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To whom it may concern,

### **Submission to the inquiry to development of a State-Wide Strategy for Volunteering**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission into the Department's inquiry to develop a West Australian strategy for volunteering. The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is glad to be given the opportunity to contribute to a potential strategy that is fundamental to not only the non-government sector but also the State as a whole.

YACWA is the peak non-government youth organisation in Western Australia with a membership of over 300 youth service organisations, community organisations, academics, individuals and most importantly young people themselves. Established in 1980, YACWA has worked tirelessly for 30 years to deliver high-level representation and advocacy for the Western Australian youth sector and young people.

Our role is to:

- Act as a lobbying group for the non-government youth sector and Western Australian young people aged 12-25
- Provide information and support to the non-government youth sector
- Work to promote fair and positive outcomes for young people in our community
- Promote equity, equality, access and participation for young people in Western Australia
- Advocate to all levels of government on the best interests of Western Australia's young people
- Encourage the active participation of young people in identifying and dealing with issues that are important to them
- Improve youth services by exchanging ideas, information, skills and resources
- Provide a strong, united and informed voice capable of effectively advocating for the non-government youth sector and the young people with whom they work

In our feedback to the Department's Inquiry we have addressed the discussion questions that we feel are most pertinent to the members whom we represent.

### **Do you agree with the vision?**

The vision, while being generally acceptable, doesn't adequately emphasise the principle that while volunteering should be promoted and supported in a partnership approach it is essential that volunteers are in control of their own volunteering and community involvement.

This point is fundamental particularly in small volunteering groups or groups not only staffed by but also managed by volunteers. It is integral if there is a desire to attract and retain more young people into volunteering that they feel as though they are contributing wholly of their own volition and are in partnership with an organisation that not only values their time and effort but respects that is theirs to give.

Furthermore while a partnership approach seems beneficial the vision doesn't outline who in fact the partners are nor does it emphasise existential equality between partners. Thus while being generally acceptable the vision is in places ambiguous.

### **Do you agree with the principles?**

Introducing principles as a guide for good volunteering practice is an effective way of ensuring they aren't viewed as overly regulatory. The first principle of 'choice', as fundamental as it seems, is one that young West Australians are more and more often being brought in conflict with. It has become increasingly difficult to reconcile this principle with the fact that schools throughout the state are beginning to implement programs of compulsory volunteering. Research indicates that compulsory volunteering generally doesn't help young people to develop active citizenship and that choosing to volunteer is of paramount importance if young people are to receive all the benefits of volunteering. It has however been suggested that there are some not insignificant benefits to be gained from the practice of compulsory volunteering, specifically skill development for paid employment<sup>1</sup>. While we recognise the necessity of this principle in any volunteering strategy it is important to note that even as a guideline choice in volunteering isn't always practiced.

Although previously listed in the draft strategy under the 'Rights and Responsibilities' section the right of a volunteer to work in a healthy and safe environment appears to also be a basic and significant principle of volunteering. It would be prudent to possibly include this principle in both sections.

Whilst understanding the principle of inclusiveness is meant as a guideline we believe the language utilised is far too general and does not recognise that the very nature of volunteering means that not all individuals have the ability or desire to work in certain organisations or stakeholder groups.

Excluding the areas of concern previously mentioned we feel the principles listed provide an appropriate guideline for measuring and facilitating volunteers and volunteering programs in general. The principle of 'dynamism' is of particular importance in that it lays the foundation for future development and improvement of any final State-wide volunteering strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> State of Australia's Young People Report, 'Compulsory Volunteering', *Office for Youth*, Page 81

## **Do you agree with the goals?**

We believe that whilst the goals are admirable in their intention, the language used is far too ambiguous and the plan could benefit from more specific wording.

It is difficult for groups, large or small, to feel as though they're achieving a stated objective when the goal is couched in vague generalities rather than a specific and achievable outcome. Furthermore it would make more sense to have one set of goals for large volunteer organisations and one for smaller groups. We also believe many of the goals detailed in the draft strategy are unachievable for small groups and don't address the basic goals of informal volunteers.

## **Do you agree with the strategies?**

### *Goal 1*

The strategy behind this goal, although supporting the promotion and recognition of volunteering and volunteers, doesn't detail who is in charge of the promotion and recognition and if the public promotion of volunteering is coming from the organisations themselves or is the responsibility of the Government as part a larger state government strategy.

We believe that promoting the strategy as well as volunteering in general needs to be approached as a partnership between the non-government sector and government departments, recognising that many organisations may not have the capacity to fund or sustain campaigns.

### *Goal 2*

The most obvious and troubling concern with the strategy related to this goal is that while being cognisant of the fact that diversity in volunteering is important it fails to adequately acknowledge the breadth of diversity. It defies logic to attempt to list types of diversity and not have a single overarching strategy to promote diversity in all its forms. Diversity needs to be encouraged as a general rule.

Including young people in this strategy doesn't adequately recognise the important role they play in the volunteering community. According to recent ABS statistics nearly a third of all Australian young people volunteer in some form<sup>2</sup>. In order to ensure this figure continues to grow it would not only be beneficial but encouraged to have an entirely separate strategy for the attraction and retention of young people into the volunteering community as a group that while still contributing a great deal has the potential to give more.

### *Goal 3*

The strategy outlined for this goal raises a number of concerns not the least of which being the seemingly high standard of training and qualification it sets for volunteers and volunteer managers. One of the appeals of volunteering, particularly for young people, is often its informal nature that lends itself to casually donating time to a cause without the hassle of any form of official hierarchy. It would be damaging to volunteerism in general if potential volunteers found the complications of official training and corporatised volunteer managers too much to want to get involved with an organisation. However

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, '4441.0 - Voluntary Work, Australia, 2000'

we of course recognise that well-trained, adequately resourced volunteer managers are essential to ensuring young people are supported in their volunteering roles and can access information and support when they need it. There potentially needs to be a distinction drawn between large formal organisations and smaller informal groups of volunteers and the requisite level of training provided by each.

#### *Goal 4*

While we support the practice of recognising and adequately funding the costs of volunteering the goal appears to place a large administrative burden on the non-government sector, employees and volunteers who work for organisations. It would be beneficial for both the volunteer organisations and the Department to develop a strategy that will allow volunteers to easily and accurately quantify the costs of volunteering without any unnecessary bureaucratic encumbrances.

#### *Goal 5*

The only concern we have with this strategy is the ambiguity surrounding the nature of the volunteering undertaken by public sector employees. Is this volunteering going to be part of paid leave or is it encouraged to occur in the employees' own time?

#### *Goal 6*

We support the strategy behind this goal, believing that research and development is fundamentally important if the state is to not only attract but retain volunteers moving into the future.

Research is essential in order to gain an understanding of patterns and trends regarding numbers of volunteers, time spent volunteering and the areas in which they are volunteering. This type of research would make it exponentially easier to create volunteering strategies that target areas with low numbers of volunteers and groups that have typically low rates of volunteerism.

The Youth Affairs Council of WA is glad to have been able to contribute to the development of a State-Wide volunteering strategy. While the draft is the beginning of an effective and important strategy we believe there is potentially a lot to gain from being significantly more specific in not only the language of the proposal but also its desired goals. We believe it is essential that young West Australian's are encouraged and supported adequately in all their volunteering endeavours and that in order to do so an individual youth volunteering strategy needs to be developed. If you wish to contact me or feel we can provide further advice please do not hesitate to contact me via email [eo@yacwa.org.au](mailto:eo@yacwa.org.au) or by phone 9227 5440.

Kind regards,



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