

Questions and Answers

Volunteer South West - Regional Out of the Box Volunteering

Primary Priority Group focus: Intersectional

Project summary:

To support Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to break down barriers to recruiting volunteers from the identified priority groups.

This support was offered to VIOs outside of the Bunbury area, and within the surrounding 5 LGAs (ie: the Shires of Capel, Collie, Dardanup, Donnybrook-Balingup and Harvey).

In addition, we undertook activities in these LGAs to target and inform volunteers, from the priority areas, who may otherwise miss out on meaningful volunteer opportunities.

Questions asked after presentation and responses:

1) Could you give us more information about the 'Helping Hands'?

The Helping Hands Hub is a new initiative that emerged directly from the connections and conversations at the Dardanup Community Connection Night. The event, co-hosted by Volunteer South West and the Dardanup Districts & Residents Association, brought together 16 local Volunteer Involving Organisations and community members interested in volunteering. Each organisation had 10 minutes to introduce their purpose and available roles, and VSW used the opportunity to highlight the importance of flexible and inclusive volunteering pathways.

As we all know many people are looking for short-term, flexible volunteering options that don't require long-term commitment or extensive onboarding. In response, the participating organisations collaborated to create the Helping Hands Hub, a shared pool of micro-volunteering opportunities that anyone can join without paperwork or formal processes.

These opportunities are now promoted on local Facebook pages and include simple, one-off tasks such as pruning roses at the Visitor Centre or helping with a community busy bee. Community members can simply turn up for an hour or two and contribute.

2) How much time did it take you to establish connections?

Establishing meaningful connections took longer than initially anticipated, mainly because trust-building and community engagement required a relationship-centred approach that doesn't happen over night. Over the two years we ran the program, we focused on one Shire at a time, which allowed us to spend the necessary time visiting Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) in person, learning about their needs, and understanding the challenges they faced.

Gaining a foothold in some communities is an ongoing process, particularly where there was resistance to change or hesitation about external input. Building trust required repeated visits, follow-up conversations, and demonstrating genuine commitment before organisations were ready to take our advice on board.

We also invested time in attending local expos (such as those organised by Workforce Australia – South West Local Jobs and the Shire) and delivering presentations at the

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Chamber of Commerce. These activities helped us gradually build visibility and credibility, but again, the impact was not immediate.

A key learning was that programs in regional areas must be designed with realistic timeframes. Relationship-building cannot be rushed, and a one-size-fits-all approach does not work.

In summary, establishing strong connections took months rather than weeks, and in some communities, the process continues. The time invested was essential – without it, the deeper work of supporting VIOs to redesign volunteer roles, improve induction processes, and adopt more inclusive and flexible practices would not have been possible.

3) How did you prioritise the stakeholders?

We didn't prioritise any stakeholders. We started with building a database of organisations per Shire and phoned the contacts to introduce the program, make appointments for personal visits and spent several days simply visiting and learning.

4) How did you track the data metrics?

We tracked data using a combination of structured planning tools, standardised forms, and regular follow-ups.

1. Centralised quarterly schedule An in-house quarterly schedule recorded all VIO visits, mentoring, training, and presentations, allowing us to track engagement numbers.

2. Standardised data collection tools We used updated forms, attendance sheets, stakeholder contact logs, and follow-up templates to ensure consistent data capture across all activities.

3. Ongoing monitoring with VIOs Regular follow-ups helped us track changes in readiness, progress in inclusive practices, support needs, and mentoring outcomes.

4. Attendance and engagement data For all training and presentations, we recorded participant numbers, VIO representation, priority group engagement, and qualitative feedback.

5. Communications analytics We monitored social media reach, interactions, click-throughs, and newsletter engagement to measure awareness-building activities.

6. Final evaluation All data is consolidated into our reporting to DSS/VWA with evaluation summaries and case studies at the end of the project.