

**Submission
No 17**

VOLUNTEERING AND UNPAID WORK PLACEMENTS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW

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Date Received: 9/04/2014



Youth Advisory Council New South Wales

Ms Melanie Gibbons MP
Deputy Chair
Committee on Children and Young People
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Gibbons

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

I am writing to you on behalf of the NSW Youth Advisory Council, the Government's statutory advisory council on issues of concern to young people. The Council provides advice to the Government through the Minister responsible for youth affairs, the Hon Victor Dominello MP. A summary of the Council's functions are attached.

The Minister has recently appointed a new Council. At the Council's first meeting on 3 March 2014, the Minister suggested it make a submission to the parliamentary inquiry into volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW.

The attached submission has been informed by the work undertaken by the Youth Advisory Council in 2012 and 2013 and the extensive personal experiences of Council members. It addresses the first three issues listed in the inquiry's terms of reference. It does not address the fourth and fifth issues: the role of the Commission for Children and Young People, the role of the Children's Guardian or providing advice to the Government. Under the Youth Advisory Council Act, the Council's advice to the Government, particularly in relation to the role of Government agencies is confidential to the Government.

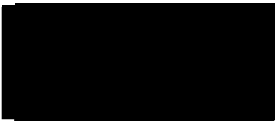
Council members have asked that I particularly draw your attention to the lack of data in relation to children and young people's volunteering and unpaid work placements. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on adult volunteering (people aged over 18 years) varies wildly between census data (just over 20% of adults volunteering) and survey data (around 34% of adults volunteering)ⁱ. They do not collect data on children and young people under 18 years. Mission Australia's 2013 survey of young people suggests that 57.5% of young people aged 15-19 years volunteerⁱⁱ. The Mission Australia survey is not a statistically reliable survey, but when the figures for 2013, 2012 and 2011 are compared with the ABS data it could be suggested that a greater percentage of young people age 15-19 years volunteer than the percentage of the general community.

Council members support the concept of encouraging even more young people to volunteer, but think it is equally important that the inquiry look at why young people stop volunteering. Retaining volunteers is as important, if not more important than recruiting volunteers. Recruiting and losing volunteers is counter-productive as they may never return.

Some of the Youth Advisory Council's earlier work on young people and volunteering has been informed by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) 2004 report: "Passions, People and Appreciation: Making Volunteering Work for Young People", which is one of the few reliable research report on young people and volunteeringⁱⁱⁱ.

Council members have asked me to thank you for the opportunity to share some of their views on young people and volunteering and young people and unpaid work placements with your committee.

Yours sincerely



Kayla Lochner
Chair
NSW Youth Advisory Council

ⁱ 4441.0.55.002 - A Comparison of Volunteering Rates from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing and the 2006 General Social Survey, Jun 2012. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4441.0.55.002Main%20Features2Jun%202012?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4441.0.55.002&issue=Jun%202012&num=&view>

ⁱⁱ Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2013 p 58. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do-to-help-new/young-people/understanding-young-people/annual-youth-survey>

ⁱⁱⁱ Passions, People and Appreciation: Making Volunteering Work for Young People. <http://education.gov.au/national-youth-affairs-research-scheme-publications-2003-2005>.

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

The Committee on Children and Young People is inquiring into, and reporting on, volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW and in particular:

1. Existing policies relating to volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW

RESPONSE:

Volunteering

The NSW Volunteering Strategy

In relation to volunteering, the Council understands that NSW Volunteer Strategy 2012 is the primary NSW Government policy in relation to volunteering and that it expands on the volunteering related goals in the Government's NSW 2021 Plan to Make NSW Number One.

It is understood the strategy is to be implemented over a number of years. The Strategy includes a number of new initiatives aimed at young people. They include:

- "2.1 Launch an annual competition for students to develop a media campaign aimed at increasing volunteering".
- "2.3 Encouraging young people and employers to recognise the value of skills acquired through volunteering".
- "3.3 Helping young people demonstrate evidence of their community participation to future employers by developing a volunteer log book to enable young people to document their volunteer efforts".
- "5.4 Identify opportunities to raise the profile of National Volunteering Week in NSW, particularly among key population groups such as young people".

The Council members are not aware of any of these initiatives being progressed and promoted to young people.

Premier's Student Volunteering Awards

Many Council members participated in the "Premier's Student Volunteering Awards", a program providing state-level recognition of Year 9 and Year 10 student's volunteering. A change in policy has resulted in the program being

discontinued and being replaced by a school-level recognition of a student's volunteering.

The Council was advised by the Minister for Education, the Hon Adrian Piccoli MP that 22,000 students had received a Premier's Student Volunteering Award before the program ended in 2012.

Council members are strongly of the view that recognising a young person's volunteering efforts will encourage a sustained commitment to volunteering. Members were disappointed that state-level recognition of school students volunteering has been discontinued and at best will now only be recognised at a school level. Council members feel strongly that state-level recognition of school students volunteering should be reintroduced to encourage a sustained commitment among young people to volunteering.

Unpaid work placements

Unpaid work placements are different from volunteering. It is the Council members' view that volunteering - unpaid work performed in the not-for-profit sector, or by an individual on their own initiative - is as an act of goodwill which benefits all parties and the community. Unpaid work placements have a legitimate role in situations such as a component of course work for a tertiary qualification. Council members don't think unpaid work placements have a role in our society when a number of young people have to undertake unpaid work in the hope or expectation that they will be offered permanent paid employment at the end of a particular period.

Council members are aware that the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) has identified unpaid work in Australia as a growing feature of the Australian labour market, and has conducted extensive research on the issue.

The *Experience or Exploitation?* report commissioned by the Fair Work Ombudsman examined both unpaid internships and unpaid work trials. From the report, it appears that the number of unpaid work placements is increasing as a result of higher rates of youth unemployment, and a misunderstanding of rights and entitlements by children and young people.

The growing prevalence of unpaid work placements in some industries, as a first step to obtaining permanent employment is leading to situations where young people from disadvantaged socio-economic background are being further disadvantaged. They do not have the necessary family financial support to be able

to afford to undertake unpaid work and may be limited to having to work in the casual labour market.

2. Measures to encourage volunteering and foster opportunities for volunteering among children and young people in NSW, including possible incentives to volunteer.

RESPONSE:

Measures to encourage volunteering

Council members are concerned about equity in incentives to encourage and foster volunteering among young people. They are concerned at the potential for particular groups of young people to be disadvantaged or excluded in the process of offering incentives.

Members noted that there are a wide range of definitions of volunteering and ways of measuring volunteer participation.

Members are concerned that the Government's focus is on measures to encourage, foster and provide incentives to increase formal volunteering as increasing participation in formal volunteering is required to meet the NSW 2021 Goal 24 target of "increasing the proportion of the NSW population involved in volunteering to exceed the national average by 2016".

Council members feel that the broadest possible definition should be applied so that it ranges from young people in private schools who have the opportunity through their school to undertake a week's voluntary work overseas, to the young carer with a disabled parent who spends much of their free time undertaking a range of caring duties in the home.

Council members noted that unless the broadest definitions are applied young people like those caring for parents or siblings will not be recognised for what they do and will be disadvantaged.

Council members were also concerned 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.

Recognising a young person's volunteering efforts

Council members are strongly of the view that recognising a young person's volunteering efforts is fundamental to encouraging participation and sustained commitment to volunteering.

Members were disappointed that state-level recognition of school students volunteering through the Premier's Student Volunteering Awards has been discontinued. Students volunteering will now at best only be recognised at a school level. Discontinuing the Premier's awards has told students that volunteering is not important, and certainly that it is less important than reading (Premier's Reading Challenge) spelling (Premier's Spelling Challenge) or debating (Premier's Debating Challenge).

The decision has sent the wrong message to school students about the importance of volunteering. Council members feel strongly that state-level recognition of school students volunteering should be reintroduced to encourage a sustained commitment among young people to volunteering.

The Centre for Volunteering's Volunteer of the Year Award includes a "Young Volunteer of the Year Award". In Council members' experience, these awards are poorly promoted to young people and youth sector organisations. As a result, it is understood the Centre for Volunteering receives very few nominations, and in some regions, no nominations, for this award. This has been at a time when 22,000 students received a Premier's Student Volunteering Award. The Centre for Volunteering's lack of engagement with schools, youth sector organisations and young people themselves devalues the "Young Volunteer of the Year Award" and misses an opportunity to promote volunteering to young people.

Council members feel strongly that state-level recognition in the form of a Premier's Award recognising school students volunteering should be reintroduced to encourage a sustained commitment among young people to volunteering.

Incentives to Volunteer

Entry into university course is determined by students having the required number of ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) points. Different universities offer ATAR bonus points to students for a range of reasons, including where they live and the subjects they undertook at high school. Council members support the argument that participation in the community is a strong indicator of capacity to engage with a subject and with other students. They feel the high school students' volunteering in their community should be recognised by offering an additional bonus point to students with a strong track record in volunteering. This would act as a strong incentive to students attempting to get into university to broaden their focus from just studying for the Higher School Certificate and participate in their community through volunteering.

A number of universities have robust and popular volunteering programs. There is a strong level of participation in these programs, as they are generally recognised on students' Academic Higher Education Graduate Statement (AHEGS). Given the current highly competitive job market, this is a strong incentive for students to volunteer. The Council supports the idea of these types of programs being extended to all tertiary education institutions as an incentive for students to volunteer.

Council members are very enthusiastic about volunteer incentive programs such as the Optus Rock Corps concept where volunteers are rewarded with complementary tickets to rock concerts. The Council would like to see other corporate sector organisations put programs in place to recognise and act as an incentive to young people to volunteer.

Council members also noted the incentive to volunteer provided by work development orders. This program enables disadvantaged and disengaged young people to pay off their outstanding fines by undertaking structured volunteer work. The Council member with experience working with young people in the juvenile justice system has noted the positive impact this program can have on reconnecting disadvantaged and disengaged young people to the community and understanding the value of a commitment to volunteering.

3. Best practice in supporting and promoting safe opportunities for volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in other jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas.

RESPONSE:

Council members have little knowledge of best practice in other jurisdictions in Australia or overseas. They have strong views on what should be best practice in engaging young people in volunteering and in unpaid work placements.

Council members believe that young people undertaking unpaid work placements are entitled to have clear written contracts setting out the conditions of the unpaid work, including the number of hours that the young person will be required to work unpaid. Written rather than oral employment contracts would reduce misunderstandings between the employer and the unpaid worker. Unpaid trial work is common for young people in many industries, and often ends in the unpaid worker being dismissed at the end of the trial period

Council members are of the view that the NSW Government should endorse the findings and recommendations of the *Experience or Exploitation?* report

commissioned by the Fair Work Ombudsman and work with other jurisdictions to implement the report's recommendations. In particular the Council would like to see the recommendation to educate the Australian community about the legitimacy and legality of unpaid work arrangements should be implemented immediately. To achieve this end, the Council would like to see the NSW Government put pressure on the Fair Work Ombudsman to upgrade the service provided to young people through the Fair Work Infoline so that the service can be accessed outside normal work hours and does not require the person ringing the Infoline to hang on for up to an hour.

Through its work with WorkCover NSW, the Council is aware of the unacceptably high rate of death and injury of young workers in the workplace. Best practice regarding unpaid young workers must include appropriate training and easy access to workplace health and safety information.

Youth Advisory Council Act 1989

Part 3 – Functions of Council

11 Functions of Council

- (1) The Council has the following functions:
 - (a) to advise the Minister on the planning, development, integration and implementation of Government policies and programs concerning young persons,
 - (b) to consult with young persons, community groups and Government authorities on issues and policies concerning young persons,
 - (c) to monitor and evaluate legislation and Government policies and programs concerning young persons and to recommend changes if required,
 - (d) to conduct forums, approved by the Minister, on issues of interest to young persons,
 - (e) to collect, analyse and provide the Minister with information on issues and policies concerning young persons.
- (2) Any advice given to the Minister by the Council may be given either at the request of the Minister or without any such request.
- (3) The Council has such other functions as are conferred or imposed on it by or under this or any other Act.