



**volunteering**  
TASMANIA



**VolunteeringACT**  
an inclusive Canberra



The Centre for  
**Volunteering**

# **INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAM**

Impact Report  
2020 - 2025

## Words from our CEO's

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We are delighted to share with you this Impact Report highlighting the successes and impact of the Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program we are proud to deliver across the ACT, NSW and Tasmania.

We know that the Program is transformative for organisations in their own journey towards genuine inclusivity. From small changes to processes, to broader systemic shifts, the program challenges organisations to look at themselves and ask – 'Are all volunteers welcome here?' and supports them to make genuine structural and cultural changes.

Thank you to the incredible participants who trust us with their story and for the privilege of walking beside them as they engage with volunteering as a pathway to employment and connection.

Thank you to the organisations who are open to learning and transforming their own ways of working for a richer organisation and community.

We also want to acknowledge the funding and support of the Department of Social Services which has made the Program thrive across the three jurisdictions.



**Jean Giese**  
CEO VolunteeringACT

## Words from our CEO's



**Gemma Rygate**

CEO The Centre for Volunteering (NSW)

The Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program has contributed greatly to achieving our organisation's vision and mission, to build strong, diverse and inclusive communities through volunteering.

The Inclusive Volunteering Program enables participants to gain the skills, experience and confidence to seek employment, and this program has made the journey far easier for those who may not have been able to take the first step.

The program has provided many organisations with the knowledge, resources and support to become more inclusive and to see that embracing inclusion and diversity does not have to be a daunting undertaking. This in turn has helped organisations to tap into a greater pool of volunteers, enabled them to inject new ideas and ways of doing things into their programs, and helped to create fulfilling experiences for all involved. We believe this work needs to be ongoing and can not be fully successful if it is short-term and limited by lack of funding.

For NSW, the success of the program and the outcomes achieved are evident when considered against the challenges of the pandemic and the impact in the early years of the program. Whilst the pandemic is no longer a direct barrier to the program, more time is needed to build on the program's success, as organisations continue to refresh and adapt their programs post pandemic and need the ongoing support to do so.

The Program celebrates the power of connection, transforming lives and strengthening communities. The program in Tasmania stands out as a beacon of hope and empowerment in a world where connection is more important than ever. Designed to provide volunteers with a network to integrate into the wider community, the program is making waves in improving individual wellbeing while fortifying community resilience. Through the program, volunteers discover purpose, friendship, and a sense of belonging, leading to enhanced employability, skills, and confidence. But the impact doesn't end there. As volunteers thrive, the ripple effect extends to the entire community, bolstering its wellbeing and vitality.

Recent testimonials highlight the profound impact of the program. One participant expressed heartfelt gratitude, stating, "I'm so grateful this program exists. It's a great service. I feel very comfortable working together and appreciative of all the help I'm getting." Another participant emphasised the program's significance in building confidence and skills, underscoring the value of the time spent together.

The program is not just about individual growth; it's about building stronger, more connected communities. With every connection made, lives are transformed, and communities become more resilient.



**Mel Blake**

CEO Volunteering Tasmania

The Program has been able to successfully **increase organisational capacity for inclusion** while also **supporting the development, confidence and community engagement** of program participants living with disability or mental health conditions. This report demonstrates the achievements of the program to date and the outcomes for participants, organisations and wider community,

## Participation

### 782 organisations

Have engaged with the program to become more inclusive.

### 87 organisations

hosted a participant

### 329 participants

supported throughout the life of the program with.



### 116 participants were placed in volunteering roles

### 21 participants matched with mentors



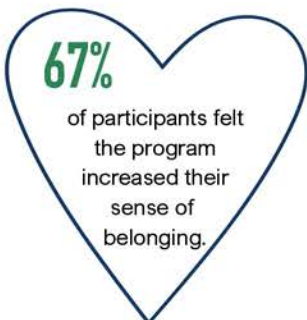
and the program worked with **217 carers/family members**



## Outcomes

The program has supported participants by providing one on one coaching, mentoring programs, training, administrative support and tailored volunteer matching.

Through these supports, participants were able to build their understanding of how to find volunteering opportunities, as well as how to overcome possible barriers that may be in place for them.



The program had **far reaching impacts** beyond just volunteer placements including increased confidence, independence, sense of wellbeing, purpose and self esteem.

"I had zero confidence in myself to be a part of the community and I was really isolated.

Now I can be in an environment where I can be a part of the team and be supported. It's really common for people with mental health struggles to feel like you can't contribute, like you're useless. This program helped me with that. I have now found paid employment through this pathway."

- Program Participant

Many participants shared the immense and personal impact the program has had on their sense of connection to the community, and belonging. One participant state:

*"Now I have more connections with people and organisations who I would have never met, and didn't even know existed before."*

The Program was recognised as the Winner of the 2023 Inclusion in Business Award, as part of the ACT Chief Ministers Awards. Judges noted the program had strong foundations and continues to grow and empower many people with disability through a person-centred approach enabling people with disability to access volunteering.



**Chief Ministers Award  
for Inclusion in  
Business  
2023**

On average participants rated the program 4.4 / 5





# 85.71%

of organisations were able to increase motivation of staff to **identify and reduce organisational barriers** to volunteer involvement.

# 75.7%

of organisations were able to improve their knowledge and awareness of barriers within their own organisation.



# 71.4%

of organisations were able to reduce the stigma towards those with disability and mental health within their own organisation



On average organisations rated the program 4.3 / 5



Organisations have been supported by the program through inclusion training, one on one coaching and advice, and tailored volunteer matching. These supports have used a person centred approach, meeting each organisation where they are and tailoring supports to individual organisations needs and barriers.

"The program has opened our eyes to new things, for example how looking at making our new data system more accessible and thinking about what barriers we are putting in place and helping all volunteers to participate. It's built our understanding of the idea that **everyone has strengths** and building in ways to helping those strengths flourish into the program." - Organisation

Many organisations have used their involvement in the program as a 'jumping point' which inspired them to investigate within their organisations what barriers may be in place for volunteers, and break them down with support and advice from experts.

For those organisations who had volunteers with disability placed in their programs, 64% experienced no challenges.

Those organisations that did identify challenges shared stories for identifying their own bias, as well as bias from the clients or community, and worked with participants to overcome those bias and that stigma.



The program has been able to increase volunteering participation for those living with disability and mental health conditions, reduce bias and stigma, and build the capability of volunteer involving organisations and their staff to involve people from these cohorts.

# Participant Stories

## Carol-Ann

Program Participant -  
Tasmania

Carol-Ann moved to Australia from the US and became an Australian Citizen. She is a passionate advocate for fellow domestic violence survivors and those living with complex mental health issues. She is pictured [left] here with her Program Coordinator Nicole [right].

Carol-Ann has Autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and describes herself as a 'community person', but when she first moved to Australia she found it difficult to find work, even with appropriate qualifications and experience.



Carol-Ann

Nicole

*"It was application after application... it got to the point that I thought I would never be able to get hired in the field I wanted to work in... For someone with autism, I worked really hard to make everything the best it could be but it takes up so much emotional and mental energy, just to be rejected again and again." - Carol-Ann reflected.*

When Carol-Ann found the program, she was able to receive much needed one on one support through her coordinator including assistance in matching with the right organisation.

*"Through the program I got regular check ins and support, and I could ask for help if I needed it. Because of that I was able to find a volunteering role, which led to paid work. It was so good when it finally worked out. It was priceless, and I never had that kind of support before."*

Carol-Ann was paired with Playgroup Tasmania, and able to work in her chosen field, working with children. After several months volunteering with them, she was offered a paid role with the same organisation.

*"Volunteering Tasmania and Playgroup Tasmania have advocated for me and helped me to advocate for myself as well. **They have accepted me just the way I am, with my disabilities. I feel like I've found home,**"*

Carol-Ann's story is one of resilience through adversity and a perfect example of what people can achieve when given appropriate support.

# Participant Stories

## Sarah

Program Participant -  
NSW

Sarah is an energetic and community minded young woman living in NSW. She has cerebral palsy and uses mobility aids such as a walker and wheelchair to get around. She goes to 'day program' twice a week, where she learns life skills such as how to use a coffee machine.

Sarah joined the Inclusive Volunteering Program because she wanted to get into volunteering but needed some extra help to find opportunities that were accessible and inclusive.

*"I wanted to volunteer because I like helping people, but my main struggle is that lots of buildings have no ramps." - Sarah shared.*

When Sarah connected with the Inclusive Volunteering Program, she was able to get some support from a coordinator who could help connect her with opportunities that would be physically accessible and would support her.

*"He (my coordinator) was really friendly and assured me he could help me find volunteering, which he did. I volunteer every Monday now at the information centre. He helped me by arranging a meeting with the organisation and time to look around and get comfortable with the place. It's modern, new and accessible. They are very welcoming and kind, and even have adjustable tables that my wheelchair can fit under!"*

Sarah now volunteers at the Central Coast Visitor Information Centre.

*"Since I started volunteering, it's given me a purpose, to help other people beyond myself, which I like. I've had to use different strategies to get through life because of my CP, but something I'm passionate about is getting out there and helping others." - Sarah shared.*



Sarah



# Participant Stories

## Heidi

Parent of Program Participant -  
ACT

Heidi's twin boys have been participants in the Program since January 2024.

They joined the program after experiencing barriers to participating in work experience and study. Both had recently finished College and were looking for opportunities to be involved in volunteering to assist in progressing into the community and building skills that could lead to paid employment.

*"We have had some challenges finding further study and structured work experience, but volunteering has proved very successful."* - Heidi reflected.

Meeting with each of them enabled the program coordinator to identify possible pathways of interest, and seek assistance from Heidi.

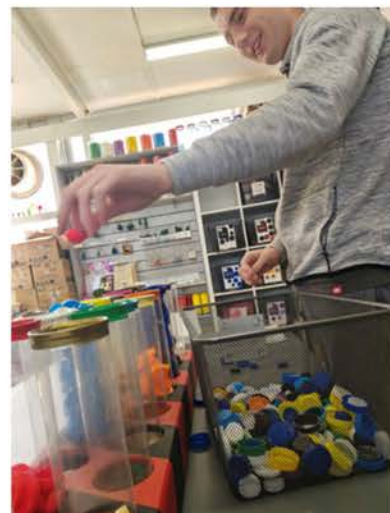
"The volunteer roles have been invaluable. I can't thank you enough for the efforts you've put in so far. There is such a big hole or gap for people finishing off school and then moving into the big wide world. These roles that they are fulfilling add value to their lives. They are gaining valuable experience, feeling good about themselves for contributing and are seen by others in the community as contributing in a valuable way. Having 'valued roles' is enormously important to a person with disability. The more valued roles a person has, the more value people place upon a person.

I am very grateful for the assistance that has been provided to us from inclusive volunteering."

- Heidi, mother of participants

Through the program, Heidi's two children have received support with finding and applying for volunteer roles, as well as identifying opportunities for skill development and achievements.

This has led to both of them finding volunteer placements in roles aligned with their passions at Lids4Kids, Grind to Ground and Legal Aid ACT. This is an ongoing journey, with the prospect of paid employment an achievable goal enhanced through volunteering engagement and experience to support transferable skill development.



# Host Organisation Stories – Orange Sky, ACT

Orange Sky ACT first became involved in the Program in 2021 because they saw values alignment.

*"It fits well with how we operate; Orange Sky strives to be very inclusive."* - Hilary, Orange Sky Community Impact Coordinator.

Orange Sky supports people experiencing homelessness, called 'Friends', through providing a safe, positive and supportive environment for them to access laundry and shower services. Hilary and Kevin, program coordinators in Canberra, shared how participating in the Inclusive Volunteering Program has benefited them, their volunteers and their 'Friends'.

*"The Friends we provide laundry services to are very diverse, and it benefits us having very diverse volunteers. We want as much diversity as possible when it comes to volunteers who join us. We had a participant from IVP join us, it helped build up her confidence and she was then able to move on to paid work elsewhere. The participant just fit in so well with the volunteers, from a team perspective the other volunteers were really supportive."*

The Orange Sky volunteer program has been able to connect with the Inclusive Volunteering Program to build more diversity into their program, while taking a flexible and person-centered approach to volunteer management.

*"I think, as we do for all our Friends, we provide a really supportive environment for someone looking to return to work. It's a great environment to build vocational skills and confidence, as well as enjoy themselves and engage with others, again to their degree of comfort. We can modify most activities required according to their level of comfort and ability."*

Orange Sky is passionate about inclusion for their Friends and their volunteers, and is looking forward to taking on more participants.

*"We would be very keen to have more participants join us. It's definitely mutually beneficial. The nature of our volunteers are all about making others feel comfortable and welcome and engaged in non-judgmental conversations. It's a great environment to assist people through the transition from volunteer work to paid employment if that is their goal. And this is exactly what happened with our last participant,"*

Orange Sky's approach to engaging volunteers with disability and mental health conditions is a shining example of how a person-centered approach, with flexibility and compassion, can have wide reaching program impacts for fellow volunteers and program clients.



# Host Organisation Stories – We Care Connect, NSW

We Care Connect is a charity which supports disadvantaged children in NSW. They collect pre-owned materials donated by the community which volunteers sort, refurbish, clean and check and then distribute for free to families who are struggling. They started engaging in the Inclusive Volunteering Program in June 2023, and since then have taken on three participants, all of which are thriving. Reflecting on their engagement with the program, their volunteer coordinator Jackie shared that:

*“Engaging with IVP has had huge personal and social benefits for We Care Connect, it contributes to the philosophy of our organisation which is to make it clear to the community and our volunteers that society is diverse and there are supports out there to help. It ensures the volunteers, and our staff gain personal experiences of some of the challenges that some of the families we help are actually dealing with. It’s simply a demonstration that we are prepared to take the time and effort to ensure all members of our community are welcome with us and there are opportunities for everyone to have their needs met,”*

We Care Connect joined the program because it aligned with their values and supported their program.

*“We’ve had volunteers with disabilities in the past. Personally, I’ve had a history of being involved in organisations that assist people with disabilities, so I’m aware of the immense capabilities people with disabilities have. So, we thought okay let’s give it a go... We’ve come to trust that the IVP coordinator has carefully matched us with participants who would fit our needs as well as theirs.”*

Three participants are currently placed with We Care Connect and they are all thriving.

*“One of our participants is exceptional, he lives with cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. He is a very smart and very determined person with a great personality. He fits right in and brings a sense of joy to the space. He’s a hard worker and is accepted and celebrated within the group,”*

We Care Connect’s program relies on volunteers for its operations. One thing they learned as they grew is that the social side of volunteering as is important as everything else.

*“The connections volunteers make are a support network for them. A number of people experiencing challenging life events have used volunteering as a structured social support. The program exposes our volunteers to a wider range of experiences, meeting people with disability and learning from them. For example, learning how to communicate with someone who is unable to speak but uses a communication device, which one of our volunteers through IVP does,”*

We Care Connect has also been able to gain more volunteers through the Program, and not just through taking on participants.

*“We are also able to gain support from additional volunteers, as participants sometimes bring a mentor, support worker or family member with them. These support people often then develop their own connection to the program and become dedicated volunteers in their own right,”*

We Care Connect provides a suite of options for volunteers to choose from based on their interests and support needs.

*“Volunteers can do tasks they are comfortable with in a safe environment. They can do a set job that they know and do it well... Participants, and in fact all volunteers, can identify a number of things that they enjoy doing and be supported to do that,”*

We Care Connect is a shining example of how an inclusive and flexible approach to managing volunteer programs can have a powerful impact, especially for volunteers with disability.



# Inside the program

Across the ACT, NSW and Tasmania, program coordinators support participants with disability to find meaningful and engaging volunteer opportunities as a pathway to employment.

As you read in the stories above, program coordinators play a vital role in supporting organisations to be more inclusive in their program design, advocating for participants with disability and building participant's confidence and capability.

Throughout the life of the program, they have successfully placed nearly 100 participants in volunteering opportunities, which is no small

achievement given the immense social, physical, mental and emotional barriers some participants face.

Coordinators support participants to figure out what kind of volunteering they would like to engage with, work dynamically with participants and organisations to find the right match, and help both to overcome any barriers they might face.



VolunteeringACT's Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program team accepting the ACT Chief Ministers Award for Inclusion in Business.

## Program Insights

"We see a need for the program in Tasmania, and love that we can provide depth in support to participants. We learn a lot about the barriers people with disability face from supporting volunteer involving organisations. Providing individualised support to participants is paramount to overcoming these barriers,"

- Program Coordinator

"A program such as this embraces the way in which we can all respectfully engage with community, not compartmentalising people into boxes and subsets. Having the opportunity to help people engage with volunteering is often the first step in enabling confidence, competence, and capacity to begin an otherwise challenging and confronting journey to consider paid employment is fundamental to this program. The goals may be simple and indicative of a supported strategies plan but none of it could be feasible if programs such as this were discontinued."

- Program Coordinator

"Helping people identify and achieve goals to enable a personal progression toward employment, is a significant motivator for me in my role. Recognising the depth of discriminatory behaviours within the community has astounded me as I work through accessibility and availability for participants. Using that awareness to support and develop strategies to break down barriers has been a positive outcome. Sharing those insights and experiences has added an awareness of what can be achieved, the multi-layering ways in which communication and solution driven approaches can occur and the value of removing stigma, embeds a powerful contribution to the program and community. Being a part of the slow but steady change in perceptions of disability in a broad way, is a lasting and impactful benefit which continues to bring strength in my commitment to working in this sector."

- Program Coordinator

"The coordinator was **approachable, listened, helped out** and sent links to projects and opportunities that I then acted upon,"

- Program Participant

"I was surprised at how above and beyond my coordinators went to advocate for me, **I was amazed at how much he listened** and actually acted on the things I said. It got me to a point where I no longer have difficulty with the issues I raised because I was supported to overcome them,"

- Program Participant

# The Future of the Program

VolunteeringACT, Volunteering Tasmania and The Centre for Volunteering in NSW remain committed to supporting individuals to access volunteering and supporting organisations to become more inclusive and accessible.

The Program sees first-hand the challenges that people with disability and mental health conditions can face to participation. We encourage organisations to consider how their volunteer program increases or reduces accessibility for marginalised cohorts, and to seek support from Volunteering Peak Bodies and the Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program.

The Program reflects the immense impact a 'person centered approach' can have. This work plays a vital role in the lives of program participants and their families, enhancing their ability to participate in volunteering and the community. The program impacts extend beyond personal participant growth to enhance community connectedness and resilience.

Unfortunately, without ongoing, consistent, long-term funding the Program will not be able to continue to deliver these vital services to individuals, organisations and the community. We look forward to exploring all opportunities for program support, funding and partnership.

## Program Objectives

The aim of the Inclusive Volunteering Program (henceforth referred to as 'the Program') is to reduce and remove organisational barriers to volunteering and employment for people with disability or a mental health condition. It does this by supporting individuals to engage in volunteering, while also building the capability of volunteer involving organisations to become more inclusive workplaces. This program runs across ACT, NSW and Tasmania.

Program coordinators and managers work one-on-one with organisations to help them overcome barriers to inclusive volunteering, including supporting the design of inclusive policies and procedures, simplifying and streamlining recruitment and onboarding processes, provide training for staff and general advice and support. The team also works one-on-one with program participants, supporting them to identify goals and overcome potential barriers.



# Thankyous

We would like to thank all the people who have made this program a success, including our staff and volunteers, without them we could not have achieved the outcomes shared in this report.

We would specifically like to thank the members of our lived experience advisory group: Allie Senior, Caroline Cochrane, Christiaan McCann, James Reynolds, Kerry Chin, Maimiti Brook; Michael Katzakis, Sara Barker

## Acknowledgements

The Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Regions on which these activities have taken place the Ngunnawal peoples, Palawa/Pakana people of Lutruwita and Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

We acknowledge and respect their vital ongoing contribution to the community and are committed to reconciliation. We will continue to walk alongside First Nations Peoples and embrace the traditions, stories and wisdoms of the oldest continuing cultures in the world.

This document was created on Ngunnawal Country.

The program acknowledges those of all abilities, genders and sexualities, and from all cultures. Their skills, expertise, and time are critical to delivering services and programs, and making Canberra a better place to live. We also acknowledge the contribution of the volunteer involving organisations that contribute to the health and happiness of our community.



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