

Committee Secretary
Department of the Senate
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission and Summary

Submission to the inquiry into the formation of the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army).

Dear Senators

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. This submission represents my personal views as a young person, with previous experience within the voluntary sector. My submission fundamentally supports the introduction of qualifications schemes to support those engaged with volunteer organisations to better support their professional development. I also strongly support the introduction of a secondary-school based engagement model, to allow for better engagement and exposure of the different volunteer organisations to students who may otherwise not have access to the information.

Introduction

Volunteerism as a community characteristic has been slowly declining over the last half century, with the last decade bringing about a 10% decline in the rate of individuals who engage in unpaid voluntary work. Which has contributed to a significant range of other societal issues which have been emerging and growing across our nation.

Being a young person myself, and one who has engaged in a range of volunteering roles, including as a board member of a local service club, and chairperson of our localities Flood Recovery committee following the October 2022 Floods, this decline has been extremely disappointing to observe. Young people especially, are facing significant challenges within the current economic climate and social climate they find themselves surrounded by.

However, there are a range of underlying issues which can be addressed to stabilise and hopefully reverse the current trend of people across the board abandoning volunteerism.

Context - Overarching

Ultimately, there is a question of the influence of organisational culture on the induction of young people into such organisations, one of the issues that I have observed in many of my peers is feeling as though they are not valued, and in some of my engagements this sentiment can be shared. Simply, changing cultures to empower young people and imbue them with confidence, and surety that their work is being valued. Cultural issues around treatment of non-heteronormative and non-male individuals also presents a significant barrier for many young people to engage, with the personal and communal beliefs of many in the older generations which occupy organisations not matching those in the younger generations.

Similarly, a cultural change has created a ripple, observed within my local service club, the demographic of members used to largely consist of middle-aged families, now largely has trended towards more senior members. However, this cultural change can also be attributed to the increasing cost-of-living stress faced by many families who are struggling to meet ends meet. With the increasing struggle and stress faced by many households, the emotional and physical energy able to be contributed to voluntary activities has greatly reduced and this has directly reduced the exposure of young people to the range of volunteering.

Context - Personal

Having been raised in an environment like that discussed above where the stresses of business, and other struggles swallowed vast amounts of time, the ability for exposure to volunteering efforts was minimal. However, being exposed to the opportunities presented by volunteering organisations, and in my instance, organisations taking an active approach to engaging new and prospective members proved to be sufficient to engage me into the organisation and then onto the board.

Holding the position of chairperson in our local Flood Recovery Committee, it was very clear that the demographics who were largely able to engage in the process of recovery and preparedness planning for future emergencies, were of the same demographics as the existing service clubs.

Responses

(c) integrating volunteer opportunities within educational institutions to increase student participation in volunteer organisations.

1. Creation of Networks to Bolster Presence
 - a. Working with local service clubs and integrating their inputs into existing Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN's), there is a significant opportunity to increase the exposure that students are able to receive to service clubs.

2. Subject Based Engagement
 1. Creation of targeted electives and subjects throughout different year levels curriculums, and by use of 'work-experience' aligned activities for students to be able to properly immerse themselves in the service clubs and emergency response

agencies, will increase the likelihood of adopting a more open mindset when it comes to volunteering more broadly.

2. Working with schools, and classroom teacher implementing reflective practices on any tasks engaged with external agencies (service clubs, or emergency response agencies), will ensure that students are able to reflect on the purpose of these activities and enhance their perspective of the works that they do.
 3. Incorporating these into subjects can also ensure that students who may otherwise not be exposed to volunteer-based organisations have the ability to do so.
3. Vocational Major and Alternative Educations
 1. Working within the curriculum of existing alternative senior certificates, including for instance in Victoria the VCE VM pathway, it is possible to engage emergency service organisations with the capacity to do so; by introducing a two day a week 'structured workplace learning recognition'. Using this as supporting their advancement to their senior certificate, would bolster the active number of engaged individuals and enhance the possibility of continuation following the completion of secondary education.

(d) creating a nationally recognised qualification scheme that provides tangible benefits to volunteers and formally acknowledges their skills and contributions across sectors.

1. Diploma Qualification
 - a. Depending on the nature of the services provided within volunteering, it is highly possible to create a new and separate diploma or qualification that not-for-profit and volunteer based organisations could apply to be granted to their volunteers, based on the existing 'Recognition for Prior Learning (RPL)' structure the whole qualification could be granted based on set circumstances, such as number of years with organisation, time contributed to the organisation or complexity of the work completed with the organisation.
2. Existing Qualifications
 - a. Similar to the structure above, using the volunteering experience developed by the individual, there are a range of existing qualifications at the Diploma level which may be able to be gained or partially gained through their volunteering efforts. Including the Diploma of Community Services (CHC52021), with a large number of the modules covered overlapping with the skills required when delivering either emergency services, or within the regular routine engagements with these organisations.

Sincerely,

Rowan Farren