



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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# Survivor story-telling in road trauma education and support programs

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## About this research

In 2019, 23 phone interviews were conducted with Road Trauma Support Services Victoria volunteers who agreed to be involved from the previous survey.

### Who participated?

The majority of the 23 participants were female (65%). The participants' relationship with road trauma included experiencing the death of a family member(s) (35%), sustaining injuries from road trauma themselves (30%), having been exposed when working/volunteering with emergency services (17%), having family member(s) who sustained injuries (13%), being a traffic offender or related to an offender of road trauma (9%), and/or being involved in a fatal road trauma incident as a non-offender (4%).

Nineteen of the participants had prior volunteer experience, including community volunteering (74%), social services (31%), and emergency services (21%).

Nearly half of them had completed the group training program with RTSSV and 13% completed one-on-one training. One quarter (26%) stated they did not complete any training,

### Why volunteer?

The most common reason for volunteering at RTSSV was to make a difference generally, and to change the behaviour of others, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reasons for volunteering (n=23)

		Reason for volunteering	Frequency
External reasons	Altruism	To make a difference generally	14
		To change behaviour by educating people of the potential impacts	13
		To prevent others from the same traumatic experience	9
		To encourage participants to relate to victims and survivors	8
		To support others in recovery	4
		To give back to the organisation and the community	4
	Professional factors	3	
Internal reasons		For themselves	12
		For their deceased or injured counterpart	9
		For the community	8

## In their own words: Why participants volunteer at RTSSV

*'For the [RTAS] participants, I just wanted to make a difference. I wanted to make them see more of the after-effects.'*

*'Planting the seed, the importance of being safe and being aware and taking driving as a serious responsibility that deserves our respect fully, every time we get in the car.'*

*'If I can just stop one of those kids from turning their mum and dad into what it's done to me, I will continue to do it.'*

*'Also, that the loss wasn't just for nothing, that there was a purpose to it so that there's a learning in the community and that the person in my life who had passed away didn't die in vain, that there was a continuation to her story beyond just dying in a road crash.'*

### What are the benefits?

Most participants found participating in volunteer storytelling to be therapeutic, as they could talk about their experience, increase acceptance of their story, make better sense of their road trauma experience, along with personal growth such as increasing confidence, increased empathy and acceptance towards others, and connecting to other opportunities (Table 2).

Table 2: Benefits of volunteering (n=23)

Perceived benefits of volunteering			Frequency	
Relative to their personal growth	Help in grieving	Post-traumatic growth	Meaning making	16
			To create positivity out of a negative experience	4
			General help in healing process (unspecified)	12
			Having a space to talk about their experience	12
			Being able to share their story	11
			Increased acceptance of their story	6
			Building hope and resilience	4
			Getting anger out	2
	Development of skills and opportunities	Connection to other opportunities and people	4	
		Development of advocacy skills	1	
		Increased empathy and acceptance towards others	4	
		Increasing confidence	4	
		Increased connection with those in their personal life	2	
Relative to the RTAS participants	Implicit impact on participants	19		
	Explicit impact on participants	12		
Relative to the organisation	Feeling valued by RTSSV	4		

## In their own words: The benefits of being a volunteer

*'It's very rewarding in that sense that you are making a difference.'*

*'But to see the difference in their faces, as they realised, and there is something in what they're saying, that was an advantage to me.'*

*'Most people come up and thank you and shake your hand and give you a hug. It's really, really good.'*

*'I think it was a good way to help me recover from my trauma.'*

*'it provided me with a safe space for me to do what I need to do and be what I need to be. I need to be able to do my grief and be able to grieve my son without having to worry about what everybody else is or isn't thinking.'*

## What did participants like about the training?

As shown in Table 3, participants liked various parts of the training, especially the training format including group training and one-on-one training, support in narrative development during the training, peer support as well as staff support during training. Participants speak in their own words about what they like about the volunteer training.

Table 3: What participants liked about the training (n=23)

Like about training		Frequency
Training format	Various training structures (one-on-one, group training)	13
	Narrative development	12
	Activities during training	2
	Good food	2
Peer support		11
Staff support		7
Building a sense of trust and safety		1
Inclusivity		1
Finding a purpose in training		1

## In their own words: What participants liked about the training

*'Group training is good.'*

*'I thought it was really well put together and really thought out.'*

*'It helped with all those professional development skills as well with like public speaking and how to share a story that has an actual benefit, it's not just pure storytelling that there is actually a purpose to it.'*

*'I really connected really well with some of those people that I trained with and I feel like because they know my story, they know me and we understand each other and we can have that chat.'*

## What are some areas for improvement?

In Table 4, the areas of improvement that were raised by the participants were specifically related to the training program, RTAS seminars, and/or the management of volunteers, or they were quite separate to the RTAS program.

Table 4: Areas of improvement (n=23)

Areas for improvement in the RTSSV volunteer training		Frequency
Specific to RTAS	Specific to training program (e.g., assessment for readiness before group training, flexibility)	10
	Management of volunteers	5
	Policy related to time since trauma two-year requirement for new volunteers	4
	Specific to seminars	4
	Valuing volunteers	4
	Clarifying role expectations	1
	Integrating the Department of Justice seminars with RTAS	1
Separate to RTAS	Peer support	7
	Expansion of counselling methods	1
	More effort towards increasing the school program	1
	More publicity	1
	Requiring RTSSV staff to be conscious of an individual's decision to not associate with other volunteers	1
No areas for improvement		2

Participants identified some specific areas of the training program that they thought could be strengthened, particularly in relation to their own preparation as speakers and their support needs, as exemplified in the quotations below.

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## In their own words: Areas of improvement for the training program

*'Public speaking is up there with divorce and death and all that sort of stuff as far as creating anxiety. So yeah, it's not something that comes natural to most people. So a little bit of training in that from someone who knows how to do it or who does it on a professional basis can be really valuable.'*

*'at no point really in the whole process, other than a couple of casual comments by facilitators, has it ever really been suggested to me what I should be talking about and how I should be going about it ...'*

*'I think having a counsellor there or counsellors at the training and then say you can speak to a counsellor afterwards. We've got a half an hour session at the end where you can have a group chat or an individual chat if you like.'*

### **Next steps**

The findings will be published in an international peer-reviewed journal and presented at a road safety conference.

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