

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

General Position:

An opportunity to train volunteers in generic spiritual care (which aligns with current evidence-based mental wellbeing/trauma theory¹) is being missed because volunteers often cannot self-fund for the world-recognized training required for the role².

The community is missing out on untold wellbeing benefits as demonstrated below.

Background:

- I currently volunteer as President of Queensland Institute of Clinical Pastoral Education (QICPE), a not-for-profit organisation whose sole purpose is to provide world-recognized training in generic spiritual care, which is inclusive and supportive of people of all faiths or none. This training is Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).
- All QICPE Committee Members volunteer their time.
- I began volunteering as a spiritual carer in nursing homes, community and hospitals eight years ago. I was lucky enough to be able to self-fund the necessary training³ and ongoing supervision⁴.
- An example of the impact of this specialized volunteering: As a volunteer spiritual carer, I have supported a war veteran whose recurring admissions to a mental health hospital ceased 5 years ago, when I began offering him 2-3 weekly spiritual care support. He wrote “you have kept me out of hospital on many occasions”. He has grown to accept his woundedness and compassionately care for himself, supported by spiritual validation and research-based self-compassion strategies⁵. He is now showing an interest in supporting others.
- Regional access to training issue: Just this month, someone from regional Queensland pulled out of enrolling in a Clinical Pastoral Education course suitable for prison ministry, where they wanted to volunteer. Their reason: they could not afford the course fees. Here is an example of so much lost potential for the community because a volunteer could not self-fund the required training.
- In an environment where many are traumatised and acting out their trauma in society, there is an opportunity to train up volunteers in a generic non-religious model of spiritual care, which can enhance a trauma victim’s capacity to self-heal. This general model of spiritual care has the potential to support the wellbeing of many across the community, and can be taken to hospitals, aged care facilities, people in community and prisons.
- The cost of the CPE Course is currently \$2600 – way beyond the reach of many people who are retired or in a position to volunteer.
- QICPE has provided this world-recognized training in spiritual care to the regions of Queensland including Mt Isa, Townsville, Hervey Bay, Bundaberg and Toowoomba. This has facilitated access to training for regional first nations people and for those of all faiths and none. However, travel and accommodation costs need to be passed on to the trainees which can further exacerbates access issues.

¹ Richard C. Schwartz, 2021, No.Bad.Parts?pp;88_89

² Framework for Integration of Spiritual Care in QH Facilities (look up doc name and page number)

³ Necessary training reference

⁴ <https://divinity.edu.au/professional-supervision>

⁵ Kristin Neff, Self-Compassion <https://self-compassion.org>

- We need many more volunteer spiritual carers in the hospitals because, in Qld, spiritual care practitioner roles are paid positions only in private hospitals. Research has demonstrated quality spiritual care can reduce length of stay.⁶

To maximize the potential community benefit that would come from these specially trained volunteer spiritual carers, funding is needed to facilitate access to this world-recognized Clinical Pastoral Education. Funding is needed to cover:

- (i) the cost of training volunteers,
- (ii) the cost of professional supervision of volunteer spiritual carers, and
- (iii) the travel costs associated with taking this training to regional Queensland.

Trish Byrne
President

⁶ Reference for length of stay.