

Case study: Leading change towards inclusive practice

Building local connections: Saturday Vollie Club

Cultivating Community's 'Saturday Vollie Club' is an inclusive volunteer initiative aimed at fostering community connections. By offering a low-commitment, culturally inclusive volunteer experience, the program brings together people of diverse backgrounds to learn gardening skills, build relationships, and engage with local food systems.

About Cultivating Community

Cultivating Community is an accredited social enterprise and non-profit organisation with 25 years of experience in community engagement and sustainability. The organisation manages over 21 community gardens across Metro Melbourne and provides food system-related services, including gardening education and food waste management. One of its key initiatives is managing Melbourne's largest rooftop garden, where fresh, culturally appropriate produce is grown for local communities and partners.

The need for inclusive volunteering

The Saturday Vollie Club operates from the rooftop garden in Burwood, a public space located atop the Burwood Brickworks Shopping Centre. This space serves as an educational hub, with excess produce donated to local food relief programs. The local community is highly diverse, with more than 41% of residents born overseas, and over a quarter of residents living alone.

Frasers Property, the owners of Burwood Brickworks, approached Cultivating Community to find ways to engage local residents with the rooftop garden and foster connections among residents. Many residents are new migrants with English as a second language, and engagement in the space had been minimal, particularly following the challenges of COVID-19 lockdowns. Recognising the need for an accessible and culturally inclusive approach, Cultivating Community launched the Saturday Vollie Club.

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Program design

The Saturday Vollie Club is a low-barrier volunteer opportunity designed to accommodate diverse community members. The group meets once a month on Saturday mornings, allowing participation from those with full-time jobs, families, and school-aged children. Volunteers engage in tasks such as weeding, mulching, and harvesting under the guidance of a trained horticulturalist. The garden is also fully accessible for people using wheelchairs, scooters, or other mobility aids.

A key feature of the program is its simplified onboarding process. Volunteers check in via a QR code, eliminating the need for Police Checks while maintaining necessary identity verification. This streamlined approach reduces barriers to participation.

To enhance the volunteer experience, coffee and croissants are provided from the rooftop café, creating a welcoming and social atmosphere. A WhatsApp group enables ongoing engagement, where participants share gardening tips, recipes, and insights into culturally appropriate food.

Key learnings

The Saturday Vollie Club has been a highly effective model for inclusive volunteer engagement.

Key takeaways include:

- **Minimise barriers to entry** through a simplified onboarding process.
- **Offer flexible, low-commitment opportunities** that accommodate different lifestyles.
- **Clearly communicate the purpose and outcomes** for both the organisation and volunteers.
- **Create a welcoming and social environment** that fosters friendships and community connections.
- **Partner with local organisations** to secure funding and support for volunteer programs.

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Program impact

The Saturday Vollie Club has provided a thriving, inclusive volunteer opportunity that has made a meaningful impact in the Burwood Brickworks community. In four months, the volunteer group has grown from zero to 13, with members from diverse backgrounds through prioritising inclusion, including youth, new migrants, people with disabilities, and vulnerable women. By fostering connections, promoting sustainable practices, and offering a space for cultural exchange, this program exemplifies the power of inclusive volunteerism in community building.

Acknowledgements

For more information, follow Cultivating Community on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Cultivating Community would like to thank Box Hill Rotary, Whitehorse City Council, and Frasers Property for their support of this volunteer program for the residents of Burwood Brickworks and the surrounding area.

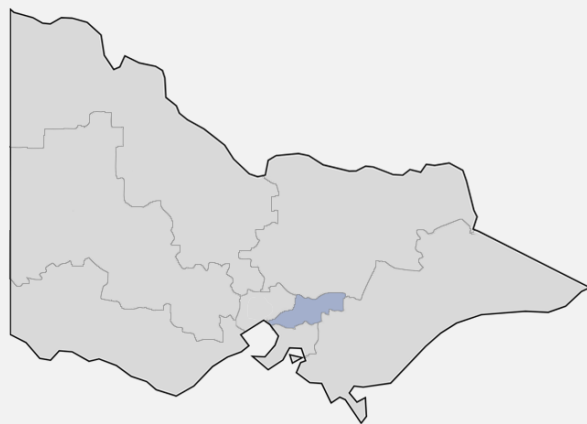
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Consortium region: Eastern Metro

Date: August 2024



This case study was produced with funding provided through the Volunteer Management Activity 2022-2026 grant. You may learn more about the program by visiting this website:

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



Funded by the Australian Government
Department of Social Services.



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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.