



House of Assembly

Extract from Hansard

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Page 1643

Volunteers

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (15:15): This week is National Volunteer Week so I would like to take a few moments today to talk about these wonderful and selfless people called volunteers. On Monday I had the pleasure of representing, in my capacity as chair of the ministerial advisory group for volunteering, the Minister for Volunteers (the Hon. Ian Hunt MLC) at the Volunteering SA & NT National Volunteer Week 2012 launch. I was joined by the Governor of South Australia, Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce; Mark Witham representing the South Australia/Northern Territory board of Volunteering SA & NT; Evelyn O'Loughlin, the CEO of Volunteering SA & NT; Kurna elder Auntie Josie Agius; and the member for Morphett was also in attendance.

At the launch I and my fellow speakers talked about the incredible ways in

which volunteers contribute to South Australia. All told, Australian volunteers contribute more than 700 million hours per year. They are directly responsible for 8 per cent of South Australia's gross product. As well as the economic impact – perhaps more importantly than the economic impact – is the impact volunteers have on our society. Volunteers are some of the most important people in our communities. I am not exaggerating when I say that without volunteers large parts of our society just would not work.

Our caring system, as an example, is bolstered by volunteers, particularly the way we care for our elderly. Meals on Wheels brings them food and volunteer groups visit hospitals and nursing homes for no other reason than to provide companionship to the lonely who may not have much time left, or family to care for them.

Last week, for example, I attended the awards ceremony for volunteers who work actively alongside Comitato Assistenza Italiani (CO.AS.IT), an association that provides services to aged Italo-Australians. Two special people, Bill Bailey and Melodyelisa Silvestri, were named volunteers of the year for their efforts working alongside older Italian-Australians. Chairperson, Franca Antonella, CEO, Luisa Greco and their team do a great job in supporting aged Italo-Australians. Many of our parliamentary colleagues joined me in congratulating these two wonderful people and all the nominees for the award. Also present at that ceremony were the Minister for Education and Child Development, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the

Hon. Carmel Zollo from the other place, and the members for Morphett and Morialta were also in attendance.

Volunteers help in other areas of society beyond just caring for the elderly. Our sporting clubs, particularly juniors, are staffed by volunteers taking the skills they have learnt and the experience they have received and passing it on to future generations. Many of our environmental causes are furthered by volunteers who feel strongly enough about the cause to get out there and fight for it. Our tourism industry is built on volunteers.

In my own electorate of Light we host the largest country event in South Australia, the Gawler Show. Every year more than 30,000 people pass through the gates—almost double the actual population of Gawler itself—and the entire event would not happen if it were not for more than 500 volunteers. There is only one paid part-time position of secretary.

Our volunteer culture is embedded deep in the Australian psyche. It goes back to helping out a mate. No neighbour would ever begrudge his mate a helping hand and that attitude is reflected in society at large. At no time is this more important than during a crisis. During our bushfires and the recent floods in the Eastern States, for example, there was a massive call to arms for volunteers across all walks of life. Shocked by Mother Nature, they turned out in their droves to help the injured, the stranded and the homeless.

Despite the vast work that volunteers do in the community we always need more. More than 34 per cent of Australian adults volunteer in some way but recent research suggests that almost 70 per cent of organisations need more volunteers. I encourage all my parliamentary colleagues to support the efforts of volunteers in their electorates in every way they can.

The year 2012 also marks Volunteering SA & NT's 30th anniversary, which is quite an achievement. It is so wonderful in this state to have such an organisation which continues to strive to improve opportunities for volunteers. To them I say happy birthday Volunteering SA & NT. This week I will be attending the Volunteers Big Red Picnic held in my electorate at Princes Park in Gawler by the local council. This event is being held to recognise and celebrate the significant national contribution of volunteers.

I would like to say thank you to all those volunteers. Before I close, I would like to acknowledge all those volunteers who work in schools, churches, youth organisations, community safety, CFS, SES, St John's, police service volunteers, community education, service clubs and the more than 300 community groups in my electorate that make our community a better place.

TIME EXPIRED