

VOLUNTEERING *and* CONTACT ACT

Volunteering and Contact ACT

Submission in response to the *Inquiry into the Employment of people with disabilities*.

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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 employment of people with disabilities, and focusses on relevant experiences and learnings from the Australian Capital Territory, and other relevant matters to the Inquiry; namely volunteering as a pathway to employment.

Overview

In 2015, 63 per cent of people with a disability were in the labour force in the ACT, compared to 86.7 per cent of people who do not have a disability.ⁱ 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.'ⁱⁱ 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. Furthermore, Australians with a severe disability have sub-standard outcomes on every indicator of community participation and wellbeing.ⁱⁱⁱ

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.^{iv} Further, these statistics suggest that people with disability may be underemployed, with only 27 per cent engaged in full time employment.^v

Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment

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

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, include people with disability, 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.^x Further, the experience of helping others provides meaning, a sense of self-worth, a social role, and health enhancement.^{xi}

Volunteering and Contact ACT encourages the Committee and the Assembly to consider the benefits of investing in volunteering as a pathway to employment. 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.

Volunteering and Contact ACT welcomes the opportunity to expand on this submission, and to advise on how investment can encourage people with disability to engage in voluntary work as both a pathway to employment, and to enhance their social connectedness, meet new people, learn new skills, and find meaningful engagement in their communities.

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- ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) '4433.0.55.006 Disability and Labour Force Participation, 2012', available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4433.0.55.006Main+Features12012?OpenDocument>
- ⁱⁱ 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
- ⁱⁱⁱ 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>
- ^{iv} 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
- ^v Ibid.
- ^{vi} 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
- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} 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>
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x 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>
- ^{xi} 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.