

Volunteering Tasmania submission to the Change for Children draft Strategy and Action Plan

Prepared for	Tasmanian Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet changeforchildren@dpac.tas.gov.au
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Prepared by	Volunteering Tasmania
Contact	policy@volunteeringtas.org.au
About Volunteering Tasmania	As the peak body for Volunteering in Tasmania, we work to see an inclusive, thriving, and celebrated culture of community participation across the state by strengthening and enhancing volunteering through leadership, education, and connection. We work to ensure community-based volunteering is sustained, valued and integral to community resilience and wellbeing.

Content warning

This submission is about child sexual abuse. It also references working conditions which contributed to the death of a worker. We encourage readers to exercise care in their engagement with this content and to seek support as required.

Kids Helpline

24/7 support for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years

Ph: 1800 55 1800 | webchat: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

1800RESPECT

24/7 counselling and information support for domestic, family and sexual violence

Ph: 1800 737 732 | SMS: 0458 737 732 | webchat: <https://1800respect.org.au/>

State-wide Sexual Assault Support Line

24/7 support provided by Sexual Assault Support Service and Laurel House

Ph: 1800 697 877

13 YARN

24/7 crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Ph: 13 92 76

Lifeline

24/7 crisis support

Ph: 13 11 14 | SMS: [0477 13 11 14](tel:0477131114) | webchat: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/>

A Tasmanian Lifeline

8am – 8pm telephone support

Ph: 1800 98 44 34

Terminology¹

Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

Formal volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

Informal volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one's own family members. For example, looking after children, property or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (National Standards):² Are a best practice framework to guide volunteer involvement in Australia. They are an essential resource for all organisations and groups that engage volunteers. The National Standards can be used flexibly, recognising that volunteering takes place in highly diverse settings and ways.

Volunteer coordinator, managers and leaders: The person/s who are responsible for the recruitment, induction, training, supervision, and ongoing support of volunteers.

Volunteer involving organisation (VIO): Any organisation/company/department that engages volunteers may be known as a volunteer involving organisation (VIO).

Volunteering infrastructure/ volunteer-enabling infrastructure: The enabling governance, operational and technological structures, bodies and platforms that provide volunteer involving organisations with the capability to involve volunteers ethically and efficiently.

Volunteering Industry: Refers to the broad network of organisations, individuals, and systems that facilitate and support volunteering in Tasmania. This industry encompasses government, non-government, and private sectors, and includes volunteers, VIOs, volunteer-led groups, philanthropic entities, businesses, and governments. Together, these groups work within and across various sectors to enable and sustain volunteering activities, fostering community engagement and delivering essential services.

About this submission

Volunteering Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to Change for Children, the draft ten-year Strategy for upholding the rights of children by preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse, and Collaborating for Children the first two-year Action Plan. This submission will focus on key issues associated with the Workforce, Professional Development and Training, and Government Funded Service Commissioning Priority Areas and will make a number of recommendations to strengthen these areas in the final Strategy and Action Plan.

¹ Volunteering Australia, [Common Languages Guide](#).

² Volunteering Australia, [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) (2023).

Background

The Strategy and Action Plan have been developed in response to Recommendation 19.1 from the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings.

Recommendation 19.1

*The Tasmanian Government should develop a whole of government child sexual abuse reform strategy for preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse, including child sexual abuse in institutions and harmful sexual behaviours.*³

Volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are crucial stakeholders in Tasmania's child and youth safe reform project. However, the distinct needs, challenges and complexities associated with Tasmania's volunteering industry are often overlooked and underrepresented in policy and legislative reforms with outcomes that depend on the leadership, participation, and stability of the workforce and industry. Public policy that misrepresents the role of volunteers in the lives children, young people, families and communities will undermine efforts to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people within the volunteering industry.

In 2023, nearly 70 per cent (69.8 per cent) of Tasmanians aged 15 years and over participated in volunteering;⁴ including 72.4 per cent of young Tasmanians aged between 15 and 25.⁵ This represents 332,000 Tasmanians who contributed their time, energy, and resources to support their communities in a wide range of ways.

Volunteers provide critical skills, knowledge, and support across a range of government and non-government sectors and services that engage with children and young people and victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. In 2023, research revealed that 29.6 per cent of Tasmanian volunteers were engaged in the delivery of social and wellbeing support; 22.6 per cent volunteered in someone else's home; 20.8 per cent volunteered in the sport and recreation sector; 18.4 per cent in teaching and coaching; and 9.7 per cent in faith based or cultural support.⁶ These sectors rely heavily on volunteers to deliver services to children and young people. The desire to volunteer directly with children and young people is also held by those not currently volunteering. In 2022, research revealed that of those not currently volunteering, 22.7 per cent of respondents expressed an interest in volunteering in the future with child and youth focussed organisations, programs or services.⁷

While Tasmanian volunteers are primarily motivated to volunteer to help others, for enjoyment, and for social and community connection,⁸ the nature to which perpetrators have leveraged their

³ Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings (2023), [Recommendation 19.1](#).

⁴ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 8. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

⁵ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 13. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

⁶ Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering in Australia 2022: The Volunteer Perspective](#), pp. 42.

⁷ Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering in Australia 2022: The Volunteer Perspective](#), pp. 43.

⁸ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 16. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

volunteer roles and standing within the community to abuse children has been well documented.⁹ While many VIOs are well equipped and well positioned to safeguard children and young people from harm, others face significant challenges in doing so. This includes limited understandings about child sexual abuse, as well as their ethical and legal responsibilities to protect children and young people from harm, a lack of human and financial resources to implement necessary changes (as many VIOs are entirely volunteer run), and insufficient access to legal counsel. Additionally, many VIOs lack best practice infrastructure to appropriately identify and respond to concerns, risks, and disclosures of harm to children. These challenges are further exacerbated by pervasive myths and misconceptions about child sexual abuse, including the character of perpetrators and the functions of grooming.

Given the extent to which children and young people engage with volunteering, and the persistent challenges within the industry, it is crucial that the Strategy and Action Plan accounts for, responds to and enables the involvement of Tasmania's largest and most diverse workforce in safeguarding children, young people, and victim-survivors of child sexual abuse from harm.

Key Issues

Workforce Priority Area

Workforce definitions – 'staff', 'volunteer' and 'worker'

The consultation draft defines the workforce in the following ways:¹⁰

- Staff – a paid worker employed or engaged by an organisation or institution
- Volunteer – an unpaid worker who participates in or supports the work of an organisation or institution
- Worker – any person who carries out paid or unpaid work for on behalf of an organisation or institution; includes staff and volunteers

These are some inconsistencies present within these definitions that we believe would be beneficial to address in the context of the Strategy and Action Plan.

The definition provided within the consultation draft is inconsistent with national and state-based definitions. Volunteering Australia¹¹ define volunteers as '[t]hose who give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain', while the *Work Health and Safety Act (Tas) 2012*¹² defines a volunteer as 'a person who is acting on a voluntary basis (irrespective of whether the person receives out-of-pocket expenses).' The distinct differences between these definitions and the definition within the consultation draft is that neither refers to 'unpaid work' or to place of work. This is significant for the following reasons:

The words 'unpaid work' or 'unpaid worker' are not specific to the volunteering context and are used to refer to a range of unpaid work experiences including vocational placements, unpaid work trials,

⁹ Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings (2023), [Final Report](#).

¹⁰ Tasmanian Government, [Change for Children consultation draft](#) (2024), pp. 103 – 104.

¹¹ Volunteering Australia, [Common Languages Guide](#).

¹² Tasmanian Government, [Work Health and Safety Act 2012](#).

unpaid work experience, unpaid internships, and caring.¹³ The roles, responsibilities and legal frameworks around each of these types of work are distinctly different from volunteering.

In addition, the definition within the consultation draft references the workplace as an organisation or institution. This does not account for the substantial levels to which volunteers participate in and engage with children and young people through informal volunteering, which takes place in community settings and outside of formal organisations and institutions. The majority of volunteering in Tasmania does in fact take place informally.¹⁴

It is also interesting to note that while the *Work Health and Safety Act (Tas) 2012* provides a standalone definition of a volunteer, it does not provide a standalone definition of a paid staff member or employee. Instead, the *Work Health and Safety Act (Tas) 2012*¹⁵ represents those work arrangement within the definition of a 'worker':

Meaning of worker

*(1) A person is a **worker** if the person carries out work in any capacity for a person conducting a business or undertaking, including work as –*

(a) an employee; or

(b) a contractor or subcontractor; or

(c) an employee of a contractor or subcontractor; or

(d) an employee of a labour hire company who has been assigned to work in the person's business or undertaking; or

(e) an outworker; or

(f) an apprentice or trainee; or

(g) a student gaining work experience; or

(h) a volunteer; or

(i) a person of a prescribed class.

While we support the use of the word worker in line with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012*, we also acknowledge that there may be circumstances in which it is beneficial, if not necessary, to clearly distinguish between types of workers by using words such as 'staff' or 'volunteers'. We recommend however that any differences in the responsibilities and legal requirements of different workers to safeguard children and young people should be clearly outlined and communicated. Where this is not the case, the word 'worker' should be used.

As such we encourage policymakers to exercise careful consideration when selecting terms that are most appropriate for the context. For instance, 'a changed future'¹⁶ offers a vision for 'staff member' rather than worker in a community organisation. Nearly 90 per cent of community organisations

¹³ Australian Government, Fair Work Ombudsman, [Unpaid Work](#).

¹⁴ 70.9% of volunteers engage in informal volunteering, 51% of volunteers engage in formal volunteering. The overlap of 19.9% accounts for those who volunteer in both formal and informal settings. Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

¹⁵ Tasmanian Government, [Work Health and Safety Act 2012](#).

¹⁶ Tasmanian Government, [Change for Children consultation draft](#) (2024), pp. 12.

engage volunteers in their workforce.¹⁷ Therefore, focussing on ‘staff’ rather than ‘workers’ excludes volunteers as key stakeholders, and minimises their role within the reforms. This is also true ‘a changed vision’ – ‘staff member in Government agency’.

Volunteers play a vital role within government agencies that engage with children and young people. For example, the Department of Health engage nearly 400 volunteer ambulance operatives;¹⁸, ¹⁹ the Department for Education, Children and Young People valued volunteer contributions to Libraries Tasmania in 2023 at \$1,573,000;²⁰ and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment recorded 36,883 volunteer hours with the Parks and Wildlife Service in 2022-23.²¹

Another example is present within the Incident Management Priority Area, which states, that this priority area will... ‘[b]uild trust and confidence among children and young people, families, staff and the community that incidents will be taken seriously and addressed transparently and appropriately’.²² We are unsure why volunteers are not represented in this context and why the word ‘staff’ has been chosen over the word ‘worker’.

A volunteering informed approach to public policy is crucial to ensure that the roles, responsibilities and expectations of volunteers are clearly outlined. However, increased representation of volunteers must be accompanied by an understanding of the complexities associated with the volunteer workforce and action to ensure they have the supports required to ensure they are able to perform their roles in line with best practice requirements. The development and implementation of best-practice, volunteer-enabling infrastructure, is often overlooked, leading to increased barriers to formal volunteering, the withdrawal of formal volunteers from VIOs, and the creation or exacerbation of workforce shortages.

Recommendations

- 1) Policy makers reconsider the definitions provided within the Strategy for ‘staff’, ‘volunteer’ and ‘worker’ in line with the information above.
- 2) Policy makers carefully consider and ensure that references to staff, volunteers and workers are accurate within the Strategy and Action Plan. The language should be consistent throughout the Strategy, Action Plan and associated policy measures.
- 3) Policy makers should engage with Volunteering Tasmania and volunteering industry stakeholders to understand the enabling infrastructure required to prevent, identify and respond to child sexual abuse across institutional, organisational and community settings. The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement will also support analysis about best practice infrastructure requirements.

¹⁷ Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc, A Community Services Industry Built for Tasmania’s Future: [Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031](#), pp. 8.

¹⁸ Tasmanian Government, Media Release from Guy Barnett Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing, [Celebrating out volunteers in health](#), May 2024.

¹⁹ Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2024, [Ambulance services](#), Table 11A.2 – Ambulance service organisations’ human resources.

²⁰ Tasmanian Government, Department of Education, Children and Young People, [Annual Report 2022-23](#), pp. 140.

²¹ Tasmanian Government, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, [Annual Report 2022-23](#), pp. 26.

²² Tasmanian Government, [Change for Children consultation draft](#) (2024), pp. 58.

Workforce shortages

The term "workforce" often draws connotations of the paid workforce, minimising the crucial role that the volunteer workforce plays in keeping children and young people safe from harm. To create effective, robust and responsive workforce policy, it is critical to ensure that the challenges, needs and strengths of the volunteer workforce are considered and addressed alongside those of the broader workforce.

Tasmania's volunteer workforce is the largest workforce in the state. It provides critical services to Tasmanian children, young people and families across sectors including education, health, community services, sport, art, conservation, emergency management and response and more.

In 2019, modelling forecast a 42 per cent gap between the demand for and supply of formal volunteers in Tasmania if significant action was not taken to address the declining trend in formal volunteer participation.²³ State and National datasets demonstrate that the structural decline of Tasmania's formal volunteer workforce is worsening, alongside structural growth of Tasmania's informal volunteer workforce.^{24, 25}

In 2023, 169,371 Tasmanians participated in formal volunteering, reflecting an 11.1 per cent decrease in participation from 2019. Meanwhile, participation in informal volunteering rose by 14.9 per cent, seeing 235,458 Tasmanians volunteer informally in 2023.²⁶ In practical terms, this can be seen in reduced volunteer availability or the withdrawal of volunteers from VIOs engaged in the delivery of essential services such as surf lifesaving, emergency relief, emergency accommodation, suicide prevention, and fire and ambulance services; to increased volunteer activity within local communities through the provision of informal emotional support, community childcare, tutoring, and recreational activities.

This trend in volunteer participation is particularly concerning when we consider the level to which many critical sectors rely on the formal volunteer workforce. For example, between 2022 and 2023, the Tasmanian Government employed 396 qualified ambulance officers and 384 volunteer ambulance operatives;²⁷ the State Emergency Service employed 33 paid staff and 686 volunteer personnel;²⁸ and volunteers accounted for 63% of charity staff.²⁹ The Tasmanian community services industry employs approximately 17,800 paid employees and is supported by more than 35,000 volunteers³⁰. It was estimated that by 2024, the community services industry required an additional 14,000 formal volunteers to meet projected community need. This is 350 per cent more than the

²³ Volunteering Tasmania, [Tasmanian Volunteering Profile 2029](#) (2019), pp. 3.

²⁴ Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Volunteers](#) (2023).

²⁵ Volunteering Tasmania comparison of 2019 and 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Research.

²⁶ Volunteering Tasmania comparison of 2019 and 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Research.

²⁷ Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2024, [Ambulance services](#), Table 11A.2 – Ambulance service organisations' human resources.

²⁸ Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2024, [Emergency services for fire and other events](#), Table 9A.5 – State and territory Emergency Service organisation human resources.

²⁹ Australian Government, Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, [Australian Charities Report, 10th edition](#), pp. 27.

³⁰ Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc, A Community Services Industry Built for Tasmania's Future: [Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031](#), pp. 8.

4,000 additional paid jobs required to meet that same demand.³¹ These sectors are reliant on a formal volunteer workforce and often engage with children and young people at times of increased vulnerability.

Unlike the paid workforce, the volunteer workforce is primarily motivated by passion and purpose, rather than by financial incentive and do not therefore require formal structures to find meaning in their work. Many formal volunteers are responding to increased barriers such as financial and administrative burden, growing requirements and responsibilities (particularly in circumstances where organisations lack safeguarding infrastructure), time constraints and burnout, by withdrawing their time from formal VIOs and seeking less onerous ways to contribute to their communities. Volunteer workforce shortages can have significant implications for the safety and well-being of children and young people across prevention, early intervention, response and healing from abuse. This includes:

- **Reduced support services** – many programs and services that support children and young people rely heavily on volunteers. Workforce shortages can lead to reduced service delivery and availability, limiting children’s participation in wellbeing activities, the early identification of child maltreatment, and access to safe spaces, mentoring and support networks.
- **Overburdened workforce** – volunteer shortages can place additional strain on the remaining paid and volunteer workers, increasing experiences of worker burnout and reducing organisational capacity to maintain safe practices and respond effectively to emerging risks and children’s needs.
- **Quality of programs** – with fewer volunteers, VIOs may have to scale back programs to operate with less oversight, this can lead to compromises in the quality and safety standards of activities designed for children and young people.
- **Decreased community engagement** – volunteers often serve as a crucial link between services and the community and support children, young people and families to develop trust and relationships with services. Volunteer shortages can disrupt and weaken these connections, leading to decreased community involvement in child-focused initiatives.
- **Care network** – children are safest when surrounded by a supportive and trusted care network capable of recognising early signs of concern and of responding to harm. These relationships can also have a significant bearing on children’s decision to share concerns and/or to experiences of harm with adults. Volunteers often form part of a child’s care network in their provision of supports, services and activities such as counselling, transport and community events. Disruptions to these relationships with workers can leave children and families without a strong, consistent support system, where there are fewer opportunities for prevention and early intervention, fewer trusted individuals for children to confide in, and an increased risk that signs of abuse go unnoticed or unaddressed.
- **Primary prevention** – volunteers often serve as role models in their communities and hold unique opportunities to challenge the drivers of gender-based violence, including child sexual abuse. Through their volunteer roles they can disrupt rigid gender stereotypes, for instance by increasing the representation of women and gender-diverse people in what are traditionally male dominated fields like sports coaching. Volunteers model the promotion of

³¹ Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc, A Community Services Industry Built for Tasmania’s Future: [Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031](#), pp. 10.

women's independence and decision-making in public life, by exercising agency in how they choose to spend their free time. Additionally, volunteers play key roles in supporting boys and men to develop healthy masculinities and foster positive, supportive male peer relationships. This work can help to shift the cultural norms and attitudes that promote and perpetuate sexual violence, including child sexual abuse.

The declining trend in formal volunteer participation not only affects the safety and wellbeing of children and young people across primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention initiatives, but also adds layers of complexity for policymakers given the bearing that the stability of the volunteer workforce on achieving positive policy outcomes. This issue is also pertinent, given the extent to which children and young people volunteer in Tasmania.

Young volunteers

Young Tasmanian's value volunteering. In 2023, 72 per cent of young Tasmanians between the ages of 15 and 25 volunteered.³² They have told us that they volunteer because 'it's good for the soul', for 'connection', to 'improve life skills and English', to 'help the community' and to 'spread happiness and support each other.'³³ In addition, young people often cite the opportunity to increase their employability as a reason to volunteer.^{34, 35}

Young volunteers contribute to their communities through a wide range of formal and informal volunteering activities, such as event support, teaching, or coaching, providing social and wellbeing supports, and environment, conservation, and animal welfare work. However, due to increased barriers to formal volunteering, many young Tasmanian's are turning to informal volunteering to contribute to their communities. While informal volunteering can be highly structured and responsive to community need, it often lacks the organisational structures that are more associated (yet not always found) with formal volunteering, such as adherence to codes of conduct, policies and procedures, risk management, and supervisory practices. However, many formal VIOs also lack these structures and require high levels of support to meet child and youth safe standards. While some VIOs have undertaken significant change, others have responded to the child safe reforms by withdrawing opportunities for children and young people to participate in volunteering or by ceasing the delivery of programs and activities for children and young people. With limited resourcing and support, many others have continued to operate without making the necessary changes to safeguard children and young people from harm. This highlights the urgent need to provide Tasmania's volunteering industry with targeted support to ensure that all VIOs can create safe and structured environments that protect children and young people while supporting their participation in and access to the benefits of volunteering.

Volunteer enabling infrastructure

Many Tasmanian VIOs are finding it increasingly difficult to attract, recruit, manage, and retain volunteers in a reform environment that has yet to address the unique challenges facing the

³² Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

³³ Volunteering Tasmania consultation with students for National Student Volunteer Week 2024.

³⁴ Alzaareer, M., & Abdalla, M., [Exploring Motivations and Benefits of Volunteering: The Perspectives of High School Students in Selected Australian Islamic Schools](#).

³⁵ Alegria, P., [The Impact of Volunteering on a Young Person's Life](#).

volunteering industry. While we support policy development that aims to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, increased regulation must be accompanied by the enabling infrastructure required to support and sustain the volunteer workforce, ensuring that VIOs can meet their obligations without creating additional barriers to formal volunteer participation. This not only applies to formal volunteering within government and non-government VIOs but also to informal volunteering across Tasmanian communities.

This is evident in the policy response to the Commission of Inquiry's recommendations concerning formal volunteers. The Commission's recommendations emphasised adherence to professional conduct policies, mandatory training certification, and professional development³⁶ – all necessary measures to enhance workforce accountability, capacity, and capability to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children and young people involved with VIOs. However, industry stakeholders have raised concerns that these policy reforms have not been supported by enabling infrastructure. For instance, some VIOs require volunteers to complete worker screening and mandatory child and youth safe training, yet they lack processes to manage their volunteers. This is captured in the following comment from a Department Education, Children and Young People volunteer.

Before I started volunteering at the school, I had to do the online training and show my work with vulnerable people card and get a police check, but I didn't get an induction, I didn't have to check in at the office or show anyone by card, I just go straight to the classroom. I don't have a point of contact at the school.

The absence of accompanying infrastructure and resourcing has led to significant uncertainty among volunteers, paid workers, and broader industry stakeholders about their responsibilities and requirements to protect children and young people from harm. Over the past year, we have seen a drastic increase in requests for support from industry stakeholders regarding the child and youth safe reforms. Through these interactions, we have identified the following as key issues.

- **Focus on the paid workforce** – Existing resources are tailored to the paid rather than volunteer workforce, leaving industry stakeholders without access to relevant and applicable guidance material. Additionally, existing resources fail to account for the diverse sectors in which volunteers and VIOs operate, making it difficult for VIOs to access practical advice about how to adapt to the reforms.
- **Resource disparities** – There are significant disparities between the human and financial resources available to VIOs. For instance, one VIO recently advised that they have employed 5.0 FTE staff dedicated to the organisation's implementation of CYSOF, while another VIO, despite working directly with children and young people, has been unable to resource dedicated roles requiring existing staff to undertake this work off the sides of their desks and with already high workloads. Resourcing issues are particularly challenging for VIOs and groups that are entirely volunteer run and funded.
- **Limited understandings of child sexual abuse** – There is a lack of awareness across the industry about the general and organisational risks associated with child sexual abuse. This gap in knowledge impacts the capability and capacity of volunteers and VIOs to effectively

³⁶ Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings (2023), [Final Report](#), Recommendations.

prevent, identify, and respond to concerns, risks, and disclosures of harm and limits cultural change within VIOs.

- **Limited understandings of legal safeguarding obligations** – Significant disparities exist among industry stakeholders, including volunteer boards of VIOs that work with children and young people about their ethical and legal obligations to protect children and young people from harm. This includes uncertainty about requirements to comply with CYSOF and is furthered by the lack of access that many VIOs have to legal counsel.
- **Child safe structures** – Many VIOs lack essential internal, child-safe structures, including adequate risk assessments, clear policies and procedures (such as processes to ensure the VIO is able to access updates about a workers Registration to Work with Vulnerable People in the case of an investigation or registration cancellation), well defined volunteer roles and statements of responsibility, reporting mechanisms, and provisions for storing and sharing sensitive information.
- **Professional development** – Some volunteers have experienced safeguarding training as burdensome; this is particularly the case for those who volunteer with multiple VIOs and have had to undertake training with each of those VIOs. Other volunteers have experienced safeguarding training as insufficient, raising concerns about their ability to effectively prevent, identify, and respond to risks and harm. This has had an impact on volunteer retention, for instance some volunteers have expressed fears that after completing safeguarding training they are now liable for any harm that may occur in a child and young person's contact with the VIO. Concerns such as these are compounded without access to organisational supports, such as established volunteer coordinator roles or access to regular supervision.
- **Volunteer coordinator roles** – Volunteer coordinator roles are not standardised within VIOs, leading to inconsistencies in the supervision, support, and guidance available to volunteers.
- **Informal volunteering** – Many VIOs and informal volunteer-led groups that have direct contact with children and young people are not required to comply with CYSOF and are not therefore required to develop child and youth safe practices. This highlights the need for broad scale prevention and community education efforts, as well as by dedicated volunteering-informed resources to support cultural change across the industry.
- **Reluctance to engage with the Office of the Independent Regulator** – many stakeholders including volunteers and paid workers, have expressed hesitancy and concern about contacting the Office of the Independent Regulator for guidance and support. They fear that doing so may implicate the VIOs they are involved with, as well as potential repercussions for themselves.

The child and youth safe policy reform project must account for the volunteer-enabling infrastructure required to address the systemic policy gaps identified above to ensure that volunteers and VIOs are able to create safe environments for children and young people, as well as for volunteers, a significant number of whom will be victim-survivors of harm.

Recommendations

- 4) Volunteering Tasmania invite discussions with the Department of Premier and Cabinet to explore the development of policy responses that address the infrastructure and support needs required to strengthen the capacity and capability of VIOs to safeguard children and

young people from harm. Policy responses should be informed by the unique challenges and responsibilities faced by VIOs working directly with children and young people, some of which have been outlined above, ensuring that the solutions are tailored to the specific context that the VIOs work within.

In addition to immediate capacity-building efforts, it is crucial to allocate ongoing funding and resources to foster long-term cultural change within the volunteering industry. This includes investing in professional development for volunteer coordinators, establishing standardised child-safe frameworks, and providing continuous support to ensure that VIOs can effectively uphold child safe standards. A sustained investment in both infrastructure and workforce development is essential to create a safe and supportive environment for children and young people across Tasmania's volunteering industry.

Volunteer coordinators

One of the most significant elements of volunteer enabling infrastructure relates to the professionalisation and standardisation of volunteer coordinator roles within the volunteer workforce.³⁷ While policy reform, including that associated with the Commission of Inquiry recommendation implementation project has sought to professionalise the formal volunteer workforce, less attention has been paid to the professionalisation and standardisation of volunteer coordinator roles within VIOs. Developing this highly complex and underrecognised profession will be critical in supporting the formal volunteer workforce to safeguard children and young people, particularly as the expectations and responsibilities of and barriers to formal volunteer participation increase.

The standardisation of volunteer coordinator roles within VIOs

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (the 'National Standards') provide the best practice framework for volunteer involvement in Australia and set out clear expectations about volunteer coordination/ management.

Standard 2.4 volunteering programs are supported by adequately resourced volunteer managers or officers.

People with volunteer responsibilities are provided with training, supervision and resources to effectively undertake their role.

People with responsibility for volunteers have a voice in the organisation.³⁸

Yet the profession of volunteer coordination is confronted by a pervasive lack of understanding and recognition of the criticality of volunteer coordinators within the workforce. One of the most impactful things that can be done for the volunteer workforce is to enhance, recognise and resource volunteer coordination roles within VIOs to ensure that volunteers have a direct, suitably trained point of contact. While the evidence is lacking, anecdotal evidence points to the lack of volunteer management roles within VIOs. This has a range of impacts upon oversight of volunteers, upon community and volunteer safety and for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

³⁷ Volunteering Australia, [National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033](#), pp. 62.

³⁸ Volunteering Australia, [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) (2023), pp. 15-17.

Span of control

Guidance provided by the Australian Government about optimal management structures within public service agencies, recommends that the optimal span of supervision for high level service delivery of case management is 6 – 9 direct reports per supervisor, and for high volume service delivery of regular and less complex tasks is 8 – 15 direct reports per supervisor.³⁹ Such benchmarks do not however, appear to translate to Tasmania’s volunteering industry.

The 2023 State of Volunteering Research (SOVR) demonstrates that while the majority of volunteer coordinator respondents (about 48 per cent) were responsible for coordinating up to 20 volunteers, it is not unusual for volunteer coordinators to be managing between 21 and 50 volunteers (about 26 per cent), or between 51 and 100 volunteers (about 12 per cent). The research also demonstrates that a significant number of volunteer coordinators (about 14 per cent) are responsible for coordinating between 101 and 250 volunteers (about 5 per cent) and upwards of 250 volunteers (about 9 per cent). Of the respondents, just over half (53.5 per cent) undertook volunteer coordinator roles in a paid capacity, compared to those who coordinate volunteers as a volunteer themselves (51.0 per cent) (‘unpaid volunteer coordinator’).⁴⁰ While *unpaid* volunteer coordinators (those who lead volunteers in a paid role but whose responsibilities to coordinate volunteers fall outside of their statement of duties) are more likely than paid volunteer managers to lead up to 50 volunteers, *paid* volunteer coordinators are more likely to lead groups of 50 to 250+ volunteers. However, it should be noted that *unpaid* volunteer coordinators are also responsible for coordinating over 50 to 250+ volunteers.⁴¹ While it usually takes many volunteers to deliver one-full time paid employee equivalent position, each individual volunteer has the individual requirements of a paid employee, including recruitment, induction, training, delegation, supervision, scheduling, communication, relationship building and development.⁴²

The implications of such untenable arrangements were highlighted in a 2021-2022 Coroner’s Investigation into the death of a Tasmanian Government employee. In undertaking the investigation, the coroner identified a number of issues associated with the deceased employment, expressing particular concern about the lack of resourcing and the unsustainable manager to staff ratios. The coroner noted that while the recommended span of control was between 10 and 30 people, five to eight workers was considered optimal. At the time, however the span of control within the workplace was approximately 180 full time-equivalent employees and around 300 volunteers to one manager.⁴³ Despite such detrimental consequences, the 2023 SOVR demonstrates that volunteer coordinators are still expected to manage staggering and unsustainable numbers of volunteers without appropriate training or resourcing.

³⁹ Australian Government, Australian Public Service Commission, [Optimal Management Structures Guidance 2023](#), Table 1: number of direct reports by work type.

⁴⁰ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 31. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

⁴¹ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 32. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

⁴² Newstead, T., & Lewis, G., [Leading and Managing in Tasmania’s Volunteer Sector](#) (2021), pp. 8.

⁴³ Tasmanian Magistrates Court, [Findings, comments and recommendations of Coroner Olivia McTaggart following the holding of an inquest under the Coroners Act 1995](#), pp. 8-9.

Professional Development and Training Priority Area

While the substantive functions of coordinating a paid and volunteer workforce are similar in nature, research suggests that leading volunteers is more challenging than leading a paid workforce.⁴⁴ One of the key distinctions is that coordinators of volunteers are required to engage with a complex set of motivations related to passion and purpose rather than financial incentive.

Managing volunteers requires a different way of working with people – at any point your volunteer can walk out the door. - Volunteer Coordinator⁴⁵

Volunteer coordinators navigate distinctly different tasks and responsibilities from managers of paid employees that relate to the complex policy and legislative framework surrounding volunteer engagement. In addition, the highly discretionary nature of volunteering means that volunteer coordinators must operate with different degrees of skill, nuance, and expertise in order to negotiate and positively influence volunteer performance, satisfaction and retention.⁴⁶ Despite this, career pathways into volunteer coordination and professional development opportunities for those already working as volunteer coordinators are limited as available leadership courses tend to focus on the operational aspects of employee management, rather than the nuances of volunteer coordination.

Volunteer managers should have just as much opportunity as paid employee managers to upskill. There's a lot of value in properly learning how to lead people, how to manage conflict, how to collaborate with people that aren't paid to be there. Some volunteer managers I know have only ever managed paid employees but managing volunteers is a completely different thing to managing paid employees. There's a different level of commitment from volunteers, they can leave at any time. What happens if a volunteer adds a participant [including young people] on Facebook, how does the manager engage with the volunteer on this. You have to approach these situations in a different way with volunteers. – Volunteer coordinator, health sector

Alongside specialised leadership training, there is a need to provide volunteer coordinators with professional development opportunities, resources, and practical guidance about children's rights and child and youth safety that is tailored and applicable to the volunteering context. Industry stakeholders continue to raise this as a significant gap, expressing concern about the implications for child and youth safety and for the psychosocial safety and wellbeing of their volunteers across the age spectrum.

[S]ending vulnerable people out to engage in volunteering, requires skill sets of the people that will be managing them in those volunteer positions. - Volunteering professional

...you see people at their finest, [and] most vulnerable...you have to be really aware of that, you know, in terms of scheduling, in terms of management, in terms of morale, in terms of formal and informal support. - Volunteer coordinator, arts sector

The nature of volunteering means that volunteer coordinators are often working with individuals who have diverse identities, backgrounds, and experiences of vulnerability. Given the prevalence of

⁴⁴ Kragt, D., Wilson, S., Newstead, T., & Forner, V., [Without leadership there is no volunteering: The importance of strategic investment in leadership development in Australia](#) (2022).

⁴⁵ Newstead, T., & Lewis, G., [Leading and Managing in Tasmania's Volunteer Sector](#) (2021), pp. 9.

⁴⁶ Newstead, T., & Lewis, G., [Leading and Managing in Tasmania's Volunteer Sector](#) (2021), pp. 6.

child sexual abuse, it is entirely plausible to suggest that this will include significant numbers of volunteers with lived or living experiences of child sexual abuse, whether disclosed or undisclosed.

Volunteers can be exposed to a range of physical and psychosocial risks within their volunteer roles. Yet volunteer coordinators (where they are in place) don't necessarily receive the specialist training required to safeguard their volunteers from harm. This is particularly pertinent given the level to which young people, including those at risk of harm, participate in volunteering, as well as the level to which we anticipate victim-survivors participate in volunteering. Without the necessary infrastructure to safeguard volunteers from harm, they are responding to undue stress and exposure to risk by leaving VIOs in many cases without the protections, supports and entitlements that are typically provided to paid employees, such as loss of income insurance, access to Employee Assistance Program and professional supervision. For volunteers of all ages this can culminate in a sense of betrayal, a disruption to the relationships that were established through volunteering, to a sense of purpose, and in worry about the implications for those in contact with the VIO or for fellow volunteers.

Recommendations

- 5) The Tasmanian Government work alongside Volunteering Tasmania and industry stakeholders to understand the needs of and develop accredited professional development opportunities for prospective, emerging and existing volunteer coordinators.

Whole of Government Commissioning Framework Priority Area

We are pleased to see that the draft Action Plan includes the development of a Whole of Government Outcomes-Based Commissioning Framework and a Quality and Safety Framework that emphasises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in the commissioning of community services. This aligns with the sector's long-standing advocacy for the development of a transparent, outcomes-based funding model developed in partnership with the community sector.

Historically, the commissioning of VIOs in Tasmania has been marked by fragmentation. Many VIOs face challenges of inadequate funding and indexation that does not account for the true costs of volunteer involvement, short term contracts, and inconsistent data collection, reporting, and evaluation practices. A more strategic, transparent, and evidence-based approach to commissioning presents a valuable opportunity to enhance short- and long-term outcomes for the community.

The true costs of volunteering

Volunteering is defined as 'time willingly given for the common good without financial gain.' While volunteering is often associated with providing free labour, volunteering does not come without a cost. Instead, the provision of safe, accessible and best-practice volunteering is accompanied by significant administrative and management costs. For instance, a member organisation recently advised that it costs their organisation approximately \$600 to onboard a single volunteer. This does not include the costs to provide ongoing management, training, or support. Another member highlighted that it costs their organisation \$239 to provide each volunteer with mandatory first aid training. With first aid certificates expiring after two years and with a volunteer workforce of approximately 800 volunteers, this is an unfunded cost of \$191,200 that must be absorbed by the organisation every two years to meet their obligations. Due to persistent underfunding and

misconceptions about the cost of volunteer involvement, many of these expenses are being absorbed directly by volunteers and volunteer coordinators.

For volunteers

Tasmanian volunteers have identified the cost of volunteering as one of the primary barriers to volunteer participation.⁴⁷ Between 2019 and 2023 the average hourly cost of volunteering, per individual volunteer rose from \$4.03 to \$11.88; this means that on average Tasmanian volunteers are spending \$267 per month to participate in volunteering. This accounts for nearly 20 per cent of a monthly Jobseeker payment and limits access to the benefits of volunteering to those who can afford the cost.

The 2023 SOVR revealed that while the majority (57.1 per cent) of these expenses were allocated to food and drink; transport, travel and motor vehicle expenses; and accommodation, the remainder was spent on tools, equipment, technology or other gear (12.5 per cent); memberships, licences and mandatory checks (8.4 per cent); self-education, training and courses (8.2 per cent); and uniforms and clothing (8.0 per cent).⁴⁸ While some VIOs have rigorous reimbursement practices and cultures in place, these policies require volunteers to cover the initial costs, which for many is unaffordable in an ongoing cost of living crisis.

The SOVR also highlighted that volunteers are shouldering 80.1 per cent of the total direct costs associated with volunteering, with Tasmanian volunteers incurring a staggering \$872 million in out-of-pocket expenses in 2023 alone.

For volunteer coordinators

The 2023 SOVR demonstrates that significant costs are being incurred by volunteer coordinators in the management of volunteers. While three quarters (73.6 per cent) of volunteer management expenses were covered by VIOs, a quarter (26.4 per cent) of volunteer management expenses were paid for upfront by volunteer coordinators.⁴⁹ On average, Tasmanian volunteer coordinators are paying 11 per cent more than their interstate counterparts for costs associated with managing volunteers.

There are a range of issues associated with the financial burden being carried by volunteer coordinators, this includes impacts on workforce retention and inequalities in leadership, as well as substantial conflicts of interest and ethical considerations for engagement with children and young people. In addition, without commensurate funding and as the requirements around child and youth safe practices expand, there is a risk that the financial burden held by volunteer coordinators will grow. If left unaddressed, these gaps are likely to affect a VIO's ability to meet the Child Safe Standards and to effectively safeguard children and young people from harm.

For VIOs

⁴⁷ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 50. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

⁴⁸ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 51. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

⁴⁹ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 40. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

In 2023, VIOs reported spending an average of \$190.95 per volunteer per month, or \$5.23 per volunteer hour.⁵⁰ This includes costs associated with wages, insurance, equipment, training, administration, transport, reimbursement, catering, recognition, marketing and accommodation. The disparity between the direct costs of volunteering absorbed by volunteers, volunteer coordinators and VIOs indicates that there are substantial issues associated with funding arrangements of VIOs that must be addressed within the Commissioning Framework.

Co-design

The development of an outcomes-based commissioning framework for the community sector must be codesigned with the sector and should be informed by a volunteering perspective, given the significant role that volunteers play in the community sector workforce. A key part of this process is ensuring that VIOs receive adequate funding to cover the true costs of volunteer involvement, so that volunteers and volunteer coordinators are not financially responsible for delivering services to children and young people. Without this funding, many VIOs will continue to struggle to develop, implement, and maintain child and youth safe practices.

Commissioning arrangements should be grounded in research and evidence that defines best practices services and that outlines the infrastructure needs of organisations to uphold the Standards and the rights of children and young people. To support this, we strongly recommend that the Commissioning Framework align with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement,⁵¹ which provides a best practice framework for volunteer involvement in Australia. This alignment will inform essential best practice workforce provisions for VIOs who engage with children and young people, such as the standardisation of volunteer coordinators within VIOs, training and professional development for volunteers and coordinators, worker screening, and the necessary equipment to perform volunteer roles. By incorporating the National Standards, for Volunteer Involvement, VIOs will be better equipped to safeguard children and young people from harm.

Additionally, we recommend that independent pricing assessments and reviews are conducted at regular intervals to ensure transparency and accountability in commissioning processes and practices.

Recommendations

- 6) The development of an outcomes-based commissioning framework must be codesigned with the community sector, including VIOs, to ensure it addresses the unique needs and challenges of the volunteer workforce and industry.
- 7) The Commissioning Framework should align with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, which provide a best practice framework for managing volunteers in Australia. This alignment will ensure that VIOs are equipped with the necessary infrastructure to support volunteer coordinators and volunteers in their roles, while upholding child and youth safety standards.
- 8) Commissioning arrangements must adequately fund VIOs to cover the true costs associated with volunteer involvement. Without sufficient funding, it is likely that volunteers and

⁵⁰ Volunteering Tasmania, 2023 Tasmanian State of Volunteering Report, pp. 52. Available via Volunteering Tasmania.

⁵¹ Volunteering Australia, [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) (2023).

volunteer coordinators will continue shoulder the cost of volunteer participation undermining ethical practice, the sustainability of the workforce and the industry's ability to safeguard children and young people.

- 9) To ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability, we recommend that independent pricing assessments and reviews be conducted at regular intervals. This will ensure that the financial realities of volunteer involvement are accurately reflected in commissioning practices and that funding models are adjusted to meet the evolving needs of VIOs and volunteers.
- 10) In addition to immediate funding needs, we recommend that long-term resources be allocated to foster cultural change within the volunteering sector. This includes continuous professional development for volunteer coordinators, investment in infrastructure to support volunteer management, and resources to help VIOs implement and maintain best practice child and youth safe frameworks. These investments are essential to building a sustainable, well-supported volunteer workforce capable of delivering safe and effective services to the community.