

SPEAKING POINTS

The Honourable Lindy Nelson-Carr MP
Minister for Communities

12th National Conference on Volunteering

Radisson Resort, Gold Coast
9.00am, Wednesday 3 September 2008

Good morning everyone and welcome to the 12th National Conference on Volunteering.

What a wonderful turn-out. It's fabulous to see so many people with a genuine interest in volunteering.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the conference and — for the first time — welcome this conference to Queensland.

Not only is Queensland a very special place, but it's home to an army of volunteers.

VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

The most current census figures show Queensland has the nation's highest proportions of volunteers, with 38% volunteering.

We all know volunteers are an extremely valuable.

They help address social inequities, and they strengthen and add great value to our communities.

In May, the Bligh Government released an updated *Economic Value of Volunteering report* which highlighted again, the enormous contribution volunteers make to our community fabric.

The report was produced by internationally-renowned economist Associate Professor Dr Duncan Ironmonger, from the University of Melbourne.

Importantly, it quantified the value of formal and informal volunteering.

It valued the efforts of volunteers at \$13.4 billion, which equates to some 299,000 jobs around the State.

In fact, regional Queenslanders contribute approximately \$2.2 billion to their communities through organised volunteering alone.

One of our successful volunteering initiatives this year has been the *Reading to Children* program.

It is providing wonderful opportunities for volunteers, particularly seniors and grandparents, to contribute to the nurturing and wellbeing of young Queenslanders.

It also benefits seniors because they become positive role models, they get out into the community, and the entire initiative helps in breaking down the generation gap.

This program will additionally have positive effects on physical and mental health over time.

The Department of Communities funds the Smith Family and the Carpentaria Shire Council up north to run *Reading to Children*, and I look forward to the Gold Coast program being up and running before the end of the year.

VOLUNTEERING TRENDS

Social and demographic trends show Queenslanders of all ages are active in volunteering work.

But an ageing population and a preference for short-term or specific projects, also creates a decline in the amount of time people spend volunteering, even though volunteer numbers continue to rise.

So we have some challenges and I know this conference will enable you to hear the latest and work together to plan the way forward.

We, as a government, are also working in partnership with the sector to develop ways to overcome barriers.

In May this year, the Queensland Councils for Seniors and for Youth came together for the first time, and they brainstormed ways government and non-government organisations could recruit younger and older volunteers.

As a result, I'm pleased to announce we have a range of new resources available to assist in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

The resources aim to help your organisations increase the generational range of your volunteer support base, so you can sustain the excellent work you do, well into the future.

There's a booklet, factsheets and checklists to help your organisations and the sector stay 'volunteer-friendly' and catering for the needs of all ages.

These resources are available here at the Communities display today. They're also available on the Department of Communities' website and via other websites, such as Community Door and Volunteering Queensland.

You see, we too are committed to developing a stronger base for volunteering.

Also outlined in our *Valuing Volunteers* policy is strengthening rural and regional volunteering.

The fact regional Queenslanders contribute approximately \$2.2 billion to their communities clearly demonstrates we're already well on the way – but we cannot rest on our laurels.

And, I might add, neither should any sector of the community – public, private, young, older.

Over the next 12 months, the Office for Volunteering in my department will focus on supporting and promoting innovative practices in the sector, to increase the diversity of people volunteering as we anticipate what lies over the next horizon.

The Bligh Government is also pleased to be supporting this conference.

With a theme like “Catch the New Waves”, I trust you will be inspired to be part of the solution as you set about developing the clear path forward.

It’s a great opportunity to debate, share information, exchange views and ideas.

My special thanks to Volunteering Australia for organising this conference and also for the fabulous work you do at the national level to reduce fragmentation and duplication across the sector.

To Volunteering Queensland, I want to pay tribute to your commitment and hard work.

Whether as individuals, groups or companies, a volunteer's efforts can really make a difference and I want to thank each and every person here today for the valuable contributions you will continue to make.

Without further ado — I now declare the 12th National Conference on Volunteering officially open.

/ ends