

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

Additional question

- 1) The Committee notes the Council's concern that young people in rural and isolated areas do not have the same opportunities to volunteer without parental or other support to transport them to and from volunteering opportunities. How might Government agencies, schools and volunteer organisations assist rural and geographically isolated young people to take up volunteering opportunities?

1. Localisation of opportunities

Where possible, local opportunities should be fully explored so that young people do not need to travel outside their local communities to volunteer. Volunteering opportunities should ideally relate to facilities and services which already exist in individual communities. The Council understands that community facilities in rural and geographically isolated areas often suffer a lack of resources. This need for more resources can be aligned with the interests of young people to have greater access to volunteering opportunities. For example, young people could volunteer in the local library to extend its opening hours.

The Council believes that schools in rural and geographically isolated areas can provide convenient opportunities for young people to volunteer, including outside school hours. For example, schools can provide recognition and incentives for young people to volunteer for school working bees, gardening or stacking shelves in the library. The Council recommends that volunteering opportunities be a strong feature of primary schools as well as high schools, to develop positive attitudes towards volunteering from a young age and engender a sustained commitment to volunteering.

Volunteer organisations in rural and geographically isolated areas should open up more opportunities for young people to volunteer with their organisations. For example, local sports clubs could encourage young people to volunteer as referees, canteen helpers or committee members. The Council also supports a broad definition of volunteering which encompasses online activities like maintaining a website or a Facebook page for a charity. This allows rural and geographically isolated young people to volunteer from home.

Young people generally prefer volunteering alongside other young people in a social, energetic team environment. Local councils in rural and geographically isolated areas can seek teams of young people to volunteer in maintaining community gardens, painting murals, clearing rubbish or helping at markets. These youth-led activities can give young people a sense of achievement and a desire to continue volunteering. Local councils can incentivise youth volunteering by hosting social events where volunteers can celebrate their

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efforts. Certificates of recognition and references are also good incentives, and positive experiences lead to peer-to-peer promotion.

The creation of a database or website of volunteering opportunities in rural and geographically isolated areas could be effective in engaging young people. These measures could also serve to identify those towns which have high rates of successful volunteering, providing ideas for other towns. Communities can consult with each other to share strategies.

2. Travel concessions

Government agencies, schools and volunteer organisations could partner to provide free bus transport for rural and geographically isolated young people when travelling to and from volunteering activities.