



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## VFBV AFFILIATION

Thank you for members' strong show of support. VFBV affiliation rates averaging 95% over the past 5 years, shows the value of our unified voice is clearly recognised and demonstrates strong support for the important work that VFBV does on behalf of all CFA volunteers.

The 2021/22 renewal notices for your Brigade/Group's VFBV Affiliation and Welfare Fund have now been forwarded to all Brigades and Groups with a due date of 30 June 2021.

In recognition of the significant donations received to the Welfare Fund from the public following last year's devastating bushfires, a one off 50% discount is being offered for the 2021/22 Welfare Fund Subscription, reducing the cost to all Brigades this year to \$45.00. Both the VFBV Board and the Welfare Fund Committee see this as a way of supporting the many Brigades who have subscribed to the Welfare Fund since 1913. It is hoped that this reduced cost will encourage new Brigades to join the Welfare Fund this year for the benefit of their members. This is a very low cost to ensure that your members are covered should they find themselves in financial hardship for whatever reason.

Brigades and Groups who pay their VFBV affiliations before 30th June 2021 will automatically go into the draw to win their choice of one of the worthwhile prizes kindly donated by GAAM - G-Force Nozzle with Quick connect coupling; Gated Wye with Stortz Inlet and quick connect outlets; Root Soaker; TFT Break Apart Nozzle; or from Powdersafe - five Helmet Torches and carry case; or donated by CFA six Uniden Digital Scanners. VFBV sincerely thanks GAAM Emergency Products, Powdersafe Pty. Ltd. and CFA for their continued generous support in providing these prizes.

For further details of the prizes on offer, see the flyer which was included with the VFBV invoices sent to your Secretary last month.

## Zero BAC

Members are reminded that Victoria's road rules have been recently changed that now make it a requirement for all drivers of vehicles weighing 4.5 tonne or more to have a zero-blood alcohol concentration. This applies to the vast majority of trucks in CFA's fleet.

In essence, any truck that you cannot drive with a standard car license is now defined as a "heavy" vehicle. There are harsh penalties for any driver who exceeds the zero limit – with the same penalties that apply to other legal limits. All offences incur a large fine, loss of license, mandatory behaviour change program attendance and an alcohol interlock requirement.

Both State Council and the VFBV Board have recently discussed this issue and are calling on the Government to remove caps, limits and budgetary pressures currently in place that restrict CFA volunteers' ability to upgrade their licenses and access driver training. Significant investment is now required to increase our driver capability and number of available drivers to account for the significant vigilance required to monitor zero BAC.

VFBV is in the process of contacting brigades to determine what other support or assistance you may need, and members are encouraged to respond and assist with our advocacy.

## Nominations for Trust Fund

The VFBV Board is calling for nominations to the CFA and Brigades Donations Trust Fund. The purpose of the Trust Fund is to raise and receive money and donations of goods and services from the public for distribution to Brigades, to assist with costs of purchasing and maintaining firefighting equipment, facilities, training and resources and administrative expenses of Brigades which are associated with their firefighting functions.

Following nominations, five new or reappointed members will be appointed by the VFBV Board to serve as VFBV Trustees on the Trust Fund for a term of two years. One member has advised they will not be re-applying; all other members are eligible for re-appointment.

The Trust Fund committee meets quarterly, either via teleconference or at CFA HQ, with appointments to come into effect as from the Trust's AGM which is normally held July/August.

Nominations can be mailed to VFBV office, 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East 3151 or emailed to [vfbv@vfbv.com](mailto:vfbv@vfbv.com)

## VIRTUAL REALITY

VFBV delegates are currently working alongside CFA to develop virtual reality and XRV Incident Command Technicians and Facilitators. CFA has confirmed that they have recently purchased an additional five Flaim VR (Virtual Reality) units bringing the total to 10, these have been funded partly by the public donations and form part of CFA Training Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024.

These units are expected to be located at each CFA Region for bookings and use by Groups and Brigades. VR and XVR can be used for skills maintenance and adds an additional resource for volunteers to access.

## RATIONALITY AND EXCELLENCE

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

As at time of writing we have just entered week two of Victorian lockdown number four. I want to acknowledge the impact these lockdowns have on not just our personal and professional lives, but the significant impact on our CFA and emergency response duties.

While it may not feel like it now, the resilience and redundancy on display across our network of 1,217 volunteer fire brigades across the State is one of the few good news stories to come from this pandemic.

The fact our systems and processes have been able to adapt and respond to these significant periods of upheaval is a real testament to your unwavering commitment to your communities.

Small outbreaks within our networks have been quickly minimised and stamped out, with brigades showing the utmost discipline in doing what is required to contain and isolate but ensuring redundancies are in place to ensure our service to the community remains unaffected. All without any fuss or fanfare. Thank-you and well done.

For those of you impacted by closures, unemployment, underemployment, small business pressures or supply line shortages etc that are causing financial pressures – please don't feel alone. Councillors, peers and chaplains are all available through the CFA Member Assistance Program and services are available to not only all members but your immediate families as well. Its free and confidential and can be accessed via 1800 959 232.

The program offerings have evolved over the years but are based on a foundation principle that your mental health is just as important as your physical health. Acknowledging the holistic nature of mental health and the myriad of influences and contributing factors across our busy lives, these services are not just focussed on CFA or brigade related matters.

For example, solution focussed counselling can assist you with strategies and solutions to manage work or personal issues which may be impacting upon your mental

health, in addition to your brigade/group roles.

Even if all you need is a sounding board or fresh perspective please reach out and make use of these services. A problem shared is a problem halved.

### The Stoics

At the risk of diving a little too deep this month, the current COVID related pressures seem as good a time as any to briefly discuss some coping mechanisms. As you can imagine, in my role I speak frequently to a broad range of members on a daily basis. Over recent months I have noticed a real significant increase of people presenting with high levels of anxiety, frustration and the tell-tale signs of resentment from feeling out of control. And while COVID has certainly contributed – many of these feelings appear to have been stirred up very much by reform, restructure and the larger role that governments now play in our everyday lives.

You have heard me speak before about using history to contextualise our present and inform our future.

Over 2,500 years ago the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates taught moral philosophy. Socrates is often considered one of the founders of western philosophy. To give you some frame of reference - Socrates taught Plato, who taught Aristotle. Without going into too much depth - 'the Stoics' were one of five major philosophical schools during ancient Greece and Rome. Much of their works forms the basis of many new age self-help type writings and modern-day discussions around mindfulness.

Now before you think I've gone completely mad, one of the principles of the stoic teachings were about focussing on the things you can control and ignoring the rest. You've probably read the bumper stickers or t-shirts as some of these teachings have crossed into popular culture.

One of the major stoics of the time was Epictetus, who was born a slave of a former slave. Interestingly, both men were freed at different times - by Emperor Nero. (Yes I know I'm playing a little fast and loose with the term 'interesting'.)

It was Epictetus who contributed significantly to discussion and teachings on rationality, virtue, excellence and the dichotomy of control.

And it is this last point that I want to settle on. There is much currently outside of our direct control, and it is this loss of control or perceived 'helplessness' that is swirling around us and feeding emotions and anxiety.

Modern psychologists refer to this as internal locus of control vs external locus of control. When we are concentrating on the external locus – we are now simply experiencing what is happening to us. Whereas, if we focus on the 'internal locus' ie the things that we have control over – then rather than simply 'experience' or falling victim to what is happening around us,

we are now focussed and responsible for how we react, how we feel and what we do. In other words, we are making things happen vs not simply experiencing what is happening around us. It gives focus and purpose.

*"Small-minded people blame others. Average people blame themselves. The wise see all blame as foolishness."* - Epictetus

For example, there was an American naval vice-admiral and aviator called James Stockdale who was the most senior naval officer held captive in Hanoi, and brutally tortured for seven and a half years during the Vietnam War. He credited the teachings of stoicism, and Epictetus himself in not only getting him through it, but later admitted it was the defining event of his life for which he would not trade.

Admiral Stockdale described his approach during his confinement as balancing realism and optimism during what was a dire and prolonged situation. He taught that during times of seemingly never-ending hardship, set-backs, suffering and distress we still need to maintain optimism that we will survive and pull through, while balancing the importance and discipline of realism and facing the practicality of the harsh present to focus and deal with the things we can and must.

I use Admiral Stockdale's example as if you read any of his lectures or interviews - he was a very harsh critic of what I call blind faith or empty optimism. While he had strong faith, and drew strength from his belief that he would get through it – he attributes his survival to not simply waiting for things to happen, but rather taking an active role and making things happen and taking responsibility for the things within his influence and control, no matter how small.

I share these stories to remind us not to get needlessly angry, frustrated and upset by the things we cannot influence. I have spoken previously about the needless energy of stewing over past grievances. Rather, we are better to focus on what we can influence, including our own behaviour.

The same can be said for how we approach the rebuilding and strengthening of CFA into a strong, world class volunteer emergency service. As I remind people - it's not broke – but it does require some TLC. Like that old saying about forging steel: the finest steel has to go through the hottest fire.

My advice to all of us in these uncertain times is to focus on the things we can influence, and the things that matter. Don't be distracted by the noise of other people's agendas or the things that we have no control over.

What will make your brigade a great place to be? What support do you need in place to best meet your community's needs? How can volunteer leaders be supported and encouraged? How must



things be structured and done that allows you to contribute your all to our shared mission of saving life and property? What will make CFA a great place to volunteer?

Life isn't a movie so please don't sit back and just watch it unfold. The same can be said about reform and CFA's current change journey. Get involved. Contribute to discussions. Think, discuss and provide feedback. Don't just criticise or blame or leave it for others. Respect one another and be kind to your fellow volunteers and staff, but most importantly – just get involved. Together, we can and do make a difference.

### VFBV Survey Results

In this quarters VFBV Supplement, we have published the most recent VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey results. With almost 2,700 volunteers taking part and contributing, the results are a highly credible source of volunteer views and opinions.

This year's results show a decline in volunteer satisfaction across all key results areas. I am hoping we have hit rock bottom as the dust settles on the governments reforms. I have been very pleased with the commitments made from both the new CFA CEO and Chief Officer to address the results, use them to inform their planning and the promise to work in collaboration with VFBV to address the areas of most concern to volunteers as we move forward in the new operating environment.

For the first time in many years, I am growing more confident that the message is being heard within CFA, the data is being used and actions are following that will genuinely shape and lead the change journey ahead of us.

While it is early days, there have already been some very good signs and actions commenced to address issues. I provide this assessment not as blind optimism but rather as a reminder that having your say and providing feedback does make a difference. The priorities and critical gaps that are evident from the survey results are already having a significant impact on future priorities, internal budgets and lines of effort. We will keep pursuing and advocating for improvements and strengthened consultative arrangements.

I would like to thank all delegates for their continued passion, enthusiasm and dedication in representing and advocating on behalf of all our volunteers. We still have much to do, but early results are very promising.

## MORE FOR ONLINE SUBSCRIBERS

Want to receive this information direct to your email? You can register for VFBV's e-newsletter via [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au) and clicking on the VFBV Newsletter Box.

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