

Inquiry into volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW

Questions taken on notice by The Centre for Volunteering

- 1) Up until 2012, The Centre for Volunteering was partially funded by the then Department of Education and Training (DET) to support youth and student volunteering. The need to keep supporting youth and student volunteering despite a reduction in funding was broadly acknowledged by the staff and Board of The Centre for Volunteering and youth/student volunteering was kept on at The Centre as a focus area, though now only as a part-time resource. Since then, the number of requests from various stakeholders for support in the area of youth and student volunteering has steadily increased. From young people looking to get involved in volunteering and students looking for community placements, to teachers reaching out for support in running student volunteering programs and organisations wanting to engage with the younger generations of volunteers, The Centre continues to provide a strong knowledge base and helping hand around youth volunteering that is consistently appreciated. However, The Centre is working in a very reactive manner trying to address all enquiries in two days and would require more time and resources to implement projects identified as relevant and necessary in the youth and student volunteering landscape.

- 2) The 2010 SCIP evaluation (SCIP = Student Community Involvement Program), which in part looked at the impact of The Centre's Intro to Volunteering Seminars (previously referred to as SCIP Seminars) indicated that 96% of student learned either 'a lot' or 'some' about volunteering and 70% found the seminars useful in finding a volunteer role. Additionally, feedback forms from a sample of Intro to Volunteering seminars run by The Centre in 2012 indicate that overall students who attended the seminars found them useful, with 92% of students remarking that they learnt either 'a lot' or 'some' information on volunteering and 80% of students at one school indicating that they would be using the information. Based on the feedback received students found information on the following to be the most useful:
 - How to get involved with volunteering
 - The impact of volunteering
 - The different kinds of volunteer work you can do
 - The different types of organisations you can volunteer withWhen students were asked what they liked most about the seminar, the main response was hearing personal stories and examples of volunteering.

Our qualitative analysis of the data suggests that students generally found the Intro to Volunteering Seminar informative, engaging and interesting. They enjoyed hearing from a range of organisations that provided insights, information and most importantly personal stories that made volunteering a "relatable" experience. Feedback suggested that the seminar positively changed students' perceptions about volunteering and the rewards it can generate (both personally and socially). Responses to the seminar suggested that the presentations were able to break down preconceived notions of "this is not for me", "I'm not experienced enough" or "you're too young"; this resulted in students feeling that volunteering was more accessible than previously thought. Students were also able to understand the positive impact volunteering can have for the community, not-for-profit organisations and their clients, as well as for them personally. Overall students were able to better understand formal volunteering from both a community and individual perspective.

It is important to note that a large number of young people who contact The Centre are looking for formal volunteering opportunities that will allow them to meet a certain number of community service hours required by their school. More often than not the student has not been provided with any relevant information or context for the community activity. The Centre for Volunteering's Intro to Volunteering seminars, while making sure to highlight the difference between 'volunteering' and 'community service', are a great tool for providing this important context and helping students connect with volunteer opportunities in the community. They also try to ensure that students and schools are not just 'ticking the box' with these community activities.

In the SCIP evaluation schools rated the Intro to Volunteering/ SCIP seminars highly ('most/ quite beneficial') on the basis of the following:

- They are a very efficient means of imparting relevant volunteering information to large numbers of students
- As these seminars involve 'third parties' the information relayed has a higher impact on students than if presented by Teachers/ Careers Advisors
- The seminars involve 'inspiring' speakers who present 'reality based' experiences which serve to motivate both students and staff
- Seminars are interactive and popular with students
- Such forums underline a school's commitment to student volunteering
- The Seminars are appreciated because they directly reduce SCIP Co-ordinators workload/ are time-saving

And organisations reported that the Intro to Volunteering/ SCIP seminars:

- Facilitates contact with schools and students which would not otherwise occur.
- Establishes/maintains a valuable relationship with The Centre personnel
- Is a source of positive support for involving student volunteers
- Is a good networking opportunity
- Is an opportunity to provide information or raise awareness about the work of their organisation

Additional questions

- 1) The Centre often refers enquiries relating to youth volunteering and risk management to the Commission for Children and Young People and the Office of the Children's Guardian and in particular their Child Safe Organisation resources. The Centre feels that they are very well placed to support and promote safe volunteering opportunities among children and young people. They encourage and support organisations to reflect on their practices and provide guidance in terms of child safety and well-being. The Centre has had discussions with the Commission for Children and Young People and the Office of the Children's Guardian regarding how these tools could be adapted to target youth volunteering specifically (as opposed to youth clients/service users).

The Commission for Children and Young People faces a similar challenge as The Centre in that people contact them wanting specific answers and are frustrated when told that there

is no black and white answer and that they are responsible for applying the tools and information to each their particular context.

Reflection tools are only effective if used and implemented properly. The challenge is to get organisations to actually do this, not just set the documentation/tools aside for another day when there is more time, because rarely is there more time. The plan is to set up a targeted youth volunteering workshop where organisations actually start applying the tools and resources to their organisational context.

- 2) For this I refer back to the 2006 Volunteering Makes a Difference pilot project, run by The Centre in partnership with Youth Off the Streets, that looked to engage disadvantaged or at-risk young people into volunteering opportunities and to identify and build the capacity of volunteering organisations to provide a range of volunteering opportunities, training and support to young people who are facing a range of issues and are at-risk or have already disengaged from mainstream education. The project identified the Certificate of Active Volunteering (CAV) as a key element to help youth services, educational facilities and organisations structure volunteering training and orientation sessions with the young people and establish goals and objectives for the young people to reach during the volunteering experience. The certificate, if suitably administered and customised to the audience, can provide the young people with an important pathway to further education or work, increased skills and confidence, as well as a sense of purpose and belonging in their community.