Whanaungatanga Programme

2024 Qualitative Report – programme update

Prepared for Fire and Emergency New Zealand

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Whanaungatanga Programme, funded by Movember and Fire and Emergency New Zealand, aims to improve the psychological wellbeing of career firefighters and operational managers by fostering connection, trust, and a sense of value and belonging. Supported by Fire and Emergency's Executive Leadership Team (ELT) as well as the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU), the Auckland and Whangarei Local Union Committees (ALC, WLC), and the Fire and Emergency Commanders Association (FECA), the programme seeks to eliminate harmful work factors and enhance supportive ones.

This report presents findings from the open-text response question in the follow-up Whanaungatanga wellbeing survey (March 2024), in addition to interviews with operational managers (Group, District, and Regional Managers) and representatives from the PFU. Employees were asked about changes at Fire and Emergency NZ in the past 12 months impacting their mental wellbeing. The report compares current views with those from the 2023 qualitative report.

It is important to note that the views expressed in interviews reflect those of operational mangers working in the Te Hiku Region (Northland, Waitematā, Auckland, Counties Manukau); the experiences of operational managers elsewhere and non-operational managers may differ. Similarly, where views of the union are referenced, they reflect the perspectives of the two representatives who were interviewed and may not represent those of all union representatives. The open-text responses in the first section of the report cover individuals from a wide variety of roles and locations. It is also important to note that:

1. The open-text responses were in the context of a large and detailed wellbeing survey which asked pointed questions about organisational capabilities, mental health, trauma and so forth.
2. The answers provided by managers are their opinions and understanding of policy. That may not reflect actual policy and practice.
3. For both analyses we feel it best to provide verbatim quotes to help understand the nuances around themes emerging.

Whanaungatanga Programme Pilot

The Whanaungatanga Programme Pilot is being implemented in the Te Hiku region, with workshops conducted with firefighters and managers to design interventions aimed at improving organisational support factors. Eight interventions were approved by the Governance Group to trial in the pilot region. Of those interventions, three were completed at the time of the survey while a further four were in different stages of being operationalised. Given the varied degree to which interventions have thus far been implemented, this report offers early indications of their outcomes, necessitating further long-term assessment.

Interventions being trialled in the pilot region:

- Absence Indicator: Turned off organisation-wide on December 15, 2023.
- Enhanced Connections: Identified meeting-free Wednesdays, which involved managers visiting and connecting with crews on Wednesdays, as a Regional initiative to scale and refine.
- Workload: Undertook work to identify tasks managers could share with officers that would increase their autonomy and reduce manager workload
- Leadership Training: Non-Violent Communication and SpeakEasy workshops, plus a fast-tracked 6-month leadership development programme starting February 2024.
- Reward and Recognition: Exploring a regional approach to reward and recognition and reviewing processes to identify those due for medals and honours.

- Relationship with the NZPFU: Training and mediation sessions for Auckland and Whangarei union locals and regional management.
- Enhanced Connections: Induction process to foster face-to-face interactions between uniformed and non-uniformed employees.

Methodology

A total of 684 open-text responses from firefighters and other Fire and Emergency employees were analysed from the Whanaungatanga Wellbeing Survey. Interviews and focus groups with middle management in Fire and Emergency across Te Hiku were conducted in person, in addition to two interviews with union representatives. All interviews/focus groups were recorded and transcribed in summary form. All qualitative data were analysed using both inductive and deductive approaches.

The results presented here represent the summation of the themes and sub-themes extracted from these two data sets.

Key results

Differences between the pilot and control regions

Sentiment analysis revealed a significant shift in the attitudes of managers and firefighters within the pilot region compared to outside. While managers (18%) and firefighters (16%) outside the pilot wrote a low proportion of positive comments, positive comments dominated in Te Hiku (managers 63%, firefighters 47%). This lies in contrast to the comments in the 2023 survey which were mostly negative organisation wide, as they continue to be outside the pilot region. Such a significant shift within Te Hiku represents hope for future improvements that as yet, are not seen as fully in the quantitative part of the survey given the short time that interventions have been in place.

This shift was also evident in interviews with managers. While there continued to be issues that needed to be addressed, most managers felt that there had been improvements in at least some areas. Overall, it appeared evident that they were trying to find ways to work around ongoing challenges.

Perceptions of the Whanaungatanga programme and the interventions

Both managers and firefighters were positive about the Whanaungatanga programme and its interventions. Firefighters were optimistic about Fire and Emergency's engagement with the programme and its efforts to make meaningful changes. Despite some scepticism about long-term change, there was a sense of hope and a belief that the organisation was heading in the right direction. While in the baseline survey, firefighters thanked the research team, in the follow-up survey, they expressed gratitude for Fire and Emergency's involvement in the programme. They also appreciated the shared aims with the PFU, fostering a more cooperative relationship.

Meeting-free Wednesdays were frequently praised in open-text responses, as firefighters appreciated their managers' increased visibility and efforts to spend more time with them. This increased presence helped improve relationships and provided valuable information, reducing rumours. The removal of the absence indicator was well received across the organisation, reducing pressure on many employees, especially those with young families.

In interviews, managers were overwhelmingly positive about the programme, particularly valuing meeting-free Wednesdays. They felt the programme was needed and overdue, given the results of the baseline survey.

Areas for improvement

Any scepticism about the programme often related to the implementation of interventions rather than the interventions themselves. For instance, while most firefighters appreciated meeting-free Wednesdays and increased GM presence, issues arose when GMs used the time in ways that firefighters perceived to be inappropriate. Firefighters felt that Wednesdays should focus on repairing relationships rather than being used for activities perceived as punitive.

There were also comments about the time needed for change and the inability of interventions to immediately fix deep-seated issues from past events like collective bargaining and COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Some firefighters felt that the organisation and certain managers appeared more interested in the appearance of doing the right thing than in making genuine efforts.

Managers suggested several improvements for the programme, emphasising the need to reduce GM workload and improve induction processes and training for DMs and GMs. Despite efforts to manage GM workload, many felt it had only increased, making it barely manageable. Addressing widespread employee burnout and refining the use of Wednesdays were also highlighted as important future steps.

Wider organisational issues

Wider organisational issues continued to be problematic for many employees, especially outside Te Hiku. A sense of not feeling valued remained a key concern, similar to 2023. Staffing shortages caused stress, poor mental wellbeing, and physical health issues, with individuals often working 80-hour weeks.

Issues raised were similar to those in the 2023 qualitative report, particularly outside the pilot region. Employees frequently cited a disconnect with senior management, a perceived lack of accountability and competence within Fire and Emergency, and a mismatch between the organisation's values and actions. Disagreement over spending priorities and unresolved bullying allegations also persisted. Some employees felt the organisation needed to apologise for past wrongdoings.

Managers raised additional concerns not addressed by the programme, particularly around staffing. Promised new recruits had not yet improved the situation, partly due to issues with transfers and secondments. Several GMs also noted that they still felt somewhat powerless to make meaningful decisions, in part, but not only due to the actions of the PFU, who continued to represent a major challenge for some managers.

At risk groups

Employees in certain roles expressed particularly high levels of negative sentiment in the open-text responses. Only 9% of comments from other uniformed employees were positive. Many noted a lack of support, especially regarding community risk reduction, and felt that budget cuts over the past 12 months had worsened their mental health.

Communication centre employees were identified in the quantitative report as having the highest rates of mental ill health. They expressed significant negative sentiment, particularly about staffing shortages, which they felt had worsened over the last year, increasing their strain. All interviewed managers were empathetic and showed good understanding of the challenges faced by communication centre workers.

Recommendations

The issues raised by this report led to several potential action points that we suggest Fire and Emergency NZ should consider. Evaluation of these initiatives should also be considered to ensure evidence-based intervention. In summary, these recommendations centre on the below points:

- **Commit to long-term investment**: Ensure the continuation of the Whanaungatanga Programme with ongoing financial investment and full implementation accountability.
- **Enhance managerial training**: Provide psychological literacy training and comprehensive induction programmes for new GMs and managers, including secondment opportunities and the development of a GM handbook.
- **Reduce workload for GMs**: Develop initiatives to reduce GM workload through role clarity and task delegation to SSOs and SOs.
- **Support communication centre employees:** Improve staffing levels, including shift managers, to reduce pressure and allow breaks after difficult calls.
- **Continue and expand meeting-free Wednesdays:** Continue and clarify the objectives of "meeting-free Wednesdays" and consider extending the initiative to other regions.
- **Focus on overlooked groups:** Recognise and involve other uniformed employees, particularly Volunteers Support Officers and Risk Reduction personnel, and foster relationships with firefighting crews.
- **Improve organisational communication:** Ensure clear, open, and timely communication within the organisation and make decision-making processes transparent.
- **Emulate best practices:** Learn from regions with harmonious teams and satisfied firefighters to improve organisational practices.

Background

The **Whanaungatanga Programme** came about as a result of interest amongst operational personnel in the prevention of first responder suicide and psychological injury.

It has been selected as one of 15 international projects to be funded by the Movember Foundation [1] as a part of their Grants Programme aimed at developing evidence-based mental ill-health and suicide prevention programmes for veterans and first responders.

The **Whanaungatanga Programme** seeks to improve the wellbeing of firefighters by:

- identifying and eliminating or minimising the organisational factors that contribute to mental ill-health.
- identifying and promoting the organisational factors that contribute to wellbeing.
- creating organisational changes that promote connection, trust, and a strong sense of value and belonging.

To achieve this, the Whanaungatanga Project Team delivered organisational change workshops to around 500 career firefighters and operational managers in the pilot region, Te Hiku (Northland, Waitematā, Auckland, Counties Manukau). In the workshops, participants had the opportunity to identify helpful and harmful workplace factors, and to identify strategies to address harmful factors. This feedback was captured via post-it notes and on whiteboards before being transcribed, coded, and themed. These data were used alongside the benchmark quantitative and qualitative report data to inform various interventions in the pilot region.

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) has been subcontracted to conduct two evaluations for the pilot programme. The first evaluation gathers quantitative data through an electronic survey conducted both at baseline, and again after implementation of the interventions, to assess change in individual outcomes. The second evaluation includes interviews and focus groups with operational managers to understand changes in organisational practice.

To ensure the pilot evaluation is robust, Fire and Emergency has provided additional funding to extend the survey to all employees. This extension will allow for a comparison of outcomes between the pilot group in Te Hiku with career firefighters and managers in other regions, as well as a non-uniformed group.

The Whanaungatanga Programme has been endorsed by Fire and Emergency New Zealand's Executive Leadership Team (ELT), as well as the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU), the Auckland and Whangarei Local Union Committees (ALC, WLC), and the Fire and Emergency Commanders Association (FECA).

Whanaungatanga Wellbeing Survey

The purpose of the Whanaungatanga Wellbeing Survey is to gain insight into the current levels of mental ill health and perceptions of organisational support, and to assess the effectiveness of organisational change initiatives in improving these outcomes. At the end of the survey, respondents were given the option of adding comments in an open-ended text box.

MacKay *et al.* [2, 3] covers the quantitative data collected from the surveys in 2023 and 2024 respectively, including the baseline relationships between PTE exposure, organisational factors, and mental ill health, in addition to the changes over the last 12-months. Using data from the open-text response part of the survey, Schofield *et al.* [4] focused on understanding the thoughts and feelings of Fire and Emergency employees at baseline and provides more context around their beliefs about Fire and Emergency New Zealand (Fire and Emergency). The present report addresses changes in the views of employees since the baseline survey and covers their perceptions of the Whanaungatanga programme, as written about in the 2024 open-text responses.

It is important to note, that the views expressed in this report reflect those of career firefighters, non-operational employees, and managers; the experiences of volunteer firefighters may differ greatly. The open-text responses were unprompted in the national survey, aside from asking about any changes that have occurred, but were given in the context of a comprehensive wellbeing survey that included pointed questions about organisational capabilities, mental health, trauma, and related issues.

Interviews with operational management

2023 time point 1

Interviews were conducted with Group Managers (GMs), District Managers (DMs), and Regional Managers (RMs) and were designed to delve into the intricacies of psychological well-being within the organisation, as well as the organisational elements influencing elevated or diminished well-being. While the survey responses provided an understanding of potential factors contributing to mental health issues and how employees perceive Fire and Emergency, the interviews were targeted at comprehending the strategies being employed at a management level to bolster firefighter well-being. The effectiveness of these strategies and the feasibility of new approaches were also explored through these interviews.

Interviews aimed to capture all career managers (GMs, DMs and RMs) employed by Fire and Emergency in Te Hiku Region (Northland, Waitematā, Auckland, Counties Manukau) with additional interviews conducted in Wellington as a comparison group, and with one staff member from NHQ.

2024 time point 2

Interviews were again conducted with GMs, DMs, and RMs within the Te Hiku region. Interviews aimed to investigate their views on the Whanaungatanga programme in more detail and to gain more context on any changes that may or may not have occurred in the last 12 months. Further, they were designed to explore strategies and the discuss feasibility of new approaches that may be considered in future. Two further interviews were carried out with representatives from the NZPFU.

It is important to note that the views expressed in the second half of this report reflect those of operational mangers working in the Te Hiku Region; the experiences of operational managers elsewhere, and non-operational managers may differ. The answers provided by managers are their opinions and understanding of policy, this may or may not reflect actual policy and practice. Similarly, where views of the union are referenced, they reflect the perspectives of the two representatives who were interviewed and may not represent those of all union representatives.

Workplace interventions

Following the results of the baseline survey, a series of workshops were held with firefighters and managers within the Te Hiku region. Insights gained from these workshops were then used to design further interventions. Eight interventions were approved by the Governance Group to trial in the pilot region, as detailed below. Depending on their success, these were intended to become permanent fixtures within Fire and Emergency. It is important to note however, that at the time of the survey, of those interventions, three were completed while a further four were in different stages of being operationalised. As such, they would not be expected to immediately impact mental health.

1) On Friday December 15, 2023, the National Commander directed that the absence indicator be switched off across the whole organisation (not only within the Te Hiku region).

2) Initiatives to improve connections between managers and firefighters were identified, in particular meeting-free Wednesdays which allow more time for managers to visit crews/stations within Te Hiku. These were implemented as a regional initiative to scale and refine.

3) Work was undertaken to identify key tasks which managers could delegate to officers with the aim of giving officers more autonomy while decreasing the workload for managers.

4) Leadership training for managers was provided, including delivery of Non-Violent Communication and SpeakEasy workshops. This also includes an accelerated 6-month leadership development programme for Te Hiku managers (starting in February 2024).

5) Reward and recognition for firefighters was explored, including evaluating the feasibility of a regional approach to rewards, and a medal audit to bring presentations up to date.

6) Training and mediation for the Auckland and Whangarei union locals and regional management was provided to improve relationships.

7) Improving connections between uniformed and non-uniformed staff became a focus, via an induction process that facilitates more face-to-face time.

Methodology

Whanaungatanga Wellbeing Survey

Survey development

The AUT research team developed the comprehensive survey in collaboration with a technical advisory group from Fire and Emergency, the late Professor Robert Eisenberger (1943-2022), and Dr Zihan Liu from the University of Houston. Professor Eisenberger was an internationally renowned expert in organisational psychology, management, and leadership, best known for his pioneering work on Perceived Organisational Support (POS)[5]. The survey was reviewed by clinical psychologists and subject matter experts in first responder trauma research. While the majority of the survey is quantitative in nature (and covered elsewhere [2, 3]), the final open-text question provides respondents with an opportunity to share their thoughts or experiences that may not have been captured by the survey questions.

Survey testing

Pilot testing of the survey was conducted by the technical advisory group, firefighters, managers, non-operational staff, clinical psychologists, and several subject matter experts in the first responder research field. Based on their feedback, amendments were made to the wording, order, and presentation of survey questions.

Ethics

The Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved the application for ethics approval for the Whanaungatanga Wellbeing Survey on 17th January 2023 (reference number 22/320). AUTEC approved the amendment for the extended sample to include all Fire and Emergency employees on 2nd February 2023. The final survey was signed off by Fire and Emergency on 2nd February 2023.

An amendment request was subsequently submitted to AUTEC on December 14, 2023, to include additional evaluation questions for Time Point 2, this was approved by AUTEC on January 16, 2024.

The manager interviews received full ethical clearance through the AUT Ethics Committee, reference number; 22/362 Wellbeing of Fire and Emergency New Zealand first responders: Interviews/Focus groups.

Survey implementation

The baseline (time point 1) survey was conducted online using the Qualtrics Survey Platform in March 2023, while the follow up (time point 2) survey used the same platform in March 2024. The target population for both surveys was employees of Fire and Emergency New Zealand, including both operational and non-operational staff. Two distribution lists were created from HRIS information:

- Career firefighters and managers in the Te Hiku region (Whanaungatanga Programme Group), and
- All other employees (Control Group).

Invitations to participate in the survey were sent by the Fire and Emergency communications team to each list, along with the relevant Participant Information Sheet. Participants from Time Point 1 who had consented to be contacted were eligible for the follow-up survey at Time Point 2.

Upon completing the electronic consent form and two-step verification, participants were able to self-complete the survey online via the Qualtrics Survey Platform.

The baseline survey was launched with a soft launch on 7th March to a small number of stations and then expanded to the full organisation on 9th March. The follow-up survey again had a soft launch to a small number of stations on the 7t March 2024, before being opened up to the rest of the organisation a few hours later. Both the baseline and follow up surveys remained open to employees for a period of three weeks.

To encourage maximum participation, two reminders were sent to eligible participants during the survey period. Additional targeted reminders were sent to participants that started but had not completed the survey within 5 days.

Interviews with operational management

Regarding the interviewees and their role in Fire and Emergency, we have elected to provide no further details beyond those below to ensure confidentiality.

Independent support was provided via emails from FECA and the NZPFU - including the Auckland Local Committee and Whangarei Local Committees. This email notified potential participants of the upcoming study and indicated their organisational support for the study.

2023 timepoint 1

All career managers (GMs, DMs and RM) employed by Fire and Emergency in the Te Hiku Region (Northland, Waitematā, Auckland, Counties Manukau) and a comparison group from Wellington (RM, DM, and GMs) were invited to interview in 2023, along with a member of staff working at the National Headquarters (NHQ).

Te Hiku managers were initially briefed on the components of the Whanaungatanga Programme. Potential participants were provided with information about the programme and informed that focus groups/interviews would take place as part of the programme activities.

An email formally inviting managers to participate in focus groups was then sent to all potential participants via Fire and Emergency internal communications. Participants registered their interest in undertaking an interview by emailing Professor Grant Schofield. A reminder email was additionally sent to all eligible participants 10 days after the initial invitation to participate if there has been no response.

Focus group interviews were conducted by Professor Schofield and Paul Oswald between mid-March and 11th July 2023. Initially, interviews and focus groups were conducted in a semi-structured nature, informed by a consultation with the University of Canberra, and took around 80-120 minutes to complete. This process evolved as themes emerged after several sessions had taken place, with later conversations being guided to cover particular topics of importance.

2024 time point 2

Only managers from Te Hiku were invited to interview, along with two representatives from the NZPFU.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted by Professor Schofield, Dr Jessica Campbell, and Paul Oswald during April 2024. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner inquiring about each intervention within the programme but were also free flowing, enabling managers to bring up topics they wished to discuss. Compared to 2023, they were more structured such that particular issues could be addressed. They were also typically restricted to approximately 60 minutes.

Analytic strategy

As in the 2023 Qualitative report, the data collection techniques used as part of this research produced a massive quantity of open-text data. Because the primary objective of this report is to assess change, we have

focussed on differences between the open-text responses of 2023 and those of 2024, rather than providing an exhaustive list of themes and sub-themes raised by employees. Similarly, when analysing the data obtained during interviews, we have tried to highlight areas of change, in addition to noting several areas which are yet to be addressed and could constitute areas for future interventions.

Reducing the large amount of data generated to themes, sub-themes, and important consistent concepts through thematic induction techniques is a time-consuming and, ultimately, a judgement-based task. We have grouped the findings as we deemed most appropriate, but you, the reader, may make other connections because these topics are interrelated, and you will have your own experiences, especially if you are from Fire and Emergency. We ask you to read and interpret the results with this in mind.

Open-text response sentiment analysis

Qualitative analysis for the 684 open-text survey responses utilised sentiment analysis. Data were initially read multiple times to gain a holistic view, before being grouped into positive, negative, and neutral comments. Where employees wrote multiple comments covering more than one topic within their answer, these were divided into statements and categorised individually. The total in each category was then summed for each role type and the percentage of positive comments was compared between the pilot and control regions.

Quotations used throughout this report have been lightly edited to facilitate reading and to maintain anonymity of participants/individuals mentioned by participants.

Interviews with operational management

Transcripts and a summary of the main points covered were produced for each focus group and interview conducted. Analysis then utilised a deductive strategy, guided by the subheadings relating to each intervention that was put into place. A small number of additional topics were added as subheadings as these appeared to be common sub-themes across multiple interviews.

Results

Open-text responses

Although there was a large amount of variation in the topics that survey participants wrote about in the open-text response portion of the survey, there were several broad themes that were frequently discussed. These are summarised below.

Key findings

- There was a large shift in sentiment of firefighters and managers in the pilot region as compared to the control region; 63% and 47% of comments from managers and firefighters within Te Hiku were positive as compared to 18% and 16% in the control area.

- Perceptions were mostly positive about both the Whanaungatanga programme and the interventions.

- Firefighters and managers were especially positive about the meeting-free Wednesdays, which enabled GMs to be more visible on stations.

- Where scepticism was expressed, it was usually regarding the way that interventions were implemented, rather than the interventions themselves.

- Outside the Te Hiku region there continued to be large amounts of negative comments about wider organisational issues; these were extensively covered in the 2023 report.

- Employees in certain roles expressed much lower rates of positive sentiments. Other uniformed employees had the lowest rates of positive comments (9%) while many communication centre employees expressed that conditions had worsened in the last 12 months.

Summary of 2023 findings

Overwhelmingly, the majority of comments in the 2023 survey were negative, with many employees raising significant issues. Many survey participants expressed that equipment and training for frontline personnel was inadequate. This resulted in increased perceived personal risks, elevated stress levels, and a sense that the organisation did not prioritise the wellbeing of its employees. While many firefighters had positive experiences with their immediate managers, a key concern was the disconnect between senior management and frontline staff. The lack of training for managers was also frequently raised as an issue, along with the perception that many in leadership positions were self-serving in their approach and completely out of touch with the realities of their front-line staff.

A perceived loss of focus on core principles by Fire and Emergency was written about frequently in 2023 and many survey respondents expressed that the organisation had become overly corporate and preoccupied with its image. Many also expressed the belief that Fire and Emergency, especially senior management, lacked accountability and were often dishonest with both employees and the public.

The impact of repeated exposure to potentially traumatic events (PTEs) was evident, with many comments describing the adverse effects that it had on mental wellbeing.

Summary of 2023 findings

Managers expressed their concern for the well-being of front-line first responders and consistently emphasised their commitment to providing necessary support for their teams to perform effectively. While many managers faced their own challenges, they continued to make efforts to shield their team members from the more difficult aspects of their work. Many managers were clearly proud of the large number of years they had served with Fire and Emergency.

Variation in management philosophy between different regions was extremely evident and appeared to significantly influence the level of autonomy and efficacy trickling down to every level. Having a clear leadership structure with well-defined roles helped to improve efficiency and leaders showing trust in their team was frequently noted to have a positive influence on the work life of all team members.

Poor communication and/or lack of communication appeared to be a central issue, however. Managers noted often finding themselves caught in the midst of conflicts and unfairly being held accountable for issues beyond their control. This was compounded by unclear job roles and expectations.

Most agreed that there have been significant improvements in the culture within Fire and Emergency over recent years, but that there was/is still work to do, particularly with regards to the role of women and around mental health.

All agreed that the relationship with the (national) PFU was highly combative and counterproductive which lead to multiple issues. Managers were nevertheless keen to work alongside the PFU in a more constructive manner.

Although several managers possessed valuable insights into enhancing mental health and resilience strategies, overall, there was a clear need for improved psychological literacy among managers.

2024 update

Differences between the pilot and control region

Sentiment analysis revealed a significant shift in the attitudes of managers and firefighters within the pilot region compared to outside. While managers (18%) and firefighters (16%) outside the pilot wrote a low proportion of positive comments, positive comments dominated in Te Hiku (managers 63%, firefighters 47%). This lies in contrast to the comments in the 2023 survey which were mostly negative organisation wide. Such a significant shift within Te Hiku represents hope for future improvements, even though they may not yet be clear from the quantitative part of the survey given the short time that interventions have been in place.

Perceptions of the Whanaungatanga programme and the interventions

This section covers the overall feelings of employees about the Whanaungatanga programme in addition to their comments on specific interventions. As some interventions were not discussed in the open-text responses, not all interventions are covered here.

Perceptions of the programme overall

Both managers and firefighters within Te Hiku were positive about the Whanaungatanga programme and the interventions that had been put into place.

Firefighters were optimistic about the fact that Fire and Emergency was seen as, a) recognising there was a problem which needed to be fixed, and b) engaging with the programme and trying to make meaningful change. Even when there was scepticism about long term change, or uncertainty about any given initiative, there was a

sense that Fire and Emergency was heading in the right direction which gave firefighters hope. While in the baseline survey, firefighters frequently wrote comments thanking the research team for the opportunity to fill in the survey, in this follow-up survey, sentiment was more often thankful that Fire and Emergency was participating in the programme.

> *"Seeing some action around recommendations from Whanaungatanga **offer hope where there was none**, and that the organisation is listening and trying something new. The execution of the ideas seems forced but I'm open to the idea it's just the beginning and hopefully in time it will run more organically with the right people and processes creating a positive culture."*

> *"I am now of the belief **that FENZ [Fire and Emergency] management genuinely want to bring positive change** to Firefighters lives in both work, and home life."*

> *"**I am optimistic of the outcomes, something I haven't felt for ages**."*

> *"I think the fact that FENZ have taken the recommendations on board and are implementing some of them **gives me hope** and that's a positive thing."*

> *"I have been a part of a couple workshops and they have been great! At least we are trying to make a difference and trying things out. **Some may fail but at least we tried**…"*

Additionally, there was appreciation of the fact that the PFU and Fire and Emergency agreed on the shared aims of the programme which had potential to foster a more co-operative relationship going forwards.

> *"The fact that NZPFU and FENZ reps seem to be in agreement about achieving the aims of the project also gives some reason to hope that maybe changes will be able to be implemented."*

Meeting-free Wednesdays

Meeting-free Wednesdays were frequently written about in a positive light and were the most commonly discussed positive topic within Te Hiku. Firefighters greatly appreciated the effort their managers were making to spend more time with them and were mostly positive about their increased visibility on stations. Additionally, some firefighters felt that the relationship between firefighters and management was improving due to this, at least at the level of GM.

> *"There has been a **positive change in the way my leaders (Group Managers) have engaged with the firefighters.** By just simply stopping and having a chat or looking after the firefighter's welfare on the incident ground."*

> *"Managers and FENZ overall appear to be treating firefighters with more respect. **I feel there is a noticeable change for the positive occurring**."*

> *"Yes, there seems to be more engagement between management and firefighters. There is a **feeling of hope that the relationship can be mended**."*

They also valued the additional information gained from the increased presence of managers, as this curbed the 'rumour mill' and provided a better understanding of the managerial role within the organisation. This represented a significant shift from 2023, when many firefighters felt they rarely saw their managers and often

did not perceive their value. The increased visibility of managers helped clarify that decisions to decline requests often came from higher up in the organisation, rather than from their GMs. This understanding reduced the blame and frustration that would have previously been directed towards their direct managers.

> *"Also, it is fantastic having my immediate manager visit on Wednesday's. The rumour mill dies a quick death, we learn about each other, stories shared, and casual advice asked for and given."*

> *I've learnt more about what management actually do, and that a lot of the "NO's" come from higher up. With a closer working relationship, the "WHY's" information now reaches the Firefighters on the trucks who it could affect the most."*

Much like views towards the programme as a whole, even where firefighters questioned the sincerity of individuals, overall, the initiative was viewed positively.

> *"Managers coming to say hi on Wednesdays. whether forced or willingly, I believe it's good for relations."*

Nevertheless, not all firefighters were happy about the intervention. Some expressed that they felt Wednesdays were being used inappropriately by managers to drill them, or simply that their managers were turning up but were not genuinely interested in their crews. There was some indication that firefighters might be open to drills further down the line, however, this would require that a better relationship were first established. It should be noted however that the overwhelming majority of comments about Wednesdays were positive and that these issues appeared to be potentially confined to one or two managers.

> *"I've noticed that our managers are visiting more often without any notice. Lately our manager has been popping in and drilling the on-duty crew. To be honest, us firefighters feel uncomfortable in general around them. Whenever we see them it seems to be only for negative reasons. I personally don't feel valued or cared about by my managers, my mental wellbeing has taken a negative dive from recent encounters with my manager."*

> *"Managers meeting-free Wednesday is a shallow attempt- they turn up with lists - not a compassionate experience."*

> *"The Wednesday's (no) meetings are going to be and have already been used by group managers to test our skills not to connect with us. I see this as a punishment from them since they lost time to use their Wednesdays for other meetings. If this approach continuous it will do more harm than good. I understand that managers from time to time need to test us but to have already started with this is not positive way forward."*

Removal of the absence indicator

Across the whole organisation, the removal of the absence indicator was well received, with many employees felling like this lifted pressure from them, especially those with young families. In some cases, comments noted an improvement in their mental wellbeing because of this.

> *"The removal of the sickness score system has been a huge relief due to it being a system that does not apply any form of consideration to the health or wellbeing of the person involved, and also didn't take into account the amount of extra shifts also being worked by the individual. it was a flawed and inaccurate form of measurement."*

*"The removal of the absence **indicator immediately helps relieve anxiety around taking sick days when necessary**."*

"Stopping the use of the absent indicator was huge, with 2 kids under 5 that both attended daycares it was my role to look after them when they were sick, and I was penalised for putting my family 1st by people that I bet would've done the same."

***"The removal of the absence indicator has changed my mental wellbeing in a positive way**. I didn't realise how much I would worry about that when it came to taking days off work for sickness."*

*"The removal of the absence indicator system **has positively affected myself and those around me**. In the sense that we feel like we are not being "monitored" for taking time off to look after our bodies and mental health."*

Comments about no longer feeling forced to turn up to work when unwell also aligned with findings from the 2024 survey that presenteeism had fallen in the last 12 months.

*"Removing the absence indicator has made me feel a lot less stressed about taking time off work when I haven't been feeling well. **Previously I was forcing myself to come to work when I was sick or injured** because I was so anxious about how my absenteeism score would impact my career opportunities."*

Unfortunately, however, a minority of firefighters still had concerns about absenteeism being used as a barrier to transfers.

*"**Unfortunately, I still hear managers talk about absenteeism** being a consideration during applications for transfer which is really disappointing. The organisation shouldn't discriminate like this."*

There were a few firefighters who did not agree with the removal of the indicator, however. They preferred to keep track of their sick leave so that they could self-monitor. Interestingly, there was a suggestion that the indicator could be visible to firefighters if they wished to look at it but could remain hidden from managers to prevent the previous issues with it resurfacing.

*"I preferred having the absence lights on, kept track of leave I had better and seeing patterns for myself. **If anything, it's frustrating not having it**."*

*"I would rather see the absence indicator myself **but have the managers not able to compare myself to others**"*

Improving relations with the union

Interventions targeted at improving the relationship with the union were infrequently mentioned in the open-text responses, perhaps because these didn't immediately affect firefighters given that speakeasy and non-violent communication training were targeted at managers and local union representatives. Additionally, further aspects of the intervention had not been completed at the time of the 2024 survey. Nevertheless, there were a few comments from managers filling out the survey who noted that the training was a positive step

locally. Further, they felt that it was positive to see the union and Fire and Emergency working towards shared goals. Nevertheless, there was a sense that there was more work to do nationally.

> "Speak Easy workshop and mediation workshop between leadership and NZPFU at local level - **provide a sense that some positive can come out of those actions** but watch and see because the main issue is at national level on how both sides are interacting and working together."

> "Witnessing the combined efforts of our **managers and local unions to move forward and work together are great**! Hopefully it continues and doesn't fall over when the funding runs out."

Improving connections between uniformed and non-uniformed employees

The intervention targeting improved relationships between uniformed and non-uniformed employees was also infrequently discussed in the open-text responses, likely as this intervention was yet to be fully operationalised at the time of the survey. Feelings were mixed when comments were written. While some individuals thought that huis for new employees and ride-alongs for non-operational staff were valuable, others felt that longer-serving employees should be the focus.

> "NHQ hui for firefighters who have been in the job for a year. **Great to meet non-operational staff and see the passion they have for their roles** and the care for operational staff."

> "I see steps taken from non-uniformed staff - such as HR staff, to sit in on a shift for a "ride along" as a positive. Enabling understanding and appreciation from them of our day-to-day work and vice versa. Good relationship and trust building"

> "I believe the initiative of taking recruits to NHQ is pathetic and **aimed at the wrong personnel.** Recruits haven't been around d long enough to see how bad FENZ is. it seems to me like a [profanity removed] attempt to bribe them or pill the wool over their eyes."

Leadership training

Again, leadership training was not frequently discussed. While one individual was very positive about the steps taken so far, others suggested that more training was needed, both in general and also more specifically for firefighters who were not looking to be promoted but were nevertheless involved in training of new employees.

> "**Leadership Workshops for all ranks – positive**"

> "Can we look to have leadership type courses for the firefighters who don't want to be promoted but are still full-on training our rookies. Just to show appreciation."

More generally, there were comments from several individuals praising new managers who were having a positive impact on their team and the working environment. Unfortunately, this was countered by others who had the opposite experience of newly appointed or transferred managers.

> "I have had a change of direct manager. This person is qualified, engaged and is interested in his staff and the job of firefighting/rescue. This change has had a profound effect on my

*wellbeing. **I am now interested in coming to work and am able to positively make changes.**"*

Positive sentiments nationwide

Although responses within the Te Hiku region were markedly more positive than those outside it, there were still numerous positive comments from individuals outside the pilot region. Many respondents reported seeing positive changes within the last 12 months, some of which were attributed to the programme, while others were more general. Notably, there were frequent mentions of increased awareness around mental health. While some of this improvement was credited to the programme, the PFU wellness pilot was also perceived as hugely beneficial.

Elevation of the importance of mental wellbeing

> *"Staff are becoming more accepting when individuals express difficulties in their ability to deal with mental health issues. **The stigma that used to be present with these situations has disappeared.**"*

> *"My **Manager [name removed] has been extremely proactive in promoting positive mental wellbeing** amongst the staff, even trialling different techniques to deal with workplace stress. i.e. breath courses, cold exposure courses."*

> *"It seems that **due to the results of the first wellbeing survey, FENZ is more open and accommodating of mental and physical health, exhaustion and stress**."*

> *"Firefighters definitely have a wider vocabulary when it comes to talking about traumatic events at work, and **conversations like that are more common**."*

> *"Attending the psychological well-being pilot has made me **feel positive in making change to how we deal with people who may not know they may be struggling**."*

> *"**I feel more entitled and comfortable with seeing my psychologist** regularly, and no longer feel any guilt in regards to what cost the services I use incur back to FENZ."*

> *"My station is lucky with **the easy and immediate access to our local peer support firefighter**, who can easily push us up the chain for physiological help or counselling."*

Other positives

Other significant positives noted included increased salaries which have given firefighters hope for a sustainable career. While there were a few mentions of this within Te Hiku, this was more often noted outside the region. Additionally, there was an appreciation of the ability to use superannuation for home purchases which was felt to have been transformative for their future plans. Supportive management, and opportunities for professional growth were also perceived to have improved wellbeing, fostering renewed interest in work and increased confidence.

> *"The salary increase in the CEA has given me **more hope that I can stay in this career into the future.**"*

"Being able to use my super for a first home has been a game changer for my partner and I's future."

*"My Group Manager allowed me and a workmate to deliver targeted training to our brigade [details removed]. It was hard, but **it has given me a lot of confidence, which has had a positive and lasting impact on my wellbeing.** I delivered a similar talk to a [details removed] group I belong to, and one of the comments was that I've "come a long way in the last year". I have also made other life changes, **but this was also a contributing factor allowed by FENZ. I am grateful**."*

"Managers have been sending emails acknowledging work above and beyond."

Areas for improvement of the programme

Where there was scepticism about the programme, it was often related to the way an intervention was implemented rather than the intervention itself. Meeting-free Wednesdays was an example of this; while most firefighters saw increased GM presence as positive, in stations where GMs were felt to use the time inappropriately, this was not the case, as discussed above.

There were also multiple comments referring to the fact that it would take time to change and that interventions couldn't fix the deep wounds inflicted by the collective bargaining and the COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Additionally, there was a feeling by some firefighters that the organisation/some managers were insincere and were more interested in being seen to do the right thing than doing it.

*"I just hope it continues **because there is a long way to go to rebuild trust** within our organisation."*

*"**The effort so far in actions is more a box ticking exercise than a genuine effort to improve things**."*

*"I have found the changes brought about by the whanaungatanga project to have been potentially effective, **but then the way in which they were implemented has been less than ideal, which has a further detrimental effect on my wellbeing.**"*

*"More engagement from our district managers. **But still a huge disconnect between firefighters and NHQ. It's going to be a long road to forgive them for how they treated us during industrial action. Contract negations coming up; strap in……**"*

Additionally, one individual noted that although they were supposed to take part in workshops to feedback, this was never rescheduled after it was cancelled due to a call out.

*"No, I haven't!! **I never got to any of the meetings as they cancelled our one due to calls and they NEVER gave us another date.**"*

Wider organisational issues

Particularly outside Te Hiku, but also to a much smaller extent within it, wider organisational issues continued to be problematic for many employees. Outside the pilot region, a sense of not feeling valued by the organisation continued to be a key area of concern for many employees, much like in 2023, while this was no longer evident within Te Hiku. Many of the issues raised were similar to those discussed in the 2023 qualitative

report, especially outside the pilot region. As such, they are not fully discussed here, and only a small number of illustrative quotes are presented.

> *"I feel like nothing has changed at FENZ since the last Whanaungatanga survey 1 year ago. While I still enjoy my workplace **I continue to feel undervalued from the organisation with a lack of support to be able to do my job to the best of my abilities**."*

> *"I don't feel the organisation values my role. They seem to be spending money on the wrong things, not front-line staff. **That makes me feel undervalued.** It's makes me worry about my community, that FENZ is not providing me with the skills and resources to do my job, which is to look after my community and myself. **This causes me stress on a number of levels on most days at work.** But I feel supported by my fellow firefighters and officers. Overall I like coming to work to be part of the team."*

Many individuals raised staffing shortages as problematic, causing stress and leading to both poor mental wellbeing and poor physical health. These issues arose when individuals knew that they could not perform their jobs well and were having to work 80-hour weeks on a regular basis.

> *"**Lack of staff and a failing fleet are both becoming the biggest factors causing frustration** at work and neither problems will be resolved in the near future."*

> *"**Continuous excessive work hours i.e. 80+ hours per week have negatively impacted my family life.**"*

> *"Negative - pressure to work more with OT [overtime] texts all the time. No one working weekends and closing stations. Unknown work finish times, getting callouts late in the day when I have important whānau commitments with young kids."*

A disconnect with senior management, a perceived lack of accountability and competence within Fire and Emergency, and a perceived mismatch between the organisation's values and actions were frequently raised. Additionally, employees often disagreed with how money was being spent and what was being prioritised. Serious bullying allegations persisted, with concerns that processes were not being followed correctly. Some employees felt that the organisation still needed to apologise for past transgressions.

> *"Negative impact: Seeing people get employed in offices and **paid ridiculous amounts of money for a very minimal amount of productive work or positive return**, yet management is happy to make cost **cuts in operations and resources** where the service we provide truly matters."*

> *"**A disconnect from head office** who only seem to turn up to "support us" when in reality it seems more about them being seen or photographed on the front line. I just feel so angry and disgusted about the way I am treated…."*

> *"[positive comment about direct manager] **BUT, nothing from upper management,** constant issues with our fleet & trucks not being fit for purpose."*

> *"Conflict resolution. Utterly biased, lengthy, stressful, life ruining, accusatory and designed to protect rank."*

> *"FENZ seem to increasingly put aside the basic requirements of being an operational firefighter, yes they support us with mental health and wellbeing things, but the lack of*

*basic reliable equipment and training facilities, and continually breaking promises such as sorting contracts etc. are wearing very thin, there is a negative vibe throughout the organisation, it **appears to be that middle and upper management are far more important than the operational side of helping the communities**…"*

*"Funding cuts for training in the specialised roles, white water etc. They want the capability but won't give proper training or resources to support it. **The team members are at danger and can't respond to the best of their ability**."*

At risk groups

Other uniformed employees

Employees in certain roles expressed an especially high percentage of negative sentiments in the open-text responses. Only 12% of comments from other uniformed employees were positive in sentiment analysis, including other uniformed managers (18%), communication centre employees (16%), and other uniformed employees (including those in roles related to community risk reduction, training, volunteer support, and other uniformed roles not further defined (9%)). In particular, many other uniformed employees noted a lack of support, especially with regards to community risk reduction, and felt that budget cuts in the last 12 month had worsened their mental health.

*"No changes whatsoever. From my position within the organisation, FENZ is just the same. **Lots of hui with little doey**."*

*"Community Readiness and Recovery teams **are isolated, marginalised, not respected**. Most people including managers, do not understand what CRR does, and what their own role in CRR is, that everyone has a role in CRR."*

*"Changes the organisation wants implemented and that CRR teams try to implement **create resentment, mistrust toward CRR teams**."*

*"The **workloads and expectations for my role and others like it, have skyrocketed and FENZ do not have the systems in place to help me or my colleagues to do our job to full capability**, FENZ is so disjointed that none of the departments or systems talk to each other."*

*"Yes - the pressure and **additional workload has dramatically increased with no additional resources,** and constantly being told we can't do what is needed to protect the organisation and our people because of costs, despite solutions that actually save the org money - we have people in our organisation in extremely well-paid positions that are consistently roadblocking progression and change**. I feel completely drained, exhausted, burnt out."***

Further, other uniformed employees noted that they felt left out of the Whanaungatanga programme, as they had neither been invited to workshops, nor seen interventions addressing any of their issues.

*"**We have not been invited (overlooked) to attend the intervention meetings."***

> *"For community risk management teams there has been very little change- **the changes are targeted at Firefighters. If anything, the CRM teams have become more isolated and neglected in my opinion**."*

Communication centre employees

Communication centre employees were highlighted in the quantitative report as having the highest rates of mental ill health. They expressed a lot of negative sentiment in the open-text response question, especially around staffing shortages which they felt had worsened in the last 12 months, leading to even greater strain in an already difficult role.

> *"**Staffing issues have gotten worse in comms**., which means more staff are doing overtimes to cover... which has a flow on effect with staff sickness due to working heaps... which in turn brings me back to staffing issues..........vicious circle."*

> *"Staffing issues have had an impact on mental wellbeing. **Knowing that you will be working short-staffed just puts that much more pressure on you**."*

> *"**The staffing levels are still in dire straits which causes a lot of stress and disharmony.** Too many staff are doing too many hours that is not good for their physical or mental health.*

There was also discussion of the fact that while Fire and Emergency appeared to give lip service to the issues faced in the communication centres, little changed in practice. Some employees felt that continuing to talk about issues was doing more harm than good given the lack of action.

> *"FENZ is talking lots about helping the comcen with the ongoing issues we face **but at the moment it is all talk**. This is dragging on so much that **the talk is more harmful than good because it has become such a false promise**. I can get more done by going outside of procedure and process directly to the people in charge of projects than through feedback forms or my managers."*

> *"Same day, same issues. Same words, no action by FENZ. **They use the right buzz words, but things are no different**. Instead they feel like they are getting worse."*

Interviews with operational management

This section of the report delves into prominent themes derived from interviews conducted with operational managers spanning various levels within Fire and Emergency, in addition to members of the NZPFU. Each intervention from the Whanaungatanga Programme will be examined, along with a few other key areas that were frequently mentioned. The quotes presented in the following sections have been minimally edited to enhance clarity and ensure anonymity for both participants and all individuals mentioned.

Key findings

- **Managers emphasised the well-being of frontline responders as important, but acknowledged they could benefit from further training and induction processes. They also face their own challenges in managing their well-being.**

- **There is significant variation in management philosophy across districts.**

- **Poor communication and a difficulty in working in a slow bureaucracy remains a central issue. The lack of control over some of these processes leads to conflict for managers and problems in relationships, both with firefighters but also with the union and more senior staff in Fire and Emergency.**

- **There is acknowledgment of cultural improvements within Fire and Emergency, especially as part of the Whanaungatanga Programme.**

- **A combative relationship with the NZPFU remains an issue for some, but not all, managers. There is a universal willingness to work constructively with the union, which recognises the difficulty of the DM and GM roles in Fire and Emergency.**

- **Managers and the union both viewed the Whanaungatanga Programme positively. The union stressed the need for financial commitment to ensure its sustainability and continued impact.**

- **There was an especially positive reception of "meeting-free Wednesdays". Mostly, managers used this time to engage more personally with crews.**

2024 update

Perceptions of the programme overall

Much like the firefighters, managers were overwhelmingly positive about the programme, appreciating both the work done so far in highlighting current issues and the need for the programme to continue in the long term.

> *"**The whanaungatanga programme is fantastic. I think the work is groundbreaking.** It's probably long overdue. The results so far have been really interesting. And obviously, we have some major issues that need to be addressed. And I think the tone of it's all really good, it's going in a really good direction. I'm involved in the reward and recognition side, I picked that because I saw it as pretty low hanging fruit, that we could get some good results pretty quickly. And we have. So although it's identified, I think**, I think we're seeing the state of the nation, warts and all, a lot better than we perhaps have done in the past. And it was not something we could ignore."*

> *"Either way you slice and dice it, the long term view for doing business up here, it needs things like Whanaungatanga, it has to have that …..**anything that gets people side by side talking is always valuable,** the more they [firefighters] realise the managers are just human and the more they [managers] realise you know, that the guys have got a point, I think that's valuable."*

> *"**The whanaungatanga programme, is helping us to better relate to people**, in my mind we've, you know, we get trained, command and control, so we don't necessarily get a whole lot of training around people skills. So let's definitely seeing an improvement in the engagement for my staff right across the board… which is positive."*

However, there was also an acknowledgment that further efforts were required to address the well-being of employees, with an understanding that many were burnt out after the collective trauma of recent years.

> *"And I think some of these initiatives that have been put into play are really useful. But there's still, **I think people are burnt out.** I think that's a very real thing, whether it's recognised by the individual or not. So it's how we sort of move forward from that, without being able to take, I just don't think leave cuts it I think things have to change. But I'm not quite sure the vehicle of how we do that."*

Representatives from the local and national branches of the union also shared a positive view of the programme, recognising its value and stating that although there were still some gaps, it was realistically the best it could be within the current Fire and Emergency environment. They also believed that Fire and Emergency is genuinely trying and wants to support the programme. They emphasised the importance of continued financial support to ensure the programme's longevity and expansion nationwide. However, the national union also perceived that Fire and Emergency values being seen to be part of a global initiative and expressed concerns about whether the organisation would maintain its investment once the initial enthusiasm for the project had faded, and Movember's involvement came to an end.

> *"That's my biggest concern, that once Movember's out of the scene… I think they genuinely do want to do something about the wellbeing, **but they love the hype around being seen to be doing something amazing, and innovative**, and I just wonder once that global view and publicity is gone, how much they genuinely will have the energy for ……. image is more important to them."*

The national union also noted that while Fire and Emergency's concern about the survey report's revelations was genuine, it was primarily due to the negative light it cast on the organisation's performance. While the organisation indicated that the findings of the 2023 survey were a surprise, the union suggested this should not have been the case, especially given that previous research had documented the negative impact of adding medical response to firefighters' roles.

> *"**The survey report will upset them genuinely, but it primarily will upset them because it shows how poorly they're doing in this area**"*

> *"**I think they've known about this for a very long time**"*

Meeting-free Wednesdays

Managers were extremely positive about the "meeting-free Wednesdays," similar to the firefighters, noting it was one of the most effective interventions for fostering closer connections. One manager expressed that these

days without meetings had become their favourite, as it allowed them to visit fire stations and connect more deeply with the culture and personnel. They found it beneficial to engage with the crews on a personal level, learning about their lives, issues, and aspirations. This closer interaction also helped facilitate important conversations that some officers might not be having with their crews.

> "Wednesday is now with the no meeting. **Wednesday's is actually my favourite day,** getting out round to the fire stations and things …… I see it as a real positive thing to actually get, I guess, closer to the culture. And when you're there, then you can actually influence things…………… but it's great, I've got to know my crews and my people a lot more, about their kids, some of the issues that are going on, how they feel about things, their aspirations. Sure, their officers should be knowing all of that as well, about them. Some of the officers don't do that with their own crew, they've only got three, and group managers being there facilitating that conversation, they're finding out things too…. so it's good in that we're growing people to know this is what you should be doing to know your people."

> "Yes it's [meeting-free Wednesdays] been good. I've enjoyed it. **You feel a closer working relationship with the troops.** And I always ask them, you know, 'is there anything you want to ask me?' I give them that opportunity. And it's an also an opportunity for, for our regional leadership team to give us stuff that they want us to talk about. And they do, and we do…….. It's also a little bit of a pressure relief valve actually."

> "**I've enjoyed it and it's a good opportunity to talk about anything really** so once you cover off on the RLT stuff and ask them if they've got any questions then I quite often fire stuff back at them like, 'do you know how the on-call system works with the commanders?' And often, they don't. So we can talk about that a bit"

> "**What I'm seeing and hearing, getting out amongst the staff is a really good thing, getting to know the staff on a more personal level.** You You've obviously picked up the organisation's got a really, really strong culture that's just perpetuated over the years. And some of the unionism type aspects come through in that culture. **But to try and move culture of trying to bring change in the organisation, it's a really big deal.** And we don't do it well. But having management at the table with the staff… [GM name removed] has been doing it from day one, but he's on an island by himself …I think it's a really good thing."

Despite the overall positive reception, managers noted that the accumulated work from missing meetings presented a challenge, as emails piled up instead. The increased workload on other days was a downside of the intervention, but most felt that the benefits of improved staff relationships more than compensated for this. Some pushback from other parts of the organisation regarding the scheduling of meetings was also mentioned, but managers were confident that these adjustments would be accommodated over time.

> "So it's increased our workload. And I think [GM name removed] would agree with me and that the priority is our as our people…. **So I would much rather do a Wednesday and have the emails build up. But I'm afraid that's what happened.**"

> "I guess because we always prioritised what's in the bloody inbox. you know, and maybe we shouldn't and now we've got a 'no, we can't do a meeting on Wednesday, because that's the deal'. **And there's been a little bit of pushback on that [from outside Te Hiku, from NHQ]. It's convenient for us, but it's not necessarily convenient for those that are trying to schedule meetings. Yeah, but they'll get used to it.**"

The NZPFU also supported the initiative and even proposed extending it nationwide. While they received mostly positive feedback from their members, they expressed some concern about its long-term viability. Managers expressed a commitment to continuing the practice however, emphasizing the importance of being visible and accessible to their teams. They recognised that while there were logistical challenges, the opportunity to build stronger relationships and improve workplace culture was invaluable, even if the intervention in its current form did not continue.

> *"**I think the message is even if it's not carried on the message that we've received is they want to see more of us.** And that's healthy for them and probably for us to build those relationships. **So if it doesn't carry on, we really need to take on board as GM, that they want to see us**."*

Some managers also discussed the nature of the interactions on Wednesdays and how the time could best be used. While the idea of incorporating drills was unpopular, a few managers communicated that the suggestion to use Wednesdays for training and drills had come about due to concerns about declining standards; something that had been raised by the National Training Centre (NTC). Despite pushback, the intention was therefore to use this time effectively to enhance overall performance and standards within the organisation. Managers noted that feedback from the staff indicated a preference for keeping drills separate from Whanaungatanga activities, however, as has been covered in analysis of open-text responses. There were also general comments about teething problems at the start of the intervention.

> *"There was a misconception to start with……………… And we've got the feedback that actually some of the stations were feeling a bit like 'are they gonna go?' like they'd come for an hour, and it got a bit awkward…"*

> *"The concept was there, but just in some of them were like, 'well, hang on, they're turning up to do audits', so they were trying to utilise their time as well……"*

> *"We did talk about, or we have talked about perhaps introducing some drills on those days. The feedback we received today was, they don't want to combine whanaungatanga with drills… we've got a bit of an issue in the organisation with standards practical standards slipping. mumble..., we've identified it at incidents, and the feedback that we've had from trainers in the National Training Centre, and other training sessions is that the standards have dropped. And in fact, the standards of a rookie coming out of the training, and over their first nine months, it drops when they go on the next course, so that's a real worry to us. So we want to go out there and try and lift that bar again."*

> *"Maybe the scope that we wrote, and I was part of writing a scope for what we do on Wednesday…. But maybe that scope needs to be widened or modified slightly so that the troops now know that Wednesdays is also an opportunity for us to see the troops at their best…."*

Acknowledging that Wednesdays could not be used for drills without creating bad feeling, some managers did see potential in instead utilising the time for more officer meetings. They suggested that this approach received positive feedback from their crews, as it provided valuable interaction and engagement opportunities. Managers acknowledged that there had previously been a gap in holding these meetings due to the busy schedules and recent organisational changes, especially with Tranche 2.

> *"You talked about the impact on the Wednesdays and meetings and talking partly in this district…. what we haven't done is probably enough officer meetings. And we've just done a round which has been great, **we've had unbelievable feedback with interaction***

occurring, you know, we're starting to slowly get back into it. And I feel like we went through a bit of a gap where we were so busy that we didn't we didn't have that……. You know I think there's going to be some real change for the good."

"Now we're trying to redesign that a little bit too, and saying, well, actually, we could do officer meetings in that time, too, because we're engaging with our people."

Removal of the absence indicator

Few topics sparked as diverse a range of views as the absence indicator and sick leave within the organisation. Managers had mixed feelings about the removal of the indicator. Some expressed indifference, viewing it primarily as a tool for initiating discussions, while others saw it as a valuable tool for spotting trends and starting important conversations.

> **"Oh, look, you know, if it was driving them bananas, yeah, turn the [profanity removed] thing off."**

> *"I know them all individually and I know the ones that have got kids, I know the ones that have got working wives. I know the ones that play sport a lot …….. And so, yeah, the turning off of them didn't really make a lot of difference."*

> *"The indicator, I never really looked at it to be honest. So for me personally, no change whatsoever. ……… I know who the people who've got a problem. And I know the ones like [example name] who's never taken a sick day in his life."*

For some, the indicator was never viewed punitively but as a starting point for discussions.

> *"I never really saw it using it in a punitive way. It was just a monitoring. And it was the start of a discussion. If somebody I mean, we were meant to start the discussion if it went to orange, but we never did, because you'd be out there talking all day. So but you know, if it went to red, then we were meant to go and have a sit down, have a chat….. but before we'd have a chat, we would have a chat with the officer in charge and say, 'what's going on?' It's their job to know the crew and to sort of manage their attendance. So, yeah, I was a little surprised now that it's gone. I don't really miss it. If it makes things better then that's great….".*

Others acknowledged that it was sometimes used negatively, though primarily it was still a tool to start conversations. The local union also felt that having an indicator was fine to spot trends, and that it only became problematic when it was used for punishment or punitive reactions. Some managers were disappointed by its removal, feeling it was an important wellbeing tool and they worried that without it, they might miss issues with their crews.

> *"For me, it's a bit of a bit of a nonsense I never saw it is a point to create stress for firefighters. For me, it was a tool to go and have a look and see what's going on with our firefighters. I do understand that there were opportunities that some managers may have used to discount somebody from a position or something because they just weren't putting the shifts in at work. And it was the go-to place, it was really quick and easy……….. what it did do, it provided me with an opportunity to find out what's going on, …….. It was a conversation starter. So personally, I was quite disappointed."*

> *"So that is opportunity for a conversation. **Are they being bullied at work? What's the crew makeup there that's doing that? Have they become sick? Are they starting to suffer from a cancer or something?** And I've picked up a number of people [where I've said] 'you should really go get checked out'. And that is what we no longer have. [GM name removed] and **I have helped a number of our staff by looking at the absence** and going 'ah there's something going on here'. It's a little marker that gives you something and that's what it was all about. The absence indicator was an opportunity to have a conversation."*

Concerns were raised by some managers that turning off the indicator left the system more open to abuse, albeit by a small minority of employees. They also felt that the removal made sick leave harder to manage, complicating the monitoring process. This had serious implications for budget management, as high sick leave rates could consume funds otherwise allocated for training, leaving no resources for employee development.

> *"One day, they'll tell us to start managing that, again, and we'll go **'give us the tools**.'"*

> *"Ironically, our rosters people downstairs here are the ones that highlighted it to us that there's people that are ripping the system off. It wasn't us looking for it, they came up to us and said to us, we've got people ripping off the system again [abusing sick leave]. As **soon as the indicator was turned off**, they noticed it, the same people have been off sick more. [But it's a small minority] and the majority didn't do it in the past."*

> *"The other thing about it for our ranks is that **we're held accountable for our budget management.** If it blows out in overtime, but you don't have visibility of the absence indicator, you don't know where that spend is going. Because……, it gets spent automatically through SMS……………..And that screws our budget."*

More senior management didn't necessarily agree however, suggesting that sick leave could easily be managed without the absence indicator.

> *"And the managers, as always, will say to you 'ah, we haven't got a tool now to manage it', you know, my kind of answer is **you can still manage it**. It's still there, you can still see the trends of it. **You don't need an indicator to tell you when somebody's had 10 days off**………… it's always the same 20% It's always the same people, you don't need an absence indicator."*

This discussion also explored the rationale behind the initial implementation of the absence indicator. Previously, absenteeism within Fire and Emergency was notably high, prompting the introduction of the indicator to monitor this issue. The mere presence of the indicator, however, effectively reduced absenteeism as individuals self-managed, checking the indicator themselves reducing their absence, without the need for direct managerial intervention. With regards to its punitive use to block transfers, managers asserted that if GMs were managing effectively, they would already be aware of their teams' situations. They emphasised that individual circumstances matter; managers would support employees with genuine reasons for taking extensive sick leave. Managers also acknowledged that many employees were undertaking extra shifts and long hours, which needed to be considered in discussions about sick leave as their employees were already stretched and working hard.

Additionally, managers understood the unique challenges firefighters face. Unlike other employees who can work with minor ailments or remotely, firefighters must be completely fit for duty. Any injury, no matter how small, can prevent them from performing their tasks, potentially sidelining them for weeks. Managers acknowledged that firefighters lack the flexibility to adjust responsibilities when injured.

> *"That's the nature of it. You have to be 100% fit."*

> *"There is a difference, though, like, I had a [details of injury removed]. **And if I was a firefighter, and I and I was on had a duty shift today, I couldn't go to work,** because you got to put a glove on, you know, you got to pick up drain hose around, you know, I can type with a couple of fingers and still do my job………**We need to acknowledge that…."***

There was also discussion about the significant increase in sick leave this year, with February recording the highest in Fire and Emergency's history. Managers suggested several potential reasons for this, including employees previously coming to work when sick to avoid triggering the indicator, agreeing with the quantitative survey results [3]. Managers were clear that employees should not return to work until they were symptom free. Other suggested reasons included a high rate of injuries, and factors like more young children due to a pandemic baby boom, frequent school closures, difficulties in getting GP appointments, and the start of winter colds and flu.

> *"You know, people ring up and say, 'look, it's been five days, but I still feel blah, blah'.. I say, 'do you have symptoms Yes. Don't come to work.' I don't care if it's five days, or seven days or 10 days. **Don't come to work until you're symptom free**."*

Managers and the union (local and national branches) both agreed that only a small minority tried to abuse the system. There was a discussion around the (government agency wide) move from a 5-day sick leave allowance to a 10-day allowance, with some acknowledgment that unlimited sick leave might actually reduce absenteeism, as the 10 days wouldn't be seen as an entitlement. Others believed the change made little difference.

> *"Ah look, at the end of the day, **if a person is going to take time off work, they're going to take time off work.** All we're saying is 'we see you' and they gonna go 'good, you see me, I'm still not well, I'm not coming to work' so they still do it, I don't think it makes much of a difference."*

> *"**For me for that small percentage that cause the problems of not coming to work.** And it depends where you go. **The firefighters my stations have a high work ethic.** When they come to work, they know that they're going to be working…. but we might have one or two in the outer stations who just are never at work."*

Manager workload

All GMs agreed that the workload had not been reduced. While some had developed better management strategies, they still acknowledged it to be a significant issue, and others felt they were barely managing. It should be noted however that at the time of conducting interviews, while work had been undertaken to identify tasks which could be delegated to officers, this had yet to be fully operationalised. While managers felt that day-to-day workload had increased, there were also examples of unforeseen one-off tasks that generated substantial amounts of work and could not be anticipated.

> *"From a personal perspective, the continued work on the GM workload, **I think we're still running a little bit of a knife edge there. A lot of people probably not that far from overload.**"*

> *"**We have gone on and on and on about our workload.** In the major metropolitan areas, that hasn't been calculated and worked out. Our workload is phenomenal compared to*

what they do in the provinces. The provinces have also a different job really, it's a group managers role, but it's different."

"It [workload] hasn't [reduced].....Things like rosters… I don't care who who's on station, as long as we've got a bum on a seat, really. That's a very broad-brush view of it. So why not let the people who are doing it, manage it themselves? That's my personal view. Why am I poking my nose into the administration of operating a fire station."

Several specific examples of managing workload were provided, particularly regarding the high volume of emails. Strategies included not responding to those where managers were copied in (cc'd) and automatically sending cc and bcc emails to a separate folder. This approach was discussed in multiple interviews and focus groups. DMs also emphasised the importance of self-management, particularly taking time off when not on call. They noted that many managers lacked this skill and had not received adequate training in this area.

"I think [DM name removed], anything he's copied into he doesn't reply to that quickly. I think he only looks at the ones that he's the recipient for, which is good skills really."

"It's the self-management, you know, the 'hey I'm not on call this week, I can turn my phone and turn my pager off. I'm actually out of service' sort of thing. So to clear your head. Or if everything's getting on top you, you know, how do you…… we don't teach people how to do that well."

There was further discussion regarding the GM role not being seen as aspirational or appealing to firefighters. Many managers as well as the union representatives felt the role was insufficiently compensated, however, some managers believed the improved work-life balance at least in part made up for this, as they had more control over their hours and the ability to work from home. Opinions varied, with some noting there were no current issues in filling these roles, as all positions were occupied.

*"And in the next few years, some of us are going to be leaving. **And I don't see a lot of other people saying that's a really great job.** I want to step up for that."*

*"Just from a succession planning point of view. **I think we do have a little bit of an issue there; I don't see a lot of SSOs lining up to become GMs.** It should be more attractive than it is."*

"If you ask an SSO to come and do my role for six months, you know, they they're losing money because they're on huge amounts, *but then I can I can, you know, work my own hours, go home when I feel like it, I can go out you know, time owed and whatever, they're working 80 hours and thinking what a great life it is."*

*"It is a bit of a loaded question though because it depends on the motivation of the individual because if I flip it around, **I don't see any vacancies for any group managers anyway, that haven't been filled.** So there's obviously people out there that want to become."*

Representatives from the PFU expressed empathy with and concerns about the GM role, additionally highlighting that GMs often felt disempowered and burdened by bureaucracy, making the role unappealing. Additionally, they noted that the GM role had not been properly reviewed or updated for many years, further contributing to the dissatisfaction among those in these positions.

> *"**I think they feel neutered a fair bit of the time**, I think group managers in particular, but district managers feel very disempowered and they think that the union has more power than they do, which we do sometimes, but that's because we assert it, but they are caught in this bureaucracy, **I don't even know how they stand their jobs, I'll be honest with you, I couldn't stand it**"*

> *"The jobs haven't been properly reviewed and looked at all since probably 2013, so ten years… the group manager role is the [profanity removed] job in the organisation [more so in relation to the volunteers]'*

Managers emphasised the importance of team dynamics and colleague support in maintaining morale and motivation. Despite frustrations over areas beyond their control, they focused on fostering a supportive environment and encouraging teamwork to overcome obstacles.

> *"A lot of it and I can only speak for myself …… it's probably a **lot of it is to do with the team you work with** too you know, because I if we're all honest, we all have patches where 'this job's [profanity removed], I'll go back on the trucks.' You know what I mean? And it's the rest of the team sort of, 'come on, mate. **It's not that bad, you know, we're here together.**' And I know for me, that keeps me going."*

> *"We had a thing in the office recently talking about, you know, **it's about our attitude too, the cup can be half full or half empty. And if someone's down, it's about picking them up**."*

> *"I think that our frustration is knowing there that there's parts of the organisation that we can't influence in order to change. But we try our damnedest to influence and change what we can at our level, and it does become frustrating when we don't have as many wins as we'd like to………**we actually support each other to get through stuff, crack on with it.**"*

Managers unanimously agreed on the necessity of a structured induction process. Recognising the varying needs of different regions, DMs have initiated the development of regional induction programmes. The absence of a formal induction has led many to self-learn essential aspects of their roles, underscoring the need for a comprehensive, time-intensive training package. Managers noted that a thorough induction, ideally delivered by experienced GMs, would ease the transition for new recruits. They emphasised the importance of role clarity and the creation of guiding documents to ensure new managers understand their responsibilities and expectations from the outset. Additionally, they highlighted the usefulness of secondments for potential future GMs to cover leave and gain valuable experience.

> *"Induction definitely, ….. because I've had to self-learn this stuff myself, really. I will go you know, just go ask questions and learn about, but I'd say, it'd be a couple of day induction if not more."*

> *"Yeah, **we definitely need to do that**…… that needs probably needs to be delivered by GMs who've been around for a while, and they'd put together some sort of training package. But it all takes time and effort. And they don't have the capacity of the time to do it. **And it would make the transition easier for people coming into that role.** But the dilemma is just the capacity to do it."*

> *"I've just had two SSOs that have been up as group managers, for, six weeks, and both of them were six weeks, I think. And the whole, their whole attitude on management has*

*changed. **And they just can't believe the work that happens up here.** And it's all for the troops, they suspect. And then now they're now selling that."*

*"**I think what's glaringly missing for me is a proper induction package for someone who's stepping up** [to DM and especially to GM]. So great way to have exposure by the SSOs doing secondments, but we can't rely on that being the only way. …..There's still that 'what is my role?' Role clarity…………… And then there's also that part two, just a guiding document. The you know, what you must go to, what is discretionary, what, who you need to… all the stuff….. it's just something to be able to share with people before they even take the steps, so they have a real understanding of what's expected."*

Leadership training

There was limited discussion about leadership training, particularly regarding the Speakeasy and Non-Violent Communication (NVC) courses or the accelerated 6-month development programme. Some managers felt these programmes were not effective, suggesting they duplicated existing training and competed with current offerings, creating silos rather than fostering collaboration. However, opinions among GMs were divided. Some believed these courses were valuable for SOs and prospective SOs, addressing a gap in their training.

"I've had quite a few years involvement with peer support, probably 20 years and been involved in recruiting and training people in various methods of dealing with people who've got stressful times, those sorts of situations. I came out of that non-violent communication session like I'd just done day one of a counsellor course. Did I get any value out of it? Probably not? Yeah, it was, it wasn't it was more about built around your listening techniques. People go through trouble, don't give them advice. Let them work it out for themselves but be there to support them."

*"Yeah, so yeah, for me personally, because I've had quite a bit of other involvement and non-violent communication through the peer support **team I didn't get a hell of a lot out of it**"*

Training challenges included difficulties in getting staff to attend existing courses. Managers spoke little about this, but the PFU highlighted that longer courses in Rotorua were particularly challenging for women with young families due to the need to be away from home for several nights. Additionally, women who took time out for family reasons often found themselves behind their male colleagues in career progression. This meant that while male employees attended courses with familiar peers, women often did not, making the demanding courses even more daunting without peer support.

Reward and recognition

There were varied perspectives on reward and recognition within the organisation. Most managers felt that they were on top of it for their crews, noting that the previous backlog was largely due to COVID-19 disruptions. They highlighted recent efforts to be more proactive, with support staff taking responsibility for ensuring that rewards and recognition processes are up to date. Additionally, higher managers noted that they were exploring ways to automate parts of the process, such as the application for long service good conduct medals, to ensure timely recognition and reduce the burden on individuals who might otherwise delay their applications.

*"**We were pretty well on top of it anyway,** apart from the delay with COVID and stuff. ………….. Because our BSCs were managing that pretty well…."*

*"**We're ahead of the game. We've been we've been doing pretty well**, if I say so myself. We've been playing catch up for about two or three years. And [name removed – non-ops support] has done a great job. She's proactive now. So she looks, she has a spreadsheet. She orders what she can, [but] some things they have to order themselves, like the 14-year long service, good conduct. But we run Goldstar presentations, long service, good conduct presentations as needed. And we're pretty up to date."*

Different views emerged regarding the recognition process itself. Some GMs believed it had become more challenging to reward firefighters appropriately, while others disagreed. DMs discussed the logistics and funding of awards, acknowledging ongoing efforts to navigate these challenges despite limited progress on the intervention itself from the DMs' perspective. They noted that some restrictions were related to the fact that spending lay with the finance branch of Fire and Emergency.

*"**I've pushed those [medals] for decades to get those to people, but it became harder and harder.** It may have changed in the last 24 months because of the Whanaungatanga stuff. But I saw again, the bureaucrats the finance people eroding the value of that, those honours, those service honours, when they used to be sterling silver bars, sterling silver medals. 'No you can't have those one, are expensive! Just give them just give them chrome plated plastic'. You know, and that sort of thing."*

The discussion also noted that volunteer brigades often have better rewards and recognition systems than career firefighters. This disparity is due to larger social grants allocated to volunteers, who receive substantial budgets as part of their reward since they are not paid employees. This allows volunteer brigades to run effective recognition programmes with strong community involvement, posing a challenge in achieving similar outcomes for career firefighters with more limited resources.

Training and mediation with the union

There was extensive discussion about the relationship with the union. Regarding the interventions specifically, opinions were mixed about their effectiveness and impact thus far. As with several other interventions however, it should be noted that the main components of the intervention (including pre-mediation sessions with both the regional leadership team (RLT), engagement team, and the two local branches of the union, in addition to in-person mediation) were not operationalised at the time of conducting interviews.

Some managers expressed disappointment with the Speakeasy sessions, noting that the anticipated interaction between management and union representatives did not materialise as expected. They felt this was a missed opportunity for meaningful engagement. The NVC sessions received varied feedback, with some finding them somewhat enlightening, while others saw limited value. However, there was recognition that these sessions had begun to change thinking, particularly at the local level, though more work was needed at the national level.

*"**The speakeasy, I was disappointed with it.** Because my understanding was we were going to go there as a management group, and we were going to have the union group there. And we didn't, **we had one union executive there.** So from that perspective, that interaction was, for me, it was a **lost opportunity**. And it was pushed by quite heavily by the union to you know, we want to see management, we want to get in this room with the management, but it didn't play out like that. So that was my take on it."*

"The nonviolent communication session, for me, that was maybe a little enlightening, but nothing miraculously for me. But I don't know, the rest of the room was really quite positive about it."

*"I think one of the interventions with the NVC training and that has been, has been good. **Yeah, it might still work in progress, but it has that has changed some of their thinking,** particularly in the local space, not necessarily the [national space]."*

Overall, views were mixed on whether relations with the union had improved or worsened. Most felt there had been no significant change due to the intervention, with some managers finding union interactions still challenging. In general, it was noted that personalities played a significant role in these dynamics, with some union representatives being more positive influences than others. Positively, some managers noted that new, less combative union representatives had helped to improve local relations. Conversely, a minority thought the Whanaungatanga programme, if anything, had empowered the union to make even more demands, thereby worsening the relationship. Even though tensions were higher in certain regions, the national union noted that historically, the nature of the relationships within these areas had previously been much more combative and negative than in recent years. They further noted that to a large degree, managers and union representatives had common aims, even if they had different ideas about how to pursue them.

"They're the up and comers, the quiet achievers that people are getting things done' ………….. *'**So there hasn't been a step change. But there has been a change'***

*"I was very nervous after hearing about the [region removed] and how they sometimes treat people………… some of these union guys have been really good ever since we've sort of had that first engagement with them……….. **So yeah, I feel a lot more comfortable around them now**."*

*"**Yeah, I haven't seen much improvement.** ….. I attend the personnel meetings, including with the union, and they're still pretty hard work, actually. It does come down to personalities, to a certain extent, some are just a little bit louder, and more dogmatic than others. But I haven't seen a big improvement. [Name removed] is a good influence. He really is. And it's just his personality, really. Yes, calm and measured. Unlike others."*

*"**It's almost like they can say what they like and there's no consequence**. But if we were to say the same thing, we'd be on the mat. So I don't see much improvement there."*

"I think the union and some of the managers have always been able to work out that we've got common interests and common things we can fix, and we might just have different idea about how to get there, but there's a pocket for who it's truly personal for."

There was also extensive discussion about the nature of the relationship between the union and managers in general, and differing views on this. In some areas, the relationship was not as problematic, with local union representatives and managers getting along well, facilitated by an open-door policy and more cooperative union representatives. However, in other areas, the relationship remained clearly antagonistic. Some managers mentioned that even though they individually had good relationships with all the union representatives, this did not prevent the union from subsequently making negative comments in the press after an otherwise productive meeting.

*"**It's just a whole new world up here**. And I noticed that when I came up here, so with regards to the unions, I have an open-door policy within like, we don't have that same sort of union problem up here."*

*"There are still some rogue elements sitting in there. **You can have a conversation on a one-on-one basis and think things are in a good place, then the next thing you're in the media being quoted** as saying something and you think 'I didn't say that"*

> *"I really struggle with that, because I think with the associations and unions, individually, you can get on pretty well, there's no one person there that I dislike, you know. It's the way we then don….. this is the hat I'm wearing today, and then people change, it's a bit like tuning up and putting uniform on."*

Some managers felt that union interference was so pervasive that it hindered their ability to perform their duties effectively. Managers cited specific examples where proposed actions - which they believed would benefit most employees - were blocked by the union. GMs also expressed frustration that higher-level managers often acquiesced too readily to union demands, making it difficult for GMs to implement necessary changes. The national union acknowledged that in many instances, they wielded more power than the GMs. They justified their assertiveness by pointing to poor decision-making within Fire and Emergency and a lack of necessary changes. The union expressed continued frustration with the organisation implementing changes without proper consultation, most recently concerning the communications centre.

> ***"So to summarise our discussion and the point you gotta take is, we've got balls but can't use them, people above us have got no balls and won't use them."***

> ***"And to be honest, it gets to the point where managers are saying to people, you're better off to go to the union,*** *because they'll get [profanity removed] down. No one listens to us. It's just wrong."*

> *"We're sort of at the point of time now where we're sick of it.* ***We've actually got a job to do to run the district and they don't run the district, we do,*** *they're there as advisory to their union members, they don't run the district………………* ***the district managers meet more with the union than they do with us"***

> ***"We're in almost every possible pie, that's our diligence really,*** *there's a lot of stuff I'd much rather not be doing, but because of FENZs poor decision-making processes, we have to keep getting in at every level and agitating, if they had proper decision-making processes and proper engagement with us … we wouldn't have to be as assertive as we are"*

> *"A few months ago they decided some initiative, didn't speak to us, didn't speak to the reps or anyone, or the workers, and this email came down saying they had to do something…..[I said to the manager] 'it doesn't matter what the content of this initiative is, if you don't speak to them, engage with them, consult with them, that's the organisational stress…… how you implement something is just as important as what you're implementing.' So they haven't learnt"*

Additionally, there was some reflection from DMs on their own responsibility in contributing to the current state of affairs.

> *"I think it's one of those hard things, because it's like…. These things have happened, or this is happening, but taking that 'what is my action, or what is my part that I've played in that negativity'* ***I think there's an element of personal ownership that we all struggle with. So I think there's a little bit there that needs to happen.****"*

Improving connections between uniformed and non-uniformed employees

While this intervention was yet to be fully operationalised at the time of interviews, there was some discussion about improving connections between uniformed and non-uniformed staff. Although some managers felt that not much progress had been made, most were overwhelmingly positive about ride-alongs. They found ride-alongs to be very beneficial, although not new, as certain districts had already been implementing them prior to the programme. The national union also viewed ride-alongs positively but noted it was unfortunate that a formal framework was required to facilitate them, given their previous existence. Higher managers provided insight that while ride-alongs had been occurring, they did not always involve the targeted employees, likely due to reluctance stemming from past issues.

> *"Yeah, good idea. I mean, **I think it's a great idea.** When you look at people who come into the organisation, and can be here for a long time, and never actually get a close look at operations, you can understand them thinking, you know, they'd like to increase their knowledge about how it all works."*

> *"**Well, we do that anyway.** Yeah, like I mean all of non-operational staff in the region office as part of their inductions have all been out and had ride-alongs, and certainly anybody on my team on the leadership team certainly has"*

> *"Yeah, it has. Particularly we get regional people, even national people to come along and do ride-alongs. They do a lot of ride-alongs downstairs here…………….. it's been interesting, I've even had a member of the board do it, you know, so that **they get a better understanding of what what's happening on the station at the grassroot.**"*

> *"Because it gets because there's a sharing of what do you do in your job. 'Oh, work in national strategy, you know, and this is what we got challenges with'. Yeah. And then our **firefighters go, 'oh, wow, they're actually interested in what we do'**."*

> *"….breaking down those barriers. **So yeah, it could be more regular could be more formalised.** Yeah, definitely. It should be part of an induction."*

> *"There was an intervention, that was saying that OSCD, which is the branch that deals with like property, trucks, that sort of stuff, you know, would have a day and sit and have a conversation, that hasn't happened. **And I suspect there is a major reluctance on behalf of those people, because they have, they have had some very bad experiences** [context, abuse when they go out, mostly from the union]."*

Additionally, while ride-alongs were seen as highly beneficial, it was noted that other initiatives were also necessary to foster collaboration and understanding across different roles within the organisation. Managers in some areas noted that this was already happening, but this varied greatly.

> *"It's around creating opportunities for that two come together. And the ride-along is a classic case of that, and **it's an awesome opportunity, but shouldn't be the only opportunity.**…….. So things like honours nights, getting one or two of the [non-uniformed] RLT team members along to that."*

> *"Often our non ops people turn up [to award ceremonies] anyway, because [names removed], up until now have been pretty actively involved in the organisation of those functions as medal ceremonies. So they're always there. And often the other people like*

the VSOs, and risk management people, they often know, whoever's getting the medal. So they'll come along as well."

A minority of managers also spoke specifically about the efforts to improve engagement with community risk reduction teams and the role in general. While these teams are uniformed members of staff, they have also noted a disconnect from firefighting crews. Managers highlighted the positive impact of better integration and relationship-building between these teams and operational crews. Higher managers also noted that there was much work to do and that this was currently not well engaged with.

> *"Risk reduction people, our community readiness and risk reduction people that work in the district office, often they're not firefighters, some of them are volunteers but we've got a lot better engagement with our operational crews for them now.* **So they understand their roles they know the faces**, *and when they turn up to do a fire investigation at the fire. 'oh yeah, hey [name] how are you going?' you know, so that's, that's really positive."*

> *"But equally in the community risk management team…. So our risk reduction advisors are going out on Sundays as well to create that form of relationship, because a lot of the discussion was, a lot of the feedback we received was that it's a disconnect from the office ……………… S*o **we've been putting in a big effort into sending our team out there, which is quite good**. *I mean, culturally, I think there always will be [a bit of an us vs them mentality] because firefighters being firefighters, you know, we go through some tough times, you know, some dodgy times, and you get through the other side. And it's like, yeah, we were there, all those other people they don't matter."*

> *"They'll engage, we'll get a lot more out of them……. particularly in the risk reduction space which is not just that engaged with well across [area removed] … it's about getting out to schools to work, doing some school programmes, home fire safety visits, doing site plans. All that stuff that sits below supporting, a) reducing the number of fires, reducing harm, bit also making sure that they're ready if they do get one…….. we kind of struggle to get them motivated across that space."*

Other issues

Although not directly related to the interventions, several issues consistently emerged in focus groups and interviews, making them important to include.

Staffing

Staffing was a major concern. Despite some districts reporting improvements, many managers felt that little had changed in practice, even though the number of firefighters had increased on paper. Open-text responses revealed that several employees consistently had to work large amounts of overtime, often putting in 80-hour weeks. Managers acknowledged this issue, and the national union noted that Fire & Emergency had not met their minimum staffing levels for a long time. Some managers also pointed out that staffing issues had been anticipated but not taken seriously.

> *"**We'll never have enough staff.** Because our people are always training or on leave or 15, we've got 10% always injured on long term injury and all that sort of stuff plus your general sickness."*

> *"Yeah, we got officers doing the same thing [80-hour weeks], particularly SSOs. **We don't have a huge pool of senior station officers, so they're doing what overtime is required.** And then they're involved with national training or special projects or other things as well."*

> *"We've been in personnel for over a decade. At over a decade ago, we were talking about, 'we don't have enough people to cover the vacancies. We were shouted down. And now they disempower us and give that voice to the union."*

There were also lengthy discussions about secondments and the impact that these had on staffing levels. In some districts significant numbers of employees were away on long-term secondments (in some cases for years), yet still counted towards a station's numbers.

Fleet and property

Fleet and property remain significant issues for many managers. It was noted that despite being identified at higher levels as needing action, there has been little change on this issue. GMs and DMs continue to express frustration, feeling powerless to address firefighters' concerns. They also feel that decisions are enforced upon them without proper consideration of their feedback, despite claims of consultation. Communication remains a major problem, with managers highlighting a lack of transparency. One manager recounted an incident with their property manager, emphasizing that actions often happen without prior notice. This lack of communication results in sudden, unanticipated activities at stations, leaving officers uninformed and unprepared.

> *"Like, he's aware of it. And at their level, they can see that, but they don't appreciate that the pressures, **you know, we're in the piggy in the middle**. When we get squeezed by our people………..We talk to property and they go 'ah it's going to take several months to get quotes and blah, blah'. It's like, your inability to, to rectify what the issue is, you know, by going through fleet and property is frustrating."*

> *"Well, yeah, because what they'll say is 'I've consulted on something'. And the feedback might be completely opposite to what they're proposing, but it goes ahead anyway. But they've consulted."*

> *"I think the I think the biggest thing, and I had a conversation [with the property manager], yesterday, **the biggest thing is communication.** There's no transparency to see what's happening. It just sort of happens. And suddenly, someone arrives on a station. And they're here to do something… they go 'as the officer I didn't know that was happening.' But we didn't know either. So there's a transparency thing. Then I said, 'if there's one thing you could tidy up, it would be communication so that we can let our people know, well in advance'."*

Communication centre employee wellbeing

There was extensive discussion about the wellbeing of communications centre employees, given the 2023 survey data showing higher rates of mental ill health among them. Many managers, having direct experience working in or with the communication centres, provided significant insights. Despite this, there was a consensus that little seemed to be changing. Some managers were initially surprised by the severity of the issue, but upon reflection, they recognised and empathised with the numerous stressors inherent to the job. These factors, often unavoidable, are tied to the nature of the work. For instance, during incidents like fires, employees might hear people trapped in burning buildings pleading for help, waiting for assistance from crews to arrive. During

floods and cyclones, call takers may not know whether help is available or if anyone will come to the caller's aid. Managers also noted that communication centre personnel often continue taking calls without having time to process the traumatic events they just witnessed. Their role is especially difficult as they lack the physical presence and team support that firefighters have when responding to emergencies.

> "What was really interesting was one thing that really jumped out at me was the control room staff. Like, I wasn't aware of that. But looking at it and hearing that, and thinking about it, I'm not surprised, really, **now we're a lot more aware of what they go through. And what they what they probably carry**."

> "**They'll just take the next call.** They haven't even processed it in their head. And the next ones coming up, **it's pretty, pretty tough**."

> "The floods in Hawke's Bay was a big one here. Comcen operators [are telling people] 'get up in your roof space, get higher, get higher'. And then eventually the phone just goes dead, it's like, 'oh [profanity removed]'. **You've just heard someone die. So, they've had to wear that.** Whereas on the trucks, you know, it's more of a, it's in front of you, it's physical….. and you have a team around you as well."

> "At least the firefighters can feel that they can actively do something**… for those on the end of the line, it's really bad**"

> "Not being able to do anything physically. It's not like when you turn up at a job and you're actually gonna cut them out. You can have a go at it……………….. And then when the fire brigade do turn up and rescue the lady people involved, and the person goes off the call. **And then she just takes a breath composes itself and gets back to work**."

Some managers expressed regret for not having done more to engage with the communication centre teams, though they acknowledged the unfortunate reality of this situation. Others, particularly those geographically closer to the communication centres, made efforts to visit and check in with them.

> "I mean, we talk to the operators every day. But they're isolated physically from us. I haven't even visited the new location. And they've been in there three years, which makes me feel really bad**. And I feel like I know them all on a personal level.** But I've never gone in there and met the new staff, which is pretty poor really, on my behalf."

Other issues, however, were more within the organisation's control and could be improved. Staffing, although a widespread issue, was particularly problematic in the communications centres, leaving staff overworked and isolated. This concern was raised in the open-text responses of many communication centre employees and was shared by managers and the union. The union emphasised that this issue had been highlighted during the industrial action 18 months ago and stressed the need for measures to address it moving forward. The staffing shortages had multiple impacts; employees were working massive amounts of overtime and long hours, were unable to take proper breaks, and, after handling especially difficult calls, either couldn't take the time to compose themselves or had to do so in isolation, exacerbating their stress.

> "**Comms centre literally struggle to even go to the toilet because there's so few of them on**"

> "The staffing crisis in the comms centre has been ongoing for a while but it's actually been mainly driven by management decisions … 5 to 6 years ago they used to run every of the three comms centres used to have least 4 dispatches/ call takers on and a shift manager.

> *If we're lucky, a very, very good day in New Zealand is where we have 2 dispatchers and one shift manager on three different call centres".*

> *"There has to be an agreement that we will not go under x amount of people on each centre every shift unless there's something extraordinary… We need the ratios, more shift managers as well."*

> *"As firefighters we have the luxury of having lots of other fire appliances around with crews, so if the crew needed 10 minutes to take time out to go and sit down have a group chat or something like that, we can do that. **The comm centre operators generally, there's there is no relief**…. Supervisor says, 'come on [name], go back and have a cup of tea.' So you're out there having a cup of tea by yourself. What are you going to think about?"*

There were also insights from managers about changes in the way the communications centres were run, noting that they used to have more direct contact with firefighters, and it was common practice for firefighters to help relieve call takers when they were overloaded. More recently, they have been moved to buildings shared with the police. Both managers and the national union felt this change was negative, leaving communications centre employees isolated from Fire and Emergency.

> *"I was a relief content operator for many years as a firefighter. So I'm aware of what they do. **It was better when they were here. We could just wander upstairs and see them.**"*

> *"So the crews would interact with them, and when the overload bell would go 'ah [name of GM removed] up you go' [to help in the communication centre]."*

> *"Say it's a motor vehicle crash, they would take the 111 call and ……… then 'ding dong, ding dong' there's another triple one call coming in. So they've got that, do the job. It's a housefire or something and they have to move on all the time. **So they're left hanging, wondering all the time, what's happening, what's going on**………… they have to keep their mind and move onto the next thing. They do get affected, the want to help just like firefighters."*

The national union also discussed the inadequate pay prior to the settlement, which hindered the ability to attract suitable candidates. They emphasised the critical need for staff who can accurately record place names and dispatch the correct crews during emergencies, noting that individuals with dyslexia or poor spelling skills were not suitable for these roles.

Additionally, the national union expressed concern about future changes proposed by Fire and Emergency, particularly the idea of making the communications centre virtual. This change would involve taking calls from across the country, which the union argued would be extremely harmful. They pointed out that employees unfamiliar with specific areas would struggle to deploy the correct crews, especially in rural regions with numerous volunteer crews. The union believed this would lead to lower job satisfaction, as employees would feel they were not performing effectively, and could create dangerous situations for the public due to potential critical delays or errors in emergency responses.

Communication

It was clear that communication issues remained prevalent within the organisation, as noted throughout the report. This was further highlighted in relation to the purchasing power of managers at different levels. Some GMs indicated that it was impossible for them to make any decisions, or to purchase even the most basic items for their crews. In stark contrast, DMs reported completely opposite experiences, stating that GMs and Station

Officers had purchase cards allowing them to buy anything under a set amount. For larger purchases, they simply needed to call and explain their needs to the DM, who would then approve the request.

> "W**e can't even order a box of pens basically**. Especially if it's not the brand that we're supposed to have."

> "There's still that underlying 'where are our fire trucks, where's our PPE? Where our helmets where our boots, where's, where's….' It doesn't happen. They talk to us as group managers 'can we get a [item removed]? Can we get some? Can we' and you go 'erm, erm' **we're totally disempowered**."

> "If they [GM's] want to spend over that, it's a phone call [to the DM]. It's all it is, is a phone call."

> "But it's, it's about the reason why you're doing it. If you can justify the reason, then, you know, **we're the ones signing those things off. It's not anyone else**. So, it's just been able to justify what you're doing."

Wellbeing

Overall, managers discussed several factors they believed contributed to the high rates of mental ill health reported in the 2023 survey. A major factor mentioned by multiple individuals was the collective bargaining and industrial action, which they felt had significantly impacted the results. Nevertheless, there was also acknowledgment that many underlying issues had been present even before the union action.

> "Going back to what [GM name removed] said about the industrial action. Yeah, there was some pretty stroppy firefighters around I put their attitude down to battling the industrial crisis in negotiations at the time. But all of that was underlying there all the time. **And the industrial battle only brought it to the surface. So that has to be acknowledged that that is always there**."

There was also discussion about the cultural differences between new recruits and previous generations of firefighters. Managers felt that some of these differences reflected broader societal changes, with previous generations tending to be more likely to accept their circumstances without complaint. Concerns were also raised about the lack of screening for mental toughness or resilience during the selection process, despite the availability of tools to support firefighters once they are in the role. Despite this, research shows that the ability to cope with trauma exposure is mediated by multiple modifiable organisational and social factors [6-8].

> "As soon as I met him on his passing out parade, I though, this guys a bit soft… I transferred two guys to [station removed] and I knew the officer and I thought 'the officer's going to kill this guy' so I swapped them round and the soft guy went to another officer…… [details of traumatic incident removed] … that was the key, that was the pivot that this guy said 'that's too much. But I saw that on the very first day I met him."

> "They've everything you've got in place as a catch net after the event. And we don't have any sort of psychological stream streaming of new people, screening of new people coming into the job, do we know that?"

Additionally, insights were shared about the significant impact of introducing a medical role, which changed the nature of the job for firefighters. Differences in training methods were also noted; while past training was more

in-person and practical, current training often includes online courses, which may not suit the practical nature of firefighters. Some managers also observed a decline in camaraderie compared to previous times, though it should be noted that this was still suggested to be high when measured in the 2024 survey.

Managers in one district highlighted effective approaches they had implemented, while the local union emphasised the need for more preventative measures, including ongoing mental health check-ups and job debriefs after traumatic calls.

> *"[place name removed] has a lot of weird stuff, hanging, suicide, just different places, but we're really hot on being in touch with our brigade but also giving them a day or two to come down off the adrenaline so that we can follow up with them as well. Now people at [place name removed] have a psychologist guy that comes in. He sets up shop there for the day and it's just an open-door thing. Yes, it's quite common…..* **Anyone who wants to talk to him can just pop and have a chat. Be quite open about it. There's no stigma or anything. We're way past that***."*

Future of the programme

At the conclusion of several interviews, there was some discussion about future interventions and areas that should be prioritised. The research team identified a clear need for increased psychological literacy to better educate managers and provide more training on managing team members with mental health issues. Additionally, it was noted that nothing is currently being done for the mental health of managers themselves, highlighting a critical area for future focus. Enhancing induction processes and addressing manager workload were also emphasised as key areas needing improvement, these have been discussed more extensively in previous sections of the report.

The national union stressed the importance of addressing tangible issues that impact mental health, such as ensuring access to reliable equipment. For example, knowing that a fire truck's pump has failed multiple times can add a significant level of stress for firefighters. The local union also highlighted the necessity of continuous training for managers and SSOs/SOs, advocating for ongoing development rather than one-time sessions. They emphasised that a better selection and development process for managers is crucial, as the role is not suitable for everyone.

> *"Some things need urgent prioritisation because if we got all of those things addressed, or well on their way to being addressed, that in itself would do a lot [to improve mental health], right"*

It was also noted by the national union that there is significant variation in what their members in different stations and different regions would need moving forwards. As such, they would be expected to give different answers if asked about desirable future interventions. Some would primarily be concerned with ensuring their buildings are safe and structurally sound, such as being earthquake-proof, while others would prioritise the removal of hazards like asbestos and black mould. For them, these physical issues would likely overshadow personnel-related issues that others might focus on. This variation highlights the need for tailored solutions to address the specific concerns of each district or region, rather than interventions which are the same across the whole country.

> *"**So, rolling out Whanaungatanga across the country,** and those workshops and stuff like that, **there will be huge variation in responses as to what they want done."**

One positive intervention that is already underway involves the development and review of local operating procedures (LOPs) to complement national policies and procedures. Managers spoke positively about this

initiative, emphasizing its importance in addressing local contexts where national procedures may not be fully applicable. This process involves engaging with SSOs and other personnel to review and develop new LOPs, ensuring they are practical and effective on the ground. By involving employees in decision-making, the organisation aims to create procedures that are not only theoretically sound, but also workable in real-life situations. This collaborative approach should continue, as it fosters a sense of ownership and practicality among the staff.

> *"They are guided and supported to be able to write, because it has to work for them. So we're involving them in the decision making about this is, you tell us what you need to do, to for this to work on the ground, like rehabilitation on the fire ground, for instance,, all of them know what to do, but put it in a procedure that then everyone can understand, so it can actually work on the day.* **So, we're involving them,** *historically, it was always developed up here [higher part of the organisation]. So, here's your procedure, go do it, and that might not necessarily work.* **So, it's part about engaging and having them involved in the decision making***."*

Discussion & Recommendations

The Whanaungatanga Programme has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from firefighters, managers, and union representatives. Notably, there has been a significant shift in the responses of firefighters and managers within Te Hiku in the open-text portion of the survey. This reflects a significant increase in positive sentiment and hope for future improvements, despite the lack of substantial changes in quantitative indicators at this stage.

A notable success of the programme is the introduction of "meeting-free Wednesdays," which has facilitated more meaningful interactions between managers and their teams. These interactions have generally been well-received, fostering stronger relationships and improving workplace morale. However, in instances where the feedback is less positive, there is a need for clearer expectations and adjustments to ensure that these interactions remain beneficial.

As would be expected, the programme's impact outside the pilot region remains limited. Many comments from these areas are still negative, echoing the same issues identified in the baseline qualitative report. This highlights the need for ongoing efforts to address these concerns and extend the benefits of the Whanaungatanga Programme across all regions. Nevertheless, there was appreciation for removal of the absence indicator and still some sense that the culture was beginning to shift regarding the importance of good mental wellbeing.

For the pilot region, continued commitment to the programme is crucial. Without sustained support and visible progress, there is a risk that the progress made in decreasing scepticism could be reversed, potentially causing even greater harm to the organisational culture. Ensuring the long-term success of the Whanaungatanga Programme will require consistent dedication to addressing the concerns and needs of all employees, fostering an environment of trust, connection, and psychological wellbeing.

Specific recommendations

Enhance managerial training and support:

- **Psychological literacy training:** Provide more training for managers around psychological literacy to better support their teams' mental health needs.
- **Thorough inductions for GMs and managers**: Implement comprehensive induction programmes for new GMs and other managerial positions. This should include multiple days of training delivered by experienced personnel in the relevant roles, and opportunities for potential future GMs to gain experience by covering leave and temporarily taking on the role. Documents similar to a GM handbook would also be highly beneficial.

Workload reduction initiatives:

- **Delegation and role clarity:** Develop initiatives to reduce the workload for GMs, emphasizing role clarity and delegating tasks to SOs and SSOs where possible. Despite being a planned intervention, as noted, this has yet to be implemented fully and remains a priority.

Support for communication centre employees:

- **Staffing improvements:** Address the high pressure on communication centre employees by ensuring adequate staffing levels, including shift managers. This would reduce the pressure on employees and provide more capacity for them to take breaks after particularly difficult calls.

Improved communication:

- **Clear, open, and timely communication**: Ensure communication within the organisation is clear, open, and timely. Make decision-making processes transparent and ensure that staff consultations have a genuine impact on outcomes, rather than involving employees only after decisions have already been made.

Continuation and expansion of meeting-free Wednesdays:

- **Clarification of objectives:** Continue the "meeting-free Wednesdays" initiative, as it has been beneficial in starting to repair the disconnect between firefighters and middle management. However, clearer communication about the aims of these Wednesdays is necessary to ensure they are used effectively. While officer meetings can be productive, starting drills immediately may not be beneficial until better relationships are established. The scope of these days could be broadened beyond informal chats to include mutually beneficial activities, allowing GMs to remain productive.
- **Roll-out beyond Te Hiku:** Consider extending "meeting-free Wednesdays" to other regions, as it would likely benefit the entire organisation.

Focus on overlooked groups:

- **Inclusion of other uniformed employees:** Strive to ensure that other uniformed employees, particularly those in community risk reduction roles, feel recognised and appreciated. Actively involve them in decision-making processes and clearly communicate budget constraints and expectations.
- **Foster relationships:** Continue and expand efforts to familiarise firefighting crews with other uniformed roles such as Volunteers Support Officers and Risk Reduction personnel. This will foster better relationships and help firefighters understand the vital roles these employees play within the organisation.

Long-term commitment and accountability:

- **Sustained investment in personnel:** Ensure the long-term continuation of the Whanaungatanga Programme by committing to ongoing financial investment in people. Maintain accountability and responsibility for fully implementing interventions as intended, avoiding shortcuts that could undermine effectiveness.

Learning from successful regions:

- **Best practice emulation**: Attempt to emulate the practices of regions where teams are more harmonious, and firefighters are generally happier. This includes ensuring easier access to GMs, DMs, and RMs and demonstrating a genuine care for personnel.

By implementing these recommendations, Fire and Emergency NZ can build on the positive momentum of the Whanaungatanga Programme, fostering a supportive and well-connected organisational culture across all regions.

Abbreviations and Terms

DM	District Manager
ELT	Executive Leadership Team
FECA	Fire Emergency Commanders Association
GM	Group Manager
NHQ	National headquarters
NTC	National Training Centre
NZPFU	New Zealand Professional Firefighters union
Potentially Traumatic Event (PTE)	An event that meets the diagnostic definition of a "trauma," as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (5th Edition; DSM-5). The DSM-5 definition of trauma requires "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (p. 271). Not all exposures to PTEs result in trauma.
RM	Regional Manager
UFBA	United Fire Brigades' Association

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