

REPORT



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Budget Priority Statement

December 2016

Volunteering Tasmania

Department of Justice

About Volunteering Tasmania

Volunteering Tasmania is Tasmania's Peak body for volunteering. We:

- Deliver volunteer management services to organisations who involve volunteers;
- Assist the Tasmanian community who wish to volunteer their knowledge, skills and time; and
- Offer advocacy and social policy development services.

Volunteering Tasmania is regarded as the single authoritative volunteering voice in Tasmania. We provide strategic advice and leadership as Tasmania's Peak volunteering body. Volunteering Tasmania's continued presence is essential to the sustainability of volunteering and to act as an advocate for the industry.

For organisations seeking volunteers, Volunteering Tasmania provides:

- Practical services to Managers of Volunteers so they can deliver effective and sustainable programs;
- Skills development for Managers of Volunteers to ensure the best outcomes for the organisation as well as the volunteers;
- Assistance to organisations to find the right volunteers through our web portal 'Volunteer Connect';
- Best practice insights on the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement which are supported by research to deliver the best outcomes; and
- Information on changing trends in volunteering worldwide.

For volunteers and potential volunteers, Volunteering Tasmania encourages and facilitates their active participation in the Tasmanian community and guide them into roles that are a good fit for them. We work to ensure the volunteer experience is a quality one and that they keep participating as volunteers.

With offices in Hobart and Launceston, Volunteering Tasmania works with a wide cross section of the community.

Recommendation: Support Volunteer Involving Organisations to better navigate Working with Vulnerable People Registrations

Volunteering Tasmania has historically had significant involvement with the implementation of the *Registration to Work With Vulnerable People Act* (the Act). As the Peak body for volunteering, we have supported Volunteer Involving Organisations to better understand their legislative requirements. While the cost and process involved in the Working with Children checks may be burdensome for volunteers and the organisations they belong to. It is Volunteering Tasmania's position that this difficulty is mitigated by the importance of compliance with the Act.

It is pivotal that volunteers working with children are aware of their responsibilities to provide a safe environment. Volunteering Tasmania believes the Working with Children check also forms a core function of a Volunteer Involving Organisation's duty of care, where checks can be undertaken:

- to minimise risk to the organisation
- to minimise risk to the organisation's clients and stakeholders
- to minimise risk to the volunteer, and other volunteers

To meet the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, Volunteer Involving Organisations should also be addressing adequate background checks as part of Standard 4 (Recruitment and Selection).¹

The requirement to be registered may present a potential barrier or inconvenience for the volunteer. The fact that the person responsible for a child or vulnerable person may be a volunteer does not remove or reduce the potential risk of harm that they pose to other vulnerable people involved in the activity. The potential inconvenience does not outweigh the importance of consistent, reliable screening for the protection for anyone supervising a child. This is a requirement for anyone regardless of industry or organisation, 16 years or over.²

Rationale

As part of a commitment to protecting children and vulnerable people, Volunteering Tasmania has consistently recommended new and existing volunteers that work unsupervised with children or

¹ Volunteering Australia, "National Standards for Volunteer Involvement" at <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-and-best-practise/national-standards-and-supporting-material/> (11 April 2016)

² Ibid

vulnerable Tasmanians undertake a Working with Children Check. However, ongoing work between the State Government, Volunteering Tasmania and the volunteering sector is required to make sure there is appropriate education and awareness in this sector. Throughout our consultation, Volunteer Involving Organisations have consistently highlighted key challenges in managing the transition and implementation through the Working with Children Checks – particularly as vulnerable adults begin to be included in this process.

Volunteering Tasmania recommends the State Government pursue more ‘plain English’ guidance and information sessions to Volunteer Involving Organisations. More assistance to communicate these changes is needed for our industry. We agree that regulation is a necessity for volunteering positions. However our stakeholders have highlighted that they struggle to understand these processes. We would like the Department of Justice to promote these important requirements in a way that is accessible for organisations. Our goal is to achieve an appropriate balance between supporting Volunteer Involving Organisations to implement important legal requirements, and ensuring that these requirements are not so complex as to deter volunteering opportunities.

We acknowledge the significant work the Department of Justice has undertaken to ensure that Volunteer Involving Organisations understand both their new legal obligations, and the rationale behind these changes. However we recommend that this work is expanded in 2017, particularly as new changes are made to Working with Children registrations. We believe there are still significant areas of confusion in the community about the processes and requirements for volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations.

Cost: Nil

This recommendation would come at no or little cost to the Department. More work is needed to embed communication around the Working with Children Checks within the Department and the volunteering industry to raise awareness and education in the sector. Volunteering Tasmania is happy to collaborate and support this work into the future.