

**20** NATIONAL  
**23** VOLUNTEERING  
CONFERENCE  
THE FUTURE IS NOW

## **D5: Volunteering in aged care settings**

# Volunteering in Aged Care Settings the lessons of COVID-19 beyond PPE

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Murdoch Business School  
and  
Centre for Healthy Ageing Murdoch University**

**National Volunteering Conference  
Canberra February 14<sup>th</sup> 2023**

This project was a Murdoch University initiative  
in partnership with Volunteering WA and supported by Lotterywest

# Acknowledgement of Country



I would like to acknowledge that this conference is being held on Ngunnawal country.

The research about which I am talking was largely undertaken on the lands of the Whadjuk and Binjareb Noongar people.

I would like to pay my respects to the enduring and dynamic culture and the leadership of elders past and present.

## OVERVIEW

- About the research project

## Key focus of this paper

- Communications
- Organisational support for volunteer programs
- Vulnerabilities



# The context

- Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
  - Aged Care Quality Standards
- Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety
  - Changing government policy including health advice
    - COVID-19 impact visible in other states
  - Constant updating of health advice and policies
    - Rapid increase in academic literature
  - Previous projects – including Jacaranda Project



## Recommendation 44: Volunteers and Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme

From 1 July 2021, the Australian Government should promote volunteers and volunteering in aged care to support older people to live a meaningful and dignified life and supplement the support and care provided to them through the aged care system, whether in their own home or in a residential care home, by:

increasing the funding to the Volunteer Grants under the Families and Communities Program – Volunteer Grants Activity in 2021–22 to support organisations and community groups to recruit, train and support volunteers who provide assistance to older people

requiring, as a condition of approval and continuing approval of all approved providers, that all aged care services which use volunteers to deliver in-house coordinated and supervised volunteer programs must:

assign the role of volunteer coordination to a designated staff member, provide induction training to volunteers and regular ongoing training to volunteers in caring for and supporting older people, complaints management and the reporting of reasonably suspected abuse or neglect

“co-ordination” training and complaints

retain evidence of provision of such training

providing additional funding, and expanding the Community Visitors Scheme and changing its name to the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme, to provide extended support for older people receiving aged care who are at risk of social isolation.

## Government response

- Highlight existing funding under volunteer grants
- Committed to look at CVS
- VMA funding



# Statistics about volunteering in aged care



## *2020 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey* - compared to 2016

- significant drop in volunteers in residential aged care facilities (RAC)
- decreased volunteer numbers for home care volunteers in the HCCP and CHSP.

### The workforce census data

- not a full representation of volunteers in the aged care context\
- does not include many other volunteer groups which provide services in aged care settings including pet visits, entertainment experiences or other specialised activities.



### **THE AGED CARE WORKFORCE, 2016**

March 2017

Kostas Mavromaras, Genevieve Knight, Linda Isherwood, Angela Crettenden, Joanne Flavel, Tom Karmel, Megan Moskos, Llainey Smith, Helen Walton and Zhang Wei



# What do we mean by....



MU

- **Volunteering:**

“time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain” (Volunteering Australia, 2015)

## Our focus: **formal volunteering**

- **Aged Care Settings**

Residential Aged Care (**RAC**); In-home care settings in the community (Home Care Packages Program – HCP and Commonwealth Home Support Program- CHSP) (Community Visitors Scheme **CVS**); Retirementvillages/communities; Day Centres/Eldercare facilities; Senior Citizens Recreation Centres and related programs.

Our participants: **largely RAC and CVS volunteers and managers**



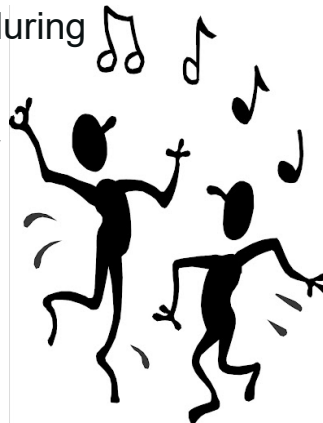
# Research approach

- Iterative workshop based process.
- Workshops with volunteers, volunteer managers, online, face to face, **COVID-19 interrupted (storm interrupted)**... Reorganised and repeated.
- Literature – academic literature, grey literature, media including social media, newsletters and updates from key agencies/organisations
- Meetings and brainstorming, including with **reference group**
- Analysis, research, development of guides
- Draft guides workshops
- Online feedback via survey from wider audience
- Development of final guides, report



# Volunteers in Aged Care Settings:

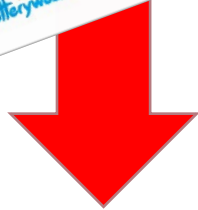
- **Companionship and befriending** (including playing board games, knitting, watching television, home visits, and conversation – sometimes in languages other than English)
- **Activity support** (including therapy support, bus outing support, exercise class support, social activity support)
- **Driving**, to and from medical and other appointments, for social outings or shopping (including bus, pool vehicle, personal vehicle driving)
- **Food preparation, delivery, and service** (including for example meals on wheels, dining room helpers, kitchen helpers)
- **Gardening and maintenance activities** (including in the gardens at retirement facilities or in people's home gardens)
- **Pet care and pet visits** (including helping with pet care during difficult times or bring their own pet to visit)
- **Reception, clerical, and administrative roles** (and may include helping organise other volunteers).



## Specialist volunteering (not covered in depth)

- Dementia care support volunteering
- Palliative and end of life care volunteering
- Advocacy volunteering
- Faith focussed volunteering (cf. faith-based)
- Board membership
- Supported volunteering; and
- Other specialised roles - such as hospital liaison, residents association committees.

# Good Practice Guides developed for ...



As expected

- **Volunteers**
- **Volunteer managers**

Unsurprisingly

- **Policy makers and peaks**
- **Senior managers and boards**

Because of the data:

- **Staff who work alongside volunteers**
- **Frontline managers of volunteers (onsite)**



Sought feedback on drafts -

- *What is missing?*
- *Anything misleading or distorted?*
- *What is really helpful or useful?*
- *Is the tone or pitch right for the audience?*
- *What about the level of detail?*
- *Any other comments or observations?*

Because of the feedback on drafts

- **Potential volunteers**

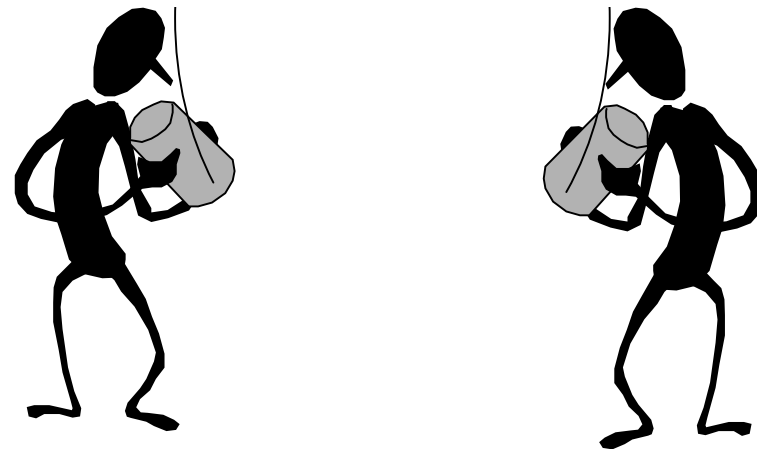
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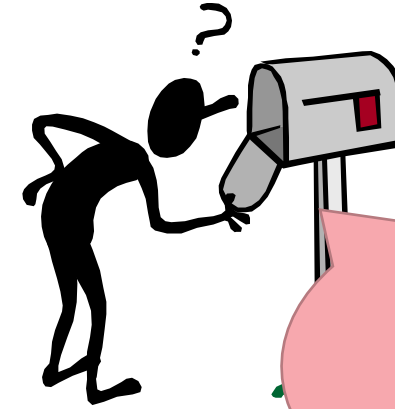
# Is volunteering in aged care different?

- Different context brings different rules and frameworks

Communication at the base of all interactions and operations



# Communications during COVID-19



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- Organisations needed to be quickly ‘on message’  
(including volunteers on website advice)
- COVID-19 communications were designed to keep staff and clients/families informed – sometimes forgot to include mention of or information for volunteers
- Volunteer Managers had to find ways to keep in touch with volunteers to maintain relationships during the lockdown/restricted access period

Not hearing from my organisation about what to do in lockdowns made me feel unimportant (participant initial volunteers workshop)



# Organisational support of volunteer programs

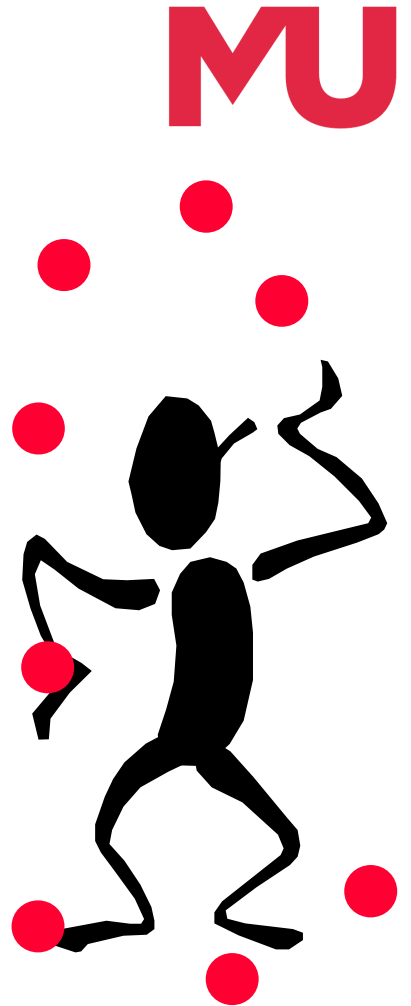


- Some organisations not as well prepared for the impact of COVID-19
- Some were more prepared re staff and clients BUT not volunteers
- Lack of provision of PPE/masks for volunteers
- Volunteer programs were put on hold beyond lockdown
- Volunteers were not allowed on most sites during lockdown
- Some VMs were moved to other roles/retasked/reduced hours
- Some sense that the volunteer program was not highly valued



# Volunteer Management during COVID-19

- Staff worked from home and relied on technology to keep in touch with the organisation **and with volunteers** – some still do
- Paperwork became more efficient – forms reduced
- Initial recruitment interviews were online – saved a lot of time
- Recruitment of new volunteers during the pandemic: writing letters, helping with tech training for clients/staff, phone calls to clients
- In some organisations, new online volunteer training mandatory – some new modules were introduced re PPE/Infection Control



# Volunteer Management during COVID-19

- Loss of existing volunteers due to requirements re COVID jobs
- Loss of existing volunteers due to COVID hesitancy, age limits, health concerns
- Some new volunteers stayed, others fell away after lockdown ended
- Time invested in recruitment and training
- Need for more clarity/shared understanding of requirements for volunteer activity on site/supervision
- Some VM's who went above and beyond to communicate with volunteers in their own time were not always recognised by their executive





# Vulnerabilities: Volunteers and clients

- Volunteers reported missing their regular volunteer activity during lockdown
- Volunteering contributes to volunteers' health and wellbeing
- Volunteers missed being in contact with clients
- Some programs found new ways to engage volunteers/client contacts – technology (dependent on staff availability to assist)
- Volunteers were concerned by degeneration of clients over the lockdown period 'due to lack of contact/activity'
- Volunteers view their contribution as an important part of keeping their client well and engaged
- Some volunteers expressed concern around confidentiality exacerbated by COVID-19 absences

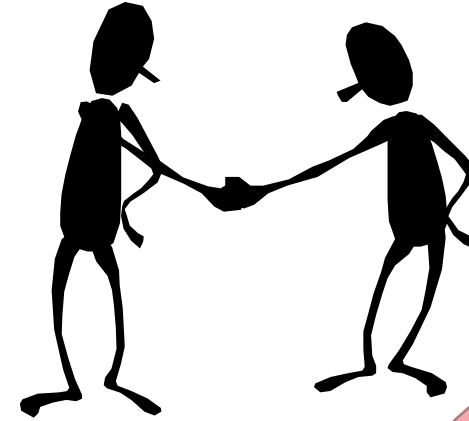


*For some of my clients  
I am their only visitor  
(participant initial  
volunteers workshop)*

Essential  
visitor policy  
changed later

Not only  
during  
COVID-19

# Staff/volunteer relationships



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*I find onsite staff are the biggest culprits for assuming volunteers have existing knowledge or experience in aged care and only telling volunteer the bare minimum.  
(online survey)*

- Our GPG was designed for staff to understand the role of volunteers in their aged care settings
- Volunteers should not do tasks which are the role of paid staff
- Volunteers are there to build relationships and help with recreation activities, they are not there to take staff jobs
- Volunteers are **usually** not allowed to feed or assist clients with moving around
- Levels of trust between support staff and volunteers were eased by good communication

## *Diversity and inclusion, dignity and respect*

Understanding of diversity – important for staff, clients and volunteers

Plus - Need for ethno-specific volunteers to work with clients who may have reverted to first language/who understand cultural background

COVID-19 isolation exacerbated when no volunteer visitor



More attention needed  
to diversity and  
inclusion  
(LinkedIn feedback)

# How to find our report

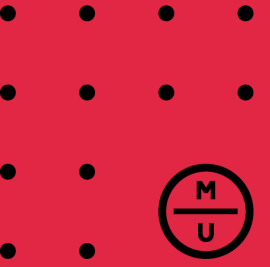
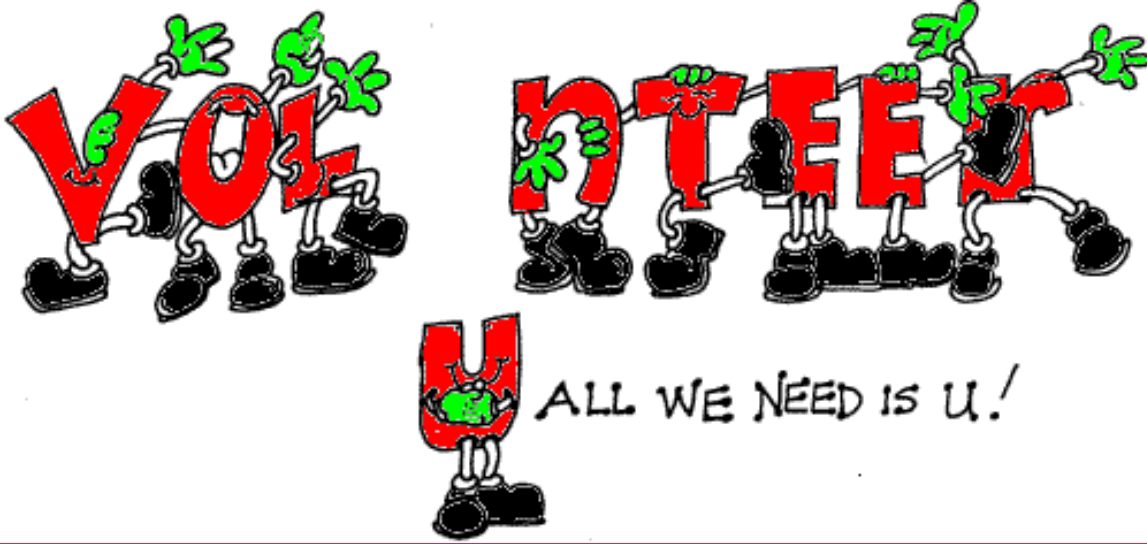
Available at:

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Report includes Good Practice Guides to be used separately

This guide makes me feel so valued (participant feedback workshop)





**Thank you**

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