

VOLUNTEERING

ACCORDING TO THE NSW
MINISTER FOR CITIZENSHIP
AND COMMUNITIES:

“Volunteering underpins our society, binds us together and contributes to strengthening and sustaining communities.”¹



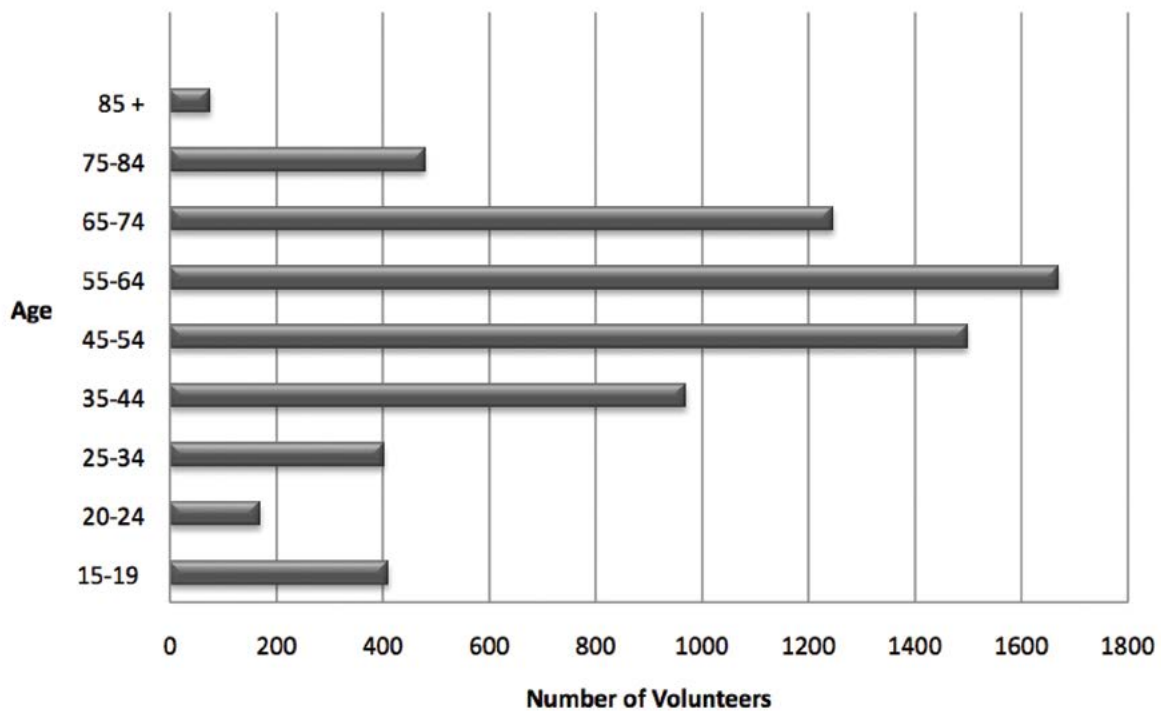
OVERVIEW

When we think of volunteering, and look at the majority of recognised volunteers in the Bega Valley Shire, they tend to be people who volunteer their efforts via a volunteer organisation.

Preschool management committees, School P&C's, sporting groups, Surf Life Saving Clubs, Hall Committees, Seniors Citizens, Men's Sheds, and community groups like Canteen and the Red Cross are all managed by volunteers on committees. These volunteers spend large amounts of their time raising funds for people and resources in the community.

Volunteering strengthens the social connections for people within a community. Volunteering can provide meaning, purpose and satisfaction in the lives of many people. Volunteering can also bring health and wellbeing benefits.²

Volunteering in the Bega Valley Shire



IN THE BEGA VALLEY

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census, the Bega Valley Shire has one of the highest levels of volunteerism in the state with 26.3% of residents reporting they did some form of volunteering through an organisation or a group. This compares to the NSW average of 16.9%. Volunteering tends to be highest amongst middle-aged people, and seems to only decline with incapacity as people get older. In the Bega Valley, the rate of volunteering was highest amongst those aged 55-64 years when 24% volunteered, and the next highest in the 45-54 year and 55-64 year age groups, with 22% and 18% volunteering respectively.³

Although the Bega Valley Shire boasts a large number of people who volunteer their time, there are also a large number of volunteer organisations competing for volunteers. In the Shire there are hundreds of volunteer-reliant organisations including, community service organisations, sporting clubs, social clubs and entertainment groups.

ACCORDING TO THE 2011 NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY:

“volunteering can be regular or episodic, formal or informal, pre-planned or a spontaneous response to emergencies. It can be done through an organisation, the workplace or individually, in person or online. It can involve professional or other work skills, generic or manual labour”⁴

Some of the more active organisations operating within the Shire, who rely heavily on volunteers, include the Rural Fire Service (RFS), Volunteer Rescue Association (VRA), Surf Life Saving Clubs (SLSCs), the State Emergency Services (SES), Volunteer Coast Guard, Sports Clubs (including football, cricket, soccer, hockey, netball, fishing, basketball, tennis, bowling and golf), Rotary, Lions, Country Women’s Association (CWA), Meals on Wheels, Community Transport, numerous nursing homes and community care providers, native wildlife rescue services (WIRES & NANNA), the Animal



ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY:

“The volunteering landscape is changing..... While traditional forms of volunteering are still popular, new forms are emerging.”⁶

Welfare League (AWL) and Landcare.

In addition, the Bega Valley Shire Council relies on over 350 volunteers to provide services ranging from the home library service through to maintaining cemeteries, gardens, halls and sportsgrounds. The work undertaken by volunteers is appreciated by Council and contributes to considerable savings.

THE CHANGES

New work health and safety (WHS) laws were introduced in NSW on 1 January 2012. These laws replaced the occupational health and safety (OHS) laws. This new

health and safety legislation has resulted in a growing need for support and resources about the new legislation for volunteers and the organisations that support them.⁵

Under the legislation, a volunteer organisation with paid workers is now known as a ‘person conducting a business or undertaking’ (PCBU). This type of volunteer organisation has responsibilities under the WHS Act to provide a duty of care to ensure its volunteers are not exposed to any risk to their health and safety. People who are volunteer workers will also have the same obligation as ‘workers’ to take reasonable care for health and safety.

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Ageing Population

The Bega Valley has a very high proportion of older people compared to the NSW average. Therefore, the ageing population has been identified as a significant issue for volunteering. With an ageing population, many of the organisations that have been at the forefront of volunteerism are under threat.

The key drivers of many volunteer organisations are now moving beyond their active lifetime and there is a need for some form of succession planning. In some organisations, people who have been volunteers are now becoming the clients of the agencies that they previously provided a volunteer service to.

The Australian Government is encouraging older Australians to include volunteering in their retirement planning. There are also opportunities to increase volunteering through Centrelink arrangements. Older people on unemployment benefits are currently able to contribute 15 hours per week to volunteering in lieu of paid work.

Volunteer work undertaken through arrangements with Centrelink must take place in approved not-for-profit organisations. Guidelines are available from the Department of Human Services website. The program is beneficial to the Bega Valley as it encourages older people to volunteer their time and skills for the benefit of the wider community.⁷

Engaging the Community

Attracting young people (18-30) to volunteering today is necessary for volunteering in the future.⁸ Young people need to be able to enter a volunteer organisation and be encouraged to develop and discuss innovative ideas. Developing mechanisms for older people to provide mentoring and skills training to young people would be beneficial.

Furthermore, supporting young people to share their skills and knowledge with older more experienced volunteers would also be advantageous to the sector.

The Council would like young people to be involved in all aspects of local life including civic leadership, business, education and volunteering. Young people are interested in volunteering, however they have different interests and will often look for alternative causes for their volunteer experience than older people. Many schools encourage volunteering, however it is understood that this avenue for volunteering usually extends to a limited number of organisations.

STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY

The Bega Valley Shire has a long history of volunteerism and an established network of volunteer organisations. The ABS statistics have shown that the Shire has a high level of volunteerism when compared to the NSW average.

The Bega Valley is a relatively isolated part of NSW. Nevertheless, residents of the Shire have a strong community focus and this is an asset. Volunteering is an element that can further assist in strengthening the Bega Valley communities' well being and social capital.⁹

With an ageing population, the Bega Valley is well placed for an increased number of skilled older people exiting the workforce and looking for volunteering opportunities. The Shire has a significant number of retirees migrating to the area and it is expected that many early retirees are seeking volunteer work.

THE CONSTRAINTS

ACCORDING TO THE NSW VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY,

“in some areas the demand for services is increasing just as volunteer numbers are declining.”¹⁰



The Australian Government is encouraging older Australians to include volunteering in their retirement planning.

The Strategy also points out that many volunteers feel that their efforts are not fully appreciated. Volunteer organisations are able to access resources from Volunteering Australia, such as national standards for managing volunteers.¹¹

Volunteers need to be recognised for their efforts and there are a range of mechanisms, both locally and nationally, to show volunteers their contributions are valued. In the Bega Valley Shire, community organisations are diligent in acknowledging the efforts of their volunteers. However, it is understood that different volunteers value recognition of their efforts in different ways. Developing new initiatives to recognise the efforts of volunteers is required.¹²

Some people may find it difficult to identify and connect with organisations that offer volunteer roles that appeal to them. This may be a barrier for some people in their quest to service the community through volunteering.

Changes in work and family circumstances over the past few decades have seen an increase in double income families. Busy lifestyles mean that families and professional people may have difficulty finding the time for volunteering. There are also growing demands for volunteers from a range of social activity based groups, such as sporting groups, social clubs and organisations surrounding the arts.



Prospective volunteers are also deterred from volunteering due to the bureaucratic 'red tape' that often hinders their will to 'serve their community'. Some organisations require a very high standard of volunteer training in order to meet their contractual obligations. This level of training can often deter volunteers from providing their services to these organisations. Streamlining and rationalising the bureaucratic burdens on volunteers may assist in maintaining and growing the volunteer base.

Volunteering is an important part of our society and according to the Productivity Commission, the value of this unpaid labour in Australia is over \$14 billion.¹³ Although volunteers' time is unpaid, there are often personal expenses to support their volunteering, such as the costs of transport. Not-for-profit organisations also bear significant costs for training and managing volunteers and arranging insurances and police checks.

There are an increasing number of volunteers who choose to volunteer on a short-term or project based arrangement. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many volunteers over the age of 55 would prefer to volunteer in their social activity based groups than community service organisations.

Episodic type of volunteering increases the costs and time required for organisations to manage volunteers. Every time a new volunteer enters an organisation, regulations require that they undertake a range of activities, including a police check.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

The Bega Valley Shire Council has identified an opportunity to facilitate the development of a Volunteer Resource Centre (VRC) in partnership with key volunteer groups in the Shire. VRCs are currently operating in many localities around the country. A funded and operational VRC in the Bega Valley would provide community organisations and volunteers with information, support networks and other services in various aspects of volunteering.

A central location that coordinates information for volunteers and organisations has cost and time saving opportunities. A VRC could develop a database of available volunteers that includes information on their skills, training and experience. The development of such a data base would improve data sharing between organisations.

Episodic volunteering results in volunteers providing their services to more than one organisation. It is understood that often people would be interested in providing small amounts of their time to volunteering in multiple organisations, rather than committing to one organisation. There are opportunities through a VRC to ensure this group of volunteers' time is used as effectively as possible.

There is an opportunity to increase the number of volunteers through the 'grey

nomads'. The Bega Valley is a tourist destination for people who have retired and are now travelling around Australia. Many grey nomads are looking for volunteer opportunities on their travels and there are currently some grey nomad websites that post volunteer opportunities. There is an opportunity for the Bega Valley to tap into this resource base of volunteers.

The volunteering sector recognises the value and potential of gaining volunteers through work-based programs.¹⁴ It is suggested that partnerships could be developed between volunteer organisations and workplaces to develop options for work-sponsored volunteering in the Shire.

Encouraging more young people to volunteer may result in an increase in the number of volunteer services and organisations. For example, there is a growing need for computer and internet based volunteering and many volunteer groups are not skilled in these areas. There is an opportunity to engage young people to volunteer their time and skills in these areas to support existing organisations.

People may be attracted to volunteering as a pathway to employment. Volunteering may be an opportunity for people who are unemployed, under-employed or a recent school leaver to improve their skills and knowledge to enhance their employment opportunities. This arrangement must be undertaken with caution as it is understood there have been instances where volunteers have been used as replacements for paid staff.¹⁵

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SOCIAL ISSUES PAPERS

This document is part of a broader Social Issues Paper produced by the Bega Valley Shire Council. To read the document in its' entirety go to www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au

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