

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

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About The Salvation Army

We 'Believe in Good'

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Positive Lifestyle Program
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity. Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at:

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>



Executive summary

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee ('the Committee') in relation to Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland ('the Inquiry').

In this submission, The Salvation Army will assume other submissions to the Committee will address the common challenges for volunteer-involving organisations - of which The Salvation Army also faces and wishes to alleviate. This submission, however, will focus on the opportunities and untapped potential of volunteering, particularly for a large organisation such as The Salvation Army with its multitude of activities in local communities, as well as the faith and social sector.

Referring to the terms of reference, this submission responds to particular points of the Inquiry, in the context of The Salvation Army Queensland. Those are:

- *The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the state;*
- *The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement;*
- *Opportunities for the Queensland government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland;*
- *Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimise the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery;*
- *Any other relevant matters.*


This submission covers information about The Salvation Army Queensland's volunteers, their value and potential, along with recommendations. There are two further 'Special Focus' sections, one on emergency volunteering and 'Transformative Volunteering'.

1 About The Salvation Army's Queensland volunteers

- 1.1 In 2024, The Queensland Division of The Salvation Army would not have been able to deliver its 61 community and social programs to 45,000 Queenslanders without the support of 2483 volunteers fulfilling 4409 volunteer roles (many do multiple volunteer roles).
- 1.2 Across Queensland, the Salvation Army has 50 Salvos Stores and 66 locally managed retail stores, with profits supporting national and local programs and services. These stores require an additional 1236 volunteers to run them successfully.
- 1.3 The Salvation Army in Queensland employs 210 managers who oversee a total of 3925 volunteers, which equates to a ratio of 1:19 volunteers per manager of volunteers.
- 1.4 Each volunteer role is assessed for its risk level which then dictates background check and training requirements. Training includes Work Health and Safety, Child Safety, as well as code of conduct and introduction to The Salvation Army. Volunteer onboarding is estimated to cost The Salvation Army \$200-300 per volunteer to cover background checking costs, resources, IT systems, as well as orientation support and induction training costs (excluding insurance premiums currently at \$18,500 per year for Queensland volunteers).
- 1.5 The average tenure of a Salvation Army volunteer in Queensland is 2.2 years. There were 2173 volunteers onboarded last year across the Queensland Division, equating to approximately \$450,000 – 650,000 in onboarding costs per year.
- 1.6 The Salvation Army Queensland volunteer demographics show the average age is 55.1 years and 58 percent of the volunteer work is done by those who identify as women. One percent of volunteers report their identification as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a number The Salvation Army is committed to increasing as part of our 'Stretch' Reconciliation Action Plan.
- 1.7 There is one full-time employee, a Volunteer Resources Advisor assigned to The Salvation Army Queensland Division. They advise on all volunteer matters for 2483 volunteers in the Division, as well as any national programs with operations in Queensland. This employee is supported by a National Volunteer Resources Manager. From 2019 to 2024, there were two Volunteer Resources Advisors however due to organisational budget cuts, the second Advisor role will not be filled at this time. Note: Salvos Stores have a national team to support volunteer matters.

2 The value of The Salvation Army's volunteers in Queensland

- 2.1 The Salvation Army in Queensland provides local social support and spiritual connection through its 43 churches (referred to as 'corps'). These corps are highly reliant on volunteers to deliver their local social programs and community activities, helping to make communities more resilient. In the last 12 months, the local social programs delivered assistance to approximately 30,000 Queenslanders doing it tough, some needing multiple instances of support (approximately 50,000 instances).
- 2.1 The Salvation Army Queensland Chaplaincy Services engage **volunteer pastoral carers** to assist in supporting aged care residents, Australian Defence Force personnel, Queensland Fire and Emergency personnel, communities based in rural and remote locations, Queensland prisoners, as well as participants in Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) recovery services.
- 2.2 Each year, The Salvation Army launches its **Red Shield Appeal** and **Christmas Appeal** campaigns, engaging around 2000 additional short-term volunteers to oversee committees and collect donations to support its major social programs and local community programs. The additional funds (on top of Government funding) for these programs allow for greater effectiveness in areas such as homelessness, family violence, addiction (drug, alcohol and gambling), financial counselling as well as general social casework.
- 2.3 In addition to Salvos Stores, The Salvation Army has a number of other social enterprises which includes **The Salvation Army Aged Care** who operate four centres in Queensland, as well as **Employment Plus** who currently have 21 offices located in South East Queensland. These social enterprises are developing a volunteer workforce to enhance the delivery of these important services to Queenslanders, however this requires additional costs for training and administration to comply with federal compliance and regulations. There is potential to tap into funded training, specifically *Skilling Queenslanders for Work*, [focussing on the cohort experiencing disadvantage](#), to upskill volunteers to effectively work in our social enterprises with the prospect of moving into paid positions. However, resources are limited in The Salvation Army to effectively structure, implement and manage an intentional pathway from volunteering to employment at this time.
- 2.4 Historically, **The Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES)** has provided catering for emergency and disaster activations, serving meals around the clock to emergency services personnel (fire, rescue and police) as well as impacted Queenslanders. These activations are primarily delivered by volunteers. Volunteers also fill recovery support roles in the weeks or months after a disaster which saw 6700 impacted Queenslanders seek assistance from SAES Recovery Services in the last 12 months. *More on this area of volunteering is explored in Section 5.*
- 2.5 It is estimated volunteers save The Salvation Army Queensland operations (and indirectly, the taxpayer) around \$74,000,000 in wage costs each year (based on 2024 volunteer peak body



calculations vsant.org.au/value-of-volunteering/). However, the incalculable value is the broader positive social impact and resilience volunteers bring to the community with their support of service users, vulnerable community members, and those overcoming from addictions and challenging behaviours.

- 2.6 Twenty percent of volunteers report it is their calling as a follower of Jesus which motivates them to work with society's most desperate and lost. The value of a faith motivation for these volunteers is they are more likely to sustain their volunteering when their work environment becomes especially challenging.
- 2.7 Volunteers who responded to our engagement surveys report they are most aligned to The Salvation Army's mission intention of '**Caring for people**'. This mission intention is a consistent motivator for our volunteers, regardless of their beliefs.
- 2.8 Additionally, volunteers represent themselves in their communities as advocates for the work of The Salvation Army, helping to raise awareness of how The Salvation Army can support people and prevent them from deepening their vulnerability.
- 2.9 Salvation Army volunteers bring value to Queenslanders by making the experience of seeking assistance less daunting, easier and more dignified. Because the volunteers **are the community** (not government service or other agency paid workers), there is a mutual and powerful sense of healing that comes from **community helping community**. We know that a long-term supportive community is a proven success factor for many people that are recovering from the traumas of addiction, abuse, violence, homelessness and isolation.


Recommendations

- I. That the Committee considers the value of volunteering not just for their wage replacement value, but for the vastly more **valuable social impact volunteers** bring to Queenslanders. Along with the usual wage replacement measures, other measures could include:

Wellness impact measure of community members – We know that when someone has been assisted *by a volunteer*, not a paid employee, community members report that there is a positive experiential difference, often described as the volunteers' support felt more genuine - because it's assumed volunteers are not motivated by a wage, rather a desire to turn up of their own free will and help people. Connection to volunteers increases a community's resilience, preventing reliance on more acute services provided by government (hospitalisation, Medicare-funded services) and isolation.

Spiritual impact measure of community members – Whilst The Salvation Army is a Christian organisation, it is inclusive and respectful of all spiritual or religious beliefs. Salvation Army personnel, directly or indirectly through their work, demonstrate the love of Jesus in their practical care and compassion for all people. This spiritual quality, which permeates in various ways within the organisation, motivates and unites our volunteers to help others, to 'Believe in Good', regardless of their own spiritual beliefs.

Transformation measure of volunteers – We know from engagement surveys volunteers are positively transformed by the experience of volunteering in The Salvation Army. They feel better



about themselves and more positive about the world because they see others' lives transforming for the better with their assistance. If more people were able to volunteer (by removing/reducing barriers to volunteering), there would be even more transformed lives.

3 The current climate of volunteering in The Salvation Army

- 3.1 With decades of erosion of people's ability to meet their cost of living, due to low wage growth not keeping up with inflation, Queenslanders experiencing challenging times realise their basic social security is barely met by government support, leaving them to increasingly rely on organisations such as The Salvation Army to keep them afloat. (See social impacts on Queenslanders in The Salvation Army's [Social Justice Stocktake 2025](#)).
- 3.2 The Salvation Army is facing its own increases in 'the cost of doing business' (wage increases, compliance measures, IT systems and cybersecurity) and is therefore looking for efficiency opportunities (eg streamlining processes). Notably, the cost of reimbursing injured volunteers above the Medicare coverage is borne by The Salvation Army or by the volunteer themselves.
- 3.3 Meanwhile, monetary donations and volunteer contributions are challenged to keep up with the increasing costs and work needed to meet the growing demand for our services. People can no longer volunteer as much as they would like to due to needing to be working full-time to meet their increasing expenses **All the trendlines are going in the wrong direction.**
- 3.4 The Salvation Army has been cutting expenses significantly in the last 5 years, mainly infrastructure, tools of the trade and staffing. With less budget to employ people, the reliance on volunteers has increased, yet they are harder to come by.

"The sorts of issues that we want to address will take more than one person, they will take more than one party of politics, and they will take more than one parliament, they will take more than one level of government to really bring about change. But with all of those levels working together, and us working in our communities, in our workplaces and as individuals, we absolutely can address every one of the social justice issues."

- Jennifer Kirkaldy, General Manager of Policy and Advocacy at The Salvation Army.

(Hear more from Jennifer about 'The Salvation Army's Social Justice Stocktake 2025' via [this video](#))

- 3.5 With these adverse trends, The Salvation Army is maximally stretched to support Queenslanders who have hit hard times. Considerable financial intervention and innovation is needed to prevent people from breaching the slippery slope of homelessness, addiction, family violence, anti-social behaviour and mental illness – problems that are significantly more expensive to remediate than prevent.

Recommendations

That the Committee recognise that *gifting time* through volunteering has a 'bottom line' value for individuals and organisations (ie it is done instead of earning money/other productivity), and saves taxpayer dollars by preventing social issues from deepening. This value could be recompensed by:

- I. Tax incentives for individuals to volunteer.
- II. Tax incentives for corporations to allow workers to volunteer on a regular basis (ie beyond a few days of corporate volunteering each year, which is often a corporate's team-building activity that has limited benefit for the non-profit organisation).
- III. Financial incentives (reward) for non-profit organisations who meet or exceed their 'social impact KPIs' - as agreed in collaboration with government.
- IV. Advocating to the Federal Government to increase the current volunteer grant funding and make the process to apply based on merit, not based on a local MP's invitation.
- V. Advocate to the Federal Government that they introduce a streamlined approach to volunteer grant funding by adding an option for multi-site/multi-program organisations to apply with one application and distribute according to organisational need to support volunteer involvement. This will be much more efficient and effective, compared to the current process of having personnel work on multiple applications from one organisation. Additionally, remove an organisation's reliance on their relationship with local MPs to secure an invitation to apply. This also takes up precious time.
- VI. Advocate to the Federal Government to incentivise young people to volunteer on a regular basis, eg linked to reducing their current or future HECS/HELP debt. This will assist them to gain meaningful work experience relevant to their interests, and not spend all their productive time working in unrelated jobs.

That the Committee advocates for insurance coverage to relieve volunteers from the financial burden of Medicare Gap-related expenses, which are currently restricted by Federal legislation, noting the precedent in Queensland and Victoria where State Emergency Service volunteers are entitled to compensation under their scheme. See *State Emergency Service Act 2024*.

4 Special focus: 'Transformative Volunteering' in The Salvation Army

- 4.1 The Salvation Army Australia's vision is to "...transform Australia, one life at a time, with the love of Jesus". Volunteers not only play their part in changing the lives of others, volunteers themselves are often transformed by the opportunity to engage with community through volunteering.

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"I was once very mentally ill and as I was getting better, I felt that I wanted something to do that gave something to the community and also helped my mental health. I looked at the Salvos site and decided to volunteer. I'm glad I did."

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- Survey respondent comment - Volunteer Engagement Survey 2023

- 4.2 There is untapped potential to utilise the experience of volunteering, particularly for those who are marginalised (for example as listed in the Committee's TOR and detailed in The Salvation Army's [Social Justice Stocktake 2025](#)), through a dedicated 'Transformative Volunteering' program of intentional pathways facilitated within various Salvation Army services and programs. The intention is to 'break the cycle', to take people from being dependant on The Salvation Army's services, to become independent, and ultimately dependable community members. This is similar to the intent of the Federal Government's [WorkFoundations](#) model, however with volunteering being the primary component of work experience for the participants to become 'job ready'.

- 4.3 Potential 'Transformative Volunteering' pathways could include:

Example 1: Participants who have recovered via a Salvation Army AOD program are supported to become 'job ready' by engaging in a mutually agreed volunteer role. These individuals are case-managed by The Salvation Employment Plus service to ultimately secure a job either externally or within The Salvation Army. These participants can be further supported in their journey with access to Salvation Army chaplains and/or Career Mentors (who are also volunteers with skills in mentoring and career coaching).

Example 2: Long-term unemployed, who are currently being case-managed by The Salvation Army Employment Plus service, are encouraged to take up *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* funded vocational training, doing their work experience placement in a relevant volunteer role, with the ultimate goal of engaging in paid work, again either externally or within The Salvation Army.

Example 3: Recent migrants connected to The Salvation Army's migrant support services are placed in volunteer roles suitable for those with limited English skills. These volunteers are coached to learn English and gain work experience in programs within The Salvation Army, whilst receiving other wrap around supports to integrate with communities in Queensland.

Example 4: Enhance the experience of Workforce Australia job seekers with requirements to undertake volunteer roles by placing them in more specialised areas (currently only engaged in

retail roles), with further wrap around supports, such as career mentors and positive lifestyle programs.

- 4.4 With the immense body of social programs in The Salvation Army, along with its footprint across all of Queensland, any combination of the above could be tailored with a career plan (which includes volunteering) to transform the life of a person who's been experiencing vulnerability and/or barriers to engage effectively and sustainably in work.
- 4.5 However, this specialised 'Transformative Volunteering' program would need upfront funding to support a project team to design and implement across our various social programs, and then ongoing funding for program coordinators and case managers.
- 4.6 Due to its large size and breadth of specialisation, the key advantage of The Salvation Army is the prospect of having a long-term career, experiencing a number of areas. It is encouraging to see 10% of employees started as a volunteer in The Salvation Army.
- 4.7 The Salvation Army could potentially collaborate with its corporate partners in Queensland (eg Woolworths, Technology One, Bunnings) to expand the work experience offering for volunteers and encourage corporate professionals to volunteer as mentors for 'Transformative Volunteering' participants.

Case study – Work for the Dole participant now manages a Salvos Store

In 2019, Michael started volunteering in a Salvation Army Family Store (a locally managed charity store, not a Salvos Store) as part of his mutual obligation requirement for his job seeker payments.

In the first few months of volunteering, Michael was informed by Salvation Army Queensland Volunteer Resources team of the opportunity to participate in a Certificate III in Retail training course funded by *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* program. He completed this course, undertaking his placement hours within the store.

With his experience and training in the store, Michael's confidence grew, helping him with his successful application for the paid Store Manager position, which happened to come up soon after completing his training. He is still happily (and gratefully) working with the same team, who all recently transitioned to be part of the Salvos Stores national retail network.

Recommendations

That the Committee consider the value of volunteering in positively transforming lives, utilising innovative, holistic and sustainable approaches, such as:

- I. Government funding is made available to organisations with a broad social mission footprint to unleash the potential of volunteering as an effective way to help the most vulnerable Queenslanders to flourish, including job seekers, migrants, youth, and Indigenous people.
- II. The funding is based on a co-designed program with the Queensland Government, partnering with large Queensland-based social mission organisations and employment agencies, such as The Salvation Army.
- III. That an agreed program is piloted in Queensland with The Salvation Army, an organisation that has the expertise and reporting capability, however currently fiscally constrained to implement any new initiatives requiring paid workers to oversee such a program.
- IV. That the effectiveness of such a program is measured and reviewed according to agreed outcomes, with recommendations to iterate and improve, with the goal to release broadly to other large organisations as an ongoing funded program in Queensland.

5 Special focus: The Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES)

- 5.1 The Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES) is contracted by most local councils across Queensland to provide immediate and long-term support during Queensland disasters and emergencies. This activity is largely supported by teams of volunteers who provide catering around the clock for firefighters, police and other emergency agencies, as well as longer-term recovery support for impacted community members.
- 5.2 These immediate **response volunteers** require specialised training in food handling, equipment safety, large vehicle orientation, and child safety awareness. As disasters can occur anytime, anywhere, training certification must remain current at all times with regular refreshers. This cohort of volunteers require continued engagement throughout the year to ensure their readiness to respond to disasters and emergencies at any time.
- 5.3 Currently, SAES **does not engage spontaneous volunteers** during disasters due to the training required to be ready to respond at short notice, as well as the requirement to have a current police check.
- 5.4 Another important activity of SAES is **disaster recovery**. This involves immediate, as well as longer-term support for those impacted by flood, fire and other natural disasters. Volunteers in



this space need to be trained in psychological first aid, right through to IT system training to ensure accurate client assessment and reporting to government departments.

- 5.5 With an aging and diminishing volunteer base, and a prolonged disaster season becoming the new normal, volunteers are often stretched beyond capacity. This means we are putting the call out to *paid* Salvation Army workers to leave their substantive roles to take up temporary SAES roles. Many are from interstate which the Queensland Government funds to relocate and accommodate. This is not sustainable for an already lean organisation and is not the most effective use of government spending.
- 5.6 It is only in recent months, The Salvation Army has managed to budget for a full-time national Volunteer Coordinator to take the administration and coordination of SAES volunteers to a sustainable and appropriate level, where they can ensure all the training requirements and background checking is efficiently and accurately undertaken. This funding also covers new software to better communicate and train volunteers. Previously, volunteers were administered by our senior SAES workers whose priorities lay with disaster preparation and activations, resulting in patchy adherence to volunteer compliance requirements and inconsistent communication, active engagement and training.

Recommendations

That the Committee considers the following:

- I. That government funding is made available to SAES to increase numbers of Queensland-based volunteers who can support disasters and emergencies. This would include the costs to promote the SAES volunteer roles to the wider public, the increase in administration, onboarding and training, coordination and deployment across all parts of Queensland.
- II. That the administration, coordination and deployment of **spontaneous volunteers** continues to be managed by a central body in Queensland. Whilst The Salvation Army recognises that community members are driven to help others during acute times of disaster, and that their involvement also helps to lessen their own, SAES can only engage ongoing volunteers due to police check and extensive training requirements.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to partner with the Queensland Government to develop and implement a dedicated **volunteer program** as a vehicle to strengthen individuals overcoming complex challenges ('Transformative Volunteering'), as well as communities more generally. Volunteering has multifaceted benefits and The Salvation Army is well-positioned to harness the potential of volunteering with further Government support and collaboration.
- 6.2 The Salvation Army thanks the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering Committee for the opportunity to provide a written submission and have input.
- 6.3 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from [REDACTED] or by contacting the Volunteer Resources General Manager, Vincent Ciardulli, [REDACTED] or phone [REDACTED].

Submitted by **The Salvation Army Volunteer Resources team**, on behalf of The Salvation Army Australia Territory.

February 2025



Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children. Our values are:

Integrity
Compassion
Respect
Diversity
Collaboration

The Salvation Army is a worldwide movement known for its acceptance and unconditional love for all people. We love unconditionally, because God first loved us. The Bible says, “God so loves the world” (John 3:16, RGT). As both a church and charity, we believe all people are loved by God and are worthy of having their needs met. Everyone is welcome to find love, hope, and acceptance at The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory wishes to acknowledge that members of the LGBTIQA+ community have experienced hurt and exclusion because of mixed comments and responses made in the past. The Salvation Army is committed to inclusive practice that recognises and values diversity. We are ensuring our services affirm the right to equality, fairness, and decency for all LGBTIQA+ people, rectifying all forms of discriminatory practice throughout the organisation.

We seek to partner with LGBTIQA+ people and allies to work with us to build an inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe environment in every aspect of Salvation Army organisation and services. Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected.

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: <salvationarmy.org.au/about-us>

