

Australian Volunteers



Volunteering your way into
the job market

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Creating opportunities for recent graduates to contribute to partner organisation priorities, as well as gain professional skills and experience.

Complete

Mar 2021 - June 2023



Cover image: Belden Samual, a university student, inspects a recycled plastic bottle with volunteer Marketing and Events Support Officer Jessica Lamb at Port Moresby Nature Park, Papua New Guinea. Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono.

Summary

The program partnered with two local organisations, [Probono.org](#) and [Refugee Social Services \(RSS\)](#), to prototype a 12-month youth local volunteer model. The project, 'Volunteer Your Way into the Work Market,' explored how university graduates can contribute to partners' priorities while gaining valuable skills and work experience.

Our objectives

- Explore what an ideal work experience journey would be for partners and graduates, including requirements, risks, and possible barriers associated with undertaking a new volunteer model.
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- Learn how local volunteering can support both partner organisations and graduates' needs while contributing to each group's long term goals.
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- Allow young graduates to gain work experience, develop new skills and be better prepared for the world of work.

Our approach

This project underwent a thorough co-design process, with several young people and partner organisations actively participating in discussions to exchange ideas and thoughts. The program conducted a series of prototyping activities based on the feedback of the students and partners, which was seen as a low-risk way to test the assumptions of those involved.

Through a consultation process, Probono.org and Refugee Social Services expressed their interest in getting involved and were selected to trial the final version of the prototype. These partners were responsible for the management of the volunteers while the program provided additional support for career development and learning through the creation of the Youth Peer Support Network.

The program worked with partners and the Youth Peer Support Network on monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities to record valuable learnings that would inform the future design of the model, including keeping track of the progress of each assignment and capturing stories. We also held a reflection event with participants at the end of the project to record their key learnings, refer to Appendix 1 to learn more about this workshop.

What we learned

- New graduates have a strong desire to gain practical skills and opportunities.
- Partners are keen to support young graduates and to support the career development of young people.
- Bringing in new groups to the innovation process continues to create new ideas and ways of working.

Appendix 1 - Reflecting on the volunteer, peer, and partner experience in South Africa

The Volunteering for Development project in South Africa concluded in April 2023 with a reflection workshop in Johannesburg. The workshop brought together 18 participants including volunteers, Youth Peer Support Network members, partner organization staff, and program staff who shared their experience of being involved in the project from its beginning to the present day.

In this workshop, we learned:

- It was a highlight for all participants to meet in person after a year of working together virtually.
- Five out of six volunteers found employment after their assignments. One was employed by the organisation of their assignment and four found employment in a related field in different organisations.
- The volunteer opportunity brought value to volunteers, peers and partner organisations by contributing to the building the capacity of the young people while also helping to achieve development outcomes for the organisations in South Africa.
- Both partners and peers observed a significant increase in confidence and improved soft skills among the volunteers.
- The Youth Peer Support Network could be improved by having a member take a lead role in managing tasks and assignments
- Key challenges included limited connectivity, competing priorities, and uncertainties brought about by a new modality being tested.



Participants of the Reflection Workshops in Johannesburg South Africa



The Youth Peer Support Network members together with the program team



Workshop participants on a gallery walk of the V OI4 Dev journey maps



Youth Peer Cassandra Mnisi working on her journey map about the Vol4 Dev Experience



Discussions with Volunteers Ayanda Zulu and Nokwanda Zuma Peer Support Cassandra Mnisi and PO staff Margaret Fish left to right



Group discussions with Peer Support Linda Masango Left Volunteer Zamazitha Mlotshwa center and Program Manager Wendell Westley right