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18 April 2017

Senate Community Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities

Volunteering Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020. The key focus of our submission is on social inclusion and the role of volunteering in helping people with disability fully participate in cultural, social, civil and political life.

About Volunteering Tasmania

Volunteering Tasmania is the Peak body for volunteerism in Tasmania. We make a positive impact on volunteering, and as a result, we help to improve and sustain our wonderful community and the people within it. Our focus is creating an environment that promotes and sustains effective volunteerism. To achieve this goal Volunteering Tasmania:

- Delivers volunteer management services to organisations who involve volunteers
- Assists the Tasmanian community who wish to volunteer their knowledge, skills and time
- Offers advocacy and social policy development services

We are the experts on volunteering and have the local knowledge to create a positive culture of volunteering across our state.

Value of Volunteering in Tasmania

Volunteering not simply about generating warm and fuzzy feelings. Its value is also in generating opportunities, delivering key services, and contributing to prosperity. In Tasmania, 4 in 5 people give time, unpaid to the community donating over 7.1 million hours. This has a huge social, cultural and economic value to Tasmania with a cost benefit analysis generating \$4.9 billion per annum.

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For every dollar invested in volunteering, \$4 in benefits are returned for the community (Volunteering Tasmania, State of Volunteering Report 2014).

Volunteering is, therefore, not just essential to the welfare and wellbeing of Tasmanians. It is also a key driver of economic growth. Our research places volunteering front and centre as Tasmania's largest industry (State of Volunteering Report 2014). Volunteering influences economic activity across a range of sectors.

Volunteering Tasmania's position on the National Disability Strategy

The National Disability Strategy sets out a clear national plan to improve the lives of Australians with disability and their families. This is a commitment supported by Volunteering Tasmania and we fully support the implementation of the National Disability Strategy. Implementing the National Disability Strategy is critical if we are to truly engage people with disabilities in the full social and economic participation of Australian life. We believe that we all need to work together to help people with disability to reach their full potential.

Volunteering is critical to reducing barriers to participation. Research consistently shows that volunteering can reduce social isolation and improve mental wellbeing of vulnerable people. It offers opportunities to both build relationships with community members, develop employability skills and gain access to employment. Volunteering plays a vital role in creating inclusive environments for people with disabilities to fully engage in their community, often as a pathway to employment or to fuller participation in community services and events.

The role of Volunteer Involving Organisations under the National Disability Strategy

The National Disability Strategy is dependent on generating opportunities for individuals to participate in employment, volunteering and other forms of civic participation. In Volunteering Tasmania's view, enabling this participation needs more than sentiment. We support the aims of creating more opportunities for individuals with disabilities to volunteer. However to engage individuals into volunteering, government leaders need to work closely with the volunteering industry.

Whilst Volunteering Tasmania sees volunteering as an accessible and welcoming pathway into community participation - and potentially even the paid workforce - we do emphasise the barriers that currently exist, and the additional support needed to give potential volunteers a positive experience.

In our experience resourcing for volunteer management is critical to creating these opportunities. Volunteers may donate their time for free. But volunteer programs do not come without a cost. For any organisation wishing to engage people with disabilities (or of any ability or background) a

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cost is attached. This is part of effective human resource management. As with a paid workforce, we would not expect individuals to simply walk into a job and start working. This is also the case with the volunteering industry. Any good volunteer program needs coordination and management so that volunteers can be recruited, trained and supervised. This is needed for volunteers to have a safe and meaningful volunteer experience. For any organisation this comes at a cost. While many organisations that involve volunteers have the goodwill and desire to engage more people with disabilities in volunteering, adequate funding is needed to make sure the programs can happen.

Currently many organisations that involve volunteers are under resourced and unable to adapt roles and positions to suit people with disability. The 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia Report for example, showed that 46 per cent of organisations were completely unable to engage volunteers with barriers to volunteering (including those with disabilities). The majority of organisations surveyed noted this was due to an absence of resources. Volunteering Tasmania believes that this is not due to a lack of willingness of organisations to accommodate the needs of volunteers with disability. It is simply that better resources are needed so they can adapt their programs to suit these individuals. This is particularly important for the infrastructure needed, which may range from upgrades to buildings and/or computer software.

Conclusion

Volunteering Tasmania agrees that the National Disability Strategy should offer opportunities for individuals with disabilities to engage in their communities through volunteering. Volunteering is critical in growing socially inclusive and vibrant communities. We are concerned, however, that many of the structures and supports necessary are not yet in place, and must be established and adequately resourced if we are to create more pathways to volunteering for people with disability.

Funding support will be necessary, particularly in these areas:

- Disability Awareness Training for Volunteer Involving Organisations
- Infrastructure funding support so that (particularly small) Volunteer Involving Organisations can adapt their premises and technology to better engage individuals with disabilities
- Volunteer management support so that positions and programs can better be adapted for individuals with disabilities
- Research into best practice volunteering models for supporting people with disability.

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Volunteering Tasmania notes that many organisations that involve volunteers are willing to engage individuals with disabilities into volunteering. These organisations are constantly facing extra requests for support but with little financial support to help them build their capacity.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss Volunteering Tasmania's submission further please do not hesitate to contact me on alisonl@volunteeringtas.org.au or on (03) 6231 5550.

Kindest Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Alison Lai'.

Alison Lai
Chief Executive Officer

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