

Aged-Friendly Volunteering



Introduction

Volunteering is a common way for senior Victorians to keep in touch with, and give back to, their community. Senior people have a lifetime of skills and experience to give back to a community or an organisation. These knowledge and skills can help organisations in a unique and valuable way.

To enable an effective and thriving volunteering sector in Victoria, organisations should work towards being aged-friendly and make the best use of the strengths senior Victorians contribute to the volunteer workforce.

However, with older age comes numerous factors that need to be considered. It will help organisations recruiting senior people in a volunteering capacity to understand how to manage disabilities that come with older age.

50% of men and 52% of women aged 65 and over had some form of disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015). This proportion was higher for those aged 85 and over, with 4 in 5 experiencing disability (78% of men and 80% of women).

Australians over 55 years of age volunteer for approximately 290 million hours each year (Volunteering Victoria, 2011). The 2016 Census reported that approximately 20% of senior Australians, that is 668,000 people volunteered within the last year (AIHW, 2018).

This guide will assist organisations recruiting senior people with disability as volunteers to better understand the benefits, challenges and processes to follow so that the relationship can be as mutually beneficial as possible.



What does disability mean for senior people?

Often certain conditions come to mind when we think of disabilities. But for senior people, a disability could relate to diminished hearing or vision, or the inability to climb stairs more than a certain distance at a time. Disability can take many forms and have varying levels influence over a person's life. For example, consider:

- type of disability, e.g. physical, intellectual, sensory, learning, psychiatric or a combination of these
- extent of limitation, ranging from mild through to severe
- personal differences, e.g. interests, shyness, resilience, experience of pain.

Senior people can also experience disability in different ways. They may have:

- a pre-existing disability, either lifelong or longer-term, e.g. intellectual disability, cerebral palsy
- acquired a disability as a result of the ageing process, and associated health conditions.



Strengths that senior Victorians can contribute to the volunteer workforce

Senior people can have a unique set of skills and knowledge to offer as volunteers. A lifetime of skills and experience can help organisations in a variety of ways, from mentoring and tutoring younger people, to providing career guidance.

Governance and strong oversight are integral to the success of organisations in Victoria. With a wealth of experience to contribute, senior Victorians are well-placed to serve as Board members in a volunteer capacity. Consider the winner of the 2018 Premier Award for Victorian Senior of the Year.

Case Study (www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festivalsandawards/seniors-awards/2018-awards)

Hamish Russell is receiving this award due to the breadth, reach, and lasting impact of his volunteer work. Since retiring 24 years ago, Mr Russell has dedicated himself to volunteering in his local community in the Shires of Yarra Ranges and Cardinia.

In support of his nomination, his nominators wrote of the inspiration he provides those he comes into contact with, saying Hamish is a highly accomplished man with a firm commitment to giving back to the community. An Agricultural Scientist, Hamish draws on his working life experiences to inform and assist the organisations he is involved with.

Some of the most impactful results of his volunteering include:

- Initiating a Tertiary Health Scholarship as Chair of the Board of Management at the Lilydale Community Hospital which has supported 70 students through their medical careers.
- Leading the development of the Yarra Ranges Public Health and Wellbeing Plan as Chair of the Yarra Ranges Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee which enabled the Council to sharpen their focus to wellbeing with a more targeted program of services.

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- Overseeing the amalgamation of nine magnificent gardens in the Dandenong Ranges as Chairman of the Dandenong Ranges Gardens Trust. This amalgamation brought the management and preservation of gardens under one umbrella with Parks Victoria, making them more sustainable in the long term.

The Victorian Premiers Award for Victorian Senior of the Year provides other inspiring examples and demonstrations that impressive life achievements for many Victorians occur after retirement. Visit the Senior Awards website for examples www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festivalsandawards/seniors-awards/

Benefits of volunteering for seniors

Volunteering is a fantastic way for senior people to be active, involved and make positive contributions to organisations and the community.

Volunteering isn't just beneficial for those being helped. Research shows that volunteering in and of itself also benefits senior people mentally and physically, and encourages positive social and professional relationships. Some examples of how volunteering can benefit senior people (including those with disability) and the organisations they work with have been listed below:

- Senior people who volunteer have a unique opportunity to work with and assist younger generations.
- Senior people can demonstrate that they are active, involved and essential to a healthy community.
- Volunteering is good for mental health. It can help keep the brain and the body active, which contributes to continuing cognitive health.
- Volunteering has a positive effect on psychological wellness. Those who volunteer experience greater life satisfaction, a sense of purpose and accomplishment, more stress resilience, and lower rates of depression. This can alleviate feelings of social/professional isolation for senior people.
- Volunteering can be good for keeping the body active.

With Australia's aging population, it is important to note that age does not cause social isolation but can exacerbate it. It is generally accepted that volunteering protects against loneliness, is associated with healthy aging, and slows mortality.

Volunteering is most beneficial for older adults when there is a personal benefit as well as a benefit to society (Morrow-Howell et al, 2003).

Volunteering reduces depression, increases self-belief and self-worth, and decreases the gap between generations which protects against ageism and discrimination.

Senior Victorians participating in the community increases social capital and decreases feelings of vulnerability and fragility. It encourages a sense of meaningful participation particularly when related to church involvement, develops skills and knowledge and widens social networks, which can provide social support and protect against stress.

Volunteering gives older people a sense that they have more time and a purpose greater than themselves (Mogilner et al, 2012). Volunteering also lowers the risk of fracturing a hip through falling, perhaps through keeping physically active and reduces the incidence of hospitalisation (Warburton, 2008). It also increases cognitive and executive function (Carlson et al., 2009).

As people age, they are likely to decrease their volunteering hours, but remain involved in activities that have personal meaning. This suggests that what makes volunteering beneficial is its altruistic nature (Kahana, 2013).



Barriers senior people face

Senior people with disabilities can face many barriers when it comes to participating in a volunteering capacity at an organisation. This includes issues with accessibility, safety and security. The table below lists examples of barriers that might be faced, and offers solutions to mitigate these barriers.

ACCESSIBILITY

BARRIERS

WAYS TO HELP

Limited transport to volunteering role, or as part of the role

- Councils often provide transport services for people with disability.
- Ask colleagues if they can car pool with volunteers.
- The Multi-Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) is for eligible people with a severe / permanent disability that will not improve with treatment, and also hold an Aged Pension or Disability Support Pension. Read more here:
<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/multi-purpose-taxi-program>
<https://cpv.vic.gov.au/passengers/mptp/how-to-apply>

Inaccessible work environment

- Contact your local/state disability service to assist you to undertake a disability accessibility audit of your work environment.
- Work out ways you can accommodate wheelchair access (including workstations, toilets, ramps etc.).



SAFETY, SECURITY AND INCLUSION

BARRIERS

WAYS TO HELP

Feeling socially or professionally isolated within the volunteering group.

- Make sure proper introductions are undertaken and individuals are linked to appropriate activities.
- Initiate a buddy system in the workplace.
- Adopt a step by step approach to building capacity in your group.

Lack of current experienced staff, resources to support volunteers

- Local/state disability services may provide information, training and support to organisations hiring senior people with disability.
- Be upfront about what can and can't be provided by your organisation.
- Develop policies that reflect the capacity of you organisation to support people with disability.

Concern about existing staff not being understanding or tolerant of people with disability in the workplace

- Consider providing disability inclusion training for your staff
- Encourage your staff and existing members to think about issues from the point of view of people with disability.
- Gain input from current staff on how to be inclusive.
- Provide opportunities for members to directly experience and learn from what people with disability can contribute to the group activity..
- Promote the benefits of inclusion to members:
- Diversity of members with new ideas, different skills and attributes.
- Potential to access funding/grants to acquire additional equipment/resources.

Feel safe in the workplace for volunteers with disability

- Ensure the volunteers want to be there.
- Establish strong communication.
- Promote safety and familiarity.
- Introductions and explanation of role may need to be repeated a number of times.

Senior Victorians and insurance

Your organisation should provide volunteers insurance to protect you and your volunteers. Unfortunately, not all insurance companies provide insurance for all ages so you will need to check the details of your insurance coverage.

Many insurance policies have an upper age limit on their coverage, "it is the most significant barrier to senior Victorians participation in volunteering." (Volunteering Victoria, 2011).

Volunteering Australia's recommended insurance provider is AON which offers policies with no age limit. See: www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/insurance/

How to attract senior people with disability to your organisation

Organisations with a commitment to inclusion need to consider how they are going to promote their services and activities in order to reach senior people with disability.

Organisations can advertise for volunteer roles in a number of different ways:

- Websites such as www.GoVolunteer.com.au provide advertising services for volunteer positions which allow senior people with a disability to filter their search and find roles appropriate for them.
- Contact local volunteer support organisation. Volunteer support organisations can help guide and support you in finding the right people for volunteering roles. You can find local volunteer support organisations by visiting: www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/volunteering-support-in-my-area
- Make sure you are advertising your volunteering roles directly on your website and make note of the fact you are encouraging applications from senior people with disability.

Partnerships with disability organisations can also be valuable in this context. These partnerships can further develop disability awareness and competencies, as well as provide a point of access to potential users or participants. Some ways to start collaborations:

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- Set up short, informal meetings with the leadership of local disability organisations. Be prepared to explain your programs and the goals of your organisation.
 - Invite staff and consumers of disability groups to organisation events and meetings.
 - Coordinate a project with a disability organisation to either benefit the organisation or its consumers.
 - Invite disability organisations to conduct disability awareness training for your staff.

Further help

www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/get-involved/volunteering

www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/emag/articles/volunteering-benefits

www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/04_2013/cota_handbook_-_accessibility_checked.docx

https://volunteeringqld.org.au/docs/Managing_Older_Workers.pdf

www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/volunteering-support-in-my-area

<https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festivalsandawards/seniors-awards/>

www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festivalsandawards/seniors-awards/2018-awards

www.providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/ministerial-council-volunteers

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