

Volunteering Tasmania Submission to *Becoming an Adult: the experience of young Tasmanians today: A discussion paper to guide action.*

Prepared for	Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT)
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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.

About the Youth Transitions 18-25 years Action Plan Project

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) is developing a “whole-of-government Action Plan that will focus on and address the needs of young people 18-25 years as they transition to adulthood. The Action Plan will align to the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and will set program and policy direction for young people over the coming years. The Action Plan will be developed in collaboration with young people 18-25 years, key government, youth and community sector stakeholders and the Tasmanian community.”¹

As part of the consultation, YNOT have published *Becoming an Adult: the experience of young Tasmanians today: A discussion paper to guide action*. “This Discussion Paper recognises that times have changed and the support young Tasmanians need to successfully emerge into adulthood needs to change with them. That’s why we know a whole-of-government Action Plan is needed to focus on and support young Tasmanians to emerge successfully into adulthood.”²

About this submission

Volunteering is a well-established pathway to employment. For many young people, volunteering acts as a bridge between secondary school and employment, providing opportunities to utilise existing skills, to gain new experiences and to develop networks to increase employability.³ It is often the first opportunity young people have to access this kind of formal, experiential learning.

While the benefits of volunteering can be great, we recognise the privileges associated with formal volunteer participation and the barriers that prevent young people from accessing the opportunities they wish to engage with. Just as action must be taken to reduce the barriers to volunteering, we must also recognise the endless ways that young people contribute to their communities through volunteering. By increasing understanding about and raising the profile of volunteering broadly as well as within institutions such as secondary schools and employment support services, we can support young people to identify and speak with confidence about the transferable nature of their volunteer work within paid employment contexts.

This submission highlights some of the benefits of, and barriers to, volunteering and responds to question three of the discussion paper, emphasising the role that institutional support of volunteer participation can have in aiding the transition from school to work as a pathway to employment.

Volunteering Tasmania congratulate YNOT on the advocacy that has enabled this work and the development of the discussion paper. We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback and appreciate any opportunities to discuss the content of this submission further.

¹ YNOT, Youth Transitions 18-25: A Plan for Action, <https://www.ynot.org.au/young-people/youth-transitions-18-25-plan-action>

² YNOT, Becoming an adult: the experience of young Tasmanians today, A Discussion Paper to Guide Action, pp. 3, https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-11/YNOT_Youth_Transitions_Discussion_Paper_November2023.pdf

³ 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>.

Definitions of volunteering⁴

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.

Volunteer work should never be exploitative. It should provide the volunteer with the opportunity to contribute in a way that meets their needs and goals.

Benefits of volunteering

Volunteering is often dismissed or minimised by policy developers and decision makers as superfluous. In and of itself, volunteering does not provide access to basic needs such as housing, financial security and healthcare, yet many people consider 'volunteering', 'helping', or 'community giving' as essential to their wellbeing.

In applying a volunteering lens to the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, volunteering can be seen to contribute to the wellbeing of young people by advancing five of the six wellbeing domains outlined in the Strategy.

- Children and Young People are Loved, Safe and Valued
- Children and Young People are Healthy
- Children and Young People are Learning
- Children and Young People are Participating
- Children and Young People have a Positive Sense of Culture and Identity

With the right infrastructure in place, volunteering can provide participants with an array of positive wellbeing benefits. It can promote wellbeing by increasing positive and trusted relationships across the community, strengthening social capital and cohesion,^{5,6} and increasing life satisfaction.⁷ It can also provide opportunities to engage in activities driven by passion and purpose, promote physical and

⁴ Volunteering Australia, Common Languages Guide,

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wpcontent/uploads/CommonLanguages-Guide-2022-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ Australian Government, AIHW, Volunteers, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/volunteers>

⁶ Australian Government, Measuring What Matters: Australia's First Wellbeing Framework, pp. 56, https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/measuring-what-matters-statement020230721_0.pdf

⁷ OECD, How's Life? 2015: Measuring Well-being – The value of giving: Volunteering and well-being, pp. 189, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/how-s-life-2015/the-value-of-giving_how_life-2015-9-en#page1

mental health benefits and strengthen connection to place.^{8,9} Volunteering can offer varied, individual learning opportunities by supporting young people to realise their learning potential in different environments and break down barriers to inclusion by increasing connection and belonging, providing mechanisms to access and participate in the community by recognising that everyone has something of value to offer.¹⁰

This is highlighted in the following quotes shared by young Tasmanians and Australians:

Volunteering is an important way for young people to connect into the community to get one-on-one engagement with other people, because social media makes it hard for people to connect face-to-face these days. - Young Tasmanian volunteer

It also provides a great way to experience new things that you might never have even dreamed about and can give you exciting opportunities for the future. - Young Tasmanian volunteer.

[B]y getting some of the students to help with the outside community, I think it gives them that sense of belonging and they also feel like oh we are part of Australia too. - Young Muslim Australian volunteer¹¹

[I]t really builds a great opportunity to have like much more experience. ... it is not only about an academic level. ... you also want to have that sort of understanding of the real world. ... understanding of how to deal with people because that is ultimately what you're going to be doing once you leave school. - Young Muslim Australian volunteer¹²

In addition, volunteering can also act as a powerful pathway to further education, training, and employment.

A pathway to employment for young Tasmanians

While the motivations of volunteers vary, young people often cite the opportunity to increase their employment pathways as a primary reason to volunteer.^{13, 14}

⁸ Volunteering Australia, Volunteering, Wellbeing and Wellbeing Budgets, pp. 1,

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering-and-Wellbeing-Briefing-September2022-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ Australian Government, Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children – Prosocial behaviours and the positive impact on mental health: Growing Up in Australia Snapshot Series – Issue 9, May 2023, <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/lsac-snapshot-9-prosocial-behaviours-and-mental-health.pdf>

¹⁰ OECD, How's Life? 2015: Measuring Well-being – The value of giving: Volunteering and Well-being, pp. 190, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/how-s-life-2015/the-value-of-giving_how_life-2015-9-en#page2

¹¹ 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>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 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>.

¹⁴ 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>

In navigating the opportunities and risks that accompany emergent adulthood, volunteering can provide emergent adults with opportunities to develop new skills, gain confidence and expand their social and professional networks. It can equip them 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.¹⁵ 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 peoples lived and volunteer experiences, shifting the way we frame 'deficits' in paid work experience to recognising the depth of knowledge and skill that young people have gained and/ or demonstrated through volunteering.

*When people are looking to employ people, they are more inclined to choose someone that has volunteered in the previous years than someone who has no experience with volunteering as lots of benefits come with volunteering, so they know he can work well with a group, he can talk to customers or whatever the job may be.*¹⁶

At 10.4%, Tasmania's youth (15-24 years) unemployment rate is concerningly high compared to the unemployment rate of 4.2% for all other ages.¹⁷ While it cannot address them all, volunteering can reduce some barriers to employment by supporting young people to gain exposure to different areas of work in lower pressure contexts than paid employment and make more informed decisions about their development 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 to support, guide, and encourage their aspirations of employment, training or further education and who may experience additional barriers to employment.¹⁸

*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.*¹⁹

While young people overall see volunteering as a useful pathway to gaining paid employment, it has been suggested that young people from low socioeconomic

¹⁵ 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.

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 ABS, 6202.0 Labour Force Australia, Table 9. Labour force status by Sex, Tasmania – Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original, accessed via <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>

¹⁸ Fundamental principles for youth employment, Social Ventures Australia, pp. 10, <https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Fundamental-principles-for-youth-employment-report-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁹ 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>

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).²⁰

Tasmania has the most regionally diverse workforce in Australia, with more than half of all workers employed outside of Hobart.²¹ 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.²² Further research also notes that “volunteers have 22% higher odds of finding employment after being out of work than non-volunteers.”²³

“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.”²⁴ Yet, employment company SEEK has found that 85% of employers believe that volunteer experience can be just as credible as paid work.²⁵ While employers recognise the value of volunteering in bringing 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.

The following story highlights the impact that accessible, and institutionally supported volunteering can have in the lives of youth people:

²⁰ 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

²¹ Australian Government, National Skills Commission, Australian Jobs 2021: Tasmania, <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/reports/australian-jobs-2021/jobs-location/tasmania>

²² 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.

²³ Ibid, pp. 9.

²⁴ 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>.

²⁵ 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>.

Story of a young Tasmanian volunteer

A young Tasmanian was linked with an employment and skills building service and had expressed an interest in working with animals. They had enquired about relevant Tafe courses, however there were no places available for the remainder of the year. They also reviewed job vacancies but there were limited employment opportunities, particularly limiting for those without prior work experience or qualifications.

They were referred by the employment and skills building service to commence voluntary work with a wildlife sanctuary. They thrived in the role and were offered an opportunity to undertake a certificate in animal care with the wildlife sanctuary.

Voluntary work provided them with the opportunity to learn to work in a team, to increase their social and professional networks, to develop new skills and knowledge, and provided them with practical experience with animal care work. They were able to gain confidence and experience to transition to study and complete a qualification in an area they knew they wanted to work in.

This story was shared with Volunteering Tasmania by a stakeholder engaged in with Volunteer Management Activity consultations.

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 diverse and comprehensive pathways to employment.

Barriers to volunteering and employment

25 per cent of Australians aged 18-24 years volunteered formally in 2022.²⁶ Given the complexities that surround the collection of accurate, comprehensive volunteering data, we expect this figure to be much higher. We know that young people and emergent adults contribute to their communities through formal and informal volunteer participation. They volunteer in places that are accessible to them and for matters that they care about.

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 formal volunteering as they do to paid employment.²⁷ These include cost of living pressures; transport; digital access; a lack of reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses; ageism; and a lack of workplace flexibility to accommodate personal needs and availability. Public policy that seeks to address barriers

²⁶ Volunteering Australia, Youth Volunteering Key Statistics, pp. 2, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Volunteering-Factsheet-2023.pdf>

²⁷ Feedback provided by young volunteers to Volunteering Tasmania through engagement with the Youth Volunteer Army.

to employment, should also aim to address barriers to volunteer participation as a pathway to employment.

While volunteering does not replace the need for paid work, it does form an important and undeniable part of the employment landscape as a pathway to employment, training and further education. Despite this, the complexities and opportunities that surround volunteering are often accompanied by a lack of representation and legitimacy in public policy, with implications for the outcomes of those the policy intends to support.

Young people and employers value the transferable experience and skills obtained and/ or demonstrated through volunteer work. Yet we have found that young people can be hesitant to speak with confidence about the skills, knowledges and experiences they have obtained through formal and/ or informal volunteer work. By increasing the capacity of our educational institutions and employment services to recognise the strengths, skills, values and interests that young people have demonstrated through volunteering, we can increase strengths-based service delivery and support young people to identify and speak with confidence about their transferrable work skills and experiences. By continuing to minimise volunteer work, young people will not receive comprehensive support to draw on their full strengths and experiences when seeking paid employment.

It is therefore essential that efforts to reduce barriers to formal volunteer participation are coupled with efforts to raise awareness and understanding about volunteering so that young people are encouraged to speak with confidence about their skills and experiences.

Question three: How can young adults be better equipped to move from school to work?

Access to volunteering opportunities can affect life outcomes. Experience with volunteering can support young people and emergent adults to be work ready when entering the workforce, to know and understand their workplace rights and responsibilities, to gain the confidence to apply for work, and to find pathways into their chosen industry or field.

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.²⁸ 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*

²⁸ 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>.

- *to give students an opportunity to tell the ANU more about themselves and for this to be recognised.*²⁹

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.^{30, 31}

Jurisdictional policy support for youth volunteering includes:

- Volunteering Tasmania's Youth Volunteer Army program³²
- Learner Profiles in South Australia³³, and New South Wales³⁴
- Active Volunteering – VET Certificates I, II and III in Queensland.³⁵

Given the barriers to volunteering, the shifting structural focus and the reach of the secondary education system, schools are well positioned to promote and support their students' access to volunteering and the array of benefits that accompany it. The following case study has been included as an example of how structural support for volunteering can reduce barriers to voluntary participation and create positive impact in the lives of young people.

²⁹ 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-%2018%20June.pdf>.

³⁰ Government of South Australia, South Australian Certificate of Education, Capabilities & Learner Profile, <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/innovating/drivers>.

³¹ 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.

³² Volunteering Tasmania, Youth Volunteer Army, <https://volunteeringtas.org.au/future-of-volunteering/youth-volunteer-army/>.

³³ Government of South Australia, South Australian Certificate of Education, Innovating the SACE, <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/innovating>.

³⁴ NSW Government, NSW Education Wallet, <https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/career-and-study-pathways/nsw-student-learner-profile---digital-wallet>.

³⁵ Volunteering Queensland, Training and Events, <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/training-events/#schools>.

Case study: 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 recognise the contributions that young people make to their communities.

From 2021 to 2024, Volunteering Tasmania has partnered with Tasmanian secondary schools and Regional Jobs 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 employment pathways for Tasmania's 24,500 secondary and senior secondary students each year.³⁶

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.

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).
- 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 November 2023, the Youth Volunteer Army has:

- Enrolled seventeen public secondary schools and five jobs hubs in the program.
- Registered 597 users on the Youth Volunteer Army app.
- Seen young people log 16,246 hours of volunteering.

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.

³⁶ Tasmanian Government, Department of Education, Key Data March 2022, pp. 16, <https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/Key-Data-2022.pdf>

Conclusion

Volunteering is an evidenced pathway to employment. It can support young people and emergent adults to become work ready, to gain the confidence and skills to apply for work and to strengthen and diversify their professional networks. 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.

Access to formal volunteering opportunities can affect life outcomes. Despite young people's motivations to engage with formal volunteering and to access the associated benefits, young people are underrepresented in the formal volunteer workforce due to structural barriers which impede participation. As a known pathway to employment, training and further education, policy that seeks to reduce barriers to employment must also aim to increase young people's access to formal volunteering to ensure that young people are provided with diverse learning and development opportunities.

Equitable access to formal volunteering is made more complex by the chronic lack of understanding, representation and resourcing of volunteering and volunteer enabling infrastructure in public policy. While formal volunteering must be made more accessible to young people, we must also recognise and validate the ways that young people already contribute to their communities through volunteering. By increasing understanding and legitimacy of existing informal and formal volunteer work, education and employment systems will be better equipped to support young people to speak to future employers about their strengths, skills, interests, and transferrable work experience.