Evaluation of Vulnerable Communities Resilience Project For Fire & Rescue NSW

Final Report

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### Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDER</td>
<td>Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>Australian Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIP</td>
<td>Community Resilience Innovation Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBEU</td>
<td>Fire Brigade Employees Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRU</td>
<td>Fire Investigation and Research Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRNSW</td>
<td>Fire Rescue New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HFSC</td>
<td>Home Fire Safety Checks</td>
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<td>HFRP</td>
<td>Home Fire Resilience Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>HILDA</td>
<td>Household Income Labour Dynamics of Australia</td>
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<td>HPSP</td>
<td>Home Power Savings Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>LFEPA</td>
<td>London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPES</td>
<td>Ministry for Police and Emergency Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSWRFS</td>
<td>New South Wales Rural Fire Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SABRE</td>
<td>Smoke Alarm and Battery Replacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMSS</td>
<td>State Mitigation Support Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>VCRP</td>
<td>Vulnerable Communities Resilience Project</td>
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<td>WSU</td>
<td>Western Sydney University</td>
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Executive Summary

Background: There is a growing recognition in Australia for emergency services agencies to be more proactive in the community to prevent fire incidents from occurring especially by high risk population groups. Older people who live on their own have a high risk of house fires and fire-related injuries and fatalities. They are almost three times more at risk from fire compared to the rest of the population. The most common causes of the fires are unattended cooking, careless smoking, heating and electrical appliances. In addition, it was identified that for most of these aged people they did not have working smoke alarms. The Home Fire Resilience Program (HFRP) was conducted in New South Wales to address the issue by engaging vulnerable older people in emergency preparedness, building resilience and reducing risks of fires and fire related injuries and fatalities.

Methodology: The evaluation began in February 2016 at the completion of the program and was conducted over three months, concluding in May 2016. Quantitative and qualitative data for the evaluation were collected mainly from representative of the three agencies, FRNSW, NSWFR and ARC. Data collection was through the following methods: gathering all available program documentation including training kits, home visit materials, pre-, during and post client survey questionnaires; evaluator’s observation and participation in forums and informal interview with program agencies and their team members; evaluator also designed a questionnaire directed as agency participants – volunteers with the ARC, FRNSW and NSW firefighters and program staff – at the completion of the program to gauge their perspectives on the program.

Analysis: Quantitative data were mainly derived from client survey questionnaire and documentation provided by the program facilitators. These were analyzed mainly through collation techniques. Qualitative data were broadly coded in MS Excel. Then selective coding and close reading for themes was used for content analysis to identify patterns illustrative of themes at the completion of the data collection phase.

Subjects: Program subjects were clients of ARC’s Telecross who were vulnerable older people and who were living mostly in isolation in the following areas in New South Wales: Norther Rivers (Lismore, Clarence and Tweed), Hunter, Central and Greater Sydney.

Program Agencies: Program agencies for the HFRP were the ARC volunteers, FRNSW firefighters and NSWRFS volunteers, HFRP project management team and steering committee. ARC established two regional advisory groups with members that maintain special relationships with communities.

Program Implementation: The program was conducted as a partnership between the three agencies who worked in co-ordination to produce training materials and program resources for
their representatives and the home visits. The program delivery started with Centre based telephone calls conducted and follow-up in home visits by ARC volunteers to the clients’ homes followed by SABRE visits by FRNSW firefighters or NSWRFS volunteer fire fighters.

**Findings:** There were 370 residents that registered for the HFRP program by September 2015 and by 30 April 2016, 254 had received a visit by ARC volunteers, 43 withdrew and 73 had yet to receive a visit. For three quarters of those registered, three quarters were female, mean age of 81 and over 40% were born in Australia with 5 residents identify as Indigenous. The recipients of the program are people that were initially identified to be in great need for fire preventative activities as well as emergency preparedness. The target group are vulnerable people who tend to be home bound and used to having all their communications with ARC and Telecross via telephone. Their responses to the program show that it brought them a deeper awareness of home fire emergency preparedness and community connectedness.

**Discussion:** The delivery of the home visits by volunteers entailed the distribution of the client preparation kit that contains information on home fire safety, smoke alarm, battery and preparation documentation. In addition, the volunteers’ time in discussion with the residents is centred on emergency preparedness with a focus on home fires. The number of injuries and fatalities, particularly involving persons aged 65 and over, is too small to have a demonstrated outcome in reduction in the evaluation period. It is suggestive that the installation and checking of the smoke alarm by FRNSW or NSWRFS by the conduct of the SABRE program for all program personnel (those registered only, expressed an interest only, or both) and the information provided by volunteers would result in reduced number of fire incidents that results in lowering the number of injuries and deaths.

**Recommendations:** Findings support a recommendation for the program to continue to be rolled out as there is supporting evidence that it is most worthwhile. In addition, the following recommendations come for consideration to enhance any future implementation of the program. Check the process of registration for the program by the residents. In the future delivery of training, the training package and all associated delivery of training may need to be finalised before the commencement of the program. In addition, the delivery of the training be organised for on-line delivery. Design project logistics and referrals to maximise use of existing database. The referral process through the ARC has merit as the agency already has a database so that as part of their regular calls to Telecross clients, the agency could offer the SABRE program to clients. In that way, attending to Telecross clients could be undertaken in the same way as other SABRE activities. The main difference would be the provision of smoke alarm, batteries and educational materials for the clients who are older vulnerable people in the community. This is necessary because Telecross clients tend to have significant mobility issues and it is not feasible for them to provide their own products needed for SABRE.
1.1 Introduction
There is a growing recognition in Australia for emergency services agencies to be more proactive in the community to prevent fire incidents from occurring especially by high risk population groups. Older people who live on their own have a high risk of house fires and fire-related injuries and fatalities. They are almost three times more at risk from fire compared to the rest of the population\(^1\). The most common causes of the fires are unattended cooking, careless smoking, heating and electrical appliances. In addition, it was identified that for most of these aged people they did not have working smoke alarms\(^\text{ii}\).

Community broad based information sessions have been recognized to be insufficient particularly for this cohort. In addition, ensuring the individuals have an operational smoke alarms appropriately located may assist in reducing the severity of fires together with the number of injuries or fatalities. The Home Fire and Resilience Program was designed as a partnership between Australian Red Cross (ARC), Fire & Rescue New South Wales (FRNSW) and New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS). ARC as part of their Telecross program focusses on providing support to isolated and vulnerable older persons. FRNSW’s Community Engagement Development Unit (CEDU) conducts the Smoke Alarm and Battery Replacement (SABRE) program targeted to at risk communities who are vulnerable to fire because they are unable to install or maintain smoke alarms. NSWRFS undertakes the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER) program to reduce the fire hazard that can come from outside the house if the individuals live near bushlands. Their objective was targeting this vulnerable group for improved emergency preparedness by minimising risks and reducing fire related injury and deaths.

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide the partnering organisations with information about program implementation; confirmation of project outputs (i.e. what the project has achieved and not achieved in relation to what it set out to do) and project outcomes (i.e. benefits, for example reduced risks for vulnerable older people) to assist in future planning and enhancing the program. Evaluation of the program is a deliverable for the HFRP.

1.2 The Home Fire and Resilience Program
The program commenced initially under the name, Vulnerable Communities Resilience Project and is funded by the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services (MPES) Community Resilience Innovation Program (CRIP) 2014/15 and was later renamed and implemented under the name, Home Fire Resilience Project (HFRP). The program operated as a collaborative undertaking by three of the state’s most respected emergency agencies – Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW), NSW Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) and the Australian Red Cross (ARC) – working in partnership to visit vulnerable persons requiring assistance with their smoke alarms and home fire safety, and install a 10 year smoke alarm and provide information on emergency preparedness. The lead
agency in the project partnership was FRNSW. FRNSW, NSWRFS and ARC, through its Red Cross Emergency Services and Telecross welfare phone call program\(^{iii}\) in NSW, partnered on a 12-month project to visit Telecross clients to check their smoke alarms, provide information about basic fire safety and generally increase their preparedness for any emergency. The project brief was mainly client focused. Targeted at at-risk seniors identified by the Red Cross through the Telecross, the key aim was to provide vulnerable people within the state with the needed support to help build resilience and a better preparedness for home fire emergencies if they should occur.

For FRNSW it was business as usual through the SABRE program. FRNSW has been undertaking the SABRE statewide since 2002. SABRE entails local fire stations formal partnerships with community based organizations to maintain battery-operate smoke alarms in the homes of the elderly. It also has been identified to give firefighters the opportunity to conduct risk assessments and to help older people live safely and independently in their homes\(^{iv}\). In 2014/2015, firefighters visited 3,838 homes to install battery-operated photoelectric smoke alarms or check previously installed alarms by working with local councils and community care organizations\(^{v}\).

For NSWRFS, the program was an entry into the conduct of SABRE in addition to their AIDER program. NSWRFS has been working on reducing the risks facing vulnerable residents by preparing their properties in readiness for the bush fire season through the AIDER program since 2009. AIDER entails the State Mitigation Support Services (SMSS) Mitigation Crews clearing gutters, thinning vegetation, removing leaf and tree debris, trimming branches from around and overhanging the home, and mowing and slashing long grass around residential homes\(^{vi}\). In 2014/2015, 1,063 AIDER services were completed\(^{vii}\). Householders are eligible for the AIDER program one-off and their property must be on bush fire prone land, land that can support a bush fire or be subject to bush fire attack\(^{viii}\).

For the ARC, it was an extension of two of their programs: i) Telecross which provides telephone support for vulnerable and isolated older people, and ii) the Red Cross Emergency Services, a program which offers support following an emergency incident. ARC provides support and emergency services to vulnerable older people who are isolated through its Telecross program. Telecross undertakes daily phone calls to check on the wellbeing and safety of their clients through the use of trained volunteers. Telecross has 7600 clients throughout the country who are predominately female and are aged 80 years of age and over\(^{ix}\). The ARC recruited volunteers specifically to deliver HFRP program under their emergency services area. Training was offered and taken up by many ARC volunteers.
1.3 Aims of the Evaluation

Under a Research, Development, Engagement and Innovation Contract dated 17 February 2016 Western Sydney University (WSU) was engaged to undertake an evaluation of the HFRP. The evaluation brief included checking program outputs including the following:

- Brief and telephone script for Telecross call centres volunteers to identify vulnerable persons requiring support
- A training package and minimum of five workshops to educate volunteers and fire fighters on risk reduction and emergency preparedness
- 10 year lithium battery residential smoke alarm installed in 100% of households identified
- Home Fire Safety Kit for each participant including a disaster preparedness resource

Part of the agreement requirement signed between FRNSW and WSU is the delivery of the draft report for input and feedback on program outcomes. Expected program outcomes in the agreement were used to raise the following questions: has the HFRP

- Increased the capacity and resilience of socially isolated older people?
- Empowered older adults to engage with their local communities and establish supportive relationships?
- Developed a volunteer base trained in emergency management?
- Reduced fire related injuries and reduced fire related deaths in the home?
- Developed an enduring partnership between emergency service agencies, FRNSW, NSWRFS and ARC?

These questions guided the evaluation design and methods used to look at the HFRP. With these questions, the evaluation of HFRP investigated the implementation of the program. The evaluation also identifies ways of enhancing the program and achieving improved outcomes for vulnerable older persons.
2 HFRP Evaluation Design and Methods

The evaluation of the HFRP was conducted by WSU as a FRNSW commissioned project. It involved the evaluator’s gathering of a detailed description of the program’s operation, the general environment in which it operated, stakeholder engagement including the services provided and client engagement including clients served. The evaluation commenced in March 2016 with final data collection ending in May 2016.

2.1 Design

An initial appraisal of all documentations supplied by the three agencies (FRNSW, ARC, NSWRFS) detailing process, outputs and listing of the outcomes of the program was undertaken. That led to stakeholder partnership and perspectives in the delivery of the HFRP being identified as required. The design of the evaluation included an initial appraisal of all documentations. Survey questionnaires, observation of agency forums and interviews with key representative of agencies were used as primary data. An appraisal of a checklist of program outputs with client feedback was also conducted.

2.2 Main evaluation methods

Documentation supplied by the three agencies to the program evaluated included the following:

- project team committee minutes
- project steering committee minutes
- requirement of volunteer pamphlets
- training material
- forms used in the project inclusive of registration, home visit form, and post visit evaluation
- all quantitative and qualitative data collected by the different agencies on the project recipients and volunteers.

Appraisal of all documentations was undertaken together with linking of all program recipient data files using MAVIS client id. In addition, demographic data were obtained on program recipients from the Telecross client database. Data from FRNSW and NSWRFS was provided on completed SABRE files and data matching was undertaken by client addresses to determine if the residents had received a SABRE visit.

2.2.1 Agency survey questionnaire

A survey was designed by the evaluator and disseminated to all volunteers with the ARC, FRNSW and NSWRFS firefighters and the program staff at the completion of the program. The main aim of the survey was to gauge their views understanding and opinions of the program delivery including output and outcomes. The survey was hosted on Survey Monkey. The URL of
the survey website was emailed by each agency to their own staff and/or volunteers. Each question had a non-compulsory aspect to it. The survey opened in May 2016 for a period of two weeks. There were a total of 28 respondents comprising 20 from ARC, 6 from FRSNW and 2 from NSWRFS. Henceforth, survey respondents are simply referred to as participants. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix 1.

2.2.2 Agency forums and interviews with key agency representatives
The evaluator attended project team meetings held on 16 March 2016 and 21 April 2016 at the ARC offices in Town Hall, Sydney. The evaluator took field-notes from these meetings as part of data collection. The evaluator was an observer with minimal input for the first one and was more of an active participant in the second team meeting.

The evaluator, in addition, attended one-on-one meetings held on 21 April 2016 with each of the project team members (2 from FRNSW, 2 from ARC, 1 from NSWRFS) for approximately half an hour. During each of these debriefing sessions, which were unscripted and informal discussions about the program and their agencies’ involvement, the team member provided their individual insights on the project. The evaluator collected these as field-notes and these were analyzed for qualitative interpretation.

2.2.3 Checklist of program outputs
Checklist of program outputs gathered by the evaluator included client survey information and information on agent training and materials developed for training agents. Listed outputs for the program included pre-, during and post-project surveys of clients. These were collected by the program facilitators who made them available to the evaluator. Also the evaluator was provided with copies of training and training material. For example, volunteers were provided with scripts with lead in statements about the climate and cooling down of the weather which they used to engage the clients. It contained information about FRNSW Winter Fire Safety and asked questions on whether their smoke alarm had been checked. In addition, clear emphasis was made in the telephone discussion that ARC was not calling for donations and that there would not be a charge for being involved in the program.

2.3 Data management and data analysis
The researcher was responsible for developing the survey questionnaire which was hosted by Survey Monkey, attending project management meeting and holding interviews with key agency representatives, as well as managing all data. Data containing all pre- during and post HFRP client survey were made available electronically to the evaluator. The quantitative data received on program recipients was linked using MAVIS number and de-identified by the evaluator prior to analysis. The data was imported into STATA for analysis.
The evaluator created an electronic database where all the data was managed. Transcripts of interview data, field-notes and all documentation were entered into this database as data for analysis. Analysis entailed the following quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative: collation and analysis of quantitative data collected by the project on the training and process of the providers of the program; and collation and analysis of quantitative data collected on the recipients of the program on all aspects of receipt of the pack, increased knowledge of home safety and greater connectedness with FRNSW, NSW RFS and the ARC. Qualitative: identification and interpretation of themes in response to the questions that guide the evaluation.

2.3.1 Quantitative analysis
Quantitative data were mainly derived from client survey questionnaire and documentation provided by the program facilitators. These were analyzed applying the following techniques:

- Collation and analysis of data collected by the project on the training and process of the providers of the program.
- Collation and analysis on the data collected on the recipients of the program on all aspects of receipt of the pack, increased knowledge of home safety and greater connectedness with FRNSW, NSW RFS and the ARC.
- Collation of data and linkage of FRNSW SABRE visits.
- Collation of data on SABRE visits by NSWRFS.

2.3.2 Qualitative analysis
Qualitative data were derived from a variety of sources including client survey questionnaire, documentation provided by the program facilitators and the end of project agent survey questionnaire. Significant qualitative information was collected by volunteers on recipients, by program managers on the volunteers, and by the evaluator from agents both in one on one discussion or in the online survey. Data were broadly coded in MS Excel. Then selective coding and close reading for themes was used to identify patterns illustrative of themes at the completion of the data collection phase (Neuman, 2006). This method helped to provide the interpretations and comparisons across clients as well as the different stakeholders in the program that form the basis of this evaluation.

2.4 Limitations
There were a number of limitations to both the evaluation and the study that impacted on the evaluation.

The evaluator was commissioned and involved in the project at the end stage of the project. This had meant that they were not involved in any aspect of the project design, process of data
The data provided to the evaluator required significant amount of data cleaning and linking. The analysis on the program is based on the provided information.

The data on the program recipients were collected and entered by volunteers with ARC from the field (those undertaking visits to the residents) and in their offices. Some of the volunteers in the field did not attend the training on the program and as such may have implication on the type and quality of information collected. This was noted during the agency forum.

*Clients registered on a form that was entered into a database, the visits track – it is a printout – paper and digital, the post visit by ARC and the evaluation forms that are obtained from the visits that are paper based (paper/digital). The volunteers are undertaking each of these steps. The breadth and amount of work being undertaken, getting the information, entry, and tracking (data entry issues and quality control). You have a lot of people that are working on paper and digital. The volunteers are not necessarily the same – they can be different (ARC Manager)*

The training material evaluation was based on the developed power points with speakers’ notes. Assessment and evaluation of the training was limited to the minutes to meetings and provided data file on the internal evaluation undertaken.

The evaluation timeframe for such an extensive and multi-faceted program was time and funding constrained. This was compounded by the need to negotiate and conduct the evaluation with information sourced from three different agencies. The complexity of the project and the evaluation was noted in the agents’ forum:

*This was a 1 year project – it should have been 1 year to plan, 1 year to execute and 1 year to evaluate. We were doing home visits on the first day of the project and we will be doing home visits on the last day. (Agents’ discussion)*

The data provided on the different aspects of the program was constantly being updated as the program was ongoing in delivery with ARC volunteers’ home visits and SABRE visits by FRNSW and NSWRFS.
3  HFRP Implementation

The HFRP specifically targets Telecross clients of ARC, who are vulnerable and isolated older persons who receive daily telephone calls by volunteers to check on their welfare. The program delivery started with Centre based telephone calls conducted and follow-up in home visits by ARC volunteers to the clients’ homes followed by SABRE visits by FRNSW firefighters or NSWRFS volunteer fire fighters. The sections that follow present brief overviews of the program delivery in terms of the engagement of vulnerable older persons targeted for the program (Section 3.1) and the engagement of program agents (Section 3.2).

3.1  Engagement of vulnerable older persons for the program

In May 2015, 1713 Telecross clients in New South Wales were contacted by Telecross volunteers and staff. These community based client calls were done by a small number of volunteers in the Dubbo ARC office and who had been recruited for the HFRP project. Centre based calls were determined easier to undertake due to training, resourcing and management of volunteers. Callers had all received training and a kit on how to engage and build rapport with the clients (see Section 3.2.3). Figure 1 contains the contacts with the program clients and number of clients engaged by the different agencies and periods of engagement.

Figure 1: HFRP Contact with Clients

From the telephone calls, 488 or 28% of the Telecross clients across NSW expressed an interest in the service. Eighty-five percent of those interested were located in the Hunter, North Coast and Greater Sydney (2) (Figure 2). Based on the expression of interest and the three
organisations assessment of internal capacity, the project was decided to be delivered in Norther Rivers (Lismore, Clarence and Tweed), Hunter, Central and Greater Sydney\textsuperscript{vii}.

**Figure 2: Number of Expression of Interest by NSW Regions**

Socio-demographic information was collected from targeted household residents that had expressed an interest in receiving the program. These clients were asked if they have had their smoke alarm recently checked with three potential answers: Yes, No and Maybe. Also details of their housing status as social housing tenants or otherwise were collected. As Table 1 shows majority of the participants (93 persons) were not social housing tenants. Forty-four percent of the residents that were not social housing tenants stated that they have not had their smoke alarm checked recently and another twenty-six percent were not quite sure if they had or not. This provided a total of approximately seventy percent of persons that are not social housing tenants and that needed to have their smoke alarm checked. For those residents in Housing NSW property, 15% stated that they had not had their smoke alarm recently checked and 59% stated maybe (}
Table 1).
Table 1: Housing status by responses to "Have you had your smoke alarm checked?" for EOI Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Status</th>
<th>Have you had your smoke alarm checked recently?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Housing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Housing Provider</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing NSW</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Social Housing Tenant</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Registration letters for the program were then sent out by ARC to 1,600 clients with initial deadline of 24 August 2015 that was extended to 11 September 2015 to enable more clients to register. Members of the ARC Regional Advisory Groups assisted some clients who were unable to complete the forms themselves. Registration was received from 373 clients giving a response rate of 23%. Of these, 40 residents withdrew or refused the visit for a number of reasons including not contactable, does not want a visit or moved (15, 9, and 8 respectively). This reduced the number of clients who engaged in the program to a total of 333 clients. For residents that registered for the program, only 146 of them were the same as those that had expressed an interest in May 2015 (39%).

Visits by ARC volunteers began on the 9th of October 2015 and the last visits were conducted on the 29th of April 2016. For residents, the date of visits by the volunteers from the date of registration ranged from 1 month to 8 months. This may partly explain the approximately 11% of residents that withdrew from the program. A total of 253 clients were visited by ARC volunteers and 4 clients received a phone call. The visits undertaken ranged in length from 3 minutes to 105 minutes with the average of 44 minutes.

In the delivery of the visits, the residents received a Client Preparedness kit that comprised plastic bags supplied by FRNSW with joint FRNSW and NSW RFS branding and:

- smoke alarms from FRNSW
- batteries for smoke alarm from FRNSW
- taping kits from FRNSW
- FRNSW presentation folder (information pack)
- FRNSW “Fire Safety & Prevention in the Home” booklets

1 Upon cleaning the data, the number registered for the program is 370. This includes couples living at the same address submitting two separate registration forms.
The main aim of the visits by volunteers was to engage the clients in a conversation and prompt them into thinking about the steps they can take to be better prepared for an emergency incident. In addition, they were to use the items in the Client Preparedness Kit to involve the client in conversation about RediPlan and about the Fire Agency at the end of which the volunteers would let the client know that someone from FRNSW or NSWRFS would be in touch for the SABRE visit.

The initial design of the visits was to have included fire agency personnel with the volunteers. However that was identified to not be feasible given the on-duty role of FRNSW personnel and the identification of the SABRE delivery as being business as usual.

In the Home Visit Information for Australian Red Cross Volunteers booklet dated 18 September 2015, the referral process was described on page 14 to be as follows:

Within 24 hours, if the Fire Agency was not present at the home visit, call the Fire Agency to:

- Provide client address and contact information so the Fire Agency can book a time with the client directly to do a smoke alarm.
- Let the Fire Agency know that you made the visit with another Red Cross volunteer and any considerations about visiting the client and access to their property.
- Let them know that you left the Preparedness Kit, including the home fire safety information and the smoke alarm in the client’s home.

FRNSW and NSWRFS worked together to identify the fire service area that each of the residents reside in. This is in respect to the operation of each agency to its fire districts. The list was compiled and finalised to provide the contact information to the volunteers for their local brigade (either FRNSW or NSWRFS). There were delays in the finalisation of the local fire station contact numbers and this resulted in hold up of SABRE visits to residents that received ARC visits up to early February 2016. This would translate to approximately 160 clients that had received their visits by volunteers but would have been waiting for 1 month up to 4 months for their fire agency visit. In addition, there were 35 visits to clients by ARC volunteers in April 2016 with referrals made directly to the stations. The SABRE visits have been planned but are yet to be delivered by the two fire agencies.
Post home visit surveys were conducted by ARC volunteers contacting participants in the program. By 5 May 2016, 195 calls were made with 161 clients that were successfully reached. In addition, initially the post home visit surveys did not include a section 8 – questions on fire safety in the home. These were added in late March with the result of missing data for many of the residents surveyed before that date. It would be concluded that for all of the residents that had received a SABRE visit, regardless of their response to the survey, has a working 10 year battery smoke alarm. As of 18 May 2016, this equates to 125 residents. In addition, FRNSW and NSWRFS are continuing to conduct the SABRE program to the residents that received the ARC volunteer visits and the kit. For 39 residents, they withdrew their interest in receiving the program for different reasons.

The two agencies, FRNSW and NSWRFS, have undertaken the process of contacting all residents that registered for the program but not receive the ARC visit and those who had expressed an interest but did not register. They are using a three stage approach: contacting all those who indicated that they wanted to receive the program (put in an expression of interest); those that are within trained area of personnel from RFS and FRNSW and third are those who are outside of the area with trained personnel. The other basis for the visit is to disseminate the client preparedness kits as there were 500 kits and 256 had been used.

3.2 Engagement of program agents

Program agents for the HFRP were the ARC volunteers, FRNSW firefighters and NSWRFS volunteers, HFRP project management team and steering committee.

ARC established two regional advisory groups with members that maintain special relationships with communities. ARC developed a recruitment flyer and FAQs and sent it to all Red Cross volunteers in July 2015. A total of 45 ARC volunteers undertook the training in September 2015 and an additional 11 more volunteers were recruited for the visits. Initially only one trained ARC volunteer had been allocated to a client but this was changed to 2 volunteers for safety reasons. The number of client visits undertaken by volunteers ranged from 1 to 65 with a mean of 9. ARC used a computer program to assign the volunteers based on their locations, travel times, workload, local knowledge of the area, volunteer availability and mobility.

FRNSW undertook a number of internal communication processes and e-mails directly to all fire fighters in the state by September 2015. Further, to engage firefighters with the program, HFRP was presented as business as usual as SABRE. Other forms of announcements made on the program consisted of publication of internal intranet articles to all fire stations and it was repeated in the commissioners’ corner. Emails were sent to relevant Zone Commanders in areas where training has been planned outlining the HFRP with follow-up phone calls and discussion. Eleven firefighters attended the training in September 2015 and the method of
involvement of FRNSW is the delivery of the SABRE program with the only additional entry into their data capture system is that referral agency being Red Cross.

NSWRFS developed an internal communication plan sent to volunteers to communicate the HFRP program to volunteers aligning the program with the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER). For the training, 19 NSWRFS attended with a strong concentration to the training in East Maitland. Conduct of presentations was made at two zone commanders in August 2015.

Training was conducted in four different locations: Ballina, East Maitland, Grafton and Homebush. There were 46 ARC volunteers were trained across the four locations that were predominantly from Emergency Services and Telecross respectively (69% and 25%). A fifth training day, scheduled for Wauchope, was cancelled due to the number of participants registering.

4 Findings of the Evaluation

There were 370 residents that registered for the HFRP program by September 2015 and by 30 April 2016, 254 had received a visit by ARC volunteers, 43 withdrew and 73 had yet to receive a visit. For those registered, three quarters were female, mean age of 81 and over 40% were born in Australia with 5 residents identify as Indigenous (
Table 2)\textsuperscript{xv}.
Table 2: Baseline Characteristics of Residents Registered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age mean(sd)</td>
<td>81.4 (12.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Birth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages spoken at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Cross service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Support</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeleYARN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecross</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had their smoke alarm recently checked</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents visited by ARC volunteers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal from program</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the residents visited had lived in private accommodation and were accessing ARC’s Telecross service. For the residents that withdrew from the program, the main reason for withdrawal were attributed to them not being contactable or had moved to different locations. Ten residents no longer wanted the visit and another three needed an interpreter to be present due to language being a barrier. More than a quarter of the residents that registered stated that they would like to have someone present during the visit (e.g. an interpreter, friend, carer). Some residents also indicated on registering that locked gates (40 persons) or pets (26 persons) may affect access to their home.

4.1 Increased the capacity and resilience of socially isolated older people

Preparedness is defined, by the United Nations Office for Disaster Reduction (UNISDOR), as the knowledge and capacities developed by individuals to effectively anticipate the likely impact of
hazard events or conditions. Participants in the HFRP were asked the same question on emergency preparedness at three different time periods: at registration, during the visit by the ARC and post visit telephone calls by the ARC volunteers. The question was “Do you feel prepared to deal with an emergency?” They were provided with a five point Likert scale of 1 “not prepared” to 5 “very prepared”. At first registration, 24% of the residents stated that they were prepared or very prepared. Following the ARC volunteers, 75% of the residents stated that they felt prepared or very prepared in case of an emergency (Table 3).

Table 3: How prepared do residents feel for an emergency? (at three periods)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Registration (n=370)</th>
<th>During visit (n=257)</th>
<th>Post home visit (n=156)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Prepared</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Prepared</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Prepared</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For residents that stated that they were not prepared in case of an emergency after the ARC volunteers visit, it was mainly due to mobility factors. While others felt very prepared for an emergency due to connectedness with their neighbours or having been through an emergency before. This was commented by the volunteers’ notes:

“Limited mobility … Really needs someone local as well to check his welfare and transport in emergency” (ID202).

“Lived in their home for a long time. Well known to emergency services. Good neighbours and others in … who care for them” (ID196)

“Is much more aware of what can be done to be safer and better prepared” (ID284).

Residents were asked a number of questions about what they had done to prepare for an emergency in the registration form emergency. While for the post home visit survey, the same questions were asked again but phrased as have they taken any of the seven steps for an emergency as a result of the visit.
For all eight actions, residents’ demonstrated increased capacity to respond to an emergency post home visit when compared to registration. At the registration in the program, approximately 20% of the residents’ stated that they did not find out about what emergency might affect their area, found out about where to get information or packed an emergency bag. In the follow-up visits, residents’ indicated that they had undertaken steps to improve their preparedness by finding out about emergencies in the area, where to get the information, packed an emergency bag and thought about transport if needed urgently (Figure 3).

In addition, for preparedness for fire in the home, the proportion of residents that had a working smoke alarm and knew how to maintain it increased to 94% and 93% respectively up from 87% and 49%. As well, all of the responding residents stated that they knew what to do if there was a fire in their home and had an plan.

Some of the comments provided by the residents further illustrated that they have increased their capacity to respond to fire and other emergencies.

*Has planned escape route, placed keys by front door or alternatively will break window with chair. Appreciates visit very much (ID51).*

*Fire Service has Installed alarm. She said she would get her emergency documents digitised (ID09).*

*Difficult to understand. She has good neighbours, no family to help, seems confident, Firies installed alarm (ID67).*
Better informed. Council had since a flood, knows how to contact SES. Problems with phone been resolved, Fire Brigade have installed smoke alarm and given further advice. Key kept in door (ID187).

In terms of preparedness, the 257 residents that received the home visit by ARC were also provided with a client preparedness kit to contained emergency preparedness information and items. In addition, for residents that had not received a visit but registered or had indicated they were interested, the two emergency services agencies (FRNSW and ARC) are continuing to offer them the kits and SABRE program.

4.2 Empowered older adults to engage with their local communities and establish supportive relationships

Empowering older adult involves risk reduction and capacity building. Within that notion, capacity is defined as societal coping abilities as well as human knowledge and collective attributes such as societal relationships. HFRP is specifically aimed at Telecross clients of ARC, vulnerable and isolated older persons who receive daily telephone calls by volunteers to check on the welfare. For the program delivery, it was conducted in home visits by ARC volunteers to the clients’ homes followed by SABRE visits by FRNSW or NSWFRS.

A number of questions were included in the registration form, the ARC visits form and the post home visit survey on engagement with the local community and establishment of supportive relationships. The three common questions on engagement are whether they had prepared a list of people to call in an emergency; swapped phone numbers with neighbours; and had a conversation with someone about their plan.

Figure 4: Engagement of residents with the communities in three different surveys

In terms of social connectedness, residents’ had prepared lists of people to call in an emergency, swapped phone numbers with neighbours and had conversation with someone
about their plan (53%, 58%, and 27% respectively). This increased strongly during the visit and post visit with post-visit responsiveness with 60% having undertaken this post visit (Figure 4). It is interesting to note that there appears to be a gender difference in engagement with the communities. On all three questions in the post home visits, males respondent 82% that they had undertaken those three steps compared to 77% for women.

On the question if they had a conversation with someone about their plan as part of the registration process, only 35% said they did and it was predominantly with family, friends and neighbours. In case of an emergency, 60% stated that they were aware of who can help them in their neighbourhood and these were in almost half the time it was their neighbours followed by friends, and lastly family XVII. For two thirds, they stated that they had exchanged phone numbers with them. Some of the comments added in terms of the visit by the ARC on social connectedness are detailed below.

*Neighbours are very well prepared with client. Legacy also helps out.* (ID60)

*Have daughter complete information in Red Cross book and check emergency bag.* (ID82)

*Talk to neighbour, swap details.* (ID263)

The checking and installation of the smoke alarms was conducted by the local FRNSW fire brigade or local volunteers with NSWRFS. The delivery of the program service for the residents that have a SABRE visit establishes relationship between the clients and the local emergency services brigade.

### 4.3 Developed a volunteer base trained in emergency management

The HFRP engaged volunteers within the different organisations at different levels and stages. These include the ARC volunteers engaged in the initial EOI, the advisory support for the registration into the program, the home visits, and the volunteers in the ARC offices that entered the data.

The project began with the use of ARC Telecross volunteers that were recruited for the project and located in the ARC Dubbo office. These volunteers received training and instruction (written and verbal) by the call centre coordinator and were provided a script and database to contact all Telecross clients. The script included prompts on use of heater or electric blanket and the Winter Fire Safety Fact Sheet from FRNSW on how to be safe during winter XVIII.

Recruitment was undertaken for ARC volunteers to take part in the home visits program. The volunteer recruitment flyer and the Home Fire Resilience Fact Sheet Volunteers provided details about the program and the focus on assisting Telecross clients to be house-fire read and more resilience to emergency. A total of 45 volunteers were recruited and undertook the
training sessions that were conducted in September 2015. One-day training sessions were held on the following dates and locations:

- RFS Fire Control Centre, East Maitland, Wednesday 2 September 2015
- RFS Fire Control Centre, Homebush, Saturday 19 September 2015
- RFS Club Ltd, Lismore, Friday 25 September 2015
- District Services Club, Grafton, Saturday 26 September 2015

The training sessions comprised presentations by the three organisations: ARC, FRNSW and RFS. In addition, training material included draft learners’ guide, facilitators’ guide, supporting documents developed by ARC for use by ARC volunteers (e.g. Home Visit Evaluation Forms), ARC “Household Preparedness for Seniors Booklet”, Seniors A4 Fact Sheet, and FRNSW “Fire Safety and Prevention in the Home” booklet.

In addition, as the program progressed additional volunteers were recruited and were trained by senior volunteers. The new trainees were provided with the training material and their learning was facilitated with delivery requirement of two volunteers per home visit. The feedback provided by the volunteers was very positive on the training and material.

*Emergency tips. Make the clients think independently. Life safety. (ARC199)*

In addition, NSWRFS volunteers attended the program training sessions and undertook the SABRE program delivery to residents. For NSWRFS, this was a real extension to the AIDER program and was an opportunity for the organisation to begin the addition of SABRE into its delivery of services. There were 19 NSWRFS that had attended the training sessions on HFRP and have extended their knowledge in emergency management inclusive of prevention service with vulnerable older people.

*Meeting with other agencies (Red Cross and Fire & Rescue) gave a lot of insight into what they do and how they operate (in this context) (RFS12)*

The number of volunteers that has been estimated based on the different data sources, that were trained are HFRP and emergency management is 116\(^{xix}\). The total number that attended training were 75 people (45 ARC, 11 FRNSW and 19 NSWRFS).

Participants were asked to evaluate the training and resources provided for the project. The evaluation covered their views on training and resources helpfulness as follows i) very helpful. It provided skills and knowledge needed in the role; ii) helpful but needed more information on home fire safety; iii) helpful but needed more information on how the different agencies worked together; iv) helpful but needed more information on logistics of home visits and reporting; v) helpful but needed more information on other; vi) not applicable as it was not
provided to me; and vii) not helpful. Mostly participants, majority of whom are ARC participants (14) and two of the Fire Personnel both from FRNSW also felt the training and resources provided were very helpful. There were only a few who indicated Not helpful with explanation – these comments came from four participants: one ARC participant said they did not take part in home visits. What the remaining three expressed are excerpted below:

*Most of what was provided at the training course (i.e. training + resources) were NOT what actually happened out in the field. Agencies did not work together at all? Not a single joint home visit. May as well not have had Red Cross involved at all, since they ignored home fire safety messages and only talked about their own projects.* (NSWRFS participant)

*As the learning and information resources are still in development it is too soon to see if these resources provide the value required. In their current state they fall short of providing the necessary value to meet the desired objectives.* (FRNSW participant)

*I had applied to undertake training which was cancelled. I undertook a personalised Training session together with another volunteer at Port Macquarie (ARC participant)*

Overall ARC participants mostly found the training helpful. This is to be expected as they were engaging in a new role whereas for those in the fire profession or were fire volunteers, the program was business as usual or an extension of business as usual.

The program sourcing of ARC volunteers and engagement with FRNSW fire fighters and NSWFS volunteers and provision of training was undertaken prior to finalization of clients’ registration. Training was also conducted prior to the registration. This resulted in ARC volunteers that were engaged and trained, as well as FRNSW and NSWRFS personnel, were not necessarily geographically located where the program residents were. This then limited the management of the home visits and engagement with the emergency services agencies.

*RFS fell short on not knowing who to train before the training began. Three crews and 2 supervisors were trained out of two to three hundred...The six people that were trained by RFS, only 1 client was within their district and the rest of the jobs are awaiting for approvals for those who were trained to travel.* (RFS participant)

### 4.4 Reduced fire related injuries and reduced fire related deaths in the home

The number of accidental fires per 1000 households for those aged 65 and over was 9 compared to 4 for the rest of the population. They have more than double the risk of accidental fires than the general population. Some of the characteristics that have been identified of older people that make them more vulnerable to fire are poor housing and living conditions; reduced
mobility, impaired mental capacity, social isolation and medication. The older persons have been recognised to have both higher fire related injuries and fire related deaths.

In the period 1998/99 to 2011/12, there were a total of 62 preventable fire fatalities involving seniors aged 65+ in private residential dwellings. They comprised 30% of all preventable fire fatalities and have a higher fatality rate than the population overall. In addition, the population requiring assistance with core activities have a higher risk of fire. The majority of these preventable fires occur in the bedroom followed by the lounge room. Since the introduction of the smoke alarm legislation in 2006, at least 27% of fatal fires where the victim was aged 65 and over no smoke alarm was present and another 23% the smoke alarm failed to operate.xx

The population targeted in the HFRP are the most vulnerable and highly isolated. These are those aged 65 and over and for 96% of them are in receipt of Telecross as they live alone. They have two of the identifiable risk of age and requiring assistance with core activities that experience higher frequency and severity of fires than the population overall. The majority of the fatalities of seniors were when the victim was asleep suggesting that the installation/maintenance of smoke alarms together with an emergency preparedness plan would reduce the number of fatalities.

The thinking was that using Telecross clients you have then clients who you know and you have their address details and you can refer them and it is much easier than cold referral. Plus this age group fits the profile for being the most at risk. So it ticks the box for fire related deaths in home. These two matched up in terms of clienteles and the profiles and what FRNSW and RFS mainly FRNSW were concerned about inside the home. (ARC agent)

The delivery of the home visits by volunteers entailed the distribution of the client preparation kit that contains information on home fire safety, smoke alarm, battery and preparation documentation. In addition, the volunteers’ time in discussion with the residents is centred on emergency preparedness with a focus on home fires. The number of injuries and fatalities, particularly involving persons aged 65 and over, is too small to have a demonstrated outcome in reduction in the evaluation period. It is suggestive that the installation and checking of the smoke alarm by FRNSW or NSWRFS by the conduct of the SABRE program for all program personnel (those registered only, expressed an interest only, or both) and the information provided by volunteers would result in reduced number of fire incidents that results in lowering the number of injuries and deaths.
4.5 Developed an enduring partnership between emergency service agencies, FRNSW, NSWRFS and ARC

This section reports mainly on qualitative data from survey questionnaire that the program agents had responded to at the end of the project and agency forums and interviews. Two main questions on partnerships were used to gather agency representatives’ views of what is required for enduring partnerships in a program such as the one in which they had taken part. Their perspectives are presented under the following two topics: Relationship within organisations and with partner organisations (Section 5.5.1) and Future partnership possibilities and sustainability (Section 5.5.2).

4.5.1 Relationship within organisations and with partner organisations

The question posed was: Describe your relationship with partner organisations and/or individuals in your organisation to deliver the project. Please include most relevant and/or unexpected outcomes.

Internal

ARC participants were very satisfied with internal relationships and used descriptions such as: “Very helpful, encouraging and professional”; “good connection”; “excellent people”; “quick and accurate answers to any questions and appreciated what we are doing” and “Heads of project very clear about project and path to achieve objectives. Very well organised” in their comments on their intra agency interactions during the project.

FRNSW participants held mixed feelings. Some were happy while others felt their organisation could have provided better support in terms of the management of the project.

Lack of support from internal management due to the focus/prioritisation on a new smoke alarm program and lack of resources eg. project support officer resulted in a failure to fully deliver the SABRE program project deliverables (FRNSW participant)

Key lead on the project, however revolving project managers may have caused inconsistency (FRNSW participant)

NSWRFS participants were satisfied with how their organisation operated during the project.

External

ARC participants expressed a mixture of positive and critical comments about their relationship with the fire agencies. For example, some indicated having had “no direct contact” with them. With those who had made contact, comments show that on the one hand there was dissatisfaction with participants citing “confusion over roles and lack of priority” in relation to FRNSW and a “lack of priority” on the part of NSWRFS. On the other hand there were
expressions of satisfaction with others commenting favourably on both FRNSW and NSWRFS as follows:

During the development of the programme I worked with this organisation which I found valuable. Learning about their expectations and how their organisations worked, their thought processes etc. was helpful (ARC participant)

NSWRFS and FRNSW participant seemed satisfied with the relationship they developed with each other during the project. NSWRFS participants described their relationship with FRNSW in glowing terms such as “Excellent” and “We worked well together”. However NSWRFS participant comments on ARC was mixed. One participant was clearly satisfied stating the following:

We worked well together in my time on the project (NSWRFS participant)

However another participant showed a lot of dissatisfaction with the how the agency operated during the partnership. Below provides evidence of that dissatisfaction:

Worst inter-agency relationship I have seen or experienced in 40 years. Extremely disappointing (NSWRFS participant)

FRNSW participants’ evaluation of the NSWRFS involvement in the project were also mostly expressed in glowing terms and indicated their satisfaction with the agency with the following examples:

Excellent partnership, open to new training outside of their "descriptive" roles and very collaborative (FRNSW participant)

Excellent partnership with FRNSW, joint collaboration on a common objectives and outcomes (FRNSW participant)

However, FRNSW comments on ARC showed mixed evaluations with participants’ expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the agency. Positively expressed evaluations were as follows:

Great partnership however the project aim and objectives were did not seem to be shared or common (FRNSW participant)

The gentleman from the Red Cross we dealt with was very understanding (FRNSW participant)

Keen to follow up to ensure their clients were visited (FRNSW participant)
Not so positive evaluations:

*External stakeholder, unfortunately relationship difficult to manage. Expectations and outcomes often did not align to program (FRNSW participant)*

*Very single minded and one eyed in their outlook and views, unaccepting of new information and carried on their own sweet way regardless (FRNSW participant)*

One participant also explained at length their dissatisfaction with project management and administration with ARC. The participant elaborated on how instead of working fully in the interest of the partnership and the project, the ARC tended to promote their own internal program.

Logistical challenges were highlighted by the agents that impacted on the referral process from the ARC volunteers following their residents’ visits to FRNSW or NSWRFS. This impacted on the number the SABRE visits and the timing of these visits. Most notable were the home visits conducted between October 2015 and early February 2016 were only referred to the emergency services in early February 2016. This was explained by misunderstanding of the different agents on what was to have been done. This was further affected by lack of shared program database between agencies.

*The referral process has been something that has not been static and used throughout the project. There have been changes but all the clients have been referred. Once the referrals have been made by RC to RFS or FRNSW, then the responsibility of what happens next is passed on to the other agency. There is no shared datasets between agencies that provide details of what has occurred. The only thing that is coming out is in the post-visit evaluation calls whereby clients call to say that they have had a visit or have been contacted by the FRNSW. That is the only way that we have been able to track. (ARC agent)*

This other partnership challenge encountered was the staff turnover within each agency and external via the trainer. This compounded the elements of differing ways of operating with ARC and NSWRFS working with volunteers while FRNSW working with permanent or retained paid fire fighters.

*Challenges that we faced in the relationship is the different ways of working - combat response versus ARC. The staff turnover was quite a challenge. It was a complex project with a lot of entities and movements of people within those entities. Need to manage expectations and need to clarify what each agent wants to get out of it. (ARC agent)*
4.5.2 Future partnership possibilities and sustainability

The question posed to gauge how participants felt about future partnership was as follows: As a result of your participation in this project, are you more likely to look for opportunities to partner with these organisations and individuals in the future? The comments from the participants reveal overwhelming support for partnership with majority indicating that they are in favour of future partnerships. However, it is also evident from their comments that a clearer framework may be needed for an inclusive and sustainable partnership in the future.

Yes to future partnerships

ARC participants:

*Definitely. Lots of potential to do more. Lessons learned should be shared*

*Yes definitely. We all need to deliver related messages. It's great to pool resources and share experience*

FRNSW and NSWRFS participants:

*Yes, however the communications on objectives and outcomes need to be continually reinforced*

*Yes, successful smoke alarm installation programs rely on sharing data and undertaking installations in partnership with service providers with existing relationships with at risk individuals*

*Yes. It is necessary and valuable to seek and foster partner opportunities. This program was a nice introduction and learning experience*

*Good cross overs. A better defined project would ensure greater collaboration*

No to future partnerships

ARC participants:

Only a few participants said no compared to those who indicated yes to future partnerships. One participant was of the opinion that it “not likely unless the project re-starts”. Another ARC participant also cited inequity in partnership as a main concern as follows:

*Only if they want to participate as equal partners accepting Red Cross as part of the team*

FRNSW and NSWRFS participants:
Participants were mostly happy with partnership with NSWRFS but critical of partnership with the ARC. One participant commented as follows:

*Red Cross very locked in "their" ways, I was constantly told "Red Cross don't do it like that"* and another said “Difficult for retained firefighters to align visit to client residence along with Red Cross

*No. Will never work with [person’s name] again*

**Maybe to future partnerships**

Three ARC participants and one FRNSW participant made the following comments:

*Thought it was a good program and would definitely be involved, if it was to be rolled out to help other vulnerable groups - e.g. refugees, indigenous...*

*I am happy to work with them, but trying to synchronise client visits on a large scale with them would be frustrating and inefficient. We have worked well together in emergency situations.*

*Only if they want to participate as equal partners accepting Red Cross as part of the team*

*Difficult for retained firefighters to align visit to client residence along with Red Cross*

**Don’t know**

Comments were from ARC mostly and showed that they were not in the position to make this decision. The only other comment came from a participant in the fire profession who expressed dissatisfaction with how the structure of the partnership had panned out.

*Doubtful I could work with Red Cross at all again after this experience. Maybe, if I were satisfied that there would not be a repeat of the events of this Project*

Overall, majority of survey participants as agency representatives were in favour of the program as a worthwhile partnership to help vulnerable and older people. However, based on some of the comments, it can be seen that there is a need for some consideration about partnership sustainability and measures that may help with future collaborations. This elaborated on in the recommendations section.
5 Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

This section brings together the above discussions of the study’s design and methods (Chapter 2), the HFRP implementation (Chapter 3) and the impact for clients and agency partnerships (Chapter 4).

The Evaluation Methodology

It may be helpful to engage the evaluator at an earlier stage of the project. The evaluator entered at the final stage of the project and therefore did contribute to the development of any aspect of the project.

HFRP Implementation – achievements

The program was able to achieve the delivery of home visits to a highly isolated and vulnerable group of New South Wales residents. The visits to 257 residents in geographically dispersed areas in NSW is most commendable given the time frame, the need to recruit, train, develop the program systems, and evaluate within 12 months is a most notable achievement. This was done by volunteers and not paid staff and to a most differing population base.

The impact of the personal visits by the volunteers to the residents’ homes and the time spent talking to them and discussing preparedness is beyond the program expected output. The act itself and the SABRE visits by FRNSW or RFS also had the effect of engaging and connecting with the residents.

The program was delivered very much with value for money with unremunerated hundreds of man hours travel and project time spent delivering the program. This was done with good will of the volunteers on the ground with the residents’ as well as back-office support.

The impact of developing training material through three of the state’s emergency services working in partnership, trialling resources and honing it with feedback from their representative on the ground is commendable. The agencies have also built a relationship in partnership which in view of the common need to provide help to vulnerable will be further developed.

The delivery of client preparedness kits and ongoing deployment of SABRE to residents who registered and did not receive a visit or had expressed an interest, is most honourable undertaking by the two agencies FRNSW and NSWRFS.

The adoption and inclusion of emergency preparedness into other programs within the agencies is an unexpected achievement. ARC indicated that they will be tapping into existing
home visits schemes and add emergency services kind of preparedness. NSWRFs has embraces SABRE and are providing that to the residents’ they service in New South Wales.

In addition, the knowledge and inclusion of other organisations’ activities and services is another plus for the HFRP. This was noted by one of the agents:

*All AIDER’s clients that we saw last year and will be sent them a letter at the start of the season, information will be sent that is inclusive of FRNSW SABRE program and Telecross services. (RFS agent)*

**HFRP Implementation – challenges**

Some target residents did not register because of language and literacy issues. The process of registration did not support these challenges for participants. The need to complete the form and send off to ARC may have caused residents who are most in need of the program to not register. This can be due to the English language proficiency that is required, the level of literacy or simply the practicality of getting the document filled out and dropped off at the Post Office for people who had limited mobility.

*The process of registration for the clients was too hard – had to fill out a full 4 page forms. Suggestion was that instead you know they are interested why don’t you call them. I think it is because of the way the registration was – the form itself. That process did not allow the actual target population. (RFS agent)*

Underestimation of challenges and the logistical management and co-ordinating home visits in partnership. For example, the co-ordination of two volunteers to conduct the home visits, the submission of documentations/data back to ARC was involved in terms of organisation with different processes, procedures and staffing was also an important factor. This was noted in terms of attendance at training sessions by FRNSW personnel.

Red Cross home visits and management of volunteers going inside the home differed dramatically to providing telephone support or on the doorstep of the house. The unanticipated psychological distress that may arise for the volunteers was not planned for given the living conditions of the program participants.

*Our volunteers don’t normally do this in terms of going into people’s homes. Even in recovery. This was the first time that our emergency services volunteers were going into people’s home and the reasons why we needed to have two volunteers go out for safety reasons. In some cases it was necessary from a welfare perspective as some visits were really confronting, circumstances of the clients were quite disturbing. (ARC agent)*
The need to have and to prepare two volunteers to travel together to deliver the program differed markedly to original design. This increased the demands on the volunteers to conduct all aspects of the home visits with the exclusion of installation of the smoke alarm. The role of and process of referrals of the clients to the emergency services was also an issue.

The process of collecting and entering the data on the volunteers and residents was most tasking with significant handling of paper and data entry issues. This was noted in data quality issues encountered.

The initial design of the HFRP was for 1 volunteer and 1 fire service agent (fire fighter from FRNSW or volunteer from NSWRFS) to go out together. This was planned to mean that the home visit together with the SABRE visit would be conducted simultaneously. As this was not feasible, two additional steps were added to the program: the referral process by the volunteers to the relevant fire service agency and the conduct of SABRE by that agency.

The referral process encountered the borders of operation by each of the agencies and ensuring the volunteers contact the appropriate agency for the residents. As there was some delay in the finalisation of the contact details for each resident to the appropriate agency and the changing project personnel, it resulted in delays in referrals for the SABRE program.

A further matter that impacted on program delivery was NSWRFS introduction to SABRE program while for FRNSW it was continuation of existing program. For two of the three agencies involved in the program, they were implementing a new program or an extension in important aspects to existing programs.

The HFRP required the development of training material and conduct of training. The program had a number of personnel attached to the development of the material that was subsequently imposed on the program managers. This added to the stressful element of delivery and the continuous changes in the training package from one site to another. The other imposition was on the time for 5 trainers to be present at each training day.

5.2 Recommendations
Based on the above data and findings, the evaluator recommends that the program continue to be rolled out and is most worthwhile. The recipients of the program are ones that was initially identified to be in great need for fire preventative activities as well as emergency preparedness. The target group are vulnerable people who tend to be home bound and used to having all their communications with ARC and Telecross via telephone. Their responses to the program show that it has brought them a deeper awareness of home fire emergency preparedness and
community connectedness. In addition, the following recommendations come for consideration to enhance any future implementation of the program.

The process of registration for the program by the residents. The mode of registration by filling a form and mailing it did not consider language, literacy and also mobility issues for some people within the target group. Also the clients are used to having all their communications with ARC and Telecross via telephone. The introduction of a new medium of writing to show consent and mailing out filled out forms may not be the best choice for this particular group to show consent and inclusion in the program.

The program is aimed at existing Telecross clients that are part of the program of services offered by ARC. Demographic data already exists on the residents and they receive daily contacts by ARC volunteers. As part of their regular calls to Telecross clients, they can be offered the SABRE program. If the residents’ agree then their details would be forwarded to FRNSW/NSWRFS.

In the future delivery of training, the training package and all associated delivery of training may need to be finalised before the commencement of the program. The agency training locations and target sites for the program delivery may need to be more aligned with the location of the residents’ in receipt of the program. This would ensure the engagement of the front line staff by NSWRFS and FRNSW that would be in contact with the residents.

In addition, the delivery of the training be organised for on-line delivery. This would reduce the need for logistical management of bringing personnel from different locations together. As well, as new staff are involved in the program (paid and unpaid) they would be able to access the training. The training would be enhanced by the provision of additional modules tailored to the different roles of ARC volunteers, fire fighters and NSWRFS.

Review the referral process. Considering that FRNSW/NSWRFS have already established manpower on the ground with local fire brigade and volunteers as well as their own processes in place for the delivery of SABRE as a prevention program; and ARC has existing database of clients, referrals from ARC for Telecross clients could be undertaken in the same way as other SABRE activities. The main addition would be the provision of smoke alarm, batteries, and educational materials to these vulnerable older clients. This is because the SABRE program usually operates on residents supplying the smoke alarm and or batteries and emergency services workers assisting in the appropriate installation in the mainstream community. However, Telecross clients have significant mobility limitations and accessing the products needed for SABRE installation would not be feasible for them.
Appendix 1

This survey is for all Australian Red Cross, Fire & Rescue New South Wales, New South Wales Rural Fire Service volunteers and staff who participated in the Home Fire Resilience Project. To inform future planning, Western Sydney University has been commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the project. The information provided will be used for the purpose of project evaluation only and not be divulged to any third party. The survey will take you 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for your time. We really appreciate your feedback.

1. What do you think was the main aim of the Home Fire Resilience project?

2. What do you think was of most value to the client as a result of this project? (e.g. trust; time; personal contact; meeting specific needs (disability, vulnerability)

3. What strategies did you find were most effective in engaging clients in this project?

4. Describe if and how this project helped clients to:
   - Improve fire safety in the home?
   - Improving emergency preparedness?
   - Become more resilient to any emergency?
   - Connect with their family, friends and community?
5. From your experience in conducting the project, what are your views on the training and resources provided:

- [ ] Very helpful. It provided with the skills and knowledge needed to do my role well.
- [ ] Helpful but needed more information on (tick all that apply):
  - Home fire safety
  - Helping clients prepare for any emergency
  - How the different agencies worked together
  - On logistics of home visits and reporting
  - Other ________________

- [ ] Not helpful. Please explain ________________
- [ ] Not applicable as it was not provided to me

6. Other than training, how did you find the support and communication that was provided to complete your role:

- [ ] Very helpful. It provided me with all the support/communication needed to do my role well.
- [ ] Helpful but needed more
  - Support
  - Communication
  - Other ________________

- [ ] Not helpful. Please explain ________________

7. Describe your relationship with partner organisations and/or individuals in your organisation to deliver the project (most relevant and or unexpected outcomes)

Australian Red Cross:


Fire and Rescue New South Wales


New South Wales Rural Fire Service


8. As a result of your participation in this project, are you more likely to look for opportunities to partner with these organisations and individuals in the future?
   □ Yes
   ○ Describe: ____________________________________________________
   □ No
   ○ Why: _________________________________________________________
   □ Maybe
   □ Don’t know.

9. Based on your experience on this project, do you have any other comments or suggestions for future planning?

   ________________________________________________________________

10. What organisation were you employed by, on paid or voluntary basis, for this project?
    □ Australian Red Cross (including Telecross)
    □ Fire & Rescue New South Wales
    □ New South Wales Rural Fire Service

    Thank you for your participation and time. If you would like to discuss any aspect(s) of the project further with Dr Kathy Tannous (independent evaluator), please feel free to contact her on k.tannous@westernsydney.edu.au or 02 9685 9345.


Community Engagement Unit (2015), Reaching out to the vulnerable with the Red Cross, Intranet communication, 15 September 2015.


In the project management report, the figure stated is 465 but in analysing the EOI spreadsheet, 502 clients registered.


Australian Red Cross (2015), Home Fire Resilience Project – Home Visit Information Red Cross Volunteers, Draft Dated 18 September 2015.

Detailed demographic data was provided on 200 residents visited up to 31 March 2016 by the Australian Red Cross.

[https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology](https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology)

Quantitative assessment was unable to be made during the visit or post home visit on these as information was not collected other than qualitative.


FRNSW Head Office (7), FRNSW Staff (11 + 2), NSW/FS(4+19), ARC (4+4+65) = 116 volunteers