

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Qld Parliament
Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

To Whom it may concern:

We thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission for the inquiry. This submission comes from Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited (GAPDL) however we will provide perspective from ourselves and our partner organisations specific to volunteering.

GAPDL is a not-for-profit organisation originally founded in 1983, charged with the job of developing the local business community and promoting the region as a tourist destination (the appointed Registered Tourism Organisation). In 2004 GAPDL were appointed as the Facilitating Partner for the Department of Social Services Communities for Children project. This has enabled GAPDL to take on the task of making the region a great place to live as well as a great place to visit.

Both projects actively engage volunteers to undertake a range of roles including tourism ambassadors, visitor information centre staffing, administrative tasks including accommodation and tour bookings, child and family program supports, garden and premises maintenance and general operational tasks.

Funding for the Communities for Children project comes from the Federal Government's Department of Social Services. We have communicated our extensive waitlists for participation in parenting and early learning programs and shortfall of funding to our Funding Arrangement Managers for the past six years however we have been advised there is no capacity for increased funding.

Funding for the Tourism project comes from Tourism and Events Qld, Gladstone Regional Council, sponsorship and self-generated income. Our visitor information centres across the region are primarily staffed by volunteers with paid staff undertaking limited hours because of budget constraints.

In 2024 the organisation engaged volunteers for more than 6,000 hours. This represents two people per day however, we need to double these hours to cover the non-funded workload of our organisation.

Decline in Volunteers

As an organisation, we have seen a steady decline in volunteer numbers for almost a decade, however we saw a significant drop in numbers after the lockdowns for the global COVID-19 pandemic. A significant portion of our volunteers are seniors or people with medical conditions that don't allow them to engage in regular paid work. The pandemic highlighted the risk of communicable diseases when working in public spaces and places.

We have limited volunteers aged 30-65 with feedback being that those who are inclined to volunteer have limited time outside of their paid work commitments, family commitments and they are more likely to participate in volunteering specific to sports and recreational clubs.

Feedback from our local young people is that volunteering is difficult when they don't have access to private transport and our public transport is extremely limited, as well as balancing their school-based commitments.

We observe that individuals are more likely to volunteer when an immediate family member has demonstrated or introduces the opportunity. This is concerning as it would indicate to us that as our aging volunteer pool declines, there is limited opportunity for us to recruit new volunteers. The loss of services will be a significant blow to our community and it will significantly increase the financial cost to our organisation as we will need to either reduce our services or demand increased funding from our relevant funding bodies.



Barriers to volunteering

As an organisation, barriers for volunteers include the financial and time resources associated with training and onboarding.

There are financial costs associated with accreditation and training necessary for volunteers to undertake their activities. Costs for uniforms, PPE, and transportation are just a few of the barriers. The costs associated with Public Liability and Volunteer Insurance increase most years, with more and more paperwork needed for public events etc.

While many of our volunteers cherish the opportunity to give back to the community, they are often people on low income, without the capacity to absorb costs such as transport (public or private), PPE, uniforms and/or training.

Within our organisation volunteers may be required to undertake training in the following areas:

- Safe Food Handling
- Child Safe Organisation
- Cash Handling
- Culturally Safe Practices
- First Aid
- Fire Safety
- Software Specific Training (tourism and booking software)
- Local Knowledge – time and peer mentoring needed

Some of this training is mandatory and required to meet our contractual obligations.

The financial and time resources necessary to undertake this training is significant. As an organisation, we take the risk of investing into volunteers with no guarantees on the commitment they can make in return. There are many reasons volunteers have to withdraw their service and they (of course) are under no obligation as they are not an employee.

As a small local organisation with limited opportunities for self-generated funds, the financial and time resources necessary to appropriately train and support volunteers is a significant barrier. With the increasing cost of living, the turnover of volunteers means we must be mindful of the investment we make into training and volunteer readiness versus the return we may get for this investment.



Funds and Grants to support organisations host volunteers

GAPDL regularly apply for grants and funding specific to volunteering however we have had limited success. We are aware that the pool of funding for these grants is often small, and this is shared across the state.

It should also be noted that the majority of community grants where we meet the eligibility criteria, do not allow for funding to be spent on staff wages. This puts us in a precarious position of needing to engage volunteers for tasks that require specialised training and skills. For example, volunteers for the Communities for Children project need training and/or certification in the following areas:

- Child Safe Organisations
- Child Safe Practices (we must provide a statement of compliance to the Federal Government each year)
- Safe Food Handling
- Culturally Informed and Trauma Informed Practices
- Vicarious Trauma
- Helping Clients to Regulate
- Inclusive Practices
- Mental Health First Aid

We see that there needs to be recognition from all levels of government that if service providers are not being funded to employ staff to perform these tasks with the training and support necessary, then it should be expected that we see a gradual decline in our community wellbeing.

This trend is already evident by the change in youth detention laws in Queensland, highlighting the lack of early intervention and support for families in distress, developing into young people offending.



Collaborative Projects

With the struggle to onboard volunteers, we have taken the opportunity to collaborate with other local organisations.

When hosting community events, we call for volunteers with other organisations to assist and vice versa. An example of this is the 2024 Disability Forum facilitated by Parent2Parent. While the GAPDL do not specifically support the disability community, we encouraged our volunteers to give some time to ensure the success of the event. Those who participated spoke of the experience positively and shared their learning around inclusive practices, that it gave them better understanding of the challenges for those with physical disabilities face that they otherwise would not have recognised. This event has led to conversations with the venue provider around improved sound absorption within the facility as many of the hearing-impaired participants experienced issues with sound reverberation – some of which had to leave early as it was making them physically unwell.

Volunteering provides an opportunity for community members from all walks of life to meet. As staff who supervise volunteer activities, we are regularly delighted to see people from very different demographics meet over the desire to support the local community. Not only does volunteering provide a valuable service to your community but it improves inclusive culture and wellbeing. Providing an opportunity for an individual who may not be able to commit to the schedules associated with paid work builds pride, self-confidence and resilience.

