

BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum - 6 April 2017  
Bill Calcutt – Valuing Volunteers Study – 3MT dot points

### Research rationale

- Volunteers are the lifeblood of Australian emergency services and constitute a unique skilled workforce that provides an essential public service
- A number of emergency services have been experiencing a level of volunteer turnover exceeding 20% annually, with major financial and capability implications
- Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics has revealed a significant decline in traditional forms of volunteering in Australia

### This research

- The Valuing Volunteers Study is seeking to better understand the primary motives for volunteering in Australian emergency services, and to determine what role the alignment of corporate, unit and individual values plays in volunteer dissatisfaction and turnover
- Research so far has involved surveys of the values preferences of volunteers in the State Emergency Services in NSW and SA
- Currently undertaking face-to-face consultations with particular NSW SES units, considering how the highly rated value of self-direction is expressed, accommodated and encouraged within a command and control structure
- Participants in the unit consultations have been exploring more flexible and innovative ways to engage with a dynamic and diverse volunteer workforce in the future

### Findings

- Re reference to volunteer choices in accompanying powerpoint - What does it take to get someone up at 2 am to put on a uniform and go out in a storm to help others?



- The values surveys affirmed the importance of altruistic values, but also revealed statistically significant differences in values priorities by gender and generation (but not location)
- The research has revealed the sensitive and conditional nature of the volunteer's relationship with and commitment to the unit and agency, and highlights the importance of recognising and respecting the individual's values in order to sustain the level of personal goodwill necessary for ongoing volunteering. This goodwill can be easily eroded by poor management, perceived unfairness, a lack of consideration or consultation, or a sense of exclusion
- Evolving social values and the demands of modern life are changing the nature and forms of social engagement. A rise in egoism and decline in altruism has implications for many traditional forms of social participation, potentially posing challenges for the future resourcing of emergency services volunteer workforces

### **Implications/utilisation**

- The methodological contribution of this research will include a values audit package that can be used by agencies to assess the evolving values priorities of their volunteer workforces
- This research is providing valuable insights on the dynamics of emergency services volunteering in a rapidly changing world

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