

VOLUNTEERING *and* CONTACT ACT

Volunteering and Contact ACT

Future of Education in the ACT

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Volunteering and Contact ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the Canberra Region. Volunteering and Contact ACT pays respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their vital ongoing contribution to the Canberra Region.

Volunteering and Contact ACT acknowledges the contribution of the volunteers and volunteer involving organisations that contribute to the health and happiness of our city. Volunteers include people with all abilities and from all cultures. Their skills, expertise, and time are critical to delivering services and programs, and in making Australia a better place to live.

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Overview

Volunteering and Contact ACT (VCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the ACT Government's consultation on the Future of Education in the ACT. This submission will highlight the benefits of aligning volunteering with the Australian curriculum, and investing in structured volunteering programs in ACT schools.

VCA is the peak body for volunteering and community information in the Canberra Region. VCA has a vision of an engaged community, enriched by volunteering, participation and knowledge. Through our services and programs, we foster community networks and undertake research, advocacy, projects, training, and events.

VCA is a people-driven, service-focused organisation that represents the interests of 185 member organisations.

This submission provides an evidence-base to support three key recommendations for the Future of Education in the ACT:

- That the ACT Government and Education and Training Directorate look to implement the Volunteering and the Australian Curriculum resources in ACT schools.
- That the ACT Government and Education and Training Directorate consider how to better resource structured volunteering programs in ACT schools.
- That the ACT Government and Education and Training Directorate work with Volunteering and Contact ACT to provide support for volunteer involving organisations to increase opportunities for young people to volunteer.

Background Information

Volunteering spans every aspect of Australian life, with an estimated 43.7 per cent of adult Australians volunteering each year.ⁱ These volunteers gave a total of 932 million hours in 2015-16, at an economic worth of over \$31 billion.ⁱⁱ Here in the ACT nearly four in ten people volunteers, contributing an estimated \$1.5 billion to the ACT economy annually.ⁱⁱⁱ

For every \$1 invested in volunteering there is a \$4.50 return to the community.^{iv} Economically, the return on investment in volunteering is exponential over time, and delivers tangible outcomes that government and private sector services would not be able to achieve in isolation.

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In addition to the economic benefits generated by volunteering, it also delivers significant social and cultural benefits. Volunteers play a pivotal role in creating connected, diverse, and inclusive communities. With the highest rate of volunteering in the country, the ACT benefits tremendously from the work of volunteers who contribute to the health and happiness of the Canberra community.

Future of Education in the ACT

In 2015 the United Nations set 17 Sustainable Development Goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Goal 4 is to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.^v Work done by other agencies in the ACT, including the ACT Council of Social Services and the Youth Coalition of the ACT, highlight the hidden inequity in the educational attainment of ACT students.^{vi} Namely, there is a widening gap between students from high and low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and prospects. Access to quality education is a primary way to break the cycle of poverty and address entrenched and intergenerational disadvantage. Education also empowers people to live more healthy and sustainable lives, and is crucial to creating diverse and inclusive communities.

Volunteering is a proven pathway to employment, and the additional educational, health, and wellbeing benefits can be particularly pronounced for young people. The ACT has a culture of volunteering, evidenced by the 57 per cent of young Canberrans actively engaged in volunteer work.^{vii} Further embedding volunteering in ACT classrooms through the Australian Curriculum would provide additional opportunities for young people to advance their education through community service.

Volunteering plays a key role in achieving educational outcomes for students experiencing disadvantage. The 2013 research report 'Promoting youth engagement and wellbeing through student volunteer programs in ACT schools' found that, "for disengaged youth, the development of a sense that they are good at something and can contribute leads to success and better engagement."^{viii} However, the report further noted, "that it was often these young people who were least given access to [volunteering] programs in the school setting."

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Following the 2013 research report, Volunteering Australia undertook a project to align volunteering with the Australian Curriculum. This was based on evidence that showed lower levels of engagement with volunteering activities by students where it was an 'add-on' to school. Volunteering Australia worked with teachers around Australia to design a suite of resources that embedded volunteering concepts and practices in classes from Foundation to Year 10.

In addition to contributing to educational outcomes for young people, volunteering also plays an integral role in teaching new skills, creating new networks, and allowing people to experience real-life working environments. The future of work is likely to be centred on portfolios of skills, rather than specific jobs or careers.^{ix} Volunteer involving organisations are an incubator for teaching people skills that make them more adaptable to changing working environments. Additionally, volunteering gives young people an opportunity to 'road test' different careers, and can assist people to find their passion and purpose. In the ACT, the schooling environment plays a pivotal role in introducing young people to volunteering.

Youth unemployment is one of the preeminent issues facing Australia today, with the rate in the ACT being 11.7 per cent, compared to a national unemployment rate of 5.8 per cent.^x Research indicates that young Australians who experience unemployment for over 12 months are at a double-digit rate of disadvantage compared to their peers in the workforce.^{xi} Volunteering can play an important role in intervention, by giving young people opportunities to engage in meaningful opportunities that keep them engaged and work ready.

Barriers to Volunteering for Young People

The biggest barrier to volunteering, as noted by young people, was after school commitments. Students suggested that they wanted their school to facilitate volunteering placements on their behalf. ACT students who had not volunteered identified the two main barriers as time and lack of interest. However, the third and fourth biggest barriers were students not feeling like they had anything to offer and never being asked to volunteer. This suggests there are some practical actions schools could take to increase participation rates in volunteering, especially for students experiencing disadvantage.

Structured Volunteering Programs in Schools

One of the key ways to foster participation in volunteering activities in schools is a structured volunteering program that links students with local volunteer involving organisations (VIOs). Despite the irrefutable benefits of volunteering for young people, 76 per cent of schools in the

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ACT do not have a structured volunteering program. This suggests that young people are at risk of missing out on opportunities because of the lack of effective brokerage between students and VIOs. Volunteering and Contact ACT recommends investing in structured volunteering programs within schools to bolster participation, noting that a structured program is essential for young people experiencing disadvantage.

Conclusion

The future of education should be based on a well-rounded experience that includes community participation and volunteering as key mechanisms to support educational attainment. The three recommendations outlined at the beginning of this submission highlight the need for the ACT Government to take a proactive approach to resource and support ACT schools and volunteer involving organisations to identify pathways for young people to participate in volunteering. Greater collaboration between schools and the volunteering sector in the ACT will create opportunities to realise benefits for young people, which will assist to reduce disadvantage and increase educational outcomes.

The Volunteering and the Australian Curriculum resources can be found on the Volunteering Australia [website](#).

ⁱ The Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (ACNPS), Centre for Social Impact (CSI) Swinburne and the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs (December 2016) *Giving Australia 2016*, available online at <http://www.communitybusinesspartnership.gov.au/about/research-projects/>

ⁱⁱ Volunteering Western Australia (May 2015) *The Economic, Social, and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia*, available online at

https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014*, available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.

^{iv} Volunteering Western Australia (May 2015) *The Economic, Social, and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia*, available online at

https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf

^v United Nations (2018) *Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning*, available online at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

^{vi} ACTCOSS (2017) *Media release: Education – we can lift attainment by working together*, available online at <https://www.actcoss.org.au/news-events/media-release/media-release-education-we-can-lift-attainment-working-together>

^{vii} Mission Australia (2017) *Youth Survey Report*, available online at

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people>

^{viii} Volunteering ACT (2013) *Promoting youth engagement and wellbeing through student volunteer programs in act schools report*

^{ix} Portable (2017) *Future of Work*, available online at <https://www.portable.com.au/purpose/future-of-work/>

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^x Brotherhood of St Laurence (2018) *An unfair Australia? Mapping youth unemployment hotspots*, available online at

http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/10573/1/BSL_Unfair_Australia_Mapping_youth_unemployment_hotspots_Mar2018.pdf

^{xi} Mission Australia (2006) *Youth Employment: The Facts*, available online at

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