

Fire Research Report

Recruitment and retention of women volunteers within the Fire Service

UMR Research

March 2003

The primary objectives of this study were to:

- Develop a profile of female volunteers in the New Zealand Fire Service, and
- Provide direction for strategies which will aid in the recruitment and retention of women in the fire service.

The study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative research, distinguished as follows:

Qualitative research is about understanding. It identifies the range of issues involved, allows an assessment of the intensity with which views and attitudes are held, and gives a feeling for the language used.

Quantitative research is about measurement and is necessary to establish, with some certainty, the extent to which views and attitudes expressed in qualitative research are held throughout the wider population.

The study explores volunteer behaviour in the context of the reported experiences of volunteers and the challenges faced by women who join as volunteers. The report profiles the women volunteers exploring their motivations for joining, their expectations of the job and the quality of relationship with the New Zealand Fire Service Commission. Issues of recruitment and retention are also addressed. A number of recommendations are made to deal with the problems identified.

As there was no database of volunteers, the United Fire Brigades Association, the New Zealand Fire Service and the National Rural Fire Authority supported UMR Research in contacting volunteers through volunteer brigades to participate in the research.

Alice Kan

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Recruitment and Retention of Women Volunteers within the Fire Service

A Qualitative and Quantitative Study

March 2003



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I. Introduction

1.1 Objectives

Primary objectives

The primary objectives of this study were to:

- Develop a profile of female volunteers in the New Zealand Fire Service including:
 - exploring their motivations for joining
 - expectations of the job
 - quality of relationship with the New Zealand Fire Service Commission.
- Provide direction for strategies which will aid in the recruitment and retention of women in the fire service.

Specific objectives

a) *To develop an in-depth understanding of the recruitment and retention process for women volunteers.*

- What motivates women to become volunteers?
- What motivates women volunteers to choose the Fire Service as their particular volunteer activity?
- What process do they go through to join and what are their main sources of information?
- What are the key incentives to join, and stay, as a volunteer with the Fire Service e.g. work experience, community involvement, social activity, education and training, etc?
- What incentives are of most value to the female volunteer?
- Are women satisfied with their current role in the Fire Service?

b) *To explore the relationship women volunteers expect to have with the Fire Service.*

- What level of involvement do they expect to have?
- What factors would encourage loyalty and commitment?
- What kind of organisation would women volunteers relate to?
- What would improve their current relationship with Fire Service management and other Fire Service staff?

c) *To test appeal of recruitment initiatives amongst potential women volunteers.*

- What appeals about the concept of being a female fire service volunteer?
- What discourages them and what are the barriers that stop them considering being a volunteer?
- What would be the best way to communicate information to them?
- What would be some incentives to join and stay as a volunteer with the Fire Service e.g. work experience, community involvement, social activity, education and training, etc?
- What incentives are of most value to the women volunteer?

1.2 Research methodology

The study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative research, and it is important to understand the differences between the two.

Qualitative research is about understanding. It identifies the range of issues involved, allows an assessment of the intensity with which views and attitudes are held, and gives a feeling for the language used.

Quantitative research is about measurement and is necessary to establish, with some certainty, the extent to which views and attitudes expressed in qualitative research are held throughout the wider population.

As there was no database of volunteers, the United Fire Brigades Association, the New Zealand Fire Service and the National Rural Fire Authority supported UMR Research in contacting volunteers through volunteer brigades to participate in the research.

Qualitative research

The qualitative phase of the research consisted of the following:

a) *Thirteen depth face-to-face interviews and eleven depth telephone interviews amongst the following audiences:*

- Regional Commanders
- Volunteer Chiefs
- Volunteer Support Officers
- Permanent female fire fighters

These depth interviews were undertaken between 17 July and 14 August 2002. While they did not form part of the main project, they did provide background and direction when developing the question-lines and questionnaire to be used in the research amongst female volunteer fire fighters and potential female fire fighters.

b) *Six mini-groups amongst the following women volunteer fire fighters:*

Urban Brigades:

- Auckland
- Nelson
- Palmerston North
- Whakatane.

Rural Fire Forces:

- Rotorua
- Wellington.

The groups were undertaken between 14 - 31 October 2002.

c) *Three focus groups amongst potential women volunteer fire fighters. The groups were undertaken across the following audiences:*

Urban:

- Auckland (under 35 years old)
- Auckland (mix of age, household types).

Rural:

- Rotorua (women with children at home).

Respondents also had to voice interest in at least one of the following activities:

- sporting activities
- regular gym attendance
- volunteer work
- physically challenging activities.

These screening activities were developed from the research conducted amongst existing women volunteers. The groups were undertaken between 23 – 28 January 2003.

Quantitative research

The quantitative phase of the research consisted of a telephone survey of 195 women volunteer fire fighters (149 urban, 46 rural). The interviews were conducted out of UMR's National Research Facility in Auckland, between 6th - 16th December 2002. For the overall sample size of 195 the margin of error for a 50% figure at the 95% confidence level is $\pm 7.0\%$ (based on an estimated population size).

For the sample of 149 urban volunteers, the margin of error for a 50% figure at the 95% confidence level is $\pm 6.9\%$ (based on a population of 548). A margin of error could not be provided for rural volunteers, as the total population is unknown.

Due to rounding, some tables may not add up to 100%.

II. Executive Summary

2.1 Volunteer behaviour

■ Volunteer work categories

Most volunteer fire fighters were also involved in other types of voluntary work which can be grouped into three broad categories – nurturing, personal interest, and specialised services. A key trait amongst respondents was a keen sense of community spirit and participation.

■ Drivers of volunteer behaviour

The overriding theme driving participation in volunteer work was the satisfaction gleaned from making a contribution to the community. Other factors included personal links with a particular volunteer organisation, often from past experience or family affiliation, and using or learning new skills.

Recommendation

Tap into the existing core community values, possibly stronger in the rural sector, to encourage female participation in volunteer fire fighting.

2.2 Experiences as a volunteer fire fighter

■ Becoming a volunteer fire fighter

Existing volunteers were generally enticed to approach their local station, and therefore become fire fighters, in three main ways:

- knowing existing fire fighters
- advertising material
- experiential (having seen the brigade in action).

Most found the initial experience worthwhile despite some understandable apprehension, although the physicality of the training and acceptance by existing members were key issues. There also appeared to be no uniformity in the induction process, with experiences varying widely from station to station.

■ Expectations

Most volunteers, 89% urban and 71% rural, said their experiences as a volunteer fire fighter had met their expectations, a strong endorsement of the value in participation. The main reasons given, such as personal development and skills training, and societal aspects such as helping the community and the camaraderie, mirrored the general behavioural aspects.

Recommendation

Personal testimonials, especially those which show both the positives and negatives (honest appraisals), are a very strong driver to encourage involvement and should be leveraged at every opportunity.

2.3 Recruitment

■ Barriers to women joining

Becoming a 'volunteer fire fighter' received little support. When potential volunteers in the focus groups were asked to nominate a voluntary activity to participate in, very few chose fire fighting, highlighting issues women had to deal with in order to become fire fighters. These included physical limitations and family responsibilities, feelings of inadequacy, presupposed difficulties in coping with "horrific scenes", and the impression of a male dominated environment.

■ Overcoming barriers

It was clear from the potential volunteers groups that there is a limited pool of women that can be attracted to become volunteer fire fighters, which gives credence to ensuring the right recruitment message gets to the right target audience. The research showed the key driver was "wanting to support my community", especially after encouragement from family or friends.

■ Techniques for attracting women volunteer fire fighters

Current volunteers considered the most effective techniques to attract new recruits were TV documentaries, showcasing real women fire fighters and word of mouth. At present, the greatest issue regarding images of female fighters were their paucity, and when they did appear, they often appeared staid or inactive. Respondents were split as to whether advertising should target women, the most common argument for being breaking the gender stereotype, while those against noted the requirement for good people regardless of gender.

■ Information for potential recruits

Important information that needed to be disseminated to new or potential recruits included the time commitment and training required, the roles, responsibilities and types of work undertaken by brigades and fire forces the levels of fitness required.

Recommendation

It is essential to meet the expectations of potential recruits, in particular pointing out the commitment required and critically, despite some small limitations, that women already play an active and important role at the sharp end of volunteer fire fighting. Aspects such as community and camaraderie are important, as is the need for good people of either gender.

The importance of these factors cannot be underestimated. An underlying theme throughout the research was, despite noted dissatisfaction in some areas, that women were 'fire fighters', not 'women fire fighters'.

2.4 Profile – women volunteer fire fighters

■ Characteristics of women volunteer fire fighters

The perceived required characteristics of women fire fighters were quite distinct and reflected a strong need for practicality, adaptability, and physical and mental strength. Particular areas of strength also included perceived female virtues of being caring, nurturing and compassion.

■ Demographic profile of women volunteer fire fighters

Key characteristics were:

- Aged 30 or older - 74% with rural volunteers tending to be older.
- Married or de facto relationship – 65%. Single - 27%.
- Full-time workers - 54%. Part-time 19%, homemakers 8%.
- Fire fighter for between one and five years - 60% (23% between six and 10 years).

■ Perceived image of women volunteer fire fighters

Pictures chosen by potential volunteers as the women most likely to be volunteer fire fighters were cause for concern as those chosen were mainly of young and very active women, contrary to the actual demographic profile of actual women fire fighters.

The main reasons the four images were chosen were physical strength, determination, capability and practicality while few were perceived as having family commitments.

Recommendation

Potential volunteers need to be shown the role is not only for young, extremely active women. Again, experiential testimonials might be very useful as would demographics such as almost half have children under 18 years of age at home, more than half work full-time and still contribute fully as volunteer fire fighters.

2.5 The impact of women fire fighters

■ **Current numbers of women fire fighters**

The majority of volunteers surveyed felt there were currently not enough women fire fighters (urban 62%, rural 74%), not surprising given the currently low number of women volunteers and the numerous benefits women were seen to bring to a brigade and fire force.

■ **Benefits of having women fire fighters**

The main reasons women were seen to have improved their brigade or fire force highlighted the gender differences and included bringing a different set of skills and attributes, and being more attuned to the needs of particular groups of victims.

Statements from the quantitative survey highlighted that the perceived differences they brought enriched the service, although the women in the focus groups were also at pains to ensure they were not treated any differently to male volunteers.

Recommendation

Use the special strengths women bring to further encourage participation – they are special but part of a team from across the community helping the community.

2.6 Challenges for women volunteer fire fighters

■ **Challenges for women volunteer fire fighters**

Urban volunteers were almost evenly split on the issue of having experienced difficulties, the main issues raised being the physical challenges involved in the role, sexism and male acceptance, while there was also some evidence of stereotypic of 'women's roles'.

■ **Dealing with difficulties**

The word that is most resonant in this section was 'respect', and it was interesting to note that extra effort or direct confrontation on largely gender-based matters were vital to developing and improving cross-gender relationships. However, somewhat disturbingly, there was also the suggestion that while women may put up with difficulties in a role if it was a paid position, it was often not considered worth the bother as a volunteer.

Recommendation

Again, the demographics and profiles provide the keys, indicating that while being a volunteer fire fighter is not easy, it is rewarding, a fact borne out by those who have stayed with the service and the benefits they have gained both personally and for the community.

2.7 Turnover and retention

■ Turnover

The quantitative survey clearly showed the three main issues dissuading women from staying on the force were family commitments, male attitudes and work commitments, results mirrored in the qualitative study. Non-gender specific issues highlighted difficulties in training, work commitments and relocation.

■ Improving retention

Two non-gender specific issues gained wide support, namely the need for recognition within the community, a factor that could support recruitment, and maintaining or increasing morale within a brigade or fire force. The choice of Fire Chief was considered crucial to overall station morale, a factor which may correlate to issues of male dominance and the assumption that as older men retire, there will be more overall acceptance of women.

Female-specific issues received a mixed reaction, a common theme being the potential divisions these initiatives could create with male counterparts. Again, the premise that while there may be some differences in the amount of physicality women possess, they wanted to be regarded as fire fighters, not women fire fighters.

Recommendation

Serious consideration should be given to leveraging 'service to the community'. The gender specific issues such as family and work commitments should not be ignored, indeed they can be reinforced by highlighting women volunteers who playing a full part at home, work and in the community. This should, of course, not be done at expense of recruiting male volunteers.

2.8 Training issues

■ Training within the brigade / fire force

Training and learning new skills were key attractions when becoming a volunteer fire fighter. The large majority of volunteers were happy with the level of training they received, in particular that provided by local brigades and fire forces. One point of interest during focus groups was the need to standardise training across all brigades and fire forces and possibly nationally.

■ National training

There was, overall, a very high degree of approval with the national training material presented with 85% of urban and 96% of rural women volunteers expressing satisfaction and, interestingly, most considered males generally found basic training as hard as women. The NZFS national training courses and Fire Industry (ITO) Unit Standards Programme were rated highly by urban and rural volunteers respectively for both their content and professionalism.

Recommendation

Volunteer fire fighter training can, and should, be presented as a positive factor in any recruiting. By-products of this are that personal growth and ones standing in the community will be enhanced through participation. If this course of action is pursued, meeting volunteers' expectations will be reinforced as key driver in building the service.

2.9 Volunteer fire organisations

■ The performance of the volunteer fire organisation

The performance of the volunteer fire fighter organisations, the New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) and the National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA), was highly rated, with 87% of urban and 82% of rural volunteers expressing satisfaction.

However, women volunteers felt removed from the overall workings of the NZFSC, NZFS and NRFA, being more focused, national training apart, on issues in their local brigade or fire force.

Perhaps the most pertinent point was the contrast between the level of community acknowledgment and much lower levels of recognition from the NZFSC, especially of the support received from families and employers.

■ Information and communication

Overall, the amount of information received from NZFS was regarded as being adequate although, again, rural volunteers were less impressed, a point that further emphasising their isolation. Some people noted communication channels within the NZFS and NRFA were rather patchy and that not all recruits were easily reached.

Critically, the parent organisations were viewed as quite separate from local brigades and fire forces, and information from parent bodies was not viewed as crucial to everyday operations.

Recommendation

An audit of existing and potential communications vehicles needs to be undertaken to ensure that the right information is getting to the right people in the right manner. In the detailed research in section XI, there are some firm views expressed by existing volunteers about the methods that could be used, and this will form an excellent base from which to make decisions on the communication between the parent bodies, the local brigades and volunteers.

We would also recommend reference be made to *Developing a Strategy to Nurture, Enhance, and Expand the Volunteer Fire Brigade*, UMR Research; October 2001, a study amongst both male and female volunteers. This research will give some insight into the changing nature and attitudes of volunteers and potential volunteers.

III. Volunteer Behaviour

3.1 Background

The numerous types of volunteer work that can be undertaken were explored in the groups of current and potential fire fighters. Most volunteer fire fighters were also involved in other types of voluntary work, a key trait being a keen sense of community spirit and participation.

Types of voluntary work could be grouped into three broad categories – nurturing, personal interest, and specialised services.

■ Nurturing

For many women (both current and potential volunteers), voluntary work that involved a “nurturing” role was seen as being a natural fit for their skills. Women felt comfortable and at ease performing these duties, and derived a great sense of personal satisfaction from such roles.

Typical voluntary work in this category were visiting rest homes, remedial reading for children, hospital visiting, meals on wheels delivery, volunteer drivers, and collecting for Women’s Refuge.

[Volunteering?] I’ve been saving poor sick animals since I was a kid and sticking up for all the kids that got picked on at school ever since I was little so I think there’s something there. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Personal interest

Many women were involved in voluntary roles that were heavily linked to areas of personal interest, often being extensions of existing hobbies. Examples given included working at the community art gallery, helping with the local Forest and Bird Society, involvement in church activities, and volunteering to operate the local miniature train.

If something interests you, like you might like remedial reading, whether you get paid or not is beside the point. It’s of interest to you so you do it. (Rural, volunteer)

■ Specialised services

The last category pertained to voluntary work which involved specialised training. Volunteers in this group required special dedication, specific skills and an ability to meet heavy time commitments, all of which were considered part of these roles.

Volunteer fire fighters were included in this category, while other examples included St Johns Ambulance officers, Red Cross workers, and Victim Support counsellors.

[Types of volunteer work?] *You need training for the fire brigade and St John's Ambulance and possibly some for Victim Support.* (Potential volunteer)

3.2 Drivers of volunteer behaviour

A variety of reasons were given for why women chose to volunteer, a common element being that volunteer work satisfied the need to contribute something to the community.

■ Personal links

Many women had become involved in volunteer activities through a family member or close friend, often talking about being “roped into help”.

A lot of this coaching starts off when somebody's got a child who wants to play and they can't find a coach so Dad or Mum gets roped in and then they stay and work their way up through the grades. (Potential volunteer)

You also find that you always ask a busy person to do something because they can always fit it in. You choose a lazy person and they'll just keep putting it off. (Urban, volunteer)

Some had joined organisations because they had obtained help from that organisation in the past and wanted to give something back.

I've tried to do volunteer work for Women's Refuge. My circumstances have changed but I've been in there about three times, hiding from dangerous men. It's a really good cause. Every time I clean out my clothes, I give them my woman's clothes and kids' clothes. I've met women there that are even worse off than me from beatings. (Potential volunteer)

The reason I ticked yes was I could have done with that myself 10 years ago so I feel I would now like to make myself available for somebody who does need it. (Potential volunteer)

■ Contributing to the community

A number of respondents felt they had been relatively lucky in life and wanted to be involved in their local community to give something back. It was also felt that if you helped others, this would be reciprocated in turn at some stage.

I never forget, I never will until I die, my Mum always says “What goes around comes around” and I know it's like suspicion, like she always said “Don't cross your knife and fork” but I believe if I don't give anything to society I'm not going to get anything back. That's why I do it because I figure that one day I may be in a position where I need help. (Potential volunteer)

I'd find it really easy compared to so many other people. I was just lucky to be born in a country that's not a third world country for a start but in so many other ways I feel that I should give something back because I've had it pretty easy. (Potential volunteer)

Voluntary work was also considered a good way in which to integrate into a community and to meet and socialise with a new group of people.

■ **Community need**

Smaller communities felt that it was clearly communicated when help was required and that these calls elicited a good response from local people.

A number of people felt voluntary organisations that supplied a necessary service held a certain appeal as they could visualise themselves or family members requiring help from such an organisation.

[What is it about Red Cross that would encourage you to consider them for a voluntary activity?] It's something that can affect anybody, being in an accident or having some kind of a blood disease or something. You just feel like it could happen to you at any point and you've got to be supportive of a group that can help. They help anyone at any time. It's very good. (Potential volunteer)

■ **Matched to interests and skills**

Some volunteers participated in activities that were of interest and which could utilise their skills. Driven by a need to contribute to their community, they sought roles they felt comfortable with and that suited their skill set.

[Interested in Victim Support?] Probably because I've just come from working in that area and so I've spoken to lots of victims and probably feel like I'd have something to offer maybe, just through roles that I've held. (Potential volunteer)

For mothers, working with children was considered a “natural role” and one where they felt they could contribute valuable life skills. Working with children was also seen to provide a high level of satisfaction to the volunteer as it provided goal posts where achievements could be measured.

[Interest in remedial reading?] It wouldn't be a chore. I just love it. I love reading to kids, especially kids that are really into it. Stories and things. It's not a chore at all. You get so much back from so many enjoying it. (Potential volunteer)

Active women also valued roles that helped to keep them physically fit and active.

■ **Learning new skills and training**

Some felt that people were attracted to the idea of learning new skills, and considered the training involved in some types of voluntary work as a positive.

It's a people thing to me and it's also a learning thing for me. Even with everything I've done so far, I'm still learning. I'm learning new things and that, like when I went for my first aid, I actually turned around to the St John trainer, the one that was taking us, and I said "When we did it three years ago, we did it this way". It's changing all the time. See what I know about the Red Cross now, there's more added to it. (Potential volunteer)

■ **Personal satisfaction**

Some people were seen to undertake voluntary work to fill a personal need, and received significant satisfaction from taking part in voluntary work.

[Why do people volunteer?] I think it can be quite self-serving. I think some people might have that need to feel part of something or the need to assist, some people have a real need to do that. (Potential volunteer)

Voluntary work was often seen to enhance self-esteem and build up confidence in many women.

IV. Experiences as Volunteer Fire Fighters

4.1 Becoming a volunteer

Existing volunteers were generally enticed to approach their local station, and therefore become fire fighters, in three main ways:

- knowing fire fighters
- advertising material
- experiential (having seen the brigade in action).

Volunteers who knew other fire fighters (usually friends or family members) before joining were informed about the enrolment procedures and the reality of being a fire fighter.

[Who did you contact to join?] I knew the chief. He just told me to come down Monday night, training night, and I did. We just had a chat. He told me to do it. It does help if you have backing from your family. (Urban, volunteer)

Some had noticed advertising material (e.g. community newspapers, fliers and posters) and had been prompted to contact the local brigade or fire force.

I got a flyer and I rang up. [How was the phone call?] He just said come down on a Monday night and he said there would be one lady and she didn't turn up so I actually went home and came back the following week and the chief wasn't there but I filled out these papers and he was as nervous as I was. He was more a fire fighter than a secretary and straight away they put me through a pre-train so that was quite nerve-racking as well. [What does that entail?] We just have a list of things that you have to do like hose drag and hauling up ladders or something. [Is that on your first time that you turn up?] I turned up and I had to do this and we had to put a BA set on and run 500 metres. (Urban, volunteer)

Some had seen the fire brigade or fire force in operation, visited an open day or had always had an interest in becoming a fire fighter.

I did actually used to feel envious when I heard the siren go off, envious of the people going out to help other people. (Urban, volunteer)

On contacting their local brigade or fire force most respondents were invited to join the next scheduled training session.

Experiences on the first training session varied. While some had been given paperwork to fill in and been invited to simply watch training that evening, others had been “thrown in the deep end” and been asked to participate in the training exercises.

Some recruits suggested a structured induction procedure be introduced that was common across all brigades and fire forces.

The first night I went there I got a BA thrown on. We had basically a buddy with us but they weren't BA'd or anything. [Would it put someone off?] I did it with two guys and one of the guys nearly blacked out and never came back. He was a big guy. [Did they warn you that might be doing something like that?] I can't remember. I wasn't fully prepared. I was quite fit but I didn't turn up thinking I was going to spend an hour doing all this exercise. I had to climb a ladder as well and my knees were giving out. I never thought that would happen to me because I'd never done it before and I'd never climbed so high. We actually had to climb the tower and that was quite freaky. Then they asked questions and you had to look around and just pretend that you were okay. [Would you have felt like you'd failed if you hadn't been able to do it?] Yes but that wasn't even in my mind. I felt sorry for that guy, you could see that he looked really, really tired and you knew he wasn't going to come back. They said come back the following week and he didn't. (Urban, volunteer)

[First night?] Frightened, scared but after meeting some of the members of the brigade, I felt more relaxed and welcome. I can remember the night I turned up, it was a training night. They were all lined up and I watched them muster. I'd never seen anything like it. It was like you were in the army. It was frightening. I thought "I can't do this" but they went off into their crews and I was given to a senior officer and he was brilliant. Took me under his wing. (Interjection.) (Urban, volunteer)

Some felt the first training session was a stressful experience, even those with friends or family members within the brigade.

Basically for me it was the fear of the unknown. Just going in there and not knowing. Acceptance by the others and actually being taken seriously by the brigade leaders. [Fear of the unknown?] More the fear of the unknown of going in there and thinking "What the hell am I doing?" [The reactions of the other people?] I suppose that's really being taken seriously by the others too because I did know them. "What's she coming down for?" It was good that I did know them but it was bad in other ways. [How did it go?] Yes I just got taken in the office straight away by the chief. He gave me a sexual harassment form and said it was physically hard. I was basically being told I'd better be serious about it and that maybe I should be considering fire police or just community ed. [What did you think of that?] He's actually my daughter's godfather but I said "Oh no, if I'm down here I'll do the whole hog". I said as long as they don't sexually harass me, I won't sexually harass them. That was the thing that I did know them. [Make it easier or harder?] It made it easier in one way but then it was really difficult in the other. It was just weird. I did know them. You're crossing the boundary line. As one of the wives – because my husband was in there too - it was whether they treat me like one of the other fire fighters or one of the fire fighters' wives. It was a little bit different. (Urban, volunteer)

[First night?] Terrifying. It was such a big brigade, a huge building, four bays. _____ is a huge fire station. [How long did it take you from going about thinking about joining?] A lot of time to work up the courage to even approach them in _____ because it's such a huge brigade. It's a massive station that was built just before the commission took over the building so the council built it. It's got four three-bedroomed flats out the back plus the single quarters which is five bedrooms plus a huge social hall. (Urban, volunteer)

There were two key areas of apprehension raised by women volunteers regarding their first training night:

- whether other volunteers would accept them
- the training exercises and whether they were capable of undertaking the necessary tasks.

I was nervous about being around a bunch of guys and I wanted to impress the people around me and I was apprehensive about turning up. I'd sat for ages wondering if I should go home or go in. I rode my bike down and wondered if I should just ride past. I wanted to go early so there wouldn't be many people. Everyone was really good. [Were you the only woman?] There was one lady there but she never spoke to me and she left quite soon after I'd joined. [She was a member already?] Yes and I don't know for how long, probably a year and the chief said to me that I could talk to her about female issues but she was never around. [In what way did you feel welcomed there?] They were really helpful, not negative about anything. They seemed to be accepting of me I suppose. (Urban, volunteer)

I was apprehensive as to whether I could do it, whether I could learn it. I suppose because I considered it important, I thought "I've got to learn this" and I wasn't concerned about fitting in with the social aspects because I knew most of the people. My main priority was being trained. [Whether you could do it?] It was the more the technical aspects. A lot of gear. Sequences and stuff, remembering where everything goes. Like getting water access out of the back of the truck, turning that on, pulling that little lever under the seat, have it on, pull this lever. (Rural, volunteer)

4.2 Expectations of being a fire fighter

Most volunteers, 89% of urban and 71% of rural, said their experiences as a volunteer fire fighter had met their expectations (combined 1 and 2 on a 1 to 5 scale where 1 meant 'totally met expectations' and 5 meant 'did not meet expectations at all').

EXPECTATION FULFILMENT			
<i>Thinking about your experiences since signing up as a volunteer fire fighter, please tell me whether being a volunteer fire fighter has met your expectations? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means it has totally met your expectations and 5 means it has not met your expectations at all. Remember you can use any number between 1 and 5.</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL	URBAN	RURAL
	%	%	%
1 Totally met your expectations	54	57	43
2	31	32	28
TOTAL 1 + 2	85	89	71
3	11	7	22
4	4	3	7
5 Not met your expectations at all	-	1	-
TOTAL 4 + 5	4	4	7
Unsure	-	-	-
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural.			

Of those that felt that the experience had met their expectations, the main reasons given were:

- the experience had helped in their personal development
- they had derived satisfaction from helping their community
- that they had acquired new skills
- the social aspects of being a fire fighter.

HOW BEING A FIRE FIGHTER HAS MET YOUR EXPECTATIONS			
[Respondents who said that being a volunteer fire fighter had met their expectations (1+2 on a 5 point scale) were asked:]			
<i>In what way has being a fire fighter met your expectations? What are the personal benefits to you?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT Gained confidence Sense of achievement / satisfaction Keeps me fit Helped my life in general Personal growth You get to push yourself Physically challenging Realisation that I can do it	45.9	47.6	39.5
I ENJOY HELPING MY COMMUNITY	45.2	49.7	30.2
ACQUIRED NEW SKILLS / TRAINING Learned new things / learned to use fire equipment / learned fire fighting techniques Up-skilling / opportunity to learn skills otherwise would not have obtained Gained qualifications Learnt communication skills Excellent / challenging training	45.1	42.7	53.5
SOCIALISING Making friends / getting to know others Social aspect / social events / competitions	32.3	35.7	21.0
TEAMWORK	23.7	27.3	11.6
I NOW HAVE GREATER APPRECIATION OF FIRE & ACCIDENT HAZARDS	5.4	4.9	7.0
THERE IS GOOD SUPPORT FROM SUPERVISORS	4.3	3.5	7.0
EQUALITY Women in a male environment I am treated equally Showed me I can do things that guys can do	3.8	3.5	4.6
TEACHING THE FIRE WISE PROGRAM	2.7	3.5	-
I CAN HELP PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT	2.2	-	9.3
OTHER I have now the confidence to handle situations - traffic accidents, fires Interesting	2.2	2.1	2.3
Base: Respondents who said that being a volunteer fire fighter had met their expectations (1+2 on 5 point scale); multiple response.	N=186	N=143	N=143

The qualitative focus groups backed up these quantitative results, with the personal sense of achievement, satisfaction of helping their community, and learning new skills being cited as key benefits of being a fire fighter.

It's just such a buzz. You're doing something so physical and at the end of it you are totally exhausted and you know, like you go to a scrub fire, you might work five hours non-stop. At the end of it you feel you've achieved something. It's out, we can all sit down, we're stuffed but if it gets away on you, you think "It's not going to beat me". You always walk away with a sense of achievement. As a team you've achieved. (Urban, volunteer)

People always comment too when you're at the incident and that makes me feel good that you're actually helping. [What do they say?] Just a couple of times you're rolling hoses and they'll say "That looks hard" or "You've had a busy day, haven't you?" and we chat. Sometimes they say "You girls have done really well". (Urban, volunteer)

There were very few respondents who felt being a fire fighter had not met expectations, some reasons being:

- training not matching actual practices within a brigade
- lower call outs (work) than expected
- unexpected exposure to MVAs
- the physical challenges involved
- some processes could be improved
- unexpected age differences within a brigade.

The verbatim responses outlining this dissatisfaction are given, but care must be taken when analysing these comments due to the small size of this sub-sample (n=9).

HOW BEING A FIRE FIGHTER HAS <u>NOT</u> MET YOUR EXPECTATIONS - ALL	
[Respondents who said that being a volunteer fire fighter had NOT met their expectations were asked:]	
<i>Why has being a fire fighter not met your expectations?</i>	
	Dec 2002
<p>"Because the stuff that we were taught is different to what is put into practice like not as much hands on fire fighting like working on the front line."</p> <p>"There is a gap in what you learn in training and how it is applied in your brigade."</p> <p>"Not as busy as I thought it would be."</p> <p>"Not prepared for what can happen i.e. accidents"</p> <p>"I'm hoping there's more; you learn more every day and technology changes. I'd like to go into fire investigations and that sort of thing and learn more. I went in not knowing what to expect and so I haven't got anything to gauge it off."</p> <p>"I didn't have high expectations, I'm a small fire fighter in my fifties and I can't manage some of the heavy work very well"</p> <p>"I think things can be done better."</p> <p>"Big age gap between me and the other volunteers."</p>	
<p>Base: 4% of respondents who said that being a volunteer fire fighter had NOT met their expectations, n=9; multiple response. [Respondents' verbatims used due to small sample size.]</p>	

Some in the focus groups felt that if fire fighters did not think the experience had matched their expectations, it was probably because those volunteers had joined with an idealised image of what fire fighters do.

[Are expectations unrealistic?] I really don't know what people's expectations are. Maybe it's a real hero thing. I've got news for them. There's a hell of a lot more work and not that much glory. I wonder if some people do. There's programmes on TV and you think "Yes I'd like to be one of those" but it's not really like that in real life. (Rural, volunteer)

V. Recruitment

5.1 Barriers to women joining

In the potential volunteers' focus groups, respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they would consider participating in a number of different volunteer activities. Becoming a 'volunteer fire fighter' consistently received the least number of nominations, highlighting specific issues women had to deal with in order to become fire fighters.

■ Physical limitations

Many potential volunteers felt that they did not have the physical strength and fitness to undertake the job, the perception being that women fire fighters would need to be very strong and at the peak of physical fitness.

[You don't have the level of physical fitness required?] I can't run to the letterbox and back. Aerobically I don't have that sort of fitness. (Potential volunteer)

Up in Auckland, in Panmure, where they do all their fire training and everything like that, during their training times you see the smoke billowing out of the thing and where they have to stand and go through this thing, I'm puffing away. My asthma got worse just going past there, just driving past there. (Potential volunteer)

A number also felt too old (40 years old often being nominated as the outer age limit for a fire fighter) or of inadequate health.

I've got the sports and everything behind me and everything but I just wouldn't do it. I feel that to be a fire fighter woman you have to be from 28 to about 40, that's your prime that would be your prime. [No I think I was less fit when I was 20 to 30. (Interjection.)] I was so fit when I was younger but now that I've got older, my Dad makes me feel as if my skin's sagging and all sorts. (Potential volunteer)

I might have considered it when I was younger but I know I wouldn't be much help today. I'm not particularly physically strong and I have a lung problem so being around smoke probably I wouldn't be able to be helpful. Leave the field clear for those that can. When I was younger I felt more energetic and I would probably have given anything a go. (Potential volunteer)

Many women volunteers surveyed considered the physical challenges involved in being a fire fighter a barrier to more women joining. Some noted the generally lower physical strength and height of women often made it difficult for them to undertake the necessary tasks and training.

You do have to be strong enough. To do your BA you've got to carry that 73 kg but then you contribute other things as well as a woman. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Family commitments

Fire fighting was clearly identified as a dangerous activity and some potential volunteers felt it their duty as mothers not to participate in activities that were clearly dangerous and could put their life at risk. Their key concern was to ensure the security of their family unit with some noting that while men should also have the same considerations, men were not seen to take into account such risks.

Current women volunteers who were mothers acknowledged this was an issue, with childcare duties often the domain of the female partner. Their participation in the local brigade or fire force was seen as contingent on the support of their partner and / or family and friends.

A lot of things I'd like to volunteer for but I can't do it because of my kids. I have to stay home during the night. (Potential volunteer)

[What did your husband think?] When I just started living with him basically I just joined up Titirangi then so he accepted it because I was already doing it basically. He didn't have a choice. Who's the one left holding the baby all the time? Basically he is. You don't worry about that. He's done as much work to support me and what I've done in the brigade because always the damn thing goes off at dinner time or bath time. Really they support you in the background. In fact I think it's harder for the women on the Monday night to get there at seven o'clock. "Can you help with homework, can you help with this?" whereas the guy just walks out the door. But I always have a guilt thing. (Urban, volunteer)

We're probably more dedicated than the men. [In what way?] I think we've got more hurdles to get over to do the job. Comparing that to running a home and other things, it's easier for the guys to drop tools and run. The whole thing really revolves around the big decision that we made anyway, especially if we've got kids. (Urban, volunteer)

■ The actual work

Some potential volunteers felt that they were "not up to the job". There was concern that they could possibly let down their counterparts in an actual fire-fighting situation and endanger lives.

It's not so much the risk that's involved as long as – I'm prepared to take a risk because there's people out there risking their lives for me. As long as I have the skills to know that I could take that risk. If I was a St Johns first aider and I knew they'd given me the equipment to protect myself with the gloves and stuff like that, and I'd been trained sufficiently to know how to protect myself, then that would be fine. But if I was a fire fighter and climbing up a ladder when I'm scared of heights, you're not just risking your life, you're risking their lives. (Potential volunteer)

Unaware that not all volunteer fire fighters attended every incident, some mothers felt that they would be leaving the team short if they could not attend due to family illness or crisis. The time commitment involved was viewed as considerably more than for other voluntary work.

Many also acknowledged a fear of fire and blood that would make undertaking the role very difficult. Some felt inadequately equipped to deal with life and death situations.

The most difficult part would be knowing they're unable to help. Recognising that a situation was out of their control or going into a burning house and having two people to rescue and choosing which one you're going to get out. (Potential volunteer)

I think it depends how strong you are, whether you'd be able to handle the mental side of it. The mental thing would be the hardest part to deal with. Anybody can physically get themselves into the extra strength. I'm always surprised what strength we have but emotionally dealing with some of the things. [What sort of things?] I was thinking about motor vehicle accidents where people are actually dying. You can't get to them. If it was a case of just dealing with property, that would be fine. (Potential volunteer)

Amongst volunteers, many felt the nature of the work undertaken was a key barrier to joining, although this was not considered a gender specific issue. Most noted that motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) were very difficult to deal with, requiring a certain type of personality to be able to cope with the difficult decisions and some of the “horrific scenes” they would be confronted with.

■ **Closed shop**

Some potential volunteers felt the local brigade or fire force was a male dominated environment that did not welcome women. There was a stereotype that volunteer fire fighters were middle-aged men.

With anything else I felt like if I wanted to join the Neighbourhood Watch or Red Cross or St Johns or Surf Lifesaving, whatever, I'd just turn up and knock on the door and say “Here I am” and they'd just grab me, saying “We need you” but I've always felt like volunteer fire fighting is this secret mason's type organisation that you get invited into. How often do you hear about – all these other people come knocking on your door, they ask for money, you see them, you hear about them every day, but the volunteer fire brigade, you look at them, when you do see them in the paper there's 60-year-old men, they're elderly men who look like they've lived in that little area for a long time. They don't ever come knocking on your door or ring up or anything. (Potential volunteer)

[Recruiting women?] I think it's got to be at the ground level. It's pretty obvious when your local group is not interested in having women. (Potential volunteer)

Current volunteers backed up this view and felt that that the attitude of male volunteers could deter women joining the fire force.

[Other barriers to women joining?] Some think it's a male environment. Twenty guys in a room is fairly scary. Some of them can be fairly overwhelming. It is when you first turn up. It was for me. I just thought that if these guys don't accept me, I'm out of there. I wasn't there to prove a point but I just thought if they're not going to be friendly or whatever I wouldn't stick around. (Urban, volunteer)

■ **Lack of awareness**

Current volunteers also felt some women may not realise women could join as fire fighters, and that there may be a perception that it was only a male role.

■ Taking paid jobs

One potential volunteer disliked the thought that volunteers were taking jobs that paid fire fighters should be doing.

5.2 Overcoming barriers

The key task is getting the right recruitment message to the right target audience.

It was clear from the potential volunteers groups that there is a limited pool of women that can be attracted to become volunteer fire fighters. Nevertheless, from the three groups staged with potential volunteers, there was a small subset that said they would seriously consider the option.

The main attractions for this group were the physical challenges and the sense of contributing to their community, with a number interested in non-operational support roles at the fire station. Just raising awareness of the real need in their community for volunteer fire fighters would go a long way to enticing these potential women fire fighters to sign up.

■ Helping their community

Some women stated they had been motivated to join when made aware of the shortage of volunteer fire fighters in their community. The potential dangers of having a severely undermanned service, or a longer wait while services arrived from another area, were key drivers to joining up.

For many, contributing to their local community and its safety was a key reason for undertaking voluntary work, and this voluntary role was clearly seen as an excellent opportunity. It was also seen as important that the community appeared to appreciate the effort and work done by the volunteers.

[Benefits of being a volunteer fire fighter?] *The community-based type feeling that you get from being involved in something. It's your community, go out and look after it.* (Potential volunteer)

[Community spirit is quite strong?] *It's different, different sort of people. You do depend on them. Just like if you're driving into town and your car breaks down, you think "Somebody will come along soon" whereas in town you probably wouldn't even think that. You'd probably think "I'm going to get mugged" or something.* (Rural, volunteer)

■ Personal challenge

Many volunteers relished the challenge of being a volunteer fire fighter. The fact that they thought many other women (and men) would be incapable of undertaking the role simply enhanced the challenge involved.

Given the challenges involved in being a fire fighter, this type of voluntary work was considered particularly good for building confidence and self-esteem.

[Why do people in general volunteer?] *It's the adrenalin, you're addicted to it. That happy feeling that you're left with, there's no money that can buy you that feeling. You've done something special. It's a special thing. You don't get an opportunity in everyday life to do special things like that. [Is that quite important, doing something that you know you can't do in everyday life?] To me it is. I never got a good education and I'm not clever that way but I'm very good at hands on. I've always wanted to do something in life where I could be good at it but academically I couldn't probably achieve that. This way I can. I don't need a diploma in something to be able to join in.* (Urban, volunteer)

I didn't realise it was going to contribute to my self-esteem until we did the basic skills training. [Do you find you're more confident outside the brigade as well? (Interjection.)] I felt I was more of a team member once I'd done that training. I felt like I didn't sort of belong really to start with until I got my hands dirty. Now I don't feel like any of the others have got any right to look down their nose at me any more. [No they haven't, you've proved yourself. (Interjection.)] Not to them. I'm not there to prove myself to those guys. I'm not there for them either. I'm there for the callouts. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Physically active

The women who were generally active people and who liked outdoor pursuits were attracted to the physical and fitness aspects of being a fire fighter.

[Consider volunteer fire fighting?] *I would do it. I think that's probably one of the few things that I would seriously consider doing. Part of it is because I think it would force me to maintain my physical fitness which you have to but also I think it's a part of the community that is a really critical piece. In some cases it's entirely left up to volunteers. There is no other help. It is just volunteers.* (Potential volunteer)

[How did you get into it?] *I had a boss who was good mates with lots of people who worked at the fire station. I had been running marathons at that time and I suddenly had a cartilage out of my knee, which meant I couldn't run, but I wanted to still do something. I was living in Titirangi at that time and Titirangi was still on volunteers at that time. I went there and joined up straight away and stayed there for two years and then shifted out to Kumeu for the last 14 years.* (Urban, volunteer)

■ Personal connection

Many respondents had joined after encouragement from friends or family members who were already members. Initiatives that target by affiliation should be seriously considered as they have the added advantage of the current members being able to assess (with some accuracy) the likelihood of the targeted person having the temperament and ability to do the job.

[First joined?] *We already had a woman out there in the brigade and she asked me four years ago if I'd come and join. [Word of mouth contact?] Then I thought one day "Yeah, why not?"* (Urban, volunteer)

[First joined?] *I didn't chase the truck but I always raced down the drive wondering where they were going. When helicopters arrived I was definitely running down there. I moved back to where I am, Te Moana, recently. Within the last year and a half and I just wanted to get more into the community. This guy I know was in the brigade and he kept coming around saying "Join, join" and I was like "Nah", but I knew all the guys anyway. One night he must have got me drunk and I must have said I was joining so he came down the next day and dragged me to the meeting. I was always curious. I'm always down the beach wandering around. If there's something on, I'm always helping out. I'm an outdoors person anyway. I went along to a practice and to me it was different because I knew all the guys and I said "Oh yeah I'll join" and they gave me the forms and then I just kept going to the meetings and then I got accepted. (Urban, volunteer)*

■ Interest in being a fire fighter

Some women said they had always harboured an interest in being a fire fighter including aspects such as driving / riding the fire truck, using the equipment / machinery and general images of actual fire fighting.

[What appealed?] *Just fun. It sounded fun. I really like being able to use the equipment and have the time to learn and to practice because it all involves getting all the gear off the truck and driving. You'd get it off the truck and then have to assemble it. Put together all the couplings and the breaches. (Rural, volunteer)*

[How did you get into the fire service?] *I had said for years and years that I'd love to be a fire fighter and I never did it. Then one day I saw the trucks go out and there were two people on it and I thought I'm going to go and do it. The chief and his wife were friends of ours. He said give it a go so I did and I've never looked back. (Urban, volunteer)*

[What made you think you'd enjoy it?] *I'm a mechanical minded person and like tinkering around with things. The whole idea of it just interests me I guess. That just goes along with the St Johns stuff as well, a similar sort of thing. (Rural, volunteer)*

The variety of duties and call outs mean many women found the role exciting and interesting.

It's multipurpose. It's not just about fighting fires and cutting people out now. We get a lot of medic calls. Cats up trees, dogs under houses, kids stuck down pipes. A plane crash. Trains. Multi-task. That's the fire service. Not one call is the same. It's the variety. We haven't fought a fire in I don't know how long. We've had 11 callouts this month and 10 of them have been MVAs. We had three in one night, two quite serious. It's multipurpose. You don't know what you're going to get. (Urban, volunteer)

[What's the defining thing about the fire service?] *They do the initial job of supporting the person. When they're stuck down a hill, we get them up and then the ambulance deals with them. The fire service is the first response and then everyone else like the police and everyone else takes over after that. You're initially the first person to do the rescue. (Urban, volunteer)*

■ Learning new skills and training

Training was raised as a key reason for joining by some volunteers, feeling the instruction would provide them with skills that could make a difference and ensure they could provide the best possible help in an emergency.

Some noted they were the type of person that liked to continually learn new skills.

My main concern is being somewhere and not being able to do anything. That's why I joined the fire service. For example if someone had a heart attack or was drowning, I'd want to know that I can do all I can to help them and not just stand around like an idiot and let them die in front of me. I couldn't do that. Just basically having the knowledge to know that you can help the person as much as possible. (Urban, volunteer)

I knew that it was 30 minutes for ambulance or police or anyone to get out there so really I know if anything happens, the fire brigade is the first call whether it's medical or anything so I just thought "Oh yeah cool, I'll be first on the scene". I'd be able to help the people. I didn't really have any questions and then when they said there were all these courses and they were free it was like "Yes, I want to learn". I just want to do as many courses as I can and I love it. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Socialising

Joining the local fire brigade or fire force was seen as a good way to meet new people, in particular when newly arrived to any area.

Many of the women volunteers appreciated being part of a tight-knit team. There were comments that their brigade or fire force was a "family-type" unit.

It's amazing. I had a miscarriage last year and it was horrible. The morning I was going for the D&C we had a house fire, fully involved and my partner went and came back and got me two hours later, six o'clock in the morning and he took me around and I swear to God, I got out of that car and it was like they all gathered around me. No-one said anything but they all just stood there looking at me. It was like I had all these big brothers. That sounds really sappy but that's what it was like. That's why I think I'm lucky where I am. [Big family, get bickering but they pull together?] They do and they really showed me that day that I do matter and they did care. It was quite amazing. I wondered afterwards if I'd imagined it. (Urban, volunteer)

Both the quantitative and qualitative research showed the overriding reason for becoming a volunteer was "wanting to support my community" (58% for urban, 46% for rural volunteers).

MAIN REASON FOR JOINING			
<i>Thinking back to when you first joined as a volunteer fire fighter with the [NZFS / Rural Fire Authority] what was your MAIN reason for joining?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
WANTING TO SUPPORT MY COMMUNITY	54.9	57.7	45.6
ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTER	8.2	8.1	8.7
FRIENDS / WORK COLLEAGUES / FAMILY ENCOURAGED ME TO JOIN	6.2	7.4	2.2
SOCIAL ASPECT	6.2	6.7	4.3
RESPONDING TO THE NEED FOR VOLUNTEERS	6.1	5.2	8.7
TO HELP PROTECT THE LAND AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENT	3.6	1.3	10.9
LEARNING NEW SKILLS / SOMETHING DIFFERENT	3.0	2.0	6.5
EXPERIENCE / CHALLENGE	2.6	2.6	2.2
TO RIDE ON THE FIRE TRUCK, USE THE EQUIPMENT, MACHINERY	2.1	2.0	2.2
EXTENSION OF ROLE IN DEPT OF CONSERVATION	1.5	-	6.5
OTHER – ALL It was a change from my ambulance role I was available I didn't want to be left at home I did not want to be caught not knowing what to do in case of fire In response to an appeal on the Radio In response information gained at school For the fitness	4.0	-	-
OTHER – URBAN It was a change from my ambulance role I was available I didn't want to be left at home In response to an appeal on the radio In response information gained at school For the fitness	-	4.8	-
OTHER – RURAL I did not want to be caught not knowing what to do in case of fire (2.2%)	-	-	2.2

Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural.

5.3 Techniques for attracting women volunteer fire fighters

■ Current volunteers

The most effective recruitment techniques, as assessed by current volunteers, were:

- TV documentaries
- showcasing real women fire fighters
- word of mouth / informing women of the wide range of fire fighting duties
- advertising on TV.

The least effective methods were seen as:

- open days at the brigade
- advertising in the newspaper
- distributing fliers or pamphlets.

RATING RECRUITMENT METHODS

Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means that you think it would be very effective and 5 means you do not think it would be effective at all, how effective do you think the following ways would be in recruiting new women volunteer fire fighters? Remember you can use any number between 1 and 5.

	Dec 2002 %								
	1 Very effective %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Not effective at all %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
TV documentaries	46	38	84	10	5	1	6	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	63	24	87	11	-	2	2	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Showcasing real women fire fighters	44	34	78	17	3	1	4	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	57	30	87	11	-	-	-	2	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Word of mouth	40	33	73	17	6	4	10	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	46	31	77	17	2	4	6	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Informing women of the wide range of fire fighting duties	34	37	71	22	5	2	7	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	41	37	78	15	7	-	7	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Advertising on TV	33	37	70	21	5	3	8	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	41	26	67	18	9	4	13	2	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Articles in local community papers	30	36	66	25	7	1	8	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	33	30	63	33	2	2	4	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Open days at the brigade	29	29	58	23	11	7	18	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	26	22	48	32	9	11	20	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Advertising in the newspaper	18	27	45	34	14	7	21	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	11	24	35	37	17	9	26	2	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Distributing fliers/pamphlets	13	23	36	34	21	8	29	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	13	26	39	28	18	15	33	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Advertising on the radio	13	22	35	34	22	8	30	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	15	22	37	30	22	11	33	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Word of mouth

Many in the focus groups noted the efficacy of word of mouth for recruiting new volunteers. This was considered an especially useful technique in rural areas where most residents were well known to the community and it was seen as relatively easy to identify and approach any likely recruits.

I think you should probably go to the people who have got those qualities, like for example if there was a surf lifesaving woman, go to her and ask her if she wants to join. Or go to someone that's in a particular club that's not judo or karate but someone that's assertive and you can see they've got a bit of strength and they're individual, someone that stands up for themselves. Rather than asking the public to come to us, I think really we should be going to the right people and identifying the people that perhaps have those skills. (Urban, volunteer)

Quite often if we've got a practice session coming up, we'll talk about it at committee meetings. Someone might say "I know so and so, they might be interested" and they might go through and get half a dozen names and someone will contact those people. It's often names bandied about from new people coming in or neighbours or something and we ask them. I think that's basically how we do it. (Rural, volunteer)

A personal approach is a way of getting people. Just going up to someone and asking if they'd like to join rather than advertising on a noticeboard. I think a personal approach always helps. (Rural, volunteer)

Greater visibility and education

Urban recruits endorsed this recruitment technique but also raised other suggestions for attracting female recruits. In line with the quantitative survey many noted that women fire fighters needed to be visible in general material relating to volunteer fire fighters.

If they're talking about a volunteer fire fighter, it's usually men that you see on the TV and in pamphlets. I went to the kindy today and this little kid said to me "You're a lady" and I said "Yeah and I'm a mother". They are quite shocked to see women. (Urban, volunteer)

Seeing women fire fighters visually. Don't promote them as women fire fighters but promote them as fire fighters. Do you remember those ads where they had the fire fighter standing in the burnt building and he'd say "This was a kitchen once, now it's not. We here at New Zealand Fire Service want one in every house", you remember that one. Why not a woman? It's the advertising of that sort of thing that gets to the public most. (Urban, volunteer)

There was also the feeling that stories or articles promoting the role of volunteer fire fighters (including pictures of real women fire fighters) in community newspapers and council newsletters would be useful in educating people about the role, and the way women can participate in the fire service.

It's the younger generation that you need to instil these things into and then there may be less of that sexist bullshit too if you work with the next generation up that's coming. I think it's already starting to show. There's not so much sexism now in the younger generation. It's the older ones. (Urban, volunteer)

You've got to be doing it in your local papers. The female then is in your face. I also think the public need more information about the situation with so many professionals versus volunteers. A lot of people don't realise that our local station is a voluntary station. They think when they ring there at 10 o'clock in the morning that someone's going to answer the phone and they're horrified to think no-one does. Then they'll get an after hours number and they'll ring that number and say "There was no-one at the fire station". We don't sit there all day. We don't give enough information. (Urban, volunteer)

I didn't know until we had someone to come out to see us, I didn't realise exactly when I joined what was involved in being a fire fighter. All those things you mentioned, I wasn't aware of a lot of that when I first joined. (Urban, volunteer)

Maybe any woman thinking of joining need to know that any woman can join. You don't have to be particularly strong, you don't have to be particularly technically minded. (Rural, volunteer)

Posters and fliers

Distributing posters and fliers promoting volunteer fire fighters was suggested, especially at venues likely to be frequented by "active" women, including gyms, schools and sport clubs. Any material distributed was seen to need to be eye-catching and available in different media.

[Posters in gyms a good idea?] Yes, that's right. A gym person would be ideal. Mind you, if you're really serious about your gym work, it's all time again. (Urban, volunteer)

Open days and community events

Community events such as fairs and markets, and the usual open days held at the station, were considered good mechanisms for raising awareness and interest.

Having women volunteers involved in these sorts of events was regarded as critical.

I think I saw an open day and they were there. I thought it looked cool. Then the flyer came out about two weeks later and I said I was going to put my name forward but I remember saying to my husband that if it's all very much men orientated and they give me grief, then I'm not going to stick around. I wasn't going there for that. I wanted to go and help. [Did you go to the open day?] It was just sort of like a gathering. They were just partaking in something but I did not see one lady there so that was a bit daunting. (Urban, volunteer)

At careers expos they always have guys promoting the fire service. They need females. Who's more approachable? Who are you going to like, a female or a male? A female. (Urban, volunteer)

Respondents in the quantitative survey were asked if they had any other suggestions for recruiting new women volunteers. The main suggestions were having promotional material that featured women volunteers, and visiting and speaking at schools and tertiary institutions.

RECRUITING WOMEN FIRE FIGHTERS

Do you have any other suggestions for recruiting new women volunteer fire fighters?

	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Promotional material featuring female volunteers	12.3	12.8	10.9
Speaking in schools / polytechnics / universities	6.7	6.0	8.7
Raise it's profile as a positive thing women can do well	5.1	5.4	4.3
Word of mouth	4.6	5.4	2.2
Make women aware they don't have to be incredibly fit / strong / tall	4.1	4.7	2.2
Do more outreach education and recruitment days in the community	3.1	3.4	2.2
Approach women's groups	2.6	1.3	6.5
Invite women to the brigade to try the drills	2.1	2.0	2.2
Get rid of the old sexist hierarchy / macho attitudes who discourage women from joining	2.1	2.0	2.2
Emphasise the training and skills you acquire	2.1	1.3	4.3
More advertising / marketing	1.5	1.3	2.2
TV	1.5	2.0	-
Don't present it as macho / old boys / man's job	1.5	2.0	-
Women don't realise that they are allowed to join	1.5	2.0	-
Get a documentary made about women volunteer fire fighters	1.5	1.3	2.2
Approach schools career evenings	1.5	2.0	-
Leaflets and flyers	1.0	0.7	2.2
Supply more childcare facilities	1.0	0.7	2.2
State its flexibility	1.0	1.3	-
Advertise that there are non-fire-fighting opportunities also	1.0	1.3	-
Have uniforms that fit them	1.0	0.7	2.2
Approach the right age group	1.0	1.3	-
Approach AMP shows	1.0	1.3	-
Target DOC employees and volunteers	1.0	0.7	2.2
Change fire chiefs who're unmotivated to recruit women volunteers	1.0	0.7	2.2
Unsure	59.0	59.7	56.5

Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural.

■ Targeted advertisements

Volunteers were reasonably polarised over whether recruitment advertisements should directly target women. While 52% of rural volunteers were in favour of targeted advertisements, a 50% of urban volunteers were against targeted ads.

RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENTS TARGETED TO WOMEN

Do you personally think there should be recruitment advertisements directly targeted to women?

	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Yes	45	42	52
No	48	50	41
Depends	5	5	5
Unsure	2	3	2

Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural.

For women who felt there should be ads directly targeted to women, the main reasons given were:

- ads could dispel the impression that fire fighting was a 'male only' activity
- women have the skills necessary and can bring special skills to being a fire fighter
- targeted ads would gain a better response from women.

REASONS RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENTS SHOULD BE DIRECTLY TARGETED TO WOMEN			
[Respondents who said that there should be recruitment advertisements directly targeted to women were asked.]			
<i>Why?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
FIRE FIGHTING CONSIDERED A MALE ACTIVITY Fire Service is seen as male dominated and therefore difficult to approach A lot of women do not appreciate that it is open to women Women often assume that such a male organisation wouldn't want them Needs to be made clear that there is a place for women in the Fire Service Fire Service is seen as a 'boys club'	67.8	71.4	58.3
SKILLS REQUIRED Need to show that women's 'natural' skills are needed i.e. compassion Need to show that women can be as good as men in the Fire Service Show jobs that female can do that don't involve heavy lifting	25.2	25.4	25.0
BETTER RESPONSE Women will respond more readily if directly targeted	18.4	17.5	20.8
AVAILABILITY Show that women are needed during the day Target homemakers	9.1	11.1	4.2
ENCOURAGEMENT Women need more encouragement that they can do the job	6.9	4.8	12.5
OTHER Stress that women are needed Let women know what is involved More female fire fighters would create a more balanced team	9.1	9.6	8.4
Base: 45% of respondents who said that there should be recruitment advertisements directly targeted to women, [n=87]; multiple response.	N=87	N=63	N=24

The main reasons given for not having ads targeted specifically to women were:

- gender should not be a consideration
- such an ad would discriminate against males
- it was not necessary to have targeted ads.

REASONS RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENTS SHOULD NOT BE DIRECTLY TARGETED TO WOMEN			
[Respondents who said that there should NOT be recruitment advertisements directly targeted to women were asked:]			
<i>Why not?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
GENDER NOT AN ISSUE Should target both sexes equally Should target anybody We want volunteers, gender doesn't matter Gender shouldn't matter Personality is more important than gender	60.3	56.8	73.7
DISCRIMINATORY / SEXIST It is discriminating against men May get a defensive response from men It is sexist We do not want to segregate males and females Why should we be so politically correct and have token females?	27.9	29.8	21.1
NOT NECESSARY Women know they can join without being specifically targeted	15.1	13.5	21.1
OTHER They must be able to do the job Should show that males and females work as a team We need more men than women	7.6	6.9	10.6
Base: 48% of respondents who said that there should NOT be recruitment advertisements directly targeted to women, [n=93]; multiple response.	N=93	N=74	N=19

In the focus groups, most women volunteers preferred a generic recruitment campaign rather than a campaign that was specifically targeted to women. A few felt that a female targeted campaign may point to special treatment for women, and that a campaign showing men and women working together would be more effective at showing that women can be active fire fighters.

They're always interviewing those guys. It's always guys. There are never women there. [So just getting the profile of women more in the media in a general sense?] Yes but it needs to be really realistic. Not put on, enacted. It needs to be shown by someone who is actually doing that. [A real person, a real fire fighter?] They're on the shovel or doing whatever. For goodness sake, when they take their helmet off, not have some bimbo shake her head and say "Oh yes, it's so invigorating being a fire woman". That really puts people off. They've got perfect make-up and lipstick. They need to come out with their hair looking a mess and smoke and grit, real life. (Rural, volunteer)

[Would it work better if it had males and females, just having females there as well?] *I think if you showed them working together, or at a training session or something. It's got to be realistic.* (Rural, volunteer)

There was also a preference for images of “real” women fire fighters rather than using models or idealised images. Some noted that most women fire fighters were of average build and it was these sorts of images that need to be promoted – showing that the average “Kiwi woman can be a fire fighter”.

Even if you had two or three, the ordinary housewife. [Like a range of different types of women?] There is. Look at us in this room here. We're all different. You get that across to people and it may strike a few of them. (Urban, volunteer)

[Showing more real life situations of women fighting fires?] *Yes. Don't make it too serious though. If you're going to do an ad don't have some big butch thing sitting there who looks like a Bulgarian shot-putter who is totally unrealistic. Have it realistic so women can relate to her and think “look at her, she's only 5'6”, she looks like she's about 67 kg”, what women look like in the fire service, not some huge Bulgarian shot-putter with bleached blonde hair. That doesn't look normal.* (Urban, volunteer)

Some felt the current Fire Service advertisements were too intimidating and that many women may feel unable to meet the requirements to join.

■ Potential volunteers

Potential volunteers noted there were many voluntary organisations competing for their time, and therefore recruitment approaches should highlight the need for volunteers, the contribution they can make to the community and a willingness to accept women members.

There's lots of volunteer activities that really need volunteers and if they really want women you've got to see that they really want you. [They could choose something else?] Not just saying “Oh yeah, well, we're supposed to say we need women but we don't really want them”. (Potential volunteer)

Education on role

A lack of awareness of the duties involved in being a fire fighter, and that women needed to be educated on the actual role and the important role they can play, was also mentioned. Most potential volunteers felt their knowledge of fire fighters was generally limited to stereotypical images.

They have to take it out to the community. Even in rural communities there's a lot of people that aren't home, that are working and stuff like that, and they need to also take it nationally because it is a national problem. There's a shortage everywhere and they need to take it on TV and stuff like that. (Potential volunteer)

Support roles

There was a suggestion that women could initially be attracted to volunteer in a capacity other than directly as a fire fighter. Some felt that a first response function might appeal more to some women, while some potential volunteers voiced interest in a support role.

Once aware of the different roles within the service, it was felt by many that they could make the conversion to regular fire fighter functions.

[How do you attract more women?] *You've got to bring them in, like with me with the community ed, you could bring them in alongside of doing the community education job and then slowly integrate them into maybe taking on more roles within the fire service and becoming fire fighters. Instead of dropping them straight in. (Urban, volunteer)*

More women seem to go towards that than the actual fire service. Muriwai had no women and then suddenly when the first response came on, they got half a dozen women just like that who all felt that was their thing. It's more of a first aid, nurse idea. There's no lifting, there's no portable pumps, there's no mechanics. (Urban, volunteer)

Word of mouth invitations to join

A key recruitment technique was seen to be a word –of mouth invitation to join, although some mentioned this would need to be seen as a genuine invitation from male members of the fire fighting team. Some potential volunteers noted that newspaper ads for volunteer fire fighters often said “Come on you men – become a volunteer fire fighter”, which clearly indicated that the preference was for male members. One respondent also commented that volunteer fire fighters had visited their home to invite her husband to join but did not extend the invitation to her.

[What would make you think about joining?] *If that guy had come in and asked me if I wanted to be a volunteer fire fighter instead of asking my husband, I would have considered it on the spot. (Potential volunteer)*

If I remember rightly in the _____ News out there, they said “We need more fire fighters, come on all you men out there”. [Need to have more information focusing on women?] I think so. You need to see that they want women. I've never had any indication that they do. (Potential volunteer)

If I saw something on TV I'd think “Oh that's good, I could do that, I should do that, one day I'll ring up about that, maybe tomorrow I might do that” but if one of the local fire guys came around and said “Can I come in for a cuppa, I'm so and so, are you interested, why don't you just come down and have a look”, I think that would be the one way that would actually get me physically through the door if I was invited because I don't knock on strangers' doors and say “Here I am”. But if somebody came to me and said “I need help” I'd never turn them down. (Potential volunteer)

Other women members

Given the perception that the fire service was male dominated, some women felt it would be easier to join if there were already some female team members in place.

If there were a couple of women already in a volunteer brigade, I would feel more comfortable joining definitely. [You wouldn't like to be the first woman?] I wouldn't like to be the only woman because I feel I have a better rapport with women than I do with men. If I was in my 20s again that probably wouldn't be so important but as I get older it becomes more important. (Potential volunteer)

Showcase fire fighting using women fire fighters

Some potential volunteers considered showing women undertaking active fire fighting roles was important. These women were interested in a fully active role within the service and would be deterred if they were offered only a support role.

In rural communities having a stall showcasing the role of volunteer fire fighters at fairs or market days was seen as a way to educate locals on the role. It was seen as important to have at least one woman manning the stall to show that women can be “real fire fighters”.

They need to target their adverts. We need women, we can make our own scones and coffee. We need you to be fire fighters. If they said “We need women” I’d think their fire station needs cleaning, they want us down there. If they said “We can clean our toilets, we can make our coffee, we need people who can put fires out”. (Potential volunteer).

Reality TV

There was a suggestion to make a reality programme based on volunteer fire fighters and to ensure female fire fighters were seen to be playing an active part in the fire fighting team.

The current NZFS television advertisement

Most potential volunteers did not think the current advertisement would entice women to become fire fighters. The ad was seen more as a tribute ad rather than a recruitment ad.

[The NZFS television ad?] It makes me feel an appreciation for them but it doesn’t give me any feeling that I want to join. (Potential volunteer)

[The NZFS television ad?] The thing that jumps out with me is, it’s emotional. The music is kind of emotional and everything and the way that it’s set up is like that. It just brings out the response “Oh yeah they really do, do an important job” but there’s nothing in there that says “We want you”. (Potential volunteer)

The advertisement was also considered rather melancholy, contemplative and therefore it did not convey any of the excitement or physicality of being a fire fighter. Some felt an ad that showed real people would be more effective at reaching potential recruits and for fostering a feeling of community spirit, which was seen as a good “hook” for recruiting people.

[The NZFS television ad?] I think they should show the fire fighters and say “Other people are risking their lives to protect your property, if you’ve got time we need your help, males, females, we need your help”. (Potential volunteer)

A number noted that the occupations used in the ad were not really female-oriented, indicating a preference for male recruits.

[The NZFS television ad?] It didn’t show a mother, it didn’t show a male, it didn’t show any people. (Potential volunteer)

[The NZFS television ad?] *There's the ad on TV where it has cook, baker, taxidermist. They go down the peg line. Volunteer fire fighters. Why is there not housewife, mother? They could accentuate that. It could be added on to that to say the normal, average, everyday woman or the average baker or taxidermist or whatever and the average housewife can still do this job so maybe they should add housewife to that.* (Urban, volunteer)

The Fact Sheet

It should be noted that the Fact Sheet was tested at the end of the focus group sessions so respondents may have been more critical of the material after having an in-depth discussion on the role of women fire fighters.

Many potential volunteers felt that the Fact Sheet had very few images of women (some noted that the same women appeared to be repeated through the Fact Sheet). The images used were also viewed negatively with many feeling the people were too posed. There was a preference for showing the fire fighters in action.

[Fact sheet- female stereotypes?] *The front cover is "My husband's just got home from fire fighting so I'll make him a cup of tea or get him a bottle of beer". This one here with the children was the male's come in and done educating campaigning and the woman's stayed there in case there were any children that were upset.* (Potential volunteer)

[Fact sheet?] *It features women more than I thought it would but I only see one woman in here actually and it's the same one on this other page. I think it would be an improvement to see multiple women on here. To me this is probably looking at this front, this is probably exactly the proportions that you would see in the volunteer fire department, maybe 10-20% at the very most women, but if you want to attract more women you put more women on here. You don't show what's reality, you show what you want.* (Potential volunteer)

5.4 Information for potential recruits

Current volunteers felt there was important information that needed to be disseminated to new or potential recruits, in particular the time commitment required, including night call outs. Additional information needed to be given to rural recruits regarding the low level of actual call outs per year.

[What information should they provide to people before they join?] *I wish I'd known a lot actually. [Key things?] How many times I was going to get up in the middle of the night. You should be fairly fit. I think you've really got to sort out what your commitment can be because we often have a problem where people, because their pagers have messages on them and for however years they hadn't had messages so you just went to the station regardless, people are now picking and choosing calls that they're going to. The commitment has got to be total.* (Urban, volunteer)

I think I could have been informed a little bit more about being a bit more physically prepared for it. (Urban, volunteer)

In line with potential volunteers, current volunteers felt the roles, responsibilities and types of work (call outs) undertaken by brigades and fire forces needed to be outlined to potential recruits.

It's basically full-time. From the time I get home I'm usually down the station or something's happening somewhere. We tell them that they're expected to do their basic and their BA within the first six months and they've got to do this and we expect that, etc. You guys weren't given that. [No it was a bit of a shell shock. (Interjection.)]
(Urban, volunteer)

Most noted the role required a certain level of fitness and that this should be clearly specified to potential recruits. Some current volunteers thought it was necessary to outline the training period required so expectations were realistic and new recruits were aware of the length of training required before they would be able to take part in actual call outs.

Information to potential recruits also needed to outline the benefits to recruits such as the uniform, social events and team spirit amongst volunteers.

[What else could be in there?] The fact that we provide the uniforms. [And provide the training obviously. (Interjection.)] (Rural, volunteer)

An emphasis should also be placed on the teamwork involved in being a fire fighter.

A lot of people would ask what's expected of them. They're not going to have to go out and man that pump by themselves. There are people there. Some people might think it's a bit scary to have to manage that pump by yourself. There are lots of experienced people around who will help you. They need to know that. (Rural, volunteer)

VI. Profile of Women Volunteer Fire Fighters

6.1 Characteristics of women volunteer fire fighters

The majority of women volunteers were homemakers who, prior to having children, had led very active lifestyles. Most noted that they were the “type of person that was always busy”, one other people often called on for help.

Characteristics and descriptive traits crucial for women fire fighters were explored in the groups. Common groupings raised by respondents are discussed in the following section.

Team player

“Supportive of others”

“Willing to listen, take orders”

Women volunteers, and volunteers in general, needed to be able to work cohesively in a team environment.

[Women fire fighters?] A person who's a good team player and who will support and back-up always. Someone who likes challenges, is reasonably fit and likes to push themselves and somebody who will be in a hurry but also be calm and be a logical thinker. [How important is being a team player?] Huge. You've got to work together. The person behind you is going to save your life if you're in a fire. With a BA it's black, you can't see in front of you. The person behind you is your eyes and ears behind you. Everything basically from there back is them. They're the ones who are going to save your back. You don't want to go in with anyone who isn't going to be able to do that. While I'm looking at the front, this person is looking all around here. If they see something like the floor or roof going to give way, they're going to say so. You put your life in their hands. (Urban, volunteer)

Social / out-going

“Sense of humour”

“Likes to socialise/ party animal”

“Friendly”

Most noted that woman volunteers were generally very social and out-going people. The team environment, the training and tasks, and social aspects of being a volunteer fire fighter were seen to attract this sort of person.

Male tolerant

”Get along with guys”

“Can tolerate men / male jokes”

As fire stations were still staffed predominately by males, women volunteers had to be comfortable around males and tolerant of perceived male ‘foibles’.

[Women fire fighters?] *Being able to fit in, being one of the guys to a point. You need to be one of the guys. No matter how much you want to say PC, you do. It's a male-orientated organisation and you're not going to change it overnight but do you really want to change it that much?* (Urban, volunteer)

[Women fire fighters?] *You have to accept that when you go in, it is male orientated and to a certain extent you do have to accept that. It's been that way for over 100 years. Who are we to go in there and suddenly say “Here's a female, I'm sorry, you can't talk like that”. We don't have the right to do that. They have to accept that women are coming in and there are certain things that may need to change and do need to change.* (Urban, volunteer)

[Women fire fighters?] *Able to put up with men, the way they swear and carry on, cursing. [Do they tone it down around you?] No. I just don't listen.* (Rural, volunteer)

Mentally strong

“Confident”

“Assertive, gutsy”

“Can take criticism”

“Strong personality, able to take and give orders”

“Can stand up for herself”

The male environment and physically demanding role of being a fire fighter required women that were confident, determined and possessing strength of character.

[Women fire fighters?] *Other things I had were assertive, being able to stand up for themselves if something's not right. Reliable, knowing that they're going to be there, not just be there for show. Flexible, to be able to do whatever they're told really, whether they know how to do it or not. [Assertive?] You have to speak up otherwise you're just left in a corner.* (Urban, volunteer)

Caring and nurturing

“Compassionate”

“Patient”

“Calm”

Volunteer roles often required women to show caring and compassionate natures, particularly when calming victims, and fire fighting was regarded as attracting women of this type.

[Women fire fighters?] *Wanting to help people I suppose. Wanting to help the community.* (Rural, volunteer)

Physically fit

“Fit and active”
“Physically strong”
“Outdoorsy”

Most noted the training and actual fire fighting required recruits to be physically fit. Women that enjoyed physical activity and outdoors pursuits were seen as particularly attracted to this role.

They're reasonably fit. I don't think they would be in it if they were unfit, had to move slowly because of lack of fitness. I think you have to be a good keen outdoorsy sort of person. (Rural, volunteer)

Keen to learn / want a challenge

“Want to learn new skills”
“Like a challenge”
“Want to prove themselves”
“Push themselves”
“Motivated”

Women volunteers were seen as particularly keen to learn new skills and take on new challenges.

Reliable and practical

“Sensible, practical”
“Reliable, trustworthy”
“Diligent, dedicated”
“Committed”

Some felt that women volunteers were generally sensible, practical and reliable. The demands made on their time were also seen to attract women who were dedicated and committed to the role.

[Traits of a fire fighter in general] I think you have to be quite sensible. Fairly level-headed. It's not really gender specific. Some of the guys who come along, it's quite humorous because they don't have a clue. They don't see the logical sequence. (Rural, volunteer)

Need flexible work arrangements

Volunteers were seen to need to have flexible work arrangements that allowed for absences at very short notice. Many volunteers in rural areas felt women, mainly homemakers, were now filling the gaps for men who were increasingly unable to meet the flexibility required.

Specific skills and abilities

“Need confidence in their abilities”

“Able to multi-task, be adaptable”

“Able to work fast and in a logical manner”

“Need mechanical ability”

Women with particular skills were also seen to be attracted to becoming a fire fighter with organised women who could multi-task seen as particularly well suited to the role.

Somebody a wee bit mechanically minded to understand the pumps and stuff, that knows when things go wrong. (Rural, volunteer)

It's just your lifestyle really as to whether in your lifestyle you do those sort of things. If something's wrong with the motor mower you go and check the spark plug or something like that, or you just let the husband do it, or you take it and get someone else to do it. It's the way you've been brought up. (Rural, volunteer)

6.2 Demographic profile of women volunteer fire fighters

The quantitative survey enabled a profile of existing women fire fighters to be developed. Key characteristics were:

- The majority of fire fighters were aged 30 or older (74%), with 39% between 30 to 39 years old and 35% over 40 years old with rural volunteers, tending to be older than their urban counterparts. Only 26% were under 30 years of age.
- Two-thirds claimed to be married or in a de facto relationship with 27% stating they were single, 5% separated, 2% divorced, and 1% widowed.
- Of all women fire fighters, 45% had children under 18 years old living at home.
- Most women were of European background (86%), with a representation of Maori similar to the wider population (14% Maori).
- Just over half (54%) of women fire fighters surveyed claimed to work full-time, 19% part-time, 8% were homemakers, 3% students and 1% were retired.
- A majority (60%) had been a fire fighter for between one and five years. Twenty-three per cent had been a fire fighter for between six and 10 years, and 9% more than 10 years.
- Most women fire fighters surveyed were part of an all-volunteer brigade or fire force (95% urban, 84% rural).

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN			
	All [n=195]	Urban [n=149]	Rural [n=46]
ETHNICITY (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)			
NZ Maori	14	16	9
NZ European	78	79	73
British	6	3	13
Other European	2	1	2
Pacific Island	1	1	-
Chinese	1	1	-
Other	3	2	4
LENGTH OF SERVICE			
Less than 1 year	8	9	4
1-5 years	60	59	60
6-10 years	23	22	27
11-15 years	7	6	9
16-20 years	2	3	-
21-25 years	-	1	-
POSITION WITHIN FIRE SERVICE			
Secretary	-	-	2
Fire fighter	73	78	58
Senior fire fighter	12	12	11
Station officer	3	3	-
Training officer	-	-	2
Deputy Chief/Officer Third Officer	2	1	7
Crew Leader	1	-	2
Unsure	2	1	5
Other	7	5	13
NUMBER OF CALLOUTS A MONTH			
One a day or more	3	4	0
At least twice a week	28	35	7
Once a week	16	18	9
Once a fortnight	21	22	15
Once a month	26	18	53
Unsure	6	3	16
TYPE			
Composite brigade	6	5	9
All-volunteer	93	95	84
Other	1	-	5
Unsure	-	-	2
AGE GROUP			
16-24	14	15	11
25-29	12	15	5
30-34	23	26	13
35-39	16	18	11
40-44	14	10	27
45-49	10	10	11
50 plus	11	6	22
EMPLOYMENT STATUS			
Employed full-time	54	54	54
Employed part-time	19	21	13
Self-employed	15	11	29
Unemployed	-	-	2
Retired	1	-	2
Student	3	4	-
Homemaker	8	10	-
MARITAL STATUS			
Married / de facto	65	62	76
Single	27	30	16
Separated	5	5	4
Divorced	2	2	-
Widowed	1	-	4
Unsure	-	-	-
Other	-	1	-
CHILDREN UNDER 18 LIVING AT HOME			
Yes	45	45	44
No	55	55	56

6.3 The perceived image of woman volunteer fire fighters

A 'photo sort' exercise was conducted in the qualitative focus groups amongst potential volunteers to identify and explore underlying perceptions of women fire fighters.

Four pictures were chosen by potential volunteers from a group of fifteen different images as the women most likely to be volunteer fire fighters. The most concerning aspect of the images chosen was that they were mainly of young and very active women, meaning many potential volunteers considered themselves ineligible on this basis.

As shown in the demographic profile of actual women fire fighters, 39% were between 30 to 39 years of age and 35% were over 40 years old. Potential volunteers need to be shown that the role is not only for young and extremely active women.

The main reasons the four images were chosen are outlined below.

- The woman looked like she had the physical strength and ability to undertake the role.

[Photo sort.] *Just about the physique. [So volunteer fire fighters has to have a certain look?] They have to have a level of physical fitness. (Potential volunteer)*

- The woman looked to have an inner strength or determination.

[Photo sort.] *I'd actually see her running with the hose and jumping up the ladder. She's got that determined look on her face again. (Potential volunteer)*

- The woman looked capable, practical and not concerned with vanity or "getting dirty".

- Most women chosen were not seen to have family commitments.

[Photo sort.] *She's busy playing happy families and she's got two kids and a husband to feed and she probably works and wouldn't have time. (Potential volunteer)*

- Most images were also of younger women. As mentioned, between 20 to 40 years of age was considered the optimal age for being a woman fire fighter.

[Photo sort – not a fire fighter.] *She looks like she'd be into Neighbourhood Watch, or helping the elderly. [A family kind of person?] Yes, she looks more like a shoulder that you could lean on. (Potential volunteer)*



A.

- This was the most nominated image.
- This woman was viewed as physically capable and no nonsense.
- Most could easily visualise her in the role.



B.

- This woman was seen as physically capable and her “outdoor” hobby was seen to fit with a pursuit a fire fighter would do.
- A few felt that her long hair ruled her out as a candidate.



C

- Again this woman was seen to look physically capable of undertaking the role.
- Some also felt that she would be comfortable working around males as she was training with them.
- A few felt that people that were “really into their sport” would not have the time to commit to being a fire fighter and would be more focused on improving their skills as a sportswoman.



D

- This woman was also seen to look physically capable. Some noted her “Push Play” t-shirt, which was seen to indicate that she liked to keep active.
- Although she had children, they were seen to be at an age that required less “hands on” care.

VII. The Impact of Women Fire Fighters

7.1 Current numbers of women fire fighters

The majority of volunteers surveyed felt there were currently not enough women fire fighters, not surprising given the currently low number of women volunteers and the numerous benefits women were seen to bring to a brigade and fire force.

Rural volunteers were slightly more likely to state that there were too few women in the NRFA than urban volunteers of the NZFS with 74% saying there were too few, 13% about right, and 13% unsure. For urban volunteers, 62% said there were too few women fire fighters, 1% too many, 17% about right, and 20% unsure.

NUMBER OF WOMEN FIRE FIGHTERS			
<i>Do you generally think there are too many, too few or about the right number of women fire fighters in the [NZFS / Rural Fire Authorities]?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Too many	1	1	-
Too few	65	62	74
About right	16	17	13
Unsure	18	20	13
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural.			

While most women in the focus groups felt there were not enough women fire fighters, they did not necessarily think numbers of men and women should be 50:50. Having too many women in a brigade or fire force was seen to cause disruption and not lead to the ideal unit.

The fire brigade in 1941 was 80% women. Definitely I agree but we're not at war. It's like I think actually too many – I don't mean to sound un-PC but I think having too many women in the brigade is not a good idea. I think it would unsettle the guys, definitely would start to unsettle them. (Urban, volunteer)

Too many women in a brigade would not be a good thing. We've got another one transferring in and she's brilliant, she's in her 40s, she's had 10 years' experience. She looks like she's going to be awesome. That's all I'd say the brigade can handle, three. [A 50/50 balance?] No, hell no. (Urban, volunteer)

One woman felt the push for greater representation of women in the fire service meant that she had received favoured treatment. She said that she just wanted to be treated the same as other fire fighters and resented being singled out.

My chief couldn't wait to get me in there. To be seen to have women. I was nearly given the rank of senior fire fighter because I was a woman. Hate it, loathe it. He wanted to get me in there to be seen to be having women in the brigade. He actually made some quite derogatory comments about it all. He thinks it's fabulous but it's the point where it's embarrassing that suddenly you're different. [You just want to be accepted as a fire fighter?] Yes. When someone says to me "What's it like to be a woman fire fighter?" I say "I don't know, I'm a fire fighter". That's the way I see myself. Until someone points it out, I actually forget, not that I'm a woman. (Urban, volunteer)

7.2 Benefits of having women fire fighters

Most female volunteers felt that the NZFS and NRFA were better organisations with the advent of women fire fighters, although rural volunteers were less likely to think women fire fighters made a difference to their parent organisation (NRFA). Amongst rural volunteers, 52% claimed the NRFA was a better organisation with women fire fighters, 37% said it made no difference, and 11% were unsure.

The equivalent figures for urban volunteers on the influence of women fire fighters on the NZFS were 68% better, 23% no difference, 1% worse, and 8% unsure.

IMPACT OF WOMEN FIRE FIGHTERS ON THE ORGANISATION			
<i>Do you think having women fire fighters has made the [NZFS / Rural Fire Authority] a better organisation, a worse organisation, or made no difference to the [NZFS / Rural Fire Authority]?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Better	65	68	52
Worse	-	1	-
No difference	26	23	37
Unsure	9	8	11
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural.			

Women volunteers were even more likely to think that women fire fighters had improved their brigade or fire force with 72% of urban volunteers suggesting their brigade was better with women fire fighters, 1% worse, 22% no different and 5% unsure.

Amongst rural volunteers 67% stated their fire force was better with women fire fighters, 26% no different, and 7% said they were unsure.

IMPACT OF WOMEN FIRE FIGHTERS ON LOCAL BRIGADE / FIRE FORCE			
<i>Do you think having women fire fighters in your brigade or fire force has made it better, worse or made no difference?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Better	71	72	67
Worse	1	1	-
No difference	23	22	26
Unsure	5	5	7
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural.			

The main reasons women were seen to have improved their brigade or fire force were:

- they provided a different set of skills and attributes
- they were better able to deal with particular groups of victims
- their presence had improved the behaviour of male recruits
- women added a different perspective within the service.

Rural volunteers also noted that women helped to boost volunteer numbers and were often more readily available than men to attend incidents.

REASONS WOMEN FIRE FIGHTERS BENEFIT BRIGADES AND FIRE FORCES			
<i>[Respondents who said that having women fire fighters has made the service better were asked:]</i>			
<i>What do you personally think women add to volunteer brigades and fire forces?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
SKILLS / ATTRIBUTES Good organisational skills Better communication skills More compassion We can offer different skills / background, Women are more sensitive Women are less competitive We do school visits, community outreach and education We can provide emotional support within the fire service We have better people skills Women can do the job just as well as men	47.6	49.9	38.7
VICTIMS NEEDS Woman are better working with victims i.e. grief / trauma Women are better working with women Woman are better working with children	45.4	50.0	29.1
IMPROVED BEHAVIOUR OF MALE FIRE FIGHTERS We have improved behaviour of male fire fighters Less sexism Less swearing now	29.5	31.5	22.6
WOMEN ADD A NEW DIMENSION / PERSPECTIVE	25.3	25.9	32.3
PROVIDE BALANCE TO THE SERVICE	12.9	13.0	12.9
WE HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOUR / HAVE FUN	7.2	6.5	9.7

BOOST VOLUNTEER NUMBERS/ MORE AVAILABLE	5.8	2.8	16.2
WOMEN CREATE A MORE SAFETY CONSCIOUS FIRE SERVICE; MEN OFTEN JUST RUSH IN	5.8	5.6	6.5
THE FEMININE TOUCH	5.8	6.5	3.2
Base: Respondents who said that having women fire fighters has made the service better (n=139); multiple response.	N=139	N=108	N=31

In the focus groups, most volunteers felt women added a lot to the NZFS and NRFA generally and to individual brigades and fire forces in particular. Many women noted that they often provided a more sensitive and caring approach to some situations, particularly MVAs where women volunteers were better at calming victims or had moved to cover victims when male colleagues were oblivious to the embarrassment and discomfort of the victim.

[Dealing with MVAs.] *You were saying before with children. All our guys have got kids anyway but I think sometimes they feel that they're not doing it quite right and they prefer if there's a woman there.* (Urban, volunteer)

[What women fire fighters bring to the force or brigade?] *The men don't have compassionate words to share in between "Are you okay? Does it hurt when you breathe?". There's nothing. Once that's all done there's none of that nice soft stuff to help calm them down.* (Urban, volunteer)

[What women fire fighters bring to the force or brigade?] *It's the humanising of it and the acceptability that men will learn just by watching. A lot of men don't know what to do and that's part of their upbringing, that they're not encouraged. Just being made aware. Maybe next time they're in the situation they will think of helping in that way too.* (Rural, volunteer)

Many noted that women within the brigade or fire force undertook numerous duties and were more organised and skilled at multi-tasking.

[What do you think women add to the fire service?] *I reckon women add a lot. You've got all those things we said before. Not soft but the more caring approach. Men can only do one job at a time. If you say to a man "Can you do that and do that and keep an eye on that" and they'll say they can't do all that at the same time. You're cooking the dinner, checking the kids' homework and you're ironing a shirt at the same time. Men, one job and one job only. [Do you actually do that as a fire fighter?] [You only do really one job at a time but we know how to do all of that. (Interjection.)] Maybe not on a fire round but at the station probably. You were saying you were the Treasurer and you did this and that and you probably were organising training or organising something. I know with me I do all of the schools in the fire safety and everything. We are doing an honours night at the moment so I'm thinking about that. We've got the Clevedon A&P show coming up so I'm trying to sort out some stuff for that and at the same.* (Urban, volunteer)

Women were seen to provide a different way of thinking or way to approach issues or problems. A more gender-balanced fire force was also seen to improve the image of the NZFS and NRFA.

Men are not the best communicators anyway so I think women are good to have there because we will open our mouth and we will communicate. (Urban, volunteer)

[Do women add anything special to the fire forces around the country?] *I like to think they've added – perhaps this isn't right but almost acceptability almost of the human side of it. Because we are part of life, women, part of the everyday world, I wonder if having the women in there ... not so much – because we don't see it in our unit, there's not that macho bravado. It's a bit more real. Whether it would still be like that whether we were in there or not, I don't know. It's the same with everything else as well, not just the fire service. Women are becoming more involved in all sorts of other things. It's just one other thing that they are becoming involved in. It just shows that that's the way it is these days. They don't just stay at home.* (Rural, volunteer)

In some areas (particularly rural) women were seen to be filling crucial day shifts where male fire fighters were unavailable due to work commitments.

But also during the daytime for us, a lot of the men can't come to the calls so I work from home doing my accounting so I can just walk out of my computer room and go down the road whereas somebody who's got a job and he can't leave because he's in the middle of fixing someone's car, although he does sometimes, so it's are you available or aren't you? We're going to have three women who are available during the day and no men, I'd still rather see a fire truck come with three women on it pull up to my house than no men. (Urban, volunteer)

In the rural sector a lot of them are farmers. They're not there now. We've only got one farmer in our brigade. Farmers, except for at milking time, could basically get up and go but now there's only one farmer in the brigade. (Urban, volunteer)

It surprises me there's not more women attending during the day if there's a callout. That was something when I was at home. The last thing I wanted to was be sitting at home with someone's house burning down or if it was my house, you expect people to help. It still surprises me because there's lots of women at home. (Rural, volunteer)

Women within the fire brigades and fire forces were seen to “tone down the male macho attitude” and allow for more acceptability by men to show a sensitive, caring side.

[Benefits for having women] *Maybe it does break some of that male bullshit that goes on. [It might tame them a little bit. I don't think it does them any harm. Keeps them on their guard. (Interjection.)]* (Urban, volunteer)

7.3 Statements on women fire fighters

A number of specific statements on women fire fighters were tested in the quantitative survey. Amongst urban volunteers the top four statements on the combined agree rating (1 plus 2 on a 5 point scale where 1 means strongly agree and 5 means strongly disagree), all recording almost the same combined agree scores were:

- women volunteers should not be treated any differently than male volunteers
- women are generally better in sensitive situations e.g. talking to victims of MVAs
- women bring a lot of different skills to the NZFS
- it is important women are represented in the NZFS as this more accurately reflects New Zealand society as a whole.

Amongst rural volunteers the same four statements recorded the highest agreement, although there was greater agreement for the statement 'women bring a lot of different skills to the Rural Fire Authority'.

The high agreement rating to the statement 'women volunteers should not be treated any differently than male volunteers' amongst both urban and rural volunteers highlighted reluctance for women volunteers to be given special treatment. In the focus groups many felt that male volunteers may feel discriminated against if women were given special equipment, facilities or training. Where women had worked hard to prove themselves equal to the male recruits, highlighting any differences between the sexes was considered divisive rather than helpful to building a cohesive team.

Women volunteers were clearly experiencing problems with the equipment and gear provided, with 37% of both urban and rural volunteers disagreeing with the statement 'equipment and gear provided is suited to the needs of women volunteers'.

Rural volunteers also had high disagreement (52%) with the statement 'there are adequate facilities such as showers and toilets provided for women'.

STATEMENT TESTING (COMPARISON) OVERALL EXPERIENCES AS A WOMEN FIRE FIGHTER					
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree - please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statements?</i>					
	Dec 2002				
	URBAN			RURAL	
	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %		TOTAL 1 + 2 %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %
Women volunteers should not be treated any differently than male volunteers	83	5	Women bring a lot of different skills to the Rural Fire Authority	82	7
Women are generally better in sensitive situations such as talking to victims of Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVAs)	82	7	It is important that women are represented in the Rural Fire Authority as this more accurately reflects New Zealand society as a whole	74	6
Women bring a lot of different skills to the New Zealand Fire Service	81	3	Women volunteers should not be treated any differently than male volunteers	74	6
It is important that women are represented in the New Zealand Fire Service as this more accurately reflects New Zealand society as a whole	80	4	Women are generally better in sensitive situations such as talking to victims of Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVAs)	72	4
There are adequate facilities such as showers and toilets provided for women	64	20	The Rural Fire Authority provides enough support to women volunteers	61	24
Women are filling crucial day shifts when men are often unavailable	57	9	Women are filling crucial day shifts when men are often unavailable	54	15
The New Zealand Fire Service provides enough support to women volunteers	55	14	The Rural Fire Authority understands the needs of women volunteers	42	15
The New Zealand Fire Service understands the needs of women volunteers	47	15	Equipment and gear provided is suited to the needs of women volunteers	41	37
Equipment and gear provided is suited to the needs of women volunteers	30	37	There are adequate facilities such as showers and toilets provided for women	35	52

Full response details for the statements, for both urban and rural volunteers, are set out below:

STATEMENT TESTING (URBAN)								
OVERALL EXPERIENCES AS A WOMEN FIRE FIGHTER								
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree - please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statements?</i>								
	Dec 2002							
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %
Women volunteers should not be treated any differently than male volunteers	72	11	83	11	5	-	5	1
Women are generally better in sensitive situations such as talking to victims of Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVAs)	40	42	82	10	4	3	7	1
Women bring a lot of different skills to the New Zealand Fire Service	49	32	81	16	2	1	3	-
It is important that women are represented in the New Zealand Fire Service as this more accurately reflects New Zealand society as a whole	54	26	80	14	3	1	4	2
There are adequate facilities such as showers and toilets provided for women	49	15	64	14	11	9	20	2
Women are filling crucial day shifts when men are often unavailable	39	18	57	20	5	4	9	14
The New Zealand Fire Service provides enough support to women volunteers	25	30	55	28	10	4	14	3
The New Zealand Fire Service understands the needs of women volunteers	19	28	47	35	12	3	15	3
Equipment and gear provided is suited to the needs of women volunteers	17	13	30	33	19	18	37	-
Base: Urban respondents [n=149].								

STATEMENT TESTING (RURAL)								
OVERALL EXPERIENCES AS A WOMEN FIRE FIGHTER								
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree - please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statements?</i>								
	Dec 2002							
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %
Women bring a lot of different skills to the Rural Fire Authority	43	39	82	9	7	-	7	2
It is important that women are represented in the Rural Fire Authority as this more accurately reflects New Zealand society as a whole	46	28	74	18	2	4	6	2
Women volunteers should not be treated any differently than male volunteers	63	11	74	20	6	-	6	-
Women are generally better in sensitive situations such as talking to victims of Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVAs)	37	35	72	17	2	2	4	7
The Rural Fire Authority provides enough support to women volunteers	37	24	61	9	20	4	24	6
Women are filling crucial day shifts when men are often unavailable	39	15	54	13	13	2	15	18
The Rural Fire Authority understands the needs of women volunteers	20	22	42	28	13	2	15	15
Equipment and gear provided is suited to the needs of women volunteers	26	15	41	22	20	17	37	-
There are adequate facilities such as showers and toilets provided for women	31	4	35	2	17	35	52	11
Base: Rural respondents [n=46].								

VIII. Challenges for Women Volunteer Fire Fighters

8.1 Challenges for women volunteer fire fighters

There were varying opinions as to whether volunteers had faced any particular difficulties in becoming volunteer fire fighters. Urban volunteers were almost evenly split on the issue, with 46% claiming to have experienced difficulties (33% rural), while 51% (67% rural) said that they had not.

EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTIES AS A FIRE FIGHTER			
<i>Have you personally experienced any particular difficulties being a fire fighter?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Yes	43	46	33
No	55	51	67
Unsure	2	3	-
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural			

The main difficulties raised were physical challenges involved in the role, male acceptance and sexism, and uniforms that did not fit properly.

Receiving the second highest number of mentions, acceptance by male colleagues was clearly an issue for a number of women volunteers. Concerns over the uniform and toilet facilities were higher amongst rural volunteers.

DIFFICULTIES BEING A FIRE FIGHTER

[Respondents who said that they have personally experienced particular difficulties being a fire fighter were asked:]

What difficulties have you experienced? Anything else?

	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES I need more physical strength I need more height Keeping physical fitness up to scratch Heavy lifting is difficult I need more upper body strength	45.3	46.4	40.0
MALE ACCEPTANCE/ SEXISM Not being accepted as easily as a male would be Men need to give women room to let them do their job I had to prove myself more than if I had been a male Sexism Male chauvinism in the higher ranks	32.1	31.7	33.5
SIZE / STYLE OF UNIFORMS The uniforms are too big It is difficult to go to the toilet when wearing overalls	16.6	11.6	40.0
OTHER COMMITMENTS Juggling time Work / family commitments Lack of weekends and sleep	6.0	2.9	6.7
TOILET FACILITIES Need toilet facilities for women	3.6	1.4	13.3
EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES Accident scenes are stressful	3.6	4.3	-
Base: Respondents who said that they have personally experienced particular difficulties being a fire fighter; multiple response	N=84	N=69	N=15

In the focus groups, women volunteers were often quite divided on the issue of whether women faced any particular difficulties. A few felt women did not face any difficulties or issues that were different to those faced by their male colleagues.

A slight majority felt there were some areas that were particularly difficult for women, the outcomes of which are discussed in the following section.

■ Ribbing by male recruits

Some considered ribbing and taunts from male recruits a major concern, although most felt this had improved as women had increased in numbers (and would continue to do so). Some older recruits noted they had to “suffer” quite heavy ribbing in their “early days”, many of whom felt women with less “strength of character” would have left the service as a result.

I think we're a bit more resilient to putting up with the male side of it whereas I think if it was in the reverse, I'm not sure if the males would cope as well if we were the superiors. I'm sure they wouldn't. Coming from so long ago when women weren't the norm, for me it's been a real tough time. [What made you stick it out?] Probably just saying I wasn't going to let them beat me. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Acceptance by male fire fighters

The view was expressed by some volunteers that there were brigades that would never vote to accept a women volunteer, or which would make the training experience so difficult that women would be unlikely to complete it. Some felt that these brigades would only accept women volunteers once certain individuals in the brigade had retired.

[The voting in system.] It's wrong that they can turn around and say "She's not getting in" but it's a very hard thing to prove. [Do you think it happens often?] I think a lot of women, if they felt that uncomfortable where the guys were saying they didn't want her in, they probably wouldn't go to that stage. I know there's a brigade where no woman would even attempt to go in there. (Urban, volunteer)

Fifteen minutes down the road at the next brigade, he won't have a woman even turn up. No woman would turn up because she would just get – [What would they do?] It's the boys' brigade. [They wouldn't get voted in or what?] It's a secret ballot you see. It doesn't take much – but with me, I did go out and do fitness classes and that, I do five or six hours of workouts a week. I'm probably fitter than some of those guys but I have to all the time prove myself. These other two guys – I did my basic back in June. The other two guys who joined before me have just done their basic now and it's like the guys are really wonderful but when I did my basic it was "Oh yeah". One of them actually turned around and said to me, because I have a problem with getting the ladder back on the truck, you get so far and there's nothing left, one of the guys turned around and said to me "You shouldn't have passed basic then". This was out in front of everyone doing the training. He actually had another go at me the following week and said exactly the same thing in the middle of a meeting and I just let him have it. The two that are on the truck – that person that's up on the truck should be taking the ladder the last – I said everybody's got their strengths and weaknesses. I said there's probably things that he couldn't do but he said he could do everything. I'd forgotten that he'd recently failed his pump operator's course. [The issue was it wasn't really to do with the ladder, it was to do with you. (Interjection.)] It was to do with me. [Being a woman?] Yes. I had to let rip back because now he's backed off me a bit. [If a crew is short, would they prefer not to have a woman?] Yes. It's like the fire prevention thing. I said we needed to do it and one guy said it's a load of rubbish, and I said he was just a hose holder. Unless there's a fire they're all saying "We haven't had a fire call for ages", they've got itchy feet. (Urban, volunteer)

Until the guys accept you into the brigade there's no use going into the fire service rigmarole because the guys might turn around and say they don't want you in there. It's cost you all your screening and the medical and that so you don't even bother filling out a form until the guys have accepted you. (Urban, volunteer)

Some of them stand there and watch your lips move but if they are one of these ones that doesn't want a woman in there, you aren't going to change them. Perhaps your issues with them won't get dealt with in as quick a response as what you'd like or you won't get directed in the right direction. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Male behaviour

Although not necessarily aimed at them, jokes were often considered, by some volunteers, excessively crude. Likewise, while most admitted to swearing themselves, the obscene language used by some male volunteers was viewed as quite offensive.

We've got one guy whose every second word starts with F. [What happens when other guys' wives and children come down? (Interjection.)] I've never bothered to listen to him. We went to a call one day and this guy was working out of the area. They put his gear in the truck and he was going to meet us at the incident. He rang up because he got there and we still weren't there; in fact we got turned back anyway and all you could hear was him on the cellphone in the truck saying "Fuck it, fuck it, fuck it". That's all he said. I'm sitting in the back thinking – [Shouldn't have to put up with it. (Interjection.)] This guy is not a kid. He's 32. He lives on his own and I can understand why. It sounded really gross. That's what he's like though so I tend to switch off. [Does your chief say anything to him? (Interjection.)] My chief wasn't there that day. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Acceptance by wives or partners

It was suggested that the wives or partners of male colleagues had been uncomfortable having women recruits in the service. While sometimes uncomfortable, most felt that it was more a problem for their male colleagues than for themselves.

[Does it work in your favour meeting partners?] Oh yeah, I think so. I think they feel less threatened. [That helps you in your work?] I think it helps your relationship with their husband better. One of the guys that I did my BA with, this is a long time ago, he wanted to do it and I wanted to do it and I'd just had a baby and it was like "Can I do it?" and him and I trained together and I followed up his rear end basically all weekend. His wife met me at the shop and said "You shouldn't have sent my husband home so bruised". My husband was complaining about my bruises too. We were having this lovely conversation and you could actually talk to each other because we'd got to meet each other. I didn't know her from a bar of soap until I'd met her. [That's quite helpful sometimes?] Yes. It made me relax better with him. I'm really good mates with the husband. I see the wife socially but he's quite a good mate now because of the thing that we did together. (Urban, volunteer)

My concern was partners. I didn't want them to think I was about to steal their men. You do feel that way. You worry about how they feel. I proved from the start that it wasn't why I was there. I do it for self-esteem. I've got very low self-esteem and I'm like "Man, I did that". (Urban, volunteer)

■ Female facilities

A few noted that that there were no separate female facilities at their station. While "nice to have" most had grown to accept their absence.

[No female toilets] It would be nice to have more than one toilet. The chief's office, you get the chief in there and forget about anyone else getting in there. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Physical challenges

Some noted that particular training exercises were often difficult for women to perform. In brigades where male colleagues were supportive this issue was not a problem but in brigades where male colleagues were more critical of their women counterparts, some felt pressure to try to match their male colleagues regardless of any physical limitations.

[Any difficulties?] *Strength-wise, I lack the strength.* (Urban, volunteer)

[Anything particularly difficult for you as women?] *It's just carrying the heavy gear is the worst part. We put on a big pack of hoses and we all just stagger off.* (Rural, volunteer)

■ Women's work

A few women did feel that they undertook more of the “women's work” at the station, but often it was considered their choice to do it. They also felt that many men were not necessarily shirking their duties but that they did not notice that a task needed to be done.

[Cleaning up.] *They don't actually say that to me but I can see that it needs to be done. That's why I actually do it. Everyone's drinking and then they just leave all the crap. It's like “Can't you just take it to the rubbish bin” so I do that. [I wouldn't start that. (Interjection.)] It's usually the same guy doing it. If I don't do it so then I feel sorry for him doing it so that's why I do it. He's the chief. Some of them are young and their mothers clean up. They'll eat some chips and just leave it there. The chief says “The mess you make, the mess you clean up”. He says that so many times. He does the cleaning up as well. When we turn out on a Sunday to clean up, he does all the toilets, the vacuuming and all that and we do all the truck work.* (Urban, volunteer)

8.2 Dealing with difficulties

Many women volunteers felt that the best way to deal with any issues was to confront it directly. Most stated that they had had to “make a stand” but once they had done this, they had gained the respect of their male colleagues and relationships at the station had improved dramatically.

I just got up and walked out of a meeting and nobody knew what to do. Got up, walked out and went home. I just told my husband what had happened and then the next day, of course, 10,000 people turned up on my doorstep. Next minute the fire siren went while we were all standing there. We all took off. It was a bit of a “We don't want a woman” type thing and “We don't think you're good enough”. This was very early on. It was quite big then. [Was it different after that?] Yes it was but with the old school there's always a person who might be 10 years older than myself thinking “What makes these women think that they can do what I can do?” sort of thing. I probably wanted to blow but I wasn't the sort of person that could because I would have been useless. I just had to get up and leave but I think that actually caused more of a ruckus than if I'd exploded because nobody knew what to do. They just stood there and everybody went quiet. (Urban, volunteer)

[How do you deal with ribbing?] *I let it go until I let rip real major. Then it wasn't pleasant and I wish I hadn't let rip like that but I think it sorted it out. It was like I let it keep going and then I said "Right that's it, man" and I let it rip.* (Urban, volunteer)

Right at the beginning I needed to let it be known to them that I was prepared to do that. I'm not prepared to take any shit. I am prepared to be one of the team. I'm not there to try and be any better or try and be up there with the best. I'm just me. I just want to treat them with respect and I want them to do the same. (Urban, volunteer)

A number felt that working hard to equal, or better, their male counterparts, and showing the different skills women had to offer had eased earlier tension. Many noted that male colleagues now appreciated many of the special skills women brought to the service.

At Kumeu I really wanted to continue doing what I was doing but they didn't have any females there. They were very, very against having women. You've got to remember it was 14 years ago. They couldn't refuse me for the fact that I was coming into them from one to the other. I decided I'd go and see what happens so I went on the Monday night and basically the guy said to me "We'll see how it goes" and I said "Yeah and I'll see how it goes". Went for a couple of weeks and it was okay but nothing that would make me want to stay. Then we had a house removal company out there and they had a couple of big fires on the site and it was an all-night job and we were shovelling crap and at the end of that a guy came up to me and said "Oh well, you are here to do what we are so you're one of us now" so I had to prove myself. (Urban, volunteer)

I knew I was as good as them but you have to prove it. Instead of giving 100% you give 150% to be their equal. (Urban, volunteer)

[Does it take a while to be accepted?] *It's a personality thing. You've got to prove yourself, prove you can do the job, male or female.* (Urban, volunteer)

Some older volunteers felt that attitudes were slowly changing (and would continue to evolve) as more female recruits joined brigades and fire forces.

Depends what age group brigade members are. Once the fossils go, it'll happen - a generation thing. With the last chief there was no way a woman would go. They turn up now because they can - they've got a big thing to play in the fire service because there seems to be a daytime crew problem in the rural sector. There's a whole brigade of women because all the men are out in the bush during the day. (Urban, volunteer)

Things have got better because these so-called portable pumps which are meant to be two-man pumps but they're four-man pumps - as things go on and change, it is getting easier for women. There's three girls in our brigade. We can take out the truck and put out a fire - I'm the only one of the three with the HT but that's beside the point. One girl is as strong as anything. I know that we can do a job. (Urban, volunteer)

Finally, while women may put up with difficulties in a paid role, it was often considered not worth the bother as a volunteer, being easier to quit rather than to try to change entrenched attitudes.

If you were having problems you'd probably get out. Because it's a volunteer thing. You don't have to be there and there's no commitment for you to be there. You probably wouldn't bother. (Rural, volunteer)

IX. Turnover and Retention

9.1 Turnover

In the quantitative survey volunteers were asked the main reason they thought women left the brigade or fire force.

Family responsibilities were clearly viewed as the overriding reason, with the second most nominated being a lack of acceptance by male volunteers. Recorded at much lower levels were the pressure of work commitments, the tough physical conditions, and relocation.

MAIN REASONS FOR LEAVING			
<i>What do you think are the MAIN reasons women leave volunteer brigades or fire forces?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES & COMMITMENTS Family responsibilities are more important Family commitments Wanting to start a family / pregnancy	56.4	61.7	39.1
ACCEPTANCE BY MALE COLLEAGUES Not being accepted by male volunteers Ribbing and joking by male volunteers Closed male environment	25.6	24.8	28.3
WORK RESPONSIBILITIES & COMMITMENTS Work responsibilities and commitments Changed jobs	11.3	11.4	10.8
The tough physical conditions such as being wet, cold, dirty, and tired.	8.2	9.4	4.3
Moved out of the area	7.2	8.1	4.3
Retirement	2.1	1.3	4.3
The training is too tough	2.1	2.0	2.2
Being overburdened with work from the New Zealand Fire Service / Rural Fire Authority	1.5	2.0	-
Lack of community support for female volunteers	1.5	1.3	2.2
Not wanting to deal with the emotional situations that are part of the job	1.0	1.3	-
Not being about to attend courses / training opportunities	1.0	0.7	2.2
Joined for wrong reasons i.e. to meet guys / to look cool	1.0	1.3	-
Lack of internal support for female volunteers	1.5	2.0	-
Not being treated equally / fairly	1.0	0.7	2.2
Getting bored, losing enthusiasm for the work	0.5	0.7	-
Not being able to handle difficult situations	0.5	0.7	-
Lack of facilities	0.5	-	2.2
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural			

In the focus groups, respondents raised many issues that were seen to influence volunteers leaving their fire brigade or fire force. Some were viewed as pertinent to both male and female recruits, while others were considered issues mainly dealt with by women.

■ **Non-gender specific retention issues**

The main retention issues mentioned in the focus groups as pertinent to both male and female volunteers included:

- difficulties coping with the training
- increasing or changing work commitments
- relocation to a new area
- the experience of being a volunteer fire fighter not matching expectations including issues such as difficulty coping with MVAs and a low number of call outs per year
- natural boredom and fatigue over time
- morale within a brigade or fire force
- relationship with permanent fire fighters.

■ **Female specific retention issues**

The main retention issues raised in the focus groups that were considered more relevant to women volunteers were:

- increasing family commitments (while both male and female recruits were seen to come under pressure on this issue, most respondents still felt that the female partner often carried the brunt of family care giving)
- difficulties coping with a male dominated work environment.
- some volunteers felt that women appeared to become involved in personality clashes with other members more often than men.

9.2 Improving retention

■ **Non-gender specific ideas to aid retention**

Respondents in the focus groups were asked for any ideas which they felt would help in the retention of volunteers. The key suggestions were in line with those suggested by volunteers generally in research conducted in September 2001 ¹.

Recognition from the community and the NZFSC

There was a call to promote the role of volunteer fire fighters to local communities and New Zealand, with greater recognition of the contribution of volunteer fire fighters from the NZFSC and the public being seen as a spur to encourage volunteers to continue in the role.

¹ Source: Developing a Strategy to Nurture, Enhance, and Expand the Volunteer Fire Brigade, UMR Research; October 2001.

The thing that I don't like about it is that we go around and do a whole lot of fire prevention talks to the schools and the kindergartens and that. We're not acknowledged for the amount of work we put into it. The guys from fire safety, they ask for ... to come through, goes on their computer. They look really good. Yet it's us that's doing all the work. [That's why you're a volunteer. (Interjection.)] I know but it just doesn't seem right that they should even – they shouldn't be acknowledged for doing it. (Urban, volunteer)

[How does it benefit your unit by having better PR in the community?] I think it's just people's view of what we do. It's a changing community and there's people coming in here all the time that probably don't know what the fire unit does. We're going to be putting in a newsletter in our ratepayers' newsletter, hopefully to inform people of what we do. That's also got a little bit slack in the last few years since we haven't been fundraising. I think it's really important that people know what we do. That's where our volunteers come from. (Rural, volunteer)

Morale within a brigade or fire force

Morale in a brigade or fire force was regarded as having a significant impact on retention. As in many groups, personality clashes and “politic manoeuvrings” within a unit could affect the overall morale. The choice of Fire Chief was considered crucial to the overall atmosphere and morale of a station, and most felt that it was important that the selection process was thorough and based on the appropriate criteria.

[New Chief?] He's brilliant, he's great but I tell you, some of the older guys did not like it. It was quite resentful. They felt they should have had it because they had a couple of years' more experience, they've held that position in other brigades. [That's also too because they can't accept change. (Interjection.)] One of them in particular got quite bitter about it, and it was like “Hang on a minute, you were an officer in your last brigade, you know what it's like, when you leave your brigade you leave your rank and if you get transferred you go in as a fire fighter, you may have reached deputy chief”. A couple of them – it can cause bitterness too but we're still working through. (Urban, volunteer)

The attitude of permanent fire fighters also had an impact on the morale of volunteers. Some permanents were seen to be unappreciative of the role volunteers played and fostering a better relationship between these two factions was seen as a positive move for the Fire Service as a whole.

I think the paid look at volunteers, male and female, as second rate. Most of them look at us as second rate, part-timers or assistants. There's already that there. It's really, really hard like you go to calls with some of those permanent crews here in _____ and they all ignore you. They will not even acknowledge that you are there. I've heard some of the officers be so rude to our officers “What are you doing here?” ... “We thought you wanted us”, “No, you can go away”. (Urban, volunteer)

Financial incentives and funding

Financial incentives to employers of volunteer fire fighters, in recognition of the flexibility they have to show employees that are members, was seen as helpful.

Urban volunteers also noted that requesting funding for necessary equipment and administrative support was very difficult and overly bureaucratic. The administrative burden was seen as especially frustrating given the voluntary nature of their role.

[Request for funds?] *I recorded everything we did and asked for money to help us out. They did help us for the next three to four months until we got someone else in. We had to prove for that first three months that we needed it before they would do anything about it. It's full of bureaucracy.* (Urban, volunteer)

Communication and support structures

Improved communication within units could help keep recruits happier in their roles. It was considered important that recruits were monitored and debriefed on their experiences. It was also suggested that someone independent should periodically check up on each brigade or fire force to ensure standards were being maintained.

For anyone thinking about leaving the fire brigade, they could talk to them and ask their reasons. [They wait until you've left and then it's too late. You've made up your mind. (Interjection.)] (Urban, volunteer)

[What else could be improved?] *Just staying in regular contact with you, making sure you're okay, that things are going well. [For new recruits?] Yes. After the first year you're going to be there.* (Urban, volunteer)

I think the brigade needs to be checked up on every now and then because our one has had so many things slip. No drills, none of this and that and certain things. [Improving the quality of the brigade] They need to maybe have not an audit but maybe the BSO needs to come out and prompt things. [Probably region would be better, someone from region to come and audit you guys. (Interjection.)] To make sure we're all up to the same standards. (Urban, volunteer)

■ Gender specific ideas to aid retention

In the focus groups women volunteers were asked what the Fire Service Commission could specifically do to retain and better support its women volunteers. Some were concerned that male volunteers would view any 'extra support' as favouring women volunteers, thereby causing a further rift between the genders in their brigade or fire force.

Given this view, care would be needed implementing any 'gender' specific initiatives, and most respondents would only like to see subtle initiatives focussing on factual information such as lifting tips for women rather than dealing with the issue of male prejudice head on.

[Gender specific initiatives?] *That would put us apart from the guys. I don't think you want any different treatment.* (Urban, volunteer)

A number of initiatives to support and aid the retention of women volunteers were tested in the quantitative survey. For urban volunteers, support initiatives garnering greatest interest were:

- meeting with other women volunteers in their area
- regional or national workshops for women volunteers
- meeting with paid women fire fighters from time to time.

Amongst rural volunteers the preferred initiatives were:

- meeting with other women volunteers in their area
- a website with information specifically relevant to women fire fighters
- regional or national workshops for women volunteers.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUPPORT INITIATIVES – SUMMARY TABLE						
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very interested and 5 means you are not interested at all, please tell me how interested you are in the following?</i>						
	Dec 2002					
	ALL		URBAN		RURAL	
	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %
An updated women's dress uniform	71	15	75	11	59	26
Meeting with other women volunteers in your area	70	10	71	10	68	8
Regional or national workshops for women volunteers	65	14	67	13	58	16
Meeting with paid women fire fighters from time to time	60	14	62	15	56	11
A newsletter specifically with information relevant to women volunteers	53	23	52	23	54	26
A website specifically with information relevant to women fire fighters	48	23	44	26	61	15
Provision of crèche facilities at the station	38	36	39	36	33	37

Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural

Crèche facilities

Despite 'family responsibilities' being a key reason for leaving the service, there was divided support for providing crèche facilities at the station. Across all women volunteers, 38% were interested in the provision of crèche facilities, 36% were not. From the focus groups, family responsibilities involved many issues, while from the quantitative results it is evident that crèche facilities would only meet a small part of these responsibilities.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUPPORT INITIATIVES – CRECHE FACILITIES									
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very interested and 5 means you are not interested at all, please tell me how interested you are in the following?</i>									
	Dec 2002								
	1 Very interested %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Not interested at all %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
Provision of crèche facilities at the station	22	17	39	20	11	25	36	5	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	20	13	33	13	4	33	37	17	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Family interaction

Fostering involvement and interaction with the families of volunteers would help families understand the commitment required and help ease the “guilt” some felt for the time spent away from their families.

It's stopping the whole family thing which we're trying to encourage. [Why is the family thing important?] Because you don't feel guilty about so many hours down the road. (Urban, volunteer)

Meeting with other women volunteers in your area

There was moderate interest (71% of urban, 68% rural) in setting up informal networks of female fire fighters within a region. In the qualitative research, many women volunteers voiced strong interest in this idea as it was considered a forum that could be used to support each other, swap stories, and share tips and ideas.

[Did you benefit from having the interaction with other units?] It was neat, yes, like the meeting tonight, like having other people here would be good just to see them because we don't see them. We've all got the same interest and just to talk to each other and see what they're doing. (Rural, volunteer)

There's three of us here tonight and I know we're all part of the brigade and we're one of the guys and that's cool but perhaps we do need to meet once a month and have an air out and say “God, those guys frustrated me last week”. [Our guys do it down the pub in their own little group. (Interjection.)] Perhaps we could get together once a month and sit there and have a yack. You might have heard something that we haven't on the grapevine. Set our own little thing up. (Urban, volunteer)

You can't talk to anyone who's not in the brigade. It's like when you go home and you want to share – this adrenalin rush – but you don't want to give away too much information. He's like “Oh yeah, you went to an MVA, there was two people in it, one went off in the ambulance, one was okay, that was it” but you really want to get in there and talk about it. (Urban, volunteer)

More information, information to be more accessible. Social gatherings for women fire fighters in same area able to contact each other and have gathering once in a while to be able to discuss problems and let off steam. (Urban, volunteer)

It was acknowledged by some that it was difficult enough making time for training and that it would be unlikely that they could fit in additional meetings.

[What about just getting together?] Honestly straight up I wouldn't have time to do it. I don't even have time to go out with my husband on the weekend. I don't think going out on a girls' night would go down too well. (Urban, volunteer)

Some preferred to initiate more informal contact with both male and female fire fighters within a region, and to seek out female colleagues in this non-gender specific forum.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUPPORT INITIATIVES – MEETING WITH OTHER WOMEN VOLUNTEERS IN YOUR AREA

On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very interested and 5 means you are not interested at all, please tell me how interested you are in the following?

	Dec 2002 %								
	1 Very interested %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Not interested at all %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
Meeting with other women volunteers in your area	38	33	71	19	6	4	10	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	37	31	68	24	4	4	8	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Regional or national workshops

There was some interest (but less than for informal networks) in attending regional or national workshops for women volunteers (67% urban, 58% rural).

[Wish list?] *Perhaps an annual forum for all women fire fighters, if they're having a conference, if they're looking for more team players in the fire fighters' games, in a specific sport or something.* (Urban, volunteer)

There was less interest expressed in the focus groups for regional workshops, the rationale being the perceived need for more subtle or neutral forms of support for women. They felt that male colleagues could react quite negatively to a forum only available to women.

To say "I have problems doing this" and somebody says "If you do it this way, that will help you do this" so I think a workshop in that way as in females helping other females in terms of achieving something on their training. [So that would be good?] Again you've got to be really careful that you don't disassociate yourself from the guys. (Urban, volunteer)

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUPPORT INITIATIVES – REGIONAL OR NATIONAL WORKSHOPS FOR WOMEN

On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very interested and 5 means you are not interested at all, please tell me how interested you are in the following?

	Dec 2002 %								
	1 Very interested %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Not interested at all %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
Regional or national workshops for women volunteers	35	32	67	19	7	6	13	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	28	30	58	24	7	9	16	2	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Uniform

A number of women in the focus groups felt it would help if equipment and uniforms could be provided in smaller sizes to suit the smaller frames of many women. There were also calls for an updated dress uniform and one suitable for pregnant women.

[Other possible improvements?] *The dress uniform skirt is absolutely disgusting. I tried mine on the other night for an honours night. The skirt was up around my backside.* (Urban, volunteer)

Our brigade is all of the opinion that nobody likes their dress uniform, so we will go years and years without having an honours night because nobody likes them. (Urban, volunteer)

Back in 1989, you ended up wearing men's pants or nothing and men's pants don't fit women. I ended up having to make a skirt. I had this skirt. I won't tell you why I threw it away. Anyway I finally got a pair of pants. I was rapt. I felt like I was one of the team now. I hated my skirt. Got my pants about 10 years ago and love it. (Urban, volunteer)

In the quantitative survey, urban volunteers showed a strong interest in an updated dress uniform with interest slightly lower amongst rural volunteers.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUPPORT INITIATIVES – NEW DRESS UNIFORM									
On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very interested and 5 means you are not interested at all, please tell me how interested you are in the following?									
	Dec 2002								
	1 Very interested %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Not interested at all %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
An updated women's dress uniform	60	15	75	13	5	6	11	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	46	13	59	9	11	15	26	6	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Website

There was reasonable interest shown by rural volunteers (recorded second highest interest) in a website that had specific information relevant to women fire fighters. Urban volunteers showed much less interest, rating it second lowest of the seven options proffered, although there was significant ambivalence (rating 3) for both urban and rural volunteers at 29% and 24% respectively.

In the focus groups, a web page with information relevant to women fire fighters was viewed favourably as it was seen as less overt and only obvious if you were searching for it. Nevertheless, some felt that information needed to be factual hints or tips for women rather than a “chat” forum, where male colleagues could be discussed.

[Website for women fire fighters?] *You could do that in your own time. [What would be useful to have?] You could swap uniform sizes. It sounds stupid but I know we had some equipment that got sent out somewhere else because someone didn't have it. The fire service weren't looking for it back. (Urban, volunteer)*

You'd also get information like if you're struggling with something, you could put that in. You could get advice from them as to how they dealt with it. (Urban, volunteer)

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUPPORT INITIATIVES – A WEBSITE									
On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very interested and 5 means you are not interested at all, please tell me how interested you are in the following?									
	Dec 2002								
	1 Very interested %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Not interested at all %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
A website specifically with information relevant to women fire fighters	25	19	44	29	13	13	26	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	26	35	61	24	4	11	15	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Newsletter

A newsletter with information specifically relevant to women volunteers scored the lowest interest across both urban and rural volunteers. Many in the focus groups felt that a newsletter aimed at just women fire fighters could alienate male colleagues. It was seen as a more obvious initiative as male volunteers would almost certainly get to see the newsletter at some stage.

[Newsletter for female fire fighters?] *I think you'd have to be careful because if you got that, then the guys would be saying "Why are they getting all this extra stuff?" and you are actually going to set yourself apart from the guys which we don't want to do. [Is the website less obvious then?] Yes. They don't need to know about it. You've just got to be careful not to put up the barrier of us and them. That's the whole thing about the fire service. (Urban, volunteer)*

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUPPORT INITIATIVES - NEWSLETTER									
On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very interested and 5 means you are not interested at all, please tell me how interested you are in the following?									
	Dec 2002								
	1 Very interested %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Not interested at all %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
A newsletter specifically with information relevant to women volunteers	25	27	52	25	12	11	23	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	28	26	54	20	9	17	26	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Meeting paid women fire fighters

There was moderate interest shown in meeting with paid women fire fighters from time to time.

In the focus groups some volunteers felt that they could learn from the experiences of paid women fire fighters.

[Wishlist?] *Someone from western region head office, even coming out and saying – not necessarily taking you aside but even ringing to follow-up and say “How was your training, did you have any problems, did you find this hard, do you have any issues that you want to bring up privately?” See how you mould into the brigade. [Having someone as a role model?] Just to be able to look at her and think “Wow man, she did that”. (Urban, volunteer)*

I like to hear about other women and their successes, of gaining higher rankings, etc. (Urban, volunteer)

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUPPORT INITIATIVES – MEETING PAID WOMEN FIRE FIGHTERS									
On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very interested and 5 means you are not interested at all, please tell me how interested you are in the following?									
	Dec 2002								
	1 Very interested %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Not interested at all %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
Meeting with paid women fire fighters from time to time	35	27	62	23	8	7	15	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	39	17	56	31	4	7	11	2	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Mediation and support for women fire fighters

There was the impression that having an independent outlet for support and intervention would be positive for women volunteers if they were facing male prejudice within their unit.

Perhaps if there was an avenue for the women to actually discuss what is going on – would they have that, that there could be somebody who could come in and talk to the men and say “This is unacceptable, you’re a rural fire unit, you’re getting funding, you can’t behave in this way”. (Rural, volunteer)

X. Training Issues

10.1 Training within the brigade / fire force

The majority of volunteers were comfortable with the amount of training they received, with 77% of urban and 83% of rural volunteers stating the amount of training was 'about right'. However, 21% of urban and 17% of rural volunteers felt they received too little training.

TRAINING NEEDS MET			
<i>Thinking about the training you receive, would you generally say you receive too much training, too little, or about the right amount of training?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Too much	-	1	-
Too little	21	21	17
About right	78	77	83
Unsure	1	1	-
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural			

Training provided by local brigades and fire forces received high satisfaction ratings with 83% of urban volunteers (77% rural) rating training either 1 or 2 on the 5-point satisfaction scale.

SATISFACTION WITH TRAINING PROVIDED BY LOCAL BRIGADE OR FIRE FORCE			
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very satisfied and 5 means you are very dissatisfied - how satisfied are you with the training provided by your local brigade or fire force?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
1 Very satisfied	45	46	44
2	36	37	33
TOTAL 1 + 2	81	83	77
3	14	13	15
4	3	2	4
5 Very dissatisfied	1	1	2
TOTAL 4 + 5	4	3	6
Unsure	1	1	2
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural			

The few people who were dissatisfied with their training were asked how training could be improved. It must be noted that these suggestions were raised by a very small sub-sample (n=8) and therefore responses must be interpreted with care.

REASONS DISSATISFIED WITH TRAINING PROVIDED BY LOCAL BRIGADE OR FIRE FORCE	
[Respondents who said that they were dissatisfied with training were asked:]	
In what ways could training at your local brigade or fire force be improved?	
	Dec 2002
<p>“Content repeated and tired; need more involvement in lectures from lower ranks, not just spoken to by seniors. A mixture of visual and auditory learning. Focus on new techniques.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“It could be more structured and realistic and more team based.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“They could be a damn sight slicker, I think it is too time consuming for what we have to learn.”</p> <p>“Very difficult to get onto training courses, not sure why but its frustrating. Training courses are not available at the moment.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“They need to do basics more regularly, train more often.”</p> <p>“If we could have all our courses at the station or as many as possible. We could use more local facilities to do our courses and it seems ridiculous to take 10 people and cut out our weekends having to go to a main centre to do them when you’re working as well.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“Change the chief.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“Have a national training instructor with scheduled training programme.”</p>	
<p>Base: 4% of respondents who said that they were dissatisfied with training, n=8; multiple response. [Respondents verbatims used due to small sample size].</p>	

In the focus groups most volunteers claimed to enjoy the training within their brigade and fire force, consistent with training and learning new skills being considered key attractions of being a volunteer fire fighter.

[How is the brigade training?] *Good. We get a lot of variety. It’s all organised internally by your own brigade. However good your chief or training officer is, depending on who organises it.* (Urban, volunteer)

[Training?] *Awesome. It was hard. Hadn’t pushed myself that hard for about 20 years when I did territorial training at 17. That was weeks, this was just a couple of days. It was a really awesome feeling at the end, especially the last day.* (Urban, volunteer)

Some felt brigade or fire force training was too disorganised and unstructured, the impression being that the quality was dependent on the attitude of the unit’s volunteers and trainer.

[Anything you don’t like about the training?] *I’ve been here since May and only ever had one good training night.* [What is it you don’t like?] *I just guess they’re not as motivated, as organised and as ... as what you guys are.* [Need to be more organised?] *I like structure, regimental type things. That’s me. That’s what I like. I don’t hear anybody else complaining. I’d like more organisation, “This is what’s getting done tonight, this is what we’re doing” and then have somebody who knows what they’re doing to teach me. I don’t feel that we’re getting that.* (Urban, volunteer)

You get to your training night, get your gear on and you go, you don't really know where you're going, you get there and you don't really know what you're doing. There's no one person saying "This is your job, that's your job". There's a lot of running around like headless chickens. [Do you feel as a beginner that you really need that guidance? (Interjection.)] Yes. [They're in charge of your safety, you're everything, aren't they? To train you properly so you don't put yourself or your team mates in danger. (Interjection.)] (Urban, volunteer)

Others suggested standard training across all brigades and fire forces. This was seen as especially useful when brigades or forces from different areas had to work together on a fire.

There's differences when brigades meet on the same fire ground too. One person, particularly with motor vehicle education, they would have been trained just a fraction differently on how to take a roof off from how this guy is and that can often cause problems. (Urban, volunteer)

It's just that people think differently about doing things. Everybody can see a good way of doing something. Actually on your own fire ground station you do it the way your group does it and that's sometimes where it gets difficult, perhaps if you both go to a house fire, particularly because our closest people don't have water tanks and we have water tanks so our first job is to look for a water tank and they're like "Where's the hydrant" and there is no hydrant ... probably should come together a little more than what they do. [How would they do that?] We all train on a Monday night so what you do is actually – because we've got three trucks we would probably leave two in our area and send one out to their area so our area's covered the whole time. Then they will train together doing something, particularly with water more than the hydrant. You probably don't use portable pumps as much as we do so if you came to us we'd teach you a few tricks that we have. [Is that what you do now or is that what you're suggesting?] That's what I'm suggesting. (Urban, volunteer)

Most noted that the workload on trainers and trainees was extensive, and while training did require a certain level of dedication from volunteers, some felt it would help if trainers could acknowledge the efforts recruits have to make.

There were also suggestions that trainers should be more understanding, again highlighting the need for trainers to acknowledge that recruits were volunteers and each had different skill levels and capabilities.

If I do something at training and I've just done something that I thought I'd never do, I turn around and wait for the applause but you don't get it. (Urban, volunteer)

A few felt that local training provided before the BA course was sometimes inadequate, with more senior recruits acknowledging this sometimes occurred, but noting that the BA courses were scheduled so infrequently that they had to send "slightly under-prepared recruits" or possibly wait six months until another course was scheduled.

[Access to courses?] We often send people even if they haven't quite done the training as there aren't enough courses on. There's either not enough people or there's too many. One guy tried to get in, in September and couldn't get on. We've only just got him into one now. (Urban, volunteer)

A few rural volunteers were glad not having to train to the same extent as urban volunteers.

[Could the urban and rural services be more integrated?] *We have certain limits we can go to as rurals like we don't have BA suits, any of that gear. We can't go past them because of regulations or our training. [Would you like to have extra training?] We discussed it and decided 'no' but I know there are other fire parties that would like to be a volunteer group, change from being a fire force to being a volunteer group and they'd be prepared to put in that training. Depends on your group. (Rural, volunteer)*

10.2 National training

Three-quarters of urban recruits claimed to have attended a national training course, while less than half rural volunteers had.

REGIONAL OR NATIONAL TRAINING COURSE ATTENDANCE			
<i>Have you attended any regional or national training courses?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Yes	69	76	48
No	27	19	52
Unsure	4	5	-
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural			

However, those women volunteers who had attended a national course rated them very highly, with 85% of urban and 96% of rural women volunteers expressing satisfaction with the training.

SATISFACTION WITH THE REGIONAL OR NATIONAL TRAINING COURSES			
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 - where 1 means you are very satisfied and 5 means you are very dissatisfied - how satisfied are you with the regional or national training courses you attended?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL [n=133] %	URBAN [n=112] %	RURAL [n=21] %
1 Very satisfied	59	60	55
2	27	25	41
TOTAL 1 + 2	86	85	96
3	10	10	4
4	2	3	-
5 Very dissatisfied	2	2	-
TOTAL 4 + 5	4	5	-
Unsure	-	-	-
Base: Respondents who said that they had attended regional or national training.			

The main areas of dissatisfaction with the national training courses, in this very small sub-sample (n=5), were:

- courses pushed recruits too hard
- courses were physically very difficult
- complaints about some instructors
- requests for more frequent courses
- objections that courses took up weekends.

IMPROVEMENTS TO TRAINING COURSES	
[Respondents who were dissatisfied with the regional or national training courses were asked:]	
<i>What improvements to the regional or national training courses can you suggest?</i>	
	Dec 2002
<p>“The courses are about pushing the person to the limits until they break – we need to go back to what its about – fighting fires and supporting”</p> <p>“Found it too hard to compete with men younger than me – physically too hard.”</p> <p>“Look at the attitude of the instructors and their qualifications.”</p> <p>“A little bit more flexible with their times so they don’t muck up our weekends, they suck up our weekends with the training they expect you to do.”</p> <p>“Not enough, need to be longer. It’s hard because they are held over weekends.”</p>	
<p>Base: 3% of respondents who said that they were dissatisfied with the regional or national training courses, n=5; multiple response. [Respondents verbatims used due to small sample size.]</p>	

■ Basic training (urban volunteers)

Attitudes towards national basic training were explored in some depth in the focus groups, with non-gender related issues dominating discussion. Most respondents felt males were generally seen to find basic training as hard as women, although a few noted that particular trainers had given some women a particularly difficult time.

[Difficulties with BA training?] But I don't think that's just solely on women. That's on all. The guys on basic, I'd love them to be on our station. There was one guy who thought he was better than anyone else but that wasn't in regard to me, that was in regard to everybody. He was the sort of guy who said "Do you sit down and listen to the beeps on the radio?" and I said "No I have a life". I didn't have a problem. They were all really good. One guy wasn't good at knots so there are strengths and weaknesses there. He wasn't good at knots but he was good at portable pumps. Everybody, whether you're male or female, has got strengths and weaknesses and that's all there is to it. (Urban, volunteer)

Volunteers in the focus groups noted that national basic training was often quite different to that experienced within their brigade or fire force, a factor which caused some stress as it necessitated picking up new concepts very quickly.

[Well prepared by your own brigade before you went?] *No I think I could have been better prepared. It comes down to having the right person in the right positions back at your own home brigade. It comes to having the right qualifications and enough to be in that position. [So you had basically no training at all. (Interjection.)] We had the very, very basic but there is still more that would have definitely benefited me. [I didn't have much at all. (Interjection.)] (Urban, volunteer)*

[BA training?] *It's a different language. It's like going from Earth to Mars and earning a whole new different language and having to learn it quick and having it yelled out and you giving instructions in a whole new language and you have to remember that up here and then do that. [So you could have had more of that at the brigade first?] Yes. In a fortnight's practice it's pretty hard to get all that stuff in. It's not their fault. You actually need time out of your brigade time to learn a bit more. (Urban, volunteer)*

Trainers were regarded as being relatively tough on recruits and had “yelled a lot”. Some felt that this was necessary as during a fire, fire fighters had to respond to orders quickly and efficiently.

On the basic they treat you like crap to sort you out. [Isn't it to see whether or not you can handle that pressure? (Interjection.)] (Urban, volunteer)

[Do they have to do that?] *Yes because if you're at a house fire and your chief is not going to come and say “Could you please go and set up that portable pump just around the corner?” They blast you. [Is that what it's really like?] If somebody comes up to you and yells at you which is what they do at basic and you're going to freak, burst into tears, then you get more and more flustered, how good are you going to be on a fire then? (Urban, volunteer)*

They don't push you hard to fail you. They push you hard to test you and to make you do it right. (Urban, volunteer)

Positive feedback throughout the training programmes from trainers was seen as desirable, with an additional call for follow-up with recruits once they were back working in their unit.

[What could they be doing better?] *I think we need more contact before, during and after you do courses, in your very early stage courses. I'd like to have somebody to communicating with you afterwards so you've got somebody to share things with. I got no support, no pat on the back, nothing. [No feedback when you go on these courses?] Not from my own brigade. (Urban, volunteer)*

The BSOs could come back to you six months later and ask you what could be done better. They don't ask you. You do a course survey on the day but you just want to get out of there. You don't really fill it in. (Urban, volunteer)

Some felt acknowledgement from their brigade and Fire Chief on passing the course would also be appreciated.

[Want more contact from your brigade?] *That 'pat on the back stuff'. “Good on you, shit, I remember doing mine and it was so bloody hard.” You come back on such a high and you really want to share and it's like you go there and nobody gives a shit. You're at practice and they do practice, but then that's men for you. (Urban, volunteer)*

■ NZFS national training courses (urban volunteers)

Urban volunteers rated these courses highly, with 89% agreeing (combined 1 and 2) to the statement 'the training courses provided are professional and of a high standard', and 87% agreeing 'the course material covers information and skills I need to be a volunteer fire fighter'.

There was moderate support for more women trainers with 61% expressing the desire to have more women trainers, while just over a fifth of urban volunteers identifying the need for additional funding to attend national training courses.

IMPRESSIONS OF NZFS NATIONAL TRAINING COURSES - URBAN								
<i>Now thinking about the fire service national training courses available to volunteer fire fighters, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree.</i>								
	Dec 2002							
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %
POSITIVE STATEMENTS								
The training courses provided are professional and of a high standard	68	21	89	9	1	-	1	1
The course material covers information and skills I need to be a volunteer fire fighter	57	30	87	9	1	-	1	3
I would like to see more women trainers	33	28	61	23	6	6	12	4
I can attend all the national courses I feel I need to	44	16	60	23	11	4	15	2
I get enough financial support from the New Zealand Fire Service to attend national training courses	32	21	53	14	10	12	22	11
NEGATIVE STATEMENTS								
I would like more feedback from trainers on how I am progressing during the course	33	28	61	22	9	5	14	3
I would like to see more information or tips for women on how to manage equipment or how to do training exercises	30	28	58	22	9	10	19	1
I would like to be better prepared by my local brigade	18	28	46	24	10	19	29	1
The training courses offered are not locally based and are difficult to get to	16	15	31	15	18	34	52	2
The content of the courses often overlaps with other courses offered	6	18	24	30	21	14	35	11
Training instructors do not treat volunteer fire fighters with respect	9	9	18	12	15	50	65	5
Base: Urban respondents [n=149].								

Other key findings from these questions included:

- 61% of volunteers stated they would like more feedback from trainers
- 58% wanted more information or tips specifically targeted to women volunteers
- 46% of urban volunteers would like to have been better prepared by their local brigade
- 31% found courses that were not locally based difficult to get to
- Most volunteers, 65%, felt the training instructors treated them with respect.

■ Fire Industry (ITO) Unit Standards Programme (rural volunteers)

Consistent with their urban colleagues, rural volunteers rated the training programme highly with 87% agreeing with the statement 'the training courses provided are professional and of a high standard'. While most, 72%, also rated the course material highly, this was a lower than the rating than given by urban volunteers (87%).

Rural volunteers also appeared to feel the pinch a bit more with 30% (urban 22%) believing they did not receive enough financial support.

As with the urban volunteers, there was moderate support, 61%, for the provision of information or tips for women on how to manage equipment and on how to do training exercises.

IMPRESSIONS OF FIRE INDUSTRY (ITO) UNIT STANDARDS PROGRAMME - RURAL								
<i>Now thinking about the Fire Industry (ITO) unit standards programme available to volunteer fire fighters, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree.</i>								
	Dec 2002							
	1	2	TOTAL	3	4	5	TOTAL	Unsure
	Strongly		1 + 2			Strongly	4 + 5	
	agree	%	%	%	%	disagree	%	%
	%					%		
POSITIVE STATEMENTS								
The training courses provided are professional and of a high standard	52	35	87	4	-	-	-	9
The course material covers information and skills I need to be a volunteer fire fighter	48	24	72	17	7	2	9	2
I get enough financial support from the National Rural Fire Authority/Rural Fire Authority to undertake these unit standards	33	9	42	15	6	24	30	13
NEGATIVE STATEMENTS								
I would like to see more information or tips for women on how to manage equipment on how to do training exercises	41	20	61	15	9	11	20	4
I would like to be better prepared by my local brigade	17	26	43	13	20	20	40	4
The content of the courses often overlaps with other courses offered	15	15	30	11	18	17	35	24
Base: Rural respondents [n=46].								

Again consistent with urban volunteers, 43% of rural volunteers would like to have been better prepared by their local brigade, while only 30% felt that 'the content of the courses often overlaps with other courses offered'.

XI. Volunteer Fire Organisations

11.1 The performance of the volunteer fire organisations

The performance of the volunteer fire fighter organisations, the New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) and the National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA), was highly rated, with 87% of urban and 82% of rural volunteers agreed with the statement “the NZFS / NRFA provides a good service with the funds available to it”.

These ratings were in line with those recorded amongst the general (male and female) population of volunteers in research conducted in September 2001 ² where agreement was 90% and 87% amongst urban and rural volunteers respectively.

NZFS / RURAL FIRE AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE RATING			
<i>Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement? The [NZFS / Rural Fire Authority] provides a good service with the funds available to it.</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Strongly agree	44	41	52
Somewhat agree	43	46	30
TOTAL AGREE	87	87	82
Somewhat disagree	5	5	7
Strongly disagree	-	1	-
TOTAL DISAGREE	5	6	7
Unsure	8	7	11
Base: All respondents - 149 urban, 46 rural			

In the focus groups, it was acknowledged that the services provided by the NZFS and NRFA filled a gap and provided a cost-effective service to the community in areas where a permanent fire brigade or fire force was generally considered unwarranted.

[Volunteer fire brigade positives.] *It does a fairly good service at a low cost to the fire service.* (Interjection.) (Urban, volunteer)

² Source: Developing a Strategy to Nurture, Enhance, and Expand the Volunteer Fire Brigade, UMR Research; October 2001

■ NZFS / NRFA ‘Out of touch with volunteers’

Women volunteers felt quite removed from the overall workings of the NZFSC, NZFS and NRFA. In the focus groups, most (apart from those that undertook administrative duties) were unaware of the organisational structure and management of the service. Most volunteers were more focused, national training apart, on issues in their local brigade or fire force rather than on issues affecting the service nationally.

This lack of knowledge was clearly evident in the quantitative survey with nearly a quarter of urban and more than a third of rural women volunteers unable to nominate a response as to whether they agreed that the direction of the NZFSC is set by the government of the day.

In a survey of all volunteers conducted in September 2001³, only 7% gave an “unsure” response to the same question.

STATEMENT TESTING									
<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree?</i>									
	Dec 2002								
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
The direction of the New Zealand Fire Service Commission is set by the government of the day	10	18	28	38	9	3	12	22	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	9	11	20	35	-	6	6	39	Rural volunteers (n=46)

Rural fire services felt a stronger sense of isolation from the parent organisation, probably because their funding is received from District Councils rather than the NZFSC and only recently have Commission training standards been enforced. Conversely, there was greater knowledge of the administrative structures in place amongst urban brigades.

[Do the NZFSC need to communicate to you?] *The only thing I know about them is that they provide funding for fires and stuff. I don't really know what they do actually to be honest. The person at the top of the tree or anything...* (Rural, volunteer)

[Do you want to know more about the NZFSC?] *It probably would be handy to have the organisation chart to put on the notice board. It would be quite handy to have it with their job descriptions beside it but whether anybody would read it, probably not. It probably doesn't really apply to us.* (Rural, volunteer)

³ Source: Developing a Strategy to Nurture, Enhance, and Expand the Volunteer Fire Brigade, UMR Research; October 2001

■ Inadequate support

It was believed both the NZFS and NRFA could improve the level of support provided to volunteer brigades and fire forces through the provision of equipment, and in administrative support.

I think they should look after their vollies better. [In what way?] Gear. I'm a three shoe size and they don't make gear for you. [What do you do?] Two lots of inners in your gumboots and two pairs of socks. [We've got a new girl just joined who's about a size three. She's wearing her own shoes at the moment. (Interjection.)] (Urban, volunteer)

The provision of equipment to volunteer brigades and fire forces elicited a sharp response with only 15% of both urban and rural volunteers stated that the NZFS and NRFA were doing an excellent job, a result mirrored for satisfaction for the provision of administrative support where only 12% and 15% of urban and rural volunteers respectively gave an 'excellent' rating.

NZFS / NRFA OR RURAL FIRE AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS									
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means the New Zealand Fire Service is doing an excellent job and 5 means it is doing a poor job - how good a job do you think the NZFS is doing on the following?</i>									
	Dec 2002								
	1 Excellent job %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Poor job %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
Providing equipment to volunteer fire brigades	15	32	47	29	18	5	23	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	15	33	48	30	13	7	20	2	Rural volunteers (n=46)
Providing administrative support to volunteer fire brigades	12	31	43	34	12	3	15	8	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	15	28	43	20	11	4	15	22	Rural volunteers (n=46)

■ Training opportunities

A majority of women volunteers stated that they were satisfied with the level of training opportunities provided by the NZFS and NRFA with 67% of urban and 78% of rural volunteers rating training opportunities as 'excellent / good job'. Rating of the training programmes was explored in some depth earlier in Section X – Training Issues on pages 76-80.

NZFS / NRFA OR RURAL FIRE AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS

On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means the New Zealand Fire Service is doing an excellent job and 5 means it is doing a poor job - how good a job do you think the NZFS is doing on the following?

	Dec 2002								
	1 Excellent job %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Poor job %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
Providing training opportunities for volunteer fire fighters	33	34	67	22	9	2	11	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	28	50	78	11	4	-	4	7	Rural volunteers (n=46)

■ Recognition

While most volunteers felt their local community acknowledged the contribution of volunteer fire fighters (69% of urban, 65% of rural respondents), recognition by the NZFSC of the support received from families (40% of urban, 37% rural) and employers (36% urban, 33% rural) rated much lower.

It's outside your own brigade but when you go to someone, they've got to go to somebody. Then it gets lost along the way and you've got to start again. There's nothing from the top level that will just walk into your brigade one night, turn around and say "gee thanks guys for what you've been doing". I know we haven't had the hierarchy out this year at least, probably half of last year. You just don't see them from year to the next. (Urban, volunteer)

STATEMENT TESTING

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree?

	Dec 2002								
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
The contributions of volunteer fire fighters in New Zealand are recognised by local communities	36	33	69	24	5	2	7	-	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	46	19	65	20	11	2	13	2	Rural volunteers (n=46)
The support volunteer fire fighters receive from their families is acknowledged by the New Zealand Fire Service Commission	15	25	40	29	19	9	28	3	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	11	26	37	17	22	11	33	13	Rural volunteers (n=46)
The support volunteer fire fighters receive from their employers is acknowledged by the New Zealand Fire Service Commission	11	25	36	28	21	9	30	6	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	7	26	33	26	13	4	17	24	Rural volunteers (n=46)

■ Women volunteers

There was a clear mandate amongst women to encourage more women to become volunteer fire fighters. Sixty-nine per cent of urban and 81% of rural women volunteers agreed there should be more female volunteer fire fighters, in contrast with 56% agreement to the same statement amongst male volunteers in the 2001 survey ⁴.

STATEMENT TESTING									
<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree?</i>									
	Dec 2002								
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	TOTAL 1 + 2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	TOTAL 4 + 5 %	Unsure %	
There should be more female volunteer fire fighters.	43	26	69	25	3	2	5	1	Urban volunteers (N=149)
	68	13	81	17	-	2	2	-	Rural volunteers (n=46)

11.2 Information and Communication

Only 16% of urban female volunteers thought the amount of information received from NZFS was too little with 76% saying it was 'about right' and 8% regarding it as 'too much'. In the focus groups, most noted they received quite a substantial amount of information from the NZFS, but that the information was often quite "dry and boring".

Rural volunteers were less satisfied with the amount of information provided by the NRFA with 30% stating they received too little and 57% about the right amount. None thought they received too much information. The sense of isolation felt by many rural volunteers was exacerbated by a perceived lack of contact and communication from the parent bodies.

⁴ Source: Developing a Strategy to Nurture, Enhance, and Expand the Volunteer Fire Brigade, UMR Research; October 2001

AMOUNT OF INFORMATION RECEIVED

Thinking about the information you receive from the, would you say you receive too much, too little, or about the right amount?

	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
Too much	6	8	-
Too little	20	16	30
About right	71	76	57
Unsure	3	-	13

Base: All respondents

In the focus group discussions, most people were comfortable with the current level of communication. As mentioned earlier, the parent organisations were viewed as being quite separate from local brigades and fire forces, and information from parent bodies was not viewed as crucial to everyday operations. Current information was mainly gleaned from the *Gazette*, the station notice board, team meetings, and training nights.

Probed on suggestions for improving communication and information, some noted that communication channels within the NZFS and NRFA were rather patchy and that not all recruits were easily reached.

[Improvements to communication?] *If you want to get hold of us, it's really hard. I only found the fax thing on the watchroom desk. I took it and rushed home and rang you the next day. It's really hard. All information is like that.* (Urban, volunteer)

Another suggestion by rural volunteers was for a newsletter from the NRFA, although it was important this communication was informative and interesting rather technically focussed.

There is actually a Rural Fire Association of New Zealand, that was set up about 10 or 12 years ago and they have a newsletter that goes out. It's now on the computer, on the web or whatever you call it, but it used to come out in print four times a year. [Was that useful?] It was really neat. [You still get that now?] We still subscribe to it but because I don't have a computer I can't get through to it but up until last year it used to come out four times a year. [What was good about it?] It was just set up by Wainuiomata group actually initially just to give rural fire parties support. It was helping people also when we started this registration ... district councils and it's become a lot more technical but it's still really interesting. They have all sorts of articles from all over the country. That was really good and I miss that now. (Rural, volunteer)

[What about the NRFA, do you get enough communication from them?] *No, we never hear much at all really. Every now and then circulars used to turn up but they were so technical that I don't think anyone used to read them. They were technical bulletins and nobody used to read them.* (Rural, volunteer)

Amongst urban volunteers who would like more information, the key areas raised were:

- information on training courses
- general information on what was happening within the Service
- information pertinent to their specific region.

Amongst rural volunteers, the key information gaps were:

- general information on what was happening within the Authority
- practical information on equipment use
- specific information for their region
- information on how their force compares with others.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION			
[Respondents who said that they receive too little information were asked:]			
<i>What information would you like to receive from the What do you want to know?</i>			
	Dec 2002		
	ALL %	URBAN %	RURAL %
MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING / REGULAR UPDATES	31.6	25.0	42.9
TRAINING COURSES More information on what courses are coming up More details about the course content Improved information on course attendees i.e. part-time / full-time fire fighters Need to be given handouts at the course More information on training (not specific)	29.0	41.7	7.1
MORE REGIONAL INFORMATION	15.8	16.7	14.3
PRACTICAL INFORMATION - REQUIRE A GUIDE FOR EQUIPMENT USE	10.5	4.2	21.4
HOW OTHER AREAS / BRIGADES HANDLE THINGS	7.9	4.2	14.3
HOW OUR BRIGADE COMPARES WITH OTHERS	5.3	4.2	7.1
STATISTICS ON NUMBER OF FIRES / NUMBER OF BRIGADES AND LOCATION	5.3	4.2	7.1
COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE	2.6	4.2	-
Base: Respondents who said that they receive too little information; multiple response.	N=38	N=24	N=14