

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Committee Secretary
Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

SUBJECT: SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland.

Drug ARM is founded upon 175 years of volunteering. Established through the earliest temperance movements in Queensland, today Drug ARM provides compassion and specialist care in Australia through a range of mental health, alcohol and other drug awareness, rehabilitation and management programs.

As an organisation working with people, families and communities every day on these issues, we recognise the importance of volunteers in our community in the delivery and facilitation of alcohol and other drug services and ensuring they meet the needs of all Queenslanders. Drug ARM receives support from between 250 and 350 volunteers on an annual basis, who contribute significantly to community wellbeing through supporting our Street Outreach Services, Op Shops, Boards and Committees, and our alcohol and other drug support programs. We simply could not do what we do without the magnificent contributions of volunteers.

We welcome this opportunity to share insights into the current state of volunteering and the challenges and opportunities faced by volunteer-involving organisations. Below, I have briefly addressed several key areas of the inquiry from our organisation's perspective.

1. The Value of Volunteering in Queensland

Volunteering plays a crucial role in delivering essential services and strengthening communities. Beyond organisational benefits, volunteering provides individuals with opportunities for social connection, skill development, and personal fulfilment. However, ensuring a positive and sustainable volunteering experience requires adequate support, funding, and resources.

2. Barriers to Volunteering

Older Australians:

- Many compliance and training requirements have moved online to reduce costs, which can make it difficult for older Australians who may not have digital literacy or access. The lack of organisational resources to assist them in this process can deter participation.
- The requirement for a Blue Card for organisation such as Drug ARM often necessitates an updated driver's licence photo, requiring older volunteers to visit Transport and Main Roads. This extra step can be a barrier for some organisations, and not others.

Prospective Volunteers:

- Government-funded programs require all volunteers to obtain a Blue Card. For programs such as our Street Outreach initiative, potential volunteers often want to experience the work before committing. However, requiring a Blue Card in advance creates a barrier to participation.

Corporate Volunteers:

- Large businesses often approach charities for half-day volunteering engagements, which are difficult make meaningful for volunteers without the charity consuming additional costs.
- Compliance requirements such as Blue Cards for half a day's volunteering make it challenging to create accessible opportunities.
- Many corporate partners prefer to fund organisations that offer volunteering opportunities, yet high compliance in skilled volunteering sectors can limit private funding potential.

Retail Volunteers:

- Obtaining police checks in a timely manner is costly. A reimbursement scheme for police checks would ease the financial burden on charities.

Student Volunteers:

- The documentation and compliance requirements for student placements are complex and resource intensive. Universities often pressure organisations to accommodate students without adequate funding to support their supervision.

- Many students face 'placement poverty,' struggling to volunteer while unable to earn an income.

3. Volunteer Experiences, Motivations, and Challenges

Improving Volunteer Management:

- Volunteers have diverse experiences and motivations, but many program leads lack formal management training instead hired for their program skillset. This gap affects performance management, volunteer support, and recognition efforts.
- Dedicated staff that can support and coordinate volunteers would go a long way to increasing volunteering engagement, yet many organisations, including ours, lack funding for such roles.

Managing Volunteer Expectations:

- Many potential volunteers, especially those with lived experience, require extensive training before they can safely engage in frontline work. Without funding for this training, we must turn away willing volunteers.
- Regional or after-hours metropolitan volunteers often prefer a paid supervisor to be on-site, increasing costs, particularly for evening services.
- Small regional teams face significant service disruptions when a single volunteer exits a program. Recruiting too many volunteers for a regional team can lead to roles that aren't fulfilling for volunteers.

5. Government Support and Sustainable Opportunities for Improvement

Grant Programs:

- While valuable, grant programs come with significant compliance burdens that limit accessibility.

Training for Program Leads:

- Subsidised HR and management training for program staff supervising volunteers would enhance volunteer experiences and retention.

Volunteer Coordinator Funding:

- Funding agreements that rely on volunteers should allow for not for profits to allocate a higher percentage of management costs toward volunteer coordination, training, and support.

Mutual Obligations Volunteering:

- Volunteering is a dignified way for individuals over 55 to meet Centrelink mutual obligation requirements. Awareness campaigns to the public or through Centrelink and employment agencies could improve engagement in this initiative.

7. Emergency Response Volunteering

- Many organisations, including Drug ARM, operate outreach services that could be mobilised in emergencies. Training existing volunteer networks and investing in vehicle upgrades would enhance emergency response capacity.

8. First Nations Volunteering and Closing the Gap

- Barriers that exist for tertiary education have a flow on effect for skilled volunteering participation for First Nations people. Addressing these barriers would improve engagement in professional volunteering roles.

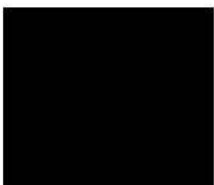
Volunteers are essential to the health and wellbeing of Queensland communities. However, without adequate resources and support, volunteer-involving organisations struggle to attract, retain, and support volunteers effectively.

Drug ARM urges the Committee to consider targeted funding for volunteer coordination and recruitment, streamlined compliance processes, and greater investment in training and support.

Thank you for considering our submission. We appreciate the Committee's efforts in addressing these critical issues and welcome further discussions on how to enhance the volunteering experience in Queensland.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with the Committee further, either through the Committee process or with Members individually.

Yours sincerely,



Brad Strong
Executive Director

VOLUNTEERING AT DRUG ARM

Boards and Committees

Drug ARM has 1 Board and 5 Board Committees consisting of volunteers, excluding the Executive Director and Company Secretary. The volunteers provide strategic oversight, governance, and financial stewardship to our organisation to ensure Drug ARM fulfills its mission effectively and ethically.

Locations:

- Brisbane

Community and Family Support Service (*Student Placement*)

Drug ARM's Student Placement program is embedded in the Community and Family Support Services (CAFSS), a treatment program for individuals with low to moderate substance use concerns, as well as their family members.

The students and volunteers deliver a treatment program through a co-counselling model overseen by a Drug ARM supervisor.

Locations:

- Brisbane
- Ipswich

Op Shops

Drug ARM's Op Shops help raise vital funds for the delivery of non-government funded programs. The volunteers assist with sales and operation of the shops.

Locations:

- Brisbane
- Redlands
- Toowoomba

Street Outreach Services

Drug ARM's Street Outreach Services provide a vital outreach of care and compassion to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The volunteers offer drinks, snacks, other supplies as well as a listening ear, all while acting as a referral source to other community services.

Locations:

- Airlie Beach
- Brisbane
- Gold Coast
- Ipswich (veterans' outreach)
- Hervey Bay
- Mackay
- Maryborough

