

Question on notice

Does the NSW State Emergency Service have any process in place to deal with disputes and Grievances among its volunteer contingent?

An interim policy relating to grievances was released in July, 2013 by the Manager of Human Resources and is the current policy used by the NSW SES.

In December 2013, as a result of the ICAC and Public Service Commission Inquiries, NSW SES Acting Commissioner Jim Smith, established a Governance and Business Improvement (GBI) team. This team has been tasked with reforming all people and culture related policies, including policy, practice and procedure relating to grievance and complaint handling for all volunteer and paid members of the NSW SES.

The GBI team has been conducting research to identify models of best practice in grievance and complaint handling that can be introduced into the NSW SES. New policy, practice and procedure is currently under development and is near completion. The new governance policy will address the reporting and handling of grievances and complaints in relation to bullying and harassment, corrupt conduct, maladministration, serious waste of public funds, privacy, security of information and workplace health and safety issues.

An online management solution will also be implemented to support the objectives and intent of the new policy.

New Policies on the *Code of Conduct and Ethics (20 May 2014)*, *Public Interest Disclosures (PID) Policy (19 February, 2014)* and *Compliance Policy (20 August, 2014)* are examples of the governance which is being built around dispute and grievance handling among staff and volunteers.

Additional questions

Question 1

In evidence to this inquiry the Commission for Children and Young People highlighted research which suggests that disadvantaged young people often have the least access to volunteering programs or support needed to help the volunteer. What measures could be put in place by Government, Schools and volunteer organisations to reach out to disadvantaged young people about volunteering opportunities?

Response

Provide information to School Career Advisors and Youth Workers-Volunteer organisations can often provide opportunities to gain unique employability skills, experience and sponsorships that will be of benefit to young people, however, it has been identified that many young people do not know what the opportunities are. Information and training for Career Advisors and Youth Workers could help to get the message out.

Create specific youth volunteering websites for each volunteer organisation- Relevant information for young people is usually hidden away in a main website and is not developed to be attractive to the younger demographic. Youth targeted websites with popular keywords embedded would help attract young people to look at the information.

Ensure there are no financial barriers- The NSW SES Secondary Schools Cadet program is free of charge for School students and this has meant that many disadvantaged youth have engaged because there is no financial barrier. Anything that a volunteer needs in order to participate should be free eg: Uniform, equipment, meals, travel costs etc. Volunteers should not be expected to pay out of their own pockets, even if they will be reimbursed. This same strategy should be applied to all volunteering programs to ensure accessibility for anyone that is disadvantaged.

Provide transport to training venues- Many young people have said they find it difficult to get to the training venues of volunteer organisations because it is not always practical to use public transport and they do not have any other practical way of getting there. It can also be cost prohibitive. Solutions such as free public transport for volunteers, community transport options, free bicycle programs and car-pooling services could help to overcome this barrier.

Promote acceptance of young people in volunteering- Young people up to 17 years of age are sometimes rejected based on age alone and incorrect assumptions are often made on their capability and maturity levels. There is often an extreme fear present in adults about the risks involved with having young people engaged in volunteering. This fear often leads to young people being rejected from being involved in volunteering until they reach 18 years of age.

Question 2

In what way could agencies such as the Commission for Children and Young People, the Centre for Volunteering and the Department of Education and Communities assist organisation like the NSW SES to engage with young people about volunteering opportunities?

Response

Commission for Children and Young People

1. Provide information, training, advice and news to volunteers and staff about child protection policy, practice and procedure.
2. Coordinate information sharing between youth related organisations.
3. Promote volunteering opportunities to young people.
4. Assist agencies to identify and overcome barriers that exist in relation to engaging young people in volunteering.

The Centre for Volunteering

1. Promote the benefits of volunteering (general).
2. Promote volunteering opportunities to career advisors and youth workers.
3. Provide links and basic information about all volunteering opportunities (searchable database).
4. Create a youth specific volunteering website.
5. Educate employers about the skills and experience volunteers gain.

The Department of Education and Communities

1. Promote the benefits of volunteering (general).
2. Inform career advisors about the benefits for young people in volunteering.
3. Map the volunteers skills and experience to the school curriculum.
4. Provide teachers to supervise Secondary School Cadet programs and similar initiatives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Smith', is written over the typed name and title.

Jim Smith
Acting Commissioner
NSW State Emergency Service