



Benefits, Barriers and Bringing About Change: Disability Inclusive Volunteering

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report summarises findings on inclusive volunteering with a focus on:

- Benefits of volunteering for people with disability.
- Barriers to inclusive volunteering for organisations and people with disability.
- Bringing about change, including:
 - a range of strategies and areas of focus for organisations to more effectively involve people with disability through volunteering, and
 - recommended initiatives to improve inclusiveness of the volunteering sector.

The Victoria ALIVE (Abilities – Links – Inclusive – Volunteering – Everyday) Project sought to improve accessibility and inclusion for volunteers with disability in volunteer-involving organisations in Victoria.

This project was delivered in partnership with Volunteering Victoria and Neighbourhood Houses Victoria with the support of the Victorian Government. The project management office was run from Volunteering Victoria.

The Victoria ALIVE project activities delivered over 2018–19 included the development and delivery of:

- **Events** – such as community forums, professional development workshops at conferences, a training workshop for volunteer managers and a Leaders Breakfast for CEOs, Board members and other organisational leaders.
- **Resources for organisations** – including guides, online “micro-credentials” and a Volunteering Victoria webinar.
- **Media showcase and promotion** – including the **#WeAreAble** social media campaign featuring video case studies, regular project newsletters and a podcast.

Further project information, summaries of project outcomes and resources can be found at www.victoriaalive.org.au

Content for this report is based on learnings from the Victoria ALIVE project activities, including multi-factor research, a Project Advisory Group, community forums and collaboration with various organisations, outlined below.

1. Internal Research

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria undertook research to inform Victoria ALIVE project activities and to contribute to the evidence base on the topic of organisational disability inclusion for volunteers with disability.

The project research activities included:

- A literature review.
- A survey of volunteer-involving organisations.
- Focus groups and one-on-one interviews with volunteer managers and volunteers with lived experience with disability.
- Case studies on organisations identified as undertaking best practices.

Reports on the research are available at www.victoriaalive.org.au/research

2. Project Advisory Group

The project was informed and advised by a Project Advisory Group. The members of the group were all people with lived experience of disability, including first-hand experience, family members and carers.

3. Victoria ALIVE community forums

Community forums were held in five areas of Victoria: Eastern Metro Melbourne, Cobram, Geelong, Western Metro Melbourne and Gippsland. Volunteer managers, disability sector workers and people with lived experience attended the forums. The forums included panel speakers and group activities to explore ways to reduce organisational and volunteer barriers to inclusive volunteering.

Reports on the outcomes of the forums are available here:

www.victoriaalive.org.au/event-wrap-ups/ and www.victoriaalive.org.au/research/

4. Collaboration with numerous organisations throughout the project

In addition, the Victoria ALIVE project collaborated with and relied on the expertise of many organisations to inform and deliver the project.

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| • Voice at the Table | • Latrobe Valley Health Services |
| • DARU | • Moira Shire Council |
| • Volunteering Geelong | • Avise la fin Consulting |
| • Eastern Volunteers | • Women with Disabilities Victoria |
| • Volunteer West | • Coonara Community House |
| • Brimbank City Council | • Fertile Films |

5. Project Partners

The project was supported and informed by staff from the project partners, including the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria and Volunteering Victoria.

SECTION ONE: DISABILITY & VOLUNTEERING

Case study – Julyne Ainsley, Duke Street Community House.

Julyne Ainsley (seen in the photo on the left) has been transformed by the work and connections to community made in the years since 2012 when she started volunteering at Duke Street Community House. Julyne is a brilliant example of the significant, positive, long-term impact volunteering can have on a person with disability.



Julyne on inclusive volunteering: “There is still a long way to go to be fully inclusive, but I really do think people are more aware now of people with disability and how to accommodate them. It’s just slow to change because people are slow to change their old views.”

Benefits for Julyne as a Volunteer

Before coming to Duke Street in 2003 for a computer course, Julyne had been isolated in her home for 20 years. She was isolated first by a situation of family violence, and later because of an acquired brain injury caused by that family violence. Julyne says she used to be depressed all the time. “I couldn’t walk out my front door without having an anxiety attack. I couldn’t have a proper conversation or keep eye contact with people.”

Not only was her disability a factor, but her experience of family violence had an impact on her. “I couldn’t be in close proximity with males without having an anxiety attack. I had no confidence, no self-esteem, and would cower in a corner if I heard raised voices, or even a male’s voice.”

Things have changed dramatically since 2003, and especially since 2012 when she started volunteering and giving back to the Duke Street community. “I feel I am more positive about myself and have a bit of direction. I am more confident and interact with more people. Duke Street Community House feels like a second home to me. I just love the atmosphere there. It is so warm and welcoming,” says Julyne.

It’s not just the atmosphere and the support Julyne has received that have made the difference. It’s also that she has a role and a purpose. She can see that her involvement and her work is important and is making a difference to the community.

“We need to understand just how much we’re offering,” says Lana Bedford, Manager of Duke Street Community House, about the role of Volunteer Managers and Coordinators. “For people with disability to be involved in volunteering, it’s about being part of a team, about not being alone. It’s about being able to achieve things.”

Lana finishes by saying, “Julyne’s public speaking about her lifelong learning, disability inclusion and family violence experiences have made the whole organisation extremely proud. She is making such a positive impact and a difference to the community.”

Context and background

Disability

About 1 in 5 people in Victoria live with disability. The exact number of people with disability varies depending on the research method and source of information. Definitions of disability vary too. For the purpose of the Victoria ALIVE project, mental health was understood as a disability.

Considering everyone's links to family members, co-workers, sport teammates, club and society members and so on, nearly every Victorian has a connection to a person with disability

Disabilities come in many forms, including:

- Physical – affects a person's mobility, dexterity, or other physiology
- Intellectual – can affect a person's abilities to learn, communicate, retain information and undertake activities.
- Mental Illness – can affect a person's thinking processes, mood and social functioning
- Sensory – affects a person's ability to use one or more senses including hear or see
- Neurological – affects the person's brain and central nervous system
- Learning disability
- Immunological – the presence of organisms causing disease in the body ¹.

Over the past decades, progress has been made to improve the human rights and quality of life for people with disability. From the 1970s in Australia, until the 1990s in Victoria, there has been a process of deinstitutionalisation and move towards empowerment and legislative protections.

Both in academic literature and collectively through organisational practice, our understanding of “disability” has shifted. One major change has been from the “medical model” of disability – that is disability understood and treated predominantly as an illness, to the “social model” of disability – which recognises that people are ‘disabled’ because of the way society is constructed around them.

Our understanding of disability is complex, contested and evolving. The social model of disability acknowledges a failure of society to accommodate people with disability and highlights the need to better adapt to people's accessibility requirements. This understanding dovetails well with the scope of the Victoria ALIVE project, which focused on how organisations can better include volunteers with disability.

Even still today, people with disability face barriers and discrimination in our workplaces and communities. Issues relating to disability discrimination account for the largest category of complaints to the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission ².

¹ <https://www.and.org.au/pages/what-is-a-disability.html>

² There were more complaints relating to disability than sex, race, sexual harassment or employment in the year 2017–18. See <https://www.humanrightsccommission.vic.gov.au/2018yearinreview/>

The employment participation rate of people with disability is approximately 30 per cent lower than the general population ³. People with disability are more likely to have a lower income than a non-disabled person with the same level of education ⁴.

Volunteering

About 1 in 3 people volunteer in Victoria. Volunteering is currently defined as “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain”.

Effective and meaningful volunteering is mutually beneficial for both the organisation and the volunteer. Volunteering can be undertaken formally or informally. Many people often volunteer without considering themselves a ‘volunteer’.

Volunteering is a crucial pathway for participation and a way to give back to our communities for people with disability. There are typically more than 8,000 formal volunteer positions advertised at any time on the Seek Australia and GoVolunteer platforms across Australia ⁵.

Almost half of charities in Australia are run completely by volunteers ⁶. From large not-for-profit and community organisations such as the Red Cross and the Country Fire Association, to small local and informal groups like a cultural society, to sports clubs, to churches, to op-shops, to galleries, volunteers are essential for so many of the activities that support our life in Victoria. Every local government uses volunteers to provide services to their communities ⁷.

Neighbourhood Houses provide inclusive environments for local communities and run programs using volunteers. In 2017 in Victoria there were 410 Neighbourhood houses, where more than 6,650 people volunteered each week. On average every Neighbourhood House had more than 17 volunteers each week ⁸.

Volunteering Victoria, the peak body for volunteering in the state has over 400 members spread across a wide breadth of sectors, such as:

- Culture
- Libraries & museums
- Health & aged care
- Law & order
- Education & training
- Heritage
- Festivals
- Political
- Welfare/community
- Sports & active recreation
- Environment
- Tourism
- International aid & development
- Business/professional/Union
- Emergency services
- Animal welfare
- Disability support
- Services
- Faith-based
- Arts
- Parenting, children & Youth
- Board & committee leadership

³ People aged between 15 and 64 years with disability have both lower participation (53%) and higher unemployment rates (9.4%) than people without disability (83% and 4.9% respectively). See <https://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html>

⁴ https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/

⁵ https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/resources/annual-report-2017-2018/vwa_annual_report2018_for_web.pdf – pages 28–29.

⁶ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-2017>

⁷ For more information see Victorian Government Ministerial Council For Volunteers, *Volunteers in Victoria: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities*, June 2017.

⁸ See *Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, Neighbourhood Houses Survey 2017*, available <https://www.nhvc.org.au/documents/item/747>.

1908

- Introduction of Invalid Pension (currently known as the Disability Support Pension).

1970s

- Early disability rights movement.
- Handicapped Persons Assistance Act 1974.

1980s

- Shift towards disability self-advocacy.
- Move away from institutional services to community-oriented service provision.
- First “International Year of Disabled Persons” 1981.
- Equal Opportunity (Discrimination Against Disabled Persons) Act 1982 (Vic).
- Disability Services Act 1986 (replaced Handicapped Persons Assistance Act 1974).
- Intellectually Disabled Person’s Services Act 1986 (Vic) – rights of people with intellectual disabilities to live and access services in community.

2000s

- Disability Act 2006 – to improve social & economic participation in the community.
- 2008 – Australia ratifies the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

1990s

- Disability Reform Package 1991 – encouraging integration into the workforce.
- Australian Disability Discrimination Act 1992.
- National Mental Health Strategy 1992 – supporting individuals in their community, away from an institutionally based mental health system.
- Commonwealth Disability Strategy 1994.
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic) – protecting disability in accommodation, education, employment.
- Change of name to the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

2010s

- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic) – protecting disability in employment.
- National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 – National plan for implementation of the UN 2008 Convention (led to eventual creation of National Disability Agency then National Disability Insurance Agency).
- 2013 – Introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and a shift to individual choice and control [9](#) – [10](#).

Disability and volunteering

For the purpose of this report and the Victoria ALIVE project, and in keeping with the social model of disability, a key aim was to explore ways in which organisations can reduce barriers for volunteers with disability by improving their practices and promoting positive cultures.

Some Volunteer Support Organisations (VSOs) reported that there are more people with disability who want to volunteer than there are roles available in organisations for them. There is therefore a mismatch of supply (disability inclusive volunteer positions) and demand (people with disability wanting to volunteer). There are certainly many organisations in Victoria with staff (and volunteers) that do not feel prepared to recruit volunteers with disability.

While the lack of disability inclusive volunteer roles may vary between regions and organisations, and differ according to different forms of disability, it reinforces the case for organisations to adapt to the needs of people with disability.

SUGGESTED AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PROJECTS

What proportion of the sector feels unprepared to include volunteers with disabilities? Are there particular parts of the sector that need greater support?

Are there certain types of disability which organisations are particularly concerned about or require training around?

Is the experience of volunteers living with mental illness included in disability inclusion research and projects? Do they identify as having a 'disability'?

What are the differing perspectives and issues facing particular groups within the disability community, including women, the LGBTQTI+ community, Indigenous Australians and people from migrant and refugee communities?

How is the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) impacting the inclusion of people with disability in the volunteer sector?

How is volunteering valued in a socio-economic culture focused on gainful employment as the primary source of meaningful activity? What implications does this have for people who can not engage in the workforce?

What is disability inclusive volunteering?

“Sometimes bringing volunteers in [with disability] can bring you benefits we can’t even tell you about. Unintended consequences are beautiful things – please be open to them.” – **Leah Van Poppel, CEO of Women with Disabilities Victoria.**

Disability inclusive volunteering involves organisations in the volunteer sector welcoming, supporting and adapting to people of all abilities to undertake volunteering. Disability inclusive volunteering is a group effort and occurs at multiple “levels”, as illustrated on the next page.



Image 1: Fiona volunteering as a gardener at Castlemaine Community House



Image 2: Robyn, Junior Leader volunteer at Country Fire Authority

Motivations and benefits of volunteering for people with disability

There are both uniquely personal and also very common and consistent reasons for why people with disability volunteer. The following illustrates some common reasons for volunteering in the words of people with lived experience of disability, carers and family members.

To further a cause and give back

"Being able to contribute to society" **Sam Buis, Eastern Metro Forum, panellist**

"I like seeing people get something out of what we're providing"
- **Western Metro forum, panellist**

"Everyone deserves the opportunity to make a difference in the world" - **Tracey from Austin Health, Eastern forum, attendee**

"Building social skills - from reserved to confident - through positive inclusive volunteering practices" - **Gippsland Forum attendee.**

"It's a chance for me to meet people, and it helps me overcome my fears and anxiety" **Julyne Ainsley, Western Metro forum attendee**

"I enjoy socialising with other people. I think it's the teach-learn factor, I can learn just as much from other people as I'm able to teach them" **Riki, Western Metro forum, attendee**

"Being part of a team and feeling like I belonged and was valued and respected" **Melanie Edge, Eastern Metro Forum panellist**

Social connection, inclusion and community

Career and skill development

"I like getting to know many different kinds of people and also learning new skills" **Callum Lydiard, Eastern Metro Forum attendee**

"When I started it wasn't all about the disability first - the first issue was and always has been "are you able to do the role?" and that's how it should be" **Judy Ingram, Western Metro forum, attendee**

"Volunteering is important for people of all abilities because it is good fun!!" **Mark Glascodine, Project Advisory Group member**

To have fun and pursue an interest

Personal development and growth

"I've found a voice, that I've always had, but I'd lost along the way and now I've found the voice back and can use it, and use it quite confidently." - **Julyne, PAG member**

"It's the little micro-praise that encourages people and makes them want to come back next time" **Volunteer Manager, Eastern Metro Forum, attendee**

"Feeling the freedom to be yourself" - **Gippsland Forum, attendee**

Volunteering and overcoming social isolation

In various forums through the Victoria ALIVE project, people with disability and their family members shared many personal stories about experiencing abuse, discrimination and long periods of social isolation. Many people too have suffered mental health issues which has led to social isolation and being out of the workforce for long stretches of time.

Due to its unique nature as a form of participation, volunteerism was the primary way for many of these people to come out of isolation, rebuild their confidence, trust in other people, and ultimately take control of one's life again. This often occurs through the process of volunteering leading to natural supports.

Natural supports can be defined as the “resources inherent in community environments including personal associations and relationships, typically developed in the community, that enhance the quality, and security, of life for people” ¹¹.

Rather than formal types of support (e.g. paid social workers) natural supports can include:

- Family relationships;
- Friendships reflecting the diversity of the neighbourhood and community;
- Associations with fellow students or employees in regular classrooms and workplaces;
- Associations developed through participation in clubs, organisations and other civic activities.

For people with disability, engaging in volunteering (or having volunteers as supports) is an important way to develop natural supports and networks within the community, through:

- Engaging with community organisations and other volunteers
- Building individual resources and skills, including self-advocacy
- Developing relationships with peers
- Becoming aware of other community groups or opportunities
- Creating awareness and promoting inclusivity in the broader community

Natural supports are a valuable resource, complementing the role of formal, paid supports through providing emotional and psychosocial support, opportunities for social engagement and the development of social capital that is pivotal to leading an independent life, engaging in the workforce and improved health and quality of life.

“No one needs to stay at home isolated and bored if they can find a friendly organisation to get involved with. It's great for mental health, to make a contribution and to be part of a community” – **Sarah Barton, Fertile Films.**

¹¹ <http://nda.ie/nda-files/Natural-Supports-Research-Dr-Christine-Linehan.pdf>

General barriers to volunteering for people with disability

“The first thing an able-bodied person does is look at your disability first and it would be great if they could look at me as a person first” – **Anthony Aitken, President Volunteering Geelong and Councillor for City of Greater Geelong.**

Some of the overall barriers to volunteering faced by people with disability include:

- Difficulty in finding out about volunteer opportunities. Many people with disability do not have easy access to the internet where a lot of volunteering opportunities are advertised. Other people do not know who to contact in the first instance.
- Some people with disabilities are known to “self-select” out of volunteer roles. They might be intimidated by formal recruitment processes. Others lack the confidence to engage with an organisation or lack the support throughout the process.
- Stigma and misconceptions about disability; negative attitudes and interactions.
- The financial cost to the volunteer and the need to prioritise work and income.
- Transport costs and lack of transport options, particularly in rural and regional areas over large distances.
- Inaccessibility of the physical environment, within and around buildings.
- Volunteer agencies and support services under-resourced to match or support people with disability to be able to undertake appropriate roles.

Volunteering as a goal in the NDIS

One of the key barriers to inclusion of people with permanent and significant disability (eligible for NDIS support) was the perceived lack of support for volunteering available. Representatives from volunteer-involving organisations were often unclear if the NDIS would provide support for volunteers, or what kinds of supports were available.

The perception that volunteering is not supported through the NDIS is in itself a major barrier for organisations to overcome. In addition, understanding how the NDIS works and the lack of established coordinators with links between the NDIS and volunteer-involving organisations likely contribute to barriers.

The NDIS does support volunteering activities, see [here*](https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/finding-keeping-and-changing-jobs/thinking-about-work#booklet).

It should be noted that the Victoria ALIVE project took place during the roll out of the NDIS. Nevertheless there are significant opportunities for the NDIS to develop volunteering-specific resources to support NDIS clients through volunteering pathways. In particular the many benefits of volunteering for the volunteer could be better promoted to new NDIS clients.

The organisational infrastructure and coordination that facilitate the volunteering sector could be strengthened for more seamless support for NDIS clients/volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and family members of people with disability.

* <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/finding-keeping-and-changing-jobs/thinking-about-work#booklet>

SECTION TWO: ORGANISATIONS AND DISABILITY INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING

Case study – Lana Bedford, Manager of Duke Street Community House

Volunteering can be a catalyst for dramatic change in a person's life. It can open doors and create new relationships. It can increase connections within community and reduce social isolation. It also can have positive benefits for the organisation itself.

Lana Bedford has seen the transformation in Julyne Ainsley, a long-term volunteer with disability, through the work and connections to community she has made since she started volunteering at Duke Street Community House. Lana says about inclusive volunteering "You can have all the policies and procedures you like, but if the leadership of the organisation isn't 'walking the walk' then nothing will change."



Benefits for the organisation

"Volunteer inclusion has impacted everyone in the organisation positively," says Lana Bedford. "We all benefit from the amazing skills, knowledge and expertise [our diverse workforce] contributes. It is rewarding to see Julyne grow and develop her confidence."

Lana has a strong commitment to community development principles and disability inclusion, and is passionate about promoting disability inclusion in volunteering. "We have more volunteers in the organisation than paid staff which helps us achieve wonderful things for our community that we wouldn't otherwise be able to achieve. I feel very passionate to ensure our workforce – paid and unpaid – reflects the diversity of our community."

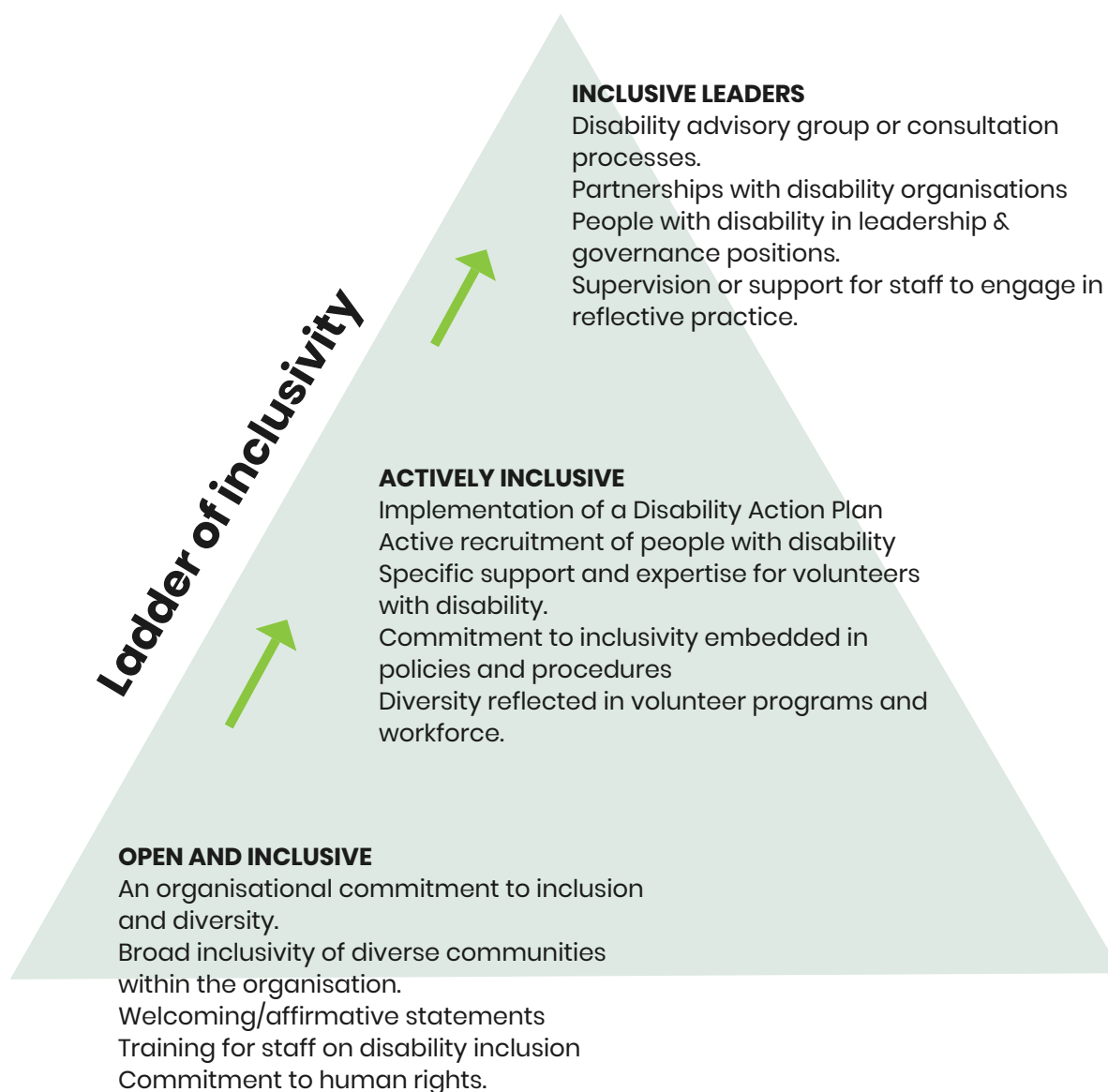
Lana and the team at Duke Street have been so grateful for Julyne's work that they recently employed her as a Peer Educator and Mentor for a specific project. Julyne, with Lana's encouragement, has also stepped up into the role of Volunteer Coordinator, taking the skills she's developed over the past years and continuing to make a difference. Lana says "A lot of what we try to do is help people move to their next challenge, and with support we can do that successfully".

"When volunteers with disability arrive and tell us they have a disability, they talk about what impact that might have on us," says Lana. "Often they don't know what their own strengths and weaknesses are. There are things about themselves that they don't see. As a good manager, you pick up on the things they're good at, and you empower them to see these aspects of themselves."

Organisational barriers to inclusive volunteering – and how to address them

“There is no limit to the scope of voluntary involvement of people with a disability as long as there are no barriers, real as in inaccessible workplaces, or artificial as in attitudes” **Michael Simpson 12.**

Every organisation can take steps to be more inclusive of volunteers with disability. The ‘ladder of inclusivity’ model below represents the degrees of proactive inclusion and indicates possible next steps for an organisation. Many of the Victoria ALIVE project activities aimed to encourage organisations to ‘move up a rung’ on this ladder.



Benefits to organisations of inclusive volunteering (and reasons to move up the inclusivity ladder)

In addition to providing essential services for many organisations, volunteerism brings numerous benefits to organisations. Ensuring your volunteer workforce is inclusive and accessible will also have benefits for an organisation's paid workforce.

"Volunteering is a two-way street. It's both advantageous to us as an organisation, but even more so advantageous to the individual getting some positive experience out of volunteering for our organisation." – **Elias Lebbos, CEO Travellers Aid**

Some of the many benefits of inclusive volunteering for organisation include:

- Increased access to a bigger talent pool, tapping into more diverse skills and perspectives for your organisation.
- Improved organisational reputation in the community, so long as tokenism is avoided.
- Organisations with an inclusive workforce better reflect the communities they work in.
- Greater understanding of diversity and challenging stigma. Working alongside people with disability creates greater awareness of specific disabilities and discrimination. Able bodied people often become advocates for the disability community too.
- People with disability are highly conscious of safety, have less accidents and make fewer compensation claims. When given the opportunity to volunteer, people with disability display more loyalty to the organisation and have fewer absentee days.
- Disability can affect anyone at any time. Making workplaces as accessible as possible is just good business.

Disability inclusive volunteering is not without its challenges, however. The remainder of this section covers barriers that organisations face in providing inclusive volunteering opportunities for people with disability, and suggested initiatives to overcome them.

These strategies have been identified in research undertaken for the Victoria ALIVE project and from project activities. They are suggestions for individual volunteer-involving organisations to consider and implement if appropriate.



Image 3: Shane volunteering as a Peer Support Leader at Neighbourhood Learning Centre

Organisational Culture and Attitudes (Theme 1)

“A lot of amazing skills and knowledge are going un-utilised because of the structural and attitudinal barriers. This so easily can be changed.” – **Jake Lewis, Project Governance Group.**

An inclusive culture is a key determinant in overcoming barriers for volunteers. Some organisations are large and well-resourced while others are small, with limited resources. However, organisations with a strong culture of inclusion and a desire to embrace diversity are more likely to be adept at reducing barriers, regardless of resourcing.

Many not-for-profit and community sector organisations have an inclusive mission and consider themselves inherently inclusive places. “It’s in our DNA”– **Victoria ALIVE focus group participant.**

Particularly inclusive examples of volunteer-involvement were often founded on a strong, trusting relationship between volunteer manager and volunteer, with both learning from each other over time. Conversely, organisations without a strong culture of inclusion and self-reflection are likely to create barriers, even unknowingly, which cumulatively reduce the participation of people with disability in the volunteer workforce in Victoria.

“One of the main challenges that (volunteers with disability) face is the erroneous belief that it will be too difficult to incorporate disabled people (sic) into the work of our organisations” **Esther Gill 13.**

BARRIERS

Stigma and direct discrimination

One of the mostly commonly identified barriers is the perception that people with disability are not capable of meaningfully contributing to an organisation because of their disability

The soft bigotry of low expectations; staff perceptions that people with disability are incapable of fulfilling roles

People with disability often thought of only as the ‘client’ or ‘patient’, and generally as recipients of support rather than as people who add value to an organisation and support others

Unconscious bias and not valuing the expertise and experience of people with disability

Direct discrimination; excluding people because of their disability; limiting the opportunities available to them; treating people differently because of their disability

“Some people want to know and some people just don’t want to know” – workshop participant, Voice at the Table

A lack of familiarity and experience with forms of disability

A lack of sustained, ongoing interaction with diverse communities of all abilities which can lead to anxiety around engaging people with disability. People are afraid of offending or mismanaging interactions with people with disability

A lack of experience with a specific disability, even when an organisation has experience with a specific type of impairment

A lack of understanding of diversity, which contributes to an organisation not being able to offer a space that is culturally safe or accessible

An inability or resistance to recognise 'invisible disabilities'

"Some people deny that I have ID [an intellectual disability]" – workshop participant, Voice at the Table

Organisational commitment

A culture of inclusion requires a whole-of-organisation commitment to inclusion and accessibility. Cultural barriers at a broader organisational level include:

Unrealistic organisational expectations (for example time taken to train someone) and inflexibility (for example shift durations and availability)

Prioritising other operational requirements over inclusion and accessibility

Risk averse thinking and attitudes

A lack of people with disability in the employed workforce and leadership positions

BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Stigma and direct discrimination

Active recruitment of people with disability to volunteering, paid and leadership roles

A willingness to be adaptable, flexible and make adjustments as required e.g. adjusting duties or positions descriptions, allow time for shorter hours, time to undertake tasks more slowly etc

Addressing risk averse thinking and shifting to a human rights-based approach

Unconscious bias and not valuing the expertise and experience of people with disability

Adopting an abilities-focused approach; focusing on people's abilities rather than disability

A lack of familiarity and experience with forms of disability

Encouraging a 'growth mindset' for staff; learning through doing

Developing a culturally safe environment by ensuring staff are educated on cultural and diversity awareness; addressing misconceptions and issues as they arise

Organisational commitment

Establishing a Disability Advisory Group or regular consultation with people with disability

Demonstrating organisation-wide that volunteers' work is important and valued. This can be done by:

- o recognising and promoting the achievements of volunteers with disability. Volunteer recognition is one of the eight National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. See - <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material/>
- o Actively raising awareness of how inclusion can value add to an organisation.
- o Including a commitment to inclusion and diversity in the mission, vision and values of the organisation.

Being committed to a change process, over the short, medium long-term, without tokenism or reactivism

Overt signs and visual clues that the organisation is inclusive and culturally safe e.g. displaying a logo, affirmative statements and photos of diverse communities

A whole-of-organisation commitment is required, not only from staff but also to ensure volunteers are not discriminated against by other volunteers

Organisational Leadership and Action (Theme 2)

“We’ve got quite a few people within the organisation with a form of disability and that helps culture. Our CEO has a disability so it truly goes from the top to the bottom” – **Nick Gabb, Western Metro forum, attendee.**

Culture and leadership was found to be a critical determinant of successful inclusion regardless of organisational size or funding constraints. It is likely that a commitment to inclusion at a governance level enables organisations to be adaptable and address other barriers that arise. Strong leadership and inclusive cultures are often inter-related. Leadership which drives organisational inclusivity is not only ‘top down’ but should also build capacity and embed inclusivity from the bottom up and from side-to-side (including staff and volunteers).

“Leadership is really important – we’ve had strategic planning with ALL our volunteers, and for me as a leader it’s about investing in our volunteers and showing them how important they are.” – **Laura, Western Metro, panellist.**

BARRIERS

A lack of leadership on disability inclusion is a barrier to organisations being inclusive and accessible and can result in:

Organisations not prioritising diversity, inclusion and volunteerism

Barriers to people applying for roles or accessing the organisation

Staff not feeling empowered to make the changes required to be inclusive

Barriers to inclusion not being addressed or being ignored

Negative attitudes and the perpetuation of misconceptions

BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Organisations with strong leadership on disability inclusion at a governance level empower staff to act and change their practice to be more inclusive. Strategies can include:

An explicit focus on volunteers with disability in the strategic direction of the organisation (e.g. linking to the mission statement, strategic plan, organisational values)

Developing a Disability Action Plan for the organisation

Setting diversity and inclusion targets for the paid and volunteer workforce, including leadership positions

Ensuring volunteering and inclusive practice is adequately resourced in the organisations’ budget, including staff training

Seeking governance and advice from people with lived experience of disability

Ensuring volunteering and inclusion is part of quality audit processes of the organisations (e.g. meeting volunteering standards, having people with disability participate in audit process)

Disability Action Planning

Many organisations do not have a Disability Action Plan (DAP) and therefore are not actively considering and implementing a range of strategies to engage a diverse volunteer workforce. Where organisations do have a DAP, they often do not reference their volunteer workforce nor directly implement effective intervention strategies relating to volunteers.

Disability action planning was identified in the Victoria ALIVE research as one of the most effective means of making improvements in an organisation and is recommended as the first step for an organisation wanting to make a more concerted effort towards inclusion.

Given that many organisations have not undertaken this process, there is a need for guidance and encouragement for organisation to initiate the process. While a DAP does not need to be lengthy, an effective DAP should be a living document, requiring regular revisions and actions (for example the DAP approval and reporting could be included in standing orders for Board and Committee meetings).

Governance and advice from people with lived experience with disability

Diverse governance including people with lived experience with disability has flow on effects for the organisation. A survey of volunteer-involving organisations conducted for Victoria ALIVE found that respondents with above average participation rates (of reported number of volunteers with a disability) were twice as likely to have at least one board member with a disability than those with below average participation rates. A clear majority of respondents with more than one board member with disability had above average participation rates.

Another effective practice is to have regular consultation with volunteers around what is and is not working well and incorporating lived experience in discussion and decision making.

There was a tendency for organisations who are particularly inclusive to have a disability champion that fosters participation of volunteers with disability. Champions typically had a special motivation and drive to make positive change, for example having a family member with disability or an earlier role in their career focusing on disability support.

Inclusion and diversity targets

Affirmative measures like targets and quotas for diverse communities are more often used in employment settings than the volunteering context.

Responses to a Victoria ALIVE survey of organisations indicated that levels of volunteers with disability in organisations is below the levels reported for the levels of people with disability employed in government and business. This may in part be due to limitations in collection methods for measuring the numbers of people with disability volunteering (including disclosing disability, protecting privacy, establishing systems to capture data for monitoring and reporting). Nevertheless, our research found that organisations which actively targeted volunteers with disability had above average participation rates of volunteers with disability.

Organisational Resourcing and Capacity (Theme 3)

“Working with people with disabilities – it also gives you access to an excellent new pool of potential workers, and a chance to see how you might creatively problem solve around hiring people with disabilities into your organisation.” – **Anthony Aitken, President of Volunteering Geelong.**

Inclusion (like the use of volunteers) does not come free, requiring an appropriate and adequate investment of time, effort, space and resources. Particularly for smaller, community-based organisations, these factors are often constrained by funding limitations.

BARRIERS

Stigma and direct discrimination

A lack of time and resources to implement strategies and initiatives

The time and expense of training for staff and volunteers to work with people with disabilities

High workloads and turnover of staff

Possible costs involved in meeting the specific access requirements of individuals

Costs in improving access to inclusive information and signage

The expense of legislative compliance

The time and cost of other investments required to make the work environment fully accessible including assistive technologies, hearing loops, large print, accessible website, and software.

A reliance on grants for funding. Grants are often time-limited and one-off, application processes are time consuming exercises, and grants frequently do not provide the continued assistance and funding required to make sustainable changes.

Physical access

Many organisations operate out of older buildings which do not conform to universal building regulations

Organisations which commonly utilise a volunteer workforce, such as not-for-profit and community organisations, are often constrained financially and therefore do not have the capacity to lease newer buildings or undertake building upgrades

Resourcing for volunteer management

A successful volunteer program also requires an investment of time and resources. “We need to provide individualised support, not one size fits all, because it doesn’t.” – Christine, Western Metro forum

A lack of understanding of the value of volunteering by other staff and limited opportunities for training or education

A lack of dedicated staff to support volunteers or staff feeling too stretched to properly support volunteers

A lack of resources to support and maintain systems for volunteering

Limited volunteering opportunities available, particularly for people with disability

BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Funding and resources

Stable and consistent funding opportunities that enable the development of inclusive volunteer programs and initiatives within organisations

Funding and improved access to inclusion and disability awareness training for staff

Physical access

Funding support to make adaptations to the physical environment and access assistive technologies for volunteers (funding is currently only available for those in paid roles)

Increased awareness of the availability of assistive technologies and accessible equipment

Resources for volunteer management

Funding for volunteer coordination is required, such as a dedicated role to ensure the organisation is accessible and inclusive for volunteers with disability. This is particularly the case for small organisations, that are predominantly volunteer-run

Increased support resources, including dedicated volunteer support services for including volunteers with disability

Mentors and buddies

Not all people with a disability require formal support workers. Some people require no additional support while others may only require a short period of guidance to settle in or someone to go to just in case. Providing a mentor or buddy from within the organisation or volunteer program can be a great way to address this

More information: www.victoriaalive.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Using-mentors-buddies-or-other-support-1.pdf

Organisational Capability (Theme 4)

“We want to make sure if there’s a person living with a disability who is willing and able to participate in a volunteer capacity, then we’re going to work very closely with them to ensure that they can achieve that.” – **Elias Lebbos, CEO Travellers Aid.**

An organisation’s capability is often reflected through its competencies, attributes, attitudes and behaviours. These factors contribute to the capability of an organisation to be inclusive of volunteers with disability. While there are many aspects of capability that influence inclusion, the skills, knowledge and strengths of staff are often a key factor. “We are not disability experts”, said one volunteer manager in a focus group. Training in aspects of disability is therefore seen by many organisations to be an essential part of healthy inclusion and diversity.

“I think it’s really important to remember you don’t have to know everything about every disability to be inclusive.” – **Melissa Hale, Coordinator DARU.**

BARRIERS

Skills, competency & the need for training

Many organisations lack confidence and key information around disability. The disability cohorts that organisations are involved with vary from organisation to organisation. Therefore training needs to be tailored to the organisation and be disability specific. For example training specifically on how to support people with vision impairment is different from the knowledge and skills needed to support volunteers on the autism spectrum

Lack of training and lack of time to undertake training: in small organisations there is often a lack of personnel to backfill while others train

Lack of confidence: fear by organisation of doing or saying something wrong; fear of not being able to handle incidents – especially in regard to people with mental illness

The need for guidance to re-imagine and design roles for volunteers and/or match volunteers with meaningful tasks appropriate for their abilities

Lack of knowledge and experience in how to educate volunteers without disability or staff in inclusion, and how to deal with negative attitudes

The need for whole of organisation training

Respectful communication

A lack of confidence to deliver required messages or information, while still being respectful

The need for time to build relationships with volunteers and understand their perspective

Staff not being aware of their attitudes, assumptions and biases that can inform their responses

A lack of knowledge on how to respond respectfully to disclosures

A lack of awareness on appropriate language around disability

Specialist volunteer role & reflective practice

Organisations consistently reflected on the need for specialist roles to support volunteers. This role was considered essential for all volunteers, particularly in promoting the inclusion of volunteers with disability. The purpose of this role was seen as co-ordinating volunteer activities, providing support and mentoring, and addressing issues as they arise

Similarly, reflective practice was seen as critical to ensuring the organisation was inclusive and accessible, and providing a culturally safe environment. Reflective practice was needed to promote self-awareness and early identification of issues

BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Skills, competency & the need for training

Disability awareness training for staff and volunteers including information about particular impairments (especially mental health issues).

Training that is organisation-wide and ongoing but also “as needed” and sometimes specific to particular impairments. The delivery of specific or multiple training sessions may be problematic for people already short of time.

Respondents to the Victoria ALIVE research suggested that if organisations were allowed a discretionary training budget which they must spend and for which they were accountable, this would allow them to organise their own training according to their needs.

Respectful communication

Learning communications skills and strategies on how to be respectful towards people with disability, including active listening and a relational approach to reduce bias

Learning about appropriate language to use around disability

Asking the individual if questions arise about their skills or requirements, rather than making assumptions

Ensuring volunteers are called by their name, have a name badge, are welcomed and acknowledged.

Taking time to build relationships and maintaining regular times for communication and feedback.

Specialist volunteer roles & reflective practice

Accessing or allocating funding for specialist volunteer support roles

Embedding reflective practice in the organisation, through allocation of time for supervision or regular meetings with staff and volunteers

Promoting reflection on unconscious bias and assumptions to promote increased cultural safety

Disability awareness training

“Managers lack the confidence to take on people with disabilities” – **Judith Buckingham, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.**

Through Victoria ALIVE research, volunteer managers were asked for their views on how to build disability awareness capacity and their preferences for future opportunities.

Training stood out as the most powerful tool used by organisations to increase their capacity to be inclusive. In cases where training was used most effectively, the training was ongoing, organisation wide, face to face, specific to a particular disability or disabilities and involved people with disability.

Face to face training has the advantages of:

- a live presenter who is able to field specific questions which a webinar or manual does not address.
- it does not leave it up to an individual to find time they do not have and thus put it on a the 'back burner'.
- training can be tailored to a specific organisation, addressing their existing strengths and needs.

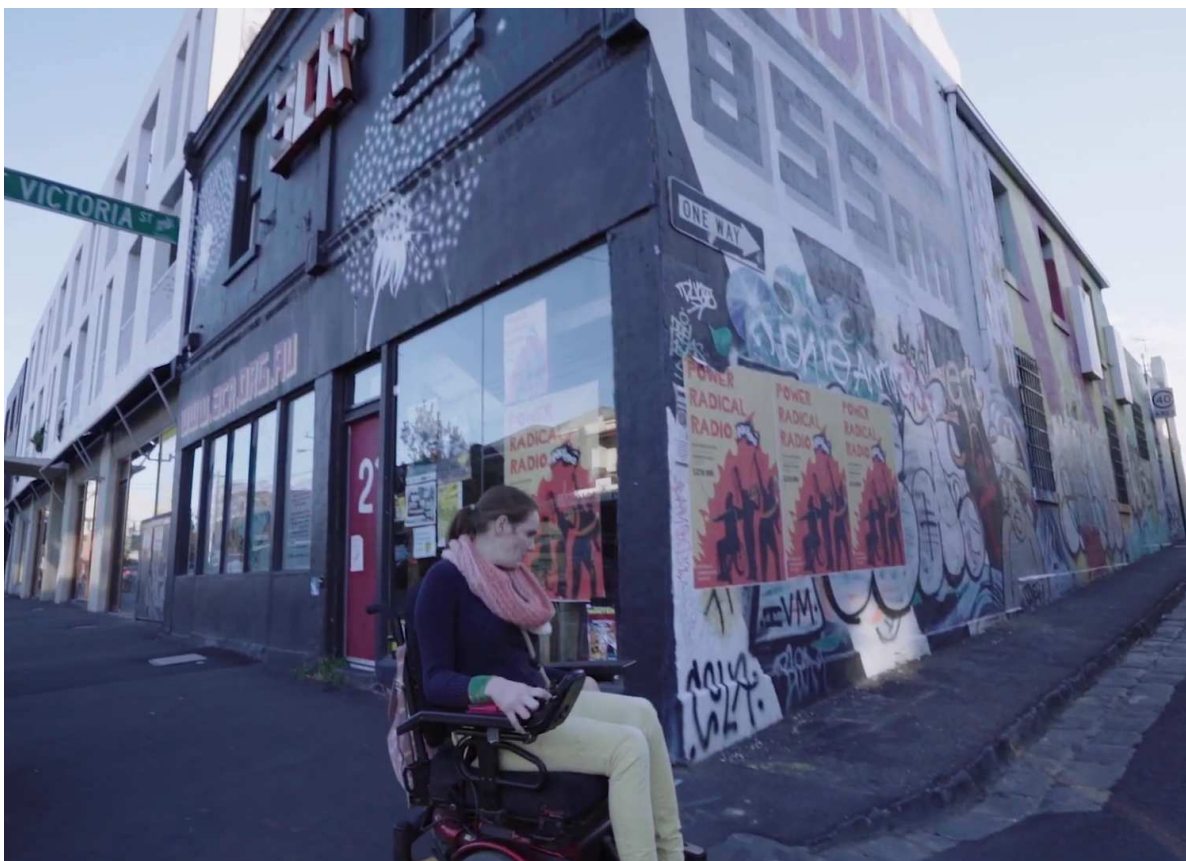


Image 4: Stella volunteers as a Radio Presenter at 3CR radio station

Organisational Systems and Processes (Theme 5)

Barriers related to organisational systems was one of the dominant themes identified in the community forums, particularly the systems and processes in place for working with, supporting and managing volunteers. These issues were seen to impact organisations and volunteers alike, with the capacity to negatively impact the volunteer experience.

Making small changes to systems and practices not only benefits the organisation and supports the development of a robust and diverse volunteer program, but also can promote positive volunteering experiences for people with disability, providing a wide range of benefits.

BARRIERS

Effective systems for volunteer management

The current systems and processes in place for volunteer management are often not well designed for including working with volunteers with disability. These 'back of house' dynamics create hidden restraints for staff and volunteer managers

Processes that are not responsive to the diversity of people with disabilities

Policies and procedures that do not reflect inclusivity

The anticipated, additional need of supporting administration and back end organisational support (resource management, role design, networking, policy development and so on)

The need for supportive resources to guide practice

The need for processes to appropriately plan, implement and evaluate systems, incorporating the perspective of people with disability

Issues through the volunteering life cycle

Inaccessible information, advertising and application processes

A reliance on technology for advertising which can be a barrier for people with technology access or skills

Limited knowledge on how to promote opportunities to reach different members of the community

Position descriptions need to be checked for accessibility and unnecessary barriers eliminated (such as requiring a drivers licence or fitness for heavy lifting when the role does not in fact require it)

The lack of adaptability within an organisation regarding the requirements of the volunteer role (for example, flexibility in hours or shifts) and the inability to redesign a volunteer role

Challenges with matching people to the right roles based on their abilities, particularly if their disability has not been disclosed

Inadequate induction processes and support when first starting a role

Training that is not adaptable to different learning needs

A lack of confidence in providing feedback, managing performance and exiting volunteers in specific circumstances

The volunteering experience

While all of the barriers listed above have the potential to reduce access to volunteering and negatively impact the volunteer experience, there were also other issues identified from a volunteer perspective that could pose a barrier to a meaningful volunteering experience

Organisations not understanding and responding to the volunteer's personal motivations behind volunteering and their professional goals

A lack of awareness of specific needs or requirements

A lack of meaningful roles, flexibility in roles, or opportunities for skills development

A lack of pathways to employment (when desired)

Volunteers not feeling valued or 'having a voice'

BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Effective systems for volunteer management

Having processes for reviewing and re-designing existing volunteer management systems to ensure they are inclusive and accessible

Develop procedures for evaluation and measuring the outcomes of systems, that include the perspective of people with disability

Developing systems and strategies that are adaptable and flexible to support the individual needs of volunteers with disability

Ensuring there are accessible policies and procedures in place before engaging a volunteer

Issues through the volunteering life cycle

Advertising roles in an accessible format and in a broad variety of forums, including those accessed by people with disability

Designing clear and appropriate position descriptions, volunteer roles and agreements

Taking time during the recruitment process to understand the motivations, skills and passions of volunteer as well as any support needs

Ensuring that the volunteer roles are meaningful and utilise the volunteer's skills

Having some volunteer roles that are designed specifically for people with disability

Promotion of the organisation as accessible on all organisational collateral and advertising materials such as course programs, Facebook, newspaper ads and so on

The volunteering experience

Develop mentor/buddy programs to provide support and enable the volunteer's professional growth

Identify opportunities for skills building and create meaningful pathways for volunteers, where possible

Establish clear mechanisms for feedback to promote volunteers with disability having a voice and being actively involved in informing programs and services

Offer flexible learning approaches suited to the individual

Informal and formal reward and recognition

"It's really important wherever you are on your inclusive journey to ask yourselves 'how are we including people with disability in the design of this?' and 'how are we valuing their expertise' and 'how are we keeping them front and centre in the design of our volunteer programs?'" – Leah Van Poppel, CEO of Women with Disabilities Victoria

Inter-organisational Partnerships (Theme 6)

“If your organisation is wanting to engage more with people with disability, reach out to some like-minded organisations in the disability sector who might be able to work with you on projects. That’s a really good way of bringing in lots of people, but really one of the best ways is to talk to your own community” – **Helen Gwilliam, 3CR, Victoria ALIVE Video Series.**

A novel finding from the Victoria ALIVE research was a tendency for particularly inclusive organisations to have partnerships with other organisations. Having relationships with disability organisations is important in developing an organisation culture and for the successful inclusion of volunteers with disability. Partnerships between community organisations and disability organisations are often reciprocal relationships providing opportunities for learning and pathways for skills development, volunteering and employment. Disability organisations can also be a valuable partner in providing information and support for volunteers with disability when required.

BARRIERS

While there are many benefits to developing partnerships with disability organisations, a significant number of organisations do not have such relationships and may face barriers in doing so

A lack of time and resource to develop partnerships

Lower coverage of disability services, which is particularly challenging for rural communities and likely lowers the opportunities for partnerships and the rate of organisations that have volunteers with disability

Specialisation in a particular area or type of disability may promote the perception that an organisation is inclusive of all disabilities

BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Strategies for developing inter organisation partnerships include:

Promoting volunteer roles and opportunities directly to local disability organisations (including disability service providers, peak bodies and special schools)

Actively engaging disability organisations in the process of referring volunteers and recruiting people with disability already engaged with the organisation

Approaching people to participate in the organisation in an advisory capacity or to contribute to service development

Approaching disability organisations for information or training opportunities

Inviting disability organisations to open days or information sessions

Approaching organisations to partner on projects, initiatives or grant applications

Develop communities of practice to share ideas and learn from each other

SECTION THREE: DISABILITY INCLUSION AND THE VOLUNTEER SECTOR

The disability and volunteering sectors

“Volunteering creates friends, it creates skills, and it creates work. Volunteering isn’t free but it’s value is priceless” – **Daniel Leighton, Branch Manager, Information, Linkages and Capacity Building, NDIA**

Inclusive volunteering has flow-on benefits for workplaces and communities in Victoria. Disability inclusive volunteering helps break down stigma and misconceptions and challenge negative attitudes. Volunteering contributes to the Australian workforce as a common pathway to employment and increased workforce participation.

For volunteering to be truly inclusive of people with disability in Victoria, individual organisation need to take steps to reduce barriers in their organisation, the broader culture needs to be more disability inclusive, and the sector-wide infrastructure that facilitates volunteering needs to be strengthened.

Volunteer-involving organisation have direct responsibility to ensure they are undertaking inclusive practices. However, the volunteering sector generally is facilitated by supporting infrastructure and other organisations that also have a role to play. This includes:

- **Volunteer Support Organisations (VSOs)** – which provide place-based support, often tailored to the needs of the communities in the region. Typically, VSO services include volunteering information and support to individuals, volunteers, volunteer managers and volunteer involving organisations. VSOs are located in metropolitan and regional areas across Australia. There are over 30 VSOs in Victoria.
- **GoVolunteer and SEEK Volunteer** – and other platforms which match people interested in volunteering with appropriate volunteering opportunities. These platforms are for formal volunteer roles. They offer search functions for different accessibility requirements.
- **Volunteering Victoria** – and other peak body organisations, such as Neighbourhood Houses Victoria. Peak bodies provide training opportunities, support professional development, undertake research, contribute to sector policy work and advocate for their sector.
- **Centrelink** – payments and services through Centrelink lead to volunteering placements in some cases.

Some of the services and organisations that support people with disability include:

- **Disability peak bodies and service providers** – which provide advocacy, representation, services and support.
- **Disability Employment Services (DES)** – offers specialist employment assistance to help people with disability, injury or health conditions, find and retain suitable employment in the open labour market. A DES can also offer support and advice to employers.
- **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** – supports people with disability to achieve their goals, assist them to realise their full potential and exercise choice and control over their lives. The NDIS works with participants to develop a plan that outlines their needs, goals, aspirations and disability supports required. This can include supports to undertake volunteering.
- **Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)** – among other responsibilities, the VEORHC responds to complaints about disability discrimination in employment contexts and promotes human rights.

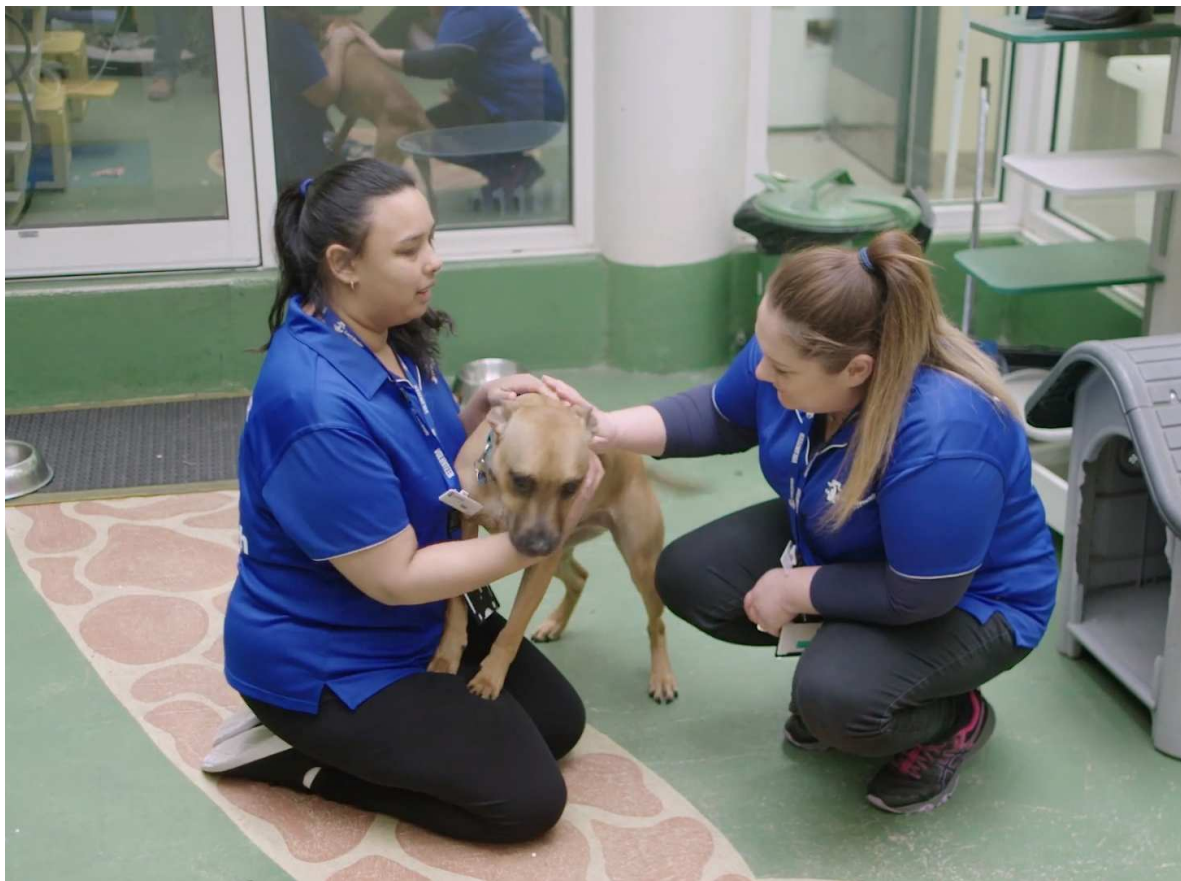


Image 5: Danni volunteers as a Laundry Assistant at Lort Smith

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT DISABILITY INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING ACROSS THE SECTOR

Many of the recommended improvements outlined in this report are low-cost and no-cost initiatives that volunteer-involving organisations are encouraged to implement themselves. But to continue improvements in the volunteering sector beyond the Victoria ALIVE project, disability inclusion needs to be a clear priority by volunteer-involving organisations, Governments and relevant agencies.

Volunteer sector-wide structural improvement would likely require further resourcing.

The following recommended activities for future work to improve disability inclusiveness in volunteering have been developed based on project findings and informed by the Victoria ALIVE Project Advisory Group and the Victoria ALIVE Project Governance Group.

Recommended Initiative 1: Disability inclusive volunteer management training package

The Victoria ALIVE project developed a range of resources (available online at www.victorialive.org.au). These resources could support the delivery of training. In addition, in 2019 Volunteering Victoria will pilot disability inclusive training opportunities as part of its ongoing professional development offering.

Further funding would allow for the robust development and delivery of a training package to ensure continuous improvement of inclusive practices within volunteer-involving organisations.

OPTIONS AND VARIATIONS

- Training opportunities should be resourced with strong regional coverage – where training opportunities are harder to access – due in part to increase travel and time required.
- Unaccredited workshops help to improve practices across the volunteering sector. Options could be explored to develop modules for accredited course on volunteer management and disability support.
- Develop training linked to The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement.

Recommended Initiative 2: Supported volunteer placement services for people with disability

As outlined in this report, there are a number of factors which inhibit organisations from involving and recruiting volunteers with disability, such as the lack of confidence around working with people with disability and concerns over additional resources required for support.

Disability Employment Service work with both applicants and organisation to match people to paid positions and provide appropriate placement supports. VSOs play a similar role to match and place volunteers into volunteer positions.

The volunteering sector would be strengthened with specialised services with the necessary expertise and connection to the volunteering community, to be able to match and support people with disabilities into volunteer roles. A model such as this would help VIOs have the confidence to recruit people with disability and provide expert support to people with disability interested in volunteering and organisations recruiting them.

This service model is currently being delivered by Volunteering Services Australia. See www.vsaaustralia.org.au/ndis-mainstream-opportunities/

OPTIONS AND VARIATIONS

Placement services could also help prepare people with disabilities for volunteer roles. This could be in the form of individualised case management support or seminars for groups of people with disabilities to understand their rights and responsibilities and what to expect.

Recommended Initiative 3: Outreach to volunteer-involving organisations

Victoria ALIVE activities engaged organisations with active interest and a commitment to improve their practices, mostly through short-term and one-off activities. The project found that exceptionally inclusive organisations often have a ‘disability champion’ who pushes for improvements in inclusive practices. Furthermore, effective change often comes from self-advocacy, where people with disability are supported and empowered to lead change.

OPTIONS AND VARIATIONS

Two possible forms of outreach include:

1. **An “ambassador” program.** People with disabilities promote inclusive change – either broadly or to selected organisations. Such a model would prioritise awareness raising and self-advocacy.
2. **Targeted engagement with a cohort of volunteer-involving organisations.** Working closely with a select number of volunteer-involving organisations over the medium term to improve their disability volunteer management practices and organisational practices (for example developing a DAP, establishing a Disability Advisory Committee and implementing a schedule of inclusive goals).

Recommended Initiative 4: Community engagement

The Victoria ALIVE project engaged over 500 people through community forums, conferences, workshops and other events. For most people, these events were the first time volunteer managers and people with disability were given a platform and the time to engage on the topic of disability inclusive volunteering. The events were empowering for people with disability to share their stories and useful as professional development for volunteer managers. The forums raised awareness of issues which were consistent in every region but which have not received direct attention. Importantly, the forums encouraged communities to take steps to improve their organisations.

One forum participant said “I hope to see something like these forums every year.” – **Western Metro Forum, attendee.**

OPTIONS AND VARIATIONS

More events, such as community forums, would activate more organisations and further spread constructive messages. Opportunities for further engagement using forums or other events include:

- Events in regions the Victoria ALIVE project did not engage – the north and south-east of metropolitan Melbourne, and rural and regional areas.
- Smaller and more targeted opportunities for volunteer-involving organisations and sectors that have not yet prioritised inclusive volunteering.

Recommended Initiative 5: More project activities such as Victoria ALIVE

Through the Victoria ALIVE project, a wide range of activities were undertaken.

- **Events** – such as community forums, professional development workshops at conferences, a training workshop for volunteer managers and a Leaders Breakfast for CEOs, Board members and other organisational leaders.
- **Resources for organisations** – including guides, online “micro-credentials” and a Volunteering Victoria webinar.
- **Media showcase and promotion** – including the **#WeAreAble** social media campaign featuring video case studies, regular project newsletters and a podcast.

OPTIONS AND VARIATIONS

Many of these activities could be continued, updated, evaluated, expanded or scaled up.

Recommended Initiative 6: Seed funding for regional or specialised networks

The Victoria ALIVE project was delivered to stakeholders in a way that was generalised (i.e. did not require expert knowledge or specialised training) and often through peer-to-peer learning, place-based techniques. In lieu of state-wide project activities, networks could progress inclusive volunteering in particular regions, for example using a community of practice model.

OPTIONS AND VARIATIONS

Resourcing could support place-based activity, for example working locally with VSOs and VIOS. Alternatively, resources could support a focus on a particular disability cohort (for example autism or people with low vision) and the relevant disability peak body to reduce similar barriers in the volunteering sector.

Recommended Initiative 7: Strengthening governance and leadership through volunteering

Governance in the not-for-profit and community sector is often provided by volunteers serving on Boards and Committees (noting Board and Committee members often do not identify as “volunteers”).

In general, the volunteering sector is more effective when leadership reflects the communities each organisation serves. Top down leadership is one way of empowering people with disability and ensuring workplaces are inclusive and accessible. There are currently services, institutes and projects which focus on improving the diversity of leadership.

OPTIONS AND VARIATIONS

Peak bodies such as Volunteering Victoria could play a role in supporting people with disabilities to develop leadership and governance skills and engage the volunteering sector to open up positions for diverse governance.

PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP



Mark Glascodine – “I believe many volunteer organisations can easily become more disability inclusive through small changes.”

Lisa Bartkus – “For inclusive volunteering to be successful you need to be respectful, patient and to always understand that people come from different backgrounds and learn differently from you.”

Ali Street – “I strongly believe that meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities in our community benefits everyone.”

Judy Ingram – “People who are home-bound or home all day need to be able to feel they still belong in the wider community – and volunteering is a great way for this to happen.”

Julyne Ainsley – “I believe leading by example is a great way to demonstrate the abilities of people with disabilities.”

Melanie Edge – “People with disability will do things differently from others – it’s not right or wrong, just different. Be inspired by the person, not the disability.”

Jason Heagerty – “Living with cerebral palsy and autism spectrum disorder, I see opportunities where others would see roadblocks.”

Michael French – “I would love to see a universal education program designed for managers to learn more about working with someone who has a disability.”

Samantha Buis – “I believe that all people can contribute to their community when they receive the right support.”

Tamsin Jowett (not in photo) – “My vision is to empower and highlight the wonderful, often unappreciated abilities of our Aspergers community.”

VICTORIA ALIVE

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Research

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHVic) led the research for the Victoria ALIVE project. The research conducted was to better understand the extent of disability inclusion in volunteer-involving organisations in Victoria, the strategies that organisations use and how the Victoria ALIVE project can best support the sector.

The project research activities included:

- Benchmarking surveys of volunteer-involving organisations.
- Focus groups and one-on-one interviews with volunteer managers and volunteers with lived experience of disability.
- Case studies on organisations identified as undertaking best practices.

Community Forums

The community forums engaged volunteering-involving organisations in an active process of identifying the barriers they face to provide disability inclusive volunteer opportunities for people with disability. The forums utilised a place-based approach and the project ran 5 highly successful forums in different regions in Victoria including Gippsland, Eastern & Western Metro, Cobram and Geelong, with a regional collaborating partner in each location.

The community forums provided a platform for people with lived experience with disability and volunteer-involving organisations to share their experience and for attendees to benefit from a participatory learning environment.

A key aim was to activate the community. Attendees, organisations and networks were encouraged to continue progressing inclusive volunteering initiatives in their regions and to commit to three actions that they would take in their own organisation over the next 3 months to make volunteering more inclusive for people living with disability.

Newsletter

A project stakeholder newsletter was been developed to provide project updates and promote awareness of issues and activities relating to volunteering and disability. Most importantly the newsletters provided a platform for people with disabilities to tell their stories. The newsletter also put a spotlight on people undertaking disability inclusion work.

Micro-credentials

The Victoria ALIVE project worked with Coonara Community House to develop inclusive volunteering "micro-credentials". The online micro-credentials provide organisations with training opportunities to improve inclusion for volunteers with disability. The micro-credentials are available for anyone working or volunteering in a volunteer-involving organisation.

The “So...” Podcast

The “So...” podcast focuses on disability issues through conversation with everyday people, such as: social workers, CEOs, activists, politicians, artists, accountants and “everyone with a story to tell”. Members of the Victoria ALIVE project team featured on the podcast to talk about the project and what they had learned.

NHVic 2019 Conference

The Victoria ALIVE project held a stall and delivered a breakout workshop on Thursday 9 May. The workshop was entitled “Making volunteering disability inclusive”. The session provided a professional development opportunity for the neighbourhood house sector to learn about the project research findings, hear from a panel with lived experience with disability on how best practice volunteer management and also to commit to actions in their organisations to become more disability inclusive.

Volunteering Victoria 2019 Conference

The Victoria ALIVE project collaborated with the Department of Health and Human Services to deliver a conference session called “Inclusive Program Design: Delivering for Your Volunteers and Community”. The workshop included a panel discussion of people with lived experience, a presentation of Designing for Diversity and an interactive group discussion.

Disability Inclusion: Volunteer Management Training

The Victoria ALIVE project held a one-off training session to help people who lead volunteers with the basic theoretical basis and a range of practical skills to support inclusive volunteering. Those who attended were provided with an introduction to Disability Inclusion in Volunteering micro-credentials and participated in workshop activities on volunteer management developed by Volunteering Victoria.



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