

# HELP IS ON THE WAY

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES PROVIDES MOBILE SERVICES FOR COMMUNITIES IN RURAL AREAS AND OFTEN ASSISTS PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTER OR ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS. IN RECENT TIMES, IT HAS PARTNERED WITH SG FLEET TO ENSURE ITS UNIQUE SERVICE IS FIT-FOR-PURPOSE AND ALWAYS AT THE READY.

Created in response to drought in 2006, the Mobile Service Centres now offer services for Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support as well as information about Department of Veteran Affairs programs to regional and rural communities. The vehicles now offer similar services to those found in any urban service centre, including private interview rooms, service desks, social workers and online access to myGov accounts. As the first government department to achieve national TruckSafe accreditation, it has evolved in recent years. This evolution, according to Colin Hall, Director of the Department of Human Services Mobile Servicing Team, has been facilitated by three key factors: the increasing technology on board the trucks; improving connectivity around the country; and the widespread use of social media. "We tailor services to community needs,"

Colin says. "That means doing a lot of work in advance of the next visit in order to work out what the community's needs are." Each Isuzu FX vehicle boasts wireless IT connectivity and is allocated two service officers, a manager and driver to help with whatever human services is required. "We used to go to a lot of places that didn't have Telstra connectivity," Hall says. "That was quite limited. The advent of social media has enabled more people to be aware of what services we provide, alerting them that we are coming to town." The Human Services Mobile Services team works closely with mobility solutions provider, SG Fleet, on the design of each vehicle to exploit its maximum height and length as space inside the mobile centre is at a premium. Expanding capsules are employed to increase floor and head space so the interior flows appropriately while taking into account egress access issues. SG Fleet helps triangulate the design process

between the body builder and Human Services Mobile Services team. It's an interactive process, according to Colin, in which engagement well in advance of the design phase is crucial. "Through the build, you always find new innovations, new ideas and issues to troubleshoot. In that way it's really about the three parties working together to keep finding new ways and solutions that arise throughout that whole build process," he says. "It's all about engagement, so when there are challenges all three parties can deal with it together. SG Fleet's role is really to facilitate that process and make it happen." The vehicles deployed by Human Services have changed shape over the years. They originally started with Winnebago campervans before upscaling to DAF prime movers. At present they have found that a heavy rigid vehicle, at its maximum height and maximum length, is ideal for the access and requirements of the moment,

namely accommodating the number of customers in the vehicles with the maximum amount of service points. In addition to the onboard technology and resources, the builds encompass fuel range, fuel tanks and storage for the 200 litre tanks of water they carry, which all need to be stored under the chassis. With that weight distribution comes another consideration. Materials for the build are chosen for how they might affect fuel efficiency and travel range.

As the Australian Government Mobile Service Centres are sometimes dispatched to rural locations, even crossing the Nullarbor once annually, having the widespread SG Fleet network of service providers at its disposal is a major drawcard. SG Fleet also offers vehicle tracking and a pool vehicle booking system.

"In these rural communities, we often draw on SG Fleet's network of service providers to get us on the road again if we have an issue around vehicle repairs or maintenance. SG Fleet is fantastic as they allow us to tap into that network. Even when they are not the actual provider, they'll find someone who can get us on the road again should we have an issue."

More recently the Mobile Services Centre vehicles attended sites in New South Wales and Queensland where communities had been ravaged by bush fires. Safety is the first priority, according to Colin, particularly when it comes to delivering services in an area suffering from a natural disaster.

"You need to be in the right place at the right time. That's really front of mind. You might have flood waters rising or fires moving through the district. The challenges for us are that we really need to understand what the community's needs are, determine we have the right service offer and make people aware of our visit," he says. "Moving heavy vehicles on rural roads is a risky affair. We take that very seriously."

To mitigate those risks, the Department of Human Services achieved national TruckSafe accreditation to ensure it understands the issues around fatigue management, vehicle maintenance and driver training.

"In all of those things, we adopt industry

The Mobile Service Centres are housed in purpose built Isuzu FX rigs.



best practice through our quality control," Colin says.

Recognising the risks of driving the heavy vehicles in areas stricken by natural disaster means a professional standard is required of the operation. Industry experience, Colin explains, is valued and professional drivers are recruited as part of the department's safety strategy.

"Then we underpin that with our driver training and our support programs. We invest in that. We make sure we have our drivers undertake advanced driver training regularly," he says, acknowledging support is also provided in skills testing. "All the drivers take great pride in the job because they know that they're recognised as professionals and are trained and equipped to deliver to quality standards we have through our TruckSafe Accreditation and all the other courses we can do around fatigue management and chain of responsibility legislation."

A rotational system is in place for the three vehicle crews. Two crews are always on with one crew off. For every week off, two weeks are spent on the road so that the vehicles are kept on the move as much as possible. Having well-trained and well-equipped drivers helps to insure daily checks are completed and faults in reports are followed up so the vehicles, during handovers, are in great shape. Inspect365, SG Fleet's fleet management tool, has enabled the Human Services Mobile Service team to automate its manual process of daily checking and

fault reporting. As it takes a driver through a sequence of checks in the morning, the faults are then logged and registered so they are prioritised.

"The management information in Inspect365 underpins the integrity of our quality systems and our truck safe standards and that keeps us at industry best practice," Colin says. "Working within the realms of government services, we still adopt those industry best practices around vehicle maintenance, driver training and fatigue management. Everything that's involved in the chain of responsibility legislation is covered to mitigate all of those risks and that's where we want to stay."

Colin came across from the Department of Agriculture in 2004. He's been involved in managing rural programs and regional servicing strategy for much of his career. The new technology and management now available, he explains, helps identify risks and provides greater visibility as to where the vehicles are. It's a big country after all. "We get reports on heavy braking and speed and it gives you a lot more helpful information to manage risks," Colin says. "We've got access to people and information and support at the touch of phone. That's really what it's about. It's about making problems go away. If there are issues we need to find solutions and that's where SG Fleet comes in. From our point of view, we've really got to make sure that we've got these trucks working on the road and delivering what they need to do all the time." 



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