Peer Support Team on Scene Response

The ACT Rural Fire Service Chief Officer has issued this standard operating procedure (SOP) under Section 38(1) of the *Emergencies Act 2004* – A Chief Officer may determine standards and protocols.

Purpose

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure is to establish and provide the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) and ACT Rural Fire Service (RFS} staff and volunteers with a clear and consistent understanding of the utilisation of ACTRFS Peer Support Officers in providing reactive responses to an individual, operation or incident.

Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is applicable to personnel engaging in supporting firefighting operations within the ACT or cross border, which includes personnel from ACT Rural Fir e Service and ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

This Standard Operating Procedure should be read in conjunction with the ACTRFS Operational Manual and the Standard Operating Procedures and policies of the ACTRFS and ESA.

Background

Within ESA, the ACT State Emergency Service and ACT Fire & Rescue have been providing Peer Support Programs for their members for a considerable time. In 2015, ACT Ambulance Service identified through the "Enhancing Professionalism: A Blueprint for Change" (2015) that a Peer Support Program should be established as a commitment to the health and wellbeing of ACTAS staff and their families. ESA endorsed this approach and broadened this commitment to begin planning for all Services in ESA to have access to Peer Support Officers.

Peer Support Officers in RFS, in addition to their firefighting volunteering, volunteer to be of assistance to their colleagues in helping come to terms with some of the most stressful effects of their volunteer firefighting role, as well as other work stressors and life events. The ACTRFS Peer Support Team shall be available to provide non-judgemental support to volunteers in need during times of potentially high emotional impact. Peer Support Officers (PSOs) are not professional counsellors. They are volunteers and colleagues who have come forward to undertake special training to assist others in coping with personal or volunteer related difficulties and operate within the Peer Support Officer Code of Conduct. PSOs can also put volunteers and colleagues in touch with professional counsellors or community organisations when needed.

Participation in the ACTAS Peer Support Officer program is voluntary, both for the PSO and for the ACTRFS member who activates Peer Support. Peer Support Officers are generally available as required and undertake to make a commitment to be available after or outside working hours when necessary.

Applicability of this SOP

ACTRFS personnel will comply with this SOP when deployed at any incident or community engagement activity in the ACT. The IMTs, agency representatives and agency personnel are responsible for compliance with this SOP and should ensure that they enable the PSOs on scene to undertake their role, such as ensuring they have dedicated area to work within, ensuring they are included in briefings and maintain their situational awareness.

Operational procedure

Prior to arrival on scene

1. Upon activation, the Peer Support Team Leader organising the response team ensures that one of the attending PSO's is designated as the PST Leader whilst at the scene or incident.

Arrival on scene of peer support team member(s)

2. PSO team member(s) are required to notify the RFS Incident Controller of PSO team presence and ensure it is recorded at the incident.

3. PSOs are required to complete a T-card on arriving at an operation or incident.

4. On arrival at the scene:

    a. Review completed operational T-cards to develop an awareness of ACTRFS members present on scene.

    b. Introduce yourself to Incident Controller and other agencies present.

        i. Describe the PSO role on scene, for example to provide support to members for personal and physical wellbeing.

        ii. Ensure you are present at the briefing processes (brief and debriefs) and keep informed of developments so you can provide the best support possible.

        iii. PSOs will engage with members and maintain situational awareness.

        iv. PSOs will brief Incident Controller and RFS crew leaders on scene with any concerns in respect to personal and physical wellbeing (whilst maintaining confidentiality).

        v. PSOs are also available to help Incident Controller and IMT as needed - only if PSOs hold the relevant qualifications and it is operationally suitable for them to do so they may assist in additional duties (such as moving teams or vehicles, set up, supporting communications, or assisting with delivering or handing out catering etc).

5. Other on scene PSO responsibilities may include:

    a. Observing other members and volunteers for signs of fatigue, distress, physical well- being and any other relevant concerns.

    b. Liaising regularly with team leaders about welfare issues, paying attention to any team members who have been deployed on

consecutive operations.

    c.   Building rapport and be proactive with all members including by introducing yourself, offering snacks and offering other assistance as appropriate.

    d.   Being respectful of members' personal space and privacy.

    e.   Maintaining situational awareness.

    f.   Ensuring adequate self-care resources.

    g.   Being available for the Incident Controller for other taskings.

    h.   Monitoring and reviewing team lists.

    i.   Providing a detailed handover to any relieving PSO teams as required.

    j.   Checking-in regularly with Crew Leaders about their personal and physical wellbeing and how they feel their crew is travelling.

    k.   PSO Shift patterns/fatigue/requirement for changeover crew.

Standing down as a PSO team and handing over to a new PSO team at the same incident

6.   A PSO should:

    a.   Touch base with anyone who engaged with them and agree to follow-up.

    b.   Record any relevant engagement in PSO diary.

    c.   Give a handover/debrief to the next PSO team (include PST Leader) coming in, including:

        i.   Brief of status of operation/ incident

        ii.   Introduce them to Incident Controller/Agency lead

        iii.   Equipment

        iv.   Logistics (t-card and team lists)

        v.   Resources (food, drinks etc)

        vi.   Identify if any additional support required (EAP etc) - if required they would need to advise HQ to arrange for attendance.

        vii.   If there are concerns about someone' s personal or physical wellbeing, then the PSO must talk with the person concerned and if necessary, inform their Incident Controller and advise new PSO team (be mindful of confidentiality).

        viii.   Advise the Incident Controller of the departure of the originating PSO team updating the T-Cards as per operational protocol.

Standing down as a PSO team for the day with a new PSO team to take over the following day

7. A PSO should:

   a. Be identified during the Controlling Agency debrief / RFS debrief. If asked by Incident Controller to present information, determine if you need to provide any further information regarding self-care.

   b. Touch base with anyone who engaged with them and offer to follow-up.

   c. Record any relevant engagement in their PSO diary.

   d. Give a handover/debrief to the next PSO team (include PST Leader) attending the next shift.

   e. If there are concerns about someone's personal or physical wellbeing, then the PSO must talk with the person concerned and if necessary, inform their RFS Incident Controller and advise new PSO team (if necessary and being mindful of confidentiality).

   f. Advise the Incident Controller of the departure of the PSO team updating the T-Cards as per operational protocol.

Standing down as a PSO team for the conclusion of the incident

8. When an incident is concluding and PSO team is standing down

   a. Be available if asked by Incident Controller to present information and determine if you need to provide any further information regarding self-care.

   b. PSOs to touch base with anyone that engaged with them and offer follow-up.

   c. Record any relevant engagement in PSO diary.

   d. Give a concluding SITREP to the PSO Team Leader.

   e. If there are concerns about someone's personal or physical wellbeing, the PSO must talk with the person concerned and if necessary, inform their team leader and advise new PSO team (be mindful of confidentiality) or ESA Director Welfare Programs for next steps.

   f. Advise the Incident Controller of the departure of the PSO team updating the T-Cards as per operational protocol.

Definition of terms

Term	Definition
ACTESA	Australian Capital Territory Emergency Services Agency
ACTRFS	Australian Capital Territory Rural Fire Service

Term	Definition
ACTSES	Australian Capital Territory State Emergency Services
IMT	Incident Management Team
PSO	Peer Support Officer
PST	Peer Support Team
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SMSER	Short Messaging Service
SITREP	Situation Report
WWVP	Working With Vulnerable People

Document information

Version history

Author	Version	Version Approval Date	Summary of Changes
Ann-Marie Burgoyne ACTRFS PSO Team ACTRFS Operational team	1.0	23 October 2019	SOP authorised
Rohan Scott	2.0	12/12/2019	Renumbered only & reissued

Approved by

Name	Title/Role	Signature	Date
Rohan Scott	A/g CO ACT RFS		12·12·19

Document Owner

Position	Section
RFS Manager	Membership

Next review due: 12/12/2021

Related documents

Document name
3.2.1 Peer Support Team Activation & Reactive Response SOP

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.