

# COMMUNITY SERVICE OF THE YEAR

## ESPERANCE VOLUNTEER RESOURCE CENTRE



The Esperance Volunteer Resource Centre (EVRC) started in 1999 through a joint initiative between the federal departments of Health and Aged Care and Family and Community Services.

Esperance has always had a very strong volunteer ethic, but as communities grow it is not always easy for individuals to find their niche and there is greater need for systems to manage volunteers and their roles. With support from the Shire of Esperance, the EVRC was started and was originally funded through the Federal Volunteer Management Programme. The EVRC was one of only three in the state to be supported at the time.

By June of 1999, EVRC had established the Volunteer Referral Service, programs in Community Education and Training for both volunteers, volunteer coordinators, paid staff, as well as a membership of committed community organisations. It provided support previously missing from Esperance to both agencies and volunteers. From this solid foundation came growth in best practice management of volunteers, increased recognition of the value of volunteers, and an increase in the use of volunteers.

EVRC continues to be funded through Federal Volunteer Management, and has for many years also obtained funds through the state Volunteer Resource Centre. EVRC supplement this funding with contributions from both private and public sector opportunities for specific projects which extend their work into new areas. The geographic area that EVRC works with has expanded over the years and they now also cover Norseman and Ravensthorpe.

EVRC operates as:

- A Referral Service - they undertake initial interviews to identify the interests and skills of potential volunteers and then match them with volunteering opportunities within the community.
- An Information Service - EVRC look after the needs of both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations locally.
- Education and Training Opportunities - EVRC aim to provide a variety of training sessions which enable local groups to upskill and inform their volunteers and/or volunteer coordinators.
- Volunteer Coordinators and Managers - EVRC encourage best practice in their local member agencies and arrange courses and seminars that assist them in this area.
- National Standards in Volunteering – EVRC aim to ensure that they provide information that is considered best practice and encourage all to work to the National Standards as produced by Volunteering Australia.
- Recognition of Volunteering - EVRC offer two main opportunities each year for volunteers to be recognised for the work they do. They hold functions celebrating National Volunteer Week during May and Thank a Volunteer Day in early December.

Having a strong volunteer ethic within a community helps to make the town vibrant, welcoming and inclusive, encouraging people and businesses to come to Esperance for either the short or longer term, and can lead to people choosing to settle down here for good. By assisting the local volunteer-involving agencies to ensure that they are attracting and managing volunteers to the best of their capabilities EVRC are ensuring that those who volunteer in Esperance enjoy doing so.

EVRC have also recently instigated the Community Connections program, aimed at new residents and those with changing life circumstances. This program helps people with practical matters, such as local medical practitioners, and, more importantly, assists in finding them recreational pursuits, such as local clubs and groups they may be interested in joining. This in turn helps them to feel connected to the community and more likely to want to stay in Esperance.

In terms of the value of volunteer roles; the Volunteer Benefits Calculator, which can be found on Volunteering WA's website, shows that the replacement cost of an individual in their mid-20s to mid-40s volunteering just three hours a week is over \$7,000 annually. In 2015 the socio-economic and cultural value of volunteering to Western Australia was estimated to be \$39 billion\*.

By matching people to volunteer roles suited to their interests, and by ensuring that volunteer roles are adequately advertised, EVRC help to keep roles filled. Volunteer roles ease the financial pressure on not for profits, allowing their funds to be spent in other areas. For Shire-run organisations such as the Library, Museum and Home and Community Care, the use of volunteers enables them to offer more services to the community. EVRC play a key role in creating opportunities and encouraging community engagement by demonstrating how fun and rewarding volunteering in Esperance can be.