

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee

Inquiry Into Volunteering in Queensland

22 February 2025

1. Introduction

The Queensland Youth Policy Collective (QYPC) has prepared this submission to assist the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee in its inquiry and report into volunteering in Queensland.

The QYPC was founded in 2021 and has approximately 45 active members across Queensland. We are non-partisan and comprised of young people who want to contribute evidence-based, youth-led perspectives in public debate, particularly in the fields of human rights, climate change and youth justice.

We urge all levels of government to recognise volunteers' significant contribution to Queensland and take proactive measures to reduce the barriers that young volunteers frequently encounter. In particular, the government has an important role in alleviating the cost of volunteering, assisting organisations seeking volunteers to engage more effectively with young people, and helping young people leverage their volunteer experience to progress their careers.

2. What are the benefits to Queensland of young people volunteering?

In 2023, 68.5%¹ of Queenslanders aged 15 to 24 volunteered an average of 22.6 hours per month,² representing nearly a quarter of the state's formal volunteer population.³ Young volunteers contribute an estimated \$16.4 billion annually in benefits to Queensland,⁴ and 65% of young Queenslanders intend to volunteer the same or more over the next three years.⁵

For every dollar invested in youth volunteering, \$3.60 of benefit is returned.⁶ When Queenslanders begin volunteering at a younger age, they return much greater value to the community than older people due to the cumulative impact of their efforts over the course of their volunteering career.⁷

¹ 'Youth Volunteering: Key Statistics' *Volunteering Australia* (Information Sheet, July 2024) 2 <<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org>>.

² Volunteering Queensland, *State of Volunteering in Queensland* (Report, 2014) 3.

³ Ibid 45.

⁴ Gold Cross, 'Youth State of Volunteering in Queensland Report launch' *Pharmacy ITK* (Web Page, 21 May 2024) <<https://www.pharmacyitk.com.au>>.

⁵ Gold Cross (n 4).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

3. Where do young people volunteer?

Volunteers aged between 18 and 29 are most likely to volunteer with animal welfare, health and education/training organisations.⁸ In Queensland, most volunteers aged 15 to 24 assist with event support, teaching, coaching and skilled support.⁹

Young people are also more likely than their older counterparts to volunteer in the field or over the internet, as opposed to in person at an organisation or over the phone.¹⁰

Members of the QYPC, for example, volunteer their time to support a range of organisations, including the Australian Air Force Cadets and the Women's Legal Service Queensland.

4. Why do young people volunteer?

Young individuals engage in volunteer work for various reasons, including:

- **Career development.** Volunteering is a valuable opportunity for young people early in their careers to gain employable skills like time management, teamwork, and customer service. Young people also often volunteer in the same sector they plan to work in, allowing them to expand their professional networks and gain exposure to future paid employment opportunities.¹¹
- **To make connections.** Volunteers can meet and engage with like-minded people from diverse backgrounds, improving their sense of belonging.¹² This aspect of volunteering can be especially valuable for university students, given that the shift from in-person classes to online and remote learning can make it difficult to connect with their peers in person on a regular basis.
- **To support a valuable cause.** Young people often have more limited financial resources than their older counterparts. Nearly half of Australians aged 15 to 19 have nil or negative income, and over 75% of Australians aged 20 to 24 earn less than \$1000 per week.¹³ While young Australians may not be in a position to donate their money to organisations and causes, they care about, they may be able to donate their time by volunteering.

⁸ Youth Volunteering: Key Statistics (n 1) 5.

⁹ Gold Cross (n 4).

¹⁰ Youth Volunteering: Key Statistics (n 1) 7.

¹¹ Thuc Bao Huynh et al, 'Anxiety, Wellbeing and Engaging Young People in Volunteering' (Report, Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice, July 2024) 15.

¹² Ibid 9, 15.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *New census insights on income in Australia using administrative data* (Article, 2 May 2023).

- **Political anxiety:** Young people who have higher self-reported levels of political anxiety are more likely to volunteer.¹⁴ This may suggest that anxiety motivates young people to make a difference by volunteering¹⁵ or that some young people turn to volunteering as a therapeutic activity to help them cope with their anxiety.¹⁶

5. What are the current barriers to volunteering for young people?

Nearly half of organisations in Queensland with volunteer programs do not record having any young people under 25 volunteering with them.¹⁷ 27.9% of Queenslanders aged 15 to 24 who do not volunteer (and 20.7% of those who do) report that their age makes it more difficult to volunteer.¹⁸ Some of the main barriers include:

- **Financial issues:** A third of young people consider the cost of volunteering (e.g. membership fees, transport costs, costs for materials, etc.) to be a barrier to volunteering.¹⁹
- **Time and work commitments:** Young people are more likely than their older counterparts to identify time as a barrier to volunteering²⁰ and to report that their employer makes it difficult to volunteer.²¹
- **Lack of knowledge, encouragement and support:** Young people are also more likely than older Australians to report being unsure how to volunteer and/or never being asked to volunteer.²² Many young people report feeling a lack of emotional support when volunteering and that they do not receive enough attention and encouragement from government agencies to become involved.²³

¹⁴ Huyan et al (n 12) 10.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Volunteering Queensland (n 20) 44.

¹⁸ Ibid 34.

¹⁹ Huyan et al (n 12) 17.

²⁰ Volunteering Queensland (n 20) 33.

²¹ Volunteering Queensland (n 20) 36.

²² Ibid 33.

²³ Huyan et al (n 12) 18.

6. What can Australian governments do to support young volunteers?

The Federal, state and local governments can take important steps to support young volunteers and encourage more young people to volunteer formally.

- **Financial support:** To help alleviate the financial barriers to volunteering, governments should:
 - offer free public transport to individuals travelling to/from volunteering opportunities;
 - provide vouchers for taxis/rideshare services, petrol or parking where there is no convenient public transport available between a volunteer's home and the location where they volunteer); and/or
 - make the costs of volunteering (e.g. transport, memberships, supplies, etc.) tax-deductible.
- **Training and resources:** Governments could offer free training and resources to organisations to encourage them to engage young people as volunteers, such as by empowering these organisations to:
 - establish formal mentoring programs between members of the organisation and young volunteers;
 - develop, strengthen and/or expand their platforms for online volunteering; and
 - increase their presence on social media to engage more directly with young people on platforms they frequently access.
- **Career development:** Governments should develop an official system where young people can formally record their volunteering hours and experience against their USI education number. They can then present this record to a prospective employer, demonstrating a reliable record of volunteering experience.