



Volunteering is Catching:

**A study into young people's
volunteering in Victoria 2011**

By Clare Wynne

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We would also like to acknowledge the support given by the members of the Youth Volunteer Development project's steering committee. Furthermore, we thank the Department of Planning and Community Development; without their support this report would not have been possible.

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body representing the youth sector in Victoria. YACVic provides a means through which the youth sector and young people can voice their opinions and concerns in regards to policy issues affecting them. YACVic works with and makes representation to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people, and organisations that provide direct services to young people.

YACVic's vision is for a Victorian community in which all young people are valued as active participants, have their rights recognised and are treated fairly with respect.

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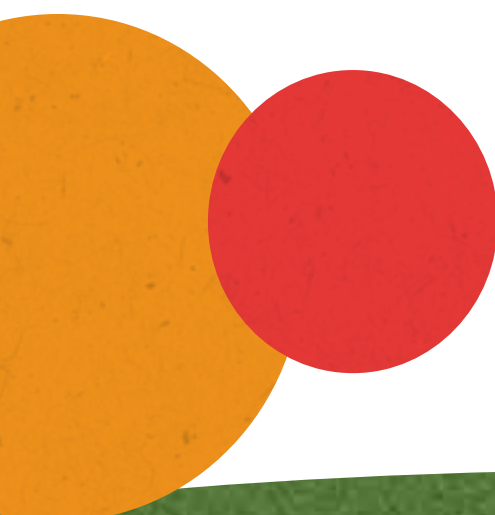


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Executive Summary

Volunteering is an everyday activity where young people connect, interrelate and show a commitment to community - enabling civic engagement and contributing to the construction of active citizenship, for both the individual and society as a whole (Wilson, 2000).

This study draws on a contemporary understanding of volunteering that captures both the informal and formal volunteering activities of young people and defines youth volunteering as:

an activity where young people (aged 12 to 25) freely give their time and energy to benefit another individual, group or community.

Volunteering refers to an array of different activities within which young people's civic engagement varies enormously; with some voluntary roles and opportunities enabling more active participation and engaged citizenship than others.

This report aims to understand the contemporary experience of volunteering for Victoria's young people and poses the following questions:

- How does volunteering strengthen a young person's active participation?
- What makes volunteering meaningful for young people?
- What is the impact of volunteering on young people?

Key findings

This report is based on the findings of an online survey of four hundred young people aged 12 to 25 across Victoria. The survey explored the experiences, motivations, barriers and perceived impact of volunteering. The key findings of this study are:

- Young people were volunteering in 'youth specific' areas, alongside peers, identifying volunteering areas that overlap with the activities of youth participation.
- Young people volunteer because they want to be involved in something that is meaningful, of benefit to the community, fun and will improve their employment opportunities.
- A 'community of volunteering', characterised by a community in which people volunteer, talk about volunteering and invite young people to volunteer, had a key role in young people taking on volunteer roles. Young people were unlikely to be exposed to volunteering in their school community (language schools, secondary schools or tertiary institutions).
- Volunteering is a process whereby volunteers start in standard-cause service roles, which are opportunities that expose young people to volunteering but do not challenge their belief systems. As their confidence and experience with volunteering builds young people are begin to take on social-cause service roles, exposing them to people with different values, public issues and pushing them out of their comfort zone. Standard-cause volunteering developed the personal and professional skills of young people. Social-cause volunteering strengthened their connection to community. Both are important in the volunteering journey.
- Young people's volunteering was shaped by their age and stage, gender, whether they had a disability, where they live and their cultural background.
- There was a lack of youth friendly information informing young people about volunteering, particularly for young people who were not part of a community of volunteering.

Key recommendations

Based on the findings outlined in this report, the following recommendations are made to support the continued development of young people's volunteering across Victoria. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria recommends:

1. The development and use of a contemporary and relevant definition of volunteering that recognises the contributions of young people.
2. The continued development of resources (both print and online) that inform young people about volunteering.
3. The continued capacity building of community organisations and groups to be better able to create and identify meaningful volunteering opportunities for diverse groups of young people.
4. The strengthening of volunteering awareness programs and volunteering opportunities in educational institutions.
5. The continued development of the capacity of the youth and community sector to use online media and social networks to engage with and support youth volunteering.
6. The development and support of a community of young volunteers.
7. The continued support and development of activities and campaigns that legitimise and raise awareness of youth volunteering in the community.
8. The strengthening of support and resources for young people who are organising their own social action.
9. The continued research into the role, experience and impact of volunteering on a young person's life and community.

"People always ask why we volunteer! We do it because we are being the change we want to see in the world"

Female volunteer, 18

Background

In 2009, the Victorian Government launched Victoria's Volunteering Strategy as a part of the Government's Respect strategy. The purpose of the Volunteering Strategy was to sustain volunteering in Victoria by providing practical and effective support to volunteer-based organisations and volunteers across the state (Department of Community Planning and Development, 2009). Victoria's Volunteering Strategy was developed with an understanding that:

- people are increasingly time poor and are not becoming involved in community organisations in the same way as previous generations;
- people want to volunteer and make a difference, but many cannot easily find suitable opportunities;
- as the population ages there will be increasing demand for the services that volunteer-based organisations provide; and
- many volunteer-based organisations are not yet responding to the necessity of adapting to the changing volunteering landscape.

The strategy detailed a number of challenges facing volunteering and proposed four key approach areas:

1. support for community organisations providing volunteer opportunities;
2. support for people wanting to find suitable volunteering opportunities;
3. support for volunteering by particular groups; and
4. support for volunteer recognition.

The Victorian Volunteer Portal (www.volunteer.vic.gov.au) was developed as part of the Victorian Volunteering Strategy 2009. It is an online community and an information resource for Victorian communities and volunteering organisations. The Department of Planning and Community Development administered Organisational Change Support Grants to increase the usage and functionality of Victoria's Volunteer Portal. This grant has enabled the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria to focus on the development of volunteering for young people in Victoria.

This report aims to further the understanding of volunteering as it relates to Victorian young people (aged 12 to 25) in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Such an understanding is important for good policy development, given:

- The impact of an ageing population on the capacity of volunteering organisations to recruit and retain volunteers (Volunteering Australia, 2007) and the findings of recent research, which suggest that volunteering when started during adolescence continues into adulthood (Shannon, 2010; Metz, McLellan and Youniss, 2003).
- The benefit to organisations and community groups of involving young people as volunteers and reflecting the diversity that exists within community (Volunteering Australia, 2007).
- The role that volunteering plays in creating social cohesion and strengthening participation in civil society (Brown, Lipsig-Mumme and Zajdow, 2003).

Youth Participation, Civic Engagement and Volunteering

Participation is fundamental to any democratic society and “is the standard against which democracies should be measured” (Hart, 1992: 7). People become active citizens when they participate in decision-making processes, contribute to the direction of our community, and take action around areas of interest, enriching our society (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2007; Brown et al., 2003; Wilson, 2000). Typical frameworks of participation tend to focus on political participation, which usually refers to traditional associations, political knowledge and voting (Beadle, 2011, Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2007, Golombek, 2006).

Beyond the political

Participation that is understood solely through a political lens is not something young people find relevant (Harris et al. 2007). The limitations on young people aged under 18 to participate in voting for local, state and federal representatives (Golombek, 2006); the impact of globalisation upon the role and power of the nation state with social and political issues increasingly negotiated at a global level (Harris et al, 2007) and a general distrust of formal politics (Harris, Wyn and Younes 2008) all contribute to the disenfranchising of young people. “For today’s citizens, social change is not a linear process of electing politicians to make the decisions that affect their lives” (Hannon and Tims, 2000:122), but includes activities where individuals, of any age, have agency to make decisions and take action on the issues that impact upon them.

For a more inclusive understanding of participation, we need to “bracket traditional, adult centric views of what engagement means and explore the everyday ways in which young people experience and express their place in society” (Harris et al., 2008: 9). We need to understand young people within a contemporary social and political context. Young people are living in a world that is less structured and predictable than that of their parents: the labour market is more unpredictable, the pathway

from school to work is not longer a linear inevitability (Stokes, 11) and the access to Web 2.0 challenges and redefines boundaries, borders and identity. To traverse and succeed in this environment young people need to be mobile, flexible and assume higher levels of personal responsibility - competencies which are at odds with traditional notions of civic and political engagement (Harris et al., 2008).

The secrets of success

Successful youth participation practices challenge traditional frameworks of participation, going beyond the limits of political participation. These practices ensure that there are meaningful and effective opportunities for young people to be involved in decision-making processes that directly relate to them (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004). They are underpinned by three principles:

- Empowerment – young people having greater control over their lives through participation
- Purposeful engagement – young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them and influencing real outcomes
- Inclusiveness – all young people are able to participate

Typical activities include the involvement of young people on boards, committees and action groups, where they make decisions and take action on issues that are important to them. Harris et al. (2008) raise concerns about these traditional strategies and methods of increasing youth participation, suggesting that they may no longer be relevant and that it is time to engage differently with young people. “There is no one way in which to tackle issues of youth participation and youth civic engagement... [such] initiatives and structures must also be complex and multifaceted” (Beadle, 2011: 202).

A menu of options

We need a new understanding of civic engagement that encompasses connection, interrelatedness and a commitment to community; one which captures the ways that young people engage with issues that are relevant to them (Harris et al., 2007). Hannon and Tims (2000:127) propose that “there needs to be a menu of options to allow young people to engage in different types of activities”. Young people are keen to have more opportunities to be further engaged in everyday life. A concept of civic engagement that truly acknowledges the contemporary experience of young people needs to be located in the “lived reality of placing one in community

and the everyday experiences of grappling with social and political issues that arise through this process” (Harris et al., 2007: 26).

Figure 1 represents the core principles and tasks of youth participation, suggesting activities that young people employ in their civic engagement - there are a variety of ways young people participate in everyday life, of which volunteering is one. Volunteering is not typically considered in the context of youth participation practice. Yet, as an everyday activity where young people connect, interrelate and show a commitment to community, there is no doubt that it enables civic engagement, and contributes to the construction of active citizenship, for both the individual and society as whole (Wilson, 2000).

Activities	Campaigning	Debating	Flash Mobs	
	Voting	Lobbying	Social Groups	Online Communities
	Volunteering	Youth Committees	Student Action Groups	
Tasks	Advocacy	Decision Making	Action	Connection
Principles	Empowerment: young people having greater control over their lives			
	Purposeful engagement: young people taking on valued roles			
	Inclusiveness: ensuring that all young people are able to participate			
Assumption	That participation of all is fundamental for a democratic society			

Figure 1: A conceptual framework for youth participation: A “menu of options”



What is volunteering?

Volunteering Australia (2009), the national peak body for volunteering, define formal volunteering as an activity which takes place through not-for-profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

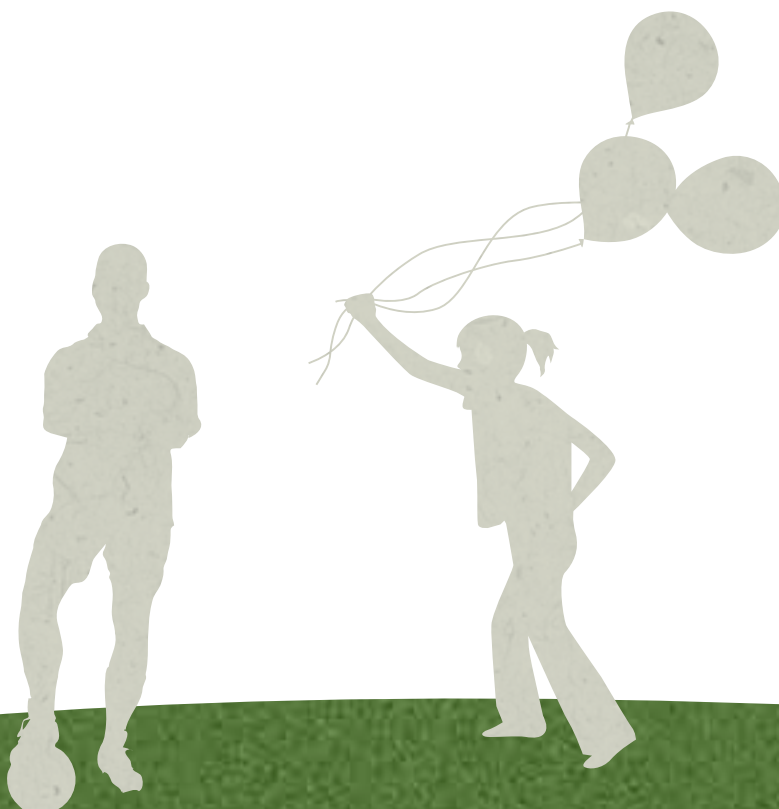
- to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- for no financial payment; and
- in designated volunteer positions only.

Research conducted by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme in 2004 explored ideas of volunteering with young people and found that young people's understanding of volunteering was "broader and more complex than the definition of the term laid down by Volunteering Australia" (Ferrier, Roos and Long, 2004: 15). Young people understood volunteering to include both formal activities, as detailed in Volunteering Australia's definition, and informal activities which included community service activities outside of a specific organisation and activities of mutual support (e.g. babysitting and care for the elderly) (Ferrier et al. 2004; Gaskin, 1998). Drawing on local and international research and commentary (Wilson, 2000), this report defines youth volunteering as:

an activity where young people (aged 12 to 25) freely give their time and energy to benefit another individual, group or community.

Volunteering encompasses a vast array of diverse activities and it is "not fruitful to try to explain all activities with the same theory or to treat all activities as if they were the same with respect to consequences" (Wilson, 2000: 233). The level of young people's civic engagement in volunteering varies enormously; some voluntary roles and opportunities enable more active participation and engaged citizenship than others (Eley, 2003). Eley (2003) asserts that youth volunteering is most effective when it supports:

- the development of positive attitudes towards community engagement;
- a sense of commitment and a deeper understanding of social issues; and
- the development of lifelong learning skills and skills for community action.



Meaningful youth volunteering

Metz, McLellan and Youniss (2003) suggest that volunteering opportunities can be broadly grouped as either 'standard-cause' service or 'social-cause' service. Within standard-cause service, young volunteers are not exposed directly to people in need or public issues; instead, they help their peers and/or do functionary work for an organisation (i.e. administrative work, organising a morning tea fundraiser at their school). Social-cause service, in contrast, exposes young people to people in need; it puts them in direct contact with public issues (i.e. volunteering to build a home in a disadvantaged community, mentoring a person from a different socioeconomic background).

Metz et al (2003) found that standard-cause service was less likely to push young people out of their comfort zone or challenge their capacity or values, but that it did provide young people with practical experience in the community's broader agenda and served as an important entry point to volunteering. On the other hand, they found that young people who took on social-cause service were more likely to be involved and interested in larger social issues and civic activity into the future. Both types of service are important in young people's experience of volunteering; young people "who engaged in 'social-cause' service tended to have a 'career' in volunteering, starting with less challenging volunteer experiences and incrementally taking on more demanding tasks" (Weber, 2011:14).

"I think everyone should volunteer at least once in their life!"
Female volunteer, 22

Meaningful volunteering reflects an understanding:

- That for young people volunteering is a process, as their skills and confidence with volunteering grows so does their interest and ability to volunteer in roles that challenge their values and push them out of their comfort zone. There is a role for both standard and social cause roles.
- That young people develop (and want to develop) personal and practical skills which will enhance their ongoing contribution as a volunteer in their community as well as their employment options. Opportunities to develop skills need to be inherent in the tasks of the volunteering role and/or complemented by support and training.
- That volunteering opportunities that challenge the life views of a young person and increase their awareness and connection to the broader community i.e. social cause service roles, strengthen their participation.

"For young people, citizenship is an act, rather than a duty" (Hannon and Tims, 2000:122); young people want meaningful opportunities to participate that reflects their diverse interests, skills and experience. There are a range of activities which promote young people's active participation with meaningful opportunities to volunteer being one way. As volunteers young people are able to strengthen their connection to community, improve skills and extend relationships as well as develop a genuine long lasting commitment to community. It is for this reason this study aims to understand the contemporary experience of volunteering for Victoria's young people posing the following questions:

- **How does volunteering strengthen a young person's active participation?**
- **What makes volunteering meaningful for young people?**
- **What is the impact of volunteering on young people?**

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of an online survey. The survey was developed in collaboration with the project's steering committee and tested with eight young people aged 12 to 25; their feedback and suggestions were integrated into the survey design.

The survey was divided into three parts.

Part 1: fourteen questions completed by all respondents, which focused on collecting data pertaining to the demographics of the sample.

Part 2: three questions completed by respondents who identified as never having volunteered, which explored potential interest areas for volunteering, barriers and possible strategies for volunteer engagement.

Part 3: seven questions completed by respondents who identified as having had experience as a volunteer, either currently or previously, which focused on capturing information about young people's volunteer experience.

There was a combination of free text and multiple choice questions, with the responses for the multiple choice questions randomised. There was a mix of compulsory and optional questions. The survey was live for seven weeks between March and April 2011. Respondents who completed the survey were invited to opt in to be in the running to win an iPod Touch.

The survey was distributed and promoted through youth services and volunteering networks including member organisations of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the Volunteer Resource Centres, the Victorian Volunteer Portal, the Ampersand Network, social networking sites as well as through organisations with a large number of young volunteers (i.e. Edmund Rice, CFA etc).

Study limitations

While the survey had a broad geographical reach, with respondents from both rural and regional Victoria, the language used to promote the survey targeted young volunteers. As a result, the majority of the sample had some experience as a volunteer.

There was a low number of respondents aged between 12 and 14. This may be due to the way the survey was promoted. A promotional strategy that targets the places 12 to 14 year olds are engaged, such as secondary schools, may be more effective for future studies.

This survey was online, with a print version available on request. There were no requests for the print version of the survey. This was a study limitation, as the completion of the online survey required young people to have access to the internet.

The number of respondents who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) was small (five respondents). As a result, this study is unable to explore the understanding and experiences of this group in relation to volunteering. Future work in this area may benefit from a strong partnership with an indigenous specific organisation or being led by an Indigenous controlled youth organisation.

The sample

A total of 434 people participated in the survey. For the purpose of this report, only the responses from young people aged 12 to 25 who live in Victoria and completed the survey were collated and analysed, totalling 400 responses.

A majority of the sample (88%) had previous or current experience as a volunteer (referred to throughout the report as volunteers). The remainder of the sample (12%) had no experience as a volunteer (referred to throughout the report as non-volunteers).

The mean age of the sample was 19; with a relatively even spread across young people aged 15 to 23. There were a smaller number of respondents aged 12 to 14 and 24 to 26. Please refer to figure 2 for a more detailed breakdown of the distribution of the volunteers and the non-volunteers by age.

Sixty two percent of the sample identified as female and thirty five percent identified as male. One respondent identified as queer. The prevalence of female volunteers in this study mirrors patterns of volunteering in the broader population.

Thirty three young people indicated that they had a disability; ten percent of which had more than one disability. Disabilities included autism, physical disabilities, hearing impairments, intellectual disabilities and/or learning difficulties. A small percentage of young people indicated that they had a chronic or mental illness.

Respondents were largely born in Australia (73%) with eighteen percent of the sample indicating that they were born somewhere other than Australia. Respondents came from a total of 36 countries. Nine percent did not respond

to this question. Majority of the sample spoke English as their main language, as depicted in figure 3. Fourteen percent spoke a language other than English as their main language (one of 27 different languages)¹.

Thirty eight percent of respondents identified with a religious belief, across approximately 20 different religions. Twenty nine percent described themselves as non-religious (agnostic, atheist or of no religion). Thirty percent of respondents skipped this question.



Figure 2: Number of young people in the sample, volunteers and non-volunteers: By age

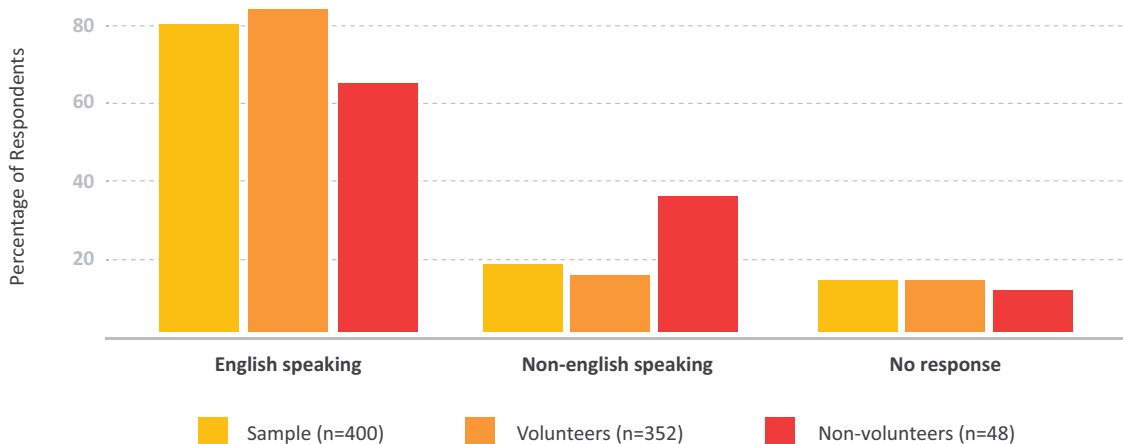


Figure 3: Distribution of sample, volunteers and non-volunteers: By main language spoken at home

¹ In the survey respondents were asked to identify the main language spoken at home. This was an optional free text question. Some respondents indicated that they spoke more than one main language at home. In instances where one of the languages was English for the purpose of this study, those respondents have been grouped as young people who speak English as a main language at home.

The Findings

The Volunteering Experiences of Young People

Young people are a diverse group; their attitudes and perceptions of volunteering vary depending upon a range of factors including: age, gender, cultural background, religious beliefs, geographical location, disability and/or family structure (Volunteering Australia, 2007; Longitudinal Survey of Australia Youth, 2003). The following section will first present the key findings for volunteers in the study and then explore the differences in young people's volunteering experiences based upon age, gender, disability, geographical location and cultural diversity

Volunteering or youth participation

Respondents were asked to select the areas in which they had volunteered, either currently or in the past, as represented in figure 4. The five most common areas that young people selected included:

- in a fundraising role,
- with a youth and/or social group,
- with a youth led organisation,
- within their local community; and/or
- with a youth committee.

Interestingly, whilst these are common areas in which to volunteer, these are also typical activities of youth participation, suggesting a strong connection between participatory practice and volunteering.

When young people are part of youth participation activities, such as youth committees or groups they are often considered as participants or members. In these roles, young people are freely giving their time and energy for the benefit of the group and wider community; they are volunteering. Whilst there are concerns with the term volunteering, fundamentally, it is a concept that is universally understood and not limited by age. Referring to young people as participants or members minimises their voluntary contribution to their community.

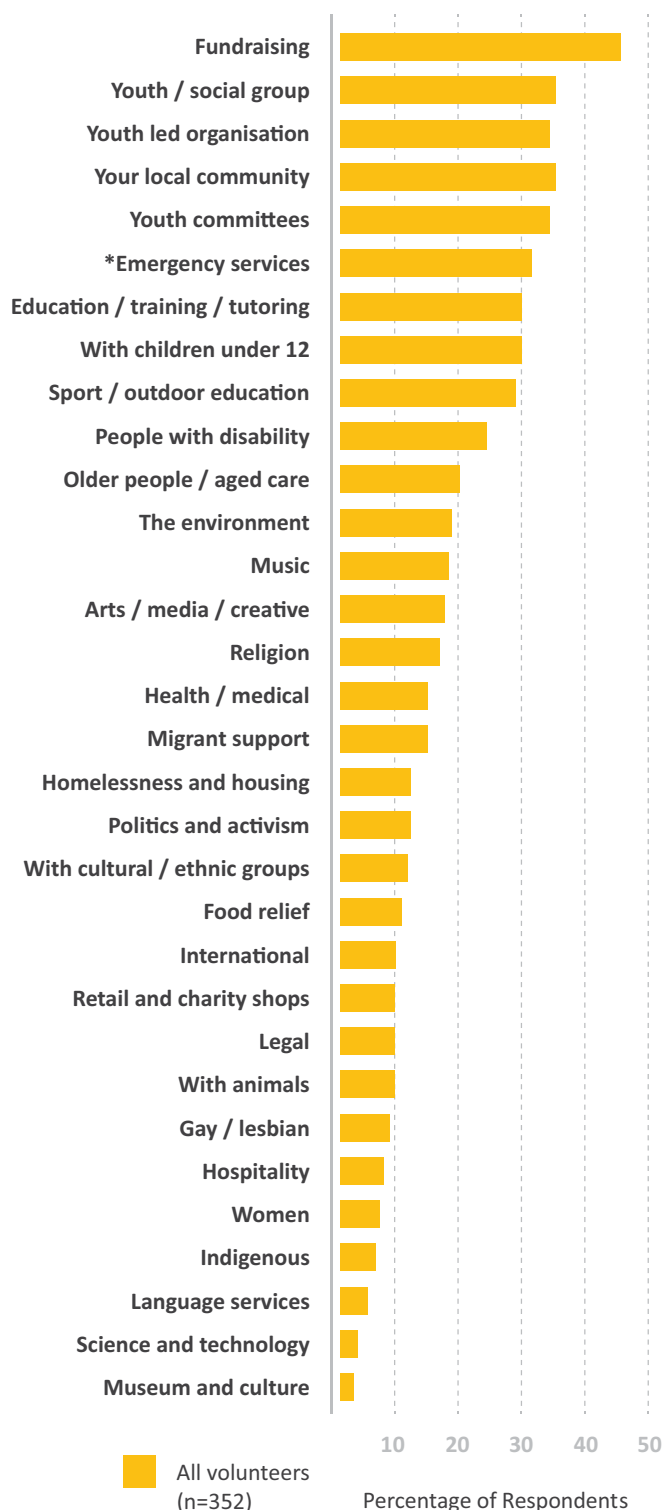


Figure 4: Areas young people volunteered: Volunteers' responses

*Emergency services includes: St John Ambulance, Royal Life Saving Society and the Country Fire Authority.

Including young people

Young people were largely volunteering in roles with peers – volunteering with youth committees, youth led organisations or youth groups. This may be a reflection of their desire and interest to be involved in activities that strengthen their peer networks, but may also be a reflection of young people’s position and role in community. Patterns of volunteering are shaped by the opportunities that are available. Organisations and groups, who already engage young people in their work, are likely to be better equipped, better resourced and more attractive to young volunteers. Organisations and groups who do not typically engage young people in their work, experience a number of real and perceived barriers to young people volunteering. The lack of opportunities for young people to volunteer outside of a ‘youth specific’ context, limits young people’s participation and excludes them from opportunities in the broader community.

Beyond generation Y

Young people were overwhelmingly motivated to volunteer because they wanted to do something to benefit their community as well as themselves as represented in figure 5; challenging popular rhetoric which depicts young people as selfish, self centred and disinterested in community. Young people get involved in community when they are inspired, encouraged and informed as depicted in figure 6. They are more likely to volunteer when they are part of a ‘community of volunteering’ – a community where people volunteer and talk about volunteering. This study found that young people who knew someone (parent, sibling, grandparent or friend) who had volunteered were more likely to volunteer themselves. This shifts the responsibility of young people’s involvement in community from being solely an individual responsibility, to being a shared community responsibility.

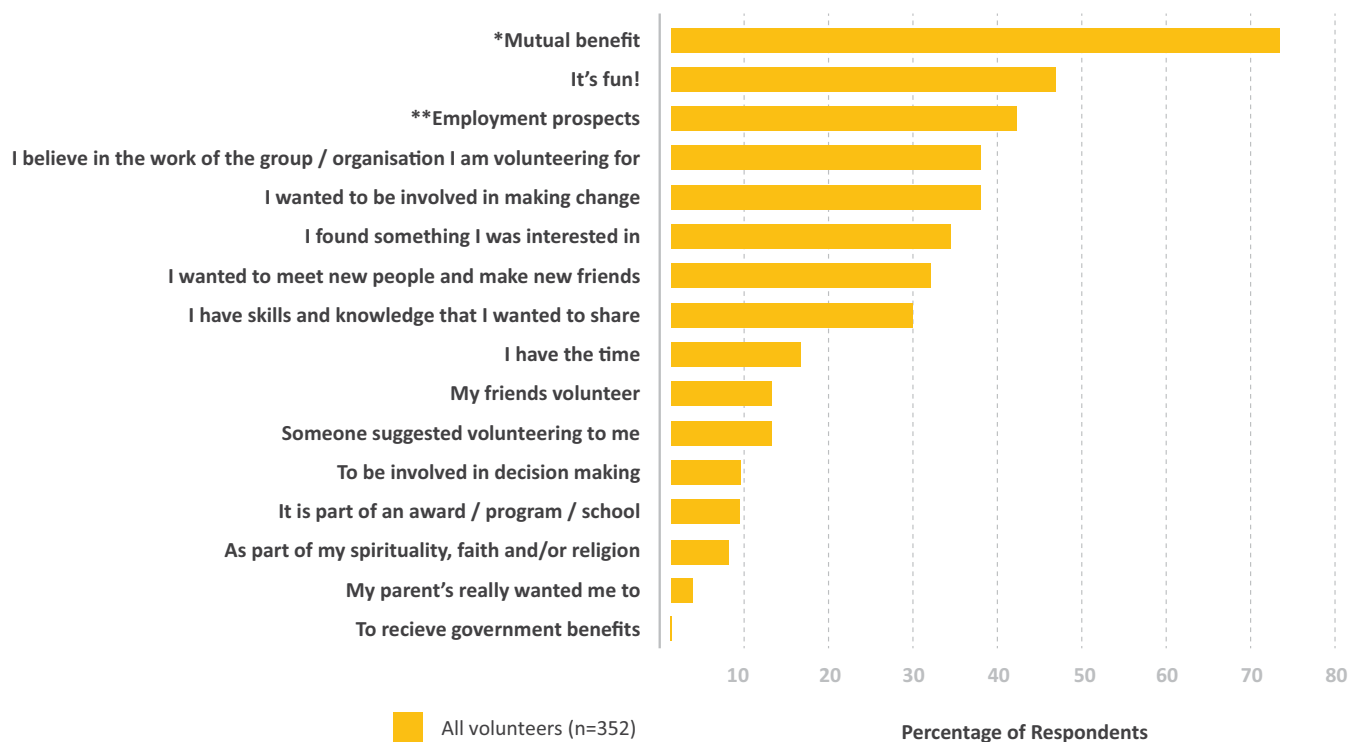


Figure 5: Motivations to volunteer: Volunteers’ responses

* This indicator is a collection of the following responses: (1) I wanted to do something of benefit to myself and the community; (2) I like to feel like I am helping and (3) I wanted to give. Note: respondents who indicated more than one of these were counted as one for the purpose of this indicator.

** This indicator is a collection of the following responses: (1) experience on my resume; (2) I think it will help me get a job and (3) I want to work in that area. Note: respondents who indicated more than one of these were counted as one for the purpose of this indicator.

For many young people of secondary school age, the school community is a significant one. As illustrated in figure 6, approximately twenty five percent of volunteers indicated that they had heard about volunteering through their educational institution. But less than 10 percent had been involved in a program at school that exposed them to community service. This is likely to be due to a lack of opportunities for involvement in volunteering programs within the school setting as opposed to lack of interest. Whilst community service and volunteering is a feature in some secondary schools, for example schools that have the International Baccalaureate or support the Duke of Edinburg Award or Advance program, it is not in all schools. Young people need points of entry to support their participation in community including information, opportunity, exposure and inspiration.

Going social

Social networking and online media did not feature as an enabling factor to volunteering for young people in this study, as illustrated in figure 6. Given the role that social networking and online spaces play in shaping young people’s experiences, relationships and communication, this is unlikely to be an issue of young people not using these media platforms but a reflection of the way community organisations understand and utilise online media. Social networks are another form of community, whereby users create content, share information, develop relationships and build networks; young people are part of this community. A ‘community of volunteering’ needs to extend into social networks and online media. This will continue to legitimise youth volunteering, to inform young people of youth appropriate volunteering opportunities and to create conversation between young volunteers.

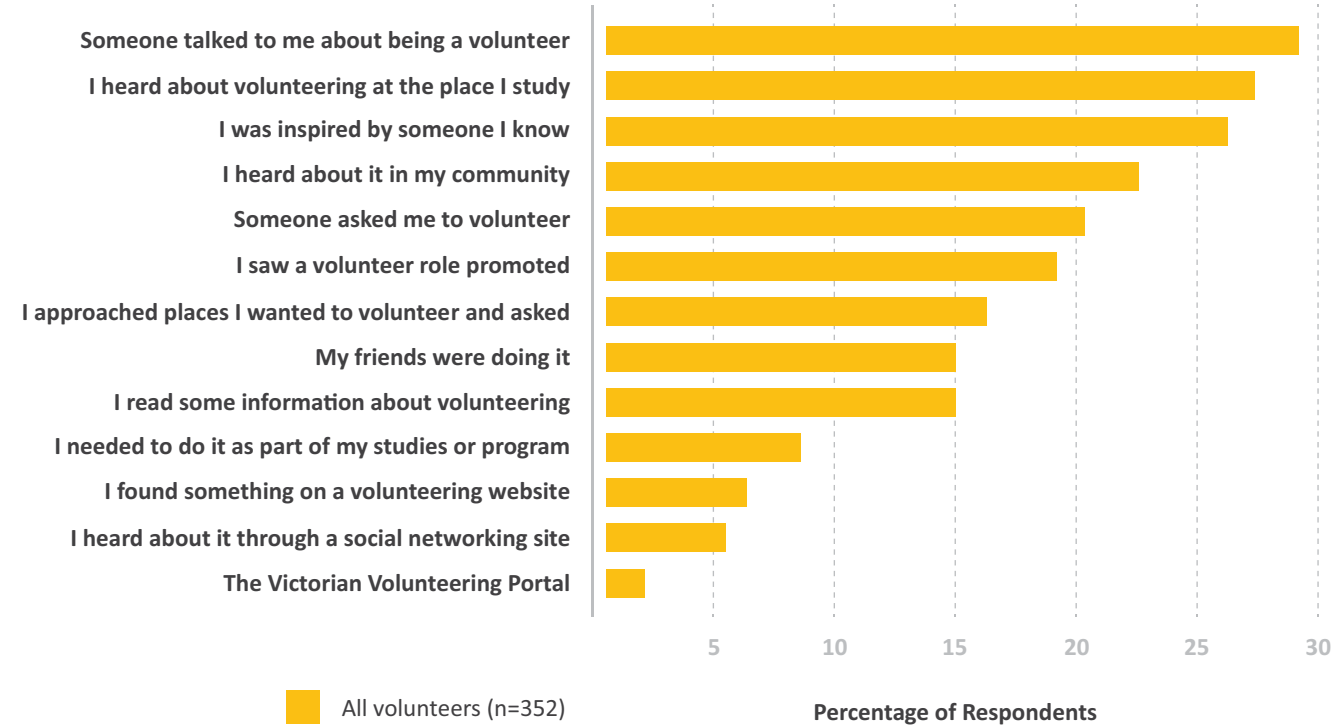
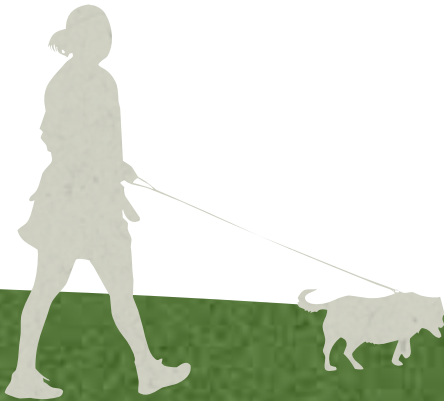


Figure 6: Getting started: Volunteers’ responses



Make it meaningful

Young people felt that volunteering had improved their connection to community and had pushed them out of their comfort zone, as highlighted in figure 7. Weber (2011) suggested that volunteering opportunities that pushed young people out of their comfort zone (i.e. social cause service) challenged their value base and exposed them to parts of society that they would not normally come into contact with. This experience broadens young peoples understand of society and their place within it – as they are exposed to the experiences of other individuals, groups and communities. Volunteering provides young people with agency as they are able to take action, however small, towards making a difference for another individual, group and/or community. Meaningful volunteering that challenges the normative experience of young people and empowers them to take action, enables the active participation of young people in community.

"Volunteering helps put things into perspective, makes you aware of the bigger picture and gives you something to be passionate about."

Female volunteer, 21

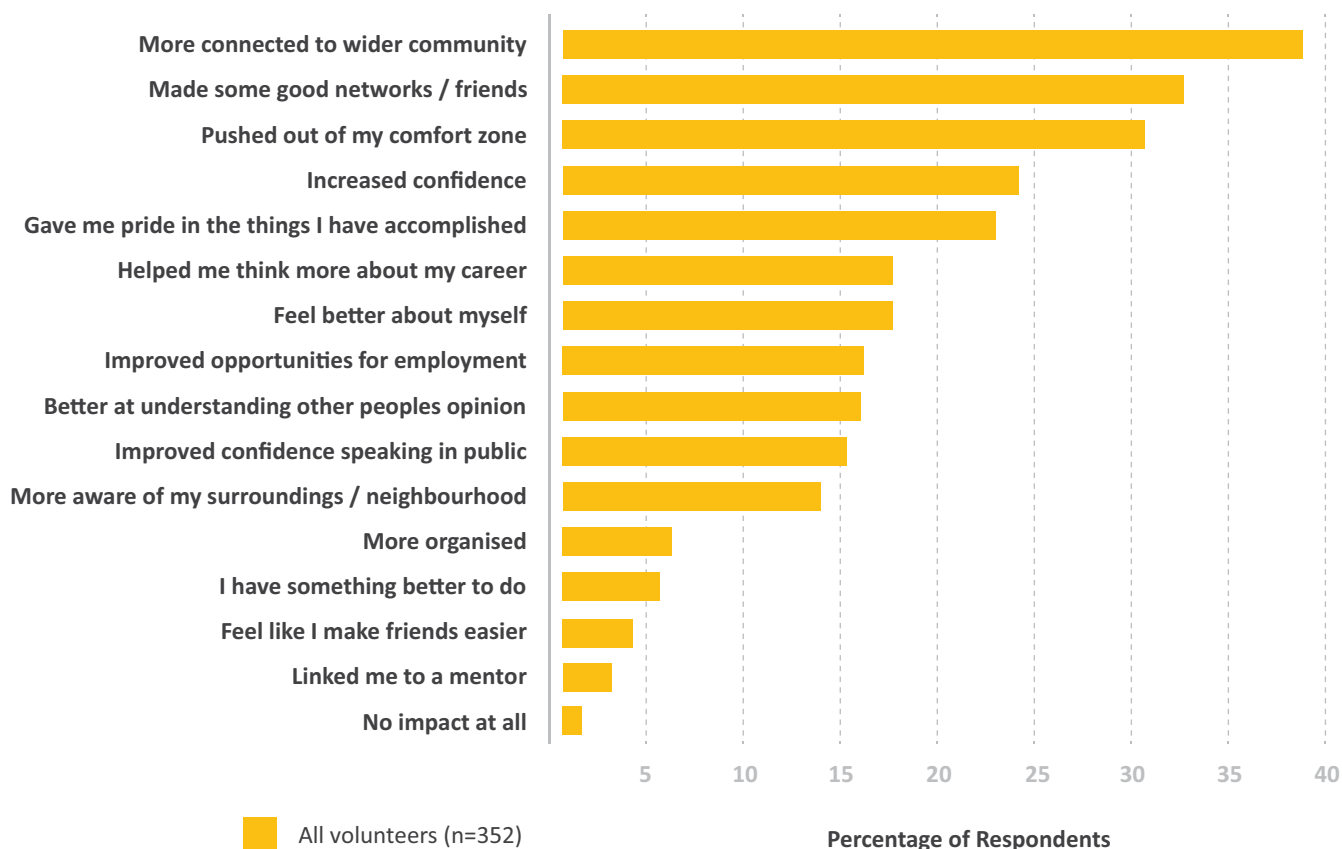


Figure 7: Perceived impact of volunteering: Volunteers' responses

Differences in volunteering experiences based upon age

The following presents the experience of volunteers within the sample looking at the difference between younger volunteers (12 to 17) and older volunteers (18 to 25).

Hard for under fifteens

Older volunteers tended to volunteer more in social cause service areas compared to younger volunteers, as evident in figure 8. They were more likely to volunteer with youth led organisations, in an education, training or tutoring role, with people with a disability or overseas. Volunteers aged 12 to 14, were less likely to volunteer in a social cause area, reporting that they volunteered in their local community, in fundraising roles or with a youth social group. This is likely to be due to younger volunteers seeking out standard cause roles as an entry point into volunteering, but is also strongly influenced by the opportunities available to younger volunteers. There are limited opportunities for young people under 15 to volunteer particularly outside youth specific roles and organisations – due to concerns regarding legal and supervision requirements as well as misconceptions regarding the ability and potential of young people as volunteers.

Impact of tasks of adolescence

Young people preparing to leave secondary school and/or tertiary education are concerned about their future. They are making decisions relating to future study and/or work. In this context, young people are looking for experiences that will consolidate their career interests, develop their personal and professional skills, broaden their networks and assist them with future employment. Older volunteers in this study were more likely, as compared to younger volunteers, to be motivated by themes relating to improving employability.

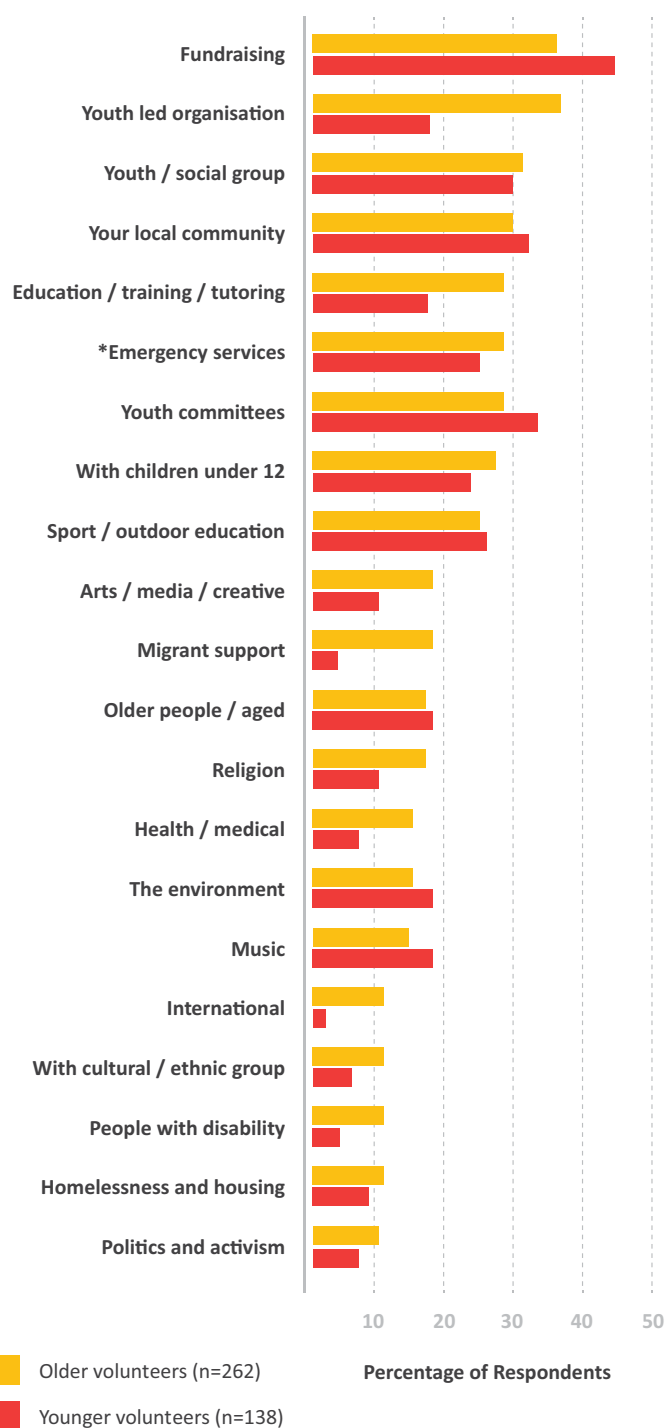


Figure 8: Areas young people volunteered: Volunteers' responses by age

* Emergency services includes: St John Ambulance, Royal Life Saving Society and the Country Fire Authority.

Note: Volunteer areas that received less than 10% of responses have not been included in this figure.

Older volunteers were also more likely to indicate that they were motivated by a desire to do something to benefit the community, a belief in the work of the group or organisation and wanting to be involved in making a change. This suggests that older volunteers have a greater understanding of their role in community and that they have something worthwhile to contribute. In contrast, younger volunteers prioritised making new friends as a motivator. The motivational differences between these two groups are a reflection of their age and developmental stage. It is not uncommon for peer relationships and friendships to influence and inform the actions of secondary school aged young people.

The role of peers and role models upon younger volunteers is also evident in the ways they got involved with volunteering. Younger volunteers were more likely to indicate that they decided to volunteer because they were inspired by someone they knew or because their friends were (depicted in figure 9). Peers have a strong role in the life of a secondary school aged young person. The inclusion of young people as volunteers in our society relies on volunteering being something that young people and their friends are doing and talking about.

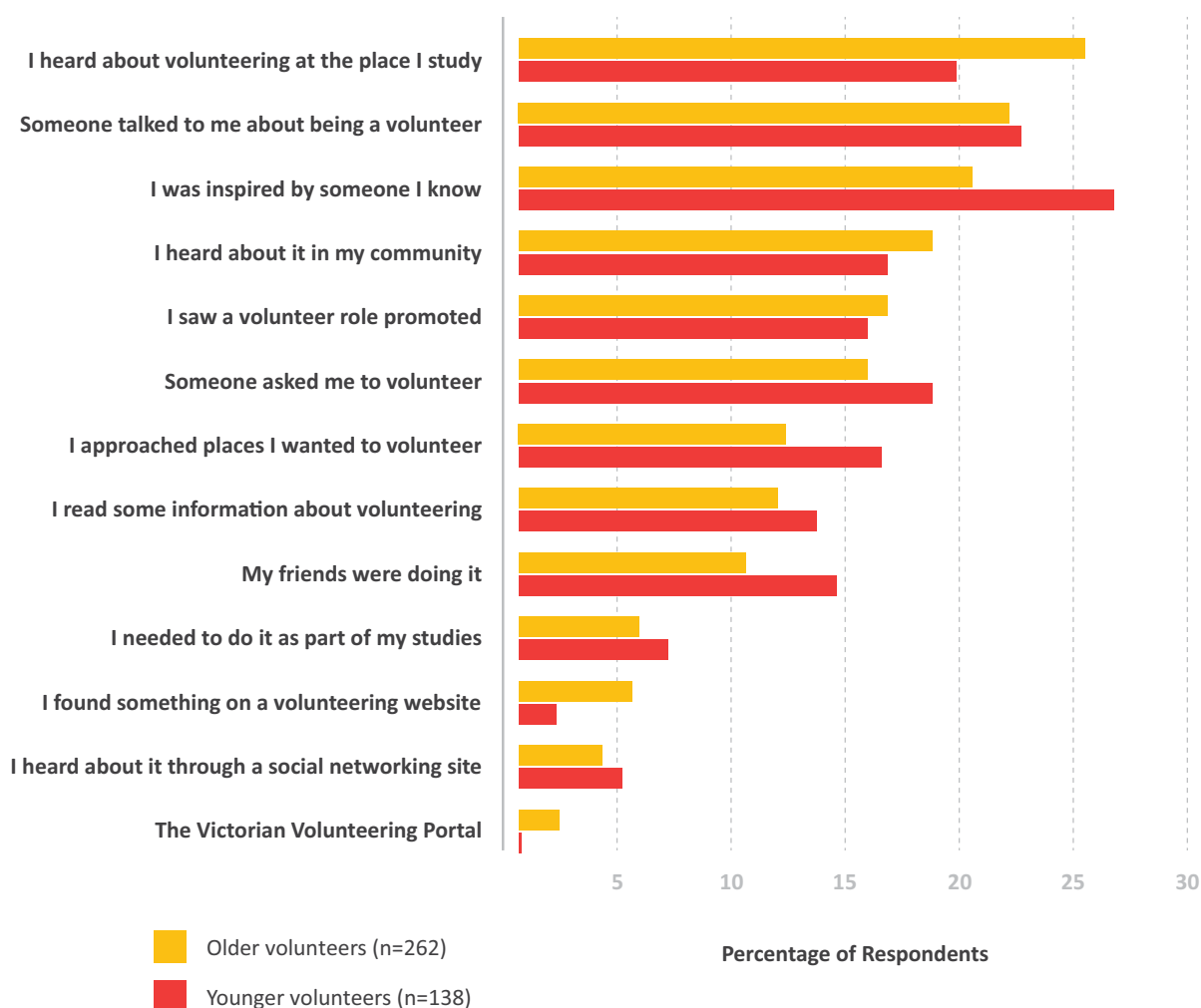


Figure 9: Getting started: Volunteers' responses by age

The volunteering journey

Figure 10 illustrates the differences in the perceived impact of volunteering according to age; with significant differences between older and younger volunteers evident. Older volunteers were more likely to indicate volunteering had resulted in the development of good friendships, had pushed them out of their comfort zone and given them a better understanding of the opinions of others – impacts that build the connection of a young person to their community. Younger volunteers felt better about themselves as a result of volunteering and more confident – impacts that strengthen the personal skills of young person and provide a positive introduction to volunteering as represented in figure 8.

These differences mirror the differences in the volunteering areas of younger and older volunteers; in that older volunteers were more likely to take on roles in social-cause areas and younger volunteers in standard-cause areas. It is important that there are opportunities for young people to volunteer in both standard cause and social cause service areas. Young people in their early teens and young people who are new to volunteering, need opportunities that introduce them to volunteering and which help them to develop their understanding of the value of being a volunteer and personal skills (i.e. standard cause service). As young people develop experience as a volunteer, they seek out opportunities that are more challenging and have greater community impact.

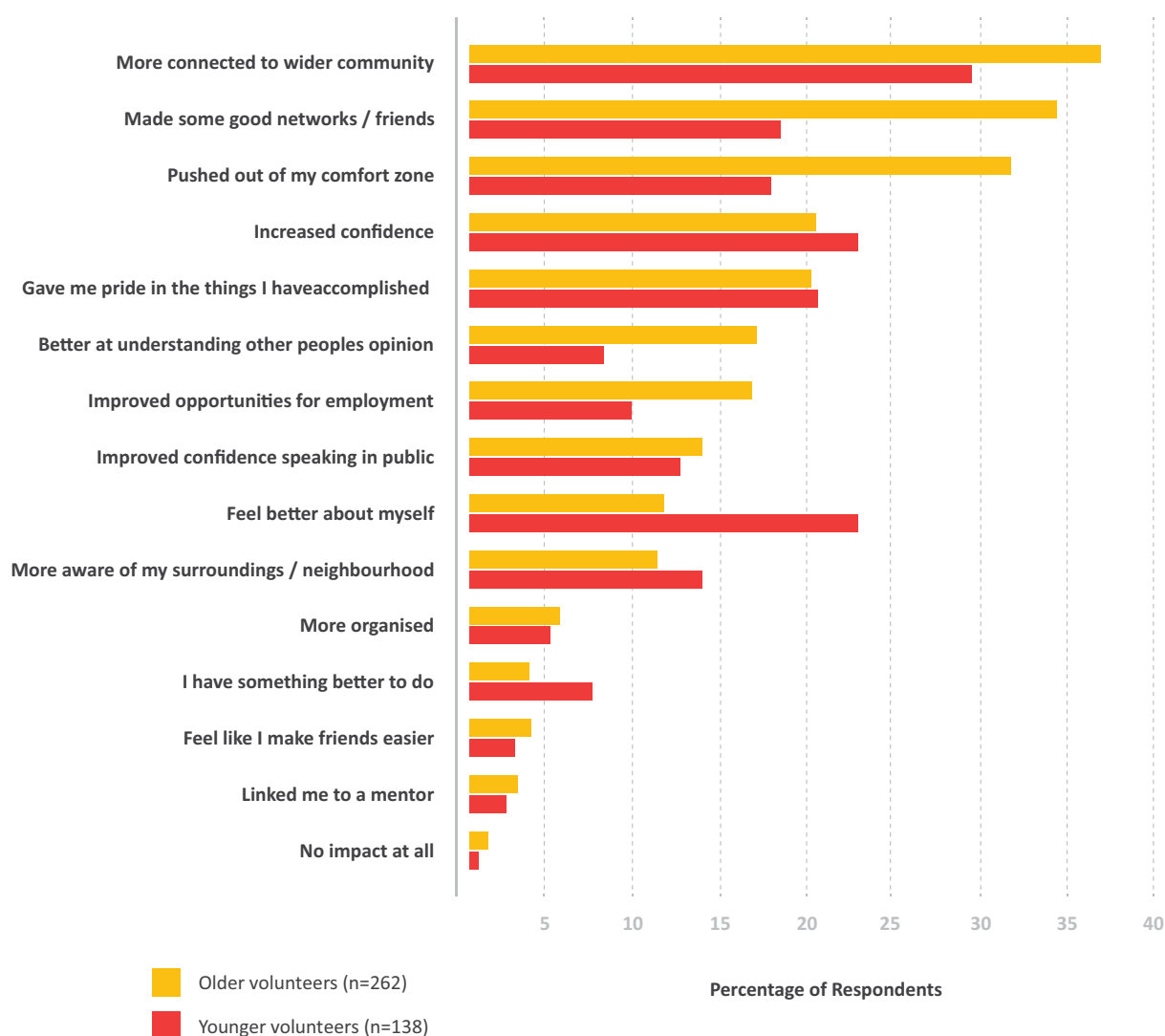


Figure 10: Perceived impact of volunteering: Volunteers' responses by age

Differences in volunteering experiences based upon gender

The gendered nature of work is reflected in the patterns of volunteering for young people, as shown in figure 11. Young men were more likely to volunteer with the emergency services and young women in 'caring roles' i.e. volunteering with younger children, people with a disability and in the health sector. Young people's volunteering is influenced by the perception that some roles and areas are more 'suitable' for people of a specific gender. Young people volunteering in areas they may not have considered as a traditional career pathway introduces them to different opportunities and challenges gender stereotype. For volunteering to be more inclusive of young people, regardless of their gender, changes to the image and culture of organisations are necessary.

Peer relationships are important

Peer relationships were an important feature for female volunteers. They were likely to be motivated to volunteer because they wanted to meet new people and develop friendships. They were also volunteering in roles with their peers (figure 11); yet males were more likely to feel that they had made good friends and networks as a result of being a volunteer. Forty three percent of male volunteers felt that they had made some good friendships and networks, as compared to twenty eight percent of female volunteers (depicted in figure 13). This raises questions about the experiences of young people within a volunteer role, and the impact of gender.

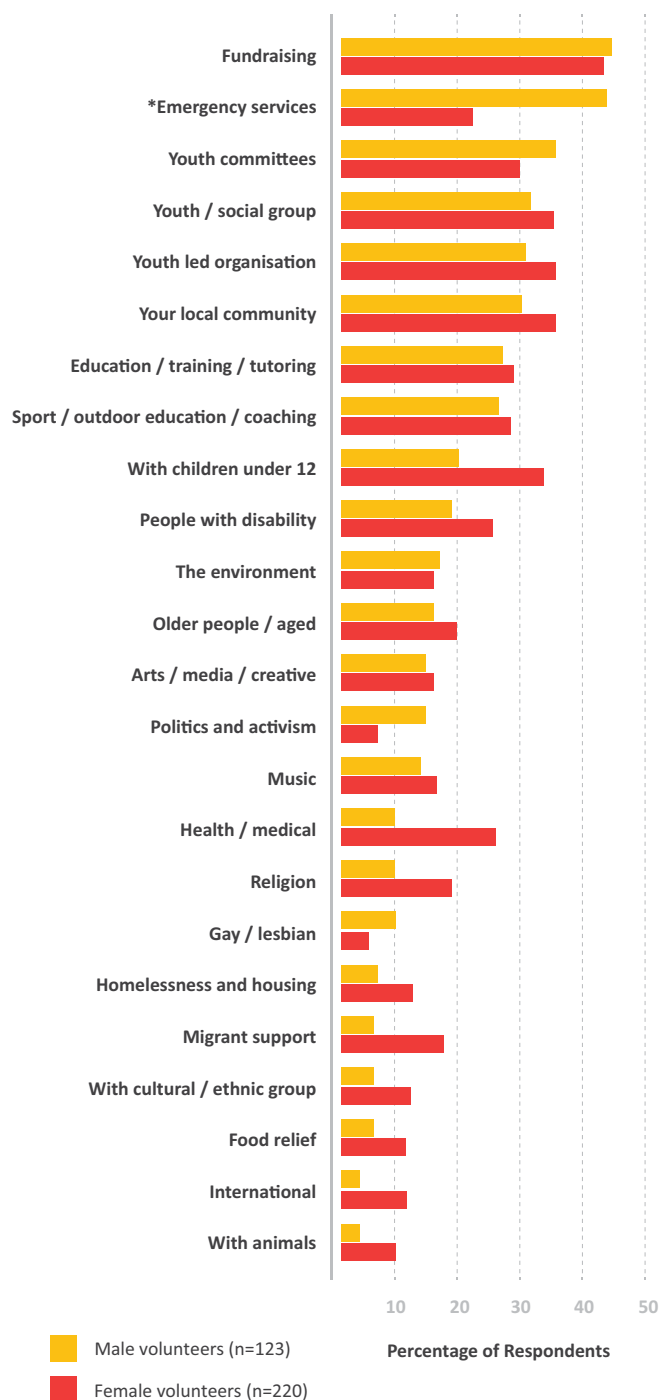


Figure 11: Areas young people volunteered: Volunteers' responses by gender

* Emergency services includes: St John Ambulance, Royal Life Saving Society and the Country Fire Authority.

Note: Volunteer areas that received less than 10% of responses have not been included in this figure.



Different impacts: Different experiences

Male volunteers were more likely to indicate that volunteering had developed their personal and professional skills –strengthening peer networks, improving opportunities for employment and developing public speaking skills. Female volunteers were more likely to indicate that volunteering had developed their understanding of the bigger picture – feeling more connected to the wider community, having experiences that pushed them of their comfort zone and a greater

awareness of their surroundings. The differences in the perceived impact of volunteering is unlikely to be due to a difference in motivations to volunteer or the areas of volunteering, as these differences were actually quite small but rather a reflection of the way young men and women experience volunteering. Raising the following questions: Is there a gender difference in the way young volunteers understand how their volunteer role fits in the organisation or broader context? How they access support and training? How volunteering roles are structured?

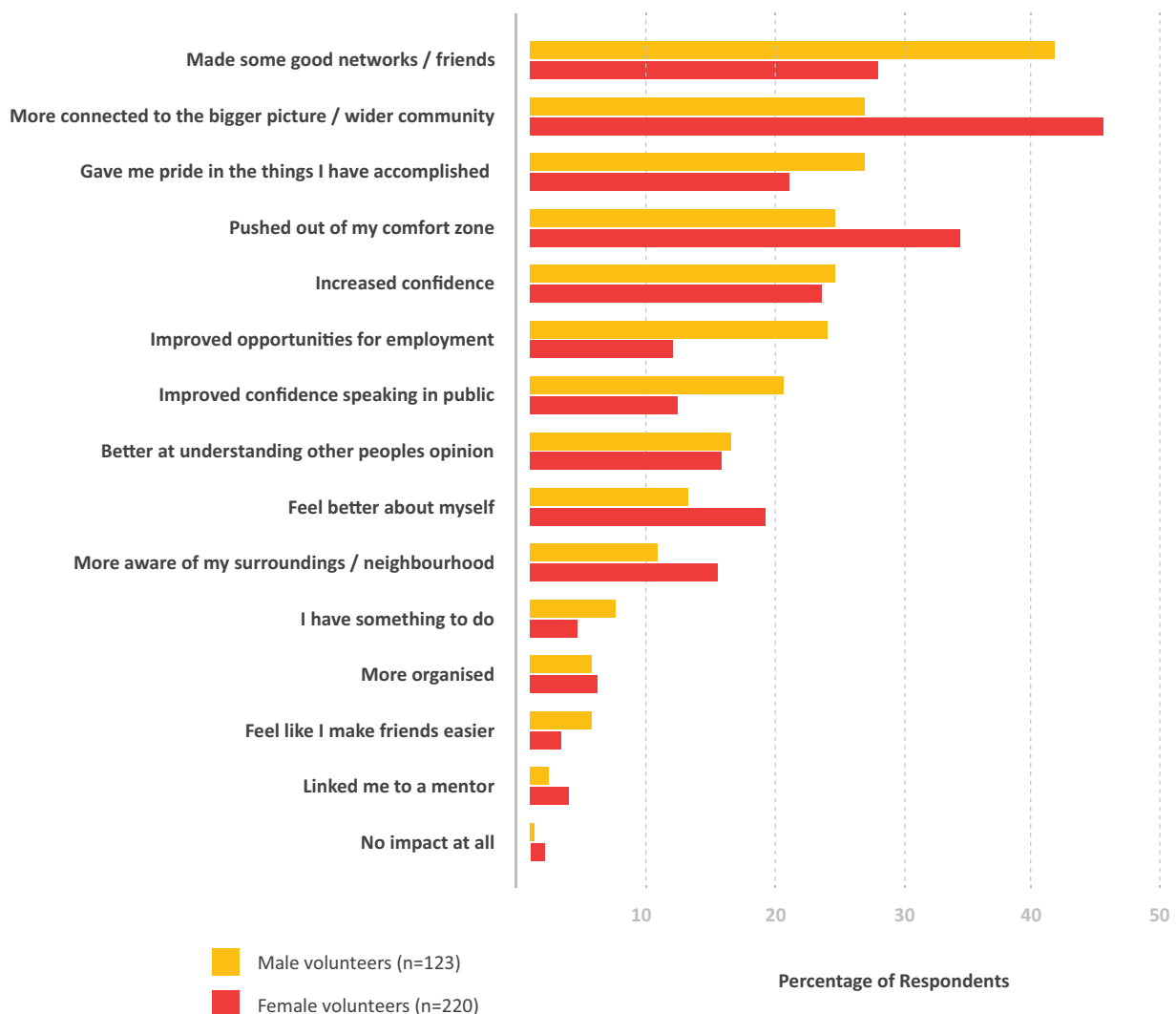


Figure 12: Perceived impact of volunteering: Volunteers' responses by gender

Differences in volunteering experiences based upon geographical location

This study has considered the experience of volunteering for young people in metropolitan Melbourne² and non-metropolitan Melbourne³; with approximately seventy percent of the sample from metropolitan Melbourne and thirty percent from non-metropolitan Melbourne.

A community of volunteering

Volunteering in rural and regional Victoria is different from that in metropolitan Melbourne. In rural and regional Victoria many community groups and organisations exist because of volunteers, as evidenced by the volunteer base that supports the Country Fire Authority and sporting clubs. This creates a culture of volunteering where there is an understanding that without a strong volunteer base, some services cannot be provided. This culture of volunteering is evident in the pattern and motivations to volunteer for young people in rural and regional Victoria.

As shown in figure 13, volunteers from non-metropolitan Melbourne were more likely to volunteer with the emergency services or sporting groups, strengthening the sustainability of these largely volunteer run groups, as compared to volunteers from metropolitan Melbourne. This reflects the opportunities that are available in rural and regional Victoria as well as the normative pattern of volunteering in these areas. The challenge for rural and regional Victoria is making these opportunities accessible to young people regardless of gender and cultural background.

This study found that female volunteers and volunteers who did not speak English as their main language were less likely to volunteer with the emergency services (refer to figure 11 and 18 respectively). Volunteers who did not speak English as their main language at home were also less likely to volunteer in a sporting or coaching role.

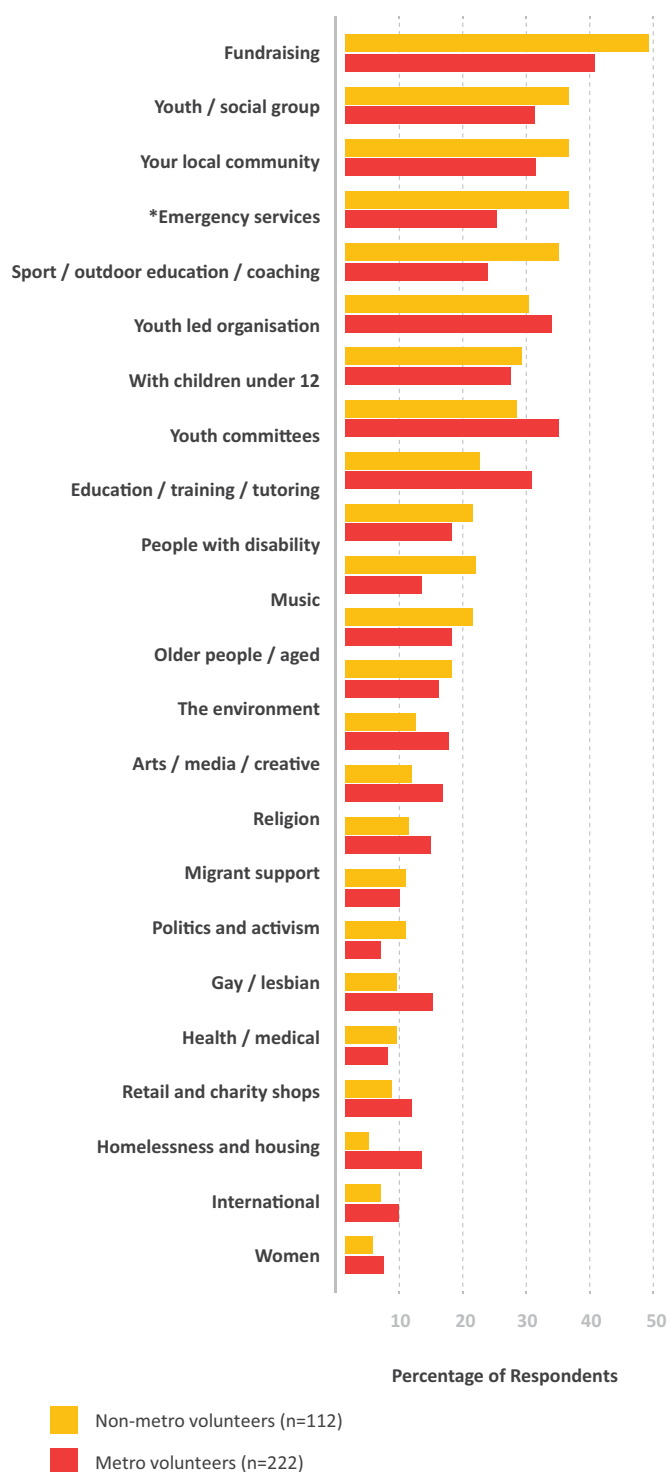


Figure 13: Areas young people volunteered: Volunteers' responses by geographical location

* Emergency services includes: St John Ambulance, Royal Life Saving Society and the Country Fire Authority.

Note: Volunteer areas that received less than 10% of responses have not been included in this figure.

² Young people who reside in metropolitan Melbourne include those from Metropolitan North, Metropolitan East, Metropolitan South and Metropolitan West.

³ Young people who reside in non-metropolitan Melbourne including those from Gippsland, Barwon South West, Loddon Mallee, Grampians and Hume.

The culture of volunteering in rural and regional Victoria played a strong role in young people getting started in volunteering. Volunteers from non-metropolitan Melbourne indicated that having someone talk to them about volunteering, hearing about it in their community and being invited to volunteer were key in introducing them to volunteering. Volunteers from non-metropolitan Melbourne were significantly less likely to identify that their educational institution had a role in introducing them to volunteering. This is an issue for young people in non-metropolitan Melbourne who are not part of a community of volunteering. As these young people are unlikely to be exposed to volunteering in their community, in their educational setting, and are unlikely to come across print or online media about volunteering; so how do they get started?

Volunteering: A normative part of rural and regional Victorian communities

The different role that volunteering has in rural and regional Victoria as compared to metropolitan Melbourne was also evident in the factors that motivated young people to volunteer. Young volunteers from metropolitan Melbourne were motivated to volunteer because they wanted to improve their employability, with fifty percent of volunteers from metropolitan Melbourne identifying this as a motivation, compared to thirty percent of volunteers for non-metropolitan Melbourne. Equally, volunteers from metropolitan-Melbourne were more likely to feel that volunteering had helped improve their employment outcomes. This suggests that in rural and regional Victoria, volunteering is less likely to be seen as something that develops the professional skills and employment prospects of young people, but rather as something community members do, not for any other reason, than it is an expected behaviour.

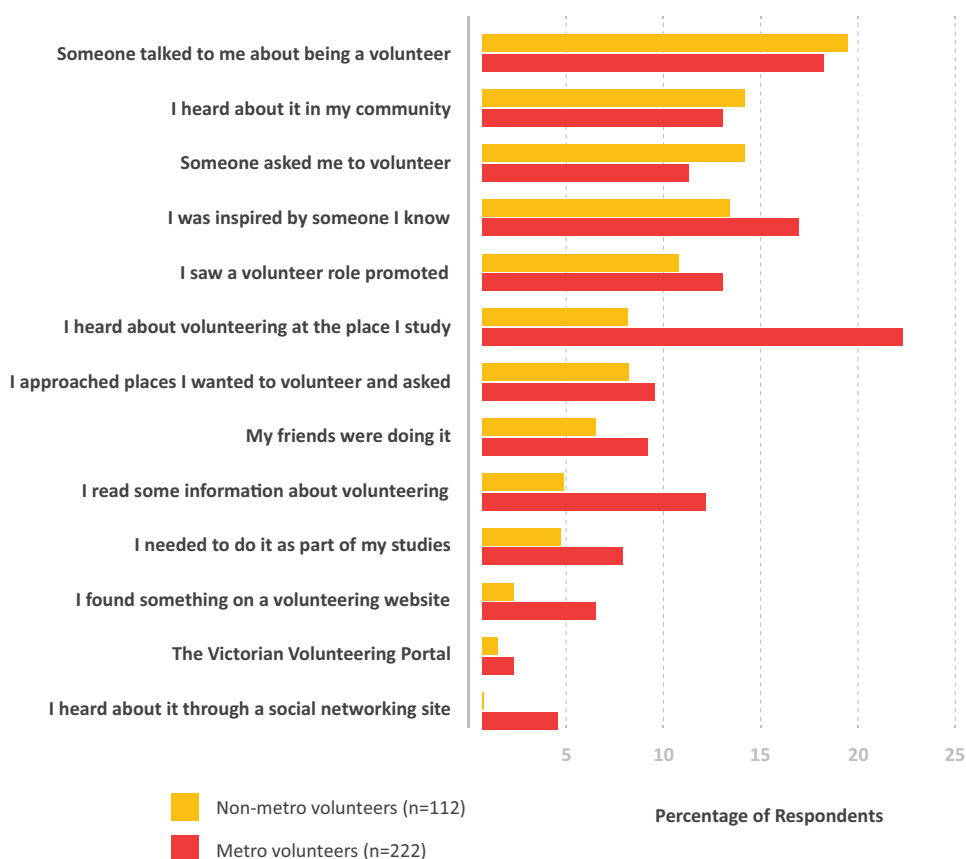


Figure 14: Getting started: Volunteers' responses by geographical location

The impact of volunteering as identified by volunteers from non-metropolitan Melbourne, as represented in figure 15, suggest that their experiences were less likely to push them out of their comfort zone, expose them to alternate world views or values that were different from their own. This suggests that for young people in rural and regional Victoria, it can be harder to find social-cause volunteering roles. For volunteering to impact upon connection of young people to community and develop their personal and professional skills, opportunities need to be meaningful and diverse. There needs to be opportunities for young people to volunteer in standard cause roles as well as social cause service, the combination of both builds the volunteering base of young people and develops the social fabric of community.

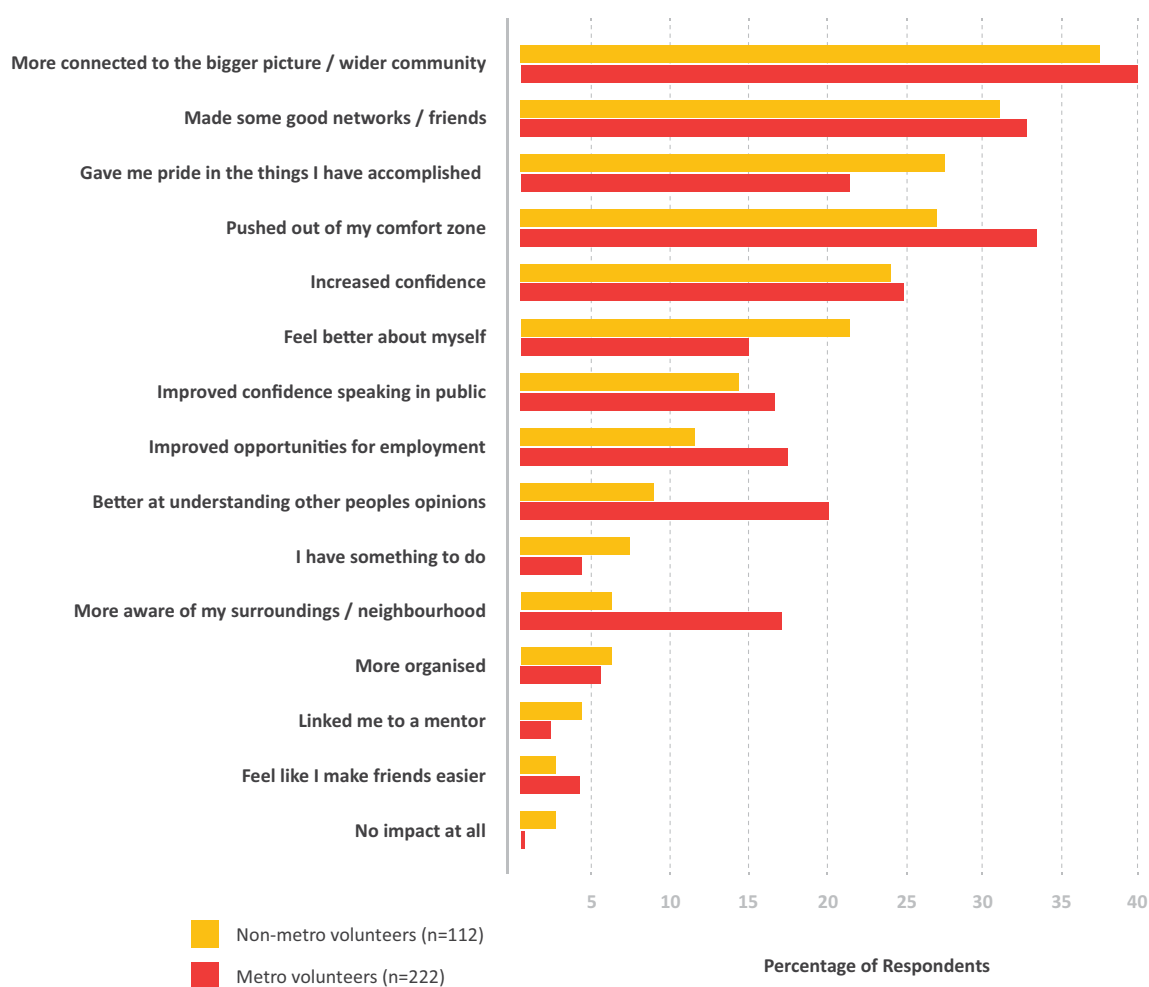


Figure 15: Perceived impact of volunteering: Volunteers' responses by geographical location

Differences in volunteering experiences based upon disability

This study considered the experience of volunteering for young people with a disability. While the sample was relatively small (27 respondents reported as having a disability), it is still useful to explore the experiences of these young people.

Volunteers with a disability were more likely than young people without a disability to select that they volunteered because they thought it would help them get a job, but only ten percent felt that volunteering had improved their employment opportunities. However, they did identify that volunteering had helped build their confidence and helped them think more about their career. This may well be a question of mismatched expectations, with young people with a disability expecting unrealistically that volunteering will lead to employment; but given that across the sample young people identified that volunteering had improved their employment opportunities this is unlikely. This is more likely to be a reflection of the young person's volunteering experience – the type of training they are able to attend, the types of tasks they fulfil in their role as well as the opportunities that are available. Are there opportunities for a young person with a disability to develop skills and confidence as a volunteer, moving from standard cause service to social cause service?

Skills and expertise to share

A strong motivational factor for volunteers with a disability was that they wanted to volunteer because they had skills and knowledge they wanted to share. This challenges stereotypes that portray young people with a disability as the passive recipients of volunteering (Lukka and Ellis, 2001). Young people with a disability in this study were volunteering and were motivated to volunteer because they had skills and expertise they wanted to share. It is important to create opportunities for dialogue between community organisations/groups and young people with a disability to identify what the young person's skills and interests are and also to understand their support and accessibility needs.

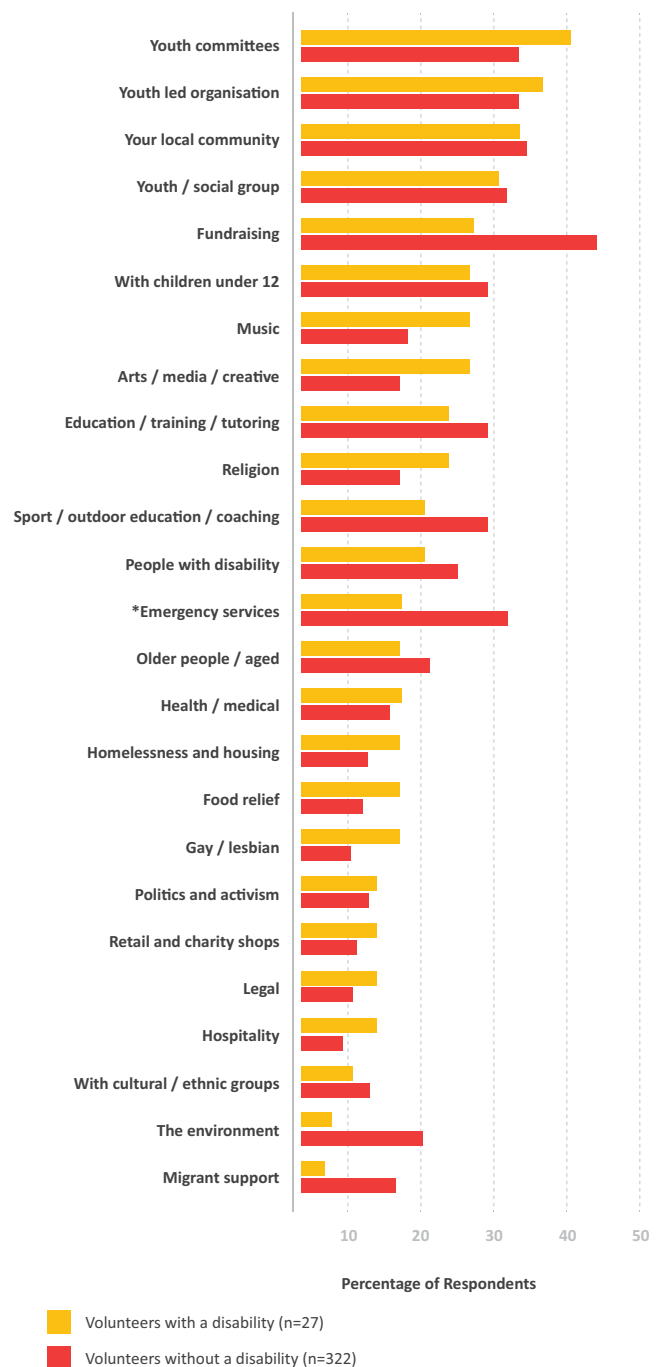


Figure 16: Areas young people volunteered: Responses of volunteers with and without a disability

* Emergency services includes: St John Ambulance, Royal Life Saving Society and the Country Fire Authority.

Note: Volunteer areas that received less than 10% of responses have not been included in this figure.

For some young people, volunteering had no impact

Figure 17 illustrates the perceived impact of volunteering for young people with and without a disability. Of considerable concern, is that seven percent of young people with a disability felt that being a volunteer had had no impact on their life. Volunteering in a role that has had no impact upon a young person's personal or professional development, peer networks or connection to community raises some significant questions about the

nature of the volunteering opportunity. Young people with a disability need to be supported and encouraged to identify what they are looking for in a volunteer role with community organisations and groups, and equally community organisations and groups need to continue to work towards creating accessible and meaningful volunteering opportunities. An experience where a young person volunteers, yet feels their contribution has been of no benefit, may be counter-productive at the individual, organisation and community level.

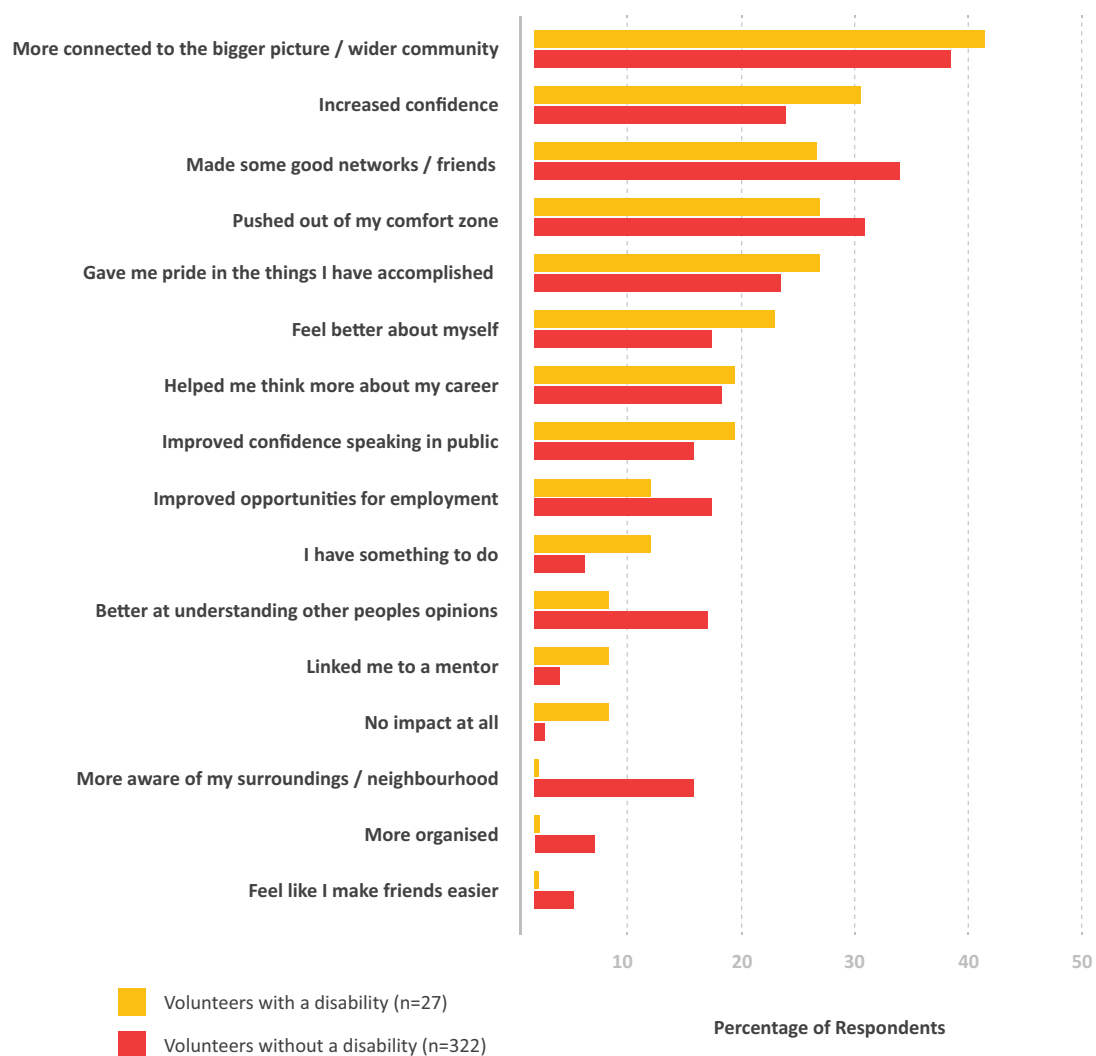


Figure 17: Perceived impact of volunteering: Responses of volunteers with and without a disability

Differences in volunteering experiences based upon cultural diversity

The experience of volunteering is different for culturally diverse young people. In this study, the indicator for cultural diversity has been broadly captured as young people for whom English is not the main language spoken at home.

More meaningful opportunities

Young people's experience of volunteering varied according to the language spoken at home. Volunteers who did not speak English at home felt that volunteering had developed their personal and professional skills i.e. overall confidence, confidence with public speaking and familiarity with their surroundings and neighbourhood. They were significantly less likely to indicate that

volunteering had improved their connection to community or that volunteering had pushed them out of their comfort zone (as depicted in figure 18).

The impact of volunteering for young people who do not speak English as a main language at home, is shaped by the areas in which they were volunteering. Culturally diverse young people were largely volunteering in standard cause service roles – which are less likely to exposure them to people with different values, beliefs and opinions or to public issues that affect whole communities. To strengthen the volunteering opportunities for young people from cultural diverse backgrounds, organisations and groups (including culturally specific organisations and groups) need to identify roles that serve as an entry point to volunteering for culturally diverse young people (i.e. standard cause service) as well as more challenging opportunities that expose young people to different people and different issues (i.e. social cause service).

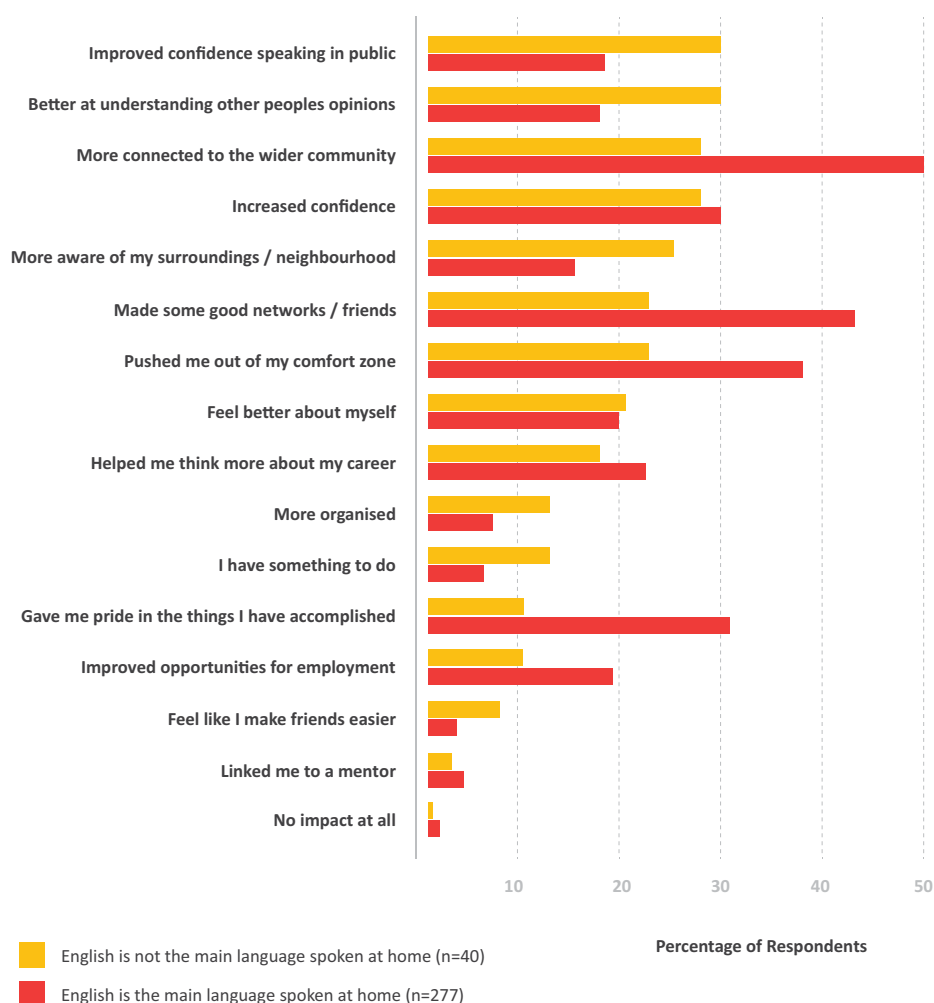


Figure 18: Perceived impact of volunteering: Responses of volunteers grouped by the main language spoken at home

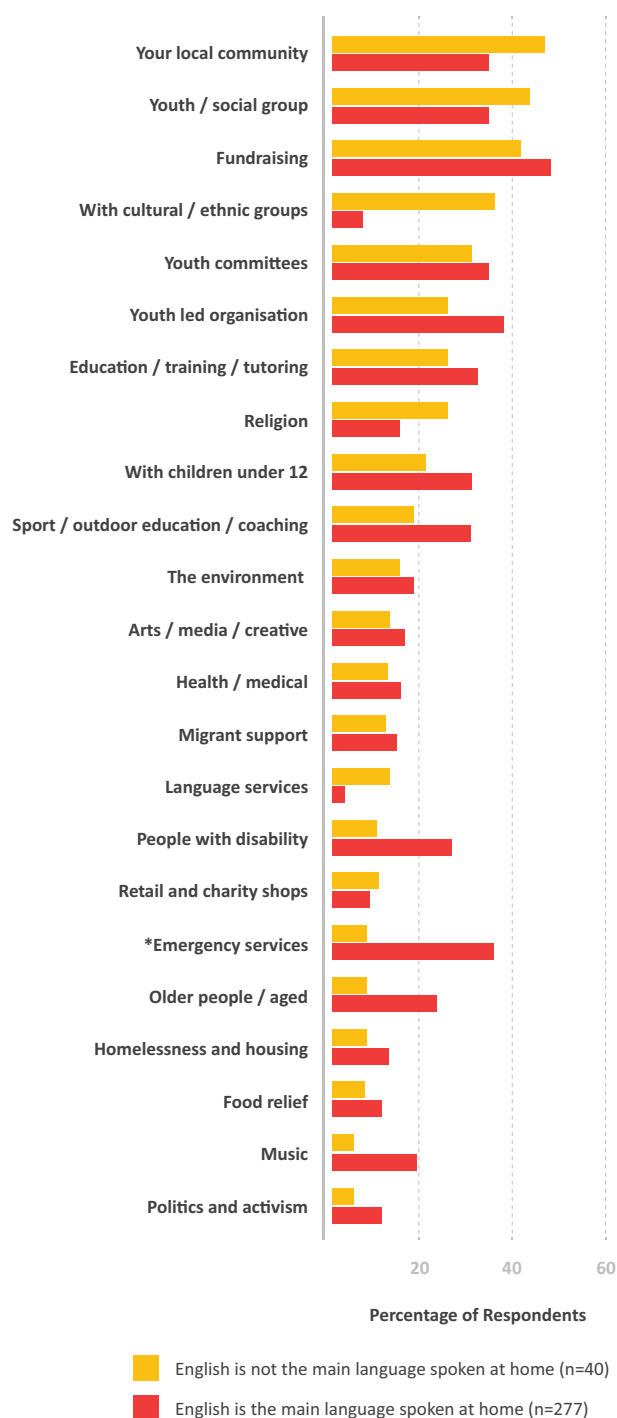


Figure 19: Areas young people volunteered: Responses of volunteers grouped by the main language spoken at home

* Emergency services includes: St John Ambulance, Royal Life Saving Society and the Country Fire Authority.

Note: Volunteer areas that received less than 10% of responses have not been included in this figure.

Role of Community

Community has a strong role in the lives of young people and their families from culturally diverse backgrounds and influences how young people get started with volunteering. Volunteers in this study who did not speak English as their main language, indicated that they started to volunteer because someone had talked to them about volunteering or they heard about opportunities to volunteer through their community. They were significantly less likely to hear about volunteering through their school community (language schools, secondary schools or tertiary institutions) as compared to volunteers who spoke English as a main language. The lack of information and opportunities to volunteer within educational settings is a recurrent theme in this study. An inclusive society ensures that information and opportunities to participate are extended to all its members, including information about and opportunities to volunteer.

Cultural competence strengthens cultural diversity

Volunteers who did not speak English as their main language, were volunteering largely with their own community – either an ethno-specific community or a youth specific community (refer to figure 19). This may be a reflection of:

- *The interest areas of cultural diverse young people:* they may be interested in volunteering with their own ethnic community as a way to give back to a community that had supported their migration and/or settlement or seeking culturally specific organisations and groups with whom they feel accepted and understood.
- *The role that young people take in families where the adults at home have a limited confidence with English:* this is supported by the frequency in which young people volunteer in language services which is significantly higher than for young people who spoke English as a main language at home.
- *The experience and understanding of their parents with volunteering as well as with non-ethno specific community organisations or groups:* Parents may have a limited understanding of what volunteering involves or of organisations and groups outside of their cultural community.

- *Community groups and organisations that support diverse communities being more attractive to culturally diverse young volunteers:* They may be more aware of these organisations and groups as a result of the affiliation of family and friends with these groups; and they may find that these organisations and groups have a greater level of cultural competence making it easier for young people to volunteer.

For community organisations and groups to have a volunteer base that reflects the diversity of the community they support, they need to continue to strengthen their organisations cultural competence, developing and reviewing their strategy for attracting culturally diverse young volunteers. This includes understanding what motivates young people from culturally diverse backgrounds to volunteer, the way volunteering is promoted and information provided (to both young people and families). This will increase their understanding of diversity, their connection to diverse communities and create avenues through which to promote and talk about volunteering.

Volunteering: The perspective of young people who have no experience with volunteering

There were forty-eight (48) respondents in the study who indicated that they had no experience of volunteering. The areas non-volunteers indicated they would be most interested, in if they were to start volunteering, included volunteering with animals, a youth/social group and/or the environment. One respondent indicated that they would not be interested in volunteering in any of these areas.

Interest but no opportunities

The top five most commonly selected areas of interest for both non-volunteers and volunteers are represented in figure 20. Sixty two percent of volunteers indicated that they had or were currently volunteering in a youth specific interest area, referring to an activity where young people are volunteering with their peers, in youth-led organisations, youth committees and youth social groups. Twenty five percent of non-volunteers indicated that they would be interested in volunteering in a youth specific area. This suggests somewhat of a mismatch between the interest of volunteering and the opportunities that are available for young people e.g. non-volunteers indicated that they were interested in volunteering with animals but the pattern of volunteering suggests that very few young people actually volunteered with animals. Non-volunteers identified areas of interests that are part of a broader community, but volunteers were primarily volunteering with a youth specific community.



Information is the key

The non-volunteers in this study tended to not be part of a 'community of volunteering' - they were less likely to know someone who had volunteered and identified that not knowing someone who had volunteered was a barrier to volunteering, as represented in figure 21. Knowing someone who volunteers introduces young people to the idea of volunteering and legitimises it as something people they know do.

Young people need to have access to:

- information about volunteering;
- people who have volunteered; and
- opportunities to volunteer.

A contemporary image of volunteering needs to be promoted through the communities of which young people are members, including sporting groups, school communities and ethnic communities.

"Volunteering should be promoted in a way that the benefits for the person are clearer."

Female volunteer, 16

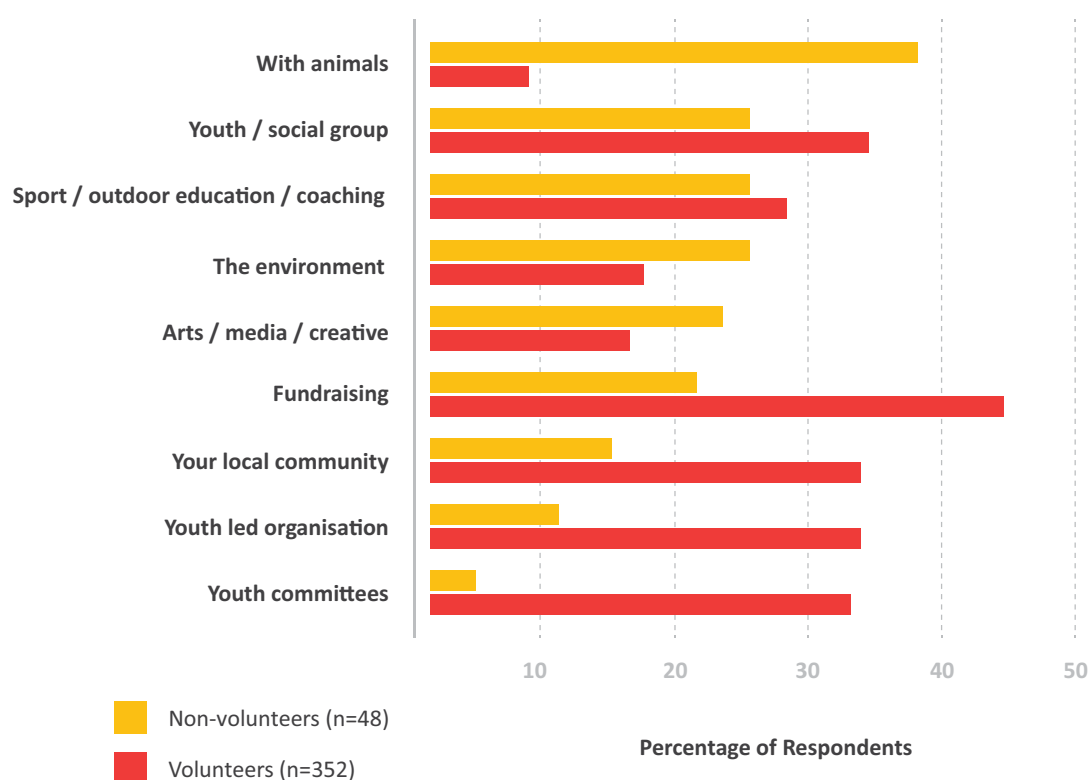


Figure 20: Top five areas of volunteering interest: Comparing responses from volunteers and non-volunteers

Time for something meaningful

Having the time to volunteer was a commonly cited barrier to volunteering in this study, with forty-six percent of non-volunteers indicating this. The limitations of time also featured for young people who had previously volunteered: sixteen percent indicated that they were not currently volunteering predominately due to time constraints. While there is no doubt that concerns regarding availability and time affect a young person's ability to volunteer, ample free time is not necessarily a prerequisite to volunteering.

As illustrated in table 1: young people across the sample were juggling a multitude of roles and the majority made time to volunteer. Of the sample (including both volunteers and non-volunteers) 165 young people were enrolled in TAFE or university and 133 were enrolled in secondary school. Ninety six percent of those enrolled in TAFE or university were volunteering and seventy six percent of those enrolled in secondary school were volunteering. The volunteers in this sample did not volunteer because they had a lot of free time but because they wanted to do something meaningful, of benefit and something that was fun.

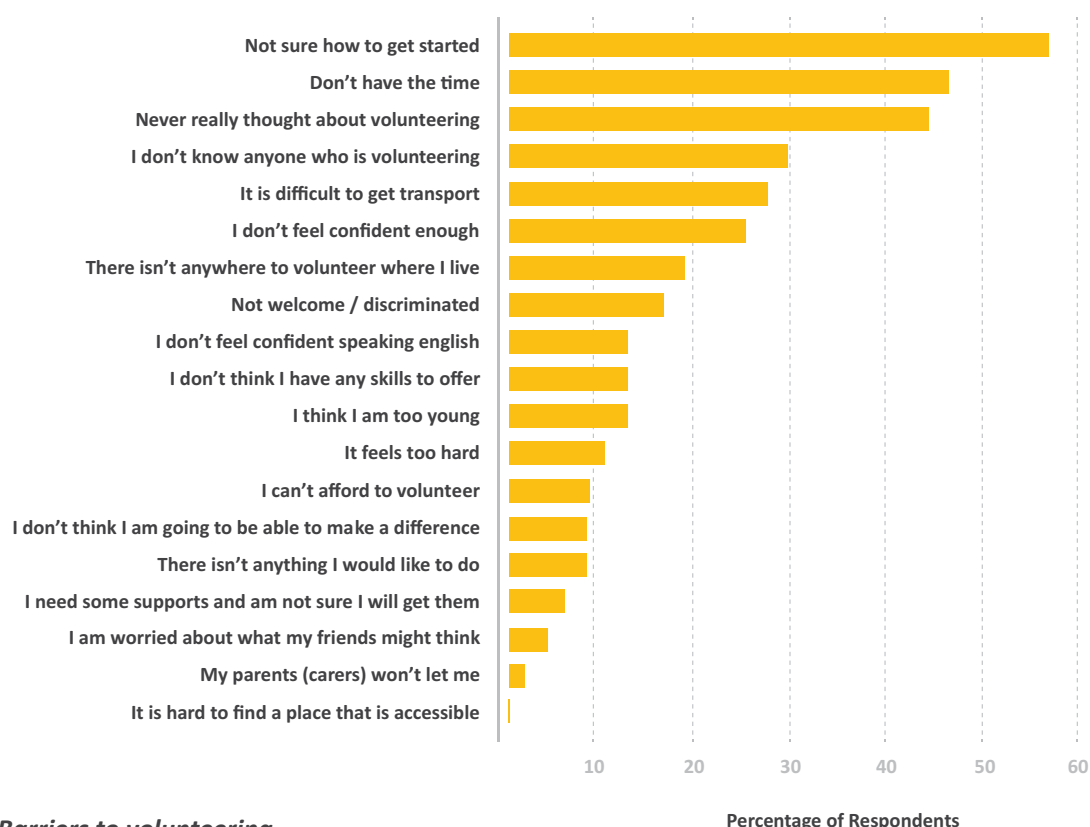


Figure 21: Barriers to volunteering

	At TAFE or University		Enrolled at Secondary School	
	Total number of respondents		165	
Other Commitments	Enrolled at TAFE or University		-	
	Enrolled at English Language School		7%	
	Working part time		56%	
	Looking for part time work		22%	
	Working full time		37%	
	Looking for full time work		10%	
	Apprenticeship		3%	
	Volunteering		96%	

Table 1: The other commitments of young people in the study who are enrolled in a tertiary institution

Recommendations

This study supports the role of volunteering in the active engagement and participation of young people in the community as well as its impact upon both the personal and professional development of young people. This study highlights the gaps and areas for further research, development, capacity building and support. The following are recommendations and suggested areas of action that are informed by the findings of this study.

1. YACVic recommends the development and use of a contemporary and relevant definition of volunteering that recognises the contributions of young people.

- a) YACVic to work in partnership with peak bodies for volunteering to support the development and implementation of a more inclusive and contemporary identity for volunteering.
- b) YACVic to conduct consultations with young volunteers to ensure that the identity and definition of volunteering captures their current experience of volunteering.

2. YACVic recommends the continued development of resources (both print and online) that inform young people about volunteering.

- a) YACVic to work in partnership with the Office for Youth, Department of Planning and Community Development and Volunteering Victoria to strengthen the online resources and information that is available to young people.
- b) YACVic to develop youth specific information about volunteering including tools to support young people (and support workers/teachers) to plan and identify areas in which young people would be interested in volunteering, and online resources where young people can share and obtain information and inspiration.

3. YACVic recommends the continued capacity building of community organisations and groups to be better able to create and identify meaningful volunteering opportunities for diverse groups of young people.

- a) YACVic to provide professional development sessions and workshops to community organisations and volunteer networks that support the development of youth volunteering opportunities

- b) YACVic to work in partnership with local volunteer resource centres to offer tailored support to community organisations and groups who have a genuine commitment to increasing youth volunteering in their organisation.
- c) YACVic to develop strategies and tools that can be used by community organisations and groups to develop their ability to have young people volunteer i.e. self assessment tools (re: “Are you ready to have young people as volunteers?”), planning tools
- d) YACVic, Volunteering Victoria and Volunteer Resource Centres to continue to approach, engage and develop the capacity of community organisations and groups, who do not typically engage young people, to create opportunities for young people to volunteer.
- e) Community organisations to consider the development of a regular internship program for young people with their organisation.
- f) Continued support of youth participation programs that encourage and support the voluntary contribution of young people in their community (e.g. FReeZA, YPA).
- g) Community organisations and groups to continue to develop their cultural competence so that they are better able to attract and support culturally diverse young volunteers.

4. YACVic recommends the strengthening of volunteering awareness programs and volunteering opportunities in educational institutions

- a) Continued and increased support for programs that foster volunteering and community service in schools, including the ADVANCE program (Office for Youth), awards programs that include a community service component (Awards Australia), VicSRC, and leadership development programs (i.e. REACH, The Oaktree Foundation).

- b) YACVic to develop a series of workshops for young people (upper primary through to secondary school) complemented by a train-the-trainer package (for teachers, youth and community workers) to introduce and inspire young people to get involved with volunteering and community service in their own community.
 - c) Secondary schools celebrating the voluntary contribution of young people in their school community as school leaders, SRC representatives in school newsletters and local media.
 - d) Inviting young volunteers to share with and inform other young people about their volunteering experience e.g. young volunteers speaking to school groups.
- 5. YACVic recommends the continued development of the capacity of the youth and community sector to use online media and social networks to engage with and support youth volunteering.**
- a) Continued support and resourcing for the Office of the Community Sector who are working to increase the usage of information and communications technology by community organisations.
 - b) Volunteer Resource Centres working in partnership with local youth services providers and/or YACVic to create opportunities for young people to volunteer, to train adults and workers in the community in relation to how to use social networks and online media.
 - c) Development of print and online resources that support organisations with social networking, including managing and responding to risk management concerns.
- 6. YACVic recommends the development and support of a community of young volunteers.**
- a) Development of an online community where young volunteers can make contact with each other, share information, promote opportunities and create a public face for youth volunteering.
 - b) YACVic in partnership with youth service providers, to develop a framework to support and provide training opportunities for young volunteers in their local area.
 - c) Further investigation and development the initiative proposed at the 2020 summit regarding volunteering and the reduction of a student's HECS-HELP debt.
- 7. YACVic recommends continued support and development of activities and campaigns that legitimise and raise awareness of youth volunteering in the community.**
- a) Development of a recognised state-wide awards program with a focus on youth volunteering (in partnership with Awards Victoria) that recognises young people and their volunteering.
 - b) Continued support and development of campaigns that raise awareness of volunteering and encourage people to talk about volunteering, with a specific youth appeal (i.e. creation of "I Heart Volunteering" badges)
- 8. YACVic recommends strengthening of support and resources for young people who are organising their own social action.**
- a) Start-up grants for youth-led organisations and groups to support them in the development stage.
 - b) Continued support and expansion of Foundation of Young Australians' Young Social Entrepreneurs Program
- 9. YACVic recommends continued research into the role, experience and impact of volunteering on a young person's life and community.**
- a) Further research into volunteering and the experience and barriers for particular groups of young people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people with a disability, young people from regional and rural Victoria and young people aged 8 to 14.
 - b) Research and development of alternate models of volunteering which include family volunteering opportunities, opportunities for young people to volunteer in a group as well as the capacity and opportunity for the for-profit sector to support youth volunteering.



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"It is one of those difficult things that is incredibly difficult to fit in, but there is always and will always be time. The reward of seeing smiles and achievements is always worth the haste that can sometimes come with volunteering"

Female volunteer, 20





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