

# Case study: Leading change towards inclusive practice

## Conference Activity – Identifying Barriers and Solutions

**Volunteering Gippsland and Latrobe Valley Authority joined forces for an impactful collaboration at the 2024 Volunteering Victoria Conference Regional Hub in Traralgon. The conference theme, “Shake it up: Bold Change”, resonated deeply with our shared passion of a more inclusive and diverse volunteer community across Gippsland.**

The Latrobe Valley Authority was established in 2016 to support the region's economic transition following the Hazelwood power station closure and is focused on fostering a thriving future for the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland. Volunteering Gippsland, created through the Volunteer Management Activity, is dedicated to promoting volunteer organisations, recruiting volunteers, and offering resources like training and good news stories. Together, these two organisations are a perfect fit, sharing a vision of supporting the community and creating opportunities for Gippslanders to engage, grow, and succeed.

### **The Challenge**

As part of the conference proceedings, attendees participated in a group activity designed to address real-life barriers faced by volunteers from four key cohorts:

- Youth;
- First Nations;
- New Migrants, and;
- People with Disabilities.

Deidentified scenarios and barriers previously discussed with Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) were presented to ensure the activity was grounded in real experiences and challenges.

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### The Approach

Each group was tasked with developing solutions based on six guiding principles:

1. Embracing Change
2. Being Curious and Having a Playful Mindset
3. Fostering New Connections
4. Creating Social Connection
5. Realising Different Strengths
6. Building Knowledge and Understanding

### The Activity

During the brainstorming sessions, participants were encouraged to think creatively and collaboratively. The room buzzed with energy as diverse perspectives came together to forge innovative solutions. To capture the essence of these discussions, we enlisted the talents of graphic design artist Jessamy Gee. Jessamy worked in real-time, transforming the groups' ideas into vibrant visual representations that encapsulated the spirit of each proposed solution.

## VOLUNTEERING BIG IDEAS



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In this workshop, graphic design was used as an additional communication tool. The use of colour, iconography, and presentation come together to create visual representations of the ideas explored and enhance communication.

### Group Insights and Solutions

#### 1. Youth

**Barrier:** Limited public transport.

**Solution:** The concept of collaborative volunteering in schools, centres on making volunteering opportunities more accessible, cost-effective, and engaging for youth while promoting community involvement and education. By bringing volunteering activities directly to schools, we can overcome transport and logistical barriers, ensuring that all students have the chance to participate. This initiative involves collaborating with local volunteer organisations, councils, and corporate entities for funding and support, enabling a variety of volunteering activities within the local community. School incursions and events can serve as platforms to introduce students to the concept of volunteering, fostering early engagement.

**Future plan:** We envision a guide for schools and volunteer organisations to facilitate school-based volunteering programs, establishing partnerships with multiple organisations to offer diverse opportunities, and implementing regular workshops and events to keep students engaged.

#### 2. First Nations

**Barrier:** Cultural misunderstandings and lack of trust.

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**Solution:** First Nations Youth Engagement emphasises creating culturally safe spaces for First Nations youth to participate in volunteer activities, fostering cultural safety and understanding, and supporting community-led initiatives and allyship.

**Future plan:** Include consolidating existing resources on reconciliation and cultural safety within Volunteering Gippsland online hub, fostering partnerships with local councils and First Nations communities, and implementing regular cultural training and awareness sessions for volunteers and staff.

### 3. New Migrants

**Barrier:** Language barriers and unfamiliarity with the local volunteer landscape.

**Solution:** By establishing partnerships with existing resources, we aim to include on Volunteering Gippsland a welcoming committee toolkit. To support individuals from diverse backgrounds and abilities, provide resources in collaboration with state government, local councils, and volunteering bodies, and celebrate cultural events year-round to foster inclusivity.

**Future plan:** Developing/adapting a comprehensive resource hub and partner with educational institutions and established cultural groups for cultural training.

### 4. People with Disabilities

**Barrier:** Social barriers and support from carers.

**Solution:** By collaborating with disability organisations, we facilitate tailored volunteering opportunities and establish networks linking disability organisations with volunteer roles. Creating safe spaces for inclusive discussions and planning is integral to ensuring volunteers with disabilities feel supported.

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**Future plan:** Disability organisations attend regular meetings and forums to address challenges and opportunities, explore a mentorship program for volunteers with disabilities, and promoting awareness through targeted campaigns on disability-inclusive volunteering.

### Key Takeaways

The 2024 Volunteer Conference collaboration with Latrobe Valley Assembly was an inspiring example of how communities can come together to lead the change toward inclusive practices. By addressing real-life barriers faced by volunteers, the participants engaged in dynamic discussions, proposing creative and practical solutions for youth, First Nations, new migrants, and people with disabilities.

The energy and engagement of the event reinforced that fostering inclusion is not just about removing barriers but also about creating opportunities for everyone to participate and contribute. The visual representations captured by Jessamy Gee underscored the importance of creativity in problem-solving, and the brainstorming sessions highlighted the need for continuous collaboration and open dialogue.

As we move forward, the insights gained will guide Volunteering Gippsland and other Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) in implementing these innovative ideas, ensuring the volunteer sector in Gippsland becomes more accessible, inclusive, and vibrant.

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### Tips for Facilitating a Similar Event on Inclusion

If you're looking to replicate or adapt this event in your own community, here are some tips to help you get started:

- ❖ **Collaborate with diverse stakeholders:** Partner with local organisations, councils, and cultural groups to ensure a wide range of perspectives. Collaboration is key to addressing specific community needs and building trust.
- ❖ **Create safe, inclusive spaces for discussion:** Ensure that the environment is welcoming for all participants, especially those from underrepresented groups. Establish guidelines for open communication and respectful engagement to foster an inclusive atmosphere.
- ❖ **Ground discussions in real-life experiences:** Use scenarios and examples that are relevant to your community to make the discussions practical and focused. Gathering feedback from participants and organisations beforehand ensures that the activity addresses actual barriers.
- ❖ **Encourage creativity and bold thinking:** Invite participants to think outside the box and challenge traditional practices. Providing creative outlets, such as visual storytelling or collaborative brainstorming, can help spark fresh ideas.
- ❖ **Use a facilitation framework:** Structure the discussions around clear guiding principles, such as embracing change and fostering connections, to keep the brainstorming focused and productive.
- ❖ **Capture insights in real-time:** Consider hiring a visual artist or note-taker to document key ideas as they emerge, making it easier to turn conversations into actionable plans later.
- ❖ **Provide follow-up resources:** Ensure there is a plan for action after the event. Compile insights into a report, share resources like toolkits, and maintain partnerships to support ongoing implementation.

By following these steps, you can create an event that inspires change and supports the development of an inclusive volunteer community, tailored to your local context.

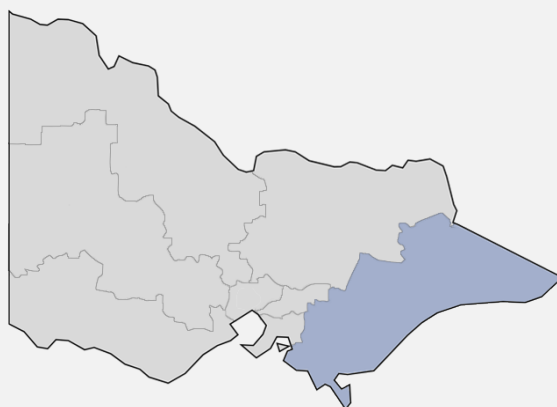
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<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



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*Volunteering Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*