

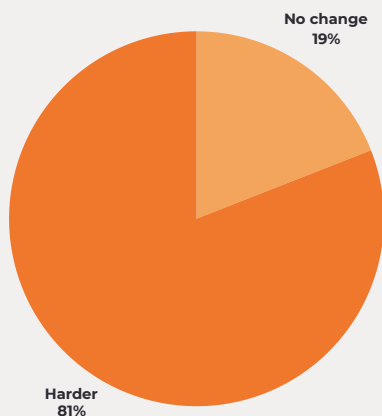
ONKAPARINGA VOLUNTEER CONVERSATIONS MAY 2025 EVENT SUMMARY

Purpose:

To bring together individuals and organisations involved in volunteering - both those who offer their time and those who rely on volunteer support - for a conversation about the challenges surrounding the decline in volunteer participation. This trend has been observed not only within the City of Onkaparinga but also on a national scale.

The event aimed to create a space for people to share their experiences and insights.

Southern Volunteering collaborated on this event with the City of Onkaparinga to explore and implement effective strategies for increasing volunteer engagement in the region.



When attendees were asked the question 'Has recruiting volunteers over the past 5 years become easier, stayed the same or more difficult', no-one in the room said it had become easier and 87% indicated it had become much more difficult

Current Challenges

Cost of living impact

- Employment: unemployment is low and people are working more hours or more than one job, meaning they have less free time and poor work/life balance. Casual employment is common meaning people cannot commit to regular volunteering due to irregular shift patterns
- The cost of volunteering: volunteering can come at a cost to the individual, whether that be paying for ID documents for police checks or travel associated with volunteering. It is difficult to get funding to help volunteers with these expenses

Example: Southern Koala and Echidna Rescue volunteers need to be able to travel to the headquarters, but also out to rescue sites which may be many kilometres away, using a substantial amount of fuel in their car

Example: A volunteer cited the cost of obtaining a licence to drive a bus and the only time he utilised this licence was in the course of his volunteering.

- Indirect impacts: Families may be cutting childcare bills by utilising family members, often grandparents, instead, meaning these people who may have been volunteers in the past are no longer available

Example: Woodcroft Morphett Vale Neighbourhood Centre has reported a significant drop in volunteer availability during school holidays. Additionally, many of their volunteers prefer to volunteer during school hours, as they have responsibilities such as school drop-offs and pick-ups for their children

Current Challenges (cont.)

Red Tape

- Obtaining police checks or Working with Children Checks can be a significant barrier for some individuals. Challenges include a lack of required identification documents, difficulty in providing a consistent address history, and limited digital literacy, which can make it hard to navigate the online systems used to complete these checks

Example: A volunteer expressed their frustration at getting a renewed Working With Children Check (WWCC) and having a birth certificate from another state that was not accepted by the portal, even though it had been accepted for the original check

Example: Riding for the Disabled indicated that DHS state checks (WWCC and Disability) were taking weeks to process and volunteers were walking away from the opportunity because of this wait

- Insurance for small volunteer-involving organisations was an issue, with this being cost prohibitive for organisations

Ageing volunteer workforce

- People are staying for the friendship and connection but declining health of volunteers is impacting services

Example: Morphett Vale Rotary club used to have volunteers to take equipment by trailer to the RARE (Rotary Australia Repurposing Equipment) project in Edinburgh but physical ability of existing volunteers to do this is declining

Burnout of existing volunteers

- Long term existing volunteers have more responsibilities and there is no flow-through of new volunteers so they can relinquish tasks or resign from roles

Other Factors

- **Caring responsibilities and changing family structures:** More females in the workforce ("double burden"), single parent households, multi-generational living (due to cost of living), single-person households, less multi sibling households so sharing the burden of caring for ageing parents is reduced. The 'Sandwich Generation' who have caring responsibilities for children and ageing parents
- **Declining trust in institutions including Charities:** scandals, royal commissions, nfps often held to higher standards than businesses, impact of social media misinformation and increased circulation of rumours
- **Urbanisation:** Research found that urban areas often have a weaker sense of community compared to smaller towns, leading to less social connectedness. This reduced sense of community may translate to decreased motivation for volunteering, as individuals feel less invested in their local area. Additionally, densely populated urban areas often result in longer commutes for residents, leaving less time and energy for other activities, including volunteering
- **Competing participation activities that are not volunteering:** e.g. sports, hobbies etc.



ACTION AND IDEAS

- Advocate to the State Government for greater awareness of the impact that delays in volunteer screening checks have on community services, and push for expedited processing times specifically for volunteer-related checks
- Increase funding opportunities across all levels of government to help reduce the financial burden on volunteers, ensuring that volunteering remains accessible to all
- Introduce tax deductions for volunteers, recognising their contributions, whether through travel expenses or time donated
- Encourage organisations to reframe volunteer recruitment by highlighting the personal benefits of volunteering, such as skill development, social connection and a sense of purpose
- Adapt volunteer roles to fit individual capacity, promoting a flexible approach - "Do what you can, when you can"- to increase participation and reduce pressure
- Establish a centralised volunteer database that enables organisations to notify registered volunteers of new opportunities as they arise
- Explore models for volunteer sharing among organisations, enabling more efficient use of volunteer resources across the community sector
- Support volunteer transitions by encouraging those ready to step down to do so without guilt, recognising that new volunteers often only step forward once a role becomes available
- Partner with Job Active and Disability Employment Service providers to create a singular pathway for advertising volunteer opportunities directly to case managers, who can promote roles to jobseekers
- Facilitate group insurance purchasing by allowing smaller organisations to pool resources and jointly secure insurance, making coverage more affordable and accessible