

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Parliamentary Inquiry into volunteering

Lions Australia have proudly served our communities nationwide since 1947, recently celebrating 77 years of service. Within Queensland there are four Lions Districts, including our District (201Q3) which encompasses north Brisbane, Moreton Bay, Somerset, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Toowoomba, Sunshine Coast, Western Downs, Southern Downs, Goondiwindi, Maranoa, Balonne, Murweh, Paroo and Quilpie local government areas. The 201Q3 Lions District is comprised of 66 community-based clubs with around 1400 members.

At an international level, Lions focusses service activities around the global causes of childhood cancer, diabetes, disaster relief, environment, humanitarian, hunger, vision and youth. At a local level, service activities look different for each club, but each will be providing support to their community in the way that it is needed but still aligned with the global causes. During 2024, Lions clubs in the 201Q3 district conducted more than 1500 service activities which served more than 163,000 people. All service activities undertaken by Lions are volunteer activities.

Despite all of this, Lions (and many other similar volunteer-based organisations) face many challenges. The most obvious challenge is that the average age of our members in 2024 was 68. In Lions district 201Q3, almost 70% of members are at or above retirement age, and worryingly, only 5.4% of members are in their twenties, thirties or forties.

Restrictions on volunteering caused by legislation and regulation

A significant barrier to volunteering is some of the legislative requirements. While we understand the need for safety legislation, food handling requirements etc, sometimes the requirements seem onerous and a deterrent to volunteering.

Current government support for the sector and opportunities for improvement

Volunteering has become an expensive exercise. People join groups like Lions because they want to feel useful in their community, meet new people or simply have fun. Many volunteers expect that they will have to pay a membership fee of some sort but are sometimes surprised by additional costs for things like Club shirts and hats, and if they progress into leadership roles within the District, there can be additional costs for travel and accommodation. If support from government were available by way of sponsorship or subsidies, it may encourage more people to consider volunteering within their community.

We appreciate recent changes to the OFT requirements for organisations to undertake an audit. The blue card portal has made life easier for us in this area

There are a number of grants available, but do not cover club admin (or it is not prioritised) and are usually well oversubscribed and difficult to get.

Some employers allow staff a couple of days volunteering leave a year. This not only provides a workforce for volunteer organisations, it also exposes the staff to volunteering and hopefully they will continue to volunteer beyond their volunteering leave

Barriers to volunteering for non-volunteers

In previous generations, there was a multitude of service clubs to choose from in each community from Lions, Apex and Rotary to CWA and Meals on Wheels, as well as community

sporting clubs and the likes of Scouts and Girl Guides, and many mums and dads were involved because that was simply how we all got things done. We now find ourselves in a position where the cost-of-living pressures of everyday life mean that people who once might have volunteered and been involved in different activities in their community now barely know their neighbours' names. They don't have capacity to serve others outside of their immediate family and feel that volunteering is something they can think about doing after they retire. Simply put, many people who would like to volunteer in their community are already feeling burnt out and overloaded.

To address the issues, we could look at

Time - Many people believe that work, family and other personal commitments leave them no time to volunteer.

Cost-our organisation believes that every dollar we raised from the community goes back to the community so the administration of clubs to a large extent comes out of the volunteers' pockets. While it is not an exorbitant amount, some people question why they have to pay to volunteer. To offset this, Government could:

make membership fees and necessary equipment [eg club shirts) tax deductible

financially reward people who volunteer by offering them a discount in their car registration or rates, especially if the car is used for volunteering purposes

provide assistance with Public Liability and personal accident insurance. This is a cost that volunteers have to cover.

provide a compulsory insurance that people pay into to cover their volunteering. As people are preferring to offer themselves for episodic volunteering, existing members whose membership fees pay these insurances are currently covering the cost of insuring episodic volunteers. And the impost will increase as episodic volunteering increases.

Age - the average age of our volunteers is 68. This does cause us to have difficulties convincing younger people, who wish to volunteer, that we are for them and they will fit in.

Promotion- in a world where print and TV media are shrinking, it is very hard for us to get our message out, so people don't know we exist. The print media is not interested in stories where funds raised by volunteers are donated to local charities to assist the less fortunate / homeless people within their communities. Some assistance in arranging publicity for what volunteer organizations do on a daily basis for their communities and the benefits of being a member of such an organisation would be beneficial to all volunteer organisations.

Current restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers

In many instances, the mind is willing but the body is not. Given the aging membership, we find we are limited in the activities we can undertake. For example, instead of having a working bee at the home of someone in need of gardening assistance with a dozen Lions pitching in for the day, we now might raise money through a barbecue to pay someone else to undertake the tasks needed, affording us one worker for maybe two hours.

The cost of living crisis extends to service clubs as well, minimising the service we are able to provide.

Some clubs have difficulty finding appropriate storage for their club equipment and suitable meeting places. Some clubs find they have to meet in the corner of a bar where they have no

privacy and probably disturb other patrons. I understand this is not a legislative restriction, but it does cause difficulties for clubs.

Opportunities for diversification in the volunteer workforce.

Queensland is such a great place to live that thousands of people are moving here every year from interstate and around the world. What better way to help them find their place in our communities than by providing them with connections to local service clubs and encouraging them to try it out.

If the government promoted volunteering as a way of reducing isolation and loneliness, particularly in communities which may be disconnected from the mainstream of society, it may provide additional volunteers and increased mental well being