BANKWEST CURTIN ECONOMICS CENTRE

Family Influence on Volunteering Participation in Australia

Prepared for Volunteering WA (VWA)

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Executive summary

This report examines the landscape of volunteering in Australia, with a particular focus on Western Australia. It explores the intergenerational transmission of volunteering activities and the socioeconomic drivers that influence volunteering activities at the extensive and intensive margins. Utilising data for Australians aged 15 years and over from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, the analysis identifies how parental behaviours, housing tenure, and demographic characteristics shape the volunteering habits of Australians across five generational cohorts.

The findings of the research confirm a role model effect, where an individual's propensity to volunteer is intrinsically linked to their parents' past and present volunteering activities. Childhood exposure to parental volunteering is common, with around two-thirds of individuals experiencing parental volunteering during childhood (ages 0–9) or early adolescence (ages 10–14). While current parental volunteering is less prevalent, around 22 per cent of individuals have one parent who volunteers, and a further 7.2 per cent have both parents volunteering.

Both childhood and early adolescence exposure (ages 0–14), as well as current parental participation, significantly increase the likelihood of an individual entering the volunteering workforce. The influence is substantial, equivalent to around one-third of average volunteering participation and weekly volunteering time. Early adolescence appears to be an important period to influencing volunteering intensity, as a high level of parental engagement in volunteering during this stage is most strongly associated with a higher number of volunteering hours per week later in life. The findings further indicate that both current and past exposure to parental volunteering can shape individuals' volunteering behaviour by strengthening pro-social orientation and encouraging greater community engagement. Exposure to volunteering within the family environment can help develop trust, social responsibility, and stronger connections to local communities, which in turn can increase the likelihood of volunteering both now and later in life.

Socioeconomic factors also influence volunteering activities across the board. The findings reveal that:

- higher education remains the most robust predictor of engagement in volunteering activities, with individuals who completed Year 12 or above consistently volunteering at a higher rate and intensity than those who completed Year 11 or below.
- excellent health status is associated with higher volunteering participation, highlighting the importance of health in enabling community involvement.

- full-time employment is associated with lower volunteering participation and fewer volunteering hours, suggesting that work-related time constraints is an important barrier to volunteering.
- homeowners and individuals who have lived longer in the same area are more likely to volunteer alongside their families, suggesting that residential stability is a prerequisite for deep community investment.

The findings suggest volunteering participation can be strengthened and enhanced by providing more supported pathways into volunteering for younger generations. By lowering barriers for young families and renters, and by leveraging the high engagement levels of older champion cohorts, we can build a more resilient volunteer workforce and social fabric. Recommendations include the implementation of family-friendly volunteering roles, targeted outreach in high-density rental corridors, and the expansion of inclusive opportunities for young people. Ultimately, viewing volunteering as a multigenerational legacy rather than a transactional activity may be essential for sustaining WA's volunteering sector.

Introduction and background

Setting the scene

Volunteering plays a vital role in advancing equitable growth, wellbeing and community cohesion in Western Australia (Duncan et al., 2021; Holmes et al., 2019). Despite some post-pandemic recovery in volunteering activities (Volunteering WA, 2023; Zhu, 2022; Biddle & Gray, 2022), the longer-term declining trend in volunteering remains a concern.

Intergenerational volunteering (IV), where people of different age cohorts engage in shared volunteering activities, can foster social cohesion and mutual understanding (Lokon et al., 2012; Blais et al., 2017). Family volunteering, where family members volunteer collectively or in a similar timeframe, is one form of IV that can shape an individuals' future engagement in volunteering. Research shows that adolescents are more likely to volunteer when their parents do (Van Goethem et al., 2014), and early exposure to community values fosters future volunteering (White, 2021).

Despite the economic and social significance of family influence in volunteering, little is known about the factors that shift the intensity and dynamics of volunteering participation within families. As such, it is important to understand whether children exposed to volunteering participation of parents and grandparents may be more likely to volunteer, or whether parents and grandparents exposed to volunteering participation of their children may be more likely to volunteer. By addressing these gaps, we can develop a more precise understanding of how the Western Australian family unit shapes the state's volunteering landscape.

While existing Australian research has laid a valuable foundation for understanding the social drivers of volunteering, there remains a significant opportunity to broaden the scope and depth of this inquiry. Currently, the evidence base is primarily built on qualitative methodologies, such as interviews and focus groups, which provide insights into how family, peers, and mentors inspire the initial decision to give back (McGregor-Lowndes et al., 2017). However, there is a distinct lack of rigorous quantitative analysis within the Australian context regarding intergenerational linkages of volunteering behaviour.

Notably, comprehensive longitudinal datasets like the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey have yet to be fully utilised to explore these familial dynamics. Furthermore, while current studies highlight that young people are often drawn to volunteering because it is a shared family value (Webber, 2011; Nursey-Bray et al., 2022), the relative weight of this influence remains unclear. Recent findings suggest that religious incentives or skill-building motives are some of the key drivers of volunteering (Alzaareer & Abdalla, 2023).

To move beyond descriptive themes and truly understand the mechanisms of generational giving, there is a clear need to shift from purely qualitative or mixed methods approaches toward robust and rigorous quantitative modelling. Leveraging rich longitudinal datasets (e.g., HILDA) enables us to track volunteering behaviours over time. It is essential to rigorously assess family influence against other primary motivators, such as career development and personal altruism, to determine its true impact on long-term engagement in volunteering.

The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) conducted this research project examining the influence of family on volunteering participation in WA through the Volunteering WA Research Grant Program 2025-2026.

This project investigates the following questions:

1. How has volunteering participation and intensity evolved within families and across generations of the same family in WA over time?
2. To what extent does exposure to volunteering participation by family members influence an individual's likelihood and intensity of volunteering in later life?
3. What demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic factors enable or constrain volunteering participation across generations?

This research will be the first to address the dynamics of volunteering within families and across generations of the same family in WA and Australia using rich longitudinal data and a rigorous yet accessible methodological approach. The project will provide Volunteering WA with a data-driven evidence base to better understand how volunteering behaviours are shaped within families and across generations. Understanding how early exposure to volunteering within families fosters lifelong engagement can help to inform practical, on-the-ground initiatives to boost participation, particularly among young people.

Recommendations from this research will support Volunteering WA in shaping its strategies to build sustainable volunteer networks in WA and strengthen its advocacy with government and community agencies.

Report structure

Chapter 1 provides introduction and background, including the research questions, data source and methods used in this report. **Chapter 2** provides detailed description of the data and methodology employed in this study. **Chapter 3** aims to answer the research question of how volunteering participation and intensity have evolved within families and across generations of the same family in WA over time. **Chapter 4** presents the analysis examining the second research question of the extent to which exposure to volunteering participation by family members influences an individual's likelihood and intensity of volunteering in later life. **Chapter 5** explores what demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic factors enable or constrain volunteering participation across generations. Finally, **Chapter 6** provides concluding remarks and recommendations.

Theoretical framework, data and empirical approach

Theoretical framework

The literature shows that a range of factors are associated with individuals' participation in volunteering activities. Wilson (2012) provides a broad theoretical framework in which volunteering is shaped by motivation, resources, and opportunities. Haski-Leventhal et al. (2017) translate this into a more operational concept of 'volunteerability,' defined as individuals' willingness, capability, and availability to volunteer.

The **willingness** component reflects pro-social orientation and values. These can include charitable donations, attitudinal measures such as social trust, or views on community engagement. These variables capture the extent to which individuals are inclined toward helping others, contributing to society, and participating in collective activities. Parental volunteering can foster these attitudes and values through socialisation and role modelling, increasing children's willingness to volunteer later in life.

Parental volunteering can also contribute to the development of social capital. Social capital and willingness are closely related and mutually reinforcing. Individuals with stronger social networks, higher levels of trust, and greater community engagement may be more likely to volunteer. Social capital can facilitate volunteering directly by increasing awareness of opportunities and strengthening community connections, and indirectly by fostering pro-social attitudes and a greater willingness to contribute to society.

The **capability** component reflects individuals' ability and confidence to volunteer and can be measured using variables related to human capital and personal capacity, such as educational level, disability status, and health status. These measures align with the idea that volunteering requires not only motivation, but also skills and functional capacity to engage.

The **availability** component captures whether individuals have the time and access needed to volunteer. Key variables may include employment intensity (full-time or part-time), and whether individuals have dependent children which shape time constraints. In addition, geographic location can capture volunteering opportunities and exposure to recruitment networks. These indicators reflect the extent to which individuals are able to translate willingness and capability into actual participation.

Connection to place is another important factor in volunteering. Its influence can be mixed: some people begin volunteering after moving to a new location, while others may be more likely to volunteer when they remain in the same place for a longer period (Rotolo et al., 2010).

In this study, we draw on this strand of literature to examine the influence of parenting volunteering on individuals' volunteering participation and intensity, while controlling for a comprehensive set of factors that influence volunteering related to the capability and availability components. We further contribute to the literature by investigating whether housing tenure and residential stability shape volunteering behaviour, captured through indicators of homeownership (versus renting), and number of years living at current address.

Both willingness and social capital are likely to be associated with parental volunteering. In this sense, they are not simply background characteristics but may represent potential pathways through which parental influence is transmitted across generations. Through socialisation and role modelling, parental volunteering can foster pro-social values and a willingness to help others. At the same time, it can strengthen social capital by exposing children to community networks, civic participation, and volunteering opportunities from an early age. Including willingness and social capital in the model can therefore reduce the estimated effect of parental volunteering by controlling for factors that are themselves shaped by parental volunteering. For this reason, we treat willingness and social capital as potential mechanisms through which parental volunteering can influence later volunteering behaviour. In particular, we control for parental volunteering, capability and availability components in the model. We then explore how parental volunteering is linked to willingness and social capital, and how these factors are associated with individuals' volunteering.

Data and empirical approach

This study uses 23 waves of data from the HILDA Survey to examine volunteering participation within families and across generations of the same family in WA between 2002 and 2024.[1] The way volunteering is measured in HILDA can lead to some under reporting, as the survey uses a narrower definition of volunteering than other Australian data sources.[2] However, HILDA provides a valuable and reliable longitudinal data source that allows us to track individuals' and family members' volunteering participation and intensity over time (Gray et al., 2011). As such, HILDA data offers a unique opportunity to explore how volunteering behaviours are shaped across generations. This research therefore focuses on the relationship between volunteering by individuals and their family members, rather than overall prevalence of volunteering, in WA and Australia.

The HILDA survey asks the respondents how much time they would spend in a typical week on volunteer or charity work (for example, canteen work at the local school, unpaid work for a community club or organisation)?[3]

[1] The 2001 data is not used as information on minutes of volunteering per week is missing for that year.

[2] HILDA measures volunteering using a single question that asks respondents how much time they spend on "volunteering or charity work such as canteen work at the local school, unpaid work for a community club or organisation" in a typical week. While this question captures many forms of formal volunteering, it may not capture the full range of volunteering activities, particularly informal volunteering and other forms of unpaid assistance provided outside organisational settings.

In contrast, Volunteering Australia defines volunteering as "time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain", encompassing both formal volunteering, where an individual volunteers through an organisation, and informal volunteering, where an individual is not associated with an organisation but still gives time for the common good of the community.

Similarly, in the General Social Survey (GSS), the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collects information on both formal and informal volunteering. Formal volunteering is defined as "unpaid voluntary work through an organisation", while informal volunteering refers to "the provision of unpaid work/support to non-household members, excluding that provided only to family members living outside the household".

[3] The HILDA survey also includes a question on how often respondents volunteer their time to work on boards or organising committees of clubs, community groups or other non-profit organisations. This information however has only been collected every four years since 2006 (2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022).

The national sample includes 36,686 observations from 2002-2024 with information on respondents' parents, of which 3,226 observations are from WA. As there are very few observations of grandparents' volunteering, this study focuses on volunteering behaviours of parents only.[4]

This study utilises the longitudinal nature of the HILDA data to identify intertemporal (prior or contemporaneous) volunteering patterns by individuals and their parents. This allows us to assess whether exposure to volunteering by parents at different life stages, in childhood (ages 0-9), early adolescence (ages 10-14), or concurrently (ages 15+), influences an individual's likelihood and intensity of future volunteering. By profiling volunteering patterns among WA families, the study explores and compares the prevalence and intensity of volunteering across different generations (Builders, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z).

To assess familial influence on volunteering, we use data from all states and territories to have a sufficient sample size for analysis. By including state fixed effects in the model, the analysis effectively compares individuals within the same state, and accounts for broader state level differences in economic conditions, policies, demographic characteristics, and volunteering environments that influence volunteering behaviour.

We compare the participation rates and time commitments of individuals with active volunteer parents against those whose parents do not volunteer. We then look at earlier life stages, comparing individuals who were exposed to parental volunteering during childhood and early adolescence with those who were not, to assess how these early experiences are associated with volunteering later in life. Next, we examine whether the level of exposure to parental volunteering (number of parental volunteering hours per week or number of years in childhood or adolescence with parental volunteering) differs between people who currently volunteer and those who do not.

To strengthen the analysis, we apply a rigorous statistical approach – a two-way fixed effects (TWFE) model - that follows the same individuals over time. This is the key advantage of using the HILDA data, which tracks people over 23 years. It allows us to better identify how changes in parents' volunteering are linked to subsequent changes in an individual's volunteering, while accounting for stable personal characteristics such as family background and culture, as well as broader social and economic changes that influence volunteering for both individuals and their parents. These methods enable us both to profile volunteering behaviour and to isolate the influence of volunteering across generations.

The TWFE model is specified as follows:

$$Individual\ volunteering_{ipsy} = \alpha + \beta Parental\ volunteering_{ipsy} + \gamma X_{ipsy} + \delta_i + \Phi_y + \phi_s + \pi_p + \varepsilon_{ipsy} \quad (1)$$

where $Individual\ volunteering_{ipsy}$ represents the volunteering participation or volunteering intensity of individual *i* living in postcode *p* in state *s* surveyed in year *y*. The variable

[4] Although many older respondents in the HILDA sample are likely to be grandparents, identifying them as the grandparents of a particular respondent would require linking three generations within the data and having volunteering information available for each generation. This would substantially reduce the sample size. Given these limitations, the analysis focuses on parental volunteering only.

$Parental\ volunteering_{ipsy}$ indicates the current or past exposure to parental volunteering for individual *i*.

The vector X_{ipsy} captures factors related to capability and availability that can influence whether and how individuals volunteer, as discussed above, including age, gender, country of birth, education level, disability status, health status, employment status, whether the individual has dependent children, region and remoteness, home ownership, and number of years living at current address.

δ_i indicates individual fixed effects capturing all time-invariant personal characteristics that can influence both individual and parental volunteering but not are directly observed in the data, such as personality, family background, and social network preferences. Φ_y and ϕ_s represent survey year and state fixed effects, which account for economic and social shocks that affect all individuals in a given survey year in each state, such as changes in macroeconomic conditions, policy reforms, or broader social trends. We also include the postcode fixed effects, π_p to capture postcode level differences that can affect volunteering participation of both individuals and their parents, and ε_{ipsy} is the error term.

As discussed above, we also examine whether willingness and social capital are potential mechanisms through which parental volunteering may influence individuals' volunteering behaviour. The HILDA data does not include direct measures of willingness to volunteer and social capital but provides several proxies for pro-social orientation and community engagement. This information was collected in years 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022 (waves 6, 10, 14, 18 and 22) in the Self-Completion Questionnaires.

Pro-social orientation captures individuals' trust, perceptions of social cohesion, and beliefs about helping behaviour within the community. These measures include agreement that people are willing to help their neighbours, generalised trust in others, and trust in people within the local neighbourhood. These indicators reflect intrinsic motivations for pro-social behaviour and are therefore closely linked to individuals' willingness to volunteer.

Community engagement measures include attending community events, attending religious services, encouraging others to become involved in groups that aim to make a difference, discussing current affairs with friends, family and neighbours, and being an active member of a sporting, hobby, or community club. These indicators reflect individuals' embeddedness in social networks and exposure to community life, which may facilitate access to and participation in volunteering.

Finally, we examine the drivers and barriers to volunteering within families and across generations, across demographic groups and geographic areas, accounting for the factors that influence the number of family members volunteering concurrently, and the challenges faced by different generations in volunteering participation.

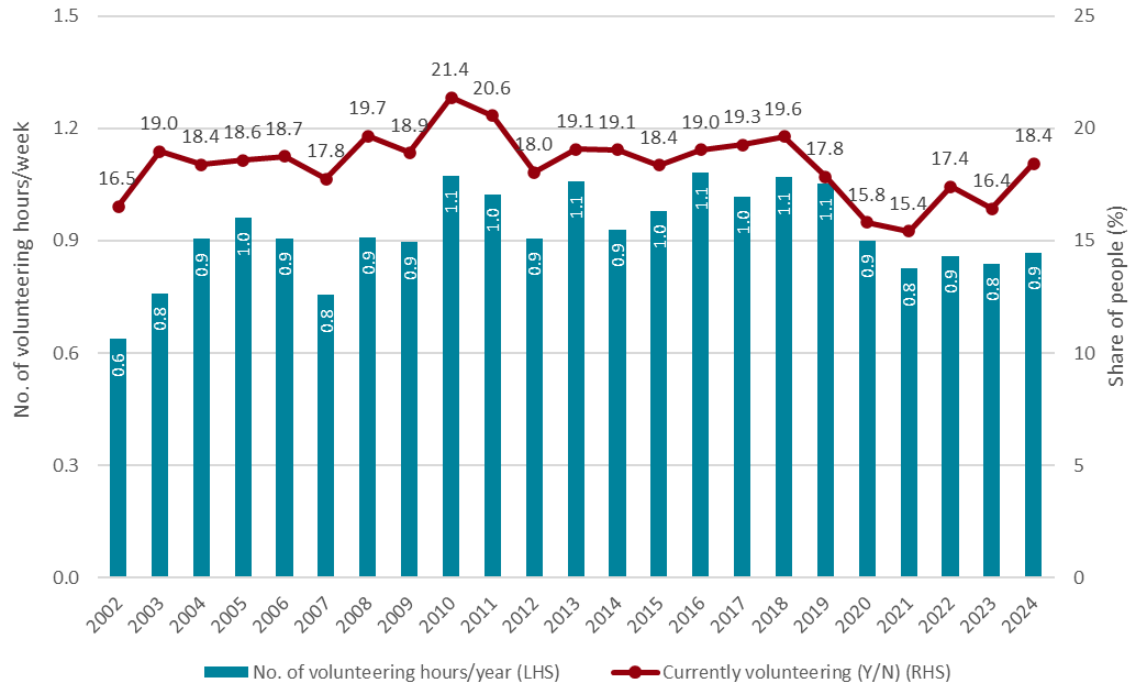
Volunteering participation and intensity across generations over time

Overall trend of volunteering participation and intensity over time

Volunteering participation and intensity is derived from the HILDA survey responses to the question on how much time respondents spend in a typical week on volunteer or charity work (for example, canteen work at the local school, unpaid work for a community club or organisation).

Volunteering rates in WA peaked around 2010–2011, followed by an abrupt decline and a period of relative stability until 2018 (Figure 1). After hitting a record low in 2021, participation has shown a partial recovery leading into 2024, with volunteering rates appearing broadly comparable to pre-COVID levels. This pattern is broadly consistent with the trend reported by Volunteering Australia (2026) using the 2025 General Social Survey, which also found that formal volunteering in Australia has declined since its peak around 2010 and remained relatively stable over the five years leading up to 2025. Average hours volunteered have also declined after 2010 and remain below peak levels even after the post-COVID recovery (nearly 1 hour per week on average).

Figure 1. Volunteering participation and intensity, WA, 2002-2024



Notes: Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

When comparing HILDA estimates with other data sources, volunteering participation and intensity appear to be lower in HILDA, which is consistent with differences in survey definitions and question wording. Other surveys report higher levels of volunteering participation in both WA and Australia. For example, using data from the 2023 Public Survey of Western Australian residents and volunteer managers, *WA State of Volunteering Report* shows that around 32 per cent of people aged 15 and over engaged in formal volunteering, while approximately 43 per cent participated in informal volunteering in 2023 in WA (Volunteering WA, 2023). The report also indicates that formal WA volunteers contributed an average of 20.2 hours per month (around 5 hours per week), while

informal WA volunteers contributed around 10.5 hours per month (approximately 2.6 hours per week) (Volunteering WA, 2023). Similarly, the 2026 *Volunteering Australia* report, which uses data from the 2025 General Social Survey (GSS), found that formal and informal volunteering participation rates were approximately 23 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively, in Australia (Volunteering Australia, 2026).

Generational patterns

This chapter also aims to examine how volunteering participation and intensity have evolved across generations in WA over time. We explore how volunteering participation and intensity vary across generations (Builders, Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z), and how these patterns have evolved over the past 23 years. Builders born in 1901-1945, Boomers born in 1946-1960, Gen X born in 1961-1975, Gen Y born in 1976-2000, and Gen Z born from 2001 onwards.

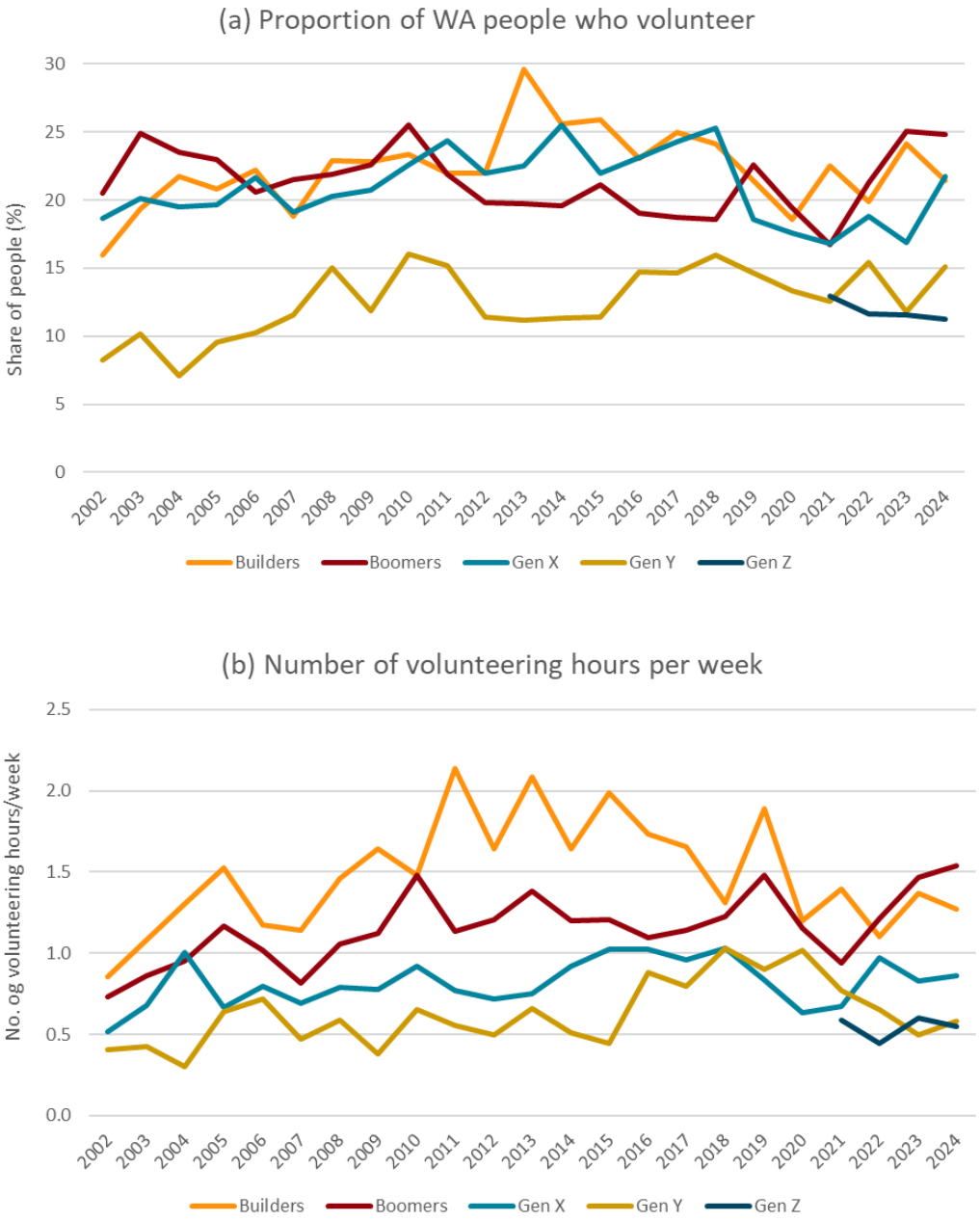
Older cohorts (especially Builders and Boomers) consistently have higher volunteering rates than younger cohorts. Both participation and volunteering hours for Builders and Boomers peak around 2010-2014, indicating a period of strong engagement (Figure 2). In comparison, Gen Y and Gen Z maintain lower participation rates and contribute fewer hours, with relatively limited growth over time.

By the early 2020s, gaps between generations narrow slightly, driven by declining engagement among older groups and modest changes among younger groups.

It is important to also appreciate that we see consistent trends in levels of volunteering activity through the life course across generations. These trends reflect changes in capacity, mobility and free time, as well as levels of social inclination and participation over time. Figure 3 shows a consistent pattern of volunteering rates increasing during early adulthood, slightly declining during the middle years (where family, work and career commitments dominate over free time).[5] Volunteer rates then rise again post-retirement, reflecting greater free time and need for meaningful social participation, only to decline as increasing age and frailty limit mobility and capability.

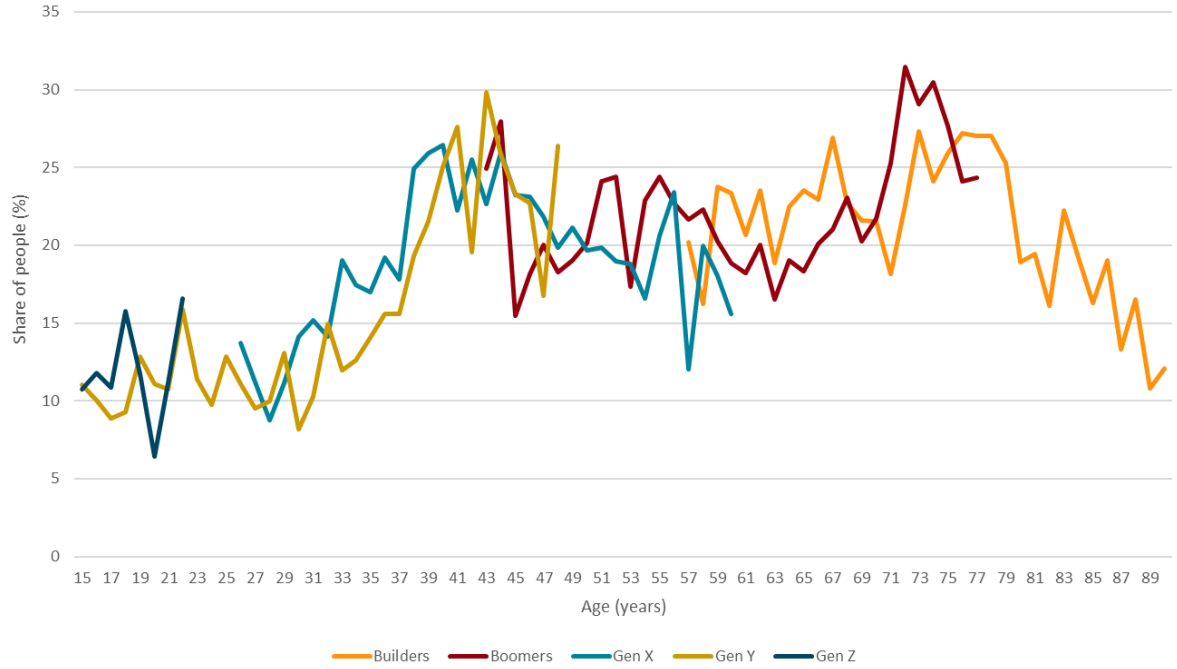
[5] See Buckland et.al. (2025) *A Balancing Act: Life, work and connection in the middle years.* Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, Curtin University.

Figure 2. Volunteering participation and intensity across generations, WA, 2002-2024



Notes: Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights. We do not include statistics for Gen Z from 2016-2020 due to very small sample size.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

Figure 3. Volunteering participation by generation and age, WA, 2002-2024



Notes: Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

Participation in board and committee volunteering

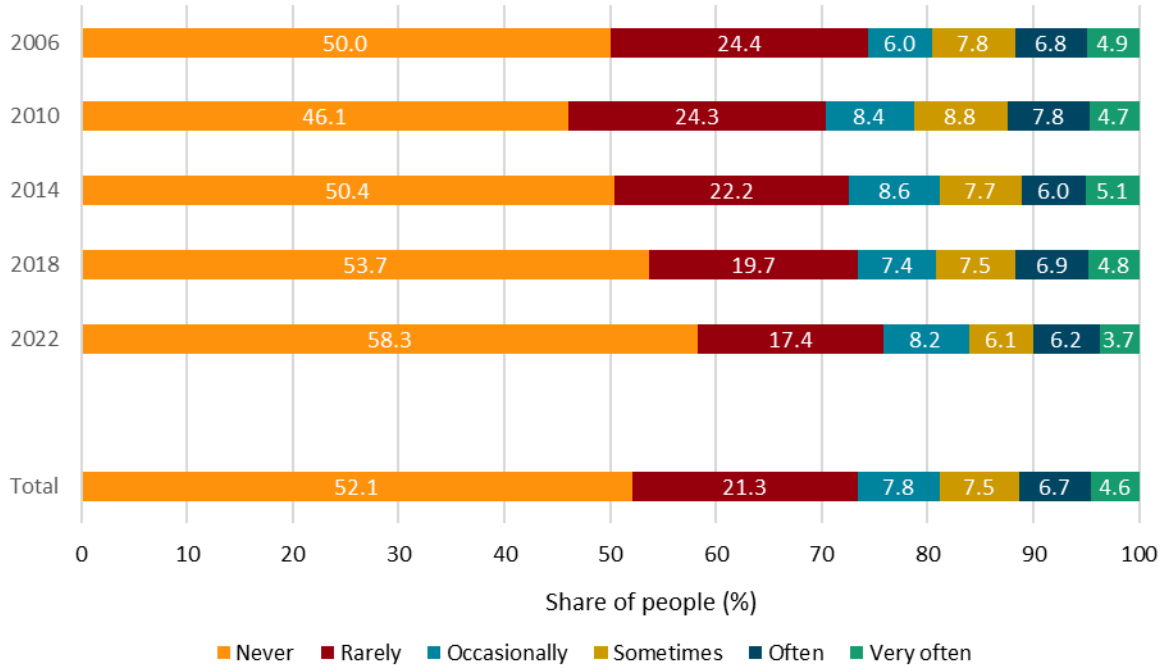
The HILDA Survey also collects information on how often people volunteer their time to serve on boards or organising committees of clubs, community groups, or other not-for-profit organisations, with response options ranging from "never" to "very often". This information provides valuable insights into volunteering in leadership and governance roles. However, the question is only asked every four years (2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022).[6] This section provides a snapshot of how participation in these leadership and governance roles has changed over time.

Figure 4 shows that participation in these leadership and governance roles was relatively low overall. Across all survey years, over half of respondents (52.1 per cent) reported that they had never undertaken this type of volunteering, while around one in five (21.3 per cent) said they did so rarely. The proportion of people who had never participated in board or committee volunteering increased over time, from 50 per cent in 2006 to 58.3 per cent in 2022. Less frequent forms of involvement were more common than regular participation, with 7.8 per cent of respondents reporting that they volunteered occasionally and 7.5 per cent sometimes across all years. More regular involvement was relatively uncommon, with only 6.7 per cent reporting that they volunteered often and 4.6 per cent very often. Participation in the most two frequent categories (often and very often) reduced in the last 16 years, from 11.7 per cent in 2006 to 9.9 per cent in 2022.

[6] This results in relatively small sample size when linking individuals to their parents. Consequently, we do not use this information to examine the association between parents' involvement in board and committee volunteering and individuals' own volunteering behaviours.

These findings suggest that while many people contribute to their communities through volunteering, a much smaller group take on leadership and governance roles within organisations. Participation in these roles has also become less common over time, indicating potential challenges for community organisations in attracting and retaining volunteers for boards and committee positions.

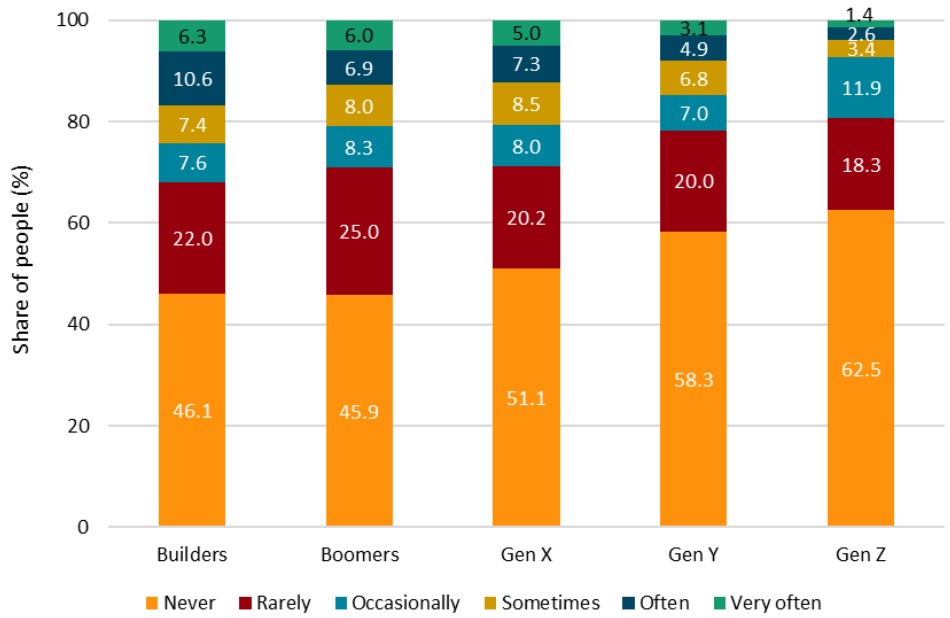
Figure 4. Participation in board and committee volunteering, WA, 2006-2022



Notes: Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 6, 10, 14, 18 and 22.

Figure 5 highlights clear generational differences in board and committee volunteering. Older generations were more likely to participate in these leadership and governance roles than younger generations. Less than half of Builders (46.1 per cent) and Boomers (45.9 per cent) reported never volunteering on board or organising committee, compared with 51.1 per cent of Gen X, 58.3 per cent of Gen Y, and 62.5 per cent of Gen Z. At the same time, nearly one in five Builders reported volunteering in these leadership and governance roles often or very often, compared to just 4 per cent of Gen Z. The results reinforce the above findings that older generations are consistently more likely than younger generations to participate in volunteering, including in leadership and governance roles.

Figure 5. Participation in board and committee volunteering by generations, WA, 2006-2022



Notes: Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 6, 10, 14, 18 and 22.

The influence of exposure to volunteering participation by family members

Introduction

This chapter aims to answer the question that to what extent does exposure to volunteering participation by family members influence an individual's likelihood and intensity of volunteering in later life.

The HILDA data provides information on volunteering activities of individuals and their parents, drawing from a sample of 33,686 observations from 2002-2024, of which 3,226 observations are from WA. Due to the limited sample for WA, we use the national sample for analysis, while controlling for the differences across states and territories. As there are very few observations with information on grandparents' volunteering, this study focuses on parental volunteering.

Parents in the sample used for analysis are typically in their 50s, with mothers and fathers averaging 53 and 54 years of age, respectively. Around 70.8 per cent of individuals were not exposed to parental volunteering during this period (that is, neither of their parents are currently volunteering), while only 7.2 per cent have both parents volunteering. Having only one parent volunteering is more common, accounting for 22 per cent.

Mothers are more active volunteers than fathers. About 20.7 per cent of individuals have their mother volunteer, compared to 15.7 per cent of fathers, and mothers also contribute more hours per week on average (0.96 hours) compared to fathers (0.76 hours). Parents contribute around 1.71 hours per week in total.

Childhood exposure to parental volunteering is common. Around 68 per cent of individuals experienced parental volunteering in the past at ages 0-9, and 62 per cent experienced this at ages 10-14. However, exposure tends to be short term. On average, individuals were exposed for about 3 years in the total 10 years of childhood (ages 0-9), and over 2 years in the total 5 years in early adolescence (ages 10-14).

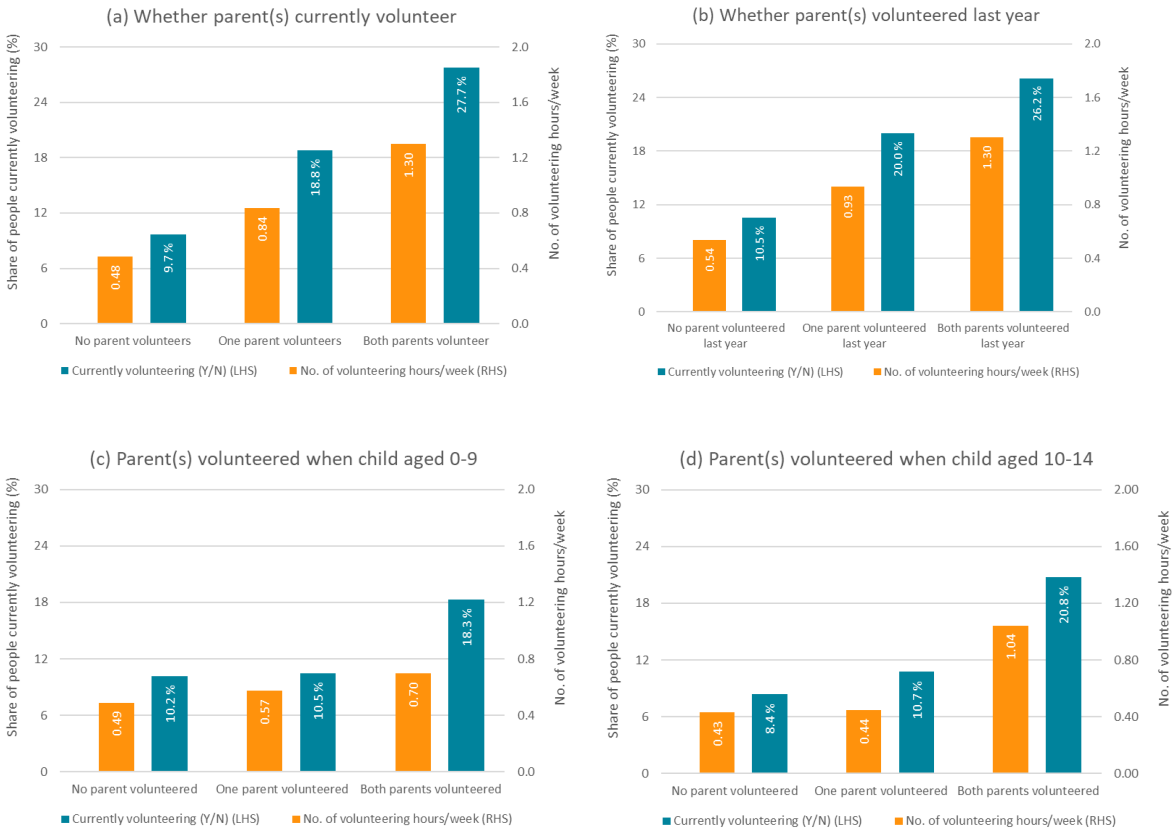
Does parental volunteering influence the likelihood and intensity of volunteering?

People are more likely to volunteer, and to contribute more hours, when their parents currently volunteer or have volunteered in the past (Figure 6). The influence of parental volunteering is strongest in the short term (when parents are currently volunteering or did so in the past year). However, there is also a longer term effect, as individuals who were exposed to parental volunteering during childhood (ages 0-9) or early adolescence (ages 10-14) are still more likely to volunteer later in life.

In families where both parents volunteer (now or in the past year), around 26-28 per cent of individuals aged 15 and over also volunteer. This is nearly three times higher than that of families where both parents have no current or past volunteering activities, where only about 10 per cent of individuals volunteer. Individuals in these families also spend more time volunteering, about 1.3 hours per week, compared to just 0.4 to 0.5 hours in families without parental volunteering (Figure 6a and 6b).

Individuals are also more likely to volunteer if they were exposed to their parents volunteering while growing up. Those who saw their parents volunteering during childhood (ages 0–10) or early adolescence (10–14) are more likely to volunteer, and spend more time doing so, compared to those who did not have this exposure (Figure 6c and 6d).

Figure 6. Volunteering participation by exposure to parental volunteering

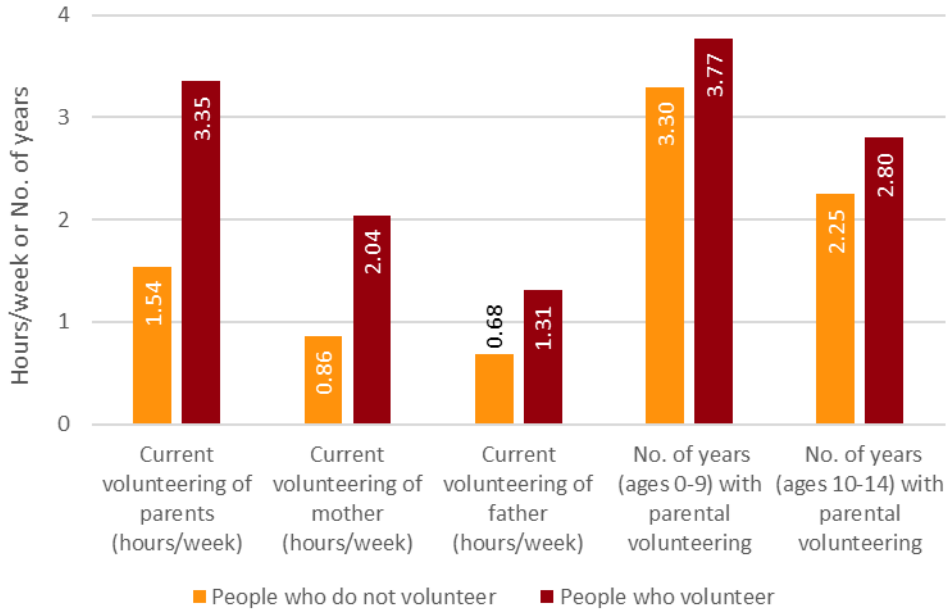


Notes: This figure uses data from all states and territories. Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

Does intensity of exposure to parental volunteering matter?

Individuals who volunteer tend to have a higher intensity of exposure to parental volunteering. Compared to individuals who do not volunteer, individuals who volunteer report nearly threefold higher levels of parental volunteering hours. Furthermore, they experienced significantly longer exposure to parental volunteering during both childhood (ages 0-9) and early adolescence (ages 10-14) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Intensity of exposure to parental volunteering among volunteers and non-volunteers



Notes: This figure uses data from all states and territories. Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

Is the influence of parenting volunteering long-lasting?

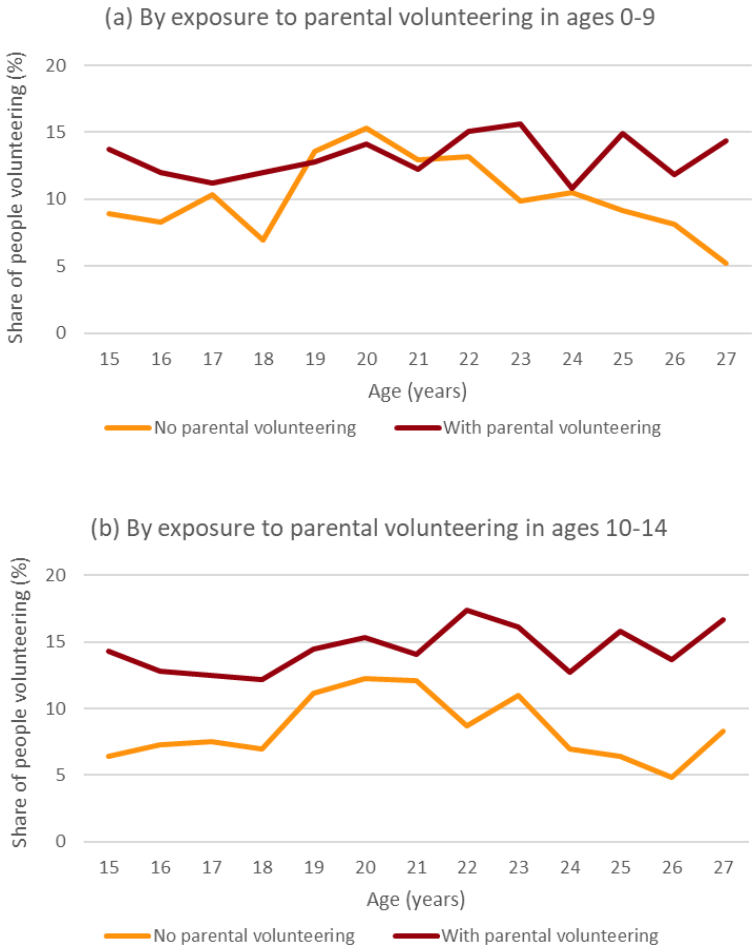
Young individuals exposed to parental volunteering in childhood or early adolescence are consistently more likely to volunteer and this gap persists for more than 10 years later into adulthood (Figure 8).

Across ages 15-27, around 12-17 per cent of individuals with an exposure to parental volunteering at ages 0-9 or ages 10-14 take part in volunteering compared to about 5-12 per cent of those without.

The gap persists into adulthood, showing that the influence of parental volunteering tends to be long lasting, not just temporary.

This pattern is seen for both childhood (ages 0-9) or early teenager years (10-14) exposure.

Figure 8. Long term influence of parental volunteering



Notes: This figure uses data from all states and territories. We track individuals up to age 27 only, where the sample size remains sufficiently large. Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

Empirical analysis

The empirical results from Model (1) are reported in Tables 1 and 2. We use a linear probability model for the binary outcome of volunteering participation, that allows us to interpret the results as changes in the probability of volunteering. For continuous outcomes (number of volunteering hours per week), we use standard linear regression with the same fixed-effects structure.

The findings presented in Table 1 underscore a powerful intergenerational transmission of volunteering engagement, revealing that individuals with volunteering parents are not only more likely to participate in volunteering service but also tend to commit a significantly higher time compared to their peers from non-volunteering households. On average, having volunteering parents increases the likelihood of volunteering by around 3 percentage points (from a baseline of around 12.7 per cent) (Column 1). Exposure to parental volunteering during childhood (ages 0-9) is associated with a higher likelihood of volunteering later in life, about 2.5 percentage points higher. Exposure during early adolescence (10-14) is also associated with a higher likelihood of volunteering, about 5 percentage points higher (Columns 2 and 3).

Importantly, past exposure to parental volunteering participation during childhood or early adolescence is clearly linked to how many hours an individual volunteers. Exposure to parental volunteering during ages 0-9 and ages 10-14 is associated with increases of approximately 0.17 and 0.15 hours of volunteering per week, respectively (Columns 5 and 6). Relative to a mean of 0.5 hours per week, these effects are substantial, equivalent to about one-third of the mean.

Table 1. The influence of parental volunteering participation

Panel A: Outcome = Individual currently volunteering (Y/N)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Reference group: No parent volunteers			
Parent(s) volunteer	0.030***		
	(0.005)		
Reference group: No parent volunteered when child aged 0-9			
Parent(s) volunteered when child aged 0-9		0.025***	
		(0.007)	
Reference group: No parent volunteered when child aged 10-14			
Parent(s) volunteered when child aged 10-14			0.052***
			(0.005)
Mean of outcome variable	0.127	0.119	0.118
Observation	33686	15590	24805
Panel B: Outcome = No. of volunteering hours/week	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Reference group: No parent volunteers			
Parent(s) volunteer	0.089		
	(0.047)		
Reference group: No parent volunteered when child aged 0-9			
Parent(s) volunteered when child aged 0-9		0.168*	
		(0.063)	
Reference group: No parent volunteered when child aged 10-14			
Parent(s) volunteered when child aged 10-14			0.146**
			(0.043)
Mean of outcome variable	0.587	0.531	0.524
Observation	33686	15590	24805

Notes: Column (1) reports estimates from a fixed effects linear probability model. Columns (2)–(3) report OLS estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses. All models control for age, gender, country of birth, education level, disability status, health status, employment status, whether the individual having dependent children, region and remoteness, home ownership, and number of years living at current address, and include survey year, state and postcode fixed effects. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

These results align with broader literature suggesting that a volunteer's values are deeply embedded through family practices and the observed actions of parents (McGregor-Lowndes et al., 2017). Some studies document that positive parental experiences have been shown to foster a sense of social obligation and duty in their children (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009; Tye & Costello, 2015). Within diverse immigrant communities, parental behaviour remains a primary inspiration for greater involvement in volunteering in adult children (Li et al., 2025). The present study finds that exposure to parental volunteering before the age of 15 increases the likelihood of future volunteering, with particularly strong associations observed during early adolescence (ages 10-14). This mirrors international evidence suggesting that the relative weight of parental influence is at its peak during the early years before peer influence begins to dominate as children age (Van Goethem et al., 2014). This early life immersion appears to lower barriers for young people who might otherwise find volunteering joined in isolation to be anxiety producing (Webber, 2011).

Higher parental volunteering intensity is associated with a greater likelihood of volunteering and more volunteering hours (Table 2). A one hour increase in parents' volunteering is linked to about 0.2 percentage points increase in an individual's likelihood of volunteering participation (Column 1). A one year increase in exposure to parental volunteering during childhood is associated with 0.7 percentage point higher probability of volunteering (Column 2).

The number of years exposed to parental volunteering during early adolescence matters. Each additional year is associated with about a 1.7 percentage point increase in the likelihood of volunteering (Column 3), and about 0.06 more hours of volunteering per week (Column 6).

While international studies often show a significant impact of parental volunteering on adult participation (Kukla-Acevedo & Powell, 2024; Perks & Konecny, 2015), the eventual intensity of an individual's commitment can be more heavily moderated by external factors. Consistent with Mustillo et al. (2004), while parental modelling sparks the initial behaviour, the intensity of volunteering may ultimately determine the depth of that commitment into adulthood.

Table 2. The influence of parental volunteering intensity

Panel A: Outcome = Individual currently volunteering (Y/N)	(1)	(2)	(3)
No. of volunteering hours/week of parents	0.002***		
	(0.001)		
No. of years (ages 0-9) with parent volunteering		0.007***	
		(0.001)	
No. of years (ages 10-14) with parent volunteering			0.018***
			(0.001)
Mean of outcome variable	0.127	0.119	0.118
Observation	33686	15590	24805
Panel B: Outcome = No. of volunteering hours/week	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
No. of volunteering hours/week of parents	0.002		
	(0.004)		
No. of years (ages 0-9) with parent volunteering		0.029*	
		(0.013)	
No. of years (ages 10-14) with parent volunteering			0.061***
			(0.012)
Mean of outcome variable	0.587	0.531	0.524
Observation	33686	15590	24805

Notes: Column (1) reports estimates from a fixed-effects linear probability model. Columns (2)–(3) report OLS estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses. All models control for age, gender, country of birth, education level, disability status, health status, employment status, whether the individual having dependent children, region and remoteness, home ownership, and number of years living at current address, and include survey year, state and postcode fixed effects. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

What are the potential underlying mechanisms?

Figure 9 presents the differences in pro-social orientation and community engagement between individuals with and without exposure to parental volunteering (both current and past exposure).

While the regression results show that individuals exposed to parental volunteering are more likely to volunteer themselves, Figure 9 suggests that one important pathway may be through stronger pro-social orientation and greater community engagement.

Across all measures, individuals with parental volunteering exposure report higher levels of trust, social connectedness, and community oriented attitudes than those without parental volunteering exposure. For example, they are more likely to agree that “most of the time people try to be helpful”, that “people around here are willing to help their neighbours”, and that “most people can be trusted”. They are also more likely to trust people within their local neighbourhoods.

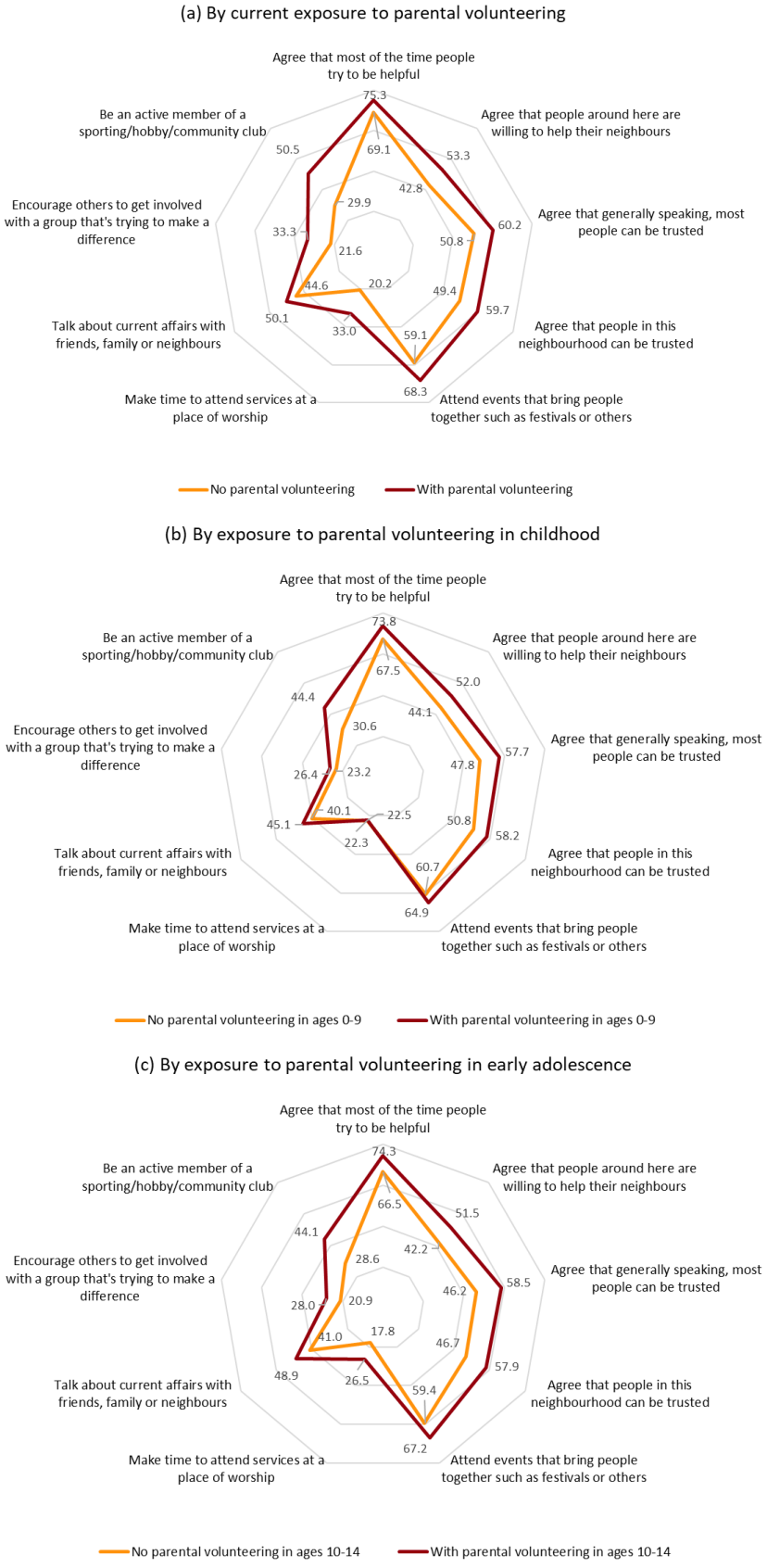
Figure 9 also suggests that parental volunteering is linked to stronger community engagement. Individuals with parental volunteering exposure are more likely to attend events that bring people together, talk about current affairs with friends, family, or neighbours, attend services at a place of worship, encourage others to get involved in groups trying to make a difference, and be an active member of a sporting, hobby or community club. In several cases, the differences between those with and without parental volunteering exposure are quite substantial.

The results hold with both current and past exposure to parental volunteering. This suggests that exposure to parental volunteering during childhood and early adolescence is associated with a greater likelihood of developing stronger pro-social orientation and community engagement later in life.

Figure 10 further supports that pro-social orientation and community engagement can be pathways linking parental volunteering to individuals’ volunteering participation. It compares volunteering participation rates between individuals who agree and do not agree with a range of statements related to trust, social connectedness, and community involvement.

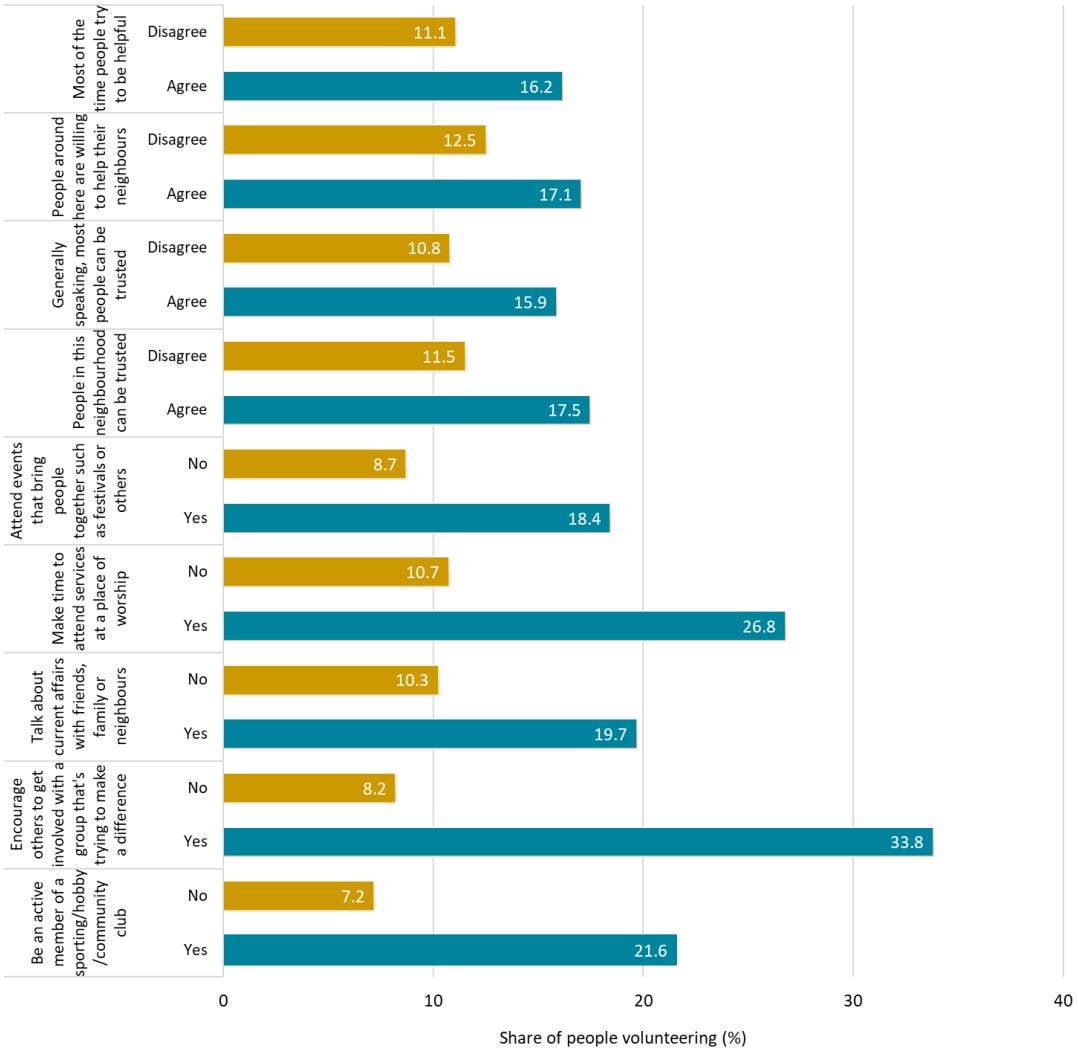
Across all measures, individuals with stronger pro-social attitudes and higher community engagement report substantially higher volunteering participation. For example, volunteering participation is noticeably higher among individuals who believe that most of the time people try to be helpful, that neighbours are willing to help each other, and that most people can be trusted. Similar patterns are observed for trust within local neighbourhoods.

Figure 9. Proportion of people (%) with pro-social orientation and community engagement by exposure to parental volunteering



Notes: This figure uses data from all states and territories. Proportion of people agreeing with the statements related to pro-social orientation and community engagement (%) are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 6, 10, 14, 18 and 22.

Figure 10. Volunteering participation by pro-social orientation and community engagement



Notes: This figure uses data from all states and territories. Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 6, 10, 14, 18 and 22.

The relationship is even stronger for indicators of active community engagement. Individuals who attend community events, participate in services at a place of worship, talk about current affairs with family and neighbours, or encourage others to become involved in groups trying to make a difference are much more likely to volunteer. Volunteering participation reaches almost 34 per cent among those who encourage others to engage in community groups, compared with only around 8 per cent among those who do not.

Figure 10 also shows that individuals who are active members of a sporting, hobby, or community club are nearly three times more likely to volunteer than those who are not active club members (21.6 per cent compared with 7.2 per cent). This suggests that participation in community organisations and volunteering is closely linked.

One possible explanation is that children who grow up in families actively involved in sporting, hobby, religious, or community organisations are more likely to see community participation as a

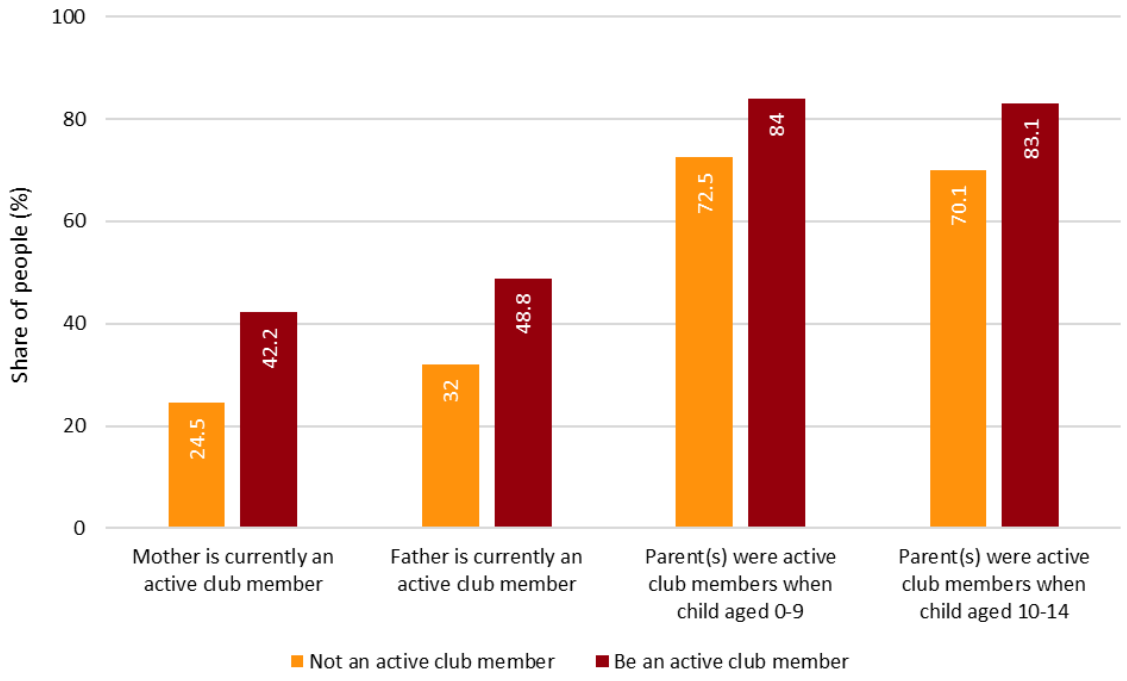
normal and worthwhile part of everyday life. By observing their parents taking part in these activities, children can develop positive attitudes towards helping others and contributing to their communities, which can encourage their own involvement in community organisations later in life.

A second explanation is that clubs and community organisations often provide direct opportunities for volunteering. Sporting clubs, community groups, and places of worship frequently rely on volunteers to organise activities, support members, and run events. People who are actively involved in these organisations may therefore be more likely to encounter volunteering opportunities and become involved themselves.

Figure 11 provides some support for these explanations. Individuals whose parents are, or were active members of sporting, hobby, or community clubs are more likely to be active club members themselves. This suggests that participation in community organisations may be transmitted across generations, with children exposed to community involvement during childhood more likely to remain engaged in community activities as adults.

While the data does not allow us to directly observe whether children saw their parents volunteering, these findings are consistent with the idea that exposure to community participation during childhood and adolescence can foster ongoing community involvement and increase the likelihood of volunteering later in life.

Figure 11. Relationship between parental club participation and individuals' club participation



Notes: This figure uses data from all states and territories. Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

What enables or constrains volunteering across generations?

What drives volunteering across generations?

As discussed above, Wilson (2012) and Haski-Leventhal et al. (2017) developed a framework identifying three key domains that influence volunteering: willingness, capability, and availability. Following these studies, we explore the demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic factors that can enable or constrain volunteering participation within families and across generations.

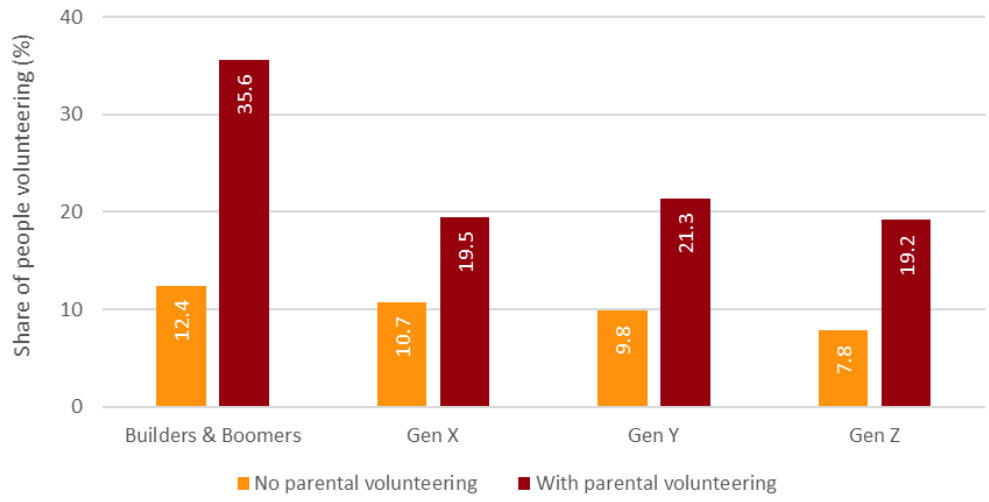
Does the influence of parental volunteering vary across generations?

The findings in the previous chapter showed that exposure to parental volunteering is associated with higher volunteering participation and intensity. We further examine this relationship by exploring whether the influence of parental volunteering differs across generations.

Figure 12 presents the proportion of individuals participating in volunteering by parental volunteering exposure and generation. The results show that individuals whose parents volunteered are consistently more likely to volunteer themselves compared with those whose parents did not volunteer. This pattern is observed across all generations.

The difference appears to be strongest among Builders and Boomers. Around 36 per cent of individuals in these two generations with parental volunteering exposure participate in volunteering, which is nearly three times higher than the volunteering rate among those without parental volunteering exposure.

Figure 12. Volunteering participation across generations by exposure to parental volunteering



Notes: This figure uses data from all states and territories. Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights. Builders and Boomers are combined to make the sample size sufficient for analysis.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

Do individual capability and availability influence volunteering?

Following Wilson (2012) and Haski-Leventhal et al. (2017) and using HILDA data, we measure individual capability to volunteer by educational attainment, disability status, and self-reported health status. Availability is proxied by employment status, whether individuals have dependent children, and whether they live in major cities or regional and remote areas. These factors help capture whether people have the resources, time, flexibility, and physical capacity to participate in volunteering activities.

Table 3 shows that volunteering participation is generally higher among people with greater personal capability and more flexible circumstances. Overall, the relationships appear to be relatively consistent across generations.

Educational attainment is positively associated with volunteering participation. Across most generations, individuals with Year 12 or above report higher volunteering rates than those with Year 11 or below.[7] This relationship is slightly stronger among Builders and Boomers. The finding is consistent with Volunteering Australia (2026), which also reports that formal volunteering is more common among Australians with higher levels of educational attainment. Higher levels of education can increase awareness of volunteering opportunities, strengthen social networks, and support greater community engagement. These individuals may also have higher levels of cultural and social capital which provide more opportunities to volunteer.

Health status is also strongly related to volunteering participation. Across all generations, individuals reporting excellent health generally have higher volunteering rates than those with poorer health status. These findings suggest that good health and physical wellbeing can play an important role in enabling volunteering participation.

Overall, volunteering participation is similar for people with and without disability. However, among Builders, Boomers and Generation X, people with disability are less likely to volunteer than those without disability. This is because the disability group contains a much larger proportion of older people. For example, nearly three-quarters of people with disability in the sample are Builders or Boomers, compared with only around one-third of people without disability. Since older Australians are generally more likely to volunteer, the larger share of older people in the disability group helps lift the overall volunteering rate, even though participation is lower among people with disability within some generations.

Employment status shows notable differences in volunteering participation. Part-time employed individuals report the highest volunteering rates across almost all generations. In contrast, volunteering rates are generally lower among full-time employed individuals compared to those with part-time employment, likely reflecting greater work and time pressures. This finding is in line with Volunteering Australia (2026), which also reports that formal volunteering is most common among

[7] We classify individuals who have not completed Year 12 or higher as having “Year 11 or below” because the sample covers people aged 15 years and over, some of whom may still be attending school.

people employed part-time. This pattern suggests that flexibility and available free time are important factors supporting volunteering participation.

The relationship between volunteering and having dependent children is more mixed. Among Builders, Boomers, and Gen X, individuals with dependent children report slightly higher volunteering rates than those without dependent children, potentially reflecting participation in school, sport, and community activities linked to family life. Among Gen Y, individuals with dependent children are still more likely to volunteer, although the difference is significantly smaller than that observed among older generations, suggesting that parenting responsibilities can constrain volunteering participation for younger adults. This may also reflect the age of their children, who may be too young to be involved in organised community activities.

Differences between major cities and regional or remote areas are also evident overall, although some variation exists across generations. Individuals living in regional and remote areas generally report higher volunteering participation than those living in major cities, particularly among Builders, Boomers, and Gen X. This pattern is consistent with the findings reported by Volunteering Australia (2026), which show that formal volunteering was more common in regional and remote areas in Australia in 2025. While Volunteering Australia (2026) reports results from the 2025 General Social Survey, reflecting volunteering patterns in a single year, our report draws on HILDA data collected over a much longer period, from 2002 to 2024. This enables volunteering patterns to be examined across different generations and time periods.

Table 3. Proportion of people volunteering (%) across generations by subgroup

	Total	Builders & Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
Year 11 or below	15.2	19.1	13.9	9.5	10.5
Year 12 or above	20.1	26.7	22.0	14.0	12.8
People without disability	18.7	24.6	20.9	13.2	11.3
People with disability	18.7	20.9	14.0	11.5	11.9
Excellent health status	19.4	28.3	25.5	14.6	13.3
Poorer health status	18.6	23.5	19.9	12.8	10.8
Unemployed	21.7	25.5	21.8	13.5	11.4
Part-time employed	24.7	32.0	31.9	18.7	13.9
Full-time employed	17.2	19.9	20.1	13.8	10.8
No dependent kids	17.3	23.2	14.1	12.1	-
Have dependent kids	21.9	27.4	25.1	15.4	-
Major cities	17.4	21.9	19.4	12.6	11.7
Regional and remote areas	21.5	26.9	22.7	14.4	10.6

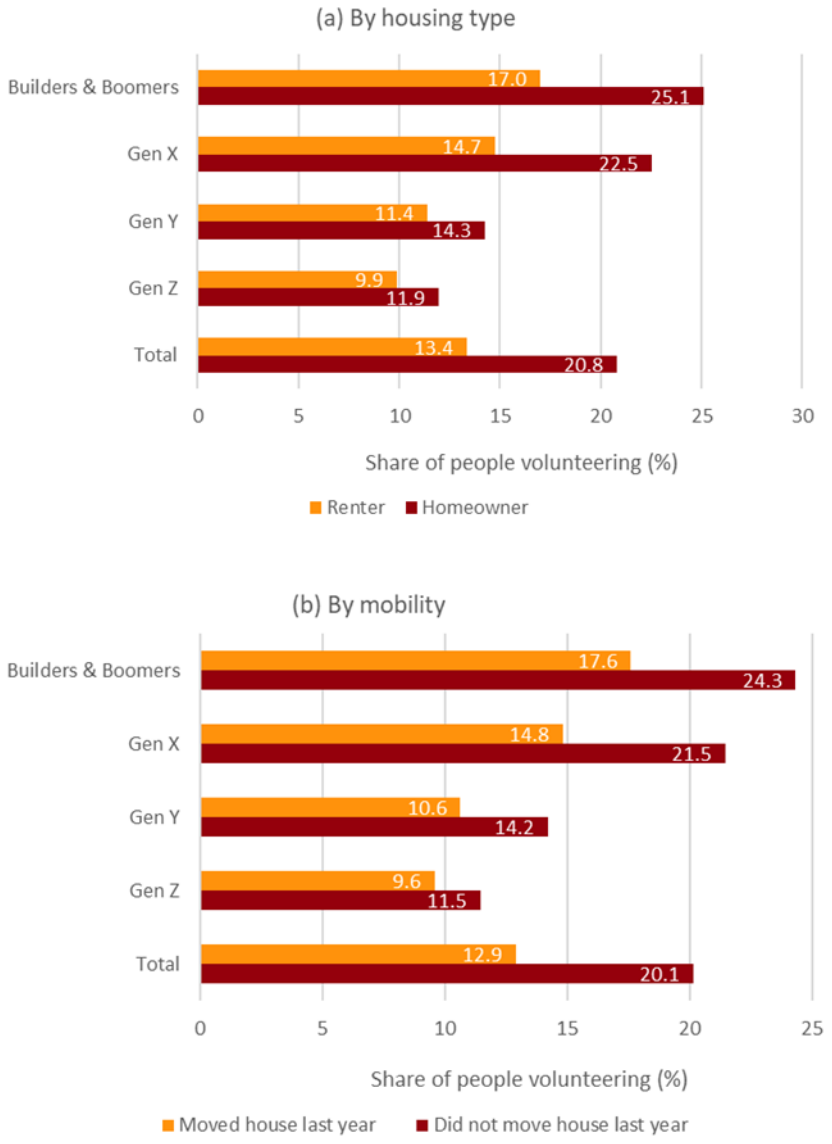
Notes: Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights. Builders and Boomers are combined to ensure a sufficient sample size for analysis. Some statistics for Gen Z are excluded due to insufficient sample size.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

Does housing stability influence volunteering?

In addition to individual capability and availability, housing stability and residential mobility also appear to be strongly associated with volunteering participation across generations.

Figure 13(a) shows volunteering participation by housing type. Across all generations, homeowners are consistently more likely to volunteer than renters. Overall, 20.8 per cent of homeowners participate in volunteering compared with 13.4 per cent of renters. The difference is particularly large among Builders and Boomers, where volunteering participation among homeowners reaches 25.1 per cent, compared with 17 per cent among renters. Similar, although smaller, patterns are observed among Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. These findings suggest that homeownership provides greater financial stability, stronger community attachment, and longer term local connections, which can support volunteering participation.

Figure 13. Volunteering participation across generations by housing stability



Notes: Mean variables are calculated using HILDA's responding person weights.
Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre| Authors' calculations based on HILDA waves 2-24.

Figure 13(b) presents volunteering participation by residential mobility, which reflects the length of time individuals have lived at their current address. Individuals who did not move house in the previous year report higher volunteering participation than those who moved. Overall, 20.1 per cent of people who remained in the same residence volunteered, compared with 12.9 per cent among those who moved house. This pattern is consistently observed across all generations. Residential stability can help individuals build stronger social networks and maintain ongoing involvement in local organisations and community activities.

Empirical analysis

The findings above suggest several key factors that can influence volunteering participation, with broadly consistent patterns observed across different generations. We therefore bring these factors together into a single empirical model for all generations, examining both volunteering participation and volunteering intensity. Following the framework developed by Wilson (2012) and Haski-Leventhal et al. (2017), the models consider factors related to willingness, capability, and availability to volunteer. Consistent with the earlier findings, parental volunteering (both current and past exposure) is included as a proxy that influences pro-social orientation and a willingness to volunteer.

The analysis includes individual fixed effects, which capture time-invariant individual characteristics such as gender, country of birth, and generation. The model also controls for individuals' age, survey year fixed effects which capture broader changes over time affecting all individuals, as well as state and postcode fixed effects, which account for geographic differences in volunteering opportunities, local community characteristics, and regional conditions. The results are presented in Table 4.

Compared to the descriptive findings presented earlier, the empirical results estimate the association between the capability and availability factors and volunteering after accounting for a range of other factors that may also influence volunteering behaviour.

The influence of parental volunteering exposure has already been discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Therefore, the discussion here focuses primarily on the influence of capability and availability factors, while controlling for parental volunteering exposure, which serves as a proxy for pro-social orientation and willingness to volunteer, as discussed above.

Overall, the results are consistent with the above descriptive findings, suggesting that volunteering is shaped by a combination of people's personal circumstances, available time, health, and connection to their community. Even after accounting for a wide range of individual and geographic characteristics, several factors remain strongly associated with volunteering behaviour.

Education is consistently linked to higher volunteering participation. Individuals with Year 12 or above are more likely to volunteer and tend to spend more hours volunteering compared with those with lower levels of education. Higher levels of education may increase individuals' capabilities, awareness of volunteering opportunities, and cultural capital, making it easier to engage in community activities and volunteering.

Health and wellbeing also appear to matter. Individuals reporting excellent health are generally more likely to volunteer compared to those with poorer health. Although not all estimates are statistically significant, the overall pattern suggests that good health can make it easier for people to engage in volunteering activities. This relationship may also operate in the opposite direction, with previous research suggesting that volunteering can improve wellbeing, particularly among older adults. For example, Jongenelis and Pettigrew (2021) surveyed 293 volunteers aged 60 years and over and found that those who felt appreciated, engaged in socially and mentally stimulating activities, and believed their efforts benefited others reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing.

Table 4. Empirical findings on factors influencing volunteering

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Outcome variable	Currently volunteering (Y/N)	Currently volunteering (Y/N)	Currently volunteering (Y/N)	No. of volunteering hours per week	No. of volunteering hours per week	No. of volunteering hours per week
Reference group: No parent volunteers						
Parent(s) volunteers	0.030***			0.089		
	(0.005)			(0.047)		
Reference group: No parent volunteered when child aged 0-9						
Parent(s) volunteered when child aged 0-9		0.025***			0.168**	
		(0.007)			(0.063)	
Reference group: No parent volunteered when child aged 10-14						
Parent(s) volunteered when child aged 10-14			0.052***			0.146***
			(0.005)			(0.043)
Year 12 or above	0.017**	0.023**	0.016**	0.398***	0.337***	0.319***
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.046)	(0.068)	(0.048)
Disability	-0.007	-0.015	-0.005	-0.144	-0.264	-0.039
	(0.011)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.094)	(0.157)	(0.112)
Have excellent health status	-0.000	0.027***	0.024***	-0.068	-0.072	-0.029
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.047)	(0.058)	(0.043)
Reference group: Unemployed people						
Part-time employment	-0.001	0.013	0.008	-0.241***	-0.089	-0.139***
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.042)	(0.055)	(0.041)
Full-time empployment	-0.037***	-0.041***	-0.040***	-0.522***	-0.506***	-0.485***
	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.054)	(0.079)	(0.056)
Have dependent kids	0.006	-0.050	-0.042*	-0.112	-0.014	-0.190
	(0.017)	(0.029)	(0.020)	(0.151)	(0.260)	(0.172)
Regional and remote areas	0.005	-0.020	-0.020	-0.992*	-0.116	-0.084
	(0.053)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.460)	(0.231)	(0.174)
Homeowner	0.013	0.032***	0.020**	0.038	0.101	0.014
	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.108)	(0.077)	(0.055)
Years at current address	0.001**	-0.000	0.001*	0.004	0.008	0.009**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Observations	33686	15590	24805	33686	15590	24805
Mean	0.127	0.119	0.118	0.587	0.531	0.524

Notes: Column (1) and (4) report estimates from a individual fixed-effects linear probability model. Columns (2), (3), (5), and (6) report OLS estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses. All models control for age, gender, country of birth, education level, disability status, health status, employment status, whether the individual having dependent children, region and remoteness, home ownership, and number of years living at current address, and include survey year, state and postcode fixed effects. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Employment status shows a particularly strong relationship with volunteering intensity. Compared to individuals who do not work, full-time workers are less likely to volunteer and tend to spend fewer hours volunteering, likely because of work pressures and limited available time. These findings highlight the importance of time flexibility in supporting volunteering participation.

Part-time employment also shows a small negative association with volunteering hours, although the estimated effects are generally modest (Table 4, Columns 4–6). The associations between part-time employment and volunteering participation are generally positive but not statistically significant (Table 4, Columns 1–3). These findings appear somewhat different from the descriptive patterns shown in Table 3, where individuals employed part-time are the most likely to participate in volunteering. However, the descriptive statistics in Table 3 do not account for differences between individuals, such as personality traits, family background, education, or pro-social orientation, whereas the regression analysis in Table 4 controls for a broader range of individual characteristics.

Family responsibilities can also reduce opportunities to volunteer. The results show that individuals with dependent children are less likely to volunteer (Table 4 – Column 3), suggesting that childcare and caring responsibilities compete with time available for community activities. The relationship between volunteering and living in regional or remote areas is also less consistent. Most estimates are relatively small, although one regression suggests that individuals living outside major cities spend fewer hours volunteering on average.

Finally, housing stability and local attachment also appear to play a role. Homeowners are generally more likely to volunteer than renters, and individuals who have lived longer at their current address tend to report slightly higher volunteering participation and volunteering hours. This may reflect stronger community connections and greater involvement in local networks and organisations.

From the findings above, several important enablers and barriers to volunteering in Australia can be identified.

Enablers of volunteering

Parental role modelling appears to be one of the most significant drivers of volunteering. Individuals who identify as Australian often cite a sense of duty and community responsibility developed through watching their parents volunteer (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009). This is supported by international evidence showing that having at least one volunteering parent makes an adult 1.66 times more likely to engage in formal volunteering (Perks & Konecny, 2015). Consistent with the findings of this study, parental volunteering remains one of the strongest predictors of volunteering participation across generations, particularly when exposure occurs during childhood and early adolescence.

A key enabler of volunteering is therefore the intergenerational transmission of values, where pro-social orientation and community engagement are embedded through family and community practices (McGregor-Lowndes et al., 2017). Beyond childhood, the influence of social networks continues to evolve. While parents and friends have similar influence during adolescence, the role of peers and partners becomes increasingly important as individuals age, with partner encouragement often acting as a strong catalyst for participation (Van Goethem et al., 2014; Ramaekers et al., 2022). However, these social enablers are often strengthened by greater socioeconomic resources and individual capacity.

The findings of this study show that higher education is consistently associated with both higher volunteering participation and greater volunteering intensity. Higher levels of education can provide stronger social networks, greater civic awareness, and better access to volunteering opportunities (Kragt & Holtrop, 2019). Good health, stable housing, and longer residential attachment also appear to support volunteering participation by increasing individuals' capability and strengthening their connection to local communities.

Employment flexibility is another important enabling factor. Individuals with greater time flexibility, particularly those not engaged in full-time employment, tend to report higher volunteering participation and volunteering hours. This suggests that volunteering is shaped not only by willingness to contribute, but also by whether individuals have sufficient time and flexibility to participate in community activities.

Barriers to volunteering

The findings of this study also suggest several important barriers that can reduce volunteering participation, even where a willingness to volunteer exists. Socioeconomic disadvantage acts as an important structural barrier, where a family's overall socioeconomic circumstances influence whether volunteering participation continues into adulthood (Mustillo et al., 2004). Consistent with the findings above, housing instability (renting), and shorter residential attachment remain barriers to long term volunteering engagement.

Time pressure and competing responsibilities also appear to be major barriers to volunteering. The findings show that full-time employment is associated with lower volunteering participation and fewer volunteering hours, likely reflecting limited spare time and demanding work commitments. Economic pressures and changing work arrangements particularly affect younger adults who feel a greater need to prioritise employment and income security (Miranti & Evans, 2019; Nursey-Bray et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings suggest that volunteering across generations in Australia is shaped by a combination of exposure to parental volunteering, individual capability, availability, and community attachment. Table 5 summarises the multifaceted factors that facilitate or constrain volunteering engagement across different generations in Australia.

Table 5. Key enablers and barriers to volunteering across generations

Generations	Factors that enable volunteering	Factors that constrain volunteering
Builders & Boomers	Parental volunteering; higher education; excellent health status; homeownership; residential stability; greater employment flexibility	Lower education; poorer health; renting; housing instability
Gen X	Parental volunteering; higher education; excellent health status; homeownership; residential stability; greater employment flexibility	Lower education; poorer health; renting; housing instability
Gen Y	Parental volunteering; higher education; excellent health status; greater employment flexibility; residential stability	Lower education; childcare and caregiving responsibilities; renting; housing instability
Gen Z	Parental volunteering; higher education; excellent health status	Patterns less clearly identified due to weaker or inconsistent relationships across factors

Conclusions

Summary and policy discussion

Summary

This study provides a comprehensive overview of volunteering dynamics in Australia, with a particular focus on WA.

In WA, older generations, particularly Baby Boomers and Builders, consistently report higher rates of volunteering than younger generations. By comparison, Gen Y and Gen Z are less likely to volunteer and contribute fewer volunteering hours. Volunteering participation generally increases with age, with participation rates highest among people in their early 40s and 70s, and lowest among younger people aged under 30.

Parental volunteering is a common feature of many Australian families. Around two-thirds of individuals were exposed to parental volunteering during childhood or early adolescence, while almost one-third currently have at least one parent who volunteers.

A central finding is the important role of parental volunteering. Specifically, individuals exposed to parental volunteering (both current and past exposure during childhood and early adolescence) are significantly more likely to participate in volunteering. The influence is substantial in some cases, equivalent to around one-third of average volunteering participation and weekly volunteering time.

The findings also suggest that parental volunteering (both current and past exposure) influences volunteering behaviour through stronger pro-social orientation and greater community engagement. Growing up in families where volunteering is visible can help foster trust, social responsibility, and stronger engagement with local communities, which can then increase the likelihood of volunteering currently or later in life.

The demographic analysis identifies several consistent patterns across generations. Individuals with higher education and excellent health status are more likely to volunteer and contribute more volunteering hours.

Employment flexibility also appears important. Full-time employment is associated with lower volunteering participation and volunteering hours, suggesting that time pressure and competing work commitments remain important barriers to volunteering engagement.

The results further highlight the importance of housing stability and community attachment. Homeowners and individuals who have lived longer in the same area are generally more likely to volunteer, suggesting that residential stability and stronger local connections can encourage long term community involvement.

Overall, the findings suggest that volunteering participation is shaped by a combination of intergenerational influence, willingness to contribute, individual capability, available time, and

community attachment. While several findings confirm existing evidence that volunteering is associated with factors such as age, education, health, employment circumstances, and social connectedness, this report makes several new contributions.

First, it shows how volunteering participation varies across generations and different stages of the life course. Second, it provides evidence of a strong association between exposure to parental volunteering during childhood and early adolescence and an individual's likelihood of volunteering later in life, with the association being particularly strong for exposure during early adolescence. Third, the findings suggest parental volunteering fosters socialisation, pro-social orientation, and community engagement among children, which will in turn influence volunteering attitudes and behaviours in adulthood. Finally, the results highlight the importance of community attachment, showing that homeowners and people with longer term connections to their local area are more likely to volunteer.

Together, these results highlight the importance of creating supportive pathways into volunteering across different life stages and socioeconomic groups to strengthen long term volunteering participation in Australia.

Australia faces a number of challenges directly related to social connection and community belonging. In recent years we have seen a significant rise in anxiety and poor mental health among young adults coming of age in a challenging world.[8] This is directly linked to their experiences of loneliness, social isolation and a lack of community belonging – all factors that can be positively addressed through volunteer participation. At the same time, there is an ageing population that is more likely to experience an extended period of active life post-retirement than their predecessors.[9] Their health and wellbeing can also be positively supported by active participation in community-based volunteering activities, that help keep them mobile, socially connected and feeling life is worthwhile.

Governments concerned about rising costs of crisis and care services across health, mental health and ageing should be looking to proactively invest in programs that support volunteer participation and actively connect those who can benefit, through successful models like social prescribing seen in the United Kingdom and New Zealand.[10] Supporting intergenerational volunteering is a great way to strengthen community cohesion and create a more inclusive community for all Australians.

[8] See Dockery et.al. (2025) *Youth in Focus: Navigating wellbeing in a changing world*. and Duncan et.al. (2021) *Stronger Together: Loneliness and social connectedness in Australia*.
[9] See Buckland et.al. (2025) *A Balancing Act: Life, work and connection in the middle years*.
[10] For example, see Social Prescribing Academy UK and NHS England social prescribing guidelines.

Recommendations

The robust evidence of a strong intergenerational link suggests that volunteering policy should move beyond individual-centric recruitment and towards family based engagement strategies. If the habit of volunteering is partly formed during childhood and adolescence, policy interventions should target early exposure. Based on the findings regarding intergenerational transmission, socioeconomic drivers, housing stability, and the significant role of life stages, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen and sustain volunteering in Australia:

- **Intergenerational funding model:**
  Funding should prioritise family volunteering initiatives that allow parents and children, especially those in the critical 0-14 age bracket, to volunteer together. Alternatively, volunteer organisations can be supported to provide child-safe spaces and supervised play activities while parents volunteer.[11] By reducing barriers for children to accompany their parents, organisations can help foster the next generation of Australia's volunteering workforce.
- **Reducing barriers to youth volunteering**
  Insurance requirements can be a significant barrier to youth volunteering. Exploring options such as a government backed indemnity or insurance program for volunteers under 18 could help create more volunteering opportunities for young people, particularly outside schools, sporting clubs, and religious organisations.
- **Addressing the housing tenure gap:**
  The significant disparity between homeowners and renters suggests that housing insecurity and weaker residential attachment can be barriers to community integration and volunteering participation. Supporting neighbourhood based volunteering hubs that specifically reach out to high density rental areas and social housing developments might make participation in volunteering and community activities easier, however this may not reduce the barriers to a tenant's sense of community belonging. Broader reforms that strengthen tenancy rights and support longer tenancies, along with those reforming the tax treatment of investment properties to increase the likelihood of home ownership, are likely to have additional benefits in improving community participation and belonging.
- **Making volunteering more inclusive of renters and new residents**
  Renters and people who have recently moved to a new area are less likely to volunteer. Volunteering involving organisations (VIOs) can help address this by ensuring volunteering opportunities are welcoming and accessible, and by actively supporting renters and new residents to build local connections and become involved in their community.

[11] Volunteering Australia (2024) *Pre-Budget Submission 2025-26.*

- **Enhancing education, community engagement, and participation supports:**
  Since higher education is a strong predictor of volunteering participation and volunteering intensity, integrating service learning and community engagement activities into school, vocational, and tertiary curricula could help strengthen volunteering pathways for individuals who may not have grown up in volunteering families. Initiatives such as the Building Connections project[12] that introduce volunteering activities in public schools and support engagement with retirement communities are strongly recommended.
  In addition, ensuring that people with disability have access to appropriate participation supports, accessible volunteering opportunities, and social support funding can help reduce barriers to volunteering and strengthen community engagement, particularly among Builders, Boomers and Gen X.
- **Incentivising workplace volunteering for "time-poor" cohorts:**
  The findings suggest that full-time employment and work pressures reduce volunteering participation and volunteering hours, likely due to limited spare time and competing commitments. Encouraging the corporate and government sectors to adopt flexible workplace volunteering policies could help unlock a significant pool of skilled labour for community volunteering activities.
- **Supporting volunteering among families with caring responsibilities:**
  Individuals with dependent children face additional barriers due to childcare and caregiving responsibilities. Providing more flexible, family-friendly, and locally based volunteering opportunities can help improve participation among working-age families.

[12] Volunteering WA (2025) *Investing in our Volunteers,* WA State Budget Submission.

Glossary

HILDA Survey
The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey is a nationally representative, household based panel study that began in 2001. It follows the same individuals over time and collects information on economic circumstances, subjective wellbeing, family life and labour market experiences. HILDA is widely used in Australian research to examine changes in people's lives and wellbeing over time.

Volunteering
Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

Formal volunteering
Formal volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

Informal volunteering
Informal volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one's own family members. For example, looking after children, property or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

Linear probability model (LPM)
A statistical model used when the outcome is binary (e.g., yes/no). It estimates how changes in explanatory variables are associated with the probability of an outcome occurring, with results interpreted as percentage point changes.

Two-way fixed effects (TWFE) model
A statistical method used with panel data, where the same individuals are observed over time. It compares each person to themselves, controlling for stable personal traits (such as personality or family background), while also accounting for broader changes over time that affect everyone. This helps identify how changes in key variables are related.

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