



▶ **Submission to the Productivity New Zealand on 'More Effective Social Services'**

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▶ **Contact Details**

This submission is by a group.

Name of Organisation: Volunteering New Zealand

Contact person: Vanisa Dhiru, Chief Executive

Postal Address: PO Box 25333
Featherston Street
Wellington 6146

Email: office@volunteeringnz.org.nz

Phone: +64 4 384 3636

▶ **Background**

Volunteering New Zealand

1. Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ) is the “voice of volunteering” in Aotearoa. Our vision is for a New Zealand that promotes, values and supports effective volunteering for the benefit of individuals and communities – and our mission is to promote, support and advocate for volunteering.
2. We are the only national organisation in New Zealand that focuses purely on volunteering, volunteer management and is the “voice of volunteering”. We hold the ‘big picture’ and are in a position to liaise, work with, and advise government and business sectors. This works

to ensure that volunteering occurs within a positive environment where it is encouraged and fostered.

3. For over 13 years, VNZ has raised the profile of volunteer groups, volunteer management and volunteering and its value to New Zealand society through sharing stories; producing tools like the Best Practice Guidelines and Competencies for Managers of Volunteers; and giving voice to volunteering in Aotearoa.
4. We can see the big picture when it comes to volunteering in New Zealand as we work with numerous organisations across the voluntary and community sectors. This big picture view means we are best placed to give advice on matters related to volunteering.
5. We work to ensure that volunteering occurs within a positive environment, where it is encouraged and fostered. We envisage a society that promotes, values and supports effective volunteering for the benefit of individuals and communities.
6. We have a membership of 45+ national and regional member organisations that involve volunteers achieving their missions. We advocate on behalf of member organisations and other groups aligned to our mission and values who may not be members.

New Zealand's voluntary sector

7. New Zealand has more than 97,000 non-profit organisations, contributing 2.6% to GDP. This increases to 4.9% of GDP when taking into account the volunteer labour contribution and is similar to the contribution of the entire construction industry. We have been ranked as fifth in the world for volunteer participation in 2014¹.
8. The most up-to-date data on the New Zealand volunteer sector suggests that there are more than 1.2 million volunteers who give over than 270 million hours of unpaid labour to the sector. In 2008, 67% of the community and voluntary sector workforce was made up of volunteers; 90% of New Zealand non-profit organisations employ no staff, and rely solely on volunteers².

How VNZ collated this submission

9. More effective social services can contribute to improving the well-being of all New Zealanders. We note that the role of the volunteers in social services is specifically provided for in the Issues Paper:

¹ From the World Giving Index 2014:

https://www.cafonline.org/PDF/CAF_WGI2014_Report_1555AWEBFinal.pdf

² From the *The New Zealand Non-profit Sector in Comparative Perspective*, 2008

“Social service providers often draw on volunteers driven by a desire to help their fellow New Zealanders. Volunteers want their efforts to be valued and effective”

10. To ensure this inquiry is well-informed and relevant to volunteering, and that the advice provided by the Commission is credible and workable for our sector, VNZ provides the following submission about the role and importance of volunteers in the social services.
 11. VNZ's submission is based on responses from our members and networks to the 10 questions which are listed in Appendix A. These questions were guided by the 56 questions asked by the Commission in the Issues Paper.
 12. Our submission is divided into five sections:
 - Context (eg. the importance of volunteering in the social services and who within the volunteering sector has been)
 - Measurement (eg. how best to measure and report on the effectiveness of volunteering)
 - Consultation and Cooperation (eg. the role of Managers of Volunteers, how volunteer involving organisations best cooperate, volunteer recruitment and retention and population density)
 - Funding (e.g. how funding effects service providers/vulnerable clients)
 - Other
 13. We received 27 responses from members and friends. The following submission provides a thematic analysis of these submissions with verbatim comments to illustrate specific points.
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► Submission

A. Context

The Issues Paper asked specific questions about social, economic and demographic trends that may change the social service landscape in the future. Many of our VNZ respondents felt that the inquiry posed other fundamental questions about the role of the state in providing social or community based services, especially for volunteer-led and for volunteer-involving organisations.

VNZ recognises that the productivity of the state sector is out of scope for this inquiry but feel it is impossible to measure the productivity of the social services sector without acknowledging that the two sectors are interlinked and very dependent on one another - not only in terms of designing, commissioning and funding of contracts, but also in the way that people experience service and what outcomes the clients may receive for the issues they are seeking help for in the long run.

The government also approved the Government Policy on Volunteer 2002³, stating they recognise:

- volunteers are found in wide-ranging spheres of activity, including sports, arts, heritage, emergency services, social services, health, education, recreation, human rights, tourism, conservation and the environment
- volunteers offer their time and expertise of their own free will, out of commitment to their community, and to fulfil cultural obligations
- the nature of volunteering varies widely depending on different cultural expectations and the nature of the task
- volunteers give their time unpaid and should have the opportunity to gain benefits in return, such as new skills, and a sense of belonging and achievement
- volunteers should not replace paid workers
- volunteering is an essential element of civil society.

Many VNZ respondents raised concerns that this inquiry is over simplifying the way that outcomes and outputs in the social sector can be measured, and that this is quite difficult to measure these in a meaningful way. Community based work is holistic and touches on many different parts of a person's life, well-being and happiness. It can take a very long time to create change and even longer for that change to stick.

Respondents also wanted to note that there is a real sense of increasing vulnerability and inequality for many people in New Zealand. The issues that people are facing are becoming

³ Located on Community Matters, [http://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/Government-Policy-on-Volunteering/\\$file/Government-Policy-on-Volunteering.pdf](http://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/Government-Policy-on-Volunteering/$file/Government-Policy-on-Volunteering.pdf)

more and more complex and link across a lot of different government agencies and community-based organisations.

When coupled with current Government policies around the promotion of efficiency and effectiveness, and a push to more quantitative reporting measures, respondents raised concerns that an outputs based way of quantifying success in this sector will lead to more complex cases, left aside in favour of creating measurable “widgets” or ticking boxes – commodifying the social services sector.

These issues are only further augmented in volunteer-led and volunteer-involving organisations with contracts usually issued for the delivery of services only. The recruitment, upskilling, retention and support of volunteers are not normally part of the deal, with the costs of running a volunteer programme rarely included in contract pricing.

Question A - How important are volunteers to the provision of social services? Why are they important?

The role of volunteers and volunteering in the social services increases productivity in the sector. The importance of volunteers for social services are highlighted in four main ways:

1. Workforce and resourcing

The workforce of many social service providers are made up of both paid and volunteer staff. Many of these providers would not be able to deliver their services at all or to the same extent without the contribution of volunteers. The sector is under resourced, and in some cases there is no government funding at all.

2. Being closer to the communities they serve

Volunteers are a bridge between service users. They are embedded within communities, they do help out of a real interest in the area and build networks and experiences in those interest areas. They truly represent the communities we work in, and can make valuable contributions to understanding best ways to address need - often in a way that paid professionals may not.

Volunteering promotes participation through activities and advocacy, can lead to a more dynamic community by enhancing work of social services. Volunteering keeps communities alive, and a community can take ownership of what occurs, what services might be needed and ultimately delivery of some services. They are coming from a place of passion, realism and drive and often personal experience; a paid staff member may not always have the same personal commitment.

Volunteers are actively engaged in shaping their communities with a communal sense of influence and ownership of their future.

3. Benefits for the volunteers themselves

Involving volunteers delivers a range of additional benefits (sometimes unintended) for

the volunteers themselves and their wider communities, eg. enhanced well-being, strengthened social networks and improving social cohesion, health benefits and improved employment prospects.

4. **Benefits to the organisations they volunteer for**

Volunteers bring new ideas and fresh thinking, increasing an organisation's capacity and capability.

What our respondents say:

"Volunteers are motivated by the best of intentions to make a positive difference, and are committed to connecting with and supporting their community. They work collaboratively to make their world a better place, and build a better connected, more compassionate and more resilient community."

"Volunteers can be seen as less intimidating – clients may seek help, direction and support from a volunteer organisation/ workforce before engaging in the health sector. Through this voluntary role, clients may then be referred to the correct social service. The volunteer with their relevant and specific knowledge is able to be the conduit between the client and the professionals."

"[they are] ...critical to our services. We only have two paid part-time staff, one [is] a volunteer coordinator - and approximately 60 volunteers. Quite simply we could not do all that we do without the active support of our volunteers."

"Extremely important because they comprise a very large part of social services delivery and without these volunteers there are a number of key services that would not be delivered. An example is my own organisation [where our service delivery to victims is almost entirely on a volunteer basis.]"

"Our [organisation] which matches trustworthy caring adults with vulnerable primary school aged children would not exist without volunteers. They see their buddies weekly for a minimum of a year. Currently 57 matches (74 supervised over a full year for each of the past 2 years). The programme has been running 12 years which represents a huge number of volunteer hours and social benefits for hundreds of children."

Question B - Who should be responsible for designing, commissioning and funding social service contracts, and why? (Government agencies, Crown entities, non-government agencies, communities, other?)

Responses received divide the commissioning and purchase cycle described in the Issues Paper into the design, commissioning and funding of contracts.

Respondents felt that government should have more meaningful engagement with volunteering-involving organisations in all three parts of the process as they know what the work is like "on the ground", and how to best to deliver their service with the resources they have. Government can have an incomplete picture around what it looks like to recruit, train, retain (through adequate reimbursement, allocating work utilising skills and peaks interests) and meaningful support for volunteers and what their capacity for work is. Leaving this up to government may force unrealistic or unattainable goals for measurement or reporting.

Respondents did acknowledge that government does have a significant advantage in their access to information, research, experts and resources, so are in a place to identify where public funding is best targeted. However, this advantage does make it unfair when organisations are presented with contracts and do not have the resources, knowledge or option, in some cases, to negotiate or amend a contract.

Contracts do not often allow for anything other than basic service delivery. Overheads, administrative costs, applying for funding, cost of reporting, analysis and evaluation following a project or programme and time that allows for iterations and improvements that would provide a more sustainable service in the future.

Funding was seen by the majority of respondents to be a role of government, but there should be a focus on more long term funding to allow the social service groups to truly engage and deliver in realistic timeframes with appropriate resources. Adequate funding made available to implement appropriate processes and training of volunteers to allow the social service to optimise delivery of the service to clients was seen as important.

People involved in the commissioning and purchase cycle should be wider than just the stakeholder in the social and state sectors.

"All should be involved in the design and implementation model as various stakeholders, whether they be funders, users or deliverers of social services so the models encompass their input."

"Designing and commissioning should be done by government, crown entities, universities, NGOs, communities and service users. This will ensure diverse perspectives are presented and solutions are developed that draw on both theory and practice."

B. Measurement

Question C: What are the most efficient and/or accurate ways to measure the effectiveness of a particular social service? Do metrics about volunteer hours or numbers provide any useful information?

There is no approved framework in New Zealand to calculate/measure the work of volunteers. There are a few recent initiatives to describe the value of volunteer involvement to society including Andrew Haldane's (Chief Economist of the Bank of England) speech "In giving, how much do we receive?" and the research on the social value of volunteering the Project Management Institute is undertaking⁴.

Respondents felt it was difficult to express the value of volunteer-involving organisations in terms of effectiveness alone. The term 'effectiveness' denotes the servicing of specific outcomes or 'widgets' in a contract, however these outcomes and 'widgets' don't speak to the quality of service or the long term effect:

"Effectiveness of a social service depends on terms of the contract. 'Effectiveness' is a word referring more to outputs than outcomes and impacts. Better to define the purpose of the service, and measure achievement – except short-term (annual) info is not a fair test of social service programme delivery.

Metrics can tell us the size of a volunteer programme, and maybe a few demographics – but nothing about quality of service, or intrinsic factors (e.g. relationships) that made it work for clients. And even less about volunteer contribution to the overall service delivery outcomes."

"Outcome based measurement of the effectiveness of social services is unfair because:

- *Rarely will the organisations providing the social services have the resources required to measure the outcomes and will in fact have to rely on a government agency funding the services to measure to what extent the outcome based obligations have been met. This is a conflict of interest for the government agency who again with their big pockets can afford to get the "outcome" they want!*
- *Many outcomes require longitudinal study if the outcome is to be scientifically measured and therefore are expensive, and do not provide information regarding the outcome in a timely enough manner to inform policy and funding decisions.*
- *Many outcomes are impossible to measure (ie. improved parenting, stronger relationships in family, more functional families, happy birthing experiences, informed first time parents, etc.)*

⁴ Andrew Haldane, Chief Economist of the Bank of England speech: <http://institute-project-management.edu.au/research/volunteering/>.

- *It is very often impossible to isolate one social service organisation as responsible for achievement or failure of an outcome as there are so many other interdependent variables that will have had impact on results."*

"Volunteer hours and numbers are indicative of the vibrancy of a particular programme and how well supported it is within a community. But the outcome for clients is the best measure of effectiveness. Monitoring progress throughout the intervention is useful, however it should be remembered that many long-term positive outcomes are not immediate. (I get anecdotal success stories from mentors who keep in touch with their buddies up to 8 years after formal mentoring is completed.)"

Statistics gathered about volunteers do not paint an adequate picture of how much volunteers were contributing to the sector, as a strategic investment to deliver the mission of organisations:

"Hours volunteers contribute and the number of volunteers that are involved indicate to what extent volunteers are involved in a particular organisation and start to build a picture. These measures could be a useful starting point to measure the extent of the volunteer involvement, as long as it's realised that this is only a small part of the value of volunteer involvement.

Regular attempts by the government to measure the value of the volunteer involvement across sectors would be helpful to increase the visibility and perceived importance of volunteer involvement.

Besides looking at numbers and hours, it could also be useful to look at what type of work the volunteers are involved in and what role they play within the organisation."

"...it is vital to remember that social change and outcomes take time - they cannot be expected within financial year/reporting time frames. Quantifying volunteer effort in hours and stories is a valuable way of expressing volunteers' contribution to social outcomes."

Question D: How do reporting requirements impact on the core business of service providers? This includes volunteer recruitment and retention).

The need to collect, collate and report on appropriate data is necessary, but also very time consuming and often contracts and funding for social services are not designed in a way that takes this into account. This is especially true for volunteer-involving organisations, who may not have volunteer programmes fully funded.

"Reporting can sometimes represent an onerous task, a time consuming task, a task that takes resources from core services, and according reporting is a task that has a negative connotation. For volunteers reporting can be just another "pointless" task that takes their time, that does not yield anything that is relevant to them, and they are always so pressed for time to do what they volunteered to do. Sometimes I wonder if reporting would act as a disincentive to their volunteering especially if they are informed of this task prior to accepting a role as a volunteer."

"Our core volunteering activity - mentoring through befriending and guiding vulnerable children - is what attract and retains mentors. The other obligations we impose such as monthly supervision and reporting of hours, seems an added imposition to me as [a paid] coordinator - especially as they are well vetted and trained, sign contracts outlining their obligations and know they can contact me any time they require support. However, the mentors understand why this is necessary."

C. Consultation and Cooperation

Strong partnerships, shared goals, and working agreements can achieve a shared vision in the social services sector. While a move to longer term, high trust, outcome-focused funding arrangements may be desirable, such arrangements must happen collaboratively.

Effective social service delivery requires an understanding of local conditions and priorities, and volunteers are well placed to offer this understanding – especially in the governance areas, which often are voluntary positions, offering strategy and direction.

“...proliferation of small committees with limited understanding of the difference between governance and management, need for a rationalisation of related organisations so there is good, high-level governance rather than duplication for each tiny organisation.”

VNZ also suggests there is limited capacity and capability for umbrella organisations representing the views of social service providers to engage collaboratively and effectively with funders and other stakeholders.

Question E: Should Managers of Volunteers and volunteers in an organisation be consulted when reviewing the need for, or the effectiveness of a service?

Respondents felt that if done correctly in the first place, Managers of Volunteers and the volunteers themselves must be incorporated into the design of any programme or service and as a corollary should be an integral part when reviewing the effectiveness of a service.

“Yes, a Manager will have responsibility for volunteers who are involved in delivery of a service, for collection of data or evaluations creating better “buy-in” and performance if all those involved in service delivery have some consultation. Building confidence and competence comes from involving volunteer’s input – need to be very aware of not isolating volunteers as many social services are heavily reliant on their involvement and participation.”

“Yes, volunteer managers and volunteers should absolutely be consulted, as they are most likely to best know the likely impact of changes to services, or the consequences of reducing a service. Often these are services that are absolutely central to people’s health and well-being, and removal or reductions in support can be catastrophic, causing all sorts of knock on effects from the community as a whole.”

Question F: Which social service (especially volunteer-involving ones) providers do you know of that cooperate successfully, and what strategies do they use?

Social services can co-operate successfully with the resources they have available to them. Respondents were wary of our particular question, concerned that it would lead to a not-so-subtle push towards organisational amalgamation to reduce numbers of non-governmental organisations that the state has to deal with.

Some organisations are luckier than others with one key person(s) who is/are able to effectively lobby and advocate for their cause.

Generally, it was felt that organisations who were best at cooperating those who have capacity and time. Where social services are funded by outputs, it becomes difficult to have the staff time to network, talk and share information. This is critical first step in most cooperation and partnering approaches. Efficient social services require flexible funding, where organisations are able to cooperate and have the flexibility in their contracts to try new ways of doing things.

Some specific agencies and programmes identified by respondents are quoted below.

"Salvation Army, Selwyn Foundation, St Johns, Wellesley Trust, Red Cross - all seem to have strong annual and longer term strategic planning with strong processes and policies to support volunteers just as much as paid staff - sustaining an appreciative culture and meaningful experiences for all their people - paid and unpaid."

"In my experience Dress for Success Northland and North Haven Hospice. The strategies [they use] are high quality, consistent and continuous communication that is mainly through personal relationships not mainly e-based, although supported by email."

"Family Works Presbyterian Support USI - the Synergy Youth Mentoring programme in particular has an Agency Partnership Agreement with the agency who refers a child. The mentor can be child-focussed but the mentoring coordinator in consultation with the referrer can draw on the services provided by other agencies can to support outstanding social needs in the families."

"Dress for Success, Women's Refuge and Rape Crisis ... use regular and clear communication."

Question G: Does population density affect the client's choice of social services? Does this also affect the ability to recruit and retain volunteers to provide these services?

Population density affects client choice (or lack thereof) of social service providers, and ultimately the accessible services. Population density was also seen to effect the ability to recruit and retain volunteers to provide the services, due to the high pressure on volunteers and can lead to competition between rural community groups to source the most capable volunteers.

"The focus on client choice assumes there are multiple providers available for a particular service. In many places there is no choice or service users have to travel to something out of the region, even for very basic services. As a corollary, smaller centres likely to generate cooperation through necessity. They may develop models of service delivery that are quite different from larger urban cities."

"Small communities like Golden Bay struggle to have enough volunteers to meet need due to demographic shifts towards many more older residents, and fewer families able to afford to live there."

"Very small communities can be difficult to sustain more than one social service. That can create problems when the single service isn't up to the task."

D. Funding

Question H: How does competing for funding affect cooperation and volunteer recruitment and retention between social service providers? How does it affect vulnerable clients who may need a seamless service?

While competitive funding models can generate innovation, it was seen not to be without its problems. This is not only for the volunteer-led and volunteer-involving organisations, but also for the services that vulnerable clients receive. This is due to activity that takes time out of basic service delivery (i.e. the onerous reporting requirements for many pools of non-governmental funds, the pursuit of funds that will provide for volunteer expenses).

"Funders might focus on one large organisation who can provide a number of services – this has the potential to rule out other organisations who have a proven track record of delivering high quality services. Competition can generate positive and dynamic initiatives, however, a need to ensure funding proposals are realistic and achievable is important. Competition might also mean stifling of a collaborative approach. Well-resourced and supported service providers is essential for true positive client outcomes and benefits."

"Less funding available could lead to organisations desperately searching for 'qualified' (read well trained) volunteers to be able to run their services. At this moment the pool of volunteers is big enough but an extra decrease in funding might lead to organisations competing for volunteers."

"The competition model does not work at all well. Service providers have to spend a lot of time and effort proving their case for getting funding... This is an unfair platform to be testing who the best service deliverers are, and usually turns up who is the cheapest, not the best. This is funding cuts by stealth."

"Our youth mentoring programme, although the only one of its kind in Marlborough and well supported by the community is over-subscribed, constantly has a big waiting list and is under-funded. Presbyterian Support has been deficit funding it for about 70% of costs for over a decade but has found this increasingly difficult."

Competitive funding was also seen by respondents to erode the capacity to collaborate. Organisations have to focus more on their core business, administration and funding applications which often limits their capacity to collaborate.

Question 1: How is a provider's service delivery (especially their ability to recruit and retain volunteers) affected by funding insecurity? What are the issues facing service providers that expect and receive relatively secure funding?

It should be better acknowledged that volunteers do not come for free. If a contract does not specify funding for a volunteer programme (manager salary, overheads, reimbursement of volunteer expenses, recognition/appreciation budget), then volunteering is very much at risk of being affected by funding security/insecurity.

"It takes time to build capability within an organisation and once an organisation has established an infrastructure for delivery of the services the insecurity of funding can dismantle that structure very quickly resulting in fragmented services, high volunteer turnover, and lack of job-satisfaction for those that weather the storm. Insecure funding is demoralising. Insecure funding can change the culture in an organisation. Insecure funding creates staffing issues. Insecure funding can disrupt service delivery."

"Because a lot of training sessions should be organised late afternoon or early evening not during office hours, as the volunteers are also working full time."

"Organisations that have got a well organised volunteer programme will have more chance to recruit more volunteers to keep up their service level when funding drops. Most of the time these organisations are the larger not-for-profit organisations that have employed a volunteer coordinator."

"It takes considerable time to set up a volunteer programme. Organisations that received relative secure funding might struggle to keep their service level up when they haven't invested in a volunteer programme."

Organisations felt they are hamstrung by short-term funding. They are not able to make longer term plans around future services to communities or retention and recruitment of volunteers. Often a service provider takes time to be able to provide robust service delivery through the process of continuous improvement. Short term funding does not allow this process to happen.

"Funding insecurity is a constant distraction yet we focus on serving our community and figure out ways to fund essential services (rather than being funding driven). We see well-funded organisations which sometimes seem to lose their service focus. Some degree of funding security is needed to progress long-term goals."

"Volunteer turnover has increased and coupled with funding insecurity makes it difficult to be consistent with service delivery as skills and info are not always passed on from volunteer to volunteer."

"You can start a project but you can't necessarily grow it because the funding may be removed the following year. You are always chasing your tail to do funding applications when you might be making long-term structured plans for service development. Even"

when funding may seem secure, change is always around the corner, so you always need to be aware and trying to guess the future"

"Funding insecurity casts a shadow of doubt over organisations and increases stress levels for staff. The pressure can often also result in organisations feeling 'too busy' to recruit volunteers because of the initial investment required to recruit and train volunteers. When time and resources are tight, organisations often feel too busy/stretched to make this investment."

"Youth mentoring is not considered to be a core activity of [organisation] but it is the flagship volunteer service provided in Marlborough with a strong reputation for safety, consistency and effectiveness over many years. Insecurity of funding is therefore a critical issue. This is especially true as the programme needs to expand both in number of matches and a broader age range of young people mentored. It also needs to recruit a part-time coordinator to job share as a way of addressing succession planning. As it is currently under-funded these issues are not being addressed."

► Appendix A

Questions posed by Volunteering New Zealand to members and friends

1. How important are volunteers to the provision of social services? Why are they important?
2. Who should be responsible for designing, commissioning and funding social service contracts, and why? (Government agencies, Crown entities, non-government agencies, communities, other?)
3. What are the most efficient and/or accurate ways to measure the effectiveness of a particular social service? Do metrics about volunteer hours or numbers provide any useful information?
4. How do reporting requirements impact on the core business of service providers? (This includes volunteer recruitment and retention)
5. Should Managers of Volunteers and volunteers in an organisation be consulted when reviewing the need for, or the effectiveness of a service?
6. How does competing for funding affect cooperation and volunteer recruitment and retention between social service providers? How does it affect vulnerable clients who may need a seamless service?
7. Which social service (especially volunteer involving ones) providers do you know of that cooperate successfully, and what strategies do they use?
8. When does population density affect the client's choice of social services? Does this also effect the ability to recruit and retain volunteers to provide these services?
9. How is a provider's service delivery (especially their ability to recruit and retain volunteers) affected by funding insecurity? What are the issues facing service providers that expect and receive relatively secure funding?
10. What important issues around the commissioning, funding or delivery of social services do you think need addressing?