

School Leavers & Volunteering



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Volunteering holds many benefits for young people leaving school, including the opportunity to make new friends and social connections, build confidence, and develop valuable professional and workplace skills. This is particularly the case for school leavers living with disability who may face increased challenges in these areas due to social and economic barriers to participation.

Including school leavers as volunteers can be a great opportunity to build, strengthen and diversify your volunteer workforce. However, it is important to remember that school leavers with disability may face unique issues or challenges either associated with their disability or the barriers they face in society.

It is important to ask your volunteer school leavers what they need to best do their role when they first commence the position and develop a plan for any support needs, they may have. The period after leaving school is challenging for most young people, so being aware early on can ensure the volunteer experience is a positive experience for everyone!



Matching people to the right role

Many school leavers are on a journey of learning where their interests, skills and strengths lie, while others will already have some idea of what they enjoy and are hoping to do. If a school leaver isn't immediately clear about what sort of position they want to do, it can be worth putting in some extra time to help identify the best role for them:

- Ask them broader questions such as: "What interests do you have?"; "What do you like to do in your spare time?"; "What subjects did you like at school?"; "Are there any skills you want to learn?"
- Ask them how they best like to learn and work e.g. visual, verbal, active. Many school leavers will be aware of their preferred style of working from their experience in the school environment
- Check in regularly to ask what they are enjoying or not enjoying about their role
- If possible, be adaptable with duties and roles; sometimes a small change in someone's duties can make the role more enjoyable and sustainable.



Developing independence and confidence

All young people are developing independence after leaving school. This can particularly be the case for young people with disability who may have had more structured support during school, or support workers within the school.

Many school leavers with disability look forward to the prospect of gaining more independence and control over the lives and daily routines.

However, it is also a period of adjustment and learning. Ways that you can support your school leaver with disability to gain confidence and independence include:

- Ask them what they need to do their role, and what they don't need
- Make time for regular meetings to check in with how they are progressing in the role and any issues that may arise – their confidence and need for support are likely to change over time
- Provide flexible volunteer arrangements that allow the young person to work around managing their daily routine
- Provide regular and constructive feedback and recognition
- Include carers or support workers only with the young person's permission.
- Always address them by name and introduce yourself by name.
- Speak clearly and in a normal voice

Volunteering and specialist schools



School leavers from specialist schools often do not receive help with job seeking and often go from school into a day service, missing out on opportunities to participate in our communities and workforce.

If your organisation wants to proactively provide opportunities for school leavers with disability, there is likely a special school in your area.

You can find a list of special schools in Victoria here:

<https://imvc.com.au/youthservices/broaden-your-horizons/education/government/>

and here: <https://imvc.com.au/youthservices/broaden-your-horizons/education/independent/>

You might want to discuss opportunities for collaboration between your organisation and a school's principal, class teacher or career advisor.

Some initiatives to engage school leavers with disability include:

- Distributing information flyers at the school for students and parents.
- Speaking at a school assembly about your organisation and up-coming opportunities.
- Providing group volunteering opportunities for a school class.

Other ideas for a successful volunteering experience

- Consider having a mentor for your volunteer school leaver. This can help build trust, confidence and a good relationship for providing support and feedback. It can be particularly helpful if the mentor is another volunteer with a similar lived experience
- Family, carers, friends or support workers can be a great source of information and support for volunteers and organisations. If a school leaver is experiencing any difficulties, consider asking if there is anyone you could contact to get support
- Provide opportunities for connection with other volunteers. This can foster good peer relationships, social connections and support networks
- Remember the importance of not making assumptions and confidentiality: in some cases this may be a young person's first experience participating in an organisation or professional space. Help make it a good one by building trust, always asking the volunteer rather than assuming, and making sure any personal information disclosed is kept in confidence.

Further help

www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/additional-needs/Pages/default.aspx
<https://apm.net.au/individuals/disability-employment-services/school-leavers>
www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/OnTrack2015/2015%20On%20Track%20Statewide%20Report.docx