

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

**Submission No:** 233

**Submitted by:**



**Publication:**

**Attachments:**

**Submitter Comments:**

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering. I would prefer that my name not be published, and my submission not be published in full, though if you find anything that I say more valuable than a rant, feel free to publish the bits you see fit. NB: Although I am heavily involved with a sporting club on the Sunshine Coast, I am writing this submission as an individual.

While volunteering remains a vital part of our communities, there are a range of factors at work that contribute to the steady decline of volunteers.

I have a personal history of volunteering, mostly in junior sports, but also in community activities. My involvement includes:

- Driver Reviver shift volunteer
- Clean Up Australia Day participant – numerous occasions
- PGA Golf volunteer – communications
- Sydney Olympics 2020 – spectator service
- Gold Coast Commonwealth Games 2018 – spectator service
- Chancellor Park Soccer Club - team manager 13 years (and occasional very inept coach), club secretary since 2012, life member
- Little Athletics – barbeque and canteen
- Miscellaneous other one-off events – charity swim (administration), helping in canteen at other sporting clubs when they have been short etc

In addition, I have recently retired from secondary teaching after thirty-eight years of service, and my husband and I own a sports photography business where we meet many, many volunteers across a wide range of sports and clubs.

Below are some of my deliberations:

### **The “Marquee” Events Do OK:**

My perception, from the point of view of someone who has gone through the application process and participation in an Olympics and a Commonwealth Games is that people scramble to be involved and that there is an oversubscription. While there is no glamour associated with shouting directions to the Maroubra bus queue through a megaphone, or standing for hours checking tickets, people are attracted to these events because they are on the world stage. There is the opportunity to see some world class events. Even though I was not working in the general precinct at Olympic Park in 2000, volunteers were gifted tickets to a session of athletics. There is the excitement (generally unfounded) that you might get to run into Usain Bolt or some other champion. You are provided uniforms and food on shift and other little gifts along the way, and you are representing your country in a way that those of us who are a LOOOOONG way from elite athleticism could never hope to.

I did see a report recently where the government was looking into ways of training up volunteers for the Olympics by providing them “training opportunities” like volunteering at big events like Magic Round at the Gabba. From my experience at working at the Olympics and Commonwealth Games, this seems to be:

- a. Unnecessary because the training provided to volunteers was fine as it was

- b. An extra time burden and commitment on people who are volunteering their time
- c. A way for the Stadium Corporation to reduce its overheads by utilising volunteers instead of paying casuals.

## **We're Great in a Crisis**

In some ways it's a bit unfair to say that volunteering is down 10%, because there is some volunteering that can't be measured by the by number of members registered in a club. If there's a bushfire or a flood, Australians are out there in droves. One need look no further than the "Mud Army" after the Brisbane floods in 2011, or the blokes cruising around Ingham streets in their tinnies rescuing people stranded in their homes, only a few weeks ago. Or people baking goods and taking them to the refuge centres during the 2020 bushfires.

## **On the other hand, GRASS ROOTS volunteering is suffering:**

### **1. An aging population:**

The much-maligned Baby Boomer generation is getting old. These people, who were born in the 20 years post war, seemed to have volunteering built into their DNA. This is because their parents knew what it was like to have to pull together for the war effort. They knew about rationing and hardship, and they volunteered in droves for organisations such as the Australian Red Cross. the Country Women's Association, founded after the first world war, was it its peak following the second, as were service clubs such as Rotary International and Quota. The Lions Club of Australia was started in 1947.

But now, many of these service clubs are in decline. For many years, in my job as a teacher, I was the school coordinator of the Lions Youth of the Year Quest. Every year I would take kids along to the competition, and I would the see the same old faces, and I mean that literally. I never saw any new members and the average age of the members was mid-sixties. I remember being most saddened when I read about the closure of the Alice Spring branch of the Lions Club (I know that's not in Queensland, but it's a case in point) after fifty-nine years of service. You would be hard pressed to find a town more in need of volunteer service organisations, but they just couldn't find the helpers. But it's not only the clubs themselves. At the height of my involvement with the Youth of the Year Quest, I would have a dozen or more kids entering. In the end, I couldn't get anyone to enter.

### **2. The "Me, Me, Me" Generation/s**

I cannot base this on any form of research, only my own observations, but there is definitely an increasingly growing group of people out there who suffer from a great sense of entitlement. I quite enjoyed reading a Facebook comment war a week or so ago because a mother had thrown a tantrum because people without children parked in the bay next to the trolley return of a shopping centre, which she believed need to be reserved for mothers of young children because it was "hazardous and difficult" to return a trolley if you had to park too far away. Needless to say, what followed was a tirade of "in my day..." comments as well as a few helpful parenting tips for her. My point is that there ARE people out there, and they ARE younger people, who expect everything to be laid out for them on a platter.

Last year, one of the soccer clubs in the same association as the one I my club is affiliated with was desperate for volunteers for its canteen. It posted on social media that the canteen would not be operating at the next home game unless they got volunteers. This resulted in

feedback from a number of parents telling the committee that they “don’t understand what it’s like to have two parents having to work in this cost of living crisis”. The club in question wouldn’t exist if it wasn’t for the incredible hard work of a married couple who owned, and worked full-time in a pharmacy, while raising four children, and paying off a mortgage when interest rates hit 17%. Yet these current parents couldn’t spare an hour of their time to volunteer in a canteen. I guarantee those same parents would have been there to watch their kids’ games every week, when the reality is that many parents who DO volunteer in canteens get stuck in there and don’t get to watch their own children play – that is certainly the reality for committee member is my club. I missed the baby boomer era by two days, but the reason I have ended up on committee in the first place is because I used to notice that the couple who were running the canteen at the club at the time were frequently run off their feet because no-one would turn up to help them. So, I got in there and helped them. And I enjoyed it. And I joined committee. And I’ve been there ever since.

Several of the schools in my area offer a Cert I in Active Volunteering. A few times during my association with the soccer club, we have approached those schools to see if any of the kids would be prepared to help out at the soccer club. We have never had a single bite. Why? Because we are not the “school community or approved external organisation”. Fair enough, but shouldn’t this course be developing altruism? Couldn’t these kids just volunteer because it might be doing something good for the benefit of their community? It would seem to me that the schools that introduce this course are trying to get kids over the line for their QCE and nothing about promoting the development of well-rounded altruistic individuals - and that’s exactly how the majority of students who enrol in that course see it; what’s in it for “me”.?

While on the subject of schools, especially high schools, there is another steady decline which I don’t think is unrelated to the decline in participation in volunteering. When I was at school myself, swimming and sporting carnivals were the highlight of the school year. I was definitely not much of a swimmer, but I would cheer my house on from the sidelines. At athletics day, I would go in everything. Almost the whole school would be in attendance. These days, fewer than half of the students in my school even bothered to show up on athletics days, and about a third of the ones that did sat at the back of tents playing games on laptops or iPad. There is a declining notion of camaraderie and team spirit. There used to be small numbers of kids turning up for the last day of school for the year. Over time this became a decline over the last week of the school year. Now those same patterns exist at the end of every TERM. These aren’t people who are going on holidays; it is just a “can’t be bothered” attitude and this malaise does extend into an attitude to volunteering.

I also think that the “me, me, me” mentality extends far beyond volunteering. Ever wonder why there are crises in staffing teaching, nursing and aged care? All of these are occupations where you have to think of the welfare of others. Oof course, there are other influences, but this can’t be a mere coincidence.

### **3. FIFO**

There has been an increasing number of families in our community where one of the parents is working on a “Fly-in/Fly Out” basis. This truly does have an impact a person’s ability to volunteer, especially when young children are in the mix. I also hate the effect the FIFO system has on the communities they are FIFOing in and out of as well, but that is a topic for a whole other level of community consultation.

This effectively increases the numbers of single-parent families in a community for whom volunteering does definitely become a problem (not an insurmountable one, but a problem nonetheless).

#### **4. Red, Red Tape**

Once you have people who want to volunteer, even then it's not always easy to keep them. I have no idea why people would want to volunteer to be a club treasurer, for example. While my job as club secretary has become easier over time with the prevalence of email, social media and websites as communication tools, the role of treasurer is one which is crippling with processes and compliances. While grateful for the Fair Play Voucher scheme, this puts added pressure on committee volunteers. The fact is, it is not easy for just anyone to step into these roles – you almost have to have an accounting degree to be a club treasurer, and if there is no-one in your club with that level of specialised expertise, then you are stuck.

I would never for one minute deny the importance of child safety, but child safety legislation adds a level of difficulty for club volunteers – chasing up, linking and keeping a register of Blue Cards. There are definitely people who might otherwise have volunteered for positions who won't because of the Blue Card system – not because they harbour a secret past of domestic violence or harming a child, but because they resent what they consider to be another form of government interference or control in their lives, or that is too much hassle, or the whole system is pointless because it doesn't protect children anyway. That latter point of view is understandable. Recent high-profile cases of the abuse of children in child care centres proves that. I can guarantee that every teacher currently employed by Education Queensland who acts inappropriately with a student undertook the same mandatory Code of Conduct Training as the other 54,999 teachers who have never done anything wrong. Paperwork doesn't detract predators, but it can detract volunteers. There are people who have said to me that they don't want to apply for Blue Cards because it makes them feel like they have to prove that they are decent people.

But then, even if you already have a Blue Card, you still have to jump through administrative hoops to connect it to another volunteer organisation or job!

One of the only forms of revenue that some clubs have is their canteen, but even here we are caught up with red tape over food control and handling, workplace health and safety and so on. Someone turns up to volunteer and they don't have the right footwear (despite being told) – off they are sent, in case their own stupidity causes them harm.

#### **5. Fear of Dealing with People**

While most people are perfectly fine, there are some who are truly obnoxious, aggressive or both. In our sporting association, we have to have a ground controller at every home game to ensure that everything is going smoothly. This is one of the hardest roles to fill in our club. This is because there is the very real fear that one of these days you are going to have to deal with a parent who is yelling abuse at a thirteen-year-old referee, or another parent or both. You are very likely to cop a mouthful from parents who choose to ignore the "no dogs" policy. If you are the grounds official on a Friday night game in our association which has a "no alcohol" policy, you are likely to have to deal with people drinking at the grounds, or after the game in the car park. All of the volunteers in our club have VOLUNTEER written across their backs, but this does nothing to deter abhorrent parent behaviour.

It only takes one incident to frighten away a volunteer, They will tell their friends about their harrowing experience, and a snowball begins.

I really have no answer to this. This sort of behaviour seems to be more prevalent in society, and it seems the more it is reported on the news, the worse it gets..

## **6. Do Our Elected Representatives Really Care About Volunteers?**

It is all well and good that this investigation into the state of volunteering is being undertaken by the government, and I suspect that it is all part of the panic about the 2032 Olympics, As I said before, I do not think there will be a problem attracting volunteers for the Games. But at other times, does the government really care?

I know that some elected representatives are very good. For example, we are fortunate to have a local councillor who is amazing, and because he is amazing has been elected unopposed two out of the last three elections. In the past he has turned up at working bees just because he saw the notice on our Facebook page. He has helped us out with a number of projects, using his discretionary funding. He has a Facebook page where he regularly encourages "Fix IT Fridays" where people can report problems they see and he will get on to it. I regularly seem him out and about in the division, and when I bump into him, he remembers me by name. always remembers which soccer club I am with and asks how its going, and always reminds me that if there is anything he can do for our club to just ask.

On the other hand, I have seen our state MP at our club once, when we invited him to present something when we hosted a national carnival. He arrived five minutes before he was due to present, and left after a photo op. When we have approached him for assistance with sponsorship, the only offer has been marquees (for which we are grateful) which have his name and political party emblazoned all over them. Now I know that MPs are busy. I know there is no way they could get around to every sporting club. But if you know it's soccer/netball/AFL?etc grand final day in your electorate, how nice would it be to contact the hosting club and volunteer your services for an hour in the canteen. Now that would be a good photo op – and it is a small way to say that the government values the contribution of volunteers in the community.

## **7. National Volunteer Weak (intentional)**

This is a lovely idea, but it just creates more work for the volunteers that are already in place. One thing that volunteer week does for me every year is to remind me about a person who I would like to nominate for one of the Australia Day Honours, but then I will get busy and forget. Maybe there needs to be more publicity (tv/social media) about these in the months or so before applications close to encourage people to nominate volunteers who really deserve to be honoured.

## **Potential Solutions**

I am first to admit that I don't know how to fix some of these issues as they are societal and maybe the horse has already bolted. But

### **1. Reduction in Red Tape**

- A review of current compliance requirements to identify areas where reporting can be streamlined or simplified.

- Acknowledging that small community organisations do not have the same degree of complexity of large ones
- Surely if you have a Blue Card, you have a Blue Card. You don't change your identity or criminal history just because you start volunteering somewhere else. Good grief – the government knows enough about me for me to receive a personally signed birthday card for my 60<sup>th</sup> from my federal member (a generic printed letter from the afore mentioned state member). I am sent bowel cancer kits with monotonous regularity. I did not have to apply for the birthday wishes, nor the bowel cancer kit. but we can't keep tabs on Blue Cards without making it a hassle for the card holder?

## **2. Access to Templates and Training**

- Perhaps we could see the establishment of an easily accessible online hub where volunteers and organisations can access standardised resources, legal guidance, and all the other stuff that can't be eliminated altogether.
- Training modules or webinars to educate volunteers on best practices in governance, risk management, and legal obligations without requiring them to seek costly external advice.
- Use everyday language, not technical gobbledygook

## **3. Volunteer Reward and Recognition**

- The Fair Play Voucher system has been wonderful for increasing youth participation in sport. How about instead of providing 200 000 vouchers at \$200 each, they were only valued at \$190, This would give you \$2 million dollars which could be used for some sort of development or expansion of a volunteer reward or recognition program.
- Volunteering should be altruistic, but who doesn't like a little reward every now and again. When I turned 60, I became eligible for a Seniors Discount Card where I can get 10% off a coffee at Gloria Jeans or something. How about getting businesses state-wide on board to support a volunteers' discount card? I would propose that clubs could nominate (a simple nomination process) people who had volunteered for a minimum of five years (for example) and they could be issued with a card with similar perks as the Seniors Discount Card. The greater cost of this would be borne by businesses rather than the government, but if volunteers were also able to score \$20 off their car rego, or \$50 off their council rates, maybe that would make it even more worthwhile.

## **Conclusion**

There is no simple reason why people don't volunteer for things. We know that people will volunteer for marquee events, and we know that on the other end of the scale they will jump to in a time of crisis. It's all that bit in the middle that seems to be the issue. I do not know how to build altruism. I do not know how to rid society of a sense of entitlement. I do not know how to stop companies choosing profit over communities and families. But I do appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully

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