

**Western Australia**  
**Consolidated Report**

**AUSTRALASIAN  
WOMEN IN FIRE FIGHTING  
CONFERENCE**

**“SAME BUT DIFFERENT”**

**Sydney**

**7 - 9 June 2006**

**Report by WA Representatives:**

- **Adina Brucciani**                      **Captain, VFRS Brigade Wundowie**
- **Pip Jones**                              **Fire Control Officer, Chidlow Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade**
- **Kim Maddern**                        **Fire Control Officer, Byford Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade**
- **Sue Eccles**                            **A/Manager Personnel and Payroll Services, FESA**
- **Dave Hicks**                            **Manager Volunteer & Youth Services, FESA**

## WOMEN IN FIREFIGHTING CONFERENCE

“SAME BUT DIFFERENT”

DARLING HARBOUR, SYDNEY

7<sup>TH</sup> – 9<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2006

### WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ATTENDEES

- Adina Brucciani                      Captain, VFRS Brigade Wundowie
- Pip Jones                              Fire Control Officer, Chidlow Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade
- Kim Maddern                        Fire Control Officer, Byford Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade
- Sue Eccles                            A/Manager Personnel and Payroll Services, FESA
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### INTRODUCTION

The Women in Fire Fighting 2006 conference aimed to provide women and men involved in fire fighting with a venue in which to hear international and national speakers, share resources and strategies, solve problems, and develop participation and leadership skills.

The conference attracted paid, retained and volunteer front-line firefighters, support personnel, corporate and executive staff, and researchers working on diversity in the fire fighting industry. There were over 300 delegates in attendance with a high majority, understandably, being females.

### SUMMARY OF EVENTS

#### DAY ONE

Attended by all WA representatives.

**Belinda Green**, a former Miss World, was the MC and was very pleasant in her introductions. She is also an emergency services volunteer, along with her husband, which was a nice touch.

The first keynote address was from **Terese Floren**, Executive Director Women in the Fire Service USA. She joined the fire service in 1975.

In the opening address, Terese Floren related her own background, joining the fire services in 1975 and describing the difficulties she faced being the first female firefighter in her state, the gains she was able to make and disappointment as the next females to join some eleven years later were met with the same unchanged culture.

She related stories told to her by other women firefighters of lengths women had to go through to “prove” themselves to their male colleagues - even to the extent of having themselves sterilised in case of an unplanned pregnancy which would have ended their careers at that time.

In summary, some key points Terese spoke about were:

- Acceptance by women of conditions in terms of their treatment and the like.
- Needing to be “one of the boys”.
- Women put up with a lot.
- Women have to be “someone else” at the fire station.
- Motivation is needed to change the environment, eg pick up on one issue at a time, find allies, take it on.
- Stand against racism. Use focus groups for those identified in these categories.
- Passion helps win through.

This was an interesting view of the situation in the United States but there weren't particular strategies outlined to demonstrate where gains had been made or issues overcome.

The second keynote speaker was **Dr Merilyn Childs**, Director Fire Services Research Project, University of Sydney.

Merilyn provided a fascinating presentation illustrated with newly discovered photographs drawing an historic picture of the development of women in society within Australia, their emerging influences and development of social strengths and comparing these with the struggle to find integration into male dominated careers, specifically, the fire services.

In a novel “retro” fashion parade, Australian women's firefighting and dress apparel, which had been reconstructed from historic photographs, were displayed, much to the audiences combined amusement, delight and horror!

Key points Merilyn spoke about were:

- A vision for a celebration of diversity achieved in the Fire Service. Her opening slide was dated 7.6.2016 (not 2006) as a Professor giving her retirement address.
- “Good work sister” – active women, active firefighters.
- Women know best how to determine women's needs.
- “Global Fund For Women” sponsored the WIFF Conference.
- Women are active and physically capable.
- The view of women
  - 1980 women as interlopers
  - 1985 women as trivial sexual objects
  - 2002 after September 11.
  - 2002 bananas in pyjamas – “ABC - fireman” (not on).
  - 2006 women can't be trusted to determine their own solutions.
  - 2016 did the vision come true?????????. Time will tell.
- Make women's participation visible, ie celebrate the history of the largely unknown history of female firefighters.
- Normal then – normal now – you can do it.
- Diversity – is also normal.

Both speakers emphasised the importance of a gender balance within the fire services and a need to change social culture in order to achieve this. They argued that change is intrinsic to the success of the service and that women have proven themselves a capable resource.

Four ex female firefighters from the 1940's were also acknowledged on stage and were presented with flowers. They were clearly touched by the tribute paid to them.

It was disconcerting to the WA contingent that the UFU circular “banning” firefighters (female and male) from attending the conference appeared on the screen. This copped heaps and subsequently featured 5-6 times on top of that. WA representatives all ducked for cover.

Fiona McKersey, CEO Queensland CEO of the Department of Emergency Services showed a DVD of the cooperative approach of emergency services organisations in QLD. This was similar to FESA in many respects.

There was a general discussion about women in emergency services involving **Terese Floren** and **Rebecca Denlinger**, Chief of the Cobb Country Fire Department in the US. They sat on the stage doing an Oprah type interview bouncing ideas and thoughts off each other. It was something these two women handled quite well and it gave us all an insight into their working lives and how they handled their slow climb to the positions they now hold. Key points included:

- Women networks at the local level are an asset not a threat to organisations.
- Emergency service operations serve the community best when they resemble the make up of those communities.
- Discussion about setting up female organisations, communications etc. Don't forget the aim, ie networking.
- Women self recruit.
- Women can undergo specific training and mentoring.

## **DAY TWO**

Day two was comprised of about 20 concurrent sessions. The WA representatives got together before the conference and agreed that it would be useful for all sessions to be covered. As a result of very good mutual agreement as to who would attend what sessions and there was very little doubling up because of the number of them.

### **SESSION 1 – OPEN FORUM**

Covered by Pip Jones.

This “Myths and Legends” session was an opportunity for firefighters to share their stories which I thought “great here’s an easy one to start” with but boy was I wrong. What was being bounced around had me so involved that I forgot to take notes so I am at a loss to what was said as if I do not write it down I forget it all.

### **SESSION 2 – BALANCING WORK, FAMILY AND FIRE (LISA DAVIS, DIRECTOR CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE, PARKS VICTORIA)**

Attended by Kim Maddern.

The Lisa Davis session covered how the Victoria Parks has strived to maintain a balance between work, leisure and fire for its staff by committing to a “Work and Life” Policy within their organisation. Outlined were case studies of how this policy has had a positive impact for their staff and their families.

In a paid fire service profession the concept was excellent. The challenge is how do we take this approach into volunteer land with their employers and balance these aspects?

### **SESSION 3 – IS THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR CAREER FIREFIGHTERS BIASED AGAINST WOMEN? – (ROBYN PEARCE, DIRECTOR HR, TASMANIA FIRE SERVICE)**

Attended by Sue Eccles.

Robyn Pearce advised the group the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) in conjunction with the University of Tasmania is currently reviewing the recruitment process and proceeded to give an overview of the research being conducted. Some areas the TFS and the University are reviewing include:

- Physical testing
- Education
- Aptitude Test

After the overview Robyn was particularly interested to find out from the group if they felt the physical testing was biased against females and invited comment from the group. Comments from the group were:

- testing should be reflective of the job
- standards should not be lowered to accommodate females
- if females were really interested in a career as a fire fighter they should carry out as much research as possible to ensure they were adequately prepared to pass the entire testing process

The TFS is working with the Education Department to change the perception of the role of a firefighter and also with Technical Colleges regarding the viability of offering courses on the recruitment process.

Until the review has been completed the TFS is only recruiting lateral entry firefighters.

### **SESSION 4 – WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS IN AUSTRALIA AND THE USA – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES (TERESE FLOREN, REBECCA DENLINGER, ADINA BRUCCIANI, CAPTAIN VOLUNTEER FRS BRIGADE WUNDOWIE)**

Attended by Adina Brucciani and Dave Hicks.

This session wasn't on the original program. It was pulled together at fairly short notice and it was a feather in Adina's cap as she was invited, without notice, to join the panel as an Australian representative.

Michael Morris from NSW Fire Brigades facilitated this general discussion session.

A summary of the key points from the discussions follows:

- Women didn't become firefighters until 1974 (a legislation change occurred in 1972 that at least made it possible for women to join fire services).
- The testing implemented was to get women to fail.
- Of the 250,000 structural firefighters in the US, there are about 7,000 females (stated to be about 4.6% but doesn't compute). In some brigades higher rates (17%, 12% have been achieved). There is no idea in the US about the number of female volunteer firefighters.
- Adina advised that in WA there are 27 female firefighters (about 3% of the firefighting workforce) which is almost double that of other states.
- Michael added that the figures, especially with female volunteers are very rubbery.

- Adina commented that in WA, the need for change was recognised by FESA. This was a plus from our point of view. However, changing culture is a long process and takes commitment. For example, Station Officers need to stop intimidation of work colleagues.
- There was general discussion about a top down approach and commitment to achieve change.
- Rebecca stated that bottom up input was also needed as well as the appropriate supporting laws.
- Michael felt that both are needed and that the middle order personnel between them either need to make the change or move on.
- NSW recruiting is considered to be insular.
- In the USA they have what is known as “Camp Blaze” which is a pilot project sponsored by Women in the Fire Service. This is a national non-profit organisation committed to maximising women’s involvement in the fire service through education, networking, advocacy and policy development. The mission of Blaze is to develop, support and implement an annual camp for qualified young women to learn about the fire service and to have a great time while they are at it. It is viewed in a positive light.
- In the USA if the press mentions “fireman”, the organisation writes to them and is quite vehement about it (it is OK for a 6 year old girl to want to be a firefighter when she grows up). It is even better if male firefighters also take it up with the press that it is inappropriate just to refer to fireman. This is something Dave Hicks has taken up with Steve Altham, Manager Media and Public Affairs and positive action has resulted.
- Adina spoke briefly about country fire areas where the family interests, eg mums, daughters etc, are involved.
- It was considered important to sell the benefits to females of being a firefighter, ie with the right pitch. Nonetheless, the best candidates need to be selected.
- Mini workshops were seen as a means to address some of these approaches.

## **SESSION 5 – YOUR’E NOT BRAVE UNLESS YOUR SCARED (VIVIEN THOMPSON)**

Attended by Kim Maddern.

Vivien Thompson AFSM, ACT Emergency Services Authority, shared her firefighting career which spans over eighteen years. As Vivien spoke, a pictorial power point presentation played outlining life experience through her career and family life. Vivien hoped that through her experiences she was able to help others through mentoring.

As far as you’re not brave unless your scared – when faced with a large fire incident, one can never entertain thinking they are in total control. Just for a few split seconds one asks oneself unconsciously, I am scared but I can be brave and take on the challenge with all I know and all the resources at my hands.

An interesting concept and one that all volunteer/career personnel could align with. Unconsciously, we have trepidation in the challenges placed before us as emergency service workers but this trepidation does not hinder us from completing the task at hand and coming back for more.

## **SESSION 6 – BANANA WOMEN – LAKE TYERS ABORIGINAL WOMEN’S FIRE BRIGADE (CHARMAINE SELLINGS, CAPTAIN)**

Attended by Dave Hicks.

Charmaine outlined how the Lake Tyers Brigade which is situated on an Aboriginal mission was established to protect the local community which had only one access road and bush on both sides. Ensuring the access road could be used was one of the key aims to enable elders and others who had a need, to be able to use the road to obtain medical treatment etc.

It took at least 18 months to get the brigade and crew up and running. They were all females as no males had come forward. They were called the “banana women” because of the yellow PPE. The name stuck.

Charmaine outlined how they had to fight hard to get a shed and a slip on.

She also spoke about some of the incidents they got involved in. Although not major, they were important for their community. Their training was an important element.

Charmaine advised that generally there was a very supportive community despite some racial remarks early on.

There is currently at least one male volunteer and the brigade seems to be maintaining its viability.

For me it was a good story about the persistence of female indigenous people who had the motivation and desire as well as the perseverance to ensure there was a service available to their community.

## **SESSION 7 – STRENGTH. HOW TO GET IT AND HOW TO KEEP IT (LOUISE CANNON, STATION OFFICER, MELBOURNE FIRE BRIGADE)**

Attended by Sue Eccles.

The target group of this session was currently serving female firefighters and those returning from maternity leave. Louise gave an overview of why women firefighters should include strength training in their exercise program with key points listed –

- Women who don't strength train can lose up to 5lbs (2+ kgs) of muscle every decade of their adult life.
- Some tasks involved in fire fighting require strength as well as technique.
- The stronger you are, the easier heavy tasks become, therefore not expending as much energy.
- A good strength-training program can produce an 8-50% improvement in strength.
- The average male is made up of 40% muscle as compared to 23% for an average female.
- Strength training will increase your stamina and ability to do continuous work.
- Handling weights (especially free weights) will improve your balance and coordination.
- Strength training will increase bone mineral density and help to prevent osteoporosis.
- Strength training will increase metabolic rate and help to prevent weight gain.
- Strength training will improve your self-esteem and give you confidence.
- Done properly, strength training will help you sleep better and improve your mood.

Louise also gave attendees a handout of the different types of strength and weight training that can be carried out without going to a gym.

Some females attending advised they have problems with weak wrists so Louise gave them an exercise that could be performed with a piece of dowel and a rope.

## **SESSION 8 – BEYOND BULLYING (TRISHA KENDALL - CHANGECORP)**

Related by Pip Jones.

My next session was one I really wanted to attend as I felt it was quite relevant to a past experience I have had. It was presented by **Trisha Kendall**, and was labelled “Beyond Bullying: How workplace Psychopaths operate and what we can do to protect ourselves”. I would recommend everyone to familiarise themselves with what she had to say and with that in mind you can reach her on the website [www.changeCorp.net.au](http://www.changeCorp.net.au) which is the website address for her company or you can contact her on her email address [tkendall@changeCorp.net.au](mailto:tkendall@changeCorp.net.au) or phone fax her on (07) 3832 0018 or on her mobile 0423 154 456.

She started **with media verses reality**, not all psychopaths are murderers, rapists or violent. The amount of people that are psychopaths are quite astounding 1.3% males and 0.5% females which means that with all the people that you know some of them are psychopaths. They live normal lives and are very successful in the workplace.

### **What is a Psychopath?**

They are social predators, charming, manipulative and selfishly take what they want. It is a cluster of related symptoms.

### **Into the mind of a Psychopath.**

They see no wrong in what they do and feel no guilt or remorse, they experience emotions differently to others, they have a contempt for others, they are pathological liars, they have an inflated sense of self worth, a need for excitement and are easily bored. (I feel the job that we are involved in attracts these types of people so it is something we must be aware of).

### **The Public Face**

They are charming, successful they get results and are able to get ahead and seem very knowledgeable. They are keen learners when commencing their careers and they present well in interviews and psych tests etc.

### **Behind The Mask**

They victimise, enjoy humiliating and destroying others. Deceitful, they single out victims, create conflict between others, they are unethical, manipulative, parasitic and undependable.

### **Organisational verses Occupational Psychopaths**

Organisational Psychopaths are motivated by rewards, promotion, power and control. They are excited by the suffering of others. Occupational Psychopaths are motivated by the power and control that they gain through the role itself.

### **The Victim**

Is destroyed emotionally and physically often not believed and seen as a troublemaker, they feel like they are going crazy. The end result can include panic attacks, powerlessness, depression and relationship problems.

### **Organisational cost**

The victims will take sick leave; there will be a larger turnover, poor performance, client complaints/unmet needs and litigation.

## **Solutions**

To these problems are to create an abuse resistant culture and to make sure psychopaths are not attracted to the job through bad wording in any advertisements or recruitment. Make sure your work place does not reward the Psychopath either formally or informally. Make sure your work place does not have an expectation of resilience at any cost, make sure it is not a place of humiliation where the weak are ridiculed and make sure the women do not need to be tough to be accepted. The work place needs to address the culture. Does it hide or encourage the Psychopath and other bullies? The workforce needs to be educated in how Psychopaths operate. We need to create strong teams to minimise isolation, identify and manage stress and address and repair self esteem.

I would love to see every one get a chance to sit through a course run by **Trisha Kendall** as in just the 45 mins exposure, I felt I got a good insight into what to look for and how to avoid problems but I would really like to get more. I feel it is essential to any one in a position of authority.

Summary by Adina Brucciani.

Trisha, who works closely with police and other emergency services, provided a snapshot look at psychopathy and how to recognise (and not diagnose!) psychopathic behaviour in the workplace.

Trisha related that although around 0.5% of women and 1.3% of men have been determined to be psychopaths, many are drawn to emergency services as they are seen to be positions of power, even at the lower rank level.

The presentation covered both the Occupational Psychopath, motivated by power and the control they gain from the role, and Organisational Psychopath who is motivated by reward, status, promotion and power.

Trisha stated that the unfortunate fact is that psychopaths are cunning, articulate and able to read people well. They present well in interviews and psychological testing –in fact, are the ideal interviewee.

Psychopaths are successful and produce results, though generally the work is stolen from others. They rise to the top of organisations by any means necessary, and without remorse.

Most strongly underlined was the emotional and physical destructiveness psychopathic behaviour has on its victims who are often not believed when they speak out, feel powerless, or seen as troublemakers. Victims often leave their jobs in order to escape the psychopath.

Frighteningly, most of the audience was able to relate to at least one side of the presentation, as being a victim or recognizing the behaviour.

The message repeated throughout the presentation was to speak out if you feel victimised. Repeated complaints have more chance of action than no complaints.

## **Personal Observations**

**From personal experience, I can recommend this is a subject that is vital to the industry. The fact that victims' claims are often rejected by superiors, or that the victim feels their complaints are deemed irrational and without substance clearly indicates education should be compulsory in the fire services on this subject matter. It is an Occupational Health and Safety issue and also falls under anti-discrimination policies, so the threat of legal action remains lurking in the background.**

**FESA needs to pay attention to this one and clarify if Peer Support covers this issue.**

## **URBAN DISCUSSION 1**

Attended by Dave Hicks and Sue Eccles.

Michael Morris from the NSW Fire Brigades and Georgina Prattis from the Melbourne Fire Brigade facilitated the discussions.

A summary of outcomes follows:

- Women are not encouraged to go through the ranks.
- More mentoring, career planning advice (with privacy) identifying goals for the next 3-5 years are needed. Something for FESA to consider.
- Funding support is also needed for initiatives such as these.
- Hold leadership workshops and other workshops in areas/regions – try things out. Again, something for FESA to consider.
- Management should be clear on what is expected of people, their abilities etc.
- There should be clear function descriptions.
- QLD have an informal central contact point for women.
- Leadership skills are important.
- One view is that it is up to females to find their own mentors.
- Another view is that a mentor can be off site.
- There were suggestions that coaching should apply in the short term and mentoring in the long term. Whatever is put in place needs to be formalised and needs a review process, ie if it doesn't work there needs to be the ability to change it.
- QLD Police have a mentoring program that involves an online data base. Trisha Kendall who presented at the conference, was named as a person who had been involved in this.
- Non operational leadership courses were seen as worthwhile.
- Leadership should be linked to people not positions.
- Tap into individual knowledge and expertise.
- There should be opportunities for pregnant women to do more meaningful work, job share (there was also a comment that the UFU opposes flexibility, casualisation of work and working from home).
- Working on station as a supernumerary was seen as being flexible with pregnant women who could not attend incidents, ie they could do paperwork etc yet maintain their shift conditions.
- Representation of female firefighters in the media (instead of males all the time) was suggested. This would help lift the profile of female firefighters.
- There was some discussion on the job opportunity process. Victoria appears to use a very similar approach to WA. Not all states are consistent.
- There are recruitment issues and discussion sessions are needed.
- PPE important to have appropriate sizing (not men's adapted for females)

## **URBAN DISCUSSION 2**

Summary by Adina Brucciani.

This discussion amongst urban firefighters revealed common problems and areas of concern both interstate and internationally relating to PPE, lack of mentoring in the job, pregnancy leave/light duties and lack of networking within the services.

Amongst the most strongly voiced complaints were those of ill-fitting PPE, from both clothing and accessories to Breathing Apparatus.

Firefighters complained that stations were provided with three sizes of glove – designed for males – Turn Out jackets too long, level three boots size 10 and above, gas tight suits at one size fits all, as long as you're 6'4", and ill-fitting BA masks – some firefighters reporting the need to keep their mouths open during the wear in order to maintain a seal.

Strong on the wish-list was mentoring program for firefighters. Whilst some believed the fire services should provide mentors, the international guests stated that mentoring outside the service was common and one of the benefits obtained from networking.

The discussion continued on issues of light duties during pregnancy, child care, shift work and balancing the family with career.

The consensus amongst those present relative to all topics raised was to speak out when problems arise and promote female representatives in all support agencies and associations.

### **Personal Observations**

**While the majority of the participants in this discussion were career or retained firefighters I found similar problems encountered in the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service.**

- **PPE – all the issues raised are currently experienced in the VFRS.**
- **Mentoring – among the VFRS there is a clear group of people (probably 15-20% from my experience) who have the skills, capability and eagerness to perform at a higher level – something akin to a firefighter reserves. Further training would be mutually beneficial to both FESA and individual stations. In addition, mentoring and the ability to act as an observer on a career station would provide invaluable experience to those individuals and may go some way in breaking down the barriers between career and volunteer firefighters.**

### **RURAL DISCUSSION 1**

Attended by Kim Maddern.

Individuals could attend either a rural discussion or an urban discussion and issues relevant to fire services were discussed within each group. Sessions were held over an hour with facilitators encouraging all to contribute.

Main points of the discussion:

- Women's roles within rural fire brigades
- Women's capabilities within rural fire brigades
- Cultural treatment of women within rural brigades
- Availability of women within rural areas
- Age level of firefighters within rural areas
- Male PPE for Female bodies
- The distinction between states of women within the fire services.

The session outlined how far forward Western Australia is regarding women within our rural sector and their acceptance.

## **RURAL DISCUSSION 2**

Attended by Pip Jones.

The group I was in was called on to think of things we felt needed discussion. Issues that came up were mentoring, recruitment, different personalities, the fitting or not of uniforms, consistency across the board, effectiveness of networking, fitness assessment, impact of fire fighting on families, pregnancy and fire fighters, consistency and availability of training and processes to assist women. These points were discussed until we ran out of time and that seemed to happen very quickly

## **SESSION 9 - FROM MINNIE TO MADDIE (MERILYN CHILDS, FI MILLHOUSE AND JAMIE PHILLIPS, FLAMING BEAUTY PROJECTS)**

Attended by Pip Jones.

This session was run by **Merilyn Childs** and **Fi Millhouse**. Dr Childs was really happy as this session was mainly pictures and as she said she likes things with pictures. She went on to show us, through pictures, what the public see a firefighter, ie as the tall strong man with the weak fainting woman, or child in his arms. The only way this is going to change is to make sure that more images of women fighting the fires and doing the rescuing get out to the public. As was pointed out there were women at 9/11 but where in the photos do they appear, and ask anyone and you will find most do not even know females were there but they were.

## **SESSION 10 – PLANNING FOR YOUR CAREER (BARBARA LEWIS, DIRECTOR HR, CFA VICTORIA)**

Attended by Dave Hicks.

Barbara's presentation consisted of three diagrams associated with career planning.

The first one picked up on the individual considering:

- Their priorities.
- The transferable skills they possess.
- A plan.
- A career v a job.
- Stages to go through.
- Abilities and capabilities.

The second one depicted why women "miss out", ie

- Visibility v invisibility v "miracle workers" (ie they will take on everything even if it impossible or unlikely to be achieved).
- Women need to know their own future, ie prepare (know and own), accept responsibility for where they are.
- Behaving in the way they socialise, ie seeing others get their needs met v acknowledgement of their own (eg availability for their children v income).
- How they choose to respond.
- The workplace is a game with rules, boundaries, winners and losers. Women need to be aware of the rules of the organisation, list the rules, then decide if they suit.
- Women are over critical of themselves.
- Women either give up or give way (ie let someone else step in and they step back).

The third one was the key part to a career plan and was named “Me Inc”, ie what the female needs to do to plan her career. The key steps in this are:

- Know who you are and where you want to be to move forward.
- Do self marketing.
- Realise no one is ever promoted purely because of hard work.
- Showcasing is important.
- Going out of bounds (ie don't be tied down).
- Prepare for promotion.
- Get the resume right (highlight achievements).
- Women shouldn't be critical of themselves or each other.
- Women need to plan their future (ie branding, networking, career plan).

This type of career planning could be considered but it may not be appropriate to target it only at females. Certain aspects may reasonably apply just to women but career planning generally is an issue for many employees.

### **SESSION 11 – RISK PERCEPTION AND DECISION MAKING (VALERIE INGHAM, LECTURER IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY)**

Attended by Kim Maddern.

Valerie Ingham made a correlation between art and risk perception at fire scenarios. The session outline took the participants through an exploration of how on arriving at a given scene, our risk perception and decision making was based on filling in the dots. Not all the facts were clear but we could join the dots to make a decision.

The words “Violation of Expectancy” was used by Valerie. It's meaning is “something is not quite right”. This session lead to a “violation of my expectations” – still pondering how this risk perception through an artist eyes could lead me to make a positive or negative decision regarding the session.

Attended by Adina Brucciani.

I was excited at the prospect of attending this session with the expectation that I might astonish my brigade with polished skills in the duties of Incident Control at our next incident.

What I experienced was a Violation of Expectancy, a term I was to learn within minutes of the start of the presentation that means “something is not quite right”. I tossed around the idea that the printer must have missed half of the title when type setting the programme and the title should really have been something like:

“Risk Perception and Decision Making – A Representation through an Artists Eyes”

because that title is the essence of the presentation: A comparison of Art and The Process of Implementation of Initial Emergency Response Procedures by the First On Scene.

“Surely not possible”, I hear you say.

“With Artistic License, anything's possible” the author Valerie Ingham would respond.

“Interesting comparison. I never would have thought of it.” Was probably a common thought amongst the audience, who also sensed something was not quite right.

Not that I didn't gain anything from this presentation; I love "Violation of Expectancy". It's been my term of the day ever since I heard it.

It is hard to put into words such a visual presentation. So I won't.

## **SESSION 12 – PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION NSW (IAN LAMBERT)**

Attended by Sue Eccles.

Only three people attended this session. The information session was brief with a focus on the role the Public Service Association plays in representing employees in New South Wales.

## **SESSION 13 – DECONSTRUCTING THE TAKEN FOR GRANTED – SEEING AND HEARING ANEW (INSPECTOR MICHAEL MORRIS, NSW FIRE BRIGADES)**

Attended by Dave Hicks and Kim Maddern.

Dave's comments:

Michael Morris gave a presentation on this topic as part of his MBA studies at Sydney University. His supervisor is Dr Marilyn Childs.

Michael's paper was largely about the research he, (as a male firefighter), has done on diversity within the fire services.

I found this to be fairly academic although it did highlight the gender imbalance in the industry. It also highlighted that material (eg press, radio, TV, advertisements, videos, articles etc) invariably refers to gender, ie fireman. This is something that should be discouraged and issue taken with the media on the matter every time it occurs. Another one for me to talk to Steve Altham about.

Importantly this paper highlighted that the continual gender imbalance does have an influence on children, people and fire agencies where firefighting is accordingly regarded as for males only.

There is a strong need to stop reinforcing the male domination of firefighting.

Interestingly, Michael showed a clip from the Channel 7 News in Melbourne the week before the conference. This was about CFA firefighters marching on Parliament House as a result of their pay dispute. The headline on the news was about "firemen" not firefighters involved. To top it off, a couple of females in a hotel adjoining the gathering, exposed their breasts at a hotel window. Within a very short time they were joined by a couple of firefighters (no doubt male) who "assisted" them. This scene became the centre of attention. The view of those at the presentation, was that this not only reflected badly on firefighters within the CFA, but perpetuated the male domination of firefighting as well as the incorrect use of the term "firemen".

Kim's comments:

Michael Morris, lead the participants through his research project on diversity within the fire services and in this undertaking of deconstructing the taken for granted language and behaviour of firefighters and turning this around changing the way we portray professions.

Michael lead the listeners on journey through video clips of children's cartoon shows and personal life experiences to show the perception of people belief towards firefighters. Just the word firefighter is not gender based, but many media outlets use the word fireman to describe both male and female working within the industry. This lead to perception that the media portray female firefighters as undertaking only education roles and not carrying out front line duties.

Interesting concepts – how do people portray firefighters whether they are career staff or volunteers. Does the uniform make people have different perceptions of each person's role? Those faces portrayed in advertising of fire services - do they portray the real face of people who work within the industry, especially for recruitment and retention?

#### **SESSION 14 – WOMEN VOLUNTEERS IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE (JIM MCLENNAN, BUSHFIRE CRC AND LA TROBE UNIVERSITY MELBOURNE)**

Comments from Pip Jones.

This session was presented by **Jim McLennan** and seemed to find all the same problems that Western Australia is experiencing, ie as in economics, demographics and low birth rate with aging population. The conclusion was that we need to find new volunteers from women and immigrants. There were many reasons given as to why women would not volunteer. Some reasons are listed below:

- They thought they were incapable of doing the job.
- No available child care.
- Paid work took up too much time.
- It would leave the home unprotected.
- Had no spare time.
- Unaware of role of BFS.
- Too dangerous.

The attitude of the male volunteer was found to be very accepting of the female volunteer, 90%, which is how I have found it to be from my own experiences. 24% of the operational volunteers and 8% of the auxiliary volunteers reported discrimination. There was many more statistics given which I will not bore you all with. The report has been presented to the South Australian CFS and will be made available to all when they are ready.

#### **SESSION 15 – FIREFIGHTER HEALTH AND SAFETY – HOW IS MY JOB IMPACTING MY HEALTH? (DR HEATHER WEBB, SCHOOL OF MEDICAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF NSW)**

Attended by Adina Brucciani.

This fairly deep presentation described the effects stress has on the human physiology, based on research completed with firefighters in the US.

Dr Webb described how firefighters who are motivated – that, those who see an incident as more of a challenge than a threat, experience considerably less stress than those who are unmotivated.

Those “motivated” firefighters tend to have more experience, training and fitness as compared to “unmotivated” firefighters.

Dr Webb went on to relate the results of her studies;

- Women tend to have a more physical reaction to stress; bodies activate a response e.g. increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, etc and suffer twice the frequency rates of stress related illness.
- Occupational stress slows the metabolism; increases cravings; alter blood sugar levels; encourages mood swings; increases fat storage – especial in the abdomen; may have an inhibitory effect on the female reproductive system; can cause stress induced menopause; exacerbates Cortisol production which can cause miscarriage in the first three weeks.
- Prolonged activation of prolonged stress response can lead to conditions such as hypertension, Non Insulin Dependant Diabetes, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Obesity, to name a few
- Stress can be mental or physical - Mental and Physical stress (known as Dual Stress) can affect immunosuppression and cause reproductive disorders, and exacerbate inflammatory illnesses

But don't stress! These risks can be managed.

- ✓ Change your perception from threat to challenge through experience
- ✓ Re examine lifestyle; increase fitness; manage stress
- ✓ Modify your diet
- ✓ Learn and practice progressive relaxation
- ✓ Take up a hobby

Note: The best exercise for firefighters has been found to be rowing.

### **Personal Observations**

**Stress? What stress? Firefighting is my hobby.**

### **SESSION 16 – SAME BUT DIFFERENT: WOMEN IN POLICING AND WOMEN IN FIREFIGHTING (KIM EATON, QUEENSLAND POLICE OFFICER – CAIRNS AND MEMBER AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF WOMEN AND POLICING)**

Attended by Sue Eccles.

Kim gave an overview of setting up an association and the importance of

- Having a vision and being confident
- Have achievable goals
- Communicate
- Engage with males and females, as widely as possible

Kim also advised the biggest downfalls faced when setting up the Australasian Council of Women and Policing was not –

- Keeping everyone informed
- Unions – opposition was overcome by presenting an award for the most supportive union.

## **SESSION 17 – DIVERSITY IN RECRUITING (GREG PATERSON, OPERATIONS MANAGER CFA VICTORIA)**

Attended by Sue Eccles.

Greg has 69 Fire Brigades under his jurisdiction, with Integrated Fire Stations (Career & Volunteer). Gregg's presentation was about the suburb of Springvale 23KMS from Melbourne CBD with a population of 90,000 with 50 different spoken languages. Springvale's demographics had changed over the years from typically Italian/Greek families to Asian/Iranian/Pakistan/Muslim families. The Springvale Fire Brigade was experiencing problems in trying to attract both career and volunteer firefighters. Areas identified were:

- cultural diversity was not reflected within the Brigade
- multicultural attitudes – uniforms were feared rather than respected
- traditional recruitment methods were not working

A group was established to

- develop networks with community leaders
- implement cultural diversity training programs
- EOI released for volunteers to learn language with all expenses paid by the organisation
- Expert advice sought from within the community i.e. attendance at functions

This initiative was a success with the Springvale Fire Brigade having recruited

- 10 new recruits – 4 still there 4 years later
- 13 different languages now spoken in the Springvale Fire Brigade

Personal observation.

I was impressed with Gregg's presentation and the strategies implemented to increase diversity in the Fire Service. This is a strategy I would love implemented by FESA (active involvement in the community to change the perception of firefighting as a career).

## **SESSION 18 – VOLUNTEERING IN NEW ZEALAND (SERENA GROOT-JANS, NZ)**

Summarised by Pip Jones.

Serena was a very nervous first time speaker. She can put out truck fires and respond to car fatalities with out even batting an eye lid but to talk to a group of women had her terrified. However, we soon put her at ease. She started her talk with the words Tena Koutou Katoa which translates to "greetings to you all". She lives and works in a very remote area that is very close and works well together.

As she said when she first took over she got rid of the fools that were holding the station back. The people she had left work very well together and she is slowly building up the numbers again. She loves the work she does and that really showed as she got more into her session. When we started asking her questions she forgot she was ever nervous. Some of the things they do over there is to recognise employers and the firefighters.

They give a certificate after 3 years, a badge after 5 years, a bar every 2 years after that and a gold star for 25 years. The volunteers also recognise the paid firefighters in the same way. This seems to be one great way to build a good working relationship between the two, volunteers and paid.

Serena is planning to move to Kalgoorlie to be with her family and wants to get involved in the fire brigade when she gets here. I have given her my contact details and will make sure we do not lose her when she gets here as she will be a great asset to any brigade. Serena also spoke with the other WA representatives.

## **SESSION 19 – SIMULATION AS A TRAINING TOOL – VECTOR SIMULATION MODEL (ROBERT COMEFORD)**

Attended by Kim Maddern.

Robert Comeford introduced the Vector Simulation training tool that provided a computerised incident scenario capability. He explained its role within the fire services. His presentation showed a live model of the simulation tool in action and how interactive the training tool was to the users.

## **SESSION 20 – GENDER EQUITY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE METROPOLITAN FIRE BRIGADE MELBOURNE (GEORGINA PRATTIS, MANAGER EQUITY AND DIVERSITY MELBOURNE FIRE BRIGADE AND DR SUE LEWIS, SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE)**

Attended by Dave Hicks and Sue Eccles.

This presentation was about the significant learning from the success, obstacles and reactions to confronting organisational culture two years into the implementation of the MFB's five year Gender Equity Framework. It also covered the leadership development programs, what is working, what isn't, overcoming fear and negative reactions.

A summary of points follows:

- The research phase of the project involved a cultural audit, recruitment and selection review and a recruit training review.
- A five year framework resulted in key outcomes being leadership and accountability, organisational development, recruitment and retention of women and training and placement of recruits.
- Target groups were the CEO, directors, senior executive (third tier), managers and supervisors, recruitment selection panels, recruit trainers and women firefighters.
- A leadership development model that could be useful for FESA was produced.
- Program responses were generally positive. Some of the negatives were regarded as "pretty ordinary", ie derogatory.
- Women are to be involved in firefighter recruit training instead of just male.
- There is a continuous recruitment process.
- They aim to include gender equity criteria in business plans.

## **DAY THREE**

### **PYRO-HYPOTHETICAL**

Attended by all of us. However, there were four different groups operating the same simulation exercise and we were split between them. This was an exercise involving a significant fire in NSW. We were set up as an Incident Management Team with Incident Control, Planning, Operations and Logistics areas.

Dave Hicks Group.

The facilitator was Greg Patterson from the CFA. He was well versed in operations and firefighting and was a very good facilitator. Our group seemed to work quite well together and the barbs that were thrown, were all in the right spirit.

A successful outcome was achieved.

From a personal point of view, it was good to get exposure to an exercise such as this. However, from the point of view of volunteer non operational support I can't say I got a lot out of it.

Pip Jones Group.

The scenario was hard work, due to a hard night at the formal dinner the night before, but the group I was in seemed to enjoy it well enough when we got our heads around what we were meant to be doing. However, I felt they were very mean to Susan who was suffering from exhaustion and stress and should have been relieved off the fire ground before she had got to the stage of endangering her and her teams lives.

Kim Maddern Group.

Jenni Farrell gave an overview of the learning tool – Pyro-hypothetical which has been used within the eastern states to teach incident management.

Participant were broken into four separate groups each with the same scenario.

The single groups then consisted of people holding following roles:

- Incident Controller
- Planning Officer
- Logistics Officer
- Operations Officer.

The facilitators lead the groups through the scenario and the groups had to perform the above roles. Interesting concept with so many people coming from such diverse backgrounds. Outcomes and conceived ideas of who's role and function it was within the incident was highlighted. The general lack of people knowledge within ICS system was apparent.

Sue Eccles Group.

The facilitator was Jenni Farrell from the National Parks with 35 years as a firefighter. Others that assisted Jennie were Naomi Stevens, Louise Cannon and Merilyn Childs.

This session was quite vocal with some representative's refusing to participate; mainly due to the fact the facilitator's had the incorrect arms of the operation looking after incorrect areas i.e. logistics responsible for the roll in and placement of ground and air crews.

The general consensus of the group this session was not correctly planned. As most of the group were inexperienced in taking command of an incident they felt a better approach would have been to have experienced people give a demonstration of the different functions each team would manage in an incident with participates able to ask questions throughout the demonstration.

## **PLENARY SESSION - (CAROL BEAUMONT, SECRETARY, NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS)**

Attended by all of us.

The consensus generally that this session was hard going with a fair bit of propaganda and sales about unions and what they have done for workers, especially females. It was a bit about women having to prove themselves which in reality is probably the way it has been. However, in terms of contributing to the outcomes of the Women in Firefighting Forum, we didn't feel it was a lot of value. This is probably reflected in the fact that none of us took many notes.

## **PLENARY SESSION – (SENATOR CLAIRE MOORE, QLD)**

Attended by all of us.

We all felt quite similar in relation to the outcomes of this session. Primarily, there was some political grandstanding topped off by comments such as “rise of women’s voices ‘our right’ and a place for men”. One positive was probably acknowledgement of the importance of women and women’s networks. Again, none of us took many notes.

## **SUMMARY AND CLOSE - (NELLA BOOTH AND FI MILLHOUSE)**

Attended by all of us.

This was a fairly brief wrap up of the events over the 3 days. Surprisingly, no one came forward to thank the organisers and irrespective of what was on the program, it ran like clockwork and was well organised. The organising committee should have been thanked and congratulate and I (Dave Hicks), wish I had taken a minute to stand up and say something. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

## **WOMEN IN FIREFIGHTING ASSOCIATION**

Attended by Kim Madern.

An open session was held during the Conference to discuss the proposed Association. The organisers of that session advised that the Association is progressing and that the constitution is almost complete.

Discussion took place on who would be able to join and what the function of the organisation would be. Opinions were sought from overseas visitors regarding various points on how their organisations are comprised.

## **OVERALL IMPRESSIONS**

Generally, we all felt there was a fair bit of “male bashing” and with some 300 delegates and 95% or more of them women, this could probably be expected. Nonetheless, there are good news stories as well that highlight the positive influence and commitment of males to the women and diversity cause. It would have been nice to see a bit more balance and for some of the positives to have been promoted.

Other individual comments are:

(Adina). This was a thoroughly enjoyable trip, both from the rapport the group had and the content of the conference. The chance to network was absolutely invaluable – I would love the chance for a similar forum in WA.

I actually learned more about FESA in the first evening than I had in my previous eight years involvement. I think Dave and Sue didn’t know what hit them, though they revived quickly enough once intravenous drips were inserted and the paddles applied to their chests.

I hope my views and suggestions will be of some help.

It is clear from discussions with US guests that there is a steep improvement curve ahead of all Fire Services in the country, but from my observations at the conference, WA has a clear lead – at least from a cultural perspective.

As Terese Floren stated, change *is* intrinsic to the success of the Fire Service. Where that culture is ready for change, and clearly FESA is at that point, it is an exciting time for all employees and volunteers.

We're in for a fun next couple of years!

Thanks to everyone involved in making this trip happen. I will, of course, deny ever having met any of you.

(Dave). It was great to have an opportunity to attend and I thank FESA for the support in this regard. The networking was excellent between the delegates but particularly between the FESA staff and volunteers. The fact that we got together before the conference and "divied" up who would attend what sessions to ensure we covered them all, was fantastic and was achieved without any discontent whatsoever. The dinner night was somewhat special. We sat together, shared a laugh (or many laughs) and looked after our newfound absent friends (Chris and Paul). Most importantly for me was that we got on really well together and no one had any sense of being better than anyone else. I valued the opportunity and felt that our time together was enlightening in terms of what all of us do, whether that be in a voluntary or paid capacity. Thanks to Pip, Adina, Kim and Sue for their great camaraderie and friendship.

(Pip). Then it was all over and it was time to go home. I feel I really gained a lot from this conference and cannot wait to share what I learnt with all that want to know.

(Kim). The opportunity to attend a conference of this type opens up a mind field of networks that are made. The interaction between people from different areas allows one to contemplate and gauge values, standards and issues within their own area and fire services. For this I found the conference rewarding.

(Sue). I like Dave enjoyed the company of the Western Australian contingency. As far as the conference is concerned I felt more emphasis could have been placed on ways to encourage females and people from cultural diverse backgrounds to think of firefighting as a career. This year like last year there was too much "male bashing" and not enough emphasis on the males who are very supportive of females in the fire service.

THE END