

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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I'm writing as a long-time volunteer both in Queensland, across Australia and overseas. I have been volunteering from a very young age – under 10, and started with 'helping out' at my family's church cleaning it on Saturday's with my mum, and doing acts of community service as a Girl Guide. My parents have always been involved in volunteering, although they would never have labelled it as that. We were simply helping out. Working bees, fundraising barbeques, weekend clean-ups, playing music at church every week – these were built into our life and became second-nature. I'm now 40 and have dedicated a very large part of my life to volunteering. I still volunteer at church, running children's ministry, helping with fundraising and mother's groups. I now also have a paid job supporting volunteers at a not-for-profit. My reflections on barriers to volunteering – speaking as a volunteer – are:

1. Lack of governance – volunteers can have personality clashes, or take too much (or too little) control in their volunteering roles, and the organisation they are volunteering for isn't often equipped with the time or skills to deal with this. These issues left unchecked cause a variety of problems and can lead to excellent volunteers quitting.
2. Lack of clear expectations. In my many volunteering roles I have only once been given a role description and clearly explained what is expected of me. Despite this, on more than one occasion I have been reprimanded or felt belittled for not knowing what is expected of me. I can see how many would quit when this type of thing occurs.
3. Fear of legal implications – the majority of my volunteering roles have had lacklustre inductions, no training or risk assessments, and little (if any) supervision. It has made me nervous and I wonder what culpability I have if something were to go wrong due to my lack of training. I also wonder what insurance organisations have to cover their volunteers? I've rarely seen this information shared with volunteers.
4. Financial stress – Every volunteering role I've had as an adult has required some sort of monetary input from me. Whether it's been petrol money to get somewhere, purchasing appropriate clothes or resources for an activity, or even missing paid income in lieu of volunteering – volunteering comes at a cost to volunteers. There is no benefit financially to volunteer – no tax breaks, no incentives. In this economic climate, I personally have reduced my volunteering from approximately 5 hours per week to 5 hours per month, as I've needed to return to more hours of work to afford family expenses, and this has impacted my availability to volunteer. I've seen many other mum-friends in the same position, and have watched volunteer-based initiatives discontinue due to this financial pressure.

What can the government do to help?

1. Provide free training options (perhaps via Volunteering Qld) to support volunteer managers. Topics should include onboarding and recruitment, conflict resolution, your legal obligations, WHS, child safety etc.
2. Provide financial support to volunteers and volunteer involving organisations – it makes no sense that job network agencies receive funding for building a jobseeker's job readiness, yet organisations that upskill people through volunteering get nothing. Volunteer involving organisations should receive funding per volunteer. Volunteers should also personally be eligible for tax breaks or incentives – the government should be advocating this with the federal government.
3. Develop volunteer-based programs to be launched in schools and community centres. If you can build a culture of volunteering from a young age in people, it will become second nature.

Thank you for taking the time to review my submission. I look forward to seeing the outcome of this Inquiry in due course.