

VOLUNTEERING *and* CONTACT ACT

Volunteering and Contact ACT

Submission in response to the *inquiry into the delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities.*

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About Volunteering and Contact ACT

Volunteering and Contact ACT (VCA) is the peak body for volunteering and community information, and the volunteering support service for the Canberra Region. VCA has a vision of an engaged community, enriched by volunteering, participation, and knowledge. Through our services and programs, we foster community networks and undertake research, advocacy, projects, public education, and events.

VCA is a people driven, service-focused organisation that represents the interests of more than 200 individual and organisational members, and the wider public. This submission provides input on the inquiry into the delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities. VCA's submission will particularly focus on term of reference c: the impact of restricted access for people with disability on inclusion and participation in economic, cultural, social, civil and political life.

Overview

The Australian population amounts to just over 23 million people and 4 million, or 18%, present as having a disability. Of these 4 million people, 1.3 million report as having a profound or severe disability. In 2010-11 82% of disability service providers were in the non-government sector.

A priority outcome of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 is to 'increase access to employment opportunities as a key to improving economic security and personal wellbeing for people with a disability.'ⁱ Nationally, almost 50% of people with a disability in Australia live in or near poverty, which is more than 2.5 times the poverty rate experienced by the rest of the population. Further, Australians with a severe disability have sub-standard outcomes on every indicator of community participation and wellbeing.ⁱⁱ

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), and other complementary reports such as the *How Australia is Faring report*, note that participation and wellbeing indicators for people with a disability have not seen significant progress in decades. For example, employment of people with a disability remained at the same rate over three successive ABS General Social Surveys.

Considering the above statistics, VCA makes this submission to highlight the ways in which volunteering can produce tangible outcomes and progress for people with a disability.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – Opportunities and Challenges in the Volunteering Sector

Since the introduction of the NDIS there has been great uncertainty about the involvement of volunteers in disability support services. In 2006 there were approximately 155,000 voluntary workers who provided 15.7 million hours of assistance in the disability sector across Australia.ⁱⁱⁱ Based on estimates of the economic value of volunteers, these figures equate to between 3000 – 8000 full time employees.

The NDIS provides vast opportunities for people with a disability to benefit from the work of volunteers, but also to become volunteers themselves. It is this opportunity that has not been fully realised, but would have exponential benefits for people with a disability through decreased social isolation, meaningful engagement, creating new social networks, learning new skills, and gaining experience that may lead to paid employment.

Despite the opportunities that the NDIS can create for people with a disability in the volunteering sector, there are several significant challenges for volunteer involving organisations. Some of the key challenges include:

- Effective but small providers that rely heavily on volunteer participation may not be able to adapt quickly enough and may be forced to exit the market.
- The cost of volunteer management is rarely factored into pricing structures and grant agreements.
- Organisations may not be able to cover the cost of background checks for volunteers in jurisdictions where such checks are not free for volunteers.
- Expectations of volunteers may increase when a client is paying for a service.
- Volunteers may be taken advantage of as a means for organisations to avoid paying labour costs.
- Ethical issues may arise around volunteer involvement when organisations change their service delivery model to charge out individualised support.

In addition to the challenges for organisations, there are also issues for client/volunteer relationships, including:

- How organisations safeguard the rights and responsibilities of both clients and volunteers in a fee-for-service model.
- The ethics around volunteer involvement in a fee-for-service environment.
- The changing expectations of clients in a fee-for-service environment.
- The introduction of additional administrative burdens under the NDIS that may deter prospective volunteers from becoming involved.

Finally, there are several issues for the disability support workforce that may impact on volunteer involvement. These include:

- The Productivity Commission has suggested that there would need to be a paid workforce of 160,000 full time workers. This is more than double the current number. Currently it is unknown what this would mean for volunteers.
- There has been no high-level advice about how the sector is expected to differentiate between paid and unpaid work in the new NDIS world.

Organisations are faced with the potential ethical dilemmas of involving volunteers in the new fee-for-service environment, and may no longer be funded to recruit, train, and manage volunteers. The cost of training is significant and organisations that involve volunteers have a legal obligation to provide specialist support training to their staff, including volunteers. This is problematic for organisations who deliver direct client services and who may no longer be block funded to train volunteers to work one-on-one with clients. The new model of service delivery under the NDIS is forcing many providers to cut their professional development budgets for staff, or recruit low-skilled workers that have little or no experience. Where this happens, volunteers often fall further down the list of priorities for an organisation.

Lack of training can impact both the quality of services and create significant risks, such as work, health and safety risks, for staff and clients alike. Less funding may see providers moving away from volunteer involvement, which will further impact the quantity and quality of services available to people with a disability. This is particularly concerning for people with a psychosocial disability who have historically relied on block-funded services, and who may not be eligible for an NDIS package. Individuals who do not get an individually funded package stand the most to lose from a depleted volunteer workforce, and the structural barriers to becoming volunteers themselves.

Lessons from NDIS trial sites

During implementation of the NDIS there have been several studies done in the trial sites. Evidence gathered regarding volunteer involvement has shown that:

- Volunteers are, and always have been, a greatly valued commodity in the disability sector. Their continued involvement is imperative to the success of the NDIS.
- Volunteers can fill gaps in the system, providing unique and diverse skillsets, and increase NDIS participants' sense of community connectedness.
- Volunteers assist with other major functions outside direct service delivery, including administrative support and fundraising.
- There has been government recognition of the value and importance of volunteers; however, there has been no clear directive about how resources will be allocated to effectively support volunteer involvement.
- Providers need to start factoring volunteer management costs into their budgets.

Opportunities for Volunteering under the NDIS

The first opportunity for volunteering under the NDIS is the added value that volunteers can provide to organisations that work in the disability support space, or provide community services and activities. In client facing roles volunteers can provide vital assistance through social support. Often, it's the acknowledgement that a volunteer is willingly choosing to spend time with a client that makes all the difference. Additionally, the support provided by volunteers is not 'paid' for, so the relationship has a chance to flourish beyond the confines of the formal support that an NDIS participant may have included in their package.

In 'back-of-house' or non-client facing roles volunteers can add both capacity and capability in a range of areas to assist organisations to enhance their services. Particularly, skills-based volunteering can add significant value to volunteer involving organisations that do not have the time or resources to advance key strategic projects. Skills-based or professional volunteers are underutilised across the country, but can provide value surge capacity in times of need. Such individuals also make great mentors for colleagues, and for clients and service users. Greater investment in volunteer involvement is required to upskill organisations and their staff to understand how to involve volunteers, particularly those with professional skills, more effectively. Currently this is a huge gap in the market to the detriment of community and other services across the country.

The second opportunity, and the focus of this submission, is for people with a disability to volunteer themselves. Volunteering has significant social, economic and cultural impacts,

but the benefits for people with a disability are arguably greater. Volunteering is a pathway to participation and would enable people with a disability to become more engaged with their communities. This is a key area for expansion as the NDIS is rolled out nationally, and for people with a disability, and their families and carers.

Volunteering as a Pathway to Participation

Volunteering is one of the primary vehicles facilitating community connection. In Australia, more than six million people volunteer their time annually, making an estimated \$31 billion contribution to the Australian economy. People with a disability only account for 8.9% of Australia's volunteers, despite one in five people in Australia identifying as having a disability. This further indicates that there are additional barriers that must be overcome by people with a disability to participate.^{iv}

Volunteering is a key enabler of individual and community capacity building, and provides opportunities for people from all walks of life to play an active role in their communities. However, despite the irrefutable economic, civic, cultural, and personal benefits generated through volunteering, 46% of volunteer involving organisations are unable to engage volunteers with barriers.^v This restriction of access impedes progress against several priority areas under the National Disability Strategy, as people with a disability face institutional barriers in finding suitable and meaningful volunteering roles.

Given the immense benefits that volunteering can provide for people with a disability across a range of health and wellbeing indicators, better investment in volunteering at a structural level is required. Such an investment would yield exponential benefits over time, with research suggesting that increasing the rate of volunteering by as little as 1% per year will create \$6.12 billion in benefits over ten years.^{vi} Without investment in volunteering infrastructure and volunteering support services across the community, people with a disability will continue to face barriers to participation. These barriers perpetuate the social exclusion of people with a disability through their inability to engage in, and shape, mainstream services.

Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment

As evidenced in the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability, quoting data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, people with a disability are underrepresented in the labour force across the country.^{vii} Further, these statistics suggest

those with a disability may be underemployed, with only 27 per cent engaged in full time employment.^{viii}

Volunteering provides immense opportunities for people with a disability. In addition to the economic, social, and cultural benefits realised through volunteering, participation in voluntary roles also increases employment prospects. The State of Volunteering in Australia report identified that volunteers improve skills such as patience, teamwork, time management, problem-solving, and verbal and written communication through volunteering.^{ix}

Research undertaken in the United States demonstrated that volunteering is associated with 27% higher odds of employment.^x The results of the US study suggested a 'statistically significant and stable association between volunteering and employment.'^{xi} Comparable research undertaken by employment website SEEK.com.au found that 85% of hirers believe that volunteering is just as credible as paid work.^{xii} Further, 92% of employers said, 'relevant volunteer experience gives candidates an advantage in job interviews.'^{xiii}

While the above advantages apply to volunteering as a pathway to employment generally, the benefits are arguably greater for people with a disability. Participation in the volunteer workforce can empower people with barriers to go from being service users to service providers. In addition to employment prospects, meaningful volunteer engagement also has proven health benefits. Volunteers are happier, healthier, and sleep better than those who do not volunteer.^{xiv} Further, the experience of helping others provides meaning, a sense of self-worth, a social role, and health enhancement.^{xv}

Volunteering provides an introduction to the workforce, and is often used as a stepping stone for people to learn both soft and hard skills. Further, volunteering enables people to 'road test' different career paths that interest them before engaging in paid employment. In addition to the benefits provided to people with a disability, their engagement in the unpaid workforce also generates significant return for volunteer involving organisations and the community at large. This includes the unique perspectives and life experiences of people with a disability, the diversity they bring to the workforce, and their relatability to clients and service users.

ACT Case Study

VCA's Inclusive Volunteering Program assists people with barriers to find appropriate and meaningful volunteering roles. Many of the 100 placements secured through the Program were for people with a disability. The role of the Program Coordinator is to work with participants to source or craft a role that meets their motivations to volunteer. Additionally, the Coordinator works to educate and upskill organisations to involve volunteers with barriers. On two levels, the Program works to foster social inclusion and provide pathways to participation.

In 2016 the Program put together the resource 'The Volunteering Journey', which documents the experiences of Program participants and participating organisations. The Volunteering Journey speaks to the value of person-centred services that focus on the individual needs of people with barriers. Testimonials from participating organisations highlight the value that inclusion and diversity has brought to their programs. The experience of radio station 2xx fm talks to the power of volunteering for people with barriers, and to their own organisation:

"Through inclusive volunteering, 2xxfm has had closer contact with smaller community groups and differently abled people and has learnt to be aware of the community's differing needs and how to create fun and fulfilling volunteering roles for them. For 2xxfm, the most rewarding aspect of the inclusive volunteering journey has been seeing the excitement of volunteers being involved with a radio station and being able to respond to that enthusiasm."^{xvi}

Likewise, the testimonial from program participant Ali Payne shows the breadth of benefits that volunteering can provide:

"I started volunteering with the SES because I wanted to make a difference and help make it easier for people to cope in difficult situations and to help the community. I do all the same activities as my SES team, except speak on the radio otherwise it would only be a one sided conversation! I have made a lot of new friends through volunteering and it has restored my faith in humanity.

There has been so many rewarding experiences on my volunteering journey. I have an amazing team who has given me the chance to show everyone what I can do and reach new goals such as passing every training I have done to date with flying

colours. I have also enjoyed working with and learning from several Police Officers and Paramedics. As a volunteer, the most rewarding experience of all is meeting so many amazing people on my journey with the SES and having an amazing and supportive team who are now like one big family to me.

The Inclusive Volunteering Program provides invaluable support to individuals and organisations, and demonstrates the need for dedicated programs to help people with a disability find pathways to participation. The Program exemplifies the outcomes that can be achieved, aligned with the National Disability Strategy, when adequate resourcing is dedicated to volunteer involvement. VCA strongly advocates for increased funding for volunteering support services to enable programs like the Inclusive Volunteering Program to flourish. Without such programs, people with a disability are left to navigate ableist systems that do not often take their unique needs into account.

Conclusion

Volunteering has irrefutable benefits for a broad range of stakeholders, and provides unique opportunities to create inclusive and accessible communities for people with a disability. The evidence quoted in this submission, and VCA's own experience through its Inclusive Volunteering Program, prove that the volunteering sector is an untapped source of potential to realise outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020. VCA welcomes the opportunity to expand on this submission, and to contribute to making volunteering more accessible for all.

ⁱ Commonwealth of Australia (2011) 'National Disability Strategy 2010-2020', available online at https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/national_disability_strategy_2010_2020.pdf

ⁱⁱ PwC (2011) 'Disability expectations: Investing in a better life, a stronger Australia', available online at <https://www.pwc.com.au/industry/government/assets/disability-in-australia.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ PricewaterhouseCoopers draft Final Report: Planning for a sustainable disability workforce, page 1, for the Department of Families, and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs quoted in the Council of Australian Governments (2012) 'Regulation Impact Statement: National Disability Insurance Scheme' available online at, <https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/communique/National%20Disability%20Insurance%20Scheme%20-%20Consultation%20Regulation%20Impact%20Statement.pdf>

^{iv} ABS. (2015). Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) CURF, ABS Population Projections, 2006 – 2101, Series B. Cat. no. 4430.0

^v Volunteering Australia (2016) 'State of Volunteering in Australia report', available online at <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>

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- ^{vi} Volunteering Western Australia (2015) 'The Economic, Social and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia', available online at https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf
- ^{vii} Australian Human Rights Commission (2016) 'Willing to Work. National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability' available online at http://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/WTW_2016_Full_Report_AHR_C_ac.pdf
- ^{viii} Ibid.
- ^{ix} Volunteering Australia (2016) 'State of Volunteering in Australia report', available online at <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>
- ^x Corporation for National and Community Service (2013) 'Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work?', available online at https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf
- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} SEEK.com.au (2016) 'Get ahead by volunteering in 2016', available online at <https://www.seek.com.au/career-advice/get-ahead-by-volunteering-in-2016>
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} Watson, C. (2012) 'Volunteering is so good for you that doctors should recommend it, experts say' available online at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/volunteering-is-so-good-for-you-thatdoctors-should-recommend-it-experts-say/story-e6frg6n6-1226484913565>
- ^{xv} Post, S. G. (2011) 'It's good to be good: 2011 5th annual scientific report on health, happiness and helping others', *The International Journal of Person Centred Medicine*, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 814.
- ^{xvi} Volunteering and Contact ACT (2016) 'The Volunteering Journey'.