

# Case study: Leading change towards inclusive practice

## Empowering Vulnerable Women Through Volunteering

**In Albury-Wodonga, a targeted volunteering program is supporting vulnerable women and youth in mental health recovery to reconnect with their community. By breaking down barriers to participation and offering personalised support, the initiative is opening doors to greater confidence, connections, and renewed purpose.**

For those in mental health recovery, taking the first step back into the community can be daunting. The intersection of mental health recovery and community engagement offers a unique opportunity to support vulnerable populations through volunteering. Recognising this, Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau developed a program to connect those in recovery – particularly vulnerable women and youth – with volunteering opportunities that foster social benefits and personal growth.

The program focuses on empowering participants to build confidence, enhance skills, and strengthen social inclusion, supporting their journey towards independence and community participation.

### **Recognising the Need**

Through collaboration with Albury Wodonga Health and other community organisations, a clear need emerged to support vulnerable women by raising awareness of volunteering opportunities. The initiative aimed to address barriers that prevent participation, such as lack of information, social isolation, and limited access to resources.

By speaking directly with up to 10 women each month, the program has:

- Increased understanding of the social, emotional, and skill-building benefits of volunteering
- Helped identify and address personal barriers to participation
- Tailored the volunteering experience to support individual needs

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- Built self-confidence to support transitions into volunteering and employment
- Provided information about available resources to facilitate positive volunteering experiences.

### How the Program Works

An initial information session was delivered at a Residential Mental Health Recovery and Rehabilitation Support Service – a 10-bed facility offering short-term stays of up to four weeks. These services provide opportunities for recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration into the community.

The aim was to connect this cohort with volunteering experiences that could foster positive recovery outcomes. Each session runs for one hour and is tailored to highlight the role of volunteering in recovery and rehabilitation. This includes:

- Guidance on registering with Volunteer Resource Bureaus
- Help in identifying suitable roles and navigating the application process
- Emphasis on social connections, transferable skills, and wellbeing benefits gained through volunteering, as well as the sense of purpose derived from community engagement.

### Outcomes and Impact

The program has proven to be highly successful, with strong positive feedback validating the program's approach and prompting the introduction of monthly sessions.

Participants have reported:

- Greater awareness of the benefits of volunteering.
- A new sense of purpose and accomplishment.
- Increased confidence in engaging with the broader community.

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These outcomes demonstrate how volunteering can play a vital role in mental health recovery, fostering pathways for meaningful community reintegration and improved wellbeing.

### Key Factors for Success

- ❖ Consistent engagement with participants, including follow-up phone contact
- ❖ Actively listening to participants' goals, expectations, and concerns
- ❖ Flexibility to adapt activities to suit individual needs
- ❖ Operating within service guidelines, ensuring confidentiality and respect for client circumstances

### Looking Ahead

The program will continue to run sessions every four weeks, with plans to:

- Increase engagement through both group and individual discussions.
- Enhance ongoing support via the Volunteer Resource Bureau, including practical tools and resources for effective volunteering.
- Monitor and evaluate outcomes to ensure continuous improvement.

By fostering connections, building confidence, and offering tailored support, this initiative highlights how volunteering can be a powerful tool for recovery and personal growth. It is empowering vulnerable women to overcome barriers and take active roles in their own journeys, while promoting meaningful community engagement through volunteerism.

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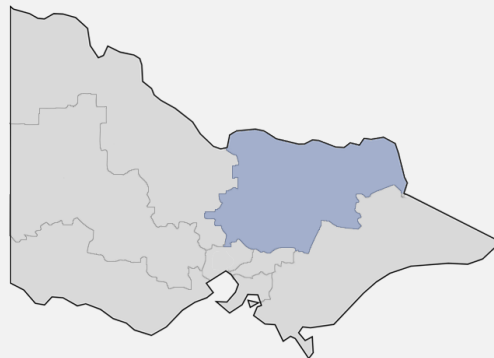
## Empowering Vulnerable Women Through Volunteering

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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.*