

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

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Attracting and retaining volunteers is an ongoing challenge for the accredited Central Queensland Highlands Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in Emerald.

Here are the specific issues:

- While most of the VIC's volunteers have reached retirement age, they continue to lead extremely busy lives. In particular, they often must care for grandchildren because of the high cost and limited availability of formal childcare. This significantly impacts the volunteers' ability to donate time at the VIC, particularly for regular shifts.
- People who are required by government welfare programs, such as Work for the Dole, to volunteer at the VIC often only do the bare minimum – it's common to have them never return after getting their paperwork signed. This is truly a missed opportunity because many people on these programs have skills and insights that would be valuable to the VIC.
- Casual paid positions were introduced a few years ago at the VIC to supplement the volunteer support. This ensures the centre maintains regular opening hours (part of its accreditation requirements) however it also reduced the inclination of some volunteers to continue donating their time.

Here are a few ideas to boost the appeal of volunteering in Queensland:

- More financial incentives from government, such as energy bill and vehicle registration discounts. This would be particularly appealing for pensioners who are juggling the rising costs of living.
- More employers, especially larger businesses and organisations, to adopt programs that enable staff to use a small portion of work time to volunteer. This would be an effective way of introducing younger people to volunteering.
- A widespread education campaign to promote the benefits of volunteering – not just the charitable component but also the enrichment and friendship that it can provide to the lives of the volunteers. Here is a poem about this, written by one of the VIC's volunteers, Myra Stanton.

*The Life of a Volunteer*  
Where are you going?  
From where have you come?  
The life of a volunteer can be rewarding and fun.  
Eyes fixed on doors, people will come.  
Hello and Welcome! Your journey and my journey has just begun.

Questions and answers many and few,  
we are always ready to listen and answer on cue.

It's hard to explain the joy that you bring.  
Helping each other and that's a precious thing.  
Information is shared and we are filled with pride.

As we show off our countryside...  
There are history, mining and precious gems just to name a few.  
And more than often the skies are blue.  
Friendships are made, that's what we do  
So come on down we're waiting to welcome you.

ENDS