

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submitted by:	Rosies - Friends on the Street
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**Submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering
Rosies—Friends on the Street
February 2025**

Introduction

Rosies—Friends on the Street welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering. As a volunteer-driven organisation dedicated to supporting individuals experiencing homelessness, social isolation, disadvantage and hardship, Rosies relies on the generosity, dedication, and compassion of our volunteers. This submission highlights the vital role volunteering plays in the success of our organisation, the significant benefits it provides to our patrons, and the profound impact it has on volunteers themselves.

Rosies—Friends on the Street

Rosies—Friends on the Street provides belonging, acceptance and friendship to those who are experiencing homelessness, disadvantage or hardship or struggling with social isolation or loneliness. We do this through street outreach, creating connection and community, with hospitality, providing hot and cold drinks, snacks/food, blankets, hygiene products and connection to other services. Most importantly, we provide conversation and connection, and a safe, dependable and consistent place where people can come.

Rosies has a strong team of some 1650 volunteers operating across 14 branch areas, as far north as Cairns, as far west as Toowoomba and as far south as Burleigh. Each Branch is run by a volunteer Branch Coordinator who works closely with the Rosies Head Office team. In addition to street outreach, Rosies provides Youth Detention Support and Court Support in specific locations.

Additionally, Rosies partners with some 85 schools to provide education and learning around community engagement and social justice principles, with the experience of outreach offered through our Youth Engagement Program. Through this program, Rosies has an additional 1500+ volunteers attending and assisting on street outreach.

During 2024, Rosies, in collaboration with Jesuit Social Services in Victoria, launched an employment pathways pilot program called HeartWorks. This program matches individuals from our cohort of patrons (or other organisations with a similar cohort) to pledged jobs from our employer partners, and supports participants and employers into the employment journey. Outcomes include not only employment, but housing, easing of financial stress and the confidence and dignity that comes with having a job.

The Importance of Volunteering to Rosies

Rosies operates with a strong foundation of volunteerism. Over 99% of our workforce consists of dedicated, passionate and generous volunteers who facilitate our outreach programs across Queensland. Without volunteers, Rosies simply could not exist in its current form.

Our outreach services, which offer the experience of community, belonging and friendship to those who are experiencing homelessness, hardship, loneliness or social isolation are entirely dependent on the time and effort freely given by our volunteers.

Volunteers contribute at every level of our organisation, including:

- Board of Directors
- Head Office administration and stock support
- Branch (local area) Coordinators
- Outreach Team Leaders and Team Members
- Local Stock and Donation Coordinators/Runners.
- Events Coordinators/Team Members and Speakers.

The willingness of volunteers to serve is what allows Rosies to create a safe, non-judgmental space where vulnerable individuals feel seen, heard, and valued.

The demand for our services continues to increase, with our outreach numbers on average increasing by some 35%, but with some of our outreaches increasing by as much as 50%. Additionally, there are numerous other areas of need within our Branch network and in new growth areas. General turnover, in addition to growing need and demand will continue to grow volunteer numbers in coming years.

Rosies has experienced regular growth in volunteer numbers in the period following COVID, and, as indicated above, would expect the continuing need to grow numbers to meet service demand. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Rosies continues to have a healthy spread of ages of volunteers, from 18 to 80, with the age spread generally 25% in the under 30's, 50% in the 30—65 range and 25% in the over 65s. This pattern continues despite the general trend in volunteering often being towards an aging volunteer workforce.

The Value of Volunteering to Our Patrons

Over a 12-month period, Rosies volunteers interacted with some 85,000 patrons on the streets of Queensland. For many of our patrons, the kindness and consistency of Rosies volunteers provides a rare source of stability and connection. Social isolation is a significant issue in Australian society, and the simple act of sharing a conversation or a cup of coffee can be life changing.

The presence of our volunteers offers:

- **Social Connection:** Many patrons experience extreme loneliness. Volunteers provide a sense of community, which contributes to positive mental health and well-being.
- **Emotional Support:** Calling someone by name, acknowledging them and holding a non-judgmental conversation can restore dignity and hope. It demonstrates to someone that they are seen and are valued as an individual.
- **Access to Services:** Volunteers help direct patrons to essential services such as housing, healthcare, and financial assistance.

In addition to the positive contribution to overall mental and physical health, and well-being, the relationships built between Rosies volunteers and our patrons helps to break the cycle of social exclusion and offers a pathway to re-engagement with society.

The Benefits of Volunteering to Volunteers

More than 1,650 individuals volunteer with Rosies, giving more than 65,000 hours of their time annually to furthering Rosies mission. Volunteering with Rosies is not only beneficial to the patrons we serve but also deeply rewarding for those who give their time. Many of our volunteers report that their work with Rosies has enriched their lives, increased their sense of purpose, and strengthened their connection to the community.

The key benefits include:

- **Personal Fulfillment:** Volunteers gain a deep sense of satisfaction from making a tangible difference in the lives of others.
- **Skill Development:** Volunteering at Rosies fosters important skills such as communication, active listening, and crisis response.
- **Community Engagement:** By giving back, volunteers become more connected to their local communities and develop a greater understanding of social issues.

Many volunteers remain with Rosies for years, demonstrating the meaningful and lasting impact of their experiences. When asked to finish the sentence "I show up for Rosies because..." our volunteers told us:

- "My kindness is returned in spades, and I get more than I give"
- "I love it that I can make a difference"
- "I love to hear our patron's life stories"
- "I want to engage with life and feel valued"
- "People depend on me and I am part of a team"
- "I feel good about helping other people"
- "I love the work and connection"
- "I love to give my love, kindness and support".

These quotes are a testament to the richness which volunteering with Rosies adds to the lives of our volunteers. We are proud to provide an environment where our volunteers can thrive and grow in their service of others.

Challenges for Rosies as a Volunteer-Driven Organisation

There are a number of challenges for Rosies in relation to the volunteer-driven nature of the organisation. These challenges include the following:

- **Recruitment and attendance:** Rosies must recruit enough volunteers to support our outreach activities to operate effectively and efficiently, providing support to our patrons as per our regular schedule and ensuring due care and safety. Due to the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of attendance, managing the appropriate numbers of required volunteers and rostering can be difficult.
- **Suitability:** It is often more difficult with volunteers than paid employees to ensure suitability for the role and cultural fit within the organisation. If volunteers are not a good fit, it can create an unhappy volunteer, a clash of volunteers or behaviour that is not in line with the values of the organisation. This can ultimately result in higher than desired turnover of volunteers or issues managing volunteers.

- **Training and Induction:** Training and induction is crucial to ensuring volunteers understand their role, the values and expectations of the organisation, and key information such as safety protocols. Ongoing training and development is equally important for effective delivery, culture, safety, engagement and to provide development opportunities. The feedback we receive is that ongoing training is seen by some as an attraction to an organisation, but to others it is a burden on top of the time someone already gives as a volunteer. It is also often challenging for organisations to get funding for training and development of volunteers, and to develop, provide and monitor additional training with resourcing constraints.
- **Volunteer Recognition and Reward:** Volunteer recognition and reward is also an area of varying opinions. Many of Rosies volunteers express they do not want, nor do they expect, recognition. Often, they would prefer the organisation to invest its monies and resources into our outreach on the street in order to better support and help others. Inherently, however, it is important to recognise and value the incredible work that our volunteers do every day of the year and ensure they know they are key to the vital and life changing work we do on the street. Rosies has found a balance with a donor who is donating solely for the reward and recognition of volunteers, allowing us to do small local events to recognise our volunteers and present them with certificates and pins to thank them for their incredible work.
- **Government Funding:** As a volunteer-driven organisation, Rosies is 96% community-funded, with government funding to date coming primarily by way of small grants for specific items, eg, awnings for our vans, equipment, marquees, etc. Provision of funding for capacity building and growth in the volunteer sector would have significant flow-on benefit and impact in the community and reduce burden on relevant support and health services. Additionally, the research work of Volunteering Queensland and others will provide resources to assist in better identifying and setting out the direct and indirect value, impact and significant benefits that flow from volunteering in our communities.

Conclusion

Rosies - Friends on the Street are a strong advocate for the recognition and support of volunteering as a critical pillar of community well-being. Our volunteers are the heartbeat of our organisation, providing essential services that uplift individuals experiencing homelessness, disadvantage or hardship, and social isolation. Strengthening volunteerism through improved funding, policies and other support mechanisms will ensure that organisations like Rosies can continue to serve Queensland's most vulnerable communities. Strengthening volunteerism has direct impacts on the individuals and families we meet on the street and our volunteers, as well as the flow-on positive benefits to our local communities, government support and health services.

We appreciate the Queensland Parliament's commitment to this vital issue and welcome further discussion on ways to more fully recognise the significant role that volunteers play throughout our many communities, and to enhance volunteer engagement across Queensland.

28 February 2025