STATE OF VOLUNTEERING REPORT: TASMANIA 2010

executive summary

Through the State of Volunteering Report, Volunteering Tasmania (VT) aims to investigate what volunteering looks like in Tasmania in 2010 – for individuals, for organisations and for our community. The region-wide frame of reference for the State of Volunteering Report makes it a unique piece of research in Australia, and it is this region-wide focus that makes this ambitious report so valuable. The report captures local issues and challenges and notes the features that are currently changing and evolving in Tasmania’s volunteering environment. Essentially, the State of Volunteering Report tells us about the motivations, pathways to volunteering, and experiences of willing volunteers; factors determining the choice of, and changing patterns in meaningful roles; and the people, practices and resources that form the effective leadership and management of volunteering – the ‘three-legged stool’ of Tasmania’s volunteer sector. In addition, the report offers reflections, furnishes ideas and highlights areas for action to move forward and confidently create the Tasmanian volunteer sector of tomorrow.

Having released a Positioning Paper on the State of Volunteering Report in December 2009, the fieldwork for the project was undertaken between January and June 2010. The research involved a set of three self-completion surveys – one for current volunteers, one for people who are not currently volunteering, and one for volunteer-involving organisations; and a series of nine focus groups – three in each region of the state, comprised of volunteers and representatives of volunteer-involving organisations. The data and information collected through the surveys and focus groups was analysed against the ‘three-legged stool’ framework, which positions willing volunteers, meaningful roles and effective leadership and management as inter-related and equal elements in a successful volunteer sector.

willing volunteers

More roles to fill – more volunteers needed

There is a demonstrated need for more volunteers in the Tasmanian community. The results from the organisation survey give a clear indication that although volunteer numbers are generally being maintained or are increasing in organisations, nearly one third of organisations also increased their number of volunteer roles in the previous two years and about the same proportion of organisations anticipate an increase in the number of volunteer roles over the next two years. Fitting alongside these findings, more than three quarters of organisations say that they require more volunteers in order to continue meeting their needs. Strategies for actively and effectively promoting volunteering and increasing the volunteering-rate in the Tasmanian community are required to meet the demand for more volunteers.
Volunteering – the best kept secret?

Among people who volunteer there is greater familiarity with volunteering and a higher awareness of volunteering opportunities available in their community than among people who aren’t volunteers. The survey found that over half of those who have never volunteered said that they ‘Don’t know what volunteering options are available’, and only one in five of them believe that they have a lot of volunteer opportunities in their local community. This suggests that a straightforward strategy based on education, information and awareness-raising is a key mechanism for promoting volunteering and increasing participation in volunteering in Tasmania. This links to the emphasis which focus group participants placed on school-age children being given the opportunity to experience volunteering as an important way to build a successful Tasmanian volunteer sector in the future.

meaningful roles

Challenge the stereotypes – something for everyone

Stereotyping exists around who volunteers are and what volunteers do. Volunteers are cast in traditional stereotypes – “old ladies who sold cakes at a cake stall” - and also in newly emerging stereotypes – “if you’re really good then you volunteer, not if you’re average. Or if you’re disengaged then you volunteer.” A clear challenge for the promotion of volunteering is to get the message across that there is something for everyone. This is important in a number of ways – to build a picture of volunteering for those with no prior concept of what it is; to expand the narrow or misguided picture of volunteering that is held by others; and to present a wide range of images of volunteering to which people can match their own self-image and, in doing so, picture themselves as a volunteer.

But I don’t have time…

“The biggest change I’ve noticed is that people are using the phrase ‘I haven’t got time’” – the time pressures of the modern lifestyle, particularly work/life balance and family commitments, are identified as major factors stopping people from volunteering. To successfully increase the volunteering rate in the Tasmanian community specific attention needs to be given to breaking through the perception of a time barrier. This can be tackled on a number of fronts: through general promotion and education campaigns on volunteering, in the way organisations design and market their volunteering roles, and through workplaces offering flexible opportunities for employees to pursue volunteering.

Well trodden paths, and forging new trails

Networks are crucial pathways to volunteering, including family and friends, workplaces and schools, and prior involvement with volunteer-involving organisations. In relation to pathways to volunteering, the results suggest that the internet is more prominent as a pathway for younger volunteers but is generally under-utilised as a way of connecting to volunteering, perhaps due to the poor web presence of many organisations, while the media is a more effective pathway to volunteering with older volunteers. However, it cannot be assumed that those pathways which brought the current cohort
to volunteering will continue to operate in the same way. Looking at how those who are not currently volunteering anticipate that they would find a volunteer role, it can be noted that there is potential to increase the role of the workplace and employers as a point of contact with volunteering (which supports the increased focus in Australia on the development of corporate volunteering), and a confirmation that the volunteering sector needs to capitalise on the significance of IT as a pathway by developing its capacity in that area. Also, that by increasing VT’s visibility in the community it is likely to grow in prominence as a pathway to volunteering, and that schools and university will continue to be of great importance in starting a lifetime habit for younger volunteers.

**effective leadership and management**

*Invest now for the future*

The findings demonstrate that organisations, now more than ever, need to invest in and develop their volunteer management capacity. This report clearly shows that having a manager of volunteers does make a difference as to whether volunteers are supported by systematic and accountable volunteer management. The research also identifies a litany of current volunteer management issues - increasing recruitment pressures for organisations, emphasis placed on a more responsive approach to the needs and requirements of volunteers, more formality and accountability being demanded by funders, and volunteer leadership roles being harder to fill - which all require organisations to be more flexible, more capable and better resourced in order to meet those challenges.

*Who is missing out on training?*

Despite these management challenges and demands placed on organisations, the survey indicated that while training for volunteers is (at least partly) provided in 90% of organisations, training for managers of volunteers is (at least partly) provided in only 58% of organisations. While it need not be an ‘either/or’ situation between training for volunteers and training for managers of volunteers, it is clear that prioritising and investing in the development of leadership and management personnel (whether they are paid or volunteer staff) is a key strategy for organisations to equip themselves to tackle the challenges they face.

*More training, please!*

The survey findings delivered a resounding endorsement for providing training for volunteers. Contrary to popular fears amongst volunteer-involving organisations, volunteers are far from shunning the training component of their volunteer roles, with half the volunteer respondents selecting it in their top three most important things when it comes to managing volunteers and nearly one third wanting more training than they currently receive (virtually none wanted less).
A barrier to inclusion

Reimbursement was confirmed as a complex issue and one of growing importance in the Tasmanian volunteer sector. There are two clear facets to the reimbursement issue – practical and attitudinal – and there are barriers to providing and claiming reimbursement attached to each of these facets. Both require investigation to be better understood, and then strategically addressed. With the social inclusion agenda in mind, the issue of reimbursement has particular resonance for those whose participation in volunteering provides protective factors against being excluded, but who are likely to be especially vulnerable to financial barriers to volunteering. There is a great deal of scope for government and public policy-makers to work towards further mitigation of this issue in the volunteer sector.

Big tick on recognition

Volunteers were very positive about both the recognition they receive and on their opportunities to have a say in the organisations where they volunteer. These are less tangible, but incredibly important aspects for successfully managing and involving volunteers. Recognition of contribution, being valued, and participation in decision-making are also those aspects of a person's volunteering experience that are protective against social exclusion – generating self-esteem, feelings of being accepted, and a sense of empowerment and confidence. It is very good news for the Tasmanian community that volunteer-involving organisations are performing particularly well in these areas.

Where to from here?

The State of Volunteering Report: Tasmania 2010 is the first in a biennial series produced by VT. It will become the platform for VT’s work with the Tasmanian volunteer sector and an evidence-base to underpin the policy and advocacy work that VT engages in as the state peak body for volunteering. The success of this report in capturing a detailed yet wide-ranging array of data and information about Tasmania as a whole region, places VT in an unparalleled position to provide current, responsive and evidence-informed leadership to the sector it serves and represents. Not only that, the State of Volunteering Report also becomes a publicly shared resource for others involved or interested in supporting and generating a thriving Tasmanian volunteer sector. It connects with and contributes to other community-enhancing initiatives, such as A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania¹ and the development of a Partnership Agreement between the State Government and the Community sector.² By presenting volunteering in the context of the whole Tasmanian community, the State of Volunteering Report positions the volunteer sector as an important contributor to that community, and, for the first time, creates a vehicle for the voice of the Tasmanian volunteer sector to be heard.

² Initial discussion on a proposed Partnership Agreement have been held between DHHS and community sector representatives

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