

Volunteer Engagement: Building Parent Participation In P&Cs Across WA

WACSSO Volunteering Research Project funded by Volunteering WA grant

Ngala kwop biddi.
Building a brighter
future, together.

Megan Paull - Murdoch University
Susanna Wills-Johnson – WACSSO
(Kath Sugars – Murdoch University)



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that Murdoch University is situated on the lands of the Whadjuk and Binjareb Noongar people.

We pay our respect to their enduring and dynamic culture and the leadership of Noongar Elders past and present.

The boodjar (country) on which Murdoch University is located has, for thousands of years, been a place of learning. We at Murdoch University are proud to continue this long tradition.



What is WACSSO?

- Established in 1921 as the peak body representing parents of public school students in Western Australia
- A largely volunteer organisation comprising Councillors (representatives) from 20 electorates across Western Australia and a small, agile staff team.
- Represents 650 public school P&Cs on decision-making committees within the Department of Education, as well as to State and Federal Members of Parliament.
- Contribute to a large number of state and national inquiries related to education each year.
- Services include: advocacy, training, insurance for P&Cs, resources, advice, events (Conference and P&C Day), research and essential information and updates.



Volunteering WA funded project



Recruiting parent volunteers is a perennial problem

The research aims to explore three broad questions

1. What works and does not work to recruit parent volunteers to P&Cs across Western Australia?
2. What can be done to increase participation in P&C activities?
3. How can P&Cs increase the participation and inclusion of a more diverse range of parents?

We are looking to

- Identify challenges in recruitment and retention
- Identify success stories about P&Cs increasing parent engagement
- Explore opportunities and barriers for increased diversity and inclusion in P&Cs
- Develop and publish a range of implementable strategies for P&Cs to increase parent engagement

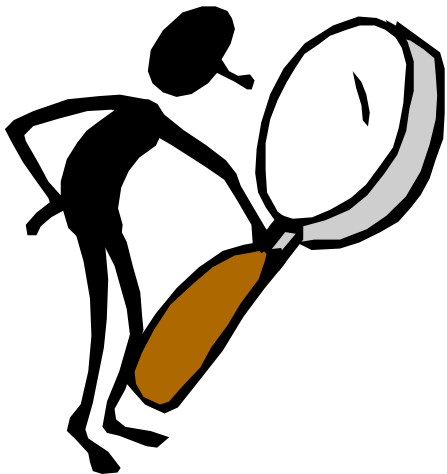
Approach

What research has been done elsewhere?

Online survey...

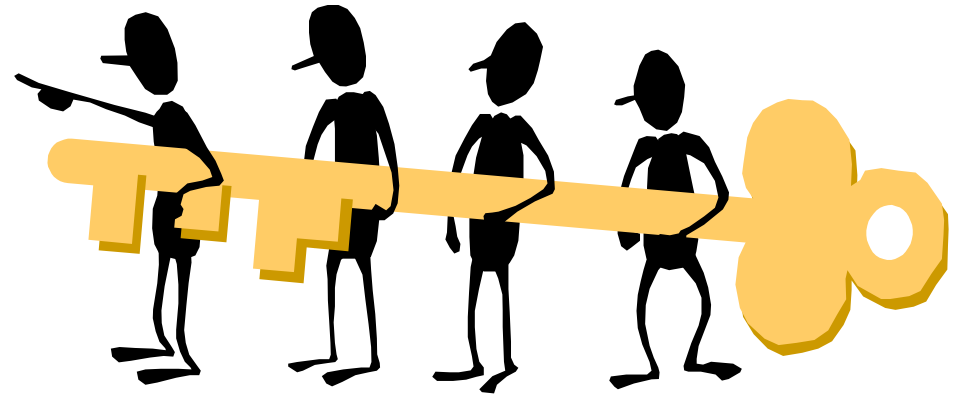
Check-in at WACSSO Conference

Interviews



What do we mean by....?

- Participation
- Volunteering
- Diversity
- Inclusion



Before the WACSSO conference in August...

Responses most commonly

- 35–45 years old
- With primary school children
- Metropolitan
- Already on a P&C for at least a year, many more than 5 years
- Many also doing other volunteering

Diverse?

Final numbers in survey

- 238 recorded responses
- 79 offers of interviews
- Includes non-volunteers

- Mainly female
- English speaking
- Some born overseas
- 1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person
- 2 people with other equity, diversity and inclusion factors

When asked: What do you imagine when you think of a successful P&C...?

Volunteering	Community	Purpose	Objectives	Culture	Process
Active, motivated, committed, vibrant, fun, happy, engaged	Creates sense of belonging in school community, connects people	For benefit of all students and the school	Activities, events, fun, infrastructure; resources	Teamwork, cohesion; variety of skills and ideas; understand and share roles and responsibility of P&C	Organised; coordinated roles and effort
Give time generously	Collaboration, friendship, good relationships	To give students a better school experience	Listen to needs of families; goals are strategic; P&C goals align with school goals	Creative, imaginative, "why not?" attitude, identifies as successful	Good governance; democratic; transparent; inclusive
Many willing coordinators and volunteers for planning and running events	Representative of school community, inclusive, welcoming, open	To make a difference; contribute	Raise money (lots of money; enough for what is needed; money in the bank)	Inviting, welcoming, friendly, inclusive, open, encouraging, listen to everyone, safe	Productive meetings, well-attended, well-run ("not too legalistic or pedantic"; "short")
Load shared equally; also (conversely); flexible in how people contribute	Families, Principal and staff, and local community	Valued by school community, understood as making a positive impact	Provide services to school community, runs canteen, uniform shop	No power struggles, divisions, individual issues, hidden agendas, gossiping or cliques; limited conflict	Organisational memory and knowledge sharing; "passing the baton"

When asked to imagine a P&C personally would like to join...



What are factors which in personal experience act as a barrier to volunteers joining the P&C?

Not a barrier	Minor barrier	Somewhat a barrier	Major barrier	Stops people joining
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial or legal liability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceived lack of skills or knowledge• Meeting times• Not knowing what to expect• Not being aware of need for volunteers• Not being asked	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time• Not fitting in socially• Not valuing the role of the P&C	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ...?

What motivated respondents to volunteer for their P&C?

To be involved
in my children's
school

Belonging...?

Purpose...?

To do my
bit

Enjoyment...?

To do
something of
value... with
other people

Because
it's fun!!

When we asked people who have never been on a P&C...?

A sense of confidence in the group, the intentions and the friendliness

Belonging...?

Purpose...?

Not having to go to **committee meetings**

Enjoyment...?

If I had more **time** or felt more like I could make a difference

I don't think I would want to be on a **committee**, but would be happy to support and volunteer

THINKSPOT

There are two types of people: those who rather like being on committees, and those who would rather walk barefoot over Lego

What are factors which in personal experience act as a barrier to volunteers joining the P&C?

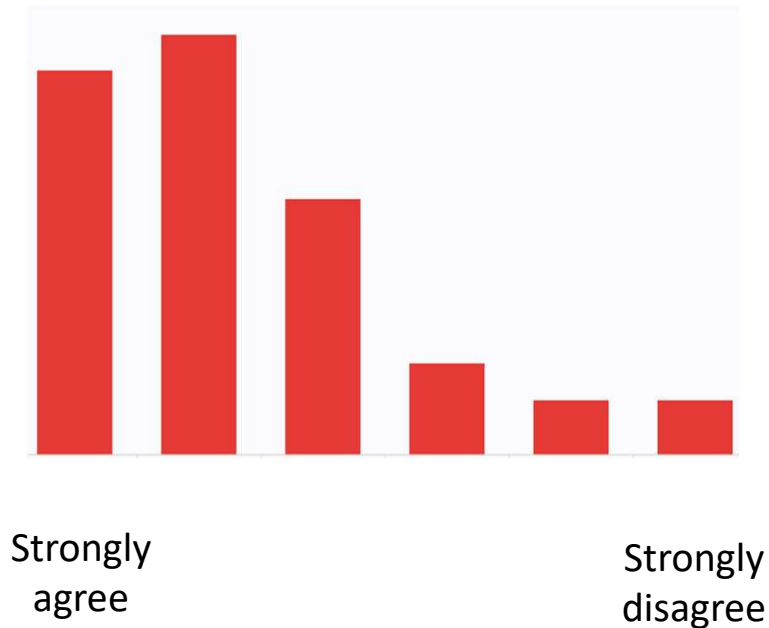
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Barriers can be surprising or look different

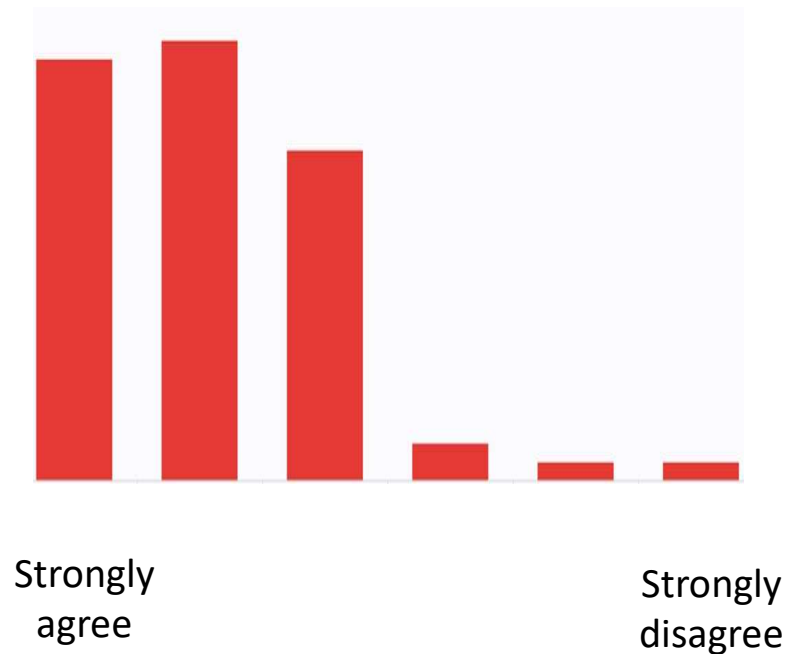
I come from overseas
with no p and c...
I didn't know what the
p and c do

The "citizens" bit is
evidenced in a real story from
a local school where parents
were not joining P&C events
and when asked they stated
that they were not citizens so
thought it was not for them

The cultural balance of students in the school should be reflected on the P&C



Getting more volunteers for the P&C is the highest priority, and if they bring diversity that is a bonus



Priorities?

**More diversity
or
More volunteers**

It only took small actions from two people to keep me on the P&C. New members need to have someone to take them under their wing

I feel part of a group where I am valued, and my input is needed and useful; I get along with everyone, and feel that what I am doing is playing an important part in the school's future

People want to make a difference and they get satisfaction from helping out

The fundraising and events run by P&C's are actually very very fun!



Share the load ~~equally~~

~~vs~~ and

Everyone contribute
what they can

Image by Jack-Moreh



Why people leave...?

From those who are still there...

1. People stuff

2. The nature of change

I had a clash with our president over something and at the time I was feeling very drained in my position along with me being a full-time working parent and running a part time business

Conflict: Low probability, high impact?

My P&C experiences have been great,
but I have heard nightmare stories
from other P&Cs, particularly on the
topic of people that won't leave, but
are a negative influence on the
committee

People talk of "cliques"
which can and do
occur, but **I have not
found them an issue
personally**

Have you ever tried to get someone to stay? What did you do or say?

Begged

Ultimately it
is often delaying
the inevitable

Just tried to get someone
to reconsider—extended
their involvement for
a while

Had a conversation with them—asked
what their concerns were—tried to
address them so they could stay in
some capacity

People give so much
time and effort, it
would be irresponsible
to request they continue
to give more

Is it ethical to ask someone to stay when they want to leave?

If I have to stay then they have to stay!

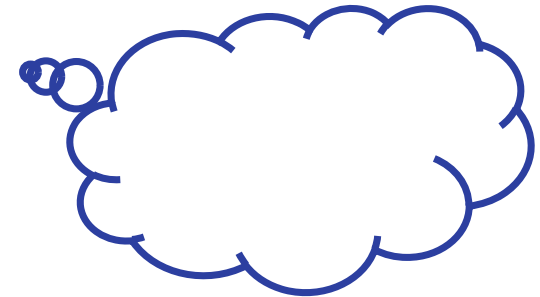
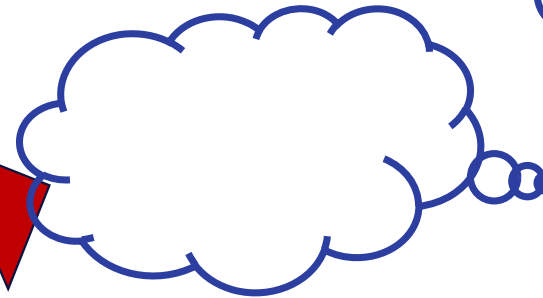
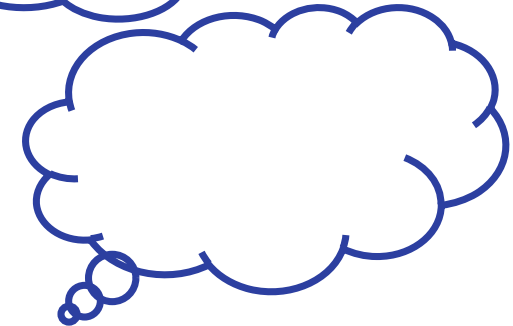
Thank you
and
farewell

Getting people to join... or stay....

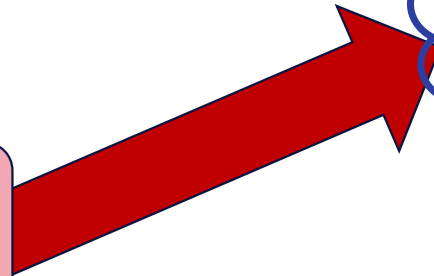


So far...

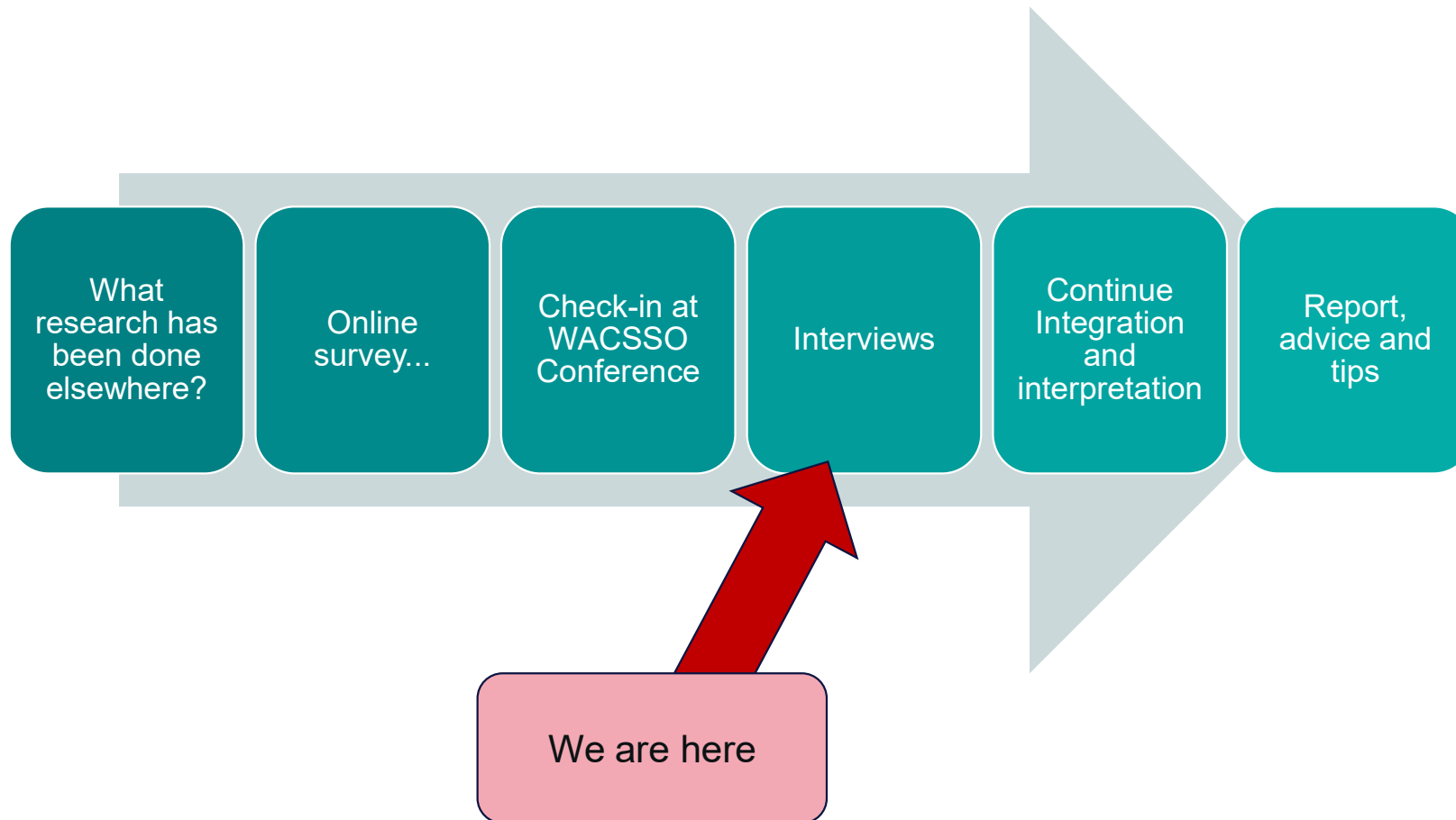
Make sure it's fun and changing,
ensure everyone gets a say and vote,
share responsibilities and
include everyone...



We are here



What next?



Closing comments

- Layered opportunities to enact change through P&C / WACSSO
- P&C stories show depth and breadth of impact
- Reconnection with schools (and volunteering) post-COVID
- Collective impact of school P&Cs across WA: millions of dollars annually and hundreds of hours committed at each school
- Encouraging culture change by spotlighting success rather than seeking contact to solve problems



WACSSO

Questions

Email WACSSO for contact information

Kath, Megan and Suze

communications@wacssso.wa.edu.au

Building Parent Participation In P&Cs Across WA



**Dr Megan
Paull**

Project Lead
Murdoch University



Susanna Wills-Johnson

Marketing & Communications
Specialist
WACCSO