Who are our volunteers?

Volunteer ambulance services have been operating in communities for many years, with NSW Ambulance actually beginning as a volunteer service over 100 years ago. ‘Volunteer’ is the generic term for the various subgroups of volunteers throughout Ambulance, in the same way that ‘paramedic’ represents the many and varied Ambulance subgroups, such as intensive care, extended care and special access casualty team, etc. There are several different categories of volunteers within Ambulance. The categories assist us with the identification of various units when we are discussing volunteer issues with Health, the State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and other associated emergency service agencies.

The diversity of volunteer units across NSW reflects the geographical and workload needs of the state. The classification of units is determined by a variety of factors, including:

- proximity to other ambulance resources and back-up
- proximity and availability of aeromedical support, such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS)
- availability of other emergency service personnel to be trained as CFRs – such as the SES, RFS, and FRNSW
- the main purpose for the establishment of the volunteer unit, e.g. difficulty in accessing patients on Scotland Island.

### TYPES OF VOLUNTEER UNITS

#### HEALTH BASED VAO UNITS

Based at a health facility, these units have an Ambulance Landcruiser to access patients, and provide transport to and from the health facility. Currently, we have the following Health based volunteer units:

- Tibooburra
- White Cliffs
- Wilcannia (the busiest volunteer unit in NSW)
- Menindee
- Ivanhoe
- Wanaaring

#### STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE CFRS

We entered a partnership with SES nearly a decade ago to provide first responder assistance to Ambulance. Commencing with Nundle, Deepwater and Sofala, the program has grown to the current 11 units:

- Burraga
- Bigga
- Captains Flat
- Canyonleigh
- Deepwater
- Gooloogong
- Goolgowi
- Nundle
- Sofala (currently the busiest SES unit)
- Tambar Springs
- Windellama

Volunteer ambulance officers (VAOs) wear the operational Ambulance uniform, are dispatched through normal response criteria and usually have an ambulance vehicle in which to respond.

Some volunteers work with paramedics on permanent ambulance stations. Most of these volunteers were previously known as honoraries.

Other VAOs are Health based and may be the health service manager, health facility worker or be a volunteer within that remote community.

### VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE OFFICERS

They have been trained in Ambulance protocols to respond to incidents and initiate patient care until a permanent Ambulance resource arrives. CFRs respond to an incident in a vehicle from their emergency service agency.

There are moves to include some other agencies into this category that have shown interest in developing CFRs within their organisation.

Community First Responders (CFRs) are accredited and operate under Ambulance governance, and are usually a member of another emergency service organisation (such as SES, FRNSW and RFS).

They are trained in Ambulance protocols to respond to incidents and initiate patient care until a permanent Ambulance resource arrives. CFRs respond to an incident in a vehicle from their emergency service agency.

There are moves to include some other agencies into this category that have shown interest in developing CFRs within their organisation.
Each of these units have recently received a new SES CFR specific vehicle to allow them greater access to respond to ambulance incidents. (See page 12).

**FIRE AND RESCUE NSW CFRS**

Fire and Rescue NSW currently has six units, including:

- Alstonville
- Branxton
- Bundeena
- Bundanoon (the busiest FRNSW unit)
- Tocumwal
- Uralia

**RURAL FIRE SERVICE CFRS**

There are currently two RFS CFR units in the state, with further units programed for this year:

- Mt Wilson
- Scotland Island

**VAOs ATTACHED TO PERMANENT AMBULANCE STATIONS**

Volunteers – who were previously known as honoraries - were attached to ambulance stations throughout the state. While most have either proceeded into a permanent position as a paramedic or moved on to other fields, there are still a few stations with volunteers remaining who provide an exceptionally valuable service. These include:

- Molong
- Lake Cargelligo
- Wellington
- Guyra

**VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE SERVICE**

These VAOs operate from a dedicated area or location within a community, and are provided with an Ambulance Toyota Landcruiser to access the patient and transport them to the nearest health facility as required. These include:

- Trundle
- Trangie
- Yeoval
- Gulargambone

**VAO – COMMUNITY RESPONDERS**

These units are supported by Ambulance resources that are close by. Some of these units were developed by communities who were concerned by their remoteness and trained interested community members. These units from the North Coast area were integrated into Ambulance CFR governance and are valuable members of our team.

- Glenreagh
- Nana Glen
- Ulong
- Lowana/Brooklana (not currently active due to a decrease in members, however these areas are accessed from the above units)

**CFR/VOLUNTEERACTIVITY STATEWIDE**

**1 JULY 2012 TO 31 MARCH 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
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<td>Metropolitan Operations</td>
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<td>212</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Operations</td>
<td>1352</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1646</strong></td>
<td><strong>1068</strong></td>
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**REGIONAL OPERATIONS**

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<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>No. of 1st on Scene</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hunter New England</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Coast</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western</td>
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<td>632</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>856</strong></td>
<td><strong>63.3%</strong></td>
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**METROPOLITAN OPERATIONS**

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<th>No. of 1st on Scene</th>
<th>1st On Scene Percent (%)</th>
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<td>Metro North</td>
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<td>Metro South</td>
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<td>Metro Southwest and Illawarra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metro West</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>294</strong></td>
<td><strong>212</strong></td>
<td><strong>72.1%</strong></td>
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Your Story

Rabbi Dovid Slavin
Chaplain, Bondi

Recently awarded the 2013 Waverley Local Hero of the Year, Dovid Slavin is a familiar face within his community. He not only co-founded Bondi’s Our Big Kitchen and the bone marrow donor registry, Gift of Life, he’s also on the Cancer Institute of NSW Ethics Committee and the Executive Director of the Yeshiva Centre and College.

‘Born and raised in Brooklyn New York, I settled in Sydney in 1991. My passion has always been community service, however following September 11, I felt an overwhelming need to do something more to counter the terrible evil. Inspired by the amazing work of the emergency services back home, in 2003 I became a NSW Ambulance chaplain.

As a chaplain, I work with people of all backgrounds not just those with a Jewish background. Paramedics understand that the level of their religious commitment is not my priority, it’s simply assisting them as people that interests me. The best thing about being an Ambulance chaplain is seeing an ambo walk into a meeting with me feeling down and then walking out proud. As paramedics, it’s important at least once a day to realise how lucky you are to be doing the noblest work imaginable saving lives. It’s as simple as that. While most of society may get that chance once in a lifetime, paramedics do this daily.

Apart from my chaplaincy, my primary responsibility is as founding director of Our Big Kitchen, a community space in Bondi that helps connect people and empower them. My wife, Laya and I wanted to create something which would give people an opportunity to be part of something that made a difference to their lives and the lives of others, ‘nourishing’ our community. Laya has always enjoyed cooking for our family and friends, so the idea came about of a community kitchen which provides nutrients not just for the body but for the soul. The kitchen’s motto is, “If you care about somebody, let them know it, let them feel it, let them taste it!”

It’s very important that people don’t feel need, particularly at their neediest time. Volunteers cook meals in the kitchen and deliver them to homeless people and other people in crisis. We’re also involved in many projects and community outreach programs. The Happy Mums program, designed to combat post natal depression, gives mothers (and their babies) a space to come together to assemble their meals. We also bring Jewish and Muslim school and university students together to cook and share food while learning about each others’ cultures. A number of the kitchen hands are on community service rehabilitation programs or are minimum security offenders on work release programs. People may have divergent opinions or come from different backgrounds, but we all eat, we all need food, we all need to be able to give and to matter.

We also provide meals for Ambulance, Police and Fire personnel, supporting those who make our community a safer and better place. OBK is part of the NSW counter disaster plan and facilitated major cook-ins following the Victorian bush fires, the Mumbai bombings and the Queensland floods. In 2011, we sent frozen meals to New Zealand following the earthquake for residents and the response team.

My inspiration for everything I do is my wife Laya. For OBK, I’m the logistics manager, she is the heart. My children are also my world. When people ask us how many children we have, we say just one! We then say, one Mordechai, one Zevi, one Chana, one Mendel, one Shaina, one Shlomie and one Sara Devora (that’s four boys and three girls) each very special. Our youngest daughter, Sara Devora, is actually named after the paramedic who responded when Laya went into labor.

I don’t really know what not working means. It’s usually 4.30 am when I start reading my emails. Downtime is important, but I get bored. I love traveling and the entire family have made many overseas trips or OBTKs (our big trips).

I’m very passionate about history. I have just submitted my PhD thesis which I’ve been chipping away at since 1995. What an incredible journey of learning and discovery, which saw me take my mother back to Poland. Her life was shattered at eight years old when the war broke out and food became scarce. She has ingrained in me that nobody around me should ever go hungry.

I love life and seeing the good in every situation and I bring this to my ambo work. Yes, you see some difficult things, but I’ve been blessed with a very supportive family and colleagues who I can turn to in times of need. The chaplaincy has only strengthened my faith. What do I know for sure right now? That light will overcome darkness - while it’s not always very obvious, I know this to be true.'
Jack Barnes
Eugowra VAO

A VAO for 30 years, Jack is well known in his region for his exceptional work with Ambulance and dedication to his community. He has received various community awards recognising his commitment, including 2009 Eugowra Citizen of the Year and 2012 Volunteer of the Year.

‘There are two members in our unit. Alison Gransden joined two years ago and has over 30 years nursing experience behind her. Alison’s enthusiasm and knowledge has assisted with my workload and inspires me to continue.

Eugowra is a small country town in the central west with a population of about 550. I’ve lived in Eugowra all my life. My grandparents settled here in 1916. The town has a strong sense of community and mateship. Sometimes it can be difficult working in a small town, as some patients are known to me and obviously over the years there have been some really bad call-outs. But this is outweighed by the satisfaction of helping the patient. The fact that I’m well known in town has the advantage of bringing reassurance and comfort to the residents.

When I started in 1983, we treated and transported to Eugowra Hospital and sometimes to Orange Base Hospital, which put us at odds with the permanent ambulance officers. The system now is so much better. We are backed up by the surrounding town’s paramedics who show us courtesy and respect. Our skill levels are vastly superior now to when I started. The fact that the volunteers have our own superintendent (Sue Webster) means we are held in a higher esteem by Ambulance.

Ambulance is extremely important to Eugowra. We always get positive feedback, sometimes through cards and letters, sometimes just a pat on the back. Last year we had 72 call-outs, which shows how valuable our presence is. If I could make one improvement, I’d get four more enthusiastic volunteers, as a total of six VAOs would be an ideal number to service the town and district.

When not on duty, I’m an irrigation farmer on the Lachlan River. I love spending time with my family, my wife Deb, two sons and their families. I have two of the cutest little granddaughters in the world! I enjoy teaching first aid and try to go fishing whenever I can, especially game fishing on the South Coast. I also enjoy knife making.

Working in Ambulance, I meet a lot of interesting, friendly and funny people who I probably wouldn’t have met otherwise. It’s been a privilege and an honour to work alongside the paramedics who I’ve come across in my years as a VAO. I derive great satisfaction from my work, being able to render assistance to patients in either a small or big way.

Krishna Burns
Sofala CFR

A member of Sofala’s CFR team since its genesis in 2006, Krishna has worked with SES for over 20 years, runs the local coffee shop and is as dedicated as ever.

‘I was already working with SES when I began volunteering with Ambulance. I felt the community needed a service like this, being a long distance from any medical help. Sometimes it can take up to 30 minutes response time from Bathurst. Now it can be as quick as two to five minutes depending on the distance. What keeps me going today is the love of the job and a great working CFR partner, Lynne Lahey.

Things have changed since the CFRs were established almost seven years ago. It was hard in the beginning and a lot of the paramedics thought we were going to take their jobs. They came to realise that we were actually making their jobs easier by accessing and treating the patient, and generally all they had to worry about was transporting them. We now have a great alliance and friendship with them. We often hear them say, ‘It’s all right, the girls will be there.’ When I started out, it was all a rush, but over the years you learn to have patience.

I have been running the local coffee shop for nearly six years. Sometimes it can be hard to juggle the shop and my CFR work, especially if you get a call-out in the middle of making hamburgers, chips or a coffee. I have great staff and a partner that I can call on. If I have a call-out during trading hours, I have a sign to put on the door ‘Shop closed due to CFR call-out’ and all enquiries go to the pub next door. I get quite a lot of requests for medical advice and first aid in my shop. Occasionally, I’ve had to activate the ambulance myself regarding the seriousness of some medical complaints.

The best part about living in Sofala is the quietness of country living and the comradeship of the community. Sofala hasn’t changed much in over 30 years since I moved here. There can be some unique challenges living in a tight knit community and it can be a bit like Chinese whispers. One of the hardest situations in the CFR is attending someone that you’ve known quite well for a long time, especially if that person has a life threatening illness. I think most of my jobs have been memorable, especially when they are alive today because of the services we provide. They’ll come to the shop to say thank you. One that stands out is the birth of a little girl who’s now three years old.

The call-outs tend to vary greatly - from road crashes to medical emergencies. Our monthly training happens at our parent station Rylstone and we couldn’t have wished for a more dedicated bunch of guys. They not only train us, but also support us. Having our monthly get together in training, discussing issues and receiving up-to-date information has helped us get to where we are today.'
SES launch their new fleet for CFRs

In March, Ambulance Director Regional Operations, Mark Beesley joined the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Michael Gallacher; SES Commissioner Murray Kear and Deputy Commissioner Tara McCarthy to launch the new NSW SES CFR vehicle.

The custom built Ford Ranger 4x4 dual cab utility vehicle has been provided to Ambulance’s 11 NSW SES CFR units throughout the state, including Sofala, Nundle, Goolgowi, Captains Flat, Windellama, Canyonleigh, Gooloogong, Deepwater, Burrgra, Tambar Springs and Bigga. This specifically constructed vehicle allows CFR members to carry all ambulance equipment, major incident packages and cervical collars, etc. that are specific to ambulance responders.

The NSW Government provided $625,000 to purchase these specialised vehicles, which were carefully selected and fitted to best meet the NSW SES volunteers’ needs.

Soon, the call signs for these SES CFR vehicles will change to reflect their CFR status. For example, CFR 2 Bigga will be known as Bigga 41, while CFR 21 Sofala will be known as Sofala 41. This will inform Ambulance crews which CFR team and area have responded to an incident.

Emotional reunion for Deepwater SES CFRs

On 23 June 1982, a family arrived at a Deepwater service station urgently requesting a doctor. Their two-year-old child was choking on food that was lodged in his throat. At the time, the village only had the services of a doctor one day a week. The service station was operated by Gerd Tucholski and his wife Brigette who was a registered nurse. Brigette was at home and immediately commenced resuscitation on the child, while Gerd called the police. The resident Deepwater Police Officer, Constable Larry Hoffman, arrived on scene shortly after and the child was placed in the police vehicle with Brigette continuing resuscitation, and rushed toward Glen Innes, a trip of about 30 minutes. Paramedic Peter Jamieson and I responded, meeting the police car halfway between Deepwater and Glen Innes. The child was moved to the ambulance and along with Brigette assisting, the child was rushed to Glen Innes Hospital under police escort with resuscitation continuing during the entire trip. Sadly the child, Christopher Rickets, died shortly after arrival at the hospital.

This event led to the formation of the Deepwater SES Unit, which also contained a nursing reserve unit. To this day, the Deepwater rescue unit is called the ‘Spirit of Christopher’.

The founding members of the Deepwater SES nursing reserve were Colleen Smith, Kay Alletsee and Brigett Tucholski. This group attended medical emergencies within the Deepwater area for many years. Colleen Smith remains an active member of the Deepwater CFR unit to this day. Colleen was invited to attend a lunch with HRH Prince Charles during his visit to Australia in November last year.
Late on 23 April last year, 76-year-old Richard Mackay from Manildra was experiencing chest pain and his wife called for an ambulance. The Manildra VAOs Ann Murray and Dot Duncan responded, backed up by Station Manager Steve Karger and another VAO Cath Stanford, both from Molong Station.

When Ann and Dot arrived on scene, the patient had crushing chest pain and could hardly speak; he collapsed shortly after, becoming unconscious with no pulse. The VAOs quickly attached their defibrillator to him and delivered one shock to the patient’s heart which resulted in the return of his heartbeat. Their quick action most certainly saved Richard’s life. The crew from Molong arrived shortly after, stabilised the patient and transported him to Orange Health Service where he received three stents. He was discharged a few days later and has since made a full recovery.

According to Ann, this was a career highlight in her 16 years volunteering for Ambulance.

‘As all CFRs and VAOs would appreciate, you know 90 per cent of the people you are called to and this was no exception. We both knew the patient and where he lived. We arrived at his property about 21 km out of town at about 3.30 am and were directed into the house by his wife, Rose. On the way in, she informed us that her husband hadn’t been well for a couple of weeks. After showing us where he was, we asked her to go down to the road to wait for the ambulance.

‘I have experienced many highs and lows during my 17 years of being a CFR, but this call-out would have to top the list as being the best outcome,’ she said.

A Cardiac Arrest Survivor Award was presented to Richard by Sue Webster at the Manildra Volunteer headquarters on 21 March. Richard is appreciative of the Manildra VAOs and wanted to express publically his utmost support and respect for their service.

Also presented with awards were Ann Murray and fellow VAO, Anne Lea, who were both presented with their National Medal for 15 years long service.
Alstonville FRNSW CFRs

Alstonville is located on the Bruxner Highway in northern NSW between the town of Ballina and Lismore. Originally known as Duck Creek Mountain, the village is central to many farms and orchards, and is known for its rich red volcanic soil producing avocados, macadamia nuts, tropical fruits and coffee.

“We cover an approximate 8 km radius of Alstonville, Wollongbar and surrounding areas. Our unit consists of Jeff Snow, Jason Simpson, Roy Challinor, Craig Hamilton, Paul Ueberdiek, Greg Whillas, Brett Coulson and Craig Newman. We’ve all been involved in CFR for seven years. The local Quota club donated an AED to Fire Rescue NSW. It then progressed from there to where we are today. A vast majority of the community, however, don’t know or understand what we do as a CFR unit.

I’ve lived in Alstonville for the past 48 years, operating my own motor vehicle repair business for 34 years. Jason Simpson is a ceramic tiler and Paul Ueberdiek is in palm nursery. When I’m called out, my workplace stops while I attend these calls, which can sometimes mean a very late finish upon my return to the workshop and you hope you don’t have any unhappy customers. Most of the time they understand.

Recently, we had a patient suffer a heart attack at the local hotel. We carried out CPR and AED with the help of members of the public until the ambulance arrived. The patient was transported to hospital and made a full recovery. Two weeks later we had a good chat in the street.

The main challenges of being a CFR is time management - fitting in work, training, family and other commitments. However, the positives of providing patient care, support and reassurance until the ambulance arrives far outweighs any negatives. I would highly encourage others to be involved with CFR. It’s good to be involved in your local community.”

Captain Jeff Snow

Cayonleigh CFRs welcome new members

In December three new volunteers were presented with their first aid certificates, facilitated by Paramedic Educator Craig Hutchins. This now brings the group’s total to 15.

Cayonleigh unit is approximately half an hour from Bowral in the Southern Highlands and responds to an average of three incidents per month.

Commencing in April 2011, Cayonleigh have responded to several trauma patients requiring retrieval by helicopter to major trauma centres. The actions of the CFR members have been crucial in providing these patients with good outcomes.

Photo: (L-R): A/Zone Manager John Brotherhood; Jilian Mara, mother and daughter Mararet and Lilyan Hough; SES Regional Controller Ashley Sullivan and Deputy Director Operations Joel Bardsley.
Bundanoon FRNSW CFRs

Situated in the Southern Highlands in the Wingecarribee Shire, Bundanoon was formerly known as Jordan’s Crossing and is colloquially referred to as ‘Bundy’. Known for its annual Scottish Highland gathering, the Brigadoon Festival, the Highland Fling and the annual 15 to 160 km mountain bike race that attracts riders from all over the world, Bundanoon has a population of about 2100 people.

'We first became CFRs in September 2009, operating under an agreement between FRNSW and Ambulance. We cover as far as the villages of Penrose and Wingello to the south and the village of Exeter in the North. We also venture into the forests surrounding our area to assist people who have come to misfortune while pursuing their activities and we’re occasionally called to the Hume Highway to assist with MVAs.

Our CFRs include Captain Paul Sedgbeer, Deputy Captain Leon Shanks, Fire Fighters Andrea Lenane, Andrew Brough, Wade Gilroy, Fletcher Gentles, Andrew Hale and Max Peek. New members are Nathan Willoughby, Chris Guiliano, Suzie O’Leary and Melinda Scott. Although our new members aren’t CFR trained, they have their basic life support training and attend calls with us. An extra pair of hands never goes astray! Our ‘day jobs’ vary. Some of us are self-employed, one is actually a paramedic and two others are police officers. We also have a uni student and a medical receptionist. If a particular officer works out of town, they cannot respond and are unavailable. The officers available just leave their work to respond to the incident and pick it up where they left off when they return. Our employers/customers are aware that it’s part of our daily life.

Most of the time our patients are people with age related illnesses and injuries from falls. We have the occasional MVA in town and the odd alcohol induced injury too. When a large event comes to town, for example, the Highland Fling mountain bike race, it usually sees us attending to a few people who’ve come off their bikes.

We rescued two people last year from the deep valleys surrounding our town, one was airlifted out; the other we had to carry all the way up the hill on a steep, winding and uneven track to the waiting ambulance. Physically it was very challenging, but with the help of the ambos and SES we succeeded.

Most calls we may know the patient, but are not well acquainted with them. As they are frequently elderly and their health is declining, it’s better to know the person and what ails them as it makes it easier to assist them.

The sad part is, even if you don’t know them you’ll often see their life celebrated in the many pictures and other memorabilia around their house. However, you’ll see that same person at the call, suffering, slowly dying. It’s always sad to see.

The challenges? Getting woken at 2.16 am on a freezing night to attend a call is a challenge for most people! Carrying an injured bush walker out of a steep valley is always tough going, but we take it in our stride. Our equipment is designed to be able to be used by any FRNSW officer and is adequate for what we do. Sometimes finding a location can be a little problematic too, as we live out in the sticks and communications can get a little frayed.

The best part is being part of a dedicated team and working with the paramedics. It’s always good to learn new things and we learn a lot from them. They’ve got a great sense of humour too! It’s great to expand your horizons and be part of a group that’s respected and valued in our little town.

It’s good to be of service to your local community. For a young person starting out, it’s a great thing to have on your resume. For older more established people, it’s a great part-time job, and keeps you mentally and physically active.'

Andrew Brough
Captains Flat SES CFRs

Situated in the Palerang shire of the south-east of NSW, not too many people have heard of ‘The Flat’ which is an old mining and forestry town. The mine was closed in 1962 as it was declared dangerous after several cave-ins, though there is talk of the possibility of it re-opening in the near future. A lot of the mine was left as is and has become a bit of a tourist attraction for the village. Captains Flat is probably best known for the local pub which once had the longest bar in the southern hemisphere. With a population of about 450 people, including the surrounding properties and stations, the closest ambulance stations are Queanbeyan (30 minutes to the west) and Braidwood (40 minutes to the east).

I started volunteering when I was just 11-years-old with the Rural Fire Service Cadets. I unofficially joined the SES as a 14-year-old (you had to be 18 at the time, minimum age is now 16) and have been an active member since. I was inspired to join the SES after the Thredbo landslide disaster in 1997. I remember watching it on TV and wanting to be able to help. I used to go down to the local oval and watch the SES and RFS train, so I hassled both units to let me join and they eventually gave in. Just the ability to help people in times of need is still the driving force behind me and my team’s reason for volunteering.

We were relieved and excited when the MOU between Ambulance and the SES was established in 2006 as it gave us greater training and capability to help our community.

Even before CFR, our SES unit would often respond to local accidents and medical emergencies in and around the town. We were relieved and excited when the MOU between Ambulance and the SES was established in 2006 as it gave us greater training and capability to help our community. Our community is proud of what we do. I think if anything we give them some comfort in knowing that there are people in the town that are willing and able to help them in times of need. They certainly let us know they appreciate us through their donations and letters of thanks, and this in itself is reason enough to do what we do.

In my ‘day job’, I’m a wardsman at the Canberra Hospital. I work permanent nightshift in the ICU and do a 12 hour seven nights on seven day off roster. I enjoy my job, but am trying to get into university to study nursing/paramedicine.

Gennene Hopkins has her own business. She has a school bus run for Jerangle Public school. We joke that the school bus is an honorary response vehicle, as Genenne has often been the first on scene at accidents on her run.

I think on a professional level, it’s easier to know the patient in certain circumstances. I think it’s usually more comfortable for the person too when we are able to relate to each other and often have an idea of their background. However, knowing the person you have to treat on a personal level can often make the situation a little harder to deal with. We have to be extra careful not to let emotions take over and prevent us from delivering our service. Also, we must be mindful that our patients haven’t called an ambulance because everything is going well in their lives. Our community only calls for help in times of crisis. It’s hard for them to invite people into their homes to discuss personal and sensitive issues. Patient confidentiality is extremely important to us. As anyone who has ever lived in a small town will know - loose lips sink ships.
Our team recently experienced a ‘close to home’ job when we arrived on scene at single vehicle MVA where we discovered the driver was one of our own SES members. After a short chopper ride to hospital, thankfully all was well. One of our first ever call-outs as a CFR unit was to our local pub where a young woman had caught fire. Again the team had to compose themselves as we treated another member (my sister) for superficial and partial thickness burns to around 30 per cent of her body.

We have a motocross park located a few kilometres from the village. Over the years, it’s provided us with numerous jobs, almost all traumas. Though the park can sometimes keep us busy, we would rather respond to the motocross park where we know where the patients are, than having to search through the national park to find injured riders. We also have military training exercises and bike riding events held in the surrounding bush.

The best thing about volunteering for Ambulance would simply be the opportunity to help our community. Of course there are a lot of other reasons why we volunteer. CFR is fun and exciting. It definitely gives you the ‘feel good’ experience when you can look back at a job and realise ‘wow, I’ve really helped someone today’ or ‘I just helped to save a life’, but I think the core reason is because we care.

Although I would encourage other people to get involved with volunteering for Ambulance, it’s probably not for everybody. In my short experience, I’ve seen the absolute best and the downright worst in people, had some really happy and rewarding times and some times where you wish you’d had a ‘sickie’. You will be exposed to things that may be hard to deal with. It takes a certain someone to be an Ambulance volunteer. My advice would be to be strong of mind and stomach if you are considering becoming a volunteer.

I’d like to thank Paramedic Jade Marks from Queanbeyan. Jade has put in so much time and effort into training us over the years, and even though we can be a tough crowd sometimes, she still enjoys coming out every month to tune us up. Jade’s knowledge and experience have reflected upon the unit, and we feel she is a great leader and role model for us and is a true asset to Ambulance.’

Kade Johnston

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Senior Chaplain uses his new volunteer skills

Late last year, I took part in the volunteer/CFR training at Gilgandra and was awarded the Certificate II in Emergency Medical Service First Response at the graduation in December. A few weeks ago, I got to put my training to use for the first time!

On the way to the local shops, my wife and I came across a motorcyclist who had been knocked off his bike by a motorist who failed to give way at a roundabout. On arrival, the rider was laying on the side of the roundabout complaining of 10/10 pain in his left foot which had born the full impact of the collision. Due to the potentially dangerous location, I got several bystanders to control traffic at the intersection, whilst I quickly assessed the patient in situ. Apart from a potentially serious foot injury, no other injuries were immediately obvious. My training gave me the confidence to complete a quick primary survey and rule out other life threatening injuries.

With very little medical equipment, I made the decision to leave his intact motorcycle boot in place as this was the best form of splint I had at my disposal to manage his potentially fractured and crushed foot. In the absence of any pain medication, I was able to reassure the patient and assist him to position his leg in a way that provided some relief from the intense pain. When the IC crew from Ryde arrived shortly after, I provided a patient handover and then spent time reassuring the bystanders who had rendered assistance.

I have completed numerous first aid courses over the years, but the volunteer course was by far the best pre-hospital training I have ever received. It has taught me to be focused and systematic in my patient assessment, to maintain scene safety and to prioritise the treatment of life threatening injuries. While this incident was thankfully relatively minor, it was good to put my news skills into practice. Thanks to Sue Webster and the educators for including me in the volunteer training. Their passion and enthusiasm for the volunteer program is greatly appreciated.

Reverend Paul McFarlane
Senior Chaplain
In the far south-west of NSW, Pooncarie is 120 km north of Wentworth and 150 km north of Mildura in Victoria. Although a small isolated village with approximately 50 people in town, it covers a large rural area, including a mineral sands mine site 55 km to the west with 350 beds in camp. Pooncarie is situated on the Darling River between Menindee and Wentworth, and on the tourist route near Mungo National Park.

We cover an area approximately 70 km north of Pooncarie towards Menindee, 100 km east towards Ivanhoe, 100 km west towards the Silver City Highway and south towards Wentworth, plus 130 km south-east towards Mungo National Park. The nearest hospital is Mildura Base Hospital and the Royal Flying Doctor Service to Broken Hill Base Hospital.

Our unit is made up of Katie, Dean, Rachel, Caroline and her husband Phillip and me. We originally started in about 2003 with a crew of 11. Over time and natural attrition, most of the original crew left town for education for their children or employment. Some of us are still here, but we’re looking forward to the group of new trainees coming on board this month. All our members live 35 to 100 km out of Pooncarie, so this means a lot of travel to attend training or jobs. Some of the new crew are based in town, so this will give greater coverage and quicker response times. Currently Rachel has to cross the Darling River by boat to attend calls, and Katie and Dean have made several trips across by boat to attend jobs.

I’m a nurse out at the local mineral sands mine, a farmer’s wife and grandmother of 8. Of the rest of our crew (who are mostly farm/station workers and mothers) some had had previous first aid training, but the majority had only what was offered by NSW Ambulance. This training is fantastic and they are well equipped to cope with roadside and community emergencies.

My employers accept that if I get a call I will go if possible. Unfortunately, the distance often makes it impractical for me to attend, but I can give guidance over the phone or organise someone closer to attend if possible. If I’m in camp or at home then I always attend call-outs, even if only to assist others doing the job. My family also understands and supports me in what I do, as they know it may be them who needs help one day. My husband and son have both attended with me when I’ve needed assistance and someone else hasn’t been available.

This can be so rewarding, even if you only help and support your own family, this is a big help in the community. Knowledge is empowering and knowing you can support others and that others can support you when it counts, life and death.

My first experiences with the need for an ambulance out to the area meant waiting for two plus hours for an ambulance to come from Mildura in Victoria. At one stage, I attended a car accident where the patient had to be maintained on the roadside for five hours, because the RFDS wasn’t available and Victorian Ambulance couldn’t come. The old town vehicle was unroadworthy and had to keep having the tyres pumped up and tow-started each time it was stopped. It also had a cracked head. Thanks to NSW Ambulance, this is all part of the past. We now have our own 4x4 ambulance and are backed up by the fantastic crew from Wentworth.

At first our community was hesitant, but after some of the most negative members needed our assistance they have continued to support us in every way they can. We still have people who use their own vehicles to take people to town, but they do ask and will accept assistance whenever possible.

A typical call-out for me means I’ll be on the job at least five hours. I live 35 km from Pooncarie, and when in camp, I’m 55 km from Pooncarie - all dirt and rough roads. If I need to get into Pooncarie to get the ambulance and then take it out to a job, this slows me down but it’s something that has to be done. When transporting to hospital, we have a 300 km round trip from the township itself, but we may have picked our patient up from anywhere else. We have been saved in recent times by the Wentworth crew who will meet us en route and do the transfer to hospital which saves our time and fuel. Our township doesn’t have fuel now so we’ve had to organise a fuel drum for emergencies.

If the tourist season is positive, then we have the potential for lots of traffic, mostly grey nomads doing the National Park or heritage trails. Over the years, we’ve attended everything from burns, fishing accidents,
lacerations and rollovers, motorbike accidents to heart attacks and gastro-based illnesses. Anaphylaxis, asthma and mental health issues are all out there with the holiday makers and tourists, as well as within the community.

The challenges are the lack of time available to be able to help and the tyranny of distance when you know time is critical. Also the terrible roads and lack of communication.

I love being able to help my community though in times of need and provide support in our isolation. This can be so rewarding, even if you only help and support your own family, this is a big help in the community. Knowledge is empowering and knowing you can support others and that others can support you shortens the distance when it counts, life and death.

Most isolated communities are willing to help one another, but they need the professional support to do it correctly. Thank you NSW Ambulance, both southern and western regions for supporting us from the start, with the biggest thanks to the crew at Wentworth for their everyday support. Pooncarie thanks you.’

Marg Healy

Roger Andrews

Well-known Gulgong businessman Roger Andrews retired in March after 43 years’ service as a VAO. Starting out at 15 as an apprentice mechanic, he unofficially began volunteering for Ambulance in 1967, checking, refuelling and cleaning the local ambulance on a weekly basis.

‘I'm born and bred in Gulgong, lived here all my life and never had the opportunity or desire to leave. When I first got involved with Ambulance, it was totally a volunteer service, with no Ambulance staff employed here until 1972. A crew would come out from Mudgee and I would meet them at the scene. Now there are five full-time paramedics with modern up-to-date equipment and vehicles.

After Station Officer John Armstrong transferred to Gulgong, he decided I should become ‘official’. It was initially part of my job and it just went on from there. The ambos just kept on ringing me!

I've always been self-employed while working as a VAO at R and J Andrews Engineering. This gave me the flexibility to offer my services when they were needed. As I was the boss, it wasn’t that difficult juggling my business and my volunteering duties.

My wife Jen and family have always been very supportive. My work with Ambulance never bothered any of them, as they grew up with it. I would normally be called out for mechanical repair work, so it was always part and parcel of my life.

My least favourite call-outs were the domestic disputes. Attending incidents where I know the patients didn’t bother me. If I knew them, it made it a lot easier to talk to them.

I'm really worried the younger generation don't have the commitment or initiative to become part of a team. They’re too busy worrying about themselves. If they join as a volunteer, they really have to be prepared to give it their all.

Working with a bunch of people who made a difference is definitely the highlight for me over the past 43 years. Although I’ve retired, I’ve told the local ambos I’ll still always be available (unofficially) to help out if they ever get stuck!’
Volunteer to Paramedic

All of our volunteers are passionate about caring for their communities. A number of our volunteers take that passion and love of pre-hospital care a step further, going on to become qualified paramedics.

**Neal Herbert**

**STATION OFFICER, FORBES**

Paramedic for 13 years. Honorary Officer (VAO) for 12 years.

‘I was stationed at Eugowra as an Honorary Officer before undergoing my internship at Dubbo Station as a Level 1. Since 2001, I have been based at Forbes. I was recruited by Jack Barnes (farmer and neighbour) who was the senior officer at Eugowra Ambulance Station. I volunteered from 1988 until 2000.

While volunteering I was involved in a family owned agriculture business partnership. The farming enterprise was based mostly on the production of cattle and lucerne hay. The property was located 10 km from Eugowra on the Lachlan River.

During my tenure as a VAO at Eugowra, I became involved in the Ambulance rugby league team. During this period, I met an extremely diverse group of paramedics who imparted upon me the desire and direction to become a paramedic.

After leaving the farming industry, I sought to become a fulltime paramedic. The selection process seemed daunting at the time, and the level of information and knowledge that was required appeared to be immense. It was definitely more intense than what I had expected. My family, friends and the Eugowra community were very supportive of this massive change in career path.

The constant response to assist the community was enjoyable and the vast variety of cases gave me a greater realisation of the health industry. This was very different to being an honorary officer.’

**Sarah Irwin**

**CFR GLENREAGH**

Studying to become a paramedic at CSU.

‘I’ve been a volunteer for two years. I was aware there were volunteers in the community and training was occurring soon, so I joined. I’ve always wanted to become a paramedic and this was the best way of getting started.

I’m currently studying at Charles Sturt University doing the Bachelor of Clinical Practice. Being a volunteer has been a major help, as I already have experience in my uni practical work, such as oxygen therapy and other practices. Biomedical science is easier too, as I have knowledge of anatomy and physiology through my volunteer training and studies.

I’m still volunteering as a CFR while I study, doing the normal responses. In Bathurst, I’m taking the opportunity of going on some ride along shifts to further my volunteer CFR knowledge. I’ve just completed my 10 year plan as part of my career pathway course that’s part of the curriculum. I’d love to go to Coonabarabran, as it’s in western NSW, a small town similar in size to my hometown. I’d also like to one day transfer south and work at Jindabyne or Perisher Valley as a snow operations paramedic.

As first responders, we are very well known in the community, in a small community everyone knows everyone. A typical call-out will usually involve two to three members who assist with the patient until the ambulance arrives, which may be 30 to 40 minutes. We usually know all of the patients due to the size of the town.’
Susan Dodds

GOULBURN STATION

Paramedic for almost five years. CFR for three years.

‘This is my fourth year at Goulburn Station. I spent my probation year at Bathurst, which was an awesome learning environment and worked for a very short time at Batlow Station.

I had just joined the SES in a little village called Sofala, 45 km out of Bathurst. Not long after I joined the SES, the first CFR unit was started in the Western Division. I jumped at the chance, with the other two women (Krishna Burns and Lynne Lahey) and committed to this 24/7 worthwhile program.

Based in Sofala, on paper our CFR unit covered a 15 km radius. But due to the geographical nature of the area, we would respond to as far as Hill End and Hargraves, which mainly due to road conditions at the time, could take up to an hour to get there.

When I undertook the CFR position, I owned and operated a takeaway/general store/post office in the village with two small children and a husband that worked away frequently. I had amazing support from my family and my staff. So much so, that any time my pager went off, they’d just step in and take over keeping the shop running and making sure my kids were looked after. I couldn’t have done it without them. I was actually undergoing the initial training to become a CFR at Charles Sturt University. Our educators were Ian Johns and Warren Mannion. I remember going through scenarios and Ian asked me if I had ever considered becoming a paramedic. My answer was yes but I had left my run too late; I felt I was too old and I had never studied before. Thanks to him, the confidence I thought I didn’t have to follow my dream was there and it came to the surface. I was also very fortunate to meet some Ambulance managers and paramedics who were positive and supporting, truly inspiring me in my quest to become a full time paramedic.

The journey to become a paramedic was damn hard though, for my family in particular. We had to sell our business, my husband had to find full-time employment so he would no longer have to travel. And I started university to cover all bases to achieve my goal. Do I think the process was easier due to my volunteer background? It gave me a far better understanding of what was required of me, but the process itself to me at the time seemed hard and I still had to meet all standards required by Ambulance.

As a CFR, you knew the paramedics would eventually turn up, so you had that safety net, handing your patient over to them. As a new paramedic you were IT and yes there was a certain transition period, but once I got through that, it was just the most amazing feeling to, as they say, own your job and position.

To other volunteers who want to become paramedics - stay focused and committed to your decision. Study everything you can relating to the job. Most of all, never give up your desire to become a paramedic. This career is truly the most rewarding and amazing experience.’