2023

DJINANGINY KAARTDIJIN

SEEING AND UNDERSTANDING

Learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people about their volunteering experiences.

Teach Learn Grow

Wanju

Kaya and wanju!

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and waters on which we work; the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We recognise the traditional owners of Country across Australia, and the ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to the life of our region and our country. We celebrate that forms of volunteering have been practised on this land for tens of thousands of years and pay homage to this tradition in our work.

Yanga

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The project team is pleased to share with you the results of this project and hopes it will be a useful starting point for those wishing to improve volunteering experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

We would like to thank all the participants who were involved in this project for sharing their experiences of volunteering through surveys and yarning.

We would also like to acknowledge the volunteer-involving organisations involved; Hello Initiative, Elucidate Education, WAUC, Fair Game Australia, Leading Youth Forward, MAN UP, UWA Guild Volunteering and Ignite Mentoring for their input for this project and to Madalah, Dandjoo Darbalung and Curtin Guild's First Nations Collective for their assistance.

Contents

Overview

This project was designed to investigate and improve the capacity of volunteer-involving organisations in Western Australia to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) volunteers, particularly young people and students at tertiary institutions.

Part 1: Consultation and research

The projects team consulted with WA-based volunteer-involving organisations which identified young people and/or tertiary students as their key volunteer demographic to gain insight into their experiences of recruiting and retaining ATSI volunteers. A literature review was conducted to examine existing literature related to ATSI volunteering, youth volunteering and student volunteering to establish which practices have been identified as effective.

Part 2: Survey and Yarning

In order to understand the volunteering experiences of ATSI young people an online survey was designed, and administered to participants aged 18-30. After the conclusion of the survey, a series of one-on-one yarning sessions were conducted, in order to gain a deeper insight into individual experiences. All participants were compensated for their time.

Part 3: Ongoing Training

As part of this project, Teach Learn Grow (TLG) has engaged a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to expand its offering of training and cultural awareness experiences to staff and volunteers to deepen their understanding of ATSI history, and culture. TLG is committed to ongoing development, reflection and improvement of volunteer engagement strategies to ensure all volunteers can engage in positive and impactful volunteer experiences.

Defining Volunteering

Volunteering Australia defines volunteering as "time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain". This project focused only on formal volunteering which occurs within organisations. Although it was not examined in this project, it is important to recognise that many Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people frequently participate in informal volunteering, which is an important and valuable form of contribution to communities.

Key Learnings

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After reviewing the findings of each phase of the project, the following are the key recommendations for volunteering-involving organisations seeking to improve their engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and tertiary students

01. Cultural Competency

ATSI young people want to be involved with culturally competent organisations. Organisations must invest in ongoing cultural awareness training for all staff and volunteers and follow appropriate protocols such as Acknowledgements of Country. Organisations should consider if their reconciliation and cultural awareness efforts are visible to prospective volunteers, as this is a key consideration for ATSI young people.

02. Safety and Inclusivity

ATSI young people are seeking a safe, welcoming volunteering environment, where they are treated with respect by all and where their perspective is valued. Organisations must ensure they have policies and procedures in place to prevent racism and discrimination and address any breaches quickly and effectively.

3. Meaningful Work

ATSI young people are looking for volunteer roles that are meaningful, relate to their interests, and allow them to give back to their communities. Organisations should consider the roles offered and how these are presented to prospective volunteers, as well as the ongoing feedback and evaluation processes that are in place for volunteers.

4. Flexibility and Accessibility

ATSI young people want flexible volunteering opportunities and support to access these. Organisations need to consider how volunteers can access opportunities that fit in with their work and study commitments, and ways to reduce the financial barriers to volunteering, such as reimbursing transport and other incidental costs.

5. Ongoing Development

ATSI young people value organisations that support their ongoing development. Organisations should consider how volunteer experiences can be enhanced through additional training, create clear pathways into leadership opportunities, and establish mentoring programs, especially mentoring from other ATSI people.

Literature Findings

The literature review (see Appendix 1 for full review) examined available research and revealed several key findings regarding volunteering in Australia, particularly regarding best practices to engage ATSI people in formal volunteering and barriers that prevent this. While there was literature available about the prevalence of formal volunteering overall, there was a lack of data available about the prevalence of formal volunteering amongst ATSI Australians, specifically youth and tertiary students.

Barriers

From the literature, the most common barriers to ATSI volunteering are:

- Screening checks required may require identification documents that are not easily accessible and have a financial cost
- Lack of flexibility from organisations that do not reflect the commitments that ATSI people have in their communities
- Racism or a lack of cultural awareness or sensitivity in volunteer-involving organisations
- Lack of time to volunteer
- Difficulty accessing transport to volunteering opportunities

Best Practice

In order for volunteer-involving organisations to engage ATSI people and youth, the literature identifies the following best practices:

- Providing flexibility to volunteers so they can meet their community obligations
- Offer opportunities for skill-building to volunteers
- Consider whether the screening processes required by organisations is restricting ATSI volunteer involvement
- Promote volunteer belonging, inclusion and empowerment
- Provide mentoring to volunteers

Consultation Findings

15 volunteer managers from 9 organisations provided input via a survey. All respondents identified that those aged 18-30 form the majority of their organisation's volunteers and most identified that university students make up the majority of their volunteers.

100% of respondents said their organisation would benefit from engaging more ATSI volunteers. Many shared how ATSI young people constitute a significant proportion of their program's beneficiaries and that ATSI volunteer participation would benefit their beneficiaries by bringing lived experience, unique skills and diverse perspectives to the organisation. Many organisations had taken steps to reach more ATSI volunteers but these had been largely unsuccessful.

> **If we're building and delivering programs to a specific group of people, we need their voices to be heard, their input should drive our direction, and they should be involved in all levels of decision making... Having lived experience voices and representation of our target demographics is essential to delivering sustainable and impactful services**
>
> - Respondent

When asked about what barriers they perceive to exist, to ATSI volunteers accessing opportunities in their organisation, the respondents noted that:
- the lack of representation of ATSI people amongst current volunteers may deter potential new volunteers
- Systemic barriers mean ATSI young people are less likely to be represented amongst the organisation's usual target demographic(eg university students)
- Administrative and financial burdens such as police clearances and needing to forgo paid work are barriers to volunteering
- There is a high demand for the involvement of ATSI young people in academic or mentoring programs and paid and unpaid work for various organisations

The resources and support that volunteers identified could help them to recruit and retain this volunteer demographic were:
- More data and information on how to share volunteering opportunities with ATSI young people, their motivations for volunteering, and the barriers they face
- Funding for cultural awareness training for volunteers and volunteer managers
- Relationships with networks and organisations that could connect ATSI with volunteering opportunities

Survey Findings
Respondents

This research surveyed 29 ATSI young people between the ages of 18 and 30 to understand their experiences with volunteering. The study uncovered several demographic, educational, and employment-related factors that influenced the participants' engagement with volunteering (see Appendix 2 for full report).

The vast majority (93%) of respondents had participated in volunteering and the respondents who had never volunteered indicated interest in volunteering in the future.

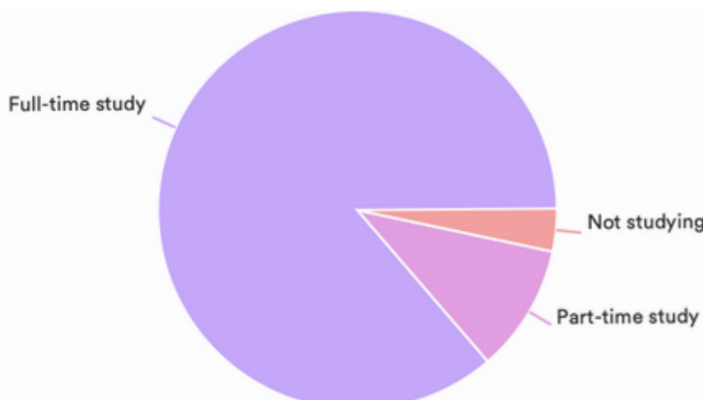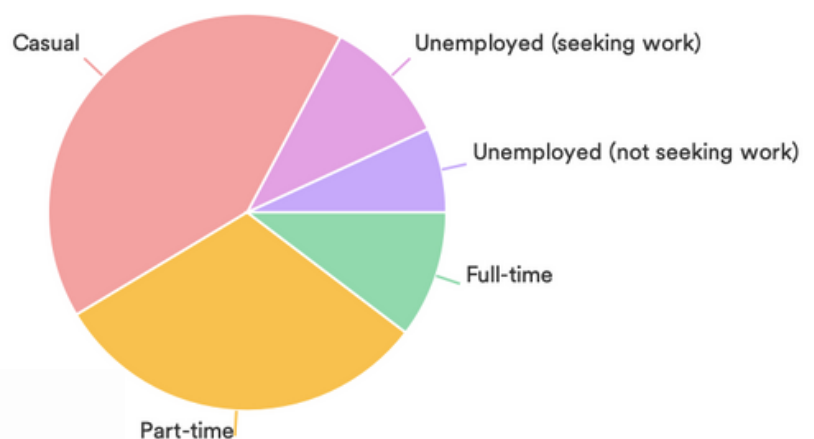**75% were aged 18-21. The mean age was 20, and the oldest was 29**

62% respondents had lived in rural, regional or remote areas

69% identified as female, 28% as male and 3% as non-binary

83% of respondents were working, 17% were unemployed

Casual
Unemployed (seeking work)
Unemployed (not seeking work)
Full-time
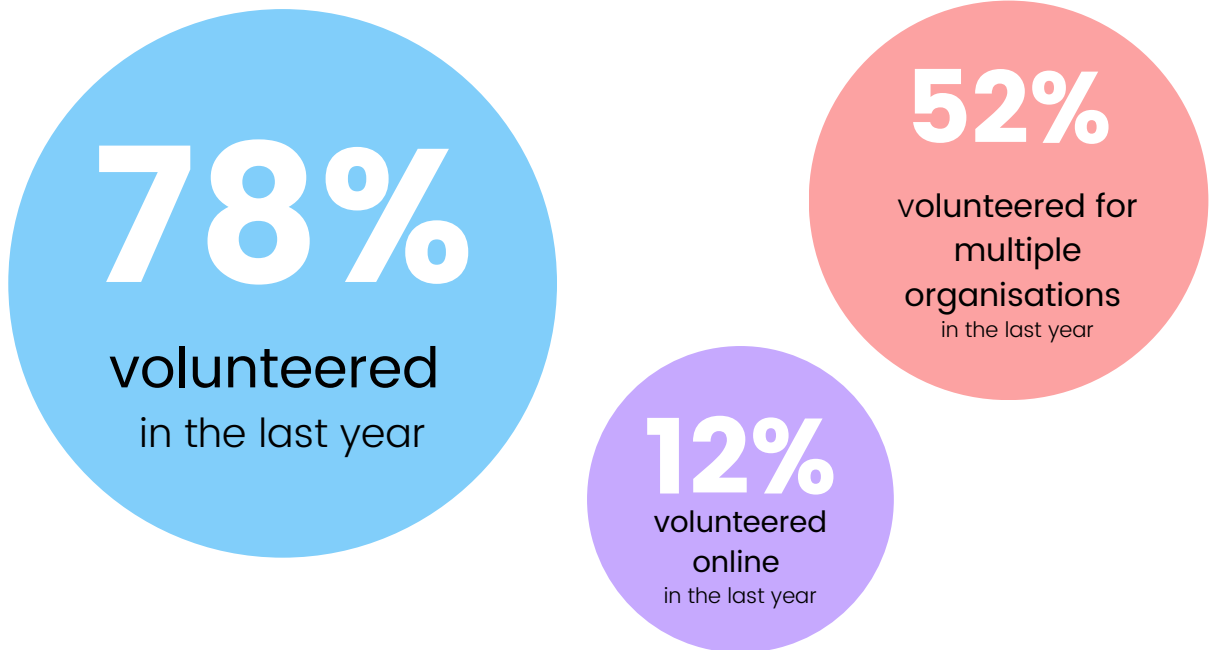Part-time

Full-time study
Not studying
Part-time study

86% of respondents were studying full-time, 10% studying part-time

Survey Findings
Participation

Of the 93% of respondents who had participated in volunteering:

78%
volunteered
in the last year

52%
volunteered for multiple organisations
in the last year

12%
volunteered online
in the last year

Organisations

The common type of organisation that respondents had volunteered for were those related to education and training, closely followed by ATSI organisations.

Horizontal bar chart:
- Education and Training: ~16
- ATSI Organisations: ~15
- Community or Ethnic Groups: ~8
- Health, Disability or Support: ~6
- Sport / Physical Recreation: ~5
- Youth Work: ~3
- Religious: ~3

(x-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15)
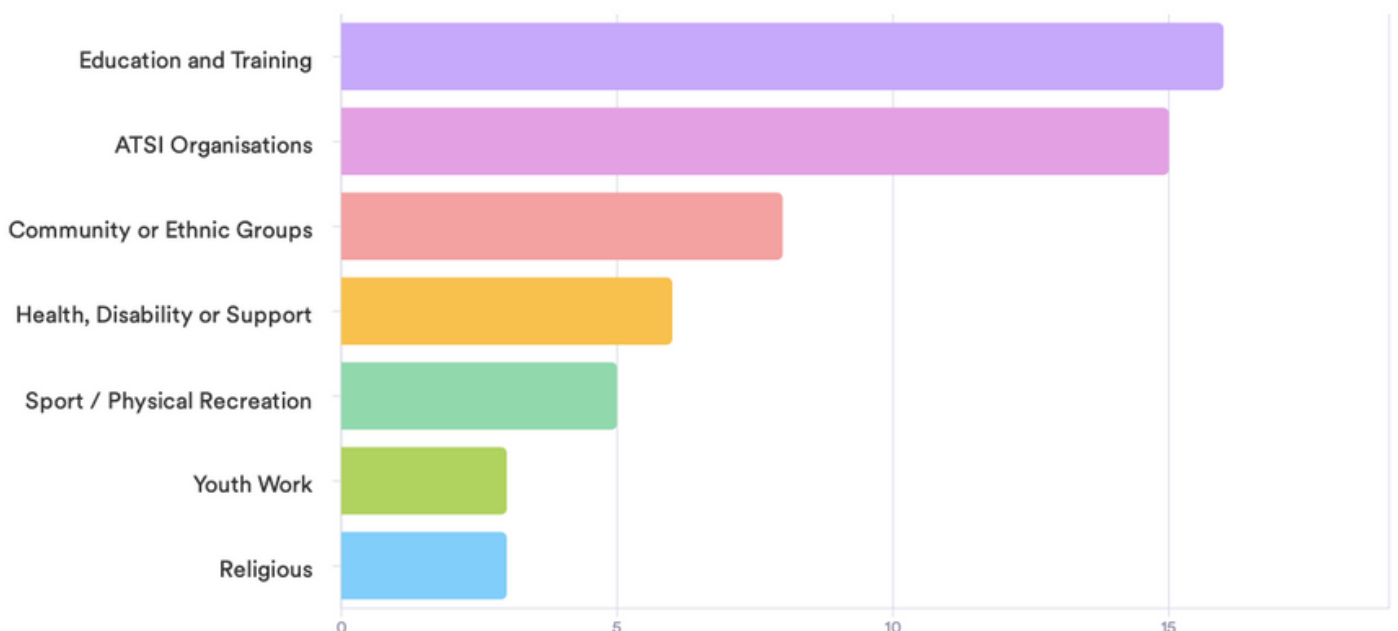
Survey Findings
Motivations

Respondents who had volunteered were asked to select up to 3 motivations for their volunteering. By far the single biggest motivator for volunteering was "to help the community". All identified at least one altruistic motivation, and more than half identified at least one learning/professional development motivation. Social motivations such as "to meet people" were less common, with only 11% of respondents selecting one of these types of motivations.
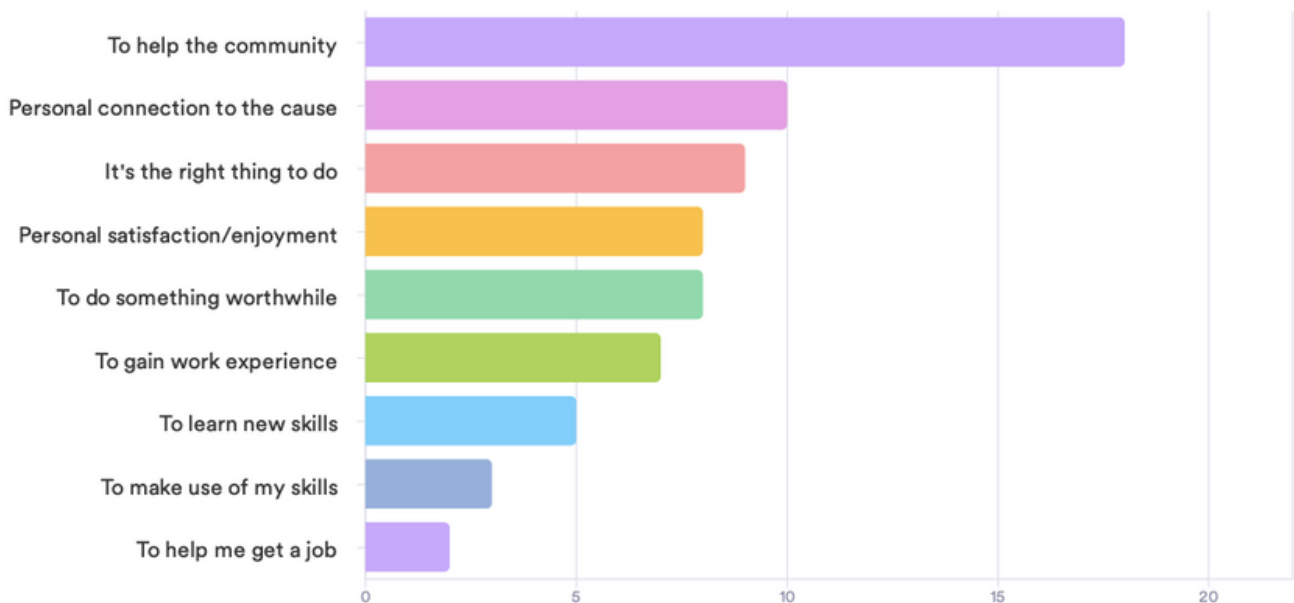
Starting the Volunteer Journey

81% of respondents first volunteered before they turned 18, with the youngest age for commencing volunteering being 12 years old.

The most common reasons for starting volunteering were:
- being asked to volunteer
- knowing someone involved
- educational institutions promoting the role

Survey Findings
Promoting Opportunities

For promoting volunteering opportunities among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, a multifaceted approach — combining digital communication, institutional partnerships, community engagement, and respectful direct contact — was suggested by the respondents.

Text analysis of the question about the best ways to share volunteering opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people showed a few key strategies were particularly prominent:

Social Media and Digital Advertising

Nearly half of respondents explicitly mentioned social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Snapchat as effective channels. The widespread use of social media among young people was seen as a means to broadly disseminate information about volunteering opportunities.

Educational Institutions

Around a third of respondents indicated that schools, universities, and TAFEs are prime venues for sharing these opportunities. Ideas included integrating information about volunteering opportunities into existing indigenous programs at these institutions or sharing through scholarship organisations.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

A quarter of respondents highlighted the importance of working directly with indigenous communities and organisations. Suggestions included forming partnerships with indigenous-led groups, community leaders, and programs/groups that directly connect with indigenous young people.

Survey Findings
Barriers

Respondents who had volunteered were asked to select up to 3 factors that limit how much they are able to volunteer. Limited free time was the most significant impediment to volunteering, followed by limited access to transport and financial constraints.
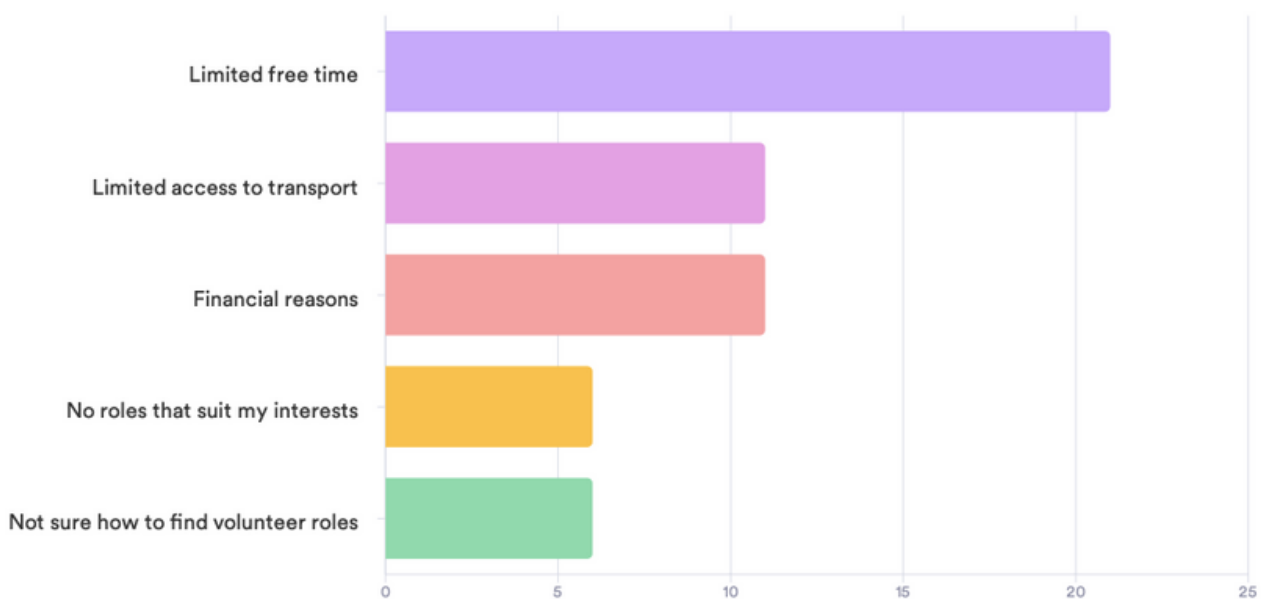
The survey respondents who had never volunteered before said the barriers to them volunteering in the future were "financial reasons", "no roles that suit my interests", "not sure how to find volunteer roles", "limited free time" and "limitations due to a disability".

The study also revealed correlations between factors like gender, study load, workload, and number of commitments with the volunteering load. For instance, respondents who identified as male spent on average less time per month volunteering. Interestingly, while full-time students spent less time volunteering than part-time students, full-time workers spent more time volunteering than other workers.

Survey Findings
Experiences

Respondents rated the experience of volunteering positively, with meeting new people, enjoyment, and feeling impactful as top responses. However, improvement in mental health and wellbeing was less often noted.

Qualitative analysis of the text fields revealed that respondents derived enjoyment from their roles through positively impacting young lives, community interactions, personal satisfaction and growth, helping underprivileged communities, and the nature of the work itself.

Individual motivations also seemed to influence the volunteering experience. For instance, those seeking enjoyment or professional development from volunteering reported successful achievement of these goals.

Positive Impacts

Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements about their volunteering experiences

85%   I have met new people

85%   I enjoy volunteering

88%   I feel I am making a difference

78%   I have learned new skills or improved my skills

70%   I have become more confident

52%   My mental health and wellbeing has improved

70%   My career opportunities have improved

Survey Findings
Areas of Improvement

When considering how the organisations they have volunteered with before could have improved the volunteer experience, the most frequently mentioned issue was time constraints and scheduling conflicts, as mentioned by a quarter of respondents. This included not having enough time due to other commitments, early morning starts, long hours, the need to allocate a full day for volunteering, and the infrequency of volunteering opportunities. Respondents also emphasised improving recruitment and management of volunteers, cultural competency, meaningful work and increasing the range of activities.

"Offer volunteering opportunities that directly support mob. Creating meaningful and mob specific roles that value the knowledge and understanding that mob are knowledgeable"

"Actually hire indigenous interviewers or volunteers who overlook the interview process to avoid wrongly interpreting interviewees perspective based on their experience"

When those who had previously volunteered were asked whether volunteering had had any negative effects on them, 11% said yes. Most of the additional comments provided pointed to issues with the people and culture within the organisation, such as shaming, not showing appreciation and some included instances of racism.

"Some people are rude and I have had experience of people in organisation shaming [me] for not being able to commit more time"

"Not being appreciated or taken advantage of which has caused myself to not volunteer as much"

Survey Findings
Considerations

Respondents were asked the select the most important factors they consider when choosing an organisation to volunteer with, both as a young person and as an ATSI person. When considering volunteering with an organisation, cultural inclusivity, a positive culture, flexible volunteering roles, and coverage of financial costs were top considerations.

From an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander perspective, cultural awareness training, having a designated Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander volunteer coordinator, and the presence of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers were of utmost importance.

Yarning Findings
Experiences

Many experiences shared during the yarning sessions echoed the data collected in the survey. Respondents had generally positive experiences.

> "I have gained a lot of experience in my various roles... I have made lifelong friends and have also learnt a lot about myself through it all"
>
> "Volunteering as a young Aboriginal woman has been an enriching and transformative experience. It has strengthened my cultural identity, empowered me to create change, and provided personal and professional growth opportunities that have shaped me into a stronger, more compassionate individual"

Racism and discrimination were raised by several participants with specific instances mentioned by two participants, in one instance, the participant felt that an instance of racism they experienced while volunteering was effectively addressed by the volunteer-involving organisation. In the other, the participant discontinued their volunteering as their experience was not addressed and they felt the organisation was unwilling to change.

All participants referred to cultural safety or inclusivity being something that impacts their volunteering experiences and the type of organisation they would consider in the future.

> "It's essential to be in an environment where I feel accepted, where my perspectives and contributions are respected, and where I can fully express myself without hesitation or fear of judgment. Feeling welcomed goes beyond just being invited to participate; it involves creating an inclusive atmosphere where my cultural background and experiences are recognised and celebrated. Acknowledging and valuing the unique strengths and insights that I bring as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young person fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment"

Yarning Findings
Advice for Organisations

Yarning participants were asked about how volunteer-involving organisations could provide positive volunteering experiences for ATSI young people. Excerpts of their responses have been grouped around the following key themes:

- Cultural Awareness
- Flexibility and Accessibility
- Meaningful Work
- Support and mentoring
- Cultural Safety
- Community and Collaboration
- Training and Leadership
- Organisational Culture

Cultural Awareness

- "Incorporate a formal acknowledgment of the Traditional Custodians and their ongoing connection to the land and waters where volunteering takes place. This recognition demonstrates respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and helps create an inclusive atmosphere."
- "First and foremost, cultural awareness and sensitivity training are essential to promote understanding and respect."

Flexibility and Accessibility

- "Ensure that volunteering opportunities are accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This includes providing support with transportation, addressing financial barriers, and considering geographic locations to increase participation from remote or rural communities."

- "Understand and accommodate my scheduling constraints, such as school, work, or personal commitments. Providing flexibility in volunteer hours and considering remote or virtual volunteering options allows me to better balance my responsibilities."
- "Recognise the diverse needs and commitments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Offer flexible volunteering models that consider cultural obligations, such as Sorry Business, community events, or cultural ceremonies. This flexibility allows for meaningful engagement while honouring cultural responsibilities."

Meaningful Work

- "Assign me tasks and projects that align with my skills, interests, and goals. Providing meaningful and challenging assignments allows me to make a valuable contribution and feel fulfilled in my role."
- "Meaningful engagement is crucial, involving young people in decision-making and tailoring volunteer programs to their interests."
- "Acknowledge and appreciate my efforts through regular feedback, expressions of gratitude, and recognition events. Feeling valued and appreciated boosts my motivation and satisfaction as a volunteer."
- "Seek my feedback and input on the volunteer program, projects, and overall experience. Conduct regular evaluations to identify areas for improvement and demonstrate a commitment to continuous growth."

Support and Mentorship

- "Offer mentorship programs specifically tailored to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. These programs should connect them with culturally knowledgeable mentors who can provide guidance, support, and cultural insights. Mentors can play a crucial role in building confidence, promoting cultural identity, and navigating potential challenges."
- "Having access to mentors who can offer guidance and wisdom is important to me. I appreciate organizations that provide avenues for connecting with experienced Aboriginal women who can inspire and support me in my personal journey."
- "Offer comprehensive training and ongoing support to ensure I have the necessary knowledge and resources to perform my duties effectively. Access to guidance, mentorship, and a designated point of contact is highly beneficial"

Cultural Safety

- "Provide a culturally safe workplace and First Nations representation in leadership, boards and employees."
- "Prioritize my safety and well-being by implementing appropriate safety measures, providing necessary resources, and ensuring a respectful and inclusive environment free from discrimination or harassment."
- "It is crucial for me to volunteer in a space where I feel safe, both physically and emotionally, and where I can rely on the support of like-minded individuals who understand and appreciate my experiences."
- "Organizations should create a culturally safe environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people feel respected, valued, and comfortable. This involves acknowledging the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, promoting cultural awareness among all volunteers, and actively addressing any instances of racism or discrimination."
- "I seek an organization that respects and values my cultural identity, creating an environment where I can freely express and share my heritage."

Community and Collaboration

- "Engage in meaningful and ongoing consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This ensures that volunteer programs are culturally appropriate, relevant, and aligned with community needs and aspirations. Involving community members in the decision-making process builds trust and fosters genuine partnerships."
- "I am passionate about being actively involved with Aboriginal communities. Volunteering with an organization that actively engages with and supports these communities allows me to make a direct and meaningful impact."
- "Provide opportunities for cultural knowledge sharing and learning. This can involve inviting Elders or community members to share their stories, traditions, and cultural practices. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young volunteers can develop a deeper understanding of their own heritage and contribute to the preservation and celebration of their culture."
- "Facilitate opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young volunteers to connect with their ancestral lands, cultural sites, and community events. This connection to Country and community strengthens their sense of belonging, identity, and cultural pride."
- "Collaborating with local communities and establishing mentorship support further enhances the experience."

Training and Leadership

- "Create avenues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young volunteers to develop leadership skills and take on active roles within the organization. Empower them to contribute their unique perspectives and guide decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and agency."
- "I am eager to develop new skills and expand my professional networks through volunteering. Being part of an organization that offers training programs, workshops, and networking opportunities helps me grow personally and prepare for future endeavours."
- "Personal Development Opportunities: Provide opportunities for personal and professional development, such as workshops, training sessions, or networking events. Supporting my growth enhances my skills and makes the volunteer experience more enriching."

Organisational Culture

- "Maintain open and transparent communication channels to provide clear instructions, expectations, and updates regarding volunteer roles and responsibilities. This helps me feel informed and engaged."
- "Foster a collaborative and inclusive environment where volunteers can connect, share ideas, and work together as a team. Encouraging communication and collaboration creates a sense of belonging and enhances the overall volunteer experience."
- "Clearly communicate the purpose and impact of the organization's work. Understanding how my volunteer efforts contribute to the organization's goals and the broader community helps me stay motivated and engaged."
- "What is most important to me is that I feel respected even though I'm a young person with less experience and to be treated the same as anyone else."
- "Foster long-term relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young volunteers, aiming for sustained involvement and continued support. Recognize that building trust and rapport takes time, and invest in ongoing communication and connection beyond individual volunteering activities."

About Us
Project Coordination

Teach Learn Grow is a Perth-based not-for-profit providing free tutoring and mentoring programs to students in rural and remote areas of Australia. TLG programs are facilitated by hundreds of passionate and motivated young volunteers who dedicate their time to help students experiencing educational disadvantage achieve their full potential. TLG believes in the power of volunteering to transform the lives of both volunteers and beneficiaries and is committed to working alongside other volunteer-involving organisations in the sector to provide impactful, positive volunteering opportunities for all Australians.

This project was coordinated by TLG staff Bridget Staude (Chief Executive Officer) and Shannan Moir (Volunteer Director).

Contributors

### Elicia Lelliot   Project Assistant

Elicia is a 20-year old Indigenous student from the Noongar region. She is the First Nations Officer at the Curtin Student Guild. Elicia volunteers for Perth STEM, a local youth-led charity that create opportunities for young people to engage in STEM. Elicia is passionate about helping the community especially in areas of injustice. She is currently studying with the goal of becoming a social worker.

Laura Searle   Research Assistant

Laura is a high school teacher from Boorloo (Perth). Her volunteering experiences while studying a Bachelor of Arts at The University of Western Australia sparked Laura's passion for education, which she pursued through the Teach For Australia graduate program. Laura has taught in Mandurah, Perth and London and has recently completed a Master of Education at Harvard University. She is committed to a career improving equity in education.

James Audcent   Data Assistant

James is a founder and entrepreneur with a degree in Computer Science and Data Science from The University of Western Australia. James has volunteered with a number of organisations and is passionate about helping non-profit organisations build mature digital cultures that enable them to do more good with less.
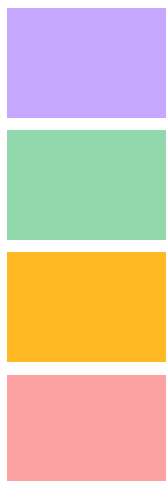
Contact

If you would like more information about this project, or access to the anonymised data for research purposes, please contact projects@teachlearngrow.org.au