

Impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme on Volunteering in the Disability Services Sector in Western Australia

June 2020

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through WACOSS, with funding from Lotterywest*



volunteeringWA

LEADING, ADVANCING, CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERING IN WA

Acknowledgements

Volunteering WA would like to thank

Thank
You

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Terminology

Customer, Client, Resident, Participants, Individual		Individual with disabilities who purchases and uses the disability support services provided
Disability Services Provider, Organisation, Service Provider		Organisation providing services for people with disabilities
NDIS		National Disability Insurance Scheme
VWA		Volunteering WA

01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was funded by WACOSS and Lotterywest through the Peaks Sector Support Grant. It was undertaken from a volunteering leadership and sector expertise perspective and explores the:

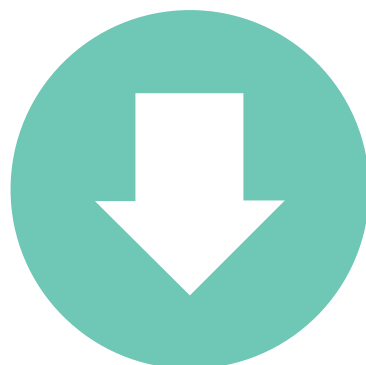
- impact of the NDIS on the number of volunteers and types of volunteer roles in the disability services sector;
- benefits of a volunteer supported services (for volunteer, participant, organisation, and community) that could not be achieved with paid staff;
- impact on use of paid staff and any issues that emerge from this for volunteers; and
- sustainability of volunteer supported services in disability services organisations.

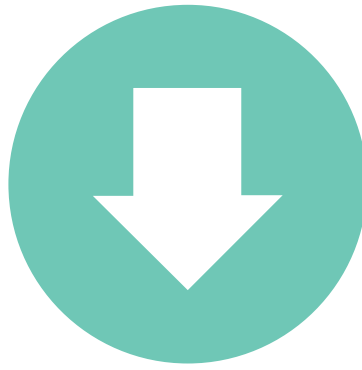
The report highlights that during the transition period the NDIS brought disruptive change to the sector in terms of organisational culture – becoming more “customer-centric” and “outcome focussed”; and business processes – becoming more “accountable” and “business-like”. The NDIS has put pressure on limited resources.

This investigation found that there is widespread recognition in the sector of the benefits and value that volunteers bring to customers, community, staff and the organisation.

Currently, most service volunteer roles support activities, social engagement and skills development. There are variations in both the context and expectations of volunteers in the range of supervision, skills and training requirements.

It appears that changes to volunteering roles to accommodate the NDIS is ongoing, with about half of all roles not reporting changes to the number or nature of role to date.





Future volunteer growth will be influenced by factors such as customer needs, defining appropriate roles for volunteers, risk management, induction and training, availability of paid staff and resources for volunteer programs.

This report provides insight into the current state of volunteering in the disability services sector in Western Australia, drawing on participation across the sector and knowledge of best practice volunteer management.

The conclusion and recommendations in this report summarise these findings. They also propose next steps to support the sector to provide high quality services to NDIS customers including:

- Establishment of support networks, communities of practice or special interest groups to foster development, collaboration and support across the disability volunteer sector
- Further, work to clarify issues such as suitability of roles for volunteers, training requirements and provision, risk assessment and management.
- Funding and other creative solutions to build volunteer management expertise and skilled volunteer managers across the sector.
- Further research into the experiences, needs, perceptions of volunteers, paid staff and people with disabilities.

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2.1 Introduction

This report captures the findings from an investigation into volunteering in the disability services sector in WA. This commenced in October 2019 and completed in May 2020.

Volunteering WA (VWA) is the peak body for volunteering in Western Australia and the leading voice for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, we work to strengthen the sector and promote the benefits of volunteering and its value in transforming and enriching the communities in which we live. With a mission to lead, advance and celebrate volunteering in WA, VWA supports over 700 volunteering involving organisations and represents over 600,000 volunteers.

This investigation was undertaken from a volunteering leadership and sector expertise perspective.

2.2 Areas for investigation

The investigation focused on issues from the service provider's viewpoint only. VWA believes that there is merit in conducting further investigations with other stakeholder groups at a later date, such as volunteers, paid workers, individuals with disabilities, or other stakeholder groups.

It explored the following:

- The impact of the NDIS on the number of volunteers in the sector.
- The impact of the NDIS on types of volunteer roles in the sector.
- The benefits of a volunteer supported service program (for volunteer, participant, organisation, and community) that could not be achieved with paid staff.
- The impact on use of paid staff and any issues that emerge from this.
- The sustainability of volunteer supported service programs in disability services organisations.

The potential for people with disabilities seeking volunteer roles to achieve their life goals, including employment, was not included, but is an area worthy of investigation in its own right.

2.3 This report

This report aims to:

- Highlight how the NDIS is impacting on volunteering and the sector.
- Show the range of practice regarding the utilisation of volunteers across the sector.
- Identify potential grey areas and areas for further work relating to volunteer involvement / management.

The sections in the report correspond to the areas of investigation. These include findings from a survey and interviews, actual or envisaged examples of practice, and verbatim quotes (unattributed for privacy reasons) with comments and issues for further work.

Background on the NDIS and some information sources are provided in Appendix 1 and 2.



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METHODOLOGY

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3.1 Process and timeline

Step 1.

Oct 2019

Background reading – on the NDIS and research into volunteering within the NDIS context.

Step 2.

Nov-Dec 2019

An online survey open to all disability service providers via Survey Monkey.

Step 3.

Jan-Mar 2020

Individual or paired face to face interviews with CEO's, Directors, Senior Managers and Volunteer Managers.

Step 4.

May 2020

Draft report made available to participants for feedback.

Step 5.

June 2020

Presentation of findings to service providers and other interested parties.

3.2 Online survey

The survey was open to registered and non-registered NDIS service providers in WA.

The project was promoted on the VWA website and the invitation to participate in the survey was distributed through the WACOSS newsletter, VWA newsletter, and direct email to VWA members and contacts in the disability services and aged care sectors.

ALL **42** RESPONDENTS WERE NOT-FOR-PROFIT (**83%**), CHARITIES OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT. (See Table 1)

The survey was open from 1 November to 20 December 2019 and 50 responses were received. Eight incomplete responses were excluded from the analysis. Given the small sample size and the complexity of the sector and issues, the survey was not designed to be statistically representative of the sector.

The results of the survey are included in Appendix 3.

52%
Less than
\$1m funding

52% had less than \$1m per annum in funding. (See Table 2)

31%
most (i.e. over 50%) of their clients were NDIS funded, highlighting the evolving nature of this sector. (See Table 3)

57%
registered
NDIS providers

57% were registered NDIS providers and a further 10% were intending to register. (See Table 4)

71%
offer volunteer
supported
services

71% provided volunteer-supported services. (See Table 5)

3.3 Preliminary telephone discussions with survey respondents

After the survey, short preliminary discussions with four volunteer coordinators/managers were undertaken to identify areas where clarity would be valuable, such as:

- What is a suitable role for a volunteer?
- What skills and experience should you expect in a volunteer?
- How do you ensure quality standards and safeguards using volunteers?
- Can you claim for a volunteer's time?

3.4 Face to face interviews

Eight interviews were undertaken with senior executives, and / or volunteer managers, between January and March 2020. They represented a range of service providers including:

- Small and large providers in terms of turnover, and diversity of services and income streams.
- Providers serving people with a wide range of intellectual, physical, neurological disabilities and care needs.
- Providers with varying levels of volunteer involvement, from a few ad hoc volunteer positions to almost complete reliance on volunteers for service delivery as well as service support.
- Providers with differing experiences of volunteer involvement from long established volunteer programs to newcomers to volunteer involvement.

See Appendix 4 for the standard interview questions.

3.5 Presentation of findings

In the closing stage of this investigation, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on Western Australia, including the volunteer sector. All participant organisations in this investigation were affected to some extent.

In May 2020, the draft report was circulated to 12 participant service providers for their feedback.

The final report was presented to an audience of service providers and other interested parties in June.



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NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE SECTOR

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4.1 Little change so far

The survey showed that almost half of respondents (49%) had not seen a change in their volunteer numbers since the NDIS was introduced. A similar number have seen increases in the number of volunteers (10%) as decreases (7%).

(See Appendix 3 Table 6)

Service providers and clients are still transitioning to the NDIS which may in part explain this. During the transition phase service providers have been coping with challenges from:

- cultural change,
- business change, and
- limited capacity.

This is in addition to preparing for changing regulation from 1 July 2020 when the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission is operational in WA. These may impact volunteer numbers and are considered below.

4.2 Cultural change

The shift from block funding to individual funding plans has required service providers to address their culture as well as priorities; to reconsider what it means to be customer focused and to ensure their services are focused on the needs of the customer and providing the best outcomes for them:

“The NDIS has forced us to become more customer orientated [...] it’s now much more about what is the customer wanting rather than what we think the customer wants.”

This is a significant cultural change for organisations that were effectively government contractors prior to the NDIS.

4.3 Business change

The NDIS pricing schedule and the strict reporting of services delivered for invoicing purposes, has meant service providers have had to tighten up their procedures and become more business-like in their approach to managing finances and resources:

“We had to start to become more judicious about our income and expenditure and operate like a business.”

This is also a significant change in priorities for organisations that previously enjoyed what one interviewee described as a *“maternalistic”* funding system.

4.4 Limited capacity

The transition to the NDIS has been the major focus for resources:

“We know that to work with volunteers we need to find them, engage them, develop them and deploy them in a way that adds value for them, for the people we support and ourselves and we just didn’t have the time or capacity to do that at the same time as this transformational change that is the NDIS.”

Staff have also had to do more work to implement the new NDIS procedures and requirements into their work schedule, and it is not surprising that they have had less time to give to supervise volunteers:

“So we do find that perhaps the NDIS shift has been the shift in busy-ness for a number of the staff who almost can’t deal with volunteers right now, because they are too busy.”

It is understandable that many service providers would not have the capacity to grow volunteer numbers in this context.

4.5 Future growth anticipated

The survey showed that just under half (43%) expected the number of volunteers to increase in the next two years. (See Appendix 3 Table 7)

Findings from the interviews suggested drivers for growth fall into three broad categories:

- purpose and values,
- market or customer needs, and
- financial priorities.

These are not mutually exclusive and the line between them can be blurred. These are explored further below.

4.6 Purpose and values

Purpose taps into the mission and values of the organisation, and the awareness of the benefits that a volunteer can bring to enhance the customer's experience and support the staff.

“We know what a volunteer can offer the people we support and the staff, it's not just the customers who benefit from what a volunteer brings into our services.”

4.7 Market or customer needs

This taps into the potential for expansion of volunteer programs, and the desire to be more responsive to customers' needs and goals and provide greater choice.

“I think there will be a need for more volunteers because of the customer demand. I think there will be more organisations going towards volunteering.”

One organisation has already experienced growth in their volunteer numbers due to rolling out new programs in response to growing customer demand.

A variation on this is the desire to expand the volunteer program to fill gaps in the service provision making up for the short fall in NDIS funding for clients.

“People’s plans don’t have the flexibility, range, broadness, pricing to enable everything that might be right for an individual, so they’ll look to volunteers to supplement what NDIS is paying for, both from the price perspective and from the overall package perspective.”

Another variation is where affordability and the efficient use of clients' funds are of concern as well as the cost of the service for the service provider. This is illustrated in the following scenario envisaged by one interviewee:

The organisation would like to be able to offer an 'on demand' short distance transport service to take customers from their home to the nearest public transport option and is considering how to achieve the best outcome for all.

If the driver were an employee, the employee would need to be paid for the time between trips when the car is not being used. If the driver role were suitable for a volunteer, it would reduce the cost of the service for the customer (just to cover the cost of the vehicle), be efficient with their funding, and affordable for the organisation.

Scenario

4.8 Financial priorities

Concerns with financial sustainability, operating costs and margins are indications of financial priorities:

“I certainly think that the pricing of the NDIS core supports is not sustainable in future, so organisations will probably have to be more reliant on volunteering than they have, as a substitution for staff.”

4.9 Comment

The value of volunteering goes far beyond an hourly dollar. In the 2015 report into the *Social, Economic and Cultural Value of Volunteering*¹, it states:

“For every dollar invested in volunteering, approximately \$4.50 in benefits are returned to the community.”

The notion that volunteering is just about saving money overlooks the significant value that volunteering brings, in social, economic and cultural terms.

¹ *The Economic, Social, and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia* https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa-report-book_web.pdf

05

NDIS IMPACT ON TYPES OF VOLUNTEER ROLES IN THE SECTOR

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5.1 Little impact on types of volunteer roles

55% have not seen any change to volunteers roles since the NDIS was introduced and 37% consider the types of roles unlikely to change in the next two years. (See Appendix 3 Table 8)

On the other hand 10% have seen changes to the roles since the NDIS was introduced, and 24% consider the types of roles likely to change in the next two years. (See Appendix 3 Table 9)

This section compares some current and envisaged volunteer roles.

5.2 Types of volunteer roles

The survey response showed most service support volunteer roles are focused on **activity support (53%), social support (47%) and skills development support (39%)**. (See Appendix 3 Table 10)

Within this, there are variations in both the context and expectations of the volunteer. These are explored below.

5.3 Supervised activity, social and skills development support roles


Roles that are most readily recognised as traditional volunteering roles have the following attributes. They:

- are performed on-site,
- take place in private or protected settings or in groups,
- do not require specific training, and
- are carried out under supervision or in the presence of a staff member.

In this regard interviewees talked about volunteers *“working in a really supportive environment surrounded by disability support workers”*, or in positions that *“don’t really need a high skill level to do them”* or with activities *“where we need lots of people coming in extra for supporting, but not necessarily with a client”*.

In such scenarios the volunteers’ presence is valued, but not essential to the service. Aligned values and motivation would be considered important from the recruitment perspective.

A variation is the volunteer who brings personal talents to the activity to share with participants:



A photography group example: The volunteer is a photography expert who brings their digital experience, love of photography, knowledge, passion and excitement to a group led by a support worker who knows nothing about photography. In this example, the support worker will be the one meeting the access needs or advocating for the customer and the photography volunteer can enhance the experience for the customer and share their skills and encourage support development.

Scenario

The following examples describe roles where volunteers have some responsibility for an individual participant, however, the activities take place in a group situation in a private setting:

a) An organisation provides recreational activities in a private outdoor setting. Volunteers walk beside participants to keep them safe. The volunteers provide an important support for the participants in this scenario. Parents or support workers have to stay nearby in case of an incident. The session is led by a senior volunteer or a paid employee. Groups vary in size from 4-6 participants with up to 18 volunteers.

The volunteers develop valuable friendships with the participants and their families.

b) Every fortnight, the volunteer picks up the client from their residence and drives them to and from a group meeting. There is no support worker with them, in the car or at the meeting. All volunteers undergo 12 hours of training with updates, and there are two team leaders who are senior volunteers or staff who volunteer.

The meeting takes place with other people with disabilities and other volunteers. At the meeting participants join in various activities and a simple meal and social interactions.

Volunteers develop lasting friendships with participants who may not have family of their own.

Scenarios

5.4 Unsupervised activity, social or skills development support roles

When it comes to volunteers spending time alone with clients, whether this is in the car, or in the community for example at the shops, the cinema or sports stadium, service providers are generally cautious. Service providers are at different stages of utilising volunteers in an unsupervised capacity, some already have such roles in place, others are considering it and others do not permit it.

The following scenarios show how the volunteer can/could make a real difference in an unsupervised setting a) when the client has no funding for a support worker, or b) the client does not need a support worker or c) a staff member is not available:

Client has no funding for support worker

a) This organisation has taken on a new volunteer for a resident in their supported accommodation. The volunteer comes in one of the days when the resident does not have funding for a support worker and they go out to see a movie or shopping. The volunteer books a fleet car, and he picks up the resident, and organises tickets etc. The resident is able to enjoy an outing when otherwise, he would not have anything to do.

Staff member not available

b) A client living in a supported accommodation loves dogs. The next door neighbour has a dog and has said the client can walk the dog anytime. No-one is available to walk the dog with her. So unfortunately the client may miss out on this opportunity which could be enabled with a volunteer.

Client does not need support worker

c) A client with autism had a work placement in a cinema. The cinema received complaints that the client flicked lights on and off constantly. A volunteer, acting as chaperone, may have been able to assist in this instance.

In each case, there are likely to be many factors and risks that need to be assessed and managed.

The example of other service providers may encourage others to be more open to the possibilities of using volunteers in different roles. When it comes to a volunteer driving a client in their own or the organisation's vehicle, one organisation found that other organisations reported *"they do that"* so it is more likely to follow suit.

In assessing the risk, the volunteer's capacity to perform the role and ensure the safety of the client are considerations.

In relation to driving for example, one organisation commented that *"there are risks with that, which we have with our current staff anyway"* for example, whether the car is suitable, road worthy, insured.

The provision of training is an important part of this:

"To add a volunteer to supported accommodation, like volunteers going out into the community one on one with a customer, of course I have to make sure that that volunteer has got first aid and that we provide that and training."

Trust and confidence in the volunteer is another important consideration. An interesting question was raised regarding 'trust' and why an organisation would trust a volunteer less than a staff member, if they have been trained in the same way.

Trust may grow over time, as a volunteer demonstrates their reliability. As one interviewee said regarding scenario a) above:

"Firstly I was really nervous. But this young volunteer is studying medicine, and now after a few weeks they're having a great time. The volunteer is switched on."

Another commented that if they were to send a volunteer unsupervised into a client's home for example to provide domestic services: *"it comes back to how well we know a volunteer"* and they would need to feel *"really confident"* about that person.

Volunteer recruitment needs to be specific for roles like this.

"We need to find out what the customer wants and match the volunteering to it as opposed to 'we've got a volunteer, what can they do?'"

5.5 Volunteer roles involving personal and high support needs

Personal care support includes assistance with dressing, grooming and personal hygiene, and assistance with other daily tasks such as eating, drinking, moving about, and taking medications. Higher support needs relate to individuals with complex disabilities or with challenging behaviours. Service providers have different protocols.

Some service providers do not entertain the possibility at all:

“If there is any personal care or any care related tasks it’s not a volunteer role.”

The clear separation of roles may be determined by the job description or in training requirements:

“No personal care. Not usually what a staff member in their JDF would do, that’s not for volunteers.”

“If there is anything that a staff member would need to have specific training in before they commence their duties, a volunteer would not be able to do those duties, or allowed to do those duties.”

Others take a flexible approach. Taking the client’s needs into account is important in considering the appropriateness of volunteers assisting with these tasks. This means obtaining the client’s, or their parent’s or guardian’s, permission first. This may be more difficult for clients who are non-verbal.

“There are certain clients where it wouldn’t be suitable to have a volunteer. They need that person and that consistency and the routine has to be followed to the T.”

Some organisations will weigh up the potential risks and the training required, as well as the level of understanding of the individual’s care plans. For example, supporting individuals with special eating, drinking, swallowing plans, or with particular behavioural triggers that might provoke an incident requires a higher level of knowledge than would be expected of a volunteer, whereas if the client is more *“easy going”* and the tasks are more *“routine”* it may suit a volunteer.

Organisations are mindful of not wanting to put volunteers into situations that would be “too difficult” or “particularly challenging”. Where the line is drawn may vary from one organisation to another.

The volunteering experience is also considered important:

“It’s about ensuring that every volunteer is comfortable with the role that they have.”

Some service providers reportedly allow volunteers to assist with making sure clients take their medications at the correct times. However, this was outside the direct experience of the organisations that participated in this investigation.

In a supervised role a volunteer may be able to support the trained staff within clear boundaries. For example, in a particular organisation, the volunteers are not to help the client to use the toilet, or with feeding, or making special drinks. If they help the client with cups of tea, it’s up to the staff member to let the volunteer know, or the volunteer to ask the staff member if they can make a drink for that person because it’s something they might not know. The client might have had a test the week before with speech pathologist and they need to be on thickened fluids, so the volunteer would need to make sure that is OK before they did that.

“No volunteer will deal with the peg feeding. Our coordinator, or someone else who is trained in it and people from agencies that we bring in will do that. The same with manual handling, if we need to take people out of wheelchairs or they need to shower and we need to bring them onto shower tables. They [the volunteer] might assist, but they will never actually lead that process, a volunteer who doesn’t have that training.”

This organisation offers more training for volunteers who are involved in their activities for clients with high support needs and regularly undertake these roles. It also offers a stipend to volunteers involved in high support services in recognition of the higher expectations of volunteers. From a recruitment perspective, most people who volunteer for these roles are community service graduates, education assistants, or nursing students or people who have volunteered with other participants over a period of time and have shown an interest.

5.6 Volunteer roles supporting therapy services

Volunteers are generally not engaged in supporting the delivery of professional services such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy, counselling.

However, this is an area where students on placement can provide support as part of their practical experience for their studies. Although unpaid, students on placement are not volunteers. They will be supervised by the therapists and may take on some of the tasks of the professional worker.

In therapy group settings, however, a volunteer may provide an extra pair of hands with activities:

“Until recently we didn’t use volunteers in our therapy services. They were professional therapy services. However, now we have openings in our school holiday programs in therapy groups where the therapists could use a person who is studying in that field.”

5.7 Volunteers in organisational support roles

The survey results showed that volunteers are used to support the organisation in other ways. 75% used volunteers in practical support roles, such as administration, fundraising and maintenance. (See Appendix 3 Table 11)

The NDIS appears to have had the most impact on the administrative functions, particularly where volunteers are delivering (and not just supporting) services, in relation to:

- setting goals with participants,
- recording participation and reporting progress towards goals, or
- calculating charges and invoicing for services.

Even though some service providers may not consider this to be a change in the volunteer role, changes to the format of the reports and pricing plans have increased the expectation on volunteers, and in some cases caused volunteers to leave.

One organisation reported that NDIS reporting increased the expectations of volunteer coaches because they now had to assess the participants, discuss their goals, plan the activity and write up notes and reports. Previously, they just had to get ready, go out and coach the session.

Administrative volunteers (some skilled, some unskilled) have found the pricing schedules very challenging and a significant increase on their workload. Some have embraced the learning opportunity while others have left as they did not enjoy or could not cope with the workload.

5.8 Comment

According to the statistics available from the VIKTOR online volunteer recruitment platform, as at September 2019, **volunteer positions advertised in the disability services sector made up for 7.34% of all positions advertised.** However, expressions of interest in these positions only accounted for **4.42% of all expressions of interest.**

Gathering information from current and potential volunteers may help to explain why there is relatively low interest in the positions compared to other service areas.

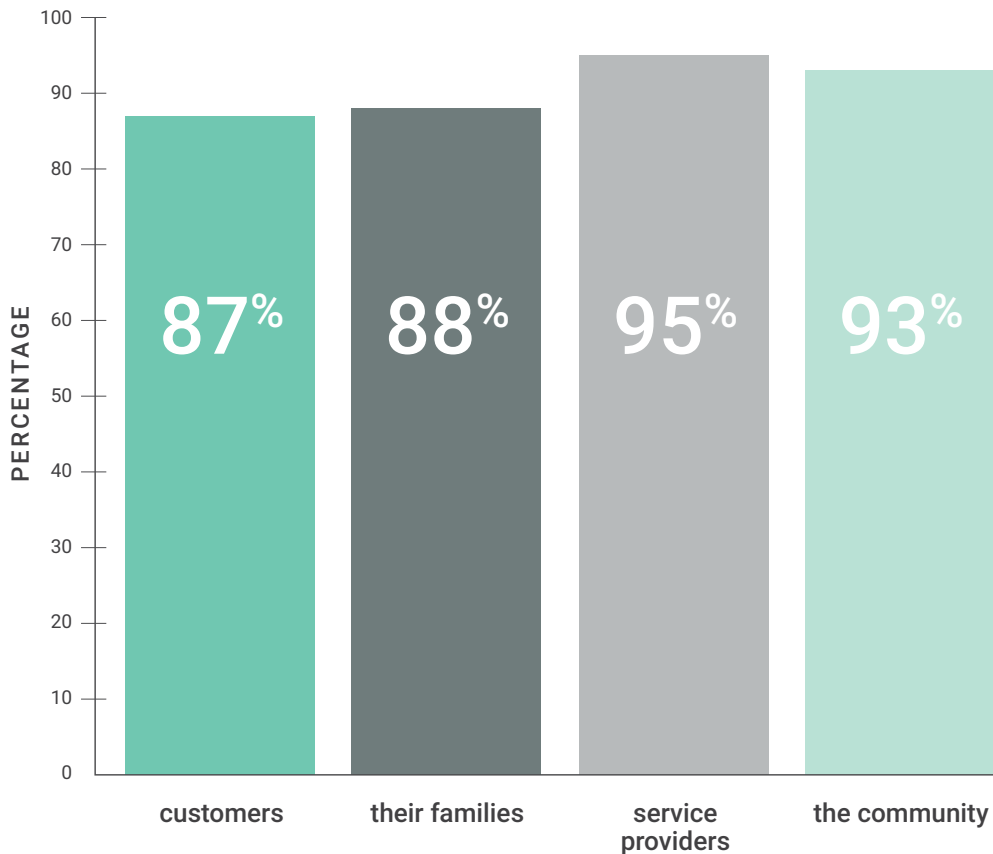
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BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEER SUPPORTED SERVICES

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6.1 Volunteers enhance outcomes

The survey showed widespread belief that volunteers provide added value for:



(See Appendix 3 Table 12)

Some of the many ways in which volunteers add value for the people involved as well as the organisation and the community are highlighted below.

6.2 Benefits for the customer

The gift of time is perhaps one of the biggest benefits of involving volunteers:

“I think our members and our clients value the people who volunteer, they can give them the time. I think one of the things they bring is time.”

Volunteers also bring a range of skills and interests, and can share these with the customers in a way that staff either do not have time for, or do not have any skill or interest in:

“It’s about matching the skills of the volunteer. Then they are not just chaperones, but using their skills to enhance the skills of the client.”

Volunteers don’t wear a “professional hat” which promotes a sense of equality in the relationship.

“For a lot of our clients, the volunteer from here is the only unpaid carer type person in their lives.”

Some volunteers form long last friendships with the clients and their families:

“They form lifelong friendships with some of the volunteers, and there are quite a few instances where they become part of the extended family, which is part of the joy of it all.

6.3 Benefits for the community

Volunteers share their experience and this helps to change community perceptions about people with disabilities:

“There is still a stigma and the more volunteers we have to get the message out there that people with disability are just like you and I would be great”

Volunteering connects people in the community and makes people feel valued:

“Volunteers get a lot out of what we do too, so a lot of seniors who might otherwise sit at home doing nothing get to come out and feel valued and share their stories with the younger generation and be part of all that.”

The community will learn from engaging with people with disabilities:

“The community will benefit a lot more because our clients will be out in the community a lot more, so they will be interacting with the community, they will be going to the shops, and doing those things in the neighbourhood, that they may not be able to do now.”



6.4 Benefits for the service provider

Service providers will be able to provide a wider variety of activities for their customers drawing on the range of interests and abilities of volunteers:

“Hopefully we will find people with similar interests, for example, people who like fishing or music, or sports like cricket.”

Organisations will be able to provide services they could not afford to provide with paid staff:

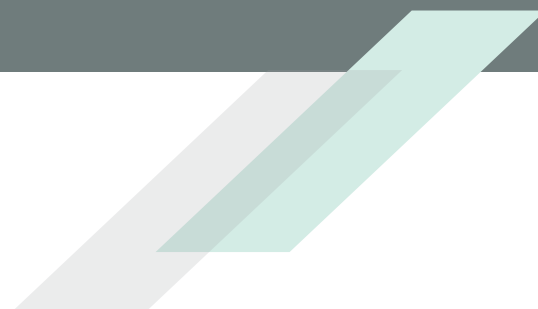
“We couldn’t offer the service we do if we didn’t have volunteers, if we only had paid staff.”

Volunteers change the culture of the organisation:

“There’s a difference when you have a group of volunteers who have gone through a certain process together, than when you bring groups of workers together. I think [volunteers] are a significant cultural benefit.”

Volunteers may become donors or leave legacies to the organisation:

“Having that volunteer has ended up with us having some money coming into the organisation which is ring-fenced to go back to people with disabilities.”



6.5 Benefits for the staff

Volunteers are an extra pair of hands for staff, which benefits the customers too.

“[...] in group situations, like the cooking group, a volunteer would definitely be an extra pair of hands.... That’s a value to the customer and the staff.”

6.6 Comment

This is consistent with the findings of the research carried out by Interchange and Melbourne University in 2019², and in keeping with Volunteering Australia’s policy submission to the NDIS Costs Productivity Commission³ in 2017.

The benefits highlighted above reflect the multi-dimensional model of the value of volunteer work, shown below⁴:



² Value Added: Volunteer-Supported Services and the Challenge of the NDIS 2019 - <https://www.interchange.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Final-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf>

³ Volunteering Australia Response on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Costs Productivity Commission July 2017 - <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/July-2017-Response-to-Productivity-Commissions-inquiry-on-the-National-Disability-Insurance-Scheme-NDIS-Costs.pdf>

⁴ 'Reconceptualizing The Value Of Volunteer Work' Linda L. Graff 2009 <http://www.lindagraff.ca/>

07

THE IMPACT ON PAID STAFF IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR AND ANY ISSUES THAT EMERGE IN RELATION TO VOLUNTEERS

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7.1 Impact on paid staff and volunteers in the disability sector

There is a shortage of NDIS trained workers and an increase in people looking to gain experience and wanting to engage in training to work in the disability sector. Volunteering may be attractive for people wanting to work in the disability sector.

Paid staff are working to strict rosters and may not have the time to supervise volunteers. Volunteers may need to be more autonomous and independent.

Staff on Awards receive higher rates of pay at evenings and weekends. Organisations may consider different ways to provide services, including through volunteers, to their customer's to make their funding go further.

Customers may not have funds to cover all their needs. Organisations may consider using volunteers to provide extra services.

The changing landscape raises questions relating to volunteers replacing paid workers, charging for volunteer time and volunteer commitment.



7.2 Volunteers replacing paid staff

From the consideration of the types of volunteer roles in Section 5, it can be seen that organisations utilise volunteers in different capacities. If organisations want to maximise the value volunteers bring to a service, they may consider placing volunteers in more responsible roles, potentially requiring more training and involving tasks that paid staff would do.

What may be considered suitable for a volunteer at one organisation, may not be considered suitable at another.

Participants in this investigation agreed volunteers are in addition to staffing and should not replace a staff member. This is in keeping with the principles of volunteering⁵.

“I’m very clear that volunteers are the icing on the cake and not a substitute for the workforce.”

However, there is concern that other services providers may not be adhering to this:

“In the sector at the moment, I think there are a lot of volunteers used as staff members and not getting paid.”

If driven by cost saving objectives or not understanding volunteering principles, this could lead to exploitation of the volunteer’s good will.

⁵ Volunteering Australia Project: The Review of the Definition of Volunteering - <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Definition-of-Volunteering-27-July-20151.pdf>

7.3 Charging for volunteer time

Generally, service providers would only consider a charge for a volunteer delivered activity to recover costs, such as the cost of the vehicle for a transport service, or tickets to a football match, not for the volunteer's time:

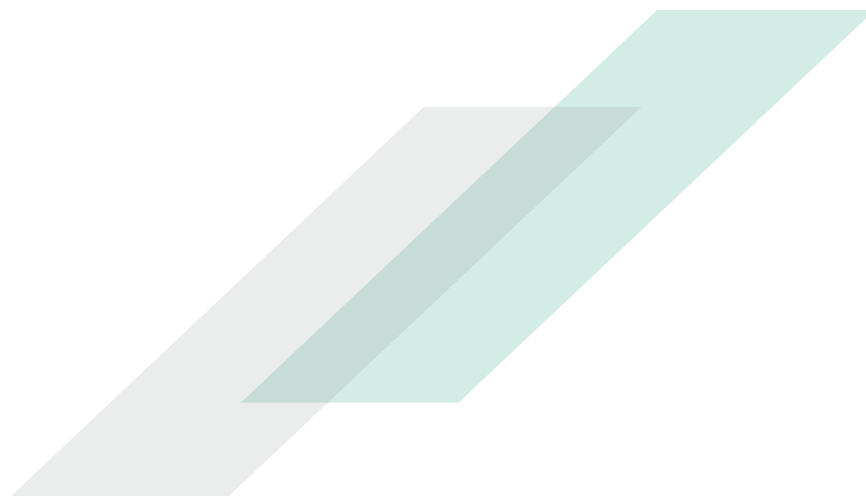
"I'd only ever match revenue with costs. If there was a cost I would charge for it, but if there wasn't a cost I wouldn't."

The situation is more complex for volunteer-delivered services where the service charge may reflect an hourly rate as per the NDIS pricing schedule. As one volunteer-reliant provider said:

"Under previous block funding our prices were quite low, because we were being subsidised. With the loss of that funding we had to put the price up to a more commercial rate to able to cover the cost of the [equipment] and expenses, so now we benchmark our price at whatever we are allowed to in the price guide under community participation."

There appears to be different interpretations as to what is acceptable:

"I have heard from different people that we can charge that [fee] per volunteer that we have."



7.4 Volunteer commitment

Unlike a paid employment, volunteers can walk away from a volunteer role without notice.

From the organisation's perspective, the longer a volunteer can stay in the role, the better their 'return' on the cost and time taken to induct and train the volunteer:

"You are providing the same input to a volunteer as an employee, or perhaps more, because the 'inculcation' takes a long time because they are so irregular."

From the customers' perspective, volunteers coming and going can be disruptive and upsetting:

"If we have somebody with an intellectual disability, they don't want change."

Organisations prefer volunteers to commit to the role whether it be for 6-12 months, 12 months or 2 years. Training may be an incentive:

"We are looking at providing all the training, subsidising the training that they will do, which will give them a qualification in order for them to commit to a certain number of [activities] a year, at least for the next 12 months."

7.5 Comment

What is a suitable role for a volunteer, and what constitutes replacing a paid staff member, has been subject of debate over many years in the volunteering world⁶. Volunteers who give their time freely may be uncomfortable if they learn their time is being charged. The issue of commitment is one of the key tests to assist in classifying employee – volunteer relationships. Volunteers may be encouraged to stay committed to a role⁷, but should not be penalised for leaving. These are potentially complex areas where a deeper understanding of the circumstances and exploration of the issues are required.

⁶ *When Should We NOT Involve Volunteers?* (2005) - <https://www.e-volunteerism.com/sites/default/files/05apr-e-Vol-keyboard.pdf>

Dispelling the myths around job substitution by volunteers (2011) - <https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2011/aug/18/volunteers-not-threat-to-workers>

Mind the Step: Replacing Employees with Volunteers (2014) - <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2014/06/mind-the-step-replacing-employees-with-volunteers>

⁷ *Creating a high-commitment volunteer culture*

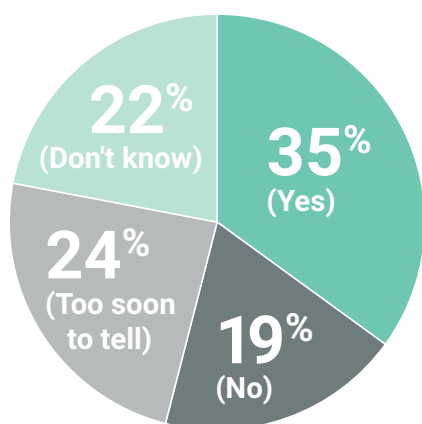
08

SUSTAINABILITY OF VOLUNTEER SUPPORTED SERVICES

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8.1 Not all are sustainable

The survey revealed some concern about the sustainability of volunteer supported services.



- A third (35%) think their volunteer supported services and programs are sustainable under the NDIS.
- A fifth (19%) do not think their volunteer supported services and programs are sustainable under the NDIS.
- Almost half are uncertain about the future, it's too soon to say (24%) or don't know (22%).

(See Appendix 3 Table 13)

There are a number of issues impacting on the outlook for volunteer supported and volunteer delivered services in the sector.

8.2 Business sustainability

The sustainability of the organisation overall is likely to impact on the viability of the volunteer function.

In general, the squeeze on funding from the NDIS affects all service providers and contraction in the sector appears likely.

“The NDIS will be too much for some organisations that are badly run. You can see it’s already happening.”

Services may fail due to poor quality:

“If the service isn’t up to scratch there is so much power now essentially in an individual, family or coordinator, that if it’s not a good enough service it will fail quickly. In community services word gets round quickly.”

Service providers that offer higher value services will be less exposed by lower margin or loss making services:

“We have two products high volume low value and low volume and high value.” This is more “stable” and provides “a good balance”.

“From a profit and loss point of view, the community [activities] where we do engage a reasonable number of volunteers, is definitely loss making so it’s subsidised by the other operations.”

Larger organisations may be more robust:

“We’ve been big enough to carry some of the additional costs that have come, bringing the NDIS into place”

The additional cost of training, independent auditing, and the NDIS cancellation policy adds further burden on the service providers.

One organisation provides outdoor activities that are subject to the weather and so in extreme weather the sessions will be cancelled in the interests of the participants.

Under the NDIS funding model it is not able to charge for cancelled services and so it makes a loss due to costs already incurred. This is a change from the former block funding model.

For a variety of reasons, the organisation is unsure if its programs will be sustainable at the same level as under the NDIS as under the previous block funding.

<http://www.volunteerpower.com/articles/HighCommitment.asp>

8.3 Sustaining the volunteer function

Implementing a volunteer program takes resources, time and knowledge and infrastructure. Only one of the participant organisations had a full time volunteer coordinator, two others had part-time volunteer coordinators, and the remainder did not have a dedicated volunteer coordinator.

The NDIS does not pay for the costs of the volunteer program (e.g. recruitment, administration, management and expenses) so, unless this changes, organisations need other ways of paying for the volunteer function if it is to be sustainable.

Some may be better placed than others. A number of the service providers received income from other sources, grants, donations, sponsorships, corporate partners, and fundraising activities in addition to the NDIS payments for their services. One had received a grant to fund a volunteer coordinator and was looking forward to establishing their volunteer program. Another funded their volunteer program through their fundraising activities.

On a more positive note, *“learning from other organisations what they do”* and *“tapping into Volunteering WA training and networking”* were considered factors to facilitate growth in volunteering.

09

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

1.

There is widespread recognition of the benefits that volunteers bring to the outcomes for customers, their families, the organisation and the community. This is consistent with other research.

2.

The nature of volunteer roles is varied. Supervised, unskilled roles in group settings most easily fit traditional volunteering expectations. However, there are also roles that are unsupervised and roles which may involve tasks that a paid worker could do and which may require additional training.

3.

In the early stage of the NDIS roll out in WA, there has been little impact on the number of volunteers engaged in the sector. There is potential for volunteer growth in the future.

4.

Future growth in volunteer numbers will be affected by several factors, such as how volunteers can be used, risk management concerns, training requirements, and resources for the volunteer program. Service providers are responding to these issues in different ways, some more quickly than others. Sharing of knowledge and experience between providers could facilitate growth.

5.

Motivations for involving volunteers, appear to be positively driven to support the organisation's purpose and values, and to respond to market needs and the customer's needs. Financial considerations play a part.

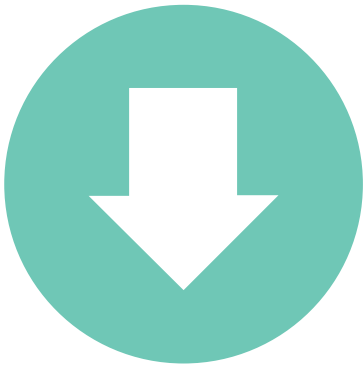
6.

There is anecdotal evidence that, within the sector, some providers may be driven solely by the cost savings achieved using volunteers and even substituting volunteers for paid workers. This would be a concern. The extent to which this is happening requires substantiation.

7.

Concerns regarding risk increase with the possibility of involving volunteers in a wider range of roles, that carry more responsibility, may require additional training, may be unsupervised. A greater understanding of perceptions of and attitudes to risk, assessment of risk, and steps for managing risk across different organisations may benefit the sector.





8.

The sector is aware of the need for inducting and training volunteers, and ensuring that volunteers understand and follow the NDIS Code of Conduct. This may be an extra burden for some providers. Organisations are reviewing their training provision, and looking at ways to make this more accessible, flexible and cost effective e.g. using online training. However, the time it takes and the cost of inducting and training volunteers, has to be balanced against the likelihood of the volunteers staying in the role. The provision of training may encourage volunteer commitment.

9.

Involving volunteers in wider range of roles can raise questions regarding volunteer management practice, particularly around how this may affect the relationship between the organisation and volunteers and staff. Answering such questions requires knowledge of and ability to apply the definition and principles of volunteering, volunteer management good practice, an understanding of legal issues as well as knowledge of the disability sector and the needs of clients and the organisation.

10.

There are concerns about the sustainability of volunteer involvement in NDIS service delivery and the financial capacity to invest in the volunteer program and management, as the NDIS does not cover this. Organisations that have diverse income streams and services may be more stable

10

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

Given the magnitude of the challenge and the criticality of supporting high quality services to NDIS customers, VWA recommends the following:

1.

Support networks, communities of practice, or special interest groups be established to foster development, collaboration and support across the disability volunteer sector.

2.

Further work be done to clarify issues such as suitability of roles for volunteers, training requirements and provision, risk assessment and management.

3.

Funding and other creative solutions be sought to build volunteer management expertise and skilled volunteer managers across the sector.

4.

Further research be considered into the experiences, needs, perceptions of volunteers, paid staff and people with disabilities.

11

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11 Appendix 1: The sector in the context of the NDIS

Changing customer service and funding model

WA is newer to the NDIS than eastern states, with full implementation scheduled for completion by 1 July 2020.

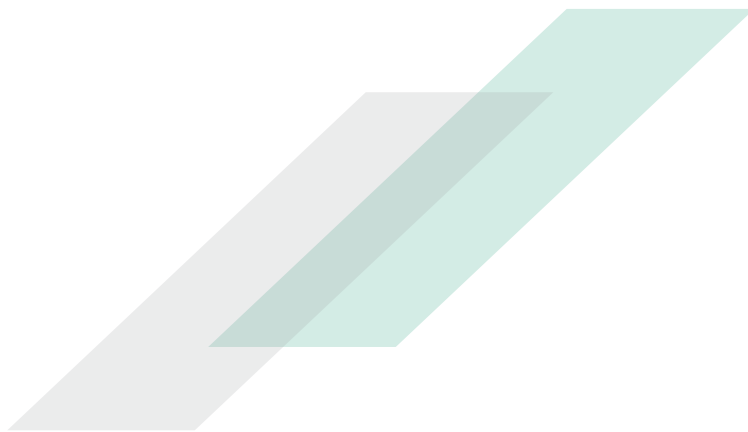
At the time of writing, many customers and service providers are transitioning to the new funding arrangements. People over the age of 65 are not eligible for the NDIS.

Historically, government block funding was provided directly to service providers to allocate according to their organisation's needs and priorities.

The NDIS gives funds to the customer, to spend on services that meet their needs and goals. This is in keeping with the NDIS philosophy of providing choice and control to the individual.

The NDIS has given many more people with disabilities funding to access support services than was achieved under block funding. This has created a significant increase in demand for services. In some service areas, supply is not currently meeting the demand.

It is not a requirement to be registered with NDIS to be able to offer services to NDIS funded customers.



Differences between registered and non-registered service providers:

Registered

Registered service providers may not charge over the NDIS charging rates. To be registered, specific safeguards and accountability measures have to be in place. The provider must have appropriate insurances, policies, training and undertake screening for support workers (i.e. national and state police clearances, working with children checks). Most registered service providers provide plan management services together with client services. Agency managed customers are only able to use registered service providers.

Non-Registered

Not registering reduces costs and complexity and allows more flexibility in charging over the NDIS set price (subject to evidence that the outcomes from the supports are greater than those of less cost). This may be attractive to small and niche service providers.

Non-registered service providers invoice the customer or their plan manager for services, rather than to the NDIS directly. Customers who use non-registered providers have either an independent plan manager or a self-managed plan.

All service providers need to record the services provided, and monitor and report on an individual's progress towards pre-determined goals.

The change in approach to customer focussed services and funding arrangements, together with additional accountability requirements, has increased administrative costs for all service providers.

Changing regulatory expectations

The NDIS places high importance on quality standards and safeguarding.

The first progress report of the Disability Royal Commission was released in December 2019. It highlighted incidents of abuse and neglect of people with disabilities and failures in standards and quality of service providers and workers.

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission will commence regulatory functions and operation in WA from 1 July 2020. From this date, service providers will be required to pay for an independent audit to check their services and procedures meet the standards required. All paid and unpaid workers, including volunteers, will need to observe the NDIS Code of Conduct introduced in March 2019 and meet minimum training and performance requirements.

The NDIS Code of Conduct applies to all NDIS providers, registered and unregistered, and all persons employed or otherwise engaged by an NDIS provider. In providing supports or services to people with disability, a person covered by the Code must:

- Act with respect for individual rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making in accordance with applicable laws and conventions.
- Respect the privacy of people with disability.
- Provide supports and services in a safe and competent manner, with care and skill.
- Act with integrity, honesty and transparency.
- Promptly take steps to raise and act on concerns about matters that may impact the quality and safety of supports and services provided to people with disability.
- Take all reasonable steps to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against, and exploitation, neglect and abuse of, people with disability.
- Take all reasonable steps to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct.

The Disability Royal Commission is ongoing, with a final report to the Australian Government due in April 2022. It will recommend changes to laws, policies, structures and practices to support a more just and inclusive society.

12 Appendix 2: NDIS information sources

Guides

NDIS Code of Conduct

<https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/document/791>

Plan Management Options in the NDIS

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/creating-your-plan/ways-manage-your-funding>

NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework

<https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/programs-services/for-people-with-disability/ndis-quality-and-safeguarding-framework>

Research reports

Value Added: Volunteer-Supported Services and the Challenge of the NDIS 2019 Executive Summary

<https://www.interchange.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Final-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf>

How Is The Disability Sector Faring? A report from National Disability Services' Annual Market Survey February 2019

https://www.csi.edu.au/media/How_is_the_disability_sector_faring_FINAL12.3.pdf

Policy submission

Volunteering Australia Response on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Costs Productivity Commission July 2017

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/July-2017-Response-to-Productivity-Commissions-inquiry-on-the-National-Disability-Insurance-Scheme-NDIS-Costs.pdf>

Websites

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/>

<https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/wa>

13 Appendix 3: Online survey responses

Table 1

Q. Is your organisation

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Not-for-profit	83%	35
Other	17%	7
	Answered	42

Table 2

Q. In terms of your funding, which tier applies to your organisation?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Less than \$1 Million	52%	22
\$1 - 5 Million	24%	10
\$5 - 10 Million	17%	7
Over \$10 Million	7%	3
	Answered	42

Table 3

Q. Roughly what proportion of your service recipients are NDIS funded?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
0	14%	6
1 to 25	31%	13
26 to 50	24%	10
51-75	17%	7
76-100	14%	6
	Answered	42

Table 4

Q. Is your organisation registered as an NDIS service provider?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Registered	57%	24
Intending to register	10%	4
Not intending to register	33%	14
	Answered	42

Table 5

Q. Does your organisation currently provide volunteer-supported services or programs for people with disabilities?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Yes	71%	30
No	19%	8
Don't know	10%	4
	Answered	42

Table 6

Q. Have you seen a change in the number of volunteers involved since the NDIS was introduced?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
It has increased	10%	4
It has decreased	7%	3
No change	49%	20
Too soon to say	15%	6
Don't know	12%	5
	Answered	38
	Skipped	4

Table 7

Q. Do you expect this number to change in the next 2 years?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Expect it to increase	43%	18
Expect it to decrease	5%	2
No change expected	21%	9
Too soon to say	14%	6
Don't know	17%	7
	Answered	42

Table 8

Q. Have you seen a change in the number of volunteers involved since the NDIS was introduced?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Yes	10%	4
No	55%	22
Too soon to say	15%	6
Don't know	15%	6
	Answered	38
	Skipped	4

Table 9

Q. To the best of your knowledge, are the types of volunteer roles likely to change over the next two years?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Yes	24%	10
No	37%	15
Too soon to say	29%	12
Don't know	10%	4
	Answered	41
	Skipped	1

Table 10

Q. Do you have volunteers in the following individual support roles? (tick all that apply)

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Activity support e.g. outings, social events, or camps	53%	20
Social support e.g. friendship, companionship	47%	18
Skills development support e.g. life, recreation, employment	39%	15
Other	26%	10
Practical support e.g. meal delivery, driving	24%	9
Out of home support	11%	4
	Answered	38
	Skipped	4

Table 11

Q. Do you have any volunteers in the following organisational support roles? (tick all that apply)

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Practical support e.g. administration, fundraising, maintenance	74%	26
Skills based support e.g. IT, legal, finance	43%	15
Governance e.g. Board Director	46%	16
Other	20%	7
	Answered	35
	Skipped	7

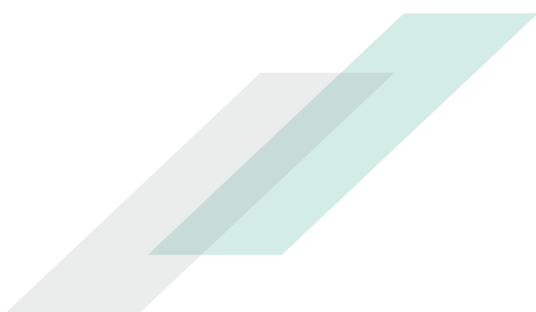


Table 12

Q. Do you believe that involving volunteers to support service delivery enhances the outcomes for service recipients, their families, the community, your organisation?

	<u>Yes</u>		<u>No</u>		<u>All</u>
For service recipients	88%	35	13%	5	40
For their families	87%	34	13%	5	39
For the community	93%	38	7%	3	41
For your organisation	95%	39	5%	2	41
	Answered				41
	Skipped				1

Table 13

Q. Do you think your volunteer-supported services and programs are sustainable under the NDIS?

<u>Answer Choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Yes	35%	13
No	19%	7
Too soon to say	24%	9
Don't know	22%	8
	Answered	37
	Skipped	5



14 Appendix 4: Questions

For preliminary telephone discussions

- ? How do you interact with the NDIS team when it comes to volunteers?
- ? You indicated your organisation used to use volunteers to support services for people with disabilities but don't currently. Can you say what happened?
- ? You indicated that your organisation could use volunteers in the future and expect number to increase and roles to change? Can you say more about this?
- ? What kind of issues are you encountering with recruitment, retention and utilisation of volunteers?
- ? What kind of benefits do you believe volunteers bring that staff don't?
- ? Are there any grey areas for you in relation to what is possible or what is funded in relation to volunteers and NDIS services/clients?
- ? Have you come across clients wanting to volunteer themselves, with a support person possibly?
- ? We will be holding a workshop to discuss findings/ issues, what kind of questions would you like to be discussed?

For face to face interviews

Background

- ? Who are your customers and how many/what proportion are NDIS funded?
- ? What services do you provide for NDIS customers?
- ? Were you using volunteers to support services for your customers prior to NDIS?

NDIS impact

- ? Has the NDIS affected the way you involve volunteers now to support any services for NDIS customers? (for example the kinds of roles they take on, the skills they need) What has caused this change?
- ? Or, if you did not use volunteers before, and are considering it now, what has led you to this?
- ? Or, why have you not used volunteers before?
- ? Do you have a plan for or ideas about how this could change in the next 2-5 years? What will drive, limit or facilitate the change? (for example affordability, service sustainability or quality, customer demand, management capacity)
- ? How important is it to your organisation to involve volunteers in supporting services for your NDIS customers? What benefits or value do volunteers bring?
- ? Has the NDIS affected your workforce (staff, students and volunteers) in any other way?
- ? From strategic or operational perspective are there any issues or grey areas relating to involving volunteers to support services for NDIS customers that concern you?
- ? Are you aware of any other ways that the NDIS is impacting on volunteering that are relevant to the sector?



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