



Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion
ACT Legislative Assembly
Via email: LAcommitteeECI@parliament.act.gov.au

21 March 2024

Re: Disability Inclusion Bill

VolunteeringACT welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into the 'Disability Inclusion Bill' 2024 (the Bill).

VolunteeringACT supports the Bill as an important framework that will establish principles to protect and promote the rights of people with disability and contribute to realising their full inclusion in the ACT community.

The objects, concepts and principles outlined in the Bill are well aligned with VolunteeringACT's core purpose - *to foster quality of life and an inclusive Canberra by enabling participation and connection*. They also align with our [Inclusive Volunteering Program](#) and the ongoing sector development activities we facilitate to build the inclusion capabilities of ACT volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) and remove barriers to volunteering for people with disability.

Volunteering acts as a gateway for many individuals to connect with their community and research demonstrates that volunteering can lead to reduced feelings of alienation and loneliness amongst people with disability and empower them to become active providers of support to others.¹ It is a strong and legitimate pathway to education/employment and has been found to help people with disability build personal skills, access networking opportunities, and find paid roles.²

VolunteeringACT is pleased to see the recognition of lived experience within the Bill and welcomes the focus on ensuring that people with disability, as well as their families and carers, are meaningfully consulted about the development of disability inclusion plans and strategies. People with disability are the experts of their own bodies, experiences, capabilities, and support needs. This perspective should be at the centre of all planning and decision-making processes and clear mechanisms for engagement with people with disability must be in place throughout. There is also a need to respect that people with disability are all diverse human beings, where inclusion and equity may look different for each person.

VolunteeringACT also supports the establishment of a Disability Advisory Council to advise the Minister about issues affecting people with disability. We support ensuring that the Chair and at least half of the ordinary members of the Council are people with disability, and that the Council membership reflects the diversity of the ACT community and includes family/carers and First Nations representation.

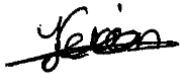
¹ Yanay-Ventura, G (2018) "Nothing About Us Without Us" in Volunteerism Too: Volunteering Among People with Disabilities, *Voluntas*, 30(1): 147,163, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-0026-7>

² *ibid*

The Department of Social Services has identified people with disability as one of the priority groups regarding removing barriers to volunteering, and inclusive volunteering objectives are firmly embedded within the ten-year [National Strategy for Volunteering \(2023-2033\)](#), the ACT Volunteering Strategy (currently under development), and our core capability building activities with volunteer-involving organisations. There are natural synergies between these current initiatives and implementation mechanisms outlined within the Disability Inclusion Bill.

VolunteeringACT calls for the ACT Government to pass the Disability Inclusion Bill 2024 and make a significant and positive step towards a more inclusive Canberra. We are keen to remain involved in this process and offer our expertise in inclusion and volunteering best practice in support of this Bill and its ongoing implementation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jean Giese', with a horizontal line drawn through the bottom of the signature.

Jean Giese
CEO
VolunteeringACT