

Volunteer Community Reference Group

30 November 2021

Communique #5

The Volunteer Community Reference Group (VCRG) is established by under the direction of the Minister for Volunteering, Hon Reece Whitby MLA with Volunteering WA providing secretariat support. The group meets quarterly and met most recently on 30 November 2021.

In attendance were:

Representing	Name
Hon Minister for Volunteering	Hon Reece Whitby MLA Natalie Capolingua, Executive Officer
Not for profit / volunteering sector	Craig Spencer, St. John Ambulance, (Chair) Maija Hildebrand, Vinnies WA Dan Minchin, CEO Chorus
Volunteering WA	Tina Williams, CEO Meredith Blais, Senior Policy Advisor Alana Cox, Executive Assistant
Volunteer Resource Centres	Elizabeth Aason, Swan VRC Vicki Pollard, Peel VRC
Researchers	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Individual volunteer (consumer)	Esme Bowen
Department of Communities	Mike Rowe, Director General Chad Stewart Sue Fielding
Local Government	Kelly McManus, WALGA

Absent: Gemma Rapson - Woodside

The Chair welcomed Hon. Reece Whitby MLA, Minister for Volunteering and Mike Rowe, Director General of the Department of Communities.

The Minister noted the success of the recent WA State Volunteering Conference and also the pending Thank-A-Volunteer-Day events across the State, funded from grants from the Department of Communities. The Minister and the Director General will attend the International Volunteer Day Garden Party to be held at Government House on Thursday 2 December, hosted by Volunteering WA.

Topics discussed:

1. Experience of Community Volunteer

The VCRG heard from the community volunteer representative, Ms Esme Bowen.

Esme recounted her formative experience in volunteering, highlighting familial expectations of service. Coupled with siblings participating at an elite sporting level, this provided her with positive experiences of volunteering in her youth. Trained as a nurse, and later specialising in spinal injuries, Esme was involved in a severe car crash which left her as a patient in the Spinal Unit. Esme was challenged to volunteer as part of her recovery which led to a range of

volunteering roles including in a variety of disabled sports (including the Paralympics), road safety and disability, as well as numerous speaking engagements to promote causes. Some of Esme's volunteer roles included Chair of Wheelchair Sports WA and Chair of Disability Sports Australia. She is now a current Director of Paraplegic Benefit Fund and proud Board member of Volunteering Australia. Her wide range of volunteering roles also led to Esme being a Council member and past President of the RAC of WA.

Experiences with Boards of NFP volunteer organisations highlight the significant governance and insurance challenges faced and the imperative to lead from the front. Esme highlighted the benefits and significant travel that volunteering has brought to her life. Volunteering has provided meaning and purpose, networks, personal growth, achievement, a pathway to employment and, most importantly, the joy of building healthy and happy communities.

The VCRG thanked Esme for her service and sharing her journey, as a reminder of the importance of volunteering and the characteristics that support positive volunteering experiences.

2. Discussion on the volunteer workforce in WA

VCRG members shared their experiences in the introduction of the WA State Government Mandatory Vaccination Policy the *Work Health and Safety Act 2020* (WHS legislation).

The introduction of the Mandatory Vaccination Policy is well progressed in some sectors such as Aged Care and Primary Health. The first requirements for Community Care Services volunteers were due to follow from 1 December 2021 with others including Fire and Emergency Services and Education volunteers from 1 January 2022. The importance of vaccinations to protect volunteers, the beneficiaries of their services and the community was highlighted. There was however expected to be some attrition of volunteers as a result of these requirements; in some cases estimated to be as high as 20%. Story telling was promoted as a supportive activity that could be undertaken to assist with implementation.

There were some queries regarding the application of the legislation, particularly in the Community Care Services sector. VCRG discussed the possibility of Volunteering WA co-hosting a webinar with a representative from the office of the Chief Health Officer to answer any queries from the sector and to promote compliance.

The introduction of the WHS legislation, currently expected to be enacted in January 2022, was also discussed. The impacts on local government and associated Emergency Services volunteers was noted. WALGA highlighted that they were working closely with Department of Fire and Emergency Services on the introduction.

There was some discussion on the differences, and the similarities, of the existing and new WHS legislation. The NFP sector requires further support in understanding changes to the legal framework as well as good practice in WHS management. It was noted that WorkSafe Western Australia presented at the WA State Volunteering Conference held earlier in the month and

released this [Guide](#) for volunteer organisations. These were felt to be a good start but more support is likely to be required, particularly for small and medium voluntary organisations.

The cumulative impact of these changes was noted. All members of the VCRG committed to continuing to support awareness and implementation of these requirements.

3. Volunteer screening in WA

Volunteering WA highlighted the support of peak community services organisations for the issue raised at the August VCRG meeting, to reduce the burden of volunteer screening in Western Australia. A summary of the issue and supporting organisations was included in the papers and is available [here](#).

The Minister for Volunteering noted that this issue impacts on three Ministerial portfolios and that further information was expected with regard to the relevant financial implications.

4. Developing a Rural Volunteering Roadmap

This research project has recently received funding from the Australian Research Council Linkage program. There are a number of partners nationally, including Curtin University, Volunteering WA and UWA.

An outline of the project was provided including opportunities for participation. The project will run from 2021 to 2025 with progressive deliverables including a spatial map of volunteering resilience and vulnerability in regional WA and policy recommendations to address any gaps. More information on this project is available [here](#).

5. Agenda items for future meetings

It was requested that the Department of Justice new program Work Permit Scheme be discussed at future meetings, as an example of an innovative way of linking vulnerable people with volunteering.

The Department of Communities also noted that the WA Seniors' Strategy is in development and suggested it may be appropriate to discuss the linkages with volunteering at a future meeting.

6. Membership of VCRG

Department of Communities tabled a request for an additional member of the VCRG for future meetings.

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