

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No:	250
Submitted by:	Cairns Region Toy Library
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Submission from the Cairns Region Toy Library.

Answering the terms of reference

1. Volunteering is undervalued – at all levels of government. Despite there being a number of well-known estimates of the cost-benefit of volunteering at an individual, state and federal level, the volunteering sector's contribution to the economy and to social cohesion of communities is largely unrecognised (the exception being for people on a disability pension). There are also well-known estimates of out-of-pocket expenses associated with volunteering at an individual level; however these costs are not even tax deductible.
2. The regulatory checks and balances that are in place for people who volunteer to meet unemployment and disability allowance requirements are fair and well structured. We need similar structure and support around other voluntary work so that it can be recognised and rewarded.
3. Our organisation works primarily with women in the under 35 age-group and their children. We have over 150 member families and, although they receive a significant benefit from our service (commonly saving \$2000-\$3000 per family per year in toy purchases), we struggle to get many of them to complete their mandatory 4 two-hour volunteer sessions per year.

This is a worrying trend, because at this age they are just beginning their parenting journey, much of which will bring them into contact with sporting organisations and other interest groups that need parental participation if they are to continue to function effectively.

This age-group may respond to incentives, such as childcare or income tax deductions. But we believe that it would be more effective to promote volunteering as a career enhancing opportunity.

4. About a third of our families are either single income, or families with one primary income earner and the other parent working limited hours to accommodate the needs of very young children. Unfortunately, when these parents want to return to the full-time workforce, this period of their lives is regarded as 'dead time'. Employers have no way to assess the value of the work, or the skills they may have acquired though unpaid work.

As an organisation, we offer young parents who join our management committee with whatever professional development they are interested in. And our president provides references which go some way towards documenting their contribution to the organisation and the skills they have developed.

But if this documentation was formalised, we believe it would incentivise volunteers in the under 35 age group.

5. About fifteen of our 150 member families are LGBTQI, First Nations, or have CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) backgrounds. We would welcome more CALD members in particular, because our experience suggests that Muslim women, in particular, benefit from a safe family-oriented context like a toy library growing their confidence, supporting inclusion and providing upskilling opportunities.

We are quietly proud that three of our five CALD regular volunteers have progressed from volunteering with a mixture of informal and formal language development, to study at TAFE, and then to employment. And we have just started working with a new recruit who arrived just two months ago

However, this is only possible because our president has ESL (English as a Second Language) qualifications and many years of experience in various educational settings.

It is also only happening by chance. Cairns is a relatively small community, and there are no clear pathways for migrant and refugee families to engage with volunteer organisations.

We would like to see volunteer organisations partnered with educational institutions or other community services – for example, linking migrants and refugees attending English language classes at TAFE with volunteer organisations. ,

Another solution would be to physically group volunteer organisations like ours with relevant government services in community hubs. This has worked well in Victoria – a number of Victorian toy libraries work with migrant and refugee communities (ref: <https://www.toylibraries.org.au/toywell>) in community hubs. We would welcome a partnership with the Qld library services (some of whom now offer language classes within their First Five Forever programs) or with Maternal & Child Health services.

6. The biggest barrier is the fragmentation of community volunteering opportunities. There are no recognisable pathways for people to gain social support, learn new skills, and get widely recognised work experience through volunteering.
7. We feel that there is no evidence that the volunteering is valued at either state or local government level. Collectively, small volunteer organisations like ours deliver billions to the economy in civic benefits, but we are invisible. And if we approach our local members or our councillors for support - eg to help finding suitable premises, or for advice about possible sources of recurrent funding – each of them attributes responsibility to the other.

There is also very little incentive or reward for volunteering in Australia. Unlike the Swiss we do not have a collective commitment to civic responsibilities, so our volunteering contributions are not recorded by governments or respected by employers.

8. N/A
9. A few First Nations children who are in foster care use our service, but we've never had FN volunteers. This does not reflect complacency on our part: we have reached out to families at health centres, held events to attract them to the toy library, and donated toys to community centres. But there are cultural differences that limit FN's families' participation in something based on the concept of borrowing and returning.
10. N/A

Volunteer	Average hours per week
Ernie	2.5
Brian	2
Katelyn	2
Jess K	1
Ailsa	45
Richard	2
Grace	15
Jenny	20
Heather	3.5
Jessie G	7.5
Ciara	2
Amy	1
Gemma	2

Borrowing sessions	
volunter 1 x 3	7.5
volunteer 2 x 3	7.5
volunteer 3 x 3	3
Total	123.5