

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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To

The Committee Secretary
Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee

Many thanks for the opportunity to submit a report to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. Over the last year we have examined how sport volunteering can be made into an equitable and sustainable practice within the context of Queensland's social sporting culture. We are particularly interested in understanding how sport volunteering can be used as a social conduit through which communities from diverse backgrounds experience a better sense of inclusion and belonging.

Our submission addresses two areas of The Terms of Reference:

Point 4 - *The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups.*

Point 6 - *Opportunities for the Queensland government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.*

Our recommendations presented in this submission are derived from an Australian Research Council funded Discovery Project (DP 230101022) titled Engaging Outsiders in Sports: Transforming Sport Event Legacy Planning. This examines the ways in which those who find themselves on the margins of Australia's sporting culture, can engage more actively with formal and informal sports. The project aims to investigate intersectional inequities in sport participation for girls, women and non-binary people in Queensland by working with them to envision legacies for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

As a part of our research project, we have interviewed sport volunteers in Southeast Queensland, in understanding the advantages and constraints of participating as volunteers in a local sport club. As such we have first-hand insight into the multiple ways in which volunteering forms an essential element of Queensland and Australia's social fabric and the immense contribution they make into the sporting culture of the state. We have also established professional relationships with key volunteering bodies in Australia, including Volunteering Australia and Volunteering Queensland and have understood from them, through in-depth interviews, the current challenges that the volunteering sector is facing in relation to attracting and retaining volunteers in Queensland in the sporting sector and beyond.

Example Fieldwork

As a part of our research project, we interviewed volunteers who actively participated in a sport for social development hockey program 'Belong in Hockey' at the Glenvale Hockey Club supported by the Toowoomba Hockey Association. The participants shared their

experiences of volunteering to teach hockey to recently settled Yazidi refugees in the region. The volunteers shared their experiences of interacting with a group of participants from a complex and diverse group of participants. They noted how the Yazidi refugees were ‘open, very willing to learn and they’re very co-operative amongst one another’ (Bob, Volunteer Participant Toowoomba). The volunteers noted how the opportunity to transfer skills, leadership and community-based friendships with the Yazidi refugees provided them with a sense of purpose and increased self-esteem. However, they observed that this was possible only because the relationship that they formed with the Yazidi refugees was long term (the sport program lasted for 12 weeks) and sustainable. The participants also noted how all major stakeholders of the Hockey Program were keen on hearing their perspective as volunteers in creating the sporting experience safe and inclusive. The participants noted how this contributed to their sense of self-esteem, instilled leadership qualities in them, as opposed to other volunteering experiences where they were primarily treated as support staff. They noted, how this in turn made them feel included, encouraging them to give more hours as volunteers to the program.

We also spoke to state and federal level volunteering bodies that highlighted the key issues that the volunteering sector is facing. Our research indicates that volunteering opportunities are primarily taken up by members of the community that has prior knowledge about the volunteering sector – either through their own experience or through the experience and presence of knowledge of their immediate family members or social circle. On the other hand, members of the community, especially those belonging from diverse backgrounds, have expressed that they are interested in volunteering yet often do not have sufficient information on when and where to begin their volunteering journey. While the top three recruitment channels of volunteering are word of mouth, social media and website research, these pathways of communication, these channels still mostly reach community members who actively look for volunteering opportunities or have the knowledge around how to look for them.

Current Trends

The recently published State of Volunteering Report in Queensland (2024) demonstrate that 64.2 % of participants volunteered in order to help other, 41.3 % volunteered for enjoyment, only 37.5 % of volunteers studied for this report, said that they participate in volunteering activities as a leisure activity for greater health and wellbeing. Our suggestion is that there is greater potential and room for growth in presenting volunteering as a leisure activity that can address some of the broader health and wellbeing challenges experienced by Queensland’s population. With Queensland’s population demographic changing rapidly, there is greater need to understand the diversified community’s pre-existing relationship with volunteering and how social, cultural, economic factors influence whether or not people have the time and energy to volunteer. This data can help us identify the unique barriers faced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations and how volunteering opportunities can be reimaged and redesigned to address the complex inequities.

With the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games around the corner, there has never been a better time to implement a clear pathway through volunteering for employment as a critical post games legacy outcome. Queensland requires an incremental increase of volunteers for the successful hosting and completion of the event. In context to this there needs to be greater clarity on how volunteering for this mega event would provide long term tangible benefits in relation to employment for volunteers post the games. These modes of communication should also highlight the clear pathways for recognition of skilled work (specifically for people from refugee and migrant background) and other opportunities that their volunteering experience can present in the future. These initiatives should also include development of training methods ahead of the games. This is also particularly crucial within Australia’s current social and economic context where most members of the community are renegotiating their time and energy given the pressures of rising cost of living and job uncertainties.

Recommendations

Drawing on the findings from our research over the past three years we propose the following recommendations for addressing Point 4 and 6 of the Queensland Government Review

- **Highlight the value of volunteering as an equitable leisure activity through creation of safe and inclusive volunteering spaces** - This can include discounted and reduced membership in other areas of physical activities and leisure spaces.
- **Creation of a statewide volunteering passport that would enable people from diverse backgrounds eligible for subsidised training and access to leadership courses via TAFE, Colleges and universities** – This will form a statewide and in the future nationwide pathway for recognition for education, leadership and employment pathways. Subsidies can also be provided to volunteering participants (that meet pre-determined parameters such as volunteering hours, diverse range of volunteering practice and leadership roles in volunteering practices) who meet these criteria.
- **Design innovative communication pathways to community members with little to no volunteering experience** – As our research shows, increased participation in volunteering can be achieved by not just making the existing volunteering landscape more equitable but through an attraction process of community members who have had unpleasant experiences or little to no

experience in volunteering. For this to happen, there is a need to understand the community's pre-existing relationship with and perceptions of volunteering and the ways in which these barriers can be challenged.

- **Volunteering as a pathway for equitable employment as a post Brisbane 2032 games legacy outcome** – This is a single most timely opportunity in volunteering to make sure that all stakeholders within the event and volunteering landscape work together and keep each other accountable in delivering greater employment as a post-Olympic and Paralympic Games legacy outcome.
- **Provide funding to sport clubs to transform their canteens, providing food from relevant cultural groups within their geographical location to provide a welcoming space for diverse community members** – Retention of volunteers is heavily dependent on their ongoing experience in spaces of volunteering. These spaces need to think of the ways in which they are welcoming their immediate local communities through greater inclusion and equitable practices. This can be achieved through transformation of canteens, waiting and organising spaces for the volunteers. Further there is also benefit of including a volunteer representative in the governance of clubs and community organisations that would consider their perspective in individual club development policy making processes.

Should you require further information on the matters raised in this submission, please contact us via email or phone. We would be happy to provide further insight or information for this important and timely inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

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