

## *Strengthing Local Communities*

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Community Consultation  
**Volunteering Strategy SA – Beyond 2020**  
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Dear Sir / Madam

## Submission to the Volunteering Strategy for South Australia – Beyond 2020 Consultation

Community Centres SA (CCSA) is the peak body for Community and Neighbourhood Centres in South Australia. Our organisation has 108 full members and 63 affiliate members. We are part of a national network of more than 1,000 centres. Our sector has a commitment to promoting volunteerism in the community. Our volunteers are a highly valued and respected part of community centres and enable individual centres to extend their reach in to the community when responding to local needs. Our submission is based on our knowledge of our sector from interactions with our membership base, and from various reports commissioned for our sector, i.e.:

- A study in to the economic and social impacts of community centres in South Australia<sup>i</sup>
- A CCSA report detailing baseline data collected from a survey of our members<sup>ii</sup>
- Research in to the experiences of community centre users in South Australia.<sup>iii</sup>

## Community Centres are integral hubs of activity and opportunity within their communities

Over 35,000 people are in contact with community centres across South Australia every week, and more than 20,000 hours of volunteer labour are contributed to Centres, valued at over \$29 million per year.

Community Centres are integral hubs in their communities, working together with residents, community groups, services, and government to understand and respond to local needs. They provide daily meaningful opportunities for social connection through:

- life skills courses
- education courses that help people learn new skills to prepare them for further education or employment pathways
- personal support programs to support recovery and overall health and wellbeing
- shared interest social groups
- volunteering opportunities; and
- community events of local and cultural significance.

Community Centres also provide a valuable local outreach location for other services, and offer affordable meeting and workshop space for use by community groups, business and organisations.

Recent research into the experiences of Community Centre Users in South Australia found that community centre users viewed community centre as places that:

- provide opportunities for connection and create a sense of belonging
- are safe places to seek support, make connections, and link with the broader community
- offer pathways to increase skills and confidence; and
- are person and community-oriented, rather than service-oriented, where people can be in control of what happens next when they first enter a community centre.

## Types of Community Centres

Centres operate under four different governing structures. All have volunteer Boards or Management Committees except those managed by local government or auspiced by a large non-government organisation:

- 54% are managed by incorporated association management committees
- 32% are local government managed
- 11% are managed by local government working with an incorporated association
- 3% are auspiced by a non-government organisation

On average, there are:

- 1.8 paid staff (employed in coordination or management positions) at each centre, and
- 38 volunteers at each centre.

## Volunteers are the essence of our sector

Overall, there are 4000 volunteers working in our sector. Without volunteers we would be unable to meet the needs of the community. Volunteers contribute in endless ways, for example serving on community centre boards, delivering courses, providing community meals, running skills sheds and op-shops, assisting with emergency relief such as foodbanks, helping to run events, and providing reception and administrative support. Volunteering roles can be temporary or ongoing, and can also range from being very flexible to very structured, depending on role requirements and responsibilities.

## Volunteer Diversity

Community Centres are places for everyone. Community Centres are committed to promoting diversity and inclusivity through:

- Undertaking broad community consultation, with targeted approaches to those most at risk of social isolation in the community
- Offering varied programs and activities that appeal to the broader community
- Holding community events to mark significant days of celebration or awareness e.g. Harmony Day, Sorry Day, Youth Week, Mental Health Awareness Week etc.
- Recruitment policies that promote paid and volunteer opportunities for people of diverse ages, gender, sexuality, culture, and ability.

Volunteers at Community Centres are often people who have completed a course or activity at their Centre, or have completed a student or work experience placement, and afterwards wish to stay connected and make a contribution to the Centre and their community. As such, our volunteers reflect the diversity of our communities.

Diversity amongst volunteers adds to the inclusive, safe and welcoming culture of Centres. This is especially important as Centres are a valuable community asset available to all in the community. Hearing from all voices in the community is essential to strategic planning and program delivery, and ensures Centres are relevant and responsive to the diverse needs of their local communities.

A diverse volunteer base provides an opportunity for Community Centres to:

- learn from new perspectives
- gain useful knowledge of specific cultures
- build mutual respect and understanding
- gain new skills and experience, and
- connect their organisation to a wider population

An ongoing challenge for our membership is reaching members of the community who are unaware of their local Centre. As such, Community Centres are always exploring new strategies to reach out to those they have not yet connected with, such as:

- Tapping in to existing youth leadership programs (e.g. those run by Local Councils) to provide further leadership development opportunities to local young people through volunteering at community centres (e.g. running a program for other local young people, or serving on the Board).
- Building relationships with community leaders from Indigenous and cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds to promote volunteering at community centres within their communities.
- Strengthening relationships with local disability services to promote volunteering at community centres to people with a disability, to support them on education or employment pathways, or with health and wellbeing, and other quality of life goals.

## Volunteer Recruitment and Management

As stated above, volunteers at Community Centres are often people who have had a previous interaction with their local Centre. Other avenues for recruiting volunteers are Facebook, word of mouth, community events, Local Council and Volunteering SA/NT.

Volunteers at Community Centres have to meet the minimum requirement of a Police Check. Depending on their volunteer role at their Centre, other requirements may include:

- References
- Working with Children Check
- Disability Employment Services Check
- First Aid Certificate
- Driver's Licence
- Food Handling Certificate

Each Centre also has a Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct that volunteers must comply with. The relevant legislation commonly affecting our membership includes: Volunteer Protection Act, Work Health and Safety Act, Equal Opportunity Act, Privacy Act, and National Police Certificate. Depending on the volunteer role, other relevant legislation may include: Department of Human Services screening check (i.e. Working with Children Check, Disability Employment Services Check), Children and Young People (Safety) Act, Disability Services Act, and Food Safety Act.

It is up to each Centre to discuss volunteering arrangements with individual volunteers, but generally Community Centres:

- provide the resources and equipment required to undertake the volunteer role
- submit applications on behalf of volunteers for necessary checks, and

- organise and pay for any essential training such as first aid or food handling that might be reasonably required to perform a volunteer role.

Community Centres by nature are places that empower individuals, offering opportunities for personal and professional development in a unique environment that tailors support to individual needs. Centre volunteers also benefit from this approach and are supported and encouraged on their volunteer pathways. Community Centres offer support through:

- Developing a clear understanding of what their volunteers want out of their volunteer experience and working with them to achieve this
- Offering a variety of volunteer roles and activities
- Providing access to relevant training (offered by CCSA to its membership)
- Being flexible in how volunteers donate their time and effort
- Providing feedback on their volunteering
- Ensuring volunteers have access to the resources they need, and
- Sharing and celebrate success stories.

As the peak body for Community Centres, our members are able to contact our organisation for any support with volunteer management. Community Centres SA is also a member of Volunteering SA/NT and Business SA and has access to professional general advice on behalf of our members. Community Centres SA does not get involved in arbitration, and members are encouraged to speak directly with both organisations for detailed advice about an individual matter (this can include fee-for-service).

## Volunteer Training

Community Centres SA constantly advocates for volunteer opportunities including professional development and training. For example, it is part of CCSA's role to support the training and development of volunteer committees so they are in the best position to guide each centres' strategic direction and meet both legal and ethical responsibilities.

In addition, as a peak we seek funding to be able to provide training to build the capacity of Centres as adult education providers. Volunteers are therefore eligible to undertake a number of professional development courses that might be relevant to their role as a volunteer program facilitator. Examples of such courses include: Digital Literacy and Foundation Skills, Planning an Adult Community Education Course, Creating an Effective Learning Environment, Assessment Procedures etc.(all of which are accredited).

Other training needs that are relevant for our sector include:

- work health and safety, governance, community engagement and needs analysis, strategic and business planning, communications, financial management etc. – for Centres to be able to demonstrate best practice and continuous improvement of their organisations, and
- Aboriginal cultural awareness, Migrant and Refugee cultural diversity, Trauma-informed practice training, Disability awareness, LGBTIQ+ awareness etc. – for Centres to continue to be safe, welcoming and inclusive places for everyone.

CCSA assists volunteers to access this training through a number of avenues. Courses have been developed and delivered by CCSA (with funding). Webinars are also available to members on the CCSA webpage to access at any time. Community Centres also take up opportunities for training run by their Local Councils (which is often free or at a subsidised cost and targeted at not-for-profit community organisations).

## Volunteer Recognition

Community Centres SA and our membership participate in activities promoted by Volunteering SA/NT during Volunteer Week to recognise volunteering in the sector. In addition, volunteers are acknowledged by individual Centres in various ways at a local level, examples include:

- Holding a free celebration event for all volunteers during Volunteer Week
- Providing a certificate of recognition
- Providing a reference if requested
- Promoting volunteers publicly with their consent (e.g. in newsletters, on social media)
- Nomination for external award programs (e.g. Local Council Volunteer Awards)
- Verbal and written acknowledgement in annual general meetings and annual reports.

## Challenges in Volunteer Management

Community Centre Coordinators face similar challenges to other small not-for-profit organisations:

- Limited paid staff resources
- Competing demands of the role - ranging from day-to-day facility operations to people management to strategic and business planning
- Challenges managing volunteers who are recipients of Centrelink payments, and whose volunteering comes about as a consequence of the Centrelink requirement for them to contribute hours to a volunteering organisation. These volunteers require Centres to complete relevant paperwork, and sometimes centre managers feel conflicted between meeting the volunteering needs and the Federal government requirements regarding hours of work etc.
- Time poor, and
- Funding challenges.

Promoting volunteering opportunities and supporting volunteers is synonymous with the work of Centres – to build connected, healthy and resilient individuals and communities. Whilst this commitment never wavers, our members have reported the following challenges regarding volunteer recruitment and management:

- 72% of centres want to increase their volunteer workforce
- 61% have lack of resources to train new volunteers
- 28% have too few volunteers available, and
- 14% have high volunteer turnover.

## Recommended Priorities

Based on the above information, Community Centres SA, on behalf of our membership advocates for the following priorities for the Volunteering Strategy for South Australia (2021-2027):

1. Promotion of the benefits of volunteering in addressing social isolation and building healthy and resilient individuals and communities. Community Centres SA would like to contribute sector stories toward any promotional material and positive story-telling opportunities.
2. Investment in ongoing research to continue to gather evidence of the social and economic benefits of volunteering. Community Centres SA would value the opportunity to collaborate in any such research opportunity, having access to 108 community centres to assist with qualitative and quantitative data collection from volunteers.

3. Development of innovative engagement strategies to raise awareness of volunteering, its benefits and opportunities for participation amongst communities that are under-represented as volunteers and/or who may be at higher risk of social isolation. Community Centres SA would value the opportunity to work together with the Office for Volunteers and other key stakeholders in developing and implementing such strategies, drawing on the local strengths and connections developed by our extensive membership across South Australia.
4. Development of volunteer leadership pathways in the community to promote opportunities to members of communities who are under-represented as volunteers e.g. young people, Indigenous and culturally diverse community members, people with disability, and LGBTIQ+. Community Centres SA would welcome the opportunity to work with Office for Volunteers and other stakeholders to develop tailored volunteer training through co-design with community leaders to promote leadership pathways at Community Centres.
5. Increased funding to enable key stakeholders such as Community Centres SA for example – as leaders in community engagement and adult education design and delivery – to develop tailored resources for volunteer recruitment and training in the community centre sector and more widely.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this process to share our knowledge and ideas of volunteering experience across the sector. Community Centres SA welcomes the opportunity to be further involved in the development of the second South Australian Volunteering Strategy. The email address to send updates to is [kfergusen@communitycentressa.asn.au](mailto:kfergusen@communitycentressa.asn.au). If you have any questions about our submission please don't hesitate to contact me on 8371 4622.

Yours sincerely



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<sup>i</sup> South Australian Centre for Economic Studies, 2017, The Economic and Social Impact of the Adult Community Education (ACE) Sector, Report commissioned by Office of the Training and Skills Commission Department of State Development, Government of South Australia <https://www.communitycentressa.asn.au/documents/item/174>

<sup>ii</sup> Mackenzie, C. Louth, J. & Goodwin-Smith, I. (June 2019). "I feel a sense of belonging here" – An investigation into the experiences of Community Centre users in South Australia, research report prepared by the Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise, University of South Australia for the South Australian Department of Human Services

<sup>iii</sup> 2016 Community and Neighbourhood Centres Report – baseline data collated from a survey completed by Community Centres SA Full Members <https://www.communitycentressa.asn.au/documents/item/793>