

Volunteering Tasmania Submission to the Youth Jobs Strategy

Prepared for **Jobs Tasmania**
 Department of State Growth

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About Volunteering
Tasmania As the peak body for Volunteering in Tasmania, we work to see an inclusive, thriving, and celebrated culture of community participation across the state by strengthening and enhancing volunteering through leadership, education, and connection. We work to ensure community-based volunteering is sustained, valued and integral to community resilience and wellbeing.

Executive Summary

The Youth Jobs Strategy aims to ensure that Tasmania's young people can access the support they need to participate in work, further education or training. In recognising that Tasmania's young people participate in these areas at lower rates than their mainland counterparts,¹ effective employment policy must look beyond traditional pathways to recognise, incorporate and expand access to alternative, innovative, and strengths-based pathways.

Volunteering is an evidenced pathway to employment. 85% of employers see volunteer experience as comparative to paid work experience. As such, access to volunteering directly affects life outcomes and holds the potential to increase the employability of Tasmania's secondary and senior secondary students as they transition from education to employment. While the motivations of volunteers vary, young people often cite increased employability as a motivation to volunteer. They see volunteering as a way to develop skills and build connections in areas of interest to them and in ways that are valuable to future employers and tertiary education institutions.

Programs like Volunteering Tasmania's Youth Volunteer Army are evidenced to have supported young people to gain employment through volunteering. Engagement with volunteering and the Youth Volunteer Army has encouraged young people, their communities and future employers to recognise the strengths, skills, interests, and experiences that young people have developed through their volunteering. These volunteering experiences help to increase their employability and job readiness.

Volunteering can act as a powerful driver of inclusion, but it is not immune to the systemic barriers that impede participation across society. Policy development that intends to reduce barriers to employment must also aim to increase young people's access to volunteering, ensuring that Tasmania's young people are provided with the opportunities they need to succeed.

Recommendations

- Despite the critical role that volunteering has in promoting work-readiness and increased employability, the volunteer industry is confronted by a pervasive lack of legitimacy, recognition, representation, and resourcing of volunteer-enabling infrastructure. We strongly recommend that volunteering is recognised, legitimised and strengthened as a pathway to employment, alongside education and training.
- The content presented in this submission aligns with the principles outlined in the Discussion Paper. The eighth principle should include the word 'volunteering' and read as follows: 'Volunteering and Vocational Education and Training are valued as great first options for many young people.'
- The state government supports Volunteering Tasmania's 2024-25 state budget request to expand the Youth Volunteer Army funding, investing in a program that has been evidenced to increase the employability of Tasmania's young people. Expansion of the Youth Volunteer Army funding would include sector capacity building to increase the capacity of volunteer-involving organisations to manage and respond to risk, ensuring that young people are safe in the volunteer workplace and that organisational policies and practices enable this.

¹ Tasmanian Government, Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper, pp. 12 - https://hdp-au-prod-app-sgtas-engage-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/5716/9466/4238/Youth-Jobs-Paper_Pages-HighResWeb.pdf

- The state government supports Volunteering Tasmania’s 2024-25 state budget request to deliver free Working with Vulnerable People registrations for volunteers, to reduce barriers to young people (aged 16 and over) accessing formal volunteering opportunities.
- Ensure that the Youth Jobs Strategy includes measures designed to build capacity and support the volunteering industry to reduce barriers to formal volunteer participation as identified in this submission for young people aged 15-24.
- Engage with Volunteering Tasmania to discuss the content of this submission and opportunities to increase young people’s pathways through volunteering.

Definitions of volunteering²

Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

Formal volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

Informal volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one’s own family members. For example, looking after children, property or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

Volunteering - a pathway to employment for young Tasmanians

Volunteering is a well-established pathway to employment, particularly for those who experience exclusion and increased barriers to accessing the labour market.³ For many young people, volunteering acts as a bridge between secondary school and employment, providing opportunities to utilise and gain new skills to increase their employability.⁴ It is often the first opportunity young people have to access this kind of formal, experiential learning. While volunteering supports employment, this submission recognises that it does not replace the need for financial income and should never be exploitative.

It is evident that young Tasmanians value volunteering. According to the 2022 Mission Australia Youth Survey, 39.6% of young Tasmanians were actively engaged in volunteering in the twelve months prior.⁵ Due to the complexities surrounding the collection of accurate, comprehensive volunteering data, we expect this figure to be much higher.

“With 14 Tasmanian job seekers for every advertised job – there is a significant opportunity to ensure we attract, recruit and train local people to fill these projected job openings.”⁶ Volunteering provides young people with opportunities to develop new skills, gain confidence and expand their social and

² Volunteering Australia, Common Languages Guide, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wpcontent/uploads/Common-Languages-Guide-2022-FINAL.pdf>

³ National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, pp. 53, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-2023-2033.pdf>.

⁴ Volunteering Australia, Volunteering Australia Project: The Review of the Definition of Volunteering, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Definition-of-Volunteering-27-July-20151.pdf>.

⁵ Mission Australia, Youth Survey 2022 Australia, pp. 29, accessed via <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/state-reports-2022?direction=asc&sort=title>

⁶ TasCOSS, Tasmanian Community Services Industry Joint Statement of 2021 State Election Priorities, https://issuu.com/tascoss7/docs/1657_tascoss_joint_peaks_statement_2021_draft_3

professional networks. It can equip young people with transferrable ‘soft skills’ such as teamwork and leadership and lead to increased mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Volunteering has also been cited as one of the primary ways that young people contribute to their communities.⁷ Volunteering supports young people to explore development opportunities in areas of interest to them, as well as those of interest to potential employers and tertiary institutions. By highlighting these experiences, we can draw on the strengths of young people’s lived and volunteer experiences, shifting the way we frame ‘deficits’ of paid work experience to recognising the depth of knowledge and skill that young people have established through volunteering.

Volunteering can reduce barriers surrounding poor pathway planning by supporting young people to gain exposure to different areas of work in lower pressure contexts than employment. This encourages young people to make informed decisions about their career pathways. In addition, volunteering can support young people to connect with and expand their networks both in and beyond their local communities. This is particularly important for young people who do not have access to existing role models who can support, guide, or encourage their employment, training or education aspirations.⁸

Some volunteers told us that volunteering afforded them access to opportunities they might not have otherwise had. They told us that volunteering was less daunting than paid employment and gave them the confidence and skills to participate in other aspects of society. They said volunteering made them feel included and gave them a sense of community and belonging.⁹

While young people overall see volunteering as a useful pathway to gaining paid employment, it has been suggested that young people from low socioeconomic circumstances have been found to be more motivated to volunteer in order to gain work experience than their peers (Spring et al., 2007, p. 2).¹⁰

Tasmania has the most regionally diverse workforce in Australia, with more than half of all workers employed outside of Hobart.¹¹ While local employment can be difficult to access, increased recognition across services, institutions and communities can encourage young people to identify volunteering opportunities in their communities or online. International research recognises that volunteers who live in rural areas increase their likelihood of finding paid employment by 55% by having gained relevant employment experience through volunteering.¹² Further research also notes that “volunteers have 22% higher odds of finding employment after being out of work than non-volunteers.”¹³

⁷ Gasser, C. & Evans-Whipp, T, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Here to help: How young people contribute to their community, pp. 121, https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/lvac-asr-2018-chap11-volunteer_work.pdf.

⁸ Fundamental principles for youth employment, Social Ventures Australia, pp. 10, <https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Fundamental-principles-for-youth-employment-report-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ Volunteering Australia, Discovery Insights: Towards a National Strategy for Volunteering, pp. 16, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-Discovery-Insights-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Youth volunteering in Australia: An evidence review, pp. 21, https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/275/filename/Youth-volunteering-in-Australia-evidence-review.pdf

¹¹ Australian Government, National Skills Commission, Australian Jobs 2021: Tasmania, <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/reports/australian-jobs-2021/jobs-location/tasmania>

¹² International Association for Volunteer Effort, Handbook: Youth Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment, pp. 9, https://www.iave.org/iavewp/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Youth-Handbook_Intro_Web.pdf.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 9.

“Frequently, young people try to apply for job roles where ‘experience is required’, however, they don’t yet have that experience and have no way of attaining experience because more and more employers will toss aside the applications of anyone who hasn’t yet worked in that field.”¹⁴ Yet, employment company SEEK has found that 85% of employers believe that volunteer experience can be just as credible as paid work.¹⁵ While employers recognise the value of volunteering in building transferrable experience, skills and knowledge to the workplace, effective public policy development must aim to build the profile of volunteering, supporting young people to identify and speak to prospective employers or further education providers about the transferable nature of their volunteering with confidence and authority. Despite the critical role that volunteering has in promoting work-readiness and increased employability, the volunteer industry is confronted by a pervasive lack of legitimacy, recognition, representation and resourcing of volunteer-enabling infrastructure. If this is not addressed by policy developers and decision makers, young people will be held back from accessing holistic and diverse pathways to employment.

Barriers to volunteering

While the motivations of volunteers vary, young people often cite the opportunity to increase their employability as a primary reason to volunteer.^{16, 17} Volunteering can act as a powerful driver of inclusion, but it is not immune to the systemic barriers that impede participation across society, where access is often mistaken for ability. While there are some distinct differences in the barriers between the two, young people often cite similar barriers to volunteering as they do to paid employment.¹⁸ These include cost of living pressures; a lack of flexibility to accommodate hours of availability; digital access; and limited opportunities that align with availability, interests and personal pathway aspirations.

Simultaneously, volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) are experiencing complexities in engaging young volunteers, having reported uncertainty about their obligations under the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework (the Framework). As a result, we are hearing feedback from the volunteering industry about a hesitancy to engage young volunteers, despite wanting to do so.

As part of their safeguarding practices, many VIOs have policies in place that require all volunteers to possess an active registration to work with vulnerable people (WWVP), however, this registration is not available to those under the age of 16.¹⁹ According to Service Tasmania, “you must be 16 or over to apply” for WWVP registration, and those under 18 require a parent or legal guardian to support their application.²⁰ This creates barriers to young people in their pursuit of formal volunteering pathways.

¹⁴ Youth Network of Tasmania, Action on Youth Unemployment, 2021/22 Budget Priorities Statement, pp. 3, <https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021-03/YNOT%202021-22%20BPS.pdf>.

¹⁵ SEEK, 3 reasons volunteering can put you ahead of the pack, 2019, <https://www.seek.com.au/career-advice/article/3-reasons-volunteering-can-put-you-ahead-of-the-pack>.

¹⁶ Alzaareer, M., & Abdalla, M., Exploring Motivations and Benefits of Volunteering: The Perspectives of High School Students in Selected Australian Islamic Schools, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/4/508>.

¹⁷ Alegria, P., The Impact of Volunteering on a Young Person’s Life, <https://communityresearch.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/What-is-the-impact-of-volunteering-on-a-young-persons-life-V1.pdf>

¹⁸ Feedback provided by community stakeholders to Volunteering Tasmania via the Youth Volunteer Army program.

¹⁹ Tasmanian Government, Consumer, Building and Occupational Services, Exemptions from registration, <https://www.cbos.tas.gov.au/topics/licensing-and-registration/work-with-vulnerable-people/exemptions>

²⁰ Tasmanian Government, Service Tasmania, Apply for registration to work with vulnerable people, <https://www.service.tas.gov.au/services/education-and-skills/working-with-vulnerable-people-including-children/apply-for-registration-to-work-with-vulnerable-people>

VIOs have also reported limitations in their insurance options, highlighting gaps in coverage for those under the age of 18, as well as a lack of resourcing to meet the organisational needs of engagement.

While volunteering is associated with the provision of free labour, only the time given is free. Instead, volunteering is accompanied by considerable, often hidden administrative and management costs, including WWVP registration, police history record check, and child and youth safeguarding training. Tasmania is one of only three Australian jurisdictions to charge volunteers for WWVP registration, and it's the most expensive.²¹ Volunteers and VIOs have consistently reported that the financial cost and administrative burden of obtaining WWVP registration is a significant barrier to volunteer recruitment. The provision of free WWVP volunteer registration is a small, tangible action that the Tasmanian Government could take to reduce young people's barriers to formal volunteering, and to increase child and youth volunteering practices. It is critical, particularly in the context of the Framework, that the financial burden accompanying increased regulation is alleviated, providing VIOs with support to deliver safe, accessible, and best-practice volunteering, and young people with access to a full range of options to support their pathway planning.

School supported volunteering initiatives

Access to volunteering opportunities directly effects life outcomes. Across the country, secondary school and tertiary education systems are looking at new ways to promote and facilitate positive life outcomes for young people. In 2020, the Australian National University (ANU) introduced a new admissions process for domestic school leaver places.²² As a condition of entry, students must now demonstrate their involvement in activities outside of the classroom from Year 10 to Year 12, such as "sport, a paid job, volunteering, school clubs, creative competitions, student exchanges and more." ANU states that the main reasons for this change are:

- *to promote community engagement and well-roundedness*
- *to highlight skills that enhance employability outcomes of students*
- *to give students an opportunity to tell the ANU more about themselves and for this to be recognised.*²³

In recognising such systems change, different jurisdictions have been implementing policy initiatives which embed volunteering in secondary school structures and curriculums. This has enabled educational institutions to expand their students' opportunities for success by moving beyond a structural focus on academic excellence, to honour and value the broader skills and capabilities that students possess.^{24, 25}

²¹ Volunteering Tasmania, Volunteers: Critical contributors to Tasmania's economic and social future – Budget priority statement 2023-24, pp. 11, https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Budget_Priorities_Statement_Oct_2022_Web_FINAL-1.pdf

²² Australian National University, Co-curricular or service requirement, <https://www.anu.edu.au/study/apply/domestic-applications-anu-undergraduate/applying-to-anu-application-details/co>.

²³ Shergold, P., Calma, T., Russo, S., Walton, P., Westacott, J., Zoellner, D., & O'Reilly, P., Education Council, Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training, 2020, pp 46, <https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public-assets/education-au/pathways/Final%20report%20-%202018%20June.pdf>.

²⁴ Government of South Australia, South Australian Certificate of Education, Capabilities & Learner Profile, <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/innovating/drivers>.

²⁵ Milligan, S., Luo, R., Kamei, T., Rice, S., and Kheang, T., 2020, Recognition of learning success for all: Ensuring trust and utility in a new approach to recognition of learning in senior secondary education in Australia, Learning Creates Australia, Melbourne, Victoria, https://www.learningcreates.org.au/media/attachments/2020/12/07/lca_success_paper_re-design_final9r2.pdf.

Jurisdictional policy support for youth volunteering includes:

- Volunteering Tasmania’s Youth Volunteer Army program²⁶
- Learner Profiles in South Australia²⁷, and New South Wales²⁸
- Active Volunteering – VET Certificates I, II and III in Queensland.²⁹

Given their reach, schools are well placed to promote and support their students’ access to the benefits of volunteering which include an array of positive social, economic, physical, mental, and emotional health and wellbeing benefits. It is critical that policy is developed to prepare “young people for their future rather than for our past”³⁰ by not only building a culture of active citizenship through volunteering to increase the employability of young people, but to add to the social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental wellbeing of Tasmania.

Volunteering Tasmania’s Youth Volunteer Army

In 2021, Volunteering Tasmania partnered with the Student Volunteer Army in New Zealand to trial a youth-based volunteering program that addresses both the declining rates of volunteering in Tasmania and highlights the contributions that young people make to their communities.

From 2021 to 2024, Volunteering Tasmania has partnered with Tasmanian secondary schools and Regional Employment Hubs through the Youth Volunteer Army to cultivate a new generation of volunteers by recognising and encouraging engagement with volunteering initiatives. This model recognises and assigns value to the diverse ways young people contribute to their communities through formal and informal volunteering. The program has the potential to increase the employability of and employment pathways for Tasmania’s 24,500 secondary and senior secondary students each year.³¹

The Youth Volunteer Army program supports young people to recognise and reflect on their current volunteering contributions, provide access to new volunteering opportunities, and uses volunteering as a mechanism to increase employability. This model recognises and assigns value to the diverse ways young people contribute to their communities through formal and informal volunteering.

Through the Youth Volunteer Army, young people:

- Use a mobile application or online portal to register and log their volunteer hours.
- Earn volunteer service badges which are presented at school and based on the number of volunteer hours completed.
- Connect every volunteer effort recorded to one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This highlights to the young person that everything they do to help their community, is connected to a global movement of change.
- Build a summary of service (CV of volunteering).

²⁶ Volunteering Tasmania, Youth Volunteer Army, <https://volunteeringtas.org.au/future-of-volunteering/youth-volunteer-army/>.

²⁷ Government of South Australia, South Australian Certificate of Education, Innovating the SACE, <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/innovating>.

²⁸ NSW Government, NSW Education Wallet, <https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/career-and-study-pathways/nsw-student-learner-profile---digital-wallet>.

²⁹ Volunteering Queensland, Training and Events, <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/training-events/#schools>.

³⁰ Shergold, P., Calma, T., Russo, S., Walton, P., Westacott, J., Zoellner, D., & O’Reilly, P., Education Council, Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training, 2020, pp. 6, <https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public-assets/education-au/pathways/Final%20report%20-%202018%20June.pdf>.

³¹ Tasmanian Government, Department of Education, Key Data March 2022, pp. 16, <https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/Key-Data-2022.pdf>

- Use their summary of service to demonstrate their skills and contributions towards the community and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- Gain increased recognition as active contributors to their communities.
- Build confidence to speak about the transferability of their volunteering experience to potential employers.

In October 2023, the Youth Volunteer Army has:

- Enrolled sixteen public secondary schools and four jobs hubs in the program.
- Registered 497 students on the Youth Volunteer Army app.
- Seen students log 15,624 hours of volunteering.

Youth volunteering increases employment opportunities

In December 2022, Youth Volunteer Army employees from Volunteering Tasmania, conducted a workshop with students at a remote high school.

When asking “Who here volunteers or has volunteered?” a number of students did not raise their hands. After further discussion, one of these students told the Volunteering Tasmania employee that they had been volunteering for the last four years with the Tasmanian Fire Service and had volunteered about 100 hours each year. At first the student shrugged off the significance of this contribution to their community but after some time they were able to realise what an incredible effort this was. This student spoke about their dream to be a career firefighter and highlighted how the skills, knowledge, and relationships they’d gained through volunteering could help them achieve this.

Young people’s volunteer work often goes unrecognised. But we know that young people across Tasmania undertake enormous volunteering efforts in their communities. They do so in ways that they can access and for causes that they care about. This program presents a pathway to highlight and celebrate those contributions and to build the confidence of young people to speak about the transferrable nature of their skills and experiences to prospective employers.

The impacts of this pilot program for young people have been recognised across jurisdictions, with Volunteering South Australia having recently commenced a pilot of the program, and Volunteering Victoria advocating for program implementation in their state.

In June 2024, the Tasmanian Youth Volunteer Army pilot period will have come to term. Given the success of the pilot, Volunteering Tasmania is calling on the state government to extend and expand the Youth Volunteer Army to continue building employment pathways for young people. This work must be accompanied by investment in critical volunteering infrastructure and a Tasmanian volunteering strategy which considers the needs of Tasmania’s communities and provides equitable access to the benefits that volunteering brings. This is essential in supporting young people to be empowered, active participants in their communities, to develop a strong sense of confidence and self-worth, and to develop greater agency in their lives.³²

³² Gasser, C. & Evans-Whipp, T, Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Here to help: How young people contribute to their community*, pp. 121, https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/lisac-asr-2018-chap11-volunteer_work.pdf.

Conclusion

Volunteering is an evidenced pathway to employment, training, and further education. Yet volunteering continues to be accompanied by a pervasive lack of understanding, representation, and legitimacy in public policy, with implications for the outcomes of the policy and for those it is intended to support.

The Youth Volunteer Army has supported young people to not only increase their employment outcomes but to alter the way they speak about the transferrable nature of their volunteer experiences with prospective employers. The program has demonstrated high levels of impact and stands as testament to why awareness about, and access to volunteering must be included within the Youth Jobs Strategy. Increased awareness about, and access to volunteering, will encourage community, government and industry to identify and support greater engagement with volunteering opportunities. This has the potential to positively impact service delivery outcomes, expanding the reach of Regional Jobs Hubs to connect young people with community-led, place-based development opportunities.

Work undertaken through the Youth Jobs Strategy to support the transition from school to work, training or further education must recognise, represent, and strengthen volunteering as an evidenced pathway to employment. Without identifying and promoting systemic change, young Tasmanians will be unable to access the comprehensive set of supports they need to pursue their pathways of choice.

Young people and employers alike recognise the value of volunteering. The success of this strategy will depend on a range of decisions. One of these decision will be how volunteering is recognised and represented as an effective pathway to employment in this Strategy.