Why do they volunteer? Research into reasons for becoming a volunteer firefighter.

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Bushfire CRC Program D: “Protecting people and property”
Dramatic, ongoing developments in wildland firefighting technology:
• Sensing and imaging
• Fire modelling & prediction
• Communication
• Suppression
• Crew protection & safety

--But wildland fire fighting remains a fundamentally human activity:
• Technological resources are of little use without the requisite “human resources”!
• The major component of the human resources needed to combat wildland fires is rural fire services volunteers

Potential threats to rural fire services volunteer numbers:
• Population movements
• Ageing population
• Generational changes in values
• Changes in the economy
• Structural changes in the nature of work
• Changes in family structures
(cf Rheinholdt, 1999/2000)
Current ‘headaches’:

- Small, rural communities with static, or declining, and ageing populations
- New housing developments in previously rural locations
- “Busy” brigades on the urban/rural fringes, 9am-5pm weekdays.

Why do they volunteer? Reasons for becoming a fire service volunteer?

- Sense of community 50%
- Social/mateship 13%
- Novelty/new skills 9%
- Competitions/training 6%
- Duty 6%
- Interest 6%
- Protect lives and property 6%

Reasons for volunteering (2):

Palmer (2000) SAFECOM [N=376]
- Serve community 84%
- Meet community need 82%
- Interest/satisfaction 61%
- Community obligation 60%
- Learn new skills 56%
- Meet new people 38%

Reasons for volunteering (3):

- Serve community 39%
- Community involvement 14%
- Self-development 12%
- Gain skills/job prospects 12%
- Excitement 8%
- Friends in brigade 4%
Motivational “drivers”?

• A mix of community-oriented motives dominating and providing a context for individually-oriented motives being fulfilled.

Implication for recruitment?

• Activate a personalised sense of community responsibility in individuals and channel this into joining a local brigade.

CFA’s “If the hat fits” campaign in Victoria’s West

• Corporate support: promotional material, 30 sec video
• Regional support: (electronic and print media, admin. Assistance)
• Local brigade control and ‘ownership’ (mail drops, meetings)
• Train quickly and deploy

---Good evidence of success!

This formula implies a well-functioning community

• What if the community’s “social capital” is deficient or distorted in some ways?

(Social capital: “networks, together with shared norms, values, and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups” [OECD 2001])

--Implies a need to go beyond “motives” of potential volunteers in our thinking about volunteer recruitment:
Network Linkages:

- “bonding”: with ‘like’
- “bridging”: with ‘unlike’

Fire services/brigades and:

- Generations
- Other ‘cultural communities’
- Women
- Families of volunteers
- Employers of volunteers

Plus: the way fire services/brigades “do things”

The Bushfire CRC Volunteerism (D3) Research Agenda:

---Working with rural fire services to find out more about:

- Volunteering in rural communities
- Volunteering in new ‘fringe’ communities
- Employers of volunteers
- Women volunteering
- Families of volunteers
- Volunteering from other cultural communities