

# Increasing the cultural diversity of volunteering organisations

SES community information sessions help boost local volunteer numbers.

**In 2012 the South Australian Volunteer Services Branch (VSB) ran a pilot program to attract recruits from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for the state's State Emergency Service (SASES) and the Country Fire Service (CFS). The program was launched in the Riverland area, east of Adelaide, and involved working closely with Multicultural SA to create networks with their local communities. An introduction to emergency services session was then held in Renmark with the assistance of local SASES and CFS volunteers.**

During February 2013, Edinburgh SASES approached VSB with an exciting opportunity to extend the program and an information session was held for members of the local South Sudanese community. As a result, four new and enthusiastic members from the Sudanese community joined the Edinburgh SASES ranks.

Manyok Ajak and Gabriel Atem come from South Sudan and have shared their experiences of walking 90 days with little food or water to a United Nations refugee camp in Kenya. Both men were volunteer firefighters in their African homeland and spent 10 years in the camp where they married and started families before immigrating to Australia to start new lives in Adelaide's northern suburbs.

All four new recruits explained their motivation for joining the SASES as an opportunity to serve their community and give something back to the country that took them in. They also hope to prove positive role models for Adelaide's 5 000 South Sudanese community as well as their own children.

Edinburgh SASES Unit Manager, John Lawrence and the volunteers created a welcoming and supportive environment for new members entering the unit. Crews are involved in search and rescue, emergency aid and road accident assistance.



Image: Matt Turner, News Limited, Adelaide.

Left to right: John Lawrence, Edinburgh Unit Manager, Gabriel Atem, Hieu Van Le, Chair Mutlicultural SA, and Manyok Ajak.