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BACKGROUND

This report has been developed by the project officer responsible for the PRAISE Project, Alison Duff at as part of the evaluation strategy for the project completed in April 2009.

One of the foci of the Partnerships, Recognising, Advocating, Including, Supporting and Education volunteers (PRAISE) Volunteer Support Grants project has been to find better ways of supporting people with disabilities to volunteer in the wider community. To better understand how this could be achieved mapping exercises were undertaken to identify issues and barriers that volunteer-involving organisations experienced in incorporating volunteers from these backgrounds into their volunteer programs. It became apparent through these activities that the volunteer workforce of many organisations did not reflect the diverse nature of the general community. These findings were also backed up by state and national research findings. How the PRAISE project attempted to address these issues is recorded in the following report along with recommendations for future strategies in this area.

SUMMARY

Given that Volunteering Geelong did not have the required expertise in the disability sector it was important to engage with representatives across the disability sector to develop effective strategies that could assist people with disabilities to volunteer. A Forum was organized that showcased a successful interstate project and established a level of interest and support from the sector. A working party was then formed with the aim of developing pilot projects specifically designed to support young people with disabilities to volunteer. These projects were commenced in 2008, continue throughout 2009 and are expanded on in this report. However, the numbers of volunteers with disabilities looking for volunteer work far out ways the number of volunteer opportunities available in these pilots. Supporting these pilots and creating new volunteer opportunities for people with disabilities requires resources, funding and skilled staff. These considerations need to be addressed for work in this area to continue.

BODY OF REPORT

SUPPORTIVE VOLUNTEERING FORUM

The Supportive Volunteering Forum was organised in an attempt to explore ways in which people with disabilities can engage in everyday life activities such as volunteering. The forum was seen as a mechanism to ensure the PRAISE project engaged with the disability sector and people with disabilities and gained a relevant understanding of the issues that affected not only the organisations that recruited volunteers but the volunteers themselves and the organisations that worked on behalf of the volunteers.

34 people attended the Forum representing a wide range of organisations throughout Victoria that included volunteer-involving organisations, Disability Resource and Support Agencies and Volunteer Resource Centres and was sponsored by the Department of Planning and Community Development, City of Greater Geelong, Encompass and the Department of Human Services.

The Forum was well received by an enthusiastic audience who appreciated the opportunity to access information, knowledge and resources from a successful Western Australian pilot project called ‘take 2 – Enhancing Access’. The Forum provided a timely and appropriate avenue for interested parties to meet and demonstrate their support and interest in the idea of developing a means by which people with disabilities can participate in volunteering. Five key issues emerged that may impact on people with disabilities participating successfully in volunteering. Participants considered these issues and provided valuable suggestions that will be considered in future undertakings.

The nominated issues were then categorised into five main areas:
• Community Awareness and acceptance of roles that people can play
• Organisational culture – is it supportive of inclusive volunteering
• Personal lack of confidence and knowledge of skills
• Financial cost of volunteering (transport, reimbursement, training)
• Who is responsible? How can we make change to ensure success?

OUTCOMES OF THE FORUM

A significant outcome from the Forum was the agreement that the Volunteering Geelong along with the PRAISE Volunteers Project should lead a working party to scope a Geelong specific project that may attract future funding and develop ways that we can support people with disabilities to engage in volunteering. A Working Party was set up and members included Rural Access (COGG), DHS, DPCD, Encompass, Pathways, LeisureNetworks, Vision Australia, Nelson Park School and Deakin University, Volunteering Geelong being the lead partner. As a result of the working party meeting two pilots were developed, the LeisureNetworks Recreational Football Pilot and the Vision Australia Pilot. Refer to Appendix 2 - Supportive Volunteering Pilot Report for more information.

ISSUES FACED WHEN SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO FIND VOLUNTEER WORK

These Supportive Volunteering Pilots will continue with the support of Volunteering Geelong and associated organisations in 2009 however due to the fact that the number of potential volunteers with disabilities who come into Volunteering Geelong far exceeds the demand for volunteers in such programs, new ways must be found to support this group. The traditional referral process used by Volunteering Geelong whereby volunteers are interviewed by a volunteer information officer and referred to volunteer-involving organisations is not often suitable nor successful for this group and the reasons for this are quite complex.

From a volunteer information officer working at Volunteering Geelong’s perspective they often feel out of their depth in making a suitable skill assessment of the person with a disabilities skill level and the suitability of the organisations they are referring the organization to adequately look after the volunteers. Other areas of concern for the officer are when to address the volunteer or the carer, the volunteer’s access to a carer to help them with their volunteer role, and the dilemma of whether the questions they ask the volunteer are impinging on their privacy rights.

From the volunteers perspective they often do not have the communication skills to adequately promote themselves to the organization, their expectations can vary significantly from that of the organization they are referred to, some volunteers are restricted by the lack of access to facilities at the organisations, there may be a lack of transport available to their volunteer opportunity and it can be a costly activity for them if there is transport available. Many volunteers either self select out of the process or are screened out by the volunteer-involving organisation.

From a volunteer-involving organisations perspective research with these groups in the Geelong and surrounding areas (through questionnaires, literature reviews, the Supportive Volunteering Forum and anecdotal research) suggest many organisations are overwhelmed when presented with the possibility of employing a volunteer with a disability. The organisations are often under resourced to support the volunteer, do not have the skills required to support the volunteers, do not have the venue that is accessible to the volunteer and do not have the time or resources to create an environment that is inclusive, their main focus being on service delivery of their program.

Another important consideration is the recent changes to the funding support available for the person with a disability along with the introduction of ‘individual plans’ that create new options for their activity choices. This new development has created issues for not only the volunteer but their support networks and the potential volunteer-involving organisations. The complexity of managing the process that involves varied key stakeholders requires a dedicated resource to act on behalf of the volunteer and ‘navigate the system’ producing positive outcomes for all parties.

Appendix 1 Supportive Volunteering Model outlines a possible framework for managing this process.

Supportive Volunteering for People with Disabilities Report
RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations have been made on how to improve the outcomes for a volunteer with a disability, the organisations that support them and the volunteer-involving organization that employs them.

- Continuation of the promotion of Disability Awareness training in the sector and the need for funding to ensure this training is easily accessible to volunteer-involving organisations
- Source funding for the development of a new pilot program to trial new processes for supporting individuals with disabilities into volunteer work.

Responsibilities could include:

- Interviewing the volunteer who has a disability at an arranged time
- Looking for volunteer roles for that person
- Advocating to the potential volunteer-involving organization on behalf of the volunteer
- Identifying skill level of volunteer
- Assessing skill requirements of volunteer roles
- Establishing what sort of mentor/carer support is required, if any
- Establishing if there is funding available for this role
- Supporting the person in their volunteer role in initial stages
- Supporting volunteer programs developed by Volunteering Geelong
- Providing the volunteer-involving organization with training
- Obtaining feedback from the volunteer and the volunteer-involving organization on the success or lack of, of the placement
- Evaluation of pilot program
Supportive Volunteering Model

Creating Inclusive Communities
Awareness, Information

Disability Advocacy Groups
Disability Agencies
Disability Support Services and Resources

Supportive Volunteering Partnership Projects

Supporting Volunteers
Individual Needs Assessment
Advocacy
Communication
Flexible mentoring (mentors, carers, family, temp volunteers)
Self Evaluation
Pathways to employment

Involvement and inclusion in community

Stronger Communities

Recruitment and Placement
Volunteering Geelong
Volunteer-involving organisations (community, sporting) Volunteers

Promotion
Create positive images in community
Promote Program
Help build inclusive organisations
Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Supportive Volunteering Working Party participants and pilot project partners from:

- Partnerships, Recognising, Advocating, Including, Supporting, Education (PRAISE)
- Leisure Networks
- Vision Australia
- Department of Human Services
- Encompass
- Rural Access (COGG)
- Pathways
- Deakin University
- Department of Planning and Community Services
- Nelson Park
- Volunteering Geelong
- Volunteering WA
SUMMARY

Volunteers are an important resource in Australian communities. Historically, people with disabilities have been excluded from many community activities such as volunteering. In 2007 the Partnerships, Recognising, Advocating, Including, Supporting and Education volunteers (PRAISE) Volunteer Support Grants project held a Supportive Volunteering Forum aimed at exploring ways in which people with disabilities can engage in everyday life activities such as volunteering. Consequently a working party was formed to respond to issues identified in the forum and two pilots were designed to explore the ways in which a sustainable framework could be developed to provide practical and positive ways to address these issues.

BACKGROUND

The idea of running a Supportive Volunteering Forum came about after the 2007 Youth Think Tank session run by COGG identified that ‘many young people faced barriers to volunteering’ and that work needed to be done to break down these barriers. The Forum was designed to ensure that all interested members in the community could have some input into developing a positive way forward to address this issue and was supported by Department of Human Services (DHS), City of Greater Geelong (COGG), Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), Encompass and Volunteering Geelong.

Consideration was also given to recent consultations undertaken by the Department of Human Services that indicate people with a disability wish to increase their education and training attainment within their local communities as well as undertaking volunteer opportunities as avenues for skill development and further community participation.

Research into best practise initiatives in this area found that many projects facilitators were willing to share their knowledge and findings from recent projects. Arrangements were made to feature a flagship program from Western Australia, the Enhancing Access ‘take 2’ project at the forum and provide the audience with an opportunity to access information, knowledge and resources from an existing pilot. The Forum also provided a timely and appropriate avenue for interested parties to meet and demonstrate their support and interest in the idea of developing new ways for people with disabilities to participate in volunteering.

Five key issues emerged from the forum that may impact on people with disabilities participating successfully in volunteering.

- Community Awareness and acceptance of roles that people can play
- Organisational culture – is it supportive of inclusive volunteering
- Personal lack of confidence and knowledge of skills
- Financial cost of volunteering (transport, reimbursement, training)
- Who is responsible? How can we make change to ensure success?
Participants considered these issues and provided valuable suggestions to be considered in future undertakings. The Forum then concluded that Volunteering Geelong along with the PRAISE Project should lead a working party to scope a Geelong specific project that may attract future funding and develop ways that we can support people with disabilities to engage in everyday life activities such as volunteering. Working party members included Rural Access (COGG), DHS, DPCD, Encompass, Pathways, LeisureNetworks, Vision Australia, Nelson Park School and Deakin University, Volunteering Geelong being the lead partner. As a result of the working party meeting two pilots were developed, the LeisureNetworks Recreational Football Pilot and the Vision Australia Pilot.

AIMS

The main aim of the pilots was to develop a framework that supported people with disabilities in finding and undertaking volunteer work in the wider community. This framework was to be built on existing foundations such as those provided by agencies, education organisations and not for profit organisations. The pilots also aimed to develop pathways to participation in mainstream volunteering, training and employment.

PILOT OUTLINES

VISION AUSTRALIA PILOT

The Vision Australia Pilot involved a group of nine 17-18 year old students from Nelson Park School, in the second year of their two-year VCAL certificate. Vision Australia Geelong developed volunteer position descriptions that were given to students allowing them to select positions of interest. Students were then matched with existing Vision Australia volunteer who provided mentor support in these roles.

Vision Australia staff and mentor volunteers were provided training in working with people with disabilities by LeisureNetworks and Nelson Park particularly tailored to working with this group of students.

Greg Giblin, Nelson Park School coordinator reported on the program.

“Each student has a mild intellectual disability and as such, there is a large range of personal requirements and support structures specific to each particular student. The students were placed in pairs and given specific roles and responsibilities that involved a wide range of different jobs and skills. The staff, mentor volunteers and clients at Vision Australia were most welcoming and accepting of our students and catered for their
individual needs effectively and efficiently. This meant that the students were comfortable with their roles and responsibilities and they felt empowered to challenge themselves and learn from the placement. Areas of focus included conflict resolution, teamwork skills, personal initiative, social interaction and basic work etiquette and expectations.

GEELONG RECREATIONAL FOOTBALL VOLUNTEERING PILOT

To commence the Geelong Recreational Football Volunteering Pilot it was decided to form a partnership between Volunteering Geelong, Leisure Networks, Deakin University and Nelson Park School to facilitate a pilot project for people with disabilities to become volunteers for the Recreational Football Competition managed by LeisureNetworks.

The first phase of the pilot identified young people from Nelson Park School and disability agencies to become volunteers for the Geelong Recreational Football Competition. The second phase identified students from Deakin University’s Occupational Therapy school to mentor the volunteers. Stage three included assigning volunteering roles such as umpiring, scoring and timekeeping to the volunteers. The fourth stage was to put in place volunteer/mentor relationships to support the volunteers in these roles along with providing training for the mentor volunteers (Training was delivered by LeisureNetworks at Deakin). Encompass disabilities support services assisted in providing insurance for the volunteers. The competition took place on a weekly basis over a 10 week period at Grovedale and Northshore Football Clubs and concluded with a grandfinal and presentation lunch at the Northshore Football Club. Volunteers acted in a variety of roles such as field umpiring, goal umpiring and scoring. Mentor volunteers acted as support people for the volunteers along with generally interacting with players on and off the field. A submission for funding was submitted to the DPCD Volunteer Support Grants to support the program, this submission was successful was not allocated in time for the pilot and will now be put towards a similar program in 2009.

FINDINGS

VISION AUSTRALIA PILOT

- Successful outcomes for all partner organisations meant that partners are keen to continue this model in the future
- Vision Australia Geelong was introduced to a new volunteer market – ‘youth volunteers’
- Need for debriefing time when students arrive back at school to discuss activities and any problems that arose and how best to deal with them thus providing a continuous improvement opportunity
• Staff, mentor volunteers and clients at Vision Australia were most welcoming and accepting of our students and catered for their individual needs effectively and efficiently.
• Some students identified they would like to continue volunteering beyond the life of the pilot.

GEELONG RECREATIONAL FOOTBALL VOLUNTEERING PILOT

• New participants with a disability not initially identified as volunteers requested volunteer roles within the competition, highlighting the need for flexibility in allocation of roles to volunteers and volunteer mentors.
• Unexpected outcomes unfolded as volunteer mentors from Deakin not only acted in the mentor roles but also participated as players in the competition. This factor allowed the students from Deakin to have a broader role and range of experiences than was initially envisaged, providing added benefits in relation to their studies (such as enhanced communication skills working with people with disabilities).
• This model could be easily duplicated and implemented in a variety of settings in the sporting, community and general not-for-profit sector, the important attribute being flexibility to adapt to changing needs and abilities of the volunteers.
• The Long Term Goal of building a positive relationship with local sporting club encountered initial difficulties as club personnel were unsure how to support the volunteers and players in the project. Football clubs require a ‘bridge builder’ to act as the person to advocate for creating an inclusive environment at the clubs and to provide information to club members on how they could be involved in future initiatives.
• Mentor role needs to be flexible to empower the volunteer, depending on the individual skill and capability of the volunteers (e.g., some volunteers preferred to be supported by the case workers or family and friends rather than mentor volunteers).
• Possible training needs of volunteers in the future in specific skills such as ‘goal umpiring’ and ‘scoring’.
• Pilot provided a ‘best practice’ example of conduct on and off the sporting field. All players and volunteers demonstrated respect, encouragement and consideration towards other players, volunteers, and mentors.

Spectators also demonstrated exemplary behavior and there was no issue with the ‘ugly parent’ syndrome that threatens the success of many mainstream sporting events.

EVALUATION

GEELONG RECREATIONAL FOOTBALL VOLUNTEERING PILOT

Below are responses from Deakin University Occupational Therapy students who participated in the Recreational Football Competition. The evaluation was undertaken by Rachael Schmidt, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University. Interest has also been expressed in continuing in being involved in further projects along with including mentor volunteers in the ‘Information sessions’ at Deakin to provide new students enrolled in the Occupational Therapy course with information on volunteering opportunities.
**Combined responses from Deakin Students**

1. **What motivated you initially to become involved in the program to assist volunteers in Recreational Football?**
   - To gain experience in working with people with disabilities.
   - Networking and experience working with and assisting people with a wide range of abilities.

2. **What was the most enjoyable part of being involved in volunteering in this program?**
   - Being active and trying creating a supportive environment for all players and their families.
   - The interaction with the participants, having a joke and talking with everyone.

3. **What did you learn from the players, the organizers and/or their families from being a volunteer in recreational football?**
   - That anything can be done with a supportive, facilitating environment.
   - That there is not many opportunities for these people to participate in activities such as football.

4. **Describe any barriers you encountered during the program, either personally or externally, that prevented your full contribution.**
   - External: transport to and from the different football oval locations.
   - As a student we all have other commitments such as work, study, social life and family. These tend to become a priority and time can become limited.

5. **Could these barriers be eliminated or reduced? Detail your creative thoughts or ideas below.**
   - A bus for players, volunteers, family and all involved could be organized. There could be several pick-up and drop-off points. Each individual could pay $2 each time they used this Recreational Football Service.
   - Unfortunately the barriers I mentioned can not be limited because they are al essential things to my life.

6. **How do you think your skills have been developed by participating in this program?**
   - I am more confident in interacting with people with disabilities
   - Problem solving skills and creative thinking (how can we make this environment for accessible to facilitate occupational participation for all?)
   - I have had worry that I would find it difficult to engage in conversation with new people but I now notice it is becoming easier to me.

7. **What words would you use to describe participating as a volunteer in Recreational Football?**
   - Fun, Challenging, Enjoyable, Motivating, Enthusiasm
o Fun, encouragement, belonging and support.

VISION AUSTRALIA PILOT

Greg Giblin from Nelson Park School commented on the success of the pilot,

“All of the students who participated in the project spoke glowingly and proudly about their achievements. They felt important and essential to the successful running of the activities and programs that they assisted in during the placement. The Vision Australia/Nelson Park VCAL Volunteer Project was a definite success from the school’s perspective. Valuable and worthwhile partnerships in the wider community are vital to the learning pathways of our students and a supported Volunteer Placement in an Organisation such as Vision Australia was the perfect environment for our students to explore and develop their skills at a more practical level.”

Jason McGregor from Vision Australia commented that from an organizational perspective Vision Australia see they have a role to play in making ‘real connections’ in the community. This pilot has been an opportunity to do this and support from all levels of the organization was important to the success of the project. Jason also suggested that in the future a smaller group may be more manageable and that the ‘model’ could also benefit with support from mentors such as Occupational Therapy students who may provide assistance and supervision with specific tasks such as gardening and detailing cars.