

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No:	82
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Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

I have had considerable experience in volunteering summarised as follows:

1. After the 1974 Brisbane floods, I was appointed as the leader of "B" group of the State Emergency Service. Together with my deputy we introduced regular training (including exercises with people made up with wounds, fractures etc.) made various suggestions about improvement including the likes of caravans as central points in disasters as well as a van set up for catering purposes. We started making displays in the shopping centres to try to recruit volunteers. Unfortunately, due to work transfer and other commitments I had to resign.
2. I did some volunteer work with Red Cross.
3. I was at Volunteering Queensland for approximately 10 years. During this time I did a lot of administration work for CHOGM and was a Team Leader for Drivers. This was cancelled because of September 11. The following year, CHOGM was held on the Sunshine Coast. Heaps of admin work.
4. While at Volunteering Queensland, I trained the volunteers in the organisation in the use of the database for recruiting volunteers.
5. Also, twice a year, I was involved with Homeless Connect – recruiting and training volunteers, and supervising them at the event.
6. I assisted Brisbane Legacy when it was the beneficiary of the Bridge to Brisbane Run. (system changed for the following year).
7. At Legacy, I assisted with its large mailout for a number of years (reducing from about 9,000 to about 5,000 for various reasons) and managed to reduce the addresses which would not barcode from over 1,200 to less than 100.
8. A former Manager at Volunteering Queensland (Carlton Meyn) was the manager of BUSHkids and asked me to help out as a volunteer. In 2012 (If I remember year correctly) BUSHkids was the beneficiary of the Loaves and Fishes Lunch at St John's Cathedral. I performed a lot of the administration work in inviting guests, etc.
9. I was dubbed in to the Dean of St John's Cathedral as a good administrator, and have been there ever since. The volunteer work has involved creation of databases for various causes for the Cathedral.
10. The Cathedral held the Loaves and Fishes Lunch each year until covid struck. I sent out all the invitations and recorded the RSVPs. (Last major lunch was for Hummingbird House at which there were over 700 guests, and raising lots of money on the day.)
11. Last year, the Cathedral started the Choral Music Trust to raise money for various aspects of music at the Cathedral. A consultant from Tasmania wanted the Dean to purchase an off the shelf database, but the Dean insisted I create the database which has had numerous challenges.

My late wife used to call herself a "volunteering widow".

Volunteering is a good way to meet people, socialise and not vegetate at home.

Volunteers volunteer for various reasons – one of the main reasons is to give back to the community.

What a volunteer does, depends a lot on his/her skill set. Some people are good with paper work and others are more practical (e.g. delivering meals on wheels). Volunteer job descriptions need to be clear about what is required e.g.

- What skills are needed (if any)
- Days and times when required
- Will there be an orientation session
- What training will be given
- Is there a mentoring program

Training is a big factor. Unless there is adequate qualified training, the volunteer will call it quits. Organisation staff need to be approachable and not seem aloof.

Time is a big factor. For retired people this is not such a big issue. For working people it's a case of when can they do the work. For example, I Volunteer as a JP in the Community and one of my colleagues works Monday to Friday, but commits to being rostered on Saturdays.

Some people like challenges to keep the little grey cells active and problem solving. Others are just as happy to be "Indians" and not "chiefs".

Volunteers need to be appreciated. For example – morning tea for birthday, a lunch at the end of the year for all the volunteers to say "thank you". (This occurs at St John's Cathedral)

Some organisations at times are a bit overwhelmed by the skills of the volunteer and do not know how to cope with such a situation. Organisations have to be susceptible to suggestions made by volunteer for the improvement of the organisation or processes within the organisation.

Costs of transport used to be a big issue, particularly for pensioners. I don't know how much has changed since the reduced fares has been introduced.

Volunteering can be a good place to start for school leavers if they haven't got a job. They can acquire skills which will assist them in gaining employment. Some organisations are not happy with this arrangement as they keep having a frequent turnover which means time of permanent staff is taken up with constant training.

When the flood hit Brisbane in 2011, it was a disaster (in my view) from a volunteering perspective.

I had created an Access database for some purposes in Volunteering Queensland. I was not called and when I was next at Volunteering Queensland, I found one of its staff had brought in a number of volunteers to take telephone calls. Instead of calling me, (I could made a couple of minor tweaks to the Access Database) , an Excel spreadsheet was being used to try to record data. However the call takers were writing information on scraps of paper and these were supposed to be entered in the spreadsheet (there may have been more than one). These calls should NOT have been to Volunteering Queensland but to the State Emergency Service as it was this service that deployed people to tasks in various areas.

Subsequent to this, Volunteering Queensland was granted a considerable sum of money to do something with the data that hade been recorded. In my opinion this went to the wrong organisation.

As a former SES Group Leader, I would have liked to have seen a decent database created (not just for that or a particular emergency) which would record names and contact details for prospective volunteers with their skills, what machinery they had, had they been trained (e.g. in proper use and handling of a chainsaw). Record, for example, church halls and their locations with details of who holds keys, for emergency evacuees etc. if needed. Contacts for other services e.g. Salvation army - provision of meals in the field.

If trees fell over roads, on to houses etc, a query could be run in the database to list those volunteers with chainsaws and refer them to central point where SES people could direct them to appropriate area.