



Making volunteer availability more flexible, visible and human

Hato Hone St John



**Hato Hone
St John**

Capgemini 

The challenge

For Hato Hone St John, volunteers are central to delivering emergency care, particularly in rural and remote communities. But the systems supporting them hadn't kept up with how people live and work today.

Volunteers were often expected to commit to long, fixed shifts, which could be hard to balance alongside jobs, family, and other responsibilities. On top of that, availability was shared across a mix of channels like WhatsApp, Messenger, phone calls, and texts. It worked, but not particularly well, and there was no single, reliable view of who was available.

This created real challenges. It made it harder to:

- Keep volunteers engaged and involved
- Respond with confidence and the right level of resourcing
- Understand what was happening across stations day to day
- Support volunteers in a way that felt personal and informed

At a time when attracting and retaining volunteers was becoming more difficult, it was clear a different approach was needed.

The ambition

Hato Hone St John set out to rethink how volunteer availability and mobilisation worked, with three clear aims:

1. Give volunteers more flexibility, so they could contribute in a way that fits their lives
2. Improve visibility for volunteers, managers, and communications centres
3. Build a clearer picture of engagement to better support and recognise contribution over time

The solution needed to be simple, trusted, and fit for the realities of emergency response.

The solution

Working alongside Capgemini, Hato Hone St John introduced the Availability Messaging System (AMS), supported by funding from Health New Zealand. The focus was on designing something practical, shaped by how volunteers and dispatch teams actually operate.

AMS was integrated with core dispatch and operational systems and supported by a model that reflects its importance to frontline response, including 24/7 coverage. For volunteers, AMS makes it easier to:

- Indicate availability in real time
- Contribute when they can, rather than committing to long shifts
- See who else is responding, improving confidence and safety
- Receive clear, consistent communication through one platform

For communications centres and managers, it provides a much clearer picture of what's happening, including:

- Who has received an alert
- Who is available and responding
- Where responders are
- Overall station readiness

The rollout was collaborative, with regular workshops, testing, and feedback shaping the system as it developed.

The rollout reached across the country, including:

- 110 First Response Unit stations
- 43 Major Incident Support Team units
- More than 1,200 volunteers and leaders trained
- Full coverage across all FRU and MIST locations

The impact

Flexibility that fits real life

One of the most immediate changes has been flexibility. Volunteers can now choose when they're available, rather than fitting into fixed shifts. That shift has made a real difference. Volunteers have described it as making their contribution more manageable and sustainable alongside work and family life. This is reflected in survey results, with flexibility and workload both scoring strongly and sitting above healthcare benchmarks.

Confidence, safety and readiness

Before AMS, it wasn't uncommon for volunteers to arrive unsure if anyone else was responding. Now, they can see that in advance with a 10% increase in station responses. That visibility:

- Reduces the risk of single-crewed responses
- Builds confidence before volunteers even leave home
- Supports better decision making for both volunteers and communications teams

For many, the change from uncertainty to clarity has been one of the most noticeable improvements.

Stronger engagement, including some unexpected outcomes

While the focus was on availability and mobilisation, other benefits quickly emerged. Teams are more connected. Some previously inactive volunteers have re-engaged. Managers are having more meaningful conversations, supported by better information. In some areas, the system has even helped rebuild connections between volunteers who had drifted apart. As one volunteer put it: "It has created friendships... that united us in a way we didn't expect."

Data that supports people, not just reporting

For the first time, there is a clearer view of not just who attends incidents, but who is consistently making themselves available.

That has enabled:

- More informed one-on-one conversations
- Earlier support where it's needed
- Fairer recognition of effort and contribution

Importantly, the data is being used to support people, not just measure them.

Ongoing support

Because AMS plays a critical role in emergency response, reliability is essential.

Capgemini continues to work alongside Hato Hone St John to maintain and improve the system through regular updates, monitoring, and preventative maintenance. The focus is on keeping things stable, current, and responsive to changing operational needs.

This provides confidence that the system will be there when it's needed, supporting both volunteers and communications teams.

A genuine partnership

Capgemini continues to work alongside Hato Hone St John to maintain and improve the system through regular updates, monitoring, and preventative maintenance. The focus is on keeping things stable, current, and responsive to changing operational needs.

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The result

AMS has helped put volunteering on a more sustainable footing. It has improved flexibility, strengthened safety, and given better visibility across the system.

The impact has been recognised with a Chief Executive's Award, acknowledging the difference it has made to volunteer availability and response.

More importantly, it has made volunteering easier to fit into real life, for real people, at the moments that matter most.