



# Impact Report

2024-25 Strong and Resilient Communities Activity

Small Grants for Volunteer Involving Organisations



*The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**

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# Strong and Resilient Communities - Small Grants

## REACH AND IMPACT

The Strong and Resilient Communities – Community Support – Small Grants for Volunteer Involving Organisations Activity delivered \$2,598,692 nationally, in small grants of \$10,000 - \$20,000, to 154 grassroots volunteer involving organisations. Grassroots organisations were defined as organisations that have:

- a workforce with a proportion of 40% or more volunteers;
- an annual income of below \$500,000; and
- support one or more of the identified priority groups (as identified below).

This activity was part of the broader Strong and Resilient Communities (SARC) Activity, funded by the Department of Social Services. The Activity provides grant funding to organisations for one-off, time limited projects. *These are community-driven and designed to help vulnerable and disadvantaged people participate socially and economically.*<sup>1</sup>

SARC helps build strong and resilient communities that support people to:

- overcome disadvantage
- provide greater community engagement
- promote participation and belonging
- promote better education, training and employment
- build self-reliance and empowerment.

The Strong and Resilient Communities – Community Support – Small Grants funding was available to support activities taking place between 29 November 2024 – 30 May 2025.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/strong-and-resilient-communities-activity>

## Key objectives

The key objectives of these grants were to build volunteer management capability within organisations to uplift volunteer capability, including volunteer knowledge, skills and volunteer numbers, and to support alignment with the strategic objectives of the National Strategy for Volunteering and the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement in organisations that support:

- young people 12 to 18 years who are disengaged, or at risk of disengaging, from education to reconnect with their community, school, training and/or employment
- people with disabilities and/or mental health conditions to participate in the community, and work towards becoming or remaining independent and engaged in the economy and/or society
- women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination to participate in the community and/or economy and increase their self-agency
- people who are unemployed to increase participation in their community and/or increase their capacity to engage in employment, training, or existing employment services.

## Outcomes

The intended outcomes of the grants were to increase the capability and capacity for volunteer involving organisations to uplift volunteer capability, including volunteer knowledge, skills and volunteer numbers, to support:

- increased social, civic and economic participation
- reduced levels of social isolation/increased sense of belonging in communities
- people to be self-reliant, empowered and experience an improved sense of wellbeing
- people to be engaged in education, training and work-ready services and activities
- people to improve work skills and have increased opportunities for paid work
- people to engage with and sustain engagement with community services and activities
- people to improve connections and linkages to services that further support their increased social, civic and economic participation.

## Volunteering peak body administration

The Volunteering Peak Bodies (VPBs) were engaged by the Department of Social Services to administer the small grants to grassroots organisations through an inclusive and accessible grant process. This acknowledged that for smaller organisations with limited infrastructure and resourcing, grant processes can be time consuming and difficult.

The Volunteering Peak Bodies set up a National Working Group, led by a National Grants Manager to develop an accessible grants process to attract new and existing audiences across diverse grassroots organisations.



# Small Grants process

Our focus in designing the grants administration process was to improve accessibility and inclusion, therefore reducing the administrative burden of the application process on all parties involved. This was particularly important given the target audience of grassroots volunteer involving organisations who are largely under-resourced and often fully volunteer-run, meaning skills and/or experience in grant applications are not always a given. It was important that the application process be relative to the size of the grant and the activities being delivered.

In order to achieve this, a two-stage application process was embedded, including:

## **Expression of Interest stage**

Applicants were invited to submit a short expression of interest, addressing essential organisational eligibility criteria and outlining proposed activities to be delivered. Each jurisdiction then assessed the information provided.

## **Application stage**

All applicants who submitted an expression of interest with eligible activities and met all organisational eligibility criteria were invited to submit a full application. In jurisdictions where expression of interests were received in significant numbers, the applications with best alignment were invited.

The benefit of this process was that it saved 387 applicants from submitting a lengthy application if their proposed activities were ineligible, reducing the impact on their resources instead of them undertaking further work on an application. This, in turn, reduced the administrative burden on the Volunteering Peak Bodies by reducing the number of ineligible applications requiring review.

The final report process was also carefully considered to ensure that it captured the achievement of the grant objectives, while not placing undue burden on the grantees. The templates for the final report and financial acquittal were shared with grantees when the funding was awarded, so that they could actively plan for, and monitor progress throughout.

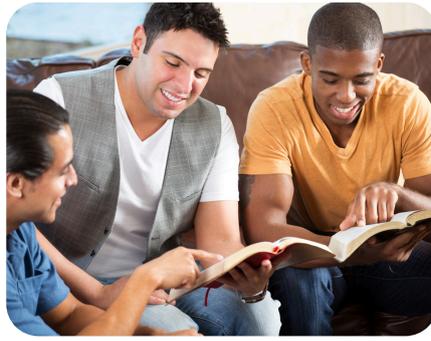
Another step taken to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of the process was the appointment of grant coordinators in each of the states and territories who were the lead contact and available to support grantees. Having a dedicated person available to answer questions, check in regularly and provide support as needed was well received and allowed grantees to seek support when needed and understand the process.

Later in this document is a summary of the barriers within this process, which the volunteer peak bodies would advocate should be removed from future grants.





Communication with our case officer was easy and helpful. We felt supported throughout the project and we have learned a great deal about the process.



The process was smooth and well-supported. The documentation was easy to access and navigate, and the flexibility within the grant allowed us to respond meaningfully to community needs. The support from the Volunteering Peak Body and the structure of the program were excellent. Thank you for the opportunity, this grant has had a lasting impact in our community.



It was great to have regular contact with SARC team who often called and made contact with me to see how we were going, I have not seen this type of interaction with any other grant.



Staff have been so helpful. We are truly grateful as we are very new and need all the assistance we can get.



As a volunteer, I really appreciate what a simple process the acquittal process is. It is a relief to be able to spend valuable time on delivering outcomes, rather than spend hours on acquittal documents. Thank you.



The grant application process enabled efficiency with clear criteria and merit. Equally, the reporting system is excellent.

As this is our first engagement with a funded grant project, we look forward to any other opportunities from Volunteering SA that will continue to build our capacity as a recognised volunteer-provider in Adelaide. Thank you.



Found the grant process clear, accessible, and supportive. The guidelines and templates were easy to follow, and we appreciated knowing we could reach out for help if needed.

We are extremely grateful for the funding, which has made a significant, positive impact on our organisation's ability to train and support volunteers. Thank you for supporting community-led programs that build connection, inclusion, and resilience.



# Impact snapshot

The impact of the Strong and Resilient Communities – Community Support – Small Grants for Volunteer Involving Organisations Activity was significant. 154 organisations were funded and supported to deliver activities that built the capacity of their organisation, their volunteer managers and more than 15,000 volunteers. Through their projects they supported 66,279 priority cohort members to better engage socially and economically in their communities.

## Priority Cohorts Supported

Here is a breakdown of the number of individuals from the identified priority cohorts supported through the funding:

### **7,123 young people**

12 to 18 years who are disengaged, or at risk of disengaging, from education to reconnect with their community, school, training and/or employment.

### **21,429 people with disabilities and/or mental health conditions**

to participate in the community, and work towards becoming or remaining independent and engaged in the economy and/or society.

### **21,696 women**

who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination to participate in the community and/or economy and increase their self-agency.

### **16,031 people who are unemployed**

to increase participation in their community and/or increase their capacity to engage in employment, training, or existing employment services.

## **Outcomes Achieved**

### **Increase capability, capacity and engagement for organisations and individuals**

152 of the 154 grant recipients reported an increase in capability and capacity in their organisations to uplift volunteer capability, including volunteer knowledge, skills and volunteer numbers. Activities supporting this increase included:

- training for volunteer managers both in understanding the needs of the priority cohorts and in volunteer management best practice;
- training for volunteers to understand the needs of the priority cohorts and to facilitate activities for the priority cohorts;
- Reviewing and updating policies and procedures.

147 of the 154 grantees reported an increase in social, civic and economic participation, this may have been for volunteers, individuals or both. 149 grantees reported reduced levels of social isolation and an increased sense of belonging in their communities. 151 reported an improved sense of wellbeing.

130 grantees reported their volunteers and/ or participants engaged in education, training and work-ready services. 126 reported an improvement in work ready skills for their volunteers and/or participants and 112 reported increased opportunities for paid work.

135 grantees reported their volunteers and/ or participants engaging with community services and activities and 134 reported improved connections to services that further support their social, civic and economic participation.

### **Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement and the National Strategy for Volunteering**

One of the objectives of the Strong and Resilient Communities – Community Support – Small Grants for Volunteer Involving Organisations Activity was to see activities align with both the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement and the National Strategy for Volunteering. The grant documentation linked applicants to further information about both the Standards and the Strategy, further promoting these important initiatives with grassroots organisations.

## National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

All grantees reported that their funded activities aligned with the National Standards for Volunteering. The following is a breakdown of which activities aligned with each standard:

**119**

aligned with **Standard 1:**  
Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture



**118**

aligned with **Standard 2:**  
Volunteer participation is championed and modelled



**123**

aligned with **Standard 3:**  
Volunteer roles are meaningful and tailored



**117**

aligned with **Standard 4:**  
Recruitment is equitable, and diversity is valued



**147**

aligned with **Standard 5:**  
Volunteers are supported and developed



**121**

aligned with **Standard 6:**  
Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected



**122**

aligned with **Standard 7:**  
Volunteers are recognised



**107**

aligned with **Standard 8:**  
Policies and practices are continuously improved

## Alignment with the National Strategy for Volunteering

All grantees reported that their activities aligned with one of more of the objectives of the National Volunteering Strategy, the following is a breakdown of which objectives they aligned to:

### Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience

- **133** aligned with Strategic Objective 1.1: Focus on the Volunteer Experience
- **127** aligned with Strategic Objective 1.2: Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible
- **99** aligned with Strategic Objective 1.3: Ensure Volunteering is Not Exploitative



### Community and social impact

- **97** aligned with Strategic Objective 2.1: Diversify the Understanding of Volunteering
- **83** aligned with Strategic Objective 2.2: Reshape the Public Perception of Volunteering
- **113** aligned with Strategic Objective 2.3: Recognise the Inherent Value of Volunteering
- **104** aligned with Strategic Objective 2.4: Enable a Community-Led Approach

### Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive

- **28** aligned with Strategic Objective 3.1: Make Volunteering a Cross-Portfolio Issue in Government
- **104** aligned with Strategic Objective 3.2: Build Strong Leadership and Shared Accountability
- **74** aligned with Strategic Objective 3.3: Commit to Strategic Investment
- **105** aligned with Strategic Objective 3.4: Recognise the Importance of Volunteer Management





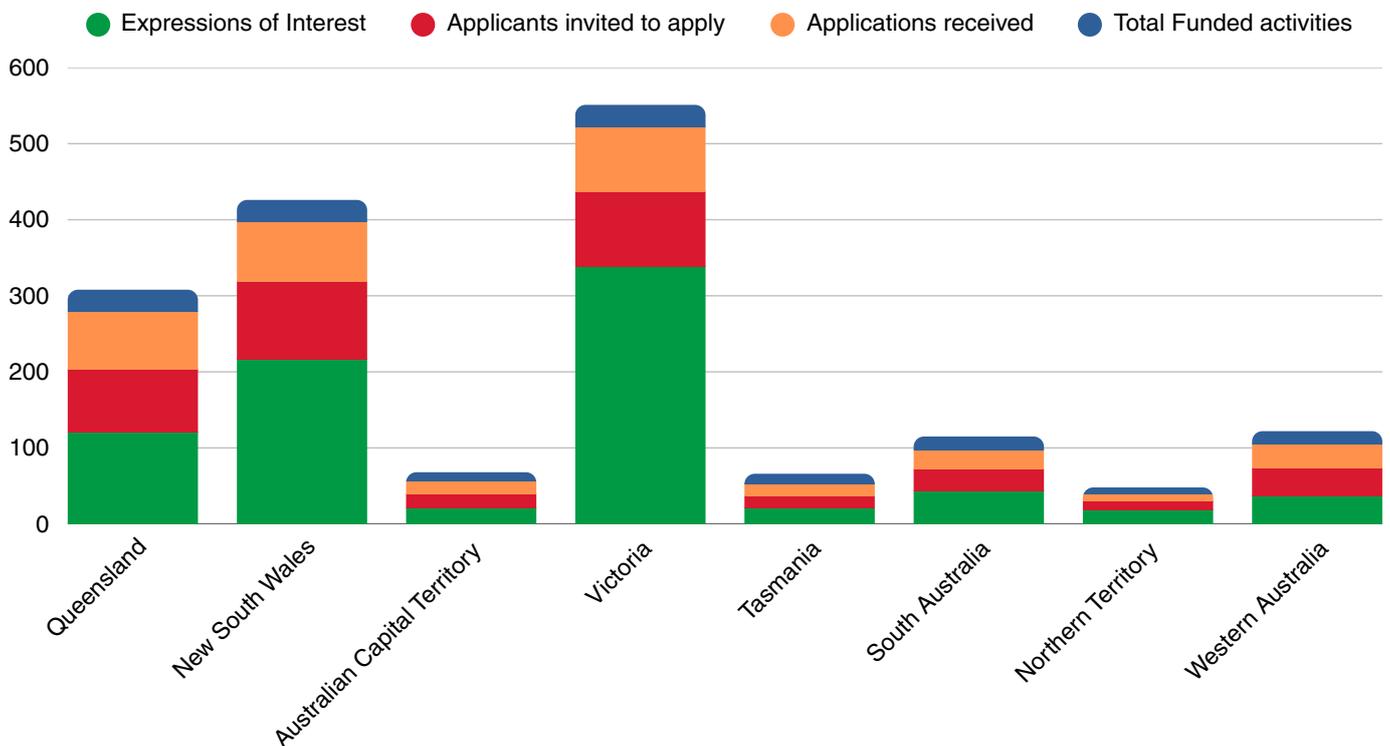
The process was really helpful and beneficial and helped us to review the National Standards which really benefitted the organisation. I found all communication was accessible and emails were responded to. I am very grateful for this opportunity as it has been of great benefit for the organisation and did come at a critical time on the management of the organisation. Thank you so much.



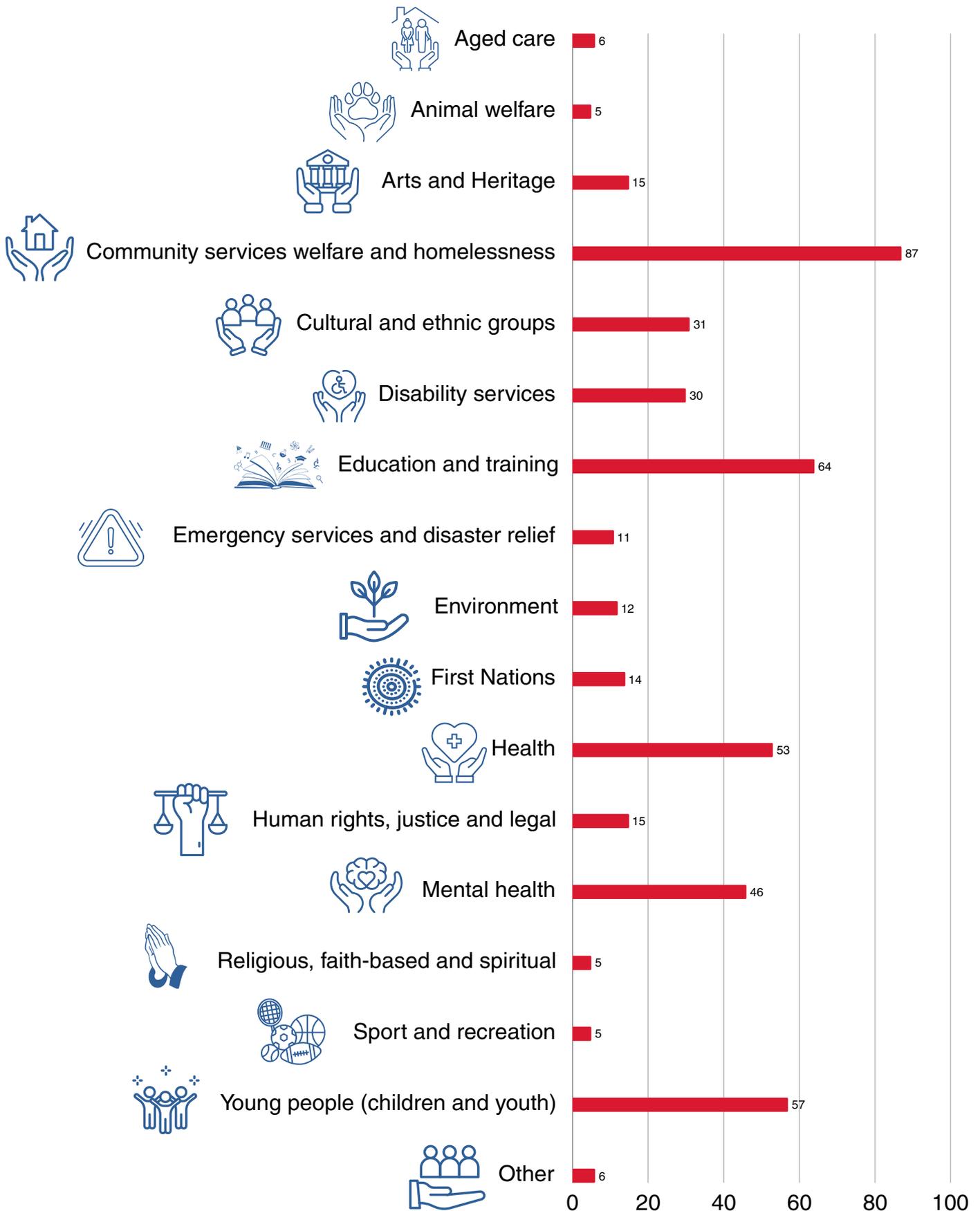
# National data

In the below chart is an illustration of the following: how many EOIs received, applicants invited to apply, applications received and total funded activities. It is important to note that funding for each state (to be on-funded to organisations) differed. The ACT, Tasmania and NT received \$200,000, WA and SA received \$300,000 and NSW, QLD and Victoria received \$500,000. As is demonstrated below, in some jurisdictions the numbers of organisations who undertook an EOI compared with percentages of those organisations who were successful was high, whereas in other jurisdictions there was a significant decrease in this percentage - particularly in jurisdictions where there were high EOIs numbers received.

## Jurisdictional Breakdown

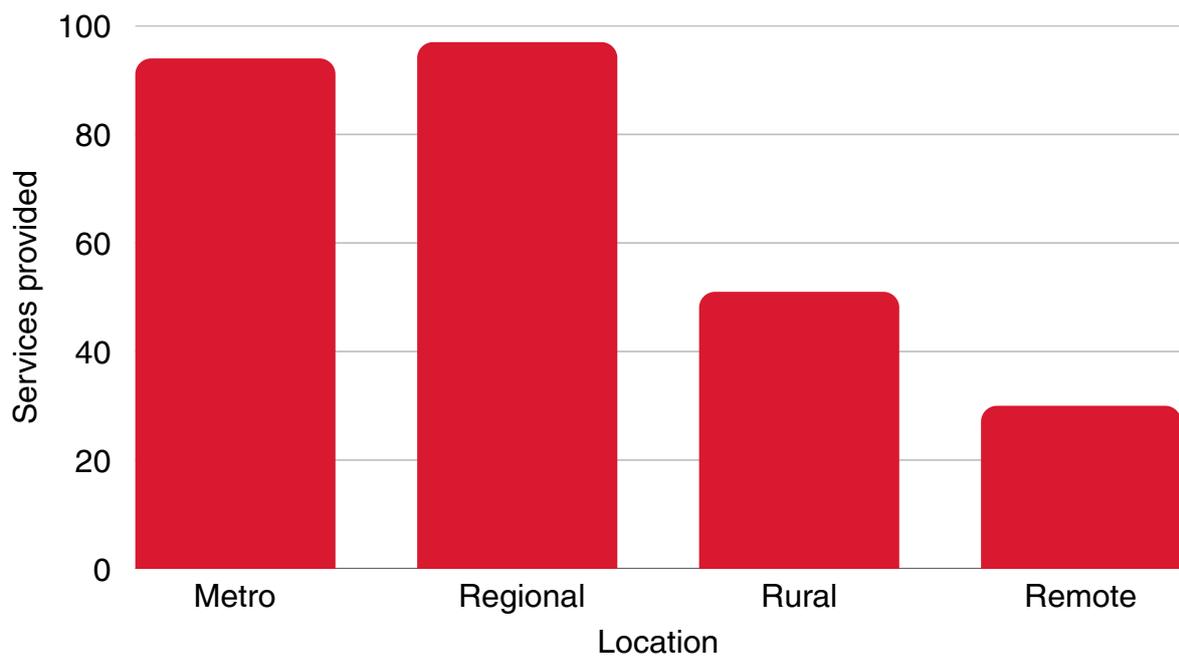


## Types of services provided by organisations





### Location of services provided



# Value proposition

Applying for grant funding and managing the grant process is often a laborious and complex task. Most small and grassroots organisations do not have the capacity to engage in formal grant funding cycles.

The Strong and Resilient Communities – Community Support – Small Grants for Volunteer Involving Organisations Activity, as led by the Volunteering Peak Bodies, bridged the gap between grant funding and grassroots organisations.

Volunteering Peak Bodies are constantly working with volunteers and volunteer involving organisations of all sizes. Within the VPBs, there is a deep understanding of the challenges they face, their needs and the most effective ways to provide support. This allowed us to build the right systems and supports to connect grassroots organisations with this incredible funding opportunity.

Grassroots organisations are often under-resourced, and often entirely volunteer led.

They do not have the capacity to search for grant opportunities, but as volunteer involving organisations they are often already engaged with their local Volunteering Peak Bodies. This existing relationship allowed us to bring the opportunity to them. For organisations not already connected with their Peak Body, the grant has enabled a relationship to form for support and capacity building to continue.

Throughout the grant process, appropriate levels of support were provided via phone, email and information sessions. Our dedicated Grant Coordinators checked in with grantees regularly, coaching them through the process from the early stages of expressions of interest and application, through to completing the funding agreements, delivering the activity and completion of reports. This level of support is rarely viable in grant environments (and particularly not in grants of this quantum) but is a key point of difference of the role that Volunteering Peak Bodies can play and enablers and capacity builders.

There has been overwhelming feedback from the grantees that this was a positive and supportive process. Grantees identified that the documentation was easy to navigate, the evaluation was straight forward and not burdensome and that the support available enabled them to succeed.



Overall, our experience with the grant process was highly positive. The documentation was accessible and clear, and communication with the Volunteering Peak Body (Volunteering SA/NT) was timely and supportive. These elements made it easy to understand expectations and meet reporting and acquittal requirements. We would like to especially acknowledge our grant manager for her helpful guidance and responsiveness throughout the process. Her support made a real difference in navigating the requirements smoothly.



The support from Volunteering WA, particularly Melanie Baker, has been outstanding. They provided lots of resources, were very contactable and gave us the confidence to succeed.





This has been a very valuable project for our organisation and the ease of management has been exceptional.

For the size of the grant the acquittal process has been appropriate, and the value received from the funding for this project has created benefits that will be generating outcomes for decades to come.

We are very appreciative, thank you so much.

This is one of the best formats and content for evaluation that we have encountered, it was simple, easy to complete and reflective of the reality of the project journey, impact and outcomes. When one volunteer is continuously writing funding applications and undertaking acquittals to support five weekly workshops there is a significant risk of burnout in small charities like ours. This is a model template for evaluations across all portfolios. We particularly liked:

- The simplicity of the evaluation templates (a lot of tick boxes and a case study) which reduced valuable time to complete the final reports
- The sample documents supplied for evaluation
- Inclusion of the case study which puts the funding body in touch with the reality of the project on the ground
- It was a balanced mix of qualitative and quantitative evaluation
- It was volunteer friendly.



This has been an incredibly collaborative approach to actioning this grant. I have really appreciated the information available, and the support given to us as an organisation by Volunteer Victoria SARC committee. The information session was helpful and clarified the project implementation process. The check in phone calls helped clarify we were on the right track. Thank you for the opportunity to work with you. We hope we have supported our volunteers to the quality you have supported us.



# Barriers within the process

## Language

It is useful to reflect upon the some of the barriers experienced within the process, which the VPBs would advocate should be removed. A summary of these barriers are included in this section.

In creating the grant documentation, there was a focus using plain language and providing as much relevant information and examples as possible. This focus was to ensure that complex language did not create a barrier for grassroots organisations, many of whom are unfamiliar with grant processes and vernacular.

Unfortunately, our ability to produce truly inclusive and accessible grant documentation was impaired by the requirements of the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines (CGRGs) which did not have flexibility to adapt to be fit-for -purpose for this Grant. One example where this was problematic was the use of suggested Plain English changes within the application, which were not approved and replaced with more complex terminology.

Similarly, in the Grant Agreements, there were limited opportunities to adjust the language to make it more inclusive. This was particularly evident in the terms and conditions. There was a need to adjust the language to clarify the terms in this particular on-funding scenario but this was not agreed to, leading to confusion for applicants throughout the expression of interest and application stages.

## Timelines

The initial timelines were tight, given that the Volunteering Peak Bodies were funded to complete the full activity within 12 months with no lead time to allow for planning. This timeframe included creating documentation and grant processes, launching the funding rounds, grant activities being delivered and grantees' reporting on the process. The timelines were further impacted due to a number of delays on approvals of documentation, making it difficult to action any feedback in a considered manner. Eventually the activity duration was reduced to 6 months, which created a barrier to many grantees completing their activities effectively and being able to see and report on the impact of their work.

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>ORIGINAL PROPOSED TIMELINE</b>	<b>ACTUAL TIMELINE</b>
Announcement of grant opportunity	19 August 2024	10 September 2024
Expressions of interest open	2 September 2024 (14 days after announcement)	18 September 2024 (8 days after announcement)
Expressions of interest close	13 September 2024 (11 days after opening, 25 days after announcement)	4 October 2024 (16 days after opening, 24 days after announcement)
Assessment and selection period	16-20 September 2024 (4 days)	7-11 October 2024 (4 days)
Invitation to apply announcement	23 September 2024	14 October 2024
Applications close	11 October 2024 (18 days after invite)	28 October 2024 (14 days after invite)
Assessment and selection period	14 October 2024 - 8 November 2024 (25 days)	28 October 2024 - 22 November 2024 (25 days)
Notification of grant recipients	11 November 2024 (3 days after selection)	25 November 2024 (3 days after selection)
Activity starts	18 November 2024 (7 days after notification)	From 29 November 2024 (4 days after notification)
Activity ends	16 May 2025 (179 days)	30 May 2025 (182 days)
Final reports due to VPB	30 May 2025 (14 days after activity ends)	16 June 2025 (17 days after activity ends)

The timeframe given to complete this project would be my main piece of feedback. As this was a new initiative for our organisation, the short timeframe (funding awarded in December with the program ending in May) meant we had limited opportunity to refine the program plan or provide deeper mentorship and project development support. Despite these constraints, the outcomes were strong, and participants showed real enthusiasm for their projects. For future delivery, a longer program cycle with a follow-up phase would be invaluable to deepen engagement, enhance capacity building, and help transition ideas into sustainable community impact.



It would have been great to have more time to clearly communicate before and after results of the funding.

A slightly longer time frame would have enabled us to complete more of our governance structural work as there was a lot of areas to address.



We found the time frame to deliver the project very tight. We had been informed of the grant outcome by the end of November 2024 and it was difficult to start the leadership program with in-person workshops before March 2025 due to Christmas and summer holidays during December 2024- February 2025, followed by the beginning of school term with participants having school going kids and family responsibilities. Therefore, delivering six workshops , 5 online sessions and a public event within March- May, interrupted by school holidays in April 2025 again, was extremely difficult. In particular, we are grassroots community organisations run by unpaid volunteers, and time poor as we have to do paid day jobs for other organisations during week days.



The timeframe was probably our biggest challenge as being from Dec 24- May instead of a whole year to execute the grant, meant a lot of pressure to deliver grant objectives in time. As we already had an intensive Christmas season period with pre-scheduled events organised, etc and then many of our services were closed until the end of Jan this added additional pressure. We did try to pre-arrange some training for this period but due to the holiday season, there was no uptake from the volunteers. As a general rule, we like to give both staff and volunteers time off for a well earned break during this period. So the execution of the grant mainly was for a three month period Feb to May. This led to the challenge of being able to schedule in our facilitators for different courses as well as the availability of volunteers to undertake the training on certain days.





- **Case study:** Volunteer Peer Mentorship for Bereaved Parents
- **Organisation:** Ladybird Care Foundation Limited, Victoria
- **Target groups:** People with disabilities and/or mental health conditions and women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination



## Project aim

Ladybird Care Foundation aims to fill the gap in essential bereavement-care and mental health services by providing a peer mentoring program to support, care for, and empower grieving parents following the death of a child of any age. Ladybird Care has expanded from SE Queensland with significant growth in volunteer numbers from Victorian residents. The grant funding will allow the development and delivery of a pilot series of specialised bereavement training and workshops for Victorian volunteer mentors which will improve volunteer capability, knowledge and skills, and assist them to better understand their mentoring role and the special mental health needs of bereaved parents.

## Activities delivered

Training for volunteers to understand the needs of objective cohorts and training for volunteers to facilitate activities for objective cohorts through the development and delivery of specialised bereavement training workshops in Victoria for volunteer mentors supporting parents whose child has died. Volunteer parent mentors with lived experience (at least two years bereaved) were trained and supervised by a social worker to provide, free of charge, vital support and human connection to recently bereaved parents.

The project development and delivery included online platform development, volunteer mentor training, resource development, and bereavement workshops.

## Change seen

Achieved 9/9 of the grant outcomes. As bereaved parents feel more supported in their grief, they are empowered to be engaged in work, family, and community activities and their need for professional grief counselling is reduced, with the flow on effect of less strain on health services, improved sense of wellbeing, community connection, and reduction in isolation. Volunteer mentor knowledge and capability is increased along with an increased sense of belonging in communities, improved wellbeing, and reduced social isolation.

## Case study

Susan\* trained to be a volunteer Peer Mentor with Ladybird Care in March 2025. She lives in a semi-rural area, in Victoria, to the north-east of Melbourne.

Susan and her husband have three children. Nine years ago, their youngest little 3 ½ year old daughter died at home, surrounded by her family after a two-year battle with a rare neurological disorder. Susan says that she had a lot of supportive people around her but over time the people she most treasured were those who had also experienced the loss of a child. They had the understanding

\*Name changed for privacy.

that no one else did. Talking to them gave her comfort and helped her feel less isolated.

Susan approached Ladybird Care to train as a Peer Mentor to help others who are going through a similar experience and likewise offer them comfort and hope.

As a new volunteer, Susan expressed some anxiety about training to be a volunteer Peer Mentor. Other than her lived experience, she was not sure what else she had to offer. She said she had very few relevant formal skills but was keen to learn more and to explore ways she could best support another bereaved parent.

When Susan met her team online for initial training she felt an unexpected instant positive connection to the other trainee volunteer Mentors. She expressed to the group that she had really enjoyed working through the online self-paced modules and it helped her to prepare mentally and emotionally for the training.

As topics were discussed during the group training Susan was able to reflect on the specific relevant module and had made some notes in preparation for the group discussion.



She said, “it was so nice to see that others had also taken the time to reflect on the learning materials and it seemed much easier to apply the training, as she was able to draw on real life examples from the various participants.” Susan said that initially she wondered if the online Zoom style training would allow for deep connections, but said she was “surprised at just how easily, quickly and naturally everyone built a rapport and trust”. “There was even one of our trainee volunteer mentors who lives in Geelong but was overseas visiting family. He was able to join us online, and it was great that could connect so well, regardless of physical location.”

“The quality of the self-paced module was really high. I’m super-impressed with the standard of the training and support and the effort that the Ladybird Team have gone to, in order to provide really helpful resources and activities.”

“Initially I felt a bit isolated, as I don’t know many other people who are also bereaved parents. I wanted to help other parents, but what I didn’t expect was that the training to be a Peer Mentor has also helped me to connect so well with other bereaved parents who are also volunteer Mentors. We are learning from each other and I feel really well supported.

Living outside the metropolitan area, I feel I often miss some of the opportunities that people in the city have, but I now have a greater sense of connection with other volunteers after doing this training. I feel that we can talk to the Ladybird Care team or other volunteers and run ideas or questions by them at any time. I don't have all the answers, but I know that I'm meant to be in this role and I have something to offer other parents going through unimaginable heart ache after the loss of a child."

"Surprisingly, I also enjoyed learning about the 'corporate' side of things and why we need to record things the way we do. The training helped me to understand the expectations of my role much better (and the risks to avoid) and the need for me to provide timely feedback to Ladybird Care so they can do their job properly."

"A few weeks ago I participated in a follow-up development session regarding the Window of Tolerance. Again, the quality of the training materials and the presentation by Ali was really high. The topic made a lot of sense, and it was good to see the theory behind what I sometimes feel and now I can relate this new knowledge in my mentoring role."

"I've recently connected with my Mentee for the first time, and I already sense that we have a positive connection and if I can do just a few things to make a difference in her life, I know it is worthwhile."



A snapshot of peer development session.



- **Case study:** Anchored in Community:  
Strengthening veteran wellbeing through training and connection
- **Organisation:** Reeling Veterans Incorporated
- **Target groups:**
  - Supporting people with disabilities and/or mental health conditions
  - Supporting women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination
  - Supporting people who are unemployed



## Project aim

The primary aim of this initiative was to empower volunteers, particularly veterans and individuals from military backgrounds, by equipping them with essential skills to enable them to contribute meaningfully to their communities. The program recognised the unique challenges faced by veterans, including mental health issues such as PTSD, depression and anxiety, as well as physical injuries that can hinder reintegration into civilian life.

By fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, the program sought to:

- Build resilience and confidence among participants.
- Provide pathways to skill development and leadership.
- Promote community engagement and social connection.
- Advocate for the needs of veterans and raise awareness of their experiences.

Ultimately, the goal was to create a space where veterans and volunteers could thrive, reclaim their sense of purpose, and positively impact others through structured training and meaningful service.

## Activities delivered

### 1. Website upgrade

A major update to the organisation's website improved accessibility and user experience.

Key enhancements included:

- Streamlined navigation for easier access to information.
- A simplified booking system for appointments and reservations.
- A more responsive contact system to facilitate communication.

### 2. Skipper training program

Reeling Veterans launched a comprehensive skipper training initiative:

- Five individuals are currently pursuing their Coxswain Grade 1 ticket, a critical qualification for operating marine vessels.
- Twelve volunteers completed a radio and marine safety course, gaining essential skills in communication and water safety.
- All training was delivered in partnership with Seafood and Maritime Industries Training (SMIT) to ensure high-quality instruction.

### 3. Intensive Training Week (20-27 April)

A hands-on training week provided real-world experience:

- New volunteer skippers worked alongside experienced mentors.
- Each trainee led daily outings with groups of four clients.
- The experience helped trainees understand the responsibilities of skippering and receive direct feedback from clients.

### 4. Mental health and safe talk training

Volunteers participated in mental health awareness sessions covering:

- Recognition of depression, anxiety and panic disorders.
- Understanding suicidal ideation and self-harm.
- Strategies for supporting individuals experiencing mental health challenges.
- Reducing stigma and promoting mental wellness.

### 5. Community engagement and volunteer recruitment

Following the training week:

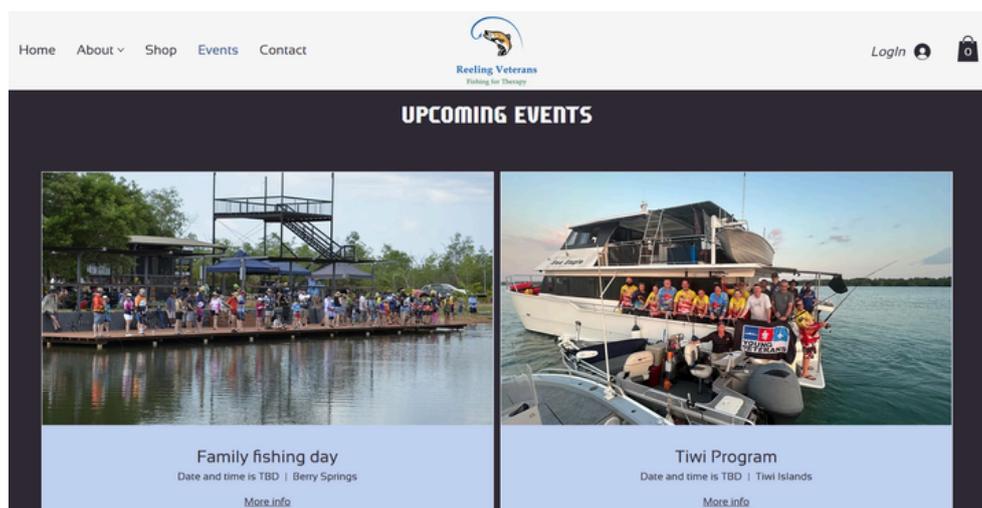
- A surge in volunteer interest was observed.
- New volunteers expressed eagerness to join and contribute.
- Stronger peer relationships and a sense of belonging were fostered.

## Change seen

The program has delivered measurable and meaningful outcomes across several dimensions:

### 1. Volunteer development

- Volunteers gained a wide range of competencies, including leadership, conflict resolution, vessel operation and mental health awareness.
- Skippers demonstrated increased confidence and proficiency in real-world scenarios.



A snapshot of Reeling Veterans: Fishing Therapy website



## 2. Community impact

- Enhanced collaboration and teamwork among volunteers.
- Strengthened relationships between volunteers and clients.
- A supportive network emerged, promoting long-term engagement and mutual growth.

## 3. Organisational growth

- Increased visibility and interest in the organisation's mission.
- A growing pool of skilled and motivated volunteers.
- Improved program sustainability through expanded training and recruitment.

## 4. Veteran empowerment

- Veterans found renewed purpose and connection through mentoring roles.
- Participants reported improved mental well-being and a stronger sense of identity.
- The program helped bridge the gap between military service and civilian contribution.

This volunteer training demonstrated that engaging in recreational fishing offers substantial health and well-being benefits, making it an ideal activity for our veterans and their families. The advantages are clear for both individuals and groups. Additionally, vessel skippering significantly contributes to improving behavioural and mental health.

The key benefits identified included comprehensive training and development, robust social support, enhanced mental health outcomes, effective behavioural management, and notable reductions in stress and anxiety. Moreover, seniors experience considerable health benefits by staying active, both physically and mentally, through this enjoyable and affordable outdoor pursuit.

Importantly, the transfer of knowledge and skills from seniors to younger generations further enriches the experience, creating lasting impacts across communities.





- **Case Study:** Supporting women and girls in sport volunteering.
- **Organisation:** Gaining Ground WA
- **Target groups:**
  - Supporting Women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination.
  - Supporting Young people 12 to 18 years who are disengaged, or at risk of disengaging, from education.



## Project aim

The problem we were looking to address is to strengthen the capability of volunteers to support the mental wellbeing of up to 1,200 women and girls, who Gaining Ground WA supports through soccer club workshops, mentorship programs, and wellbeing events in the Perth Metropolitan area in 2025.

## Activities delivered

Gaining Ground WA developed a program of trainings to equip our volunteers to deliver group workshops and self-empowerment activities. The trainings included:

- gender inclusivity
- youth mental health first aid
- group facilitation training
- leadership skills
- multicultural awareness



The training programs undertaken equip volunteers to better understand and respond to the diversity of needs faced by our program participants, in order to create a culture of belonging and an inclusive, safe, and accessible environment.

## Change seen

A Gaining Ground WA volunteer, who also belongs to the objective cohort of women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination, attended two of our trainings: two-day youth mental health first aid training and group facilitation training skills. The volunteer with Gaining Ground WA is a young female football coach to girls 12-14 years old at a male-dominated and led community club.

The volunteer attended the youth mental health first aid training and group facilitation skills training. In a post training survey this person shared the impact of the trainings, aligning directly with our objective of the grant to strengthen the capability of volunteers to support the mental wellbeing of women and girls and outcomes including -

1) volunteers feel supported and empowered to lead confidently in their roles and

2) volunteers develop greater knowledge and skills, uplifting volunteer capability and knowledge.

The volunteer shared -



“The training has helped me to feel more secure in my role working with young girls. I feel that I have more tools in my belt to be able to help them when they need it, and I feel better equipped in dealing with young people in regard to their mental health and a bit more confident in the support I am able to provide them.”

The volunteer added further demonstrating the power of this support, “The training opportunities have been absolutely fantastic, and I am so grateful for the chance to participate in them. I really hope this work continues as it is so important and helpful particularly being a woman working with junior girls and women, in a male dominated field. It is always great to see females in lead roles but often they don't have the same experience, training, or support network as their male counterparts. At times you can feel that you've been set up to fail, which is where Gaining Ground has been instrumental in bridging that gap in knowledge and experience.”

While Gaining Ground WA is aiming to reach 1,200 women and girls this year, the flow on impact from our volunteers, who are now better equipped and actively volunteer with other community organisations, will increase this reach throughout the year to build stronger and more resilient communities.

The trainings undertaken will be used directly now in soccer workshops for girls 12-14 throughout Perth which is intended to improve wellbeing. Facilitation skills is one of the trainings we completed, which is about improving presentation and communication skills. The training has also helped equip our volunteer executive director and volunteer board of directors with tools to improve communication, culture-building and value-alignment to better serve the people we support.

Approximately 215 girls and women benefitted from the training provided as part of the SARC grant. From Gaining New Ground's perspective “This has been one of the most helpful grants we have received to lift our volunteer capacity and capabilities and grow the leadership skills of the women who volunteer, mentor, and facilitate with us.” They would like to invest more resources into debriefing and evaluation, involve more women in the development and delivery of the training manual and look at how to invest in an annual training program, like continuing youth mental health first aid (as the most helpful course identified by participants), as well as leadership and facilitation training opportunities to support communication skills and emotional intelligence to build safe spaces.



- **Case Study:** Powering Communities Through Volunteerism, Engagement and Youth Support
- **Organisation:** 5FOLD Limited
- **Target Groups:**
  - Young people (aged 12–18) – students identified as disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education because they lack access to a nutritious breakfast before school.
  - Volunteers – a diverse mix, including older individuals with limited digital capability and younger community members seeking social contribution or employment pathways.

**5:FOLD**



## Project aim

The project set out to strengthen volunteer management practices by implementing a Volunteer Management System (VMS) aligned with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. This aimed to improve coordination, training, and retention of volunteers while enhancing the quality, inclusivity, and sustainability of programs—particularly the Breakfast Club, which was providing 2,500 free meals weekly across five key locations. The initial target was to expand the service to reach 500 students, three days a week.

A dedicated local resident was engaged to lead strategic change and volunteer coordination, supported by partnerships with Workways Australia, local schools, and a pro bono marketing firm.

Early observations revealed challenges including inconsistent volunteer coordination, outdated policies and governance, and roles that did not fully utilise volunteer potential. Many older volunteers also struggled with digital onboarding and sign-in systems, while the use of personal devices raised confidentiality and data security concerns. In addition, the volunteer workspace was limited, uninviting, and did not encourage productivity or engagement.

## Activities delivered

### 1. Volunteer Systems & Governance

- Implemented a Volunteer Management System (VMS) with digital onboarding.
- Reviewed and updated policies, procedures, and volunteer role descriptions.
- Purchased secure, work-specific devices to improve confidentiality and efficiency.
- Created sustainable workflows for volunteer coordination.
- Converted a storeroom into a professional volunteer office and upgraded volunteer spaces to be more welcoming.

### 2. Recruitment & Role Clarity

- Introduced new recruitment strategies targeting isolated and unemployed community members.
- Secured a formal partnership with Workways Australia.
- Engaged seven Work for the Dole participants.
- Hired a part-time Retail Operations Manager to enhance structure and support volunteer coordination.
- Matched volunteers to roles that aligned with their strengths, boosting confidence and productivity.

### 3. Community Engagement & Culture

- Celebrated National Volunteer Week.
- Embedded regular recognition practices into the volunteer culture.
- Strengthened partnerships with schools, local businesses, and community stakeholders, including securing new financial and pro bono support.

### Change seen

#### Qualitative impact

- Youth reported improved focus, attendance, and engagement due to consistent access to food and care.
- The organisational capacity expanded significantly, creating pathways from volunteering to paid employment for some participants.
- Volunteers now work in an energised professional space with clear roles and improved satisfaction.
- Marketing support became an ongoing pro bono service from a local business thanks to the strengthened relationships fostered through the project.
- Inclusion strengthened through digital accessibility and diverse roles.

#### Quantitative impact

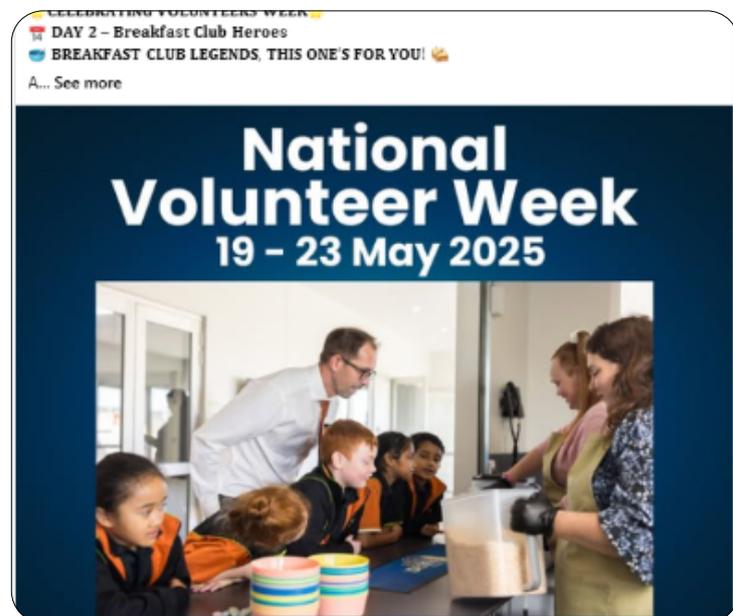
- Youth supported
  - Initial target: 500
  - Final outcome: 1,000
- Schools with daily breakfast
  - Initial target: 5 schools, 3 days/week
  - Final outcome: 2 schools, 5 days/week and 3 schools, 3 days/week
- Paid employment outcomes
  - Initial target: 0
  - Final outcome: 1 new paid role that supports volunteer coordination
- Partnership secured
  - Initial target: 0
  - Final outcome: 5 new financial partners and 1 pro bono partner
- Volunteers
  - Initial target: 27 (before project)
  - Final outcome: 33 volunteers (13 new contributors and 7 work for the dole participants)

## Summary

Through strategic improvements to policies, systems, recruitment, and workplace environments, the project successfully addressed gaps in volunteer management and digital capability. As a result, volunteer engagement increased, program quality and inclusivity were strengthened, and the Breakfast Club expanded its reach, now supporting 1,000 young people aged 12 to 18.

The initiative also created pathways for volunteers to develop skills, gain confidence, and progress into paid roles, demonstrating how thoughtful facilitation, systems thinking, and community insight can drive wide-reaching transformation.

From enhancing volunteer satisfaction to improving educational access, this project provides a blueprint for sustainable community empowerment, where every stakeholder feels valued, supported, and part of a greater collective effort.



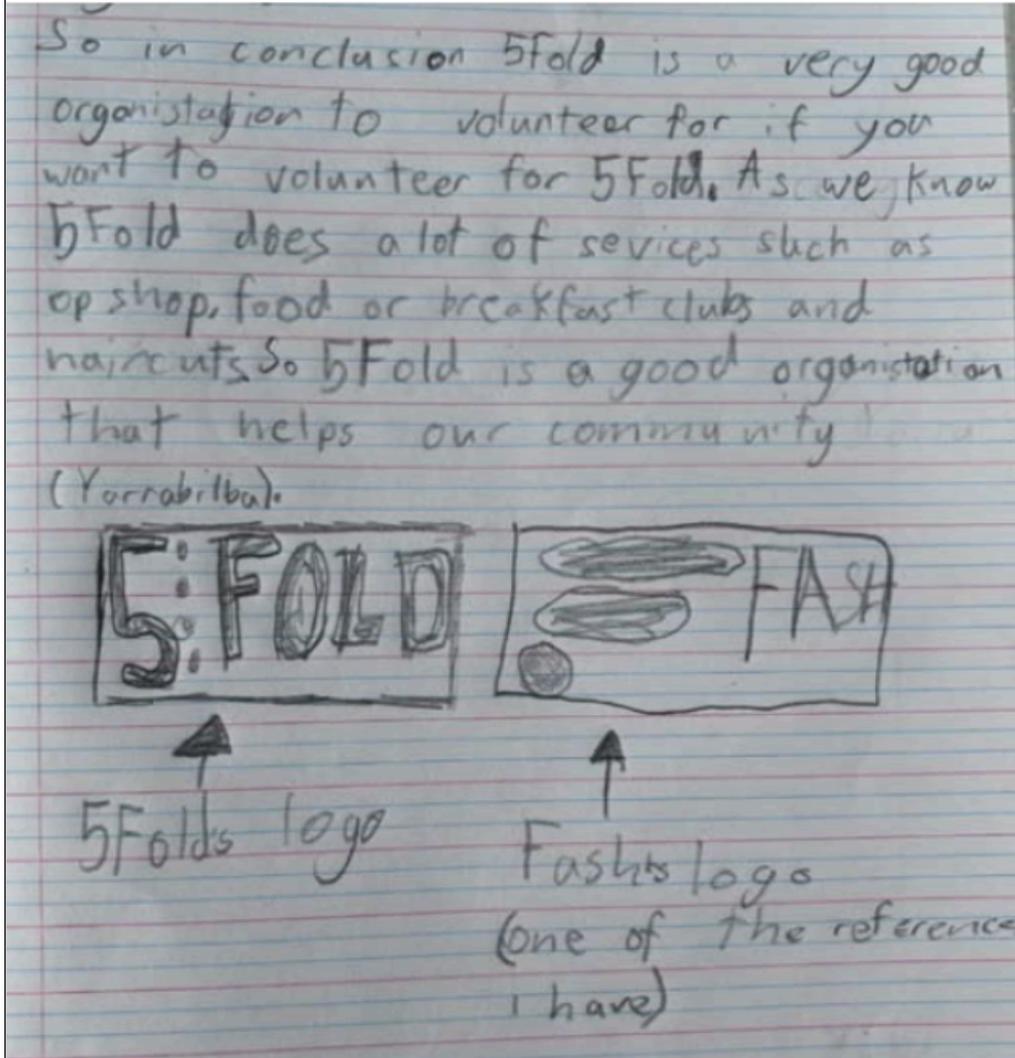
How exciting is this! 🇵🇹

Young Noah wrote an essay all about 5FOLD, how amazing is that?! 🇵🇹💙

We absolutely love hearing from kids in our community who are inspired by the impact we're making together and even more so when they're dreaming of becoming volunteers themselves one day! 🇵🇹

Check out some of Noah's beautiful words and the heart behind them 🇵🇹

#5FOLD #CommunityLove #NextGenLeaders #InspiredByImpact #VolunteersMatter



Snapshots of a Facebook post:

A letter from a student at one of the schools participating in the Breakfast Clubs program



- **Case Study:** Maryam's\* Journey – Empowering a Young CALD Volunteer to Lead Change
- **Organisation:** Baba Mazari Foundation
- **Target Groups:**
  - Supporting people with disabilities and/or mental health conditions
  - Supporting women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination
  - Supporting people who are unemployed



## Project aim

To empower newly arrived refugee and CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) women through volunteer engagement, capacity-building, and peer-led support. The project aimed to increase volunteer capability, reduce social isolation, and enhance community connection by delivering a Digital Literacy program tailored for women.

## Activities delivered

Maryam\* is a young woman from a refugee background who recently arrived in Australia and is currently enrolled at university. Eager to build skills, gain experience, and connect with her new community, she joined the Baba Mazari Foundation's volunteering program. As a newly arrived female migrant and young person, Maryam belongs to several of the program's target cohorts.

Maryam wanted to contribute meaningfully to the community but lacked local experience, professional networks, and confidence in leading groups. Meanwhile, the organisation was seeking culturally appropriate volunteers to support the delivery of a new Digital Literacy program for women—a key component of this grant. Maryam was enthusiastic but needed training and ongoing support to fulfil her volunteer role effectively.

Maryam became a volunteer mentor in the Digital Literacy program, receiving one-on-one support and hands-on experience, to facilitate digital skills sessions for women from similar backgrounds. As her involvement deepened, she completed two major capacity-building trainings:

- Accidental Counselling (delivered by Calm Connection): Focused on trauma awareness, active listening, and referral processes.
- Active Inclusion & Cultural Awareness (delivered by Welcoming Australia): Developed skills to confidently navigate multicultural environments and promote inclusive engagement.

Maryam also took part in community networking events such as Community Dinners and Volunteers Week celebrations, strengthening her ties with volunteers, staff, and participants.

## Change seen

Maryam has grown into a confident, reliable leader within the volunteer team. She now plays a key role in facilitating Digital Literacy sessions and is preparing to coordinate the expanded program, which has recently been funded for another 12 months. Her communication and leadership skills have improved significantly, and she serves as a role model for new volunteers.

\*Name changed for privacy.

Through her journey, Maryam has:

- Gained valuable work-related skills including digital facilitation, communication, and team coordination
- Built strong community and peer relationships
- Increased her self-confidence and sense of belonging
- Supported other isolated women to improve their digital skills and social connections
- Transitioned into a leadership role, contributing to the program's sustainability

Maryam's development clearly illustrates the grant's outcomes:

- Increased volunteer capability and leadership
- Reduced social isolation and enhanced community connection
- Greater engagement in education and civic activities
- Improved work skills and pathways to voluntary employment
- Strengthened program sustainability and expansion
- Empowerment of refugee and CALD women through peer-led support





- **Case Study:** Elizabeth\* – Finding Belonging and Building Skills through Local Volunteering
- **Organisation:** Canberra Environment Centre
- **Target Groups:**
  - Supporting People with disabilities and/or mental health conditions
  - Supporting Women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination
  - Supporting People who are unemployed



## Project aim

At the start of this project, we recognised the need to improve the accessibility and visibility of our volunteer opportunities, which were previously communicated informally and inconsistently. We also lacked a streamlined way for potential volunteers like Elizabeth\* to understand how to get involved.

Elizabeth is a university student who first connected with the Canberra Environment Centre by regularly dropping off food scraps to the Gungaharra community compost hub. As a young person living independently and away from family support, Elizabeth is part of a key cohort we aim to reach—community members at risk of social isolation, and people looking to build skills and engage more deeply with community life.

## Activities delivered

As part of this grant activity, we developed a new website and volunteer communication platform to make it easier for people to access opportunities and feel confident stepping into a volunteer role. Two staff members also undertook Volunteer Essentials training to improve our internal capacity to support and engage volunteers effectively.

Elizabeth has expressed interest in learning bike repair through our Recyclery program and is keen to increase her involvement. She attended a professional volunteer photoshoot with Lightbulb Studio, celebrating local contributions and helping her feel seen and valued. Her image is now featured in our digital materials and social media—a powerful reinforcement of her role in our community.

## Change seen

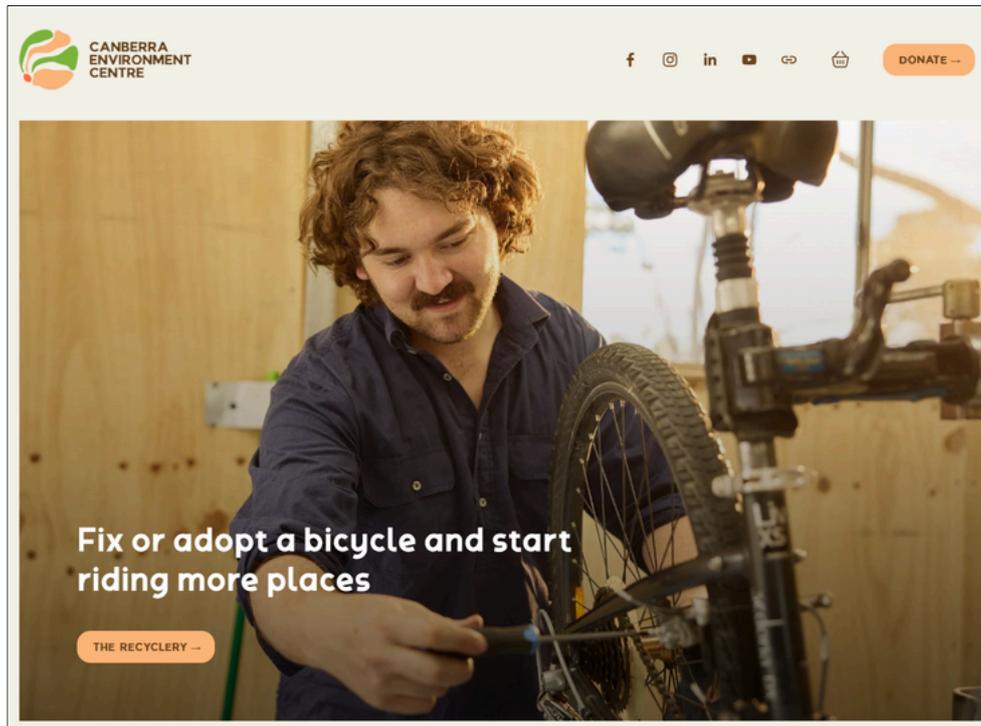
Since the website launch, Elizabeth has found it easier to see where she fits in and is planning to attend upcoming Recyclery workshops. Her story highlights the early signs of improved access, confidence, and engagement that we expect to grow further as the new system becomes established.

This case illustrates our key outcomes: increased community participation, stronger volunteer capability, and a deeper sense of connection for individuals like Elizabeth, who are beginning to see themselves as active and valued contributors to local sustainability efforts.

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\*Name changed for privacy.

Snapshots of [Canberra Environment Centre website](#)



## The Recyclery

Volunteering is a great way to learn how bikes work and how to fix them, while meeting like-minded people and contributing to Canberra's cycling community. No bike skills required. [Learn more](#) about The Recyclery.

### ROLES:

- Senior Mechanic +
- Established Mechanic +
- New Mechanic +
- Customer Service / Administration +

REGISTER TO VOLUNTEER --





- **Case Study:** Sharnee – From Finding Connection to Connecting Other (real name used with permission).
- **Organisation:** Ready2Change
- **Target Groups:**
  - Supporting Young people 12 to 18 years who are disengaged, or at risk of disengaging, from education
  - Supporting People with disabilities and/or mental health conditions
  - Supporting Women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination
  - Supporting People who are unemployed



## Project aim

The aim of the "I Am GREAT Leadership Program" is to empower disengaged youth through volunteer-led mentoring, building life skills, resilience, and community engagement to implement long-term social and economic participation.

## Activities delivered

Sharnee, a passionate single mother of 4 kids and community member, attended our volunteer training workshop as part of the Volunteer training program. She belongs to multiple objective cohorts supported by the grant, particularly women who have experienced isolation, mental health, unemployed and is now seeking to re-engage with the community.

Sharnee attended our interactive volunteer training sessions, which focused on mentoring, cultural and diversity responsiveness, embracing mental health and wellbeing, accidental skills training, and leadership and governance. These workshops inspired her and gave her the confidence and tools to create something meaningful. During one of the sessions, Sharnee was inspired to start a "Parent Connect Program" that would bring families together through peer support, shared lived experience, and community activities.

Encouraged by the supportive environment, she reached out to our team after the session to express her desire to bring this vision to life.

## Change seen

Sharnee came into the program seeking connection and direction. She was deeply committed to helping her kids and other parents in her local area but lacked the confidence, skills, and platform to turn her ideas into action. There was a clear need to build her capacity and leadership potential, and to provide inclusive, accessible spaces for volunteers like her to grow and lead.

Since attending the training, Sharnee has stepped forward as a volunteer leader within our organisation. She is currently working with our team to co-design and launch the "Family Connect Services" initiative, which will be offered under the Ready 2 Change banner. Her story has already inspired other volunteers to explore leadership roles and believe in their own potential. Sharnee's confidence, purpose, and engagement have grown significantly, and she now serves as a role model for other community members through our organisation as the Family Connect Program Coordinator.

The success of our program in achieving the above outcomes was evident through direct feedback from the participants, the great changes we observed, and tangible community impact. We delivered several powerful, interactive training workshops that boosted the capabilities of our volunteers and staff. Volunteers gained practical skills, confidence, and insight into working with vulnerable groups. Some reported that the training was life-changing, with several now enrolling in formal education studies at Tafe NSW, such as community services, youth work, and counselling diplomas, these demonstrates increased engagement in training and work-readiness.

Sharnee's journey demonstrates alignment with the grant's outcomes. Her participation has increased volunteer capability, sparked social and civic participation, and reduced personal isolation. This also directly supports improved wellbeing, skill development, and connections to community services. This case study empowers everyday people to become changemakers in their communities.





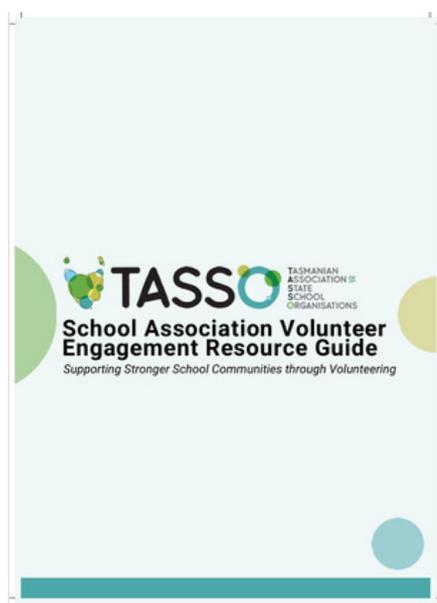
- **Case Study:** Strengthening Volunteer Confidence and Engagement
- **Organisation:** Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations (TASSO)
- **Target Groups:**
  - Supporting people with disabilities and/or mental health conditions
  - Supporting women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing isolation or discrimination
  - Supporting people who are unemployed



## Project aim

Across Tasmania, School Association Committees are central to shaping the culture of public schools. These volunteer-run groups, made up of parents, carers, and community members, often operate with limited resources and support. Recognising this, Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations (TASSO) set out to empower these “accidental” volunteer managers by strengthening engagement and building confidence.

The aim was to provide practical tools, inclusive strategies and supportive resources to help volunteers navigate compliance, inspire involvement and foster meaningful contributions. Guided by the refreshed National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, TASSO consulted widely to ensure the resulting resources reflected the real-life challenges and strengths of school-based volunteering across urban, rural, and regional communities.



Cover page of guide:

[TASSO School Association Volunteer Engagement Resource Guide](#)

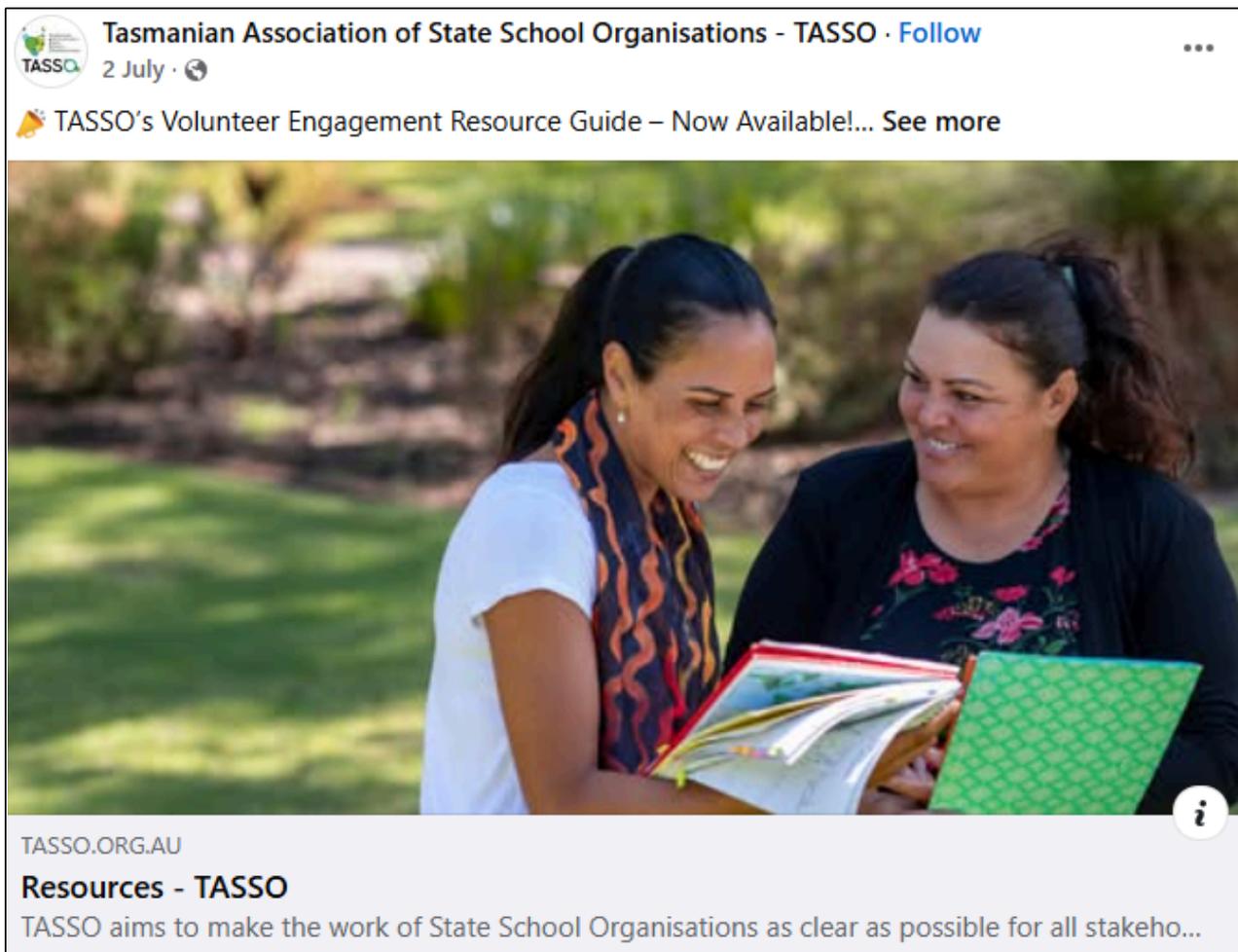
## Activities delivered

TASSO developed the School Association Volunteer Engagement Resource Guide, shaped by extensive community consultation including working groups, surveys, phone calls, meeting observations and informal chats.

Development of this resource focused on:

- Inclusive practices, ensuring everyone feels welcome to participate
- Flexible approaches, recognising not all contributions look the same
- Clear guidance on compliance and Child and Youth Safety legislation
- Diverse volunteering roles beyond traditional committee positions
- Fostering social connection and wellbeing through volunteering
- Demonstrating how volunteering impacts the school and volunteers themselves
- Succession planning to ensure continuity and sustainability

The guide was designed to be warm, accessible and jargon-free, tailored to the lived experiences of volunteers. The resource kit was distributed across all Tasmanian public schools, supported by online information sessions and in-person Cluster Network Meetings.



Snapshot of Facebook post to promote the [School Association Volunteer Engagement Resource Guide](#)

## Change seen

The guide has already made a significant impact. Volunteers report increased confidence, capability, clearer pathways to engagement and stronger community connections. Even before its official release, the resource prompted reflection and consideration of new ways to contribute.

Key outcomes include improved volunteer retention and participation, upskilling and wellbeing benefits for committee members and volunteers and ripple effects reaching the target groups.

With 190 State Schools in Tasmania, each typically hosting 9–11 committee members and up to 30 additional volunteers annually, the reach is substantial.

Julie, a Committee Chair from a regional school, praised the guide’s clarity and relevance. Her committee saw immediate improvements in welcoming and retaining volunteers. She shared, “WOW! This document is amazing... a wonderful resource.”

A key lesson learned was the importance of meeting volunteers where they are. TASSO adapted its engagement strategy to include quick chats and informal meetings, respecting volunteers' time and capacity. This flexible approach proved essential in creating a resource that truly resonates.

This initiative demonstrates the power of community consultation combined with practical support. With a modest grant, TASSO delivered a high-impact guide that fosters inclusion, empowerment, and long-term engagement. This initiative sets a powerful precedent showing how small community organisations can create widespread change.

