

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No:	290
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Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

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The submission is not on behalf of Volunteering Queensland. This is my own submission.

Barriers to Volunteering for Young People

I have been the Coordinator of the Active Volunteering in Schools program with Volunteering Queensland RTO for 8 years. During this time, I have worked extensively with schools, students, and volunteer-involving organisations to facilitate meaningful volunteering experiences for young people. My role involves liaising with schools to implement the program, supporting students and schools in finding suitable volunteering placements, and working with community organisations to foster partnerships that allow students to gain real-world experience.

Students are required to undertake 20 hours of volunteering as part of the program. The Accredited Certificate Courses (Certificate I, II, and III in Active Volunteering) provide students with QCE Points and the opportunity to learn new skills. More importantly, they build confidence, provide networking opportunities, and allow students to gain experience in real-world settings while supporting not-for-profit, charity, and community organisations. These certificates have grown in demand, with an increasing number of schools recognising the value of structured volunteering as a key component of their student's personal and professional development. Over the years, we have seen a significant increase in school participation and an increased interest in volunteering, reflecting the growing recognition of volunteering as an essential pathway for students to engage with their communities and prepare for future employment and further education.

However, schools delivering Certificates I, II, and III in Active Volunteering face significant challenges in securing volunteering opportunities for students aged 14–18 due to organisations' age restrictions. Many volunteer-involving organisations require volunteers to be at least 16 years or older, and in some cases, 18 years or older, for certain roles (e.g. Events Management Queensland for individual applied roles). While the 20 hours of volunteering must be completed within an organisation with a "structured volunteer program," many of these organisations impose strict minimum age policies, even when students have insurance coverage provided by Volunteering Queensland (VQ) as part of their Vocational Education and Training (VET) course. This restriction significantly limits the availability of volunteering opportunities for younger students and creates barriers to completing their qualifications.

The age restriction policies remain a major barrier. Many organisations cite reasons such as workplace health and safety, supervision requirements, or internal risk management policies as justification for their age limits. However, these policies often do not account for the structured nature of the Active Volunteering program, in which students are covered by VQ's insurance and placed in environments where their activities are planned and monitored. The inability of younger students to access volunteering opportunities forces schools to seek alternatives, but these are often limited in number and scope. As a result, many students complete their volunteering within their enrolled school, supporting activities such as the P&C, School Tuck-shop, School Parish, School Events, and Fundraising Activities. While this volunteering meets the requirements of the course and contributes to school community initiatives, it does not allow students to gain the full benefits of volunteering in the broader sector, where they can develop valuable real-world skills, expand their professional networks, and engage meaningfully with the broader community.

To overcome these challenges, there is a need for greater flexibility from volunteer-involving organisations to accommodate students aged 14–18. Organisations should be encouraged to review their policies and consider safe, supervised roles for younger students participating in structured school-based volunteering programs. Additionally, government incentives or policy changes that support youth volunteering could help organisations adjust their age requirements without compromising safety or compliance. Without these changes, younger students will continue to face unnecessary barriers to volunteering, reducing early engagement in volunteering and limiting their opportunity to develop essential skills for future community participation.