

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Thank you for the opportunity of putting my opinions on volunteering into this enquiry.

Difficulty across all organisations to obtain volunteers

All organisations are now struggling for volunteers, I believe it is the changing of times where people are less concerned with helping in the community. I believe a big part of this is children are not taught community pride, Authorities are more concerned about teaching youth rights before responsibility. The youth organisations that taught community spirit like Scouts, Guides, Cadets and sporting club's numbers are falling, these are the organisations that were good at teaching community pride which led to volunteering. The raising of retirement age is another factor for lowering numbers joining, at 55 people were still young enough to volunteer in the more physical organisation like RFS and SES. I am just 60 and no way could I start RFS now, my body isn't up to the full effort required but with the years of experience, I do more time as incident control than front line. So, the age of 67 people are not looking at physical things to fill in time like a 55 year old was. Saying all that whenever we have major events like the 2019-20 fires where the RFS was on the TV 24/7 the enquiries to volunteer go up. I do wonder if more advertising in the rural areas would help with recruitment numbers.

Time taken to approve applications

I do accept it takes time to get applications processed and one hold up is the blue card side, which is necessary but still time consuming. We are seeing applications take more than 3 months and some up to 5 months. If there is a query on a medical issue this time blows out even more. We have been led to believe there is only one doctor that can sign off on a fit for service. This also affects current Fire Fighters waiting for medical clearance to be able to go back onto fire ground.

We keep hearing the organisation is working on speeding up process but are not seeing it at grass root level.

The time taken for applications to be processed is leading to volunteers losing interest and pulling applications. We can't do any training of members before their application is processed due to insurance, if they hurt them selves at training. If there was a level of insurance for a volunteer that covers nonhazardous training, like classroom and truck familiarisation, whilst waiting for application process this would help keep their interest. This would mean a volunteer could start some training before they are accepted. This would make them feel part of the team and not lose interest. This would also mean they will be ready to go quicker once they are accepted.

Support from paid staff

Senior Volunteers in our area and I am sure other areas, are losing interest with the perception of lack of support from area office due to staffing issues. We have had a revolving door on the area office for years. As the Area Director took on a temporary role his position could only be filled by relieving staff until he got a permanent position. I have been first officer of my brigade for around 18 months and about to get my 6th Area Director/Manager. Every handover, things are missed, and we have to start process of many things again, That

affect day to day running. These things add up time for the volunteer. Also, with new management comes different rules to get used to. It is at a point now that many senior members don't even try to get to know the new managers because they won't be there long. The problems with the area manager changing regularly, are made worst with other staff being temporary. Last year we finally got a permanent Brigade Support Officer in the area office, which is helping a little, but he is over worked as the office is understaffed, and we get temporary staff in to assist but they are only temporary so not consistent with their processes. They have recently advertised For an Area Training Officer and another Brigade Support Officer to fill the short fall that has been there for years. They encouraged the Volunteer to Career so as First Officer of brigade so did I. We had four applicants from my brigade One got an interview, one got rejection before interview and the other two never heard anything back. The two that did hear back were both very capable of filling the role and ticked the boxes. Neither received an explanation of why they weren't successful, so we are all confused. I am now left to build their confidence and moral back up to where they went to still be part of the service. None of them will ever apply again as the hoops for a volunteer to jump through are worst then someone joining from the street. On previous occasions staff were employed that didn't come from area that were only using the role as a stepping stone into the service. This led to staff not wanting to be here and taking first available position back to SE Queensland which has contributed to lack of consistency in office. I have now got another Volunteer apply for the Brigade Support Officer, I can only hope that the organisation looks at hiring a local, that has set up a life here and wants to settle here, if they can do the job, as opposed to someone from the cities looking at it as a stepping stone.

The only consistent person we have had in the Area Office is the one administration person. She has been fantastic but heavily over worked. With the new financial rules with the reform her workload has increased dramatically. Now we feel like we don't want to ask her to do things she used to do as she is so busy. It would be good for another admin staff to help support the volunteer brigades in the day to day running.

We can only hope it gets sorted sooner than later as the group are talking about escalating the concerns of lack of support and more work load being put back on the volunteers.

Rewards

We do not do what we do for recognition or rewards, but it's always greatly appreciated. As we serve our communities and states in time of emergencies it would be good to receive something of appreciation. Some suggestions could be councils give volunteers a rate concession or state give a vehicle registration concession as a sign of appreciation or something along those lines.

Please note this is a personal submission not a brigade submission.

Thank You

Bill Sim