

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to Volunteering in Queensland

Introduction

Thank you so much for giving us the chance to be part of this important **Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland**.

Our submission is based on our wonderful experiences at the Bulimba Community Centre, where our amazing volunteers are truly the heart of our community.

Our volunteers provide invaluable support for activities ranging from programs for Bubs to our Young at Heart (seniors). Their contributions are essential for the smooth functioning of the community centre, and the impact they make on both the Centre and the community is enormous and deeply appreciated.

Through this submission, we aim to highlight both the importance of, and the satisfaction and enjoyment gained from being a volunteer, as shared with us by our volunteers.

We will also address the current state of volunteer support within our Centre and some of the areas we have identified for improvement to benefit everyone involved.

Why People Get Involved

- **Loneliness and Isolation:** Many of our volunteers join us to fill a personal gap in their lives after retirement. Additionally, the Bulimba Community Centre welcomes numerous volunteers who are new to the country, as well as our "young volunteers" who seek to gain experience and confidence.
- **Personal Satisfaction:** Many volunteers find great satisfaction and joy in their roles. They often emphasize the importance of their work and the positive experiences they gain from volunteering.
- **Community Connection:** Volunteering helps individuals feel connected to their community. It allows them to contribute to the well-being of others and be part of a supportive network.
- **Skill Development:** Our volunteers often thank us for the opportunity to learn new skills, which have helped them in many ways.
- **Meeting New Friends:** Watching our volunteers blossom after meeting and developing new friendships is wonderful and rewarding.

Focus Areas

Number of Volunteers and Their Impact

The Bulimba Centre currently has **around 100 people actively** involved as volunteers throughout any given year. Their level of support varies and is entirely dependent on their ability to give.

Roles of Volunteers

Our volunteers are the lifeblood of the Bulimba Community Centre, contributing to a wide range of activities that keep our vibrant community hub running smoothly. Their dedication and hard work are essential to the day-to-day operations and the continued success of our various programs and services. In addition to the many day to day activities of a volunteer here are a few examples of some key areas where our volunteers make a significant impact:

- **Garden Club:** Volunteers maintain the Centre's thriving edible community garden, ensuring it remains a beautiful and productive space for everyone to enjoy.
- **Kitchen Brigade:** Our volunteers are the heart of our kitchen, catering for events and organizing regular bake sales, providing delicious homemade treats for the community.
- **Bulimba Community Markets:** Volunteers manage our Centre's stall at the community markets, engaging with approximately 1,000 visitors each month and promoting our activities and services.
- **Administration:** From greeting visitors to assisting with general administrative tasks, our volunteers help create a welcoming and efficient environment at the Centre.

Without the invaluable contributions of our dedicated volunteers, our small operations team would be unable to uphold the high standards and deliver the exceptional services for which the Bulimba Community Centre is renowned. Their unwavering commitment and diverse skill sets enable us to continue fostering a strong, connected, and supportive community.

We are deeply grateful for their efforts and recognize that their involvement is crucial to our mission and success.

Support for Volunteers

The level of support required by each volunteer differs significantly from individual to individual. Knowing what they need and how to deliver this is one of our highest priorities. For example, one volunteer may have personal health and safety concerns, while others may have had negative past experiences. Our role is to make them feel safe and secure in the happy and inclusive environment we strive so hard to deliver.

We have found that the best way to do this is to spend quality time getting to know each individual and agreeing on ways to meet their needs. The Centre has recently appointed a Volunteer Coordinator with clear goals and objectives for this very purpose.

These goals and objectives include:

- Letting volunteers know how much they are appreciated.
- Acknowledging and celebrating volunteer contributions.
- Ensuring that each volunteer is trained and feels comfortable in their designated role.
- Clearly communicating the expectations of both parties, with particular emphasis on letting them know how the value of their individual contribution has a positive flow on effect within the broader community.
- Providing regular updates/feedback and quick responses to any queries/concerns.
- Offering flexibility to drop in and out of their volunteer roles as dictated by their own personal commitments.

Trends in Volunteer Numbers

Based on our experiences at the Bulimba Community Centre, our volunteer numbers have been consistently maintained over many years, excluding the COVID years. Interestingly, over the past couple of years, the trend in numbers has not only grown, but our volunteers are becoming younger (teens and young adults). This aligns with our strategic plans to move from a Senior Citizens Centre to a Community Centre that provides a welcoming environment for the entire community. This trend is also supported by the types of events and programs we have introduced, such as our Young Entrepreneurs Bootcamp.

Need for Volunteers

Volunteering plays a crucial role in building strong communities and fostering a sense of belonging. Healthy and vibrant communities prosper around such volunteer roles. Local businesses are also able to demonstrate leadership and their commitment to the community through their involvement. The role of a Community Centre is to provide opportunities for both individuals and businesses to join forces for this purpose.

Impact of Volunteer Numbers

Without volunteers, community-based organizations like the Bulimba Community Centre would be unable to continue providing the level of support required and expected of a healthy, vibrant, and inclusive community.

Personal Volunteering Journey

For this section, I have chosen to share a deeply personal story from one of our cherished volunteers, Lynne [REDACTED]. Lynne's journey with us began on the advice of her doctor, who suggested she seek out new support networks to help navigate the many setbacks she had faced in life, including significant health issues that brought about further family and social challenges along with a general feeling of isolation and loneliness.

In Lynne's own words, she often remarks that becoming involved with the Bulimba Community has been nothing short of life changing. She speaks with heartfelt gratitude about how her once overwhelming loneliness has vanished, replaced by a newfound sense of self-worth that she describes as staggering.

Lynne attributes this profound transformation entirely to the friendships she has cultivated within the Centre and the broader local community. She now finds herself surrounded by understanding and supportive individuals who are always ready to lend a hand when times get tough. This network of caring people has not only uplifted her spirits but also provided her with a sense of belonging she had longed for.

Knowing that her efforts at the Centre are making a tangible difference in the lives of others has caused Lynne's confidence to soar. Her own lived experiences have given her a unique ability to recognize and reach out to those who may also be struggling with loneliness. The support networks she has established to help others are, in turn, continuing to bolster her own confidence and sense of purpose.

Lynne's story is a testament to the transformative power of volunteering. It highlights how giving back to the community can create a ripple effect of positive change, not only for those we help but also for ourselves.

I hope this version captures the essence of Lynne's journey and the impact of her volunteering. If you need any further information, please feel free to contact me.

Barriers to Volunteering

Using feedback from our own volunteers, some of the challenges they have shared with us are:

- **Time Constraints:** Many younger people are juggling busy lives with children, jobs/school/university, and other family and personal commitments.
- **Uncertainty:** A lack of understanding of how much time is required and whether they can meet this expectation.
- **Skills:** Not sure of what is required and whether they have the skills to meet this requirement.
- **Negative Past Experiences:** When past experiences have not met their expectations, they are reluctant to commit again.
- **Health Concerns:** Concerns about whether they are healthy and strong enough to undertake the role of a volunteer.
- **Confidence:** Lack of confidence in surviving in an unknown new environment.

Overcoming these barriers requires building an entirely new understanding of the role of a volunteer, especially for the younger generation as they progress through life.

Changes in the Volunteering Space

- **Communication:** Changing the narrative of what the role of a volunteer entails.
- **Management Systems:** Introducing technical solutions to communicate, measure, and report the value of the role of a volunteer to the community and communicate this extensively so it is widely understood by all community stakeholders.
- **Feedback:** Listening to and acting on feedback from volunteers on how to improve the system and bring it into the new millennium.

Conclusion

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this Inquiry. As mentioned throughout this submission, the Bulimba Community Centre could not survive without its wonderful volunteers. Not only would the Centre not survive, but the community in general would lose its vibrancy and connections within the various levels of society.

I would be more than happy to address or expand on any of the points raised above.

Kind regards,

Cate Vickers

Manager

Bulimba Community Centre