

Case study: Leading change towards inclusive practice

Project Pitch – School program encouraging youth volunteering

Project Pitch is a school-based program encouraging Year 10-11 students to explore volunteering. Developed by the Ballarat Foundation and Highlights Local Learning and Employment Network (HLLLEN), the program uses a ‘pitch’ format to help students learn about local organisations, practise public speaking, and consider volunteering as part of their future pathways.

About Project Pitch

Project Pitch is designed to encouraging youth participation in volunteering. Delivered in schools, the program showcases the benefits of volunteering to students and inspires them to pitch an organisation to their peers. The content aligns with Certificate II in Active Volunteering and offers opportunities for young people to connect with local volunteer roles.

Research shows that volunteering during adolescence increases community involvement in adulthood, boosts self-esteem, and helps develop employability skills such as teamwork and communication. Beyond the individual benefits, it also strengthens community resilience and invigorates local economies.

Program Structure

After discussions with local schools, the program was structured as three weekly sessions of 90 minutes to 2 hours each. Each session included guest speakers from local volunteer-involving organisations and time for student discussion.

- **Session 1:** Representatives from local volunteer-involving organisations share their personal journeys, introduce their organisation, and outline current volunteering opportunities.
- **Session 2:** Students research an organisation and start creating their “pitch” on why their peers should volunteer there, with guidance on presentation and public speaking.

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- **Session 3:** Students deliver their pitch to their peers and a judging panel of volunteer organisation representatives, receiving feedback on their research and presentation skills.

Challenges

Time commitment

Delivering Project Pitch in schools required flexibility. Coordinators had to work around school timetables to ensure students could participate fully. Securing 3-5 presenters from volunteering organisations was also essential. To support attendance, the program was designed to require minimal time commitment from guest organisations by condensing the program into a single day.

Regulatory requirements

Insurance requirements presented another barrier. Some VIOs were unable to accept volunteers under 18, and there was a perception that hosting youth volunteers was administratively burdensome. A key turning point came when schools clarified that placements would be covered under their existing insurance policies. This reassurance helped more VIOs commit to participating. Likewise, being clear from the outset around the requirement for all external participants to hold a valid Working With Children Check also helped manage participation.

Student engagement

Keeping students engaged was another focus. Offering awards and prizes from the judging panel helped motivate participation and keep students feeling invested in the project. Facilitators developed a good rapport with students by keeping discussions light, offering real-life examples, and supporting students in small groups or one-on-one to assist them with researching information and discussing career pathways.

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Impact and Outcomes

In 2023, Project Pitch was delivered at 2 schools: Ballarat Grammar and Daylesford College, where students produced creative and well-researched pitches. Teachers noticed the ongoing impact:

“My Year 12s are in the thick of their Personal Development Skills project. Because their project pitches inspired them, they have carried the theme [of volunteering] on and are in the process of writing articles about different not-for-profit organisations across Ballarat and are putting together a mini-publication.”

– Teacher at Ballarat Grammar

Since 2024, Project Pitch has continued to grow in the Highlands region, expanding to more than 10 additional secondary schools. The program is now delivered alongside ‘Real Talks’, a career panel series featuring guest speakers from multiple industries, providing students with broader insights into career pathways and volunteering opportunities.

“When you’re in Year 10, it’s hard to think about your future careers... [and] to decide which paths to choose and how to get there. Listening to the volunteer organisations talk about what skills employers are looking for makes me realise that I can get some experience and skills through volunteering before going into the workforce. That makes it less scary”.

– Lilly, Year 10 student at Daylesford College

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Lisa Hall from Ballarat Foundation, who participates in both programs, highlights how volunteering connects to career development:

“When young people are considering their future careers, it can be hard to decide which paths to choose and how to get there. This program has introduced students to the jobs and industries on offer, and the skills employers are looking for, now and in the years to come...Volunteering creates real life experiences they can discuss in job interviews [and] can also help develop transferable skills, such as teamwork, leadership, communication, and problem-solving.”

Looking ahead

Engaging young people in volunteering is a two-way process that requires shifting perspectives on both sides. Many young people may not initially see the value of volunteering, while some organisations view youth volunteers as difficult to place. Project Pitch has helped bridge this gap, showing students how volunteering can build job-ready skills and providing organisations with an opportunity to see the energy and fresh ideas young volunteers bring.

Through its evolution into Real Talks, the program has been widely adopted across the region. The Ballarat Foundation and HLLLEN continue to collaborate with schools and organisations to remove barriers and create more inclusive opportunities for young people to contribute to their communities.

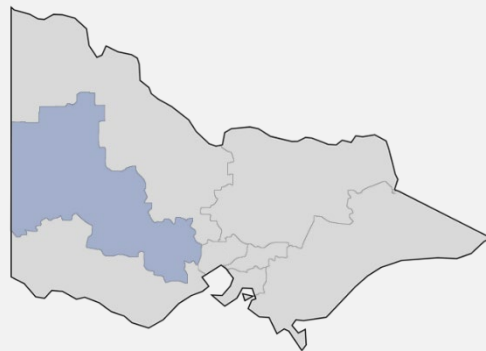
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Author: Ballarat Foundation

Consortium region: Grampians

Date: October 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.