



volunteering<sup>WA</sup>

# Growing inclusive and thriving volunteer communities

Success stories from our  
project-based grants program



2022/23

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, the VMA program aims to create a thriving, inclusive and diverse volunteering culture across Australia. Volunteering WA are proud to partner with the Department of Social Services in the delivery of the program, which aims to deliver services and activities that help build the capacity of volunteering involving organisations and break down barriers to volunteering.



## Welcome

Volunteering WA are delighted to present this booklet highlighting the outcomes of the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) Project-Based Grants 2022/23.

Last year, Volunteering WA launched a VMA project-based grants program to support projects focused on removing barriers for priority group volunteers, including First Nations people, newly arrived migrants, people with disability, vulnerable women, youth and the unemployed.

Community organisations were invited to apply for any projects that supported participation from one or more of the priority groups; demonstrated best practice and innovation in metro, regional and rural areas; built capacity and collaborations in the sector; and where learnings could be shared to strengthen our volunteering sector.

Seven organisations were selected to undertake projects in 2022-23 and we are thrilled to share the outcomes, stories and learnings in this booklet.

We thank our project partners and commend them on their project achievements. They are wonderful examples of how people from priority groups can enjoy contributing to their community through meaningful volunteering.

We hope the case studies and their key learnings will inspire you to expand your volunteer programs by making them more inclusive and accessible, and proactively engage with volunteers from priority groups in the future.

Working together, we can help you create a more inclusive and accessible volunteer program.

Tina Williams, CEO Volunteering WA

For more information, training or resources:  
**visit the Volunteering WA website at [www.volunteeringwa.org.au](http://www.volunteeringwa.org.au)**



*The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



Volunteering WA respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country across Western Australia in which we live and share. We also pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge their ongoing contribution.

\* Please note: Some names in this booklet have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

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# Reconnecting with community



Organisation:

**Befriend**

Website: [befriend.org.au](https://befriend.org.au)

Focus: First Nations



***Sam\* is a proud First Nations woman who strongly believes in connected communities and being in service to others. After realising that she had become isolated and disconnected from society, she started to actively look for volunteering opportunities. "I was looking for ways to learn how to be part of community," Sam said.***

In her search, Sam came across Befriend, a Perth-based organisation that supports people to come together and build thriving communities. Befriend connected with Sam when she attended one of their online workshops, "Contributing to your community: Discovering what you love to give". Sam also took part in a second online workshop with Befriend called "Stepping stones: Taking the next steps to connect with your community."

## APPROACH

The language around connecting with community really resonated. For Sam, it was important to find opportunities that felt natural and without set agendas. She was looking for groups where people supported each other in more general ways, and the Befriend workshops were a great fit. The workshops helped to feel more confident with volunteering.

## OUTCOME

The Befriend workshops sparked a snowball effect of involvement for Sam. She attended a writing group, storytelling workshop, and connected with a local Befriend community builder. They chatted through ideas for Aboriginal-led art workshops that Sam wants to host in the near future. She has also started volunteering with the Red Cross and is in the process of becoming a facilitator with the Alternatives to Violence Project Australia.

Sam wants to continue exploring what community really means to her. She shared that having welcoming and friendly experiences with an organisation that is grassroots in nature, has motivated her to connect more. In the future, Sam is interested in hosting her own group, where people can connect and support each other.

"The Befriend workshops really helped me come out of my shell and kind of lit a fire under me. They encouraged me to be involved and contribute more. The informal, inclusive, encouraging, and safe ways these sessions were run helped 'bring me out of myself'. By not being put into a tick box of a role, I am inclined to want to do more." – Sam (volunteer)

## LEARNINGS

- By expanding the language used to discuss volunteering, messages covered themes of generosity, empathy and sharing.
- A focus on informal volunteering made it easier to connect people and support mission-aligned and community-led efforts.
- While communities of place are important, there are other types of communities that volunteers may relate to.
- Having a more personal and human approach with people at the start of their volunteering journey can help to find roles that are fulfilling.



# Changing lives through sport



Organisation:

**Fair Game**

Website: [www.fairgame.org.au](http://www.fairgame.org.au)

Focus: First Nations

**FAIRGAME**  
recycling sports equipment inspiring healthy communities.

*“Not everyone is dealt a good hand of cards, and I think sport can really be a game changer.”*

Originally from Katanning, Simon is a proud Noongar man and descendant of the Kaniyang and Goreng Noongar peoples. He has lived on Whadjuk Noongar Country since the age of seven, when his family moved to Perth.

## APPROACH

In August 2022, Simon joined Fair Game through a partnership with UWA's McCusker Centre for Citizenship and St Catherine's College program, Dandjoo Darbalung. While at Fair Game, Simon ran their Recycle & Donate program, which provides pre-loved sporting equipment to communities that need it most. He trained new recruits on all aspects of the program, from unpacking and sorting donations, to cataloguing stock online.

## OUTCOME

At the end of his Fair Game internship, Simon transitioned into a project officer role at the organisation to manage their First Nations internship program. He is now following his dream to teach at Aranmore Catholic College, working with Aboriginal kids in the classroom as a teaching assistant.

*“I've always wanted to be a teacher, because I want to give back to the community and be that person to change people's lives”*

– Simon (volunteer)

## LEARNINGS

- Being flexible will make volunteering more accessible for people, including priority group volunteers. This may mean redesigning processes, following cultural protocols, or adapting flexible volunteering hours.
- Use appropriate methods such as contacting an Aboriginal group, university, society or peak body to allow easy initial conversations, assist with co-design and offer additional support structures for your volunteers.
- Don't 'over-utilise' your priority group volunteers.



## Promoting health to my mob



Organisation:

**Fair Game**

Website: [www.fairgame.org.au](http://www.fairgame.org.au)

Focus: First Nations

**FAIRGAME**  
recycling sports equipment inspiring healthy communities.

Paige's love affair with sport began when she was a kid living in Derby. For as long as she can remember, she has always played one sport or another. At school, she learnt how sport can positively impact a person's health and wellbeing and decided to explore her love and curiosity of sports after graduation. Paige is now studying Sports Science at UWA where she is expanding her knowledge of the human body and how sport and physical activity promote health and performance.

### APPROACH

Paige discovered Fair Game at UWA through her involvement with the McCusker Centre for Citizenship. The Centre was delighted to have her complete a placement towards the end of 2022 in Fair Game's Recycle & Donate program. While completing her placement, Paige worked with Nyikina Mangala Community School, a school she is familiar with as it has close ties to her Derby hometown. "The school has kids that come to Derby and join in on our basketball programs and swimming, which is good because they are only a small community," Paige explains.

### OUTCOME

Once she finishes her masters degree in 2024, Paige plans to return to her community in Derby to teach sports and health. She already knows the kind of work she wants, and plans to work with teenagers mainly. She is acutely aware of health challenges that impact the Aboriginal community in Derby and wants the education, knowledge and confidence to go back to her community and teach there. Paige believes that working with teenagers is a great place to start "because the kids are still learning and developing, so if I teach them they will take it on board."

***"I've made lifelong friendships and because we often have sporting carnivals for basketball in different communities and towns, I play on different teams as well. It gets me networking and knowing other people, being involved in the community – the Kimberly community – not just in my own town".***

**– Paige (volunteer)**

### LEARNINGS

- It is important to know your 'why'. When engaging volunteers, volunteer involving organisations should not simply check boxes but ensure the match is authentic and mission aligned.
- Organisational culture and cultural safety is important. Work towards embedding cultural safety at every layer of the organisation.
- Elevate voices of priority group volunteers to understand different perspectives.



# Home cook to professional caterer



Organisation:

## Multicultural Services Centre WA

Website: [www.mscwa.com.au](http://www.mscwa.com.au)

Focus: New Migrants



MULTICULTURAL SERVICES CENTRE

Multicultural Services Centre WA (MSCWA) supports new migrants and refugees with their settlement, welfare, education and training, cultural and legal needs. During a volunteering awareness workshop with the Persian community, a retired woman Esther\* expressed her interest to volunteer. However, she was unsure of the kind of volunteering she would like to do. Of concern to her was her age and physical ability, as she worried they may be barriers to doing volunteer work. Esther was also worried that volunteering in a new organisation would be too overwhelming and stressful.

### APPROACH

MSCWA introduced Esther to their volunteering buddy system and she happily joined the program. Through the program, MSCWA discovered that she enjoyed cooking at home. After being matched with one of the MSCWA mentors, Esther began her volunteering journey.

### OUTCOME

Esther's mentorship was more than successful, as was the four months she spent in the volunteering program. During this time, she was able to convert her interest in cooking to a professional catering business.

### LEARNINGS

- A volunteering buddy system that includes mentors who are familiar with cultural backgrounds, interests and languages of potential volunteers will be more likely to encourage, connect, and involve new migrant community members.
- Many new migrant participants expressed an interest in volunteering with volunteer involving organisations, after hearing from their representatives (with the use of translators). Many said the experience provided the motivation, encouragement and confidence they needed to volunteer.
- Sharing different volunteering opportunities can encourage more new migrants to volunteer. It's important to cater for a wide range of lived experience, education levels, qualifications and English proficiency.



# Disability is no barrier



Organisations:

## Peel Volunteer Resource Centre

Website: [www.peelvolunteer.org.au](http://www.peelvolunteer.org.au)

## Food Bank WA

Website: [www.foodbankwa.org.au](http://www.foodbankwa.org.au)

Focus: People With Disability



With goals of becoming more inclusive, Foodbank's Peel branch connected with Peel Volunteer Resource Centre (PVRC) to engage people with disabilities through their Socialability program. They knew that their existing team would also benefit from working with volunteers of different abilities, recognising that a diverse volunteer team is a great strength.

### APPROACH

PVRC took responsibility for recruiting and onboarding volunteers with disabilities. They helped with interviews, paperwork, and supporting new volunteers in their first shifts.

Foodbank Peel were faced with several challenges throughout the process. They had to consider space and access in the branch, ensuring that work areas were clear and accessible. Creating more space meant less volunteers could attend at any one time. Physical limitations to some roles, such as heavy lifting or standing for long periods of time, needed to be considered as well.

### OUTCOME

After substantial effort, Foodbank Peel gained four new long-term volunteers and many positive outcomes. While the new recruits were underestimated at first, they showed enthusiasm, were fast paced, and completed a large amount of work. Workspaces were re-designed to be more productive and user friendly, ultimately benefiting everyone.

Recognising that role descriptions needed to be adapted for people with disabilities, PVRC and Foodbank Peel worked together to update them with clear and fair expectations. Flexible work arrangements were also adopted to cater for individual needs.

*"I have met new people and the staff are very welcoming. I look forward to my Thursday when I get out of the house and speak with other people. I have also gained financially as a benefit to volunteering, as you get to purchase cheaper fruit & veggies after your shift. I have gained confidence and am trying out other roles at Foodbank. I will try more tasks without feeling that I can't do it. I feel valued. Thank you for making me feel more confident." – Caroline (volunteer)*

### LEARNINGS

- Disability is not a barrier to volunteering, a diverse volunteer team is a great strength.
- The project had a positive impact on Peel Foodbank's team and culture. Everyone benefited from new perspectives and lived experiences.
- Adapting for people, as opposed to expecting them to fit the organisation, is more likely to lead to success.
- Time spent inducting and mentoring volunteers with disabilities is not a waste but an investment in the future team.
- Using 'social stories' – storytelling documents that deliberately use simple text and images so that anyone can comprehend them – can be useful tools to explain new environments or situations.



# Yarning with young people



Organisation:

**Teach Learn Grow**

Website: [teachlearngrow.org.au](https://teachlearngrow.org.au)

Focus: First Nations



Helen\* is a First Nations tertiary student and passionate volunteer. Through volunteering, she has developed a sense of community, wellbeing and personal fulfilment. Helen has also gained new skills, expanded her social networks, and received new professional opportunities. She participated in a yarning session to share helpful insights on how to engage young First Nations youth as volunteers.

## APPROACH

When asked about her motivations to volunteer with an organisation, Helen emphasised the importance of feeling valued and having a sense of purpose and belonging. She said that volunteer involving organisations should foster an inclusive environment and support volunteers by showing appreciation, prioritising opportunities for growth and focusing on collaboration and teamwork. “It’s important to offer meaningful tasks, establish good communication and to interact with positive leaders,” Helen said.

Reflecting on what matters to young people, Helen shared that aligning with personal values, being ethical, having opportunities to grow, and offering flexible work arrangements were key.

## OUTCOME

During the yarning session, Helen highlighted the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity training for other staff to help create positive experiences for young First Nations volunteers. This would promote understanding and respect, and help to foster an inclusive volunteering culture. Mentoring, accessibility considerations and regular evaluation were other strategies that all help to create positive volunteering experiences.

***“Involving First Nations young people in decision-making and tailoring volunteer programs to their interests is crucial”.***

***– Helen (volunteer)***

## LEARNINGS

- Young people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, have different motivations for volunteering.
- Young volunteers look for meaningful roles that align with their personal values and/or tie in with their interests.
- Organisations that support their ongoing development will experience better retention with young volunteers.
- It is important to build a culturally competent organisation to foster an inclusive volunteering culture.
- Young people seek a safe and welcoming volunteering environment.
- Organisations may experience more success with young volunteers if they offer flexible volunteering opportunities.

**See more learnings by visiting [teachlearngrow.org.au/djinanginy-kaardijin](https://teachlearngrow.org.au/djinanginy-kaardijin)**



## Connection to place



Organisation:

## Town Team Movement

Website: [www.townteammovement.com](http://www.townteammovement.com)

Focus: First Nations



Town Team Movement's South Hedland Youth Changemaking Program set out to help youth reconnect with their community by reimagining the places they live in. South Hedland youth were given responsibility and empowered to solve problems impacting their community.

The program's aim was to break down barriers, promote volunteering, and support young people to build a sense of ownership, pride and belonging by positively influencing change.

### APPROACH

Town Team Movement partnered with organisations including Polly Farmer Foundation, Spinifex Hill Studios, the Town of Port Hedland, RAC, Julyardi Aboriginal Corporation, Kariyarra Aboriginal Corporation; Youth Involvement Council and Volunteering WA. They worked closely with Elders and local First Nations people to co-design and co-create a central public space that people love and connect with.

The project team facilitated sessions to support youth to design and create a 40-metre road mural along Wise Terrace. The project was place led and driven by the local community.

### OUTCOME

The completed mural expressed local stories and depicted the youth's connection to Country. Town Team Movement's approach connected and mobilised young people, building a strong sense of belonging and connection with public space and civic action.

The young participants felt a sense of achievement and pride, as well as a stronger connection with peers. The project created a platform and opportunity to showcase their work. Through the process, the youth learnt about leadership, teamwork and the benefits of volunteering in the community. **[Click here to watch a video about the South Hedland Youth](#)**

**Changemaking Program** which has become a roadmap for engaging First Nations youth volunteers.

***"This project inspired me. It made me get out and do something, and make the community come together."***

**– Student, South Hedland**

***"I'm not a social person so this encouraged me to go out and try new things."*** – Student, South Hedland.

***"It was authentic collaboration, the students were truly involved, their voices were heard, and they were part of the project from beginning to end, and still are. Most see their work every day when they walk through"***

**– Jessica Albers, Follow the Dream**

### LEARNINGS

- While ideas and energy can create structure it's important to avoid preconceived or predetermined outcomes.
- Allow extra time and resources to form genuine connections and relationships.
- It is critically important to bring First Nations culture into the public realm.
- Value everyone's time and ideas through a curated approach; celebrate results and expand on successful outcomes.
- Use end-to-end engagement. Trust your community to be key decision makers and equal collaborators.
- Distribute power and provide opportunities to celebrate cultural heritage, diversity, and pride.
- Build leadership capacity in young people: develop their skills and confidence, foster a sense of belonging and connection, and create a sense of achievement and pride in their work.



## Creating safety and comfort



Organisation:

**Volunteer South West**

Website: [volunteersouthwest.org.au](http://volunteersouthwest.org.au)

Focus: New Migrants



Linda\* is a young woman from Vanuatu who arrived in Bunbury in 2021. Highly educated and wanting to learn new skills, she was motivated to meet new people and build a network in her new community. Linda found Volunteer South West on social media and quickly made contact to join their ENGAGE program. She already worked full time, but was also interested in volunteering as a fire fighter, administrator or in an aged care facility. Linda was nervous but looking forward to finding a meaningful position.

### APPROACH

Volunteer South West referred Linda to the Bunbury Volunteer Bushfire Brigade. Through the support of the ENGAGE program, the volunteer manager was given training on supporting volunteers from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. The training helped both Linda and the organisation to adapt.

### OUTCOME

Placing Linda with the Bunbury Volunteer Bushfire Brigade was a win-win decision. The workplace culture improved from increasing their diversity, and Linda feels less isolated in her new home. The volunteer role has helped her to meet new people, connect with the local community and develop an understanding of the Australian workplace. At the end of the ENGAGE program, Linda decided to keep volunteering with Bunbury Volunteer Bushfire Brigade.

***“Linda is a great team worker, good at solving problems, learning new skills and is improving her communication skills. She is still very shy but it has been wonderful to see her growth.”***  
– Volunteer manager

### LEARNINGS

It is helpful to provide transition support for new migrant volunteers and complete cultural training for the volunteer involving organisation. Some ideas include:

- Buddy or mentor systems, ideally with someone who has similar lived experience.
- Suggest bringing a friend or family member to support them at initial meetings.
- Consider including cultural, linguistic or religion specific content in your onboarding, but ensure that the wording is respectful and appropriate.
- Reduce the amount of onboarding paperwork with a clear and simple process.



# Building language skills



Organisation:

**Volunteer South West**

Website: [volunteersouthwest.org.au](http://volunteersouthwest.org.au)

Focus: New Migrants



Maria\* is a young mother from Brazil and worked as a music teacher and photographer in her home country. After arriving in Bunbury, she worked as a part-time cleaner in a local shopping centre. Unfortunately, she had some negative experiences in this role, as she was still learning English as a language and was not able to answer questions.

At this time, Maria did not feel confident speaking in English and preferred to communicate by writing in a translation app. After reading about the ENGAGE program on social media, she contacted Volunteer South West.

## APPROACH

Maria was interested in volunteer roles that would help her connect with others and improve her English language skills. After meeting another Brazilian woman with better English language skills, Maria and her new friend visited the Volunteer South West office together.

After initial meetings, it was agreed that Maria needed to be matched with a supportive volunteer involving organisation that had a suitable role for someone with limited English language skills.

Milligan Community Learning & Resource Centre runs a community garden growing edible plants. The Centre also runs a garden club where people can catch up, learn about gardening, and plant or cook together – the perfect setting for new migrants to connect with each other and the rest of the community. As Maria enjoyed gardening, this was a great fit. Maria started a role with the garden club and a Volunteer South West staff member joined her for the first session to support her and introduce her to others.

Maria was also referred to Investing in Our Youth Child and Parent Centre. The family centre, renowned for having a multicultural clientele, was searching for a playgroup assistant who could play music with the

children. The position was perfect for Maria and she was again supported in her transition by a Volunteer South West staff member.

## OUTCOME

Maria paused her volunteering for a few months when she found a full-time paid job as a cleaner. Her young family needed the financial support. After feeling isolated and not learning anything new in her paid role, she contacted Volunteer South West once again. The Investing in Our Youth position at was still available and the volunteer manager was very happy to have Maria back.

## LEARNINGS

- Considering the needs of both the individual and the volunteer involving organisation can create more rewarding matches.
- Where possible, be flexible in the volunteer roles you offer.
- It's a good idea to provide education to staff and volunteers on how to be inclusive and welcoming.
- Provide opportunities to learn and connect as a team to create a stronger sense of belonging.
- Give practical demonstrations on the job and encourage questions.
- Adapt the way you communicate to accommodate volunteers with developing language skills.



