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19 March 2015

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Senate Inquiry on Department of Social Services Funding Cuts

Volunteering Victoria has provided a submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Department of Social Services funding cuts. Given our close proximity to Victoria and the concerns that we share with Volunteering Victoria, Volunteering Tasmania (VT) has chosen to support and contribute to their submission. Please take their submission as reflecting the concerns of Volunteering Tasmania about the DSS process and the outcomes from the new grant funding arrangements.

As the peak body for volunteering in Tasmania, we have some additional comments that reflect the experience in the State and the significant challenges VT is facing due to the outcomes of the DSS Funding arrangements. We have chosen to submit a short statement (below) to highlight the Tasmanian experience.

The changes in the way the DSS tendered and ultimately funded many Not for Profit organisations were an attempt to streamline and lengthen contracts – reducing agreements and allowing organisations to strategically plan for the future.

In Tasmania, VT has consistently operated as a Statewide organisation. Under the recent funding arrangements by DSS, VT will now receive funding to cover only the Hobart and Greater Hobart areas and the Burnie region. Despite promoting in their funding information support for local and community supported organisations, the DSS have decided to make Volunteer Services Australia (a Gold Coast based provider) the preferred service provider in Tasmania.

We cannot understand the logic in providing an unknown service provider from Queensland as a government supported service provided.

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Our communities in Tasmania will be affected by this decision, and will be unlikely to receive the same level of service that they have experienced from Volunteering Tasmania in the past. The DSS have provided VT with no rationale for this decision, despite our many enquiries.

Importantly, the decision made by the DSS to support a Gold Coast based service provider will have significant bearing on VT's role and future as an organisation. We are funded – like many other not for profit organisations – with multiple funding sources and are expected to provide a state-wide service. We have offices located in three major regions (Hobart, Launceston and Burnie) for this purpose. However VT will now struggle to offer consistent services across Tasmania. This will impact the estimated 3,000 Volunteer Involving Organisations based in Tasmania who rely on VT to support them.

Additionally, VT has no financial security to plan for future service delivery. Funding agreements with the DSS were offered for 12-15 month periods - not the five year terms advertised. This gives no opportunity for strategic planning or forward thinking.

By ignoring the Productivity Commission's recommendation to engage and consult with service providers, VT and other volunteering peak bodies have been severely affected by cuts to the Department of Social Services. The way that the DSS has approached the new funding arrangements has neglected to achieve their stated goals of reducing red tape, streamlining services and providing longer term funding.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrienne Picone'.

Adrienne Picone
CEO, Volunteering Tasmania

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