

Introduction

This project commenced in September 2019 and was completed in May 2020. It explored the:

- impact of the NDIS on the number of volunteers and types of volunteer roles in the sector;
- benefits of a volunteer supported services;
- impact on use of paid staff and any issues that emerge from this for volunteers; and
- sustainability of volunteer supported services.

The scope was limited, was undertaken from the perspective of volunteer leadership and management and focused on issues from the service providers' viewpoint only.

The investigation comprised an online survey open to all service providers in WA during November and December 2019. The findings are based on 42 responses. This was followed by eight interviews with senior executives or volunteer managers from a diverse sample of disability service providers between January and March 2020.

The report was published in June 2020 and is available on www.volunteeringwa.org.au

Conclusions

- The impact of the NDIS on volunteering has not yet been fully felt.
- There is potential for volunteer growth in the future. Sharing of knowledge and experience between providers could facilitate growth.
- Financial considerations play a part in decisions to involve volunteers. However, decisions driven solely by cost savings, ignore the multidimensional value volunteers bring to customers, the community, staff and the organisation.
- The nature of volunteer roles is varied comprising supervised and unsupervised. Concerns regarding risk increase as volunteers take on more responsibility. A greater understanding of managing risk would benefit the sector.
- Providers are aware of the need for inducting and training volunteers. However, the opportunities this presents have to be balanced against the likelihood of the volunteers staying in the role.
- Grey areas and questions regarding volunteer management practice e.g. re paid staff and volunteer roles, require further consideration.
- The sustainability of some volunteer supported services is in doubt.



Key Findings

The NDIS has brought disruptive change to the sector in terms of organisational culture and business processes.

The impact of the NDIS on volunteering has not been felt by all as yet. 49% have not seen any change in number of volunteers; and 55% have not seen any change in type of volunteer roles since NDIS introduced.

Some change in the future is expected. 43% expect an increase in volunteer numbers; and 24% expect change in types of volunteer roles in next two years.

Drivers for growth include supporting and meeting the organisation's purpose and values, market or customer needs or financial priorities.

Most service support volunteer roles are in activity support (53%), social support (47%) and skills development support (39%). Within this, there are variations in both the context and expectations of the volunteer.

Roles may be supported or unsupervised, unskilled or require training. Some service providers utilise volunteers in more responsible volunteer roles. This practice varies.

Many factors will be taken into account in assessing the suitability of a role for a volunteer such as, the customer's needs, training and knowledge required, trust in the volunteer, the availability of funding and paid staff to provide the service.

Induction and training for volunteers are recognised as important for ensuring standards. However, it is both a cost to the service provider and an opportunity as it may open up possibilities for new roles. For volunteers, it may be an incentive, or a hurdle if not easily accessible and flexible.

Services providers are aware of risk in utilising volunteers to support services to their customers.

The value of volunteers is widely recognised. 95% believe volunteers enhance outcomes for the organisation; 93% for the community; 88% for the family of the individual; and 87% for the individual.

The shortage of trained workers in the sector, and increase in training opportunities, plus other factors impacting time and cost of paid staff, potentially impact on opportunities and motivations for volunteering. This raises related questions of good practice in volunteer management about volunteers replacing paid staff, suitable roles for volunteers, charging for volunteer time and commitment expectations of volunteers.

Funding and resourcing for volunteer programs is a concern. Just 35% believe their volunteer program is sustainable.

Organisations with diverse income streams and that self fund the volunteer program e.g. through fundraising activities, sponsorship or grants, are better placed.

Recommendations

- A network or special interest group be established to foster development, collaboration and support across the disability volunteer sector.
- Further work be done to clarify grey areas identified.
- Funding and other creative solutions be sought to build volunteer management expertise and skilled volunteer managers across the sector.
- Further research be considered into the experiences, needs, perceptions of volunteers, paid staff and people with disabilities.

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