

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA: SOME REFLECTIONS

DR ROSALYN BLACK
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

MAY 2023



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- This presentation acknowledges my colleague, Professor Lucas Walsh of Monash University
- It draws on our 2015 report for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and New South Wales Department of Education and Communities: *Youth Volunteering in Australia: an evidence review*
- You can find the report at <https://www.education.gov.au/youth/resources/youth-volunteering-australia-evidence-review>



**FIRST, A RECAP: WHAT DID WE LEARN
ABOUT YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN
2015?**



OUR 2015 REPORT FOUND THAT:

- Contrary to popular myths, young people in Australia do engage in volunteering, both in formal and informal contexts
- Young people's volunteering is influenced by 'top-down' prompts and encouragements from policies, organisations and programs
- It is also driven from the 'bottom-up': by community needs; by young people's own desire to contribute and make a difference; and by their desire for stronger social relationships, greater skills and better work or career prospects
- At the same time, standard measures of youth volunteering don't capture the many ways that young people volunteer
- Also, many young people do not identify with the term 'volunteer', even when they are effectively volunteering

WHAT DO WE KNOW NOW?



YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IS HOLDING STEADY OR ON THE RISE

- In Mission Australia's 2013 survey of young Australians aged 15 to 19, volunteering was one of the three top activities in which young people were engaged
- This has remained steady since then: in the 2022 survey, the top three youth activities were *sports (as a participant)* (72%), *sports (as a spectator)* (66%) and *volunteer work* (45%) (Leung et al. 2022)
- Other recent studies show that volunteering by (often young) Australian university students is on the rise (Paull et al 2022)
- Student volunteering is seen as a way of boosting graduate employability. It is also part of a service learning approach which invites students to learn in 'real' contexts that offer service to the community
- Recent research also highlights the link between youth volunteering and sport
- It suggests that sports and youth clubs are important hubs for young people and potential youth volunteering (Nurse-Bray et al 2022)

**WHAT DO WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT
FOR THE FUTURE?**



YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IS NOT A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

- Our 2015 report found that young people's volunteering may be influenced by their socioeconomic circumstances, education levels, gender, location, ability and cultural identifications
- The Mission Australia 2022 survey echoes this
- It shows, for example, that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people volunteer than other youth cohorts while more young women volunteer than young men (Leung et al. 2022)
- The bad news is that there are still concerns about:
 - the politics of participation in youth volunteering (Paull et al 2022)
 - the politics of representation in youth volunteering (Nursey-Bray et al 2022)



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THIS?

- There are still stereotypes around which young people want to volunteer and which young people volunteer most often or most consistently
- There are still questions around which young people are able to access volunteering opportunities and to sustain their participation in volunteering
- Young volunteers are still at risk of:
 - being seen as less reliable and more difficult to manage than older cohorts
 - being less valued or well supervised than they should be
 - having hide their more career-oriented motives for volunteering



WHAT DO WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT GOING FORWARD?

- We need to think about which young people are welcomed to volunteer and which *feel* welcome to volunteer (two different things)
- We need to think about models of youth volunteering that can:
 - first attract and engage young people as volunteers
 - then retain and sustain them as volunteers
 - provide diverse, fun and event-based volunteering opportunities
 - connect young people and organisations through social media and good communication strategies
 - build young people's skills (the ones they want to build)
 - set the scene for their long term participation



REFERENCES

- Leung, S., Brennan, N., Freeburn, T., Waugh, W., & Christie, R. (2022). Youth Survey Report 2022. Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia.
- Nursey-Bray, M., Masud-All-Kamal, M., Di Giacomo, M., & Millcock, S. (2022). Building community resilience through youth volunteering: towards a new model. *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 9(1), 242-263.
- Paull, M., Holmes, K., Omari, M., Haski-Leventhal, D., MacCallum, J., Young, S., & Scott, R. (2022). Myths and misconceptions about university student volunteering: development and perpetuation. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 1-13.
- Walsh, L., & Black, R. (2015). *Youth volunteering in Australia: An evidence review*. Report prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Canberra: ARACY.