

Connections, compliance and community

THE CHANGING FACE OF VOLUNTEERING
IN REGIONAL VICTORIA



An initiative of





Report preparation

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Page	
4	Acknowledgements
6	Foreword
8	Executive Summary
9	Study findings
10	Introduction
12	Study context
13	The Wimmera
14	A look back: The origins of volunteering in the Wimmera
16	The volunteering landscape
16	What do we mean when we say ‘volunteering’?
19	The national profile of volunteering
21	The changing face of the Wimmera
24	Who volunteers?
24	Profile of a volunteer in the Wimmera
26	Connections: Why people volunteer
31	Emerging solutions – building connections
36	Compliance: Why people don’t volunteer
41	Emerging solution – enhancing community leadership and capacity
42	Community: The value of volunteering
45	Emerging solutions – creating resilient communities
48	Responses, solutions and the future
48	Implications for Wimmera Volunteers
51	Implications for government
52	Acronyms
53	References
56	Appendix A: Methodology
58	Appendix B: Wimmera Volunteers

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Over 500 people participated in this study, ensuring that it represented a diverse range of views across the region. The project was enriched by conversations with volunteers and staff from Wimmera Volunteers, Wimmera Primary Care Partnership, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) Network, Wimmera Transport Connections, Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital volunteers, Wimmera Regional Volunteer Co-ordinators Network,

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The contents and emerging solutions of this report are the responsibility of the authors.

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NOTE

*For privacy reasons all quotes are attributed on a first name basis only.
Many names have been changed.*

Eight months ago the conversations began... Volunteering is at the heart of healthy communities. Some would say that it is the glue that holds us together in good times and bad, and the benefits are enormous to you, your family, and your community. *Is this an ideological view or is it a reality?* Then we started wondering, if volunteering creates such important benefits for individuals and communities... *why are volunteer involving organisations struggling to attract volunteers?*

Volunteering can mean different things to different people. Indeed many volunteers themselves often do not consider what they do to help the community as 'volunteering'. *So if it is not volunteering, what is it?*

Whilst there is no universally agreed definition of 'active citizenship' there is broad agreement that it refers to the involvement of individuals in their communities, tackling problems and bringing about change, often through volunteering.

"Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in."

Marjorie Moore

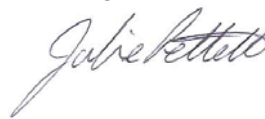
In December 2011 the Wimmera Volunteers Board decided it needed to better understand how to strengthen volunteering in the Wimmera. With that end in mind Wimmera Volunteers asked Net Balance to research the role and value of volunteering in the Wimmera; engaging volunteers, communities and the three levels of government all of whom have an interest in volunteering in regional Victoria.

Last year the federal Government delivered their vision for volunteering in Australia; the 'National Volunteering Strategy'. This was welcomed by Wimmera Volunteers as a high level policy that could influence volunteering, if it is supported by appropriate resources. There are no doubts that in regional Victoria, volunteering is the very fabric which holds our communities together... we must acknowledge, respect and foster participation in our regional communities.

Here we are in July 2012 and Wimmera Volunteers is very pleased to present the '*Connections, Compliance and Community: The changing face of volunteering in regional Victoria*' report. We believe this report will encourage constructive conversations, promote healthy change and revitalisation of that most essential activity; volunteering. We hope that this report will be used widely by individuals, organisations, communities and governments, who have an interest in volunteering.

Finally I would like to recognise the 500 or so people that contributed to this report... your collective wisdom is appreciated, thank you!

Kind regards



Julie Pettett,
CEO, Wimmera Volunteers



Executive summary



Volunteering delivers essential services to those in need. It reduces costs to organisations and government who would otherwise be restricted in the delivery of these services. It creates enormous social value by building stronger, more resilient communities. These dynamics exist in communities which are changing. In the Wimmera, there is an ageing population, shifting population densities, immigration, and numerous other factors result in the changing face of rural communities. However, many of the organisations which support volunteering are not changing as fast as the communities they serve, as evidenced by declining and ageing memberships, ageing volunteer base and under-developed succession plans.

To understand the changing dynamics of volunteerism in the Wimmera, Wimmera Volunteers and Net Balance Foundation conducted this study to explore the role and social value of volunteering. It examines the trends and characteristics of volunteerism, and barriers that prevent the community from volunteering or volunteering more. As part of the study, a set of emerging solutions were developed which have implications for Wimmera Volunteers and government. The emerging solutions support Wimmera Volunteers in strategic planning and

provide feedback to government regarding the specific needs and priorities of volunteerism in the Wimmera.

The study area included Horsham Rural City Council, West Wimmera Shire, Hindmarsh Shire and Yarriambiack Shire. Research activities were also conducted in Ballarat and Stawell.

The study involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods including:

- ▶ A literature review
- ▶ Surveys of volunteers and non-volunteers and volunteer organisations
- ▶ Consultation interviews with representatives from volunteer organisations, volunteers and government departments
- ▶ Focus groups with volunteers and organisations
- ▶ Participation in community events
- ▶ Presentations to community groups

Over 500 people participated in the study, ensuring it represented the diverse views held across the region.

Study findings

A triumvirate of themes – connections, compliance and communities – were chosen as part of the title of this report as they encapsulate much of the changing dynamics of volunteering in the Wimmera.

- ▶ **Connections:** explores the major benefits obtained by people who volunteer. The flow of value through the activity of volunteering is two-way. Value is received by both the recipient of the service and the volunteer. It examines the reasons people volunteer including the relationships created and the meaning, self-worth and purpose gained.
- ▶ **Compliance:** examines the barriers limiting people volunteering or volunteering more. The growing requirements on volunteers and organisations due to increasing responsibilities associated with risk and liability, insurance, legislation changes, reduced free time available, increased workforce participation and changing demographics are acting as barriers to volunteering.
- ▶ **Community:** describes the value to communities from a thriving culture of volunteerism. Volunteering provides essential services that may not exist without the support of volunteers. It explores the role of a volunteering culture which has been passed through families and local communities. However in response to the changing faces of rural communities for example, new entry points into volunteering need to be created to ensure volunteering is inclusive and equitable.



by declining and ageing memberships, ageing volunteer base and under-developed succession plans. “Communities” was chosen as the theme which summarises the value of volunteering.

This triumvirate of themes – connections, compliance and communities – have been chosen as part of the title of this report as they encapsulate much of the changing dynamics of volunteering in the Wimmera.

Connections, Compliance and Community: The changing face of volunteering in regional Victoria is an initiative of Wimmera Volunteers designed to promote healthy change, constructive conversations, and revitalisation across the Wimmera of that most essential activity; volunteering.



For more than 25 years, Wimmera Volunteers has been providing essential services to the Wimmera region. The organisation is now at a critical stage in its evolution and has the opportunity to expand its influence and enhance the role and performance of the volunteering community in the Wimmera and beyond.

The purpose of this study was to broadly engage with the Wimmera community to explore the role and social value of volunteering. It examined the trends and characteristics of volunteerism and barriers that prevent the community from volunteering or volunteering more. A set of emerging solutions has been developed based on feedback received from community engagement conducted between February and May 2012. The emerging solutions have implications for Wimmera Volunteers and government. The emerging solutions support Wimmera Volunteers in strategic planning and provide feedback to government regarding the specific needs and priorities of volunteerism in the Wimmera. An indirect outcome of this study was the opportunity to engage, recognise and acknowledge the incredible work of the volunteering community.

The study area included Horsham Rural City Council, West Wimmera Shire, Hindmarsh Shire and Yarriambiack Shire. The research however extended beyond these local government areas with individuals interviewed in Ballarat and Stawell where Wimmera Volunteers has an influence. The Wimmera is a diverse region with its major industry comprising broad acre farming, cattle and sheep.

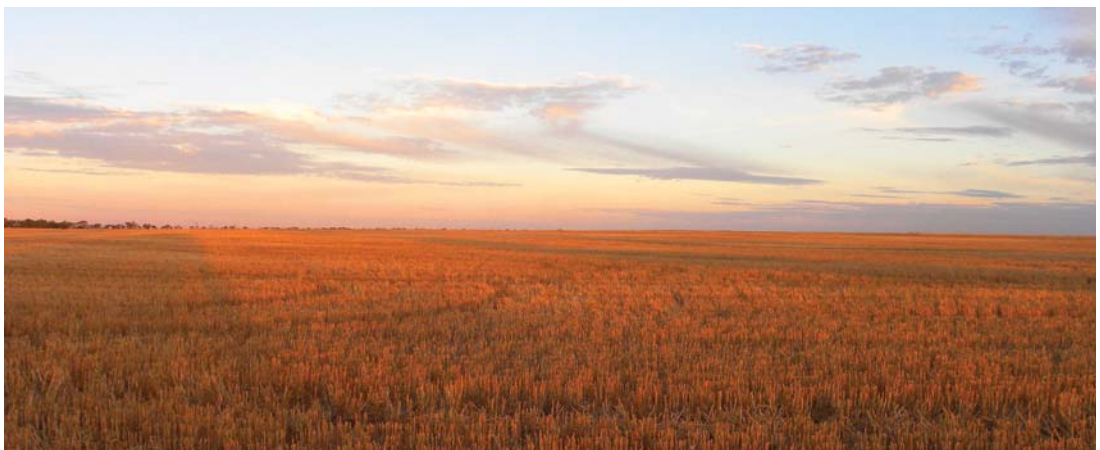
The findings of this study are based on extensive interviews, surveys, focus groups and consultation conducted across the Wimmera region. This included:

- ▶ 259 individual surveys
- ▶ 28 volunteer organisation surveys
- ▶ 15 in-depth interviews
- ▶ 12 focus group discussions
- ▶ interviews with representatives from:
 - ▶ Office of the Not-for-profit Sector
 - ▶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
 - ▶ Department of Premier and Cabinet
 - ▶ Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD)
- ▶ keynote presentations delivered to two Rotary Clubs

In order to gain an understanding of the Wimmera region, the authors engaged with the local communities through participation in activities and events such as:

- ▶ Harmony Day Walk
- ▶ National Close the Gap Day forum
- ▶ National Volunteer Week barbeques
- ▶ Wimmera Machinery Field Days

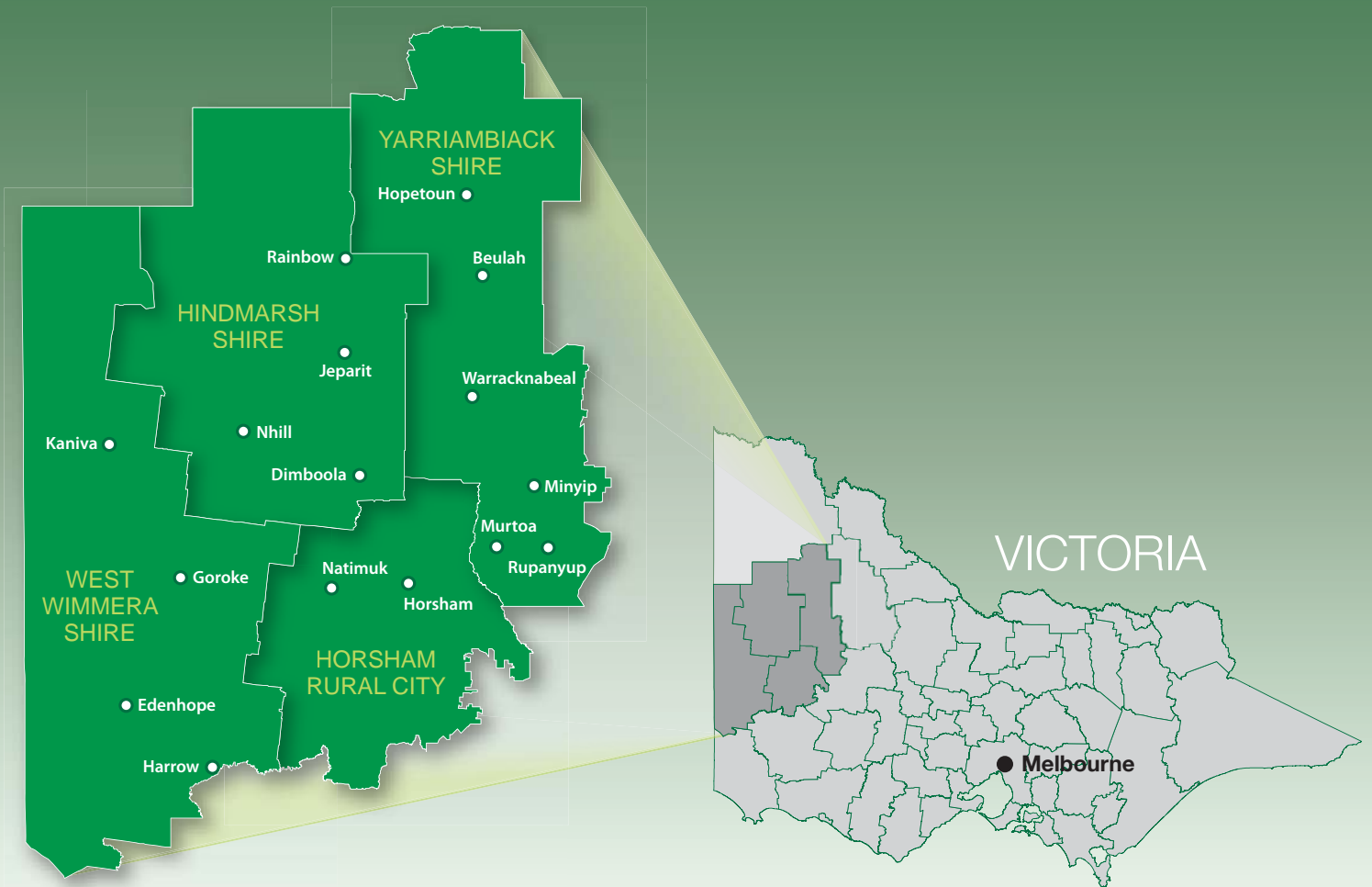
The report has been prepared by Net Balance Foundation with support from Wimmera Volunteers.



The Wimmera

The Wimmera is a region in north-west Victoria with a population of 38,448 (ABS, 2012) including the West Wimmera Shire, Yarriambiack Shire, Hindmarsh Shire and Horsham Rural City Council. It is a region dominated by broad acre cropping of cereals, pulses and oilseeds in the central and northern areas, and dry land livestock grazing in the south (CSIRO, October 2007).

Native vegetation covers 16% of the region which includes popular tourist destinations of Mt Arapiles and the Grampians National Park. Horsham is the largest town, with a population of over 14,000, and the three towns of Nhill, Dimboola and Warracknabeal are the only others to have populations of more than 1,000 (Vaughan, 2012).



A look back:

The origins of volunteering in the Wimmera

As long as people have lived in or moved through the Wimmera they have needed to cooperate and engage in collaborative effort in order to survive. While the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area may not have recognised volunteerism as we do today, Aboriginal culture is embedded in concepts of collectivism and obligation to extended family and community. In this sense, volunteering has existed in the Wimmera, for as long as footprints have marked the ground.

References to volunteering culture in the Wimmera can be found in the earliest records of European settlement in the region. Survival depended on mutual obligation, co-operation and a strong and supportive culture to succeed. The region “... shared with other portions of Australia disastrous seasons, where much hardship, battling against heavy odds and endurance were necessary” (Robertson, 1913).

Early settlers found the Australian landscape wild and unforgiving. It was a time when a sign of progress was making improvements to the land by replacing the Australian bush with a European landscape and a big gum tree was considered a relic of the past (Carter, p.9). In 1913 it was thought that if the current rate of settlement were to continue “...probably in another fifty years it will only be a legend that Mallee scrub ever existed between Nhill and Pinnaroo” (Robertson, 1913).

The records reveal that being a part of a regional community required active citizenship.

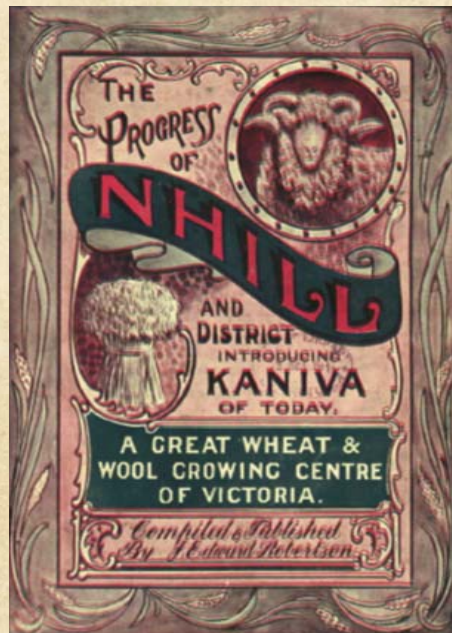
This included the prospectors who came to the nearby Stawell region in the 1850s in search of gold. They were described as taking “...an active part in local affairs...they were always to the fore in all matters relating to the betterment of the State” (Crerar, 1941). In 1913 the majority of early settlers in the Nhill district were described as “progressive men...who did in their lifetime much to build up the town and district of Nhill” (Robertson, 1913).

For example, the Nhill Fire Brigade, which formed in 1888, had in 1913 a “full complement of 25 men easily maintained due to the enthusiasm [which the captain] imparts to his men and strict attention to duty” (Robertson, 1913).

Nhill at this time boasted numerous sporting clubs, including four tennis clubs as well as football, cricket, golf, bowling, gun and rifle clubs. The town had a “splendidly equipped and well managed hospital” and it was “distinctly credible to the people of Nhill, the West Wimmera and Mallee to find they are giving so

freely and well to the institution” (Robertson, 1913). This was credited to “...the townspeople and members of the farming community [who] work in harmony and every sporting club and institution receives cordial assistance and general support” (Robertson, 1913).

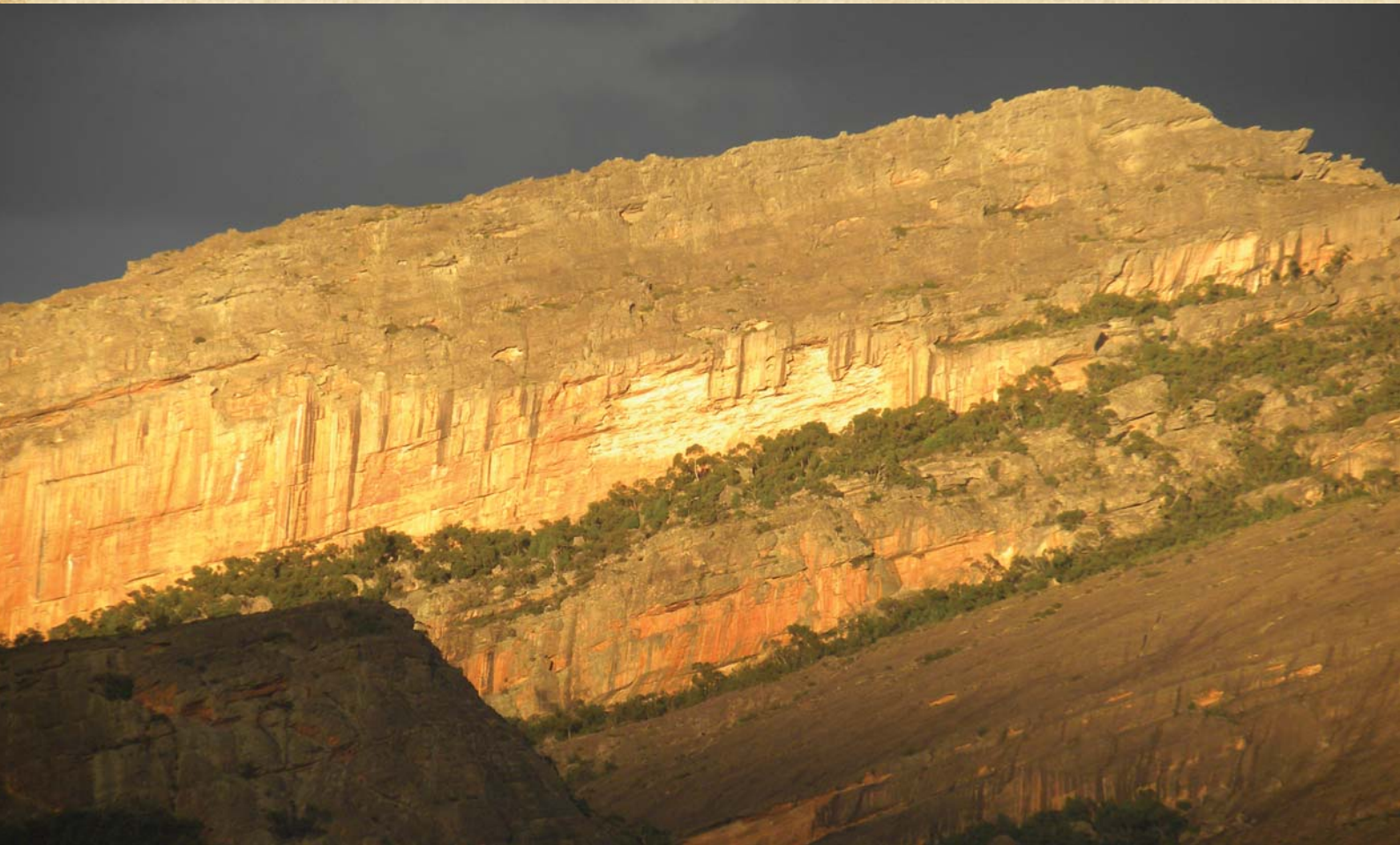
The volunteering culture of active citizenship and duty to one’s town expressed in historical documents is still prevalent in the Wimmera today. During this study, when people were asked if



they volunteered, many replied “No.” Then upon reflection, they queried whether being the Secretary of Landcare or helping out at their local footy club was volunteering. They were volunteers; but didn’t consider it more than *“just what you do”*.

Across the Wimmera, from Edenhope and Harrow to Warracknabeal volunteering is often *“just what you do.”* When considering the word volunteering

and its meaning, a plaque erected at the Memorial Gates built at the Central Park in Stawell in 1903 captures it well. The Memorial Gates were designed and built at the local foundry of George Kay & Co and paid for by *“local effort.”* This same meaning was described 107 km away and 109 years later in Warracknabeal, where volunteering effort was described as the backbone of their community.



- ▶ *to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer*
- ▶ *of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion*
- ▶ *for no financial payment*
- ▶ *in designated volunteer positions only.*

Compared with the ABS definition of volunteering, Volunteering Australia requires that the work must take place through a not-for-profit organisation or project and be of benefit to the community. Further, it stipulates formal volunteering must take place in designated volunteer positions only, in response to concerns that volunteers may occupy roles or perform functions that could otherwise be held by paid employees.

On an international front, the International Association for Volunteer Effort provides the following definition of volunteering (cited in Soupourmas et. al., 2002, p11):

- ▶ *is based on personal motivation and choices, freely undertaken*
- ▶ *is a way of furthering active citizenship and community involvement*
- ▶ *takes the form of individual or group activities generally carried out within the framework of an organisation*
- ▶ *enhances human potential and the quality of life, building up human solidarity*
- ▶ *provides answers for the great challenges of our time, striving for a better and more peaceful world*
- ▶ *contributes to the vitality of economic life, even creating jobs and new professions*

This definition attempts to capture some of the grander aspirations of volunteering and describes some of the outcomes that may be achieved through volunteer work such as building up human solidarity.

Minyip Ladies Auxiliary of the Community Health Centre

Margaret
Murphy

Long term commitment to volunteering

"The Minyip Ladies Auxiliary of the Community Health Centre began in about 1998. I was the first president of the new centre and as we are only a small group of women we work and raise money to buy any equipment the Director of Nursing may require.

I left the committee for a number of years as I was working but after my retirement I again joined the committee as I felt this was a worthwhile committee to belong to. My husband joined the 'old' Minyip Hospital Committee in 1966/67 and remains on the maintenance Committee today. We have always had an interest in our community and enjoy working for the town.

Our Ladies meet every third month on the third Monday. We are only a small group of ten ladies. We are amazed at the end of each year how much we have achieved during the year. We run competitions or raffles at Christmas time, Easter, Spring and during the year. We cater if we are required for any occasions at the centre and recently bought a defibrillator and other requirements requested by staff.

We are very lucky to have dedicated and experienced ladies and we now have two young mothers who have offered their services and are such an asset to our committee always willing to do their bit to help us when needed.

We have a good working relationship with the staff and we all enjoy our friendly meetings."

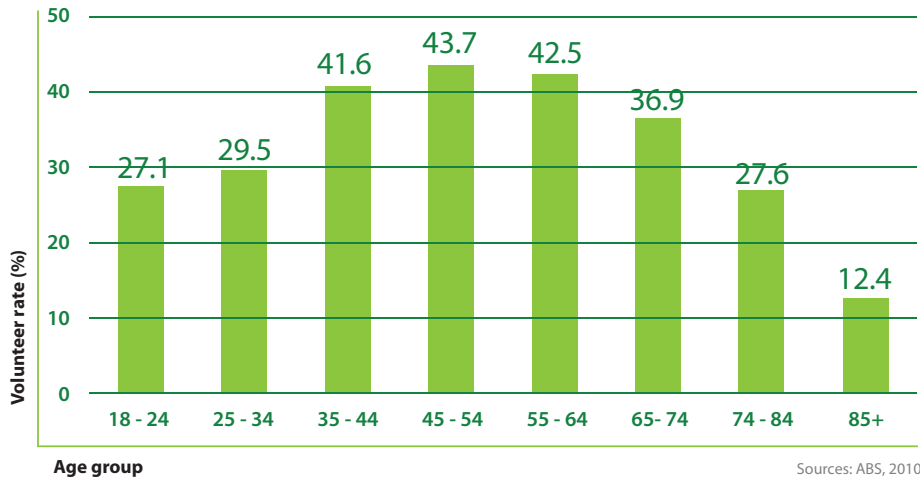


fig.1 ABS 2010 data
Volunteer rate by age group

Informal volunteering

Informal volunteering is the term often used to describe work that is undertaken outside of recognised volunteering organisations. There are many informal voluntary activities that enhance community life such as helping an elderly neighbour to shop, giving advice or looking after other people's children. Informal volunteering is spontaneous and sporadic and often takes place between friends and neighbours (Soupourmas et. al., 2002, p11).

These activities are some of the most common types of volunteering, despite being excluded by the ABS definition of volunteering. Yet it is often these types of activities that build community networks, connections, trust and social capital.

This study did not seek to adopt any one definition of volunteering, but rather examined the practice of volunteerism. This includes both formal and informal volunteering activities and enabled the Wimmera community to share their understanding and definition of the practice.

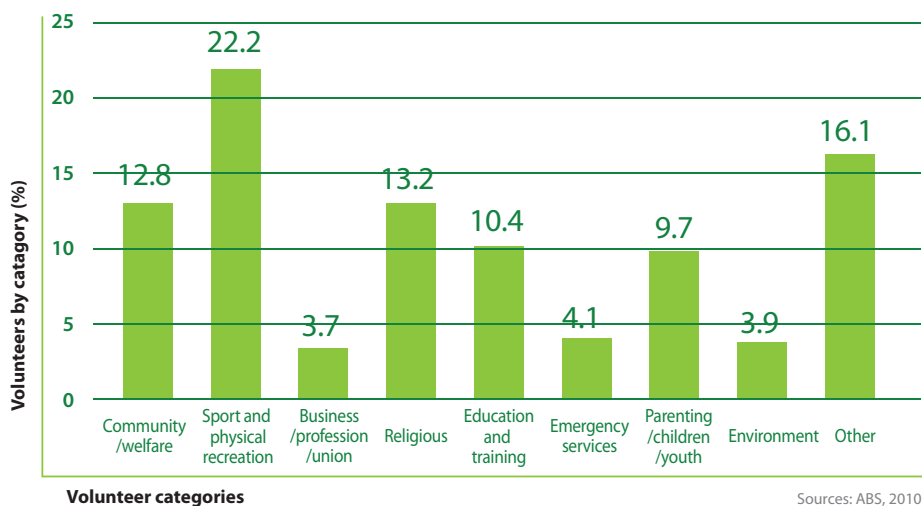


fig.2 ABS 2010 data
Volunteer categories

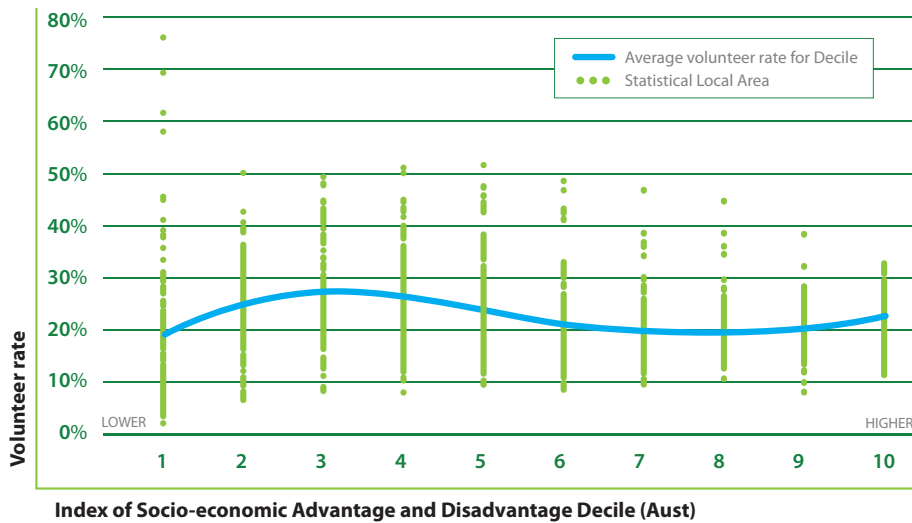


fig.3 ABS 2006 data – Relationship between advantage / disadvantage and volunteer rates for statistical local areas in Australia

The national profile of volunteering

National volunteering data

According to the ABS, there are now more people volunteering than ever before. However they spend less time volunteering in a formal capacity and volunteer with less regularity (ABS, 2010). In 2010, 36% of people aged 18 years and over had undertaken some form of voluntary work in the previous 12 months compared with 24% in 1995 (ABS, 2010). However, they volunteered for less time, 74 hours per year in 1995 compared to 56 hours in 2006 (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2011). In 2010, the volunteer rate was 41% outside capital cities compared with 34% within capital cities (ABS, 2010). In 2011, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet released the National Volunteering Strategy (NVS), based on findings from the 2010 ABS General Social Survey.

This survey found that (refer to Figures 1 and 2):

- ▶ people between the ages of 25-34 volunteer less than the national average
- ▶ volunteering rates increase from the age of 35-54, coinciding with raising children and participating in family life

- ▶ women are more likely to volunteer than men
- ▶ employed people are more likely to volunteer than the unemployed
- ▶ retirees contribute the greatest number of actual volunteer hours
- ▶ people are increasingly time poor and want flexible volunteer roles
- ▶ the greatest number of people volunteer in the sport and physical recreation category

Although some people are more likely to volunteer than others, volunteer rates are not directly correlated with socio-economic status.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) compare the relative social and economic conditions of cities, towns and suburbs across Australia (ABS, 2008). According to the index of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack are in the top ten most disadvantaged local government areas in Victoria (ranked 4 and 5 consecutively) (ABS, 2008).

Figure 3 illustrates the outputs of statistical analysis of ABS data from 2006 of the index of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage and volunteer rates. It shows that those living within the 10% most disadvantaged areas have the lowest rates (18%) on average of volunteering. However the least disadvantaged areas did not have the highest average rate of volunteering. The highest average rate of volunteering was within decile 3 (27% average volunteering rate).

Table 1 below provides a summary of volunteer rates and the index of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage for the Wimmera based on 2006 data (ABS, 2012). The rates of volunteering across the region vary, which suggests different volunteer cultures. The northern area of the Yarriambiack Shire has the highest rate of volunteering (48%) despite being classified as an area of relative disadvantage (decile 3). This rate of volunteering is above the national average of 35%. In contrast, central Horsham had the lowest rate of volunteering (30%) although in decile 4 indicating a higher level of disadvantage compared with northern Yarriambiack.

The culture of volunteering and community spirit was observed during stakeholder consultations

in Yarriambiack Shire and in and around Harrow. The Harrow community demonstrated great collaboration and leadership, with almost all residents chipping in to build the community. These regional areas know how to help themselves and other communities could learn from them.

The National Volunteering Strategy

The NVS is intended to encourage volunteering throughout Australia, with a specific goal that by 2021 the value of volunteering is accorded new recognition and respect. It is based on extensive research and consultation undertaken between 2010 and 2011, and will inform the Commonwealth's volunteering policy over the next decade.

The NVS highlights the rapidly changing volunteering dynamic. As the national social, economic and technological fabric of Australia evolves, so too must institutions, including volunteer organisations. The NVS recognises that whilst traditional volunteering will always have its place, new forms of volunteering are emerging.

table.1 Index of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage and volunteer rates in the Wimmera (ABS, 2012)

Statistical local area	Index of relative socio-economic dis/ advantage decile (Aust)	Volunteer rate (2006)
Hindmarsh (S)	2	39%
Yarriambiack (S) – South	2	39%
West Wimmera (S)	3	43%
Yarriambiack (S) – North	3	48%
Horsham (RC) – Central	4	30%
Horsham (RC) Bal	6	41%
Overall national rate	N/A	35% (Ref 1)

Note: Socio-economic status is a complex concept to capture. The ABS recommends caution when reporting. The indexes show an average ranking of an area. The socio-economic conditions of individual residents in any one area will vary, and there may be relatively advantaged residents living in areas labelled as disadvantaged, and vice versa. Due to the design of the indexes it is not possible to measure socio-economic changes over time (ABS, 2008).

Ref 1: ABS, 2008

The NVS is a ten year strategy with six focus areas:

- ▶ **Focus 1: Respond to trends in volunteering**
– including engaging youth and older Australians, as well as workplace volunteering
- ▶ **Focus 2: Harness technology**
– including volunteer matching and leveraging online tools
- ▶ **Focus 3: Better regulation and risk management** – including improving access to information and simplifying regulation
- ▶ **Focus 4: Strengthen management and training** – including improving the quality of volunteer management and the costs associated with volunteering
- ▶ **Focus 5: Strengthen relationships & advocacy** – including building relationships between organisations and sectors
- ▶ **Focus 6: Recognise and value volunteering**
– including recognising the value and measurement of volunteering.



The changing face of the Wimmera

Population trends

As in many agriculture-based economies, there has been a declining population in most towns in the Wimmera. The most recent ABS population statistics indicate a slight fall of 0.3% in the year 2010-2011 (ABS, 2011). Whilst there is a general decline in most small towns in the Wimmera, the central service town of Horsham, has grown from 12,925 in 2001 (DPCP, 2006) to approximately 14,100 today (State Government of Victoria, 2012).

Towns with smaller populations of between one and two thousand have experienced the largest population decline, often due to job losses in agriculture and other sectors where services have been withdrawn (Regional Development Victoria, 2010, p3). As an illustration, Murtoa during the 1980s supported a high school and many government departments and agencies, however a number of changes were taking place within government agencies and departments. This resulted in about 100 jobs being axed by the Victorian Railways, Telecom (now known as Telstra), the State Electricity Commission (as it was then) and other agencies and departments (DPCD, 2001). As a number of these jobs were relocated to Horsham, population movements away from Murtoa occurred (DPCD, 2001).

Statistics show that the Wimmera has an ageing population. In 2006, all local government areas in the Wimmera had a higher proportion of the population aged 65 years and over and the lowest proportion of the population between 20 and 24, compared with the average for regional Victoria (Vaughan, 2012).

The demographic changes in these communities reflect the general trends occurring more widely. Families are smaller, people are having fewer children and there are larger numbers of people living in one and two person households. In agricultural communities, farm sizes have increased significantly, due to changes in



technology and supply chain pressures. A region that once supported five families, each on a 640 acre farm, might now be one farm on 3,000 acres. Consequently this is impacting the dynamics of communities, as people become more dispersed and services more centralised resulting in a decrease in demand for services in smaller towns.

However changes in farm size and resultant community dynamics is not a new phenomenon. It has been occurring for generations. For example, in 1876 “a settler at that time could only take up 300 acres and it would certainly have been more judicious had the Government allowed at least 500 acres...in 1876 a 300 acre block over 100 miles from a railway station was far too small to make a reasonably decent living though it certainly provided an existence” (Robertson, 1913).

Another reason for the population decline of rural townships in the Wimmera is young people moving away to access education and employment opportunities. Many towns actively encourage programs to support young people returning to the region because they are “seen as a stable part of the workforce and because they are more

likely to volunteer for activities that are vital to the functioning of the town” (DPCD, 2001, p148).

There are other external factors which are influencing the dynamics of towns. The Wimmera has been subject to extreme weather events, such as the recent ten year drought, followed by widespread floods in 2011. Although the Wimmera has always faced extreme weather conditions, the intensity and frequency of natural disasters is increasing and is predicted to continue as locked in climate change proceeds.

Volunteering trends in the Wimmera

The Wimmera is characterised by strong social infrastructure and a thriving community network. A report prepared by the Department of Planning and Community Development in 2008 on indicators of community strength at the Local Government Area (LGA) level included the results of surveys conducted across Victoria. One indicator relating to volunteering (answering ‘yes’ or ‘sometimes’ to ‘Do you volunteer?’) found that the proportion of

the population volunteering across the Wimmera was above the average rate for regional Victoria (43%). West Wimmera Shire had the highest rate of volunteering with 68% followed by Yarriambiack (65.9%), Hindmarsh (55.5%) and Horsham (50%). (DPCP, 2008).

Volunteerism is changing due to multiple external factors. Changes in volunteerism also reflect the social changes in society. Volunteering was once a free spirited activity that required enthusiasm and hard work. Now, it requires specialised skills and knowledge to manage growing compliance requirements, increasing community expectations and governance obligations. With these requirements there are greater responsibilities.

Additionally, natural disasters such as those recently experienced in the Wimmera, require a permanent supply of skilled emergency management volunteers in addition to more traditional response teams. For example, the community of Warracknabeal was challenged in January 2011 by rising flood waters that threatened up to 140 homes. A 'Great Wall of Warracknabeal' was built by hard working volunteers in collaboration with staff from the Yarriambiack Shire. The community of volunteers and the Shire "worked around the clock to build up the bank for two and half days until the maximum

water arrived and the creek level began to drop" (McLaren, 2011). The Red Cross understands what can be achieved by the spontaneous engagement of volunteers during crisis events. A representative from the Ballarat Red Cross observed dryly that "when something big happens, a lot of people have a sense of 'I want to help'."

The ageing population in the Wimmera is also having an impact on the volunteer community. In some volunteer areas, there are a diminishing number of ageing volunteers. In the Yarriambiack Shire for example, often the volunteers are as old as the person to whom they are delivering the service. Volunteer Managers are often notified that their volunteers should not be driving anymore due to their age.

In some of the smaller towns, there is also a feeling that there is a core group of people "doing everything." A number of volunteers expressed that their experience at times was going "from joy to duty." The reality for many towns was that volunteering "is about community survival, not community spirit". Organisations that exist to support volunteers need to hear this message that many volunteers "are worn out."

Profile of a volunteer in the Wimmera

This study demonstrates there is a genuine and strong commitment to volunteering in the region. A survey of 259 people was conducted within the Wimmera to gain an understanding of the characteristics of volunteerism within the community. The survey identified the following current volunteering characteristics:

- ▶ 88% of respondents currently volunteer
- ▶ almost 60% of respondents have been volunteering for more than 10 years
- ▶ more than 32% of respondents volunteer for more than five hours a week
- ▶ 57% of respondents volunteer on a regular basis and 27% are committed to long-term volunteer positions
- ▶ more than 86% of respondents are likely to be volunteering in five years' time.

Of those respondents that self-identified as currently volunteering:

- ▶ 53% were over 55 years old
- ▶ 64% were female
- ▶ 90% were born in Australia
- ▶ completion of secondary school was the highest level of education achieved by the majority of respondents
- ▶ 66% of respondents parents' volunteered
- ▶ 51% volunteered as a child
- ▶ 56% volunteer 1 to 5 hours per week
- ▶ 53% would not like to volunteer more
- ▶ 85% are proud to be volunteers.

These results demonstrate a strong culture of and commitment to volunteering in the Wimmera. The majority of volunteers were either retired or employed on a full time basis as illustrated in Figure 4.

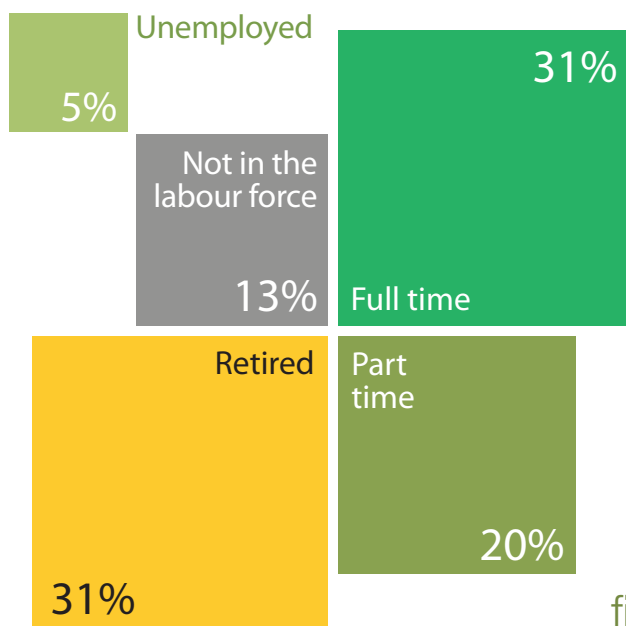


fig.4 Survey results
Employment status of current volunteers



Volunteering “brings the world to me”

Yarrilinks is an annual community planting weekend supported by the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, ACE radio, AMES in Melbourne, SAIL (Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning) and Lentil as Anything (Talbot, n.d.).

The weekend brings together farming families and newly arrived migrants to plant and share cultural experiences. The program has bridged many barriers and at the same time resulted in various environmental and social outcomes. “The environment connects everyone, it doesn’t need language” told one volunteer.

For program member Rae Talbot, the weekends have been an opportunity to “bring the world to me.” Rae has had limited opportunity to travel the world having raised four children and is now very committed to her grandchildren. Rae is able to ‘travel the world’ and experience new cultures through the Yarrilinks program.

Yarrilinks has embraced the changing faces of volunteering by engaging communities outside of the Wimmera.



Why people volunteer

Volunteering: A two way street

Between 2006 and 2007, Australian volunteers are estimated to have contributed 700 million hours of unpaid work, worth over \$14.6 billion to the community (Productivity Commission, 2010). This economic value of volunteering is well recognised by the Australian community however the social value of volunteerism is rarely quantified. Volunteering provides a two way exchange of value between the volunteer and the beneficiary of the volunteering activity.

‘Pat’, a volunteer from Harrow described the value of volunteering as “coming back three-fold to you.”

Volunteering provides volunteers with a sense of meaning, self-worth and purpose. Over 50% of survey respondents strongly agreed that they volunteered because they are passionate about the cause they support. A volunteer in Hindmarsh said “volunteering brings a sense of achievement – you see what you’ve changed.” Volunteering has been credited to individual health, wellbeing and longevity. For example, one significant study, the Longevity Project, found that becoming a volunteer, getting involved in the community and being dedicated to things and people beyond oneself is a major predictor of a long life (Friedman et. al., 2011).

There are many diverse and individual motivations for volunteering. For ‘Sid’, if volunteering is ...“not fun ...don’t bother doing it.” For a small group of around 20 men in Dimboola it is certainly not about the recognition or reward. This particular group is self-organised, with no formal structure and do not want to be told what to do. The group organise and carry out odd jobs in the town and then follow up their efforts with a barbeque. Their material is donated and they have no formal structure. According to those that know the men, they would not want it any other way!

The people engaged throughout this process have reinforced the notion that volunteering builds connections, creates social capital and forges relationships.

Figure 5 (see opposite) shows those that strongly agreed with the associated statements.

“Volunteering brings a sense of achievement – ...you see what you’ve changed.”

Volunteering builds social capital

Volunteering supports social connectedness and social connectedness is valuable to strengthening social capital. Social capital has varying definitions but most agree that it includes “networks, norms, trust and reciprocity that enable individuals to act together to achieve a shared goal” (Soupourmas et. al, 2002, p30).

The activity of volunteering was described by a volunteer in Horsham as a “form of insurance” and a way of investing in the community: “There is a mutual understanding within the community that if I helped now, they would do the same for me when I was in need”. This reciprocity created through volunteering is an ‘insurance’ that helps people feel less vulnerable.

The emergency response effort has leveraged the value of social connections by creating ‘phone trees’ within remote communities. The phone trees enable the flow of information between communities particularly during emergency events,

where each household is responsible for calling a neighbour. This type of informal volunteering provides an opportunity for individuals regardless of their background or skills to make a positive contribution to their community. It helps people feel more confident, resilient and connected. The value of these networks extends beyond the direct value of the phone tree, and builds opportunities for friendship and a sense of belonging to the community.

“There is a mutual understanding within the community that if I helped now, they would do the same for me when I was in need.”

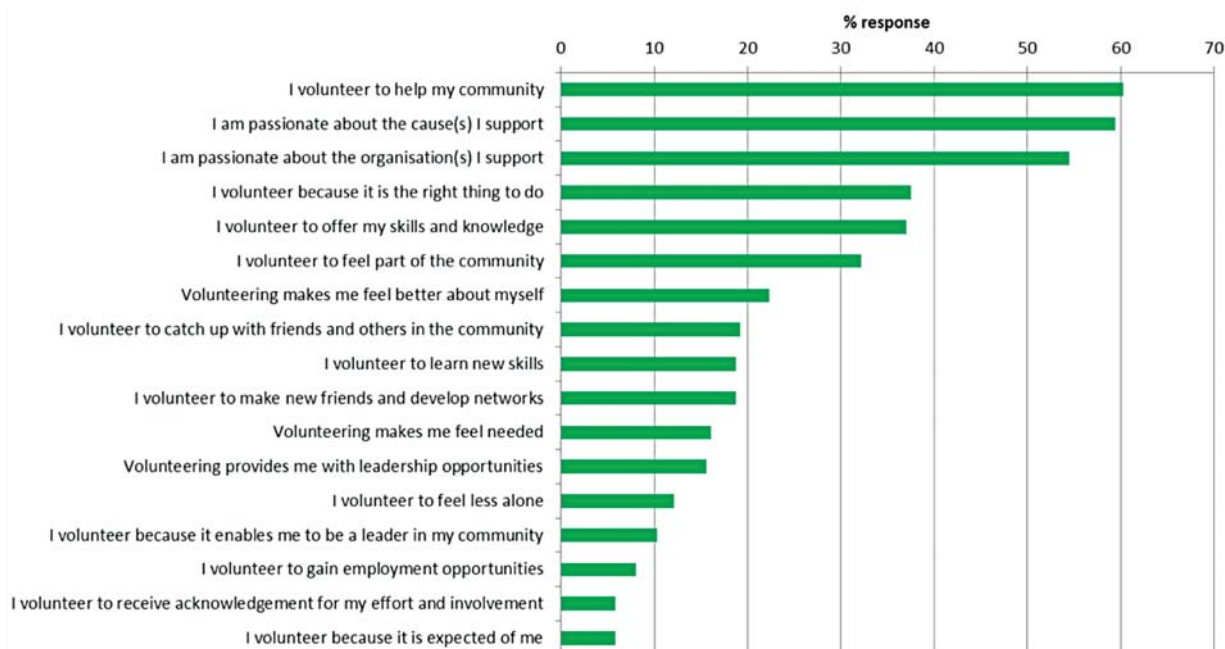


fig.5 Survey results
Why do you volunteer? % that strongly agreed with statement

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Dimboola Memorial Secondary College MATES Mentoring Program

Dimboola Memorial Secondary College (DMSC) is a small country secondary college. The school's motto is 'facta non verba,' meaning by 'deeds and not words'. The school encourages students to use this as the basis for the many decisions they will have to make in their lives. In 2010, the school had 187 students enrolled and a teaching staff of 24.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN worked in partnership with DMSC, the Hindmarsh Shire Council and the community to implement the Dimboola Mentoring Pilot Program (DMPP) in 2010. Following the resounding success of the DMPP, the MATES Mentoring Program was developed. The program matches a student with a volunteer mentor from the community. The mentor commits to spending a minimum of 1 hour per fortnight with their mentee.

The aims of the MATES program are clearly contained in its acronym:

- Mentor** – to provide an additional positive role model in the lives of young people
- Assist** – to assist and extend the positive life experiences of young people
- Target** – to specifically target life and educational goals of young people
- Engage** – to engage young people more fully into their schools and local communities
- Skills** – to identify and enhance the skills and strengths of young people

Now in its 3rd year at DMSC, MATES is very successful and has generated positive feedback from the College, the mentors, students and stakeholders. Teachers report positive changes in participating students' behaviour in the classroom. Students demonstrate increased levels of confidence, improved engagement with their peers and teachers, and are enthusiastic and excited to share their experiences. The value of the experience also flows to the mentors and Dimboola community collectively. One mentor said: "By being mentors and encouraging others to become involved we continue to create healthier communities. PS My Mentee was Dux of year 8 (I know it had nothing to do with me but I am very proud nevertheless)."

The program also demonstrated the value of seeking support from the community. One mentor provided the following feedback on their involvement. "Thank you Julie for asking me to be part of the "Mates" program... I know when you asked me that my reply was, "Oh Julie! I am involved with so many organisations I don't think I would have time". To which you replied "It is only 2 hours a month". So then my response was "Okay I'll give it a go", and I am so pleased that I did."

The MATES Mentoring Program has an exciting future. 10 programs have been established over the past 2 years across the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. 147 students have been matched with community volunteer mentors. Local businesses become Community Champions by releasing staff during work hours to mentor young people. The program has also generated interest from across Australia and has been forwarded to schools and organisations in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales.

Volunteering creates relationships

Reflecting on her volunteering experience, one volunteer from Harrow stated “What do I get out of volunteering? The 52kms I travel to get here is nothing, the friendship is something special.”

Volunteerism in the Wimmera has provided unique opportunities for unlikely relationships to be established. These relationships have had the capacity to bridge divides between generations, life experiences, cultures and geographies.

For example, the L2P program run by Wimmera Volunteers provides young learner drivers with the opportunity to gain their 120 hours of driving experience, a mandatory requirement in Victoria. The program not only enables the learner driver to fulfil this requirement, but also provides an opportunity for the learner to spend 120 hours with their driving instructor who also becomes a mentor.

“I sleep better at night because I know we can achieve something. I feel safer. It is a small community and someone has my back.”

This experience has the opportunity to profoundly change both participants. One volunteer observed change in his learner driver, a young girl who had grown up in difficult circumstances. Over the months, her confidence grew as they talked about her hopes to study and gain employment.

Luv-a-Duck — Volunteering connections creating pathways to employment

The connections and skills developed through volunteering often create pathways to employment. In 2010 Luv-a-Duck, Nhill’s largest local business faced the difficult prospect of cutting jobs and moving some of its operations to Melbourne. The Luv-a-Duck business was faced with job losses because of its success. It could not find enough people in Nhill to fill the packing and processing roles required to support the booming business.

Luckily, through a connection made possible by one of the volunteer tree planting weekends organised through the Yarrilinks program, Luv-a-Duck was able to fill these roles by employing people from the Karen community. The Karen community were refugees from hill villages on the Burma-Thai border. At the time, there were a small number of Karen tribe refugees living in Horsham and a larger community living in Werribee.

Through the participation of the Karen people in the Yarrilinks program and their inherent abilities as rural people, they were identified as being suitable to fill these roles at Luv-a-Duck.

There are now approximately 110 Karen living in Nhill and around 57 of them are employed at Luv-a-Duck. This move was also supported by AMES who provided a customised training program for Luv-a-Duck to provide the Karen people with the skills they needed. Such a large influx of people was a lot for the Nhill community to absorb but sport proved a natural ice-breaker and many of the local Karen people now play in the local soccer league.



As her confidence grew, her style of dress became more sophisticated and her use of language changed. This was such a rewarding experience for the volunteer to observe this change and to know that in some way his role contributed to this transformation.

The Wimmera has an ageing population and a growing need for support services such as Meals on Wheels. The program co-ordinator of Meals on Wheels at Horsham Rural City Council loves her job. Her volunteers are “so precious” and “special” to her and she claims that she could not do her job without them. She expressed a deep respect for her clients, who through the support of Meals on Wheels have a greater opportunity to remain in their homes, rather than enter supported care facilities. For some, the daily Meals on Wheels visit is the only human interaction they have all day. It is not uncommon for a volunteer to assist a client with a task that they were unable to do on their own, such as open and apply an ointment. This interaction draws from basic human needs and reflects a deep

human respect because as one volunteer put it “they’re us, old.”

Sport is an important feature of many kids’ weekend calendars in the Wimmera and it would not exist without the dedication and support from families and the countless volunteers. Sporting activities also provide opportunities to create friendships and “if kids were not involved in sport then they wouldn’t get access to social networks” said a volunteer from Warracknabeal.

“If kids were not involved in sport then they wouldn’t get access to social networks.”

Emerging solutions – Building connections

Utilising existing and emerging technologies

The Wimmera abounds with examples of connections created through both formal volunteer organisations, and informal activities. Despite this, technology appears to be an underutilised mechanism for creating connections in the Wimmera. A study by Dr Tim Williams (Williams, 2011) examined the importance of broadband for communities in the UK and explored the implications of this experience for Australian communities. Broadband uses technology to increase the speed and efficiency of internet connections. As many services have moved online, not having access to a reliable network could be described as a form of disadvantage and may perpetuate social exclusion.

A community today can be created beyond geographical and physical locations. Communities can be 'networked societies' and people can now

virtually gather in an online community and share common interests regardless of physical location. The 2007 Community Indicators of Victoria report, revealed that the Wimmera had below average access to the internet compared with regional Victoria for the majority of age groups (that is, less than 78.9% of the population have access to the internet) (Vaughan, 2012, p.82).

The value of the internet, in particular access through broadband technology has been described as providing "outcomes around an educated citizenship, an informed democracy, cultural understanding, community and inclusion, social capital, resilience and trust" (UK Broadband Stakeholder's Group cited in Williams, 2011).

The internet and broadband technology creates many opportunities for volunteerism in the Wimmera. It may be a way to find a volunteer opportunity or connect to a community through participating in an online volunteering activity.

You never stop learning with volunteering

Now in her 80's, Elsie seized the opportunity to try out an iPad at an information session hosted by the Wimmera Volunteers HACC program. She looks forward to sharing her new skills with the 101 year old lady she visits in the nursing home.

Using funding provided by the Department of Health, and the expertise of volunteers John and Sandra, Wimmera Volunteers were able to purchase two iPads and run an 'Introduction to the iPad' session for 10 participants. Those who participated in the hands-on training session experienced Skyping and Internet browsing on the touch screen tablets.

The participants were themselves volunteers with the HACC program and will share their new skills with their elderly clients who will also have the opportunity to Skype, share photos, browse YouTube and keep in touch with family and friends.

As people age and become less able to participate in community activities, they can suffer high rates of social isolation. This program aims to support older isolated people by keeping them connected through new technology. It's a myth that older people always struggle with new technology. Following the introduction session that saw participants Skyping a contact in New Zealand, the group of volunteers were keen to further engage with the latest technology. Maybe we'll soon see HACC clients teaching their grandchildren a thing or two about iPads!

Additional training sessions are already being planned.

Technology can also be used to help navigate the complexity of volunteering, for example identifying and locating various resources.

In order to utilise the internet, it is important that it is accessible to everyone within the community. Yet it is not just about access. It is about people with diverse backgrounds actually using the internet (Williams, 2011, p18). In order to achieve this, it requires a greater understanding of the barriers affecting people's use of the internet, and support to overcome the barriers.

Technology can also help individuals overcome isolation by reducing the tyranny of distance – creating connections without having to travel.

Embracing social media

Many participants in this study observed the decline of a 'strong sense of community'. Many others noted that it had merely shifted from the main street to the internet. The digital-savvy Generation X, Y and beyond, are increasingly accustomed to finding their communities on-line rather than in-person. Regular Wednesday afternoon meetings are not for them!

For them, committees, phone calls and newsletters have been replaced by Facebook groups, Twitter, and YouTube. The volunteering community has not been quick to embrace the opportunities which exist in social media. This is supported by a Queensland Volunteering study which looked at the views and values of different generations of volunteers from the 'Silent Generation', born 1925-1946 through to 'Generation Y', born 1980-1990. Generation Y live in the moment, they seek instant results and get impatient if things take too long, for 'Baby Boomers', born 1946-1964 they feel that time is in short supply and they need to progress, while for the 'Silent Generation' patience is its own reward as they feel they have the time to give.

Ensuring volunteering unites, not divides

Volunteering organisations are sometimes inadvertently exclusive on the basis of age, gender, culture, socio-economic background or whether a local or a 'blow-in'. There is a widely-held perception that many organisations who engage volunteers could do more to accept new people.

Using technology within the Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly

David Berry

"The move into the 21st century for volunteers who support sporting clubs and associations should see their job and roles become easier, if those that provide support for these volunteers are able to gather the resources necessary to assist with the ongoing training of the volunteers. Never before has the saying 'it's a small world' been so true. With the roll-out of the national broadband network (NBN), and the ability for service providers to train volunteers in the exciting new world of digital technology, volunteers are going to be more equipped to take on the roles associated with clubs and associations in the future. There will be a need to up-skill these volunteers on computer literacy so they can use resources like Skype to hold meetings or be involved in important conferences. The digital world will educate the next generation of volunteers far more than Generation X or the Baby Boomers, as the world will be at their fingertips, especially with the increased use of smart phones, iPads and laptops. Governments will be required to continue to provide funding for training and resources, and support to volunteers and service providers to make the jobs of volunteers easier."

“The trouble is, young people don’t want to get involved ...and when they do, they want to take over!”

In some instances, age was a discriminating factor, particularly in organisations with mainly retired people.

While young people often want to engage, the culture of some organisations was described as “a closed shop and you don’t feel welcome”. This dynamic was best expressed as “the trouble is, young people don’t want to get involved ...and when they do, they want to take over!” Volunteering Queensland also found that ‘Generation X’, born 1964-1980, tend to mistrust and are cynical of authority. Trusting only themselves and their peers, they see the ‘Baby Boomers’ as inflexible, while the ‘Baby Boomers’ see Generation X as ‘negative’.

The Country Women’s Association (CWA) has begun to bridge the generational divide. In Warracknabeal a second CWA has begun meeting in evenings. This group has since gained members as young as in their 20s. Others, especially those facing declining and ageing memberships, could do well to implement significant changes to attract the next generation of volunteers.

The link between volunteering and social exclusion has been a key theme of the volunteering movement (Institute of Volunteering Research, 2004). Many smaller towns in the Wimmera have attracted new residents who have been drawn to the affordable housing. During discussions with community volunteers, there was a common perception that there are “two sorts of people... there are the givers and there are the takers.”

The takers were described as people who do not see the value of volunteering. They do not understand that volunteering is how the community keeps

services running and “presume someone is paying for the services”. However, the perception that the ‘takers’ do not see the value of volunteering may create situations that exclude these members of the community from participating. This phenomenon has been cited in literature that notes that it is “common wisdom that people who are the ‘have nots’ will not volunteer, so in circular fashion we do not ask them to” (Ellis, 1999).

Succession planning

One response to the challenge of exclusion is the introduction of formal succession planning processes to ensure that the skills and knowledge developed over the years are passed on to a new generation of volunteers. There was very little evidence of succession planning in most volunteer involving organisations in the Wimmera.

Certainly some of the larger, more sophisticated organisations have well-developed succession plans for their paid staff, but rarely for volunteers. Participation in volunteer organisations and regional committees is often a central part of one’s identity. This leads to an understandable reluctance to relinquish leadership roles at the most appropriate time. Succession planning can be an excellent way to recognise the accumulated skills in volunteer leaders within community organisations and still make way for new thought and new approaches to achieving their social vision.

Mentoring and leadership

Recruitment and engagement of volunteers is often a quite sporadic exercise with organisations seeking to recruit or engage with individual volunteers. One response to this is the training and development of volunteer leaders.

Volunteer leaders can recruit, manage, engage, and motivate small “cells” of volunteers that may include 6-8 individuals each. This structure has the potential to provide opportunities for volunteers to be mentored, supported and recognised to a higher level.

Wimmera Transport Connections Program

The Wimmera Transport Connections Program aims to provide better opportunities for participation in community life for people with limited access to transport. The \$22.8m investment (2010-2014) supports communities to find ways to use existing transport more effectively as well as developing new ways to increase access to education, employment, health and social opportunities.

Individual projects are coordinated through local partnerships to increase opportunities for communities to participate in decision making and priority setting. These partnerships also ensure the initiatives developed are appropriate for the local community. Innovative approaches include active transport, virtual access to services and shared use of private transport. The Victorian Government funds 34 Transport Connections projects across Victoria involving rural, regional and interface council areas.

The Wimmera Transport Connections Project operates in the Shires of Hindmarsh, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack and Horsham Rural City Council. The initiatives undertaken by the project have included the Donald to Horsham bus service, the Warracknabeal to Horsham Wednesday bus service, the Melbourne Medical Companion Project, the Melbourne Medical Map, the Kaniva Volunteer Taxi Service and the Wimmera Transport Directory.

In early 2012, \$75,000 of funding was made available to the Wimmera Transport Connections Project through the DPCD Innovation Fund. This funding will support a learner driver training project for over 21's and a community transport program in the West Wimmera Shire. The over 21's driving program will specifically focus on people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, members of the indigenous population and other members of the community that may be experiencing disadvantage. The project will also provide volunteer opportunities in community transport programs for these newly-qualified drivers in the community transport initiative. Through this funding, it is hoped that outcomes such as improved access to education and employment opportunities, improved skills and independence for isolated residents and additional opportunities for community volunteering will be achieved (Thinking Transport, 2012).



Recognition

The vexed question of the 'right' level of recognition was often raised by participants in this research. Recognition of volunteer effort was frequently associated with the concept of 'volunteer burnout'.

Volunteer burnout is a self-explanatory term. It is used to describe the effect on long term volunteers who begin to feel they are doing "more than their fair share". Recognition of volunteering effort can be surprisingly simple and sometimes effective in keeping volunteers engaged. Casual functions and events, years-of-service certificates, special awards, and thank-you letters all play a part. However, it appears that the simple, informal, unstructured pat-on-the-back is still the currency of choice among volunteers. "I don't want a fuss to be made, but it means so much when someone just says thank you".

Recognition actually begins when volunteers are recruited. Just inviting someone to participate (particularly those new to the region, those from a different culture, faith, or age group) is a

"When somebody asks for (volunteer) help, it's usually the same people who keep putting their hands up."

real expression of trust. The emerging concept of volunteering equity suggests that access to volunteering opportunities is an important determinant of social inclusion.

During the interviews with volunteer organisations, respondents were asked, "If you could change one thing about volunteering what would it be?" The three most frequent answers were "funding", "more young volunteers" and "more recognition of volunteers".

L2P Program - Volunteering connections enabling skills development

Matthew Weymouth, who is employed by the Wool Factory, (a local Australian Disability Enterprise), was able to receive further assistance to develop employment skills as a result of the relationship he created through his participation in the L2P program. Chris Hood from the Horsham Rotary Club met Matthew through the L2P learn to drive program.

Chris learnt that Matthew really wanted to be a cabinet maker "but hasn't been able to get through an interview, so I suggested to Rotary that we send Matthew to the McGuire Programme – an intensive four day course" which could help improve his stutter. With assistance from Horsham Rotary Club Matthew was able to attend the course. Matthew was very happy to have had the opportunity to participate in the program because as a result he is "now more confident," he explained (Opie, 2012, p7).

The legislation, compliance and governance challenges that were most often cited included:

- ▶ Working with Children Act 2005 and the accompanying working with children checks
- ▶ Criminal Record Checks
- ▶ Food Act 1984 and the associated requirements for food handling
- ▶ General concerns about insurance
- ▶ Legal risk and liability
- ▶ Workplace Health and Safety Act and the associated national harmonisation which requires volunteers to be treated as “workers” under the Act

*“They are making it hard now. The bulls**t that you have to go through now to be a volunteer... I don’t know if they are frightened of everyone suing them or not, but it is just getting impossible.”*

Discussions regarding compliance requirements took place across the Wimmera region. There was a general agreement that government should acknowledge the impact that greater regulation has on organisations. There was angst amongst volunteers who had been volunteering in their role for over ten years and sometimes felt offended that as a result of a change in legislation, they were now required to complete a police check.

In relation to the Food Act (1984), one story which has become apocryphal tells that during the bushfires of 2009, sandwiches prepared by volunteers for the emergency workers were thrown out because they had not been prepared in a kitchen certified to meet food handling requirements. This is likely to have been the result of policy interpreting the legislation, however, is frequently cited as an example of unintended impacts of legislation intended to manage risk.

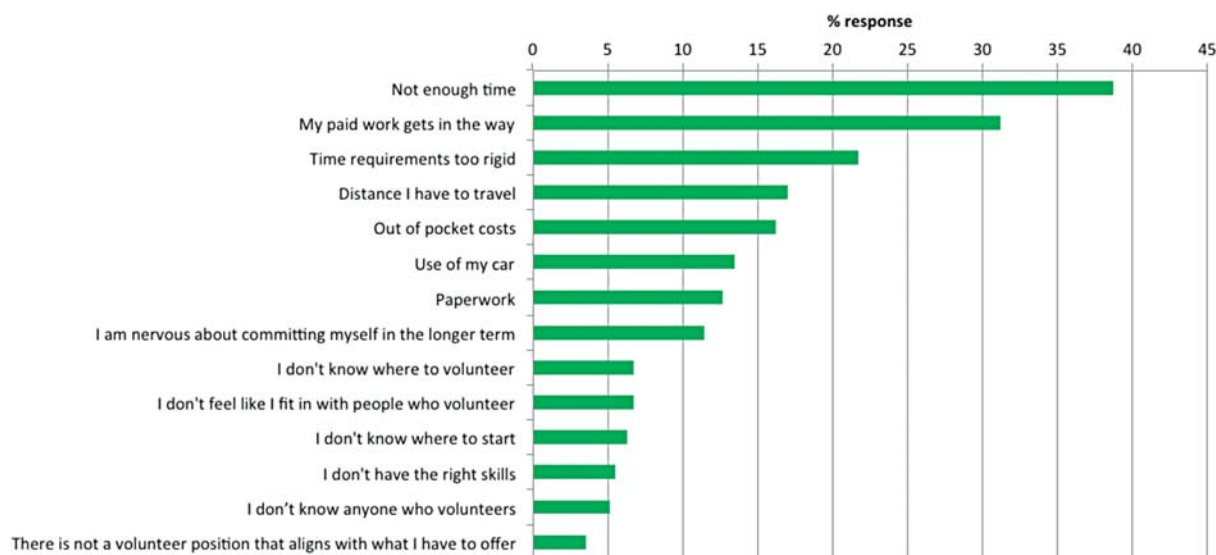


fig.6 Survey results
Why don't you volunteer or volunteer more? % that strongly agreed with statement

The role of risk management is certainly deserving of reflection. It is inherently right and appropriate that we take steps to ensure the protection of our most vulnerable citizens, including children, the elderly, and those with disability. However there are some inherent concerns with this approach. Firstly, many see the completion of a Criminal Record Check (or Working with Children Check) as completion of their risk management practices. As one pundit observes, “skilled criminals don’t get caught so a police check is meaningless”. Another pointed out that a “police check is out of date the minute it is done”. A summary from Lynne Dalton, CEO of The Centre for Volunteering is provided on page 40 which further explores this issue.

The second concern is that these risk management initiatives do not adequately address the financial risk to communities and government. By increasing barriers to volunteering, there is a risk that some services may go undelivered, which in turn increases the need for welfare, services and other support from government.

Many opportunities present themselves for volunteer involving organisations and volunteer resource centres to support volunteers to navigate the legislation and communicate the reason behind the changes (refer to Emerging Solutions).

A summary of the compliance requirements associated with this legislation is provided below.

Working with children

Reference: Department of Justice Website (www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren).

The Working with Children (WWC) Check seeks to protect children from physical and sexual harm.

The *Working with Children Act 2005* is Victorian law and commenced in April 2006. It contributes to the safety of Victoria’s children when they are being cared for, or participating in a range of activities, by seeking to prevent those who pose a risk to the safety of children from working with them, in either paid or volunteer work.

The WWC Check requires people who work or volunteer in certain child-related work (as defined in Section 9 of the *Working with Children Act 2005*) to apply for, and pass, a WWC Check. It aims to strike a balance between protecting children under 18 years of age, promoting volunteering and safeguarding the rights of individuals. WWC Check applications are assessed by the Department of Justice. It is valid for five years and is transferable between organisations.

Broadly, the criminal offences of most significance for a WWC Check are serious sexual offences, serious violent offences, serious drug-related offences and offences against the *Working with Children Act 2005* itself.



Minyip and Murtoa Football and Netball Club

Ken
Millgate

Former rivals Minyip and Murtoa merged into the Minyip and Murtoa Football and Netball Club in 1995 – one of the many examples of regional consolidation in the volunteer and community club sector.

Ken from Minyip, better known as ‘Dasher’, has been associated with the Minyip Football Club for more than six decades. In fact, he played in the 1946, 1952 and 1954 Minyip Football Club Premierships.

Now, as a volunteer and the President of the Committee of Recreation and Reserve Management, Ken oversees everything – from repairs of the roof, to food service requirements and the responsible service of alcohol.

Ken understands the importance of volunteering, and what it would mean for the club if there was no community support. Ken expressed that “it is terribly hard, even for the clubs who have volunteers, as there is never enough staff”.



Employers and volunteer organisations have obligations under the Act to make sure that all staff and volunteers who are required by law to pass the Check, have a valid WWC Check card. It is an offence for you to engage someone in child-related work without a valid WWC Check card.

Criminal Record Checks

A Criminal Record Check (or ‘police check’ as it is often known) can be conducted as a pre-screening activity before a volunteer commences work. A police check is undertaken to protect vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities or in roles that have financial or driving responsibilities (Volunteering Australia, 2009). A police check includes a background check together with criminal record checks and enables organisations to assess the suitability of the volunteer to a potential role. It can only identify convictions up to the date of issue.

www.crimcheck.org.au/intro

CrimCheck was developed by the Monash Volunteer Resource Centre and is a web-based system used to process police checks for volunteers. It is an efficient way to complete police checks.

Food Act 1984

Victoria’s Food Act 1984 was established to reduce the incidence of food borne diseases by ensuring that food sold, prepared, manufactured, stored and transported is safe, unadulterated, fit for human consumption and does not cause food poisoning.

The Food Act covers food premises such as a market stall, community hall with a kitchen, a van and a permanent site. ‘Food premises’ are grouped into four classes depending on the degree of food safety risk, with class 1 the highest risk to class 4 the lowest risk. For example, volunteers do not need to register their homes as food premises with the council (Department of Health, 2011).

The Victorian Government provides a free online course for food handlers.

<http://dofoodsafely.health.vic.gov.au>

Risk management in volunteer engaging organisations

Lynne
Dalton

CEO of The Centre
for Volunteering

Risk Management is a strategy for managing the organisation in such a way that risk of damage to staff, clients, financial security, reputation and even physical assets, are not compromised. One area where no risk is acceptable is in the area of personal services and the need to ensure the safety and wellbeing of an organisation's clients. Governments have decided that strategies must be in place to ensure that risk to clients is minimised by undertaking various checks including Criminal Record Checks (CRCs), WWC Checks etc.

While such checks give some level of confidence in assessment of appropriate appointments of staff and volunteers, the checks themselves are not adequate to be considered fully fool-proof. Such checks have limited reliability as most inappropriate applicants do not subject themselves to such scrutiny. From the experience of The Centre for Volunteering, most behavioural disruption within an organisation is perpetrated by people whose background is not criminal, but is dysfunctional due to personality or mental health issues. Organisations may fall into the trap of relying on CRC and WWC Check to satisfy internal risk management processes while ignoring time honoured and reliable procedures and information sources. Such procedures and sources of information include:

- ▶ Personal reference checks. Have inquiries been made of the staff/volunteers previous work place? If no previous workplace reference is offered – beware. And do not accept written references only.
- ▶ Supervision. What processes and procedures are in place to supervise the activities of new appointees for a set period of probation?
- ▶ Management processes. What recruitment processes are in place? Does the organisation “take anyone” who offers their services? Organisations often have less stringent recruitment processes for volunteers than they do for paid staff yet both groups may be dealing with the organisation's clients.
- ▶ Performance Measures. Are there performance measures in the job description? Performance measures can be as simple as:
 - ▶ must be reliable and punctual
 - ▶ must relate well to staff, volunteers and clients
 - ▶ must observe OHS requirements
 - ▶ must be accurate with all data entry.
- ▶ Position/Job descriptions. What is contained in the job description's list of tasks and what training, experience, and /or qualifications are required. What evidence has been provided that indicated that the Staff/volunteer is capable of filling the position.

The above processes need not be onerous if applied systematically and thoroughly. From the perspective of the volunteer, the only impost on their time is the initial application form which should contain all the background details to enable an informed decision about the appropriateness of the selection and appointment of the applicant. The only other impost on the appointees' time is the regular performance review. The time and efficiency gained by such a basic level of risk management will inevitably save time, increase organisational confidence and even potentially prevent a lot of unnecessary grief.

Emerging solutions – Enhancing community leadership & capacity

Culture of Leadership

“Committees need appropriate skills. Now more than ever! Mums and Dads sometimes don’t have capacity (to deal with governance issues)”

The demands on office bearers are larger than ever. To engage volunteers, meetings need to be well run, kept on time, and kept on topic. Specific knowledge is required to deal with reporting, liability, risk, insurance, Workplace Health & Safety, volunteer management, other legislation and much more.

Developing a “culture of leadership” appears to be one of the most significant determinants of a healthy volunteering scene. As an example, towns like Harrow and Dimboola exhibit such a culture.

Cluster models of governance

There are an increasing number of examples of governance structures being used to provide for the needs of multiple organisations. Examples

include football clubs merging with co-located netball clubs and cricket clubs with one group of office bearers appointed for all three sports. In some towns, several kindergartens have merged into one organising committee.

Building governance capability

There is a clear need for greater up-skilling regarding the knowledge of the changing governance and compliance requirements for volunteering involving organisations. Training, on-line solutions and other forms of capacity building will support the internal capability of organisations to meet compliance requirements.

Volunteer support services

Volunteers should not necessarily know about the ‘paper work’ required to volunteer. Many organisations provide services, such as managed delivery of criminal records checks, however these types of arrangements need to be increased.





The value of volunteering

Volunteering is the glue that holds communities together. The Wimmera has a strong community culture of volunteering which was described over 150 years ago by the early pioneers. According to historical documents, volunteering was about helping your community to progress, and was part of your duty as a member of the community.

This culture, inherited from the early pioneers of the 1800s, remains to this day. For Josh, a volunteer from Horsham “volunteering is just what you do everyday...it is about life membership to your town...it is part of who you are...its part of our life.” Over 75% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they volunteer to help their community. This strong sense of responsibility to the community is a core part of volunteerism in the Wimmera. However, it was found that some people living in the community have not had the opportunity to inherit this value system.

Maintaining community services

Many active volunteers were aware that if it were not for their work, many services would not be able to operate. It was well recognised that “not much money filters out here” into the country and a lot is “done by volunteers.”

One volunteer who has lived in the region for over 30 years observed the changes that have taken place in his community. The community once owned and operated many assets through volunteering effort. For example, the local swimming pool was once free for people because the community volunteered to maintain it and lifeguards volunteered their time to supervise swimmers. Everyone did their bit, because if not the pool would not survive. However over time this changed as facilities commercialised to support paid staff to maintain and operate the facility. Despite this, there are still many services that continue to run on smaller budgets because of the volunteer economy, particularly in the smaller towns. Over 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their community was stronger because of the people who volunteered. For John, a volunteer from Hindmarsh, “you only get out of your community what you put back in”. For over 29% of the organisations surveyed, volunteers fulfilled over 80% of their work and 50% of the organisations strongly agreed that they could not deliver their service if they did not have volunteers.

If it were not for volunteers, many services would need to be fulfilled by government, or risk discontinuation. Understanding the economic cost of volunteering is one measure of the value

of volunteering, however the value of the social networks which build community resilience is also significant.

Family values

Family values are a significant motivational factor for participating in the community. Many active volunteers recognise that they are very similar to their parents, out every night, busy and involved in the community. Stacey from Murtoa took three weeks leave to be the nurse on a school trip. “Volunteering is the glue that holds everyone together...if you are not engaging, then the ‘glue wont’ stick”.

Stacey’s comments indicated that there is a strong connection to belonging and identity associated with living in a rural town. Living in a rural town “...you become part of the town. You can drive out but [you] don’t leave the community”. These values are held strongly by many families in the Wimmera however for some who have not had this experience growing up, community tension appears to exist.

When are you a local?

According to some study participants, there was a tongue-in-cheek understanding in the Wimmera that “if your grandfather is not buried in the local cemetery then you are not a local.” There are also strong local identities across the region with each town having their own local pride. Despite this, communities in the Wimmera are changing and they

are changing quickly. The 2011 ABS population data revealed that the number of people born outside of Australia and living in the Wimmera had increased. The city of Horsham had the greatest increase in overseas born residents, which rose from 828 people in 2001 to 1116 people in 2011 (cited in Tang, 2012). Significantly, this increase occurred at a time when the overall population of the region decreased by 0.3% in the period 2010-2011.

There are specific towns that recognise the importance of welcoming new people to the region. To support the integration of new people, Yarriambiack Shire Council for example provided ‘welcome mats’ to new comers that included a package of information regarding local services. It was intended that the information would be provided to people who may not necessarily have the opportunity to create contacts through kindergartens or schools. However, there is still a feeling in these communities that some new families moving into the region are not committing to their community and are instead a ‘draw on resources.’ A Councillor from Yarriambiack Shire recognised that “a culture of leadership is important in a small town – it facilitates volunteering, particularly of young people. The smaller the community, the more dynamic that community can be. It is like a small ship, which can turn quicker than a big ship.” Leadership and appropriate promotion of community values is important during this time of change. Many people arriving in the town may have little experience of volunteering and do not necessarily understand the importance and role of volunteerism in maintaining the liveability of the towns.



Harrow

Like all small towns in regional Australia, Harrow faces the dual challenge of keeping young blood in the area and attracting newcomers to settle and keep the town alive.

Although a small community of less than 100 people, Harrow has taken charge of its own future. The township is a stunning example of how a small population powered with volunteering and community spirit can thrive in regional Victoria by remaining vibrant and well connected.

Harrow is a regional town that lacks for little – and the city conveniences it does not have are made up for by a strong inclusive and welcoming community. Harrow residents see themselves as a part of something greater than themselves – as a community to which they belong.

Harrow actively promotes the town and the community. Most importantly, Harrow ensures that a visitor driving into the town immediately feels welcomed and relaxed.

Perhaps the most striking example of Harrow's outreach is Beaut Blokes – a community organisation run by Ange Newton that aims to "bring together single men and women in the prime of their life". "Ange is the best thing that ever happened to Harrow", claimed one respondent.

Harrow also manages to cater to the changing needs of different generations. The Harrow Tussock is a volunteer group for the young, in particular young men. The group aims to keep the young men active and engaged in the community whilst avoiding stifling them by roping them into more traditional and less relevant (in their eyes) volunteering roles. The annual headline event is the Tussock Jumpers B&S Ball and over 500 people attended the 2012 event.

Like all regional towns, Harrow could benefit from an increase in funding for its volunteer activities. The township is full of ideas for the future, but no amount of community spirit can overcome the reality of the need for funds. While volunteering is a way of life in the community, the increasing administrative burden associated with compliance is taking its toll.

Nevertheless, Harrow is defining its own course. It does not see itself as the victim of regional decline, a lack of government funding, or any other perceived or external malaise.

Harrow identifies what it needs and goes out and finds it. One might say that Harrow residents have a unique mindset and see themselves in charge of their own journey.



Emerging solutions

– Creating resilient communities

Promoting and re-branding volunteering

The volunteering 'brand' has somehow lost its way in recent decades. Many do not understand or appreciate that volunteering is not just for those who have the resources to 'give' of their time and means. Volunteering is an activity which brings rich rewards to those who participate. Friendships, skills, recognition, pathways to employment, overcoming loneliness, community integration are all examples of the benefits observed in the research.

The meaning of volunteering requires some re-invention. For many in the community being actively engaged in your community is "just what you do" and was not understood to be a form of volunteering. There is an opportunity to promote the diverse activities and individual identities of volunteers. The images need to express that volunteers are 'people like me' and the activities are things that 'I can do.' One can imagine a day when each town welcomes locals and visitors with a sign promoting a consistent message across the Wimmera encouraging volunteerism and providing local contacts to help engage. This also needs to recognise and celebrate the unique identity of the regional towns in the Wimmera.

“When we say volunteering we don't look past the image of planting trees and saving babies... we need different volunteer images.”

Organisations identified face-to-face connections as one of the most effective means to engage volunteers. Word of mouth advertising was described as a “normal country thing.” To enable face-to-face connections, the promotion of the community 'working bee' for example requires some review. The working bee could be promoted as a social outing to connect with the local community and is not just work. It also provides the community with much needed support to maintain services and minimise costs. The other benefits of the working bee could be promoted to the community to highlight the social value of participation. It was acknowledged during the community engagement discussions that simply asking people for assistance was often a very effective means of engaging new volunteers. Often it was a lack of confidence on the part of the potential volunteer that they did not sign up to participate.

Overcoming resistance to change

There are a number of external factors influencing the dynamics of towns and the only constant is change. Volunteering has a role to play to build the capacity for communities to be resilient to change. Strong community networks and connections are examples of the characteristics of resilient communities. Change is not all doom and gloom. Organisations that involve volunteers today may not exist in 10 years' time. However, where some organisations close, others will open with new direction, relevance and commitment.

The survey results found that if there was one thing that people could change about volunteering it was getting more young people to participate. The National Volunteering Strategy cites a study by Creyton et. al. that found “young people have different interests and expectations of their

“You need to do something innovative because there are a lot of organisations competing for volunteers.”

volunteer experience from those of older volunteers. Their motivations are often linked to their sense of identity and a desire to participate in new experiences” (Creyton et.al. 2010). Volunteering Queensland (n.d) also found that Generation Y value experiences, variety and change and desire to make a personal mark on the work they do.

This Volunteering Queensland study also found that Generation Y find authority irrelevant and only demonstrate respect once they have received respect and frequently demand autonomy, while Baby Boomers, may challenge authority but do so with care.

The United Kingdom Russell Commission found that the “most successful and inspirational volunteering experiences for young people are those that are led by young people, and that a youth led approach to developing volunteer opportunities for young people should be adopted wherever possible” (Russell ,2005, p12). This will invariably create change within the community. It is the resistance and fear of change that creates tension in communities. To some degree change should be embraced and celebrated.

Creating volunteering entry points

The culture of volunteering was strongly connected to community and family values. However some people in the community have not had an opportunity to experience this culture. New and existing ‘entry points’ need to be encouraged and promoted to support people into volunteering,

particularly new people to the community. School programs are an example of a potential ‘entry point’ for volunteers and future adult volunteers. For example, Jimmy, 15, had an opportunity through his school to volunteer with the Auskick program. Jimmy had to be asked to join the program because he didn’t think he had anything to contribute. He joined the program to be the footy coach and mentor of 8 year olds. His participation changed his life. It enhanced his self-belief, he grew in confidence, and it changed the direction his life would take.

Volunteers may come from outside of the Wimmera region. Yarrilinks is an example of a volunteer program that has successfully engaged people from outside of the Wimmera to participate in activities within the region with support from the local community. When organisations compete for volunteers innovation is integral to attracting people to projects. Entry points may also be created through adoption of technology and partnerships with other community development programs.

Making people aware that they can use their existing technical skills and experience can also be an ‘entry point’. Skilled volunteers are in demand. As discussed, natural disasters require a reliable supply of skilled emergency management volunteers but other skills such as teaching, counseling, medicine, writing and law, can all be utilised to benefit the community in a multitude of ways.

“Have a look at what you can do. Use your experience to help other people. That is where the satisfaction comes from.”

Case study – Role of skilled volunteering

John and Sandra Bamkin from Horsham have almost 40 years of counselling experience between them. Clearly dedicated to their community they initially decided to volunteer to get to know people.

Now, they volunteer over four days a week working with the following organisations:

- ▶ The Office of the Public Advocate in their Community Visitors Program they visit facilities and their role is to protect the human rights of people with a disability and/or mental illness and to make sure the care and treatment provided is of good quality.
- ▶ The Independent Third Persons program to facilitate communication, assist the person to understand their rights and support the person through the Police proceedings.
- ▶ The Youth Referral Independent Person Program attending police interviews with young people under 18 years to provide support to the young person in police custody ensuring that their rights have been met.
- ▶ Wimmera Volunteers by doing transport duties to both young and elderly people and taking elderly people out shopping.

In all of these roles, John and Sandra use their wealth of counselling experience to help the people they meet. Using the word ‘counselling’ can disengage people and make them less receptive, so it’s much easier to simply have a chat.

John and Sandra also use their knowledge of communication techniques to understand how different people communicate and adjust what they say and how they interact with them to a way that works for the person concerned to give them the help they need.

Both Sandra and John are retired but they don’t see that as a reason to sit at home. “It would be crazy to have the skills that we do and not use them.”

Working with people of all ages they have only positive things to say about their own volunteering experiences and find that people are happy and thankful for the support they give. Sandra’s advice to those who may want to volunteer is “Have a look at what you can do. Use your experience to help other people. That is where the satisfaction comes from.”



Theme	Emerging solution	Description
Technology	Utilise existing and emerging technologies	<p>Technology can help individuals access communities and overcome isolation and the tyranny of distance – creating connections without having to travel. Connecting people through volunteering has always been a face-to-face proposition. Of course this is changing rapidly. Imagine the power of social media tools being brought to bear to engage volunteers, call for volunteer assistance, build capacity and connect volunteer teams.</p> <p>It has the opportunity to bridge the generational divide and provide tools for innovation in the community sector.</p>
Creating new connections	Volunteer support services	Volunteers and the organisations who engage them need support to understand and manage changing communities and the compliance requirements within them. Those that will succeed are those which reduce the barriers to volunteering and provide the highest quality volunteer experience.
	Creating volunteering entry points	Encourage and promote new and existing entry points for volunteering opportunities such as school programs, on-line portals, workplaces, and networks.
Marketing and promotion	Promote and re-brand volunteering	'Volunteering' at times suffers from an image problem – it is for 'those kinds of people' and was not often connected with local effort and the things you 'just do' in a regional community.
Leadership and culture building	Building a culture of community leadership	Developing a 'culture of leadership' appears to be one of the most significant determinants of a healthy volunteering scene. This culture is typified by an inclusive approach. Organisations which attempt to remain static and exclusive in their approach to members inevitably suffer in the longer term.
	Support succession planning	There is an opportunity for more of the skills developed by older leaders in organisations to be passed on to a new generation of leaders. CWA in many regions are setting an example by encouraging parallel 'young' CWAs to form. There are some early indications of mentoring programs and succession plans in some organisations but these are not yet well-developed.
	Overcoming resistance to change	Economic, social and environmental change is influencing the dynamics of Wimmera communities. The organisations which support these communities are not changing as fast as the communities around them.
	Cluster models of governance	One response to increasing governance demands and shortage of willing committee members is the clustering of organisations under one committee. Examples were found in kindergartens where multiple properties were now 'merged' and managed by one committee. This was also found in sporting organisations.
Development of skills and capacity building	Improved committee (office bearer) leadership	The demands on office bearers are larger than ever. To engage volunteers, meetings need to be well run, kept on time, and kept on topic. Specific knowledge is required to deal with reporting, liability, risk, insurance, OH&S, volunteer management, legislation and much more.
	Building governance capability and compliance literacy	There is a clear need for skill building in this area
Inclusiveness	Ensure volunteering unites, not divides	Factors such as age, gender, culture, socio-economic background or whether you are a local or a 'blow-in' often act to exclude. Volunteerism is one of the most readily available opportunities for communities to express inclusiveness when faced with diversity.

table.2

Organisational development

There is a clear opportunity for Wimmera Volunteers to work more broadly with the community to develop the capability of organisations (including government and private sector) to engage on challenges facing the community (e.g. engaging and supporting young people, integration of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, supporting ageing, etc). This might include developing “best practice” guides, acting as an advisory service, or consulting formally on community engagement.

Utilisation of technology

Given the need to engage more volunteers, especially in the younger age groups, the role of technology cannot be underestimated. Two main focus areas are likely to be increased use of on-line tools and social media together with increased preparedness for the planned roll-out of the National Broadband Network over the coming 2-3 years.

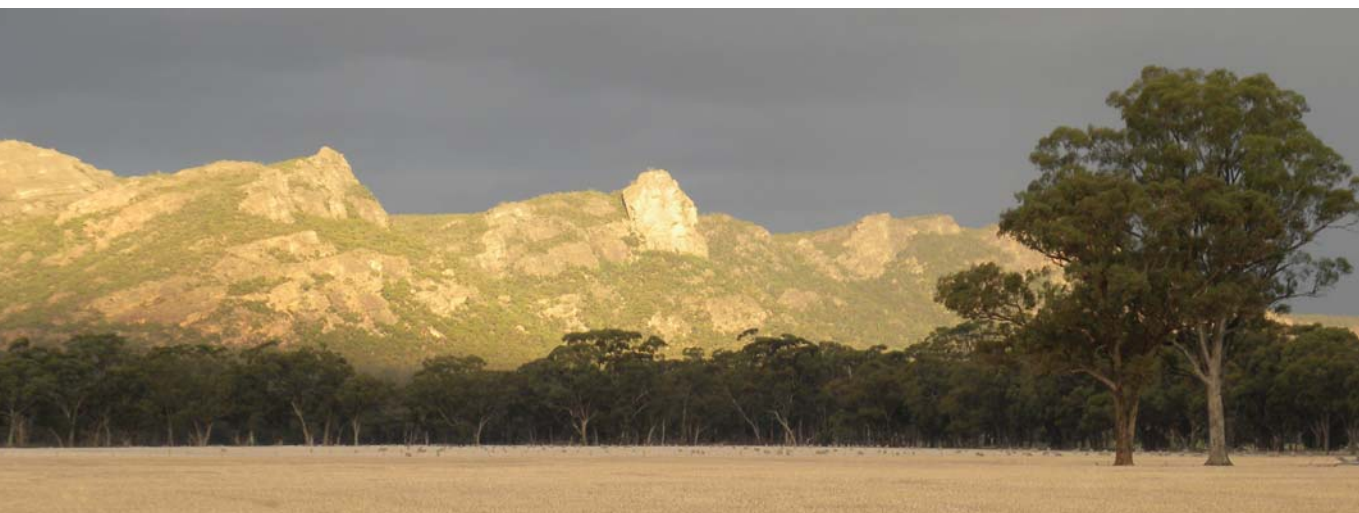
Wimmera Volunteers have already begun this journey with the recent introduction of an iPad program. This need for more innovative use of technology to engage and retain volunteers and link them with volunteering opportunities will continue to accelerate.

Promotion of volunteerism

Many marketing efforts around volunteering are often directed at recruitment of volunteers. Surprisingly, volunteering is often misunderstood and undervalued. Particularly, those who tend not to participate in volunteering have little appreciation of the benefits awaiting them. One possible implication for Wimmera Volunteers is the facilitation of greater promotion of volunteerism and repositioning it as a wonderful part of any vibrant community rather than an obligation or burden. One stakeholder asks us to envision a sign at the entrance to every town on every highway extolling us to “volunteer for a better life”.

Connecting communities

The intrinsic interrelationship between volunteering and connections gives cause to consider the role Wimmera Volunteers plays in facilitating those connections. Wimmera Volunteers may consider acting as a community sector network promoting conversations, and acting as a think-tank on volunteering (both formal and informal) and broader issues like active citizenship.





Implications for Government

Using the National Broadband Network to connect communities and build capacity

The roll out of the NBN is a critical part of the revitalisation of connection in regional communities. Horsham is scheduled for “work commenced in three years” in the fibre roll out plan. As the roll out in this region approaches, there is a distinct opportunity to do prior work with volunteer resource centres like Wimmera Volunteers on how the NBN can be used to foster the development of volunteerism in the region. This might include development of content and solutions to support or ‘automate’ the governance of volunteer organisations and development of a portal linking volunteers with opportunities. This is directly in line with Focus Area 2 in the National Volunteering Strategy, 2011.

Promotion of volunteerism

Volunteerism directly alleviates the need for government support services. It supports ageing people to stay in their community, disengaged youth and promotes pathways to productive employment. Without a healthy volunteer sector, the need for services delivered by government increases in proportion. An opportunity exists for the generic promotion of volunteerism with tailored, localised implementation of such a campaign. This could be achieved in consultation and partnership with volunteer resource centres.

Reducing compliance barriers

The requirement for Criminal Record Checks and WWC checks is clearly an important and understandable part of managing the risk to vulnerable people. For many, it is often mistaken for an entire risk management strategy. Volunteerism, such as that linked to HACC funding, would benefit from a broader understanding of managing risk to clients. Government may wish to also adopt a broader notion of risk, to include the financial risk to government (in the form of increased demand on welfare and support services) in its consideration of implementing policies which may act as barriers to volunteering.

Supporting community capacity building

Strong communities are self-sustaining communities. Policy development in the future has the capacity to directly impact the degree to which communities can support themselves through a healthy and vibrant culture of volunteerism. The future efforts of volunteer resource centres to build self-sustaining communities can be supported in a number of ways. A priority would be policy and initiatives around good governance of community organisations in times of change.

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CRC	Criminal Record Check
CWA	Country Women's Association
DHS	Department of Human Services
DMPP	Dimboola Mentoring Pilot Program
DMSC	Dimboola Memorial Secondary College
DPCD	Department of Planning and Community Development
HACC	Home and Community Care
LGA	Local Government Area
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
NBN	National Broadband Network
NVS	National Volunteer Strategy
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
SAIL	Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Index For Areas
TCP	Transport Connections Program
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
WWC	Working with Children

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Methodology

This report examines the findings of research and community engagement, conducted over a six month period, between February and July 2012, within the Wimmera in Western Victoria. It explores the role and social value of volunteering as described by the 'volunteerism' community, and examines the barriers to regional volunteering. The report has been prepared by Net Balance Foundation with support from Wimmera Volunteers.

The study area included Horsham Rural City Council, West Wimmera Shire, Hindmarsh Shire and Yarriambiack Shire.

The study was completed in five key phases. It involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods including:

Literature review

A review of literature was conducted to understand the key characteristics and trends within the volunteering community in Australia, particularly regional areas. International literature was also reviewed where relevant. The sources of information included:

- ▶ academic literature accessed from database searches and the internet
- ▶ published and un-published literature obtained through contacts made during the project.

The literature provided a framework within which to conduct the community engagement. It supported the development of broad themes including the relationship between volunteering and social capital, wellbeing, social inclusion/exclusion, trends affecting the volunteering community and barriers to volunteering.

Surveys

Two questionnaire surveys were developed in online and hardcopy formats – one for individuals (volunteers, and non-volunteers) and one for organisations.

Questionnaires were distributed to and completed by community members attending the Field Machinery Days, Harmony Day, Closing the Gap and organisations and individuals involved in focus groups and other project networks.

In all, 259 individuals completed the survey and 28 volunteer organisations completed the organisation survey.

Consultation interviews

In order to understand in greater detail the role and value of volunteering to individuals in the Wimmera, a number of one-on-one in depth interviews were conducted. In total over fifteen individuals were interviewed from across the region, who were involved in both formal and informal volunteering positions within the sectors health, arts/heritage/culture/, environment, emergency services, community/welfare, education and training. The interviews were conducted during the five field trips:

- ▶ February 7 – 9
- ▶ March 5 – 8
- ▶ March 20 – 23
- ▶ April 16 – 18
- ▶ May 14 – 17.

A number of case studies were obtained during the consultation interviews or were provided by individuals who submitted their stories through the Wimmera Volunteers website. Some of the one-on-one interviews were video recorded to create a film to capture and communicate the social value of volunteerism in the Wimmera.

The consultation also included meetings with representatives from Government Departments. It was important that government representatives were consulted during the project because the purpose of the report was to generate relevant and helpful insights for government as well as Wimmera Volunteers. The government departments consulted included:

- ▶ Social Investment and Volunteering Office for the Not-for-profit Sector, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- ▶ Department of Premier and Cabinet
- ▶ Department of Planning and Community Development

Focus groups

In order to supplement the survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews over twelve focus groups were conducted with organisations involving volunteers from across the region. The focus groups examined the trends, drivers, barriers, funding and value of volunteering. Some of the focus groups were video recorded for the film.

The focus groups conducted involved volunteers and employees from:

- ▶ Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly
- ▶ VCAL Network
- ▶ Wimmera Transport Connections
- ▶ Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital
- ▶ Wimmera Regional Volunteer Co-ordinators Network
- ▶ Horsham Rural City Council
- ▶ Wimmera Health Care Group
- ▶ West Wimmera Shire Council
- ▶ Hindmarsh Shire Council
- ▶ Volunteer Taxi Service, Kaniva
- ▶ Yarriambiack Shire Council
- ▶ Dunmunkle Health Services

- ▶ Harrow Bush Nursing Centre
- ▶ Wimmera Primary Care Partnership

Community event participation and consultation

The project team also had an opportunity to participate in the following public events.

- ▶ Wimmera Field Days, 5-8 March
- ▶ Harmony Day, 21 March
- ▶ Closing the Gap, 22 March
- ▶ National Volunteer Week, morning teas and barbeques, 14-17 May.

Ross Wyatt from the project team was the key note speaker at two Rotary Club meetings where he presented some of the initial research findings.

Over 500 people participated in the study, ensuring it represented the diverse views held across the region.

About Wimmera Volunteers

Wimmera Volunteers is a community volunteer resource centre that provides a volunteering resource and information referral point for the Wimmera region, and runs a number of community based programs that are delivered with support from volunteers. In 2012 the state and federal governments* assisted to fund key programs, including:

- ▶ **Volunteer Management Program** provides assistance, information, training and support to individuals and managers of volunteers on matters relating to volunteering. This program seeks to engage the broader community in volunteering across the Wimmera through; referring prospective volunteers to community organisations, facilitating a volunteer managers network and organising capacity building workshops to volunteer involving organisations.
- ▶ **Licencing the Wimmera** program has two arms; The L2P project, an initiative which aims to provide an opportunity for disadvantaged young people aged from 16 to 21 to have access to supervised driving practice, enabling them to meet the minimum 120 hours of experience required to move from their Learner Permit to their Probationary drivers licence. The Over 21 Program seeks to support people who are over 21 to gain their drivers licence. Both of these valuable community programs are underpinned by a learner driver being matched with a volunteer driving mentor who will then supervise their driving practice on a regular basis.
- ▶ **Wimmera Transport Connections** provides better opportunities for participation in community life, access to services, education and training for people with limited access to transport. The Wimmera Transport

Connections Project operates in the Shires of Hindmarsh, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack and Horsham Rural City Council. Key partnerships and the input of community members in the Wimmera Region are vital to the success of this program.

- ▶ **Social Support** is designed to prevent isolation by providing social links for older people and people with disabilities and their carers. The Social Support program includes;
 - ▶ Friendly Visiting - the friendly visiting program matches a volunteer visitor with an isolated older person still living in their own home, with a view to establishing a mutual friendship.
 - ▶ The Volunteer Transport Program provides access to transport for the frail aged, elderly and socially isolated people in the community who need to access a specialist appointment in another town. Wimmera Volunteers have a network of volunteer drivers throughout the region who make this program possible.
- ▶ **Community Visitor Scheme (CVS)** is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government to enhance the lives of older people living in Residential Aged Care Facilities. The aim of the Community Visiting scheme is to provide a one on one visitor to a resident of a Residential Aged Care Facilities who have very limited or no family contact, all visitors are volunteers.

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