

The many faces of volunteerism



Ready for inspection at Government House Victoria parade.

Thirteen years of volunteering – so far. Reflections on her years of volunteering by Sally Hasler

Volunteering has been a big part of my life and I have been involved with numerous organisations working with young people. Volunteering with St John Ambulance Australia has provided me with diverse training and countless personal and professional opportunities. I currently Chair the Australian Youth Council (AYC), a representative body for young members of St John. The AYC embraces youth participation and consultation, and encourages young people to be involved in the decision-making processes that affect them.

I have been involved with St John since becoming a Junior, aged 10. My parents encouraged me, along with my brother and sister, to join St John to learn first aid skills and contribute to our local community.

I progressed through Youth Leadership Training and received promotions to Corporal and Cadet Leader. As a Cadet Leader I taught on the Victorian Youth Leadership Course, a training and development weekend for potential young leaders in St John. In 2001, I received the Peter Falkland Award in Victoria, for Cadet of the Year, and acted as Aide to the Victorian Commissioner.

As a member of the St John Maroondah Combined Division I acted as second in charge of the cadet section before I moved to Knox Combined Division as Divisional Cadet Officer. My biggest leadership challenges in St John Ambulance relate to my positions as Chair of the Victorian Youth Council (VYC) and the AYC. In June 2002, I was appointed Chair of the VYC; at that stage the council suffered from a low level of recognition and was yet to earn the respect of young people and adults alike. The experience and skills I gained in this position held me in good stead when I began as Chair of the AYC in June 2004.

From 2003–2005, during my university studies, I worked as a trainer for St John Victoria, where I had valuable experiences in facilitating training and education programs. In 2005, I took leave from Operations Branch and joined the St John ACT Community Care program *Project Survival*. As a volunteer in this program I share my knowledge of Basic Life Support and Resuscitation to marginalised young people. In addition, I currently sit as a Director on the board of the St John Ambulance Foundation.

My most memorable volunteering honour was being awarded the Gold Duke of Edinburgh award by His Royal Highness, Prince Edward in 2003. The Youth Development program St John offers encourages young people to learn new skills to assist in their personal development, while contributing through service to their community.



Sally Hasler receiving the Duke of Edinburgh Award from Prince Edward.

My experience in St John has given me an incredible skill set, more diverse than just first aid training, that I apply beyond my involvement with St John. The opportunities provided as a young leader in St John are countless, and increasingly valuable as you begin to transfer these into your educational and professional career.



Attendees at the 2004 Youth Forum.

As Chair of the AYC I use my skills and experience to successfully motivate and encourage a group of young people to foster and facilitate youth participation in their home states and territories. I represented St John on Australian Forum of Youth Organisations (AFOYO), and organised a youth panel discussing Youth Development at a recent St John conference in Melbourne. I also represented St John on a panel at the 2005 Emergency Management Volunteers Summit in Canberra.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that investment in the St John Youth movement translates to the long-term sustainability of the organisation. Young people in St John, and other organisations for that matter, have an enormous capacity to become the current and future leaders of the organisation, and help drive and deliver a change agenda. Young people have an unsurpassed level of enthusiasm that, when cleverly directed and resourced, can produce strong results. It is clear that St John has committed itself to driving this agenda, and is continuing to support the Youth movement.

The sustainability of St John Ambulance is dependent on the extent to which it remains relevant to the community that it serves. I believe volunteer relevance must be accompanied by modern policies

and vibrant programs that engage members of the community.

For a Youth Development program, this means offering exciting and stimulating activities and opportunities relevant for young people in Australia. These sorts of programs may not traditionally fit within the scope of an organisation, and thus these organisations must continue to challenge themselves to engage a diverse group of young people at all levels.

It is these organisations that will reap the long and exciting rewards associated with a flourishing youth movement.

Weipa State Emergency Service

*compiled by Ron Carrick,
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Weipa is a coastal community some 750 km north – west of Cairns, situated on the West Coast of Cape York Peninsular. It has a population of approximately 3,400 and forms part of the Western Cape York Peninsula – an area rich in geographical beauty and cultural heritage. The region boasts some of the last untouched wilderness in Australia with stunning beaches and out-of-the way waterholes and camping destinations.

In 1987, three visitors came to the community to visit a friend

preparing for a wedding. As part of their trip, they planned a camping and fishing trip to Mapoon. When crossing the bay in their dingy on the way back to their camp, the seas became quite rough and the boat was swamped and they all ended up in the water. One of the party made it to shore and then back to Weipa to raise the alarm. When he and others returned another person had made it to shore but it had taken over a day to return.

Local community members used their own boats and with the help of the local Police, (all one of him), started to search for the missing person. The search lasted for many days to no avail. This incident was the catalyst in the formation of the SES in Weipa.

As with all groups, the Weipa SES is made up of volunteers from all walks of life. The majority of



North Queensland

the membership is relatively new but have proved their worth on a number of occasions. An example of the commitment of the volunteers is that three SES members travel a 1,320km round trip to Mt Carbine and back to attend weekend training.

Special thanks to Comalco Management, for supporting local volunteers and the community. Weipa SES enjoys great support from the entire community, business and private, in many ways including fund raising.

A different type of search and rescue

The Weipa SES group was approached by an officer of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to assist in logging the damage to marine life between Pennefather River and Dyfkin Point on the West Coast of Cape York Peninsular.

The search along the beaches was primarily for turtles injured or killed by 'ghost nets', which are drift nets and other commercial nets either lost or abandoned by their owners and left to wash wherever the tides and currents take them. Unfortunately these nets catch and kill many marine animals in their way.

Two SES members used the Weipa SES 4x4 two-seater Quad bike to assist the DPI officer. They travelled approx 42kms from Pennefather River to Dyfkin Point and returned, logging and taking photos of what they discovered along the way. They found over 20 dead turtles, (some quite rare) and they took samples of the remains for further analysis. They also counted 389 nets washed up on the beach.

International Rescue?

Weipa SES received a call from local Police to assist a foreign tourist bogged somewhere in the region.

The tourist, travelling the Cape on his own, had become bogged. The traveller apparently did not speak English, was deaf and was unable to provide his actual location.

Although he had a mobile-come satellite phone and a GPS, it seemed he had no map, or if he did have one, he couldn't position himself on the map well enough to pass on his physical position.

With the information he had, he rang his sister in Switzerland and she somehow found the number for Weipa Town Office (the local Council) and passed on a vague description of his situation and the co-ordinates. The Town Office gave this information to the Police who contacted Weipa SES.

Three SES members used the co-ordinates to position the traveller on the map and headed off. With the help of good mapping skills they arrived at the scene and encountered a rather rude and unhelpful man. After quite a bit of effort and a lot of drama, including burning out the winch and being harassed about taking photos, the team finally extracted the vehicle from the bog.

In the end, the team was rewarded with \$20 and the view of the vehicle heading even further north. No lessons learnt here for some.



SES crews help out in all kinds of situations.

Lockhart air disaster

Weipa SES was called on a Saturday afternoon to provide air observers when the ill-fated flight from Bamaga (at the tip of Cape York Peninsular) to Lockhart River (on the east coast, directly east of Weipa) was first reported missing. Fortunately the aircraft was located soon after activation and before the team left Weipa.

During the recovery phase it became apparent that the Lockhart community was struggling to support the influx of police and investigators and the SES team was called on to provide support by transporting food supplies from Weipa to Lockhart.

The initial trip on Sunday evening was a 5.5 hour trip. The local Woolworth's supermarket was asked to open on the Sunday to make the first trip possible. They returned Monday with a request for a larger delivery.

On arriving back at Lockhart on Tuesday, the second team was greeted with the news that three local pig hunters were reported missing. The Police on the scene requested that the SES team remain on site to assist in a possible land search for the missing hunters. While waiting for instructions the team kept busy assisting Police and investigators with tasks associated with the air crash and recovery. They received high praise by the onsite Inspector of Police and managed to profile on the evening news.

One Man, Many Thanks

by Sharon Sherman, State Emergency Service Tasmania

John Duncombe is a self effacing person who has spent the last 40 plus years volunteering in one capacity or another. He is reluctant to broadcast his actions but quietly gets on with helping out where he sees a need. The State Emergency Service would like to thank John for over 40 years of service.



John Duncombe continues to be an active member of SES Tasmania.

A busy John signs on

In 1964, John Duncombe was 20 years old and already a volunteer with the Wynyard Fire Brigade when he attended an information night for the Civil Defence Organisation. Maurice Parkin, the Wynyard Airport Fire Officer, had encouraged John to attend the information session. During the session Maurice was invited to become the Wynyard Unit Manager, which attracted a dozen people to its first meeting, including John. At least half of these people were already volunteers with the Fire Brigade, so the newly formed Wynyard unit met every Thursday evening and the Fire Brigade volunteers met every Tuesday evening.

Training was on a weekly basis and John became skilled in general rescue techniques as well as in the use of dosimeters to check for radioactivity (a symptom of the Cold War). Although very busy, and still a volunteer with the Fire Brigade, John accepted the opportunity to train at the Directorate of Civil Defence at Mt Macedon (Victoria). At that time training was operations based, however John saw the potential for Civil Defence to place more focus on the community. In 1976 John's realisation turned into reality as the Emergency Services Act came

into being and the State Emergency Service (SES) was created.

Over the following years John relocated several times, but always remained a volunteer member in the SES. John has been a member of the Wynyard and Penquin units and is currently Unit Manager for the Burnie unit. In 1984 John applied for the position of SES Local Coordinator with the Burnie Council, a position he still holds today.

"Age is no barrier to learning"

When the State Emergency Service introduced competency based training, it led to a loss of 50 per cent of the Burnie SES Unit volunteer members. However, John not only embraced the competency based training, at the age of 57, he undertook a TAFE Certificate IV in Occupational Health and Safety as well as a computer course. According to John, age is no barrier to learning; it's just a matter of giving it a go and besides, he was feeling a bit bored at the time!

"If you buy the paint, I'll paint the church"

It came to John's attention that the local Uniting Church was celebrating its 150th anniversary. The inside of church was badly in need of painting and the church community was unsure how to achieve this. John said, "If you buy the paint, I'll paint the church". Though John was not a member of this church he, and one elderly helper, painted walls and ceilings which were 40 feet high; such was his sense of community spirit.

John is also responsible for the creation of a youth group for less-privileged children in the community, taking them on bushwalking and fishing trips they would not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. While in Penguin, John was the Charter President of Apex for six years.

Another instance of helping those in need is the time he heard that a SES volunteer had become ill with cancer and could no longer work on his vegetable producing farm. To help the ill man's wife maintain an income, John looked after the farm for two years, until the man's death. During this period John would get up before dawn, spend two hours on the tractor, then drive 44km to work. At the end of the day he would return to the farm and work until dark (around 9pm in summer).

At the same time, John was still the Local Coordinator and Unit Manager of the Burnie Emergency Services Unit and Manager of the Search and Rescue team. He was asked to stand aside as he was unable to give it his full attention. John only told his unit what he was doing but kept it quiet from the Regional staff. Basically, John gave up his personal pursuits for that two year period.

A very busy man indeed

John frequently receives calls from the Salvation Army or CWA when an elderly person in the community needs help with overgrown trees or blocked gutters. He just gets out the chainsaw and ladders and gets on with the job. John describes himself as impatient and one who likes to set goals. He enjoys boating, fishing and bushwalking and is generally very active. Recently he finished a 10 year project to building a house at Arthur's Lake in the highlands of Tasmania.

"Thank you John"

Recently John received the Emergency Services Medal for his services to the community as a SES volunteer. He would like to remain with the SES for at least another five years. No doubt he will continue to be a very active member. Well done and thank you John for many years of outstanding contribution, not just to the SES but also to the communities and organisations in which you have been involved on the north west coast of Tasmania.