

# Volunteer Community Reference Group

3 May 2022

## Communique #7

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. This communique refers to the meeting held on 3 May 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
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	Mark Burgess (guest) Claire Harding (for Sue Fielding)

The Chair acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which we met, the Wadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and paid his 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 forthcoming activities as part of National Volunteering Week, including Volunteering WA's Grants Program which distributed 178 grants for voluntary organisations supported by Lotterywest, online Volunteer Service Awards this year and volunteer videos to be released during the week by the Department of Communities.

Other topics discussed:

### 1. Experience of Emergency Volunteering

The VCRG heard from Craig Spencer on his experiences from decades of emergency volunteering. Craig's earliest involvement was with the SES in NSW from the age of 18 years, with more recent roles including as a member of the Bindoon Bushfire Brigade and executive management roles in Royal Flying Doctor Service and currently in St John's Ambulance (Wheatbelt Region), which engages over 900 volunteers.

Initial motivations included getting involved with his community in a fun way, encouraged by his mother, and having an opportunity to use specialised equipment. Major events attended have included the Newcastle earthquake, Thredbo landslides, numerous land searches and bushfires. Craig noted that most emergency services in WA are delivered by volunteers and commended

the WA State Government Department of Fire and Emergency Services for their genuine care and support for, and appreciation of, volunteers in their service.

Looking forward he sees significant challenges in WA, including the ageing of the volunteer workforce (53 years average age for firefighters), the psycho-social trauma experienced by volunteers in their roles and the inadequate provision of paid leave for volunteering responsibilities (5 days pa on average). Of particular concern is the brittle nature of the emergency volunteering workforce, particularly noticeable the greater the distance from Perth.

One member of the VCRG expressed personal thanks for the role of an emergency volunteer in rescuing them from a serious car accident, ultimately averting long-term disability.

It was noted that there is an expectation for emergencies and disasters to increase in severity and duration, in part due to climate change, which increases the personal safety risk of responding volunteers.

A paper outlining some of the significant touchpoints and contributions of Volunteering WA to emergency response, particularly the coordination of spontaneous volunteers in emergencies was also discussed. Opportunities to learn from the different experiences of the Swan and Peel Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) in responding to emergencies were discussed.

Volunteering WA is working with the Department of Communities to clarify arrangements for their activation, which have been impacted by the unique nature and duration of COVID-19 welfare response.

The Minister thanked Craig, Volunteering WA and the VRCs for their contributions to the sector.

## **2. WA Volunteering Action Plan**

The Department of Communities is developing a whole-of-government action plan, to capture volunteering activities being undertaken more broadly across WA State Government departments.

There has been substantial input from dozens of State Government agencies, highlighting the role and contribution of volunteering to delivering their services. The draft document is expected to be provided to the Minister for Volunteering in late May / early June 2022, for publication.

The members of the VCRG congratulated the Department on this initiative, designed to report progress on the WA Volunteering Strategy.

## **3. Youth Volunteering program**

Volunteering WA outlined progress on the Youth Volunteering program, supported by a grant from the Department of Communities. The program aims to leverage volunteering for people aged 15-24 years as a pathway to employment and building meaningful social connections.

The [Y-Volunteer](#) website provides on line resources and has recorded these activity levels:

- 5,421 website views
- Over 700 users
- 217 training modules undertaken
- 27 young people completing all four training modules.

There is additional face to face program support in the Perth, Peel and South West regions, noting that the Peel VRC are seeking to involve youth who may otherwise be disengaged. Encouraging voluntary organisations to design roles for young people is a focus. The opportunity to better promote how volunteer insurance coverage can be accessed for youth was discussed and will be actioned.

The program runs until September 2023. Volunteering WA CEO highlighted the importance of the program and its continuation. The Minister noted that there may be opportunities to extend the program, subject to achievement of objectives.

#### **4. ABS volunteering data**

The ABS is currently reviewing the collection of data for the General Social Survey, which includes the collection of significant data on volunteering. Reducing the data has detrimental implications for the sector.

Volunteering WA is advocating for further engagement with the sector and a continuance of the changes introduced in this area by the ABS since 2019. The ABS has provided a contact to continue these discussions.

#### **5. National Volunteering Strategy**

The first National Volunteering Strategy in over 10-years is currently in development under the leadership of Volunteering Australia. Recent on-line workshops have been hosted in WA and there will shortly be large scale volunteer and voluntary organisations surveys undertaken.

Volunteering WA is seeking to host a CEO forum on the Strategy in mid-2022. Everyone is encouraged to get involved where they can, through opportunities promoted [here](#).

#### **6. National Volunteering Week 2022**

This celebration of volunteering will be held from 16 – 22 May 2022 with the theme of “Better Together”. While many activities will be held on line this year due to COVID-19, there will be a range of activities to engage and celebrate volunteering in WA.

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