

**REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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

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**At Sydney on Friday 20 June 2014**

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**The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.**

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**PRESENT**

Mr Mark Coure (Chair)

**Legislative Council**

The Hon. J. Barham  
The Hon. N. Blair  
The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

**Legislative Assembly**

Ms L. J. Burney  
Ms M. R. Gibbons

**CHAIR:** Thank you for attending the first public hearing of the Committee on Children and Young People's inquiry into volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in New South Wales. Today the Committee will hear from the Department of Education and Communities, the Centre for Volunteering, the Commission for Children and Young People, the NSW Youth Advisory Council and the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network. The Committee has resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of public hearings so we must be careful what we say. Copies of the guidelines governing the coverage of proceedings are available from Committee staff. I now declare the hearing open.

**SIMON WATTS**, Director, NSW Volunteering, Level 11, 323 Castlereagh Street, Haymarket, affirmed and examined:

**JANE ELIZABETH SIMMONS**, Executive Director, Learning and Leadership, Department of Education and Communities, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney, NSW 2000, sworn and examined:

**ROBYN BALE**, Director, Student Engagement and Interagency Partnerships, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, sworn and examined:

**CHAIR:** Can you confirm that you have been issued with the inquiry terms of reference and information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

**Mr WATTS:** I have.

**Ms SIMMONS:** I have.

**Ms BALE:** I have.

**CHAIR:** Is each of you appearing before the Committee in a particular capacity today?

**Mr WATTS:** Yes.

**Ms SIMMONS:** Yes.

**Ms BALE:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** The Committee has received a submission from your organisations. Do you want that submission to form part of your formal evidence?

**Mr WATTS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Before we proceed, do you have any questions concerning the procedural information sent to you in relation to witnesses and the hearing process?

**Ms SIMMONS:** No.

**CHAIR:** Mr Watts, would you like to make an opening statement before we begin questions?

**Mr WATTS:** Thank you, that would be great. Through the NSW Volunteering Strategy the Government recognises the importance of volunteering in our society and provides tangible measures and initiatives to support and recognise volunteering. Volunteering delivers improved health, wellbeing, trust, social connection and longevity throughout one's life. The volunteering of children and young people is principally supported through the modelling and actual volunteering of their parents. Two-thirds of adult volunteers report that their parents had done voluntary work, and 40 per cent of adults report volunteering as a child. It is good to participate and if generous-hearted giving and volunteering commences early in life, then it continues through one's life.

Volunteering actively builds social capital and the wellbeing of society. Participation in volunteering is an essential element in building intergenerational health and wellbeing. Volunteering while at school supports learning and development, creates a long-term commitment to volunteering and delivers many personal benefits. Finally, service learning provides opportunities for students to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic status and influences students' interest in future leadership and service roles. To distil the evidence on volunteering into one phrase, "It's good to be good."

**CHAIR:** Ms Simmons and Ms Bale, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms SIMMONS:** No.

**CHAIR:** We will now proceed with questions. What are the major impediments to children and young people taking up volunteering opportunities in New South Wales?

**Mr WATTS:** I think principally the thing we hear most talked about is that there is an unequal opportunity in the city compared with the bush. If you live in a more rural or remote location, sometimes the cost of travel or the actual travel arrangements to get to a volunteering opportunity are difficult. For instance, an example might be Aboriginal kids in a remote north-west town. It is pretty challenging to see them having the same volunteering opportunities as, say, kids in the inner city might have. So that is one set of issues. Of course, there is associated driving: Is there public transport? I think that is an issue.

Increasingly in the twenty-first century, volunteering for younger people is pretty passion and value driven as well. There is sometimes a perception that young people need to have direction in their volunteering but I think it is a bit of a different world these days and young people do not necessarily volunteer for organisations. They are more likely to start an initiative or an organisation themselves. I am not entirely sure that there are huge barriers. I think there are some barriers and that a lot of young people are well able to navigate that terrain themselves.

**CHAIR:** You talked about travel costs briefly. What incentives can government agencies provide to young people in that capacity of volunteering?

**Mr WATTS:** I wonder whether something like giving them a discount travel pass is appropriate. I think young people get free transport to school. Is that an opportunity for volunteering days perhaps? I do not think there is more on that tiny issue that I could add.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** You made an interesting point that young people do not tend to join an organisation but tend to set up their own initiatives. I guess Facebook and social media play a large part in that in terms of promoting it. It is fabulous that they set up their own initiatives. But when there are already organisations that have systems set up, how do we encourage them to join those organisations, taking on a little bit from your point about what the Government can do? What can we encourage organisations to do to get them in that framework that is already set up rather than setting up their own?

**Mr WATTS:** I am not entirely agreeing. I do not think that there are real barriers to young people being welcome in organisations and participating. I think there is ample evidence that many young people do, particularly sport and recreation. Any young person who has an interest in developing a professional career in sport will inevitably be volunteering heavily in that sport—for instance, umpiring, officiating. It is a sort of mandatory volunteering; it is part of learning the business of that sport. Many young people participate in that way. One thing though that we hear is that many older, better-established, conservative organisations at times do not welcome young people and some people describe that as a sort of age-related discrimination, essentially. Some of that comes from the fact that it costs to manage volunteers. There is a perception that because a volunteer's time is given freely you do not need to manage them. In fact, you need to manage volunteers in much the same way as you manage paid staff, and it costs almost the same.

So organisations that want to do that, perhaps cheaply, would see sometimes that the effort of managing younger volunteers, particularly groups of them, is heavy and they will not sometimes want to bear that responsibility. I think all of that turns on how purposeful you want the volunteering to be. If you want to achieve something that is constructive and that delivers positive results then you have got to plan it, project manage it and deliver it. The best organisations that engage with younger people do that very well. I guess sometimes there is also a perception that younger people need to be managed in a sort of negative way and I think that sort of perception could be a bit patronising too. I think that part of being younger is exploring opportunities in the world and seeing where your passion and your values take you.

**CHAIR:** It starts really at the school level. What is embedded in the curriculum for high school students in regard to volunteering? I remember when I was at high school on Thursday afternoon we did volunteering for the local disability organisation for a semester. What is embedded in the curriculum to give students that knowledge of volunteering?

**Ms SIMMONS:** I can only make comments in relation to what happens in government schools in New South Wales. In terms of the curriculum broadly, the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards is responsible for curriculum across all schools. So if you had a question, that question would need to be asked of the Board of Studies. In terms of what we are able to offer in New South Wales public schools, volunteering as

such is embedded in a whole lot of other different experiences, whether it be additional activities in the school—local schools make local decisions about what their students might participate in. We do have evidence that students do participate in volunteering. There is not anything in particular that is part of the curriculum as such but it is regarded as an extracurricular activity. In some schools that is very much a part of the local school community and that local school context.

**CHAIR:** At the end of the day it is a school-by-school, case-by-case basis. So outside the school itself there is nothing really formalised across the network of public schools as to volunteering?

**Ms SIMMONS:** I might rephrase what you just said. There is not anything that is particularly organised but anything that is organised is based around the policies, procedures and guidelines that we have in place, whether it be for students undertaking excursions or whether students are involved in any workplace learning programs. And whilst that is not volunteering, we have a whole range of systems and policies in place to support students who are doing something outside the school.

**Ms BALE:** If I could add to what Jane has said, while volunteering is implemented locally by schools based on their specific circumstance—and you mentioned a local disability group that you personally had an involvement with—we often find that schools have community groups around them which they have strong connections with, and that can often be the start of volunteering. We also have a website—I am not sure if you have seen it—on student volunteering and service learning. That website is available to schools. It provides a whole range of information about volunteering and safety, and has a toolkit for teachers to guide them in their practice as they establish volunteering programs within their schools. While we do not have a systemic volunteering program as such indicating what schools should or should not do in terms of they must participate in a volunteering program, we have a range of information available for schools and we know that many schools use that information to guide their practice in terms of volunteering.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I am interested in your views on the best motivators or ways in which to get young people involved. We traditionally think of volunteering in an altruistic way. Perhaps that needs to be fleshed out a little as to whether that works best for young people. The point you have made about young people getting up and doing their own thing is true. That is wonderful and I think we should let a thousand flowers bloom there. We should not try to put any rings around that. I am interested in your experience of the altruistic motivation for volunteering. I am interested in your views on these two different levers: governments of all persuasions have employment programs or social security benefits and the trade-off is that you must volunteer; and what governments can do to increase the volunteering call for young people. I know that is complicated.

**Mr WATTS:** I will give that a go.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I am not interested in what is going on; I am interested in your views about what we should be doing.

**Mr WATTS:** Two million people in New South Wales get up each day and volunteer but not, as some people believe, because they make a positive, social contribution. They get up and do it because it feels good. It has its own positive reward. So that is the sort of principal response. Internationally, the evidence now demonstrates very clearly that the personal benefits of generous-hearted giving of volunteering outweigh the value of the contribution of the individual. Essentially, it is legitimate to see volunteering as a public health intervention. The population is healthier, it lives longer and it is happier as a result of volunteering. If that is true of the whole population, then it is definitely true of younger people to put down Xbox, get up off the couch and go out into the world. It establishes new relationships. It gives you benefits and opportunities that you cannot see from the couch.

While not with the age group that we are talking about here, we ran a very interesting project at Bathurst called "Bathurst Grows". Essentially, 13 non-participating young women, half of them Aboriginal, participated in this program. Most of them had kids. They were very young—in their early 20s. They volunteered at a local volunteer-run bowling club. They learnt bar skills, hospitality and event management. They contributed about 1,000 hours of volunteering over about a nine-month period and five of them got full-time jobs out of that experience. Getting off the couch leads to employment and, irrespective of the sorts of ideologies that swirl around mandatory participation and younger people, it is good to get off the couch. It is good to be active. It leads to positive places at all times really.

The only caveat on that is that too much volunteering can be a problem. Essentially, it cannot be the right balance. I think that is how I would really want to answer your question. We need to encourage people to explore the world themselves. I think those benefits I talk about, the health benefits, they do not just come from volunteering; they also come from participation. They come from playing football and netball as well.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Are you actively promoting the website you mentioned earlier? Do schools utilise it?

**Ms BALE:** Yes, schools utilise it.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Is it being promoted?

**Ms BALE:** Yes, it is.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Is there a specific training program within schools on volunteering, and the principles that guide it, so that young people are aware of opportunities as well as their rights in that circumstance? Is there a training module?

**Ms BALE:** That is coming back to what Jane mentioned before in her remark that volunteering is not mandatory. The mandatory requirement in schools is really syllabus and curriculum requirements. Volunteering is not included in those syllabus requirements but we do know that a large number of our secondary schools, for example, do encourage volunteering within their school and beyond their school. Some of it is school arranged and some of it is generated by young people themselves in what they do outside the school environment and on weekends—as we mentioned, sport.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Are they given guidance and understanding of the relationship that is involved when young people go out into an adult world? Do they fully understand their rights? Are there any issues for them about entering into that relationship?

**Ms BALE:** When schools take up a volunteering program they will use the resources that we have available for them. There is a toolkit which has information in it—a student record card, for example—for their volunteering program that talks about a whole range of things. Their parents need to provide their permission. But it also gives tips and information for students not just in the record card but also as part of the student volunteering program. If it is a formalised program within the school it will be talking to its students about those very things.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Do the schools have a very clear guideline about that engagement process, where it might be—without wishing to be disrespectful, an organisation that takes on volunteers could be utilising them for work purposes rather than purely volunteering? I refer to the idea of unpaid work and whether young people have a clear understanding about where there might be crossovers and about abuse that could happen in a workplace or in an organisation.

**Ms BALE:** In relation to volunteering, we have a very particular focus on volunteering which is not related to paid or unpaid work. So the volunteering is seen very differently from a work type of program within an organisation. We also have parameters around our work placement for students within our schools. So there are very clear parameters around what a work placement looks like and the organisations that schools actually interact with in terms of arranging those work placements for them.

**Ms SIMMONS:** In our public schools in New South Wales we have workplace learning programs. There are essentially two workplace learning programs. We have the students in years 9 and 10 who have the opportunity, which many of us would know as the old work experience, and we have policies and guidelines that are very strict policies and guidelines around student engagement with host employers—that is the word that we would use. Very much embedded in those policies and guidelines is a risk assessment process; it sits within those guidelines. We have an expectation in the policy that, where students might be participating in work experience or workplace learning, the host employer needs to complete all requirements in terms of our policy.

We have very strong due diligence around student engagement beyond the school. When there are any particular issues that schools are aware of we have incident reporting policies. Students are very well prepared. They are very well briefed before they go out beyond the school and engage in the community. They have a

little card they take with them and they understand what they can and cannot do in that workplace. So our policies and guidelines, we believe, in our public school system are very strict. When there are any particular issues—which are very rare occasions—those matters are dealt with through our work health safety requirements and incident reporting requirements.

**Ms BALE:** If we return specifically to volunteering though, our schools are required to undertake a number of steps before they enter into a volunteering program or relationship with organisations. First and foremost is a risk assessment. So they are required to complete a risk assessment which will cover a whole range of things. They are also required to look at the supervision that will be provided for the young person who might be participating in that volunteering activity. Of course, the student record information needs to be completed, which the young person has with them. That has a range of information on it, including details of the organisation that will be providing that opportunity for the young person, but also the person who will be directly supervising the young person.

It also provides avenues and opportunities and information for students about emergency contacts if they need to make one in an emergency if they are in a situation on their own away from their school but, alternatively, how they can raise complaints or issues, if you like, if there is a problem. The organisations that schools actually work with to provide volunteering opportunities are very clearly advised of the steps that will be followed and the rights, if you like, of students in those circumstances and also the obligations of the organisation that might be participating.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** You referred to incident reporting. Do you have any indication of the level of incident reporting on an annual basis? Is there some evidence about the sorts of issues that come up that are instigating these incident reports and whether an evaluation happens to ensure that systems improve in the future?

**Ms SIMMONS:** In response to workplace learning programs when there is an incident, which is on a very rare occasion, we do review our remedying systems and put those in place. We review our policies and update our guidelines as a result of any incident that does occur.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Is that distributed statewide?

**Ms SIMMONS:** Yes, that is distributed statewide. Some of those things can be distributed at the beginning of the year just to remind people as well. There was an incident, for example, last year in relation to a workplace learning program vocational education and training student, and we updated our policy as a result of a particular incident. That was distributed to all people across the State: all teachers who are teaching vocational education and training across the State in our New South Wales public schools. Also, we have provided training for teachers as well as the information that was distributed.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I refer to page 10 of your submission under the heading "Policy and Child Protection". The second sentence states, "The Department consults with the New South Wales Commissioner for Children and Young People and more recently the Office of the Children's Guardian to ensure that the Department's workplace learning procedures meet these requirements and improve practice to support the ongoing safety and protection." In terms of improved practice, in the past 12 months have any specific proposals or suggestions about how practices can be improved been put forward by you; or is it an agenda item that is there all the time and you just talk about it? I am trying to establish whether there are matters you are trying to address that you have seen and flagged to try to improve in your discussions. I am referring to the requirement to improve practice, the first paragraph under the heading "Policy and Child Protection". In terms of improving practice, should this Committee be made aware of any matters that you have raised to enhance the practice?

**Ms BALE:** In our submission the most recent changes that we have made were in 2013 in relation to the Working With Children Check, and I think that is mentioned in that section there. We have a relationship with the Commission and the Children's Guardian. We talk with them about a range of matters. But there has not been anything in recent times in terms of systems improvement on that front.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** So there is nothing else that we should be thinking about or considering in our deliberations in terms of improvements and enhancements? Are there further things that should be considered in making our recommendations?

**Ms BALE:** Is this in relation to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Yes.

**Ms BALE:** Simon may have some comments on that. I was just mentioning that the most recent change we had, in collaboration, was the change to the Working With Children Check in 2013.

**Mr WATTS:** I think the new Working With Children Check is the generational change. The legislation has changed significantly. What system has not been touched as a result of that dramatic improvement? What has been happening in the last year is the bedding down of the policies and procedures that give effect to that. You would be aware that there is a rolling schedule of implementation. So it will not be fully implemented for another 18 months. One of the areas, for instance, that has been impacted upon is the new Checks coming for people who volunteer with children in contexts like volunteer supervision. One of the organisations that has borne a burden with that new change is, for instance, the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. It engages with tens of thousands of coaches. For the first time, those folk are subject to this checking regime. In a sense, we are in the middle of a really major policy update.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** We are trying to look forward. We will be producing a report and making recommendations. So is there anything that you think is worthwhile that we should be putting forward? There may be some fresh thinking or a new perspective here.

**Ms SIMMONS:** I will make a comment on that. In relation to the new procedures around the Working With Children Check, host employers—for where our students are undertaking their workplace learning experience—have been told that if there are any child protection issues, which the students are concerned about then the students will notify someone. The host employers have been told that up-front. It is written into our new procedures, and students are certainly briefed on that. It is also written into our Student Placement Record, and I am happy to table that. It says, "I have read and understood the special responsibilities associated with working with children and young people as detailed in the section relating to child protection in *The Workplace Learning Guide for Employers*." We provide that *The Workplace Learning Guide for Employers* to employers prior to students undertaking a workplace learning experience. The employer declaration in the Student Placement Record also says, "I understand students must report incidents to their school." The Student Placement Record is signed by the student, their parent and the employer. Students do not undertake any workplace learning experience unless that document is completed.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** If you could table that, that would be good. I would like to follow up on the issue of the employer. Bearing in mind that a lot of the organisations that young people do work experience with are very large and quite decentralised, what level is the sign-off done at? I put it to you that if it is being done at a very high level then we might be missing issues that could be happening in an individual workplace. Let me use a hypothetical example of a local store manager. Head office could sign off on the documentation but the work placement could be taking place out at a store in Timbuktu. We have a potential issue there if that is not being thought about at the local level. Who is "the employer" in that case? Is it at the centralised level or at quite a decentralised level?

**Ms SIMMONS:** I am not quite sure that I understand the question.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** This question follows up on my second question about the employer involved. Let us say that the employer has a site which is an isolated site and that is where the work placements will be. But the head office is located somewhere else. Is the sign-off on the paperwork that you have just referred to done at head office level? Or is "the employer" those who are supervising the work placement student at that local workplace? There can be a big gap between a decentralised local workplace and their head office.

**Ms SIMMONS:** It would be the employer at the local level. But I will also say that if students are undertaking any work placement in a very isolated area then that would raise some alarm bells at a school level. There would be a decision made at the local level by the principal and the teachers responsible as to whether or not that is a suitable workplace for workplace learning if it is isolated and remote. There are a number of things that schools do at a local level to make those decisions. For example, as I mentioned earlier, the documents must be fully completed. There are other things that raise alarm bells—for example, if they do not provide the documentation. If it is not signed off until the Friday when the student is going to start their work placement on



the Monday then from our perspective that is not satisfactory because there is not enough time to do some due diligence about what the experience is going to be like.

We do not have students undertake placements in the last week of term because there is no time to follow up because of school holidays. Teachers also follow up on work placements—they ring or visit the workplace where students are undertaking the work placement, and that is mandatory. So there are a whole lot of things that we have put in place. If a form is not completed or if there is something that concerns us then that would raise alarm bells. For example, if there is a female student going into an all-male workplace then that in itself is going to raise alarm bells. It would be very unlikely that that would be approved unless there was some further investigation of that.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I have one final question on the issue of the injury of a young person doing volunteer work or doing an unpaid work placement. I would like to get your comments on the current way in which students are protected—in other words, with respect to the existing regime. Your submission usefully refers to a number of policies, practices and procedures; and of course there is legislation as well for injuries in the workplace. Do you have a view that the current regime is satisfactory? Or are there areas where improvement and enhancement could take place with respect to the injury of young people in a workplace while volunteering or in unpaid work?

**Ms SIMMONS:** In relation to work placement, our students are participating in a learning experience that is associated with the curriculum. Any incident or anything that occurs that requires work health and safety intervention sits within our incident reporting policies. As I mentioned earlier, if there is an incident then our policies are updated accordingly. I am not an expert on our work health and safety policies, but our work health and safety policies are also updated in accordance with legislation. For example, some of our students undertake work placements in the construction sector. When there are changes in work health and safety requirements or any recommendations from WorkCover to do with the construction sector—and we work very closely with WorkCover—then we update our policies and guidelines accordingly.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** If a young person is injured in a workplace whilst doing unpaid work, what is the position? Which piece of legislation are they covered by in terms of medical expenses or costs with respect to their convalescence?

**Ms BALE:** I do not have with me specific information in relation to the legislation or what benefits would arise. But in relation to student volunteering, and it would be the same for work placements, where it is arranged formally through the school—and they would have gone through the processes in terms of risk assessment, have established their program and got their information under that two-way exchange of information with the organisations they are working with—one of the things that the school also needs to do is to activate their school's insurance and indemnity cover. That is the cover under which the student would be covered for those opportunities.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** You talked about construction sites, and obviously they are places where injuries can be very serious and obvious, but there can be injuries even in what people might think of as a "soft" workplace, so to speak. You can still be injured there. Are you saying that it is not the workers compensation that covers them but rather indemnity, which is taken out by the school? Is that the position?

**Ms SIMMONS:** No. I will make a comment on that. Our insurance and indemnity arrangements are at an industry standard and our Treasury Managed Fund covers our insurance. So if students are participating in work placement or any workplace experience, it is covered by the Treasury Managed Fund insurance and it is at an industry standard. That also covers students travelling to and from the workplace. But if students are participating in any paid type of work experience, they are not covered by our Treasury Managed Fund—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That would be workers compensation.

**Ms SIMMONS:** —because it comes under the employer's insurance.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Do you think the current arrangements you have with Treasury need to be enhanced?

**Ms SIMMONS:** No, not at this stage. As I said, it is at industry standards.

**CHAIR:** I have one final question before we wrap up. In a nutshell, is there anything that you as a government agency would like to see implemented to increase the number of volunteers across our State?

**Mr WATTS:** The New South Wales Government in 2012 released the first volunteering strategy for the State and that built on extensive public consultation—400 people across the State were consulted. My experience, having implemented that strategy now for a couple of years, is that it is resonant, it makes sense to folk and what we are doing is practical. In particular, I mention the Timebanking initiative that is now in 44 communities. In the budget earlier in the week funding was provided for another 20 communities, so essentially by the end 2014 more than 80 per cent of the population will have immediate local access to that—and I know that several of you have Timebanking active in your electorates already; in fact, at least three of you. That provides a tremendous opportunity for organisations, and for individuals in fact, to make connections and for people to receive a benefit for their volunteering. I think that we have had good success with that strategy. It has focused people's attention and I think that it has delivered the right policies to encourage volunteering.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. The Committee may wish to send you some additional questions in writing, the replies to which will form part of your evidence and be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

**Mr WATTS:** Yes.

**Ms SIMMONS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** That being the case, thank you very much.

**Mr WATTS:** Thank you for your time.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**GEMMA MARY RYGATE**, Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Volunteering, sworn and examined:

**CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee on Children and Young People today to give evidence. Will you please confirm that you have been issued with the inquiry terms of reference information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

**Ms RYGATE:** I have.

**CHAIR:** The Committee has received a submission from your organisation. Do you want that submission to form part of your formal evidence?

**Ms RYGATE:** I do, please.

**CHAIR:** Before we proceed, do you have any questions concerning the procedural information sent to you in relation to witnesses and the hearing process?

**Ms RYGATE:** No, I do not.

**CHAIR:** That being the case, would you like to make an opening statement before we commence questions?

**Ms RYGATE:** I would, thank you. The Centre for Volunteering defines volunteering as an activity undertaken to benefit the community and the volunteer. It is carried out without coercion and undertaken with the volunteer's own free will. There is no financial benefit. Unpaid work placements are conceptually distinct from volunteering. They are generally connected with work experience and linked to explicit learning and development outcomes. Both have significant merit and should be distinct from any exploitation activities that might take place where volunteers take on roles that would normally attract remuneration.

The Centre's expertise is in volunteering. Volunteering delivers a wealth of benefits for all age groups. It builds self-esteem; individuals learn and develop new skills; they gain health benefits and build networks; they make a difference in someone's life; they give back to their community, develop feelings of self-worth and make a difference. All of these benefits should be promoted to younger citizens through schools and in the media to attract younger citizens to volunteering and to promote the contribution that young citizens can make in the community. There is evidence that volunteering is influenced generationally. If one's parents volunteer, then a younger individual is more likely to volunteer.

When volunteering is undertaken early in life, then individuals are more likely to continue to contribute throughout their life. All volunteering benefits society. The Centre for Volunteering encourages youth volunteering and fosters opportunities for volunteering. The Centre delivers programs in schools to introduce volunteering opportunities and to provide information on the rights and responsibilities of volunteers. The Centre also facilitates a youth volunteer referral service to give individuals the opportunity to volunteer in their community. Organisations involved in working with these younger volunteers must satisfy best-practice guidelines when dealing with volunteers, including ensuring Working With Children Checks are met and other insurance requirements.

Younger volunteers must be considered in a new light. Flexibility is essential. There is a clear appetite from younger citizens to volunteer. Unfortunately at times there is some resistance in the community to accommodate the less traditional approach of younger volunteers. There needs to be an openness to provide opportunities that meet the interests, reasons and motivations of young volunteers. Long-term, regular commitment cannot be a prerequisite. Flexibility around engagement is essential. Organisations must allow for younger volunteers' other commitments, including study and leisure. To incentivise younger volunteers we must highlight the benefits of volunteering, both to the individual and to the community.

Evidence suggests that younger citizens are values driven and passionate when it comes to their volunteering choices. Volunteer-involving organisations must be mindful of this when designing opportunities for volunteering. It is also important to acknowledge the contribution of volunteers through such programs as the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards, which have two younger person-focused categories: student and youth. Awards not only highlight and acknowledge the effort of individual volunteers but also raise the profile of volunteering.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. You mentioned in your report that in an effort to open up as many opportunities as possible to young volunteers your organisation links young people and organisations to youth volunteering information, and of course there are seminars in schools. Is there something—and I did ask Mr Watts this previously—that schools could be doing a lot better to increase the level of volunteering in our communities in community groups such as aged care providers and disability organisations? Is there any formalised structure or anything that schools could be doing a lot better?

**Ms RYGATE:** I actually do not think it is so much on the school side of things.

**CHAIR:** It seems to be a school-by-school, case-by-case approach. What I am thinking of is a more formalised approach across the network of schools in regards to volunteering.

**Ms RYGATE:** Like a complete program throughout New South Wales?

**CHAIR:** Yes, similar to work experience, for example, where in years 9 and 10 there will be a week or two weeks when kids can do work experience, either later in the year or in the middle of the year. Is there a structure where we can have a more formalised approach where schools can allow kids to do volunteering and have that reported on their report card or in kits where you have subjects A, B and C, and perhaps on the bottom of that report card, "Volunteering" or "Community Contribution", and the name of the organisation?

**Ms RYGATE:** There is opportunity for that already through the Certificate IV in Active Volunteering. A number of schools encourage their students to participate in that. But in answering your question, Should it be more formalised and in a sense compulsory?

**CHAIR:** That is what I am getting at.

**Ms RYGATE:** Right. I am not totally convinced that that would meet a need of either the student or the community. In essence, volunteering is something that you do not do because you are coerced or you are forced to do it. Making it compulsory activity may remove some of that free will and the enjoyment that individuals get from volunteering.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I am going to have to leave in a moment, so please do not think I am rude. I am interested in what you have just said. I actually agree that putting some mandatory component into the school curriculum flies in the face of what volunteering is actually about. However, obviously it is an important notion to embed in young people. To me, that is more to do with society and the opportunities that big organisations in particular can provide. One of the things we heard from the previous panel is that young people are using their own initiative much more, setting up their own organisations—often to do with the music area or, I suspect, the environment. Having children who are young adults, I actually see this. Can you give us what you think are hot examples of young people taking the initiative?

**Ms RYGATE:** There are some fantastic examples of that out there. Young people have varying needs and motivations when it comes to volunteering. There is a particular interest in the ability for young people to be able to volunteer with their peers in groups. There would be many examples around particular events when young people can come together and participate and feel like they are really contributing and assisting society, but they are also forming greater networks and developing their own skills. There is also quite a lot of evidence, particularly in Queensland, where organisations that have greater flexibility have been able to really engage with young people and there have been many successes there. That would be something that I would advocate that we in New South Wales encourage organisations to do.

There are obviously thousands of examples of successes in sport and recreation. Without naming any particular one, without the contribution of young people in various roles of volunteering we would not have the vibrant sporting culture that we have here in New South Wales, which is particularly apt this week. There are many, many examples, and volunteering, I think, is a hugely important part of what young people do. Just going back to the previous question, I think there are things that can be done in schools to encourage volunteering without making it compulsory, such as allowing flexibility of time and perhaps offering the ability for students to use the time that they have taken in their volunteering experiences to go for a qualification.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I wish to pursue that a little bit. I think the trick with better utilising the capacity of the Department of Education and Communities is not about making things mandatory but about accreditation and making things worthwhile.

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** That therefore contributes to whatever the qualification is.

**Ms RYGATE:** So that the effort is acknowledged.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Yes. I would be interested in your view on that.

**Ms RYGATE:** I completely agree with you. Most volunteers do not actively seek acknowledgement. We are challenged constantly with the New South Wales Volunteer of the Year awards to actually get people to put their hand up.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Yes.

**Ms RYGATE:** However, acknowledgement in other ways is very significant for younger people, particularly things as simple as giving them a reference if they have participated in a voluntary activity. They are the kinds of things that will build their cachet of evidence, that they are doing all these wonderful things—and that is quite important.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** Can I go a little further and tease out some of the recommendations of the Centre's submission?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** When we talk about flexibility and recognition—for example, with high school students—I know that one day a week they all go and do sport. Not everyone is interested in sport. Allowing students to utilise that time for volunteering activities, is that the sort of thing you mean by flexibility?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** Having that recognised on a report as community service would be very hard to validate, I imagine, as part of their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank [ATAR] to get increased marks, but we do that for sport. Someone who represents their country in school sport gets an extra five marks on their ATAR. Is that the sort of thing you have in mind?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes, and the Certificate IV in Active Volunteering can be counted as two units towards the Higher School Certificate [HSC]. So I do mean that.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** So link it into the VET system?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes. Not only that, but there should be a whole suite of opportunities that acknowledge the efforts of young people. I think it is a great idea to have the old compulsory sports afternoon not as an opt-out opportunity but as an opportunity for young people to pursue their volunteering activities.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** The key message you are sending here is that you are removing the compulsion, but you are having it as an option.

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** You recommend producing a volunteering DVD. There is not something like that at the moment?

**Ms RYGATE:** No, there is not. It would be relatively simple to do with appropriate funding, of course, but that could be a useful tool. Going back to the evidence of the previous group, there are a lot of things that are happening in schools. The rights and responsibilities of volunteers are freely available on both the Department's website and the website of the Centre for Volunteering, but having more hands-on experience—and I am not

sure whether the DVD is a little bit outdated—and some opportunity for visual representation of things could be very useful.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** That should not be limited to schools.

**Ms RYGATE:** No, that is right.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** The irony is that other groups that usually have a volunteer basis can also breed more volunteering out of those groups.

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** I am thinking about things like youth groups and Scouts and Guides and things like that, and you have mentioned sporting clubs. By their nature they are volunteer organisations, but it is also another pool for getting young people to extend that volunteering.

**Ms RYGATE:** That is right.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** It is almost an irony in itself that volunteers are coming out of volunteer organisations.

**Ms RYGATE:** Volunteers beget volunteers. They do, yes.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** You were talking about the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank [ATAR] a moment ago. Your organisation has a partnership with the University of Western Sydney?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes, we do.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** How do we give students, particularly in Western Sydney, easier access into university through their community work? How does that come about?

**Ms RYGATE:** It is in progress at the moment so I can only speak fairly generally, but the University of Western Sydney has established an academy. They are very committed to providing these opportunities for people, particularly in Western Sydney, to use their volunteering experience as a stepping stone into academic study and to be acknowledged in a very concrete way that the work they are doing is leading towards what might become a more formal qualification. It is a work in progress.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Are any of our regions particularly impressive in how many people are giving their time for volunteering versus areas that are lacking? I understand that the regional and country areas have to overcome distance. Particularly in metropolitan Sydney, are there areas that are getting it right versus areas that need more support?

**Ms RYGATE:** The short answer is yes. Can I address the regional issue first of all? There are some absolutely incredible examples of massive community movement in New South Wales. It spreads right across the State. The areas of greatest disadvantage are those in remote areas because there are fewer opportunities for people to participate, but there is a willingness to participate. Further west, for example in the Orana region, there are no volunteer referral centres and so having a centralised place for people who are willing to volunteer is not strictly available there. Obviously there are neighbourhood centres and so on, but it makes it a little bit more difficult for them.

Regionally I would say there is a great appetite and people do get out and do things. The rollout of Timebanking has shown that it is very positive, so we have a bit of evidence around that. In terms of the metropolitan area, we are working, as we said earlier, with the University of Western Sydney. There is plenty of volunteering going on but the encouragement for working together is something that we are quite keen to promote. Having said that, my gut reaction is that there is not any huge gap anywhere; we are pretty good in New South Wales.

**CHAIR:** Is there anything that other States do better, you did mention Queensland very briefly, and we can use that example and take it on board in New South Wales?

**Ms RYGATE:** I guess there is always "better" in some areas than others. I would not make that a blanket statement though.

**CHAIR:** Improvement?

**Ms RYGATE:** Queensland has the emergency response volunteering down pat, but there was a huge injection of funds to be able to do that for Volunteering Queensland. They do that really well. That is something that we can develop here in New South Wales. Though we do manage to attract volunteers, there is not that centralised operational activity. The thing in favour of a number of other States is that their population is not quite so sparsely spread. Trying to put it all together in a centralised organisation is pretty difficult in New South Wales and may not be necessary.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** You refer in your submission to the issue of funding. Could you elaborate on that? There were changes in 2012 to the Centre's funding situation.

**Ms RYGATE:** I understand there were but I was not at the Centre at the time. I do not feel able to comment on that.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Can you take that on notice: the impact of any funding changes?

**Ms RYGATE:** I can tell you in a general sense that there was some funding—I cannot tell you what it was exactly—for encouraging youth volunteering, and that funding ceased.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I might follow up with something on notice to allow you to give more detail. The other area of interest is whether or not we provide enough support to the community groups who may be able to provide volunteering opportunities. We have heard from previous speakers that there is a cost, whether it is time or real financial costs. Is there enough support given to them to create the opportunities to allow young people to engage in volunteering with their organisations?

**Ms RYGATE:** Again, because it is so broad, that is quite a difficult question to answer. What I would say in terms of education of those organisations is that young people are very valuable and whilst they need more flexibility that is not necessarily a negative thing. I am sure every organisation would like more funding to be able to put towards it.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Or resources?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes. The resource element is very significant and having volunteer managers who are qualified, I think, is vital and should be encouraged across the not-for-profit sector.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I am from a regional area and some of the organisations in my community have said they would love to bring young people in. But they recognise they have a responsibility then and they might be struggling already and not clear about what is involved. It is quite a task for them to become aware of what is involved and then take on board that responsibility.

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes. It almost goes back to the DVD idea. I am also from a regional centre originally and I can see that there is that blockage at times. What is really essential is to, again I say, educate those organisations that it is not that daunting to have youth volunteers. They do not require constant supervision any more than any other volunteer. Again I talk about Queensland. A number of years ago they did a study into youth volunteering and found that once organisations realised that then the synergies were fabulous and the outcomes were really brilliant too. It is about resourcing in that educational sense.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** With the Working With Children Check and some of the important reforms that have happened, it has raised to a higher bar what people think might be expected.

**Ms RYGATE:** Again, that is all about education because some of the activities that people are doing do not require Working With Children Checks. So getting the information there that people need to make those informed decisions is the essential thing.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I am keen to hear that young people are recognised and applauded for their contributions. They might not be into sport and the fact that they might have a social conscience and do this is

great. I am interested in young people, particularly from disadvantaged groups, who often do a lot of work within their family or community that would not be regarded as volunteering. It is part of their support as carers or within their own community or family network. They could well be disadvantaged by not having the time available or the energy to do it because they have personal commitments. Is there anything that you are aware of that could be addressed in that situation? I think young carers for a variety of reasons—

**Ms RYGATE:** Are volunteering.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Yes.

**Ms RYGATE:** It comes back to how strictly one defines "volunteering". I think that can certainly be broadened and should be more encompassing of what people are doing.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Noting that in some circumstances there are quite personal or private—

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** That requires recognition.

**Ms RYGATE:** Definitely.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Do you think we could support that in some way?

**Ms RYGATE:** I do, but it would be challenging.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** It would be.

**Ms RYGATE:** I do not have the answer as to how you would do that.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I would hate to think that young people who are doing a lot on a personal level in their family or community are not able to engage in something because of their disadvantage or vulnerability that might be available to a broader network.

**Ms RYGATE:** That is right.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Thank you for appearing today and congratulations on the work the organisation does. It is very important work.

**Ms RYGATE:** Thank you.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** It helps to broaden people's thinking about volunteering. I am trying to link a couple of points and to flesh them out a bit. The second dot point on page 2 of your submission states that the Centre has no influence and cannot comment on the concept of unpaid work—such matters are obviously referred to the Fair Work Ombudsman. The second-last dot point on that page states that volunteering should occur in designated volunteer positions only; volunteering is not a substitute for unpaid work. Page 8 lists four recommendations for the Committee to consider.

At point 1 you propose that an education program be developed for distribution through schools outlining the difference between volunteering and work experience and internships. Do you think there are some vagaries about the distinction between volunteering and unpaid work experience and paid work? Is it those vagaries that have led to your making this recommendation? I am trying to get behind whether you have an underlying concern that young people are surreptitiously being required to do unpaid work. Do you have a concern about that? It is unpaid work but work that should be properly remunerated and they are doing it under the guise of work experience.

**Ms RYGATE:** That is more a precautionary statement. I do not feel or believe that there is a huge problem with that at the moment.



**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Your organisation has experience and a broad perspective in this area. Do you observe what you would consider to be abuse or unfair treatment of young people in this area who are being pushed into—

**Ms RYGATE:** No, I am not.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That is good.

**Ms RYGATE:** One example has come to my attention about an intern from overseas. We are making approaches to the organisation that is involved. It is not a New South Wales-based thing. It just happens that the student has come here from a university overseas. It is not abusive. Interns are supposed to be doing something and getting beneficial experience and this individual is not.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I understand. As an organisation you do not receive regular complaints?

**Ms RYGATE:** No, we do not.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That is good to hear.

**Ms RYGATE:** It is reassuring.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Your fourth recommendation refers to the "Intro to Volunteering" DVD. Does your organisation visit schools?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Do you get a good reception? Is that done at the local level? Do you contact local school principals?

**Ms RYGATE:** The schools generally contact us. It is done at the local level and across the State, and it involves Catholic, State and independent schools. It varies. It comes down to individual school requirements when they are establishing a volunteering program, or even just generally encouraging their students to volunteer. They will get our youth volunteer manager and some of her people to visit. As I said in my opening statement, they talk about the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and things to be wary of, and also to self-assess in terms of what kind of volunteering experiences they want, what will be good for them, what they can expect and so on.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Do you find that following those presentations you receive feedback from the schools that there has been a stimulation of interest?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** There is a cause and effect from your presentation and an up-kick in their interest in volunteering?

**Ms RYGATE:** Most definitely. I do not have the statistics with me, but I would hazard to say that it would almost be unanimous. In every school that has had a presentation, the response has been extremely positive and volunteering has taken off.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** You do not have the statistics with you. Do you have statistics?

**Ms RYGATE:** We do.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** Can you provide them on notice if it showed that?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes, but I would like a couple of weeks to do that because the youth volunteer manager is away.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** That is fine. To clarify the point, it would be great to have those statistics even if it takes a few weeks.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That is very pleasing to hear. If we as a Committee are looking at ways and means of stimulating the interest of young people in volunteering, doing it through their school—in other words, through the presentations that you or similar organisations do—that would probably be one of the better ways, or perhaps even the best way, of exposing them firsthand to volunteering, what it is about, how it can benefit their self-development and the contribution they can make. Is that your submission?

**Ms RYGATE:** It should be a two-pronged approach. It should come from the grassroots in schools and other organisations that deal with younger people. But it would be valuable to have a significant media campaign that looked at youth volunteering but did not target only younger people.

**CHAIR:** Everyone?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes. Really let people know that this is not a scary thing to be involved with. Young people are okay to have as volunteers.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Do you think there is an abiding reticence in the community about this issue?

**Ms RYGATE:** As I said, I think that is true of some organisations, but not as a general rule. Obviously there are many opportunities for young people to volunteer.

**CHAIR:** In your report, on page 6 it says:

The number of calls and emails relating to youth and students 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 ...

What types of inquiries do you receive from parents and students in regard to volunteering?

**Ms RYGATE:** About opportunities for volunteering. The younger person sometimes comes directly to us. Other times they may have approached an organisation and there has been some reticence, so they come to us to place them through our youth volunteer referral service.

**CHAIR:** More for placement than anything else?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** On page 4 of your submission you say:

The Centre supports and ensures the recognition of youth volunteers through the Youth Volunteer of the Year Awards.

This is a great initiative. How do you promote the awards at a school level, to start?

**Ms RYGATE:** The Department of Education and Communities are one of the supporters of the awards. They sponsor the youth and the student awards.

**CHAIR:** What about generally in the community?

**Ms RYGATE:** To complete that answer, the Department have promoted the awards to all their schools and they are encouraging participation. Generally in the community, I have had the pleasure of making a radio advertisement that is on some commercial channels. That has had great effect. It was a sponsored opportunity. We would like to have more mainstream media—print media and online versions—take it up because that is still a great means of communication.

**CHAIR:** What social media—Facebook and Twitter?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes, we use Facebook and Twitter. We have a campaign called the "Selfless Selfie", which has had a bit of an impact.

**CHAIR:** I can think of a few politicians for that.

**Ms RYGATE:** We will be looking for some submissions. That has been a fun way of promoting the awards in general. It is an offshoot but it has been quite fun.

**CHAIR:** Are other government agencies involved in the promotion of the Youth Volunteer of the Year Awards? They are a great initiative. Secondly, how many awards are given and how many submissions do you receive?

**Ms RYGATE:** In answer to your first question, no other departments are directly involved. It is predominantly the Department of Education and Communities, the Office of Communities. We offer—we do not necessarily always present them, depending on nominations—four individual categories. These categories are student, youth, adult and senior. There are team volunteers, so five awards are presented around the State in 19 regions. The winners of each of the regional categories come to the State awards, so the five are presented at the State level once again. There are also the volunteer management award and two corporate volunteering awards at a State level only—so, a lot.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** You mentioned that there is strong feedback when you do presentations at schools and that students are pretty happy to sign up to be volunteers. Do you find that once they get home some parents are not so keen or the idea wears off? Do they follow through after signing up?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes, generally they do.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** I wondered what factors came into play if they do not.

**Ms RYGATE:** The proportion?

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** They probably do not give feedback on that.

**Ms RYGATE:** No, not really. Because it is at the local level with the school, unless we sought that feedback once the program had been established we would not have the evidence.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** It would be interesting to see the difference. For how long do they tend to volunteer? Does it continue throughout schooling and thereafter, or do they become bored with it and move on?

**Ms RYGATE:** It is variable, of course, but the general agreement would be that young people are very committed. They need flexibility around it. It is not necessarily going to be that they start on day one and volunteer every week for the next three years. It has to be more flexible than that—that they are able to come and go, dip in and dip out. That is the experience we have had, but the commitment is there. That is the slight difference.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** At school presentations, what opportunities capture their attention?

**Ms RYGATE:** What volunteering activities?

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Yes, what kind of volunteering do they get involved in? Obviously, they enjoy the sporting side of things.

**Ms RYGATE:** That does not tend to come out of the experience so much. As I mentioned, any group opportunity to volunteer is highly sought after. Working with animals is also very significant.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Something they can do with their peers is more attractive?

**Ms RYGATE:** Yes, and also places where they see they can make a contribution; it is not just a token effort.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for attending today.

**Ms RYGATE:** Thank you for the opportunity.

**CHAIR:** The Committee may wish to send some additional information or questions in writing, the answers to which will form part of your evidence and be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

**Ms RYGATE:** I would, and the two questions on notice will be provided to me?

**CHAIR:** Yes, we will do that soon.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**(Short adjournment)**

**KERRY ANNE BOLAND**, Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People, Commission for Children and Young People, affirmed and examined:

**JACQUELIN PLUMMER**, Senior Policy Officer, Commission for Children and Young People, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee on Children and Young People today to give evidence. Can you please confirm that you have been issued with the inquiry's terms of reference and information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes, I have.

**CHAIR:** Ms Boland, the Committee has received a submission from your organisation. Do you want that submission to form part of your formal evidence?

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Do you have any questions concerning the procedural information sent to you in relation to witnesses and the hearing process?

**Ms BOLAND:** No.

**CHAIR:** Do either one of you wish to make an opening statement before the commencement of questions?

**Ms BOLAND:** I do. It is quite a short one and is based, obviously, on the material and the survey that we did with children and young people. We undertook some consultations with young people aged 8 to 17 in New South Wales. This is the first time, to our knowledge, that children at the younger end of the age spectrum in New South Wales have been asked about their volunteering activity: what motivates them to volunteer and what barriers they face in taking up volunteering.

The consultation reached 350 children and young people in metropolitan, regional and rural locations across the public, Catholic and independent school sector. However, most of the schools that took up the invitation to participate were interested because they already had active student volunteering programs. I suppose this helps to explain the high proportion of young people in the consultations who said they had volunteered, and that sat around 70 per cent; it was a self-selecting group. Young people were interested in volunteering for a wide variety of areas that fit with their interests, including interests in animals, sport, children and young people, and education.

As the Commission's remit is children aged 0 to 17 years, our focus was on school-aged children and their volunteering rather than on unpaid work and internships, which typically affected an older age group. The most common motivations to volunteer reported by children and young people were their desire to help others, followed by having new experiences, meeting new people, planning skills and having fun. The most common barriers reported were being too busy with other things, followed by not being interested, not feeling comfortable with people they do not know, followed by unsuitable hours and not knowing what kind of volunteer work would be good.

Less than half the young people consulted felt they received enough information about volunteering. This was much stronger with those who had not volunteered—57 per cent compared to 35 per cent of those who had volunteered. The benefits of volunteering are clear. From a review that we did, it is about self-discipline, compassion, empathy and a commitment to civic responsibility and a greater likelihood of pro-social behaviour later in life. The Commission therefore believes that all children and young people should have the opportunity to volunteer.

A key issue is the gap between young people who have volunteered and those who have not. Volunteering can be particularly important for disadvantaged young people as the pathway to develop confidence and skills, meet new people and enhance social and economic participation. Yet these young people are often the ones with least access to volunteering programs or the supports needed to help them to volunteer. A study of Australian adolescents undertaken by Weber in 2011 found that volunteering tends to be more

common among children of well-educated and well-resourced parents who are more likely to support and encourage their children to volunteer.

The Commission's main suggestions in the submission are: addressing the needs of young people who do not volunteer by targeting research of the policies and supports that they need to participate; promoting volunteering to young people in general by tapping into the skills and drawing on the advice of young people; engaging young people in the design of promotional strategies and involving them as ambassadors and mentors; and encouraging and supporting primary school-aged children to volunteer by looking at specific supports that may be required to assist younger children to volunteer—for example, primary school programs, youth mentoring of younger children, and whole-of-family involvement and support.

Further suggestions are: better attracting young volunteers by offering flexible hours, tiered levels of commitment, volunteering with peers and providing opportunities early in school life before time pressures become too onerous; improving retention of young volunteers by providing respectful, welcoming environments, appropriate induction and supervision; adjusting opportunities for the young person's strengths and involving them in decisions that affect their volunteering; encouraging schools to further develop volunteering programs that suit their student cohort and local communities; and recognising the potential of volunteering to engage students at risk of disengaging from education.

The Commission's suggested areas of focus for improvement reflect the clear view of young people consulted about the importance of peer support and encouragement from family and schools. They highlight the young person's clear preference for tailored opportunities within organisations that recognise the unique challenge and contribution of young volunteers. That concludes my statement. I will be happy to speak about these issues in more detail.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Boland. Just a couple of questions from me to expand on some of the recommendations you have provided in your report. I note in the consultations that were undertaken that those who had not volunteered were more likely to be male—27 per cent compared with 12 per cent of females—and volunteers were mostly from Sydney compared with rural and regional New South Wales. How can we increase male participation in particular, or just generally, participation across the board in regards to volunteering? Are incentives needed to be implemented from maybe government agencies to provide some incentive for young people to volunteer?

**Ms BOLAND:** If I could follow on from the previous set of volunteering. I think there are some unique opportunities, obviously, for the Commission to work with volunteering, in particular, to dovetail and assist with awards in particular areas. I think there can be probably some expansion into areas apart from the school environment—perhaps sporting environments. I am thinking in particular of out-of-home care, children who come into the care system via some of the non-government organisations who manage placements of children in out-of-home care. They would be a couple of the expanded remits to reach vulnerable children.

Our work really revolved around asking, as I said, children who had been engaged in volunteering. The kinds of distinctions between male and female volunteering went to the kind of volunteering that was offered and also the kinds of supports that were in place for that volunteering and how it fitted into the day-to-day opportunities of children and young people. We collected quite a lot of data and information when we undertook our consultation and in relation to that I might ask Jacqui to go into some more detail about the male-female split that you asked about.

In relation to incentives, we have looked at a number of schemes that offer incentives at the higher end of education—the Duke of Edinburgh is not a bad example of added incentives with additional points in your ATAR in the HSC environment. Again, those things really are for kids at the higher end of the education spectrum and who are generally motivated in that respect. We would say that motivations are about tailoring recognition of merit and recognition of effort. Any systems that operate like that appear from our consultation to be meritorious. Jacqui might talk about the specific examples.

**Ms PLUMMER:** In relation to the lower rate of male volunteering, the lower rate that we found in the Commission's classroom consultations seems to accord with the lower rate of male volunteering in other research, including the Mission Australia survey. The classroom consultations provide further information about particular barriers and motivations that affect young males. In order to attract young males and retain them, organisations would need to streamline the paperwork in administration and not require a big time commitment; provide opportunities to volunteer with friends and meet new people; offer skill-building activities, training and

new experiences; and reimburse out-of-pocket costs, as this was important to boys. Providing meaningful and engaging voluntary work is particularly important for young men. In our consultation, young men were more likely than girls to give up volunteering due to boredom, lack of respect for young people and not learning anything new.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Thank you for the information. It is great that you have done that work. Do you have any more information to offer about young people and the unpaid work placement issue? Do you hear from young people who have concerns when they engage in unpaid work? Is there any confusion about the difference between unpaid work and volunteering or any of those opportunities?

**Ms PLUMMER:** The Commission's classroom consultation process in relation to this inquiry did not specifically ask about unpaid work but we are aware of the work that the Fair Work Ombudsman has done in relation to that issue and that there is some definitional confusion around unpaid work versus volunteering and work experience. Because the Commission's remit has been in relation to nought to 17-year-olds we have not focused specifically on that issue but the Fair Work Ombudsman found there was no evidence to suggest that secondary school work experience programs involve an element of exploitation. The issues that are tending to come up in relation to internships are often around the older cohort of 18- to 24-year-olds.

**Ms BOLAND:** In my capacity as the Children's Guardian we have also put in a submission to this inquiry, which deals with unpaid work and our jurisdiction in children's employment in particular industries. I am not sure whether you would like me to talk about that or if you want to deal with that later in your proceedings.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** We are able to invite you back when we deal with unpaid work rather than focusing on volunteering if you are happy to come back.

**Ms BOLAND:** I am very happy to. The overlap and how we administer that jurisdiction is quite pertinent to the inquiry so I would be happy to do that.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** That would be great. I am concerned about where there is confusion for young people and whether or not we are getting the message out there about their rights.

**Ms BOLAND:** We have just finished a series of fact sheets so perhaps when I come back I can address the reasons why we have done those and how they are targeted.

**CHAIR:** That is probably best.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Does that go to point 9 of your submission that refers to the targeted research that is needed to understand the policies and supports that will encourage volunteering? I raised a point with the previous witnesses about whether, whilst we support volunteering, we recognise that it is not something that all young people can do because they often have other responsibilities that perhaps are not recognised. I wonder whether we focus too much on volunteering and do not recognise carer or family support responsibilities. Do you have any comment on that?

**Ms BOLAND:** I just have a general comment about the nature of volunteering and how it is defined. Obviously, volunteering within a context of a care arrangement has a whole lot of other motivations apart from the ones that we have elicited in our consultation. I think it would be important to look at how it is perceived. We have gone some way to asking children and young people about how they perceive their activities as volunteering but I think that more research in this area would be incredibly useful, particularly to understand how young people experience responsibility either at the social or family level or otherwise. From our perspective as the Commission, working with other agencies to look at the work that is done would be certainly something that could be further on the agenda for us.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I think it is great that we are looking at greater recognition for young people who volunteer but if that further isolates young people who are not so engaged because of their responsibilities and that is not recognised we could perhaps be creating a problem. Any information you could provide on that would be valuable.

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes. I think, as always, it is incredibly important to make those connections between young people who are often carers in their own homes and the broader initiatives. I think we are uniquely placed to do that across Government.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I will go to the recommendations in your submission at pages 17 and 18. At points 4 and 5 you talk about schools and their potential role in encouraging young people to participate in volunteering. We heard from a witness earlier today that their organisation, which is a peak body, does some work in schools. They go and speak to students and it appears to be having some stimulatory effect in pushing up interest. What did you have in mind about the role of schools in trying to open up young minds to the idea of volunteering? How should schools go about doing that? Did you have anything particular in mind or is that just a general statement in your submission?

**Ms BOLAND:** It is a general statement about the positions of schools and the importance of schools and their role in children and young people's lives to assist in volunteering. Apart from particular schools accessing various programs, we are aware of a number of schools that simply volunteer in their local community who have a sense of, if you like, a school as a community. Those initiatives are very interesting. We know about Darlinghurst schools who work with some of the local non-government organisations to make sandwiches for the homeless and those kinds of things. They also do reading and collecting books. Apart from the formal stuff that comes into schools I think it can be community based, which includes those kinds of initiatives that I know are used by many schools apart from those formal programs that come into schools. I suppose when we are talking about the school, I would see it as a school within the community in which it serves.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** It is the school community itself taking initiatives to encourage young people to undertake volunteering. Is that the point you are making?

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** On the issue of child safety, which obviously is upmost in many people's minds, witnesses from the Department of Education and Communities spoke about the rolling out of the Working With Children Check and how that is progressing. From your perspective are things satisfactory in terms of the rollout? Is there something we should be looking at that we are missing or need to bring into sharper focus? I am talking specifically about volunteer work but I suppose I am also asking about unpaid work to the extent that you can comment on it.

**Ms BOLAND:** Again, we have covered that off, to some extent, in my capacity as the Children's Guardian. I would be more than happy to talk about the case studies that we are doing on child-safe environments, and we are doing one specifically in a volunteer sector. We have just concluded the work on that and are writing it up. I am assuming that our next hearing might be later in the year and we would be very much in a position to perhaps do a supplementary report, or at least talk about that child safety case study that we have done. The purpose of those case studies, and we have done them in four different sectors, and one is volunteering, is to in fact look at the characteristics that make a child-friendly environment and what initiatives organisations need to do to ensure that occurs. It has been ongoing for a number of months now and it is an interesting piece of work, so I am happy to talk about that when I come back.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I note there are 9 recommendations on pages 17 through 18. Some of them are directed to organisations such as school communities. Are there any other specific recommendations that you would make to this Committee that we should be looking at in terms of the drafting of our final report? In other words, if you had a blank cheque—I am not saying you have got one—what would you put on it?

**Ms BOLAND:** In all of these multi-pronged approaches, working with schools, we talked about the use of social media, and we have talked also about volunteering campaigns. General public campaigns are always very effective. What we have not yet exploited enough, if you like, is the opportunity to use various social media initiatives, so certainly that area is one that if we had a blank cheque, so to speak, we would explore with some bigger—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Have you got an example in mind?

**Ms BOLAND:** I am thinking about some of the campaigns that are run online now. We have short, sharp blogs, and these are not particularly about children and young people, but the recent one that Fed Up have run about sugar in the diet has been an effective campaign for getting particular public health messages across



and for engaging the community in how to understand the health issues associated with it and participate in doing something different.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Have these been evaluated? I understand the need for campaigns, but at the end of the day everyone says, "Do it on social media." I often wonder what evaluation is done in regard to the efficacy of some of the things that are put out there as being the ant's pants to change behaviour.

**Ms BOLAND:** I agree with you.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** A lot of money can be thrown up against the wall.

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes, but if you are talking about engagement and participation it is a significant means of engagement and participation.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I am not denying that. I am talking about actual effect.

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes. I think there is room for doing something and evaluating it. I know that the marketing people evaluate it significantly, and I am sure that we could look at some of that material to look at the value of marketing—if you put this in the category of marketing—but certainly there is a significant amount of research that we could look at to find out about its effectiveness in running such a campaign.

**CHAIR:** Maybe there is some merit in that.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** I will take you to recommendation 6 and tease that out a little bit. I particularly like this recommendation. The first part states, "The Department of Education and Communities should consider ways to extend current in-school opportunities to volunteers." We spoke with the last witness about being flexible, maybe allowing students to utilise their school sport time to volunteer. I think that is fantastic. Do you agree that is the sort of flexibility we are looking for?

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** The second part states, "Schools should be encouraged to develop volunteering programs that suit their student cohort and local communities." It seems to me we spend a lot of time, particularly with careers advisers, matching students' interests and capabilities with local employers. Do you think a similar approach should be applied when we are looking at volunteering? I will paint you a scenario. I have a fair bit to do with my local Riding for the Disabled Association. It is something we need young volunteers to help with. We get a lot of older people helping midweek during school hours. Unfortunately, those older volunteers do not have the agility to run next to a horse, to do up girths as strongly as we need. Some of the local private schools send some students out, but they are all girls who want to brush ponies, and I am not being disrespectful, but we need a particular type of volunteer.

That carries on to the next part—I am sorry if I am being long, but I am trying to match this up and get your views on it—"Recognising the potential for volunteering to engage students at risk of disengaging from education." We do not want academic kids. We almost want the kid who is on the edge, to get him or her outdoors, saddling up horses. Potentially this could lead them to a career as a farrier or something that they have not been exposed to. That is my reading of such a recommendation. We need to match the kids with the type of volunteering. Maybe that could be a way of introducing them to a career and the organisation benefits. Is that the sort of thing you are thinking about?

**Ms BOLAND:** That was exactly the sort of thing we were thinking about. I raised earlier the opportunity for some of the non-government organisations [NGOs] to engage with some of their programs. The Department of Education [DEC], in the out-of-home care in particular, have strong relationships, and there is a good synergy between parts of DEC and Community Services, of course, to look at more targeted opportunities—one for vulnerable children—but also more targeted to those areas of interest, and as you are talking about horses and strength and so forth, that lends itself in particular to a number of NGOs that I can think of.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** I challenge anyone to not be moved when they see the face of a child who cannot communicate through speech when they get on a horse for the first time.

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** Also those kids who do not fit in the classroom setting may be better suited to outdoors. They could be rewarded doing something like this rather than sitting through a subject that they do not want to listen to or we know they are not going to get through. Surely this is how we should be flexible and utilise volunteering as a win-win situation.

**Ms BOLAND:** I certainly agree with being flexible. I suppose the engagement with school, obviously, is very important. It is important how the school is structured to engage children and young people.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** I am not saying it should replace the fundamentals of school, but the kid who gets kicked out of every class because he cannot sit down, they are the type of people who are at risk of disengaging from the education system, but if they can find a meaningful reason to go to school because they are able to volunteer and they engage, without being detrimental to the normal schooling, that is the sort of thing we should encourage.

**Ms BOLAND:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** Sorry, it was not really a question. I was trying to match in my mind what that recommendation meant. I commend you for the three parts of that recommendation. It is not just about being flexible, it is about thinking about who is doing what and why they are doing it.

**Ms BOLAND:** I think that comes out clearly in the consultation that we did, but that seems to be the most important thing for males.

**Ms PLUMMER:** I think we have left those recommendations open so they can be specifically worked out in consultation in communities. The example you gave is a prime example. One of the other examples that we heard in the course of classroom consultations was the one of using sport time for young people who were not engaged and those young people instead attended an aged-care facility as volunteers and reported very positive experiences out of that and did report that that would be a future career pathway for them. So I think leaving it to the communities where you can look at the specifics of the young people's needs so it is a beneficial experience on both sides for the young people.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** You might be the wrong person to ask, but as I said we have career advisers who spend their whole careers matching students with organisations in the community. Do you think they are underutilised when it comes to matching of volunteering? I do not want to load career advisers with a lot of extra work but it seems to me that they have already done most of it because they understand the kids and their community because that is their job. They are the link between the two. You may not be able to comment.

**Ms BOLAND:** Maybe I have not quite understood the role of career adviser but I understood that part of their role was to look at opportunities not just to future careers but what would build that future career, which could include volunteering.

**The Hon. NIALL BLAIR:** Maybe I do not understand. The dealings that I had with them in the past in my prior career was all about the employment setting, not so much about the volunteering side.

**CHAIR:** I suppose each school is different.

**Ms BOLAND:** There is no one-size-fits-all, but for those who are assisting children and young people, they look at volunteering opportunities as building a profile for particular things or getting exposure to different types of possible employment opportunities later or careers.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Thank you for the consultation you have undertaken and the feedback that has come back from that, because I think that is helping us a great deal to shape our views. As part of that consultation, young people do not feel they have been receiving information on volunteering opportunities, and that has come out a little from our previous witnesses, that the information is available but whether or not they are accessing it. How can we better get young people to see the information and pay attention to it and see how it can benefit them? Do you find that the information is available, and if it is available how can we get young people to see it?

**Ms BOLAND:** The feedback that we received was as you said. Then we asked them questions about the best way to receive information and it was via the teacher—not just a subject teacher but other teachers. That seemed to be the best way. Then by career advisers. Sorry, the other one was through television advertising. They were the two. It kind of makes sense. You would expect that you get information best if it is given to you directly from a person, and in a school environment that would be in the classroom or social activities that are undertaken within the school environment, the engagement with the external community.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Unfortunately the cost-effective advertisements are the ones on very late at night when they should be tucked up in bed. But you are right; it is the ones in the programs that they watch that will resonate with them.

**CHAIR:** Do you think the concept of volunteering differs in multicultural communities in Sydney?

**Ms BOLAND:** I do not know that I can answer that with any authority. Clearly in our consultations the influences of volunteering were multi-faceted for kids in general and I expect that. There would be differences in different communities and then what was considered a normal community versus what we would generally speak of as volunteering.

**Ms PLUMMER:** We did not collect information about cultural background in our classroom consultation.

**CHAIR:** Sorry, you did or did not?

**Ms PLUMMER:** We did not, no, unfortunately.

**CHAIR:** I could not see that in the report.

**Ms PLUMMER:** No, but there was a diversity of views. We are aware that there is a high proportion of Aboriginal young people and people who speak other languages who have caring responsibilities and those informal responsibilities may be more significant in multicultural communities. In terms of young people who help their families and communities through informal means, it is also important that they do not miss out on formal volunteering opportunities because those formal opportunities are the ones that are also going to provide additional benefits such as new experiences, job-related skills and expansion of social circles.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** The point about support for young people, particularly in the regions, with the ability to access transport, and the costs involved for young people to do that volunteering, you have mentioned about—

**Ms BOLAND:** Why males do not volunteer?

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** No. For a lot of young people, it is a question of whether or not they can physically, financially or actively do some of that if the local support structures are not there for them. They cannot always rely on the fact that they might be able to get lifts with parents. In some of the more disadvantaged communities they do not have cars, and if there is no transport system that can allow them—am I right that you mentioned about transport support?

**Ms PLUMMER:** I think we raised transport support. It was a particular issue in relation to primary school students in rural schools. Our sample is not big enough to be representative but it did come out a much stronger issue for younger children in general and particularly younger children in rural schools.

**CHAIR:** A previous witness raised transport costs as well.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I know that in some of your other consultations transport comes up as a big issue for children's engagement in social activities or recreational. This also would be an area where I think it is having an effect.

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes. If I could just again foreshadow—this has obviously come up in our child-safe case study, and I would be happy to talk about that later, about particularly in rural and remote areas, access to transport and safe systems of transport so I would be happy to come back to you with some of the experience of that case study.

**CHAIR:** That would be great, thank you. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. The Committee may wish to send some additional questions in writing—and I think we have one or two already—the replies to which will form part of your evidence and be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

**Ms BOLAND:** Yes, of course.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**PIERO CRANEY**, Deputy Chair, NSW Youth Advisory Council, affirmed and examined:

**JESSE MARK LESLIE HANNA**, Member, NSW Youth Advisory Council, sworn and examined:

**CHAIR:** Welcome to this inquiry. Can you please confirm that you have both been issued with the terms of reference of this inquiry and information about the standing orders which relate to the examination of witnesses?

**Mr HANNA:** Yes, I have

**Mr CRANEY:** Yes, I have.

**CHAIR:** The Committee has received a submission from your organisation. Do you want that submission to form part of your formal evidence?

**Mr HANNA:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Before we proceed do you have any questions concerning the procedural information sent to you in relation to witnesses and the hearing process?

**Mr CRANEY:** No.

**Mr HANNA:** No.

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement before the commencement of questions?

**Mr HANNA:** In examining the terms of reference for this inquiry the Youth Advisory Council has seen that there are two main issues: one is volunteering and the other is unpaid work placements. The Youth Advisory Council believes there is a fairly clear distinction between those two issues. In volunteering, the Youth Advisory Council's focus is for the New South Wales Government to expand the incentives offered to young people who volunteer and to create greater recognition of youth volunteering. For unpaid work placements, the Youth Advisory Council has identified that there are issues of exploitation surrounding that and has noted that the Fair Work Ombudsman has already looked into the issue in detail. However, the New South Wales Government could look into that area and maybe work with the Fair Work Ombudsman in clarifying the legitimacy of unpaid work placements among children and young people. Once again, we have two areas: volunteering and unpaid work placements.

**Mr CRANEY:** A particular area of concern for the Youth Advisory Council is the incentive for volunteering. With the abolition of the Premier's New South Wales volunteering challenge and considering that Timebanking, which is a program for volunteering in New South Wales, cannot be accessed by young people unless they form part of a family, entity or organisation or school, it seems as if there is no incentive in New South Wales for young people to engage in volunteering. One of our main recommendations is the reintroduction of state-level recognition for volunteering or perhaps lowering the age of Timebanking to accommodate young people or introducing a new structure in New South Wales that would encourage or incentivise volunteering in New South Wales.

**CHAIR:** In your opening remarks you spoke about incentives. What incentives can New South Wales government agencies provide to young people to volunteer?

**Mr HANNA:** As reflected in our submission, the Youth Advisory Council has been very disappointed that state-level recognition of school student volunteering has been discontinued. There used to be the Premier's Student Volunteering Awards, which has now been discontinued. Student volunteering will now, at best, only be recognised at a school level. So one incentive the Youth Advisory Council would like to see is a reinstatement of the Premier's Student Volunteering Awards to provide that state-level recognition of school student volunteering. We believe that is necessary for encouraging youth participation in volunteering and a sustained commitment to volunteering. Another incentive which the Youth Advisory Council has also thought about is bonus Australian Tertiary Admission Rank [ATAR] points. That is also mentioned in our submission.

**CHAIR:** Bonus ATAR points have been suggested a couple of times today—for example, if you are a school captain or very good at sport and have represented at state or national level, but nothing really for volunteering.

**Mr CRANEY:** The University of New South Wales offers bonus points for being a school captain or for participating in sport, the rationale being that by participating in elite sport you are exercising a lot of your time that could be spent studying or preparing for the Higher School Certificate. However, we feel that volunteering is just the same, but it is not an elite status.

**CHAIR:** It is opening it up to everyone.

**Mr CRANEY:** By volunteering you are spending your time, your effort in contributing back to the community. That time could equally be spent preparing for your Higher School Certificate, which is a very stressful time for lots of students in New South Wales.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I have raised the point previously about this. I think we should be acknowledging the work that volunteers do. My concern is where some students may be disadvantaged because it is often forgotten that some have responsibilities in the home and/or community. Some young people are carers. I would not like to see those young people be disadvantaged by not being able to do some of those things. Sometimes they feel quite invisible in that framework. Do you have any experience of that?

**Mr CRANEY:** It is the opinion of the Youth Advisory Council that the term "volunteering" should be a broad one. It could encompass aspects of volunteering even in a home where you are looking after your parent who may be disabled and have an issue, whether it is helping a younger brother or sister. We take the approach that volunteering is not necessarily a formal thing—you do not have to go to an organisation—but would encompass an informal type of volunteering. Currently in Australia there are things that can accommodate disadvantage—for example, every university in Australia has bonus ATAR points to ensure that students from low socio-economic areas in Australia can access university. This ranges from one bonus ATAR point to as many as 10 in some universities. So that would help.

In regard to encouraging students from disadvantaged backgrounds to volunteer, that is something that we should focus on and it ties back to having statewide recognition. Because if you push the responsibility onto the schools, especially public schools which do not have the resources, the funding, and who may not have the coordinators or teachers to look after a volunteering program, students who attend disadvantaged schools may not have access to volunteering. It is all very well and beneficial for students who go to private schools who can access volunteering programs, but if you push the responsibility onto the schools themselves to have the Premier's volunteering challenge it does not allow access for students from disadvantaged schools or disadvantaged backgrounds who go to schools that do not access volunteering opportunities.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Do you see equity across a broad range of issues as being a vital part of doing this?

**Mr CRANEY:** Yes.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I have a real interest in the unpaid work area. I am from a regional area where unfortunately you have heard from the Youth Council and young people about some unfortunate situations. Have you got a broader input to that?

**Mr HANNA:** The Youth Council fully supports the findings and recommendations of the "Experience or Exploitation?" report which was commissioned by the Fair Work Ombudsman and was released in January 2013. That basically said that unpaid work placements are a growing feature of the Australian labour market. However, it is not always clear whether they are legal arrangements. The Youth Council found that unpaid work placements can include unpaid trial work, unpaid internships and also other forms of unpaid work experience. This is an issue which I think the Fair Work Ombudsman has taken on board and is looking into very closely.

As I said, the Youth Advisory Council does not like to see young people being exploited in unpaid work arrangements. For example, if a young person sees a job in a local paper to work as a kitchen hand and they turn up to the interview and the employer says, "Can you start off by working unpaid so I can see how you go and see if you are right for the job?", and then after working there for a few weeks unpaid, the employer may say, "I'm sorry, you are not suitable for this position" and dismisses that young worker. It appears that a

significant number of workers, as it says in the Fair Work Ombudsman's report, are required to undertake unpaid job trials which go beyond what is reasonably required to assess an applicant's ability or suitability. In the view of the Youth Advisory Council that constitutes exploitation. They are requiring the performance on an unpaid basis of work that would normally be undertaken by a paid employee.

The Youth Advisory Council noted that the law perhaps needs to be clarified in this area, although we do note it is under Commonwealth jurisdiction. The Fair Work Ombudsman has made a number of quite robust recommendations which we think should be supported and implemented by the New South Wales Government.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Do you believe that perhaps young people are not fully aware of their rights at work in particular if it is their first opportunity?

**Mr CRANEY:** Yes, I think there are lots of misunderstandings about rights and responsibilities when it comes to internships, and even work itself. The New South Wales Youth Advisory Council hosted the New South Wales Youth Week with Fair Work Australia about two years ago and it was clear from consultation with young people that young people had no idea about their rights and responsibilities when it comes to work in the workforce. I would assume that also applies when it comes to unpaid internships as well. It is the opinion of the Youth Advisory Council that young people need to be more educated about their responsibilities and obligations and rights in the workplace and in unpaid internships.

**Mr HANNA:** The Youth Week event was actually held with WorkCover NSW but that raises the other issue: if you are in an unpaid work placement, and it perhaps does not constitute an employment relationship, then what does that mean for workers compensation matters and other issues if you get injured?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I refer to that last point about coverage with respect to injury in an unpaid work placement. To demonstrate perhaps some ignorance that exists, this morning representatives from the Department of Education and Communities appeared before the Committee. They were very clear that if students leave the classroom and go into work experience scenarios and are injured or an accident occurs at work insurance coverage is available to them with respect to such injuries and accidents, which is not workers compensation, because there is not an employer-employee relationship, but through the Department of Education and Communities, which is an organ of the State Government. The Department is very clear but in your last answer you were not clear about that coverage. Obviously the Council has been looking at this matter, and I do not say this by way of a criticism, but do you think there is ignorance amongst young people doing work experience about their protections if they injure themselves at work? Is that what you think?

**Mr HANNA:** Yes, I do agree with that. There needs to be an education campaign on what young workers are entitled to and how they are covered by things like workers compensation or that other insurance scheme to which you referred.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I am not going down this line of questioning to be critical of you or necessarily the Department of Education and Communities at this stage, but have you actually had young people say to you that they have gone to these work placements and they really do not know what the arrangements are? Something has led you to make that statement. Why are you saying that? Have you been told before that young people do not seem to know?

**Mr CRANEY:** Yes, in our consultation with young people two years ago with WorkCover NSW at Parliament House during the launch of National Youth Week there was a clear response that people did not know their rights or obligations in relation to working in a workforce.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** But when they go to placements from the school is there not some explanation to them by the school, and potentially the organisation they are going to, of what are their rights and responsibilities?

**Mr HANNA:** I will clarify one matter. The Youth Council's submission was with respect to unpaid work placements. We were not focusing on work experience undertaken through schools and that reflects the Fair Work Ombudsman's approach to this issue.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Okay.

**Mr HANNA:** The report clarified there is no evidence to suggest that work experience conducted under the aegis of secondary school programs involves the exploitation of young people. So we were more looking at unpaid internships, unpaid trial work. We were not really considering work experience for that compulsory component whilst at high school.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I am glad you clarified that, and I guess it leads me to ask the following question. Do you think that at the moment young people clearly understand and differentiate between the two? Is there a clear distinction between internships and trials versus what they might do through school? Is it pretty clear what the distinction is?

**Mr CRANEY:** From my own experience I think there is a clear distinction. When I did work experience there were a lot of forms I had to read and sign. When it comes to knowing your rights, it is very clear.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That is good to know. I am glad you have clarified that. On the same theme, I have some questions about unpaid work experience—not the work placements done through school but the unpaid work experience. How do you think young people can become better informed about what their rights and responsibilities are? The Ombudsman has identified issues, and I am familiar with his report. But there will never be enough inspectors out there, because there are obviously hundreds of thousands of workplaces, to be able to cover all the examples that have been raised. How do you think young people can become better informed and wiser about these things?

**Mr CRANEY:** It is the opinion of the NSW Youth Advisory Council that in any internship, unpaid or paid, there should always be a written contract, never an oral contract, between the employer or the organisation and the young person. It should be a contract that clearly outlines their responsibilities, their rights, what happens if there is an injury, where to go if there is a fire and first aid information. The Council really emphasises the importance of having that written contract. We also think that whilst there is an onus on the young person many young people are vulnerable when it comes to working in a new environment and new conditions and that the employer or the organisation bears the main responsibility for and onus of informing young persons of their rights. That also includes the Department of Education and Communities where they organise internships, work placements or work experience.

**CHAIR:** You mention at page 4 of your submission the Volunteer of the Year Awards. What is the view of the NSW Youth Advisory Council about how to improve the promotion of these awards?

**Mr HANNA:** The NSW Youth Advisory Council has met with the Centre for Volunteering to give them some advice on how to better promote these awards. I was not present at that meeting so Piero might like to follow up on that question.

**Mr CRANEY:** The Council recognised that there was a problem in promoting the volunteer awards of the Centre for Volunteering. The Centre recognised that as well and they came to us seeking advice. We provided advice regarding how they could better promote the awards. We gave them ideas such as having ambassadors go to schools to promote this. They already have an internship in place in which a young person can work at the Centre. I cannot recall the specific recommendations or advice given to the Centre for Volunteering. The meeting was conducted confidentially. So I am a little unsure about that. Our view was that they lacked the necessary ability to promote the awards. However, in our meeting they showed a strong commitment to promoting their organisation to young people. We commend the Centre for showing that commitment.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** I am interested in particular in volunteering for school students. What would you do to promote the idea of volunteering in the first place? We have been talking about the awards, and obviously they come into play once a student has taken up the opportunity of volunteering—although I guess they do make volunteering more attractive. What have you found works to encourage people of school age to volunteer? Is it about a teacher finding the right student and saying, "Have you thought of doing this"? Is it about having someone come to the school and do a presentation? Is it about having television advertising or posters? What makes it attractive?

**Mr CRANEY:** I think there are two ways to make it attractive—there is recognition and there is providing incentives. With recognition, students want to be recognised for the amount of effort they put in when it comes to volunteering. Whilst it does not seem altruistic or it does not seem that it is coming from the heart,



these are students who want to put things on their resume and that is a natural thing to assume. But they want to be recognised for their efforts—whether it is by an award or through a bonus Australian Tertiary Admission Rank [ATAR] point. Students want to know that the Government cares, the school cares and the local community cares—because ultimately these young people are giving back to the community. It is only natural to want a reward for what you are doing.

The second thing is that there need to be incentives. Incentives can include recognition, but incentives can also include free concert tickets. There was recently an Optus RockCorps concert which provided free tickets to a concert for any young person who volunteers through that organisation. We submitted to Victor Dominello, the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, the idea of having bonus ATAR points for volunteering. So we think that recognition and incentives play an important part in encouraging young people to participate in volunteering.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I want to play devil's advocate for a minute. What would you say to the argument—and I am being the devil's advocate so this is not directed at you personally; you may expect this argument to come from an older person—that young people have a bit of a hide thinking that we as a society should give them recognition and incentivise them to participate in the community and build social capital. In other words, there is something innately valuable and worthwhile in an individual making a contribution to society in an altruistic way without expecting movie tickets, an award, ATAR points or whatever the case may be. What do you say to that argument? Would it be your submission to the person putting that to you that that is old school thinking—that is the way it was back in the 1940s, 1950s or 1960s but the world has now moved on? How would you respond to the argument that young people just want recognition and they want things? Why do they not understand that innately volunteering is about giving of yourself?

**CHAIR:** For a second then I thought my dad was in the gallery.

**Mr HANNA:** Obviously the incentives have that long-term purpose of instilling a sense of community mindedness in young volunteers. The aim is that over time they will not need so many incentives once they become grown adults. The Youth Advisory Council would like recognition of youth volunteering so that young people can do more volunteering—and by doing more volunteering they will find out how rewarding volunteering is and how enjoyable it is. Also the incentives given are not huge incentives; they are just something to recognise that young person. Young people are also very busy, especially uni students. So if they are volunteering they are taking time away from their studies to give back to the community. I think we are recognising the time and the opportunity costs they have given up to give back to the community.

**CHAIR:** That is a very good answer.

**Mr CRANEY:** I cannot really recall the precise statistics but I attended a corporate volunteering conference at the Commonwealth Bank last year and we had a guest speaker who talked about service learning. Whilst it can be distinguished because it is not really providing incentives—it was more mandatory volunteering—it kind of highlights that once students are given that push, whether it is through mandatory requirements through schools or through incentives like Mr Hanna highlighted before, it instils that mindset about contributing back to the community. After completing that mandatory service learning, after they receive incentives, they are exposed to the altruistic benefits, the psychological benefits, of feeling good because they are doing good and after that it would be hoped that they would not need more incentives to participate back to the community.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. The Committee may wish to send some additional questions in writing to the NSW Youth Advisory Council, the replies to which will form part of your evidence and be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

**Mr HANNA:** Yes.

**Mr CRANEY:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much and thank you for attending.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**JANANI MUHUNTHAN**, Youth Representative, Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, affirmed and examined:

**ANDREW CUMMINGS**, Project Manager, Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, affirmed and examined:

**STANLEY M'MANGWA**, Youth Representative, Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, sworn and examined:

**CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee on Children and Young People today to give evidence. Can you confirm that you have been issued with the inquiry's terms of reference information about the standing orders relating to the examination of witnesses?

**Ms MUHUNTHAN:** Yes.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes.

**Mr M'MANGWA:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** You are appearing before the Committee in a particular capacity today?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** The Committee has received a submission from your organisation. Do you want your submission to form part of your formal evidence?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes, we do.

**CHAIR:** Before we proceed, do you have any questions concerning the procedural information sent you relating to witnesses and to the hearing process?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** No.

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement before the commencement of questions?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** I will start by thanking the Committee for the invitation to appear before you. On behalf of the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network what we wanted to highlight, first, was the belief that, generally speaking, volunteering and work placements are very positive experiences for young people but obviously our concern is in highlighting the issues facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. We believe that volunteering opportunities and unpaid work placements provide particular benefits for young people from those backgrounds in two main ways. One is the social connection that volunteering provides and the chance for young people who may come from other cultures to mix with other young people in Australia to develop a sense of belonging and commitment to their new community and also the opportunity to mix more broadly with young people outside the networks of their own community.

In terms of work placements, we believe that unpaid work placements are particularly useful for young people who may have grown up in countries with very different work cultures to Australia's. Therefore, although we recognise that a range of issues need to be considered in making sure that those work placements are fair, equitable and safe, generally speaking when those things are in place they provide really positive experiences for young people to develop a sense of the work culture in Australia and to develop skills that are going to be relevant in Australia. I guess that is our ultimate premise around volunteering and unpaid work placements.

**CHAIR:** Do you think the concept of volunteering differs within multicultural communities?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Certainly the research, which is quoted in our submission, shows that there are some different attitudes. Part of it can be as simple as the language that is used. Research that was done quite recently by the Centre for Multicultural Youth in Victoria and others found that often people from other cultural backgrounds do not use the term "volunteering" and we know that is true for young people generally. Often if you ask young people if they volunteer they will say no because they consider that to be a very narrow range of things that older people do—old women helping at fetes and that kind of thing—but they will do a whole range

of things, get involved in their community, help run events and all those sorts of things. They do not use that word for it but they are very much part of that volunteering spirit. We know that is true of young people generally and we also know it is true even to a heightened extent for people from other cultural backgrounds because the term "volunteering" is often a foreign one, yet that sense of social connection and taking part in social capital is very much part of that cultural experience. I do think there is a particular cultural issue there.

**CHAIR:** What incentives would encourage young people from a multicultural refugee background to take up volunteering opportunities?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** I will ask Ms Muhunthan and Mr M'mangwa to start with that one.

**CHAIR:** These questions are open to any of you so feel free to jump in at any time.

**Ms MUHUNTHAN:** We were sitting at the back of the room for the previous witnesses and I sort of thought that sometimes it is not about incentives; it is just about creating an environment about volunteering that makes it equitable for everybody to volunteer. It is not so much that young people are wanting incentives to volunteer but sometimes incentives can provide access for young people, especially from migrant and refugee backgrounds, to contribute to society and to help organisations to provide things, even simple things like food on the day, or transport costs that can be crucial for young people travelling from, say, the western suburbs for whom transport costs might be an issue. It is just about creating an equitable environment for volunteering.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** I have a general basic question, just picking up from what you said then, Andrew. Is there a better term we should be using rather than "volunteering"? If we are developing campaigns and are trying to convince people to give up their time, what is a term that will cross linguistic and social differences and be attractive? What about just "social giving"?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** It is a great question. I am sorry if I deflect it by not answering directly.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** No, it is fine. I do not know whether there is an answer, to be honest, so if you have one that would be good.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** What I would say is that I think there needs to be more work done on that. I want to refer to a study to which we referred in our submission, which is the largest inquiry into youth volunteering that I know of in the recent past. It is the one undertaken in England at a very high level that looked into how to increase youth volunteering and youth participation generally. The recommendations from that inquiry were that they stop using the word "volunteering" because it is not something that is relevant to young people. They created a quite large and well-resourced organisation to spearhead that new agenda and they called it "V" because they were getting away from using the term "volunteering" and they were just going to start using the letter "V". That was their solution to it. I am not sure, but maybe Mr M'mangwa and Ms Muhunthan might be.

**CHAIR:** What was that inquiry?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** It was known as the Russell Commission in England in about 2004 or 2005. The terms of reference were around looking at how to create a step change in young people's attitudes to volunteering—

**CHAIR:** And how to increase participation?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes, and how to make it really mainstream. One of the things that they were really concerned about was the language.

**Ms MUHUNTHAN:** Volunteering as a concept is particularly relevant for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and people in this room probably have different ideas of what that concept is. I definitely agree that "volunteering" is not generally a term that is accepted by a lot of young people, but I think it is difficult to provide an alternative. I think there is a need for a lot more research into the perceptions of young people of volunteering, what they tend to call it, and how they define it.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** That is an interesting point. But it is more about building community, is it not? It is more about being involved in the community than this different term for volunteering.

**Ms MUHUNTHAN:** I think so.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** I have a lot to do with the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre and I have seen so many different multicultural communities and how they get involved in their own community or their church, or what have you. How can we take that and bring it with school groups, in particular, to different types of volunteering in different groups? Earlier we were talking—and I do not know if you were in the room at that point—about Riding for the Disabled or helping out in nursing homes, or different kinds of volunteering. Is there a way to promote that there are so many options that help the whole community? Are any of those attractive?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** One of the things that I would like to see come out of this inquiry is the need to highlight that a whole range or menu of opportunities is available.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** The term "menu" is a beautiful one.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes, because it is that idea that volunteering creates a type of narrow attitude that it is about a certain range of tasks, opportunities or whatever. It might be as simple as getting away from worrying about the word itself to about worrying about the image and thinking about how we portray the whole range of things that people can get involved in and that come under that banner. It might be a matter of starting to stretch out the perceptions. I am also aware that when we are talking about young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds there is a need to communicate those same things to parents and community leaders, which is even more important than it is with the mainstream community because they act so much as gatekeepers to the opportunities that young people have. Certainly our research has found that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds often may understand those things more quickly than their parents do, for example, and there is a role in that for the educating parents to understand why that might be useful and how young people might get involved.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Your submission talks a lot about different systems in Australia and different workplace habits. I would think that this type of community engagement would be a good way to learn those at a basic level and to be able to get involved in that experience in the workplace later on.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes. Thinking broadly across the experience of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, but particularly maybe those who have come as migrants by choice, their parents often are coming here specifically to give their children employment opportunities or better opportunities for employment and education than they have had. There is sometimes a misconception that taking part in volunteering is a bit of a waste of time and that they should be focusing on study or getting a job. Part of the community education is about helping people to perceive that volunteering in its broadest sense creates a whole range of skills that are very much about becoming more employable and creating opportunities, and access to a whole range of things that will be helpful for a young person later on in life.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** We need to promote that message.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes, that is right.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I pick up on the need for better communication for parents and communities where there might be other responsibilities for young people in those communities and that they might be seen by others in a community to not be meeting their obligations whereas it is something that might be of value for their education and their job opportunities. It is an interesting question about whether or not those resources are needed and should be part of what we recommend to the Government as an important part of doing that. In relation to the point you raised about the unpaid work placements, I think it is an opportunity for the employers and the rest of the community to engage in and break down some of those barriers, not just an opportunity for the young people but also for everyone else who might not otherwise have experience. That was a great point and it made me think that it is a two-way street.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes, excellent.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** How would that be done by developing the materials? We have a broad range of multicultural groups. Is there a feeling that that could be done electronically rather than by production of a whole bunch of leaflets, or is hard material still important for people to be able to take it home?

**Mr M'MANGWA:** Electronic material would not be necessary. I think I would prefer mainly paper material because the kids can take paper back to their parents. Some people do not have the internet at home. For example, if it is said, "Go on the internet and access this", how can they if they may not have the internet? They will not be able to access it. But if you print it out on paper so that the kids may be able to take it to their parents, I would more prefer it to be on paper.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** And not just go to a website.

**Mr M'MANGWA:** Yes.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** This is one area where we do have to consider what is accessible.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes. Earlier, Ms Gibbons mentioned organisations like the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre and that range of networkers, such as migrant resource centres and other multicultural organisations, are vital. They already play a key role in getting across key messages to those communities and in providing a gatekeeping role to a range of multicultural communities. Talking to them and engaging in that is really what they are doing every day. It would be useful to give some thought to how, particularly for newly arrived communities who are going through the settlement process, we educate settlement support workers to talk about volunteering and the range of opportunities that that might provide. It is probably not the first thing that you need to hear about when you are settling into Australia because there are so many other things that are so much more essential, but it is that thing that, maybe 6 or 12 months down the track, is useful. It is a matter of being aware.

I suppose it is a generalisation but we know, generally speaking, refugee families, for example, often tend to be bigger than white Anglo families. We are often talking about single-parent families with several children, which means there is an emphasis placed on caring within the home for older children. There is going to be that tension between "Do I stay at home and help mum with the younger siblings, or do I go out and do volunteering, which might be fun and might be helping me to develop some new skills?" There will be a tension there, so there needs to be a really clearly expressed benefit of taking part in those activities. That is something that young people talk about a lot—that there is that divide and that tension between having to help parents to understand there are longer-term benefits and that it is not just the young person being selfish and wanting to get out of the house. They are doing something that in the long run will help them and their family in many ways.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Did you hear the Youth Advisory Council say that it wanted greater acknowledgment of the responsibilities people have?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Absolutely.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** That was really positive.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** That idea that volunteering is something much more broad. Most young carers would not use the term "volunteering" to describe what they do; they just do what they do.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** It is life.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes, it is life and in some ways that is the thing. The term "volunteering" implies going off and doing something that is external.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** It is a weird word.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** It is a bit.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** We are all finding that.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Again, thinking about migrant and refugee communities, they tend to be collectivist rather than individualist communities. So taking part, helping other people and getting outside your own family home is normal but it is not necessarily something you give a word to—it is just what we do and how they live. How we describe those things is really useful.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Did you want to say something?

**Ms MUHUNTHAN:** I think it is important to recognise that there is a lot of pressure on young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds having to grow up much quicker than they really should have to. A lot of people do not understand that. Volunteering can be a really positive experience in providing parents with an outlet for their young people to go and feel a part of the community. I think there are a lot of issues that come with being a migrant or refugee young person. My experience is that there are issues with mental health, self-confidence, self-esteem and efficacy and it can be promoted in that way. In terms of the resources it will have to be a combination of both. It is probably not sustainable to have full resources on paper. By doing research and involving organisations in providing services to young people you can work out who has access to the internet, which community groups have access to computers and those that do not and distribute the resources that way.

The last point I want to make is that I think the content of the resources itself is really important; whether they are in a range of different languages, their accessibility and they need to be in plain English. By engaging and involving youth participation in the building of the resources rather than it being tokenistic and saying, "What do you think about this?" and by integrating participation into building the resources you can ensure that they will be useful for young people and their parents.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Another volunteer program just in doing that.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Thank you for coming along today and for your submission. With respect to migrant and refugee communities—this might have more than one answer—do they readily and happily adopt involvement in existing organisations that do voluntary work, do they tend to have a greater inclination to establish their own organisations organically and through them do volunteer work, or is it a bit of both? I do not know whether that was a clear explanation. There are many voluntary organisations that do work across the community. I am wondering whether the migrant refugee communities channel into those and flourish or alternatively set up their own organisations and through them do the voluntary work?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** I think it is a varied experience. Certainly a number of ethno-specific community organisations have been set up and continue to be set up as new groups come to Australia. I think that is part of the need to feel connection and not to feel isolated. It is understandable that they do that. This is something where maybe young people differ to adults and older people: For young people there is a really strong desire to want to be integrated into the Australian community. That does not mean they want to give up their own cultural identity but it means they want to be both. That sometimes can be a tension as well because the pressure from parents and other people in their community is to stay safe and to stay within their community, but for young people they see that their future is in Australia.

One of the things we find within the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network is that when we offer opportunities for training and for young people to come together for activities they talk excitedly about how great it is to get the chance to move outside their own cultural group and to mix with and talk to other young people. That is one of the most useful things for them in getting involved in groups like ours and other organisations. They often say to us, because we tend to focus on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, "Yeah, but we want the white Australian kids here as well; we want to be talking to everybody." It is important for us to be thinking how to create those opportunities. It is a mix of both but it is an age issue in that I think the young people genuinely want that opportunity to move into mainstream Australian society.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I am not asking you to nominate specific organisations as that would not be fair but keep that response in mind. As younger people or the first generation grow to maturity and want this experience outside their immediate communities and want to contribute to the broader community, is there general acceptance and welcoming in the voluntary community for them to get involved or are there sticking points or issues that act as a barrier? I am not asking you to nominate specific examples but perhaps you could talk about principles.

**Ms MUHUNTHAN:** From my experience there is a lot of pressure on getting an education and doing well but community engagement is important as well. There is encouragement to be part of a community in the broader sense and to have an understanding of volunteering. There is a lot of pressure on young people who on the one hand are expected to do really well at school and to be exceeding and excelling and, on the other hand, to be part of a community and that could be through various organisations. Further to your other question, communities tend to set up their own organisations sometimes because they are unclear of how to apply for funding or how to access existing organisations. Everybody knows the concept of community engagement: they

see a need and they set up an organisation to meet that need and often without any funding at all because they are not aware of how the systems work.

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Can I highlight, not just in relation to migrant refugee young people, that what we have seen in Australia in the past 10 or 15 years in particular has been a really significant growth in youth led organisations and volunteer organisations set up and run by youth. There are some well-known examples like the Oaktree Foundation and the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, which have become huge organisations. It is young people caring about issues but often sensing that the established organisations have a fixed way of doing things and they are not really young people friendly, if you like. I think in a similar way young people from refugee migrant backgrounds sometimes walk into organisations and sense that they are not welcome there. It might not be anything that is said; it could just be that every face in the room is white and therefore there is a sense that this is not somewhere that I will be comfortable. We are also seeing in some ethnic communities that young people are setting up their own ethno-specific youth organisations. They are saying, "We want to change things but we want to do it our way; we do not want to do it in the way of older people." I think that is a trend across young people in Australia in the past 10 years or so.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I am not talking about work experience programs run by high schools but, rather, work experience undertaken by people of their own initiative. Exploitation is often raised. Employers might offer a one-month trial period after which the situation will be evaluated and then—surprise, surprise—at the end of the month the person is not deemed suitable and is not paid. Do people in migrant and refugee communities experience that? I know it is a pejorative word, but are young people being exploited, in other words, being required to work without pay? Have people reported that?

**Mr M'MANGWA:** When I started work, I worked for two weeks as a volunteer. They said they wanted to try me out. They said, "Stanley, you are not the person we were looking for." I wondered what sort of person they were looking for. I did everything that I could; I arrived on time; I did everything on time. I did everything that was expected, but in the end there was no job. Now refugees might be resentful and start refusing to volunteer or to accept that kind of offer because they might be told that there was no job for them; the organisation might just want to try them out. My friend might get a similar offer and he would probably say no because of what happened to me. They do not want it to happen to them. There needs to be reciprocity: What am I going to get if I volunteer? If I am going to get a job, I need to know. I used my money for transport.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** And for uniforms and clothing.

**Mr M'MANGWA:** They provided the uniform. I used my money to get to and from work for three weeks. At the end of three weeks there was no money. I lost my money. Even now, if I had my family, my mum would most probably expect me to continue the job. She would ask why I did not have a job by now and I would have to explain what is wrong.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Thank you.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** I wonder whether anyone ever got the job.

**Mr M'MANGWA:** Yes.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Thank you for your evidence.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. The Committee may wish to send some additional questions in writing, the replies to which will form part of your evidence and be made public. Would be you happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

**Mr CUMMINGS:** Yes, we would.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**(The Committee adjourned at 12.43 p.m.)**