

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

<b>Submission No:</b>	255
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<b>Publication:</b>	Making the submission and your name public
<b>Attachments:</b>	See attachment
<b>Submitter Comments:</b>	

## Volunteering Inquiry Submission - PCYC

PCYC Queensland engages over 1900 volunteers each year in locations across the state. Volunteers are critical to our delivery of programs for young people, especially the Braking the Cycle Driver Mentoring and Emergency Services Cadets.

Braking the Cycle enables more than 800 young people each year to get their drivers licence, together with becoming safer drivers, and results in greater employment, social and overall life opportunities. 400 young people engage with Emergency Services Cadets, with many going on to either work or volunteer with Emergency Services. Without volunteers, these crucial programs for the development of young people simply wouldn't be able to run and the associated outcomes would be lost.

Volunteers also add significant value in ensuring that we can deliver more sport, recreation and engagement programs for young people that divert them away from risky behaviours and support their development into young adults. Volunteers are involved in both direct delivery of these activities, as well as providing mentoring and guidance for young people attending.

Our volunteer numbers declined significantly immediately following the COVID pandemic, however in the last couple of years we are slowly seeing an increase. Many of our sites report needing additional volunteers and we have an estimated shortfall of approximately 500 volunteers to maintain our current service needs. We are likely to also need further volunteers as our services and locations continue to expand, particularly with our opportunities to contribute to broader social outcomes including youth crime, safety, and development of young people.

We conducted surveys with PCYC volunteers, and volunteer managers, in November 2024. These gave insights into challenges and opportunities that we face with some key themes emerging:

- Volunteers are largely satisfied with their experience volunteering with PCYC, but there are some pain points in application process, onboarding pathways and communication that lead to some not starting or leaving the organisation
- Training to fulfil compliance requirements can be onerous and not always felt to be necessary. Particularly where volunteers have professional or other volunteer experiences that covers similar content. There is no portability of base level training between different groups or organisations, such as in the areas of health, safety and risk, where volunteers can find themselves repeating similar information.
- Time and budget constraints are frequently cited as challenges in managing volunteer relationships.

- People volunteer with our organisation to help young people and make a difference in their community. They don't often hear directly about the difference they are making though, and would like to hear more about successes and impact of their volunteering, both at a local and organisation wide level
- The social aspect of volunteering is important and volunteers are wanting more opportunities to socialise with each other. Some of our roles are independent in nature so there needs to be intentional effort to create social cohesion.
- Capability to effectively recruit, engage and retain volunteers varies significantly across the organisation. Leading and supervising volunteers is a unique skill with limited training and career pathways currently.
- There are lots of opportunities to make volunteering easier and simpler to engage with, from application processes, onboarding and on-going support. We should be looking to make volunteering easier to participate in, not harder.

Through the surveys and in reviewing our frameworks, we have identified that our current volunteer model needs updating. It is built around volunteers contributing on a fairly rigid schedule, often with regular shifts on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Many of our processes and training are one-size-fits-all and don't account for the different timescales, commitments and methods that people want to volunteer. There will be considerable developments in this area over the coming year as we look to align with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, introduced a tiered volunteer framework and modernise our volunteer product. We anticipate this will lead to increased engagement, more volunteers and improved experiences for PCYC volunteers.

One of the key things that we would like to see more of in the volunteering space is more recognition of the true impact of volunteers on communities across the state and greater visibility of both PCYC and all volunteers. This will help to showcase the benefits of volunteering and keep it front of mind as a positive activity that people could and should engage with. Volunteering can often be an invisible activity that takes place behind the scenes with minimal fuss. Whilst volunteers don't usually volunteer for credit or recognition, celebrating the overall benefits and opportunities brought about through volunteering can help to engage new audiences and ensure that volunteers are fully aware of their value.