

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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I live in a small, relatively isolated rural community and, on behalf of a resident, I made enquiries about how to become appointed as a JP or CommDec, and was advised anyone could make an application on the relevant form, along with the payment of an approximate \$400 fee to complete a relevant course on what the role entails, with consideration perhaps given to relief from that fee if financial distress could be proven. This is an abomination in my opinion. There is no financial gain in carrying out JP or Comm.Dec duties but yet, in order to be appointed to the voluntary role and provide a service to their small community, the applicant has to incur a personal cost of \$400 approx. The necessity to have a blue card is an impediment to continued volunteering in my opinion, and from what I recall, a great number of other former volunteers when the necessity to have a blue card was introduced. I have worked voluntarily in this community for decades, including at the small local primary school when our now adult children were young and yet, when I responded recently to a call from the small local primary school to voluntarily help on tuck shop day for about an hour one day a week, my offer to help the small school could not be accepted as I did not have, and was not prepared to obtain, a blue card which would enable me to enter the school grounds and volunteer in our small community. As well, in a phone call some years ago, I was advised that, without a blue card, I could no longer volunteer for a particular group or in a particular role, as I do not have a blue card and am not prepared to obtain one. I am now elderly and retired, but I feel I still have a contribution to make. There is a major contribution which could be made by those who have retired, and that knowledge and experience encompass a myriad of professions and experience which I feel could provide immeasurable voluntary assistance. Also, in small rural communities, I believe it is vital, during volunteer work, whether it be a fire or a search or traffic control/re-directing traffic, that there be local knowledge of the topography of the region (lay of the land) and, in a fire, knowledge of fire behaviour in the region on fire. This could be provided by local knowledge, experience and accurate and up to date mapping of the region. One of the reasons, I believe, why volunteers are in a decline, is to do with financial commitments of the younger members of the community. I seem to recall, but stand to be corrected, that, in years past, when employed workers who were members of, say, the SES provided assistance in their capacity as a volunteer, they continued to be paid in their job, thereby not being put under financial stress by volunteering. Informal social gatherings at the local community level could also engender a feeling of community involvement and strengthen community ties for volunteers by a sense of being involved and being needed, by volunteers meeting residents and volunteers being thanked by those whom the volunteers willingly give their time and effort to assist, mainly because they are prepared to willingly give their time and effort in their communities, at the same time giving the volunteers a sense of making a worthwhile and valuable contribution. Volunteers are an essential and integral part of the fabric of our society and, insofar as where we live in a small rural community, an essential and relied upon voluntary service, as would seem to be recognised by virtue of this inquiry on a decline in volunteer numbers, and comments invited. In this day and age, debriefings and professional expertise and assistance are provided to all volunteers who have assisted in voluntary roles, some of which do not have successful outcomes, and I believe this is an essential service to all volunteers.