

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Case Study: New South Wales Fire Brigades' Community Fire Safety Volunteer program

The New South Wales Fire Brigades' (NSWFB) Community Fire Safety Volunteer (CFSV) program is an example of a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community engagement initiative developed in recognition of Australia's increasing diversity.

Nearly one quarter of Australia's 20 million residents are born overseas making it one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the world. More than 20% of Australians speak a language other than English at home.¹ In New South Wales, 35% of the growing population of the Greater Sydney Area (GSA) has been identified as coming from a CALD background, and 26% of the population of New South Wales speak a language other than English in the home.²

Guided by NSW's Principles of Multiculturalism and NSWFB's Ethnic Affairs Priority Statement Forward Plan, the Community Education Development Unit (CEDU) developed the program in 2007. It aims to enhance the relationships between the NSWFB and culturally and linguistically diverse groups by establishing a network of volunteers from these communities. The volunteers use their language skills, networks and cultural knowledge to assist the NSWFB in raising awareness of fire safety among new migrants and people with limited English skills.

Utilising established links with the Department of Immigration's



Community Fire Safety Volunteers

(DIAC) partner agencies across the GSA and regional areas, the first CFSVs were recruited from Arabic, Chinese, Sudanese and Vietnamese communities. They undertook an induction session outlining their role and providing them with a compendium of fire safety materials. In addition, the volunteer's local NSWFB Zone Commander visited them at their workplace to introduce themselves and present them with their NSWFB shirt. Burqas and hijabs carrying the NSWFB logo were made available in early 2009.

As part of the official program launch, the CFSVs participated in the "Fire fighter for a Day" four-hour training session³ held at the NSWFB Alexandria Training College on 10 December 2007. The volunteers took part in basic breathing apparatus training, rescuing a fire fighter from the tower and learning how to use a fire extinguisher.

The NSWFB have been able to reach vast numbers of people from CALD backgrounds via translated fact sheets distributed through the CFSV's community networks. The CFSVs

have also attended community events, acted as translators for NSWFB fire fighters at fire safety talks and provided fire safety tips on ethnic language radio programs.

Three of the CFSVs have secured local grants to assist them in their community work. These have included:

- a \$2000 grant from Canterbury City Council to fund the development of a fire safety brochure for Arabic-speaking people and also the installation of smoke alarms for the hearing impaired in three homes in Lakemba.
- a \$7700 grant from the City of Sydney Council to be used to increase fire safety awareness in Chinatown in partnership with Chinese Australian Social Services (CASS).⁴

The CFSV program now has 22 trained volunteers and another 30 people identified as wishing to train for the role. The program has expanded from the GSA to include regional areas state-wide.

Related link – Please visit www.ema.gov.au/publications to download a copy of the Australian Emergency Manual series – Guidelines for Emergency Management in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities. Or contact the CALD Project Officer for the Attorney-General's Department on 03 54 21 5295 for more information.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2006, <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/>

2 Briefing paper: 'NSWFB launches Community Fire Safety Volunteer program'.

3 NSW Fire Brigades Community Safety Volunteers 'Firefighter for a Day' DVD.

4 'NSWFB launches the Community Fire Safety Volunteer program' NSWFB Fire News, available at www.fire.nsw.gov.au/firenews, August 08.