

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering

Submission by Ronald McDonald
House Charities South East
Queensland



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Introduction

Ronald McDonald House Charities South East Queensland (RMHC SEQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering. As an organisation dedicated to supporting ill and injured children and their families, volunteers are at the heart of our mission. Their invaluable contributions ensure that families facing some of the most challenging times in their lives receive the care, support, and respite they need.

Since 2017 our volunteer work force has significantly decreased from a peak of 350 in 2017 to 181 at the start of 2024. We know that we are not alone in experiencing increased challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteer support. However, following a strategic focus on volunteering in 2024, we have seen a clear increase in our volunteer workforce. Today our volunteer team consists of 237 passionate volunteers, and we aim to further grow this team to 500 people by the end of 2027.

This submission outlines the crucial role of volunteers at RMHC SEQ, the challenges and opportunities within the volunteering sector, and recommendations to strengthen volunteer engagement in Queensland.

The role of Volunteers at RMHC SEQ

RMHC SEQ operates a range of programs and services, including:

- Ronald McDonald Houses: providing home-away-from-home accommodation and support for families of ill or injured children travelling to receive medical treatment or for mothers going through high-risk pregnancies.
- Family Rooms: located within hospitals are welcoming spaces where families can take time out of their clinical environment of the wards.
- Education Program: assists school-aged children with illness or injury to catch up on missed education following treatment and recovery. Educational support includes therapy sessions, one-on-one tutorials with experienced teachers tailored to students' individual needs.
- Hospitality Cart Program: provides practical support and comfort to patients, siblings and families such as books, crafts and entertainment toiletries and comfort items, snacks and beverages.

Volunteers are integral to these services, contributing their time and energy to tasks such as welcoming families, preparing meals, maintaining communal spaces, offering companionship, and providing administrative support.

Volunteer Workforce at RMHC SEQ

- Number of volunteers: 237
- Number of paid staff: 64
- Volunteer-to-staff ratio: 3.7 volunteers: 1 staff member

Our volunteers support families in a variety of ways, including:

- Board Governance
- Reception/Administration support
- Welcoming families into our Houses, setting their rooms, providing guest tours
- Ensuring that our pantries are stocked
- Preparing over 12,000 meals, and 1,750 drinks served
- Helping with over 550 loads of laundry
- Maintaining/cleaning communal spaces
- Welcoming and assisting families in Family Rooms at hospitals



- Providing administrative support in corporate roles
- Driving families
- Entertaining children through engaging activities
- Assisting with fundraising and community engagement events

Our volunteers range from students and professionals to retirees and corporate groups, demonstrating the broad community support for our mission.

The Value of Volunteers

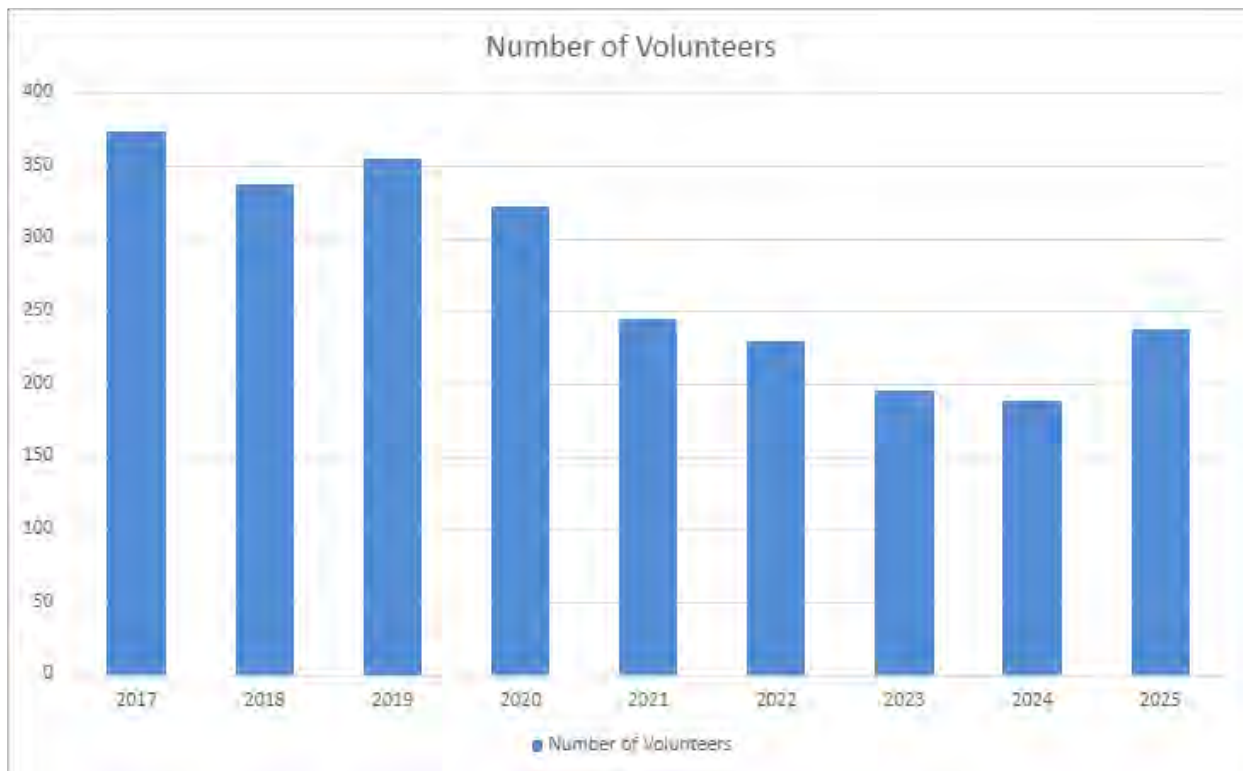
Volunteers contribute thousands of hours annually, significantly reducing operational costs and allowing RMHC SEQ to direct more funding toward supporting families. Their compassion and dedication enhance the family experience, creating a warm and welcoming environment during difficult times.

- Average volunteer hours per in 2024: 75 hours per year
- Total hours volunteered in 2024: 19,593
- Financial value of volunteers in 2024 (at \$48.01 per hour): \$940,660

Trends in Volunteer Engagement

Over the past 10 years, RMHC SEQ has experienced a decrease in volunteer numbers and hours. From a peak of over 350 in 2017 to 180 at the start of 2024. Factors contributing to changes in volunteer numbers include:

- The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on in-person volunteering (a number of our programs had to close and some volunteers never returned).
- Changes in lifestyle and work commitments, leading to decreased availability.
- Increased administrative requirements (e.g., hospital accreditation and compliance processes through our partner hospitals in Queensland Health) that can deter potential volunteers.
- A growing need for easily accessible, flexible, short-term volunteering options to accommodate modern lifestyles.



Re-Building a Sustainable Volunteer Program at RMHC SEQ

RMHC SEQ has taken a best-practice approach to strengthening our volunteer program, recognising the critical role volunteers play in delivering our services.

In 2024, we undertook a comprehensive review of our volunteer program to identify challenges and implement solutions. As part of this effort, we:

- Streamlined recruitment and onboarding by digitising much of the process, allowing volunteers to take ownership of their applications and progress at their own pace.
- Enhanced accessibility to volunteering opportunities, making it easier for individuals to get involved.
- Invested in targeted marketing campaigns to increase awareness and attract new volunteers.

These initiatives have led to tangible success, growing our volunteer base from 180 to 237 in just one year. However, despite these improvements, the broader challenges facing volunteering in Queensland remain a significant barrier to long-term sustainability. To meet our operational needs and planned strategic growth, we estimate needing 300 volunteers by the end of 2025 and nearly 500 by the end of 2027.

While we are committed to continuing our efforts, achieving these goals will require broader systemic support. Without action to address the state-wide challenges impacting volunteerism, organisations like RMHC SEQ will struggle to recruit and retain the volunteers needed to sustain essential services for Queensland families.

Challenges Facing Volunteering at RMHC SEQ

- **Volunteer Recruitment and Retention:** While many individuals express interest in volunteering, converting that interest into long-term commitment remains challenging.



- **Hospital Compliance and Accreditation:** Volunteers working in hospitals must undergo accreditation processes, which can be complex and time-consuming. Streamlining these processes and requirements through Queensland Health without compromising safety would help attract and retain more volunteers.
- **Changing Volunteer Demographics:** Younger generations prefer more flexible, project-based volunteer opportunities rather than ongoing commitments. Organisations must adapt to these expectations but is challenging when there are set regular shifts, we need covered to support operational needs.
- **External cost of living pressures:** Whilst the value of volunteering is estimated to be over \$50 an hour for an organisation, the State of Volunteering In Queensland report indicates that the average volunteer expense per hour is \$15.57, which along with additional cost of living pressures and being poor on time, leads to volunteering being an expense that people cannot afford to be involved with.
- **Impact of 2032 Olympics:** We anticipate that significant recruitment of volunteers for the 2032 Olympics will negatively impact recruitment of volunteers during the next seven-year period.
- **The burden of responsibility:** NFP Directors face an increasing burden of responsibility through increasing legislative compliance requirements. While good governance is essential for a strong NFP sector, where organisations are working with limited resources compared to commercial organisations this burden of compliance can be detrimental to the recruitment and retention of directors.

Recommendations to Support Volunteering in Queensland

- **Recognition and Incentives:** Increased government support for volunteer recognition initiatives to highlight the impact of volunteering.
- **Streamlined Onboarding and Compliance Processes:** A review of the Queensland Health hospital accreditation and onboarding process to reduce barriers to entry for volunteers. We partner with several hospitals and they each have a different approach and requirements to volunteer compliance. The hospitals that allow more flexibility and online training options have a better outcome in volunteer on-boarding and retention.
- **Greater Support for Flexible Volunteering Models:** Encouraging organisations to offer short-term and project-based volunteering to attract a wider range of participants.
- **Financial Assistance for Volunteers:** Consideration of subsidies or concessions for expenses like transport and parking to reduce financial barriers for organisations or individuals.
- **Financial Assistance for Organisations:** Grants to support cost of training, marketing/advertising for volunteer program growth, staff costs of supporting volunteers etc.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Government-led initiatives to promote the benefits of volunteering for individuals and corporations and encourage greater community participation.
- **Minimise the Negative Impact of the 2032 Olympics:** Government should ensure that the recruitment of volunteers for the Olympics is not at the costs of existing NFPs and should harness opportunities to use the games to elevate volunteerism.
- **Learning and Development opportunities for volunteer Directors:** To support the good governance of Queensland NFPs, low or no cost learning and development opportunities should be given to ensure Directors are confident, skilled and willing to take on these vital roles.

Conclusion

RMHC SEQ strongly supports initiatives that strengthen the volunteering sector and remove barriers to participation. Volunteers are the backbone of our organisation, and their continued support ensures we can provide vital services to families in need. We urge the committee to consider ways to enhance volunteer engagement and sustainability, ensuring Queensland's charitable organisations can continue to thrive.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and welcome any further discussion on how to improve volunteering across the state.



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