



Statement to Volunteering WA Member Organisations on CSP Funding Cut – June 2009

As many of you may have recently seen in the media, it was reported that the Community Service Program (CSP) would no longer be compulsory in Western Australian secondary schools and the 20 hour mandatory community service requirement for Year 12 graduation has been discontinued.

As Volunteering WA (VWA) investigated this further, it became clear that the program funding had actually been cut as a part of the 3% efficiency dividend required by state government departments. The \$10 million over three year CSP program was apparently identified as an initiative to cut some time ago. At no time was there any consultation with stakeholders and the announcement of the cut was quite unexpected, even for those closely involved with the CSP both within the Department of Education and Training (DET) and externally as participants and service providers to the program.

At this time details of the CSP are as follows:

- Schools will be funded only until the end of this year
- One staff member will remain in DET for a year after that (until the end of her contract)
- Schools will still be encouraged to continue to involve their students (although without funding, many will not be able to continue)
- VWA will continue to provide the *give20* database of volunteering opportunities and assist schools to access the website as well as member organisations who wish to make available volunteering positions for students

VWA has met with the relevant Director and CSP staff at DET to consider a way forward for CSP so that we can all work together to achieve the best outcome for students, schools and volunteer involving organisations. Whilst we were heartened to hear that DET will still encourage schools to continue with the program, concerns were expressed about the lack of consultation, the need to ensure that the volunteer sector will not bear the burden for this cut in funding, and the disadvantageous impact this decision will have on high-need schools.

It was agreed that DET will work with VWA to present a series of seminars to schools outlining to them what services and support will be available for schools to continue with CSP.

VWA pointed out that:

- Expressions of disappointment and anger have been received from many schools, volunteer involving organisations, parents, tertiary groups, the general public and the media about the funding and program cut, particularly when the program was just beginning to demonstrate real and meaningful

outcomes for students, schools and volunteer involving organisations. A number of schools have reported that students who previously did not see value in or relate to their school experience were presenting themselves on CSP days and achieving high level satisfaction and success with their placements

- The reason cited to the media by DET for discontinuing CSP – that of students not being eligible to graduate because they had not completed the mandatory 20 hours of CSP is not a valid reason as evidence demonstrates that most graduating students have completed the 20 hour requirement and those not graduating were ineligible for graduation due to other reasons. Discussions were in progress to remove the link between graduation and CSP and during the past year reasons for exemption were increased to ensure all students could meet graduation requirements
- Schools will feel pressured to run the CSP program, but without adequate resources, they will struggle to do it well. This will negatively impact on volunteer involving organisations that depend on well-organised teachers or suitable non-teaching staff to manage their students' volunteer programs
- No matter how needed volunteers are, it costs money and time to recruit, train and manage volunteers. The non-profit sector is already under-resourced and cannot be expected to organise large numbers of CSP students without involvement and support from schools

Volunteering WA believes that even though many schools vow to continue CSP without funding, involvement will eventually fall away particularly in high need schools. This will again disadvantage students at risk who do not always relate to traditional learning models and are in jeopardy of disconnecting from their communities.

In the experience of VWA, getting young people involved in community service ticks all the boxes, as it:

- Provides the volunteering sector with many helping hands
- Enables meaningful learning to take place outside the classroom
- Promotes a positive image of young people
- Fosters a sense of belonging
- Keeps young people connected with their communities
- Gives young people the confidence and job readiness skills they need for they enter the job market

A meeting is now being sought with the Sharyn O'Neill Director General of DET and the Minister for Education Hon Elizabeth Constable MLA to discuss partnership strategies to ensure a meaningful way forward for CSP.

Volunteer involving organisations and schools will be advised of the outcome of the meetings. VWA member organisations are among the many stakeholders that would like to see the continuation of a well resourced CSP so that students can continue their valuable work and education in the community and ensure they have the opportunity to become informed, active, connected citizens.

For further information, please contact the office of Volunteering WA on 9482 4333.

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