

Volunteering Victoria submission to:

CONSULTATION FOR SENIOR SECONDARY REFORM

TO: Department of Education and Training

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples, the traditional custodians of the land on which our office stands, and we pay our respects to them, their culture and their Elders past and present.

OVERVIEW

The Senior Secondary Reform presents our state with an important opportunity to improve educational outcomes for students. Furthermore, it provides us with the chance to strengthen our communities by encouraging and normalising active community participation in the formative years of development and learning.

An impressive 2.3 million, or 42.1% of Victorians give back to our communities through volunteering¹, however, rates of formal volunteering within an organisation have been in steady decline over the last ten years.² Volunteering has also been heavily disrupted by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic with 2 in 3 volunteers having stopped volunteering resulting in an estimated national loss of 12.2 millions hours of volunteer work per week.³ Groups traditionally associated with volunteering have been slower to return to their positions and there is an identified need to engage new volunteer recruits, particularly young people.

The benefits of volunteering for young people are well documented and include multiple social, economic, physical and mental health benefits. Schools are well-placed to systemically promote volunteering opportunities and harness the benefits of volunteering for their students. The existing curriculum currently incorporates elective education about volunteering, and there are various school-based volunteer initiatives across Victoria. Moving forward, the Victorian Government has an opportunity to expand volunteering learning opportunities in the curriculum; embed and promote the benefits of volunteering to students; encourage school-based volunteering initiatives and develop an evidence base around volunteering activities among young people.

Senior secondary students currently have opportunities and exposure to “work experience” before entering our workforce. Our vision is for students to likewise engage in “volunteering experience” before leaving school and develop an understanding of the importance of contributing to their community. Every senior school student should have the opportunity to learn through volunteering and experience the benefits of being empowered, active participants in their communities.

At a minimum, the existing volunteering initiatives in the curriculum should be retained. But by thinking big and following the recommendations set out in this submission, it is within the reach of the Victorian Government and educational system to have a generational impact on volunteering promotion and active community participation.

1 State of Volunteering in Victoria (2020) Report. See www.stateofvolunteering.org.au
2 [Pre-Budget Submission 2021-22](#), page 2.
3 <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/download/142/2020-2021/22699/december-2020-pre-budget-submission-2021-22.pdf>, page 2.

“One strong suggestion from the research is that schools and other educational organisations can play a key role in facilitating young people’s positive experience of volunteering and fostering their predisposition to continue to volunteer”.

-Youth Volunteering in Australia, 2015⁴

This submission is divided into four sections containing recommendations for embedding volunteering in Victorian Senior Secondary education:

Section 1:

Embedding volunteering in the senior secondary curriculum

Section 2:

Promoting youth volunteering

Section 3:

Investing in school-based volunteering programs

Section 4:

Developing the evidence base on youth volunteering

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Walsh, L., & Black, R. (2015). Youth volunteering in Australia: An evidence review. Report prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Canberra: ARACY. Page 26.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Encourage a culture of empowered, active people by embedding volunteering throughout the curriculum.

- a) Offer volunteering opportunities in the standard and vocational specialisation VCE pathways.
- b) Expand the offering of Certificate II in Active Volunteering through all relevant vocational learning pathways.

Recommendation 2:

Promote the opportunities and benefits of volunteering to students.

- a) Develop promotional campaigns highlighting the benefits and success stories of youth volunteering.
- b) Include education on volunteering in professional learning for teachers and trainers.
- c) Embed volunteering promotion in existing initiatives and processes, including:
 - » VET Champions Initiative,
 - » Enhanced Statement of Results,
 - » My Career Portfolio portal.

Recommendation 3:

Fund and expand the range and reach of existing school-based volunteering programs.

Recommendation 4:

Invest in developing the evidence base on student volunteering.

ABOUT VOLUNTEERING VICTORIA

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering, focusing on advocacy, sector development and the promotion of volunteering. We are a member-based organisation with over 400 individual and organisational members from all sectors and places around Victoria.

Volunteering Victoria has a singular and specialised focus on volunteering. We see our role as leading the development of a collaborative, sustainable, thriving volunteering community and movement in Victoria. Our purpose is to promote and build a vibrant, strong volunteering community that is inclusive, respected and sustainable.

CONTEXT

Youth Volunteering in Australia

There is a lack of clear data on the rates of youth volunteering in Victoria and throughout Australia. Previous research has indicated that while 1 in 3 young people in Australia (aged 12 to 24 years) volunteer, they do not do so on a regular basis⁵. Other data estimates that between 40-50% of young people volunteer in their community⁶. More recently, the results of the General Social Survey indicate that youth volunteering has been heavily impacted by COVID-19 with a sharp decrease in volunteering rates. In 2019, 28.8% of people aged 15-24 reported volunteering formally (through an organisation) dropping to 19.4% of young people volunteering in 2020.⁷

Obtaining an accurate picture of youth volunteering is complicated by conflicting data and differing definitions and understandings of volunteering to young people. Other factors obscuring the state of youth volunteering are former distinctions between informal and formal volunteering, and the rise of non-traditional volunteer roles and practices such as online social action, e-volunteering, alternative reciprocal and monetary systems, and 'tourism volunteering'.⁸

Despite these differing definitions and the uptake of non-traditional roles, young people experience the same benefits of volunteering as the general population, including:

Volunteering as a pathway to employment.

- » Volunteering provides opportunities to gain work experience,
- » Volunteering improves employability and is highly valued by employers.⁹

5 Walsh, L., & Black, R. Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review. Page 8.

6 Gasser, C., & Evans-Whipp, T. 'Chapter 11 Here to help: How young people contribute to their community' in LSAC Annual Statistical Report. 2018. Available at: https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/lsc-asr-2018-chap11-volunteer_work.pdf

7 ABS. General Social Survey: Summary Results. (2021). Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-andcommunities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/2020>

8 Walsh, L., & Black, R. Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review. Page 8.

Volunteering is a healthy environment in which to develop new skills.

- » Volunteering experience can help to build confidence,
- » The “soft skills” (e.g., teamwork, leadership) learned through volunteering are transferrable life skills.

Positive mental health benefits of volunteering.

- » Volunteering cultivates new connections and social supports, often with diverse peer groups and communities,
- » Well-managed volunteering is associated with enhanced wellbeing and improved happiness.¹⁰

The Senior Secondary Reform Consultation

Building on investment in education by the Victorian Government, the Department of Education and Training is seeking consultation feedback from the community on the Senior Secondary Reform of the curriculum, which will be implemented in the coming years culminating in the introduction of a fully integrated senior secondary certificate by 2023.

This is an exciting opportunity to rethink fundamental questions about how to support our school students to prepare for the future.

The pending reform has been informed by the Review into Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling, Final Report (November 2020), authored by John Firth (the Firth Review).¹¹ The Firth Review focuses on how young people will develop employment skills and become active citizens. The review found that volunteering is identified as part of the range of activities that can promote vocational learning.

9 <https://www.volunteer.com.au/advice-and-tips/benefits-of-volunteering>

10 https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/1920/10/volunteer-wellbeing-Oct-20_briefing.pdf

11 Firth, John. *Review Into Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling, Final Report*. Department of Education and Training, 2020. Available: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/vocational-applied-learning-pathways-report.pdf>

“Vocational learning delivered in secondary schooling sits within the broader school curriculum and helps secondary students explore the world of work, identify career options and pathways, build career development skills and in certain settings, develop entry-level technical skills for use within a job. It can include VET, SWL, SBATs, career education, work experience, **volunteering** and other school-based learning designed to build preparedness for the workforce.”¹²

The best reforms retain, and build on, successful elements of existing systems. The Firth Review also found that an existing strength of VCAL were the connections and partnerships facilitated between students and their community. Participation in VCAL related community and charity projects supported students to build on their social conscience and participatory skills.

This highlights the importance of volunteering in community projects and charities for students, and the opportunities for schools to form stronger partnerships with their communities through structured volunteer programs or roles.

Responding to the Senior Secondary Reform Overview Discussion Paper

The Victorian Government’s Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce: Senior Secondary Reform Overview discussion paper articulates the aims and purpose of the senior secondary reform:

“The Victorian government is working to ensure senior secondary students receive a great education, learn about the world of work and develop strong life skills, so they can make informed choices about further study, jobs and their futures. This will enable young people to contribute to, and benefit from, the growth in the Victorian economy and prepare them for active and fulfilling lives in the community.”¹³

¹² Firth, John. *Review Into Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling, Final Report*. Page 281.

¹³ Department of Education and Training. *Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce: Senior Secondary Reform Overview*, Department of Education and Training, 2021. Page 59. Available: <https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.vic-engage.files/7716/2573/2149/Reform-Overview-discussion-paper.pdf>

Volunteering is a powerful means of achieving the stated outcomes of the reform. Indeed, the current curriculum’s vocational learning pathways include active volunteering and community service training opportunities. We recommend that the Senior Secondary Reform retain successful models of volunteer training and partnerships, and expand these opportunities to all students.

Volunteering can also provide unique opportunities and learning experiences for students who are experiencing challenges in staying engaged in education by providing experience and learning in non-traditional education settings, building skills and self-esteem, and extending their community outside of the school environment.

“Volunteering makes you feel like you are a big part of the world, not small and insignificant”

–Student Volunteer¹⁴

14 Volunteering ACT. Practical lessons and resources for teachers from Foundation to Year 10. The Importance of Students Learning about volunteering. 2015. Available https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1438056660VA03895_Resources_Book_WEB_150727.pdf. Page 2.

15 www.euca.eu/activecitizenship

16 Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 23.

SECTION 1: EMBEDDING VOLUNTEERING IN THE SENIOR SECONDARY CURRICULUM

Recommendation 1:

Encourage a culture of empowered, active people by embedding volunteering throughout the curriculum.

- a) Offer volunteering opportunities in the standard and vocational specialisation VCE pathways.
- b) Expand the offering of Certificate II in Active Volunteering through all relevant vocational learning pathways.

The concept of empowered, active people is based on the principle of people being involved in their communities and democracy at all levels from local to national and global. An empowered, active person promotes quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes of developing the knowledge, skills, values and motivation, to work to make a difference in their society.¹⁵

When active, social participation is encouraged early in life through opportunities for youth to participate in the community, it can foster a lifelong culture of volunteering.¹⁶

“Positive experiences of volunteering or service learning (school-based programs) are amongst the most powerful facilitators of young people’s belief that their volunteering matters and can make a difference”


– *Youth Volunteering in Australia Report, 2015*¹⁷

Evidence indicates that traditional methods of education on social responsibility and community participation are largely ineffective in encouraging active engagement by students and instead are strengthened by embedding practical experience through school-initiated programs.¹⁸ This highlights the opportunity for schools to encourage and support students to volunteer, to gain valuable lived experience and build the skills required for being empowered, active people.¹⁹

¹⁷ Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 26.

¹⁸ Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 26.

¹⁹ Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 26



“It [volunteering] brings everyone together and encourages us as teens to be more aware of what kind of a society we are growing up in. It lets us use our own skills and the combination of those in groups with teamwork, as well to help other people. It’s a very great and inviting experience”.

– Student volunteer²⁰

The proposed standard and vocational learning pathways as part of the reformed VCE program are well-placed to include volunteer programs for students. Novel volunteer programs have achieved great success in secondary schools (see Recommendation 3) and volunteering is highly relevant to vocational specialisations which are aimed at preparing students for employment in sectors that have strong volunteer workforces and rely heavily on this contribution.

The skills that vocational learning units aim to develop correspond to the skills and benefits of volunteering. In addition to technical skills, employers across all sectors now look for ‘soft skills’ such as interpersonal and communication skills, self-discipline and awareness, and open-mindedness. Volunteering offers a unique opportunity to gain these invaluable life and workplace skills.

The number of students completing VCAL has increased from almost 4500 students in 2011 to almost 7800 students in 2020.²¹ The interest in vocational learning pathways is likely to further increase as students seek more flexible and diverse educational options that prepare them for the workforce.

Certificate II in Active Volunteering (CHC24015) is currently offered as part of the VET Community Services Program with 371 students completing the certificate in 2020.²² 208 Unit 1 and 129 Unit 2 requirements were completed as part of the Certificate II in Active Volunteering.²³

While details of the reformed VCE vocational learning pathway are still in progress, the proposed program in the reform will include:

- » 2 units of Personal Development Skills (e.g., teamwork, communication, leadership),
- » 2 units of Work-Related Skills (rights and responsibilities),
- » 180 hours of VET Certificate II or above.

²⁰ Volunteering ACT. Practical lessons and resources for teachers from Foundation to Year 10. The Importance of Students Learning about volunteering. 2015. Available https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1438056660VA03895_Resources_Book_WEB_150727.pdf. Page 2.

²¹ <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/research-and-statistics/performance-senior-secondary/Pages/2020/Section6.aspx>

²² <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/research-and-statistics/performance-senior-secondary/Pages/2020/Section6.aspx>

²³ www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/research-and-statistics/performance-senior-secondary/Pages/2020/Section4.aspx

Given the benefits of volunteering and the unique position of schools to promote volunteering, we recommend for the Certificate II in Active Volunteering to remain a part of Community Service-related pathways and be expanded across other relevant vocational learning pathways.

Under the current VET and VCAL format, pathways that would benefit from the inclusion of Certificate II in Active Volunteering include:

VCE VET Programs	VCAL Industry Pathways
Conservation and Land Management	Community Services and Health
Animal Care and Management	Sport and Recreation
Foundational Skills	
Health	
Public Safety	
Sport, Fitness & Recreation	
Tourism, Travel & Hospitality	

The Sport and Recreation sector is a key example of the importance of fostering empowered, active people and a culture of volunteering.

CASE STUDY: SPORT & RECREATION VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is critical to sport and recreation from professional sport clubs to grassroots community sport groups. Victorians volunteer for sport and recreation more than for any other activity, making it the largest volunteer base across all sectors. However, sport and recreation volunteering has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and is yet to return to a pre-pandemic rate of participation.

Consultation with the sector identifies a need to attract new volunteers including students and young people who have previously been under-represented in sport volunteering. Past research has indicated that young people show a strong interest in volunteering in the sport and recreation sector, particularly those living in regional and rural communities.²⁴

The current VCE VET Sport and Recreation stream is a popular pathway that provide students with the opportunity to acquire and develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to work in the areas of sport and outdoor recreation related industries.²⁵

Given the culture of volunteering and its contribution to the sport and recreation sector, VET Sport and Recreation students would benefit from developing an understanding and experience in volunteering. Embedding Certificate II in Active Volunteering in this pathway would prepare students for both volunteering and working with the volunteers who are key to the success of the sector.

VicSport and Disability Sport and Recreation Victoria both endorse the inclusion of Certificate II in Active Volunteering in Sport & Recreation vocational learning streams.

²⁴ Gasser, C., & Evans-Whipp, T. *Chapter 11 Here to help: How young people contribute to their community* in LSAC Annual Statistical Report. 2018. A
²⁵ <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vet/vce-vet-programs/Pages/sportrecreation.aspx>

SECTION 2: PROMOTING YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Recommendation 2:

Promote the opportunities and benefits of volunteering to students:

- a) Develop promotional campaigns highlighting the benefits and success stories of youth volunteering.
- b) Include education on volunteering in professional learning for teachers and trainers.
- c) Embed volunteering promotion in existing initiatives and processes, including:
 - » VET Champions Initiative,
 - » Enhanced Statement of Results,
 - » My Career Portfolio portal.

Volunteering holds numerous benefits for all community members. However, research has shown that there are specific benefits for young people, based on social, vocational and health measures, as well as those from the lived experience of students.

Students say that the benefits gained from volunteering are:

- » Enhanced feelings of personal worth and contribution,
- » A sense of social belonging,
- » Refinement of values,
- » The acquisition of new skills and knowledge.²⁶

Social and vocational benefits for young people who volunteer include:

- » Strengthening social relationships,
- » Developing personal and work-related skills,
- » Enhancing career opportunities and employability,
- » Contributing to community and 'making a difference',
- » Identifying with community diversity and public concerns,
- » Social responsibility and participation,
- » Civic and participatory values and skills.²⁷

26 Volunteering ACT. Practical lessons and resources for teachers from Foundation to Year 10. The Importance of Students Learning about volunteering. 2015.

27 Available https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1438056660VA03895_Resources_Book_WEB_150727.pdf
Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 21

For youth from disadvantaged and lower socio-economic groups, volunteering can have additional benefits including “positive social development with a political awareness”, and confidence in their capacity to contribute to society and succeed in future endeavours.²⁸

Given the enormous potential that volunteering holds for young people during student years and in fostering positive social outcomes into the future, we recommend five key initiatives to be adopted as part of the Senior Secondary Reform, to promote greater participation in volunteering.

Promotional Campaigns: Benefits & Success Stories

Promotional campaigns that highlight the benefits of volunteering through personal stories and case studies are a proven method of promoting and increasing participation in volunteering. Promotional campaigns are often cost effective, wide-reaching and successful on social media platforms that are universally used by young people.

CASE STUDY: VICTORIA ALIVE PROJECT - #WEAREABLE CAMPAIGN

Volunteering Victoria, through their Victoria ALIVE project, delivered the #WeAreAble campaign aimed at improving disability inclusion in the volunteer sector. The series of videos that formed the campaign highlighted stories of diverse and successful volunteering while providing accessible information and ideas on volunteer opportunities. The campaign videos were shared across a range of social media platforms and in project related events.²⁹



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Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 8.
See the videos: <https://www.victoriaalive.org.au/weareable/>

More recently, Volunteering Tasmania launched Be Connected. Be A Volunteer, a video-based campaign funded by the Tasmanian Government, to encourage re-engagement with volunteering. The promotional videos showcase stories of community contribution and include an example of student volunteering.

CASE STUDY: VOLUNTEERING TASMANIA: BE CONNECTED. BE A VOLUNTEER. AHMED AND OBSA'S STORY

Ahmed and Obsa, who are both refugees from Ethiopia, are the inspiration behind the Give Back Program, supported by JCP Youth. They created the program in 2019 to show their gratitude and appreciation to the Tasmanian community. The boys have travelled across the state, working in a kitchen for the homeless and donating clothes and housing supplies to those in need. They have mentored at-risk youth and speak openly about their life stories, thereby inspiring many people along the way.³⁰

See Ahmed & Obsa's story here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pi0q74_1aGY

Volunteering education in professional learning for teachers and trainers

“A great senior secondary education requires a highly skilled and world class workforce, including teachers, trainers and staff in schools to support vocational and applied learning”

– *Senior Secondary Reform Discussion paper*³¹

Teachers, trainers and career advisors are a key source of information for students and are well placed to offer advice on volunteering as a means of gaining experience in a chosen field, developing life skills and/or giving back to community. Incorporating education on volunteering, particularly on its value for students, in professional development for senior secondary professionals, is a highly effective way of promoting and engaging more students in volunteering.

30 See Ahmed and Obsa's story: https://youtu.be/Pi0q74_1aGY

31 Senior Secondary Reform Overview, page 4.

<https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.vic-engage.files/7716/2573/2149/Reform-Overview-discussion-paper.pdf>

The VET Champions Initiative

The VET Champions Initiative is a new awards initiative aimed at recognising high achieving students in vocational pathways. Recognising and rewarding achievement is best practice in volunteer involvement and a known factor in encouraging participation. The inclusion of an award for a ‘*Student Volunteer Champion*’ that recognises students for their contribution to the community would promote the value of volunteering and a culture of empowered, active people through acknowledgement and recognition.

“I like helping people in general. It gives me a feeling of pride, happiness, joy and I love to get positive feedback about what I have done”.

– *Student Volunteer*³²

Enhanced Statement of Results

The enhanced statement of results aims to provide training providers and employers with an overview of a students’ full range of achievements.

Including volunteering roles and related experience on the enhanced statement of results is an important recognition of the value of volunteering. It also provides employers and trainers with an understanding of a student’s broader life experience, interests, skill development and sense of social responsibility.

My Career Portfolio

My Career Portfolio is an online portal and resource aimed at supporting students in their early career decisions by providing resources and a central forum for capturing their career goals and plans.

³² Volunteering ACT. Practical lessons and resources for teachers from Foundation to Year 10. The Importance of Students Learning about volunteering. 2015.
Available https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1438056660VA03895_Resources_Book_WEB_150727.pdf.

Students can use My Career Portfolio to:

- » create and update an online Career Action Plan,
- » store files related to their course and career planning, online reports, resumes, awards and examples of their schoolwork (for example, videos and artworks),
- » access links to current information and resources to support course and career.³³

My Career Portfolio is an ideal forum to provide volunteering information, resources and guidance to support students in seeking volunteering experience and foster community engagement. Volunteering information and resources in this forum should be co-designed with students to ensure they are relevant to the experience, motivations and goals of young people.

SECTION 3: INVESTING IN SCHOOL-BASED VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMS

Recommendation 3:

Fund and expand the range and reach of existing school-based volunteering programs.

Research indicates that young people's volunteering is influenced by 'top down' factors including policies and programs implemented by schools.³⁴ School-based programs are an effective way of introducing youth to volunteering and supporting the development of social responsibility and community participation.³⁵

Positive predictors of effective school supported volunteering programs include:

- » volunteering is integrated into the curriculum and school timetable,
- » the program is supported by staff,
- » student volunteers receive reward and recognition,
- » volunteer programs are driven by young people (youth-led).³⁶

There are existing examples of effective school-based volunteer programs that have the potential for greater reach and impact with appropriate resourcing and funding.

33 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/Pages/my-career-portfolio.aspx>

34 Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 26.

35 Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 26.

36 Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 26.

CASE STUDY: ADVANCE PROGRAM

Advance is a Victorian Government secondary school-based program providing students with the opportunity to gain practical skills by volunteering on projects with local community organisations. The program enables young people to get involved in their community and develop leadership skills while having fun.

The program has five key components including learning modules, engagement in recognised certificate training, and a community project or series of volunteering activities. The program also has established processes and requirements for recognition and celebration and encourages youth-led decision making.

In 2020, 425 Victorian Government secondary schools participated in the Advance program, with 26,891 students completing the program. Young people and schools established 970 community partnerships and there were numerous benefits for students and community partners. Participants reported:

- » increased confidence, teamwork and networking skills,
- » increased healthy life choices and behaviours,
- » identification of potential career pathways,
- » reengagement in education and mentoring opportunities.

59 per cent of students reported that they were continuing their volunteer activities, equating to 15,865 new ongoing volunteer opportunities in 2020.

Advance programs can be delivered through a diverse range of community engagement options, including projects linked to animal welfare project, the environment, human rights and community service. Greensborough College represents a successful example of the Advance program as part of the senior secondary curriculum.

“The Year 11 and Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) students from Greensborough College participated in the Advance program in 2018 by focusing on personal development skills. The Year 11 VCAL class completed community projects in units including Walkability, The Royal Children’s Hospital Appeal and the RSPCA

The Year 12 VCAL classes worked on the unit of ‘Homelessness’ (Sem 1) that focused on the programs offered by the Salvation Army and The Big Issue.

Students were able to develop their leadership skills, communication skills, maturity and knowledge and understanding of the VCAL programs. These programs also enabled students to understand the impact of decisions made by the youth of today and the consequences that may come with those decisions”.

School-based volunteering programs such as those funded through the Advance program also address the many barriers that young people experience when seeking to volunteer, including logistical and practical issues such as the ‘red tape’ of police checks and other documentation requirements.³⁸ The program also aims to be led by students so that the volunteering is of meaning to young people and suited to their interests and motivations.

Traditionally, students from disadvantaged or lower socioeconomic areas experience increased barriers to accessing volunteering such as a lack of time, money and access to transport.³⁹ School-based programs that include volunteering can address these barriers and have been shown to have positive outcomes for keeping at-risk students engaged in schooling or re-engaging them in education.

CASE STUDY: PROJECT READY.

Project Ready is a hands-on work readiness and personal development program developed by Central Ranges Local Learning and Employment Network. The program was developed to support at-risk, educationally vulnerable, and challenging secondary school students, with the aim of positively influencing their education and training trajectory.

Fifteen schools deliver the Project Ready program with students completing activities including undertaking a community project, career planning, work placement and industry engagement and a range of other modules aimed at personal and professional skill development. Students also complete VET Certificate II in Active Volunteering.

Project Ready has been effective in re-engaging students in their education and helping them prepare for further training and employment.

“Many students who participated in Project Ready reported enhanced self-worth, evidence of growth mindsets, renewed positive attitudes towards education and clearer perspectives of their future career directions and employment opportunities.”


- Project Ready Preliminary Program Report⁴⁰

³⁸ Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 25.

³⁹ Walsh, L., & Black, R. *Youth Volunteering in Australia: An Evidence Review*. Page 24.

⁴⁰ Central Ranges Local Learning and Employment Network. *Project Ready 2019: Preliminary Project Report*. 2020. Available: <https://projectready.vic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Dr-Lindy-Baxter-Report.pdf>. Page 5.

These programs illustrate the enormous potential that school-based volunteering programs have for promoting lifelong active citizenship and continued engagement in senior secondary education.



“I think if we were able to volunteer through a school organised program more kids would be interested in volunteering. Most people would volunteer if given the opportunity, but they don’t because it means they have to find an organisation, contact them and then get a way there and home... if their school did all the preparation and all the kids had to do was get there, more people would volunteer.”

-Student Volunteer⁴¹

41 Volunteering ACT. *Practical lessons and resources for teachers from Foundation to Year 10. The Importance of Students Learning about volunteering*. 2015.
Available https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1438056660VA03895_Resources_Book_WEB_150727.pdf.

SECTION 4: DEVELOPING THE EVIDENCE BASE ON YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Recommendation 4:

Invest in developing the evidence base on student and youth volunteering.

While there is existing evidence on youth volunteering patterns, the data remains unclear due to differing data collection methods and approaches. There is also little evidence on the impact of, and opportunities stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic for youth volunteering. Volunteer-involving organisations, educators, and school-based community volunteer programs would all benefit from additional research into youth volunteering.

Volunteer-involving organisations frequently express an interest in diversifying their volunteer workforce and engaging younger volunteer cohorts. However, from an organisational perspective, there are age-specific considerations for engaging younger people through volunteering, for example:

- » how to best frame “volunteering” in a way that has meaning to young people,
- » how and where to recruit,
- » scoping roles that can accommodate the schedules of younger people,
- » how to lead and support younger volunteers,
- » how to recognise the contribution of younger people,
- » how to develop volunteer programs that are led by students.

Similarly, Volunteering Australia, have identified the need for further clarity on youth volunteering including characteristics of, and motivations to volunteering.⁴² We endorse these recommendations and the rationale for investing in further youth volunteering research, put forward in the Youth Volunteering in Australia Report.

“Echoing previous research, this review notes the importance of better understanding the lived experience and motivations of young people to volunteer. The contributions made by young volunteers are of great potential value, but organisations need to understand the individual functional motives and needs of volunteers in order to ensure volunteering is a positive experience for both parties”

-Youth Volunteering in Australia, 2015

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Volunteering Australia. ‘Youth Volunteering Key Statistics’. August 2021.
Available: <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Youth-Volunteering-Factsheet.pdf> page 2.

Surveying and market research techniques can identify motivations and uncover barriers to volunteering for students, young people and other cohorts. An example of research that has strengthened pathways for young people is the *Environmental Volunteering Social Research Report (September 2020)* commissioned by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.⁴³ Similar sector-specific research would assist the education sector to understand the patterns and motivations of youth volunteering and embed a culture of volunteering within the Senior Secondary curriculum.

Conclusion

The senior secondary education setting is an ideal environment in which to learn about the ethos and benefits of volunteering. Well-run school-based volunteer projects have demonstrated great value for students, schools and communities alike. We encourage the Victorian Government to thoroughly explore the benefits of incorporating volunteering in the senior secondary curriculum. Volunteering supports many of the aims of the Senior Secondary Reform by being a powerful way to learn, an important means of gaining practical experience and a key strategy of connecting and re-engaging, difficult to engage students.

We have an opportunity to look beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and consider the priorities for supporting young people to participate in the community and workforce. Addressing the long-term decline of formal volunteering is an issue that requires a strategic and considered approach. This issue is not just important for volunteer-involving organisations wanting to diversify their workforces and engage passionate youthful volunteers. We also want all young Victorians to understand the tremendous benefits of volunteering, including its potential for the development of skills, work experience, social networks and a multitude of other health and social benefits.

Volunteering Victoria welcomes the opportunity to work with the Victorian Department of Education and Training to consider these recommendations further.

43 https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/510810/NGR-2005009-Environmental-Volunteering-Research-Report-Public-Final.pdf



Survey questions:

Which of the following best describes you?

Trainer.

Do you represent one of the following organisations?

Non-government organisation.

Which of the following best describes your level of optimism for senior secondary reform?

Very optimistic.

What aspects of the reform are you most excited about?

- » Access to a broader range of high-quality VET programs for all students
- » New professional learning for senior secondary teachers
- » Celebrating excellence in vocational and applied learning
- » Supporting students to stay engaged in education and training
- » Providing students with the skills employers need

As the peak body for volunteering in the state, we are excited about the opportunity to embed volunteering education and opportunities in the curriculum and these elements of the reform.

What opportunities does senior secondary reform present?

The reform holds many opportunities to promote and facilitate student volunteering and develop a culture of empowered, active people. The benefits of volunteering hold vast potential for meeting with the aims of the reform including providing students with the opportunity to develop essential life and work skills. Volunteer programs are also an innovative approach to supporting students to remain engaged in the education system

What challenges does senior secondary reform present?

The success of volunteer initiatives in the senior secondary curriculum requires investment in education and promotion to ensure that students, parents, and teachers are aware of the benefits of engaging in volunteering.