Building strong and healthy communities

2019 STATE ELECTION PRIORITIES
TO GROW VOLUNTEERING IN NSW
Strong and healthy communities are held together by the collective effort of volunteers – those people who give so much to so many without asking for anything in return.

We celebrate their effort and praise their contribution. But rates of volunteering in NSW are amongst the lowest in the country. Evidence suggests these rates of volunteering are declining. It’s a trend that the NSW Government and Parliamentary Members should be deeply concerned about.

The social, cultural and economic benefits of volunteering are well reported. The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards – the largest celebration of volunteer recognition in Australia – provides a window into the value of volunteering, and it’s only a small fraction of the volunteering effort made in so many communities in every corner of the state.

The Centre for Volunteering is urging the NSW Government and all Members of Parliament to do more together to support volunteering and our state’s volunteers.

Together we should aim to:
• Increase rates of volunteering in NSW
• Do more to recognise and promote volunteering and its benefits; and
• Elevate the status of the volunteering sector in NSW

Questions for political parties contesting the 2019 NSW Election

- What plans do you have to grow volunteering?
- Have you set measurable targets for your volunteering strategy?
- How will you assess and renew the existing 2016-2020 Volunteering Strategy for NSW?
- What funding do you propose to deliver your plans and provide greater assistance for volunteering?
- How will you support greater recognition of volunteers in NSW?
- Will you support the re-instatement of a Minister for Volunteering in NSW?

The Centre for Volunteering is calling on all candidates for the 2019 State Election to outline their support for the volunteering sector so that the NSW community is fully informed on commitments to volunteering in NSW.

Volunteering in NSW

Volunteers provide a bridge between service providers and those that need help. The volunteering sector defines this work as ‘Time willingly given, for the common good and without financial gain’.

The connection between strong and healthy communities and high rates of volunteering is well reported. Volunteers build connections for people from diverse backgrounds, fostering positive experience and links to services across our health, education and community sectors.

Volunteering is important for connecting people to career paths and labour markets and inspiring people to work together to solve problems and take action to improve community life.

Volunteering is also associated with greater mental and physical health and happiness. The experience of helping others provides meaning, a sense of self-worth and a social role.

Official figures state that more than 2.1 million people volunteer their time across NSW each year, contributing 240 million hours to local communities.

Rates for volunteering in NSW are reported to be highest in regional communities, highlighting a greater connection to community identity and participation, and demand for greater community support in regional and rural NSW.

NSW Government Volunteering Strategies

In 2012, the NSW Government developed its first strategy to grow volunteering across the State to ‘build new partnerships that will enhance, revitalise and strengthen volunteering’.

It was a step in the right direction and helped remove some barriers to volunteering and provided more support and training for volunteer managers.

A second four year Volunteering Strategy was developed in 2016 supported by a reported $2 million from the NSW Government to increase support for volunteer recognition, and for recruitment and awareness campaigns.

The Centre for Volunteering

The volunteering sector is supported in NSW by The Centre for Volunteering, providing volunteer recruitment and matching, professional development, resource development, and importantly, volunteer recognition and advocacy.

We work for and with volunteering organisations including the 30 regional volunteer resource centres and volunteer involving organisations to enhance volunteering, to benefit individual volunteers and to build strong, resilient connected communities through volunteering.

The Centre for Volunteering also runs the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards to recognise and celebrate the effort of our state’s volunteers. Last year, more than 112,000 volunteers were recognised at 20 regional award ceremonies across NSW.
The power of volunteering in regional NSW

The Wellington Beyond Barbed Wire Volunteer Mentors shine a bright light on the value of volunteering in regional communities.

The 12 volunteer team members mentor mothers who are in or are recently released from the Wellington Correctional Centre in Central NSW. They spend time with mothers to help strengthen their parenting skills, maintain strong bonds with their children and connect them with support services when they return to the community.

Often women in the criminal justice system have experienced trauma and disadvantage in their lives. They may not have had the same opportunities that other women in their community have had. The Beyond Barbed Wire volunteers are working to change this.

The program is run by Barnardos and has helped more than 100 women. It reports that the recidivism rate amongst those women in the program is 11%, compared with the general rate of 48%.

The experience of helping others provides meaning, a sense of self-worth and a social role... Volunteering is highly associated with greater health and happiness.

Volunteering Australia

The State of Volunteering in NSW

There is strong evidence to suggest that we are underestimating the number of people volunteering in NSW and under-valuing their effort and contribution. The 2016 Giving Australia Report found that 8.7 million volunteers give their time across the country to volunteering activities – or 31 percent of the population.5

Flinders University researcher Lisel O’Dwyer estimates the total annual economic and social contribution of volunteering to the nation at $290 billion. In Western Australia, research shows that investment in volunteering delivers a 450 percent return to the community7.

There is a lack of research on volunteering in NSW. However, the national and inter-state evidence suggests that:

• NSW’s volunteers are the single largest workforce in the state
• If volunteering was an industry it would be the biggest sector in NSW; and
• Investment in volunteering programs produces the largest return on investment across the NSW public sector.

Volunteer rates by state

Analysis of the 2014 Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey provides some insights into volunteering in NSW. It reports that rates of formal volunteering in NSW are amongst the lowest in the country. The analysis also uncovered declining rates of volunteering across the country including NSW. The first reduction in more than a decade.

To reverse this trend, we need to better understand the sector, better value its contribution and celebrate and promote its success.
We ask that the next NSW Government commit more support for volunteering by:

• Working to better understand the value and contribution of volunteering to the state and regional communities
• Developing plans with measurable targets and additional new funding to grow rates of volunteering in NSW
• Providing greater support for professional development and volunteer management
• Properly fund volunteer recognition via the NSW Volunteer of the Year Program – Australia’s largest event recognising and celebrating volunteering
• Developing, funding and measuring an awareness campaign to promote volunteering to coincide with the Volunteer of the Year Awards; and
• Reinstating a Minister for Volunteering in NSW – providing the recognition, resourcing and accountability for supporting the volunteering sector.

It’s time we worked collaboratively to reach these goals – with the government, community service providers, the volunteering sector and the business community joining hands.

More than 80 volunteers from the Heaven on Earth group provide cooked meals for the homeless three nights a week in Parramatta, Liverpool and Blacktown, as well as support for newly arrived refugees and people in correctional facilities.

The YAWN project is providing in home support for parents living in the Blue Mountains. The small community based group relies on the invaluable contribution of 19 volunteers who support young families with the difficult job of being a parent. The group has helped more than 130 families over the past seven years.

Every dollar invested in volunteering returns $4.50 in benefits to the community.
Priorities to grow Volunteering in NSW

1. Work to better understand the value and contribution of volunteering to the state and regional communities

   Fund an ongoing research program into volunteering in NSW. Drawing upon existing research in other jurisdictions and overseen by a Research Committee with representatives from the corporate, not for profit, volunteering and government sector.

2. Develop plans with measurable targets and new additional funding to increase rates of volunteering in NSW

   As a first priority review the 2016-2020 NSW Volunteering Strategy including a report on progress on each of the Priority Action Areas.

   Develop a new strategy based on insights, engagement and collaboration, with additional funding and measurable targets and regular reporting.

3. Provide greater support for volunteer recognition via the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards Program – Australia’s largest event recognising and celebrating volunteering

   The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards have been held for the past 12 years and have grown to become the largest celebration of volunteer recognition in the country. The success of the program means it has out grown its funding base.

   To grow volunteering rates and healthy connected communities, we need to celebrate the value our volunteers bring. We acknowledge the existing contribution of the NSW Government for the annual awards program. However, we ask that the NSW Government increase that annual support to $180,000 so that the regional and state awards ceremonies can be a true reflection of the contribution of volunteering, and provide appropriate recognition of volunteering across NSW.

4. Develop, fund and measure an awareness campaign coinciding with the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards to promote volunteering across the state

   The past two Volunteering Strategies for NSW highlight the need to develop marketing campaigns to help grow volunteering. However, their success is limited and not measured.

   There is a golden opportunity to leverage the success and reach of the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards by developing a marketing campaign promoting volunteering and access to volunteering services that coincides with the awards program.

   We ask that the NSW Government work collaboratively with the sector on this campaign and allocate $300,000 a year towards it, including measuring and assessing its success.

5. Elevate the status of the volunteering sector in NSW and reinstate a Minister for Volunteering in NSW

   If volunteering was an industry, it would be bigger than the mining sector. Yet, NSW does not have a designated Minister for Volunteering. Responsibility for volunteering at a government level was absorbed into the Communities portfolio more than eight years ago.

   The value and effort of our state’s volunteers deserves official representation and acknowledgement in Government.

   Western Australia and South Australia are acknowledged as running leading volunteering programs and support in Australia. Both states have a Minister for Volunteering.

   Victoria has appointed a Parliamentary Secretary for Volunteering.

   We ask that the NSW Government and Opposition, acknowledge the volunteering sector and the value that it brings by re-instating a Minister for Volunteering in NSW.

References

2  The Centre for Volunteering (July 2015): Volunteering Snapshot from Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey
3  NSW Government: Education and Communities (2012): NSW Volunteering Strategy
4  Caneva, L ( May 2016): NSW Government backs new volunteering strategy with $2M funding. Pro Bono News
5  McGregor-Lowndes, Myles, Marie Crittall, Denise Conroy and Robyn Keast with Christopher Baker, Jo Barraket and Wendy Scaife. 2017. Individual giving and volunteering. Giving Australia 2016 report series commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services
6  O’Dwyer, L (2013): The Real Value of Volunteering: Flinders University
7  Volunteering WA: The Economic, Social and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia