

VOLUNTEERING *and* CONTACT ACT

Volunteering and Contact ACT

Consultation of the Future of Employment Services

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Volunteering and Contact ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the Canberra Region. Volunteering and Contact ACT pays respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their vital ongoing contribution to the community.

Volunteering and Contact ACT acknowledges the contribution of the volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations that contribute to the health and happiness of the community. Volunteers include people with all abilities and from all cultures. Their skills, expertise, and time are critical to delivering services and programs, and in making Australia a better place to live.

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Overview

Volunteering and Contact ACT (VCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Consultation on the Future of Employment Services. This submission will focus on the sustainable, long-term outcomes that can be achieved for jobseekers who access volunteering as a pathway to employment. Further, the submission will highlight the pronounced benefits for people experiencing barriers and/or disadvantage, and how investment in volunteering can deliver better outcomes for jobseekers and the Australian Government.

VCA is the peak body for volunteering and community information in 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, training, and events.

VCA is a people-driven, service-focused organisation that represents the interests of 179 member organisations. VCA supports and endorses Volunteering Australia's submission to this Consultation.

Background Information

Volunteering spans every aspect of Australian life, with 5.8 million Australians, or 31 per cent of the population, engaged in formal volunteering.ⁱ These volunteers make an annual social and economic contribution of \$290 billion.ⁱⁱ In the ACT nearly one in three people volunteers, contributing an estimated \$1.5 billion to the ACT economy each year.ⁱⁱⁱ

Research demonstrates that for every \$1 invested in volunteering there is a \$4.50 return to the community.^{iv} Economically, the return on investment in volunteering is exponential over time, and delivers tangible outcomes that government and private sector services would not be able to achieve in isolation.

In addition to the economic benefits generated through volunteering, it also delivers significant social and cultural benefits. Volunteers play a pivotal role in creating connected, diverse, and inclusive communities. With the highest rate of volunteering in the country, the ACT benefits tremendously from the work of volunteers who contribute to the health and happiness of the Canberra community.

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Volunteering is a proven pathway to employment and delivers pronounced outcomes for individuals, the organisations who support them, and the broader community. Participation in volunteering provides vital workplace experience and enables volunteers to become job ready, increasing their chances of obtaining meaningful, long-term employment. Despite the known outcomes of volunteering and its relationship to employment, there has historically been little investment in this area in Australia.

Volunteering as a pathway to employment

Volunteering is a proven pathway to employment, with research demonstrating that participation in volunteering can improve an individual's odds of gaining employment by 27 per cent.^v Research undertaken by employment company SEEK found that 95 per cent of employers identify that volunteering is just as credible as paid work.^{vi} Further, 92 per cent of employers identified that relevant volunteering experience gave a candidate an advantage in job interviews.^{vii}

In addition to improving employability, volunteering also builds human and social capital, delivering significant benefits to the community. The SEEK research found that volunteering demonstrates valuable personality traits in an individual that can signal whether they will be a good fit for the culture of an organisation, such as motivation, social responsibility, and proactivity, which are three traits highly sought after by modern employers.^{viii}

Volunteering provides additional benefits to jobseekers, including exposing people to new job opportunities and fields of work. This is particularly important for care-based careers with the disability sector providing a pertinent case study to support this. In 2006 there were approximately 155,000 voluntary workers who provided 15.7 million hours of assistance in the disability sector across Australia.^{ix} Based on estimates of the economic value of volunteers, these figures equate to between 3000 – 8000 full time employees. Not only are volunteers integral to the disability sector workforce, they provide a pool of individuals who have the skills and experience to transition into paid work. The disability workforce is expected to more than double by the time the National Disability Insurance Scheme has reached full implementation.^x Given this future workforce need, facilitating employment through volunteering would have a demonstrable benefit on jobseekers, the community, and consumers.

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Benefits of volunteering for people experiencing disadvantage

Volunteering has pronounced benefits for people experiencing barriers and/or disadvantage. Individuals with low levels of human capital, such as lower levels of education and less work experience, may benefit from volunteering more than their affluent peers.^{xi} However, despite the benefits that volunteering can provide for people experiencing disadvantage, volunteering is more accessible to people with a higher socioeconomic status. Further, those who are employed, even on a part-time basis, are more likely to volunteer.^{xii} As with employment services, barriers to volunteering can be highly complex and can involve multiple issues for people experiencing disadvantage.

The OECD finding that jobseekers who face substantial barriers to employment typically benefit from high level of assistance holds true for volunteering as well. However, Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) are not always resourced to be able to provide intensive support for prospective volunteers who need additional support to participate. The State of Volunteering in Australia report identified that 86 per cent of VIOs need more volunteers.^{xiii} Yet, 46 per cent of VIOs identify that they are unable to involve volunteers with barriers.^{xiv}

One mechanism to facilitate employment outcomes through volunteering would be to properly resource Volunteering Support Services and Volunteer Involving Organisations to establish and run structured volunteering programs for jobseekers. Such an investment will not only improve outcomes for jobseekers, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, but will deliver a significant return on investment for government. This is demonstrated by research that shows a 450 per cent return for every dollar invested in volunteering.^{xv}

Volunteering and Contact ACT runs an Inclusive Volunteering Program that supports people with a disability to find and engage in meaningful volunteering roles. This Program provides a model for a structured volunteering program that would enhance outcomes for jobseekers. Whilst IVP is in its infancy, a UK version of the Program, known as the Volunteering for Stronger Communities Programme, exceeded all core targets for supporting participants and VIOs and, “displayed impressive capacity to move individuals into volunteering and paid work.”^{xvi} Further, the evaluation found that, “employment outcomes compare favourably when benchmarked against the national Work Programme, and one in five participants said they had found paid work since participating in volunteering.”^{xvii}

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Another aspect of the UK Programme that has relevance to this submission is the capacity building of VIOs and Volunteer Centres (known in Australia as Volunteering Support Services or Volunteer Resource Centres). The Programme Evaluation found that the projects provided “an opportunity to increase existing, or develop new, capacity particularly in terms of supporting individuals with additional needs.”^{xviii} This resulted in “innovative forms of delivery to promote and support volunteering among more vulnerable groups.”^{xix} VIOs were supported to recruit and manage volunteers, resulting in 77 per cent reporting a positive increase in volunteer numbers, with this increase being attributable to the support received from Volunteer Centres.^{xx}

New Australian research has found similar results to the above, demonstrating that Volunteering Support Services enabled nearly 12.3 million volunteer hours in 2017, worth \$477.5 million.^{xxi} Volunteers sourced through a Volunteering Support Service are 28.5 per cent more likely to be retained by a Volunteer Involving Organisation, 38.8 per cent more likely to volunteer for more hours, and 20.5 per cent more likely to be better prepared for volunteering.^{xxii} These benefits translate to an employment context, with jobseekers who have participated in volunteering showing greater aptitude to transition into paid work.

Addressing recruitment challenges for VIOs would yield significant outcomes with research showing “the association between volunteering and employment has the strongest effect on individuals without a high school certificate or equivalent (51 per cent increase in odds) and those who live in rural areas (55 per cent increase in odds)”.^{xxiii} We suggest that embedding volunteering as a priority in the future of employment services may address recruitment challenges by making volunteering more accessible to disadvantaged jobseekers. In turn, this would have demonstrable flow on effects to jobseekers who are more likely to gain meaningful, long-term employment than their non-volunteer peers.

Sustainability of employment outcomes

Investing in volunteering as a pathway to employment will deliver better outcomes for multiple parties, including Federal, State and Local Government, employers, jobseekers, and the community. The current employment services system does not have a dual focus that considers the additional benefits that volunteering can provide outside specific employment outcomes for jobseekers. In addition to satisfying outcomes for Government, jobseekers who transition to paid employment

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through volunteering are likely to be more appropriately skilled and experienced, thus increasing the sustainability of their employment outcome.

The Not-for-Profit Sector is a significant employer in its own right, with 600,000 organisations employing over one million staff (around 10 per cent of all employees in Australia). In the last decade, “sector growth has continued at more than 7 per cent a year, a figure that is higher than any other industry group.”^{xxiv} The Not-for-Profit Sector can be leveraged to enable both paid and unpaid opportunities for jobseekers. This will deliver considerable benefits to the community by bolstering the workforce through an injection of paid and unpaid labour.

Conclusion

As evidenced throughout this submission volunteering is a powerful mechanism for enabling meaningful and sustainable employment outcomes. Further, these outcomes are pronounced for people experiencing barriers and/or disadvantage. The case studies outlined above demonstrate that there is significant potential for the Not-for-Profit/Community Sector to be an incubator for jobseekers by enabling participants to become job ready, acquire new skills, and explore new industries and sub-sectors.

Volunteering is both a means to employment and an end in itself. In addition to making people more employable, volunteering increases social and human capital and works to solve the pressing problems of our time. Investment in volunteering as a pathway to employment will deliver significant value for money for the Government by simultaneously delivering employment outcomes and providing vital surge capacity for the community.

To fully realise the potential of volunteering as a pathway to employment the future of job services should consider how the proper resourcing of Volunteering Support Services and Volunteer Involving Organisations can deliver dividends against a range of Government objectives. Such an investment would prioritise the outcomes for jobseekers and provide a deeper and broader level of support for jobseekers experiencing disadvantage.

Volunteering and Contact ACT would welcome the opportunity to expand on this submission in further detail, and thanks the Department of Jobs and Small Business for the opportunity to put forward our views for the potential of future employment services.

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- ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) 'General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014', available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.
- ⁱⁱ Flinders University (31 October 2014) 'Volunteering worth \$290 billion a year', <https://indaily.com.au/news/2014/10/31/volunteering-worth-290-billion-year/>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014*, available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.
- ^{iv} Volunteering Western Australia (May 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
- ^v Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation (2012) 'Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work?' available online at http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf
- ^{vi} SEEK (2016) '3 reasons volunteering can put you ahead of the pack' available online at <https://www.seek.com.au/career-advice/3-reasons-volunteering-can-put-you-ahead-of-the-pack>
- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} Ibid
- ^{ix} 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>
- ^x Commonwealth of Australia (2017) 'National Disability Insurance Scheme' available online at https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview201718/NDIS#_ftn37
- ^{xi} Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation (2012) 'Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work?' available online at http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf
- ^{xii} Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014*, available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.
- ^{xiii} Volunteering Australia (2016) 'The State of Volunteering in Australia Report 2016' available online at <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/stateofvolunteering/>
- ^{xiv} Ibid.
- ^{xv} Volunteering Western Australia (May 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
- ^{xvi} Sheffield Hallam University Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (2013) 'Final evaluation of the Volunteering for Stronger Communities Programme' available online at https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/practical_support/volunteering/vsc_final_evaluation_report_dec_2013.pdf
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} Ibid.
- ^{xix} Ibid.
- ^{xx} Ibid.
- ^{xxi} Volunteering Australia (2018) 'The Value of Volunteering Support Services' available online at <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Value-of-Volunteering-Support-Services.pdf>
- ^{xxii} Ibid

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^{xxiii} Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation (2012) 'Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work?' available online at

http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf

^{xxiv} Community Council of Australia (2018) 'Submission to the Select Committee on Charity Fundraising in the 21st Century' available online at <https://www.communitycouncil.com.au/submissions>