Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Community Development Institute Initiative (CDIi)

Submission to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland.

Community Development Institute Initiative

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Community Development Institute Initiative

Submission to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland
February 2025

Preamble:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important inquiry on volunteering. We would like to highlight a critical but often overlooked aspect of volunteering—those who serve on committees and boards of community organisations, as well as the many individuals who come together voluntarily to address injustice and drive meaningful change in their communities.

1. Who We Are

The **Community Development Institute Initiative (CDII)** is a national initiative to create a body to strengthen and sustain the practice of community development within policy, practice, education and training, research and civil society development across many sectors. The Institute will be launched in collaboration with interested people and practitioners by late 2025.

Our Vision: Communities[i] are strong, connected and able to drive societal change grounded in social justice and human rights[ii].

Our Mission: To strengthen and sustain evolving community development practices within policy, practice, research and education and training within civil society across all structures, systems and sectors to enable citizens to influence social change in relation to their human rights.

Our Primary Objects

1. To hold the *mission* for Community Development as a people-led practice for social and structural change.
2. To advance a collective **voice** of citizens, regions and organisations for policy and system change.
3. To support communities in the alleviation of poverty
4. To form structural alliances with organisations aligning with our vision and mission.

5. To promote intersectional justice to address systemic inequalities and highlight the unique challenges faced by diverse groups.
6. To be systemically accountable to its **constituents.**
7. To create a ripple effect of positive change based on ecological and social justice principles.

Functions of the Organisation: Promote developmental work at any and every level of Australian society that enables the voices of the silenced to be heard, directly from them, never about them or for them.

✓ **Collaborate with**, but not limited to, all levels of government, sectors such as community, arts, environment, economic, health, education and training, culture and recreation

✓ **Research, evaluate, share and generate new knowledge** that supports participatory community development practices

✓ **Engage with communities** to formulate and inform participatory community development practices and social policy to influence Australian institutions and beyond

✓ **Promote the evolution of participatory community development practice** training, articulation of standards, coaching, mentoring and peer support

✓ **Advocate for policy to sustain and strengthen participatory community development** practices across all structures, systems and sectors

✓ **Capture, honour and archive the stories of persons engaged in developmental practice**, with attention to those often excluded

✓ **Be the official Australian link with international entities** which share our vision and mission

✓ Undertaking and doing all such things as are necessary, incidental, or conducive to the advancement of the objects

Organisational Principles

1. **To enable the voices of people in Australian society to be heard directly**, speaking with and not for people, particularly those who are least heard.

2. **To build trusting relationships at any and every level of Australian society** between individuals, within and between communities, organizations and out to the wider Australian Society and beyond.

3. **To ensure the channels for Participation are consistently widened** so those who are least heard have an opportunity for inclusion

4. **To create and forge an apolitical nonpartisan approach** when working with all sectors

5. To act in a manner that upholds people's ownership of their issues, and aligns with equity, human rights, diversity, social justice, self-determination and collective action

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[1] SCDC.org.uk 'Communities are where we live or who we share common bonds and aspirations'
[1] Human rights.gov,au 'The relationship between human rights an social justice are consistently described as one, where human rights are a step towards or a way of achieving social justice. Social Justice being the larger goal'

2. Our Position to the Inquiry

Recognizing the Full Scope of Volunteering in Community Development and Citizen Led Social Change.

2.1 Our Working Definitions

Community Development can be described as a process where communities, people, sectors, work together to improve their quality of life, address social, economic, and environmental challenges, and build stronger, more sustainable communities. It often involves collaboration between people, local organizations, government, and other stakeholders.

Traditional Understanding of Volunteering typically involves individuals offering their time, talents and skills to support organisations or causes. Volunteering is often organised by established entities such as non-profits, schools, or community groups. The primary focus is on contributing to the goals of these organisations, with volunteers usually following predefined roles and tasks. This understanding of volunteering builds on a charity discourse.

Citizen-led action, on the other hand, is initiated and driven by individuals or groups without the direct oversight of formal organisations. It encompasses grassroots movements where citizens identify issues within their communities and take proactive steps to address them. This can involve organising protests, starting local initiatives, or creating new community programs. The emphasis is on empowerment and self-organisation, with participants often working collaboratively to bring about change.

2.2 Points of Difference and Connections.

Community Development Citizen Led Change	Traditional Understanding of Volunteering	Points of Difference
Empowerment: It focuses on empowering people, citizens to have a say in the decisions affecting their lives and to lead initiatives for positive change.	**Individual Contribution:** Volunteering is usually done on an individual basis, where a person donates their time or effort to help an organisation or community initiative.	**Focus and Scope:** Community development is broader and more strategic, focusing on long-term, structural change within the community. Volunteering typically supports specific tasks or short-term needs within existing frameworks.
Sustainability: The aim is to create long-term, lasting improvements in the community, such as better access to resources, services, and opportunities.	**Supportive Role:** Volunteers often assist in delivering services, supporting events, or helping with day-to-day operations.	**Initiative:** Community development often requires active involvement in planning, decision-making, and resource allocation, while volunteering usually involves supporting activities or causes defined by others.

Comprehensive: Community development addresses multiple aspects of a community, such as education, health, environment, housing, community arts, social enterprises, and employment.	**Variety of Roles**: Volunteers can take on many different roles, from administrative work to on-the-ground support in areas like education, healthcare, or environmental conservation.	**Impact**: Community development aims to create systemic, sustainable improvements, while volunteering usually has a more immediate, direct impact on a specific issue or need.
Leadership & Collaboration: It often requires leadership, coordination, and cooperation among various stakeholders, including local government and non-profits.	**Flexible**: Volunteering tends to be more flexible in terms of time commitment and scope.	**Both contribute to community well-being**, but while volunteering is often an individual act of service, community development focuses on collective action and structural change to improve community life.

3. Our Analysis and Discussion:

3.1. Bringing a Boarder Understanding.

We believe volunteering is frequently understood in a limited way, often framed as individuals providing unpaid labour in structured roles. However, this perspective fails to recognise the significant contribution of **volunteer leadership, advocacy, and community-driven initiatives** by people coming together to shape and strengthen our society.

Across Queensland, thousands of people give their time, skills, and resources to serve on the committees and boards of neighbourhood centres, community groups, charities, and grassroots organisations. These individuals take on **governance, strategic planning, advocacy, and decision-making responsibilities**, ensuring that essential community services exist and thrive. They are not simply administrative volunteers—they are the backbone of community organisations, working without financial reward but with deep commitment to the well-being of others.

3.2. Understanding of Active Citizenship and Social Change.

Beyond formal governance roles, volunteering can also encompass **active citizenship**—where people who come together to bring about change in response to injustice, inequality, or unmet community needs. From advocating for better local services to leading environmental action, supporting social justice movements, or strengthening community resilience in times of crisis, these volunteers are at the forefront of **structural and social change**.

This broader understanding of volunteering reflects the words of anthropologist **Margaret Mead**, who famously stated:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." (source unknown).

3.3. Leaders, Changemakers, Community Builders.

We see this in action every day across Queensland. Volunteers are not just people filling existing roles—they are **leaders, changemakers, and community builders**. Their work creates **long-term social impact**, strengthening democracy, fostering inclusion, and ensuring that communities can advocate for their own needs and aspirations.

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4. Recommendations for the Inquiry

Recommendation 1:

Expand the Definition of Volunteering – Recognize that volunteering is not just unpaid labour but also includes leadership, governance, advocacy, and grassroots activism.

Recommendation 2:

Value and Support Volunteer Leadership – Acknowledge the significant contribution of board and committee members in community organisations and ensure policies reflect their vital role.

Recommendation 3:

Invest in Community-Led Change – Provide resources, training, and structural support for volunteers engaged in advocacy and community-driven initiatives.

Recommendation 4:

Promote Active Citizenship – Encourage broader recognition of volunteering as an essential part of civic engagement and democracy.

5. Conclusion

Volunteering is the **foundation of strong, connected communities**. It is essential that this inquiry captures its full breadth—particularly the role of those who come together to plan, organise, and **walk the road to change** for the betterment of society.

Thank you for considering this submission.

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