

**SOUTHERN VOLUNTEERING PRESENTS**

# **REGIONAL VOLUNTEERING PERSPECTIVES**

**EXPERIENCES FROM THE  
FLEURIEU PENINSULA  
AND KANGAROO ISLAND**





# ABOUT

VOLUNTEERING SA & NT PROVIDED FUNDING IN 2024 FOR SOUTHERN VOLUNTEERING TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS, VIA THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY (VMA) PROGRAM.

THE AIM WAS TO UNCOVER THE NUANCES OF HOW VOLUNTEERS ENGAGE WITH PROGRAMS IN REGIONAL AREAS, AS WELL AS EXAMINE THE DIVERSITY OF REGIONAL VOLUNTEER WORKFORCES.

WITH VOLUNTEERING NUMBERS IN DECLINE NATIONALLY, VOLUNTEER MANAGER AND COORDINATOR PERSPECTIVES ON THIS WERE SOUGHT, SPECIFICALLY LOOKING AT WAYS THEY ARE TRYING TO PREVENT ATTRITION OF VOLUNTEERS, AND ATTRACT NEW COHORTS OF VOLUNTEERS.

# METHODOLOGY

A NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES WERE UNDERTAKEN TO GATHER INPUT FROM THE APPROPRIATE PERSONNEL WITHIN VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS (VIOS) BASED AND/OR OPERATING ON THE FLEURIEU PENINSULA AND KANGAROO ISLAND. THIS COMPRISED OF:

- SURVEYS
- 10 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH VIOS
- 2 REGIONAL VOLUNTEERING CONVERSATION EVENTS HELD IN VICTOR HARBOR AND GOOLWA

STORIES OF VOLUNTEERS WERE ALSO COLLATED TO DEMONSTRATE AND HIGHLIGHT THE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY VOLUNTEERS IN REGIONAL COMMUNITIES.

# BACKGROUND

## Snapshot of the area

The Fleurieu Peninsula and Kangaroo Island are approximately 45 minutes South of Adelaide and covers 6700 square kilometres of land, ocean and offshore islands, including approximately 170km of coastline. The region is home to around 156,000 people. The region is the traditional lands of the Ngarrindjeri, Kurna and Peramangk people. Agriculture and tourism are key industries with growth continuing in aged care and disability services. Around 57% of the Fleurieu's population is aged over 50 years. It is situated in the Federal government electorate of Mayo. In 2020 Mayo was hailed as an electorate with the one of the highest rates of volunteering In Australia, with 29% of the population being involved in volunteering. Many volunteer-involving organisations in the area operate without paid staff.

## Aim

With a focus on regional VIOs in the Fleurieu Peninsula and Kangaroo Island, the research aimed to:

- Better understand unique issues faced by, and support required by, regional VIOs
- Understand current level of priority group\* engagement with VIOs
- Grow awareness of priority group barriers to volunteer
- Build capacity related to best practice in inclusive volunteer management
- Gather and create learnings to be shared with wider volunteer sector

\*Priority groups being: People with Disability, First Nations People, Newly Arrived Migrants, Vulnerable Women, People who are Unemployed, Young People aged 12-18 years



# FINDINGS

## State of Volunteering on the Fleurieu

**85%** of VIO's stated it is now more difficult to recruit volunteers in regional areas than pre-pandemic

**85%** of VIO's stated they would like Government support to help attract retirees to volunteering as this is the largest cohort of people living on the Fleurieu. VIOs interviewed and attending workshops, expressed concern that the current focus and expenditure on engaging young volunteers is not helping

**70%** of VIO's stated the status of their volunteer program was under pressure and due to insufficient volunteers, many VIO's are unable to provide essential services (for example food parcelling and homelessness services) with others at risk of not being able to continue. Many Fleurieu VIO's do not have paid staff. Volunteer Coordinators are unpaid and lacking time and resources.

**50%** stated many volunteers did not return post pandemic

**50%** of VIO managers have experienced increases in stress levels over the last year

**“Existing volunteers are burnt out and doing multiple roles.”**

**“Long term volunteers are leaving due to age related health issues and insufficient new volunteers are joining.”**

**“The existing volunteers are all doing more but this cannot be sustained without some new volunteers becoming available in the next 12-18 months.”**

## Specific Recruitment and Retention Issues for VIOs

**88%** reported people preferring to engage in more informal volunteering and that volunteering 'red tape' deters people e.g. paperwork, clearances, police check

**75%** of VIOs reported declining health of volunteers leaving them unable to perform their roles

**60%** felt there was less volunteers coming forward with a Centrelink mutual obligation (historically casually referred to as '15 hour a week volunteers')

**50%** of VIOs had volunteers who travel out of the area for long periods e.g. Grey Nomads

**50%** cited people saying they “don't have time” to volunteer and several noted that the region has so much on, especially for retirees

**“Many volunteers are not wanting to be tied to the same day, same time, same frequency each week.”**

**“Younger generations are not interested in volunteering. And existing volunteers are ageing and worn out.”**



# FINDINGS

**50%** of VIOs reported people not wanting to volunteer for fear of catching Covid or Flu

**45%** of VIOs reported recruitment and retention issues related to the nuances of smaller communities. For example, the advantages and disadvantages of people knowing one another, lots of roles being available in a small community and not enough people to fill them, volunteer burnout and multiple role keepers

**38%** of VIOs cited regional transport issues being a barrier to volunteers, both public transport or private (taxis)

**25%** of VIOs reported the impact of childcare shortages in the area, meaning grandparents needing to look after grandchildren so parents can work and are therefore not available to volunteer

**25%** of VIOs reported that local residents in regional areas are working or studying a long way from home therefore have less spare time to commit to volunteering due to long commutes

**25%** of VIOs reported that people working more than one job, or casual hours impacted on their ability to volunteer

**25%** of VIOs said digital literacy of volunteers was an issue. Some reported they have volunteers who have struggled or left the organisation because they do not have the skills to operate computers, online programs or other modern technology

**13%** of VIOs said the cost of living crisis has impacted retention of volunteers. For example volunteers can no longer afford to drive to their place of volunteering

**13%** of VIOs said vaccination status affected recruitment. Where their program may require vaccinations to be up to date, sometimes people come forward who cannot meet these criteria

**13%** of VIOs programs were affected by young people moving out of the region

“Some community group members have been here for a long time. Trying to get them to accept new volunteers with new ideas is not working.”

**“Low volunteer numbers are having a big impact on our transport service. We are having to run taxis when we have no volunteers available which affects our budget. We may have to cancel some client services if our numbers don't increase. It also causes a lot of stress on our staff.”**

“Some people don't have the skill set to use technology, they may not have ever had to use computers etc. People are afraid to use technology, and may not volunteer if they have to.”

**“Childcare shortages mean grandparents are having to look after their grandchildren and because of this they cannot volunteer.”**

# FINDINGS

## Priority Group Engagement

Data was gathered on the % of VIOs stating they have volunteers that fall into the priority groups:

People living with a Disability	<b>84%</b>
People who are Unemployed	<b>66%</b>
Young people 12 to 18 yrs -	<b>50%</b>
Newly Arrived Migrants	<b>33%</b>
Vulnerable Women	<b>33%</b>
First Nations People	<b>0%</b>

## Reported challenges in Engaging Individuals from the Priority Groups

Engaging people with extra support needs presents challenges, specifically being able to provide adequate additional support due to existing volunteers being at full capacity

It was reported that sometimes unemployed volunteers on Centrelink payment do not return once the mutual obligation form is signed by the VIO

VIOs reported that there are low levels of newly arrived immigrants in the area, and believe volunteering as a pathway to employment for this group, is more common in the metro areas.

**“We discuss needs and adapt to accommodate the best fit we can, suiting both the volunteer and the organisation. Open communication has been our key to achieving balance.”**

**“Some organisations have the attitude of not trying to involve younger people because they feel they will leave; or older people because they will go on extended holidays. We can see the advantages in having young and older people even for a short period of time.”**

# FINDINGS

## What Works Well

- VIOs reported favouring a personalised approach to recruitment. Many will meet the person face to face and chat in the first instance. Potential volunteers are not initially directed to online application forms and VIOs take the time to understand the volunteer's motivations.
- VIOs try to keep 'red tape' to a minimum acknowledging that this can be a roadblock in the onboarding process.
- Many VIOs have embraced the idea of role carving, being open to dividing up the elements of a role if an individual cannot complete all aspects of the role description. They also work to accommodate people's lifestyles and commitments and provide flexibility. This strategy may also be utilised to engage individuals from the priority groups.
- Many acknowledge that word of mouth is a powerful recruitment tool in regional areas and ensure that existing volunteers are ambassadors for the program, sharing their volunteer experience with their friends, family and the wider community.

“We have changed our registration process, we have taken away the organisational language and been more specific in what we were looking for. We are doing a phone screening and then a face to face meeting where they come and have a look at the place and meet a few people. Like a come and try to see what they think. So many advantages with this type of registration process.

We then ask ‘Is this what you want to do?’ It is much more personalised.”

**“We offer flexibility and compromise, as volunteers are encouraged to offer only what they can, we do not demand attendance for specific rosters. We have found by working collaboratively, we are able to reduce the incidence of burnout or disenchantment.”**

“We have amended roles to provide more flexibility i.e. day/ time. Or we have developed roles that meet with employment pathway aspirations. We have buddied volunteers with existing volunteers or connected people with similar experiences.”

# CASE STUDY SUMMARIES

**Ten organisations participated in a one to one interview to discuss their volunteer management successes and challenges. Two of the in depth conversations are summarised below:**

## Kangaroo Island Community Centre



On Kangaroo Island there is no place to find out about volunteering opportunities on the island apart from word of mouth.

The Kangaroo Island Community Centre is a trusted space for the community and where volunteering opportunities are sometimes sought and uncovered. Various community groups use the space to hold meetings, activities, events and activities that bring volunteers together. The Kangaroo Island Community Centre also runs a volunteer transport service to increase capacity for participation in community activities.

In 2023, funding was received to employ a project officer in a part time capacity in a program named the Future Ready Volunteer Program. The FRV aims to work with community volunteer groups to support them to become resilient and build capacity into the future. This project has a community led focus and has resulted in a high level of engagement from volunteer groups.

There has been a recent survey done with community groups on the island and many have specific volunteer positions they would like filling. Like on the mainland volunteers and specifically committee members are getting older and no new volunteers are coming through. They have been working with the school to address this by exposing young people to volunteering to give them ideas for a further education or employment. Delivering awareness session on 'what is volunteering' and what the benefits of volunteering are for young people at career expos and local events has been successful in identifying what young people want to achieve with volunteering. The FRV will partner with Kangaroo Island Education campuses across the island to engage their students in the Volunteering SA/NT Student Volunteer Army/Award program. There has been good interest and uptake in this project.

Workshops have been held with community groups to dive deeper into the issues affecting them and build strategies to overcome challenges and build capacity. These have resulted in strategies such as a youth engagement program, Volunteer Management system, Training Program and one to one support for governance issue for volunteer groups. Building a program of connection, collaboration and recognition of volunteers is also an important part of the FRV project.

They recognise groups need to be innovative, open to new ideas and ways of doing things and inclusive with regard to their volunteering roles, but it is more difficult to access training on such topics for groups on the island.

Informal volunteering and a soft launch into volunteering through participation in craft groups for instance at the community centre has also been successful.

The FRV project will continue to build support for new and existing volunteer groups on Kangaroo Island.

## Whalers Peninsula Community Association



Most services are reliant upon volunteers. Current services include providing showers and laundry services for people experiencing homelessness, food parcels, housing for 13 people, free counselling and an op shop. There are ideas for other services but insufficient volunteers to run them.

The biggest challenges are long term reliable volunteers leaving due to health or age related issues with no new volunteers coming forward to replace them, burnout of existing volunteers due to carrying multiple roles, grey nomad population of the area, fuel costs and the impact of the cost of living crisis on volunteers.

They advertise in all the usual places, use word of mouth and Southern Volunteering's referral service. They have tried innovative approaches to look for volunteers on local backpacker and travellers pages as they are happy to take short term volunteers. They have noticed a decline in the number of Centrelink mutual obligation volunteers compared to a couple of years ago.

They have inclusive practices in place and welcome all volunteers working to establish individual motivations and match them to suitable volunteering tasks.



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Cate Balfour-Ogilvy, ACH Group
- Janet Cameron, Alex FM Goolwa
- Heather Mullins, City of Victor Harbor
- Clancy Retallick, Encounter Community Centre
- Johan Bruwer, Fleurieu FM
- Sarah Kay, Junction Australia Kangaroo Island
- Michelle Dyer & Guni Keiper-Bament, Meals on Wheels
- Janne Harris, Friends of the PS Oscar W
- Mary McInnes, Whalers Peninsula Community Housing

**Extended thanks to those that completed the online survey, and those that attended the conversation events.**

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Project duration July 2024 - February 2025