

**Submission  
No 3**

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

**Organisation:** Guide Dogs NSW/ACT  
**Name:** Dr Graeme White  
**Position:** Chief Executive Officer  
**Date Received:** 28/01/2014



28 January 2014

The Inquiry Manager  
Joint Standing Committee on Children and Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Via email: [Childrens.Committee@Parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Childrens.Committee@Parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Inquiry Manager,

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

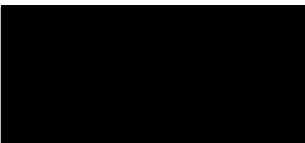
Guide Dogs NSW/ACT welcomes the opportunity to provide comment for the Committee's consideration.

As the leading provider of orientation and mobility services to people who are blind or vision impaired in NSW, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT works closely with many individuals and organisations to facilitate and support participation in voluntary and work placement activities.

Teaching orientation and mobility skills to people with low vision doesn't just include provision and training of mobility aids such as long cane and guide dogs. Our highly trained orientation and mobility instructors also provide free advice and support on adapting home, community and workplace environments to enable people with low vision to make the most of their residual vision.

If you require any further information or advice in relation to this matter, please contact Frances Tinsley, Client Services Manager on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,



Dr Graeme White, CEO

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT  
2-4 Thomas Street  
Chatswood NSW 2067  
PO Box 1965 Nth Syd 2059

Phone 02 9412 9300  
Fax 02 9412 9388  
[chatswood@guidedogs.com.au](mailto:chatswood@guidedogs.com.au)  
[guidedogs.com.au](http://guidedogs.com.au)  
ABN 52 000 399 744

## Overview

There doesn't appear to be any substantive or significant study into the participation rates of people with a disability within the voluntary sector in NSW.

Traditionally, there has been a focus on volunteers and volunteer organisations providing services and support to people with a disability but very little is known as to the level of participation in volunteer roles by people with a disability.

Young people who are blind or vision impaired face many barriers to equitable and full participation in education, employment and community participation.

Some of these barriers relate to physical access and may include inaccessible signage; inaccessible information and materials; pathways blocked with obstacles and hazards; or refusal to allow access to premises to a person with a guide dog.

Arguably, the largest barrier many people who are blind or vision impaired face however is that of preconceived attitudes. Despite significant study and anecdotal evidence to the contrary, regrettably many recruiters and employers hold the misguided perception that someone who is blind or vision impaired would not be as an effective or efficient employee as someone who was fully sighted.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT contends that increased participation and skill development through voluntary activities and positions by young people who are blind or vision impaired would be a significant and positive step towards adjusting community and employer misconceptions. Additionally, experience gained through voluntary work would improve the future employment prospects of people who are blind or vision impaired.

## Benefits of volunteering

Benefits of volunteering are well established and includes the opportunity to gain new skills and knowledge; boost job and career prospects; provides a sense of achievement and fulfilment; develops personally and boost self-esteem; provides the opportunity to enjoy better physical and mental health; the opportunity connect to and better understand [an individual's] community; and provides the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends.<sup>1</sup>

All of these benefits are vitally important to a person with a disability who through the nature of some disabilities can find themselves isolated from community and employment participation.

## Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment

The skills, experience and confidence gained through volunteering is an extremely valuable asset in the process of seeking remunerative employment and is arguable even more beneficial to people who have a disability as employers are often hesitant to employ a person with a

---

<sup>1</sup> Benefits of volunteering, NSW Volunteering, Department of Education and communities  
<http://www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/volunteers/benefits-of-volunteering>

disability due to concerns as to their ability to perform essential functions of a position. Prior voluntary experience in a similar or related field or 'task' group and appropriate references would significantly increase the prevalence of positive employment attitudes and outcomes

It has been well established that people who are blind or vision impaired are significantly over-represented in unemployment and underemployment statistics pertaining to the paid workforce.

Research undertaken by Blind Citizens Australia has determined that for people who are blind or vision impaired, 69% of people of working age and wishing to work are not employed – 4.5 times the national average.

Of those who are classified as employed, 13% are unable to find full time employment, compared to 6% of the general Australian population, and remain underemployed and unable to achieve economic and social security.

Addressing the significant challenge of unemployment and underemployment for people who are blind or vision impaired will require a collaborative and multi-faceted approach from job seekers themselves, the disability sector, government and employers.

The frustration of seeking employment is compounded all too frequently by an inability to access job advertisement and application information in accessible formats; assessment tools utilised in the interview and selection process; and regrettably continued attitudinal barriers existing around the ability of a blind or vision impaired person to be successful in a position.

The traditional methods people in the broader community undertake to gain practical employment experience, for example through volunteering and work experience placements, are often inaccessible for a person who is blind or vision impaired for similar reasons.

### Inclusive Volunteering

Volunteer organisations are required to adhere to the principles of 'equitable treatment' and 'reasonable adjustments' in relation to a person with a disability applying for and undertaking a voluntary position as required under the Disability Discrimination Act Cth 1992 and NSW Discrimination Act.

The Disability Inclusion Bill 2014 currently under review seeks to offer protection for people with a disability from paid and voluntary workers however there is no mention of positive principles to encourage and support participation of people with a disability within the employment or volunteer spheres.

The Joint report of the NSW Office of Communities and the Centre for Volunteering NSW on the Recognition of the Rights of volunteers: a report on the state-wide consultation 2012 determined that *"Many participants felt that community organisations had much to gain from being inclusive of volunteers with diverse backgrounds and needs. There was acknowledgement of the differing*

*capacities of organisations, while participants said organisations need to develop the necessary frameworks for responding to such wide ranging needs if they choose to engage with those volunteers.”<sup>2</sup>*

In her 2011 report *Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers in local New South Wales HACC Community Services: A Volunteer Perspective*, Professor Jeni Warburton observed that *“Volunteering can be a more inclusive activity if different roles are considered and an attempt is made to engage people with disabilities or language barriers.”<sup>3</sup>*

The Queensland and Victorian Governments have heeded the advice of the Centre for Volunteering<sup>4</sup> who recognised the need for additional study and resources towards inclusive volunteering and have produced material encouraging voluntary organisations to increase participation within their volunteer ranks by people who have a disability.<sup>5</sup>

## Recommendations

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT provides the following recommendations for the Committee’s consideration in the hopes that more people who are blind or vision impaired will have the opportunity to benefit from participating in volunteer activities, roles and positions:

1. The NSW Government can lead by example by increasing the number of voluntary and work experience placements for young people who are blind or vision impaired amongst their own Departments and Agencies.
2. The NSW Government can encourage and support voluntary organisations to actively engage people with a disability as a part of their volunteer workforce. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT can provide advice to Departments and organisations to improve accessibility and inclusive practices.
3. The NSW Government can establish programs to remove barriers to participation in voluntary activities for people who have a disability through providing resources and support to voluntary organisations to make reasonable adjustments to the voluntary workplace or culture to facilitate participation by a person who is blind or vision impaired.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Report on Improving Recognition of the Rights of Volunteers, December 2012*  
[http://www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/documents/23672909/23725145/Recognition\\_Consult\\_%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/documents/23672909/23725145/Recognition_Consult_%20Report_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers in local New South Wales HACC Community Services: A Volunteer Perspective* - Jeni Warburton, Jennifer Smith-Merry and Maureen Rogers - John Richards Initiative, La Trobe University @ page 8 of executive summary

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.volunteering.com.au/latest\\_news/national\\_volunteering\\_news/2008/inclusive\\_volunteering\\_february\\_2008.asp](http://www.volunteering.com.au/latest_news/national_volunteering_news/2008/inclusive_volunteering_february_2008.asp)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/communityservices/volunteering/documents/recruiting-volunteers.pdf>  
[http://www.volunteering.com.au/downloads/voice\\_of\\_volunteering/Recruiting-Retaining-Volunteers-in-local-NSW-HACC-Community-Services.pdf](http://www.volunteering.com.au/downloads/voice_of_volunteering/Recruiting-Retaining-Volunteers-in-local-NSW-HACC-Community-Services.pdf)  
<http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy-publications/yacvicother-publications-and-resources/55-volunter-tip-sheets/220-tip-sheet-6-inclusive-volunteering-for-young-people-with-disabilities>