

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No: 64
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Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: No attachment

Submitter Comments:

Dear Committee Volunteering is at the heart of community in Australia, from school P&Cs to football clubs, Lions, surf clubs and beyond. It's part of the fabric of who we are. It is also critical to our sense of belonging and identity. Volunteering underpins the fabric of our society and fosters collaboration and cooperation necessary for other parts of social life, including business and politics.

Robert Putnam's excellent work, including his book *Bowling Alone*, highlights the importance of group belonging. Volunteering with purpose not only delivers much needed services to our communities, but also acts as social glue in an increasingly fractured society. One challenge, however, is the increasingly busy lives of families, the myriad of competing demands on individuals, and the resulting unfilled volunteering positions. Too often significant workloads are left to a few individuals and others are scared to get involved on seeing the scale of the task. There are many advantages to communities of being able to collaborate and define for themselves their priorities. While local government is the proper representative of communities, communities themselves need to be able to self-define and self-determine their ambitions. The ability of a group of people far outweighs individual efforts and can bridge the gap between isolated individuals and the lowest tier of political representation. My experience of many years living in Scotland is that where communities, through volunteer groups, are given support and funding to define their priorities, through for example a Community Action Plan, local governments can support implementation, and the community has a sense of cohesion and purpose. These Community Action Plans have led to significant new community enterprises emerging including new community owned distilleries, community owned wind turbines and other community assets. The revenue from such ventures can be ploughed back into community infrastructure and a virtuous cycle emerges. What is needed is strategic support for volunteer groups – guidance on governance, leadership, fund raising tools, and strategic funding. Again, in Scotland, the Climate Challenge Fund sparked many communities to take climate action; but more importantly it gave them the impetus, tools and support to coalesce around a purpose, and establish governance and bank accounts, with the result that many more and varied initiatives emerged and the unintended but realised outcomes were significant growth in civic capacity and capability. In conclusion, volunteering is a core part of our civic lives, with much more potential to support and drive better outcomes for society and community if properly supported. Thanks for considering my submission