



▲
back

All about community

Western Australia is a big place and if somewhere feels like it's hours away from anywhere, it's usually because it is.

Many WA regional towns are remote and isolated with relatively small populations. Volunteers are the true champions of these communities, ensuring the delivery of vital services.

Regional volunteering can take on many forms and roles, but all are based around helping out the community and making sure the local people have access to important services and amenities.

St John Ambulance has more than 3200 regional and remote volunteers who selflessly contribute their time and expertise by providing an ambulance service to all Western Australians, regardless of geographical location.

St John Ambulance Volunteer Member Service Manager Kate Fina said Australia had a very strong culture of volunteering which was quite unusual and very special.

"People have to help each other out," she said. "If we didn't we wouldn't survive, and the capacity to live in country and regional WA would diminish."

Ms Fina said even though volunteering for St John Ambulance could be challenging, people were willing to volunteer to ensure they had ambulance coverage.

"We know saving lives is all about first response – it makes all the difference. Our country volunteers are the first responders in their town and everyday they save lives," she said.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) utilises more than 30,000 volunteers around WA to provide emergency and support services. In addition to frontline operational roles, volunteers also undertake a range of tasks such as radio communications, community education, volunteer recruitment and catering.

DFES Volunteer and Youth Services Manager Wayne Fanderlinden said DFES volunteers were critical to the safety of WA communities.

"We couldn't provide that same level of protection and service to WA communities without volunteers, because most of our regional locations have only volunteer workers," he said.

But regional volunteering is not without its challenges – due in the most part to isolation, according to Ms Fina.

"A lot of towns don't have a large population to draw volunteers from, and often people who do the volunteering are doing other roles within the town, so that's quite challenging," she said.

Mr Fanderlinden said other issues that came with regional volunteering included decreasing populations in some small communities, ageing populations, and fluctuating population numbers due to fly-in fly-out workers.

The rewards can be huge though, with volunteers making new friends, becoming part of their community and gaining new skills and experience.

"For regional volunteers, so often the people they are helping are people they know. That takes a lot of courage and real care," Ms Fina said.

"We have a lot to be thankful for and National Volunteer Week gives us the chance to do that."

