

Volunteering Community Reference Group

8 November 2022

Communique #9

The Volunteering Community Reference Group (VCRG) is established under the direction of the Minister for Volunteering, Hon Stephen Dawson MLC with Volunteering WA providing secretariat support. This communique refers to the meeting held on 8 November 2022. In attendance were:

Representing	Name
Hon Minister for Volunteering	Hon Stephen Dawson MLC Oliver Pincott, DPC
NFP volunteering sector	Dan Minchin, Chorus Maija Hildebrand, Vinnies WA
Volunteer Resource Centres	Vicki Pollard, Peel VRC
Researchers	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Individual volunteer (consumer)	Esme Bowen
Volunteering WA (VWA)	Tina Williams, CEO (Acting Chair) Meredith Blais, Senior Policy Advisor
Department of Communities (Communities)	Sue Fielding
Local Government	Vikki Barlow, WALGA

The Chair acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which we met, the Wadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and paid her respects to elders past and present.

The Hon. Stephen Dawson MLC, Minister for Volunteering and all members of the Group were welcomed to the meeting. Minister Dawson noted recent activity including the announcement of Thank-A-Volunteer-Day grant recipients for 2022. Minister Dawson spoke of the progress made on the National Strategy and the associated research network. The Minister noted how the data and investigations into the Volunteering Sector will be crucial to forming policy and future activities in this space both at National and State levels.

The Minister confirmed he was keen to build on the progress by investing greater support for local promotion and marketing and informed the Group that he had a draft volunteer recruitment campaign to sign off on. It is intended to be run by the State in 2023. The Minister noted that other initiatives were also under development to promote volunteering to the community and recognise volunteer contributions.

Other topics discussed:

1. Experience of VCRG representative, NFP sector

Dan Minchin, CEO Chorus, reflected on his journey with volunteering in the not-for-profit sector, coming from his background in corporate strategy and executive roles in Silver Chain.

Chorus was born out of a merger of 3 organisations, including Volunteer Taskforce which involved high numbers of volunteers. The combined organisations delivered community services for people in aged care, with a disability and / or with mental health challenges.

They are currently implementing a radical strategy to put community services back into the heart of what they do. Chorus' funding model (through NDIS and other services) has largely moved to a fee for service basis, which has increased time spent on administration and the threatened capability style programs (such as art therapy) previously supported by block funding.

Culturally, safety is being focused on as a means to unify and care for every member of the team. Chorus are also seeking to maximise paid worker and volunteer time with clients.

The nature of the volunteering program has also changed, from a predominantly formal volunteer program supported by dedicated volunteer managers. The new model is more of an informal volunteer program, focused on mobilising the local community to enhance client connection. The basis of this change was from the "Street Teams" pilot program started in 2021.

Dan noted that volunteer numbers have been in decline, like many service providers active in these sectors. This is likely due to a combination of factors, including COVID-19, changes in sector regulation and the loss of volunteer management roles and focus within the organisation other changes are implemented.

The model of seeking to build and develop community, as a broader perspective than simply running a volunteer program is an innovative one. The Group thanked Dan for his insight and contributions.

2. WA Volunteering Strategy Action Plan

The current WA Volunteering Strategy was developed in 2016 and released by the State Government in 2017. There is currently no action plan available to guide or monitor the implementation of the Strategy.

Sue Fielding from Communities noted that the Action Plan, which focuses exclusively on State Government volunteer programs, is still in development and not available for consultation. The plan provides an overview of volunteering within various state government departments and is expected to be approved by the Minister for Volunteering (possibly in Cabinet) and available for at the February 2023 meeting of the VCRG.

It was noted that the Strategy is expected to have a 10-year life and will be due for renewal by 2027.

3. Legislative changes and proposals affecting volunteering in WA

Meredith Blais from VWA introduced a paper that summarised:

- legislative changes introduced since 2018 that impact on volunteers and volunteering in WA
- examples of consultation resulting in tailored, more appropriate outcomes for the sector and
- some of the legislative changes proposed at both WA State and Australian Government levels.

Legislation	Department	Status	Comments
<i>Aged Care and Other Legislation Amendment (Royal Comm Response) Act 2022 (C'th)</i>	Dept of Health and Aged Care	Commencement date 1 December 2022.	Introduction of Code of Conduct as a legislative instrument to workers in Aged Care. Impacts on volunteers include investigative processes and sanctions.
<i>Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Amendment Bill 2022 (WA)</i>	Department of Communities	In Legislative Council, referred to Committee. Possible introduction on 1 July 2023.	Significant changes proposed including removal of exemption for parent and child volunteers in some circumstances. Additional penalties of up to \$60,000. VWA has requested further guidance on what 'reasonable steps' may be for VIOs.
Aligning regulation across Aged Care, Disability, Veterans' Care (C'th)	Dept of Health and Aged Care	Consultation closed. Awaiting legislation	
Aged Care legislation (C'th)	Dept of Health and Aged Care	Refer summary sheet below ¹	Multiple processes with implementation as a matter of some urgency.
<i>Incorporated Associations Act 2015 (WA)</i>	DMIRS	VWA met with DMIRS and made a formal submission on Discussion Paper.	Recommendations not made public as yet. VWA noted that the current Act is positive reform from introduction in 2015.
<i>Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)</i>	Equal Opportunity Commission	Attorney General has accepted Law Reform Commission of WA report in principle.	Proposed to extend provisions for employees to volunteers. Will put WA out of step with most S/T. LRCWA noted the concern raised by VWA regarding the potential for changes to adversely impact on volunteering. Proposed to review after 5 years ² .

Common themes in VWA advocacy include the need for:

- earlier and more explicit consultation with the volunteering sector on any proposed changes
- streamlined and tailored approaches in legislation that recognise the differences in motivations and risks between volunteer involvement and paid workforces
- increased supports for volunteers to respond to any potential investigations, sanctions or penalties
- increased resources and support for Volunteer Involving Organisations to implement changes

¹ <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/aged-care-reforms-regulatory-perspective-fact-sheet.pdf>

² "The Commission acknowledges that this recommendation, if implemented, could be counterproductive in that it may deter workplaces from taking on volunteers and unpaid workers. For this reason, the Commission considers that this recommendation should be reviewed after five years to ensure that it is not having this undesirable effect."

- longer lead times for implementation, recognising the number of volunteer-run organisations with limited capacity.

4. Update on Emergency Volunteering platform for WA

Further to an election commitment of the McGowan Government, VWA has completed an upgrade to the www.emergency.volunteer.org.au platform, which is the primary mode of engaging spontaneous volunteers during emergencies in WA. The platform is also used by some other states and territories and was recently used for the recruitment of volunteers to provide companionship for residents in aged care facilities.

It was agreed that a demonstration of the platform will be provided to the VCRG and the Minister for Volunteering.

5. Thank-A-Volunteer Day 2022

Sue Fielding provided a summary of the outcome of this grant program run by Communities. Changes this year included a doubling in funding available per event to \$2,000 and in the overall funding available to approximately \$60,000. These changes were welcomed by the Group.

Some members of the VCRG noted that delays in announcing the successful recipients impacted on the feasibility of some events this year. This was acknowledged and timings will be reviewed for 2023.

The Minister noted that consideration to continuing the changes to funding are under consideration, as is a possibility of allowing events anytime in the week of Thank-A-Volunteer-Day, held annually on 5 December. The Group agreed these changes would be positive for VIOs and volunteers.

6. Forthcoming events

National Volunteering Conference (Canberra) 13 – 14 February 2023.

More information on the Volunteering Community Reference Group, including Terms of Reference and membership, is available [here](#).