

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No: 102
Submitted by: Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association Inc.
Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:

20th February 2025

Ms. Alison Worrell

President

Cairns & District Senior Citizens Association Inc.

Email address: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Website: <https://www.cairnsseniors.com.au>

Queensland Parliamentary Committees

The Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee

LGSBCSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland - The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities, and the State.

Volunteers are the **backbone** of our organisation, and their contribution is immeasurable in creating a more connected, resilient, and supportive society. The role of volunteers extends beyond just assisting our organisation; they foster a sense of belonging, improve mental and physical well-being, and ensure the sustainability of vital services, especially for vulnerable groups such as our demographic.

Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association Inc. is a **not-for-profit organisation** that is entirely dependent on volunteers. We provide essential **social, well-being, and educational services** to seniors in and around Cairns, helping them stay active, independent, engaged & ultimately **reducing social isolation and the strain on healthcare services**.

With just under 300 members, mostly aged between 72 and 85, our volunteers ensure that around 15 activities per week run smoothly, along with special events celebrating milestones and cultural occasions, such as **Easter, Melbourne Cup, Anzac Day, St. Patrick's Day, Mother's Day, Member birthdays, and Christmas celebrations**, to name a few, with a weekly attendance of approximately **200 seniors**, many of whom live alone (90%) and rely on these programs for companionship and support.

However, sustaining a volunteer-led organisation comes with challenges, including recruitment, retention, and the increasing demands of compliance and administration. As the pace of life accelerates and digitalisation expands, ensuring that volunteers receive adequate support, training, and recognition is critical to maintaining these invaluable services. FNQ Volunteers Inc. and Centrelink have been instrumental in providing us with a fairly steady flow of volunteers, helping to bridge the gap and support our ongoing programs. Their assistance has been invaluable in ensuring we can continue to serve our senior community effectively.

THE NEED FOR ASSISTANCE

Because of our fragile demography a lot of support is required, both in administration and on the ground.

- **Volunteer Shortages:** We require a **minimum of 36 volunteers**, but many leave when they find employment, leading to a high turnover.
- **Administrative Burden:** Our committee, elected annually, often faces vacancies, resulting in **increased workload** for remaining members.
- **Digital Demands:** The fast-paced digital world has added complexity to our operations. As more administrative tasks, communication, and service delivery move online, the need for digitally savvy volunteers has never been greater. However, finding volunteers with strong computer and digital skills remains a challenge. Many of our volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, with varying levels of technological experience. The lack of digital literacy can slow down processes, increase reliance on a few tech-savvy individuals, and create barriers to efficiency in areas such as:
 - Maintaining records & databases (e.g., membership, volunteer rosters, health & safety records)
 - Compliance & policy management
 - Website updates & online communication
 - Event coordination & digital marketing
 - Using webinars & virtual engagement tools
 - Many of our senior members require assistance with technology, from navigating online services to using digital communication tools.
- **Impact of COVID-19:** The pandemic significantly reduced the number of retirees willing to volunteer.
- **Financial Constraints:** We receive **no ongoing funding** except through successful grant applications.

Additionally, as **tenants of a Council-owned premises**, we are required to hire out our venue for income. However, this results in **property damage**, which we are responsible for repairing. Out-of-hours volunteers assist with hall hire, but the additional administrative workload is significant.

- **Centrelink Referrals:** While 20% of our volunteers come through the Centrelink system, compliance is poor. These individuals are required to complete **15 hours per week**, but due to **lack of monitoring**, many do not fulfill their obligations while still receiving their allowances.
- **High Support Needs:** Volunteers come with varying skill levels, requiring significant supervision and support, which is not always available.
- **Inadequate Induction Process:** Due to staffing limitations, the quality and depth of volunteer inductions are insufficient. (We would like to find an organisation to design and implement our induction & tutorial programs.)
- **Limited Leadership Capacity:** A shortage of experienced committee members results in additional workload and operational inefficiencies.

- **Cultural Awareness Gaps:** A lack of understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds affects volunteer engagement and integration.
- **Transport Accessibility Issues:** There is **no bus stop** on our street, making it difficult for volunteers and members to access our centre. Despite petitioning for over a year, we have yet to see progress on this issue.

The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups, **Challenges from Diverse Backgrounds**

Cultural diversity among our volunteers is both a strength and an ongoing challenge. Many of our volunteers are **new migrants** for whom **English is not their first language**, which can create communication barriers and impact their ability to integrate smoothly into the team.

One significant issue is the **attitude of some long-standing Caucasian members** toward these volunteers, particularly newcomers. Unfortunately, this lack of inclusivity leads to a **high attrition rate** among migrant volunteers, as they often do not feel welcomed or adequately supported.

To improve retention and create a more inclusive environment, **cultural awareness training** and structured **mentorship programs** could help bridge these gaps and foster better relationships through the assistance of volunteers.

Lack Of Government Funding

Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association Inc. (**CDSCA**) receives **no regular financial support** from any government bodies. Instead, we rely solely on **competitive grants** to sustain our services. Given that our members are all retirees, we can only charge minimal fees for activities and events, which limits our ability to expand or enhance our offerings.

Supporting First Nations Volunteers

CDSCA actively encourages and supports **First Nations volunteers**. However, **80% have poor attendance records**, often due to personal or family-related responsibilities. We remain understanding of these challenges and strive to accommodate their needs, but it significantly impacts our volunteer workforce.

Skills & Workforce Limitations

We do not have the luxury of selecting volunteers based on skill level—we accept anyone referred to us or who applies. As a result, we need to be able to have a pool of volunteers to choose from to address various skill areas such as:

- **Office administration & digital skills**
 - **Membership & Volunteer Records:** Maintaining accurate databases for compliance and reporting.
 - **Policies & Procedures:** Ensuring adherence to governance, workplace health & safety, and hygiene practices.
 - **Volunteer Recruitment & Rosters:** Managing the onboarding process, scheduling, and retention strategies.

- **Event Coordination & Marketing:** Organising activities, promoting events, and engaging the community.
- **Digital & Online Systems:** Updating the website, managing webinars, and managing online communication tools.
- **Accounting & MYOB expertise:** Managing accounts to ensure full compliance.

These administrative tasks are essential for the smooth operation of our services. Addressing this gap is crucial for our long-term sustainability.

Other areas:

- **Physically capable volunteers** for moving furniture and setting up events like marquees.
- **General building maintenance** for our **50-year-old facility**, which comes with ongoing repair costs.

Without reliable funding and skilled volunteer support, the sustainability of our association remains a challenge.

Volunteering is not just about giving back; it also enriches the lives of those who serve. Volunteers gain skills, build friendships, and experience a sense of purpose, contributing to both personal and community well-being. Recognising and strengthening the infrastructure that supports volunteering across Queensland is essential to ensuring that organisations like ours can continue to deliver vital services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Greater emphasis on marketing and awareness campaigns around volunteerism is essential to sustaining and growing community-driven initiatives. Many people are unaware of the profound impact volunteering has—not just on the recipients of services but on volunteers themselves, who gain a sense of purpose, social connection, and valuable skills.

It would be great to have stronger advocacy, media presence, and educational initiatives to highlight the benefits of volunteering and encourage broader participation across all demographics. Government support, corporate partnerships, and grassroots efforts should work together to create a culture where volunteerism is recognised, valued, and actively promoted as a vital part of society.

Encouraging staff to participate in corporate volunteering programs provides immense benefits not only to the community but also to the employees and the organisations they work for. Companies that allow their staff to volunteer—whether through paid volunteering days, virtual initiatives, or structured corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs—help create a more engaged, motivated, and socially responsible workforce.

As we know these are some of the **Key Benefits of Corporate Volunteering:**

- ✓ Boosts Team Spirit – Strengthens teamwork, communication, and collaboration in a meaningful way.

- ✔ Develops Key Skills – Enhances leadership, problem-solving, and interpersonal abilities.
- ✔ Improves Well-being – Recharges employees, increasing engagement and job satisfaction.
- ✔ Elevates Brand Reputation – Showcases corporate values, attracting customers and talent.
- ✔ Creates Real Impact – Drives lasting positive change in communities.

Leading companies like Starbucks, Deloitte, and Salesforce are championing corporate volunteerism by offering paid volunteer time, hosting monthly care weeks, and embracing virtual volunteering to make giving back easier. Investing in corporate volunteering benefits businesses, employees, and communities—fostering social impact while enhancing personal and professional growth.

For example, organisations could develop comprehensive training and induction resources across all areas of volunteer work. Given the high turnover of volunteers, having structured, accessible, and efficient training materials (digital training tools, video tutorials, interactive modules, and virtual inductions) would make a significant impact to our organisation by:

- ✔ Accelerating the onboarding process – New volunteers can quickly understand their roles and responsibilities.
- ✔ Ensuring consistency – Standardised training means every volunteer receives the same quality of instruction.
- ✔ Reducing reliance on our limited staff for repetitive training – Freeing up time for more strategic tasks.
- ✔ Improving volunteer confidence & retention – Well-trained volunteers feel more prepared and valued.
- ✔ Enhancing efficiency – Volunteers can get to work faster, reducing downtime & ensuring adherence to health and safety measures.

Volunteers are essential to the survival of our organisation and others like it, reducing costs for the government, while also playing a key role in restoring values and morals within our communities.

Thank you for reading.