

# Volunteer Community Reference Group

28 February 2022

## Communique #6

The Volunteer Community Reference Group (VCRG) is established by under the direction of the Minister for Volunteering, Hon Stephen Dawson MLC with Volunteering WA providing secretariat support. The most recent quarterly meeting was held on 28 February 2022.

In attendance were:

Representing	Name
Hon Minister for Volunteering	Hon Stephen Dawson MLC Oliver Pincott, DPC
NFP volunteering sector	Craig Spencer, St. John Ambulance, (Chair) Maija Hildebrand, Vinnies WA Dan Minchin, CEO Chorus
Corporate volunteering sector	Gemma Rapson, Woodside
Volunteer Resource Centres	Elizabeth Aason, Swan VRC Vicki Pollard, Peel VRC
Researchers	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Individual volunteer (consumer)	Esme Bowen
Volunteering WA	Tina Williams, CEO Meredith Blais, Senior Policy Advisor Alana Cox, Executive Assistant
Department of Communities	Sue Fielding Claire Harding (observer) Phillipa Wenn (observer)
Local Government	Kelly McManus, WALGA

The Chair welcomed Hon. Stephen Dawson MLC, Minister for Volunteering and all members of the Group.

As the new Minister for the portfolio, Minister Dawson thanked the VCRG for their contribution to volunteering in WA. He noted that volunteers are very important to the State and that he is enjoying the opportunity to meet with and thank volunteers in the community. Minister Dawson noted that it is a challenging time for volunteering, noting also that COVID-19 has added complexity in terms of the decline in volunteers, impacts of vaccination mandates etc.

Minister looks forward to working with VCRG and assisting volunteers to get back out into the community.

Other topics discussed:

### 1. Volunteer screening in WA

The Minister noted advocacy to “Reduce the Burden” of volunteer screening in WA. He believes that the current fee for volunteers helps to ensure commitment to the process. There may be opportunities during the review of the NDIS legislation in 2025 to review fees and processes, and other opportunities to streamline Working with Children checks as part of a national review of

these processes across Australia. The Group reiterated the importance of changes in this area to the sector.

## **2. Experience of Corporate Volunteering**

The VCRG heard from Gemma Rapson, who is a member of the Corporate Volunteer Council and works for Woodside, which has a large, active corporate volunteering program.

Gemma provided an overview of the Corporate Volunteering Council which meets quarterly with members from Woodside, Rio Tinto, Deloitte, RAC, BankWest and Beyond Bank. There are a range of programs and approaches adopted in corporate volunteering including team based, skills based, pro bono, impact days and large scale environmental programs.

Western Australia is known as being a leader in this field nationally, although a number of programs are currently being paused, as part of their COVID-19 response. There is an enormous opportunity to grow corporate volunteering, including through virtual skills-based programs.

Employees who participate in corporate volunteering report higher levels of well-being, empathy and awareness of social issues.

The VCRG thanked Gemma for the overview and her significant contribution to the sector, over an extended period.

## **3. Current state of volunteering in Western Australia**

A presentation on the latest statistics and demographics for volunteering in Western Australia was provided to overview of the current state of the sector.

It highlighted areas of concern including the significant decline of formal volunteers over the last six years, the decline in the number of organisations volunteered for and the hours willingly given. There were some positive trends also noted such as the inclusivity of volunteering, the rate of participation in informal and virtual volunteering and increased motivation to use skills in volunteering roles.

## **4. National approach to seeking more volunteers in Aged Care**

The Commonwealth Department of Health is engaging all State / Territory peak volunteering bodies across Australia to recruit more volunteers for social companionship in Residential Aged Care Facilities.

Impacts of COVID-19 on paid employees and volunteer numbers has meant that residents have found themselves increasingly isolated. More announcements regarding the program will be made publicly soon.

## **5. Work and Development Permit Scheme**

The Work and Development Permit Scheme in WA is administered by the Department of Justice and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal Legal Service WA and Legal Aid WA.

The scheme provides alternative pathways to expunge specified court fines for people experiencing difficulty paying due to hardship. One mode is through the provision of services to Volunteer Involving Organisations, who can register to be a sponsor. The uptake in WA has been very positive to date.

**6. Development of Emergency Volunteering IT platform**

The WA State Government has funded an upgrade to Volunteering WA's Emergency Volunteering platform. The upgrade will automate the process of volunteer registration and Volunteer Involving Organisations matching for spontaneous volunteers in emergency response and recovery. The existing site is still operational and new functionality is expected to be in place by September 2022.

**7. Feedback from State Volunteering Conference 2021 – Spontaneous and Informal Volunteering**

A summary of feedback from the State Volunteering Conference on Spontaneous and Informal Volunteering was discussed.

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

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