

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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SUBMISSION: "PARLIMENTARY ENQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING"

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Vast and Untapped Pool of Potential Volunteers from the Multicultural Communities (CALD members) in Queensland

• About the Author

My name is Hussain Baba, and I have been actively involved in both informal and formal volunteering for the past 20 years, focusing on intra- and inter-community initiatives, primarily on the Gold Coast. I am the founder of 'Multicultural Social Network Inc.' and also serving as the Secretary of the Islamic Society of Gold Coast Inc.

Currently, I am conducting PhD research at QUT titled "*Exploring the Underrepresentation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Muslims in Formal Inter-Community Volunteering: A Study of Barriers and Motivations.*"

This study examines the experiences, challenges, barriers, and motivations of CALD Muslim volunteers, who are particularly underrepresented in formal inter-community volunteering spaces such as NGOs, public hospitals, volunteering agencies, and emergency services (e.g., SES). The findings aim to enhance understanding of volunteering dynamics, improve recruitment strategies, and offer insights for developing more inclusive volunteer programs. Additionally, the research seeks to address the acute volunteer shortage in the post-COVID-19 era amid growing demand.

• Introduction

Queensland is a vibrant tapestry of diversity, with individuals from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds enriching its social and economic fabric. However, despite this multicultural vibrancy and the growing demand for volunteers, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities remain underrepresented in formal inter-community volunteering. While the CALD population has grown in recent years, their participation in inter-community volunteering remains disproportionately low.

This underrepresentation signifies a largely untapped pool of potential volunteers, a resource that could be crucial in strengthening social cohesion and community development. In 2021, Queensland's population included 1,170,328 people (22.7%) born overseas, classified as first-generation migrants. With the emergence of second-generation migrants, this cultural and linguistic diversity continues to expand.

- **The Growing Demand for Volunteers in Queensland**

Volunteering plays a crucial role in building strong and connected communities. Various sectors, including aged care, disability services, disaster relief, and community outreach programs, rely heavily on volunteers to function effectively. Traditionally, inter-community volunteering has been predominantly undertaken by individuals of European descent who have lived in Australia for generations. With Queensland's growing population and the increasing needs of various social sectors, the demand for volunteers continues to rise. For example, the economic value of volunteering in Queensland alone was estimated at over AUD 117 billion between 2022 and 2023 (Volunteering Queensland, 2024).

- **The Untapped Potential of CALD Volunteers**

However, despite the availability of willing individuals for volunteering, CALD communities are under-represented in formal inter-community volunteering. This could be due to motivations, barriers and enablers from both sides. Despite the challenges, CALD volunteers bring unique perspectives, skills, and experiences that can enrich community programs and make them more inclusive and effective. Engaging CALD volunteers can help organisations build trust and meaningful connections with diverse communities, improving service delivery and engagement. Encouraging CALD participation in volunteering fosters a sense of belonging, reduces social isolation, and strengthens inter-community relationships. One of the CALD communities who have been active in inter-community volunteering are the members of Islamic communities. There are about 60,000 residing in Queensland representing over 100 cultural backgrounds. For Muslims, volunteering is considered as a form of charity which forms part of an act of worship. Therefore, volunteering is very important for the Muslims.

- **Importance of Volunteering by CALD Muslims**

Volunteering in Islam is deeply rooted in a God-centred ethos². The Qur'an and Sunnah strongly advocate for a culture of volunteerism, urging individuals to willingly share their time, resources, knowledge, and acts of kindness with others. In Islam, volunteerism is a broad concept encompassing any action done for the benefit of others solely for the sake of God, without any expectation of reward or return from those who benefit. This ranges from simple gestures, such as removing an obstacle from a path, to establishing large philanthropic and charitable organisations. Volunteerism can be undertaken individually or collectively. Muslims carry a profound sense of responsibility to engage in voluntary acts of goodness or worship. This responsibility is not just a duty, but a commitment to the community, driven by the principle of seeking no personal gain. Consequently, volunteerism is a core aspect of Islamic ethics and practice, forming an integral part of the identity of practising Muslims.

- **Barriers Faced by CALD Communities in Volunteering**

Several known factors contribute to the underrepresentation of CALD individuals in formal volunteering roles. Many CALD individuals are unaware of volunteering opportunities due to language barriers, limited outreach efforts, and lack of culturally appropriate promotional materials. Some CALD community members may feel excluded or hesitant to participate due to past experiences of discrimination, lack of inclusivity in volunteer organisations, or cultural misunderstandings. Additionally, migrants and refugees often prioritise work, family responsibilities, and settlement-related challenges over volunteering, making it difficult to commit to unpaid community work. Limited English proficiency can hinder effective communication and engagement, making it challenging for CALD individuals to integrate into volunteering programs that primarily operate in English. Furthermore, in some cultures, community service is informal and centered around family and close-knit groups rather than structured organisations, leading to a lack of recognition of formal volunteering as a viable option.

- **Strategies to Enhance CALD Participation in Volunteering**

To harness this untapped potential, organisations and policymakers must adopt inclusive strategies. These strategies are not just beneficial, but they are also urgent. Tailoring recruitment efforts to address the specific needs and preferences of CALD communities, including multilingual outreach and community engagement, can significantly improve participation. Providing flexible volunteering opportunities, addressing transportation challenges, and ensuring culturally appropriate training and support are crucial steps in removing structural barriers. Collaborating with CALD community leaders, faith-based organisations, and ethnic groups to promote volunteering in a culturally sensitive manner will help bridge the gap. Additionally, offering language support, cultural competency training, and mentorship programs can empower CALD individuals to navigate volunteering roles effectively.

- **Conclusion**

It is imperative for stakeholders, including government bodies, non-profit organisations, and local communities, to work collaboratively. Engage the multicultural community leaders and representative. This collaboration is crucial to ensure that volunteering is accessible to all, regardless of cultural or linguistic background. Each stakeholder has a unique role to play in promoting volunteering and fostering a more connected and equitable society.

- **Author's offer**

I am open to actively participate in study groups or working committees established by the Government, contributing their expertise and research insights to policy discussions, strategic planning, and decision-making processes. Engagement may involve collaborating with policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to address key issues, provide evidence-based recommendations, and support the development of initiatives related to their area of expertise. My eagerness to engage in policy discussions is palpable and can inspire especially the CALD members and Multicultural Community leaders and representatives to join in the discussions.

As I mentioned earlier that I am also undertaking a PhD research project at QUT University, focusing on volunteering. Their research, which delves into critical aspects of volunteering, such

as participation barriers, motivations, and community engagement, is poised to provide valuable insights for governmental programs and policy frameworks. With my academic background and ongoing research, I feel I am well-positioned to offer informed perspectives, contribute to policy formulation, and assist in shaping initiatives that promote and enhance volunteerism within culturally diverse communities in Queensland. The audience can feel confident in my expertise and my ability to make a significant contribution.

**“No matter where you come from”
“No matter what language you speak”
“No matter what your religious beliefs are”
We are all brothers & sisters in Humanity.
Therefore, we should Respect each other, extend
Love and Care, and be Compassionate to one another
– by Hussain Baba (2019)
www.MulticulturalSocialNetwork.com**

