

**Submission  
No 8**

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

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## TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

**That the Committee on Children and Young People inquire into, and report on, volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW, and in particular:**

**Existing policies relating to volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW;**

- It is important to note that ‘volunteering’ and ‘unpaid work’ are two different concepts referring to two different types of activities. Unpaid work is work done in expectation of reward (usually monetary) but without such reward. The following is the accepted definition of volunteering adopted by The Centre for Volunteering (The Centre):
  - Volunteering is a service provided through a formal not-for-profit organisation, by choice, without financial remuneration and for the benefit of the community.
- The Centre has no influence on and cannot comment on the concept of ‘unpaid work’. Such matters should be referred to the Fair Work Ombudsman: [www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au).
- The Centre for Volunteering at times receives enquiries from students looking for legitimate work experience placements, community service placements or other types of vocational placements. While these differ from ‘volunteering’, where it is felt that these placements could meet the volunteer needs of a not-for-profit organisation, The Centre looks to connect the students with such organisations. It is then the responsibility of the student *together with* the educational institution to organise the placement with the organisation and ensure all requirements are met such as adherence to the National Standards in Volunteering and appropriate insurance cover.
- Volunteering should occur in designated volunteer positions only. Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work.
- The Centre acknowledges that in order for volunteering to be successful, both the organisation and the volunteer should benefit. Young people in particular can benefit from volunteering

through skill development, networking, work experience, confidence building, enjoyment and more.

- The Centre promotes Volunteering Australia's National Standards for best practice in volunteer management, offering related training and workshops through its School of Volunteer Management.
- Organisations that have implemented best practice principles for volunteer management in their broader volunteer programs are more likely to adopt safe and suitable practices when involving younger volunteers. The Centre provides advice on some of the additional issues that need to be kept in mind and implemented when engaging with youth volunteers. Young people may lack the knowledge and life experience necessary to make suitable decisions in certain contexts. Adequate training and supervision is required, as well as a good communication and feedback systems, and proper recognition of young volunteers' efforts.

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

- Through various youth and student volunteering initiatives, and with no dedicated funding The Centre for Volunteering resources, promotes and supports youth volunteering in NSW.
- The Centre supports people, including young people under 18, to connect with volunteering opportunities for the benefit of the community and for their benefit as well. The Centre has extended its Volunteer Referral Service (VRS) hours to ensure school students have access to the service. The Centre undertakes informal interviews with young people, discussing motivations, skills, interests, etc. to ensure they are matched with a suitable volunteer opportunity.
- The Centre looks to encourage and support not-for-profit organisations to best engage with youth volunteers and provide young people with positive, safe and meaningful volunteer opportunities. It does this in part through regular networking events where issues, challenges, success stories and best practice are discussed. The Centre also runs youth and student

volunteering workshops for volunteer managers through its yearly Ignite Volunteering Conference.

- In an effort to open up as many meaningful opportunities as possible for young volunteers, The Centre advocates with and encourages organisations to avoid having a blanket 'No volunteers under 18' policy. The Centre provides advice and links not-for-profit organisations to resources that allow for reflection about youth engagement in their organisations.
- The Centre links young people and organisations to youth volunteering information, opportunities and resources on its Youth Volunteering Website and Facebook page. Through these online channels The Centre also regularly promotes stories of the great work done by young volunteers both in NSW, the rest of Australia and overseas.
- The Centre runs "Intro to Volunteering" seminars in schools and other relevant venues to promote awareness among young people about volunteering. Young people are motivated to volunteer through a discussion of its importance to the community, benefits to them, youth volunteer stories, photos and videos. These seminars also discuss the rights and responsibilities of organisations and volunteers in an engaging and practical way.
- The Centre has partnered with Max Potential, a program of Future Achievement Australia, to offer the Certificate of Active Volunteering (CAV) to the young people participating in the program. The CAV, a nationally accredited training certificate, both encourages and recognises the participants' volunteering effort throughout the program. The program will be offered in over 250 schools in 2014 and the CAV has the potential to reach, motivate and support a large number of school students to volunteer in NSW.
- The Centre supports and ensures the recognition of youth volunteers through the Youth Volunteer of the Year Awards.
- The Centre has entered into an agreement with the University of Western Sydney (UWS) to assist young people in Western Sydney to achieve easier access to the University through their community work. Such community work would result in a higher ATAR score being awarded for

students wishing to attend UWS. This agreement places further strain on The Centre's ability to source opportunities for young people because of its already limited resources and staff time due to the unexpected withdrawal of Government funding for the youth program.

**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;**

- Again it is important to note that 'volunteering' and 'unpaid work' are two different concepts referring to two different types of activities.
- In the past The Centre has participated in teleconferences with the other state Peak Bodies for volunteering in Australia, discussing best practice in youth volunteering, sharing knowledge and ideas, and brainstorming possible initiatives in support of youth volunteering nationally.
- The Centre promotes and supports student volunteering during National Student Volunteer Week (NSVW), an initiative of Volunteering Queensland. Australia's inaugural National Student Volunteer Week (NSVW) was 4-10 August 2013. During this week The Centre ran successful volunteering events in various educational facilities, organised a panel on student volunteering, and posted inspiring stories of student volunteers.

**The role of the Commission for Children and Young People and the Office of the Children's Guardian in supporting and promoting safe volunteering and unpaid work placement opportunities among children and young people in NSW;**

- The Centre has enjoyed a good relationship with the Commission for Children and Young People and the Office of the Children's Guardian, working together to provide advice and promote safe practices in youth volunteer management, and offering the Commission's Child Safe Organisation workshops to The Centre's network of volunteer-involving organisations.
- In regard to unpaid work, the issue is an industrial relations issue and one which should include some input by the WorkCover Authority. As unpaid workers are not covered by insurance

(Workers Compensation or Volunteer Accident Insurance) it is important that an education program be developed through schools to inform young people of their rights at work.

**Providing the NSW Government with advice on how it can better engage with and support children and young people in volunteering and unpaid work placements; and**

It is important to recognise the work done by organisations such as The Centre for Volunteering in this space. With no dedicated funding and minimal resources, The Centre's staff and volunteers work tirelessly to promote and support youth volunteering, with great passion and belief for the cause. Young people need guidance when it comes to volunteering. Organisations need support to develop meaningful opportunities for student volunteer engagement. Schools need support to facilitate their student volunteering programs. The number of calls and emails relating to youth and student has greatly increased in the past couple of years because of The Centre's track record and reputation in the volunteering sector. Parents and young people are turning to The Centre more than ever for guidance and support in the area of youth and student volunteering.

The Centre can provide an invaluable role in addressing the issues and barriers related to youth and student volunteering. It has played an important advocacy role in linking young people to volunteering and encouraging not-for-profit organisations to engage young people as volunteers. The Centre has connections to a large network of not-for-profit, member organisations. Through its Volunteer Referral Service (VRS), The Centre has a database of volunteer opportunities. Through its School of Volunteer Management (SVM), The Centre has the ability to develop targeted workshops and training programs in the area of volunteer management. The SVM currently manages the Certificate of Active Volunteering (CAV) which has recently been selected as a VET Board of Studies endorsed course.

Financial investment by the NSW Government in youth programs run by organisations such as The Centre is a cost effective way of supporting children and young people in volunteering. This is also an investment in community resilience and the future. However, the recent loss of Government funding

to support The Centre's youth program has made the issue of placing and supporting young people in volunteer roles even more problematic.

**Any other related matter.**

As the Peak Body for Volunteering in NSW, promoting and supporting volunteering and community participation, The Centre for Volunteering looks to create rich, vibrant and cohesive communities through the development and support of youth and student volunteer engagement initiatives.

The Centre for Volunteering receives daily enquiries and requests for support from various stakeholders about youth and student volunteering. These include young people seeking volunteering opportunities in the Not-for-Profit (NFP) sector, parents wishing to support their children's engagement in the community (including family volunteering opportunities for those with very young children), schools wanting support to develop or run student volunteering programs, organisations wanting advice on how to engage young people in volunteering, regional volunteer centres looking for youth volunteering resources, and many more.

Prior to 2012 The Centre had been supporting and promoting youth and student volunteering in NSW through its Student Community Involvement Program, (SCIP), funded by the Grant-in-Aid program. SCIP had involved providing information about volunteering to over 135,000 students throughout NSW who went on to provide a valuable service to not-for-profit organisations in areas of special schools, welfare, aged care, art and culture, sport, disability, child care, animal protection, youth services, surf lifesaving, migrant and refugee support, homeless shelters, environmental groups and more. However in 2012 the funding for such programs was withdrawn and the youth and student volunteering landscape has suffered for it. Nevertheless The Centre continues to recognise and encourage youth volunteering such as through its NSW Volunteer of the Year Award when a young person is honoured for their contribution to society. The youngest nominee in 2013 was aged 4 years and is a regular volunteer providing company and joy to residents in a nursing home and the overall winner of the category was a



young person volunteering in the Surf Life Saving movement. The Centre encourages all young people to volunteer through promoting opportunities and recognition of effort such as those two examples.

### **Recommendations**

1. An education program be developed for distribution through Schools outlining the difference between volunteering and work, work experience/internships and service learning and the rights and responsibilities of all parties in such a program.
2. The role of young people in volunteering be formally recognised in schools.
3. Previously withdrawn funding to promote and develop volunteering opportunities for young people be reinstated to The Centre for Volunteering.
4. An Intro to Volunteering DVD (based on The Centre's Intro to Volunteering seminars) be produced for schools, ensuring NSW-wide access to relevant, engaging and valuable information about volunteering.

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