

When a Volunteer Leaves

Supporting the mental health of volunteers

The prospect of leaving a volunteer role can be a big life event for volunteers and requires a certain level of skill and resourcing by Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to ensure this process is as smooth and as dignified as possible. The role and meaning of volunteering in people's lives may trigger issues and concerns when ending their volunteer contribution with your organisation. To assist VIOs in understanding and supporting their volunteers to transition out of volunteering, Volunteering Tasmania has developed a list of tips and resources to assist VIOs in the process of transitioning their volunteers to life beyond volunteering with their organisation.

What volunteers told us

We worked with volunteers and VIOs to identify the most important issues that may surface when volunteers leave their volunteering roles and things that would help make that transition as gentle and supportive as possible. Supports that maintain and enable good mental health and wellbeing were identified as crucial. They told us that being acknowledged in a small way for their efforts was important, along with still being able to attend or be involved in some volunteering activities after they leave and/or being able to stay connected with their volunteering peers.

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Volunteer voice

For some volunteers, the idea of being unable to volunteer means devastation, a sense of loss, no life purpose or relevance.

"Volunteering is part of my life philosophy, giving is necessary for health."

"Volunteering made me feel valued."

"I feel very worthy when I'm volunteering – I miss not connecting with others."

There are three main things that Volunteer Involving Organisations can do to assist with a smooth and supportive exit for volunteers.

Acknowledge

Include

Transition

Acknowledge

- Consider giving exiting volunteers a small gift or token of appreciation.
- Give a letter of thanks and acknowledgement and/or a certificate to exiting volunteers.
- Provide volunteers and staff with the opportunity to farewell the volunteer with an activity such as a morning/afternoon tea or BBQ.

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Include

- Invite former volunteers to informal social events.
- Provide past volunteers with the opportunity to contribute in some way to the social events if they wish to do so.
- Develop a fellowship program where previous volunteers can come together to contribute towards a specific event, or for the opportunity of ongoing social contact.
- Consider a 'social secretary' – perhaps another volunteer who takes suggestions and coordinates social contact, including those who have left, with the organisation's volunteer coordinator/manager.
- Maintain a birthday register and send a celebratory birthday email or card.

Volunteer Involving Organisation

"All of our volunteers are important to us – past and present. Although our volunteers may leave the operational side of volunteering, they are still part of our 'family'. We continue to involve them through sending them our newsletter, inviting them along to our social events and making sure we remember their birthdays".

Volunteer voice

"Even though we don't volunteer together anymore, we've still been able to remain friends and meet regularly. This is aided by a new member working as the 'social secretary' and taking on the job of coordinating catch-ups and news etc."

Transition

- Develop resources to make it easy for people to find new opportunities, including learning new skills, and ensuring that those resources are not limited to online access only.
- Provide recommendations on how people can access opportunities to stay physically and socially active such as walking groups, eating with friend's activity, and Men's sheds. Where possible, support people in making that next step.
- Provide resources to assist people to self-evaluate what impact the absence of volunteering will have on them and strategies to deal with this.
- If volunteers feel that they need help with closure from volunteering, consider seeking support from referral agencies.

*Please contact us if you would like to discuss this further or find out more about the resources we have to support you.
email: team@volunteeringtas.org.au or phone: 1800 677 895*

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