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STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE VOLUNTEER VIEWS ON EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND MOTIVATIONS

Findings from the Cultural Assessment Tool survey

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We would first like to thank the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Western Australian SES Volunteer Association for their tremendous support in our research efforts. We would also like to thank the 398 SES volunteers who dedicated their time and effort into completing our survey. Without your valuable input and insights into your experiences as a SES volunteer, this report would not have been possible.

We would also like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia in which this research was conducted and pay our respects to their Elders both past and present.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, The University of Western Australia and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) collaborated to obtain more information on the current state of volunteering in Western Australia (WA), specifically on volunteer recruitment, retention, wellbeing, and diversity within the State Emergency Service (SES). The key survey information and findings are presented below:

KEY SURVEY INFORMATION

Survey themes:



Responses:

- **398** SES volunteers across WA.
- Approximate response rate of 21% from all SES volunteers across WA.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

	Responses from Metropolitan units (58.6%)	Responses from Regional units (41.4%)
Average age	45.4 years (SD=15.6 years)	47.4 years (SD=15.5 years)
Gender breakdown	Male volunteers (63.2%) Female volunteers (36.0%)	Male volunteers (59.4%) Female volunteers (40.6%)
Born in Australia	71.6%	68.0%
Average tenure	SES: 9.2 years (SD=9.8 years) Current unit: 7.7 years (SD=8.7 years)	SES: 8.6 years (SD=9.9 years) Current unit: 6.5 years (SD=7.7 years)
Volunteer roles	Unit Managers (8.4%) Non-managers (91.6%)	Unit Managers (18.8%) Non-managers (81.3%)



KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the survey findings, the list of key implications are presented below:

Key Areas of Strength	Key Opportunities to Improve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers generally felt that their expectations were well managed. • Volunteers are thriving through their learning experiences in the SES. • SES leaders are seen very positively in their behaviours towards volunteers, both during and outside of call-outs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better target recruitment to specific groups. • Facilitate activities to allow more autonomy in activities for volunteers. • Improve volunteers' identification with their current SES unit and with DFES. • Improve levels of psychological safety for women and volunteers who are non-leaders. • Improve inclusivity of metropolitan volunteers in decision-making processes. • Focus on retaining younger volunteers as they are most at risk of leaving their current unit and SES overall.



END USER STATEMENT

Jennifer Pidgeon, *Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), Western Australia.*

Thank you to the 398 volunteers who have contributed their time to completing the survey. This survey is a key element of research being undertaken by UWA and Curtin University for the Bushfire Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre and which is already providing advice and guidance to improve volunteer recruitment and retention.

Volunteer recruitment and retention continues to be a focus for the emergency services in Australia. This research is providing much needed information about what drives people to volunteer their time, how to effectively recruit volunteers, and conditions required to improve volunteer retention.

The insights already received from the research have already contributed to the structure and design of DFES's Emergency Services Volunteer Recruitment Website and upcoming volunteer recruitment campaigns. It is further driving work being undertaken by DFES around volunteer role definition and recruitment and on-boarding strategies for volunteer brigades, groups, and units across WA's five volunteer emergency services.

We very much value the collaboration we have built with both UWA and Curtin University and look forward to the ongoing outcomes of this research.

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the University of Western Australia (UWA) began a research collaboration project with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), funded by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), to investigate ways to improve the retention rates of their emergency service volunteers. The State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers are a vital community within Western Australia's emergency volunteering sector due to their profound work and assistance in times of natural disasters and other emergencies. As such, researchers from UWA (Patrick Dunlop, Marylène Gagné, and Djurre Holtrop have since relocated to Curtin University) have collaborated to develop and administer a Cultural Assessment Tool (CAT) in the form of an online survey. The purpose of this survey was to learn about the SES volunteering experience from the volunteers' perspectives in order to obtain information on how to improve volunteer recruitment, retention, wellbeing, and diversity within the overall SES volunteering journey.

SURVEY INFORMATION

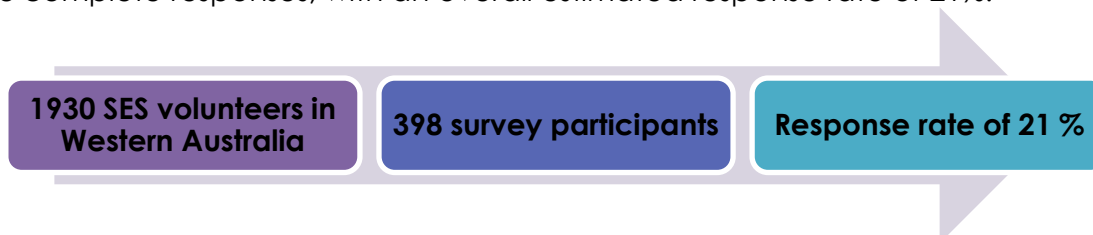
The CAT was administered on the Qualtrics online survey platform, allowing the research team to collect data from multiple Western Australian regions in a short amount of time. We also offered paper and pencil versions of the survey upon request.

Individuals who completed the CAT did so anonymously, to encourage transparency in their responses. This survey was promoted at the Western Australian Fire and Emergency Services (WAFES) conference in September 2018 and online through volunteer e-newsletters and through Facebook.

There were seven main themes in this survey, and a total of 100 individual survey questions plus nine demographic questions.



Of the 1930 registered SES volunteers across Western Australia (WA), we received 398 complete responses, with an overall estimated response rate of 21%.





PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey requested participants to provide demographic but non-identifying information so that groups (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, service tenure, and unit location) could be compared.

AGE (YEARS)

The average age of the participants was 46.1 years (standard deviation = 15.5 years) and ranged from 15 to 85 years. As shown in Table 1, the youngest cohort (aged 25 years and under) represented the smallest age group in the participant pool, with a representation of approximately 10%. This was followed by the oldest cohort (aged 66 years and older) with a representation of approximately 12%. The most represented age group was the cohort ranging in age between 26 and 35 years (21.1%). This cohort was somewhat represented more in metropolitan units, with a percentage of 23.0%. In regional units, the largest representation was by the cohort aged between 56 and 65 years, with a representation of 26.6%. Lastly, those aged between 36 and 45 years, and 46 and 55 years, were represented with a percentage ranging between 16.4% and 18.8%, depending on unit location. Altogether, for the survey participants, all age groups were relatively well represented and the differences between metropolitan and regional units were small.

	Overall	Metropolitan	Regional
Below 26 years	9.8%	10.7%	8.6%
26 – 35 years	21.1%	23.0%	18.0%
36 – 45 years	18.6%	17.6%	18.8%
46 – 55 years	17.6%	18.4%	16.4%
56 – 65 years	20.9%	18.0%	26.6%
Above 65 years	12.1%	12.3%	11.7%

Table 1. Age representation within the survey sample.

GENDER

As of August 2018, when this survey was first distributed, the overall SES population in WA consisted of 62.8% men and 37.2% women. Observing Table 2 below, it can be noted that the gender representation within this sample is representative of the SES population in WA at the time that these data were collected. There were also no significant differences found when comparing the number of leaders between male and female volunteers. Similarly, the gender representation between metropolitan and regional units were highly comparable.

	Gender breakdown	
	Male volunteers	Female volunteers
Overall SES population in WA	62.8%	37.2%
Participant sample	61.6%	37.4%
Metropolitan units	63.2%	36.0%
Regional units	59.4%	40.6%
Leader representation	13.5%	8.7%

Table 2. Gender representation within the survey sample.



NATIONALITY AND ETHNICITY

From the sample, 70.4% of the participants were born in Australia, and 29.6% of participants were born in a different country.

Participants were also asked which ethnic group they identify with most and the results are shown in Table 3 below. The overwhelming majority identified as being of Australian ethnicity, followed by Western European. Nonetheless, the many other ethnic identities were largely represented by at least one member of the SES. While these results suggest that ethnic diversity is relatively low in the SES, there are some members who identified with non-Caucasian ethnic groups.

Ethnicity	Percentage (%)
Australian	79.1
Indigenous/Torres Strait Islander	0.3
New Zealander	2.0
Asian	2.5
Indian	0.8
Middle Eastern	0.5
European	15.8
North American	0.5
African	1.3
Prefer not to say	0.3
Other	1.8

Table 3. Ethnicity representation within the survey sample.

TENURE (YEARS)

The average number of years spent volunteering for the SES by the respondents was 9.0 years (SD = 9.8), with an average of 7.2 years (SD = 8.3) spent volunteering for their current SES unit. As can be observed in Figure 1, about 30% of the sample were relatively new to the SES (volunteering for two years or less), and the remaining 70% had been with the SES for two years or longer.

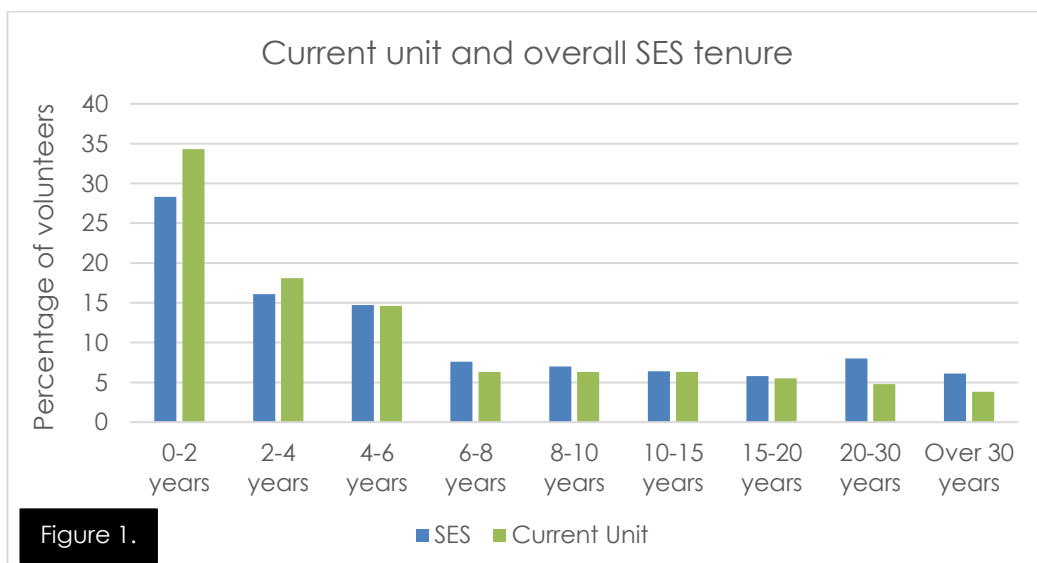


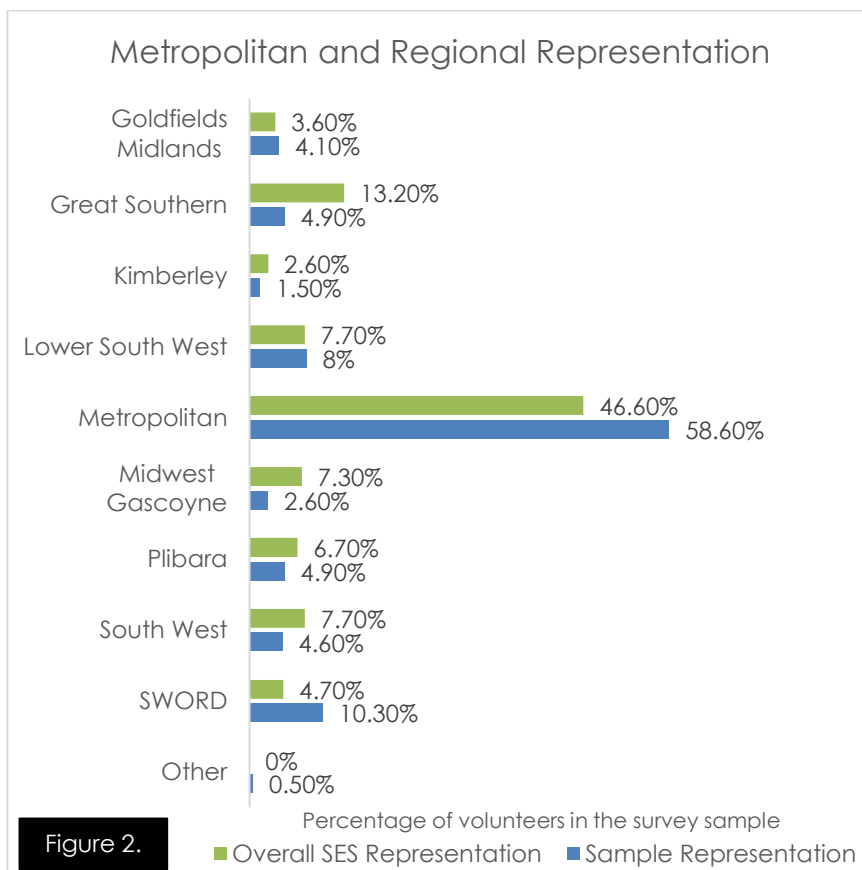
Figure 1.

VOLUNTEER ROLES

Of the 398 participants, 46 (11.6%) identified themselves as Unit Managers. Out of the 66 SES units across WA, 41 units were represented by at least one Unit Manager, resulting in an overall leader representation percentage of 62.1%.

METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATION

Out of the 66 SES units in WA, 53 (80.3%) were represented by at least one respondent. The representation from each of the 12 regions can be observed in Figure 2 below (with the four metropolitan regions grouped as one). Almost 60% of the respondents were metropolitan volunteers, with the remaining 40% of the survey respondents volunteering in the remaining regions. Observing the overall regional data from the time of data collection, it can be noted that the Goldfields Midlands, Metropolitan, SWORD, and Other regions or groups were over-represented in this survey sample. While the Lower South West region was similar to the overall SES population in WA, the remaining regions were under-represented.



FINDINGS

MEETING EXPECTATIONS

The first section of the survey asked volunteers about the expectations they held when first joining the SES, and whether these expectations were met by their experiences. Figure 3 gives an overview of the responses. Generally, volunteers agreed that their expectations were met at least to some extent. Specifically, the orientation (i.e., induction) the volunteers received mostly met their expectations, and they felt that they 'knew what they were getting into'. However, volunteers were slightly less certain about whether they had an accurate picture of what volunteering as a SES member was going to be like. Volunteers generally tended **not** to feel surprised by things after joining SES as a volunteer, which illustrated that volunteers generally (regardless of tenure) had their expectations managed appropriately when they joined the SES.



The volunteers who did experience surprises noted down what surprised them in a comment box. Some surprises were **positive** and some were **negative**. Examples of each are written down below:

"The camaraderie and sense of family came as a lovely surprise."

"I was positively surprised at how accepting the unit was of women, particularly 'non-blokey' women who had a more academic background."

"Poor leadership group mentality and non-inclusiveness."

"Pressure to attend every week, sometimes it's a bit much as people do have full-time jobs."

"I had thought that you needed to do rescue type work to be useful at SES. I've found that I've been able to contribute to our team in many other ways."

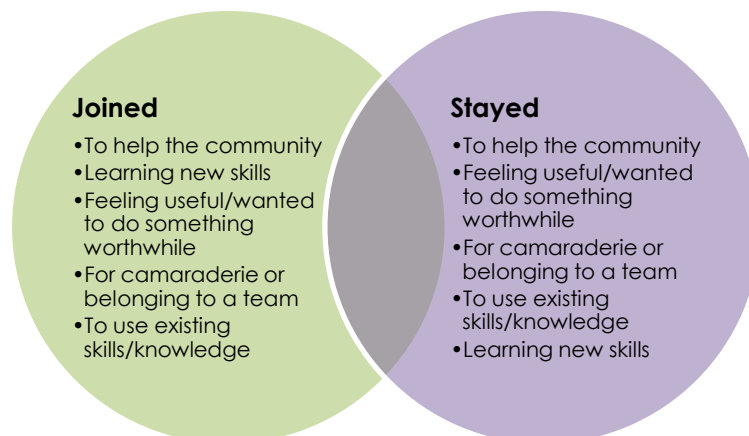
"The lack of call-outs and actually putting what we trained into practice."

REASONS TO JOIN AND REASONS TO STAY



Figure 4.

The survey also asked volunteers why they **first joined** the SES, and **what keeps them there**; the possible motives are shown in Figure 4 along with the mean response. Generally, the reasons to join matched the reasons for staying, however there were some discrepancies. Below, we have listed the **top five reasons** why people join and stay within the SES (listed in order of importance). It can be noted that helping the community is the strongest driver in motivating an individual to join and stay as a volunteer.



We next compared male to female volunteers and we found that their reasons to join and stay with the SES were sometimes quite different. For example, women were predominantly motivated to join the SES by the social and emotional aspects of volunteering. Specifically, women reported that meeting new people, being part of a team, and feeling like they are doing something useful or

worthwhile were three key reasons as to why they joined and stayed in the SES. Women also reported that learning new skills was a key reason for them to stay. Men, however, tended to be more motivated by opportunities to use their existing skills, and volunteering out of a sense of duty or obligation (e.g., a sense that 'nobody else is willing to do it').

Compared to those from metropolitan units, regional SES volunteers were more motivated to join to help the community, to belong to a team, to use their existing skills or knowledge, and as a result of knowing someone in the unit, and being asked to join. Additionally, regional volunteers were more motivated than metropolitan volunteers to join and stay out of a sense of duty and obligation. Lastly, regional volunteers also highlighted that receiving help from the SES when they needed it in the past was a strong motivator for them to stay with their SES unit. From these results, we can observe which reasons motivate which cohorts and use this information to better target recruitment to these groups depending on what individual SES units can offer.

VOLUNTEER NEEDS

Participants were also asked questions on whether their needs were satisfied in their role, and whether or not their SES role supplied them with what they were looking and wanting for in a volunteering role.

Needs Satisfaction

Research in many different contexts has demonstrated that the satisfaction of the needs of *competence*, *autonomy*, and *relatedness* is essential for maintaining motivation. The need for *competence* refers to the extent in which an individual feels capable in performing effectively in their role, whereas the need for *autonomy* refers to an individuals' desire to have the freedom to carry out an activity in their chosen way (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010). Lastly, the need for *relatedness* refers to an individuals' need to relate and connect with others (Van den Broeck et al., 2010).



Figure 5 shows that, overall, the SES volunteers who completed our survey tended to agree that their need for competence and relatedness in their role were satisfied. However, the volunteers were more neutral regarding the extent that their need for autonomy was satisfied by the role. In particular, volunteers reported that they often felt like they had to follow other people's commands, and, if they could, would do things differently at the SES. When comparing cohort



differences, female volunteers reported feeling less competent in comparison to their male counterparts, while the opposite was true for unit managers in comparison to non-managers.

Finally, Figure 6, shows that most of the participants felt that the SES as an organisation, and their role in the SES provided them with what they were looking and wanting for in a volunteering role. There appeared to be no significant differences between different cohorts.



Figure 6.

VOLUNTEER ROLE AND IDENTITY FIT

In this section of the survey, participants were asked questions on the extent to which they identified with their volunteering role. Participants were also asked how strongly they identified with their current SES unit and the broader Emergency Services organisation (i.e., DFES). Lastly, they were asked if they thought that their abilities were a good fit for the demands of their role.

Volunteer Identity

Overall, all participants somewhat agreed that being an SES volunteer was a strong part of their identity. In particular, as Figure 7 shows, unit managers were found to have a stronger sense of identity with their role as a SES volunteer than non-managers.

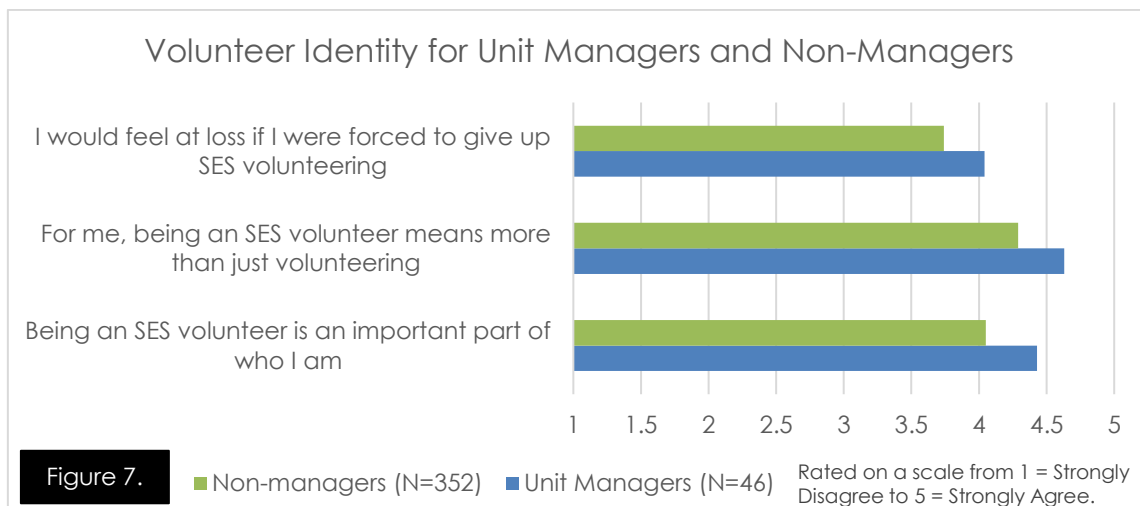


Figure 7.

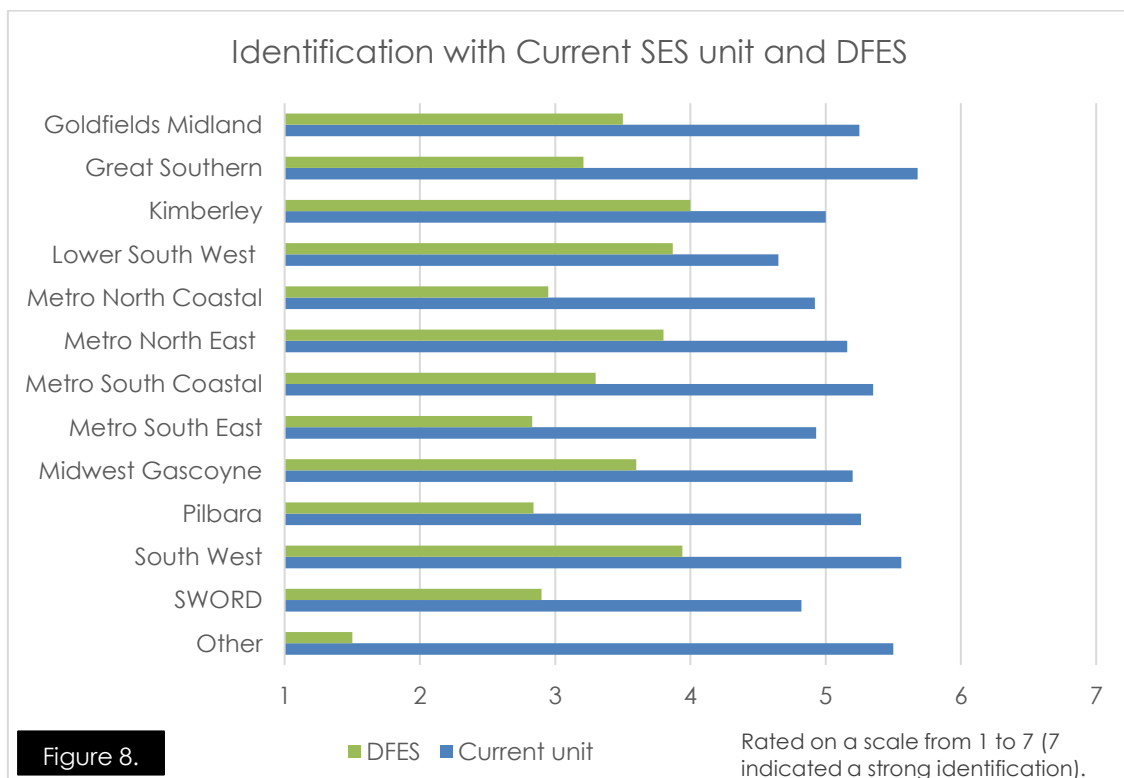


Identification with Current SES Unit and Organisation

When comparing how much a volunteer identifies with their SES unit, in comparison to the wider DFES organisation, it can be observed that volunteers identified much more strongly with their unit (rating of 5.04 out of 7) than with the broader organisation (rating of 3.25 out of 7). The two diagrams below illustrate the differences in the volunteers' identification with their unit and with DFES.



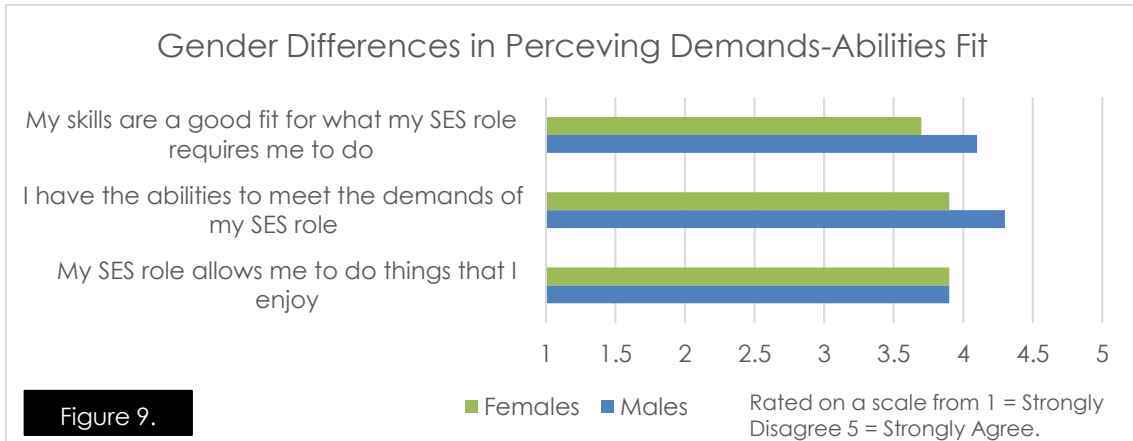
Differences were observed when comparing volunteers from metropolitan and regional units, with metropolitan volunteers identifying less so with DFES in comparison to their regional counterparts. One possible explanation for this result is that regional volunteers may have greater access and interaction with DFES staff members within their areas. Alternatively, metropolitan participants might volunteer with many different services or organisations, and as such, may identify less so with just one volunteering organisation. While the number of services volunteered by each participant was not measured in this survey, it is a factor that could be taken into consideration for the follow-up CAT survey in addition to other measures that may further explain the differences in identification between metropolitan and regional volunteers. Furthermore, unit managers also reported stronger identification with their unit and with DFES, in comparison to non-managers.





Meeting the Role Demands

Overall, volunteers tended to agree that their own skills and abilities enabled them to meet the demands of their roles. To some extent, volunteers perceived their skills to be a good fit for what their SES role requires them to do, and they believed their SES role allows them to do things they enjoy. Additionally, to a somewhat larger extent, volunteers agreed that their abilities are sufficient in meeting the demands of their role. Men, to a greater extent than women, tended to perceive their skills and abilities as satisfying the demands of their role, as demonstrated in Figure 9.

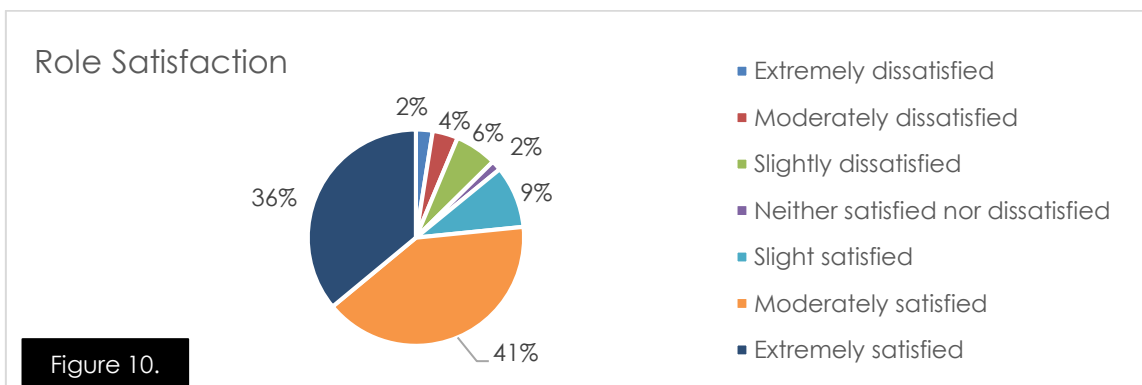


VOLUNTEER WELLBEING

This section of the survey asked participants questions relating to their wellbeing. Specifically, volunteers were asked if they were satisfied with their role overall, and if they perceived themselves to be thriving in their role (i.e., developing and learning, as well as being energetic).

Role Satisfaction

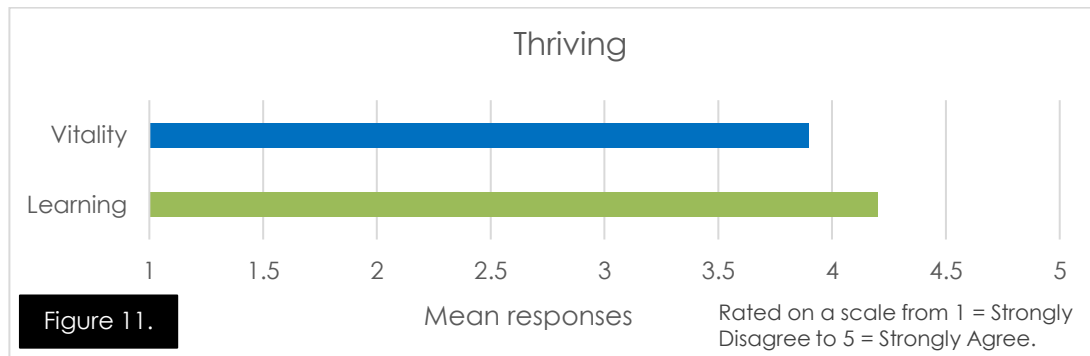
From Figure 10 below, it can be observed that most volunteers were either moderately or extremely satisfied with their role as an SES volunteer (see Figure 10). Although volunteers aged between 56 and 65 years reported the highest level of satisfaction, there were no meaningful age differences in role satisfaction, thus implying that volunteers overall were satisfied with their role.





Thriving

Thriving is a psychological state that consists of two components: *Vitality* (i.e., feeling alive and energetic) and *learning* (i.e., feeling like you are continuously developing and improving; Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012). Overall, the participating volunteers thrived in their role to some extent. In particular, volunteers reported experiencing very high levels of learning and personal development in their role but experienced somewhat less vitality (see Figure 11). This result implies that volunteers perceived their experiences to be conducive towards their learning and personal developments, whereas their role was not so much of a source of energy for them. While no differences were found between cohorts, thriving was found to be associated with role satisfaction and volunteer retention intentions, which highlights it as an important aspect of the volunteering experience to focus and improve on. The fact that many volunteers reported high levels of learning and development might also be a good signal for attracting new SES members; the SES could potentially promote the learning and development opportunities in recruitment campaigns and materials as it appears to be a major drawcard among the survey respondents.



SES UNIT ENVIRONMENT

Psychological Safety

A “psychologically safe” climate describes a group atmosphere that allows and encourages open, supportive communication, and it allows individuals to speak up if and when issues arise (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). On average, it can be noted that volunteers were neutral regarding the psychological safety of their unit.

When examining psychological safety between cohorts, significant differences were found. First, unit managers gave more positive evaluations than non-managers. This difference could potentially be explained by differences in status between the leader and non-leader roles. However, some unit leaders might be surprised that their group members do not feel as psychologically safe as their leaders.

Further, women, compared to men, reported that they felt less psychologically safe in their unit, and this was found to be consistent across metropolitan and regional units. This result suggests that women in the SES may feel less comfortable speaking up and being assertive about what they think and feel (see Figure 12). This result may warrant more attention to improve gender diversity within the SES.

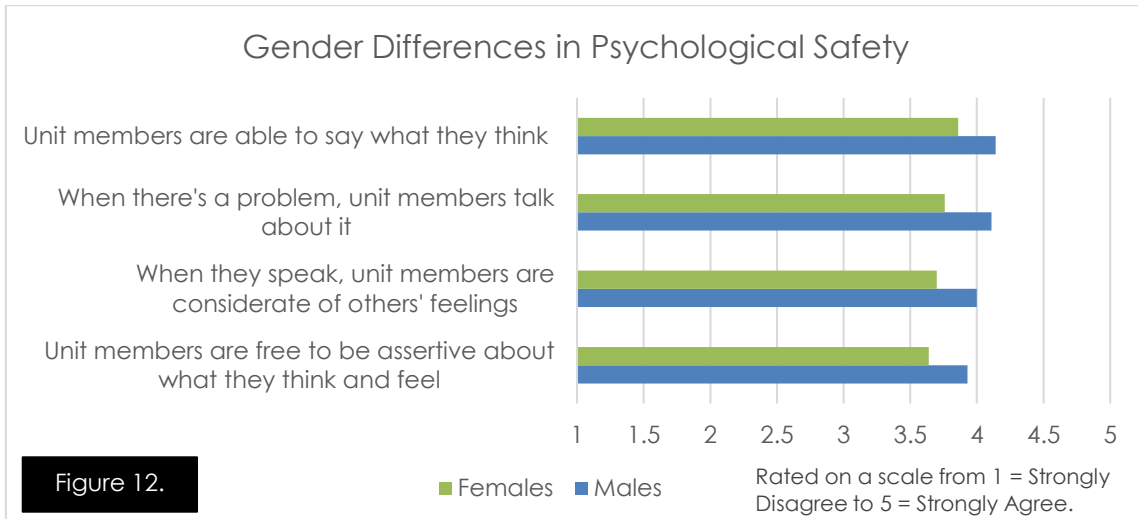


Figure 12.

Climate for Inclusiveness

An inclusive climate is a space in which individuals of different backgrounds feel valued, integrated, and included in decision-making processes (Nishii, 2013). Overall, volunteers felt somewhat valued for their differences and included in their unit's decision-making processes. While the differences between genders and Australians vs. non-Australians were not significant, there was a significant difference between metropolitan and regional volunteers in regards to feeling included in decision-making processes. In comparison to metropolitan volunteers, regional volunteers tended to report significantly higher inclusion in decision-making processes occurring within the unit (see Figure 13). This result informs us of a need to explore ways to include metropolitan volunteers in decision-making processes that occur in SES units that are potentially larger.

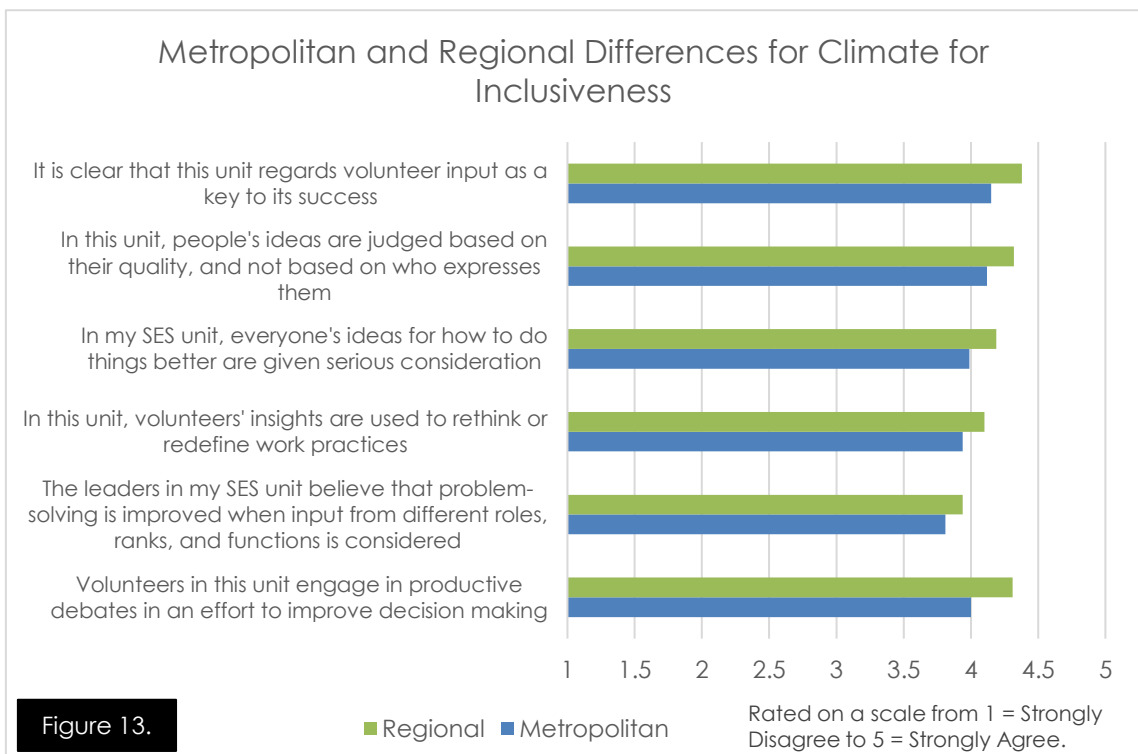


Figure 13.

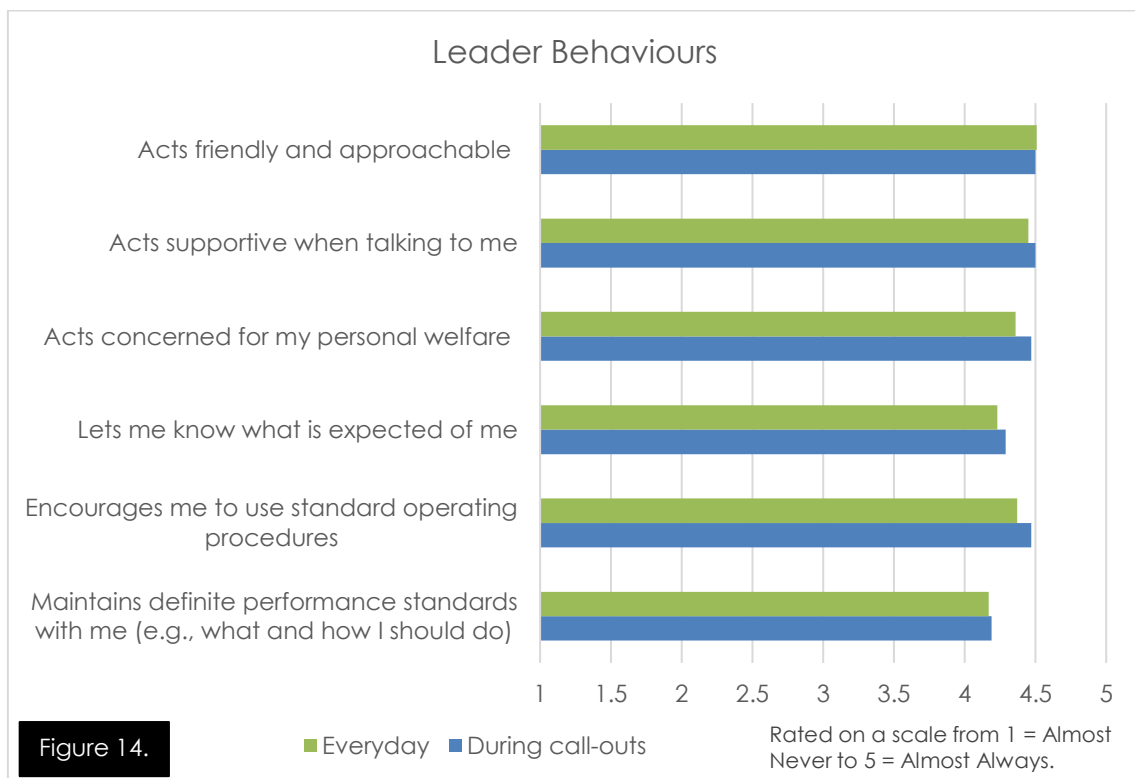


Leader Behaviours

Two types of leadership behaviours were measured in the survey: *consideration* and *initiating structure*. *Consideration* is a type of leadership behaviour that centres on concern for the wellbeing of organisational members. It involves providing organisational members with expressions of support, or displays of approachability and warmth (Lambert, Tepper, Carr, Holt, & Barelka, 2012). *Initiating structure*, refers to the act of clarifying task responsibilities and setting up performance expectations (Lambert et al., 2012).

The questionnaire asked participants about their leaders' behaviour both during call outs and outside of it (i.e., day-to-day). Importantly, volunteers generally reported that their unit manager typically behaved in positive ways (refer to Figure 14) across both types of situations. While no significant cohort differences were found across the situations, it was discovered that perceptions of positive leadership behaviours during call-outs and day-to-day were linked to both the volunteers' role satisfaction and intentions to remain.

Further, no significant cohort differences were observed, which indicates that, as a general rule, leader behaviours within the SES are regarded very positively by the volunteers.



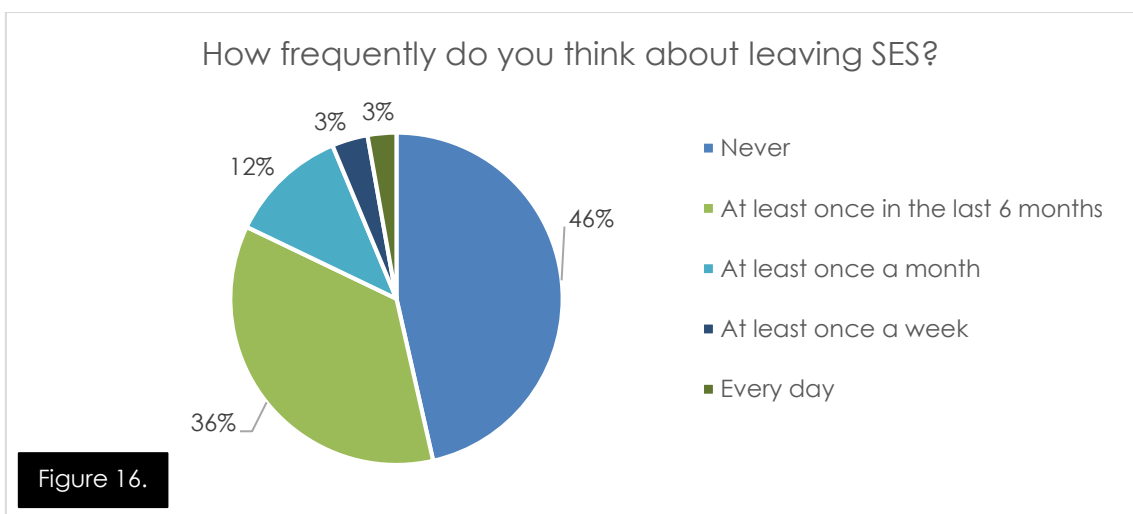
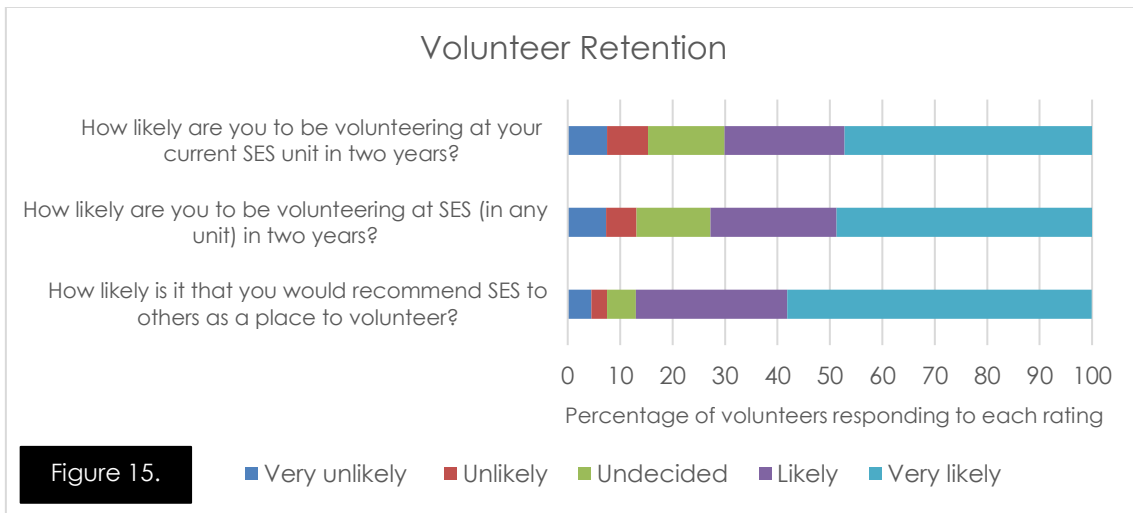


INTENTIONS TO REMAIN

Volunteer Retention

Approximately half of the volunteers from this sample were intending to stay within their current unit and the SES for at least the next two years (see Figure 15). In recent history, however, turnover in the SES nationally has hovered around 25%, and the results of this survey suggested that approximately 15% were likely to leave within the next two years, with a further 15% being undecided.

Approximately 85% of volunteers indicated that they are likely or very likely to recommend SES to others as an organisation to volunteer with, suggesting that word of mouth from existing members is likely to be a good avenue for volunteer recruitment. As word of mouth is a powerful resource for recruitment, this method could be further explored and expanded on in the future (e.g., creating "Recruit a Friend" campaigns).



When asked how frequently a volunteer considers leaving the SES, it can be observed from Figure 16 above that approximately 82% of the survey sample either never thought about leaving or considered leaving the SES at least once in the last six months. Approximately 18% of men and 18% of women reported



considering leaving the SES on an everyday, weekly, or monthly basis. When comparing cohort differences, some meaningful age differences were found. As can be noted in Figure 17, those in a younger cohort (average of 33.7 years) represent the small percentage of participants (11 out of 398 respondents) that consider leaving the SES on an everyday basis. Thus, this group should be the prime target for retention interventions.

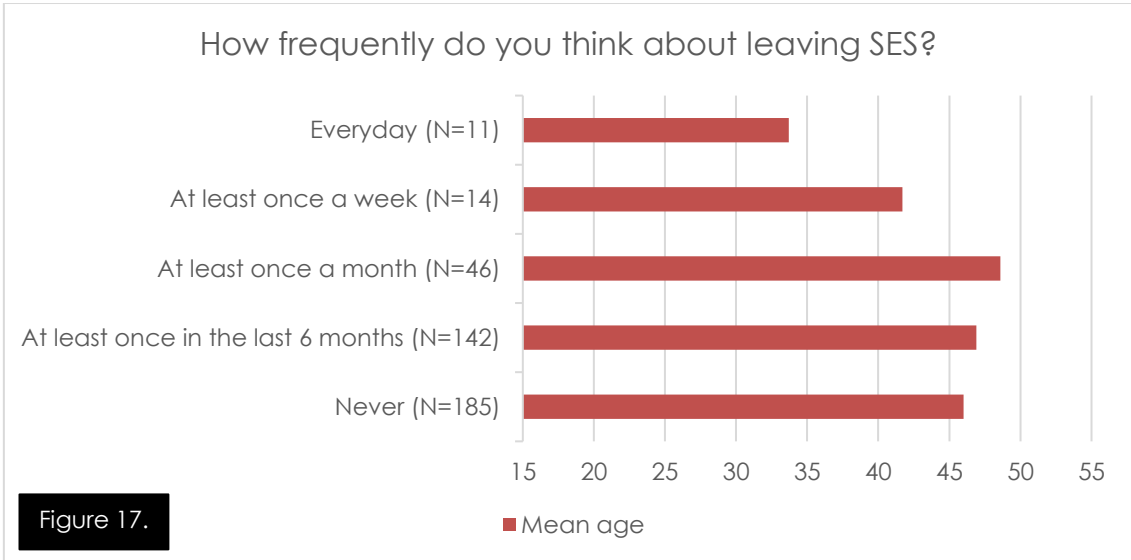


Figure 17.

The volunteers were also asked to pick one out of the four statements below to describe how they feel about volunteering with the SES, and majority of the participants responded that they can and want to stay with the SES (71.4%), with 17.5% of participants indicating that they want to stay, but may have to leave.

	Stayers	Leavers
Reluctant	I WANT TO LEAVE the SES but I feel like I HAVE TO STAY (6.3%)	I WANT TO STAY in the SES but I may HAVE TO LEAVE (17.5%)
Enthusiastic	I WANT TO STAY in the SES and I CAN STAY if I want to (71.4%)	I WANT TO LEAVE the SES and I CAN LEAVE if I want to (4.8%)

Table 4. Statements describing how volunteers feel about volunteering with the SES.



Volunteer Retention Drivers

As shown below in Figure 18, various aspects of the volunteering experience were found to be linked to the volunteers' intentions to stay with the SES. As such, these aspects should be considered as drivers to be focused on for volunteer retention. When comparing the significance of these different aspects on retention, it was found that role satisfaction, the need for autonomy, and opportunities to thrive through learning and development opportunities were particularly important in influencing the volunteers' intentions to remain. Based on the survey analyses, the next section discusses the key implications to better inform volunteer leaders and organisation managers about the current state of volunteering for SES volunteers.

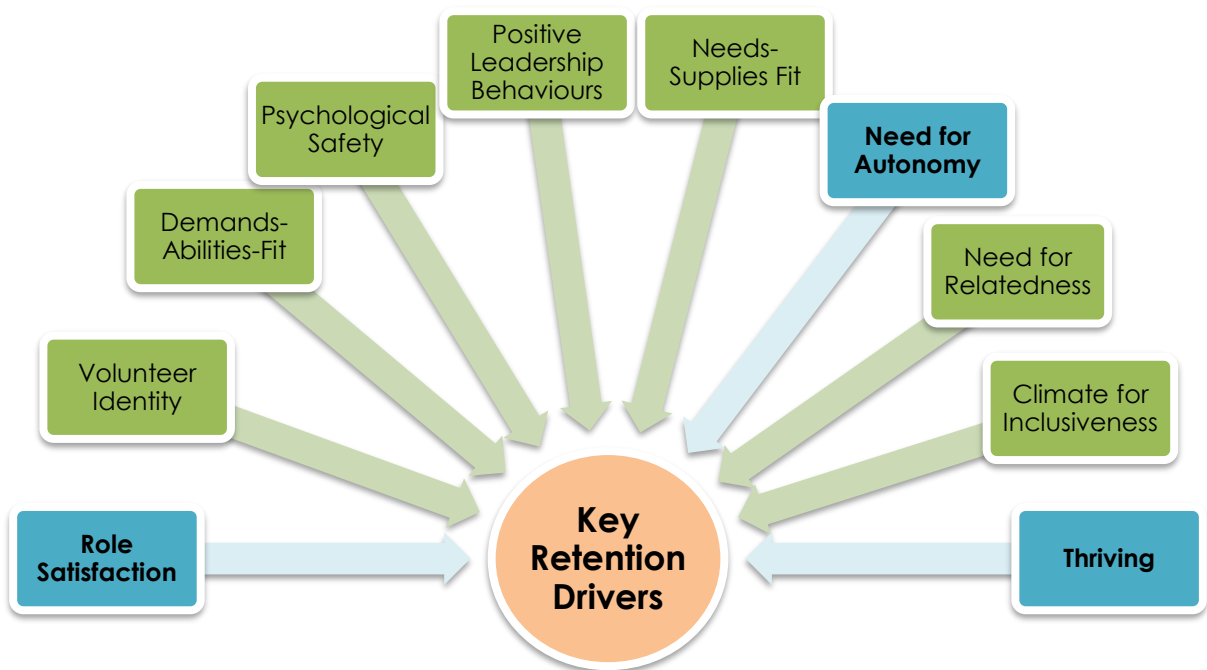


Figure 18. Key Retention Drivers.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the survey analyses, we have identified several key comparisons between cohorts and potential implications that are relevant to the current state of SES volunteering within WA.

Firstly, we identified some key cohort differences:

Gender Diversity

- Female SES volunteers were more motivated by social and emotional aspects to join and remain with the SES, whereas male volunteers were relatively more motivated to use their existing skills and volunteer out of a sense of duty or obligation.
- Women reported a lower satisfaction of their need for competence than men.
- Female volunteers also reported lower scores on the extent to which they believed their abilities met the demands of their role.
- Female volunteers reported lower levels of psychological safety, and may therefore feel less comfortable than men with being assertive or speaking up about issues in their unit.

Metropolitan vs. Regional Volunteers

- Regional SES volunteers reported higher motivation in their reasons to join and stay with the SES, with wanting to help the community being a key motivator for them.
- Overall, regional volunteers also identified more strongly with DFES in comparison to metropolitan volunteers.
- Regional SES volunteers also reported higher levels of inclusion in decision-making processes in their unit than their Metropolitan counterparts.

Unit Managers vs. Non-Managers

- Volunteers who are non-managers reported that they felt less competent in their role, in comparison to unit managers.
- Unit managers identified more strongly with their current SES unit and with DFES.
- Unit managers also reported higher levels of psychological safety, possibly suggesting that the managerial role offered more opportunities to be open and frank with thoughts and ideas.



As indicated by Figure 15, almost 30% of the participants reported that they were unlikely or undecided to stay with the SES or their current unit over the next two years. This result is on par with historical turnover rates, and suggests that the sampling of the survey was not systematically biased towards the long-stayers. To help combat volunteer turnover, we have outlined several key areas of strength within the SES which could be drawn on, in addition to key opportunities for improvement. These suggestions could help to uphold and improve volunteer retention rates overtime.

Key Areas of Strength

- Volunteers generally indicated that their expectations were well met by their experiences at the unit. Continue to manage expectations upfront to avoid mismatched expectations and "bad surprises" for new volunteers (but bear in mind that this survey only measures the attitudes of 'those who stayed').
- Volunteers appear to be learning and developing a great deal in their time at the SES. Continue to provide opportunities for learning and continuous improvement within current SES units to allow current and future volunteers to thrive in their personal development.
- Leader behaviours within the SES is generally regarded very favourably. This is another strength that can be drawn from. Continue to encourage leaders to behave positively towards their volunteers (i.e., by displaying expressions of support and by being approachable) to maintain their role satisfaction and improve intentions to remain, whether it be their everyday behaviour or behaviour towards volunteers during call-outs.

Key Opportunities to Improve

- For future recruitment; target recruitment messages to specific groups based on their different motivations to join and stay, consider promoting the learning opportunities that the SES offers, and explore ways to recruit new SES members via recommendations from current SES members.
- Improve and facilitate activities to fulfil the volunteers' need for autonomy (e.g., providing them with flexibility and creativity in their tasks).
- Work on instilling a stronger sense of volunteer identity with their SES unit and with DFES. Perhaps this process could begin during a new volunteer's socialisation or onboarding.
- Strengthen metropolitan volunteers' identification with DFES.
- Work on improving psychological safety for women and volunteers who are non-managers by allowing them to feel like their voices are wanted and heard.
- Increase inclusivity of metropolitan volunteers in any decision-making processes that occur within the unit (e.g., through focus group discussions).
- Focus on retaining volunteers who are of a younger age as they are most at risk of leaving their current unit and the SES within the next two years.

Overall, by maintaining and improving the key areas indicated above, our hope is that more volunteers will remain with the SES, for the benefit of their unit, for the DFES organisation, and for the welfare and safety of their respective communities.



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