



LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr JP Lister MP—Chair
Mr AJ Baillie MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mrs ME Nightingale MP
Ms JE Pease MP

Staff present:

Ms K Guthrie—Inquiry Secretary
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 24 March 2025

TOOWOOMBA

MONDAY, 24 MARCH 2025

The committee met at 2.45 pm.

CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. I declare open this public hearing of the committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. My name is James Lister and I am the member for Southern Downs and chair of this committee. With me here today are: Margie Nightingale, the deputy chair and member for Inala; Adam Baillie, member for Townsville; Mark Boothman, member for Theodore on the Gold Coast; and Joan Pease, member for Lytton.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. In line with the general rules relating to parliamentary proceedings, I remind witnesses to please refrain from using unparliamentary language, such as swearing or offensive terms, even if you are directly quoting material or someone else.

These proceedings are being transcribed by Hansard, and I acknowledge Giacinta and Annette and thank them for coming to Toowoomba to do that. Media may be present, and I see that WIN News is here—thank you for your interest. They are subject to the committee's rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask that you please turn your mobile phones off for the duration of the proceedings.

HART, Ms Georgina, Volunteer, Cancer Council Queensland

JACKMAN, Dr Danielle, Cancer Council Queensland

NEUMANN, Ms Jessica, Site Manager, Cancer Council Queensland

CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming before us today. Would you like to make an opening statement of around five minutes? We will then have some questions for you.

Ms Neumann: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land—the Yagara, Giabal and the Jarowair peoples—on which we are meeting today and pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. My name is Jessica Neumann and I am the site manager of Cancer Council Queensland's Olive McMahon Lodge. The lodge is one of the support hubs for Cancer Council Queensland and we provide accommodation and transport for those patients who are undergoing cancer treatment. We work really closely with the local hospitals in the Toowoomba area but we also provide support to clients who are in rural areas as well.

I will give you a bit of an overview of our services and the impact that we are making not only in Toowoomba but also in the surrounding rural areas. In 2024, the Olive McMahon Lodge accommodated 807 guests, providing a total of 4,400 nights of accommodation—a figure that continues to grow in the area yearly. In 2024, the Olive McMahon Lodge Transport to Treatment service had 1,848 bookings and covered 12,467 kilometres. To give you a bit of context, 11 driver volunteers drove those kilometres. None of them are paid employees. Already this calendar year we have provided 999 rooms to clients and their carers, and our occupancy rate is nearing 80 per cent. Guests can stay anywhere from one night up to six weeks, depending on their treatment. We also have other hub locations across Queensland where they can stay upwards of six months.

Our outreach at the Olive McMahon Lodge in Toowoomba extends across a vast geographical area and we support clients and carers from remote and regional communities, including from Thargomindah and Birdsville through to Inverell in northern New South Wales and further out to Kingaroy, Murgon and Cherbourg. It is quite a large area. This wide catchment underscores the critical role we play in supporting health equity for regional Queenslanders who often need to travel very long distances away from their homes to receive this critical treatment.

Our volunteers enable us to provide this free, safe and supportive service. Most of our guests are eligible for the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme, which provides a partial reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs for clients and their carers. We receive a \$70 per night rebate from the Queensland government per guest through this scheme. However, there is a significant gap that Cancer Council Queensland waives so there is no on-cost to the client, which is why it is really important that we have volunteers and donors supporting us. As noted in our submission, Cancer Council Queensland has a ratio of one paid employee to 25 volunteers. In Toowoomba at the lodge, we have 3.5 full-time-equivalent paid onsite staff and 15 volunteers. We have the 11 transport drivers, two Wig and Turban Service volunteers, one fundraising volunteer and one administration assistant.

Volunteers really are the backbone of everything that we do at Cancer Council Queensland and we would like to address some of the challenges that we face in sustaining these essential services for the clients and patients who access our service. We would also like to take a moment to highlight the unique and irreplaceable role our volunteers play not just in delivering the services but in providing compassionate peer-to-peer support that is fundamental to the wraparound support we provide at our lodges. Many of our volunteers have a personal connection to cancer whether through their own diagnosis or through supporting a loved one. This lived experience gives them a deep understanding and empathy that cannot be taught or replicated through training alone.

While our dedicated volunteer workforce allows us to deliver this high-quality care with minimal paid employees, we are increasingly experiencing shortages in volunteer availability which directly impacts our ability to maintain and expand our services. Several key factors contribute to this situation, including time constraints. Many of the potential volunteers in Toowoomba and surrounding areas face busy schedules of balancing work, family commitments and other personal obligations. This limits the time that they can obviously dedicate to us as volunteers. There are economic pressures too. The rising cost of living in Toowoomba has placed considerable financial constraints on residents, making it more difficult for individuals to commit time to unpaid volunteer work.

There is also volunteer fatigue. Longstanding volunteers may experience burnout, especially if they have been contributing for extended periods without support or recognition. It is really important that we have some recognition programs that better support them in the community. Toowoomba is a growing area. A lot of new families are moving to the area, and that brings a lot of community events. This means there is competition with numerous charitable events and organisations vying for volunteer support. Individuals may feel overwhelmed by options, leading to fragmented volunteer engagement. For example, organising events like Toowoomba's Christmas Wonderland requires a significant number of volunteers which can strain volunteer resources in the area. Our demographical shift is a factor as well. As I said, changes in the population, such as younger generations moving to the catchment areas, can reduce the pool potential for volunteers in our regional areas.

In our submission from Cancer Council Queensland, we have highlighted some of the things that are within the Queensland government's capacity which may alleviate some of the challenges. I would particularly like to highlight a few points that would make a real difference to supporting volunteering in the regions. Fully funding or co-funding volunteering insurance costs and background checks would significantly reduce the financial barriers for volunteer-based organisations whilst also streamlining administrative processes by eliminating the need for reimbursement management. A streamlined background check system, including traffic and criminal history checks, would be beneficial in allowing volunteers to transfer clearance across multiple organisations.

We also need further investment in regional volunteering infrastructure such as the establishment of cross-organisation or organisation agnostic volunteer hubs. A hub of this kind in Toowoomba would significantly enhance the accessibility of volunteer services by providing shared resources, such as communal IT facilities and technical support, and facilitate greater collaboration across local volunteer-based groups. Our site coordinators and care coordinators have had to drive the hub transport bus to pick up clients from treatment due to a shortage of volunteers. These challenges have tangible impacts on the services that we provide.

Further recommendations and additional organisational contexts are outlined in our written submission. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak directly with the committee today and welcome the chance to continue providing important feedback. We are committed to working collaboratively with the Queensland government to help strengthen and sustain our vital volunteering system. Thank you.

CHAIR: Ms Hart, would you like to say something?

Ms Hart: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. My name is Georgie Hart and I am a volunteer at Cancer Council Queensland at the Olive McMahon Lodge. I am

one of a dedicated team of 15 volunteers who support guests in a variety of ways. My primary role is providing a free Wig and Turban Service. In reality, it is so much more than this; it is about offering a listening ear, providing comfort and being present for people during one of the most challenging times of their lives.

Some of us have personal lived experiences with cancer but, for me, this is not the case. My experience comes from my professional background. I was a registered nurse and dedicated my career to working in oncology. I started my career in the bone marrow transplant unit at the royal Brisbane hospital, providing care to some of the most vulnerable and critically ill patients. Later on, I continued my career as an oncology nurse at St Andrews hospital here in Toowoomba.

In 2005, while nursing, a practical support person from the Cancer Council contacted me about taking part in the Nurse of the Year program with the Cancer Council. Ever since then I have volunteered. My motivation to be a volunteer came from a strong desire to provide more comprehensive wraparound support to my patients and their families. While my professional role as a nurse allowed me to deliver high-quality clinical care, I often felt that my time was limited and I was unable to offer the holistic support that people truly needed beyond their medical treatment. Volunteering has given me this opportunity to connect with the patients and carers on a deeper, more personal level, supporting them through the many challenges that come with a cancer diagnosis. In this role, I can take the time to listen, reassure and simply be present. I can use my holistic knowledge as a nurse to give the clients support and information about the support services that are available and not be restricted by the time constraints of a hospital and clinical environment.

I really enjoy being able to share the Cancer Council Queensland resources with the patients, such as booklets on nutrition and things like that, that are often overlooked as we focus on chemotherapy, side effects and things like that in the hospital setting. I also help to register them for other programs that are not necessarily with the Cancer Council such as Look Good Feel Better, yoga classes and lots of other different things, including emotional support services too.

Every Tuesday morning, I volunteer at the Cancer Council Queensland Olive McMahon Lodge. For 18 months, I was the only person doing this role because there was a lack of people wanting to volunteer for it. We did have the service on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays but we had to pull it back to Tuesdays. We do have a new person who has started who is also a nurse. This service is about so much more than just helping someone choose a wig or head covering; it is about helping them regain a sense of confidence, dignity and control during an incredibly challenging time. For many of our guests, losing their hair can feel like losing part of their identity, especially when young children are involved. My role is to support them through the experience, offering understanding, reassurance and practical solutions. Being a nurse, I really enjoy actually being able to share the practical things within the scope of my volunteer work.

We regularly have guests who have travelled long distances. I enjoy this, being a country girl myself. We have people from Ipswich to Cunnamulla and obviously north to Murgon and places like that. The effort these individuals make to get to us speaks volumes about how much they need the service. Sometimes if I am away they will literally wait a couple of days to have a wig and turban appointment, which is distressing because you know that time is very important to them.

To better support regional and remote Queenslanders going through cancer, we are working towards expanding our virtual wig and turban fitting service. This might sound unusual but it works very well. We just have a wonderful selection of wigs and you often cannot tell they are a wig. In fact, I wish I had one to show you. This would allow us to reach people who are unable to travel to Toowoomba, providing them with the same compassionate service. I do feel sad if they have travelled a long way for the wig. I think virtual would be much more appropriate for them.

In 2015, 10 years ago, I started a cancer support group for current and previous cancer patients. It is actually a support group for anyone with any type of cancer not specific to breast and other cancers that we feel have a lot of support. We also invite family and friends who support these patients to join us. We have had people who have lost a loved one and they do not find there is a lot of support for them. We trialled to see if we could facilitate that, and it worked beautifully. We meet on the third Tuesday of each month for a coffee and a beautiful scone at the Cobb & Co Museum. It has been incredibly rewarding to see the connections and friendships that have developed since 2015.

Looking ahead, we would like to extend the support group to involve guests who Jess was talking about coming from the Olive McMahon Lodge. We would like the bus drivers to bring anyone who is staying there. It can be pretty lonely when you are out of your home and community environment to be in the lodge and not have any social interaction. We would love the bus to bring them down and join our support group. I do hope this is something we can offer in the future.

Volunteering with Cancer Council is incredibly important to me. Sometimes my family get very frustrated with me about this, particularly my husband. It is something I am deeply passionate about, and I make it a priority to fit into my life alongside my family responsibilities. My husband and I are raising three wonderful children aged 11 to 16—depends on how they are going. But, despite the demands of family and business life, volunteering is a personal commitment and very important to me and a privilege. Giving back to the community and particularly supporting people going through what they are going through—which I have seen the worst of in nursing—is something I will always make time for, and I tell my family this. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences.

CHAIR: Dr Jackman, will you continue?

Dr Jackman: I defer to my wonderful colleagues here who I think have beautifully represented the context, particularly in Toowoomba. Given the tight time constraints, I am happy to defer to them.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for sharing your story as a volunteer. It is always very important for us to hear that lived experience from volunteers as well as organisations. As a former nurse, I can completely connect with what you were saying. Over to you, Jessica. I note your recommendations with appreciation. I note the mention of the organisational agnostic hubs to support volunteers. I am very interested in that. I can see how that could operate in an urban setting. I am interested in your ideas as to how that could operate where, like you said, it is quite regionally diverse and far apart in terms of the organisations.

Ms Neumann: I think it is just having a communal place for them to come and facilitate some of those learnings. Having a shared view as well I think is important. I can see it working. Toowoomba is growing. People do commute in whether it is for their shopping on whatever day they are coming in. A lot of the time they have to come in for medical appointments and other things. I was talking to a volunteer the other day and that is how they sync their schedules. If they have other appointments, they will link in that way. There are other things, like Georgie has just spoken about—getting a bit more virtually savvy as well. We always have some IT constraints with some of the cohort that we work with, but I think it would work from my view.

Dr Jackman: The idea stemmed from the federal regional study hub model which was prioritising the regions before the suburban study hubs. They are volunteer organisation agnostic and a way for organisations to share resources and cross-pollinate the volunteer workforce potentially and provide some technical support to the older demographic volunteers who may find the requirements of online training and online forms a barrier as well.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Fantastic.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Georgina, you were saying that at the Olive McMahan Lodge you were the only volunteer for a period of time and then you got a second volunteer. How did you find that second volunteer?

Ms Hart: I recruited them.

Mr BOOTHMAN: How did that work?

Ms Hart: I suppose volunteering is complicated. In our setting you need to have people who are very appropriate for these people's needs. I have a friend I worked with in nursing for a long time. I knew that she communicated very well with the patients and knew her boundaries and was probably also in a financial position to volunteer. I was looking at her and I thought, 'You'd be perfect, Jackie.' It was wonderful that the Cancer Council put her name down to be a volunteer and she went through the process. She is still in training. Wig training is very complicated. That is great.

I think it is really hard. Even for the drivers at the lodge, we do have a few people on the list but you do need to actively recruit and encourage them. I think they do not know the opportunities are there. I also think people do not know what volunteer jobs are available—obviously free jobs that are there. I think that is difficult too.

Mr BOOTHMAN: If you did not know this individual, how would you normally go about trying to replace somebody or find a position?

Ms Neumann: We basically go through the same recruitment method as we would a paid employee which is really difficult. It is on Seek and exploring that as well is important. Going back to the hub again, it is a central place where you can go if you are wanting to volunteer. I think with sporting skills there is a community that wraps around. You speak to a friend or speak to another mum or dad and they are like, 'Come and help me out and volunteer so I am not there on my own.' It is just comradery. For me it is about them having a community and somewhere they can go. Yes, we are just using mainstream recruitment strategies or the wonderful volunteers that we already have.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You do have a unique set of skills you need which certainly is very different to most other volunteering organisations. It puts a whole new level of emphasis on it and makes it very difficult.

Ms Neumann: Yes. It is not as simple as ‘Yay, we have a volunteer,’ and that is perfect. We do get people who apply for the ads and they are screened like any other employee. Like you said, getting those critical skills is really important. We need people who are able to drive because they are on the roads for long periods of time. They could be driving from 9 am. Yes, they have breaks throughout—they have their required break times—but 9 am to 5 pm is a long day for somebody who is retired or just helping out. The more volunteers we have the less likely we are burning out the ones that we do have, which is critical as well.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Do you find that this is replicated in other areas across Queensland? It is very difficult because of the skill set needed.

Dr Jackman: Absolutely, across all of our different categories of volunteers. We have our volunteers who are on the front line like Georgie here at the lodge, but we also have volunteers in regional branches. While our volunteer numbers are healthy, there are still real challenges, particularly with the fundraising volunteers as well in maintaining that level of engagement, and it is statewide. I was just looking at some statistics on volunteer driver numbers. For example, Townsville has a really healthy cohort of 21 volunteer drivers, whereas Rockhampton only has 10.

CHAIR: We are out of time. I thank you on behalf of the committee for your appearance today and for your very thorough submission. You were very impressive in your appearance here. Please feel free to remain to absorb the other volunteering ideas that you might hear in the course of the hearing today. Thank you very much.

Dr Jackman: Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

EGAN, Mr Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Clubs Queensland

NIPPERESS, Mr Daniel, General Manager, Clubs Queensland

CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee before we have some questions for you?

Mr Nipperess: Yes. Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. My name is Dan Nipperess, appearing with Kelly Egan, CEO, on behalf of Clubs Queensland. Clubs Queensland is the peak industry body for Queensland's community clubs. We represent the interests of 1,290 clubs across Queensland including all forms of sporting clubs, RSL and services clubs, surf lifesaving clubs, racing clubs and all forms of social, special interest and cultural clubs. The club industry in Queensland is worth over \$2.5 billion annually to the Queensland economy. We employ over 34,000 Queenslanders. Importantly, we deliver back \$549 million annually to communities from Coolangatta to Cooktown and west to Mount Isa.

Turning to our volunteer base, the community club industry mobilises 41,500 Queenslanders—which represents the largest volunteer base in the state. These volunteers take many forms including but not limited to club management committee, board members, subcommittee members and other advisers; sporting coaches, trainers, referees and team managers; surf lifesavers and surf administration officers; veteran and welfare support volunteers; youth and senior workers and mentors; parent volunteers; social coordinators; administrative support volunteers; hospitality and catering volunteers; grounds maintenance volunteers; first aid volunteers; fundraising volunteers; event and commemorative event volunteers; and social media and marketing volunteers.

Clubs Queensland welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the committee in relation to the current state of volunteering in Queensland. This inquiry has come at a critical time for Queensland, as we are seeing volunteering numbers fall across the state which will be a challenge for us in the lead-up to the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games.

To inform our submission we surveyed our member clubs based on the questions that form the scope of this inquiry. These members represented all types of clubs that form our membership base. Similar to the Volunteering Queensland's *State of volunteering in Queensland 2024 report*—and we commend Volunteering Queensland on this report; it is a great piece of work—specific to Queensland clubs, Clubs Queensland data shows that we are seeing a decline of 2.5 per cent to three per cent in the total number of volunteers since 2021. This is across all club types—including sporting clubs, RSL and services clubs, surf lifesaving clubs and general interest clubs—statewide.

Specific to the club industry, we are losing volunteers because of the aging demographic of our volunteer base and the fact that younger Queenslanders are not taking up volunteering opportunities at the same rate, insurance premiums and increasing instances that require specific insurances for certain volunteering roles, screening check requirements, as well as the complexity of roles as a result of often increasing regulation. Solving this issue will require a holistic approach from both state and federal governments, volunteering organisations and also corporates. We need to look at ways that we can formalise volunteer-to-career pathway programs.

We need to look at other financial incentives by way of government assistance to also help young people and families to afford volunteer time commitments. We need to mobilise corporate volunteering opportunities. We need to improve volunteer infrastructure and recognition, and we need to promote volunteer opportunities to younger Queenslanders. I just want to finish by saying, as part of our consultation, a president of a small cricket club in South Brisbane eloquently stated—

Declining volunteerism has a compounding effect. The less volunteers in an organisation places more pressure on existing volunteers which results in volunteer burnout and ultimately those remaining volunteers leaving volunteering roles sooner.

Thank you again. Kelly and I welcome any questions that the committee has.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I am interested in the idea of supporting volunteers. You have a range of different groups so a range of different skills. In relation to the volunteer-to-employment piece, how do you suggest or recommend or support clubs to demonstrate some appreciation and acknowledgement of the skills so that volunteers may be able to pass that on to potential employers et cetera?

Mr Nipperess: That is a great question. Like our submission set out, there is a very large degree of volunteers who still support many job roles within community clubs. I think the complexity around some of those volunteering opportunities—and certainly we got this feedback through a lot of our RSL service club members, as well as our surf lifesaving supporter clubs—can relate to them

becoming paid employment roles. Certainly roles like welfare support officers and surf administration officers are two really good examples about those complexities. Over time, those roles have become more complex. As we stated, the regulation and qualifications required for that is something that is going to be relevant. Certainly community clubs are doing their best to try to support that transition. It is also something that those particular volunteers want to do. They love their volunteering opportunities, so in any way that they can become more qualified and ultimately maybe transition over to paid employment roles outside of what they may be doing as an existing role is something that the clubs certainly want to support. However, it certainly is a big challenge of the industry, that differentiation between the volunteering and the paid employment roles.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you both for joining us today. I commend you on the comprehensive submission you have made. I have to note that Brothers Leagues Club in Townsville also contributed here, so shout-out to the Brothers Leagues Club. Some 41,500 volunteers across the state is a lot to try to manage. I also note that you have only seen a decline of 2.5 per cent to three per cent versus a statewide decline of close to 10 per cent. Similar to our previous speakers, they have seen an increase since the pre-pandemic levels, so the question I am asking myself is: is there something you are doing different to try to attract and engage volunteers that maybe other organisations are not? Specifically to you, how do you go about trying to attract and engage volunteers?

Mr Egan: I think we are in a very fortunate position as an industry to be able to support the attractiveness of a model around volunteering. To your point, two to three per cent across the vast array of clubs that we have is not as significant as the state-based figure. We operate in some genuine authentic connection, whether it be a sporting club, a cultural club, a surf lifesaving club et cetera, and I think the ability for our profit-for-purpose businesses to support a T-shirt, rewards, the opportunity to gather frequently and be valued for what is a non-paid commitment helps a lot in that regard.

From our perspective, when you look at our numbers, when we do our census every couple of years, if we slip back two or three per cent, it is quite significant, particularly when you are looking at putting kids on fields, whether they be boys, girls, netball, Rugby League et cetera, even that sort of shift is a challenge. We understand that surf lifesaving obviously plays a massive part in community safety. Again, we are in the fortunate position to be able to support that from a surf lifesaving supporters' club perspective. I think we are fortunate in that we can stem the flow a little bit. Just listening to the presenters before us, that work is so valued across communities, and we play a different role in regard to solidifying communities, but we are able to substantiate that a little bit more because of what we provide.

Mr BAILLIE: You mentioned that you tried to focus a fair bit on recognition with T-shirts and other bits of pieces. The Cancer Council previously spoke about going out and advertising, similar to a paid position. Do you do anything like that?

Mr Egan: When you look at our snapshot of clubs, there are eight different regions across Queensland that have been represented. Obviously, there is one in your electorate. Yes, the opportunity to do that through grassroots participation in sport is something that is marketable. Again, we have a database of people we can reach into and market those opportunities to. There is a whole range of age demographics, too, that add an opportunity for us to continue to value volunteerism. Are we doing enough? No, we can never do enough. For us, it is an opportunity to build membership but then that builds connection through volunteerism. It is a massive part of what we want to do and what we want to deliver to the communities that we operate in.

Ms PEASE: Thank you to Clubs Queensland. I know you do a lot of work in that space. I know you undertake a lot of training for your volunteer boards et cetera and provide that training externally to other smaller clubs. It is a really important way to engage. We heard earlier today, at our hearing in Dalby, about losing volunteers because the parents are so busy with sports et cetera, and you highlighted what my question would be around, which is that because you have a captive audience—you have the parents dropping the kids off to their sport—you are able to capitalise on that to get them to volunteer, and they get a T-shirt at the end of the day, so they are getting something for their time. The younger generation actually do want that; they want to see the impact they are making. Do you lose volunteers once their kids stop playing or do many of them stay on?

Mr Egan: The answer to that from a practical point of view, both as a parent who has kids playing sport—and Dan has young people just starting to do that role—yes, there is a natural attrition as you go through and your kids start doing other things.

Ms PEASE: Then there is another revolving door because there are new ones coming in.

Mr Egan: I guess the retention when your family members are no longer engaged in that particular area of interest is always an issue. What we try to perpetuate through our member databases and our clubs and communities is that there is always an opportunity to help more. Our job, as a peak body, is to make sure that is seen as valued by the industry clubs that exist within our organisation. We have been very proactive in letting our clubs know that we are here today to talk to you about why volunteering is very important across Queensland, and obviously we position that from a Clubs Queensland perspective. It is a great opportunity to support community. Unfortunately, it is a busy world with a lot of distractions.

Mr Nipperess: To add to that, if I may, that picks up on the real essence of these declining volunteering numbers: people will want to volunteer in a purposeful position. To your point, if that is associated with my kid's Rugby League team, they will want to do that. Certainly, they are the issues that we see within our industry. It is something that our counterparts in New South Wales saw, and we highlighted that in our submission with the Sydney 2000 games, that people want to be involved in the current opportunity that looks good, and it is those less desirable or less purposeful roles where you always see issues within, and that is certainly within clubs as well. Grounds maintenance, canteen operators—it is those sorts of roles where there is always a struggle associated with it. I think we have to deal with it as two very separate issues: you have purposeful roles and then those that may not be so attractive, especially to new volunteers that might want to get involved in some sort of volunteering opportunity.

CHAIR: With the Southern Downs Steam Railway in my electorate, they have plenty of applicants to be the train driver; not quite so many to paint the train or to clean the boiler after the day.

Ms PEASE: I have one in my electorate that I will send up your way.

CHAIR: I will hold you to that.

Ms PEASE: He is mad for it and he is only young.

Mr BOOTHMAN: One thing I find very interesting about what Clubs Queensland does is they do community days where they get other organisations to come in and they have a grants process. I know in my electorate you regularly do that. That is where I saw you not too long ago.

Mr Egan: Not that long ago, Mark.

Mr BOOTHMAN: It creates a whole new scope and a whole new welcoming and to celebrate these individuals for what they do. At a previous hearing today, I did mention some things they do in the US. I was looking at some stats, and the US has the best volunteer rates in the world. How they do things over there is obviously a little bit different. They like to put people on a pillar and say, 'This is wonderful.' Do you have any suggestions, though, when it comes to other organisations? Clubs Queensland is a big organisation, you have a bit of money et cetera, but are there any ideas that you feel other organisations can copy to celebrate volunteering in the way Clubs Queensland does? I suppose it is a hard question to answer because you have the ability and you have the services and facilities to do it, but is there anything you can suggest to other organisations, other bigger organisations like Kmart and Woolworths, to do something that you do very successfully and make those people feel appreciated?

Mr Egan: I think there are great opportunities around the corporate social licence and ESG et cetera components of what a publicly listed company brings. It is really hard for us to understand what motivates their expenditure, where they spend money and how relevant that is to a share price. It is difficult for us to assume what other organisations may be able to undertake. I think largely it is a board of directors saying, 'This is an important part of our social licence of what we do,' whether at Kmart, Target et cetera. It is very hard to put ourselves in their shoes.

One part of our charter is to make sure we strengthen clubs to benefit communities. That is the end of the story. For us, our constant narrative is to make sure your community grants program is first and foremost when you sit around your board table from a governance perspective. Outside of remaining strong in your compliance, strong in your governance and strong in your regulatory obligations, the biggest thing you can do is make sure your social licence is delivered well. That is, I guess, a real charter of ours. The ability to help community groups in different areas of care is something that we have seen increase in the last two years. Our data shows us that we have improved our contributions and our in-kind facilities usage and support of the community. For us, that is at the head of our charter. We want to make sure that our venues continue to do that. I do not know how that actually—

Mr BOOTHMAN: Jen, from Studio Village, was over the moon to be recognised for all her efforts during the Christmas Day storm, and for Clubs Queensland to highlight that certainly made that organisation and all their volunteers down there feel like they are really special.

Mr Egan: It is a wonderful opportunity. You would love to do it every week, not that we want a natural disaster floating around every other week either, but—

CHAIR: Oh, he made national news with his one.

Mr Egan: That is a wonderful part of what we do, so we are very grateful to be able to do that.

CHAIR: Thank you for your participation today. As I have said before, you are most welcome to remain and to enjoy the perspectives of other organisations that are here.

MACTAGGART, Mrs Emma, Lighthouse Toowoomba

CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement on behalf of Lighthouse Toowoomba and then we will have some questions for you.

Mrs Mactaggart: First of all, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here. My submission, which was two paragraphs, was made while I was trying to write some strategic directions for our very new organisation. They were not very polished, so it was wonderful to hear the depth and insight that comes from the previous submission of Clubs Queensland, so gravitas there. I represent a really tiny organisation. The Lighthouse Toowoomba only opened in February 2022. We have launched on the shoulders of giants, taking our impetus from the unnecessarily beautiful spaces for Minds on Fire, which is a methodology utilised in the United States originally, but throughout the world now, with over 100 centres, particularly focused on creativity for children and writing and literacy. There are two existing centres in Australia: there is one in Sydney, the Story Factory, and the 100 Story Building in Melbourne. We are the first in regional Australia. We have this unique perspective in regional Australia. We believe that volunteers are to be found, that they are willing because they are regional Australia. It is a matter of actually working with them and finding places and opportunities for them to thrive.

In the three years since we have been open, we have engaged with over 22,000 members of the community, with over 1,000 workshops, and we have rehomed nearly 25,000 books as one of our opportunities. In our organisation, we have a gallery, a one-way library and a writers centre. We discovered really quickly within our first six months, which was consultation, that we had to exist outside of a silo—that we could not just work with Education Queensland, we could not just work with Anglicare, we could not just work with council. I am really pleased to say that in preparation for this we acknowledge that we have worked with community groups and social enterprises, with 54 independent organisations in the community.

We think that with what we are doing we have got it right—the right recipe—but to grow our programs we need volunteers. The organisation has 1.2 full-time equivalent staff. We know, with a very genuine and considered volunteer base who have contributed over 7,109 hours to date, that the reason they walk in the door is that they value the opportunities for our communities' children as much as we do. They see literacy as a right and it devastates them that 44 per cent of the Australian population are below functioning literacy levels—how does that happen?—and they are willing and able to step into the breach, understanding that parents now work so reading groups are disintegrating in schools, that books are not going to homes et cetera.

Our great challenge—which I did pitch in the submission—was that the system makes it very difficult for us to give. The grant application process is onerous. Even though we are registered with the ACNC, we have to do an independent registration for every single grant application. Grant applications in the majority of cases do not acknowledge in kind contributions. In our case, for example, we have very gratefully received from the grant process over half a million dollars but we give half a million dollars. We are on a three-to-one ratio and easily can find room to grow from there. We are very much a minnow. We have lots of ideas but we do not have enough time. Our volunteers are the way that we can see ourselves growing and expanding our programs throughout regional Australia.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for coming today to give us this great information and thank you for the work you do; it sounds fantastic. I am interested to know how you work in terms of governance and whether you support other organisations in any way. Is there some shared understanding or shared work you do—tips, tricks, that kind of thing—because you are in a nice position to be able to engage with multiple organisations, some of which I am sure would be volunteer organisations as well? What is your relationship with them in terms of assisting one another with resourcing, knowledge or skills?

Mrs Mactaggart: I think we come in and we support them with literacy-based programs. All of the caseworkers at the department of child safety acknowledge that is really important. It is not their core business but they bring their children in to use the one-way library and to take books to be read in our Twinkles reading program. Transition to Success is a department of youth justice program. Sometimes the children are going to TAFE and are doing lots of learning skills, but because of their literacy skills the workers need to ignite an interest in literacy to even engage with them. We are providing that part of it but in response to what they are asking for. It may be an exhibition space; it might be books for Momentum Mental Health for their show tomorrow. It really depends on each organisation.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: So it chops and changes depending on the organisation?

Mrs Mactaggart: Yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: In terms of your own governance and your own management, do you engage with Volunteering Queensland or any other bodies to support you in that?

Mrs Mactaggart: We would absolutely love to. One of our priorities, now that we have our model determined and we can actually articulate it, is to look up and engage with that. Our challenge is our 1.2 staff. We cross every silo, and we are a member of the Wilsonton early childhood network and we have worked with Multicultural Australia, but they have an organisation, so if we actually went to all of those meetings we have calculated that we would need two extra staff to simply engage in that process. We are absolutely flying by the seat of our pants. Our governance comes from our board of directors who support us. Our reporting, albeit internally, is to that board so we tick the governance in that respect as far as the ACNC but we do not have the scope or the ability to even engage beyond that. Every meeting is a quarter of a work day for our employees, of which there are not any full-time ones.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I am thinking about how your organisation is set up. Similar to the Cancer Council, you need to have a select group of individuals you rely on, especially when it comes to the teaching of these young minds—and I think what you are doing is absolutely fantastic; it is really wonderful. How do you get volunteers to give up their time to be put in a classroom environment, which can sometimes be a bit difficult? How do you attract those individuals?

Mrs Mactaggart: We demonstrate to the older children in the community that there are pathways. Part of having the library, the gallery and the writers centre is we are actively engaged in numerous workshops and we engage local authors in that program. Interestingly, Reading Australia have just released their strategy for the future and it involves sending authors to schools. Book Links, which is the Queensland Centre for Children's Literature, is engaging and planning their new program which is sending authors to schools. We can do that.

The volunteering does happen with a group of dedicated volunteers when they have time available. For example, we will work in partnership with the Empire Theatre. Last year we received a grant of \$2,000 from the Toowoomba Regional Council, and we allocated 100 per cent of that to paying the authors to do the part of the festival, which meant they could put it on their resumes, but we asked them to gift us a workshop to the schools. That meant we could do a program of 26 author visits to local schools. We have to be very inventive and very clever about it.

In terms of finding the people, so far we have gone piecemeal, so limp along grant applications, so that we can pay some and ask for some. We cannot keep drawing on the authors, but our aspiration for our longer term programs—and this is another thing that I wrote about—is ideally to have someone who was dedicated to support them, to train them, to send people to schools. We know we can start attracting them because we are in a small community and that is the superpower of regional Australia—yes, their child plays sport but they are also the electrician and they are also the people who come in the door and donate books. We find them in every space they are in.

Mr BOOTHMAN: That is very creative.

Mrs Mactaggart: We have to be very creative, yes.

Ms PEASE: Can I clarify. Are you a volunteer or are you a paid employee?

Mrs Mactaggart: I am a volunteer.

Ms PEASE: And you started the organisation?

Mrs Mactaggart: Yes, and I am a full-time volunteer.

Ms PEASE: Do you class yourself as the 1.2 staff members?

Mrs Mactaggart: No.

Ms PEASE: So you do have paid staff?

Mrs Mactaggart: Yes: our chief operating officer works 30 hours of the 40-hour week; we have someone now dedicated to looking after our gallery, which is 14 hours; and we have a communications person, which is five hours. That equals 1.2 staff.

Ms PEASE: So you need volunteers to help run the programs that you want to run; is that correct?

Mrs Mactaggart: Yes.

Ms PEASE: How have you gone about finding volunteers so far?

Mrs Mactaggart: We have an unnecessarily expansive newsletter that goes out that runs to 20 pages every fortnight, and that is all of the things we do. We are constantly advertising in that space. We know that with our readership our click through rate is 40 per cent every fortnight, so we are happily expanding on that.

We have found that, whenever we actually specify what we are asking of our volunteers, we get them in droves. I think because we are in such a beautiful space that every interaction with small children, adult children or whoever is very rewarding in and of itself. We will say to people, 'Is anyone available on Tuesday between nine and 10 to go to a particular school to read to preschoolers for an eight-week program?' and we will get them. The challenge that we have is this: for example, we have a volunteer, a retired librarian, and she has developed her job into something that she can independently run. Again, in preparation, we discovered that she has done 350 hours over the last three years and we did not even have time to stop and celebrate her. When we are talking about a T-shirt or an acknowledgement, what she has done is really important but we are piecemeal when we are putting the numbers together and it is usually as a consequence of something else, as opposed to wanting to actually stick to our original plan.

We know that part of the methodology, which is described as 'Unnecessarily beautiful spaces for young minds on fire', is how to support volunteers. It is recognised internationally as a way of doing it. In all of the other organisations around the world—and I am in communication because they meet on a monthly basis over Zoom—it is about celebrating them, it is about training sessions, it is about having social interaction, it is about bringing the volunteers together. At the moment, we are lucky to do that once every six months, which is not enough because they are looking for that interaction.

Ms PEASE: What is the age of your volunteers?

Mrs Mactaggart: It is 16 to 84.

Ms PEASE: Do they come into the centre, to the studio?

Mrs Mactaggart: Yes, they do.

Ms PEASE: So that is an opportunity for them to engage with each other?

Mrs Mactaggart: Yes.

CHAIR: It occurred to me while listening to you that you have great insights into the disability that poor literacy imposes on people. If we could just invert the focus for a moment, could you give me your opinion on poor literacy as a barrier to participation in volunteering and the enrichment that is open to people in doing so. Is that something you would be willing to speculate on?

Mrs Mactaggart: Our observation is the 90-10 Pareto rule—that 90 per cent of people cannot be what they cannot see and that 10 per cent will be what they want to see, will make the community of it. With that, you can guarantee that in any cohort 10 per cent of the room will be volunteers because they can see and read the problem.

CHAIR: I think they are all in this room today.

Mrs Mactaggart: Absolutely, and hopefully they are all nodding at that as well because they can see that there is a need to do things. When we meet those 90 per cent and describe to people what we are doing, they respond with the word 'Wow,' and it is as simple as that. They do not even understand that there is capacity to do that. Our understanding is that when you are talking about what a resilient community is and what connection is—which is about wellbeing, and we focus on the five tenets of wellbeing—you can only do it when you look up. You can only achieve that and engage in risk-taking behaviour—and I am not talking about YJ; I am talking about doing something fresh and new that engages you—when you feel really safe, and you can only make mistakes in that creative environment which then is about resilience. If you are resilient and you are in the space, you are making connections that are deeper than on a screen—so you have to do it; you have to engage with other organisations.

If they are disillusioned with their education and the school is not working and the only other place you are going to is Centrelink and that is your sum total of organisational interaction, how then can you trust it if you have never walked into an art gallery or a writers centre, how then can you communicate, especially if you are then struggling to even read and process the product disclosure statement from your insurance claim that you thought you had? It is too much of a battle in that state, and you can only give the capacity that you can give, and you can only give when you yourself either identified that it is good for you or that you understand that it is good for you, or you realised that it is entirely for you in the first instance. If you are fighting the system—

CHAIR: So those insights are more readily available if you are literate and engaged, and if you are not, then the blessings of participation as a volunteer are not really available to you; is that what you are saying?

Mrs Mactaggart: Being able to process information and understand that it is not actually happening to you, it is happening around you, is an insight that comes from being literate. In regards to that participation, talking about the 44 per cent of adults who are below functioning literacy level, which is year 3, I cannot even imagine what that is like going through a day. You cannot process the news; you only hear the headline grabs. You are fighting every day. It used to be discussed in terms of the left brain/right brain, and it is disintegrating now because it is a leftover from the seventies. You have to be in a holistic mindset to even understand that you have room to give in a community. You cannot be worrying about whether you can or cannot pay that \$5, or whether you get a bill from the school because the kid has lost a library book, yet it has been returned but there are no librarians to keep track of it. The system is holding people in that space which makes it more necessary now to volunteer to help to make a difference, but we are fighting against a very muddy, grubby system that is keeping people down, too.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Emma, I think you are one of the most passionate people we have had before us. You are very enthusiastic. I can see it really pouring out of you. It is really wonderful.

Mrs Mactaggart: Thank you. That is very generous of you to have me, and I felt very nervous, not walking in the door, but when I started listening and then I went, 'Ooh!'

CHAIR: An impassioned and articulate contribution.

Ms PEASE: There are people just like you that are really keen and enthusiastic.

Mrs Mactaggart: Thank you, because you are in a position that you can actually make our lives easier to actually help our communities. You are also in the position to do the opposite. Take that opportunity to stand back and have a look at how the system is conflated and designed. There are easy ways and there are hard ways, and I appreciate the opportunity to share a sense of that, so thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for your participation. Now we move onto registered witnesses. We have one very good person who has agreed to come before us; that is Maureen Allen, a mentor from the PCYC. Please come forward, Maureen. While Maureen takes her seat, I invite anybody here who would like to make a contribution to the proceedings today to come forward and share with the committee and with the room your experiences in volunteering—as a volunteer, administering volunteers—because we need your input and your understanding of the issues to be able to formulate really good recommendations at the end of this process. If there is anybody who would like to speak, please feel free to do so. Zac will take your details so we have your name spelt correctly so it be in *Hansard* for all time.

ALLEN, Mrs Maureen, Private capacity

CHAIR: Maureen, thank you very much for coming before us. I invite you to give us a statement and then we will come to you with some questions.

Mrs Allen: My name is Maureen Allen, and I am here wholly and solely as a private volunteer, to tell you our problems that we have as a volunteer. One of them involves our blue cards. If we go to another association, we have to get another blue card. To me that is a waste of money. It is the same check constantly, so why can't that blue card just follow on? Like I said, it is a waste of money.

CHAIR: There were a few heads nodding behind you when you said that.

Mrs Allen: The second thing is there is too much red tape. I just want to go and do my mentoring and go home. I do not want to be bothered constantly with filling out forms. I got one and it takes me 84 minutes to fill it in. The next one is 46 minutes. The next one is 35 minutes. I do not want to do that. I am a volunteer. I want to go and do my job and go home. It keeps coming through. It is the same thing, over and over, with one or two different words in it. I have totally refused to do it now because I just feel it is a waste of time—it is a waste of their time; it is a waste of my time. I just think we need to make it a lot simpler for people to get involved. I feel that is why people are moving away from it, because it has become too complicated. That's it.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for sharing your perspective on it. I know that the checks and the blue cards and those things are an issue; we are hearing that more. I am hopeful that we will be able to come up with a solution. Do you have any suggestions or tips? Often it is the ideas that come from the very people in this space who have thought about ways that it could be done differently. Do you have any suggestions or tips?

Mrs Allen: On blue card?

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: On any of the barriers that you are finding.

Mrs Allen: Just make it simpler. As I said, there is just too much red tape at present. You have to go in and sit on a screen and answer all these questions. All our volunteers are 65-plus. We get up to 80-year-olds. They do not want to do that constantly. It just needs to be very simple.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do you think there are some things that can be cut out altogether, that you think there is no point to them, or do you think there are some things that are important that need to be managed differently?

Mrs Allen: I feel workplaces have a lot to do with it. They are just covering—I cannot say that—their bottoms.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Are you talking about workplace health and safety?

Mrs Allen: Yes. They have a lot to do with it. A lot of these questions we are asked have nothing to do with what we do; it is just someone covering themselves all the time.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: It is generic, not specific to what your volunteer role is?

Mrs Allen: Yes. It is exactly like if you are an employee out in the public. It is basically the same thing. We do not need that as volunteers. We are volunteers. We just want to go and do our job and get on with it.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: So perhaps instead of it being onerous, if there were a way for the questions or the requirements to be streamlined to exactly the type of work that you do in your volunteering role and not include a whole range of other things that are superfluous to what you do?

Mrs Allen: Yes. It just covers so much. You get sick of it.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: You do not need that?

Mrs Allen: No.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you, Maureen, for volunteering. The forms that you mentioned that you are continually filling in recently, what do they pertain to?

Mrs Allen: They come through emails. They are constant. I class it as more to do with the workplace because it is someone just covering themselves. The onus is back on us. If we have an accident or something like that, it comes back on us, and everyone is just covering themselves.

Mr BAILLIE: So the forms you are referring to are to do with liability in case you injure yourself while volunteering; is that some of them?

Mrs Allen: Sort of. That is part of it. I do not even understand half of it. I have said to my boss, 'If you want to fill it in, fill it in, but I am not doing it,' because to me it is just a waste of time.

Mr BAILLIE: I understand. I have a contractor background, so I understand some of those forms. You need to be a lawyer sometimes to get through them.

Mrs Allen: Yes.

Mr BAILLIE: Do you have any suggestions on how that could be simplified? For not necessarily yourself but other volunteers entering that space, if there are risks associated with volunteering, how could we ensure that they are protected in case there were an accident, in a more simpler fashion?

Mrs Allen: I had an accident the other day and it is covered by insurance. Is that not enough?

Mr BAILLIE: When you say it was covered by insurance—

Mrs Allen: The insurance covered it. We are insured. All volunteers are insured. Why is it necessary to put the onus back on us that it is our responsibility for that when the insurance actually covers it? I will tell you what happened. I teach driving. I mentor driving. We came up too close to this car alongside us. I said to the lady, 'You are too close.' Next minute the light went green, the bloke alongside us took off, she took off before I could say anything, and he had a trailer that ripped the front bumper off. That was covered by insurance. No-one was hurt; it was fine. But when you answer all these questions, that is not what they are saying. They are saying, 'It is back onto you. We want you to take responsibility for that,' not whether they are going to come back and sue me for it. We do not need that. We do not need that pressure on us, because we just want to go and do whatever we are doing.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. It is very good of you to come forward.

Mrs Allen: It is just basic—sorry.

CHAIR: I am sure you are expressing the concerns of many others.

Ms PEASE: Thank you for your volunteering. How long have you been volunteering for?

Mrs Allen: Nine years.

Ms PEASE: Well done, Maureen, thank you. It is not an easy thing to do, that driving! Well done.

ERKENS, Ms Jane, Private capacity

CHAIR: I now call forward Ms Jane Erkens representing the South Burnett Regional Council. Thank you very much for coming before us. Would you like to give us an indication of what you are thinking?

Ms Erkens: I am not sure I am actually representing the South Burnett Regional Council, but I am a councillor.

CHAIR: Let the record reflect that you are a councillor, but speaking on your own behalf and not necessarily for the council.

Ms Erkens: Besides being on the council, I am also a volunteer for numerous different organisations. I have actually found, being a councillor, a lot of organisations ask me to chair their meetings. I have found in the past 12 months that there are arguments and fights in a lot of committees. It just seems to be this year. You will go to the meeting and someone walks in with the constitution and you know straightaway—

Ms PEASE: There is going to be trouble.

Ms Erkens: You are in for trouble. I feel a lot of that comes from small organisations that are trying to take on so much work, and so much of it, as the lady before me said, is the paperwork that is involved. Who wants to be secretary? Nobody, because of the organisation. The same with treasurer. When they talk about doing all the checks on them, I come from a small country town and I can tell you that before any checks are done on somebody, most of the people in that organisation know who to trust and who not to trust. There are a lot of things that inhibit people from coming and being part of it. Especially they hear of somebody who was on a committee and it is so much work. 'Oh, no, I don't want to go.' Annual general meetings—everyone knows they are the ones you do not go to, or you come away with a job.

One of the other things that I found in these organisations, and we have so many in our community from little clubs to social organisations, are the insurance costs. With every club, you will have four clubs basically all doing things that are very similar types of things and they are all paying these huge insurance costs. We have asked the CEO at council whether there is any way that council can form some type of section or that we can do something that those clubs can come under the banner of something to save on insurance. Even through our council, clubs can apply to our council and we are paying the insurance, but we are paying all these insurances for clubs that are basically—we are not doing skydiving or anything like that—holding a local dance or holding a little music event. At the moment, a lot of organisations are trying to do things for homeless people, trying to do meals. I travelled down with Councillor Little and she is very involved in Lions. Their Lions club supplies a meal.

We have a mayor who is very keen to volunteer her councillors. She has us picking up branches after a storm or filling sandbags and whatever. Other people are prepared to come in but where do we stand? We have all these rules and regulations. What if someone has a branch fall on them? Again, it comes back to rules and regulations. I believe that heaps of people are happy to come in and lend a hand but they do not want to have to fill in all these forms, as I said before.

A lot of committees are working to raise money to pay the insurance before they can do anything else. You can run without being an incorporated association or take the risk of not taking out insurance, which a lot of people do and manage quite well. Our council staff tell me that their job is to stop me going to jail because I am a rule breaker! For example, we do scones on one morning a month. There is a lady in town who brings me two dozen scones before we start so that they are ready for us. The manager from council said, 'Jane, we can't take them because her kitchen has not been approved,' so I had to say that I came in early and cooked them in our kitchen!

Mr BOOTHMAN: You are a very honest person.

Ms Erkens: I think that is the whole thing. As I said, I have been volunteering since Mike was little, which was quite a while ago, and I have made friends during that time who are like family. You know, we cut onions up together or we stacked posters together. That is one thing that younger people now—young adults—are missing out on. I understand that nowadays both husbands and wives work and that they are busy and all that. Honestly, if we could cut down on a lot of the paperwork that they have to do and the rules that they have to follow and if we could make it a little bit more fun, they might enjoy it and pass that on through the good times spent with their kids.

Look at the organisations that really work, and probably the parkruns are a good one. There really is not a lot of paperwork for parkruns because they are not allowed to do certain things. They are not allowed to fundraise. At so many of them you have the young kids there and the kids will step

up. I think it is setting those kids up to be volunteers. We need more of that and less having to raise money for insurance and having to fill in our annual returns. They are making that a little easier now, I believe. People say to me, 'I'm not an accountant. I don't know what they are talking about.'

CHAIR: Councillor Erkens, thank you very much. I acknowledge that you have been accompanied by Councillor Linda Little from the South Burnett Regional Council. It is great to have you both here. Since I am acknowledging elected officials, former senator for Queensland Andrew Bartlett is also in the room but in a different capacity today. We have a moment for two quick questions.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you for that enlivened submission. In your experience of working with organisations and committees, do you know of any that have had to lodge a claim?

Ms Erkens: Never, no. I have instructed at pony clubs and I have been the president of darts clubs, the secretary of a chamber of commerce and the treasurer of mountain bike clubs but I have never been in an organisation that has lodged a claim.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Yet all of these organisations have had to pay quite high insurance costs every year with the potential of never having to lodge a claim?

Ms Erkens: Yes.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Thank you.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you both for joining us. I am a little bit worried about asking a question in case you incriminate yourself further!

Ms Erkens: I was going to tell you about the mountain bike club. If you fall off in the forest, we are just going to bury you!

Mr BAILLIE: I will not ask about the mountain bike club. Some of the submissions we have read have suggested an app or an online facility to manage things like blue cards and other forms that need to be filled out and that could then be applied across different volunteer organisations. You mentioned you attend and participate in lots of volunteer organisations, which we appreciate. Do you think something like that could work? If so, how so?

Ms Erkens: As the older generation drops off, hopefully the younger generation will come through and probably be a lot better. One thing that surprised me was when our youth council were looking at doing something and I asked them how they were going to advertise it they told me they were going to do posters. I thought they would all tell me that they were going to put it on TikTok, Facebook and Instagram. If you ask anyone from an older age group, they will tell you that they thought it would be electronic. Some people do still like to fill out forms. I personally would like to use an app because once I have filled out a form you can be sure I will lose it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Councillor Erkens. You have been a most impressive witness. We appreciate your participation.

Ms Erkens: Thank you.

BUNDY, Mr Robert, Private capacity

MOODY, Mr Nathan, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, gentlemen. Am I to take it that you are both volunteers in the State Emergency Service?

Mr Bundy: I am actually staff and a volunteer.

Mr Moody: I am no longer a volunteer for the Queensland Ambulance. I am no longer volunteering but I have some insight into why that is.

CHAIR: Mr Bundy, for the purposes of clarity, you are appearing in a private capacity here, but speaking with the experience that you derived from your role?

Mr Bundy: Yes, exactly.

CHAIR: I just wanted to get that clear for the record for your benefit. Mr Bundy, would you like to start off with a brief description of your views on this matter?

Mr Bundy: Thanks, Mr Chair and committee, for the opportunity. This will be off the cuff because I have not written anything down. I did put in a submission to the committee and I have read a lot of the submissions that specifically relate to the SES, and some of them were not very flattering. I think all the speakers before us today have eloquently spoken about a lot of factors, like the changing or aging demographics and the red tape involved with background checks, so I will not go over that.

I have been either a paid staff member or a volunteer for about 25 years and I think my biggest concern with the SES comes down to a lack of understanding of how volunteers work. I am only speaking about the SES here, but I have always found that you cannot treat volunteers the way you would paid staff. They are a very different group. Also, I do not think respect for volunteers currently exists in the organisation. For example, one of our members who has given 45 years service as a volunteer to the SES and a few years ago received an Emergency Services Medal for his contribution to his community is retiring and I found out this morning that they are not even going to hold a simple farewell for him. I think that is just appalling.

I can sit here and give you reason after reason but I know that time is precious. My hope out of the inquiry, for the SES specifically, is that we do a review of the organisation from the top down because it is just not working. I have been in this south-west region for probably about 15 years and we are really struggling to get members. When you look at the work done by our volunteers, you see that they are an amazing group of people. Recently we had the North Queensland floods and TC Alfred down here and we saw people in orange all the time. The work that they do for their community is just amazing. I am hoping the committee really does effect some changes as a result of this inquiry. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr Moody, for clarity, I will make it clear that we are not engaged in the investigation of individual grievances but we are happy to hear about your concerns as a former volunteer.

Mr Moody: That was not my intention. Thank you for the opportunity. My name is Nathan Moody. I have recently moved to Toowoomba from Western Queensland where I held a number of volunteering roles in small communities, such as the president of the pony club and the president of the P&F. I was also an emergency responder for the Queensland Ambulance, which was a volunteering role. I undertook those roles for the better part of 10 years whilst I lived in the area.

In listening to some of the questions that you have asked and the previous submissions, it is more around possible solutions than barriers that I have found. I held those roles and was the chair of those roles for the particular skill sets that I have. I have obviously moved because my job is still with the Queensland government but my role has changed. Many of the organisations that I led out there did not really have the continuity to bring other people in so they are either in limbo or do not have enough functioning people to continue. The pony club is now no longer. There are a number of reasons for that: the administrative overburden of running those particular clubs and organisations and the support of the 10 per cent who do do it. Sometimes you are bridging multiple divides and you do have skill sets.

Since moving to Toowoomba, I have found it quite hard to transfer my skills, my ambition and my passion for volunteering to a place as large as Toowoomba. Before, it was probably based more on word of mouth and people realising that you can come in and help. Having that capacity in the local community meant you could also support other clubs indirectly with how to run AGMs, how to document businesses, how to write grants—those sorts of things.

The biggest thing I did find—and a lot of people have mentioned it—was the insurance costs for the number of insurance claims. I do not know if the government is in a position to underwrite volunteering—I am not sure of the legalities of it. You would have to ask Crown Law. That is one issue. Another is the transferability of volunteers across the state and within the community, which you just mentioned before. Maybe you could have a volunteer identity card that organisations can sign up to which would give them access to stored information on volunteers or you could have an online training platform which provides generic training to give the volunteers the fundamentals. It would also allow for that continuity of service. I have worked for 10 years in various organisations. Some people in the room here have probably volunteered collectively for 50 years in some organisations. You do not wear it as a badge of honour but it is a clear part of the purpose as to why you do volunteer, and it feels pretty good when you are acknowledged for it. There is that self-desire to sort of be recognised for your efforts.

The key things are access, transferability and recognition, and I think all of those can be incorporated into one. Then there is cost and administrative burden. I work for the government, and that is not a job, but I also understand that sometimes we try to solve bureaucracy with more bureaucracy and that is really not what we are looking for here. It is about trying to keep it simple and getting back to the principles of what people are trying to do. Again, people have mentioned the blue card. I think we could maybe repurpose that government off-to-the-side identity card as a multiuse thing where you could have your disability and your blue card and other aspects to it recorded on the back of the particular identity card so you can quickly transfer yourself across into other organisations—whether it be through your digital volunteering identity or something like that.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Moody.

Ms PEASE: Thank you to both of you today. I thought it was interesting when you commented that some of the volunteers might have put in 50 years worth of volunteering. In this room there are probably hundreds if not thousands of hours of volunteering. Our state benefits significantly from that time so I want to acknowledge that and say thank you very much because without volunteers our society would not be the great state that it is to live in. Volunteering is also great for us. I have always been a big volunteer myself and I have got such pleasure from it and met lots of friends. I think the lady has gone now who talked about this, but I made my best friends who I am still friends with through my kids and volunteering. I am interested in what you say about transferring the digital identity for your volunteers, so thank you for sharing your thoughts with us.

Mr BAILLIE: I was going to make a comment to you, Mr Moody. It sounds like your involvement in your community is that previously you got to a position where volunteering found you and it kept expanding, but your experience now is that you have come to a new place where they do not necessarily know your background, your skill set or your interest in volunteering. Can you go into a bit more detail about what that is like? I am sure there are lots of people in the corporate space who would love to volunteer but they have no idea how to engage or where to find volunteer organisations. With your volunteering background and coming to a new place, it sounds like you face the same challenges. Is that accurate?

Mr Moody: Yes, it is. I thought on the way here about what some of the solutions are. You could call it 'SmartVolunteering'. We have the SmartJobs website; we could call it a 'SmartVolunteering' website where people can go. There are some private volunteering websites and there are many platforms, but this would be having one to go to.

I have tried to volunteer here, and it is really trying to find the right fit in larger places like Toowoomba, compared to Mitchell where everything was very impactful. You were there, you could raise money and you could see the benefits to the smaller community. It is about being put in contact with people who are the right fit or just getting a leg into organisations. I did put my name down for Meals on Wheels. I got to the last stages of being a mentor with the Raise organisation, but it was not until the last step that I worked out I could not give that much of my time through the week whilst working to mentor young children.

I do not know if I have answered your question, but it is really about having that oversight of what is available so I can make a decision myself. If someone just needs someone to mentor a chair of a board, that might be the volunteering opportunity. It might not be being involved in that organisation at all, rather just mentoring that person on how to run meetings or how to deal with those interpersonal problems that you might have. It might be being someone to call upon to say, 'We've got someone here who's quite skilled with resolving interpersonal disputes,' and they can quickly kill organisations and the culture around it. It is a bit of thinking outside the box sort of thing.

CHAIR: Thank you both. We appreciate your contribution today.

McKEE, Mr John, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. Would you like to give us a rundown on your thoughts on volunteering and then we will have some questions for you?

Mr McKee: I have been volunteering in religious instruction for 20 years. That is going good and I thank the government for accommodating that. We do struggle to get younger volunteers but that is our struggle. I also have been volunteering for seven or eight years teaching English to migrants in Toowoomba and citizenship. I have found that very rewarding. It needs training. For the volunteers who are doing the same thing—teaching English to migrants at schools and churches; for example, Darling Heights State School—I think a reward would be good for them, like a gift card.

The other one I want to put a plug in for is the rural firefighters. I am not one, but I live in the bush and I think they should be paid for the time they are on duty. I think they do not get paid. I know a few of them. It is the same for the SES. I think the time they are on duty ought to be paid. Rural firefighters take as much risk as urban firefighters, and I just put in a plug to give them a better deal.

CHAIR: You have echoed remarks that I took from some constituents of my own in Inglewood the other day. I think you have something in common with many people who come before us—that is, what you think and say is likely to be thought and said by someone else. We are coming across some common themes and that is the whole purpose of our inquiry. We want to hear from people like you to be able to make recommendations about how to make the volunteering experience as easy and as fulfilling as possible. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your appearance and thank you for the volunteering that you do. You make a difference.

Mr McKee: Thank you, and thank you for thinking of ways to improve it.

PAULL, Mr Steven, President, WhatsUp in Disability

CHAIR: Welcome. Thank you for coming before us. Would you like to make some comments?

Mr Paull: I am the current president of WhatsUp in Disability. The writers and contributors to the magazine are all volunteers and we write articles specifically about the disability sector. I have been involved since 2006, originally as a reporter and now as the president. I am also on the committee managing a community radio. Like a number of other people have mentioned—and Mr Moody stole most of my things so I will let him go with that side—my volunteering life started from even as a teenager being a surf lifesaver. I have been a president of a football club and I have been a P&C president at school so there have been lots of different experiences in my life as a volunteer.

I am now in the situation where I am retired and looking for additional volunteer work. One of the advantages is that for a number of decades I have been a JP (Qual). I have been involved in the JPs in the Community Program which has principally been at shopping centres but recently I have been able to coordinate, through a number of hospitals, to appear at hospitals with other JPs. If someone is going in for an operation or perhaps even a life-threatening circumstance, we are there to assist them in updating things like their wills, EPOAs et cetera. I have a long history with the volunteering side.

I would like to extend a couple of things in particular, and the first is with the organisations that tend to be not-for-profits. A lot of us are now transferring into that charity basis as well. I do appreciate the fact that the level has been raised to \$150,000 now instead of \$20,000, which was just ridiculous because if you could get a grant for \$20,000 then all of a sudden you had to pay for an accountant unless you got someone pro bono. That is great; we do appreciate that. The grants are difficult to get. As I said, I am chair on a number of organisations and presidents of others and I will duplicate a grant application. An embarrassing thing to me is that I will get one of those grants and for the other one I will receive a letter saying, 'You were unsuccessful. Would you like some training in how to write a grant?'

The blue card is another issue in particular, because the blue card is issued on a sponsor—that sponsor being an employer. I would like to have that changed so that once you get a blue card you have a blue card. If you can get a volunteer blue card with the (V), why do you need a sponsor? Why can't it be something that is transferable from one organisation to another? That would again cut down a great deal of paperwork.

Another thing about the blue card, yellow card and police background check is that in my early work days I was a tax inspector and I worked undercover. Part of that was working with assumed names—

CHAIR: Trench coats, trilby hats and all those sorts of things?

Mr Paull: I was going to look you up! What that does is it complicates these applications. When I was going for a JP, it took me eight months because they would be transferring to the federal government to say, 'Is this person an appropriate person? Do they have a criminal record?' The federal government would be saying, 'None of your business,' and then it was being delayed. To expedite that would be nice from that point of view.

My last point is that I have also over time been able to coordinate volunteers and community organisations myself. We have been able to negotiate with the Toowoomba Regional Council for a peppercorn agreement for an old football club which went into disrepair. We now offer free access to any not-for-profit organisation and in fact we have five at the moment and they use those premises free of charge. One of the key things is the bricks-and-mortar part. I have heard that with a couple of other people who have said, 'We allocate funds for this and allocate funds for that,' but there is a need for an allocation of funds for bricks-and-mortar and community centres.

CHAIR: The treasurer of the Dalby & District Show Society was singing your praises.

Mr Paull: That is right. I can pop down and see David Janetzki and see what David will do for us now.

A lot of the things we are talking about with the recruitment of volunteers has to be on a basis of being a good business model. We have developed a program through both the AFL and the Rugby League—particularly locally here with the Clydesdales and in Rockhampton with the Capras—where part of the contractual obligation of a football player includes community work. It is actually in their job description to be a volunteer. What we do is we go to the schools and we engage young people. A lot of those are not being included in their community or have barriers against them, and we have the players and people like me who are going into the schools and telling these kids that if you cannot be a sportsman then be a sports supporter. We find that is a good area as well for corporate Toowoomba

involvement to be able to give back. I know that the Bank of New South Wales did that for a number of years where they said to their staff that they will donate so much of their time paid by the bank into community or volunteer work. In fact, the Commonwealth Bank still do that by giving small grants to who they see in their local area as being community or volunteer based. That is about all I need to say. Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

CHAIR: Thank you for your insights, Mr Paull. We have time for probably two questions.

Mr BAILLIE: I do not have any questions. It was very comprehensive.

CHAIR: The fewer the questions, the more thorough the presentation, you can say.

Mr Paull: I have a copy of the magazine for you to have a read. That one is about volunteers.

CHAIR: With the leave of the committee, I think we may table a copy of your magazine, if that is alright. Leave is granted.

How do you go about getting the very specialised volunteers that you need? I remember hearing from the Cancer Council before that you have to have a right fit for certain things. If you are talking about journalists, that is not a skill that everybody has. Do you find they come to you because they see your product, or are you scouting around?

Mr Paull: If we look at the media which includes both this and the radio station, it is to find that area where a person has an interest in it. It can start off quite small. We have a young man who writes stories for this—he has autism—and we also have him on the radio station. We had to work around how that was going to work for him. He loves computer games, so we asked him to do a review of a computer game. We use software like Plaud where you record what he has to say, it will transfer it into text and then it just goes in there, so it is his words being used without him having to type and use those sort of things.

With regard to the radio station, we have another young guy with autism who absolutely panicked the first time he sat in a studio. I do not know if you have ever been in a radio studio, but the table is this long and it has buttons and controls. I will not say what he said as he ran out the door, but he was pretty daunted by it. We used the situation of, 'How about we record it before the time that you have to go on the radio?' so that he was comfortable with it. What he was reporting on was the last movie that he saw. His reports were quite visual, about what he saw and how he felt and that sort of thing. They have both gone on now to write bigger and better things. I think you need to find where the little bit of passion is and give the person the opportunity to do it.

I know it was mentioned before—certainly he was a president of a football club—sure, your parents came along and they ended up being the volunteers, but if you won more games, you got more volunteers. The fewer games you won—you know. Unfortunately or fortunately, I was a president of an AFL club in a Rugby League stronghold. It is difficult to get a lot of volunteers, but we were lucky because I ran my own disability company, and we incorporated clients with a disability to say, 'We would like to get you involved in sport.' We had two young ladies in wheelchairs and one of the guys used his metal work to put some stands on the side of the wheelchair where they could put their drink bottles so that whenever there was a break in play, the girls could race onto the field in their wheelchairs. If you ever called them a water girl, they would have been really upset because they were 'water boys'—that was the position.

I have heard a few people say, too, that really the reinforcement and the reward quite often is just a thanks. I am actually in my volunteer shirt for St Vincent's Hospital because I spent the morning there updating a couple of wills and that sort of thing. It is a great service that we offer for free from the point of view of the business from the hospital. They just openly embraced this and said, 'Hey, this is a great idea.' Then they get their social workers, when they are talking with the patients, to say, 'Look, we actually offer a whole lot more service than just being a hospital. We have social workers, we have workers who will work with the children, and support if you are going to be in hospital for an extended time,' telling them how do we do that. That is where I see the volunteers want to come in. They want to feel like they are part of it.

I do remember one last thing, sorry: wouldn't it be nice if a volunteer like myself, who is not entitled to a pension because I have my own business, would get a tax break for the hours that we spend volunteering? I know it is not a state thing, but, gee, it would be nice.

CHAIR: It has been mentioned to us. Rewards and recognition for volunteers are very important. I see a few heads nodding there. Mr Paull, thank you very much for your contribution.

Mr Paull: You are very welcome. Thanks for listening. I appreciate it.

Public Hearing—Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

CHAIR: I thank everybody for your attendance today. It is wonderful to see a room full of people interested in volunteering in Queensland. That concludes this hearing. I would like to thank our Hansard reporters, Annette and Giacinta—it is great that you have come—and the secretariat staff, Kylie and Zac. There were no questions taken on notice. I declare this meeting closed.

The committee adjourned at 4.34 pm.