Continuity and change: volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Key findings

- Based on analysis of **over 800 responses from volunteers**, this report presents the main themes which characterised the experience of volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing its striking diversity and resilience.
- The **experiences of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic were diverse**, with responses highlighting the benefits of volunteering to wellbeing during the pandemic, the advantages and challenges of remote volunteering, the difficulties and hazards of providing voluntary support during the disaster, and ongoing shifts in volunteer engagement.
- **People who volunteered at the same frequency or more often** in the 12 months prior to April 2021 than they had before were **more likely to report positive experiences** of volunteering, while those who volunteered less were more likely to report negative experiences.
- Many volunteers had **positive experiences**, reporting that their voluntary work helped them maintain a **connection with others**, kept them **active and busy**, and gave them a **sense of purpose**. Volunteers also emphasised the benefits of using or gaining new skills, the opportunity to understand others, and the sense that volunteering became more accessible.
- Those who volunteered less during the pandemic also reported benefits, but often indicated that public health restrictions **reduced their satisfaction with volunteering**, reporting a loss of connection and less sense of making a difference.
- For some, volunteering during the pandemic had **negative impacts**, with many reporting **increased workloads** and **heightened concern** over the risks to themselves and others.
- Some types of volunteering, such as environmental volunteering and remote roles like committee work or board membership, were **largely unaffected** by the pandemic, or adapted in response to public health restrictions.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread consequences across all aspects of community life in Australia.[1] This includes its economic consequences, and the increased strain it has placed on community services, the health system, and individual wellbeing.

This has had profound implications for the volunteering ecosystem, which faces ongoing challenges as the nation progresses to the next phase of its response to COVID-19. A study conducted by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods found that the proportion of adult Australians engaging in formal voluntary work, which is done through an organisation or group, fell from 36.0 per cent in late 2019 to 24.2 per cent in April 2021.[2] Further, only slightly more than half (56.4 per cent) of those who stopped volunteering in 2020 resumed in the 12 months leading up to April 2021, despite the easing of lockdowns and social distancing restrictions in many jurisdictions at that time.[3] Figures from the Australia Bureau of Statistics also suggest that the proportion of Australians who

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[1] https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/the-first-year-of-covid-19-in-australia/summary
[2] https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/volunteering-during-first-year-covid-19-pandemic-april-2021
[3] *ibid*

volunteer through an organisation or group has been declining steadily since 2006.[4] These numbers illustrate the scale of change in volunteering rates over the past decade, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend.

However, there is more to the experience of volunteers during the pandemic than these figures capture. The volunteer hours that support Lifeline's crisis helpline increased from around 20,000 per month in 2019 to just under 24,000 per month in 2021, peaking at 25,682 in August 2021.[5] Data from the General Social Survey 2020 also shows significant changes in volunteer participation. The number of people who volunteered online increased from 8.5 per cent in 2019 to 17.3 per cent in 2020, and three in four volunteers who indicated that online volunteering was available in their organisation or group chose to volunteer online.[6] The proportion of people volunteering for community/ethic groups increased from 11.6 per cent in mid-2019 to 22.7 per cent in March 2021.[7] Although the decline in formal volunteering is an alarming and significant trend, it is not the only way that volunteering was affected by the pandemic, and it does not adequately capture the forms of volunteering which endured, expanded, or evolved over the past 18 months.

This paper aims to provide a more detailed portrayal of the volunteering experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using data from the Life in Australia™ survey Wave 48, it presents insights from over 800 responses from volunteers asked to describe how volunteering during the pandemic impacted their life in general. Responses illustrate the diversity of experience, highlighting wellbeing benefits of volunteering during the pandemic, the advantages and challenges of remote volunteering, the difficulties and hazards of providing voluntary support during the disaster, and the ongoing shifts in volunteer engagement which may remain significant as the pandemic response progresses.

Data and methods

In 2020, Volunteering Australia and the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods undertook research on the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering in Australia, producing the study 'The experience of volunteers during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.' This study used data from the 33rd ANUpoll (now conducted via internet by the Social Research Centre's 'Life in Australia' panel), which surveyed 3,155 Australians over the period 14 to 27 April 2020. A subsequent report entitled 'Volunteering during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2021)' was released in May 2021 using data from the 48th ANUpoll (Life in Australia™ Wave 48) which surveyed 3,286 Australians between 12 and 26 April 2021. This survey collected data on volunteering which was compared with data collected from the same group of individuals in late 2019 prior to COVID-19 and in April 2020 during the early stages of the pandemic in Australia.

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[4] https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/volunteers
[5] Data on volunteer hours provided to Volunteering Australia by Lifeline Australia
[6] Australian Bureau of Statistics (March 2021) 'Table 5.1: Persons aged 18 years and over, Participation in unpaid voluntary work and unpaid help, by selected characteristics: Proportion' [data set], *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, March 2021*, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/household-impacts-covid-19-survey/mar-2021
[7] *ibid*

In both surveys, respondents were asked three questions relating to their volunteering activities:

1. *Over the last 12 months, did you spend any time doing voluntary work through an organisation or group?*

2. *In the last 12 months, have you done more or less voluntary work than you did previously?*

3. *Did you do any voluntary work prior to the last 12 months?*

In addition to these questions, Life in Australia™ Wave 48 asked respondents to describe their experience of volunteering during the pandemic. Respondents were asked:[8]

How has doing voluntary work during COVID-19 impacted your life in general?

820 responses to this question, which totalled almost 11,000 words, were recorded. Upon examination of the responses, a total of 21 themes were identified (Appendix B). Responses were coded accordingly, and thematic trends were analysed presented below.

It is worth noting that the question provided to respondents is broad and offers scope for a variety of interpretations. As such, volunteers discuss an array of subjects in their responses, including the impact of the pandemic on their volunteering, the type and intensity of their voluntary work, and their feelings about volunteering in general. These responses were kept for analysis, and many are presented in this paper, with the aim to capture those diverse interpretations and to demonstrate the breadth of experience of volunteering during the pandemic. It should be noted, however, that not all responses included below will address the question as written directly.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the experiences of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to present the sentiments expressed by respondents around key themes. The results are descriptive in nature and aim to portray the diversity of the volunteering experience during COVID-19 which is not captured in quantitative analysis. For an examination of the broader trends in patterns of volunteering and a causal analysis of the relationship between volunteering activity and life satisfaction during the pandemic, see 'Volunteering during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2021).'[9]

The volunteering experience

Analysis of the responses revealed 21 themes, which address an array of aspects of the volunteering experience. Themes are broadly categorised as positive, negative, neutral, or indicating no or little change in the experience of volunteering. Most responses were coded as positive, which mostly discussed the benefits of volunteering to life satisfaction and wellbeing. Others addressed the impacts of the pandemic on their volunteering activity, describing a sense of frustration and reduced satisfaction. Another group expressed negative aspects of the volunteering experience, reporting more onerous workloads, technostress, and heightened concern for others. Finally, many responses

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[8] All questions, including response categories, used in this paper are listed in Appendix A

[9] https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/volunteering-during-first-year-covid-19-pandemic-april-2021

indicated little change in their volunteering, highlighting the continuity and resilience in volunteering during the pandemic. Each of these categories are analysed and discussed below.

The benefits of volunteering

Positive themes were recorded in 281 of the 820 responses received. Positive themes were reported at a higher rate among respondents who did the same or more volunteering than they had done prior to the pandemic (Appendix C). The most common positive themes were connection with others, a sense of purpose, and keeping active and busy amid public health restrictions.

Connecting with others

Maintaining social networks and a sense of connection were the most common positive themes. 70 respondents reported that volunteering helped them to connect with others, and 80 that volunteering gave them the opportunity to help others.

> "[Volunteering] has helped me connect with the community and maintain support networks."

> "Allowed me to maintain and develop social relationships. Kept me active within my community, [and] allowed me to keep connected with family members and friends."

Other respondents said that although volunteering facilitated positive social experiences, opportunities to volunteer were limited by the pandemic. According to one volunteer:

> "Volunteering gets me out meeting and socialising with other people… normally I would be doing this 4-5 days a week but with covid (sic) I was only able to volunteer a couple of days a month. This was sad for me."

Sense of purpose

Another prevalent theme was the sense of purpose and meaning that volunteering offered, which was reported in 57 responses. This was particularly significant during the pandemic, as many opportunities were not accessible while lockdowns and other public health restrictions were in place. One respondent said:

> "[Volunteering] provided another purpose in my day-to-day. Kept the brain going and occupied in these stressful times."

Others (10) found that volunteering created meaningful activity during the pandemic, which allowed them to use their skills and find personal satisfaction.

> "Voluntary work opens you up to new perspectives, generally, and even more so during COVID-19. It also has allowed me to establish connections and gain skills during a time when most other opportunities were closed off."

> "I run an online community which has been the source of great comfort and personal satisfaction since I lost my permanent job and especially during the pandemic. It has taught me a great deal about myself and required me to stay [up to date] with skills. Totally love it."

Finally, many volunteers reported that their voluntary work helped them to maintain a sense of routine and offered a distraction from the challenges of lockdown and public health restrictions.

> "I've done some voluntary work from home, which helped me maintain a productive routine during lockdown periods."

> "Love getting dressed and going to 'work.' Physically, socially and psychologically beneficial."

> "Assisted me to feel that life was returning to a more normal state."

> "It gave me a purpose and distraction during isolation."

Benefits of remote work

Some respondents emphasised the benefits of volunteering remotely. A major theme in this respect was the capacity of online engagement to reduce barriers to volunteering. One volunteer said:

> "It's been easier to do voluntary work because of the convenience of doing a lot of it online (reducing transport times and costs)."

Another reported that:

> "Most or all meetings have [been] held online, which means less exercise (cycling to office or meeting locations) and more time at the computer. It has also meant that I could participate in events that would not have been accessible to me otherwise, because they were held online instead of in person."

Others reflected on how organisations innovated in their responses to the crisis.

> "Positive: creative problem-solving that enabled people who previously had restricted access due to health, disabilities [sic], etc. to engage and participate…"

Responses like these suggest that some of the adaptations made by organisations and groups during the pandemic have improved aspects of the volunteering experience for many participants who were able to continue volunteering.

Changes in volunteer work

Finally, a number of respondents indicated that although their volunteering experience was positive, difficulties volunteering amid COVID-19 restrictions impacted on their enjoyment of volunteering.

> "Logistics, restrictions/lockdowns and disrupted schedules have made doing voluntary work difficult to achieve. Generally, I am positive about the actual work, but achieving the engagement, including lead-up preparation has been harder."

> "COVID-19 has meant more work for the organisation that I volunteer for. In order to prepare for our sporting season to start there was a lot more to prepare to be COVID-Safe. However, doing this work felt very fulfilling as it meant a community organisation was getting back up and running, and bringing people together."

> "I am an information officer in a tourism area near the border of NSW/Queensland, so I have educated myself a lot with all of the changing rules which were implemented this year. Positive, but frustrating to see people confused and angry about border closures."

Other respondents volunteered specifically to assist people struggling during the pandemic. For these volunteers, having the opportunity to help others improved their overall experience during the pandemic, as illustrated in the responses below.

> "I volunteer for a charity that came about because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It brought a lot of people together and has delivered a lot of good to our community and those who were struggling because of the government regulations."

"Spent 6 months doing telephone outreach to those in quarantine [and] to the most vulnerable of our community, helping with their mental health [and] well-being."

These themes demonstrate the capacity of volunteering to facilitate social connection and improve wellbeing. However, they also reveal unexpected advantages of the shift to remote volunteering, as well as the challenges of adapting service delivery and facilitating a safe experience for volunteers.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the volunteering experience

Negative experiences relating to volunteering were reported in 128 responses.[10] People who reported volunteering less frequently during the pandemic than in the 12 months prior were more likely to indicate negative experiences. Most of these respondents reported that the inability to continue volunteering had a negative effect on their lives during the pandemic.

Loss of connection

The most common negative theme was the loss of connection, reported in 33 responses. This was overwhelmingly reported by those who did less voluntary work than they had done before April 2020. Many respondents reported that the suspension of volunteering during the pandemic was isolating.

"Could not volunteer during COVID, which greatly impacted social contact and increased feelings of isolation."

"Voluntary work was suspended during lockdowns, [which] contributed to an increased sense of isolation. I am an older person who lives alone and my volunteer work was interesting and extended my social contacts."

Others reported a loss in life satisfaction and sense of purpose.

"I teach dance classes to senior people and was unable to from 16 March 2020. I started back on 15 March 2021. I felt totally useless during that 12 month [sic] period and missed the social [and] physical aspects of my dance classes."

Less sense of making a difference

Those who were able to continue voluntary work sometimes reported feeling that their volunteering had less impact.

"Negative… not feeling like I am contributing."

"Coping with all the rules, complying with rule changes, [and] doing training has consumed more time than actually helping people."

Many of these responses relate directly to the frustrations of doing voluntary work while navigating public health restrictions and maintaining COVID-safe practices. One volunteer said:

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[10] Remaining responses were coded as "neutral" (in which respondents described their experience without indicating whether they were positive or negative, or in which both positive and negative aspects were described without an indication of the overall nature of the experience), or "no change." The distribution and proportion of all responses by categorical theme (positive, negative, neutral, no change) is presented in Appendix D

> "It's stressful making sure numbers are low enough to meet restrictions but high enough to keep the groups I run viable."

The sense of making a difference is often crucial to volunteer satisfaction. Studies consistently demonstrate that altruistic motives such as the desire to contribute to community, compassion for others, and belief in the cause or purpose of an organisation, are the most significant motivations to volunteer.[11] It is therefore unsurprising that a reduced sense of making a meaningful contribution to the common good would be detrimental to the volunteering experience.

The prevalence of these themes is consistent with the finding that those who volunteered less during the pandemic experienced a greater loss of life satisfaction than those who continued to volunteer.[12] It also aligns with broader research on the benefits of volunteering for mental health and wellbeing.[13] In general, those who had the opportunity to volunteer during the pandemic reported that the experience was beneficial, and those whose volunteering was interrupted were more likely to report negative experiences.[14]

However, it is important to note that some volunteers indicated that their involvement in volunteering had negative effects on their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Negative volunteering experiences

Many volunteers felt that undue responsibility was placed upon them, that their workload became unmanageable, or that it became difficult to balance voluntary work with other commitments which became more urgent during the pandemic.

Burden of volunteer work

A significant number (22) of responses suggested that the pandemic increased the workload and stress associated with volunteering.

> "I volunteer for my local soccer club. COVID-19 has created a much greater workload for community volunteers in terms of writing COVID safety plans, reorganising training schedules, enforcing spectator restrictions, writing comms, providing refunds, [and] cancelling fundraiser and presentation events. This has meant I have less spare time."

> "Decreased time for housework, study, and leisure, creating a bit of stress."

> "I am involved in two local community groups and the workload has been substantial. It seems more and more work is expected of volunteers as local governments and councils work less at the local level. It is rewarding to contribute to the community but the ever increasing [sic] workload is stressful."

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[11] Bill Merrilees, Dale Miller, and Raisa Yakimova, "Volunteer Retention Motives and Determinants across the Volunteer Lifecycle," *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing* (2019): 10, doi:10.1080/10495142.2019.1689220

[12] https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/volunteering-during-first-year-covid-19-pandemic-april-2021

[13] https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-Insights-Volunteering-and-mental-health-Final.pdf

[14] Proportions provided in Appendix C

The sense that voluntary work became more difficult to prioritise highlights how the pandemic exacerbated the competing demands on people's time. In 2020, the most common reason for not volunteering reported by respondents was a lack of time.[15]

Other volunteers expressed concerns over the risks associated with their voluntary work. One respondent described their volunteering as:

> "Utterly exhausting, given [the] work involved full-time care [for] a palliative individual, [and] to do so placed me at high risk everyday throughout. Positive was affording dignity and respect to the individual (so often sadly lacking). [T]he negative is [that this work was] exhausting physically, emotionally and financially."

Technostress

Many volunteers also reported decreased satisfaction and increased stress around their reliance on technology in their volunteering.

> "Negative: [Zoom] fatigue, disconnect between people, easier for people to fall through the cracks unnoticed."

> "I did it mostly online from home and visiting a few businesses with donation tins. It had a lot of impact due to the time involved around the clock. I've now resigned."

> "Moving online for some aspects of the work has been challenging."

Increased use of technologies, especially by people working from home, can cause information overload and the perceived obligation to be constantly available.[16] The emerging literature on the future of work terms this phenomenon "technostress," as it is associated with increased stress, anxiety, and mental fatigue.[17]

Concern for participants

Finally, some volunteers expressed heightened concern for the people they support through their volunteering.

> "It feel[s] good helping someone else, but I also feel helpless knowing that there must be many others who need help but I don't know how to help them."

> "I feel I am letting the people I help down."

Some also expressed concern for groups that were especially vulnerable during the pandemic. One volunteer said:

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[15] Australian Bureau of Statistics (June 2021) 'Table 12.3, Persons aged 15 years and over who have not undertaken unpaid voluntary work through an organization in last 12 months, Reasons for not doing voluntary work—By Sex, proportion of persons [data set], *General Social Survey 2020*, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release

[16] https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-10/apo-nid314497.pdf, 39

[17] *ibid*

> "My volunteer work involved vulnerable older adults so was shut down for 6-8mths of 2020. I worried a bit about how those people were managing without their social activities."

These responses suggest that many volunteers felt a stronger responsibility to provide help during COVID-19. They also demonstrate the immense contribution of volunteering to the provision of community services during the pandemic, despite restricted opportunities to operate.

Continuity and change in volunteering

While responses reveal a number of themes which characterise the experiences of volunteers during COVID-19, they also demonstrate the diversity of volunteering, and the resilience of many types of voluntary work.

This includes many forms of volunteering which were largely unaffected by the pandemic, like environmental volunteering and remote roles such as committee work or board membership.

> "I do outdoor environmental work meaning little changed. [We] had a short pause in early 2020. The work is very rewarding and last spring was the best wildflower season in a decade."

> "I am pro bono Chair of a little not-for-profit involving volunteer Telehealth to selected countries in [the Asia-Pacific region]. This work has grown exponentially during the past year. It is satisfying to see the results. So, it has been a challenge but [with] positive outcomes."

Other volunteers highlighted how organisations adapted their volunteering programs in the face of restrictions.

> "My voluntary work kept me engaged and occupied during COVID-19. Our group worked hard to establish the ability to continue volunteering from home throughout the whole year to ensure we didn't feel isolated and felt that we were still able to contribute."

> "Had to settle for phone calls to Veterans instead of face-to-face visits. No less rewarding, though!"

> "Doing health education sessions to people via Zoom with the Water Well Project. Has been great to provide services still, just through different means."

Finally, some respondents described how their roles and the work itself changed during the pandemic.

> "I am a volunteer guide. Guided tours were banned for several months (a negative) and then reintroduced on a reduced frequency. We kept in touch via Zoom and email (a positive). In the last few months, I have spent time training other guides (another positive)."

> "I work volunteer with St. Vincent De Paul. We are finding some Uni students from overseas in trouble with rent payments and we are subsiding their living monies. Food purchasing is an expensive item in their budget."

> "I followed the COVID guidelines to run a first aid course in our village. Less people were accredited, the course had an online component and 1 day face to face training. It worked well. Cooking for homeless [people] remained the same… [but] meetings followed covid [sic] guidelines."

In total, 218 respondents indicated no change or minimal change in their volunteering activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. A further 68 provided neutral responses described changes in their role or the tasks associated with their volunteering. These experiences illustrate the resilience of volunteering across sectors during times of crisis. Taken alongside the other themes presented above, they also demonstrate the contributions to community that volunteers continued to make during the pandemic, as well as the diversity of the volunteering experience and its effect on the lives of volunteers themselves.

Differences in the volunteering experience

These responses also reveal some differences in the volunteering experience among demographic groups, including by age, gender, socio-economic status, and whether English is the main language spoken at home, which offer avenues for future research.

Women were slightly more likely to report negative or neutral changes, while men were more likely to indicate no change in the way volunteering affected their lives in general. Respondents who mainly spoke a language other than English at home were more likely than those who mainly spoke English to report that volunteering had a positive effect on their lives during the pandemic, and less likely to report negative experiences. Volunteers aged under 50 years were more likely to report positive themes than those aged 50 years or over. Those living in capital cities were also more likely to indicate positive themes, while those living outside capital cities were more likely to report no change. Finally, there were no distinct differences by socio-economic index. Tables showing the proportion of responses categorised as positive, negative, neutral, or indicating no change by demographic group are presented in Appendix D.[18]

These differences suggest that volunteering experiences were affected differently across demographic groups, and played different roles in the lives of Australians, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further research could offer more detailed insight into the differential effects of the pandemic on volunteering in Australia, and the implications of these changes for the future of volunteering.

Conclusion

Volunteer engagement has changed drastically in recent years, and especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. As academic research and official data demonstrate, a stark decline in the rate of formal volunteering is a defining aspect of this change. But despite this alarming trend, millions of people in Australia continued to volunteer during the pandemic.[19] This study presents the

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[18] Note: these observations are based on descriptive statistics taken from the sample of 820 responses analysed in this paper. They are not based on correlative statistical analysis should not be interpreted as causal inferences

[19] Australian Bureau of Statistics (June 2021) 'Table 9.1: Persons aged 15 years and over, Voluntary Work and Unpaid Work/Support—By personal characteristics, estimate' [data set], *General Social Survey 2020*, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release

main themes which characterised the experience of volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing its striking diversity and resilience.

The key finding was the diversity of the volunteering experience during the pandemic, with responses highlighting the wellbeing benefits of volunteering, the advantages and challenges of remote volunteering, the difficulties and hazards of providing voluntary support during the disaster, and the ongoing shifts in volunteer engagement.

People who volunteered at the same frequency or more often in the 12 months prior to April 2021 than they had before were more likely to report positive experiences of volunteering, while those who volunteered less were more likely to report negative experiences. Respondents emphasised the benefits of volunteering during the pandemic, including connecting with others, keeping active and busy, and gaining a sense of purpose. Volunteers also emphasised the benefits of using or developing new skills, the opportunity to understand others, and the sense that volunteering became more accessible. Those who volunteered less during the pandemic also report benefits, but often indicated that public health restrictions reduced their satisfaction with volunteering, reporting a loss of connection and less sense of making a difference.

For others, volunteering during the pandemic had negative impacts, with many reporting increased workloads and heightened concern over the risks to themselves and others. Many types of volunteering, like environmental volunteering and remote roles such as committee work or board membership, often continued unrestrained during the pandemic, or adapted in response to public health restrictions.

Taken together, these descriptions illustrate the diversity of the volunteering experience, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of volunteering, and the ongoing shifts in volunteer engagement which may remain significant as the pandemic response progresses. These insights will be crucial to understanding the changes in volunteering in the future, and in planning to support a more dynamic, accessible, and resilient volunteering ecosystem.

Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

E13. Over the last 12 months did you spend any time doing voluntary work through an organisation or group?	-99	Refused
	-98	Don't know
	1	Yes, did voluntary work
	2	No, did not do voluntary work
E14a. In the last 12 months, have you done more or less voluntary work than you did previously?	-99	Refused
	-98	Don't know
	1	Substantially more voluntary work
	2	A little more voluntary work
	3	About the same amount of voluntary work
	4	A little less voluntary work
	5	Substantially less voluntary work
E14b. Did you do any voluntary work prior to the last 12 months?	-99	Refused
	-98	Don't know
	1	Yes, a lot
	2	Yes, a little
	3	No
E15. How has doing voluntary work during COVID-19 impacted your life in general?	-99	Refused
	-98	Don't know

Appendix B: Themes

Positive	Negative	Neutral	No change
Connecting with others (70)	Loss of connection (33)	Changing volunteer role/tasks (68)	Not affected/no change (218)
Wellbeing (23)	Feeling helpless (3)	Less work/opportunities to operate (neutral) (176)	
Helping others (80)	Restrictions challenging (45)	More work (neutral) (13)	
Using/gaining skills (10)	Less sense of making a difference (7)	Enjoyed break from voluntary work (8)	
Keeping active and busy (37)	Burden of volunteer work (22)		
Opportunity to understand others (10)	Fear over risks (10)		
Sense that volunteering is more accessible (5)	Concern for participants/recipients (13)		
Sense of purpose (57)	Negative experience (undefined/other) (29)		

Positive sentiment (undefined/other) (80)			

***Note: Number of observations per theme in brackets. Responses can be coded with more than one theme.

Appendix C: Theme categories by change in volunteering activity[20]

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No change
Substantially more voluntary work	58.4	11.7	11.7	18.2
A little more voluntary work	42.6	13.5	15.5	28.4
About the same amount of voluntary work	35.4	12.7	18.2	33.8
A little less voluntary work	20.7	18.7	38.7	22.0
Substantially less voluntary work	22.5	24.8	38.8	14.0

Appendix D: Proportion of responses by demographic

Distribution of responses by categorical theme (positive, negative, neutral, no change): full sample

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No change
Distribution	281	128	197	213
Proportion	35.0	15.8	24.1	26.0

Age

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No change
Aged under 50 years	39.0	16.7	21.6	22.7
Aged 50 years or over	32.1	15.1	25.2	27.6

Gender

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No change
Male	34.6	10.4	21.4	33.5
Female	33.8	19.7	26.2	20.3
Other/refused	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0

[20] Tables display percentage of responses categorised as positive, negative, neutral, and no change by demographic group, rounded to the nearest 0.1

Main language spoken at home

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No change
Language other than English	44.0	14.3	18.7	23.1
English	33.0	15.9	24.7	26.4

Capital city/rest of state

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No change
Capital city	36.0	15.7	24.5	23.9
Rest of state	31.3	15.8	23.4	29.4

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) quintiles

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No change
Quintile 1 – most disadvantage	35.3	12.9	24.1	27.6
Quintile 2	34.2	17.1	19.2	29.5
Quintile 3	34.5	14.9	23.6	27.0
Quintile 4	35.4	14.4	25.4	24.9
Quintile 5 – least disadvantage	32.3	18.1	26.5	23.0

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

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