

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Margaret Telford
Acting Committee Secretary
Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee
Queensland Parliament
lgsbcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Ms Telford

Volunteering in Queensland

I write on behalf of the Fraser Coast Regional Council to make a submission to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service's Committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland.

The Fraser Coast community and my Council rely on the work of volunteers to support numerous critical programs and services across the Fraser Coast, however, like all of Queensland many local organisations are finding it challenging to recruit and retain volunteers.

The latest 2021 census showed that 13.1% of Fraser Coast residents participated in volunteer activity which is slightly lower than the overall rate for Queensland, where 14.6% of the population engaged in voluntary activities. This lower-than-average volunteering could be contributed to the unique age structure of the Fraser Coast with an average age of 51, compared to 38 for Queensland. Large numbers of volunteers are associated with activities related to either schools or extra-curricular activities of children and our unique demographics mean that many people move to the Fraser Coast after peak volunteering ages.

Despite that, the Council and community benefit in many ways from those who do volunteer with the following volunteers involved in Council programs or facilities:

- Libraries 80 volunteers
- Museums 18 volunteers
- SES 112 volunteers
- Environment Programs 82 volunteers
- Council Committees 26 volunteers

On the Fraser Coast there are a number of barriers which can impact on people's willingness and capacity to volunteer which include:

- Time Constraints
- Lack of Awareness of appropriate opportunities
- Financial Constraints
- Health and Physical Limitations
- Bureaucratic and Legal Barriers
- Lack of Confidence or Skills
- Negative Past Experiences
- Transportation and Location Issues

While the Fraser Coast Regional Council can and does work to overcome a range of these barriers within our local community, the State Government could undertake initiatives to support volunteering and address barriers such as access to transport, financial support and a reduction in regulatory burdens which make it harder for people to volunteer, even when they want to.

Some specific initiatives we believe are worthy of State consideration include:

Reduce Financial Barriers:

- **Reimburse Expenses:** Cover transport, meals, or other costs for volunteers.
- **Training:** Provide financial support for training.
- **Grants & Funding:** Provide community grants to support volunteer expenses.

Support inclusive volunteering opportunities:

- **Adaptive Volunteering:** Offer roles suited for people with disabilities or health conditions.
- **Remote & Virtual Roles:** Allow volunteers to contribute from home where possible.
- **Support Systems:** Provide mental health resources and check-ins for volunteers working in challenging areas.

Simplify Bureaucracy & Red Tape

- **Streamlined Paperwork:** Reduce unnecessary forms and make sign-up processes user-friendly. As an example, the requirement to treat volunteers as employees leads to complicated induction processes which can often scare volunteers away and lead to no actual benefit given volunteers rarely work without being supervised by paid employees. Volunteers are required to sign forms they may not understand and which provide little benefit to their volunteer roles but are simply used as a risk mitigation measure to prove they have been trained as if they were an employee.
- **Pre-approved Volunteers:** Work with schools or community centres to create pre-screened volunteer lists that groups can share.
- **Provide Training & Certification:** Help volunteers meet legal requirements through free workshops.
- **Workplace Safety:** Simplify requirements for volunteers and organisations to comply with workplace health and safety requirements. As an example, following the recent upgrade of one of our libraries, some minor building works required all volunteers to be re-inducted and have new fire safety training which resulted in several volunteers refusing to go through the process and instead resigning from their volunteer roles. Volunteers want to help, they want to see results, they are not connected through financial necessity, and so, when they judge that the positives of their volunteer role are outweighed by the negatives (in this case, perceived redundant and onerous paperwork and training), they just leave.

Improve Volunteer Experience

- **Appreciation & Recognition:** Celebrate volunteers with awards, thank-you events, or small gifts.

Benefits of volunteering with the Fraser Coast Regional Council have included professional and personal growth for the volunteers and this is reflected by the following success stories:

- Hannah (22) returned to Hervey Bay after completing her studies in visual art in Brisbane. Keen to get involved with the local arts community and to put her studies to use, Hannah consistently volunteered for the gallery for six months. After demonstrating her strong customer services skills and personal passion for art, Hannah successfully applied for a Visitors Services Role and has become a valuable permanent member of the Hervey Bay Regional Gallery team.
- Our youngest volunteer, Jess (20) began volunteering at the gallery from May 2022 at the age of 18 and has worked almost every Tuesday morning since. One of the gallery's most dedicated volunteers, Jess has taken her responsibility for the gallery very seriously, overcoming personal challenges to grow into a confident and independent young person. For Jess volunteering at the gallery has been an opportunity to gain work experience, meet likeminded people, and come out of her shell.
- Lylah sought out a volunteer opportunity with us following post-surgical issues which prevented her from working and limited her lifting abilities. After some recovery time, Lylah's doctor recommended she venture back into a workforce environment. Lylah began volunteering with us as one of our toy cleaners in September 2024 for one hour per week. Following her first and second volunteering shifts, Lylah reached out to say how much she appreciated the opportunity to volunteer at the library. In January, Lylah requested that she increase her volunteering time, stating that she was enjoying volunteering with the library and that it is helping her overcome her health challenges.

Local Councils as the closest level of government to the community could advance many of these types of initiatives if they were resourced by the State Government to support local volunteers.

As an example, if the State Government funded local volunteer coordinators in each local Council area there would be enhanced capacity in each local community to recruit, train, support and recognise volunteers which could be deployed in both Council and local community organisations to support local communities.

I appreciate the opportunity to lodge a submission on this important matter and I would be pleased to appear at your upcoming committee hearings to speak to my submission in further detail.

Yours sincerely



George Seymour
Mayor