

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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The Lighthouse Toowoomba is a centre focused on ensuring every child can read, and write, and create with confidence. It has developed its unique programs in direct response to the local community, a key component of the 'Unnecessarily Beautiful Space for Minds on Fire' model. There are two other centres like it in Australia - Story Factory in Sydney, and the 100 Story Building in Melbourne. This is the first of its kind in regional Australia. As a direct consequence of being engaged in a community in regional Australia, we cannot stay in one silo! Consequently, our organisation serves children from multiple government department's areas of responsibility - child safety, youth justice, education - as well as our rich and diverse migrant community, and has the potential to expand significantly throughout regional Queensland and beyond. There are two issues we constantly battle with: 1. Grants - in most cases - will not contribute to organisational wages which means we can't increase the hours dedicated to growing and support our volunteer base. The focus of grants is on building and therefore comfortably paying plasterers, painters, electricians for site specific buildings fit-for-purpose. Whilst it is lovely to work in a space that actually very comfortable and well-appointed, it is a reality that throughout regional Australia there a plethora of vacant buildings! We need a shift in acknowledging that the significant requirement is for people, not buildings, which means a willingness to therefore paying community champions, artists, writers, creators. 2. Volunteer hours are not always considered as a valued 'in-kind' contribution! It needs to be a standard consideration requested from grant administrators that has a significant weighting. In a recent survey of local authors asking about their willingness to volunteer, 80% indicated they would. The value of this is immense and is indicative of the generosity of people in regional Australia, who can see needs existing in the community and simply set to address these needs with passion, gusto, and enthusiasm because it strengthens their community for everyone!