

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

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<b>Submitted by:</b>	Community Plus Queensland Inc
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Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street,  
Brisbane Qld 4000

By email: [lgsbcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:lgsbcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Committee Members,

## **Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission into this important inquiry into volunteering in Queensland.

Community Plus+ is a community led organisation, grown from a history of grassroots advocacy and enacting our strong commitment to social justice and inclusion for the wellbeing of all.

We are proud to be active partners with local communities in placemaking, working alongside partners, stakeholders, other agencies and community members to be the ears of the community, and the voice of Brisbane's Inner South.

Each part of Community Plus+ empowers communities to be the heart of inclusive social change through our neighbourhood centres, community resilience and tenancy advice services, programs and social activities.

Community Plus+ are well versed in delivering place-based outcomes through collaborative partnership and activation of community led spaces, including West End Community House, Yeronga Community Centre, Annerley Hub, West End Croquet Club and Boundary Street Kiosk.

This submission provides information on volunteering in Queensland and recommendations to overcome barriers faced.

## **The Role and Value of Volunteers in Community Plus Neighbourhood Centres**

Neighbourhood centres are built on the principle of community participation, encouraging residents to be involved place based responses in their locality. This place-based model empowers residents to take ownership of their communities and address their needs. Welcoming people from all backgrounds, experiences, and cultures, creating a space where everyone feels valued and can connect.



### ***Benefits of Volunteering at a Neighbourhood Centre:***

**Giving Back to the Community:** Volunteers contribute their time and skills to support local initiatives and make a difference in their community.

**Skill Development:** Volunteering provides opportunities to learn new skills and enhance existing ones.

**Social Connection:** Volunteering can help build social connections and reduce isolation.

**Personal Growth:** Volunteering can lead to personal growth and a sense of purpose.

**Making a Difference:** Volunteers can play a vital role in addressing local needs and creating a positive impact.

**Access to Resources:** Neighbourhood centres provide access to a range of community services and resources.

**Building Social Capital:** Volunteering contributes to building social capital within the community.  
**Flexibility:** Neighbourhood centres are flexible and responsive to the needs of the community.

From the bottom to the top Neighbourhood Centre volunteers are core to good governance and daily operations. Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland are funded to employ part time staff and rely heavily on the participation, skills and resources local community contribute in a voluntary capacity.

Community Plus is governed by a skills-based board and is successful due to the volunteering efforts of local residents, who offer vital skills, knowledge and experience drawn from corporate and government sector as volunteers in place. In addition to good governance volunteers significantly contribute to the day-to-day operations of all three community centres. For example the food relief we provide to vulnerable or disadvantaged community members during a cost-of-living crisis is only possible due to our core volunteers who prepare meals, sandwiches, weekly community breakfasts and lunches. In addition, volunteers offer skills and experience back to community through facilitating weekly social and personal development activities for example: weekly Art Group facilitated by a local resident who is a retired art teacher and therapist and Virtual Reality Workshops facilitated by recently retired academic with specialist skills.

The other significant and vital role volunteers play is during times of crisis in particular supporting community led disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Yeronga Community Centre was established by local residents during the 2011 flood, many of whom are still connected to the centre as volunteers and staff. This community led response was again enacted during the 2022 Flooding Rainfall Event with Community Plus Yeronga and West End centres opening on the weekend to provide immediate response and subsequently pop-up recovery hubs in place. Across our centres spontaneous and core volunteers were mobilised to support and assist local community through the crisis and recovery phases.

Having volunteers coordinated locally during disasters works to provide centres immediate deployment to respond to community's needs.





## **Barriers to recruitment and retention of volunteers**

General barriers include lack of time, not being asked, not knowing about opportunities, feeling under-skilled, lack of confidence, and rising costs of living.

### ***Individual Level Barriers:***

- **Lack of Time:** Busy schedules and competing demands are a major reason people don't volunteer.
- **Not Being Asked:** Many people haven't been approached to volunteer, indicating a potential untapped pool of volunteers.
- **Not Knowing About Opportunities:** Lack of awareness about available volunteering opportunities is a significant barrier.
- **Perceived Lack of Skills:** Some people feel they don't have the necessary skills or experience to volunteer.
- **Lack of Confidence:** Fear of being criticized or not fitting in can deter potential volunteers.
- **Rising Costs of Living:** The increasing cost of living can make it difficult for people to afford the costs associated with volunteering, such as transport or childcare.

### ***Organisational Level Barriers:***

- **Lack of Resources:** Many organisations, particularly smaller ones, struggle with limited budgets and resources, making it difficult to effectively recruit and manage volunteers.
- **Administrative Burden:** Overly complicated administrative processes, such as police checks and registration fees, can be a deterrent for potential volunteers.
- **Lack of Flexibility:** Inflexible volunteer schedules and commitments can make it difficult for people to find the time to volunteer.
- **Red Tape:** Bureaucracy and excessive paperwork can make it difficult for volunteers to contribute.
- **Lack of Training and Support:** Insufficient training and support for volunteers can lead to low morale and burnout.
- **Perceived lack of impact** -lack of feedback on value and importance and impact of the role

### ***Systemic Level Barriers:***

- **Changing Nature of Work:** changing nature of work, with increasing pressures and longer working hours, can leave people with less time for volunteering.
- **Ageing Population:** An aging population can lead to a decline in the number of people available to volunteer.



- **Increasing Digitisation:** While technology can facilitate volunteering, it can also create barriers for those who are not digitally literate.
- **Lack of Funding** Insufficient funding for the sector can limit the capacity of organisations to support volunteering.

### **Barriers Specific to disaster management**

The lack of a paid member of staff dedicated to Volunteer Coordination to answer requests for volunteering when disasters occur. During these times staff are stretched to support people affected by the community, enact their regular duties and coordinate existing volunteers. With a dedicated volunteer coordinator, processes would be in place ready to go with limited time – “no daylight between response and recovery.” During the recent Ex TC Alfred event our centres received a large volume of emails, texts and messaging on social media offering spontaneous volunteering support. We have been able to connect volunteers to community members, who need assistance and support the community in this distressing time. The coordination of volunteers during this time, is limited to staff who are able to support this initiative while supporting people at risk of flooding and damage to their property from the pending disaster. With a dedicated volunteer coordinator this would be their focus and timely response to these requests could be answered without delay, which if not responded to risk the loss of volunteers for future events and loss of reputation of our organisation.

Spontaneous Volunteer training before an event to ensure people are trained ready to respond when required.

Cost of volunteering such as petrol to get to activities or vehicle is required for the volunteering opportunity.

### **Barriers to retention of volunteers**

Training and support for volunteer to ensure they have the skills required.

Recognition of volunteers – acknowledging their contribution in our community.

### **Barriers to management of volunteers**

Lack of funding for a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator across our centres to support recruitment, onboarding, training, supervision and administration of Volunteer database. Funding to employ this role would greatly uplift organisational capacity and impact.

Insurance costs and risk assessments of activities, ensuring volunteers and the organisation is protected with any activity they are involved in.





## **Recommendations to Strengthen Volunteer Engagement and Impact in Neighbourhood Centres**

To ensure the sustainability of volunteering in Neighbourhood Centres, the following recommendations are proposed:

***Recommendation 1: Create Flexible, Diverse and Digital Volunteer Opportunities through our Neighbourhood Centres and Disaster Ready Volunteers.***

***Recommendation 2: Invest in Dedicated Volunteer Coordinators Based in Neighbourhood Centres- shared position across our 3 centres and our other programs.***

***Recommendation 3: Establish a Cost-of-Volunteering Reimbursement Fund.***

***Recommendation 4: Strengthen Governance and Board Support in Neighbourhood Centres***

***Recommendation 5: Promote Volunteering in Neighbourhood Centres***

***Recommendation 6: Invest in Regional Place-Based Volunteering Hubs***

***Recommendation 7: Invest in Emergency Volunteering and Disaster Response***

***Recommendation 8: Deliver a Statewide Volunteer Insurance Framework***

***Recommendation 9: Review and Update the Queensland Volunteering Strategy***

***Recommendation 10: Improve Research and Data Collection on Volunteering in Neighbourhood Centres***

***Recommendation 11: Deliver an Olympics and Paralympics Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan***

***Sincerely***

***Mel Hilditch (General Manager) on behalf of***

***Community Plus Queensland***

**[Redacted Signature]**

**[Redacted Contact Information]**