

DREAMING BIG

Reimagining Youth Volunteering in Warrnambool & Moyne

Warrnambool City Council
Moyne Shire
Regional Rural
volunteering Victoria
Australian Government
Department of Social Services



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Cover Photo: Young people volunteering to build a floating wetland system with GreenPrint Projects and Tutt Environmental at the 2026 South West Career Expo.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 3
Youth Volunteering Insights: Young People 4
Youth Volunteering Insights: Organisations 5
Project Purpose and Approach 7
Deliverables 8
1. Volunteering Snapshot 8
Youth Survey 8
Volunteer frequency and participation 9
Motivations and benefits of volunteering for young people 10
Barriers and improvements to current volunteering 11
Current vs preferred communication channels 12
Future youth volunteering 13
Young people's vision for volunteering 14
Youth survey summary 14
Volunteer Involving Organisation's Survey 15
Volunteering requirements 16
Recruitment methods 16
Current youth engagement 16
Youth specific programs 17
Perceived barriers to youth engagement 17
Benefits and key learnings to youth engagement 17
Supports needed for organisations 18
Vision for youth volunteering 18
VIO survey summary 18
2. Youth Engagement and Co-design 19
Youth at the South West Volunteer Expo 19
Youth Advisory Board Consultation 20
3. Promotion and Awareness 21
Youth Volunteering Social Media Campaign 21
4. Capacity Building 22
Delivery of child and youth related training to VIO's 22
Resources 22
Future Planning 23
Key findings and recommendations 23
Summary 25
References 25

Executive Summary



This report brings together findings from a multidimensional 6-month inquiry into youth volunteering in Warrnambool and Moyne. It brings together the local evidence, direct youth voice and practical activities to inform on findings, recommendations and next steps for future youth volunteering across Warrnambool and Moyne.

The Deliverables section is broken into four elements; the first part, Volunteering snapshot, presents survey findings from young people and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), highlighting strong interest in volunteering alongside barriers related to awareness, flexibility, transport, role design and communication. The second part, Youth Engagement and Co-design, captures insights from the South West Volunteer Expo and Warrnambool Moyne Youth Advisory Board, demonstrating the importance of youth-led, social, accessible and meaningful opportunities. The third part, Promotion and Awareness, outlines the youth volunteering social media campaign and its role in showcasing diverse, local and achievable volunteering pathways.

The report outlines practical, evidence-based recommendations to guide implementation and support a more coordinated, youth-centred approach to volunteering. Strengthening youth volunteering will require improved visibility, more flexible and accessible roles, embedding youth voice, and better support for organisations through practical tools and resources.

Youth Volunteering Insights: Young People

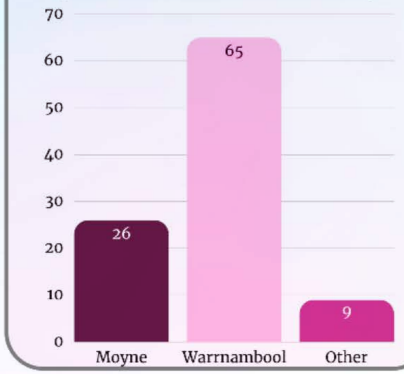
Young people

126

Survey Responses

12-17	18-25
53	73

Where?



How often?

44% of young people volunteered **weekly** or **multiple times a week!**



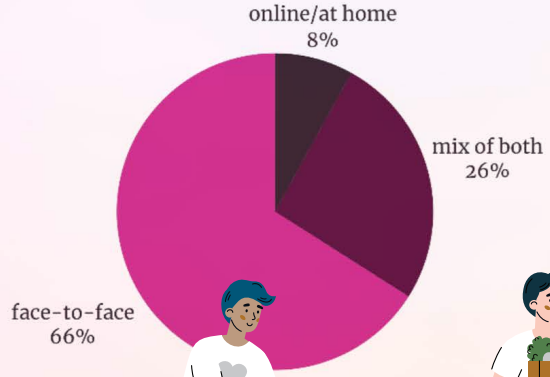
Most young volunteers discovered opportunities through family, friends, or existing groups.

Do 12-25 year olds volunteer?

2 out of 5 Young People Volunteer

4 out of 5 Volunteer outside of education requirements

Preferred methods of volunteering



Motivation to volunteer?

The primary motivation for young people to volunteer, was a desire to **make a positive impact** and **help others** (54%).



In the next 5 years...

90% of young volunteers want to volunteer **more.**

75% of young people that are **not currently** volunteering, **want to start!**



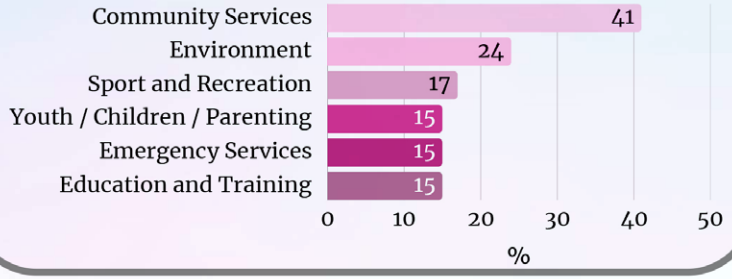
Youth Volunteering Insights: Organisations

VIOs

41

Survey responses across Warrnambool and Moyne

Top 6 sectors



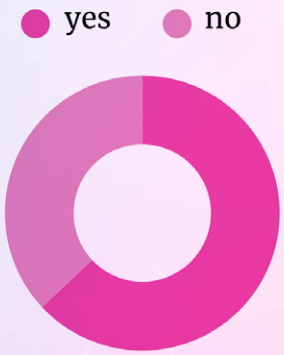
Volunteer dependency



Almost **3 in 4** organisations are predominantly **volunteer run**

Young volunteers?

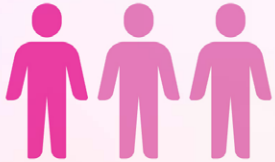
63% of VIOs currently have young volunteers



Young people typically make up <25% of volunteers

Volunteering opportunities

1 in 3 organisations offer **youth specific programs**, training or support.



Many organisations offer **both regular and one-off volunteering** opportunities.

Word of mouth was the most used and effective way to engage young people

Benefits of young volunteers

1. Stronger connections with young people
2. New ideas and fresh perspectives
3. Future workforce development



In the future

87% of organisations not currently engaging young people want to in the future.

Organisations want **practical tools and resources** to better engage young volunteers.



Introduction

In 2026, Warrnambool City Council and Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) Rural partnered on a review into the state of volunteering among young people in the Warrnambool Moyne region. The key objective was to understand the current landscape of youth volunteering in the region and identify gaps, opportunities and demand.

This study and report align with the Moyne and Warrnambool Youth Strategy 2025-2030[1] initiative 'Reimagining Volunteering'. As an initial scoping project, it explores opportunities to increase youth participation in volunteering, with the long-term aim of strengthening community connections and supporting the development of young people's skills, confidence and capabilities. For the purposes of this study, we adopt the volunteering definition as defined by Volunteering Victoria[2] 'time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.'

Background

Findings from the State of Volunteering Report 2025[3] indicate that young people (aged 15–24) are highly engaged in volunteering, with participation rates at 69.4%, above the state average. Around one-third of young people expect to increase their involvement over time, suggesting strong ongoing interest.

The report shows youth volunteering is shifting in form, with greater participation in flexible and non-traditional roles:

- 25.1% volunteer from home or online (highest of all age groups); and
- 44% prefer to volunteer with others, highlighting the importance of social connection.

Young people are primarily motivated by helping others, contributing where they can, and using their skills.

However, participation is influenced by barriers such as work or study commitments, financial pressures, and access issues, including transport. Across all age groups, volunteering is becoming more flexible, informal, and purpose-driven.

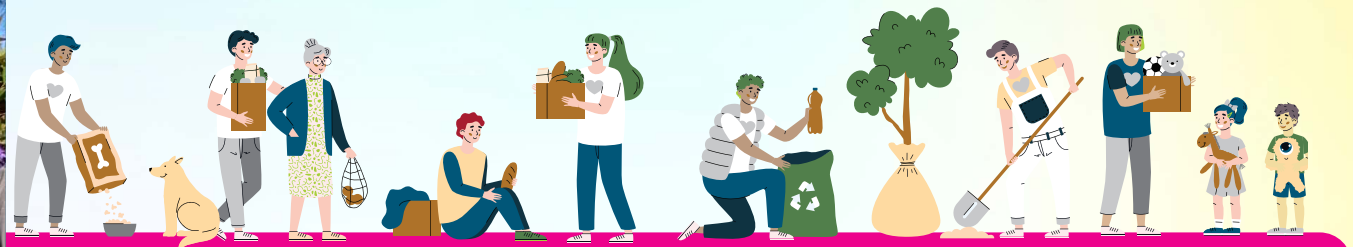
Key insights from the State of Volunteering Report point to the need for more flexible and accessible volunteering models, including micro-volunteering and a balance between digital and in-person engagement.

The Warrnambool and Moyne Youth Strategy consultation found that the region needs a review and new approach to youth volunteering.

At a local level, early observations suggest:

- Limited structured pathways specifically for young people,
- Low awareness of informal and short-term opportunities; and
- A need for more localised data, including an age breakdown to support targeted engagement.





Project Purpose and Approach

The project aims to explore youth volunteering trends at a local level and undertake initial scoping to capture the current landscape in Warrnambool and Moyne (noting the strong crossover between these communities).

Specifically, the project seeks to:

1. **Assess the level of interest and capacity of local organisations to increase youth volunteering,**
2. **Understand the level of interest and participation among young people; and**
3. **Identify opportunities to strengthen youth volunteering in the region.**

To achieve this, the project provides a snapshot of youth volunteering through targeted engagement with young people and volunteer-involving organisations (VIO), alongside capacity building and promotion activities.

Key activities/deliverables:

1. **Volunteering snapshot:** Provide a snapshot of current volunteering by collecting data through online surveys, face-to-face engagement, and consultation through existing networks.
2. **Youth engagement and co-design:** Youth-focused workshops and activities at the Volunteer Expo, co-design processes with young people, and direct engagement with the Youth Advisory Board.
3. **Promotion and awareness:** Development of short-form video content to promote youth volunteering opportunities
4. **Capacity building:** Delivery of targeted training to support organisations to confidently engage young volunteers, and curation of existing resources.

The final stage of the project was setting up future planning. A set of recommendations to guide future work to strengthen youth volunteering in the region is provided in the last section of the report.

Deliverables

1. Volunteering Snapshot

To capture perspectives from both young people and organisations, two separate **online surveys were developed**—one tailored to young people and the other to Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs). These surveys were shared through social media, existing community networks (e.g. South West Volunteer Network, YACVic networks, Youth Advisory Board), direct outreach, and local youth channels and schools. Results from each survey are presented below.

To further increase participation, surveys were promoted in person at various community events such as the January Summer Night Markets, West Warrnambool Neighbourhood House Park Day, and the Neil Porter Legacy Careers Expo, where 1189 students from 19 schools across the region attended[5]. One student who attended the Careers Expo provided this feedback: "I didn't realise that I could do volunteering as a youth. But the girls at the YACVic stand told me about different things I could do like help clean up our beaches or plant trees."

In addition to collecting data from organisations through the survey, **the project team also met directly with key groups** (i.e. CFA, Warrnambool Community Gardens, Fruit Rescue, Red Cross, Girl Guides Victoria) that already engage young volunteers to learn further about their practices and approach, and any youth specific programs or initiatives. The project team also attended South West Volunteer Network meetings as additional opportunities to engage with groups, share the survey and hear their insights.

Youth Survey

A total of **126 young people completed the survey:** 73 were aged 18–25 years and 53 aged 12–17 years. Most respondents were in Warrnambool (65.1%), followed by Moyne (26.2%), with a smaller proportion (8.7%) from other locations, including Geelong and Melbourne (with a presumed connection to this region).

Overall, **2 in 5 young people were actively volunteering.** Four in 5 young people were volunteering outside of education (e.g. work experience, Duke of Edinburgh, TAFE, University).

Approximately **1 in 3 young people (38%) reported that there were no formal requirements to volunteer**. Among those who did face requirements, the most common was a Working with Children Check (30%), followed by being over 18 years of age (21%) and holding a police check (13%).

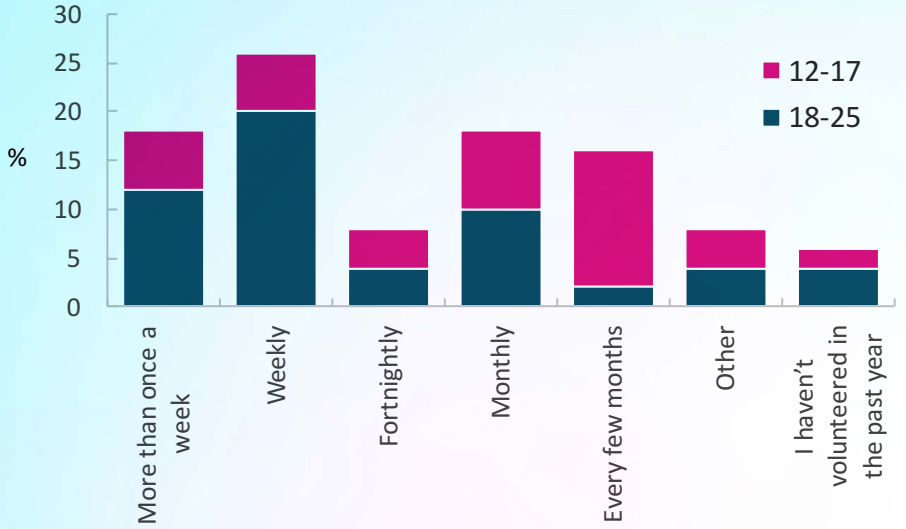


Young people volunteering with Friends of the Merri Marine Sanctuary at the 2026 Warrnambool Youth Environment Summit. Rubbish was removed from the Merri River by kayak.



Volunteer frequency and participation

Volunteering frequency

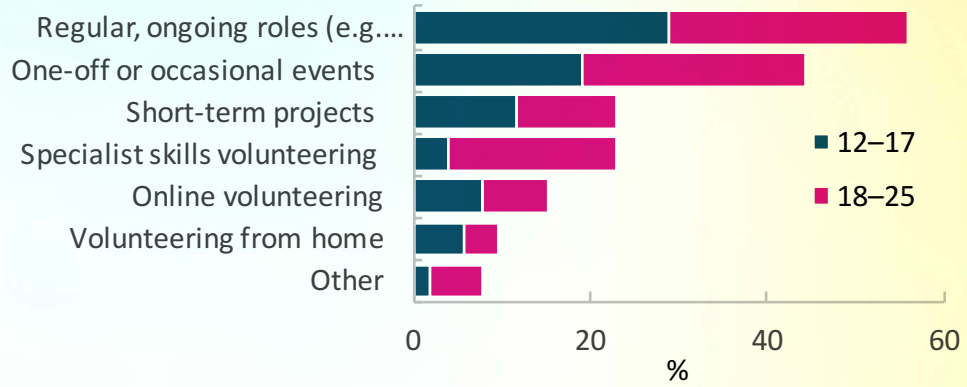


Around **50% of young volunteers were volunteering weekly or multiple times a week,** with older young people (aged 18-25) typically volunteering more frequently.



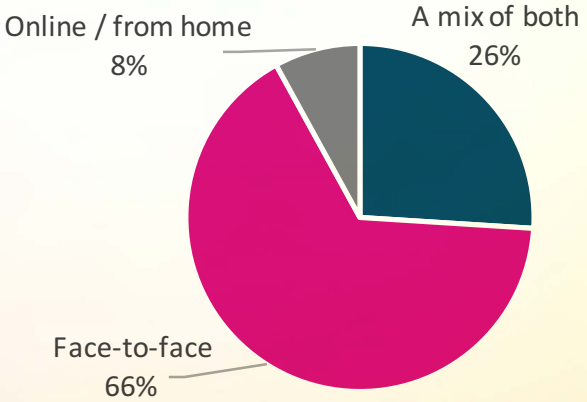


Current types of volunteering



Young people's volunteering typically fell into two categories: regular, ongoing roles (such as weekly or monthly commitments) and one-off or occasional opportunities. Engagement in roles requiring specialised or professional skills generally increased with age.

Volunteering preference



Face to face volunteering was preferred by around two in three young people. A combined approach of online and face to face appealed to a smaller proportion of young people (26%), while very few young people indicated a preference for strictly online or at home volunteering (8%).

Motivations and benefits of volunteering for young people

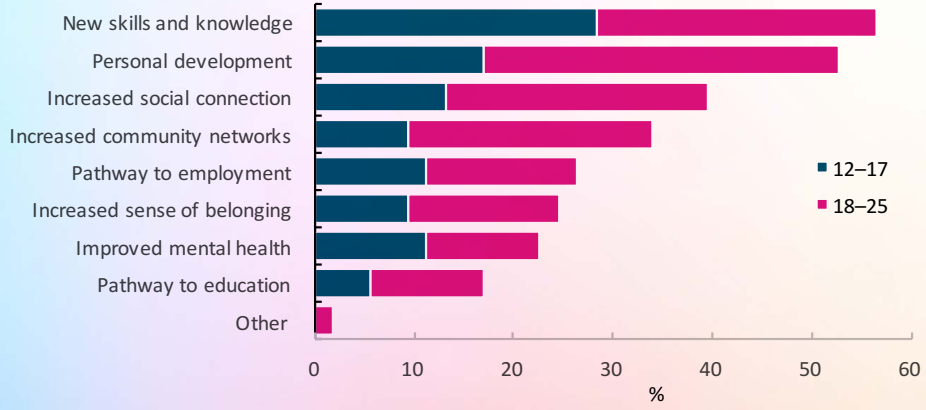
For more than half of young people, the **strongest motivation for volunteering was a desire to make a positive impact and help others (54%)**. Other important motivations included supporting a cause (14%), developing new skills (12%), and gaining work experience (10%), indicating that young people value volunteering as both meaningful and practical.

Motivations for Volunteering



The **top two identified benefits to volunteering by young people were new skills and knowledge (57%) and personal development (53%),** closely followed by increased social connection (40%), increased community networks (34%).

Volunteering benefits







Barriers and improvements to current volunteering

The **most significant barrier to volunteering for young people was work or study commitments (experienced by 47%)**. Other commonly reported barriers included not having enough time (30%), competing social interests (28%) and lack of transport (19%). Costs or financial constraints were also identified as a barrier, particularly among 18–25 year olds. In contrast, family responsibilities and limited volunteering opportunities for their age group were more prominent barriers for 12–17 year olds.

Barriers to current volunteering



Four in ten young people said volunteering would be more appealing if they could join groups with existing young members. Around one third highlighted friendly teams, social opportunities, and safe and inclusive spaces as ways to improve their volunteering experience. Provision of free transport and snacks, and flexible times and commitments were also commonly mentioned. Clear information about roles was also ranked particularly high for younger volunteers, as was recognition through certificates etc.

Volunteering improvements

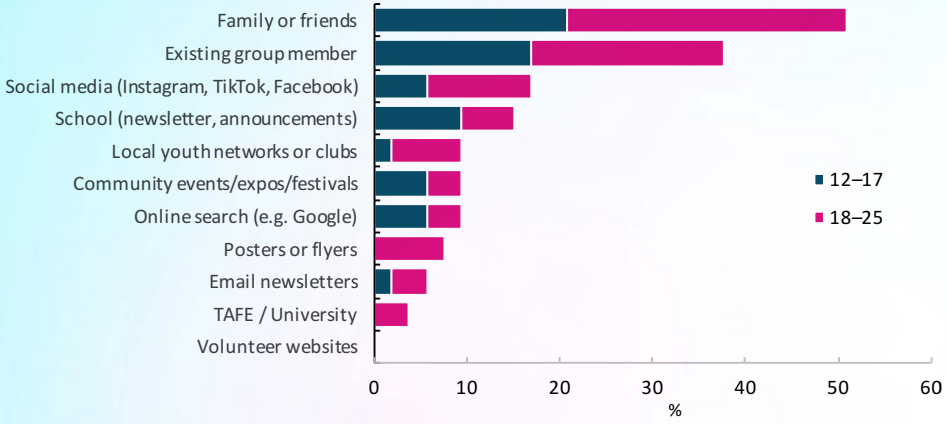


Current vs preferred communication channels

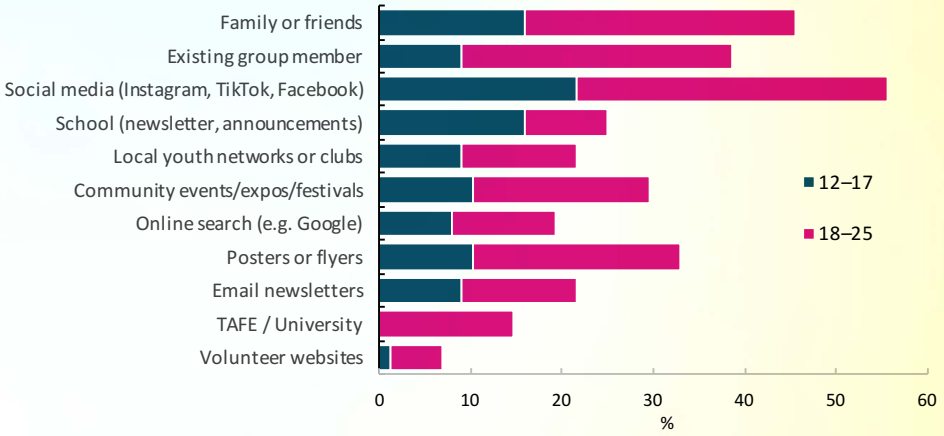
Majority of young people found out about their current volunteering role either through family and friends (50%) or were existing members with groups or organisations (40%). Only 1 in 5 respondents had found out through social media.

Contrary to the above, social media was the most preferred communication channel among young respondents (all ages) for finding out about general opportunities. Family and friends and existing networks were also important sources of general information.

Current recruitment channels

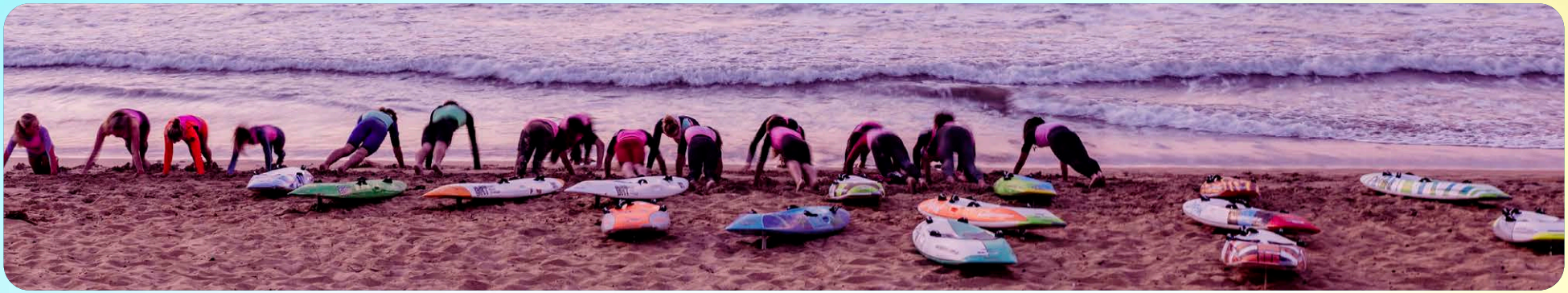


Preferred communication channels









Future youth volunteering

Over **90% of current volunteers indicated they would like to volunteer more in the next 1–5 years. More than 75% of young people not currently volunteering wanted to start** within the next 1–5 years. Young people aged 18–25 were more commonly wanting to start volunteering than those aged 12–17 (88% compared with 65%).

For those not wanting to start volunteering in the future, the main barriers were not having enough time (56%), work or study commitments (32%), not being aware of roles that matched their interests (25%) and lack of transport (25%).

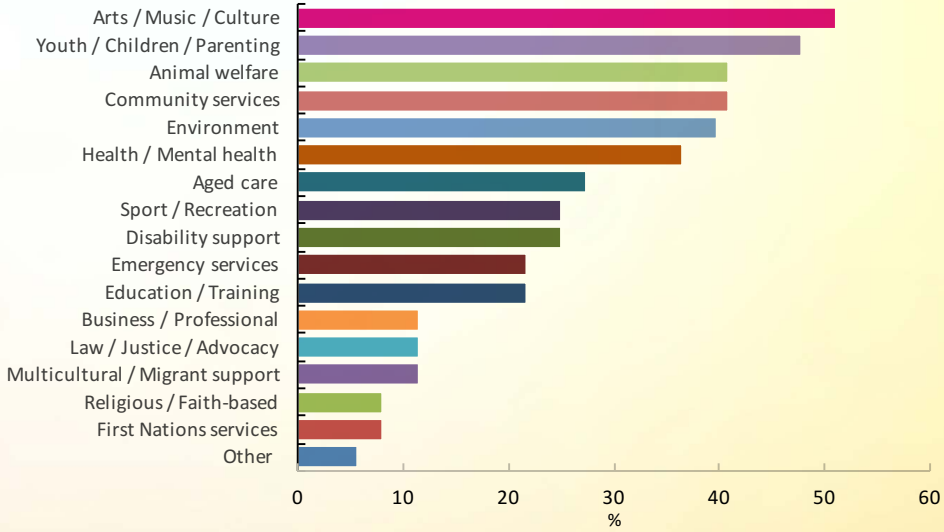
Future types of volunteering



Young people showed a strong preference for flexible, one-off opportunities in the future, with over 70% of young people wanting to participate in one off or occasional events.

The most popular **areas for future volunteering (preferred by around 50% of young people) were arts, music and cultural activities, as well as youth, children and parenting focused roles.** There was also significant interest in animal welfare, community services, and environmental causes, with each attracting interest from approximately four in ten young people.

Prefered future areas of volunteering



Young people's vision for volunteering

Young people described a clear and consistent vision for volunteering, centred on connection, impact, accessibility, and meaningful participation (see AI generated word cloud below). Additionally, below are some direct quotes from young people in relation to their vision for future volunteering:

"A way for young people to... meet good people and feel like they belong."

"Making a bigger difference to my community."

"Something that doesn't take away from work... a few hours a week that has a big impact."

"Youth led... use ideas and concepts from youth directly."

"More visible so more youth can actually try."

"Not a chore... but a core part of how young people grow and connect."



Youth survey summary

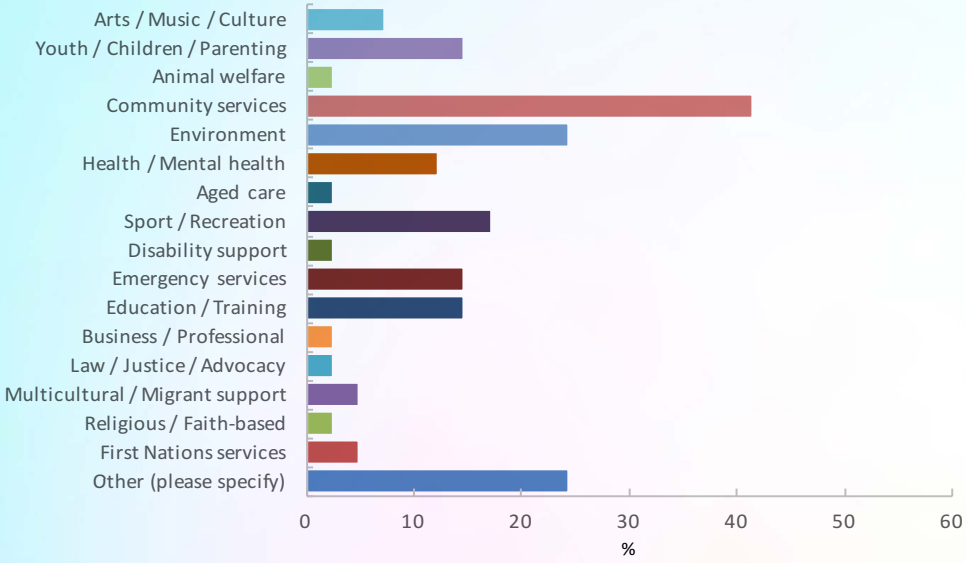
Young people are interested in volunteering, but participation depends on flexible, accessible and well-promoted opportunities that are easy to understand, socially engaging, and aligned with their interests and lifestyles. Specific key findings include:

- **High overall interest in volunteering:** Many young people are already engaged, with strong enthusiasm to start or increase involvement in the future.
- **Motivated by both purpose and personal gain:** Volunteering is seen as a way to make a positive impact, while also building skills, confidence, and pathways to employment.
- **Strong value placed on social experience:** Positive volunteering experiences are shaped by peer involvement, inclusive environments, and opportunities to connect with others.
- **Interest spans diverse areas:** Young people are particularly drawn to creative, youth-focused, community, environmental, and animal-related roles.
- **Clear preference for flexible participation:** Young people favour short-term, occasional, and face-to-face opportunities that can fit around study, work, and other commitments.
- **Main barriers are practical:** Time constraints, competing commitments, and transport limit participation, alongside a lack of awareness of suitable opportunities.
- **Awareness gap and communication mismatch:** Opportunities are mostly found through existing networks, but young people prefer to access information via social media and clear, accessible messaging.

Volunteer Involving Organisation's Survey

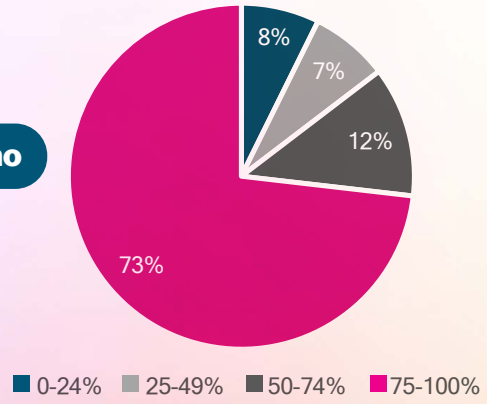
A total of **41 Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) across Warrnambool and Moyne completed the survey**. Responses show the sector is concentrated in community services (41%) and environment (24%), with sport/recreation, youth/children, education, and emergency services also well represented. Areas such as arts/culture and animal welfare currently have relatively low representation.

VIOs: Area of Volunteering





Percentage of staff who are volunteers

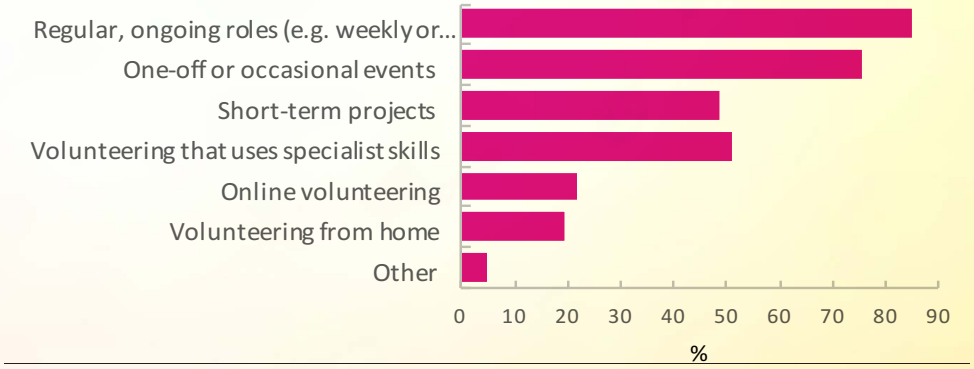




The sector showed high volunteer dependency: **30 of the 41 VIO's (73%) relied heavily on volunteers** (75–100% of their workforce were volunteers).

The sector is largely comprised of smaller organisations: 22 of the 41 VIO's (53%) had less than 25 active volunteers. A further 13 VIOs had between 25-100 volunteers, while the remaining 6 had > 100 volunteers.

VIOs: Current Volunteering opportunities



Organisations currently offer a mix of flexible and structured volunteering. According to VIOs, young people show a strong preference for one-off or occasional roles (aligning with youth survey results).

Volunteering requirements

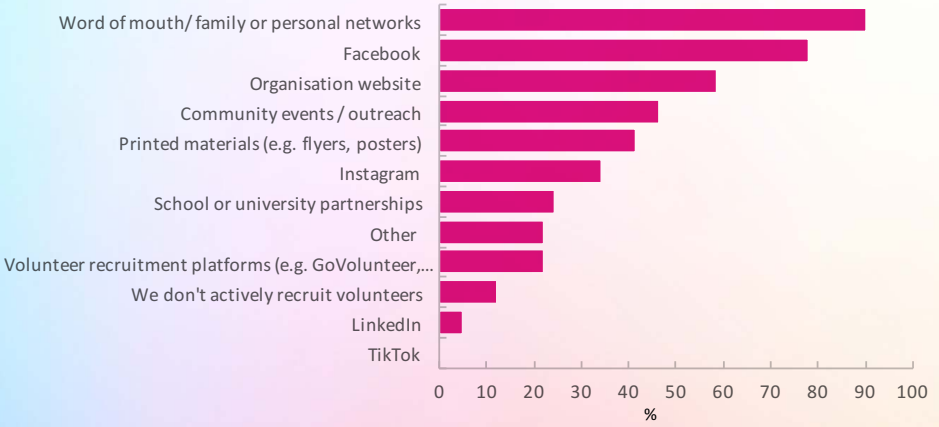
The main volunteering requirements were a **Working with Children's Check (required by 73% of VIO's), a police check (required by 39%) and being over 18 years of age (20%).** For around 1 in 3 VIO's, there were a range of other requirements not listed, such as training, compliance, and activity-specific checks and certificates (e.g. child safe training, responsible service of alcohol, food safety certificate, psychological first aid).

Recruitment methods

Recruitment is largely informal and relationship-based, with **word of mouth used by 90% of VIOs and rated the most consistently effective method** for engaging young people. Personal networks, internal connections, and informal pathways (such as events or referrals) play a central role, highlighting the importance of trusted, community-based relationships.

Digital channels are used more as supporting tools rather than primary drivers. Facebook (78%) and organisation websites are commonly used, alongside community events and school or university partnerships, which are generally seen as effective or somewhat effective for reaching younger audiences. However, social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram tend to have moderate impact, while TikTok and LinkedIn are often underutilised or seen as ineffective for youth recruitment.

VIOs: Current Recruitment Channels

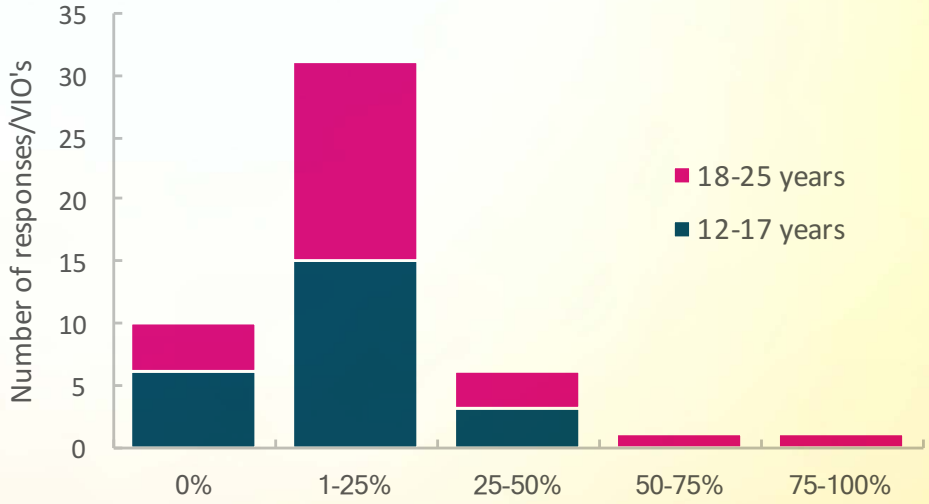


More traditional methods—including printed materials, local radio, and newspapers—are typically viewed as less effective or inconsistently used, and volunteer platforms show mixed uptake. Overall, the findings suggest that while organisations use a mix of channels, direct, relationship-based approaches and community connections remain the most effective, with digital and traditional methods playing a complementary role.

Current youth engagement

Of the 41 VIO's surveyed, 26 (63%) currently engage young volunteers (12–25). Among those not currently engaging young volunteers, 87% indicated an interest in recruiting young people in the future. A large majority (over 70%) of these VIOs were from the community services sector, with representation also from the environment, emergency services, arts/music/culture, education and training and health sectors.

VIOs: Proportion of young volunteeres



Most organisations (~60%) currently have only low proportions (1–25%) of young volunteers aged 12-17 and 18-25. A quarter of VIO's had no volunteers aged 12-17.

Youth specific programs

Youth-specific programs, training or supports were offered by 10 VIO's (37%), while 5 groups (19%) were interested in developing something in the future. Examples of youth specific initiatives included junior development programs, emerging leaders' program, training for youth specifically in the creative arts, Duke of Edinburgh, conservation-based programs for school groups, mentoring programs.

Additional direct engagement with key groups highlighted **the value of youth specific programs with structured supports, such as mentoring and pathways to further skill development and involvement.** An example is the Hookin2Hockey Program (for 5-12 years olds) led by Hockey South West, where young volunteers help support training sessions for beginner players. They are supported to take on coaching roles when and if this is something they choose to pursue. Other examples of structured youth programs include the CFA's Junior Program which gradually introduce young people to volunteering. Initially they begin with the Junior Phase, allowing young people aged 11-15 to participate in non-live fire activities. Juniors transition at age of 16+ years to the Cadet Phase where they work alongside adult members. Generally, once over 18 years, members can participate in full operational firefighting duties.

Perceived barriers to youth engagement

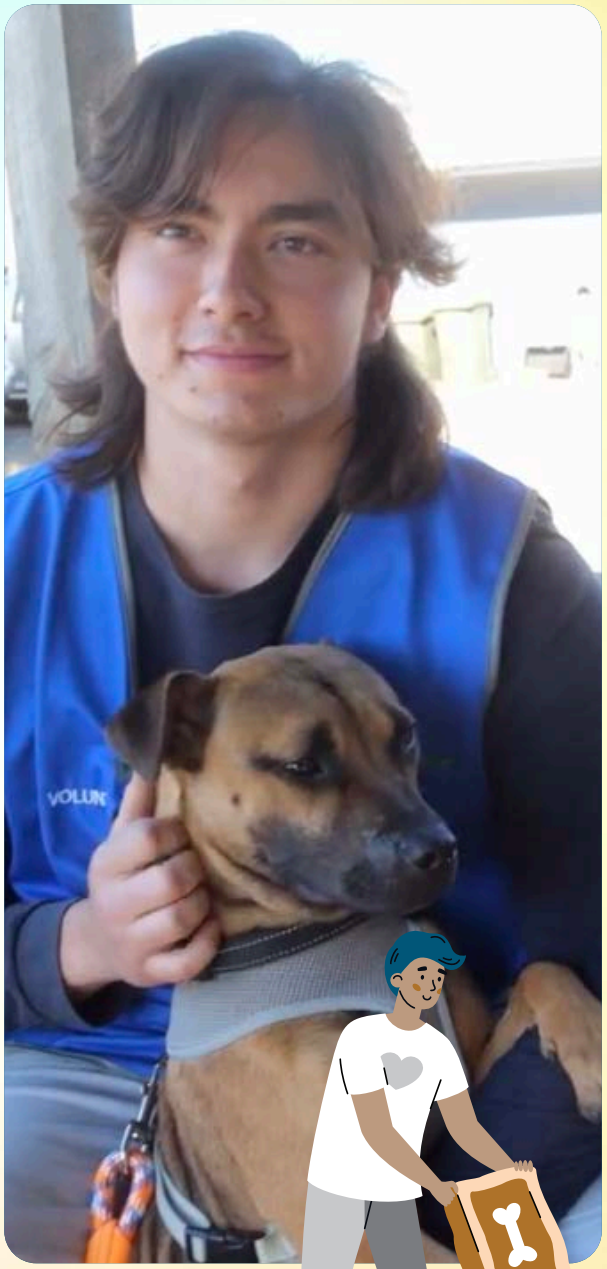
The main **perceived barrier to youth engagement identified by 64% of VIO's, was roles not matching young people's schedule or interests.** This was followed by adult-focused environments (37%), limited staff to support young volunteers (32%) and compliance challenges (29%). Additional perceived barriers identified by some VIOs centred on practical constraints and accessibility—such as age restrictions, limited roles, and scheduling conflicts with school hours—as well as perceptions of suitability.

Benefits and key learnings to youth engagement

VIO's identified clear benefits of youth engagement to their organisations, including **stronger connections with young people (88%) and both new ideas and future workforce development (80%).** Young volunteers were seen to bring **valuable local insight**—*"they have a much better idea of how the community works"*—alongside fresh energy, digital confidence, and important **skill-building pathways,** often described as *"a stepping stone to employment... to gain further skills and industry contacts."*

At the same time, VIOs highlighted the need for adaptable approaches. Maintaining consistent engagement can be difficult due to competing commitments, with *"regular attendance"* challenging and "*short term projects... enthusiastically engaged with"* seen as more effective. Successful strategies focused on **staying relevant and youth-led**—"you have to be relevant... we are youth-led"—and offering leadership opportunities to build ownership and accountability.

Overall, VIOs emphasised that while young volunteers bring strong value, attracting and retaining them requires flexible, meaningful and well-supported opportunities, alongside clear communication and approaches that align with their interests and lifestyles.



Supports needed for organisations

In response to what support would help attract more young volunteers, organisations prioritised practical engagement tools. The most selected options were **sample outreach messages (46.3%),** along with **social media templates and youth-friendly role tips (43.9%).** Strong interest was also shown in **youth network connections (41.5%) and training (39.0%),** while fewer organisations prioritised online platforms (31.7%) and posters (26.8%), highlighting a preference for targeted, ready-to-use resources.

Vision for youth volunteering

Organisations described an ideal vision where their own **services are strengthened by meaningful youth involvement—featuring greater participation, leadership, and retention of young volunteers within their programs** (see AI generated word cloud below). They highlighted the value of building more inclusive, youth-friendly environments that deepen community connections, bring fresh perspectives, and support organisational sustainability, while also creating clear pathways for young people to develop skills, gain experience, and feel a sense of ownership in shaping activities. Below is an AI generated world cloud capturing these visions, along with VIO quotes.

"A life-long commitment to volunteering... fostering community and belonging."

"Feedback from a youth perspective, leading to tailored projects and initiatives."

"Having younger volunteers will future-proof our organisation."

"We want all young people to feel ownership... and help tell our stories."

"Meaningful opportunities that build skills and pathways to employment."



VIO survey summary

VIOs are highly volunteer-dependent and recognise the value of youth engagement, but participation remains limited due to a mismatch between opportunities and young people's time, interests and communication preferences. While there is strong willingness to grow involvement, this will require more flexible, relevant opportunities and youth-centred recruitment approaches. Specific key findings include:

- Responding VIOs are **highly volunteer dependent**, with strong reliance on community services and environmental organisations.
- **Youth engagement present but limited**, with respondents willing to grow participation.
- **Clear value of youth engagement and desire to increase** it because young people bring new ideas and energy, and in return receive skills development, and possible future workforce pathways.
- **Key gap perceived by VIOs:** volunteering opportunities often **don't align with young people's time, interests, or lifestyles.**
- **Community connections and partnerships work best,** while digital and traditional channels have mixed impact when it comes to recruitment of young volunteers.
- **Word of mouth dominates recruitment** and is the most effective method, however this does not align with how young people would like to receive information.
- **Arts/culture and animal welfare currently have relatively low representation** but were highly desired areas for future volunteering by young people.

2. Youth Engagement and Co-design

Meaningful youth involvement was a central element of the project. As outlined by YACVic[5], including young people in research strengthens development, evaluation, outcomes and recommendations. This involvement included consultation, co-design, and employing young people to create content. More specifically, young people were paid to design and create promotional flyers, to facilitate panels and workshops, to develop video content, and to provide feedback and advice. Broader youth engagement involved consultation with the Warrnambool Moyne Youth Advisory Board and running youth specific workshops at the South West Volunteer Expo.

Youth at the South West Volunteer Expo

At the 2026 South West Volunteer Expo (May 23), Warrnambool City Council's Youth Engagement team, in partnership with YACVic, delivered **targeted volunteering workshops for young people aged 12–25.** These sessions provided opportunities to learn about local volunteering pathways, hear directly from young volunteers about their experiences, participate in hands-on activities, and contribute ideas to help shape future volunteering opportunities. Nineteen young people attended the workshops throughout the day.

The **workshops were co-designed with six young people** who had previously participated in the Green Futures Now environmental youth leadership program, given the title of 'ambassadors. The ambassadors attended four planning sessions to help shape the Volunteer Expo and its workshop offerings. Through this process, they identified key knowledge gaps for young people in relation to volunteering and co-developed workshops that would be engaging, relevant, and beneficial.

On the day of the Expo, the ambassadors played an active role in delivery- MCing workshops, supporting catering, assisting with set-up and pack-down, and acting as peer mentors to encourage participation and engagement among attendees.





The ambassadors were compensated for their time both during the planning phase and at the event. While the experience provided valuable opportunities for skill development and leadership growth**, involvement of young people was critical in ensuring the workshops were genuinely youth-informed and responsive to the needs and interests of young people.**

Specific youth workshops and outcomes from the Volunteer Expo included:

- **Q&A panel:** Young volunteers shared their experiences and motivations for getting involved, providing relatable insights and peer-led encouragement.
- **Hands-on volunteering workshops:** Delivered in partnership with GreenPrint Projects and Tutt Environmental, young people contributed to constructing a floating modular wetland, offering a practical and engaging introduction to environmental volunteering.
- **Volunteering Pathway Matching Survey:** Participants completed a short online quiz that aligned their interests with suitable volunteering pathways, helping them identify and connect with relevant organisations at the expo .
- **Design Your Dream Volunteering Experience:** Young people, supported by representatives from five Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), collaborated to generate ideas for future volunteering opportunities. This created a valuable space for youth voice, providing insights into how young people want to engage while fostering mutual learning, idea-sharing, and collaboration between young people and organisations.
- **Organisations at the Volunteer Expo reported higher interest and sign-ups**, suggesting that creating a more welcoming, youth-friendly space enabled young people to better connect with existing opportunities.

Youth "Dream Volunteering Experience" Workshop Outcomes

The workshops highlighted strong interest among young people for engaging, social and hands-on volunteering experiences. Three key project ideas emerged: a large-scale environmental clean-up event combining education, citizen science and social elements; a weekend volunteering camp focused on skill-building, leadership and team-based problem solving; and a "come and try" volunteering event where participants can explore multiple opportunities in one location.

Across all concepts, common themes included **a preference for practical, meaningful activities that build skills and confidence, alongside opportunities for connection and social engagement.** Young people emphasised the importance of peer support and mentoring, involvement of multiple organisations, and creating welcoming environments with elements such as food, music and incentives. Overall, there was a clear desire for volunteering that is **interactive, youth-led, and easy to access.**



Young people at the South West Volunteer Expo discussing their Dream Volunteering Experience.

Youth Advisory Board Consultation

The project team were invited to consult with the 2025/26 Warrnambool Moyne Youth Advisory Board (YAB) around youth volunteering on March 17, 2026. The YAB consists of 20 young people from Warrnambool and Moyne from a diverse range of backgrounds. The aim of the consultation was to gain direct insights into youth perspectives around local volunteering opportunities, including barriers for young people, and how we can make it more engaging.

Youth Advisory Board members recommended improving youth volunteering in Warrnambool and Moyne through greater **visibility and access to opportunities**, including centralised, easy-to-find listings linked to skill-building and employment pathways.

They emphasised the need for **clearer role design and communication**, with simple language, defined expectations and a strong focus on showing the impact and purpose of each role. They wanted to know exactly what volunteer role they would be doing before signing up with an organisation.

To reduce barriers, young people highlighted the importance of **flexible, accessible opportunities** that consider time, transport and financial constraints, alongside **training and skill development** to build confidence and readiness. They also identified that participation would increase through more s**ocial, inclusive and youth-driven experiences**, including opportunities to volunteer with peers, contribute to co-design, and engage in **creative, meaningful and enjoyable roles.**

3. Promotion and Awareness

Youth Volunteering Social Media Campaign

To increase awareness of and participation in youth volunteering, a series of short-form videos was produced to showcase different volunteering opportunities and themes. These videos were created by a young videographer from BATS Media, providing a youth-led perspective on volunteering in the community. In addition, Council's Communications team produced a feature video highlighting the contribution of local young volunteer Zach, who dedicates his lunch breaks to volunteering at the Warrnambool Animal Shelter. Overall, videos were aimed at **showcasing the diversity, accessibility and impact of volunteering opportunities** for young people in the South West (Videos available here). Themed videos included:

Environmental Volunteering: Highlighted that even small-time commitments can make a meaningful impact, featuring young volunteers from Beach Patrol 3280 and Fruit Rescue. The video reinforced how a few hours of volunteering can positively contribute to local environments and communities.

Sport and Community-Based Volunteering: Featured volunteers from the Hookin2Hockey program at South West Hockey and the Disabled Surfers Association. It emphasised the dual benefit of creating meaningful community impact while building confidence, leadership and transferable life skills through mentoring and inclusive participation.

Community Events, Creativity and Connection: Showcased volunteering as a pathway to connection and creativity, featuring Amplify Warrnambool and the Warrnambool Community Garden Harvest Festival. It highlighted volunteering as an engaging and social experience that fosters creativity, belonging, and active participation in community-led events.

The videos were **promoted across Facebook and Instagram** during National Volunteer Week, achieving strong engagement with Facebook posts reaching between **14,000 and 62,000 views.** They also supported promotion of the South West Volunteer Expo, encouraging young people to explore local opportunities. In addition, the videos were screened at key in-person events, including a local volunteering celebration at Lighthouse Theatre (National Volunteer Week) and the South West Volunteer Expo.

The campaign had the following outcomes:

- Increased awareness of diverse volunteering opportunities among young people,
- Showcased relatable, local youth participation,
- Reinforced messages around flexibility, impact and personal benefit,
- Supported attendance at the South West volunteer expo; and
- Strengthened engagement through both digital and in-person channels.



4. Capacity Building

Delivery of child and youth related training to VIO's
Of the 41 organisations to respond to the VIO survey, 15 indicated their organisation would support volunteers and staff to attend YACVic training sessions on child safety and ethical youth engagement practice.

Safety in Action: child and youth safeguarding training was held on the 18th of March 2026 in Warrnambool. A total of 24 volunteers and staff from VIOs attended and completed the training. Training was delivered by industry expert, Mandy Britt-Crowhurst. The training supported attendees to understand their child safe obligations and improve child and youth safe practice. As a result of this training, **82% of attendees stated they were 'very likely' to apply learnings, while 94% stated they 'agreed or strongly agreed' to having a greater understanding of child safe guarding** as it relates to their work. A participant commented they "really enjoyed the training, mostly how clear it was to understand and learn the current polices in Victoria."

Nine volunteers and staff from 6 VIOs attended **Navigating the Grey: ethical practice with young people** on the 19th of March 2026 in Warrnambool. This training introduced the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector and supported participants to unpack the complexities of working with young people. As a result of the training, **83% of attendees said they had a greater understanding of ethical practice** as it relates to their work with young people.



Resources

This study involved collating existing **volunteering resources for both young people and VIO's** to build capacity for both groups and ultimately strengthen future youth volunteering. These resources, together with a suite of newly developed tools and materials, have been made publicly available through the WCC's Volunteer Connect website to improve access to information, resources and volunteering opportunities.

WCC's Volunteering webpage was redesigned to improve accessibility and user experience, with dedicated sections for community contacts, youth volunteering opportunities and volunteer resources. The updated webpage enables community members to easily connect with Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), explore youth-specific volunteering opportunities, and access information and resources to support their volunteering journey.

Future Planning

Key findings and recommendations

Findings from the surveys and consultations indicate high levels of youth involvement in volunteering in Warrnambool and Moyne, with strong motivation from both young people and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to increase youth engagement. Local VIOs are highly reliant on volunteers to deliver services and programs, further reinforcing the importance of strengthening participation.

For young people, volunteering provides an opportunity to make a positive impact in their community, while building skills, confidence and employment pathways, and connecting socially with their peers. For VIOs, engaging young people is valued for the new ideas, energy and future workforce pathways it brings. However, several key factors are currently limiting participation from both perspectives. These are outlined below, alongside recommendations to strengthen youth volunteering in the region.

1. Communication pathways and promotion:
There is a clear gap between young people's interest in volunteering and their awareness of available opportunities. Young people mostly found out about volunteering opportunities through existing networks, but young people prefer to access information via social media and clear, accessible messaging.

Recommendations:

- Develop centralised, visible pathways into volunteering (e.g. online platforms) and strengthen promotion of existing resources (e.g. Volunteering Victoria, YACVic YERP).
- Use consistent, youth-led promotion, including social media campaigns at key times (e.g. continuing to share volunteering videos from this project)
- Embed volunteering opportunities within schools, youth programs and community events.
- Support VIOs to increase social media presence and engage a young person to lead this promotion.

2. Role design and impact communication:
Young people highlighted the need for volunteer roles to be clearly designed and communicated, using simple, accessible language that outlines expectations and emphasises purpose, impact and skill development. Opportunities that clearly demonstrate what young people will do, what they will gain, and how they contribute are more likely to drive engagement.

Recommendations:

- Support VIOs to develop clear, youth-friendly role descriptions that outline tasks, time commitment and expected outcomes.
- Shift towards impact, storytelling focused messaging to better demonstrate the value of volunteering and the skills and experience participants will gain.
- Engage young people in designing and reviewing promotional materials to ensure they are relevant and accessible.



3. Youth-led opportunities:
Young people are wanting to step into decision making roles within VIO's to help shape volunteering.

Recommendations:
- VIOs to actively invite young people into decision making spaces (committees, boards, governing groups) and embed co-design approaches to enable direct input of young people into organisations. This would support increased youth engagement. The SWVN could hold dedicated annual workshops to support VIOs in creating and sharing practical tools to approach this.

4. Flexible and youth-friendly volunteering models:
Practical constraints continue to limit engagement, particularly time, transport, cost and ongoing commitment. Young people consistently prefer opportunities that are flexible, low-commitment and able to fit around study, work and other responsibilities.

Recommendations:
- Support VIOs to design flexible and accessible volunteering opportunities, including one-off activities, events, project-based roles and low-commitment entry points with clear timeframes. Pilot approaches such as "come and try" days and themed activities, ensuring opportunities are hands-on, social and clearly demonstrate impact.
- Where possible, integrate flexible scheduling, transport support, and clearly communicate expectations and requirements.
- Providing recognition or incentives (e.g. certificates, references or reimbursements) can further improve participation.

5. Social connection:
Belonging and peer connection are key drivers of participation. Opportunities should be social, inclusive and group-based, with elements that make participation enjoyable and engaging.

Recommendations:
- Encourage VIOs to create social entry points into volunteering, such as promoting opportunities that enable young people to "bring a friend", supporting increased participation and a more inclusive experience.

6. Supporting participation for under 18s:
For some VIOs, recruiting young volunteers under the age of 18 is currently challenging due to a variety of reasons (e.g. need for improved understanding of child safety regulations, Working with Children Check requirements, police checks, operating hours of service not aligning with availability). This can limit volunteering opportunities for under 18s who are actively seeking those experiences.

Recommendations:
- VIOs partner with schools and TAFEs to utilise the VM program and existing child safe structures that come with education spaces. An exceptional example for this is provided in a Volunteer Victoria case study in the resources section 'Leading Change Towards inclusive practice'.

7. Supporting volunteer involving organisations (VIOs):
While VIOs are willing to engage young people, they require practical support. This includes developing ready-to-use resources such as social media templates and youth-friendly role descriptions, delivering training in youth engagement, child safety and inclusive practice, and supporting the creation of flexible, age-appropriate roles.

Recommendations:
- Continue to compile and share existing resources for this project through the Warrnambool City Council Volunteer team, local volunteer networks and websites.

8. Ongoing data and monitoring: the surveys developed through this project provide strong initial insights into youth volunteering in the region but require ongoing investigations.

Recommendations:
- Annual surveying and engagement of young people and VIOs is recommended to track trends, identify emerging needs, and provide a regular "pulse check" to evaluate actions and inform future planning and continuous improvement.





Summary

This project provides a localised snapshot of youth volunteering across Warrnambool and Moyne, highlighting strong interest from young people alongside a high reliance on volunteers within local Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs). Both groups are motivated to increase youth engagement, recognising the mutual benefits—young people gain skills, confidence, employment pathways and social connection, while VIOs benefit from new ideas, energy and future workforce development.

However, participation is constrained by a mismatch between available opportunities and young people's needs, particularly in relation to awareness, accessibility, flexibility and communication. Young people are most engaged by opportunities that are flexible, social, meaningful and clearly communicated, while VIOs require practical support to design and promote these opportunities effectively.

Strengthening youth volunteering in the region will require a more coordinated and youth-centred approach. This includes improving visibility and access to opportunities through centralised pathways and more consistent, youth-friendly promotion; enhancing role design to ensure opportunities clearly communicate purpose, impact and skill development; and embedding youth voice through leadership opportunities and co-design. It will also require expanding flexible, low-commitment opportunities that align with young people's lives, supporting social and peer-based participation, and improving access for under 18s through stronger partnerships with schools and existing frameworks.

Ongoing support for VIOs will be critical, including access to practical tools, training and shared resources, alongside continued data collection to monitor trends and inform future planning. Ultimately, increasing youth volunteering participation will depend on how well opportunities are designed to reflect young people's interests, lifestyles and motivations, supported by strong collaboration across the region.

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