

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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24th February 2025

Introduction

DV Safe Phone is a Queensland Charity who provide free mobile phones to victims of domestic violence Australia-wide.

We have put “safe phones” into the hands of over 11,000 domestic violence victims since our inception in 2020 and could not have achieved this, without our amazing volunteers.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our views and experience for your inquiry into volunteering in Queensland.

1. The Value of Volunteering in Queensland

Context from DV Safe Phone:

DV Safe Phone could not run without our volunteers, who deliver vital, life-saving technology to people affected by domestic violence and ensure that we can meet our objectives, of ensuring that victims have a “safe phone” that can be used to keep them safe and connected to support.

We have our head office on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, where we have regular volunteers, who commit to at least 4 hours every week, to test all phones, work with our network of over 1000 phone collection boxes to ensure we receive the donated phones, and pack and send all of our working phones, to over 400 domestic violence and law enforcement agencies, safe houses and hospitals Australia-wide.

The overall impact is a more resilient community and a reduction in the strain on state services.

Key Contributions:

- **Benefits to DV Safe Phone:** Increased capacity to meet critical community needs without commensurate increases in staffing costs.
- **Benefits Volunteers:** Enhanced skill sets, emotional fulfilment, and personal development.
- **Benefits to Communities and the State:** More responsive, agile services that provides a tangible, measurable outcome and saves lives.

2. Barriers to Volunteering: Legislative and Regulatory Challenges

Insights from DV Safe Phone’s Experience:

Volunteers and volunteer-led organisations such as DV Safe Phone often contend with regulatory requirements designed to ensure privacy, safety, and service quality. However, excessive or overly complex legislative demands can inadvertently deter prospective volunteers or delay the onboarding process. For

DV Safe Phone

ABN 62646969459

ACN /646969459

 dvsafephone.org

 1300 151 939

 info@dvsafephone.org

 PO BOX 1440, Mooloolaba QLD 4557





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example, stringent certification or clearance procedures—although essential for protecting vulnerable users—can become burdensome if they are not adequately resourced or streamlined.

Recommendations:

- **Review and Streamline Compliance Processes:** Simplify mandatory training and certification procedures without compromising service quality
- **Provide Clear Guidance:** Ensure that prospective volunteers are well informed about the legal and safety frameworks that protect both themselves and service users.
- **Supported assistance:** , for example:
 - Abolish cost of Police checks for volunteers
 - Abolish requirement for “volunteer insurance” when we already have Public Liability insurance for our paid staff
 - Substitute costs of industry-specific training, such as FIA (Fundraising Institute of Australia) Code of Conduct training that we currently absorb for all volunteers.
 - Provide complimentary HR services for volunteer wellness program

3. Volunteer Experiences, Motivations, and Challenges

Feedback from DV Safe Phone Volunteers:

Many volunteers are motivated by a deep commitment to community safety and a desire to support those in crisis.

Our volunteers generally have a strong willingness to assist and have set themselves up to have time each week, to make a difference with us.

We have been told by some of our volunteers, that finding quality volunteering opportunities is quite challenging, as many roles require physical labour or are not structured in a way that can be consistent.

We’ve spent quite some time developing our own onboarding program, compete with online training and over 20 policies which require the volunteer to read, understand and sign off before they can start with us. (most of this has been built by our existing volunteers, who come from HR and “people and culture roles” within corporations)

With so many charities and community groups having to create their own versions of this, surely there’s a better way.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- **Enhanced Training and Ongoing Support:** Offer an online portal, where organisations such as ours can select the appropriate modules, to train our volunteers through, rather than creating everything from scratch.

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- **Wellbeing Programmes:** Establish peer-support networks and provide access to professional counselling to help volunteers manage the emotional demands of their roles.
- **Recognition and Feedback:** Implement formal recognition programmes that acknowledge volunteer contributions and foster continuous improvement through feedback.

4. Addressing Diversity and Accessibility

Challenges Seen Through DV Safe Phone's Lens:

Volunteers and clients come from a broad range of backgrounds—diverse in gender, age, cultural identity, ability, and location. DV Safe Phone's success is partly due to its proactive engagement with volunteers from varied backgrounds, ensuring that the service remains culturally sensitive and accessible.

We have ensured that our volunteers are allocated tasks that suit their skillset, age, gender, ability and location. For example, some volunteers are not tech-savvy and are not comfortable testing phones, so we can offer them other administrative tasks instead. Others prefer not to be in the office around lots of people, so they're able to help us remotely.

Opportunities to Improve:

- **Targeted Recruitment:** Develop outreach strategies that resonate with underrepresented communities and diverse demographics.
- **Flexible Volunteering Options:** Offer remote or flexible engagement models, particularly important for volunteers in regional or remote areas.
- **Culturally Safe Training:** Provide training that respects and integrates the perspectives and needs of diverse cultural groups, including those of First Nations communities.

5. Government Support: Effectiveness and Opportunities for Sustainable Improvement

The DV Safe Phone Model as a Benchmark:

Government support is crucial in fostering volunteer-led initiatives. The experience of DV Safe Phone demonstrates that when government policies and funding frameworks are well aligned with the sector's needs, volunteer organisations can operate both efficiently and sustainably.

Suggestions for Government Action:

- **Increased Funding and Resource Allocation:** Provide grant funding for training, technological upgrades, and administrative support.
- **Policy Coordination:** Establish a centralised point of contact or framework that harmonises state, local, and community-level efforts.
- **Partnership Development:** Facilitate collaborations between government agencies, community organisations, and volunteer groups.

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6. Leveraging Cross-Portfolio Opportunities and the Brisbane 2032 Games

Integrating DV Safe Phone Practices:

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games present a unique opportunity to galvanise volunteer participation across multiple sectors. The scalable, volunteer-based model of DV Safe Phone demonstrates that with appropriate support, volunteer organisations can quickly adapt to increased demand during major events.

Recommendations:

- **Cross-Portfolio Initiatives:** Encourage collaborative projects that integrate emergency services, community health, and cultural programmes with volunteer networks.
- **Event-Focused Training:** Develop specialised volunteer training programmes to prepare individuals for the unique demands of large-scale events.
- **Legacy Programmes:** Utilise the momentum from the Games to establish enduring volunteer networks that continue to support community resilience beyond the event.

7. Enhancing Emergency Response Volunteering

Lessons from DV Safe Phone:

We are aware of the incredible work done by the domestic violence and law enforcement agencies in crisis response. As a result we have set ourselves up to provide a continuous supply of phones to support the people these agencies are helping. We do this in a meticulous and controlled way, mostly during business hours, so as not to burn out our volunteers.

For this reason we are unable to comment on Emergency Response Volunteering.

8. First Nations Volunteering and Closing the Gap

Engagement Through a Culturally Responsive Approach:

DV Safe Phone's inclusive model underscores the importance of culturally sensitive volunteer recruitment and training, particularly for First Nations communities. Increasing participation among First Nations peoples not only enhances service delivery but also supports broader social goals such as Closing the Gap.

We currently provide phones to many regional and remote domestic violence agencies, who rely heavily on volunteers to support first Nations peoples.

This is never easy due to the often physical distance from support services to these communities.

Key Recommendations:

- **Culturally Tailored Programmes:** Develop volunteer initiatives co-designed with First Nations leaders that are tailored to the cultural context and specific needs of their communities.


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- **Empowering Local Leadership:** Support the creation of locally led volunteer hubs in remote and discrete communities.
- **Long-Term Partnerships:** Foster sustained collaborations between government, community organisations, and First Nations groups to build trust and capacity over time.

9. Broader Reflections and National Comparisons

Learning from DV Safe Phone and Beyond:

DV Safe Phone serves as a successful case study, demonstrating that volunteer organisations can deliver specialist, high-quality services when provided with the right support. Academic studies and national reports consistently show that volunteer-led services not only fill gaps in government provision but also contribute to community resilience and social cohesion.

Additional Considerations:

- **Research and Evaluation:** Invest in ongoing academic research into volunteer models to capture best practices and lessons learned.
- **Interstate Collaboration:** Consider successful volunteer frameworks from other states and territories as models for further development.
- **Innovative Technologies:** Embrace digital platforms that can enhance volunteer coordination, training, and service delivery.

Conclusion

Drawing on the experiences of DV Safe Phone, this response demonstrates that volunteer contributions are invaluable across multiple dimensions—from immediate community support to long-term social cohesion. Addressing regulatory barriers, enhancing support systems, embracing diversity, and optimising government resources can significantly boost the reach of Queensland’s volunteer sector. By integrating these insights, the Queensland Government can help ensure that volunteer efforts continue to thrive, delivering sustainable benefits to individuals, organisations, and the State as a whole.

Always in your corner,

Ashton

Ashton Wood
Founder and CEO
DV Safe Phone, Australia

DV Safe Phone

ABN 62646969459

ACN /646969459

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