

Peer Support Officer

Information Kit



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1. What is FESSN?

The Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN) incorporates the services previously known as FireCare and EmBrace – which were initially established in 1992 in order to provide support for the members of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) and State Emergency Service (SES) respectively.

As a result of integrating QFES, the support services merged to form FESSN. FESSN aims to promote well-being for all QFES members and their immediate family, to deal with the challenges of the unique role of emergency services work.

FESSN incorporates the following core services:

- Critical Incident Response & Management (CIRM) - support for members before, during and following critical incidents, activations and deployments.
- Peer Support Program - a team of specially selected and trained QFES colleagues who can offer support and link to additional assistance if needed.

QFES hosts two peer support programs:

- **FireCare** - support for members associated with FRS & RFS
- **SESCare** - support for members associated with SES

The QFES Peer Support Program supports the whole QFES workforce including personnel from all three services, capabilities and corporate divisions.

- Confidential Professional Counselling - an independent network of highly qualified mental health professionals, selected for their experience and work within Fire and Emergency Services, who are available to all QFES members (staff and volunteers) and their immediate family.

FESSN also provides a 24 Hour Telephone Counselling Free Call 1800 805 980. This service is pager operated and a Counsellor will return calls as soon as possible.

- CareFULL Leaders - Leader and Team Development services.

2. What is the role of a Peer Support Officer?

- Peer Support Officers (PSOs) are QFES members who are specially trained to assist and support colleagues, with either work-related or personal difficulties.
- PSOs must be active QFES members, who have successfully completed the PSO selection and training process, and have been assessed as having the appropriate personal skills to fulfil the role.
- PSOs are located across all regions throughout Queensland and are based in a range of positions (i.e. roles and ranks) throughout QFES.
- The recruitment, training and supervision of PSOs is governed by FESSN.

2.1 Operational Interface and Reporting Function

PSOs have no operational authority or status other than that which they would have in their normal duties. PSOs are under supervision locally by a professional counsellor (Regional Supervision Counsellor) for their support role and are accountable to the FESSN Co-ordinator, Peer Support Programs on a state-wide basis.

2.2 Key Responsibilities

2.2.1 Supporting Others

- Provide support and assistance to colleagues. This often means providing a “listening ear” if the person wishes to talk about their experience, and/or applying some basic stress management strategies (which are learned during the training).
- Provide information and support to refer people to additional resources if required, including professional counselling, community agencies, websites etc.
- Organise and assist as a team member under the direction of the Regional Supervision Counsellor such as in times of disaster response and recovery.
- Advise the Regional Peer Support Coordinator, Regional Supervision Counsellor or FESSN Management Team of any local issues that may have regional impact.
- Undertake any other duties relating to peer support provision as required e.g. upon request and including the provision of information sessions at various stations.

2.2.2 Supervision and Professional Development

To maintain their role, PSOs are required to participate in face-to-face regional Supervision at least once each quarter (i.e. every 3 months).

Note: If this is unable to occur, liaise with your RSC.

2.2.3 Ethics and Standards

It is important for PSOs to:

- maintain the integrity of the role by modeling appropriate workplace behaviour at all times
- maintain a high level of ethical behaviour and adherence to FESSN’s confidentiality principles
- Comply with the standards and expectations as outlined in the “PSO Guidelines”, Code of Ethics and “PSO Statement of Agreement”.

2.2.4 Promoting Staff Awareness

- Actively encourage members to participate in education and awareness programs to promote wellbeing.
- Disseminate information regarding FESSN e.g. all stations/brigades/groups have access to current contact lists for PSOs and Counsellors.

2.2.5 Administration

- Complete regular entries and maintain current contact details on the FESSN database.
- Complete any other records of accountability that may be required.

It must be remembered that operationally, PSOs report to their normal chain of command. PSOs are a Regional and Area resource and as such, are required to work collaboratively with the operational chain of command.

Please note that the commitment from the PSO and the FESSN is for a period of 3 years. PSOs are required to be re-appointed every 3 years to continue in the role. Re-appointment is subject to meeting the requirements outlined in the "PSO Guidelines".

*Please note that a PSO does **NOT** have a role in the following:*

- *disciplinary or industrial issues*
- *performance management issues*
- *conducting group psychological debriefs/support sessions (but they may attend if requested)*
- *advocacy or mediation between members of the executive and the QFES member*
- *providing support for children or family members – PSOs refer these people to Counsellors for specialised support*
- *liaising with Managers on behalf of QFES members relating to operational matters.*

3. What qualities are required to be a PSO?

- Current active member of QFES (whether paid position or voluntary – QFES, FRS, RFS or SES) with a minimum of 2 years experience.
- Demonstration of a genuine commitment to support their colleagues.
- Possession of the capacity to obtain a high level of interpersonal communication skills.
- An ability to model appropriate workplace behaviour at all times.
- An ability to maintain confidentiality.
- Responsibility for own self-care and ability to implement healthy coping strategies.

4. What can I expect from my PSO experience?

- Many of our PSOs have described the experience as being rewarding, challenging, enjoyable, satisfying, enriching, and interesting.
- Satisfaction through helping others.
- To be part of a cohesive and supportive team of PSOs.
- FESSN will provide training, guidance and ongoing support/supervision to PSOs.

5. How do I apply?

The selection process involves successful completion of a number of phases, these include:

Mandatory Requirements

- Minimum two years QFES experience.
- Current and active QFES member.

Phase 1: Application

Online Application

- If you have been a QFES member for at least two years and are interested in becoming a PSO, please complete the [Online Application](#) and follow the steps outlined through the online application process.

Speak with a Current QFES PSO

- In order to gain a deeper understanding about the role of a PSO, it is a good idea to speak with a PSO about their experiences.

Nominate Three Referees

- All applicants are to nominate three referees.

One of whom is a direct supervisor with QFES, and two others who are active QFES colleagues.

- The FESSN Coordinator Peer Support Programs will review all applications, and communicate with referees to obtain and clarify the evaluations.

Note: Completion of phase one does not automatically result in selection to attend the training course.

Phase 2: Interview

Attend Interview

- The second phase of the selection process to become a PSO includes attendance at an interview and successful completion of an ethics screening and regional endorsement.
- The interview will be facilitated by the Regional Supervision Counsellor for the relevant region/area.
- The applicant will be notified when and where the interview will take place.
- For remote locations, telephone interviews will be arranged.
- Due to the complexity of the selection process, the FESSN Management Team may not be able to provide individual feedback to each applicant.
- All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application.

Ethics Screening and Regional Endorsement

All applications will undergo an ethics screening and regional endorsement.

Invitation to Attend the Peers Support Foundation Training Course

If you have successfully completed phase 2 of the selection process, you will be invited to attend the 5 ½ day training course.

Acceptance to attend the course does not guarantee appointment as a PSO.

Phase 3: Attendance at the Peer Support Foundation Training and Assessment Course

Attend the 5 ½ Day Training Course

The peer support training course builds upon the personal qualities, skills and abilities of the individual with the inclusion of advanced training on topics including:

- interpersonal communication
- mental health and well-being
- supporting QFES staff in the managing well-being.

At the completion of the course, each PSO will undertake an assessment and review by the FESSN Management Team.

Phase 4: Probation & Endorsement

Six Month Probation period

- Every new PSO will be required to undertake a minimum of 6 months probationary period where the PSO will be mentored by the Regional Supervision Counsellor and PSO team.

Attend Review Interview

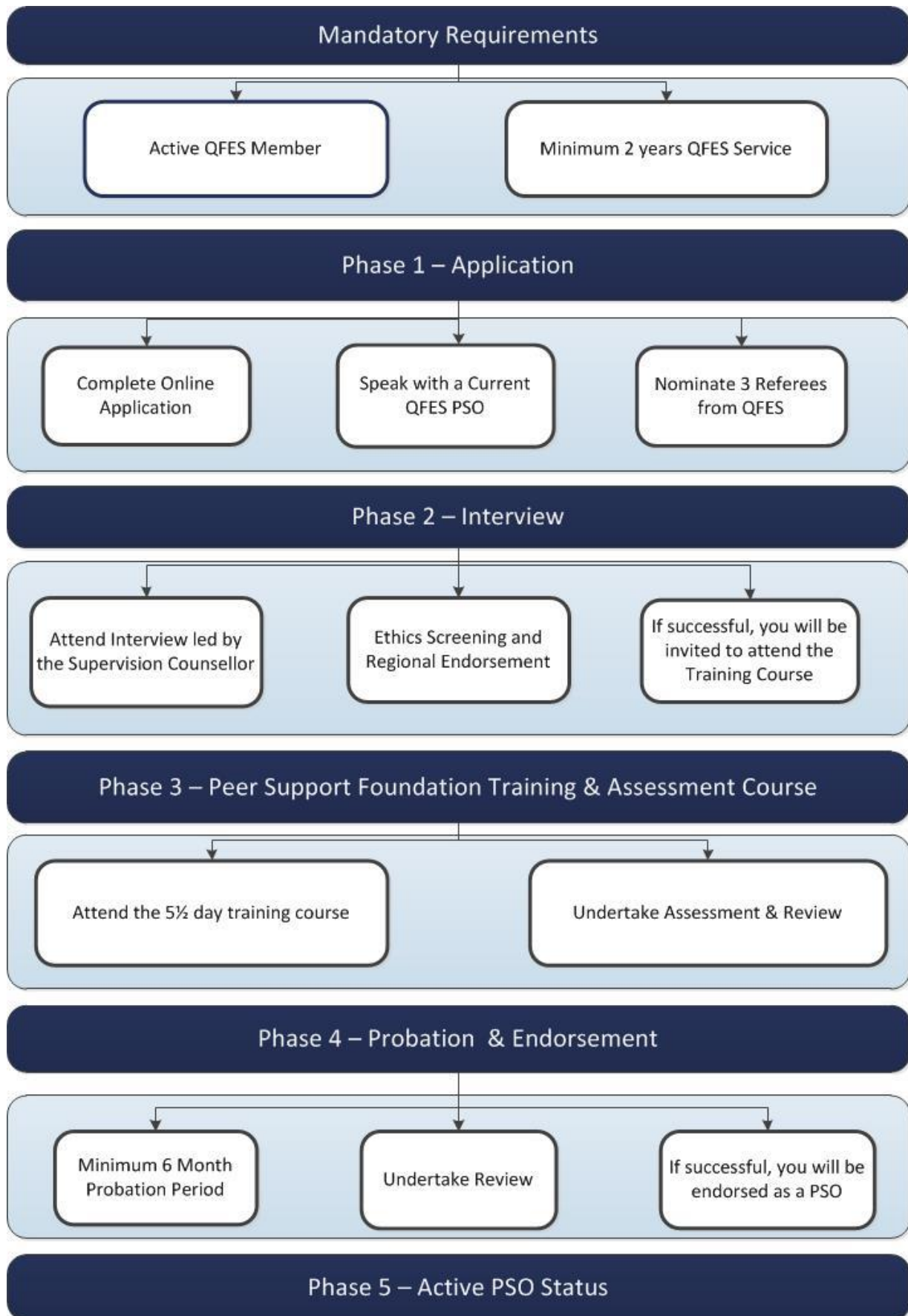
- A review will be conducted by the Regional Supervision Counsellor at the conclusion of the probation period.

Phase 5: Active Status as a PSO

- In order to be endorsed as a PSO, competency at each phase must be achieved.
- As an active PSO you will be listed on the PSO Contact List and be available for peer support duties.
- A performance review every three years is required.
- Regular performance reviews are conducted by the Regional Supervision Counsellor to ensure ongoing suitability.

If you wish to submit an application to become a PSO please go to the [PSO Online Application](https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/fessn/Pages/default.aspx) located at FESSN website <https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/fessn/Pages/default.aspx>

6. Selection Process



7. Transferring role

7.1.1 Internal transfers

“Internal transfer” is a situation when PSOs transfer between organisational branches/streams e.g. previously an SES volunteer member who joins the Rural Fire Service.

The PSO will transition into their new role/group for a minimum of six (6) months before seeking support to assume the role of PSO. This allows the PSO to build relationships and rapport with their new colleagues as well as manage their own personal needs in adapting to a new role/environment.

The process to recognise the PSO role within the new group is conditional upon successful completion of the following stages:

- a) Advise the RSSC, PSOC and FESSN management of the PSOs plans to transfer into another/additional branch/stream,
- b) After achieving six months experience within the group, liaise with the relevant new Leader/Manager to ascertain the need for Peer Support with the new group and seek their support for you assuming the PSO role,
- c) Request Leader/Manager and three (3) members of the new group to provide feedback using the online PSO application process. Contact FESSN for further guidance with this process.
- d) Participate in an interview with RSC to receive colleagues feedback and discuss outcome of selection/approval process.

It is at the discretion of the FESSN Management as to whether PSOs will be required to participate in updated PSO Foundation training.

7.1.2 External transfers

“External transfer” is a situation when PSOs have been trained by other organisations external to QFES.

Due to the specific nature of the PSO role within each organisation, and the wide variation within PSO Training requirements, QFES does not have a “Recognition of Prior Learning – RPL” arrangement for PSO qualifications obtained from other organisations.

All candidates for the PSO role, regardless of their prior experience, need to be trained & assessed in the skills & processes required to perform the role within QFES.

8. Further Information

The main office for FESSN Management Team is located at:

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Australia

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