

VOLUNTEERING IN AGED CARE SETTINGS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA: GOOD PRACTICE DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER MANAGERS

Managers of volunteers have many titles and roles across the various aged care settings including Co-ordinator, Director, Manager. This guide is designed to inform staff who are the person or people with overall responsibility for a volunteer program in an aged care setting. See also the guide for Frontline managers of volunteers.

Important: This is a generic guide based on data collected from volunteers and volunteer managers in a range of organisations for this project.

Key COVID-19 Takeaways for Volunteer Managers

- Volunteering is a major contributor to person centred care
- COVID-19 changes have affected all volunteers
- COVID-19 exposed or exacerbated systemic weaknesses in organisations
- COVID-19 changes highlighted aspects of volunteer management which were not so good
- Volunteers appreciated being kept informed with targeted messages
- Volunteers need to know how to reach volunteer managers easily
- Volunteers need to know who to contact at different sites
- Volunteers need to know how they will be kept informed and where to find information
- Encourage volunteers to get in touch – let them know how you want to hear from them
- Volunteers were largely concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on ‘their’ clients
- COVID-19 added more compliance measures to volunteer management
- Online training replaced much of the face-to-face training
- Not all training will go back to face-to-face, although this is often preferred by volunteers
- Online recruitment and selection/placement has increased but some in-person interviews have returned, particularly for volunteer/client matching
- Volunteers may volunteer in multiple places and roles and policies need to recognise this
- Vulnerable clients were sometimes left more vulnerable by the withdrawal of volunteers
- Some volunteers are also vulnerable
- Diversity and inclusion need to be central to volunteer programs
- New volunteer roles, and new forms of volunteering have emerged during COVID-19
- Staff-volunteer relationships need to be nurtured

The Volunteer Engagement Cycle:

A volunteer engagement cycle which puts a high value on quality volunteers and quality volunteering experiences will enhance the program and the organisation. This includes interviewing and onboarding volunteers to fill client’s needs for social interaction and other activity needs. It is important that, once the volunteer is in place, the manager has a program of volunteer performance management to ensure continuing benefit for both client and volunteer and ongoing adherence to organisational rules around boundaries and other specific requirements (e.g. safety).

To ensure a good fit for both the volunteer and the organisation, the quality of the initial interview with prospective volunteers is key. The volunteer manager needs to be a good judge of character, with an emphasis on gauging personality and likely commitment. It may sometimes mean that a prospective volunteer may not ‘fit’ the role being sought and thus, training in responding to people, giving honest feedback and saying ‘no’ is needed. Saying ‘no’ may mean assigning volunteers to a different role or referring them on to other volunteer opportunities elsewhere.

On occasion, the manager needs to support and advocate for a volunteer to ensure they receive a fair hearing when things go wrong and any support they may need as a result of an adverse volunteering experience. Sometimes this can mean providing/arranging organisational support through a counselling service. Some volunteers may choose or be asked to leave their volunteer role.

Volunteer managers will also need to be able to confidently present their program to their senior managers and executives; to frame the need for and the impact of the program as a vital part of the organisation’s strategy to deliver high quality person-centred care. Volunteer managers should make a strong case for their organisation to include the volunteer workforce in any survey or reporting to present a true picture of staffing/ volunteers’ contribution to their bottom line and to achievement of strategic goals.



As a result of COVID-19, more compliance measures have been introduced into volunteer management for the managers, the volunteers and onsite supervisors/managers. This includes stricter infection control measures, online training and recruitment interviews, and a review of communication practices to ensure volunteers are well informed and encouraged and supported to return to in person volunteering following lockdowns or periods of being excluded from face-to-face contact.

Communication and Engagement: Volunteer involving organisations will have an approach or policy about organisational communication– but sometimes adequate consideration has not been given to communication with or recognition of volunteers. In addition, volunteer managers or program directors need to consider how they communicate with frontline volunteer managers, staff working alongside volunteers and senior decision makers in their organisation.

Volunteers like to know what is going on, but do not want to be overloaded with unnecessary communications – this is a balancing act. What appears to work is:

- Setting expectations for volunteers about how they will hear what they need to know – examples include a newsletter or social media site.
- Ensuring organisation-wide communications which include volunteers specifically refer to volunteers.
- Having clear processes for volunteers to sign in and out, make contact with relevant staff, and be kept up to date on their clients as far as confidentiality allows.
- Setting clear boundaries about what volunteers can and can't become involved in. For instance: if client advocacy is not part of their role, advise them who they can contact about their concerns.
- Offering training activities which are relevant and engaging – to prepare volunteers for their roles without unduly requiring onerous commitments.
- Keeping in touch with volunteers and allowing them to provide feedback.
- Letting volunteers know your hours of work and contact information. Providing volunteers with information about who to contact outside those times (for instance, when they volunteer out of hours and need to report an issue etc).

Expectations placed on volunteers

Volunteers usually apply to join a particular organisation because of reputation, because they offer the sort of volunteer opportunities they are seeking, or because someone has asked them to volunteer. On successful application, they will be asked to make a commitment, receive training and support from the volunteer manager and will be allocated to an appropriate volunteering opportunity or client.

Their commitment, often by way of an agreement or memorandum of understanding, outlines their acceptance of the rules of the organisation about volunteering with aged care clients. This includes specific boundaries and expectations and the requirement for undertaking relevant training prior to starting their role, including police record checks and clearances, and health requirements such as vaccines.

Volunteer engagement is more likely when volunteer roles and expectations are clear. Volunteers reported being invited to “turn up when you like, and we'll find something for you to do”. Sometimes this laissez faire approach works, at say a busy bee clean up, but most of the time participants in this study identified that it is better from both parties' perspective if the activities and expectations are clear, including the time commitment.

Many aged care volunteers commit to a requisite number of visits on a regular basis or volunteering on a particular day, depending on what sort of role they have been recruited to fill. Generally, their commitment is to the organisation they signed up to, even if they are matched with a client whose care is under the aegis of another organisation. They need to know how to communicate with their organisation if they are no longer available to volunteer, need to take a break from volunteering, or are unwell and therefore unable to take on their volunteer commitments.

Volunteers who visit multiple sites and clients, and volunteer sharing

There are a range of volunteer arrangements where volunteers might be visiting more than one site, or more than one client. In the case of residential care organisations requesting a CVS Auspice to supply CVS volunteers to visit a client, the volunteer is governed by the CVS auspicing organisations but may also be asked to meet the compliance requirements of the requesting organisation. This is sometimes not clearly set out and needs to be addressed to ensure good communication and compliance occurs with minimal duplication and clarity for the volunteer. Some volunteers volunteer in more than one location, with different organisations, and it may be necessary to ensure that the volunteer is clear about what is or is not policy in each organisation. While it is the volunteer's responsibility to check on differences and not assume that what is policy in one place will be the same in others, volunteer managers should make it easy for volunteers to find out such information. New protocols developed by some organisations in relation to COVID-19 require that volunteers declare if they are volunteering in more than one location.

Volunteer sharing occurs when volunteers sign up with the expectation that they might be called on to undertake their volunteer activity with another organisation at the request of their base organisation. This needs to be within a clearly regulated and agreed environment. True volunteer sharing requires that organisations accept a



degree of consistency in generic training for volunteers across aged care settings, including consistency around boundaries and compliance issues so that it is clear which organisation 'owns' the volunteer and which organisation agrees to their terms to 'share' them. Multi-site or multi-client volunteering protocols will enhance volunteer sharing arrangements. 'Sharing' of volunteers should always be with the consent of the volunteer.

Vulnerable clients

Good practice and compliance requirements involve ensuring volunteers receive and complete training about boundaries when they begin their role, about what they can and cannot do, with opportunities for them to ask questions about this (e.g. not lifting clients or not feeding a client with dysphagia). Volunteers, too, may sometimes find they act as a neutral friend/sounding for clients. They are not official advocates for their 'friends' but having a mechanism in place to report any misgivings for clarification/further investigation provides a safety net for everyone. It is also important to monitor volunteer/client relationships to ensure that neither party is being taken advantage of.

Vulnerable volunteers

At times, volunteers can find their role taxing, emotional and overwhelming. It is important for organisations to have a process in place to identify vulnerable volunteers, as well as for them to self-identify, and for the organisation to provide appropriate support (for example via their Employee Assistance Program). In particular, volunteers in aged care may experience grief at the loss of a client, and an accumulation of grief experiences can be difficult. Early identification of volunteers who are experiencing difficulties can assist with maintaining the volunteer's ongoing engagement with the organisation, where appropriate, perhaps in a different role. This will help to retain volunteers and protect clients. Volunteer managers invest considerable time and effort into recruiting and matching volunteers and volunteers who feel cared for will keep coming back. Volunteers who feel burnt out, neglected or unappreciated will not. Specific training can also serve to assist in supporting volunteers.

Diversity and inclusion

Ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion for all people is a key tenet of person-centred care. It is especially important to pay attention to diverse needs in aged care settings including identifying and providing appropriate volunteers to visit and support individual clients and groups. For instance, options for volunteers with a disability, those who need wheelchairs or other support should be explored and encouraged. Volunteers and staff also come from diverse backgrounds and empathy, equity and inclusion are vital to provide optimum whole person-centred care in aged care settings.

Onsite arrangements

Depending on the organisational setup and use of

volunteers, the role of the Volunteer Manager may vary.

- The volunteer manager may organise and supervise all volunteer activity within their system, particularly in smaller organisations.
- The volunteer manager may set in place a volunteer program, recruit, train and induct appropriate volunteers and then introduce them to matched clients on various sites (residential care sites, for instance within the organisation). Overall responsibility for the volunteer program may rest with the Manager, with specific onsite supervision allocated to site managers, occupational therapists, lifestyle coordinators or other on-site staff. This requires ongoing collaboration and reporting to ensure compliance, feedback from staff, volunteers and clients.
- CVS Managers also recruit, manage and train volunteers who are then matched to appropriate clients who may be in government supported residential care places or receiving funded home care packages.

BE CLEAR - who IS responsible for volunteers at sites (including out of business hours) -and who needs to know this information.

Training for volunteer managers

To manage and develop a successful volunteer program, volunteer managers in aged care settings need to feel supported by senior managers and have access to a range of training opportunities to enable them to manage their role successfully in dealing with:

- Institutional requirements regarding care and compliance in their own organisation.
- Compliance requirements for managing volunteers in aged care settings set down by state and federal governments (subject to ongoing changes over time).
- Understanding how to manage volunteers and their expectations. While human resource management practices can inform this process, volunteers have different or additional requirements including flexibility, availability, specific training regarding boundaries and confidentiality and careful matching of volunteers with clients.
- Some volunteer managers may also manage staff in subsidiary support roles and/or onsite volunteer supervision roles.
- Experience working in the aged care field (as a carer/administrator) is important but not enough to qualify someone to manage a volunteer program.

Training is multifaceted and may include management training offered by Volunteering WA, or the Council for



Certification of Volunteer Managers; TAFE Community Services Diplomas; gerontology education; dementia care; counselling skills; administrative skills; professional HR/management/social work or related training. Volunteer managers need to keep up to date with new developments in approaches to managing volunteers. Aged Care volunteer managers also need to keep up to date with requirements associated with aged care. Volunteer manager networks are an important source of advice on training opportunities.

Learning from COVID-19 lockdowns

During the COVID restriction period, volunteer managers and onsite staff developed new forms of volunteering including sending letters to clients, personal phone calls both in residential care situations and those living at home, visiting through windows, and using computers and tablets to converse or play games. The assistance of staff was key to the success of these activities and was much appreciated by both clients and volunteers.

Many activities which were curtailed during lockdown, such as bus outings or social gatherings, were also benefitting the volunteers, who reported feeling cut off from their own social networks by the loss of activities. They reported being concerned about their clients as they missed the contact too. Some organisations put volunteers in touch with each other by phone or set up online meetings to keep them engaged.

Sometimes volunteers felt left out of the communications, decisions, and actions of organisations – and this **MUST** be recognised by managers, decision makers and organisations. If volunteers feel like they are getting too much information, not enough information, delayed information, or the wrong information, encourage them to get in touch – let them know you want to hear from them and how.

Enduring changes coming out of COVID

Less paperwork – organisations found the need to streamline the paperwork required to be signed by volunteers while still meeting insurance and compliance requirements (one organisation reduced from 6 documents to 2).

Video interviews – Many organisations have been able to change to online/video interviews for initial screening saving time for both the potential volunteer and the manager. Managers reported that face-to-face connection still gives the best indication and ‘feel’ for whether a prospective volunteer is the correct ‘fit’.

Online induction and training - many organisations developed additional online induction and training modules for volunteers to keep them up to date.

Diversity in volunteer age groups – many organisations found that active volunteers over 70 stepped back from volunteering and some did not return, due to limitations placed on this age group as ‘vulnerable’ as well as the requirement for vaccinations. Managers are now seeking to have a wider age range in their volunteer cohort. Older volunteers reported that volunteers should not be discounted only due to age as many are still capable and value being able to contribute by volunteering.

Vaccinations – aged care facilities currently require volunteers to provide evidence of an annual influenza vaccination as well as all required COVID-19 vaccinations. *Some exemptions apply.

Communications - volunteer managers have made changed how they keep volunteers updated and encouraged volunteers to go online to keep themselves informed.

New forms of volunteering have stayed - remote volunteering such as providing social support via video chat, phone calls and letters have remained, especially for clients who are isolated or in poor health. This has attracted new volunteers.

New volunteer roles - some facilities have developed new roles such as screening of visitors or writing letters to clients.

People new to volunteering - where volunteers were recruited during the lockdown period, managers looked for ways to keep those volunteers engaged into the future such as signing them up for specific roles, and including volunteers’ families in activities such as letter writing, training staff and clients in using computers and tablets to listen to music and connect with family etc. A proportion of these new volunteers have been found to fall away once lockdown and other COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

Variations in lockdown procedures - all aged care settings were in lockdown during the first WA state lockdown with no volunteers allowed onsite. Later, some volunteers were allowed to undertake some volunteer tasks subject to entry and temperature checks but with limited or no access to clients. When WA lockdowns were lifted, many volunteers were once again able to visit in person. It appears, however, that some sites owned by national organisations implemented semi lockdowns in their premises in WA when further interstate lockdowns occurred. This meant that some volunteers were restricted from visiting clients for extended periods of time. It was also apparent that there were varied interpretations of state health advice.

NETWORKING AND SUPPORT AMONG VOLUNTEER MANAGERS

Volunteer managers, especially new volunteer managers, reported great benefit from being able to rely on each other and connect via video chat with their networks during lockdown and also when things were changing across the sector. Three important groups were identified as being resources to publicise to volunteer managers in aged care settings:

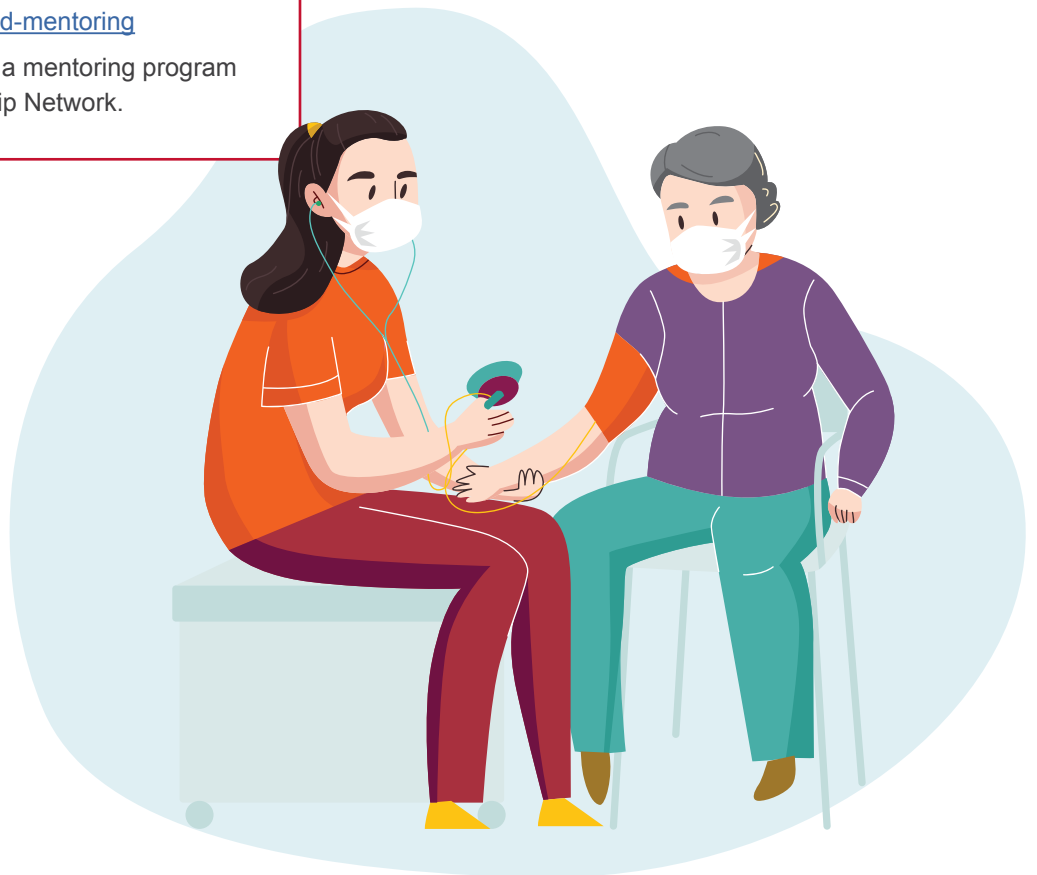
Aged Care Volunteer Co-ordinators Network

CVS Volunteer Managers Network

Volunteering WA Volunteer Manager Network

www.volunteeringwa.org.au/volunteer-management/networks-and-mentoring

Volunteering WA also has a mentoring program and a Volunteer Leadership Network.



MU Murdoch
University


volunteeringWA


lotterywest

This resource can be downloaded from www.volunteeringwa.org.au/agedcare