

Volunteer Community Reference Group

3 August 2020

Communique #1

The Volunteer Community Reference Group is established under the direction of the Minister for Volunteering, Hon Mick Murray MLA with Volunteering WA providing secretariat support. It meets quarterly with the latest meeting held on 3 August 2020.

In attendance were:

Representing	Name
Hon Minister for Volunteering	Matt Kavanagh
Not for profit / volunteering sector	Craig Spencer, (Chair) Maija Hildebrand, Red Cross
Volunteering WA	Tina Williams, CEO Meredith Blais Annie Withrow (Executive Officer)
Volunteer Resource Centres	Elizabeth Acaon, Swan VRC
Corporate Sector	Gemma Rapson, Woodside
Researchers	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Individual volunteer (consumer)	Esme Bowen
State Government Agency	Sue Fielding, Department of Communities
Local Government	Mark Batty, WALGA

The primary issue discussed was the impact of COVID-19 on volunteers and volunteering. It was acknowledged that volunteer organisations have been impacted with an estimated 64.2%¹ of Western Australian volunteers stood down during this time. Younger, female and older volunteers were disproportionately impacted.

Ongoing impacts were noted in sport and recreation, regional and service organisations, emergency services, particularly in the loss of capacity and longer term knowledge from older volunteers. This impacts volunteer programs and also risks the loss of social connection and contribution for the volunteers. Volunteer coordinators and managers are also fatigued in returning volunteer programs and ensuring that essential volunteer programs, such as patient transfer, are sustained.

Work undertaken by State and local governments, the private and not for profit sectors to begin to address this issue was welcomed.

Volunteering WA has released a document for Volunteer Organisations on 'Responding to a Pandemic in WA Guide'². It was felt that this would be very helpful to a number of organisations, including in the sporting sector and local government authorities. Actions are underway to share this resource more broadly.

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https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2020/6/The_experience_of_volunteers_during_the_early_stages_of_the_COVID-19_pandemic_0.pdf (page 5)

² <https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/factsheets/responding-to-a-pandemic-in-wa-guide.pdf>

The pandemic has, once again, highlighted the economic, social and cultural value of volunteering.

The group discussed a paper that outlined steps for the recovery of the volunteer sector. This aligns with the WA Recovery Plan released by the State Government with an objective to “regroup our community at a personal, family and social level so people feel healthy and have the confidence to lead active lives”. Volunteering is a critical enabler to regrouping our community.

It was agreed that volunteering is a key preventative measure to support mental health and well-being and essential to the social recovery of all aspects of our Western Australian community.

Key discussion points on how to get the sector back on its feet were:

- **State-wide public awareness campaign** to recruit new volunteers and establish the identity of volunteers (e.g. vital, caring, vibrant, innovative, diverse)
- A new program focusing on **Youth Volunteering as a Pathway to Job Readiness**
- **Development of resources**, endorsed by the State Government, to provide confidence for organisations returning volunteer programs
- **Support for volunteer involving organisations** as they remobilise volunteers and programs
- **Free / portable police checks** for volunteers during the COVID recovery.

The State Government has released the WA Recovery Plan to help our State to bounce back from the impacts of COVID-19. While no specific initiatives or funding for the Volunteering portfolio have been announced to date, the group was keen to continue to engage with the Minister for Volunteering on these matters for consideration in future stages of recovery.

The Department of Communities also tabled an update on the State Volunteering Strategy and agreed to discuss implementation priorities at the next meeting to be held on 16 November 2020.

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