

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Having worked in the volunteer space in my local community for over 10 years and founding a charitable Womens shed in the aftermath of the fires that devastated the Southern Downs community in 2019 and drought 2019-2020, I have found that volunteering by individuals and groups happens for different reasons. This is what I have identified: That the majority of volunteers are aged 50+ and fall into one of the categories listed below. In the space of community and founding a charitable group: * As a networking tool for new residents* A belief and passion in a cause* Wanting to promote their own business/interest Residents retire and want something to do, and as they love their community, believe its their civic duty to give back to the community. They will find a group that suits their interests or skill set and join that group. A new resident is looking to find new friends, and will look for and join for similar reasons including supporting community events that rely on volunteers to run them successfully. Some will volunteer their time, in exchange for promotion of their business or interest. While that in itself is commendable, it can become an issue if not controlled when competitors are not given a chance to quote for jobs or be offered the chance to participate. Some events lose volunteers or have difficulty with getting volunteers because either the timeline is too short to get things done successfully without high levels of stress, vague instructions and poor communication. Personality clashes and bullying of individuals prevents many from putting their hand up to help. While conflicts in any group or workplace is inevitable, minimizing them requires training in conflict management, and small group management strategies. Other barriers to volunteering are age (Currently the management committee of the group I founded has an average age of 70), health issues that precludes them from too much physical activity, being time poor, and financial constraints. There is always a financial component of volunteering that the individual is willing to donate. Again, that can get out of control very quickly. (My personal experience confirms that)* Wanting to support others in the community when disaster occurs In the Disaster Response space: When disaster occurs, you are swamped with assistance and support in the initial response to the disaster. After a month or so, volunteer numbers can decrease quite dramatically - not because there isn't anything to do, but because they have other obligations, there is lack of good management of volunteer and clients, lack of funds, and too many groups doing the same or similar service in a small community. Lack of CLEAR communication between disaster response groups and the community also delivers frustration and disillusionment. Volunteers can quickly become very disillusioned when they see their efforts being exploited, and are abused by clients demanding more without having the necessary experience to cope with that conflict. Lack of support from local and State Governments also play a factor in volunteers reluctant to continue their good work. Once the response is under control, the thankyou for a job well done, most times is remote. By that I mean, that the government/Community representatives are not standing in front of the volunteers, talking to them, thanking them and allowing them to share their experiences. Having a thankyou BBQ or concert is not necessarily the best option to do so. Lack of recognition of the volunteers by them or the media needs to be louder with volunteer stories. (Media will focus on 1-2 individuals, but its not enough in my opinion). For example, When distributing water for the town, we had over 40 volunteers that we could call on to assist in the first few weeks. By the time our service was not required that number had dropped to less than 10. Some had left due to fatigue or health issues while others left due to the perceived lack of support by Govt and the community. There were some wonderful people working who deserved recognition for what they did and were never named or recognised. Due to the immediacy of the situation, quite often response groups are evolving at the

same time as the disaster unfolds. Quite often, you will see a number of ad hoc groups pop up to assist that have no accountability or clarity. This can create a whole raft of issues like Accountability, Communication, record keeping and financial clarity. While we have the Office of Fair Trade for Associations and the ACNC for Charities, volunteers do not necessarily know the steps to take to register their entity and ensure good management practices for the disaster as well as ensuring their own accountability. It can be a minefield to navigate and it can be easy to forgo the accountability and transparency required when dealing with donations, grants, equipment and volunteers. In the months that follow a community effort to cope with a disaster, mental wellbeing is often overlooked with many volunteers not thinking they may need some support and counselling to process the events of the disaster. My personal need of support is ongoing still, 5 years later. The formation of the Womens Shed was in response to this need that was identified by our volunteers working in the field and water distribution depot. This sentiment is echoed by any number of women in our community. Thankyou for the opportunity to share our experiences.