269 volunteers participated in the survey. The retention rate was 62.5% on the fully completed 6-month follow-up survey sample (and 36.7% on the baseline survey sample). The demographic breakdown of the participants at baseline (N=732), 6-month follow-up (N=430), and 18-month follow-up (N=269) is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: New Volunteer Sample - Participant characteristics

		Baseline Number (%)	6-month follow-up Number (%)	18-month follow-up Number (%)
Gender:	Male	487 (67%)	283 (66%)	174 (65%)
	Female	214 (29%)	127 (29%)	71 (26%)
	Unspecified	31 (4%)	20 (5%)	24 (9%)
Ethnicity:	New Zealand European	509 (69%)	317 (74%)	187 (70%)
	Māori	71 (10%)	29 (7%)	20 (7%)
	Pacific people	13 (2%)	3 (1%)	2 (1%)
	Asian	22 (3%)	13 (3%)	8 (3%)
	Other European	41 (5%)	34 (8%)	19 (7%)
	Other	27 (4%)	13 (3%)	9 (3%)
	Unspecified	49 (7%)	21 (5%)	24 (9%)
Employment status:	Working full-time	371 (51%)	213 (50%)	124 (46%)
	Working part-time	61 (8%)	36 (8%)	23 (9%)
	Self-employed	122 (17%)	76 (18%)	49 (18%)
	Unemployed	23 (3%)	11 (3%)	7 (3%)
	Student	82 (11%)	49 (11%)	26 (10%)
	Retired	31 (4%)	18 (4%)	10 (4%)
	Parenting/caregiving/doing unpaid work	11 (2%)	7 (2%)	6 (2%)
	Unspecified	31 (4%)	20 (5%)	24 (9%)
Volunteer role:	Recruit firefighter		45 (10%)	35 (13%)
	Urban firefighter		202 (47%)	103 (39%)
	Rural firefighter		100 (23%)	50 (19%)

Firefighter (did not specify urban or rural)			27 (10%)
Operational Support		51 (12%)	32 (12%)
Brigade Support		13 (3%)	7 (3%)
Medical		8 (2%)	8 (3%)
Unspecified		11 (3%)	2 (1%)
Volunteer role changed since last interview: Yes		105 (24%)	108 (41%)
No		325 (76%)	156 (59%)
Volunteer at other organisation: Yes	85 (12%)		91 (34%)
No	623 (85%)		173 (66%)
Unspecified	21 (3%)		
Total number of participants	**732**	**430**	**269**

Baseline survey results

Awareness about Fire and Emergency volunteering

When participants were asked when they first became aware of Fire and Emergency volunteering, 48% reported they had been aware for more than 10 years and 16.7% had been aware for less than one year (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: First became aware of Fire and Emergency volunteering
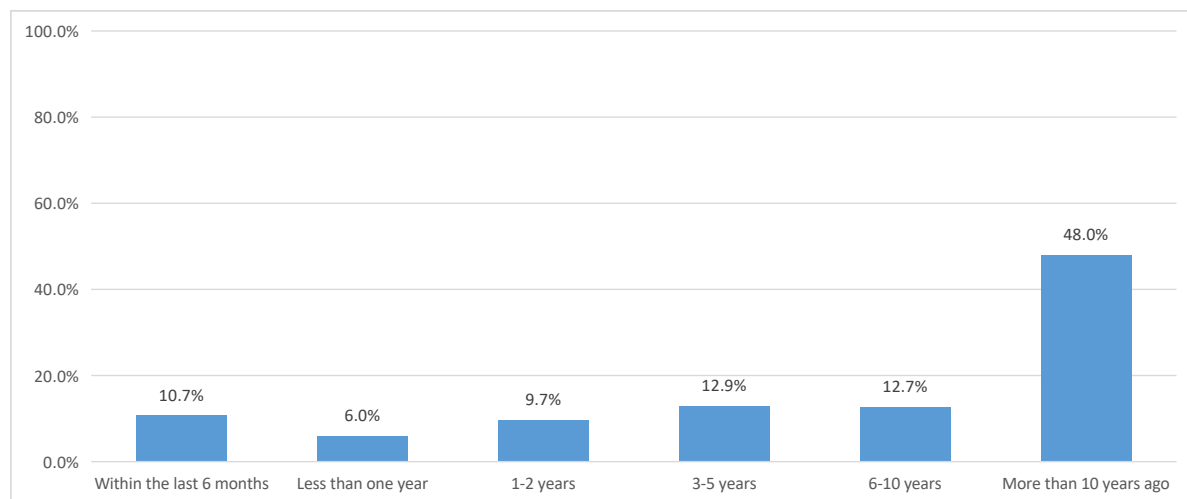
The breakdown analysis revealed no significant differences between genders. When compared by ethnicity, no differences were found between NZ European and Māori; both groups displayed a similar pattern to the overall sample. However, of those who were either non-NZ European or non-Māori[14], almost half (42.3%) had first become aware of Fire and Emergency volunteering within the last two years (19% had been aware for less than 6 months).

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[14] Non-NZ European and non-Māori were grouped together due to the low numbers of people in each ethnic group.

Time taken to consider joining

When participants were asked how long they spent considering joining Fire and Emergency, about 66.7% took two years or less, and 10.4% took more than 10 years (see Figure 4). The breakdown analysis revealed no significant differences for gender or ethnicity.

Figure 4: Time taken in considering joining Fire and Emergency
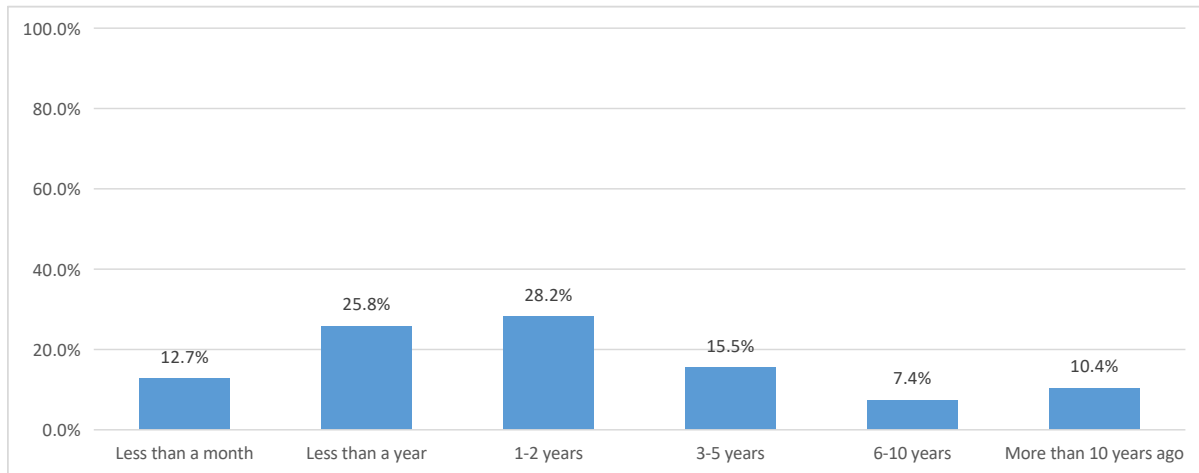
Channel of exposure

In the six months before participants applied to be a volunteer, 72.7% had seen a Fire and Emergency volunteer in action, 51.6% had been approached by a Fire and Emergency volunteer about becoming a volunteer, and 50% had seen or heard stories related to Fire and Emergency (see Figure 5).

No differences were found between gender or between NZ European and Māori across all the channels. However, for those who were either non-NZ European or non-Māori, only 59.5% had seen Fire and Emergency in action (compared to 72.7% of the overall sample).

Figure 5: Channel of exposure in the six months before applying to be a volunteer
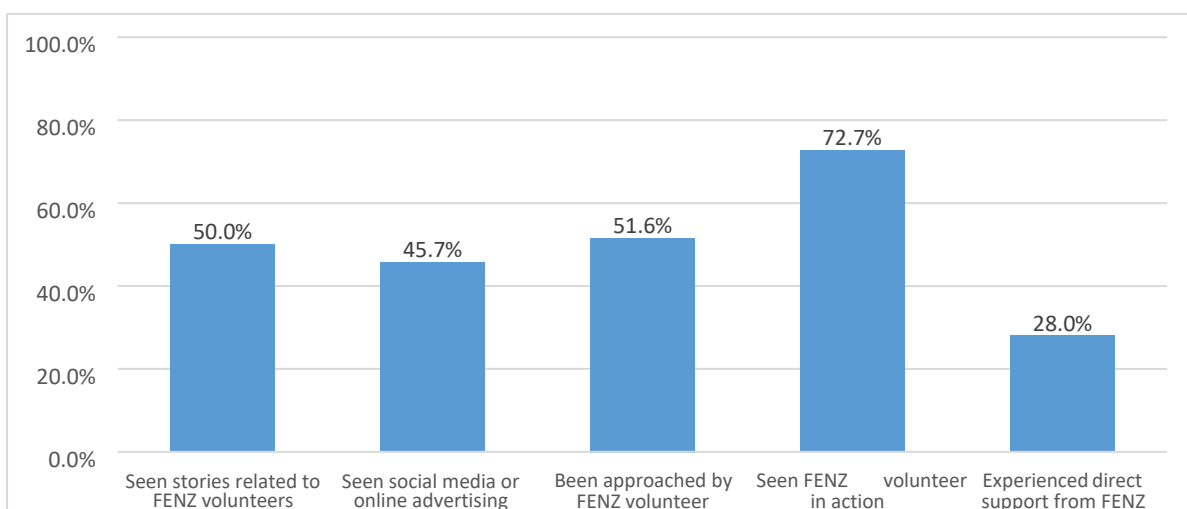
Reasons for volunteering

The top three reasons participants gave as either very or extremely important in their decision to join Fire and Emergency were:

- To support or contribute to the community (94.7% male and 96.3% female)
- To help protect people, land, and the local environment (93.0% male and 93.0% female)
- To develop new skills, training or receive on-going learning opportunities (88.1% male and 88.3% female)

The rankings for these and other statements are shown in Figure 6.

When comparing between the sex, greater percentages of males than females gave the following reasons as being very important in their decision to join:

- Making new friends and enjoying being part of the team (68.1% male vs 58.4% female)
- The excitement of being part of the action (60.6% male vs 47.9% female)
- Riding the fire truck, using the specialist equipment etc. (46.7% male vs 34.3% female)

Figure 6: Reasons for volunteering
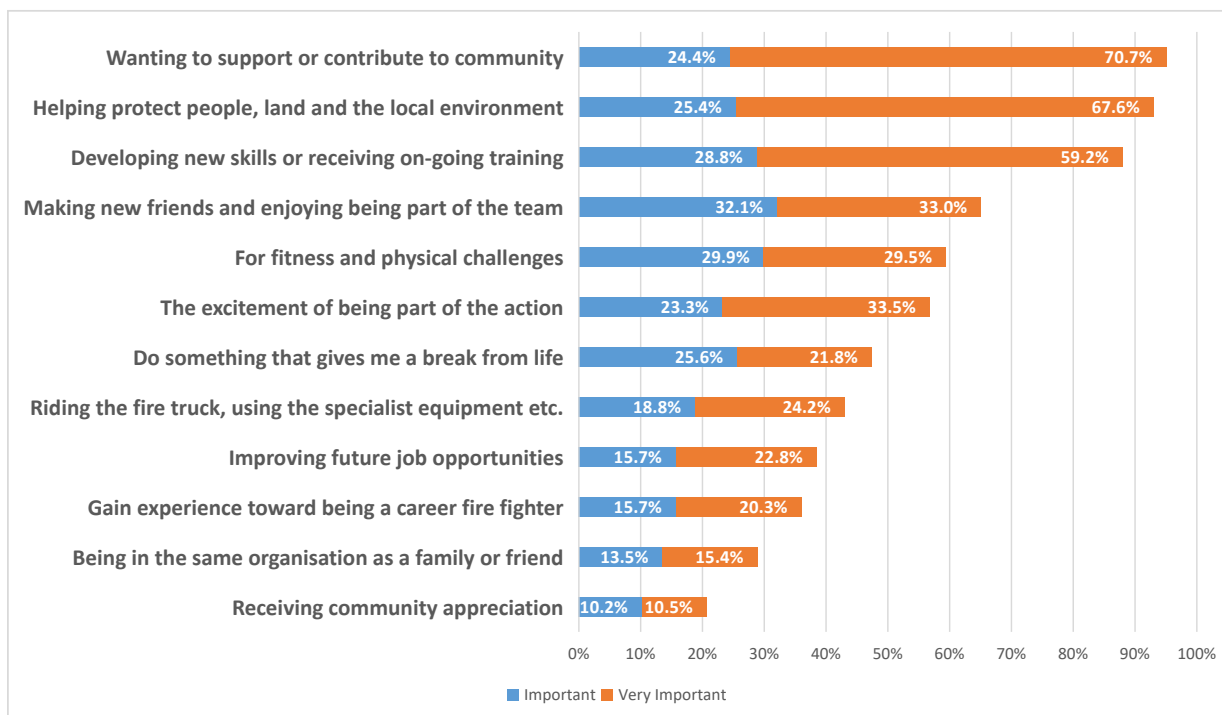
Recruitment experience

The majority of participants reported a positive recruitment experience (see Figure 7):
- 95.3% felt welcomed and encouraged by the members of the brigade
- 94.4% felt welcomed by the recruiter, the leader of the brigade
- 93.4% were supported by the brigade throughout the recruitment process

- 92.1% felt the overall recruitment experience was positive
- 85.9% were given sufficient information about becoming a volunteer and what is expected of them
- 78.8% were given good information about what becoming a volunteer might mean for their family/whānau and employer/business

The breakdown analysis revealed no significant differences for gender or ethnic group.

Figure 7: Recruitment experience

Expectation

The majority of participants (75.3%) wanted to be a firefighter (329 urban and 222 rural). Among those, 85.1% expected the time between completing the recruitment process to operating as a volunteer firefighter to be less than 12 months (47.6% expected the time to be less than 6 months).
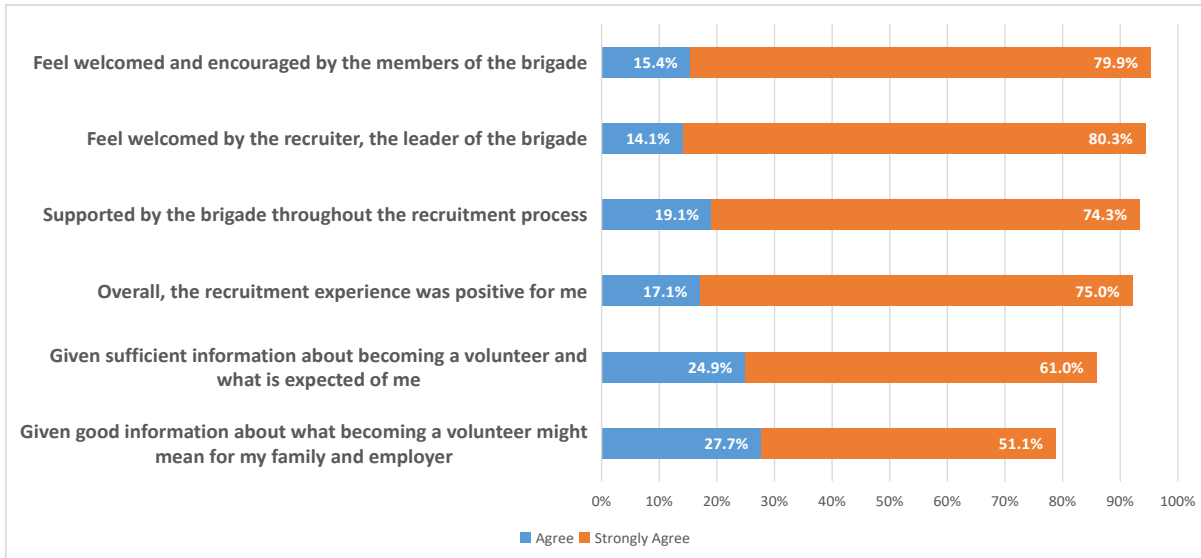
Figure 8: Expected length of time to become an operational firefighter after completing recruitment process
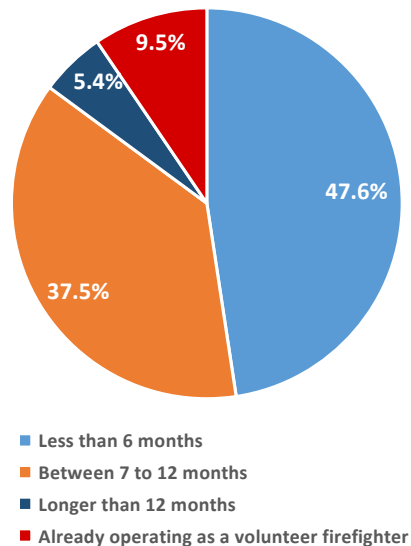
Eighty-three participants (11.3%) were interested in joining as volunteer Operational Support and twenty-seven participants (3.7%) wanted to undertake Brigade Support. Greater percentages of females than males were interested in these two roles (20.6% vs 9.2%, and 8.8% vs 1.9%, respectively).

As shown in Figure 9, about half the participants (49.9%) expected a call-out more than once per week.

Figure 9: Expected frequency of call-outs

Legend:
- More than once a week
- 2-4 times a month
- 7-12 times a year
- 1-6 times a year
- Less than once a year

Values: 49.9%, 34.7%, 9.6%, 3.8%, 2.0%
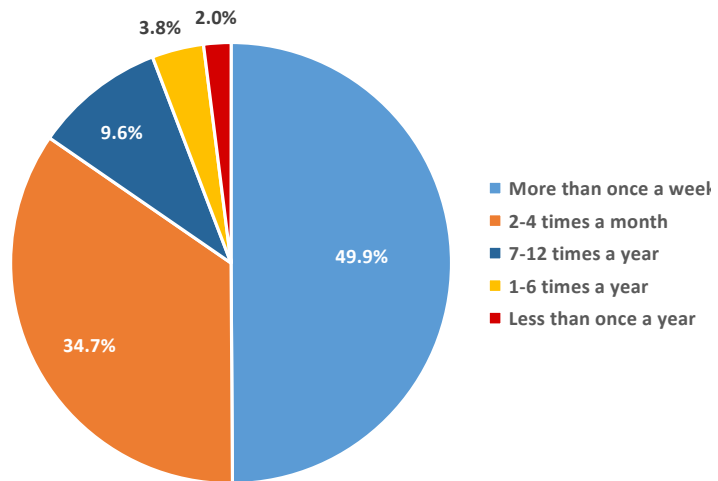
Regarding the total volunteer time commitment, 46.1% expected this to be around 2-4 hours per week. New Zealand European participants were more likely than other ethnic groups to expect the total time commitment to be around 2-4 hours per week, and less likely than other groups to expect it would be more than 4 hours per week (See Figure 10).

Figure 10: Expected total volunteer time commitment by ethnic group

	NZ European	Māori	Other
Less than 2 hours per week	8.3%	12.5%	6.3%
2-4 hours per week	49.1%	34.6%	44.1%
More than 4 hours per week	42.6%	52.9%	49.5%
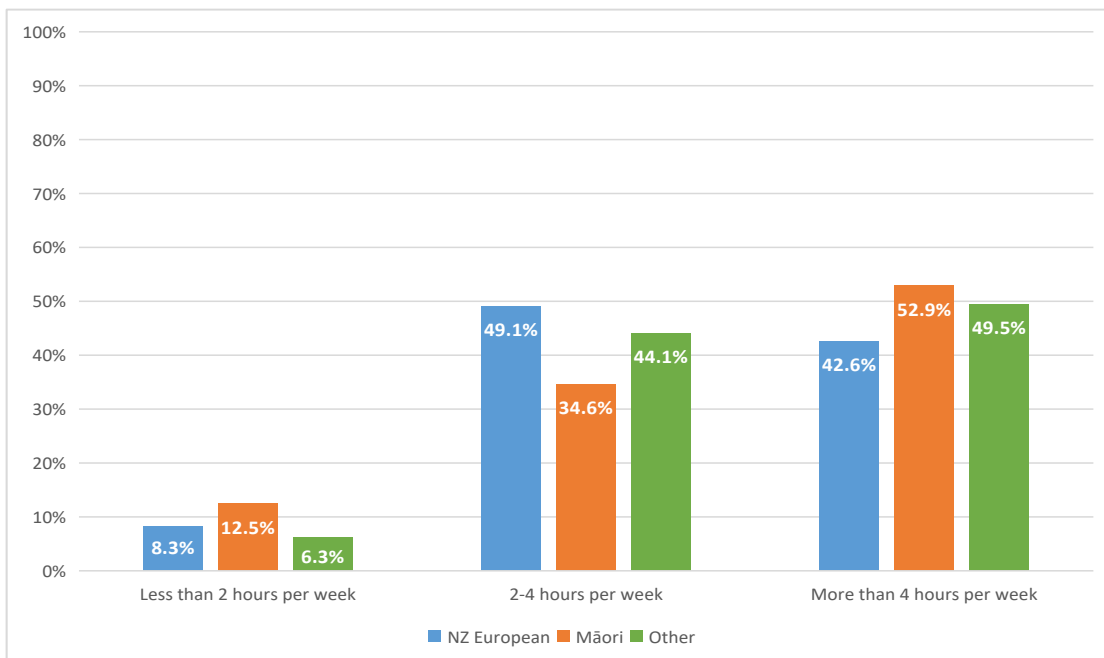
6-month and 18-month follow-up surveys

Experience and expectation

The hours in an average week spent in incident responses dropped significantly between 6-months and 18-months - this may be attributable to COVID-19 alert levels.

Table 2: Time spent

	6-month	18-month
How many hours in an average week did you spend in Fire and Emergency volunteer **training**? (average hours, min-max)	2.9 hours	2.5 hours
How many hours in an average week did you spend in **incident responses**? (average hours, min-max)	2.1 hours	0.7 hours

At 6-months, participants reported the level of time, stress, and physical challenges involved were similar to what they expected. Three aspects exceeded their expectation, these were (see Figure 11):

- Level of satisfaction in volunteer role (76.3%)
- Level of contributing back to the community (71.7%)
- Level of excitement about being part of the action (72.2%)

Figure 11: Experience meeting expectation at 6-month follow-up
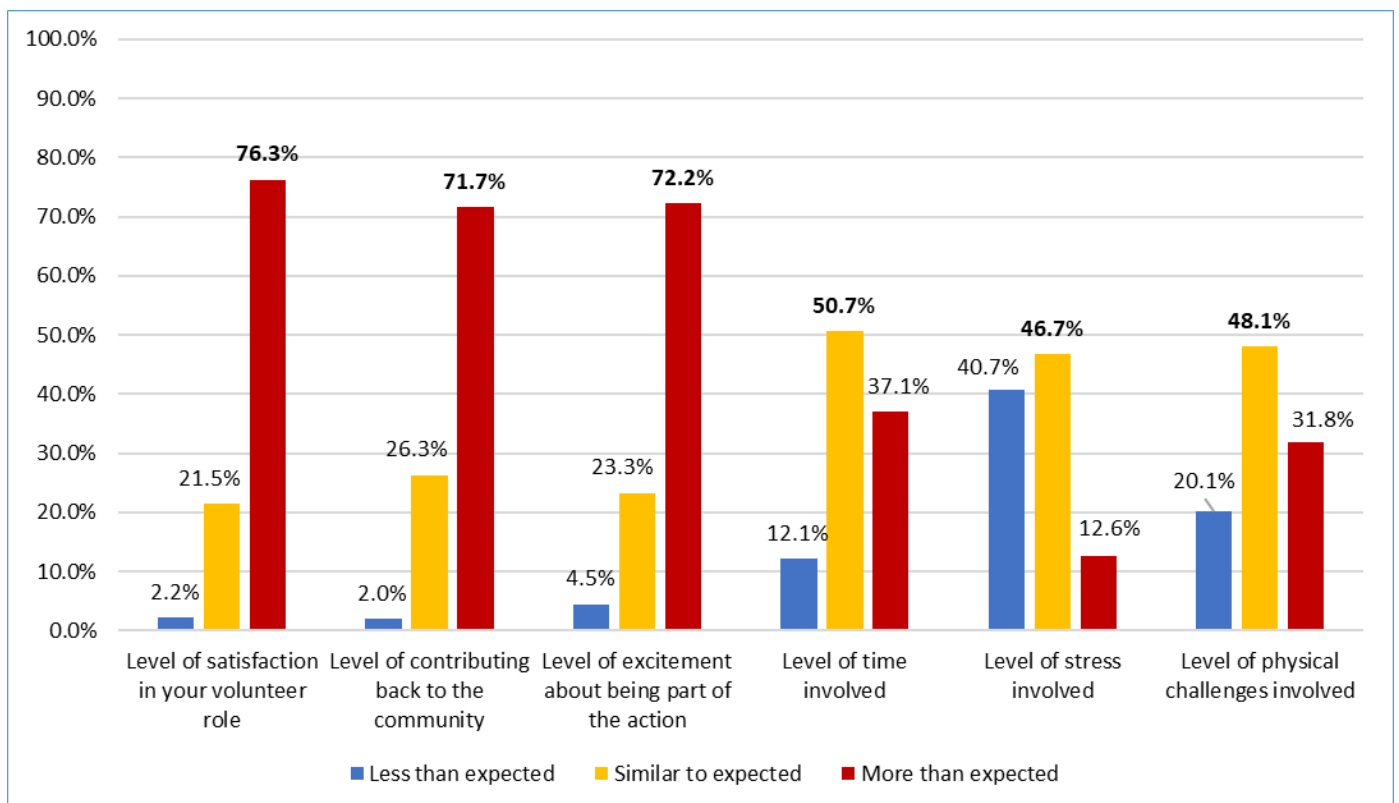
At 18-months, the level of time, stress, physical, and psychological challenges involved were again similar to what participants expected. Over 60% of the participants said the following four aspects exceeded their expectations (see Figure 12):

- Level of satisfaction in volunteer role (70.2%)
- Level of contributing back to the community (71.8%)
- Level of excitement about being part of the action (69.3%)
- Level of training received (61.5%)

Figure 12: Experience meeting expectation at 18-month follow-up
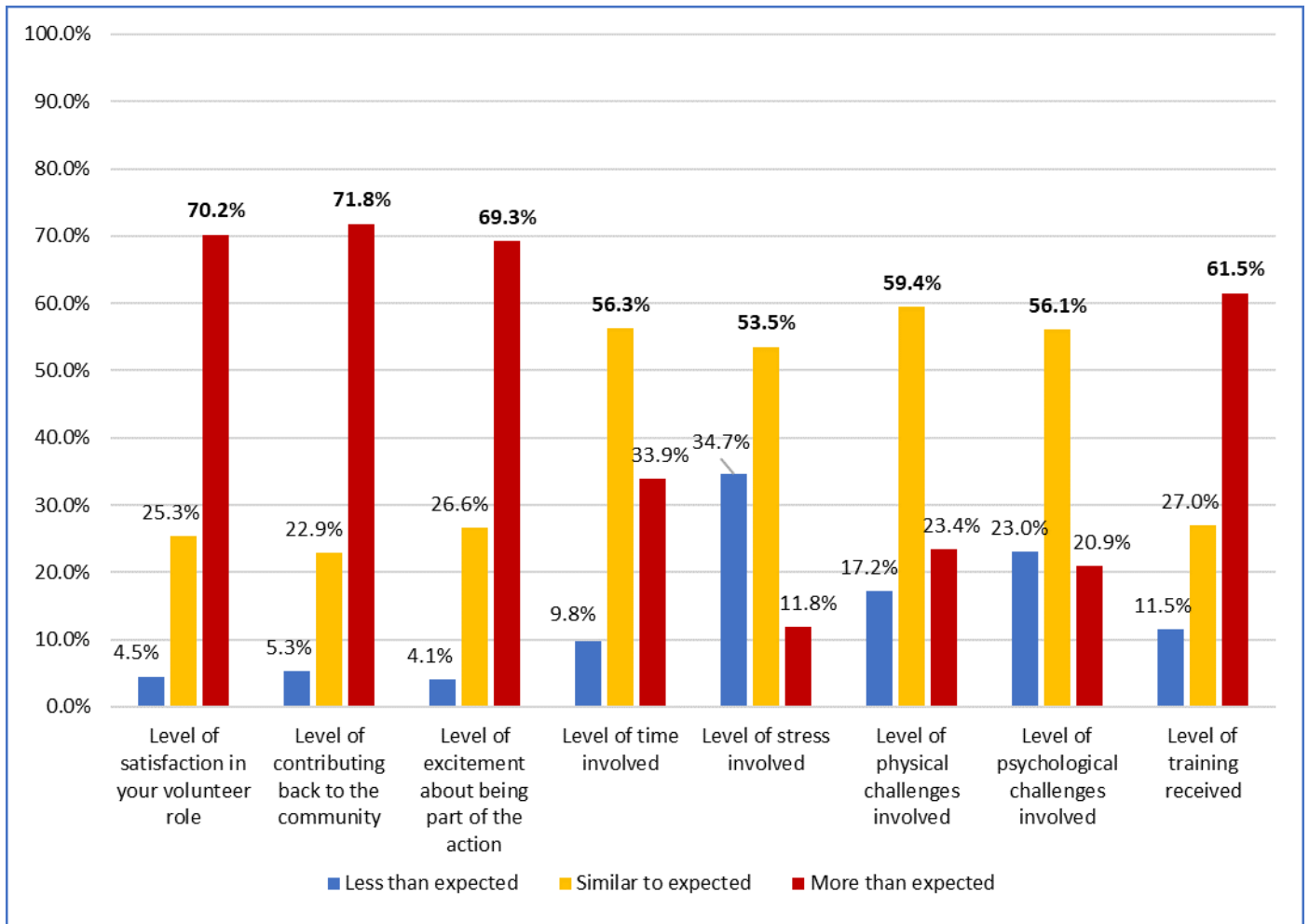
At 18-months, participants were asked to think back on the information they received at enrolment. Most participants felt the information they received gave them a good understanding of the impact on family/whānau life (78.9%), impact on work life (77.8%), frequency of call-outs (73.1%) and the activities undertaken (86.5%). However, only 63.5% felt the information they received gave them a good understanding of the training time required (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Information received gave a good understanding
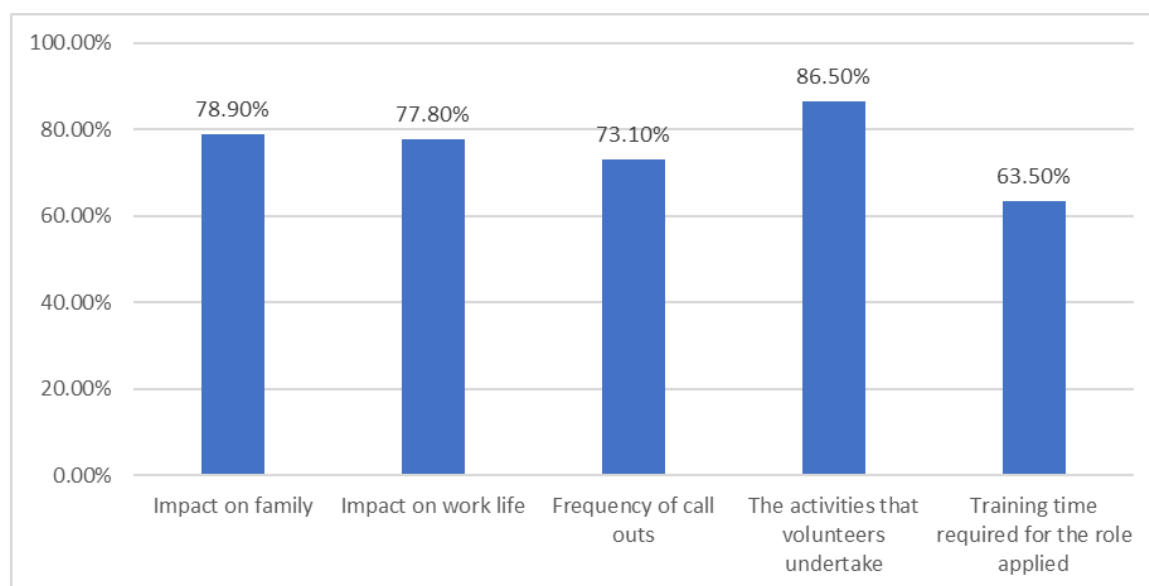
At 18-months, participants were also asked about their experience during COVID-19. The majority felt they had been appropriately informed about the impact of COVID-19 by their brigade leaders (96.3%), and by Fire and Emergency (92.5%).

At 18-months, 89.5% said the ICT equipment at their station was sufficient for them to access the Fire and Emergency systems they are using. However, 38.1% indicated there were barriers including: slowness in internet/WIFI (i.e., connectivity issues), insufficient training (system hard to navigate), no time (too busy), cannot remember password (or don't know how to renew password), not enough computers, and system incompatible with phone.

The frequency with which participants used the different systems with their Fire and Emergency username and password is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Frequency of participants' use of Fire and Emergency systems[15]

	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least once a year	Never	NA (no access)
The Portal	28.4%	30.0%	21.0%	13.2%	7.4%
SMS/OSM	32.1%	21.4%	12.8%	27.2%	6.6%
SMART Tools	15.2%	18.1%	11.9%	46.5%	8.2%
Learning Station	13.2%	31.3%	26.3%	23.5%	5.8%
MindTools	2.1%	11.5%	11.5%	65.4%	9.5%
Outlook Webmail	31.3%	15.6%	12.8%	33.7%	6.6%
Microsoft Teams	4.1%	6.2%	10.7%	70.8%	8.2%
Other Office365 app	4.9%	7.0%	5.8%	73.3%	9.1%

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[15] This was volunteers' self-report. It has not been cross-referenced with Volunteer Resilience/ICT data about volunteer usage.

Impact on family/whānau life and work life

Over 90% of the participants felt being a Fire and Emergency volunteer made their family/whānau proud of what they are doing for the community. About a quarter felt being a Fire and Emergency volunteer made their family/whānau members anxious for their safety. Less than 15% reported negative impacts on family/whānau life (see Table 4).

Table 4: Impact on family life

Being a Fire and Emergency volunteer has…	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 6-months	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 18-months
made my family proud of what I am doing for our community	91.2%	92.1%
made my family members anxious for my safety	24.4%	26.4%
taken me away from spending time with my family/whānau more than expected	10.3%	12.9%
made me moody, irritable, or depressed at home	2.0%	4.9%
put financial pressure on my family/whānau	2.0%	2.1%

Most participants felt their employers were supportive of their volunteer activities. At 18-months, 67.5% felt their employer is recognised by their brigade and 65.5% were allowed to respond to incidents during work hours.[16] Of the volunteers who were allowed to respond to incidents during work hours, 79.7% reported their employers were recognised by their brigade.

Less than 5% experienced negative impacts on work life due to their volunteer duties. About 50% said they could use the skills and knowledge from their volunteer role at work.

Table 5: Impact on work life

	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 6-months	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 18-months
My employer is supportive of my volunteer activities	77.7%	82.9%
I feel I don't have enough time to fulfil my responsibilities at work due to time I have to spend on my volunteer duty	4.7%	1.8%
Tension and anxiety from my volunteer duties often creep into my work life	2.9%	1.8%
Due to my volunteer duties, I am often too tired to do what I am supposed to do at work	2.3%	2.3%
I can use the skills and knowledge from my volunteer role at work		59.8%

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[16] 18-months follow-up was conducted after COVID-19 pandemic (between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021). Therefore, this may have affected employers' ability to allow volunteers to respond to incidents during work hours.

		65.5%
My employer allows me to respond to incidents during work hours		65.5%
I am aware of the employer recognition scheme		75.6%
My employer is recognised by my brigade		67.5%

Satisfaction with training and support

The majority of participants were satisfied with the training and support they received both within the brigade and from the Fire and Emergency (see Table 6). The only statement with less than 70% agreement is: "I am given enough support from my **regional trainers** in relation to the learning materials provided." (61.9%)

Table 6: Satisfaction with training and support

	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 6-months	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 18-months
I have been provided with the **training** I need to carry out my volunteer assignments at this time	77.7%	76.2%
The **brigade training** sessions are well delivered	83.1%	77.7%
On the whole, I am satisfied with the **training** I have received at Fire and Emergency	82.0%	
On the whole, I am satisfied with the **brigade training** I have received		78.3%
I know where to get **brigade training support** when I need it		87.0%
I am given enough support from my **Station Training Coordinator or Brigade Trainer/s** in relation to the learning materials provided		82.2%
The **structured training course** sessions are well delivered		89.2%
On the whole, the **structured training courses** I have received allow me to do my role		90.9%
I know where to get **structured training course support** when I need it		77.2%
I am given enough support from my **regional trainers** in relation to the learning materials provided		61.9%
I can contribute new learnings back into the brigade		74.6%
I am encouraged to talk about my training concerns in my brigade		76.6%
On the whole I am satisfied with the development opportunities I have received at Fire and Emergency		77.1%
I know where to get **support** when I need it	88.8%	
I am encouraged to talk about my concerns in my brigade	84.4%	
On the whole, I am satisfied with the **support** I received at Fire and Emergency	87.8%	80.3%

Brigade climate

At both 6-months and 18-months, the majority of participants agreed with the following statements:
- My brigade recognises volunteers' contributions (93.6% and 90.5%)
- I feel respected by my brigade (90.3% and 90.1%)
- The volunteers at my station work well as a team (88.6% and 86.0%)
- My leader is effective in managing and supporting volunteers (86.1% and 84.3%)
- My brigade keeps me well informed about what's going on (82.7% and 84.7%)
- My family/whānau is valued and supported by my brigade (85.3%)

Around 70% felt they had been given regular and constructive feedback on their effectiveness and performance as a volunteer (71.8% and 69.0%).

At 18-months, 12.3% reported seeing discrimination at the station and 6.2% said they had experienced discrimination at the station.

Less than 50% felt their station has constructive relationships between paid and volunteer staff.

Table 7: Brigade climate

	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 6-months	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 18-months
The volunteers at my station work well as a team	88.6%	86.0%
I feel respected by my brigade	90.3%	90.1%
My brigade recognises volunteers' contributions	93.6%	90.5%
I am given regular and constructive feedback on my effectiveness and performance as a volunteer	71.8%	69.0%
My brigade keeps me well informed about what's going on	82.7%	84.7%
My leader is effective in managing and supporting volunteers	86.1%	84.3%
My family/whānau is valued and supported by my brigade		85.3%
I have seen discrimination at the station		12.3%
I have experienced discrimination at the station		6.2%
My station has good relationships with our neighbouring stations		74.5%
My station has constructive relationships between paid and volunteer staff		43.2%

Fire and Emergency Volunteerism Strategy and volunteer support initiatives

At 6-months, only 16.3% of participants were aware of the Volunteerism Strategy. At 18-months, 48.5% were aware of the Volunteer Principles that are a part of the Volunteerism Strategy.

At 18-months, the percentages of participants who agreed with the statements listed in Table 8 dropped slightly. However, the percentage for the statement "Fire and Emergency involves and includes volunteer perspectives in decision-making" dropped significantly to 54.4%.

Table 8: Fire and Emergency volunteerism principles

	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 6-months	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 18-months
Fire and Emergency as a whole recognises, appreciates and values the role of its volunteers	98.4%	81.7%
Fire and Emergency involves and includes volunteer perspectives in decision-making	85.1%	54.4%
Fire and Emergency respects their volunteers	96.2%	85.0%
Families/whānau of Fire and Emergency volunteers are adequately recognised and valued	89.5%	73.5%
Fire and Emergency recognises and shows appreciation to volunteers' employers	80.2%	71.6%

Table 9 shows the percentage of those who were aware of the various Fire and Emergency volunteer support initiatives at 6-months and 18-months. Among those initiatives, only the annual volunteer reimbursement was taken by more volunteers.

Table 9: Fire and Emergency volunteer support initiatives

	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 6-months	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 18-months
Aware of … Annual volunteer reimbursement	91.8%	98.8%
Family/whānau support allowance	44.9%	66.1%
Discounted health insurance	44.1%	55.4%
Volunteer discount/Frequent values	70.3%	62.4%
Fire and Emergency discounts	48.2%	
Taken advantage of …		
Annual volunteer reimbursement	45.0%	78.5%
Family/whānau support allowance	7.8%	21.1%
Discounted health insurance	2.1%	1.2%
Volunteer discount/Frequent Values	13.1%	12.8%

Fire and Emergency discounts	5.9%	

Table 10 shows the percentage of participants who were aware of the services provided by the United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA) and Forest and Rural Fire Association NZ (FRFANZ) at 6-months and 18-months. The UFBA and FRFANZ merged in 2019.

Table 10: UFBA and FRFANZ free services

	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 6-months	% who Agree or Strongly agree at 18-months
Awareness of UFBA and FRFANZ free services	54.4%	74.1%
Annual conference	30.4%	52.3%
Challenges and events	44.6%	69.6%
Training	46.1%	46.9%
Advocacy and support	46.1%	63.8%
Service honours	44.3%	69.9%

Personal Wellbeing

Participants were asked to rate how satisfied they are with different aspects of their life, on a scale from zero to 10 (where zero means completely dissatisfied, and 10 means completely satisfied). The average scores ranged between 7.84 - 8.63 (see Table 11). These can be converted to the 0-100 point system format (International Wellbeing Group, 2013) as 78.4 - 86.3 points.

Table 11: Level of satisfaction

	Mean Score (Baseline)	Mean Score (6-month)	Mean Score (18-month)
Life as a whole	8.15	8.22	8.07
Health	7.96	8.05	7.84
Personal relationships	8.59	8.49	8.53
Feeling part of your community	7.97	8.35	8.14
Mental well-being (psychological stress)	8.63	8.47	8.24
Volunteer experience with Fire and Emergency		8.54	8.21

Intention to stay

Over 80% of participants intended to volunteer for Fire and Emergency for more than 5 years. If they moved to another area, over 90% would apply for a transfer to the local brigade (see Table 12).

Table 12: Intended length of time to be a volunteer for Fire and Emergency

	Baseline	6-months	18-months
Less than 1 year	0.6%	2.1%	4.0%
1-2 years	1.9%	2.9%	1.3%
3-4 years	3.8%	4.7%	4.0%
4-5 years	6.1%	7.3%	1.8%
More than 5 years	87.5%	83.0%	88.9%
If you moved to another area would you apply for a transfer to the local brigade? (% of Likely and Very likely)		94.3%	91.6%

Regression Analyses

Factors predicting Personal Wellbeing

Mixed Effects Logistic Regression was used to find variables that predict high scores (9 or 10 on the 10-point scale) for the six Personal Wellbeing measures. A random intercept was used to account for the longitudinal nature of the data. A stepwise backwards selection method was used to find the variables that best predicted high Personal Wellbeing scores while controlling for age, sex, and employment. Results were deemed significant at the <0.05 level.

Regression analyses (see Table 13) revealed:

- Only one significant predictor for "Life as a whole" and "Personal relationship" - this was: Higher overall score on Fire and Emergency Volunteerism Principles statements (i.e., greater perception that Fire and Emergency is adhering to the Volunteerism Principles[17]).

- Two significant predictors for "Health" - these were:
  Older at the time of recruitment and higher overall score on the FENZ Volunteerism Strategy statements.

- Three significant predictors for "Feeling part of your community" - these were:
  Higher overall score on Fire and Emergency Volunteerism Principles statements, greater satisfaction with support received, and experiences exceeded expectation (e.g., level of satisfaction in volunteer role, level of contributing back to community, level of excitement about been part of the action).

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[17] See Table 8 for the "Fire and Emergency Volunteerism Principles" statements

- Two significant predictors for "Mental wellbeing" - these were:
  Greater satisfaction with training received and experienced less negative impacts on work life.

- Five significant predictors for "Volunteer experience with Fire and Emergency" - these were:
  Younger at the time of enrolment, at 6-months rather than 18-months time, experiences exceeded expectation, greater satisfaction with training, and had less negative impact on work life.

Table 13: Factors predicting personal wellbeing (showing estimates)

	Life as a whole	Health	Personal relationships	Feeling part of the community	Mental wellbeing	Volunteer experience with FENZ
Time (6-months vs 18-months)	0.186	0.153	-0.052	-0.983	0.095	-0.832*
Age	0.014	0.025*	0.013	-0.068	0.001	-0.031*
Sex (Male vs Female)	0.088	-0.390	-0.613	0.184	-0.446	-0.306
In Employment	-0.157	-0.489	0.291	-1.163	0.418	0.822
Experience and Expectation				0.504*		0.105**
Impact on work life					-0.186**	-0.357***
Satisfaction with training					0.183**	0.553***
Fire and Emergency Volunteerism Principles	0.163***	0.766***	0.106*	0.585*		

*$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Factors predicting Intention to Stay

Individual logistic regression models were run to find which variables are significantly related to intention to stay (more than 5 years vs 5 years or less) after adjusting for age, sex, and employment. The following variables were significant at $\alpha < 0.1$:

- Time spent in weekly incident responses (P=0.068)
- Experience meeting expectation (P=0.021)
- Satisfaction with support and training (P=0.002)
- Brigade climate (P=0.057)
- Impact on family/whānau life and work life (P=0.017)
- Personal wellbeing: Feeling part of the community (P=0.013)
- Personal wellbeing: Volunteer experience with Fire and Emergency (P=0.0002)
- FENZ Volunteerism Strategy (P=0.007)

- Length of time knowing that volunteers are part of Fire and Emergency services (P=0.002)
- Length of time considering joining (P=0.07)
- Being approached by a Fire and Emergency volunteer about becoming a volunteer (P=0.067)
- Experience at recruitment stage (P=0.008)

All the above variables were added to a full model and a stepwise backwards selection method was used to find the final model below (Table 14).

The regression analyses indicated greater time spent in weekly incident responses and a higher score for Fire and Emergency Volunteerism Principles statements were significant predictors of volunteers' intention to stay.

Table 14: Factors predicting intention to stay (showing estimates)

	Intention to stay
Age	0.052
Sex (Male vs Female)	1.284
In employment	-2.672
Time spent in weekly incident responses	1.996*
Fire and Emergency Volunteerism Strategy	0.261**

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix Three: Established Volunteer sample

Participants

A total of 45 Established volunteers took part in the interviews, and 48 volunteers took part in the focused group interviews. The demographic for the entire Established volunteer sample is 93 and is shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Participant characteristics (N = 93)

Ethnicity	**50** New Zealander/Kiwi/NZ European, **16** Māori, **9** other European, **9** Pasifika, **7** Asian, **2** unspecified
Gender	**62** males, **29** females, **2** unspecified
Brigade type	**39** Urban, **28** Rural, **10** Both[18], **14** Composite, **2** unspecified

Key results domains

The results of the interviews are presented in seven domains (Figure 14). Taken together these domains present an overview of the experiences of Established volunteers who are still in their early years as volunteers and identify the factors contributing to their successful engagement.

Figure 14: Key results domains

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[18] Volunteered at two brigades, one urban and one rural.

Enjoyment

Enjoyment in the role was a key feature of volunteers' engagement with Fire and Emergency. A number of aspects relating to enjoyment were identified:

Key sources of enjoyment

Enjoyment

- Serving the community and helping others
- Being part of the action – the excitement of the call-out
- Comradery – meeting new people and developing teams
- Doing something different
- Learning and developing new skills

Volunteers identified serving the community as the key underpinning factor contributing to their enjoyment of volunteering. The duties they undertook as volunteers provided personal benefits in the sense of feeling good and having pride about the contributions they were able to make to their communities.

I think first of all it's giving back to the community … I look at our brigade and they're all volunteers, they all have their own businesses, daily lives, family etcetera, but they drop tools all hours of the day and night to go ahead and attend to fires and incidents, and I just take my hat off to them … they're an amazing group of people.

Being part of the action and attending call-outs was significant for volunteers – they described being on the truck and attending call-outs as exciting and exhilarating. However, alongside this was the deeper benefit of firefighting as a personally rewarding volunteer activity.

Building connections with other people was important. Experiencing comradery, and meeting and connecting with others was the result of volunteers developing teams and new friendships. These friendships and new relationships were often talked about as being additional to what they would otherwise experience in their work and personal lives.

Volunteering at Fire and Emergency provided opportunities to do something different in their lives. Volunteering was a way to switch-off from their work pressures and achieve a degree of 'stress release'.

Being with Fire and Emergency provided opportunities to learn new skills. This indicates volunteers experienced benefits at both a personal and a community-level.

In addition, **Māori volunteers** and **Brigade Support** volunteers commented on the family/whānau atmosphere in the brigade.

What I've enjoyed most is definitely being there for the community, but more so, my team, my brigade, we really are a close knit whānau, we actually call each other whānau, and I'm

sure each brigade does as well, but yeah, definitely the whānau teamwork and the community.

Challenges

Volunteers reported a variety of challenges mostly related to brigade activities. Comments were made about how the challenges of their role impacted on their personal and work lives.

Key challenges

Challenges

- Quality of brigade leadership is varied but improving – lack of preparation for leaders and some unsuitable people in the job; relationships not always built; decision-making by some leaders was based on friendship or family/whānau relationships (i.e., culture of cliquishness)
- Resistance to change in teams and leaders – tensions in Composite Brigades

- Bureaucracy of a big organisation - slow to get things done; uncertainty around management changes; political nature of and restrictions placed on leadership roles
- Incidence of sexism, racism, and bullying
- Communication (overload or insufficient); lack of communication (decisions not discussed or relayed)
- Lack of courses and long waiting list (which in turn affects progression)
- Frustration with low call-out rates and insufficient experience with fires
- Physical demands – support roles provide alternative ways to contribute
- Emotional and psychological demands (particularly when call-outs involve children, young people or fatalities)
- Time pressures – juggling/managing work and family/whānau roles with volunteering

Many challenges identified were related to 'brigade culture'. These were often linked to brigade leadership. While a strong view was expressed about how things were generally improving over time, an area of concern was variability in leadership quality (or the wrong people in brigade leadership positions). The impact or result of this was often described as a reluctance to embrace and promote change. One area of concern was undue family/whānau dominance of leadership positions.

Sometimes within a volunteer brigade structure you can have a clique or family dynasty in senior positions. When issues arise, it can often be the family dynasty's way or the highway.

In relation to culture and leadership, a toxic culture was linked to sexism, racism, and bullying.

I guess as well sort of they need to look at, what creates a good brigade, and the culture within it, I mean it's still a horrendously sexist organisation with, and I dare to say it, horrendously inappropriate comments floating around, that's being addressed, definitely within our team, but it needs to be swifter, and yeah I find that disappointing, there's a lot of poorly hidden racism that still exists, and I haven't experienced any bullying, but people I've spoken to they feel bullied … I know there's … an overall organisational directive to

change how the brigades operate, but you can't force somebody not to be a racist, and you can't force somebody not to be sexist, you can tell them, you can make it very clear that they need to not, or not express those views while they're wearing the organisation's uniform.

Poor leadership was evidenced by inappropriate communication techniques.

In our brigade shouting at people is seen to be a legitimate method of communication, when instructions could be given much more clearly if people were less excited.

Other communication concerns were identified; there was either too much or insufficient information provided. Some stations lack adequate internet connectivity, making it difficult to access and utilise systems.

I mean we get a hell of a lot of emails … I use my own data in the station because it is too difficult to get onto their wi-fi … so I can't imagine how difficult it is out in the regions with connectivity.

Training-related challenges included a dislike of paper-based training, and a slower than ideal training process. Another challenge was insufficient or inadequate practical experience.

… getting enough practical experience in relation to fires, that's probably the biggest challenge. … you can practice all you like, but until you go to fires on a regular basis, which we don't have them regularly you know … we might only get to a couple of calls a year.

Some found the physical demands of firefighting a challenge.

For me, I think sometimes the more strength-based tasks can be a challenge. I am one of the smaller members of the brigade, so kind of hauling hoses and lifting cutting tools in particular can be quite difficult sometimes.

Volunteers commented on the mental and emotional challenges they faced however these were understood as a reality of their role. There was no suggestion they were incapable of dealing with these challenges.

People think fighting fires is glamorous, but most of our time is spent mopping them up. But there's also the emotional issues when you deal with motor vehicle accidents and sometimes when you're on a medical call and you don't manage to save the patient and that can have a few problems. Young people, especially when they're hurting - that's kind of emotionally a bit difficult.

Volunteers also reported time pressures. Although they struggled to balance their volunteering with family/whānau and work commitments the general view was this is what they had signed up for and therefore had to be managed.

Among the seven groups, **Operational Support** and **Composite Brigade**s volunteers reported the greatest challenges. These were mostly related to feelings of being treated as inferior to other volunteers.

> *There's a bit of a sort of an unspoken hierarchy where operational support, which is what I'm doing, is often at the bottom of the pile … you're not seen as a real firefighter cos I don't wear BA and I don't put water on the fire myself, I do support tasks, I direct traffic, close roads and do all manner of other things around the fire ground or the incident scene, so I have detected there is that sort of unwritten perception there.*

The question: "Have you seen or experienced any discrimination at the station?" was added to the focused group interview. Two types of discrimination were identified:

(1) *Female volunteers* reported discrimination around ability and/or progression opportunities:

> *As a female sometimes I feel a bit overlooked, it's I think a typical male chauvinist culture … I don't know if it's actually discrimination or if it's valid, well probably the best example is, obviously, cos we're ranked and you see the males progress ahead of females, and I'm not saying that they shouldn't, they might be better qualified but not … when it happens time and time again.*

(2) *Composite Brigade volunteers* described improving but prevailing discrimination from paid staff:

> *There's definitely discrimination … they're slowly coming around and helping with training which is amazing, so they are getting better …*

Training

Volunteers were asked for their views and experiences of brigade-related training and Fire and Emergency structured training courses.

Training

Most useful aspects of **brigade-related training**
- Practical aspects - use of equipment (e.g., pumps, hoses, First aid)
- Training with other more experienced members
- Team building exercise
- Training in realistic environments/scenarios

Recommendations for brigade-related training

- Train the brigade trainers, keep them up to date with current standard practices
- Timetables for training (or a more detailed training programme), so people know what's coming up and can be prepared
- A recipe book for scenarios, more hands-on content, practical and realistic training
- Sufficient/adequate equipment
- More regional trainers visiting the brigade

Recommendations for Fire and Emergency structured training courses included:

- More courses available (have both weekdays and weekend course options)
- More cross-over training between urban and rural
- Running courses at times more suitable for farmers
- More training facilities (e.g., one in mid-South Island, renovate Wellington facility)
- Less health and safety concerns, need to be trained in real-life scenarios, cover different varieties of fire situations, teach fire suppression
- Recognition of Fire and Emergency training (e.g., by NZQA)
- More consistency among trainers (all trainers need to be singing off the same page)
- Equipment used on courses needs to be the same as equipment used in the brigade
- More training courses for Operational Support

Volunteers' views on **brigade training** were mixed and in general can be categorised into three areas:

1. <u>Brigade trainer:</u> Brigades with an experienced trainer kept the training sessions interesting and stimulating. However, there were brigades where the trainers were either not well organised, had not been trained as a trainer or were not up to date with new methods/procedures.

   … brigade training probably needs to be a lot more organised and you need the STCs (Station Training Coordinators) I think they are called – the Training Coordinators in the brigades – they need to be updated on the latest training methods.

   Other recommendations include:
   - Have input from an expert
   - Train with other brigades
   - More support for training-related admin

2. <u>Training sessions and content:</u> Brigade training sessions were well-organised, had good structure and variety, and content was practical, relevant and up to date. There were brigades that lacked structure in their training, or it was felt there was too much listening and not enough practical elements, content was inconsistent or not current, and the equipment was inadequate.

   Suggestions to improve the brigade training included making the training more organised (such as training timetables or a more structured training programme) and making the content more practical and realistic.

   Quite often we don't have the timetable of the training we're doing, so when trainers are coming out from town, it just seems to be a bit disjointed, so it would be quite handy to have a timetable with a pretty good indication of when stuff's going to be … they should almost have a calendar … with what their annual plan is …

   Other recommendations were:
   - A training plan that identifies strengths and weaknesses of the individual and is incorporated into a more structured training schedule

- Catch up and train with neighbouring brigades two to three times a year, or have inter-brigade competitions
- Involve career staff in training so they can share their knowledge and experience
- Design training around percentage of call-out type
- Provide better equipment and replace any gear that is ill-fitting or worn out
- Improve access to web-related training
- Provide practical, hands-on, and realistic training

3. <u>Participation of other members:</u> There was frustration with the lack of participation and engagement of fellow brigade members.

… we get really sporadic numbers turn up at our training I guess, it's not through lack of trying from the CFO [Chief Fire Officer] or the trainers, and the level of engagement with people using cellphones, and even when you confront them, or not turning up fit for wearing BA [Breathing Apparatus], so they'll turn up with beards or whatever like that and you're just like really, it's those sort of issues that hold our training back …

Training with paid staff, with other brigades or with other agencies was seen as beneficial. Volunteers also saw value in having more regional trainers visiting the brigade more often.

I think particularly more of this training would be really beneficial. So, what I mean by that is like, police in particular because we attend a lot of road accidents. So, it is about having inter-agency training.

Volunteers expressed positive views of **Fire and Emergency structured** training courses. The courses were well-organised and well-structured; the trainers and presenters were very experienced and engaging; the content was practical, interactive, and relevant; and the skills learned were applicable to everyday (personal) life as well as to volunteering. Positive comments were made on the excellent training facilities and the ability to meet other people in the same role.

Doing both my two ranked courses – one at NTC (National Training Centre) and one in Auckland Training Centre – they were awesome experiences and getting to meet new people; like-minded people and getting pretty much full immersion in those courses has been really awesome.

It was felt the courses were too few, too far away or the waiting time was too long. Rural volunteers felt courses should be planned to avoid their busiest time (e.g., lambing season), and there should be more cross-over with other urban brigades.

... if you're trying to train a rural brigade, generally a lot of those people are going to be a farmer, or farming based so you've really got to run courses at a time that's more suitable for them … but other than that, their courses and the way they run them are pretty good.

A recurring suggestion across all the focused groups was increased course availability. Senior **rural volunteers** in particular felt this was important because under the new system some of them were required to pass the course in order for their seniority to be recognised.

> *Availability of some of the courses has been an issue, especially when we were at the point where we were trying to get acknowledgement and recognition of our senior members who have a lot of experience but not a lot of NZQA (New Zealand Qualifications Authority) numbers, it was quite difficult getting on those courses especially when we were told we don't have a pre-requisite but the pre-requisite wasn't gonna happen in the twelve months or something, I think we should have had a bit of flexibility in being able to do them the other way around, taking experience into account as we go forward, that's going to be less of a factor obviously, because people are keeping up with the numbers … in the early days we were told that experience would be recognised and actually it wasn't at all, we had to plough through and get those courses and … sometimes you get a course and it's a date that someone can't do cos they've got something else and they've sometimes got to wait six months or twelve months for another course so that can be hard.*

Operational Support volunteers felt their courses should be updated and broadened, and a more structured progression pathway was needed.

> *… there is only one basic operational support training course offered by the National Training Centre … there are many experienced and valuable people, up and down the country that are operational support people who can make a significant contribution either to helping the firefighters in being as effective as they can be ... operational support people are like the forgotten part of the organisation, we've got crappy uniform, it's not durable and a lot of the helmets that we're issued leak out there in the rain … it's really quite ridiculous and it's because the whole organisation is geared towards putting the fire out or cutting people out of the car or doing whatever else they do that needs to be done, and not really fully realising that actually the organisation should be catering for all of its people who do all the various jobs on the fire scene.*

> *… we're very client, public facing and there is within the new sort of Fire and Emergency strategy it's about the care post the incident as well, making sure people are handed to the right people etcetera, but at the moment that's just a lot of talk, and there's no processes or direct connections to other agencies, and from my position in our guidelines of operation, it's got two line items there, evacuation support and victim support, but there is absolutely no training for those two vital areas, so there are gaps and it would be good to look at those gaps and also develop robust relationships with sister agencies, so we've taken it on our heads to get victim support in and teach us about identifying grief and how to manage grief, how to deal with people in stressful situations, and keep ourselves safe, and get their phone number and have … a pile of business cards so we can direct people there, but there is no way of capturing what happens to these people after we've left the scene, so there's a big gap there …*

Three training-related questions were added to the focused group interviews:

(1) Did you feel you could contribute new training learnings back into the brigade?

In general, volunteers felt they could contribute new training learnings back into their brigade or they reported they were required (or expected) to do so. Those who were discouraged from doing so felt disheartened.

I've tried and I've always been talked over, everything I've learned has been corrected by other people … I've been asked to take the training, and it's sort of been taken over by someone who thinks they know more.

(2) Did you feel you were given enough support (by the local and regional trainer) in relation to the learning material provided? What ways do you think or feel this can be improved?

Volunteers felt they were given enough support in relation to the learning materials provided or there was no need for extra support. One frustration expressed by volunteers was being removed from the training list at the last minute.

I've got a bit of a sore spot for the training because a while back … me and another guy we were going to do (a) training, and we changed our work schedule, we changed our family schedule, and at the last minute one of the trainers decided that they didn't want us on there and pulled us off which really upset us.

Recommendations included:
- More communication and more follow-up
- More frequent and regular visits to brigades by regional trainers
- Updating the online portal learning station to an app-based mobile system
- More help/support/interactions from paid staff

(3) Did you feel you were given sufficient training, support, and development opportunities? If not, how could it have been better?

Volunteers felt they had been given sufficient training, support, and development opportunities. Volunteers expressed a desire for more support and transparency in relation to progression pathways, development opportunities, and related decisions.

… in terms of development I am not being given the opportunities, and I think that's based on time and service as opposed to knowledge skills and experience … so professionally I would look at things a little bit differently but accepting that the leadership have a way in which they want to put things out that might be different to how I would do it, but there is also very little to no transparency around those decisions, around who's going to be developed and what the plan is to develop them and time frames, which then affects obviously individual value levels or perceived value levels by members.

Volunteers in **Operational Support** and **Brigade Support** suggested the entire organisation (including trainers and career staff) be trained in the roles and responsibilities undertaken by Operational Support people.

[FENZ] needs to develop training courses … so … those trainers, firstly receive training in the role and responsibilities and tasks that operational support people do … when they're designing and reviewing training courses they need to make sure there is a representative or some engagement with operational support people recognising their particular and different role to that of the firefighters.

Support

Volunteers were asked for their views on the support received from their brigade leaders and from Fire and Emergency as a whole.

Recommendations for brigade leaders

Support

- Train the brigade leaders on people-management skills and leadership (e.g., coaching, mentoring, skills in communication, delegation, mentoring, and leading a whole team rather than sections)
- Leaders to identify each volunteer's strengths and weaknesses to maximise training (i.e., more individualised training and development plans). Leaders support and encourage training, advancement, and promotion
- Listen to brigade members and respect input and ideas from all volunteers
- Eliminate all favouritism, nepotism, tolerance of unacceptable behaviour, and old-school mentality
- Reduce the amount of administration and paperwork required of brigade leaders

Recommendations for Fire and Emergency as a whole:

- Communication – know what's going on, clear and prompt communication
- Provide necessary equipment, gear, and resources
- Emotional support – ensure adequate provision and encouragement of counselling, peer support programmes, and critical incident support
- Feedback/acknowledgement/face-to-face contact from senior management
- A clear process for conflict resolution, and higher management involvement in conflict resolution
- Reimbursement/compensation
- More employer recognition
- Review and strengthen peer support programme (counsellors aren't always suitable and there's only three free sessions)
- Upgrade website to make it more user-friendly and accessible
- External mentoring programme for leadership and more leadership and management training

Volunteers gave high praise for the level of support they received from their brigade leaders.

… the support provided by my brigade leader has been of the top standard. It has been an excellent quality and I guess the best example is because he is in a similar family situation

to me, he acknowledges the balance between the family life as well in terms of just being fully supportive of when I have been unable to attend any training or brigade activity because of family commitments …

Those who felt a lack of support from their brigade leaders mentioned nepotism/family/whānau dynasties, or the old school mentality of the brigade leaders.

Yeah, try and get rid of the nepotism out of the brigade, it's not all family members you know, it's about people not about individuals and making them advance because of their name, that is our biggest drawback in our brigade.

Volunteers suggested brigade leaders be trained in people-management skills (e.g., coaching, mentoring), and the amount of administration and paperwork be reduced.

Maybe we need some more training for our SOs [Station Officers] and maybe not so much focused on the practical side of the job, but more focused on … their people management skills essentially and how they manage people.

Volunteers from **Composite Brigades** reported a lack of support from their brigade leaders.

It would help if I knew who my brigade leader actually was … we go through this person to this person to this person, and then, so my VSO [Volunteer Support Officer], our VSO he's kind of our leader, he's really supporting, really nice … though his higher up person … he's the one who's like, don't touch my toys cos that's mine, like he would have a hernia if you tried moving something that needs to be moved and you're not trained in it, or something like that, but he won't train you on it so you can move it.

Support provided by **Fire and Emergency** could be improved by having more clear and prompt communication and by keeping volunteers informed about what's going on (especially regarding equipment, gear, and resources).

… the things that we would … seek FENZ support on would be … things that directly affect us … we have been told there are no women's sizes in certain things and … it can sometimes feel quite difficult to get things like that sorted. … so that … happening clearly and quickly would be … an improvement ...

I have this feeling that when the brigade asks for support from FENZ we are being an annoyance or an inconvenience and when we bring up new ideas … we almost get the feeling that they don't want to hear ideas for improvement of our brigade. They almost give the impression that we are being greedy asking for some types of equipment and then when it has been agreed that that equipment will be supplied, there seems to be ongoing delays as to when that equipment arrives.

While some volunteers had accessed (or were aware of) the support services provided by Fire and Emergency (e.g., counselling, peer support programme, critical incident support), not everyone knew about them, suggesting a need for more education about services and how to access them.

To be honest, I don't always feel like I know what support is available. I feel like in the brigade, I feel well supported by my peers and brigade members, but I am not always aware of the external support that FENZ offers.

Volunteers felt more feedback, face-to-face contact, or acknowledgement (either verbally or in terms of reimbursement/compensation) from Fire and Emergency was needed.

One of the things that I think would be a great remuneration for volunteers would be something like the payment of fire service levies on our insurance … as a bit of a thank you for doing what you do …

Volunteers from **rural** brigades made particular mention of their appreciation for the support they received from Fire and Emergency.

… we didn't really get a lot of support before FENZ came along in two thousand and seventeen, and the huge difference that we noticed was sudden, we've got great access to training courses but also progression …

Operational Support volunteers suggested more consultation with the support people.

… with the organisational re-design process that they're undergoing at the moment, they're sort of, they put out the view that the sky's the limit, let's get all of your comments in, but I don't really see that anyone has thought in particular about operational support and gone out of their way to seek the views of operational support people, in terms of a full range of things, uniform, ranks, and role descriptions, and training … I'm trained in traffic control, I can close an intersection, I can do point duty, I know how to set up stand pipes, roll out feeder hoses, and do a whole bunch of support duties, we run a canteen, we provide refreshments and ablutions, and all sorts of support stuff, a lot of people don't even know actually that we exist, the career crew … if they are new professional firefighters, I don't believe they actually receive any training about the role of operational support and what we do.

Regarding the volunteer support benefits launched by Fire and Emergency, volunteers were generally aware of the Annual Volunteer Reimbursement and the Volunteer Discounts. Other support benefits (i.e., Family/whānau Support allowance, Discounted Health Insurance, and Fire and Emergency Discounts) were less known about. Volunteers viewed these benefits as a gesture of appreciation and recognition and a good morale booster. Volunteers who have not been issued a Fire and Emergency ID card were unable to access in-store discounts.

Impact

Volunteering at Fire and Emergency can be a time-consuming and potentially stressful activity. Volunteers reported both positive and negative impacts of the role on their lives.

Positive impacts

Impact

- Gained lots of new skills which can be used in everyday life
- Helped with career path - good for CV
- Giving back to the community
- Made the community a safer place (especially rural or isolated areas)
- Became a better person, greater life satisfaction
- Feel respected and appreciated
- Making family/whānau and friends feel proud

Negative impacts

- Interruptions to family/whānau and social life
- Lack of sleep or tiredness after a call-out (impacting work performance/productivity)
- Family/whānau anxiety e.g., lack of information about nature of call-outs; unresolved conflict within the brigade
- Juggling family/whānau, study/work, and volunteering (e.g., being away on weekends affects family/whānau, weeklong courses create pressure on workload for colleagues; clash between farming responsibilities and responding to call-outs)
- Anxiety around too many or not enough volunteers responding to call-outs

Many of the benefits experienced by volunteers were socially related. Volunteering helped them to establish in the community. Other benefits included positive role modeling for friends and family/whānau, and a sense of pride or 'status' for volunteers and their families/whānau. Building connections with others in the community was also viewed as a benefit.

> *The positive side is that the status your family feels when you have been volunteering and you have been contributing to the community and the connections that you make that also benefit your family. … you know your neighbours … just the connections you get through volunteering.*

Volunteering also provided a break from work responsibilities and an opportunity to develop new skills that could be useful in the workplace, with family/whānau or elsewhere.

> *The skills that you gain through volunteering also can help your family. … you have greater first aid skills and you can work under pressure better – all those things have benefited my family.*

Any negative impacts on family/whānau life were realistically understood and generally reported as being managed satisfactorily. However, for some, the impacts were detrimental. Volunteers reported interruptions to sleep as a significant negative impact. For those who were also employed, a key concern was the impact of sleep deprivation on work performance. Having an understanding employer was seen to somewhat reduce this impact.

Disruptions to social and family/whānau life were also reported. While brigade training nights could usually be planned around, call-outs were typically regarded as having a negative impact. The degree of acceptance of this varied between participants but it was generally recognised this is 'what they signed up for'.

I suppose the negative is being away from the family when there is a long duration event. A whole day or if you are supposed to be going somewhere and you are called out and … it's just one of those things that you know when you sign up that sometimes a call-out could be a whole day or it could be fifteen minutes, it's just one of those things.

Another issue was the uncertainty for family/whānau in relation to call-outs. As noted above this could be about the duration of the call-out or anxiety over the type of call-out.

Focused group participants suggested **ways to lessen the negative impact**:

- Self-management
- Clarity around boundaries of the volunteer's commitment
- Recruit more volunteers
- Develop a better rostering system
- A clear process for conflict resolution
- Better employer recognition or compensation
- Better coordination and communication to ensure appropriate response levels to incidents

… more coordination of the actual response of the volunteers and communication, who's doing what, and then you get other ones where everyone thinks people will respond and it turns out only two people did and … you find out to your horror a couple of days later only three people were there or other times a small incident and ten or fifteen people turn up and actually they only need three …

When asked about the impact of **COVID-19** volunteers felt they had been appropriately informed by both their brigade leaders and Fire and Emergency. Information was shared via emails, website portal, pamphlets, prints out, the brigade Facebook page, phone calls, meetings, texts, and telephone conferences. Volunteers' experiences were mostly positive - there had been very few or no call-outs, the safety protocols/procedures were well-planned and well-managed, and brigades received good PPE (Personal Protective Equipment).

All of the important things that we needed to know as a support brigade were conveyed through our brigade leadership … we also received all of the operational instructions, regional notices … from both our district commander and regional leadership as well as at a national level …

Fire and Emergency

Several factors relating to Fire and Emergency and policy, practices and reputation were identified as impacting on the experiences of volunteers and their ongoing successful engagement.

Fire and Emergency related factors

FENZ
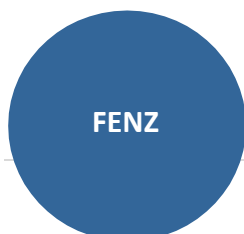
- Variation of match between experience and expectation (similar, more, less)

- Proud, reputable organisation
- Fire and Emergency re-organisation/policy/resourcing heading in the right direction – addressing issues
- Rural becoming more 'professional'
- Fire and Emergency bureaucracy perceived as prohibitive

There was variation in the match between expectations of the volunteer role and their experience both in terms of time commitment and scope of the role. Volunteers reported the commitments were greater than expected – however this was not necessarily expressed as negative. Others said their experience matched their expectations.

I think just probably the underestimation of the time spent on training. The time involved in call-outs is probably exactly what I expected, but it would be just the training that I underestimated.

The 'prestige' of Fire and Emergency was an important part of the commitment to being a volunteer.

I'm proud to be part of the organisation and I think it's a really reputable organisation and they do a lot of good work across the country … I think it has got a really strong identity.

Volunteers appreciated Fire and Emergency's commitment to addressing their needs and seeking ways to make improvements. Criticisms of the role of Fire and Emergency were minimal. As noted elsewhere, areas for ongoing and further commitment were suggested. Areas for improvement included brigade leadership, communication, equipment, facilities, and relationships.

A particular area of satisfaction was the organisation's focus on addressing the needs of rural volunteers and seeking to build an integrated fire service incorporating career, volunteer, urban, and rural sections.

I think overall they have endeavoured to try to unify the new organisation and roll out training and policies in a timely manner, it's been pretty good, we've had a lot of visits from the powers that be talking about different aspects, we were certainly informed in advance of the amalgamation of these emergency services …

Views were shared on Fire and Emergency's bureaucracy, ICT (Information, Communication, Technology) systems, pace of change and communication.

… the IT [Information Technology] infrastructure that we have at Fire and Emergency, it doesn't work with your everyday life, you can't integrate it into your everyday life, you have got to be very separate, it's a dog to use, can't stand it. … and … the communication … from senior management down … needs to improve greatly really … so we can get a good gauge of engagement … and it needs to be done faster …

Volunteers' experiences with Fire and Emergency either met or exceeded their expectations, particularly in terms of support, training, and level of satisfaction. The strong reputation of Fire and Emergency was important to their commitment to being a firefighter.

> *I was looking for team things and … just learning heaps of new skills which I definitely am, so I've been put through a lot of courses and undergoing a lot of skills I would never have been able to get if I wasn't in the service – I didn't know what to expect to be fair, when I joined I was just looking to meet new people and do cool things in the community, and … the cool thing is I've been able to interact with the community at events and open days and that kind of stuff.*

However, volunteers in **Composite Stations** felt the experience had not met their expectations.

> *Maybe no, due to lack of calls I guess, because we're a composite brigade the paid guys always go first so we don't get to many working jobs.*

Recommendations included:

- Increase engagement between volunteers and career staff
- Improve communication so brigades receive accurate information (regarding equipment, gear, uniform, and maintenance of appliances processes)
- More face-to-face engagement with senior management (e.g., Regional Managers or Area Managers/Principal Rural Fire Officers)
- Encourage and grow potential and past experience, skills, and knowledge
- Speed up the change process

Key for continuation

In addition to factors that challenge and support volunteers, a range of ideas about what was important to keep them interested and committed in their volunteering role was offered.

Key factors supporting continuation

Key for continuation

- Contributing to community
- Tangible recognition/acknowledgement/benefits
- Improving facilities and equipment
- Brigade culture and leadership – feeling valued and involved
- Group identification and social connection
- Self-development – upskilling and progression

The core value of community service was a key factor for continued commitment to volunteering. A sense of pride and purpose in helping their local communities was a strong motivator. That said, this commitment did not over-shadow areas where improvements could make the volunteer experience more rewarding.

… because my primary motivations are about working in the community, as long as there's a community to serve, I'm happy to serve, but it would be … making the things that make my role harder a little bit easier, give me that support, for me personally that's the volunteer admin side, and that resourcing. In terms of the role … there's a community here to help so I'm happy to do it. It's just … sharing a bit more of the load of that resourcing side.

Although volunteers described a strong sense of selflessness and a community-good orientation they also emphasised the importance of being recognised for their contribution. Recognition was discussed in both non-monetary and monetary terms. They viewed themselves first and foremost as volunteers, so financial recognition was typically viewed as an acknowledgment rather than a payment for service.

So, I guess not financial recognition but a financial break would be nice. Yeah, and the reduction or a waiver of your fire service levy on your insurance.

Volunteers noticed an improvement over time in brigade facilities and equipment. Continuing to improve these areas was regarded by both rural and urban volunteers as an important way to enhance the volunteer experience.

Since rural fire has amalgamated with FENZ, we've probably had a lot more training, the facilities we've got have been upgraded which is really good, we had pretty tatty sort of outfit before, our equipment we get to use … is improving all the time …

Brigade culture was viewed as improving but still with some way to go. Poor leadership was seen as a driver for people leaving. Improvements to leadership styles and skills and addressing bullying would encourage people to stay more engaged.

I think the brigade workplace culture is probably a big one. I almost left my rural brigade earlier this year. Disagreements with … some officers in the brigade … because of their leadership style and their erratic behaviour under stress can be very hard to work with sometimes. But I think that has been improved by senior leaders around the place and I think recognition of bullies, or you know, people that are causing issues in the brigade and it is improving quite a bit.

Improving and maintaining group identification was seen as important. This was mainly discussed in relation to visually identifiable practices such as uniform consistency and an identification card. Again, it was felt progress was being made in these areas.

Social interaction and engagement were identified as key factors for retention of volunteers and more broadly, for family/whānau members. This applied to both rural and urban volunteers.

Continuing to build and develop skills was a key factor contributing to volunteer satisfaction and retention. In addition, having pathways for advancement within a brigade was considered important.

… the opportunity to progress through different ranks is a real appeal and the training that I would get in order to progress and develop my skills is a big reason why I am keen to stay and keep working. … for that to happen, I need to feel stimulated in between the training

courses and I am not always going to be immediately ready for the next one. So, at a brigade level, feeling like I am still progressing and have opportunities to lead and kind of test myself and help bring newer members through as well. … the more … opportunities to grow my skills, the more likely I am going … to stay because I can really see the value that I can get personally from that.

Focused group volunteers felt there was a need for recognition and utilisation of their prior experience, skills, and expertise.

Keeping me interested would be the ability to perhaps transfer some of my skills across and to use them in the brigade and that … wouldn't be relevant simply to me but just the ability to bring in your background and make use of that background, I think especially leadership positions within the emergency services structure … that's just been a consistent theme for me is there is a real narrowing and limiting of potential that does occur because there is a lack of recognition of prior learning and experience … I just think that's an undesirable situation.

Volunteers from **Operational Support** and **Composite Stations** suggested a review of organisational structure/procedure/policy would help to address or clarify and resolve issues.

… someone has to go in and kind of audit it in a way … making sure that these teams are doing things that they should be doing, trained in things that they should be trained in … someone needs to go in and make sure things are happening cos that exactly is my situation in my brigade … the way we feel is we're not even needed, there's no need for us … (Operational Support)

I'm frustrated with people in the organisation … I've got a certificate saying I've passed the course, there's paper trails on it, it says competent, but there's no procedure saying if you're demoted how to get back there … when you're demoted for changing a station to get that rank back, there needs to be more clarity there and the bullying needs to be sorted. (Composite Brigade)

Changes observed at 15-months follow up

Role change and volunteering at other organisations

Volunteers who changed their role during the past 12 months had either moved up a rank or taken on more responsibilities or changed station (due to moving house).

Those who also volunteered at other organisations (e.g., school, community, local council, and Surf Lifesaving), time constraints had little impact on their ability to attend Fire and Emergency structured courses or brigade training and/or call-outs.

Impact on personal life and on work life

There was no additional impact on personal/home life compared to 12 months ago. The same issues around interruptions and juggling different commitments were mentioned. However, volunteers felt they were better at balancing, managing, and planning their time, so they were less affected by those interruptions. One volunteer mentioned the benefit of the Availability and Messaging System (AMS).

> … now that FENZ have introduced AMS [Availability and Messaging System] and that my partner gets a call or a text message when I am out on the road, I think it's a little bit more reassurance for her that she knows that I am on a call.

In terms of work life, all additional impacts in the past 12 months were attributed to COVID-19 (e.g., increased workload due to staff reductions, changed manager/owner, changed job, and restructuring of company), rather than to volunteering. The admin support provided by Fire and Emergency was appreciated.

> … we realised that the amount of work that I was doing for the brigade had an impact on my business, so what our Area Manager did was had a discussion and we have now got somebody that is coming in once a week to give me admin support that is from the Area Office.

Training

Volunteers felt they had been given sufficient training in the past 12 months (both brigade training and structured training) as well as sufficient development or progression opportunities.

Recommendations regarding training not previously mentioned:
- Update/revise the Portal and Learning Station (so people can find information), and more videos on the learning station on medical (first aid) trainings.
- Revise the Operational Skills Maintenance (OSM) system[19].
- Have an automated digital system for training bookings.

> … you know when I go to Bookabach or Airbnb I can easily do an online form … and book in and know that I've got a confirmed booking where Fire and Emergency is a large organisation with a lot of people, booking things, asking for solutions and then not really matching the expectation of service delivery on those aspects, and these are things that all my members complain about because … we work in the private sector, if you ring a training organisation in the private sector and book a time then you're booked in, you don't get back and forth, back and forth or you're bookings getting lost in the mix. … so, if there were more automated technological solutions for job ticketing, and training booking and the retention of our details I mean I don't know how many times I need to put in the same details of a volunteer when they've been in the brigade for five years or so. All I really should do is select

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[19] Operational personnel undertake maintenance and refresher training, known as Operational Skills Maintenance (OSM). OSM supports the maintenance of currency in safe and effective operational practices learnt on progression programmes or specialist courses.

from a dropdown list from my brigade and say this person needs this and be able to book them in.

Support

Volunteers felt they had been given sufficient support in the past 12 months.

Recommendations regarding support not previously mentioned:

- More out-of-the-brigade external support.

    … if I had someone that I could talk to who is not part of my brigade who I knew was impartial and that had the interest that FENZ had, that I could talk to about issues … would have been a lot easier. But relying on your own brigade for support because as soon as you do that, then you get a target on your head.

- Volunteers felt very positive about the new volunteer support benefits.

    I think they're really awesome. I joined before … the reimbursement and the whānau support and everything had come out … it's really helped with families as well as being so close to Christmas …

Table 16: Volunteer support benefits (N=36)

	Have been aware of:	Have taken advantage of:
Annual volunteer reimbursement	35 (97%)	32 (89%)
Family/whānau support allowance	31 (86%)	10 (28%)
Discounted health insurance	21 (58%)	1 (3%)
Volunteer discount platform	33 (92%)	11 (31%)

Points raised for consideration were:

- Variety of retail discount.

    … the retail discounts … I've noticed it is mostly targeted towards families and sort of family events, so it doesn't really appeal to me.

- Better health insurance offer.

    … the health insurance one with Southern Cross, it was no cheaper so there was no discount really.

- Remove tax from the family/whānau support benefit.

    … the whānau support one is a little bit misleading because that's the gross amount, not the net amount … you actually still get taxed on the whānau allowance which is strange because it seems more of a reimbursement than a pay … But … I think it's a good step forward."

- Activity variation between brigades makes reimbursement seem unfair.

    … there are different brigades that are very busy and … some brigades where they do five calls a year …

COVID-19

Volunteers felt they had been appropriately informed about the impact of COVID-19 from their brigade leaders and/or Fire and Emergency and few had concerns or fears about performing their volunteer responsibilities. Those who did have concerns felt comfortable sharing them with their brigade leaders. Volunteers were impressed with how Fire and Emergency responded to COVID-19.

Seen or experienced discrimination

Discrimination that was seen or experienced at the station in the past 12 months can be categorised as follows:

- Small talk (banter) or light-hearted conversations that may have sounded discriminatory but were not ill-intended.

    One guy keeps going on about the age of another guy in lighthearted, and everybody laughs but I don't think it's acceptable really. Once you start going down that road, then other little comments pop up in things like that.

- A bullying culture in the brigade.

    There is a bullying culture from the officer group, it's nothing that really has affected me significantly … It created a lot of issues because the two in question have dug their heels in and basically said it's the brigade that's got the problem not them. They're doing everything they can to discredit anyone … refusing to apologise, refusing to turn up to training, but still riding in charge of the trucks. … it's really created quite a stir … they need to be stood down while a solution is found.

- Gender-related discrimination.

    It's been mainly gender-related and not up against me but witnessed by others, by longer serving individuals not happy with decisions over a chief appointment that was a female and just making her life difficult in general. And not in a direct way, but in an indirect way.

- Discrimination from paid crew.

    So we're volunteers but there was a paid crew on, and they were on overtime and … one of the paid crew was very vocal and abusive to me and I put in a bullying complaint.

Change of perception about brigade

Volunteers' perceptions about their brigade did not change during the past 12 months. They either continued to maintain a positive view or improved their perception (to feeling more positive) about their brigade (e.g., supportive, welcoming, good training, more cohesive, better relationship).

However, those who had a lesser view about their brigade attributed this to:

- Favouritism and nepotism
- Failure to deal with bullies effectively (should stand them down immediately)
- Lost confidence in their ability to change:

I've lost confidence that it can change. I think that FENZ is doing a pretty good job trying to change attitudes, but in the local brigades there is a stronger force at work and that force builds up over generations.

- Selective turn-out by some brigade members.

Often people are unavailable but all of a sudden … they're available cos there's an exciting call comes in or converse to that they're available and don't turn up to the boring calls. … when recruits are being trained I'll always hold my hand up to go and help every time … and no one else is. With the amount of firefighters we've got no one seems to hold their hand up to the mundane jobs so I do find that frustrating.

Change of perception about Fire and Emergency

Volunteers had the same or a better perception of Fire and Emergency compared to 12 months ago.

I have grown to admire FENZ more and more. I think they have started to do a good job and I think they are structured. I think they have taken notice of what people want and they are moving along that path. So, I think they are a fairly professional organisation and I am confident in them.

Those who had a lesser view of Fire and Emergency attributed this to:

- Slowness of change (e.g., integration, restructuring) or slowness of getting things done and a prevailing 'us and them' divide.

… there is still a divide between the old urban and rural. So … my opinion of FENZ has probably gone backwards because they haven't delivered on what they said. And there still seems to be a big divide from what the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] and the Board say to what actually happens on the ground … We are all supposed to be FENZ, … but … it's more like it's been a takeover by the Fire Service and it's not actually a merger.

- Use of resources.

… there's … quite a bit of money wasted in the wrong areas. There's certain equipment that we would really benefit from as a brigade … that we don't get … I question this whole change of colour of uniform that's going through and things like that … it appears priority of spending is not right when there is certain equipment … that we really need but they won't fund.

- Bullying and harassment.

> *I am beginning to see that FENZ has got maybe a bit more issues around discrimination and sexual harassment that I was aware of when I first joined. As I said I don't experience that in my own brigade but I'm beginning to see that could be a wider issue.*

- Very little management presence and not enough recognition.

> *… the longer I stick around the more I realise how out of touch some of them are with the brigades … especially at my brigade, we have had quite a lot of change and stuff brought about by Area and Regional management and I don't think they quite realise the impact that they have on the brigade. They will come once a year and say good-day and that's all you hear and see of them for the next twelve months.*

> *We … just celebrated a firefighter's sixty-fifth year volunteering and someone from the Region actually came along and said thanks, but … we all expected there would be some kind of token of appreciation like a plaque or something. And yet there was nothing and I think that kind of shocked a lot of us …*

Overall feelings about Fire and Emergency

Volunteers expressed positive feelings about Fire and Emergency. They felt it is a good organisation and although there is still work to be done in relation to integration, equipment, and discrimination, it is moving in the right direction.

> *… how they responded to the COVID response I thought was … quite impressive to see given that it was such a moving thing at the beginning … it has given me kind of faith in the leadership at a high level there but I think there are some things at a practical level that our brigade and I know other brigades would like to see, for example head torches and other … bits of equipment that would be really useful.*

> *My overall thought is that they are a great organisation. … they are a great example of a business in New Zealand. They are a good champion and a good role model; that's the way that I feel at the moment … I wouldn't have said that ten years ago, but I would say that now.*

> *I experienced (bullying) once but the situation was taken care of, and the brigade got rid of that person … I know there are situations and I know there is bullying, and I know there is harassing … but … it's not going to make me think any less of FENZ because it's not everyone. Wherever you go, you are going to have people doing things that they shouldn't be doing … I think it's a good organisation and it's just a pity that you pick up bad apples along the way.*

As previously mentioned, volunteers were critical of the slowness in making changes, particularly in terms of merging/integrating urban and rural.

> *We're over three years into it now and nothing at all has changed right down to uniforms, dress uniforms for rural and urban brigades combined. Just that sort of stuff, we're supposed to be one but yet we're still a team of many … differences.*

Ways to retain and improve volunteer engagement

Volunteers expressed they would continue to volunteer for as long as they can. The reason they would stop volunteering in the foreseeable future is because they are moving to other city/country.

Volunteers offered a range of ideas about what was important to keep them interested and committed in their volunteering role and suggested ways Fire and Emergency could improve their interaction and engagement with volunteers.

- More visibility and more face-to-face interaction with Fire and Emergency
- More enthusiastic Volunteer Support staff

Get a VSO [Volunteer Support Officer] that actually wants to support us. I will be blunt there, ours doesn't want to be doing the job, he just doesn't want to do it and it really shows. … I have met a couple of other VSOs in the region and it is like, oh why can't we have you? … (VSO) is our … first point of call when it comes to interacting with FENZ the organisation and if that's the face that we see and the face isn't a happy one, you are like well, are you a good organisation or are you all just like this guy you know?

- More training opportunities and more realistic, practical, and specialised training
- Improved brigade culture and leadership, e.g., better conflict resolution, stronger comradeship, more willingness to change, and better leadership skills
- Better and faster integration of urban and rural
- Remove the 'us and them' divide between career staff and volunteers - more integrated training
- Be heard, be appreciated, or be consulted by Fire and Emergency

I think there is a lot of frustration when people ... and the local community and the local brigades or you know, the local area where decisions have been made that they just don't make sense for that local area and there is just not quite the understanding of local needs and by local, that's, as I said it is not just the single brigade, it's the cluster of brigades.

- More inter-brigade activities and social events, e.g., sports competitions
- Up-to-date and adequate equipment and facilities
- Support for families, having a partners' group
- Find ways to attract diverse volunteers

Appendix Four: Exited Volunteer sample

Participants

The demographic breakdown of the 25 Exited volunteers (13 who left between October and December 2019 and 12 who left the service between January and July 2020) is shown in Table 17.

Table 17: Participant characteristics (N = 25)

Ethnicity	**18** New Zealander/Kiwi/NZ European, **2** Māori, **1** Asian, **3** other European, **1** unspecified
Gender	**15** males, **9** females, **1** unspecified
Role	**15** Firefighter, **5** Operational Support, **1** Medical first responder, **4** Recruit
Brigade type	**10** Urban, **10** Rural, **2** Both[20], **3** Composite

Main reason for leaving Fire and Emergency

The main reason Exiters left Fire and Emergency was personal reasons, such as moving house or job relocation, time constraints (e.g., heavy workload, study and/or other commitments), or changes in personal circumstances (e.g., physical health, marital situation).

Another reason was an unfavourable brigade environment (e.g., bullying, personality clashes, poor leadership).

> *Bullying actually … every night there were fights basically, not physical but lots of verbal stuff going on, it was almost like two teams, they were working against each other. The guy that sort of convinced me to join up … he was basically bullied out, he took a bullying complaint higher up and it went nowhere. I got somebody to join, they ended up being bullied as well, they took complaints. … they did the same to me and I was like that's enough, I can't do this anymore, it's affecting my mental health and if I don't do something and so yeah, nobody was interested and after two years, same kind of stuff, I just kept fighting and fighting and fighting and it was like I'm done with it … the career guys that I worked with were actually brilliant, but there was so much infighting within my little unit and nobody cared, like nobody cares about Ops Support, that's actually the biggest problem, nobody gives a crap about Ops Support, so the volunteers themselves didn't care because you know, as far as they were concerned, we are not firefighters.*
>
> *I wanted to do more and my CO [Chief Officer] decided to have an argument with the ones who were trying to organise more involvement for me … it got to the point where … I was getting shutout, like there was no more emails sent to me … and my CO [Chief Officer] was*

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20 Volunteered at two brigades, one urban and one rural.

trying to force my hand on what I would sign the cheques for and what the money was going towards that we got … And now that they get audited, there is going to be that I was responsible for the decisions that I was being forced to sign over on. There was no-one, no-one else was there to sort of stop it from happening.

Willingness to volunteer again

Exiters expressed their willingness to volunteer for Fire and Emergency again after changes to their personal circumstances (e.g., change of work hours or workload, change of location, completion of study, more time).

Exiters who left due to brigade reasons expressed a willingness to volunteer again after changes to the brigade environment.

I would go back tomorrow … I just think if it had a different attitude of leadership, then I think the organisation would be such a healthier environment …

I would happily go back … provided that there was a huge shakeup. I don't tolerate bullying in any way, shape or form … I would go back today if that problem was resolved.

Ways to retain volunteers

When asked, "What could Fire and Emergency do (or do better) to retain volunteers like you?" In general, Exiters felt there is nothing more Fire and Emergency needs to do.

… FENZ when they came along gave us the better gear, better support and training … they kept us up to date, they told us what was happening, a lot of our trainings were about what was going forward. We were always able to have a say, it was always open book policy too, give us your ideas and we'll take them on, so I don't think they did anything wrong at all personally, and I think they did a great job. I couldn't complain or have a beef about anything that they did or didn't do.

Exiters suggested the need for better communication and a better attitude towards volunteers (e.g., more listening, more sincere recognition).

Listen to us. The thing … that actually drove me away in the end was my Chief, I went to him directly and said look, this is what is going on, if something isn't done, like you are going to end up losing everybody, there were five of us that were basically on the verge of walking out and … his attitude was, I don't care, go and speak to HR …

I wonder if there is any room in the FENZ schedule to do some type of annual appraisal as such so that people have that opportunity to have their strengths identified and talk about areas they want developed potentially outside of their Fire Chief, Fire Station structure. So even if the VSO [Volunteer Support Officer] from around the areas came in and did that I think you would feel more important and heard as an individual.

Other suggestions were improving the brigade environment or volunteer structure, and strengthening leadership especially around volunteer retention and motivation.

I think that they should have better monitoring of brigade issues so that they don't stay within the brigade … so monitoring, alerting of those, and number two would be faster more timely response … to brigade issues.

I actually think there needs to be a fundamental refresh of the volunteer structure. You see at the moment, the identity and the culture is, from my personal point of view, is deeply rooted at the local brigade rather than at a national organisation … there needs to be a much greater emphasis on the leadership capability to retain volunteers and keep them motivated.

Another suggestion was to increase flexibility around training and level of commitment.

I guess have an alternate day of the week … we're milkers and … sometimes it doesn't line up with milking …

… when you're in there you have to attend a certain amount of brigade training, so like maybe ease it up a little bit for people that have to work. … I could have gone on a lunch break or … an hour's break and gone over there and then go back to work but you have to be there for a certain period of time … so maybe more flexible.

Impact on personal life and on work life

Regarding impacts on personal life and work life, issues reported by Exiters were similar to those described by the Established volunteers. These included problems around interruptions, juggling different commitments, and increased call-outs coinciding with heavy workloads (particularly for rural brigades).

It does have a big impact … for the first year it was great … but then after they stopped encouraging families from coming, the whole environment changed in the last year, it's just been horrible there … it causes animosity in the home because they feel now it is a secret organisation that it's been hidden … it's quite impacting.

Training

Suggestions Exiters made about brigade training were similar to those made previously (by Established volunteers):

- More involvement with other brigades
- Better planning/organisation
- The training schedule should be publicly displayed in the brigade

... we never had a Station Training Officer that actually had a training plan or a schedule, so every night you would go to training and you would spend half an hour going, oh what should we do? ... nothing's organised ... there is no structure.

- More flexibility and variety in terms of training time and method (e.g., theory, practical scenarios)
- Train the trainers
- Better (or more specific training) for Operational Support
- Better utilisation of Operational Support personnel.

Suggestions regarding **structured** training courses were also similar to those made previously:
- Run courses at times more suitable for rural brigades
- Smaller classes (so there is more time per topic)
- More course availability
- Have a training centre in the South Island
- Provide more courses for Operational Support.

Exiters felt they could contribute new training learnings back into their brigade and they received enough support in relation to the learning materials provided.

Brigade

Exiters felt they had been given sufficient support from their brigade leaders and there was high praise for the level of support they received.

He is really receptive to any new ideas and stuff that come forward ... he just takes everything on board and he puts it into practice. He is really supportive, so if we had a rough call-out ... you can just go yarn to him and he will ... give you some insight or give you the right numbers to call. We have really good debriefings after ... call-outs ... he will go out of his way to help you ... he knows life gets in the way and it is a volunteer thing and he just wants you to give it what you can and yes, just really appreciative all round.

Exiters expressed the importance of having the right person in the leadership role. Attributes of a good brigade leader included: approachable; able to monitor and deal with brigade issues; able to lead by example; more present at training nights; strong communicators; open and honest; able to recruit and retain volunteers; and able to create and facilitate a healthy and safe brigade environment. It was suggested brigade leaders should encourage more co-operation within the brigade.

Exiters acknowledged the good teamwork and comradeship in their brigade - they felt included and supported by their fellow brigade members. However, some had experienced discrimination and/or harassment in their brigade or they felt their personal and/or cultural views had not been respected.

The whole management team is ... part of that little circle that all went to school together and are socially attached outside of the fire brigade so ... that's where the bullying comes from, it's from trying not only to fit into a volunteer environment, but to fit into a friend

circle that has been there for … forty-five years … and if you don't reflect the things that they like to do and act then you just don't fit in.

… my personal views, no I don't think anybody really cared, nobody ever asked me what my motivation was or why I was doing stuff, nobody actually cared enough.

An independent body for complaints was suggested.

(FENZ) actually need somebody independent. They need somebody outside of the brigade, so the problem they have is that there is too much insular stuff where they all handle their own issues, what they actually need is somebody independent that you can go to, I mean, that's what I thought the UFBA [United Fire Brigades' Association] were but it turned out they're all in there together as well. But like St John has got the Employee Assistance Programme, that's completely independent, who can give advice and will step in and help. FENZ needs something very similar because having an independent body you can go to would be the best way.

Perception of Fire and Emergency

Exiters had positive perceptions of Fire and Emergency as a whole.

I think FENZ is an amazing organisation, I think they are always acknowledged for things that go wrong, which isn't very often and never really given enough credit for the things that they do really well and I think that they do quite a … huge amount of positive things for brigades and for communities and for New Zealand and I do think that they are under-acknowledged for that, so I think they do a really great job.

A negative perception of Fire and Emergency was around their slowness to respond to brigades' concerns.

I think they're very slow to respond and pick up on brigade members' concerns and I also think that it's pretty abysmal that they have old and outdated equipment and that they're left to continue to use old equipment that could potentially be a hazard … there were definitely ways that they could improve to make volunteers lives a bit easier.

Recognition by Fire and Emergency

While Exiters generally felt they had been sufficiently valued and recognised by Fire and Emergency for their contribution, there were exceptions to this.

I resigned … and … I got a resignation acknowledgement letter and that was it. … no-one from my brigade had organised any type of exit interview or even asked me why I had left … just felt insignificant.

Exiters felt Fire and Emergency had sufficiently valued and recognised the contribution of their family/whānau. However, there were those who did not and they felt upset by this.

> *I don't think they were very acknowledged. (My husband) probably would have done half the amount of hours I ever did there, so he was there a lot in the first year you know, even on training nights, he would go early and make sure that everything was set up and if I was running late or I didn't come home, he would come down and he would come and help roll up the hoses and he has washed the trucks down and stuff, you don't get anything.*

Some Exiters felt Fire and Emergency had sufficiently valued and recognised the contribution of their employers while some felt recognition was unnecessary as their employers did not actively or fully support their volunteering.

> *... (we) have employer dinners or … employer events just to say thank you to the employers of the brigade members for giving the brigade time, and sometimes even monetary aide.*

Volunteer support benefits

Table 18: Volunteer support benefits (N=25)

	Have been aware of:	Have taken advantage of:
Annual volunteer reimbursement	20	11
Family/whānau support allowance	3	2
Discounted health insurance	3	0
Volunteer discount	16	2

COVID-19

Most Exiters had already left or were inactive prior to COVID-19. The few who were still volunteering during COVID-19 reported they had been appropriately informed about the impact of COVID-19 from their brigade leaders and/or Fire and Emergency, and they had no concerns or fears about performing their volunteer responsibilities during COVID-19.

Other comments or suggestions

- Aftercare for Exiters traumatised by an incident.

> *... when I fell over … I went to my chief and asked for help, I got the help that I needed … I had two sessions with this guy … he was amazing, the weight that he lifted off my shoulders enabled me to function and … the fire service has been absolutely fantastic on that side of things and looking after me, but now that I'm not a fire service member that help now is really expensive, luckily I don't require it anymore but … just because I'm now out of it doesn't mean I don't need help and I think like the RSA [Returned Services Association],*

something like that is needed for fire service personnel that are out, an avenue for fire service staff that have been traumatised by an incident … that there is a little bit of leeway there for some help would be good.

- Better policy for brigade leader selection processes and promotions.

  … when … finding out who is the next Chief, they need to have a specific policy to be able to work that out before giving someone the authority. … you should have almost like an interview with a person and see their personality and have interviews with people within the brigade before you rank up into the higher ranks …

- Empower other senior members rather than leading from just one person.

  … it was the Chief's way or no way … the more senior fire fighters, weren't empowered which I found as a bit of a surprise.

- Better rostering systems, tighter disciplinary procedures, and an independent complaints authority.

- Being more volunteer-focused is a critical aspect requiring more focus and resource – this would strengthen the overall organisation.

  … there needs to be a greater emphasis … not just on the technical ability of meeting FENZ standards which are quite arduous, but actually on … recruiting and retaining volunteers and creating an environment that facilitates that ... I never saw any real focus from FENZ at that kind of level, inside the organisation … there was lots of nice new branding and stuff but nothing actually around a common … one waka, one approach … and making it much more easier and streamlined for volunteers to reach out and get support outside their brigade when they need it … they just have to actually put focus on to a volunteer programme that's about the volunteer, not just about the technical firefighting aspect … there needs to be much more effort in … a volunteers' programme about how you come into a brigade and what you should expect … from the brigade and what you should expect from FENZ and be all over the brigade to ensure that they are culturally aligned to that national standard and approach.