

‘To serve others and do good’: An examination of volunteers in the New South Wales Police Force

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ABSTRACT

‘What is the essence of life? To serve others and do good’ (Aristotle attr). Public services across the globe have become increasingly under pressure to deliver more for the same, or at least the same for less in terms of service delivery to the public. Economic downturns, increased demands and national and local societal changes, further exacerbated by a global pandemic, have left public agencies such as the police searching for resources to cope with such changes. One source of assistance, and a chance for people to serve others and do good, is the increased recruitment and use of volunteers to assist regular police officers. However, research upon the use of police volunteers in Australia appears in its infancy, although it is gathering momentum. This article examines the use of volunteers by the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF), along with examining just who the volunteers are, what type of training they receive and to obtain their views on their roles in the NSWPF.

Key Words: Police, Volunteers, New South Wales Police.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly changing global environment police agencies across the world are facing enormous challenges to their traditional delivery of services to the public at a local, national and international level. This coupled with economic constraints have forced police agencies to consider the way in which their workforce is structured and to seek on occasions to rationalise their establishment. An example of this was the economic downturn of 2008-2010 which introduced the age of austerity for public services in the United Kingdom (UK), and in particular the Police service which saw a decrease in its public budget of nearly 30% (National Audit Office 2018). Consequently, there was significant restructuring of the workforce which saw a reduction in the number of police officers, community support officers and ancillary workers.

One also cannot ignore the fact that increased problems for policing agencies may occur as a result of environmental and climate change. The recent large-scale bush fires in Australia and long periods of drought may indicate that natural disasters could increase in scale and intensity. Furthermore, the recent COVID-19 pandemic illustrates that increased opportunities for global travel have heightened the possibility of worldwide pandemics. The COVID-19 response in Australia has seen an increased demand on police services, with the role of police extended to enforce new public health directions aimed at reducing the spread of the virus and being removed from ‘core’ duties to manage state and territory border closures. Indeed, in his evidence to the Commonwealth Government, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement: COVID-19, criminal activity and law enforcement, Scott Weber CEO of the Police Federation of Australia states “we are pretty much at breaking point with regard to staffing levels” (2020, p.40).

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In the light of such impact, police agencies are seeking ways to deliver or maintain their service to the public at a reasonable level. One way of attempting to do so is to consider the role of the volunteer in supporting the police. This involves the use of non-warranted, generally not uniformed individuals who give up their time freely to assist in whatever capacity they are able to do so. Indeed, the range of opportunities for volunteers is only constrained by legislative measures- for example special powers of arrest for police officers, a lack of understanding of their use, or perhaps cultural resistance to their use. However, they are generally used to support the police in their function, not used to replace ordinarily paid staff.

Research upon the use of police volunteers in Australia appears in its infancy although it is gathering momentum. Therefore, this research aims to explore the use of volunteers by the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF), along with examining just who the volunteers are, what type of training they receive and to obtain their views on their roles in the NSWPF. The purpose of which is to assist managers and policy makers in their day-to-day operational running of the force and to add to the knowledge in this area.

Volunteers in Context

In the UK volunteers are a key feature of social capital, with volunteers increasingly becoming involved in running libraries (Casselden et al 2015) and other local provision of services, including sport (Morgan 2013).

As Cheney and Chui (2010) point out however, at the international level there has been an increasing diversification of police roles and functions within and external to public police agencies sometimes referred to as plural policing or ‘auxiliarisation’ (for example see Rogers, 2016, Dobrin and Wolf 2016, Jones et al 2009, Jones and Newburn 2006), despite the fact that volunteers, in many formats, have worked with the police since their inception. However, whilst the use of volunteers appears to have been historically common, this aspect of policing has received very little attention especially in terms of research, even though it appears to be growing in popularity (Bullock, 2018).

Dobrin (2017) stated that both the police organisation and communities benefit from police volunteerism because people in free societies are best governed when members of the community take active participation in the oversight of the community. Volunteering has therefore been viewed as a potential mechanism for promoting the legitimacy of the police within communities. Here volunteers are seen as bridge or conduit between both parties, i.e. the police and the community it serves.

Van Steden and Mehlbaum (2019), in their study in the Netherlands conclude that volunteers are a useful bridge or contact between the community and police but also point to the fact that volunteers are in a paradoxical position. The need for volunteers must be seen in the wider socio-political context of ‘responsibilising’ citizens, whilst struggling with opposition from unions that see them as threatening jobs. Additionally, training, supervision and management from the police itself required improvement. Despite this, on the level of individual volunteers, they found that most of them choose to undertake voluntary work because they not only wanted to do something worthwhile for the community, but also felt that they improved their personal skills and created a pleasant connection with their regular colleagues.

In Sweden volunteering has been depicted as a resource and a benefit for both the public and the police (Uhnoo and Lofstrand 2018). This has been the case particularly so since the Swedish police reforms of 2015-2017, when they were given a clear political direction to get

closer to the citizens and deal with local problems as defined by communities themselves (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2016). Voluntary policing initiatives here have gained legitimacy in the eyes of the police and the public and are presented in such a light by the media, and the transfer of responsibility from state to citizens allows for citizen participation and allows for more flexible ways for citizens to influence police operations and aids accountability (van Steden et al., 2011). In addition, Morgan (2013) points to the social capital through active citizenship that volunteers support provide.

Most studies of volunteers in the USA tend to concentrate upon the sworn volunteer, known sometimes as the police reserve, police auxiliary, or similar names. The fact that there are so many police agencies in the USA (18000 according to the FBI (2014)), makes it difficult to establish just how many volunteers there are actually assisting the police in their duties. Dobrin and Wolf (2016) suggest that 30 -35% of all public safety agencies utilise volunteer officers, whilst an in-depth empirical study by Malega and Garner (2018), suggest that, even though the number of sworn volunteers dropped by approximately 29% between 1999 and 2013, driven by the drop in their use by local police departments, their widespread use supports their importance in American policing. These sworn volunteer officers are utilised on the basis of cost savings, whereby volunteers cover shifts that would otherwise require paid officers to fill. However, this approach, whilst making financial sense, could create hostility with unions that represent full time paid officers. Historically, there has been consistent resistance to the recruitment and use of volunteers by various groups within police organizations. In the UK for example, any inclusion of unsworn or non-employed individuals has been met with scorn and derision fueled by the belief that volunteers would lead to a reduction in the number of paid police officers (Gill and Mawby 1990). It would appear that one of the major tenants of police use of volunteers is that of support rather than to replace officers and paid civilians (DeManno 2013). Indeed, involvement of police and support staff representative bodies in the recruitment stages for volunteers is seen as a way to overcome cultural opposition to the use of such individuals (Rogers, 2016), which now seems to have been accepted with the Police Federation in the England and Wales acknowledging the use of such volunteers (Police Federation 2020)

Nonetheless, volunteers remain cost effective, including utilising ‘special skills’ which reduce the costs for specialist police. For example, West-Midlands police in the UK recently appealed for volunteer digital forensic analysts to sift through CCTV evidence of police incidents, as well as footage of other incidents including indecent images and fatal road accidents (British Broadcasting Corporation 2019).

Volunteers in Australia.

Volunteers within the police family have come to represent the embodiment of active community participation. The notion of volunteering involves citizens taking responsibility and contributing to the governance of the community of which they are part. Indeed, the national peak body for volunteers in Australia describes volunteering as “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain” (Volunteering Australia 2015a, p.2).

Volunteers are seen as a way of facilitating civic and neighborhood renewal, seen as a form of empowerment as communities take some ownership, creating local solutions to local problems and this in part can be achieved through volunteering in general (Victorian Government 2011). Certainly, volunteering stimulates the development of skills, confidence and greater democratic engagement, helping to encourage community renewal. Active citizenship is presumed to be the heart to civic renewal and social inclusion. Volunteering Australia (2015) suggest that volunteers (44%) were more likely than non-volunteers (15%) to

have ever provided a service or activity in their local area, whilst volunteers (82%) were more likely than non-volunteers (55%) to have attended a community event recently. 92% of volunteers expressed the opinion that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their volunteering roles, whilst there were apparent positive feelings regarding wellbeing, happiness and better health through engaging in volunteering work (Volunteering Australia 2015).

In general terms, Volunteering Australia (2015) suggest that in 2010, over 36% of people aged 18 years or over participated in formal volunteering (6.1 million people). 38% of adult women and 34% of adult men volunteered for a variety of roles and different organisations, with 7% of adult volunteers stating they assisted the emergency services, including the police. In 2006 Australian volunteers worked a total of 713 million hours (Volunteer Australia 2015) with male volunteers working an average of 52 hours per year whilst female volunteers worked an average of 60 hours per year.

According to Stott (2011) and Smith (2011), volunteers are typically degree educated, middle aged and of high social class. In Australia, in 2006, the main reason why people volunteered according to Volunteer Australia (2015), was to help others and the community (57%), personal satisfaction (44%), to do something worthwhile (36%), social contact (22%) and to use their skills and experience (16%).

Nonetheless, little is known about police volunteers in Australia with no empirical research having been undertaken. Yet, the concept of volunteering within today's police service is not a new one and indeed has been in use in different countries for a number of years. For example, Special Constables in England and Wales, who are recruited from members of local communities, are unpaid, fully warranted police officers and are the archetypal volunteers in the police in that country whilst in the United States of America (USA), police volunteers have been extensively utilised (see <http://www.policevolunteers.org/> for detailed information regarding these schemes). However, there now appears a scope in many countries, including Australia, for the introduction of and more wide-spread use of different types of volunteer. The police service in the UK for example, has increased the use of volunteers that are unpaid 'civilians', to work within the police organisation (National Police Improvement Agency 2009). These are members of the public who had expressed an interest in working with the police, undertaking various roles and responsibilities within the organisation; however, they are not special constables, have no police powers and are unwarranted. 'Neighbourhood Volunteers' assisted when they could, as many volunteers enjoyed the flexibility of supporting the service and their local community in whatever way they could. Depending on the commitment of the volunteers and the role, whether administrative or involving some sort of community engagement, some volunteers worked from different police stations and others worked on the street engaging with members of the public directly, engaging in community meetings, letter dropping and other operations often working alongside neighbourhood police teams and partner agencies.

Closer to home, the South Australia Police has more than 1,000 registered volunteers in their Police Volunteer Program that engage in a range of non-core policing activities, including providing front counter support, assisting at community events, supporting crime prevention initiatives, helping with the delivery of approved school programs at the Road Safety Centre, and sustaining partnership programmes such as Blue Light and Neighbourhood Watch (South Australia Police 2020). Likewise, the Queensland Police Service operates a Volunteers in Policing program, whereby volunteers complement the roles and responsibilities of paid police officers by assisting victims of crime, liaising with community groups, participating in community-based activities, conducting home security assessments and

property identification, and assisting police with customer service and school-based crime prevention projects (Queensland Police Service 2020). The Australian Capital Police also run a Volunteers in Policing program, with volunteers providing front office support, assistance at community events and ceremonies, catering at training exercises and workshops and role playing for police recruit training (Australian Federal Police nd). Finally, the Northern Territory Police Fire and Emergency Services has approximately 300 volunteers within its volunteer units and Emergency Response Groups (ERG) across the Territory, with volunteers supplementing police, fire and other emergency response professionals by providing vital frontline capabilities and support (Northern Territory Police Fire and Emergency Services 2020). Anecdotal evidence provided to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement suggests that these policing volunteers can “take that pressure off the police officers” and is ‘a really good gateway to improving our policing services generally’ (Close 2020, p.5; Coyne 2020, p.4), however, despite these good intentions it does not appear that these initiatives have been subject to vigorous evaluation to determine their efficacy.

Other jurisdictions such as Western Australia, Victoria and Tasmania have yet to incorporate policing volunteers into the fold. Tasmanian Police Commissioner Darren Hine indicated in 2014 that he was exploring the idea taking on volunteers, in this instance, he referred to former and retired officers being encouraged to return to fill backroom and front counter roles (Bevin 2014). A similar initiative was rolled out by the UK Metropolitan Police in March of this year in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in London, with officers that had left the organisation in the preceding five years being asked to work in a paid or voluntary capacity (British Broadcasting Corporation 2020). The matter of volunteers has been considered more deeply by the Victorian Police, as part of its Blue Paper: A Vision for Victoria Police in 2025, with a proposal that the organisation “consider seriously the use of volunteers in a systematic way as a supplement to existing...staff” (Victoria Police 2014, p.56). This was in light of serious budget constraints, the potential value of volunteers in supplying specialist skills and capacities, allowing paid staff to focus on their areas of expertise, and volunteers bringing deeper knowledge on the needs of citizens and opening the organisation to more diverse groups of people; although this has yet to eventuate (Victoria Police 2014).

In terms of accountability and management, volunteers tend to be loosely regulated, yet at the same time are required to conduct themselves in the highest of standards. Their integration seems to depend largely upon the enthusiasm of key individuals within the criminal justice system. There are undoubted risks associated with involving volunteers in the delivery of public services. Whilst professional staff are under a statutory obligation to provide a contractual service, volunteers have no obligations under any legal contract. Their relationship is fundamentally different, and this of course carries risks as well as benefits. Further, arrangements for recruiting, training, supervision and grievance and disciplinary processes are highly localised. Volunteer management is seen as being more to do with ensuring that volunteers feel welcome, are valued as part of the police service and receive appropriate thanks, encouragement and praise. Training of volunteers may be limited, reflecting issues relating to resources and available time. Vetting seen as a precautionary measure – a basic insight into the character of potential volunteers- and seen as a safeguard for police and sometimes used as an excuse for police not to involve volunteers. Whilst security in this area is vital, if measures are also too onerous this may prevent those who have a lot to offer from volunteering.

The NSWPF Volunteer Program.

The *Police Service (Volunteer Police) Amendment Act 1992* was an Act of the Parliament of New South Wales, Australia, establishing a trial of volunteer police officers in

the New South Wales Police Service. Introduced to the Parliament by the Liberal Government, the Act was strongly opposed by the Labour Opposition and the New South Wales Police Association. Supporters of the Act - members of the Liberals and the Democrats argued that volunteer police would build upon the community policing practices implemented by the Government, would augment police in the event of an emergency, and would allow members of the public to contribute to a cause which they felt strongly about. Elements of this debate can be seen below:

“Over recent years, the New South Wales Police Service has adopted community-based policing as its primary operational strategy. The proposed introduction of volunteers in policing is a logical extension of community-based policing, the tradition of volunteer service to the community is a particularly strong one in Australia. However, the concept of using volunteers in policing is new to Australia”.^[2]

The Hon. Edward Pickering MLC, NSW Parliamentary Hansard

“Volunteer involvement engenders a sense of community, a connection between paid workers and the ordinary public with both committed to a common purpose. Furthermore, the experience of volunteers and their different skills enhance the quality of the service.”^[4]

The Hon. Elisabeth Kirkby MLC, NSW Parliamentary Hansard

The Labour Opposition, however, backed by the principal unions in the Police Service - the New South Wales Police Association, the Commissioned Police Officers Association of New South Wales, and the Public Service Association - was opposed to the Act. Arguments against the Act revolved around concerns that police volunteers would not be sufficiently trained, experienced or equipped for police work, and that the Government intended on tricking the public into thinking there were more police officers on the streets than was actually the case. Indeed, concerns were raised that the legislation should be named ‘the hobby bobby legislation’ with the public requiring and deserving an accountable, trained and professional police service as opposed to well-intentioned amateurs (Dyer 1992).

In 1995, the NSWPF introduced a scheme called Volunteers in Policing (VIPs), which allows community members to assist police by performing certain *non-core* police duties. Such duties are limited to community engagement and basic administrative tasks, with no law enforcement responsibilities or powers granted to volunteers. One of the ideas behind this was to ensure volunteers were an integral part of a police team and through their participation, allow the police to concentrate on core duties which included tackling crime problems. There have been some critiques of the program however, with it being reported that a Public Service Association (NSW public sector union) staff survey identified VIP participants being used to ‘plug staffing holes’ and engage in tasks they are not trained for; such as following up on victims of crime, taking minutes of confidential meetings, shredding sensitive documents, and cataloging child pornography and photographs of criminals (Sydney Morning Herald 2007), which was denied by NSWPF.

Currently the NSWPF has 21,080 employees consisting of 17,111 police officers and 3969 administrative officers (NSW Government 2019a). However, 1500 new permanent

positions have been committed over a four-year period, following an announcement by NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian for more police to “keep our community safe” (Berejiklian 2018, p.1). This influx provides NSWPF with the capacity to expand their resources, nonetheless, challenges remain. Police services are expected to respond to increasingly complex current and future challenges as has been demonstrated, and having the right people in the right places at the right time is paramount for the efficient and effective delivery of policing services to satisfy these growing demands (Flanagan 2008). This position is reflected in the New South Wales Police Force Statement of Strategic Intent 2019, with a key pillar of the strategy to “facilitate flexible workforce allocation and deployment to meet demand and community need” (2019, p.2). Furthermore, to collaborate with communities across NSW and “promote and capitalise on workforce diversity” (NSW Government 2019, p.2). Factors that volunteers in policing have been said to address.

Becoming a Volunteer in Policing

The current process of becoming a volunteer in NSWPF contains certain criteria. An applicant for the role of volunteer must:

- be of good health and over 18 years of age;
- be an Australian citizen or have permanent resident status;
- possess satisfactory communication skills;
- have proven involvement in the community;
- undergo a police records check and fingerprinting;

(see https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/recruitment_links/volunteer_in_policing)

NSWPF state that all volunteers receive specialist training and support for a diverse range of duties. This training is normally delivered at the local Police Area Command (PAC) and the content of the training is subject to the role requirements and needs specified by the relevant Command. This includes specialist units who utilise specific skills of volunteers.

In order for the public and other police employees to determine an individual is a volunteer, volunteers in the VIP program are provided a shirt, vest or jumper and cap with the words “Volunteers In policing” embodied in blue cotton. A nametag is worn on the right side of the chest and photographic identification clipped to the clothing.

In general, volunteers work with the NSWPF in the following duties:

- assist police with victim support and customer service;
- support witnesses attending court and during the court process;
- perform community liaison functions such as senior citizens meeting and community safety committees;
- participate in community policing initiatives such as safety audits and engraving programs;
- assist during times of disaster or emergency;
- maintain local registers including citizens at risk and key holder registers;
- maintain a scrapbook of police related newspaper clippings;
- maintain the public noticeboard in the foyer;
- assist with school fetes and youth programs;

- promote crime prevention initiatives by distributing crime prevention; materials at shopping centers, schools, car parks and home addresses;
- perform administrative tasks such as minute taking, shredding, filing, photocopying and packing;
- assist Protocol Officer at medal ceremonies.

METHODOLOGY

Consideration of obtaining the views of volunteers across the whole of the New South Wales (NSW) state meant that cost was a major factor. Whilst interviews and semi-structured interviews can produce much rich qualitative data, the cost of travelling across such a large geographical area was prohibitive. Consequently, it was decided to conduct this research through the use of an electronic survey.

However, there remained the question of confidentiality and access to the volunteers. NSWPF utilise a central office that administers the use of volunteers. Working with staff at the office, the following method of delivering the survey was devised:

1. The survey questions were prepared in collaboration with NSWPF in order to ensure that protocol was observed and the questions produce meaningful results for the organisation as well as for academic purposes.
2. Once constructed the survey was produce electronically using the Survey Monkey application, and an email with a link to the survey was sent to the volunteers' administration.
3. They then circulated the survey link to all volunteers in NSWPF with a request that they complete it.
4. The survey link was left open for five weeks in order to capture as much data as possible.
5. At the conclusion of the time limit the link was de-established and the data analysed.

The research method and the research itself was passed by the Charles Sturt University Ethics Committee, and was agreed in writing by NSWPF management who were involved in the process from the beginning. At the time of the survey 256 volunteers were engaged in the NSWPF Volunteers in Policing (VIPs) program. A total of 81 NSWPF VIPs participated in the survey meaning the results are generalisable to all NSWPF VIPs.

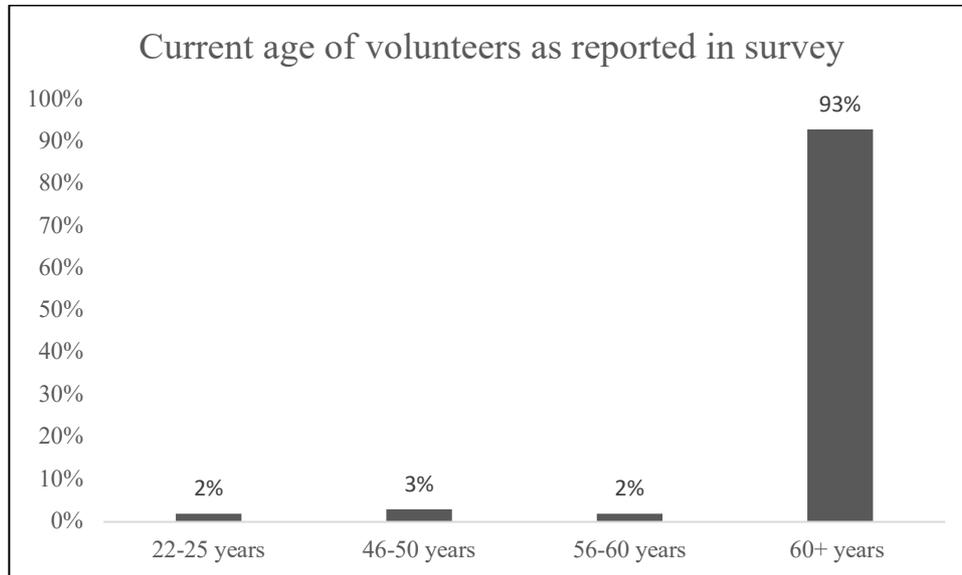
RESULTS

The survey results provide baseline data on volunteers in the NSWPF, by examining just who the volunteers are, what type of training they receive and to obtain their views on their roles in the NSWPF. This is in order to assist managers and policy makers in their day to day operational running of the force and will add to the knowledge of policing volunteers in Australia.

First, it is useful to understand the demographics of those people who volunteer for assisting the police in their duties. As previously mentioned, volunteers in general are typically degree educated, middle aged and of high social class. Furthermore, individual background characteristics such as race and formal educational attainment are commonly identified as likely predictors of volunteer engagement, although age is the most significant predictor of

citizen engagement due to an association between age and time available for volunteering (Ren et al 2006). Research suggests that volunteers in the main comprise of the mature sections of society who have completed their active working lives but remain active and feel a sense of mission in the sense of giving something back to the community

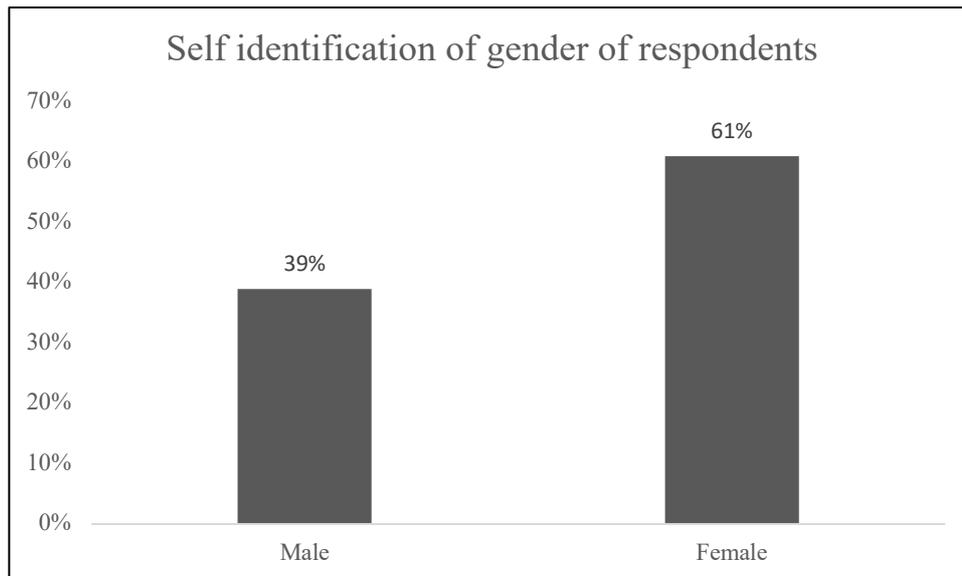
Graph 1, below, illustrates the age profile of those volunteers who completed this survey.



Graph 1: Age profile of respondents.

Clearly, those who took part in this survey were overwhelmingly the more mature section of society, with 93% stating they were over 60 years of age. This aspect of the research is important because age may influence volunteers' perceptions of community, police and of crime in general. Additionally, it may also influence a preference for certain types of tasks available. 72% of all respondents described themselves as retired with the remaining stating they were employed, or engaged in other activities.

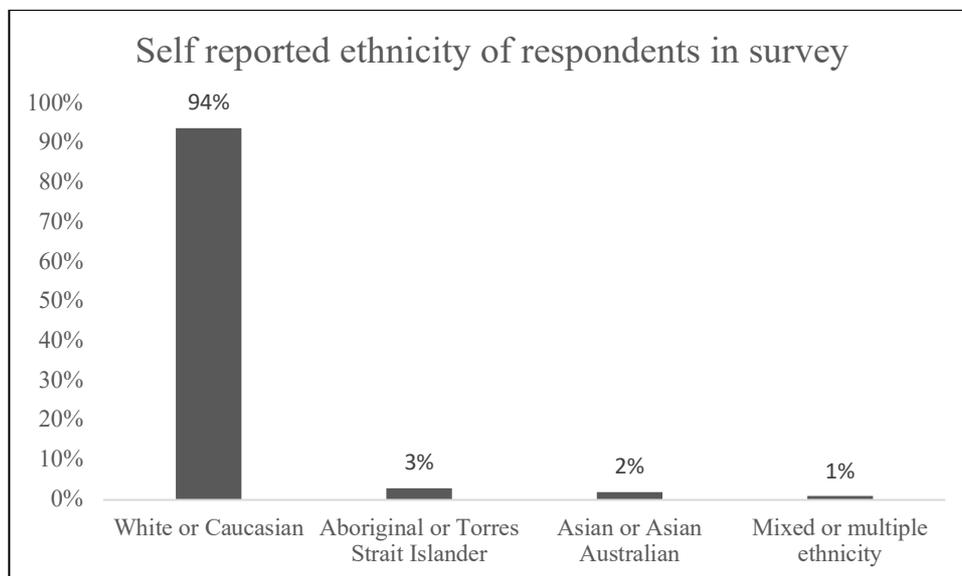
Volunteers were also asked to indicate their gender if they wished to do so. The results can be seen in Graph 2 below.



Graph 2: Gender of respondents

Whilst the male volunteers comprise 39% of respondents, some 61% identified themselves as female. This is rather higher than the national average according to Volunteering Australia who suggest that nationally 38% of females volunteered for a variety of roles, whilst 20% stated they had a disability, long term illness or health condition.

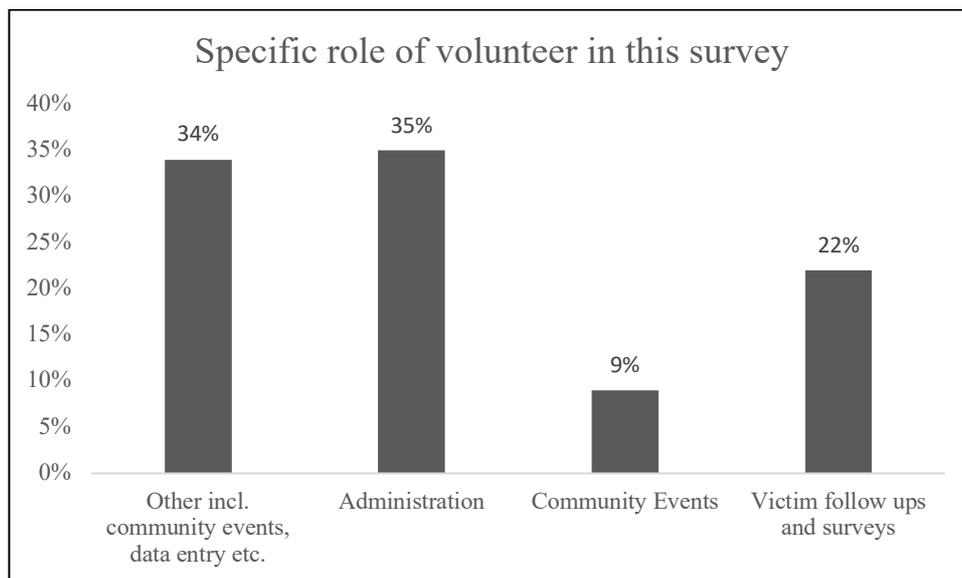
Additionally, the volunteers were asked to self-identify their ethnicity. Graph 3, below, illustrates the results.



Graph 3: Ethnicity of respondents

The overwhelming number of volunteers who responded (94%) identified themselves as white or Caucasian, while other ethnicities comprised much smaller numbers. Whereas, the new NSWPF Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Attract 2020-2023 suggests that reflecting the diversity of the community means being more aligned with their needs, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the force. Consequently, a key aim is to “recruit, develop, promote and retain a workforce that is representative of the NSW community” (New South Wales Government 2020, p.15).

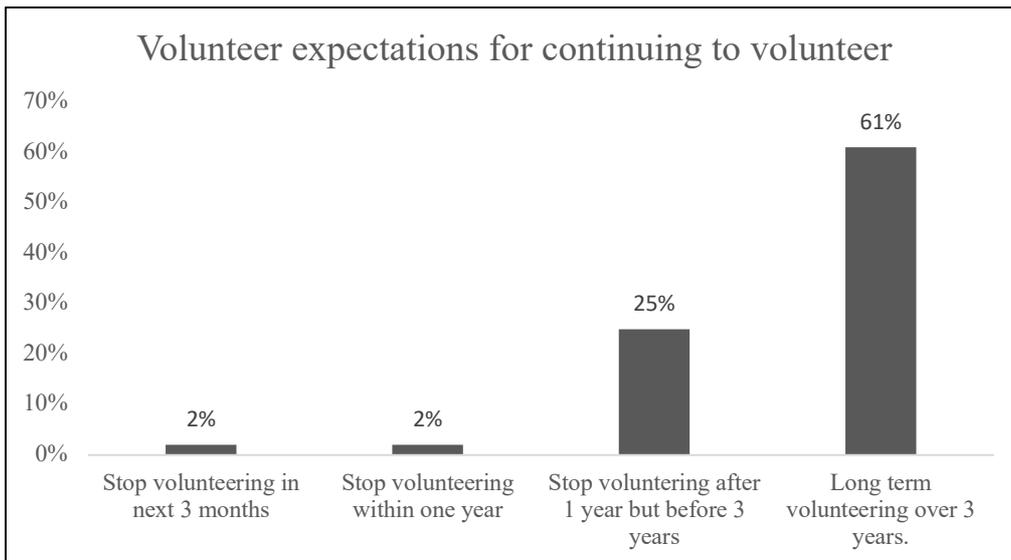
All of the volunteers were asked what specific role they were engaged in with the police from the following selection; Administration, Analysis, Community events, Non community events (such as police barbeques), Victim follow up and surveys, or Other (please specify), Graph 4, below, illustrates their answers.



Graph 4: Volunteer roles

It would appear that most of the volunteers in this survey are utilised in administration and community events whilst some are used for contact directly with victims of crime in follow up capacity. Those that selected ‘other’ cited a combination of these roles. It would also appear obvious that volunteers are committed to assisting the police and the community in the work that they do. Indeed, most (77%) respondents volunteered up to 10 hours per week, and the remainder up to 20 hours (33%).

However, even volunteers have a certain shelf life, especially if some are elderly and retired. Consequently, volunteers were asked to indicate how long they expected to continue in their volunteering role with the police. Graph 5, below, shows the responses.

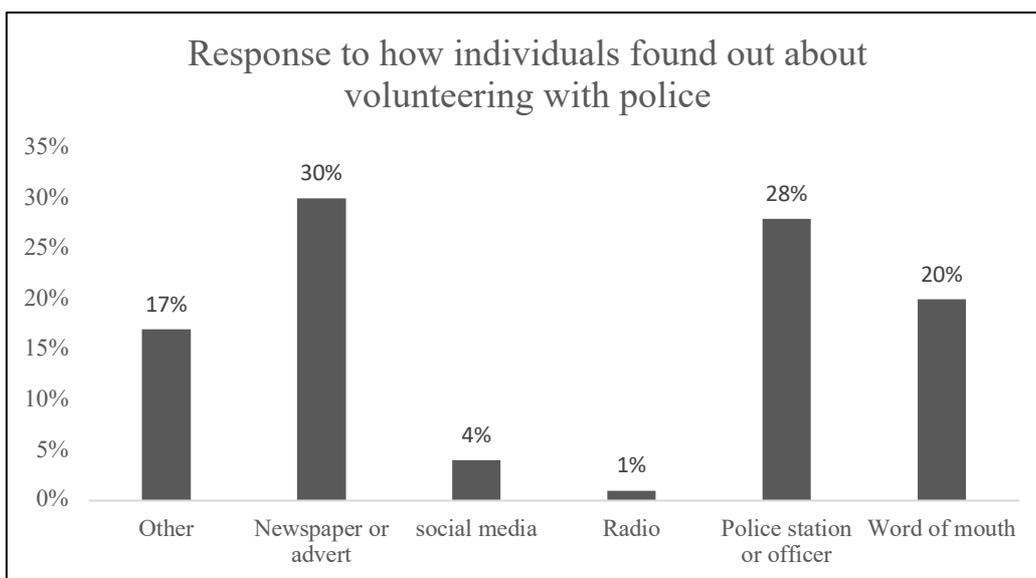


Graph 5: Expectations of continuing to volunteer.

The data provided shows a solid commitment by the majority of current volunteers to continue in this activity. However, when combined, some 29% of current volunteers may stop this activity within 3 years.

Recruitment and Training

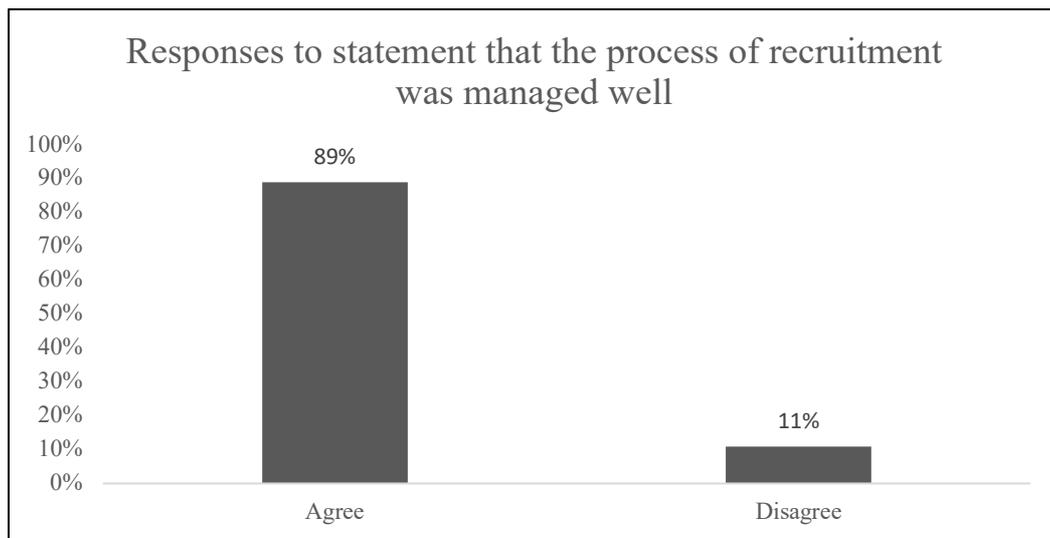
It is important to examine the recruitment process involved for volunteers in NSWPF and the initial training they received to assimilate them into the organisation. Firstly, volunteers were asked how they found out about the role in the first instance. Graph 6, below, illustrates their answers.



Graph 6: Finding out about Police Volunteers

The results in the graph above illustrate that the use of social media appears not to play such a significant part in recruiting volunteers. This may in part, explain the age profile of the respondents in this survey, and may also explain perhaps the lack of younger people actually volunteering. More established communication routes such as newspapers, word of mouth and just speaking to the police appear to be significant.

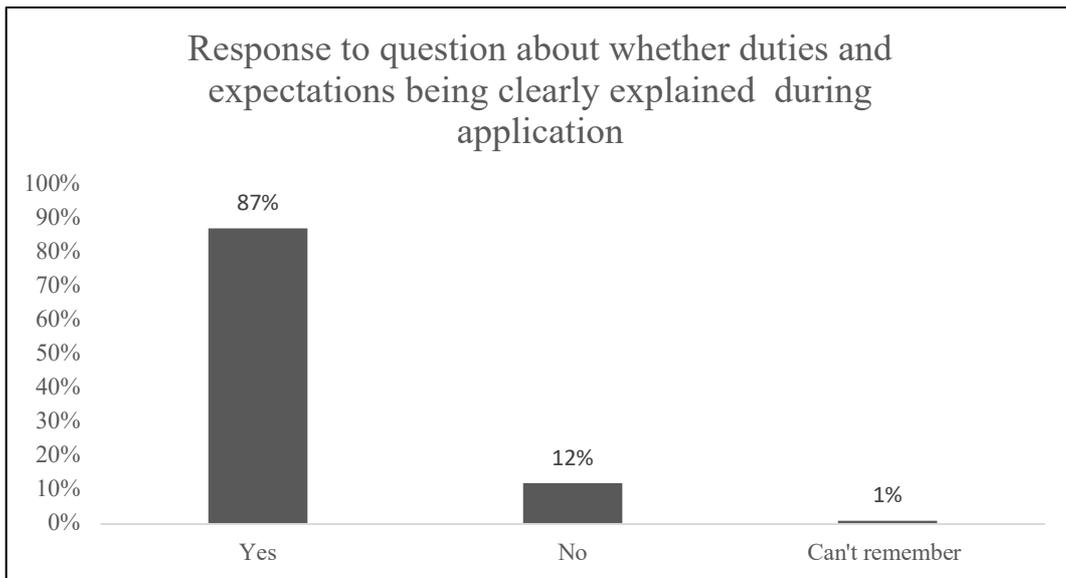
The volunteers were provided with a series of statements regarding the process of recruitment and asked to agree, disagree or provide no comment. Graph 7, below, shows the response to the statement concerning their process of recruitment, and how well they felt their individual process of recruitment went for them.



Graph 7: Response to statement that the recruitment process went well

The vast majority agreed that the process went well. Those who stated it did not go so well cited lack of contact and communication as being one of the major problems.

Volunteers were also asked to comment upon the following question concerning whether their duties and the police expectations of them were clearly explained during the application process. This is illustrated below in Graph 8.

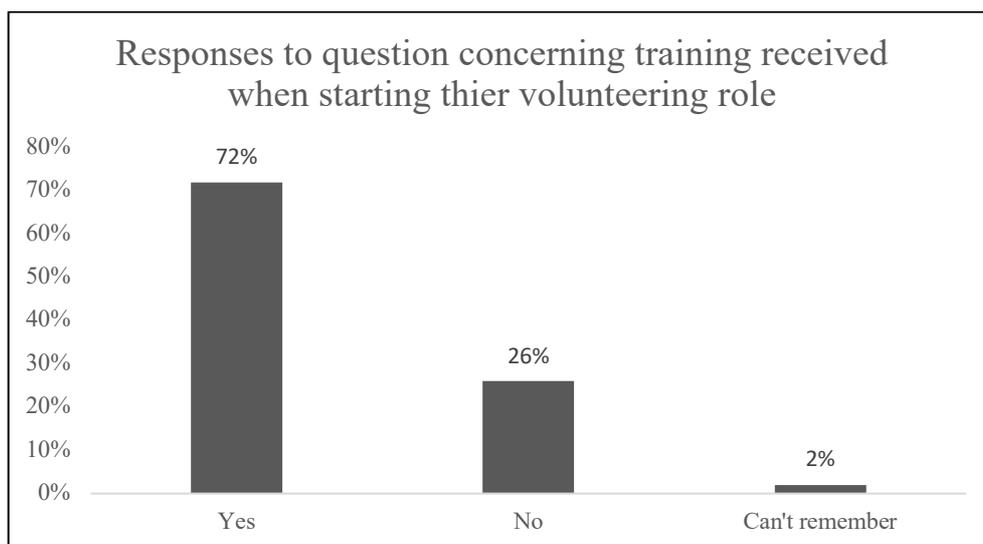


Graph 8: Duties and expectations explained

The majority of individuals stated they were told about their duties and expectations were clearly explained during the application. This is important so that individuals understand where they fit into the organisation, and helps to reduce abstractions later on in the process.

Volunteers were also asked about their experiences of being trained. Currently it would appear that training for volunteers is decentralised and delivered by staff in the PAC. It is suggested that this approach ensures the volunteers are aware of local issues and methods of policing, and is apparently delivered in a multi approach method, some being face to face, some being on-line training etc.

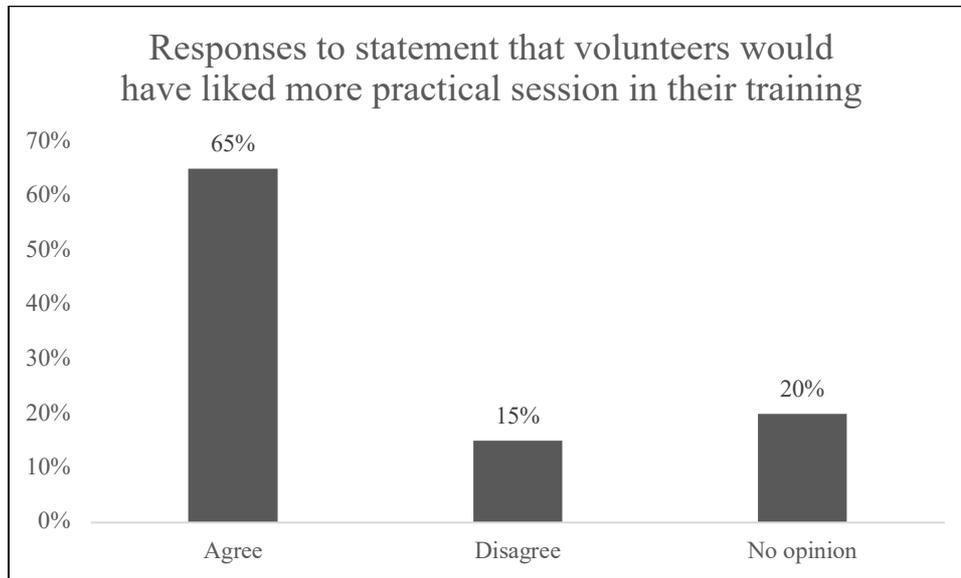
Respondents were asked if they had received training when they started their volunteering role. Their answers are seen below in Graph 9.



Graph 9: Training received when starting their role

Whilst 72% stated they had received training when starting their role a disappointing number stated they had not (26%) This of course would tend to undermine the value of the individual and their sense of worth to the organisation. Investment in staff, whether volunteer or other, is important. However, it may be the case that the demands on PAC training facilitators is such that they have to prioritise other areas.

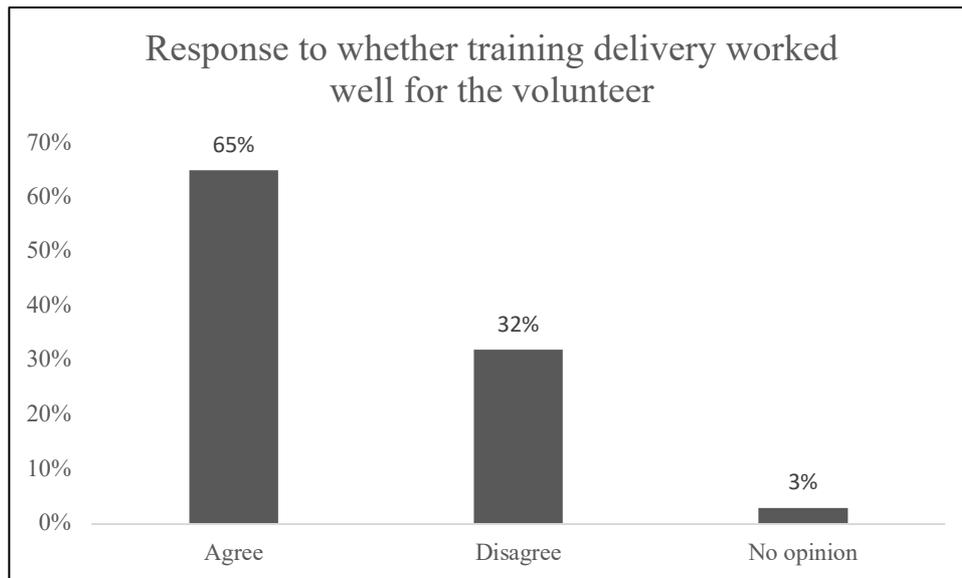
For those who did receive training, the statement concerning having more practical sessions was asked. Their response is shown in the following graph.



Graph 10: Response to having more sessions that are practical

What is interesting here is that 20% of respondents offered no opinion which perhaps indicates a lack of knowledge concerning how their role fits into the general world of policing. Despite that, 65% of respondents suggested that they would have liked to have more practical sessions in their training.

In part perhaps this would explain the responses to the statement that the training delivery worked well for the volunteer as can be seen in Graph 11, below.



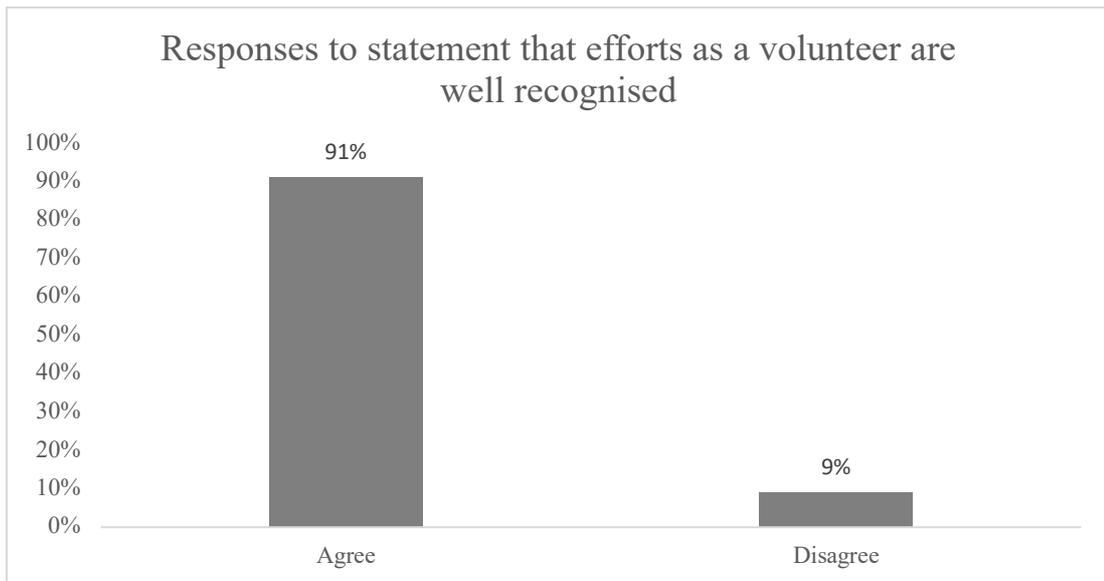
Graph 11: Response to whether the training delivery worked well for the volunteer

Whilst 65% stated the training delivery worked well for them, 32% suggested it did not work well for them. Reasons for this were reported as being the method of delivery itself- on-line- and not one to one, was not as effective as it could have been, and that some of the training was generic, and not focused on the specific needs of the individual volunteer.

Work Experiences

Work experiences are very important as they help to determine our world view of the agency we work for and also how we explain our activities to others. This is especially so with the police organisation which it is reported can have a closed occupational culture when it comes to those regarded as ‘outsiders’ (see Bowling et al 2019 for example) Therefore, it was considered important to seek the perceptions of those who work alongside the police as unsworn volunteers, particularly as volunteers are often seen as a bridge between the police and the community.

Volunteers were provided with a series of statements and asked whether they agreed or not. Graph 12, below, illustrates the responses to the statement that their efforts as a volunteer were well recognised in the workplace.

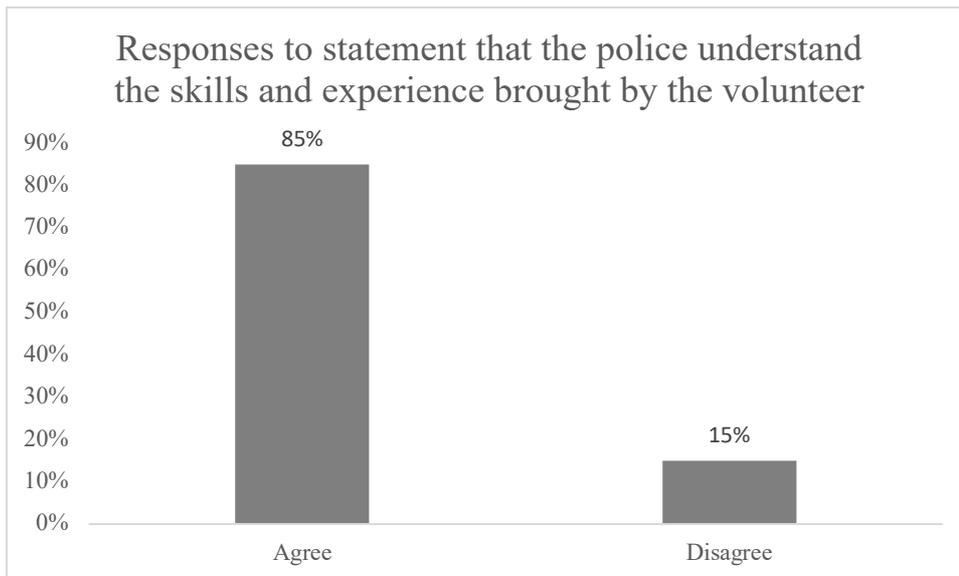


Graph 12: Volunteer recognition

Clearly the vast majority (91%) state they felt their efforts were well recognised by those working around them with only 9% disagreeing with this statement. Similarly, volunteers were presented with a statement that volunteers felt appreciated by the police for their contribution. On this occasion some 90% agreed with this statement whilst 10% disagreed with it, and 97% agreed with the statement that they felt they were treated with respect as a volunteer in the workplace.

Overall, it would appear that the day-to-day experience of working within the police organisation for the volunteer is one where they are treated fairly, with respect and feel appreciated by others. This is corroborated by the fact that 95% of volunteers in this survey felt that the service was sufficiently flexible in terms of balancing other demands on their time, whilst 97% felt the organisation was considerate of their individual needs.

One of the main aspects of utilising volunteers appears to be the fact that they can bring with them different skill sets and world views that will enhance the police organisation. It was important therefore to establish if this was the case. Graph 13, below, illustrates volunteer response to the statement that the police understand the skills and experience brought by the volunteer.



Graph 13: Understanding volunteer skills and experience

For the first time we see the agreed responses drop below the 90% mark, albeit that 85% agreed that their skills were understood and appreciated by the police. 15% disagreed with this statement which suggests there is an undercurrent of non-appreciation that may need addressing.

CONCLUSION

Volunteers suggest that overall, they are well looked after and managed in the workplace. There appears to be a clear commitment on behalf of the current group of volunteers to remain doing so. However, it would appear that there will be a reduction in the number of volunteers for policing activities in the next three years. This, coupled with an increased need for volunteers in other areas of public service, means the police need to be conscious of introducing a strategy to maintain their volunteering numbers for the pool available. Unsurprisingly, the majority of volunteers are white, over 60, retired and mainly women in this survey. This follows the pattern of the general picture of volunteering in Australia, as reported by Volunteering Australia. Therefore, any strategy must involve a greater drive for younger and more diverse members of the public to come forward to volunteer for working with the police.

The localised nature of training of volunteers is a familiar pattern across the world, with training of volunteers being limited reflecting issues of resources and available time. However, if future demands upon policing mean an increase in reliance upon volunteers then there has to be some form of investment to ensure volunteers are adequately trained and efficient in their work, as well as understanding their wider expectations within the whole of the police organisation.

A range of opportunities are already in place for diverting resource capacity, including the use of volunteers in various Australian jurisdictions, Special Constables in NSW and Protective Services Officers in Victoria, although the latter are paid positions. Calls have also

been made for a national police reservist force based on the Australian Defence Force Reserves, with an Australian model of training proposed given the disparate approach across jurisdictions. Indeed, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) have already established an AFP Reserve to support their operational preparedness, which commenced on 16 April 2020 (Australian Federal Police 2020). This will initially encompass retired and former employees, comprising of almost 50 members currently and an expectation of 200 to be in place by December 2020 (AFP 2020). What is clear is that these options are increasingly being debated, such that police services can remain agile in times of uncertainty and continue to offer effective services despite funding constraints.

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