



volunteeringsa-nt

volunteers are vital

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The Hon Tony Piccolo MP
Minister for Emergency Services
GPO Box 668
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Minister

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on *A SAFER Community Discussion Paper*.

About VSA&NT

Volunteering South Australia and Northern Territory (VSA&NT) began as "the Volunteer Centre of South Australia" in 1982. As the peak body for volunteering in South Australia and the Northern Territory it is funded by State and Federal Governments to provide advice, research, advocacy on the issues of volunteering and services to volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

VSA&NT is governed by a citizen board, responds to a body of members and works extensively with volunteers, volunteer managers, volunteer resource centres and volunteer involving organisations. As the peak body for the voluntary sector it has an integral leadership and advocacy role for that community.

As the volunteering peak body, we have had the opportunity of working with and providing advice to the emergency services sector and are vitally aware of our State's dependent on volunteers for the important and essential activities they undertake. We are also aware that like many other parts of the third sector, emergency services are experiencing difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers. Volunteering SA&NT will continue to work with these services to meet the demands and expectations of these times.

In regard to the Discussion Paper we would like to congratulate the authors for the prominent place that has been given to volunteers and their issues and for the fact that the Paper gives them parity with paid staff. We fully support the inference of the value placed on volunteers as well as their essential role within the services. Volunteering SA&NT has a strong relationship with the emergency services and will continue to support the emergency services sector, regardless of what structure is adopted as a result of this review.

Comments

We would like to make comment in relation to the issue of volunteers about which the Discussion Paper specifically seeks advice.

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Firstly, I would like to draw your attention to the *Australia National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations* (the Standards), a set of best practice guidelines to assist organisations to achieve best practice in volunteer management. These standards can be downloaded from Volunteering Australia website and cover eight key elements for an effective volunteer program:

1. Policies and procedures
2. Management responsibilities
3. Recruitment
4. Work and the workplace
5. Training and development
6. Service delivery
7. Documentation
8. Continuous improvement.

It is our view that anyone involved in the management of volunteers should:

- be aware the Standards as a model of best practice volunteer management;
- understand the Standards, which may involve training for both paid staff and volunteers; and,
- apply the standards by embedding them into the organisational policies and procedures, including performance management measures of senior staff.

Effective application of the Standards will strengthen the role, recognition and value of volunteers in the business of emergency services.

Secondly, the extent to which the importance of volunteers in emergency services is reflected in the proposed structure is not apparent in the chart provided in the Discussion Paper. The inclusion of volunteer support and training in the discussion about the structure is, however, encouraging and we assume that matters pertaining to volunteers are disseminated throughout the proposed structure.

We encourage you to consider enhancing the proposed structure with a specific unit for volunteers. This unit could have responsibility for supporting the implementation of the Standards, including developing and executing consultation processes within the various services. The unit could also develop volunteer policies and procedures especially in relation to training, recruitment and retention. Volunteering SA&NT would welcome an opportunity to assist in the development of such a unit.

We wish you well in this process and thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully



EVELYN O'LOUGHLIN
Chief Executive Officer