

Volunteering WA Report

Project Title: University students' experiences of volunteering: A qualitative case study.

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University students' experiences of volunteering to support older adults: A qualitative case study

Background

Volunteering is important to society and has benefits for recipients of volunteering, communities, volunteers themselves, and organisations. Volunteering is a well-established part of providing services to patients. Specialised programs have been developed, such as the *Hospital Elder Life Program*, where the volunteer role includes targeted support such as assisting patients with feeding and providing support to patients with delirium or cognitive decline (Hshieh et al., 2018). Evaluations of volunteer programs have generally focussed on patient health outcomes (Hshieh et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019), with less research on the experiences of volunteers and the benefits they may potentially gain from volunteering.

Student volunteering in hospitals is driven by many factors including meeting course requirements; altruism; a desire to help patients and support health professionals; to obtain experience; and improve employment prospects (Handy et al., 2010). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic there are reports of increased volunteering in hospitals by university students (AlOmar et al., 2021; Domaradzki & Walkowiak, 2021). The relationship between motivators to volunteer and benefits gained has been suggested to be intrinsically linked to the longevity of an individual volunteering (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). Volunteers with a reason for participating (e.g., to help others, or to increase employability) may have an expectation of what they will gain from this experience, and if the benefits align with the expectation, it is suggested they will volunteer for longer or volunteer again (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020).

University student volunteering has many benefits (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020), including opportunities to gain confidence in workplace settings, develop rapport-building

skills and reinforce learning (Handy et al., 2010). Volunteering as a method of increasing employability has been both a driving force for universities encouraging participation (Anderson & Green, 2012) and student incentive to volunteer (Brewis et al., 2010). Studies that explored employers' perceptions of volunteering found that they perceived discipline-based volunteering to have a direct link to increasing a students' employability (Cunningham et al., 2013), with qualities and skills desired by employees enhanced through discipline-based volunteering (Cunningham et al., 2013). Employability benefits are one aspect, yet development of life skills has also been proven as a benefit of student volunteering (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). These benefits include development of conflict resolution skills, leadership abilities, critical thinking, interpersonal communication skills, and self-efficacy (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020).

As a result of volunteering, students not only experience individual benefits but through engagement with the community and hospital environments, students may also develop greater levels of empathy and greater awareness of social difference and diversity (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). Hence, students develop a broader understanding of the community they are in (Anderson & Green, 2012). Fostering a sense of civic responsibility has the potential to lead students to volunteering again in the future (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020).

Time constraints are seen as the main barrier to students volunteering (Brewis et al., 2010; Gage & Thapa, 2012) resulting from study pressures, time spent doing paid work, family commitments, and involvement in other community groups (Brewis et al., 2010). Other barriers include financial constraints, family and friends not being involved in volunteering, being unaware of how to get involved, being unaware of volunteering opportunities, and personal health issues (Gage & Thapa, 2012).

Volunteering programs targeted at university students must remain flexible and incorporate relevant learning, socialisation and networking opportunities to remain relevant to the academic and social lives of students (Gage & Thapa, 2012). Evaluation of volunteering that is a service-learning requirement in university courses is reported in the literature (AlOmar et al., 2021), however, there are few reported evaluations of student volunteering in healthcare services that are not related to a specific course requirement.

This study aims to explore university health professional students' experiences of volunteering in Western Australia. There is limited literature on university students' experiences of volunteering outside of their curriculum requirements. Conducting this study provides an opportunity to gain insight into the barriers, motivators, and benefits of student volunteering in this context.

Research question and aims

The research question is: What are the experiences of university health professional students volunteering in Western Australia?

The objectives of the study are to:

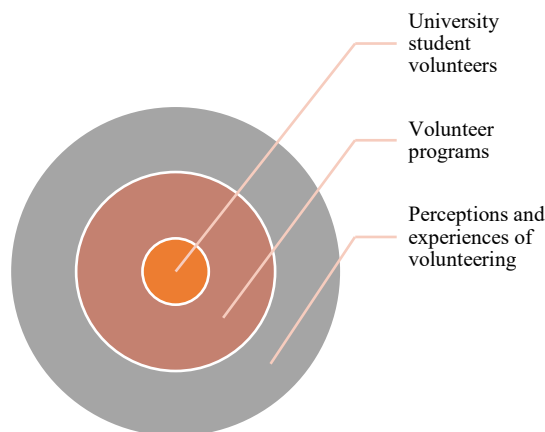
1. Describe the motivation and perceptions of the university health professional student volunteers and the relevance to learning and future practice.
2. Explore the experiences of university health professional students volunteering.
3. Explore the barriers and facilitators to volunteering among university health professional students.

Methodology

An exploratory, embedded, single case study design was adopted for the proposed research. As this research intended to understand the experiences, perceptions and interpretations of the participants and provide a discussion of the phenomenon in a real-life context, a qualitative exploratory case study approach was deemed most appropriate (Cope, 2015; Koplou et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). A case study investigates a bounded system (a case) over a period of time (Harrison & Mills, 2016). An embedded case design examines units of analysis associated with the case under study (Cope, 2015). The ‘case’ focused on in this study is volunteer programs in Western Australia, the context of the case is the perceptions and experiences of volunteering, with the embedded units of analysis being university health professional student volunteers (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Exploratory embedded single case study research design



Participants

Participants were students enrolled in a health professional program of study at a university during the time of their volunteering. Exclusion criteria were those under 18 years

of age, those volunteering as part of a course requirement and those not enrolled in a program of study at a university at the time of volunteering.

Recruitment

Eligible participants were initially identified by a nurse-led volunteer program administration staff. Those eligible were sent an e-mail from the generic volunteer program e-mail address on behalf of the researchers. The e-mail introduced the study, provided access to a participant information form and provided a link for individuals to register their interest and provide name and contact details (phone and e-mail) to be contacted by the researchers.

Secondary recruitment was undertaken via flyers posted in hospital wards of two major WA hospitals known to have older adult volunteer programs and e-mail announcement from nursing course learning management systems. Links provided introduced the study, provided access to a participant information form and provided a link for individuals to register their interest and provide name and contact details (phone and e-mail) to be contacted by the researchers.

The researchers made contact with interested individuals to discuss the study, answer any questions the individual may have and schedule an interview date/time convenient to the participant. Participants were e-mailed a link to a consent form to review and digitally complete prior to their scheduled interview.

Data Collection

Participants took part in a one-to-one semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams undertaken by a research assistant. The interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were audio recorded. Interviews were guided by an interview schedule developed by the research team to align to the research aim and objectives, guided by the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement and the literature. The interview schedule included some

demographic questions. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Teams and checked by the interviewer.

Data Analysis

Demographic data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with range, mean and frequencies being calculated. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically using NVivo (2023). Thematic analysis will be undertaken to identify, analyse and report themes and concepts generated from the data set. The analysis adhered to the six steps of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006):

- 1) Familiarisation of the data
- 2) Coding
- 3) Theme searching
- 4) Reviewing themes
- 5) Defining themes
- 6) Report writing.

The research assistant familiarised themselves with the data by listening to the audio recording and concurrently reading the verbatim transcripts repeatedly to allow for data immersion while also confirming accuracy of the transcription. This was followed by preliminary coding where transcripts were annotated for assigned meanings, linked concepts and general annotations. Selective coding was used to systematically code the data set to provide greater depth and context to the analysis. Evolved themes were reviewed and refined by two researchers.

Ethical considerations

The study was deemed low-risk. There were no instances of a participant experiencing discomfort in sharing their experience of volunteering. Consent was obtained from all participants prior to their interview taking place. Once transcriptions were confirmed and

pseudonyms used, audio-recordings were deleted. All data collected is kept in accordance with ECU's Data Management Policy. Electronic data is stored on a secure Microsoft SharePoint site provisioned by ECU's IT Services as required in ECU's Records Management Policy. The data will be retained for seven years and destroyed, if appropriate at the end of the retention period. Information will only be used for the purpose of this research, and it will only be disclosed with permission, except as required by law.

Findings

Participant characteristics

Six health professional students participated in interviews. All participants were female.

Participant ages ranged from 21-53 years, with a mean age of 31 years. Four participants were entry-to-practice nursing students, one was undertaking a Graduate Diploma of Counselling and Psychotherapy and one was a Bachelor of Biomedical Science (Population Health major) student. Participants reported volunteering from between one month to almost two years and across various settings including paediatrics, community and hospital settings (Table 1).

Table 1*Participant characteristics*

| Participant number | Gender | Age | Previous volunteering experience | University course during volunteering | Volunteering period | Volunteering setting | Volunteering frequency |
|---------------------------|---------------|------------|---|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Female | 48 | Yes | Graduate Diploma Counselling and Psychotherapy | 4 months | Hospital (older adults) | Weekly & gradually less due to her own commitments |
| 2 | Female | 21 | No | Bachelor of Biomedical Science, majoring in Anatomy and Human biology and population health | 3-4 months | Hospital (older adults) | Weekly - fortnightly |
| 3 | Female | 53 | Yes | Nursing | 1 month ago | Hospital (older adults) | Weekly |
| 4 | Female | 30 | No | Nursing | 1 year, 10 months | Hospital (older adults) | Weekly |
| 5 | Female | 33 | Yes | Nursing Masters | | Hospital (paediatrics) | Weekly and sometimes more for special events |
| 6 | 1 | 34 | Yes | Nursing | | Community (telephone helpline) | Weekly but would fluctuate sometimes |

Participants reported positive experiences of volunteering. Their experiences were strongly aligned to their chosen area of study as a future health professional. The three main themes were; 1) Reflections on volunteering, 2) Valuable and diverse experiences, and 3) Challenges of volunteering.

Reflections on volunteering

Participants shared their experiences of volunteering, reflecting on what led them to volunteer and their perceptions of the benefits of volunteering to themselves (both personally and professionally), patients and the broader community. The subthemes described below represent motivators for volunteering, benefits to knowledge application, assurance of career choice, and building connections with others.

Motivators for volunteering

Participants described the motivators which led them to engage with their volunteering role initially, and explained broader motivating factors for university students to seek out volunteering opportunities whilst studying. These motivators are presented as extrinsic and intrinsic factors. The extrinsic motivating factors for initial engagement in volunteering related to an alignment with the ethos of the organisation in which volunteering was taking place and the opportunities they offered the health professional students.

“I wanted hospital experience, so that was one of the programs at the hospital”. Participant 2

“It works perfectly with what I'm doing”. Participant 3

The intrinsic motivating factors related to the value of future benefit, chance for personal growth and development, as well as alignment to one's personal values and beliefs.

Participants shared that they engaged in volunteering for a variety of reasons, the primary reason being related to academic and future employability.

“I'm hoping to start medicine if my application gets accepted, so I know you need volunteering experience for that”. Participant 2

“I also mentioned it to one of our course coordinator(s) because I needed her as a reference”. Participant 3

“I saw like volunteering as it's something that (sic) could help your resume”. Participant 5

“I think it's really good as a resume padder to show you that you're not just interested in the job, but you know as your values and morals do align. [...] So it shows that you have a ...personal interest and it's not just a job”. Participant 6

There was also a perception that it could help with building professional experience, clarifying career pathways and experiencing the realities of their chosen career.

“I also think it's a good way to find out if ...the area within what you're studying that you perhaps want to specialise in”. Participant 1

“I think it's very it's a very good taste of what's to come, but without the same pressures. But it gives you a chance to observe without being assessed”. Participant 3

“It gives you extra experience that you might not get through job and working, prac and everything”. Participant 6

Engagement with the organisation, the environment, the staff and patients did assist in relevant exposure their chosen future profession and the development of transferable skills.

“I think it's a really good way to get some hands-on experience...while still being well supported”. Participant 1

“It gives me that clinical experience, which is really invaluable”.

Participant 3

“I never worked in a hospital before so that was a good opportunity for me to, like you know, go in a hospital environment”. Participant 4

“As a nursing student, I would like to get involved in a hospital setting, know what's the department about and what's the patient expectations and what to expect...to see how the nurses they're working, how the doctor there, how the other, you know allied health (sic) professionals, how they work. [...] Spend some time with them (children) and also want to learn how to communicate with kids. [...] What's their (parent's) perspective, because I'm not a parent myself”. Participant 5

Student volunteers were also motivated by personal beliefs and values and a the desire to contribute and support those being helped with the organisation.

“On a personal level, I feel like it's important to give back a bit and I don't, you know, I don't do enough of that. I'm so occupied with study, work, study, work and I think ‘no’, it's important just to actually do something just to be there and without any kind of, you know gain from it, although there's a gain, but...you know what I mean”. Participant 3

“They're (parents/carers) in a very stressful situation because their kids are sick [...] So for me, I want to help them. Like you know, from yeah, like as a human being, I want to help them”. Participant 5

“I do like helping people, given you know my coming profession (nursing). So I wanted to be able to give back where I could”. Participant 6

Benefits to knowledge application

The volunteering experience offered opportunities to identify, link, and at times apply the theoretical and skills-based university course content within a realistic health care setting.

“It's something that we should encourage people to do, and I think it's something that we should specifically encourage people who are studying in, like the health sector”. Participant 1

“So when you talk with people, you see things, it could stimulate your knowledge [...] And then next time when you in that setting, when you’re on the prac and you could practise it [...] (you’ll gain) a lot of confidence”. Participant 5

“You’re seeing in practice what you learn in theory [...] in that clinical environment and to see the reality of day-to-day stuff that happens, you know and all the challenges that you don’t always know about until you’re in the situation. [...] it gives you a realistic view”. Participant 3

“You can start to relate the content to the real world, which is really beneficial as student”. Participant 6

Further, participants shared that volunteering provided opportunities to better understand course content, apply skill-based knowledge, and witness health facility protocols.

“Being able to sort of try and utilise some of the skills I’ve been studying and learning and weave them into the delivery of the volunteer program”.

Participant 1

“So...it was beneficial to learn lots of things also, like you know, some signs and symptoms of certain diseases”. Participant 4

“I’m like, wow, that’s something (Code Blue response) I learned on video. But the thing I literally see what the crash cart looked like, and how the emergency will be”. Participant 5

Participants also shared a growing awareness and understanding of skills and approaches to ‘person-centered care’ and reflective practice. Person-centred care is at the core of course content related to building therapeutic relationships. Volunteers shared experiences related to the importance of presence, kindness, active listening, communication, and empathy.

“So I’ve been able to see some of that and she (client) was always giving me these, her medical background, so I can kind of relate everything together and you can see the mental health problems have stemmed from some of the physical problems and the problems have created isolation and stuff”. Participant 6

“I think for me it showed, uh, very much hands-on the benefits, [...] positive impact, that engagement can have. Showing an interest in engaging with people, spending time with people, showing them that you know their experiences are valued and valid. I think it was really important in that respect”. Participant 1

“So it’s like having to like, having a degree of, like, more empathy and kindness and gentleness”. Participant 1

“Will help me understand people, get more empathy”. Participant 5

“So before my communication was not that good, but along with the volunteering [...] if I learn something in my class or if I learn something during my tutorial, [...] got a chance to apply it [...] It also helped me to improve my uh, communication skills as well understand the patient better. (Before) when it comes to family I was, I don’t feel that comfortable. But after doing this, yeah, I also feel comfortable”. Participant 4

Participants also described how their volunteering experiences has helped link theory to practice and has further developed their understanding of person-centred care in diverse situations.

“I think in just learning how to be comfortable approaching people who may be in a state of emotional dysregulation as well, because as much as

you can study about how to content someone who's very emotional, it's something that you need to do hands on [...] in an actual setting”.

Participant 1

“It helps particularly with interacting with, well in this case, the elderly, because it's a different skill set from, say, dealing with children or dealing with your peers or you know. So it it's that learning patience being able to actually listen. Umm and not dominate, you know?” Participant 3

“I think every experience I have that kind of helped to meld now overall care I can give and just being able to sit and listen”. Participant 6

Further, volunteers discussed the importance of reflective practice and how their time volunteering has impacted their understanding of theory, person-centred care and their development of professional identity.

“I kind of feel like I don't know, doctors come in, they're like. “Ah, this is this is wrong with you. I'll fix that” and then they leave. It's just I feel like the body and the well-being and the person's health are all really interconnected. And I think that's kind of lost”. Participant 1

“So I think in a turn can help me study as a nursing student cause it taught me how to be resilient cause that's really important as a nurse or nursing students. [...] It's helped me with (developing) reflection (skills)”.

Participant 5

Assurance of career choice

Participants expressed that their volunteering experiences have helped them solidify, their chosen degree or career path.

“For me it's solidified that I was definitely studying the right area and doing the right things”. Participant 1

“(volunteering) like gives me motivation to be a nurse, a good nurse in the future. [...] The nurse, I wanna be”. Participant 5

Some also shared that their volunteering experiences have allowed them to entertain new avenues within their initial university degree trajectory.

“But it did kind of affect my learning, kind of more broadly, where it made me more motivated to want to do like medicine or nursing. [...] I felt that at uni I was studying like, what would it be like to do honours and research, whereas like doing this volunteering made me kind of want to work with people and their health. [...] I hope to start studying again. I hope to do something more like human to human”. Participant 2

“NDIS or mental health (are things) I'm interested so I can get more knowledge [...]

It could help me to maybe help me influence a little bit like which direction I wanna go”. Participant 5

“Umm, I think it's just been very helpful to. See like I would have probably never considered community nursing and this has definitely made me consider it at least or, you know, not roll it off the table”. Participant 6

Building connections with others

The volunteer programs also allowed participants to build beneficial connections with staff, fellow volunteers, patients, and clients. Some of the participants felt as though the relationships they formed have helped them grow in their knowledge and understanding.

“You learn a lot from even just the incidental conversations going along, you know, around you and just seeing the processes and how things work and actually getting to talk to nurses”. Participant 3

“Some (other student volunteers) study, like Bioscience, some study Paramedics, some study nursing. So it's like I feel like we can also, you know like learn from each other”. Participant 5

“I like to be a volunteer, so I can meet people like minded”. Participant 5

Others commented on the benefit they felt from the connection they had to onsite staff and the organisation.

“And just being part of a team as well, even though you know I must say everyone you know, I've dealt with their even though you're just a volunteer, you're usually treated as a member of the team, as if you were an employed member of the team, which is really nice”. Participant 4

“I've enjoyed being able to build a long-standing relationship with not only the organisation but with the people I see”. Participant 6

Engaging with patients and clients was seen as beneficial, both as a sense of enjoyment and also as a learning experience. Volunteers spoke of their enjoyment in their engagement with patients and clients and how learning about their life stories brought new insight and enrichment to the experience.

“I enjoyed, um, the engagement with the patients who were on the program. Just being able to go in and talk to them, find out about their own experiences, what they would, what they wanted to do, how they wanted to approach the program”. Participant 1

“It was interesting this project specifically because I had the opportunity to kind of socialise with older people. Which part of my grandparents I've never had any opportunity to yeah, spend time with people of that kind of age bracket”. Participant 2

“I feel cause you kind of think when you're at uni I'm gonna study this and that's gonna be my job and then that's my life forever. But when you actually talk to people about their lives [...] was really cool to see the twist and turns people take with like life like talking”. Participant 2

“Ohh, sunflower question, I will talk with them and ... I've learned lots of interesting things related to life which I won't be able to learn even in reading a book or any outside within our people. So I really enjoyed”.

Participant 4

Additionally, the engagement with patients and clients, was also discussed within the context of learning how to navigate when people declined having volunteer support for the day. This engagement allowed students to further understand key lessons on building therapeutic relationships.

“Ohh, some patients didn't want volunteers and I straight off the bat I would like walk in and be like hi, I'm (redacted), I'd introduce myself, say like what I'm here for, and then they would just be like. They would either not really give me good energy, like I could just you can just read when someone doesn't want to talk to you. Then some people would just plain out and be like I'm just tired, I'm going back to sleep, and yeah. I just took it as if I was in hospital and someone was knocking on like, you're not always in the mood to socialise. So I didn't take it personally, like, they're obviously in hospital. They don't have to talk to me, yeah”. Participant 2

“See, sometimes they're just really unwell and they, you know, they like all of us. You don't wanna really talk to anyone if you're not feeling well”.

Participant 3

“I can understand that sometimes they will say no, they don't want to see. But yeah I try. I try to understand why they're saying, you know, they didn't have enough sleep. They couldn't eat properly and then they go for the physio and then then Doctor comes in and then nurse will come in to do some procedure they have to go for the MRI and everything. So that was perfectly fine”. Participant 4

Valuable and diverse experiences

The overall consensus from the research participants, was that their experience of volunteering was positive, beneficial and enjoyable.

“It was overall it was a really positive experience. [...] I just thought it was really beneficial”. Participant 1

“Umm, before volunteering I didn't I honestly didn't even know what volunteering really was like [...] it had never been something like I [...] wasn't interested in. [...] I thought all the benefits were just for the people who receive [...] But now that I've volunteered, I see that there's benefits like for myself as well, which I think is important because it makes it more sustainable for like people to keep doing it”. Participant 2

“So yeah, it's good that I got this opportunity. I should be thankful ..., I got this opportunity to volunteer”. Participant 4

“Every time I go there, I enjoy my time a lot. Just it's a lot good energies”.

Participant 5

Many spoke about how welcomed they felt on the wards, within the organisations, and by the other volunteers. Having this positive experience of community and support, greatly benefited their overall experience.

“I felt that in the program we were like welcomed on the wards. It was a really good response from the patients”. Participant 1

“And just being part of a team as well, even though you know I must say everyone you know, I've dealt with their even though you're just a volunteer, you're usually treated as a member of the team, as if you were an employed member of the team, which is really nice”. Participant 3

“Like from starting first thing I enjoy, like you know, every day I get to see like, you know, lots of different people”. Participant 4

“Also I every time I go there I got a lot of good energy because people they appreciate even people working, hospital nurses, doctors, they respect volunteer because we do help them a lot so they kind of like you know not just because you are unpaid volunteer [...] they show respect to us”. Participant 5

Benefits for patients and communities

The volunteering experience was also seen as something not only beneficial for their career trajectory, but also for the patients and communities they engaged with. Participants shared that they observed the ability to have a positive impact on the mental health of the patients/clients, increase socialisation, and build hope.

“I also met (sic) few patient, like you know, where now when their family cannot come and visit them more frequently. So they get depressed [...] so I used to go there and sit with them, talk with them, so that make them feel good”. Participant 4

“So many people just want someone to talk to and they want to be heard, and I think, you know, especially with the VP Frailty project, a lot of them were just really happy to be. They were happy to be involved, they were

happy to be a part of it and they were happy to have someone coming in and taking a genuine interest in supporting them during a time it would have been quite stressful". Participant 1

"Yeah, they really enjoy the social interactions and the chat with volunteering, which they couldn't do with doctors or nurses (because they were too busy)". Participant 2

"And like this lady I see she doesn't have access to a lot of her friends and family through various situations, so having someone to chat to [...] All she ever did (in the beginning) was like tell me all these problems, and now she's talking about going on a trip and seeing the future. And I can see like there's more hope". Participant 6

"And I also think especially it's a really good way to connect people who may not normally connect in society. So, you know, people in there, you know, younger people were volunteering in aged care. Or in the disability sector, that sort of thing. [...] It also helps you know breakdown barriers".

Participant 1

"I think, you know, volunteering has benefits for the people at the receiving end of service. And it's also really beneficial for people at the delivery end as well". Participant 1

Challenges of volunteering

Challenges to volunteering encompassed both personal and program related sentiments shared by the participants.

Personal Challenges

As participants were studying at the time of the volunteering experience, the commitment of time was voiced consistently throughout interviews as one of the biggest challenges to engaging with and continuing to volunteer.

“I'm just gonna give away my time for free. And I could be spending that time like, working or like studying more cause there's always more to do it uni. I think that's a barrier”. Participant 2

“mostly finding the time is probably the biggest challenge I would think, yeah”. Participant 3

“Yeah, I'll commit every week and for a year, that's like a lot of sacrifice”.
Participant 5

Participants also spoke of the pressure to balance regular volunteering commitments whilst juggling university and life demands, and how this impacted their levels of engagement.

“But for me, if I'm studying and have like a few assignments to be do like, I feel like it would be like a lot of pressure”. Participant 5

“It's like, you know, do I also have time to put this in and say to my husband, because I have to go see a client and sometimes it can feel like a bit of a chore”. Participant 6

“I felt I wasn't able to get as much out of the program because of the own demands that then came on my time externally”. Participant 1

Student participants spoke about other personal challenges being related to finances and health. Although health was not mentioned a barrier to volunteering, one student did mention that her journey with anxiety was something that she had to overcome whilst engaging as a student volunteer. This student explained that asking for help or guidance from

program staff and hospital staff was one of her most significant challenges whilst volunteering.

“I just basically do what I always do with my anxiety and that’s like, push it down”. Participant 1

When discussing the challenges for themselves and others volunteering financial implications of not having a monetary gain were discussed. One student postulated that many may resist volunteering due to lack of monetary gain.

“I also think we do live in a capitalistic society where people like, well, what’s in it for me and if they can’t see. Umm. A specific a specific kind of monetary gain for them”. Participant 1

“Fitting it into your lifestyle can sometimes be really tricky because it’s not a paid thing”. Participant 6

Structure of volunteer programs

Participants spoke to challenges related to the formality of the onboarding process. This included the necessary documentation as well as required training. This was seen as both frustrating for students and a potential barrier to other’s engagement.

“I think it’s also a barrier that volunteering kind of takes a long time, like from when you first put in your application. It’s a while to actually start doing it and discouraging [...] that kind of time in between you can lose your motivation”. Participant 2

“You have to keep provid(ing)... vaccinations and serology and all of that. That could be a bit off putting for some volunteers. I can imagine, especially because it’s just volunteer”. Participant 3

An additional challenge was related to the time commitment requirements of programs being viewed as inflexible due to either the weekly requirements, shift length being too long or the availability of the shifts.

“Umm, the shifts. Uh, uh. I think they're flexible in the sense that they're you can afternoon or mornings, but they can be quite long. Periods of time when there's nothing you to do”. Participant 3

“It would be nice to have the chance to maybe do it, some do it on a weekend rather than weekday, but I understand that you know, administratively it's probably too hard to do that”. Participant 3

“(At the hospital) they need to commit at least one year and then they ideally they would like you to do on one shift (each week). But for me, if I'm studying and have like a few assignments to be do, like, I feel like it would be like a lot of pressure. And then maybe if do they accept like three months, six months commitments, um, there will be more flexible”.

Participant 5

Participants shared a lack of confidence may be experienced prior to and after commencing a volunteer program. One student shared that one of the hinderances for people engaging with volunteering maybe due to a lack of skillset offering or how to engage with volunteering programs.

“I also think a lot of people just don't know where to start. They'll be like, well, I can't. I wanna volunteer, but I'm not sure how or where or what I can offer”. Participant 1

“I understand that my younger sister is also a nurse and I know how busy they are and particularly this time. So yeah, I feel hesitant to ask them”.

Participant 1

After the participants were onboarded, they did share that they had varying experiences with navigating sentiments related to a lack of confidence related to skills, how to engage with patients and understanding their role within their respective programs. However, as participants engaged with the program, their initial anxiety and feelings of inadequacy did subside.

“And I had never had really any experience in a hospital volunteering or with older people. And then we were just kind of like...told these are your patients. Just go and see them. And I was just so intimidated. Like it's a bit. It's a bit hard to like, go and knock on someone's a strangers door as when they're older than you would be like, hi, can I spend the next four hours with you? You know, I found it really hard to engage with people at the start”. Participant 2

“Like initially it was challenging for me that like, you know how I'm gonna go and I would like, I'm gonna go and see every day like, you know, new people. So that that was the at the starting it was challenging but after that it got better”. Participant 4

“I was a bit nervous to start volunteering like, you know, because it was unfamiliar[...] But then it got better”. Participant 4

Additional program-based challenges were in relation to training incongruencies with what some participants did with patients and feeling as though support was not clearly accessible.

“And I think the training was really different to what it was actually like, cause in the training we were shown all these games and how to take people for walks [...] I didn't play any games. I didn't really take anyone for walks. Mine was mostly just like conversations with people”.

Participant 2

“I felt like I had to learn what to do on the job kind of thing. [...] (there) was no one telling us what to do and things. [...] It was all very like, self independent. Like I took myself to the ward and did that”. Participant 2
“You know, those sorts of things which you just, I suppose, expected to work out yourself. Because there isn't anyone around to show you”.

Participant 3

Some participants did offer suggestions in relation to these program challenges.

“Maybe if there had been perhaps a specific nurse on the ward that we could have that we knew that that was our go to person. Perhaps that might have been helpful”. Participant 1

Conclusion

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore university health professional students' experiences of volunteering. Health professional students identified clear benefits to engaging in volunteering during their course, however, identified some potential barriers to a positive volunteering experience. The findings of this study provide valuable insight into the volunteer experience of university students outside of their course requirements. It provides useful information to organisations and educators as to the barriers

and enablers of health care professional student volunteering, which may inform volunteering programs in the future.

Appendix A Recruitment e-mail

Dear volunteer,

We have been asked to circulate an opportunity to participate in a research study about your recent experiences as a volunteer within the nurse led volunteer support program at Hollywood Private Hospital and Joondalup Health Campus. The research is led by a team of researchers from ECU and has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee. The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of university students volunteering in a nurse-led program for hospitalised older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The researchers are recruiting volunteers who were enrolled in a program of study at a university whilst they were volunteering. Your participation would involve participating in a one-on-one interview online taking approximately 30-45 minutes. A \$20 Coles Myer voucher will be provided in acknowledgement of your time and efforts. Please see the participant information sheet attached to this e-mail. If you have any queries, please contact the lead researcher Dr Olivia Gallagher via e-mail o.gallagher@ecu.edu.au or phone 6304 3937, or Associate Professor Rosemary Saunders via e-mail rosemary.saunder@ecu.edu.au or phone 6304 3513.

Your decision to participate or not will have no impact on your volunteering or relationships with the health services within which you have volunteered or the university. If you are interested in participating, you can access the link below and enter your contact details and a member of the research team will make contact with you to discuss further.

(insert link)

Regards,

Volunteer program team

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Appendix B Participant information form



Chief Investigator: Dr Olivia Gallagher

School of Nursing and Midwifery

Edith Cowan University

270 Joondalup Drive

JOONDALUP WA 6027

Phone: 6304 3937

Email: o.gallagher@ecu.edu.au

Project title: University students' experiences of volunteering to support older adults in hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative case study.

Approval Number: 2022-03546-GALLAGHER

An invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a project titled: University students' experiences of volunteering to support older adults in hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative case study. This project seeks to explore the experiences of university students volunteering in a nurse-led program for hospitalised older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

You are being asked to take part in this project as you have been identified as a volunteer in the nurse led volunteer support program for older adults in hospital and were a university student at the time of volunteering.

Please read this information carefully. Feel free to contact the lead researcher via e-mail or telephone to ask questions about the research or anything that you do not understand or

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would like to know more about. Before deciding whether to take part, you might want to talk about it with a relative or friend.

What is this project about?

The objectives of the study are:

1. Describe the motivation and perceptions of the university student volunteers and the relevance to learning and future practice.
2. Explore the experiences of university students volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Explore the barriers and facilitators to volunteering among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This project is funded by Volunteering WA.

What does my participation involve?

Your participation in this research project would require you to participate in a one-to-one interview online, lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. You will be asked to sign a consent statement prior to the commencement of the interview confirming that you:

- understand what you have read;
- consent to take part in the research project;
- consent to have your interview audio recorded.

Do I have to take part in this research project?

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any time. Your decision to take part, or not to take part and later withdraw, will not affect your relationship with any member of the research team or the hospitals within which you have volunteered or the university.

How will my privacy be protected?

Any information collected in connection with this research project that may identify you will remain confidential. Your interview will be transcribed, and you will be allocated a different name in the transcript.

All data collected will be kept in accordance with ECU's Data Management Policy.

Electronic data will be stored on a secure Microsoft SharePoint site provisioned by ECU's IT Services and physical records will be stored as required in ECU's Records Management Policy. The data will be retained for seven years and destroyed, if appropriate at the end of the retention period. Data will be deidentified when stored and at the end of the retention period, the data will be destroyed, if appropriate under the State Records Act. Your information will only be used for the purpose of this research and it will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law.

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

In accordance with relevant Australian and/or Western Australian privacy and other relevant laws, you have the right to request access to the information about you that is collected and stored by the research team. You also have the right to request that any information with which you disagree be corrected. Please inform the research team member named at the end of this letter if you would like to access your information.

What are the possible benefits of participation?

There are no direct benefits to you participating in this research study. However, you will be contributing to a study that may inform or improve the volunteer experience of others into the future. You will receive a \$20 Coles Myer voucher in recognition of your time and effort in participating.

What are the possible risks of participation and how will these be managed?

There may be a low risk that you feel some discomfort when discussing specific volunteering experiences. If this occurs the interview will be paused and you will be offered a break or to stop the interview. ECU counselling services are accessible to participants if required.

<https://intranet.ecu.edu.au/student/support/counselling-and-equity-services/counselling>

Has this research been approved?

This research project has received the approval of Edith Cowan University's Human Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). The approval number is 2022-03546-GALLAGHER.

Contacts

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this project, please contact the following people.

Lead investigator: Dr Olivia Gallagher

Edith Cowan University

P: 6304 3937

E: o.gallagher@ecu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Independent Persons

Research Ethics Support Officer

Edith Cowan University

P: 6304 2170

E: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Appendix C Participant consent form



Chief Investigator: Dr Olivia Gallagher

School of Nursing and Midwifery

Edith Cowan University

270 Joondalup Drive

JOONDALUP WA 6027

Phone: 6304 3937

Email: o.gallagher@ecu.edu.au

Project title: University students' experiences of volunteering to support older adults in hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative case study.

Approval Number: 2022-03546-GALLAGHER

I, _____ have read the Participant Information Form. By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I:

- have been provided with a copy of the Participant Information Form explaining the research study;
- have read and understood the information provided;
- have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had questions answered to my satisfaction;
- can contact the research team if I have any additional questions;
- understand that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that my identity will not be disclosed without consent;

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- understand that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty;
- freely agree to participate in the project;
- understand the data collected for the purposes of this research project may be used in further approved research projects provided my name and any other identifying information is removed.

I agree to have my interview audio recorded Yes No

Participant name:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D Interview schedule

Demographic questions:

| | |
|---|---|
| What is your gender? | <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| What is your age? (years) | |
| What university course are/were you enrolled in? | |
| How long did you volunteer in the nurse-led volunteer program for? (weeks/months) | |
| What was the frequency of your volunteering during time? (e.g. /week) | |

Interview questions:

1. Explain why you decided to become a volunteer within the nurse-led volunteer program?
2. What do you think are the benefits of volunteering for university students?
3. Thinking back to your volunteering what were the things that you enjoyed?
4. Were there any parts of the volunteering. you found challenging ? If yes, can you please provide examples.
5. Did COVID-19 have any impact on your volunteering? If yes, can you please provide examples?

Prompts:

- a) Willingness to volunteer

- b) Restrictions on access/activities
- c) Personal health concerns
- d) Interactions with other health professionals
- e) Interactions with older adult patients and family members (if any)

And how were these impacts overcome?

6. How do you feel your volunteering experience contributed to your learning within your course of study?

Prompts:

- a) Personal development
- b) Professional development
- c) Clinical and non-technical skills for those who are health care professional students

7. How has your volunteering experience influenced your professional practice (i.e. Work integrated learning experience or as a recent graduate)?

Prompts:

- a) Preparedness for practice (e.g. orientation, familiarity with work environments)
- b) Communication skills
- c) Clinical and non-technical skills for those who are health care professional students

8. What do you think are the downsides of volunteering and how could improvements be made?

9. Can you share your thoughts/feelings before volunteering and if/how those are different since volunteering?

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