

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission

Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

I welcome this enquiry and thank you for providing an opportunity to make a submission.

I have been volunteering on the Gold Coast for more than 10 years in a variety of capacities including at the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

I see volunteering as a public service and, like so many, I value helping my community and am enriched by the experience. It provides great social connection, mental stimulation, and a feeling of wellbeing. Unfortunately, many do not see these benefits as just rewards for services given. I believe there has been a shift in the idea of, and the value of volunteering. Anecdotally, it appears that volunteering does not align with some generational attitudes, and asking people to do something for nothing is much harder than it used to be.

As a Justice of the Peace providing services in local shopping centres, younger people, in particular, are often amazed to find out that JP services are free and JPs don't get paid. It is not uncommon to be asked 'Why would you do this for nothing.' For some it appears that volunteering is not an embraced concept.

Volunteer Workforce:

For many, the image of a volunteer is an older person 'helping out' and 'filling in their day, or, 'merely finding something to do with their time.' This attitude diminishes the value of the work volunteers do and relegates it to a menial and lesser role than paid work. Many volunteers perform in highly complex and demanding roles often using skills and expertise from their professional lives. However, much of this work goes unrecorded and consequently unrecognised and unrewarded.

It is well known that all industries are struggling to attract volunteers. While the ranks of the older volunteer cohort maybe just about keeping pace, replacing those who are worn out, or dying out, with those recently retired from paid employment, there is little or no attraction for younger people across many sectors.

I would like to see some initiatives around raising the value of the volunteer workforce. I use the term volunteer workforce, because while they are unpaid for their services they do 'work' and are the backbone of many industries, particularly those in the charity sector.

Given that people claiming centrelink benefits are able to claim volunteer work as part of their mutual obligations requirements, it should follow that all volunteer work should be described as work. When publishing employment statistics I would like to see a column added to include volunteer numbers and hours worked. This would heighten the awareness of just how important volunteer work is and make it more visible, and valued. I believe this would improve the value and image of volunteers. Collecting such data may prove problematic at first, as, many volunteers sit on industry, not-for profit, and community boards and committees where their volunteer hours go unrecorded. I personally undertake about 20 hours per month volunteering as a consumer representative on a health-related committee, and as a secretary for a membership

organisation. I have no doubt that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of Queenslanders contributing as I do, and more.

It is my understanding that there is no formal data collection about the volunteer workforce. I believe this should be addressed as a priority. Having real data about volunteering would highlight the areas of supply and demand for volunteers.

To maintain an effective volunteer workforce, we need to attract younger people to start on a life long journey of volunteering. This will assist with the appreciation of volunteers and help to update and modernize the current image. Strategies should be aimed at

- Young people and children – (e.g. those participating in Clean up Australia)
- Parents and families – (e.g. those participating in Sporting Clubs)
- Ethnically diverse people
- People with a disability

Reward and recognition:

While I understand Volunteering Queensland hosts an annual award ceremony to recognise a handful of high performing volunteers, which I applaud, there is very little reward for those who provide the backbone of volunteering, such as the mums and dads running the tuck-shop and P&C and their like. At best, some will be recognised with a certificate from their local MP, but it is hardly a drawcard to encourage more volunteers. Many of us who have been volunteering for a long time have a draw full these sorts of certificates. While well intentioned, such certificates tend to lose their impact and significance after a while. The money spent on certificates could be better spent on useful sustainable items such as:

- Food /Beverage vouchers
- Petrol vouchers
- Supermarket / store vouchers
- Cinema tickets
- Taxi / Ride share vouchers
- Utility rebates
- Tax rebates
- Health insurance contributions
- Education and training

I would like to commend the Gold Coast Council for their support for volunteers, as they provide a range of educational opportunities such as grant writing training, and social activities such as morning teas which are always accompanied by inspirational speakers.

Financial burden for volunteering:

Most volunteers must carry a financial burden for volunteering and this will no doubt be a huge barrier for many who would otherwise volunteer, particularly where cost of living is rising so rapidly.

In my regular volunteering roles, I am required to provide my own transport and fuel, pay for parking from time to time, and to purchase various resources. I am also required to have access to a phone and the internet. In addition, I must absorb the cost of laundry

where a uniform is provided. My volunteer roles require me to maintain and regularly upgrade my skill set often at my own cost.

Not for profit and community organisations rely on volunteers to carry out fund raising. This can range from selling raffle tickets, setting up and conducting sausage sizzles at Bunnings, through to writing grant applications and submissions as well as managing the banking and finances of an organisation. When performing these tasks many volunteers feel obliged to purchase items themselves, thus giving their time, expertise and making donations.

To assist with offsetting these financial burdens I make the following recommendations:
Recommendations:

- For those in the paid workforce - negotiate with the Australian Tax Office to provide tax relief on volunteering expenditure
- For those retired from the paid workforce - negotiate with Governments to get rebates / reimbursements for some costs.
- Rebates could be offered on a pro rata basis e.g. when a volunteer has performed X number of hours, they could apply for a rebate of \$X on a utility of their choosing or access a voucher for an item of their choosing.
- In addition to offering grants Councils and Governments could offer to match the amount of funds raised dollar for dollar (up to a prescribed) by approved organisations. This would assist where organisations do not have the skills or time to write grant applications and submissions.

Commonwealth Games specific issues relevant for 2032 Olympics

While I thoroughly enjoyed the Games experience, there were some issues with room for improvement and I make the following comments.

Rostering and valuing volunteers and their time:

On several occasions shift start and finish times were altered so that the volunteer arriving at the designated time was told " *You are not needed now, go home and come back so many hours later*". Volunteers who experienced this felt they were not valued and were treated poorly as though their time was not important. It disrupted transport arrangements to and from the venue with flow on effects to those relying on friends and family members to drop them off and pick them up.

Rostered times were not always in sync with public transport. Some venues could not be reached by public transport in time for volunteers to start their shift. This often created long and circuitous journeys for volunteers to and from venues.

Recommendations:

- Improved people management skills of employed staff
- Improved communication between employed staff and volunteers
- Provide dedicated volunteer shuttle services to venues from major transport hubs
- Ensure transport is available to the venue site during games operation hours.

Branded merchandise as rewards:

Volunteers were provided with branded merchandise as rewards. Items ranged from keyrings, badges, fridge magnets to pens and other trinkets. Rewards were awarded progressively throughout the duration of the games. By the end of the games many volunteers would have had a draw full of keepsakes. Some, of course, would keep these items as mementos, but eventually, most of these items will make their way to land fill.

Recommendations:

- Volunteers should be rewarded with useful and sustainable items not likely to end up in land fill.
- Volunteers could be rewarded with a choice of useful items such as:
 - Food /Beverage vouchers
 - Petrol vouchers
 - Supermarket / store vouchers
 - Cinema tickets
 - Taxi / Ride share vouchers

These items could be awarded on a progressively as the volunteer accumulates hours worked. Such items could be sourced from corporate sponsors.

Leave them feeling warm and fuzzy:

You may also recall that at the end of the 2018 Commonwealth Games, paid employees were treated to a party with food, beverages, and entertainment supplied. However, no such recognition was offered to the volunteers. Fortunately, the State Government stepped in and provided a BBQ in the Broadwater Park. Many volunteers felt very undervalued by this slight and felt like they were 'just tossed on the scrapheap.' I hope the 2032 Games Organisers' will learn from this and leave the volunteers feeling warm and fuzzy.

Perhaps some public recognition, such as a volunteers parade in the main stadium, the day after the closing ceremony, and open to the public, would demonstrate Games Organisers' appreciation. But a party would be good!

In closing, I would like to commend the clothing provided to the volunteers at the 2018 Commonwealth Games. It was of very high quality, easy to wash and wear and looked very smart.