

# **YOUTH-FRIENDLY VOLUNTEERING**

**Toolkit for volunteer-involving organisations**

Prepared by Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc.

## **Acknowledgement**

Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc. would like to begin this document by acknowledging the Kurna people as the Traditional Owners of the land upon which our head office resides. We would like to pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

We extend our respect to the cultural and heritage beliefs, languages and laws of the traditional custodians of the land and would like to acknowledge they are still of importance today.

Our organisation seeks to learn more about the spiritual, social, cultural and economic practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to respectfully embed these learnings into the way that we operate as an organisation.

## **A special thanks to**

- League of Extraordinary Changemakers Committee Members
- Department of Human Services
- Volunteering. Youth. Participation. Impact. (YPI) working group
- Youth Governor's Leadership Foundation
- Co-design Group
- Countless incredible young people

# Youth-Friendly Volunteering Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed as part of the SA Youth into Volunteering Pilot Program (2021-2023).

The aims of this toolkit are to increase youth-friendliness in volunteering, in addition to increasing safe participation and recognition of young people to support causes and organisations.

By presenting information on this topic in the format of new frameworks, alongside resources that the volunteer sector traditionally relies on to inform organisations on how to engage young people safely - our hope is that this resource can be used to equip organisations, groups and individuals of all ages with the knowledge, resources, and strategies needed to effectively engage younger volunteers.

## Language & Definitions

**VIO** - Volunteer Involving Organisation, a supporter and/or provider of volunteer opportunities.

**YPS** - Young People Supporter, a supporter and/or provider of volunteer opportunities.

**Youth-led** - Volunteer activity that is driven by someone aged 25 or under.

**Volunteer** - A person who engages in volunteering, whether formal or informal.

**Volunteering** - Time willingly given for a cause, without financial gain.

**Youth-Friendly** - Opportunities welcoming to and accessible for people aged 25 and under: in the legal sense of providing child safe environments, as well as being inclusive of young people's specific interests, skills, goals, strengths and any support needs.

**Youth/Young People** - People aged 12 - 25.

**WWCC** - Working With Children Check, issued by the Department of Human Services (DHS) Screening Unit for people engaging in child related work.

**Prescribed position**- A prescribed position is one in which a person works with children, or in which it is reasonably foreseeable that they will work with children.

**Prescribed organisation** - An organisation that provides child-related work. These organisations are required to provide child safe environments and lodge a child safe environments compliance statement setting out their child safe environment policies and procedures.

### **The Act / Child Safety laws**

Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017. An Act to protect children and young people from harm; to provide for children and young people who are in care; and for other purposes.

**Through their Eyes training / Child Safe Environment training / RRHAN-EC mandatory notification training** - Training on the signs of child abuse, and how to respond if you suspect a minor is being harmed or is at risk of harm.

### **Mandated Notifiers**

Section 30 of the [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#) establishes a list of roles / professions that are mandated to report if they suspect harm or a risk of harm.

# What is "youth friendly"?

## SAFE

Young people feel safe when participating, they are supported by trusted members of the community.

Risks are considered and plans are put in place to reduce the likelihood and impact of risks.

In a legal sense - this may look like providing a Child Safe Environment (if involving people aged 12-17).

## RECOGNISED

Young people's contribution is validated and celebrated (whether the activity is considered "formal" or "informal" in nature).

Where possible: Aligning opportunities with the Australian Curriculum, Youth Leadership Programs, Higher education pathways, Mutual Obligations for Job-Seekers, and/or providing character references to support young people transitioning into the workforce.

## APPEALING

Young people's interests and needs are considered so that the activity is relevant to young people.

The people involved are welcoming, and the role is meaningful and rewarding for young people.

Young people's input is considered and acted on to implement continuous improvement of the organisations youth friendliness.

## Step 1: Reviewing Organisational Capacity

To successfully involve younger volunteers, a helpful starting point is to review the structure of your current volunteer positions. See which of the descriptions below best align with your volunteer program. Note that young people can be involved at any of the capacities described below, but your approach to involvement may differ.

### HIGH CAPACITY ORGANISATION

The volunteer roles offered by these organisations are formal in nature, fully supported by the organisation, usually on the organisations premises. No third parties (guardians, teachers etc.) are required for a young person to safely volunteer with them.

### MEDIUM CAPACITY ORGANISATION

The volunteer roles offered by these organisations can be formal or informal in nature, but they are not fully supported by the organisation. It may be held on the organisations premises or elsewhere. Third parties (guardians, teachers etc.) are required for a young person to be able to be eligible to safely volunteer with them.

### LOW CAPACITY ORGANISATION

The volunteer opportunities offered by these organisations are not supported. They may be formal or informal in nature, they are nearly always remote. They encourage young people to participate safely in youth-led or community-led volunteer activity which supports the aims or goals organisation, without any direct interactions with the organisation.

## Step 2: Safety and Risk - Questions to ask

Before involving younger volunteers, it's important to review your organisation's policies and procedures, to ensure everyone involved is safe and supported. The following questions will assist you in determining risk and identifying gaps:

- Is the organisation compliant with local, state and national laws with regards to engaging younger volunteers?
- Is the organisation insured to engage younger volunteers?
- Does the organisation have adequate resources and expertise or be willing to obtain this before involving younger volunteers?
- Is there a chance that a young person will be unsupervised whilst they are volunteering?
- Is there opportunity for a staff member, volunteer, service-user, or other third-party to cause harm to a young person?
- Is there a chance that, because of a lack of understanding reporting obligations, or, what constitutes an emergency, a staff member, or volunteer, who suspects a young person is at risk of harm, or is being harmed, does not report this, or, contact the police?
- Is there a chance that a person prohibited from working with children or young people could be recruited as a volunteer or staff member?
- Is there opportunity for someone to take photos or videos of a young person without their consent and their parent/guardians consent?
- Is there opportunity for someone to access and/or share private or confidential information about a younger volunteer?
- Is there a chance that the volunteer position may expose a young person to physical harm (traffic hazards, chemicals, exposure to disease etc.)?
- Is there a chance that the current volunteering culture could negatively impact a young person by not understanding and accommodating for personal and/or religious beliefs and practices?
- Are staff / volunteers able and prepared to respond to a young person disclosing? Example:
  - They may identify as LGBTQIA+ and/or use different pronouns or names
- Other forms of disclosure may be more distressing. Examples include:
  - They may have experienced/witnessed trauma, abuse or neglect
  - They may have a mental illness(es) or mental ill health
- Are staff / volunteers able and prepared to respond to a young person who isn't disclosing, but is showing signs of any of the above?
- Are staff / volunteers able and prepared for managing conflict that may include both adults and young people?
- Are staff / volunteers able and prepared to support a young person (and their family) after any of the above has occurred?

## Step 2: Safety and Risk - Resources

For an organisation to be ready to work with younger volunteers - they need to know the laws that they must adhere to, what risks they may face and how to handle them, in addition to learning about what else might be needed to make a volunteer opportunity suitable for a younger audience.

Requirements vary depending on the nature of the volunteer role, and the capacity in which young people participate. Requirements *may* include some or all staff obtaining Working with Children Checks, ensuring your insurance covers people under the age of 18, or having a school staff member or parent supervise younger volunteers.

The resources listed below will help you better understand how your organisation can safely and confidently involve younger volunteers.



Government of South Australia  
Department of Human Services

Can you reasonably predict that in the course of your activities that you will be engaging with under 18's in SA? You may need a Working With Children Check. South Australian and Commonwealth policy and legislation mean many employees and volunteers must have checks completed as part of their roles. The Department of Human Services screening unit provides Working With Children Checks (in addition to 4 other checks) which may be applicable to you, depending on your circumstances. To find out more about Working with Children Checks, we highly recommend reading the [Who Needs A Working With Children Check](#) page on the Department of Human Services Screening Unit website and the [Working With Children Check Guidelines \(SA\)](#).

Do you understand what is necessary to provide a child safe environment? You may want to book in for some training! Child safe environment training has been developed by the Department of Human Services to assist organisations providing services to children and young people to support their staff and volunteers to recognise, report and respond to children or young people who may be at risk of harm and build their capacity to provide safe environments within the organisation. To find out more we recommend looking at the DHS website which discusses [Child Safe Environments](#) and the [National Principals for Child Safe Organisations](#).

## Step 2: Safety and Risk - Resources cont.



Are you concerned about what to do if a young person shows signs of poor mental health? You may want to book in for Youth Mental Health First Aid training! The Youth MHFA course is based on guidelines developed through the expert consensus of people with lived experience of mental health problems and professionals. The course equips adults with the skills to recognise and respond to an adolescent who may be experiencing a mental health problem or crisis situation. Whilst there is no legal requirement to do this training, Mental Health First Aid training can equip your staff and volunteers with how to respond to mental health concerns until a professional can support that young person. You can find out more about this training by visiting the [Mental Health First Aid website](#).



Justice Connect provides free legal resources on a range of topics! At the time of publishing this resource, their website contains over 300 online resources, including fact sheets, guides and self-help tools, to help at all stages of your organisation's lifecycle, from getting started all the way to ending your organisation.

To find out more about the legal context of working with young volunteers, we highly recommend reading their [Guide to engaging and working with youth volunteers](#) and more broadly their [National Volunteering Guide](#).

### **Additional resources:**

- [Organisations Hosting Student Volunteers \(SA\)](#) - Department for Education
- [National Principals for Child Safe Organisations](#) - Australian Human Rights Commission
- [Handbook - youth volunteer as a pathway to employment](#) - IAVE
- [10 ways to make your organisation Youth-Friendly](#) - Volunteer Benevoles Canada
- [Young people volunteering: Removing the barriers \(QLD\)](#) - Queensland Family and Child Commission
- [Involving Young Volunteers](#) - Volunteer Strategy for SA



## Step 3: Make volunteering fun and meaningful

When involving younger volunteers, it's important to consider their motivations to volunteer, the type of role they're interested in, the training they require, and their preferred form of recognition - it may vary from other volunteers. One of the best ways to create mutually beneficial, rewarding and enjoyable volunteering opportunities is to consult with young people themselves, and see what they're hoping their experience will involve.

When involving younger volunteers, some key areas to consider include:

- Deeply consider the needs, interests and goals of young people, and where these overlap with the mission of your organisation. Refer to existing information about youth in SA, for example [Mission Australia's Annual Youth Survey 2023](#) revealed the most important issues for young people aged 15-19 are; the environment, equity and discrimination and mental health. Ask each individual young person about their own needs, interests and goals.
- Take the time to develop engaging and meaningful volunteer opportunities, without exceeding your organisation's capacity. Be open to adapting existing volunteer roles or exploring new areas where volunteers may be able to assist. You may also consider group volunteering opportunities where younger volunteers can take part alongside friends, family members, or as part of a school group.
- Make a plan that provides training and support throughout the volunteer lifecycle. Develop this with a diverse variety of different volunteers in mind, and be willing to adapt your training or support to better suit younger volunteers and their roles.
- Recognise and celebrate the contributions of young volunteers in a way that is meaningful to them (e.g. sharing their achievements, providing references for job applications, or social media posts).
- Create a safe and welcoming environment, with continuous review and improvement.

By prioritising the involvement of young volunteers, valuing their input, and creating suitable volunteer roles, organisations can cultivate a culture of diversity, inclusion, and community engagement that benefits everyone involved.



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