

A high-angle, top-down photograph of a group of people, likely young adults, sitting in a circle on a lush green lawn. Their hands and feet are extended towards the center of the circle, creating a communal visual. Many of the individuals have green nail polish. Several people are wearing colorful beaded or fabric bracelets on their wrists. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day outdoors. The overall mood is one of unity and community.

A Snapshot of Volunteering Attitudes on the Sunshine Coast

By the Sunshine Coast Volunteer Stakeholder Reference Group

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Facilitated by Sunshine Coast Council

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¹ The Sunshine Coast Volunteer Stakeholder Reference Group currently includes representatives from Sunshine Coast Council, Noosa Council, Volunteering Sunshine Coast, University of the Sunshine Coast, Qld Health, Uniting Care, Sippy Creek Animal Refuge, Playgroup Qld, Red Cross, Carers Qld, Suncare, The Smith Family, Nambour Community Centre, Comlink, Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, P&C Qld, St Vincent de Paul Qld, Sunshine 60 & Better Group.

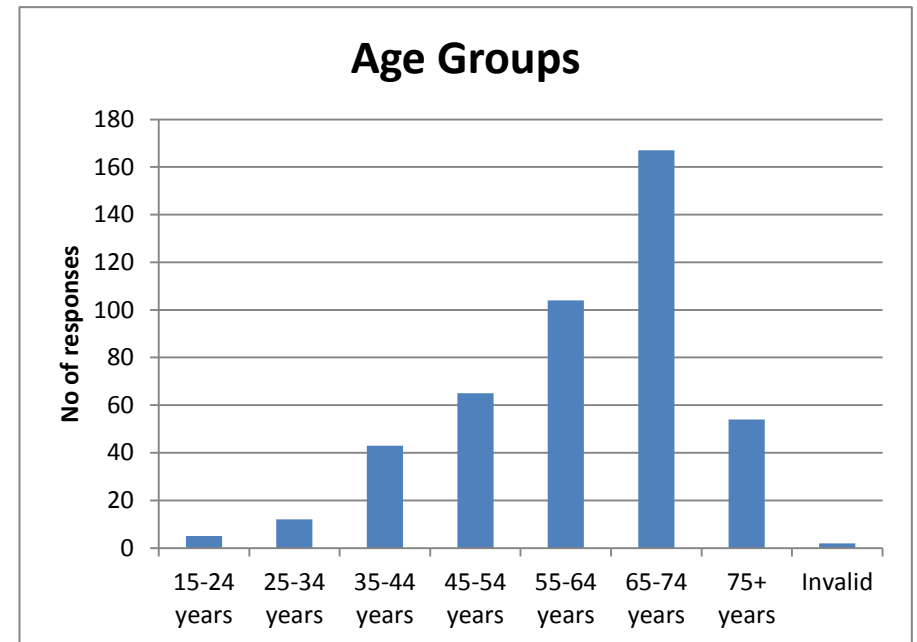
A Snapshot of Volunteering Attitudes on the Sunshine Coast

In March and April 2017, the Sunshine Coast Volunteer Stakeholder Reference group circulated the 'Volunteering on the Sunshine Coast' survey. There was a great response by 452 local volunteers that completed the survey. It is intended that this survey or a variation of it will be circulated every year so that a longitudinal study can occur of attitudes of Sunshine Coast volunteers over time. The results of the survey are as below.

Demographics

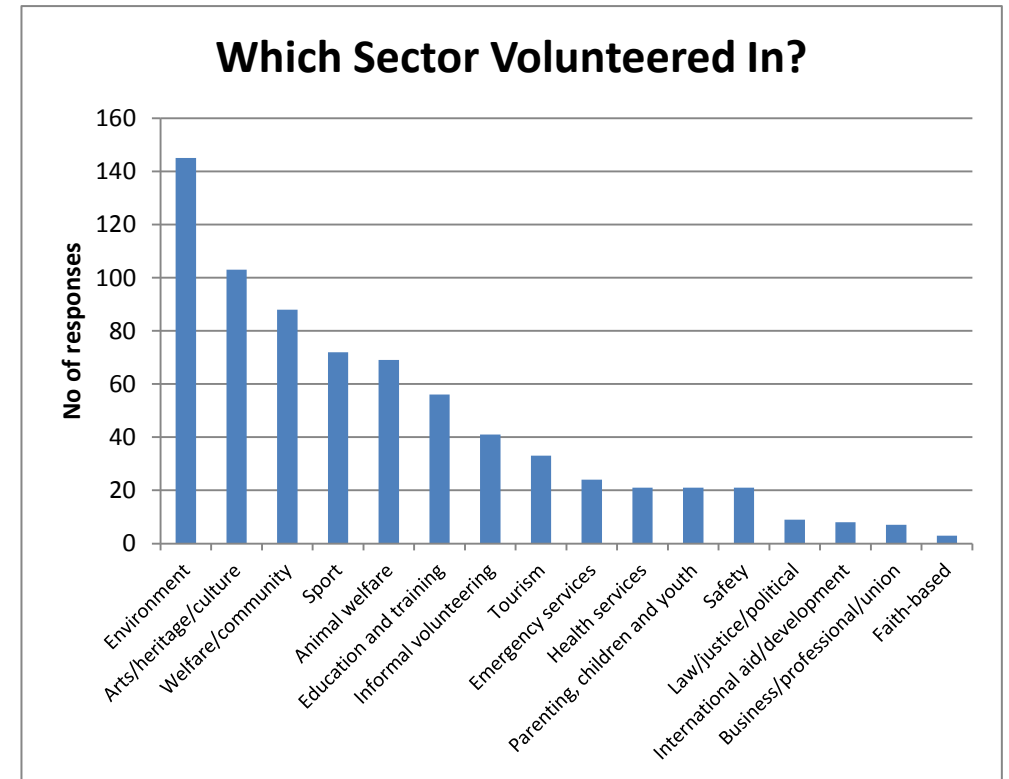
The 452 responses were by 319 females (70.6%) and 130 males (28.8%) with three invalid responses. The age group of the respondents were as follows:

Age Groups	Responses	%
15-24 years	5	1.1%
25-34 years	12	2.7%
35-44 years	43	9.5%
45-54 years	65	14.4%
55-64 years	104	23.0%
65-74 years	167	36.9%
75+ years	54	11.9%
Invalid	2	0.4%



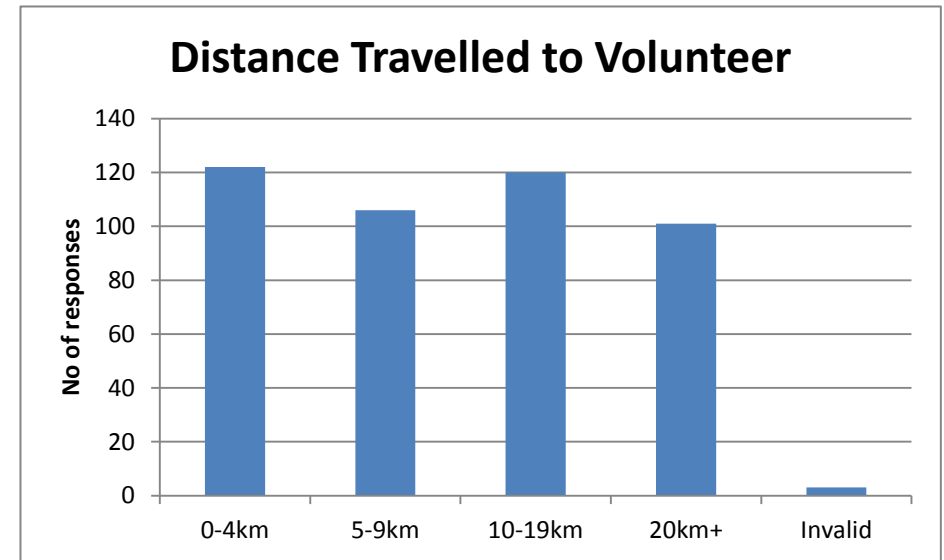
The sectors represented were:

Sector	Responses	%
Environment	145	32.1%
Arts/heritage/culture	103	22.8%
Welfare/community	88	19.5%
Sport	72	15.9%
Animal welfare	69	15.3%
Education and training	56	12.4%
Informal volunteering	41	9.1%
Tourism	33	7.3%
Emergency services	24	5.3%
Health services	21	4.6%
Parenting, children and youth	21	4.6%
Safety	21	4.6%
Law/justice/political	9	2.0%
International aid/development	8	1.8%
Business/professional/union	7	1.5%
Faith-based	3	0.7%



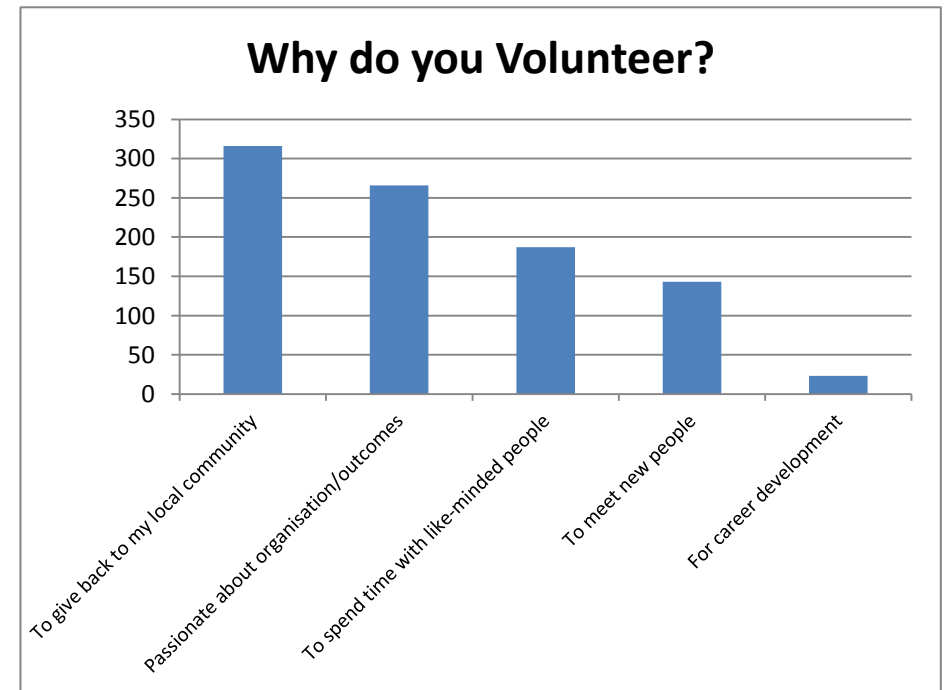
How far do you currently travel to volunteer?

Distance	Responses	%
0-4km	122	27.0%
5-9km	106	23.5%
10-19km	120	26.5%
20km+	101	22.3%
Invalid	3	0.7%



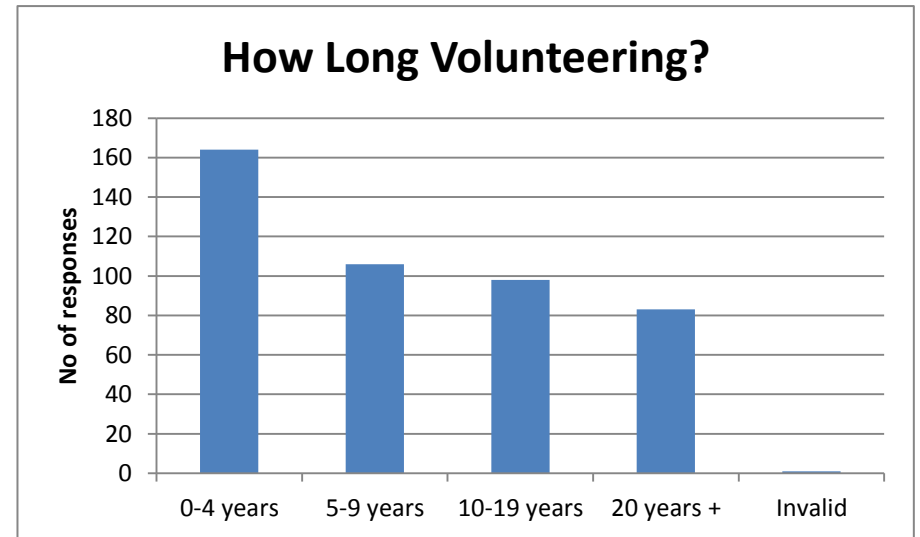
Why do you volunteer?

Reason	Responses	%
To give back to my local community	316	69.9%
Passionate about organisations/outcomes	266	58.8%
To spend time with like-minded people	187	41.4%
To meet new people	143	31.6%
For career development	23	5%



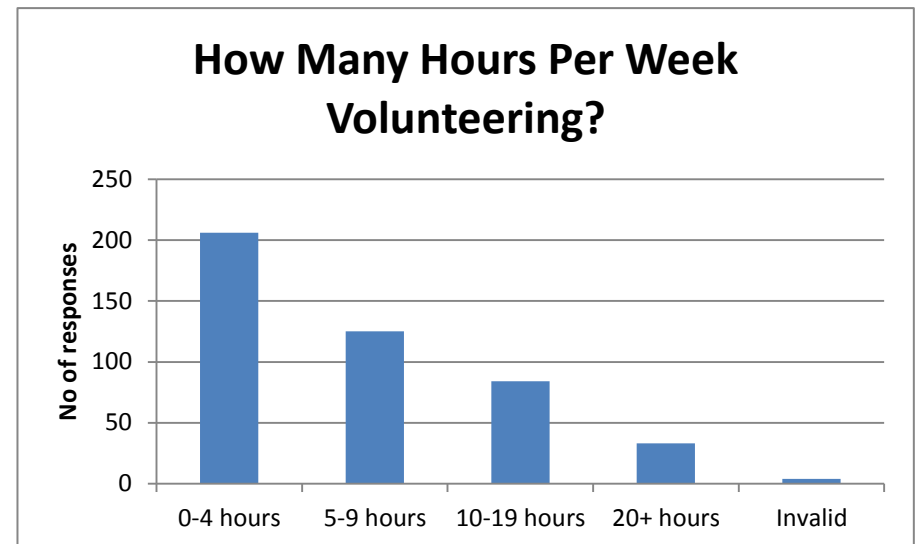
How long have you been a volunteer?

Time	Responses	%
0-4 years	164	36.3%
5-9 years	106	23.5%
10-19 years	98	21.7%
20 years +	83	18.4%
Invalid	1	0.2%



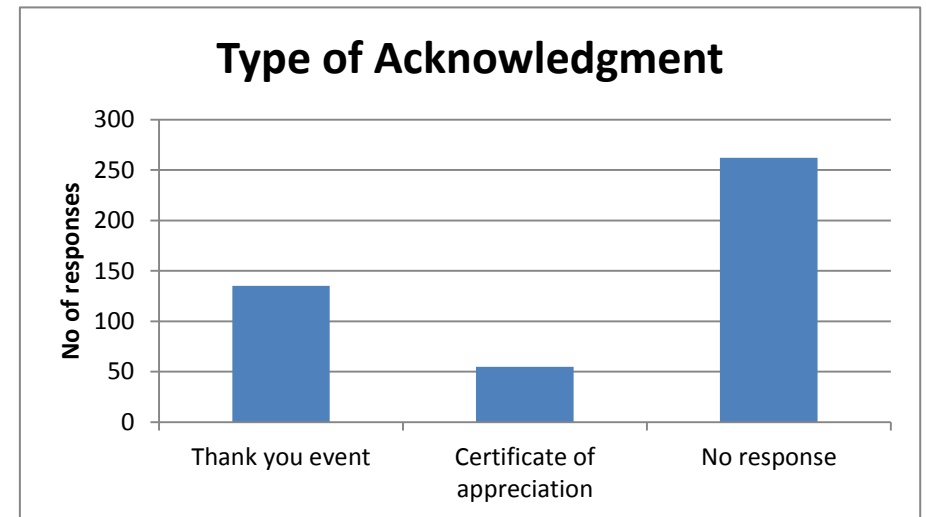
How many hours per week do you volunteer?

Time	Responses	%
0-4 hours	206	45.6%
5-9 hours	125	27.7%
10-19 hours	84	18.6%
20+ hours	33	7.3%
Invalid	4	0.9%



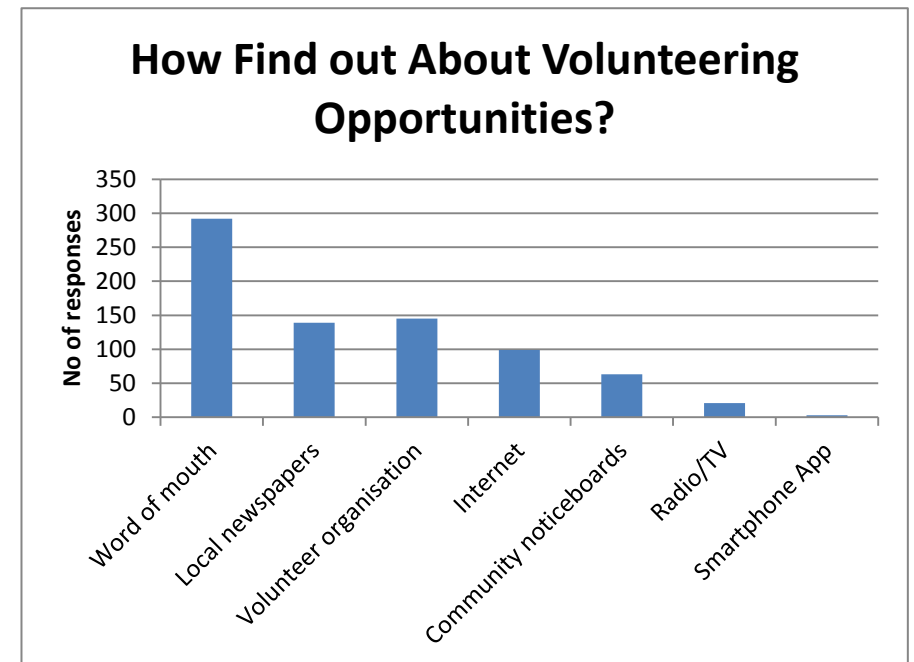
How would you like to be recognised/acknowledged for your volunteering?

Type of acknowledgment	Responses	%
Thank you event	135	29.9%
Certificate of appreciation	55	12.2%
No response	262	57.9%



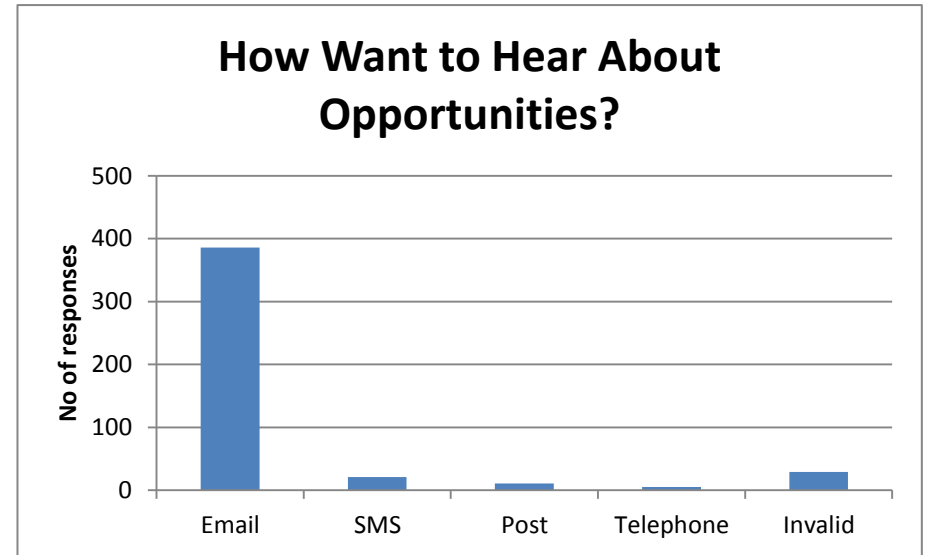
How do you find out about local volunteering opportunities?

Media	Responses	%
Word of mouth	292	64.6%
Local newspapers	139	30.8%
Volunteer organisation	145	32.1%
Internet	99	21.9%
Community noticeboards	63	13.9%
Radio/TV	21	4.6%
Smartphone App	3	0.7%



What is your preferred method of communication for receiving volunteer information?

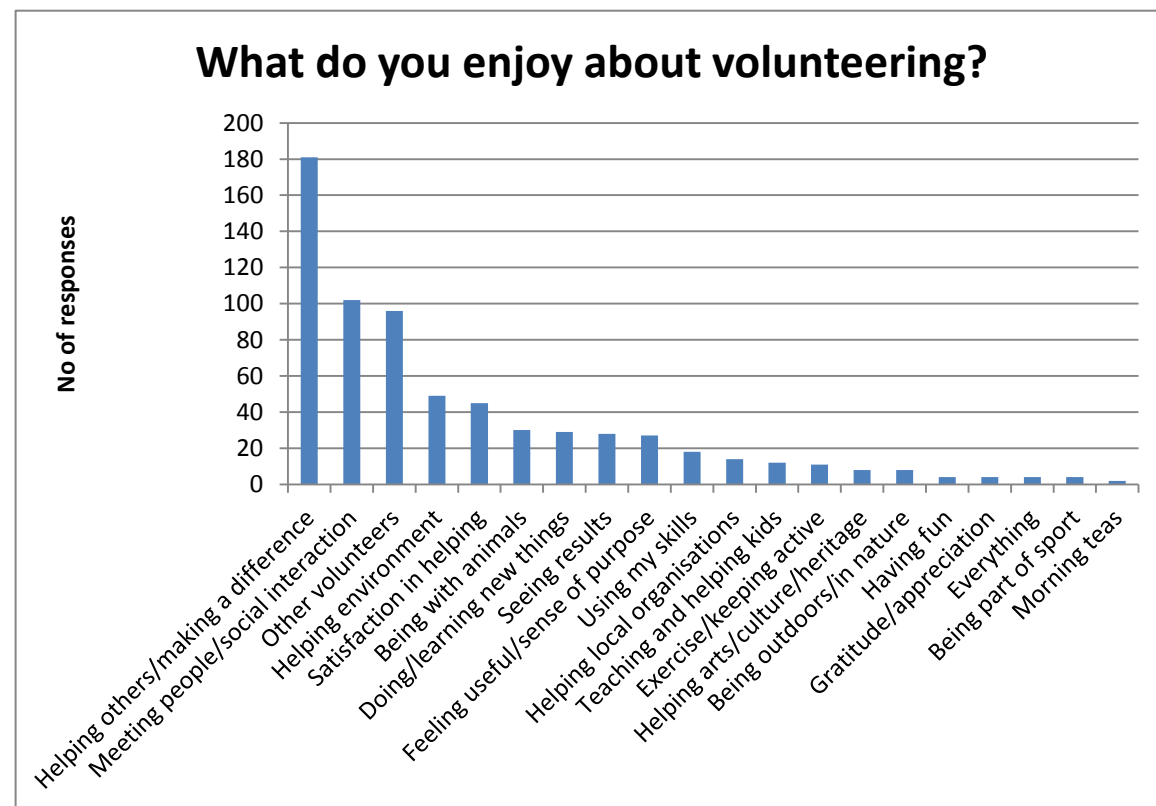
Media	Responses	%
Email	386	85.4%
SMS	21	4.6%
Post	11	2.4%
Telephone	5	1.1%
Invalid	29	6.4%



What do you enjoy about volunteering?

The survey asked the open question of ‘what do you enjoy about volunteering’, to glean further information about why people volunteer. The responses were explored for themes, and were then each response coded according to these themes. Many responses included many of the themes so may appear in a number of categories. It seems that many of the responses were from volunteers that worked with animals or the environment. This may be just that these organisations were alerted of the survey more clearly than other organisations, so may not reflect the attitudes of all volunteers. Nonetheless, the responses give a good sample of volunteering attitudes.

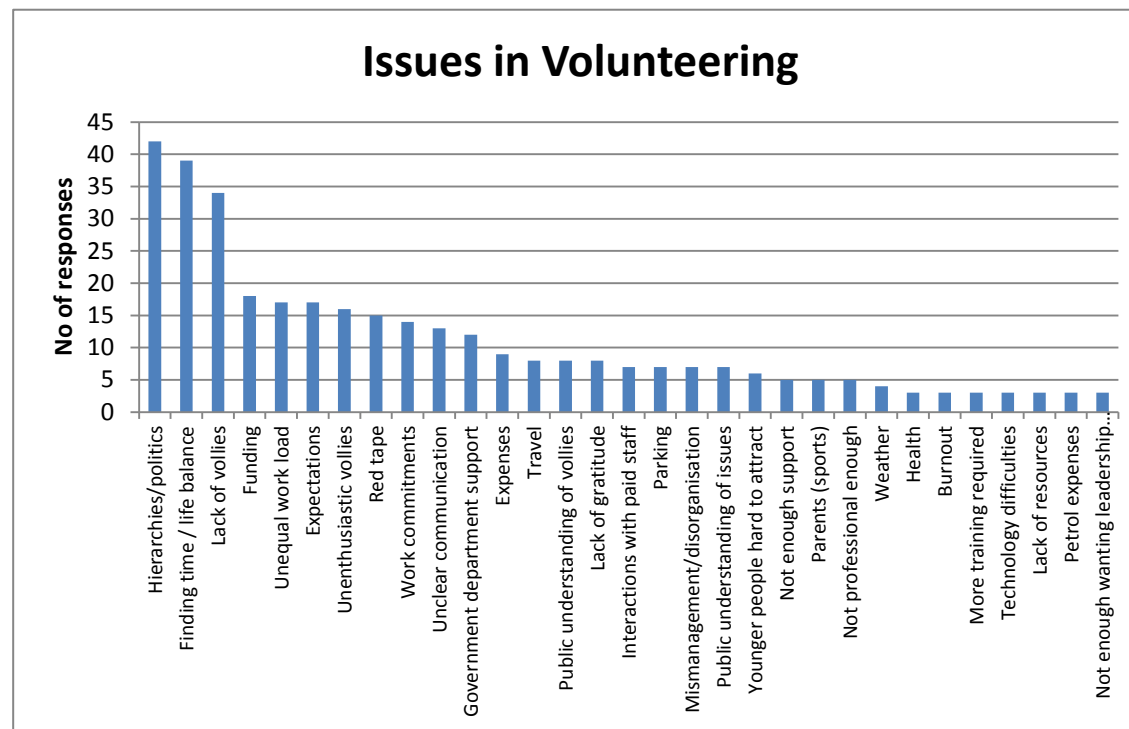
What do you enjoy about volunteering?	Responses
Helping others/making a difference	181
Meeting people/social interaction	102
Other volunteers	96
Helping environment	49
Satisfaction in helping	45
Being with animals	30
Doing/learning new things	29
Seeing results	28
Feeling useful/sense of purpose	27
Using my skills	18
Helping local organisations	14
Teaching and helping kids	12
Exercise/keeping active	11
Helping arts/culture/heritage	8
Being outdoors/in nature	8
Having fun	4
Gratitude/appreciation	4
Everything	4
Being part of sport	4
Morning teas	2



What problems or issues do you encounter when volunteering?

Another open question asked respondents what concerns they had about volunteering. The responses with the greatest number of comments are presented in the table below. Many responses included many of the themes so may appear in a number of categories. Other comments made by one or two individuals included blocks to progress, making connections with people, constant change, lack of media support, language, lack of leadership, difficulty implementing new ideas, new volunteers not informed, false volunteer descriptions, lack of communication, knowledge of other organisations, too many organisations needing volunteers, difficulty accessing opportunities, volunteers filling paid jobs, advocacy, greater demands and no pay.

What issues do you encounter when volunteering?	Responses
Hierarchies/politics	42
Finding time / life balance	39
Lack of vollies	34
Funding	18
Unequal work load	17
Expectations	17
Unenthusiastic vollies	16
Red tape	15
Work commitments	14
Unclear communication	13
Government department support	12
Expenses	9
Travel	8
Public understanding of vollies	8
Lack of gratitude	8
Interactions with paid staff	7
Parking	7
Mismanagement/disorganisation	7
Public understanding of issues	7
Younger people hard to attract	6
Not enough support	5
Parents (sports)	5

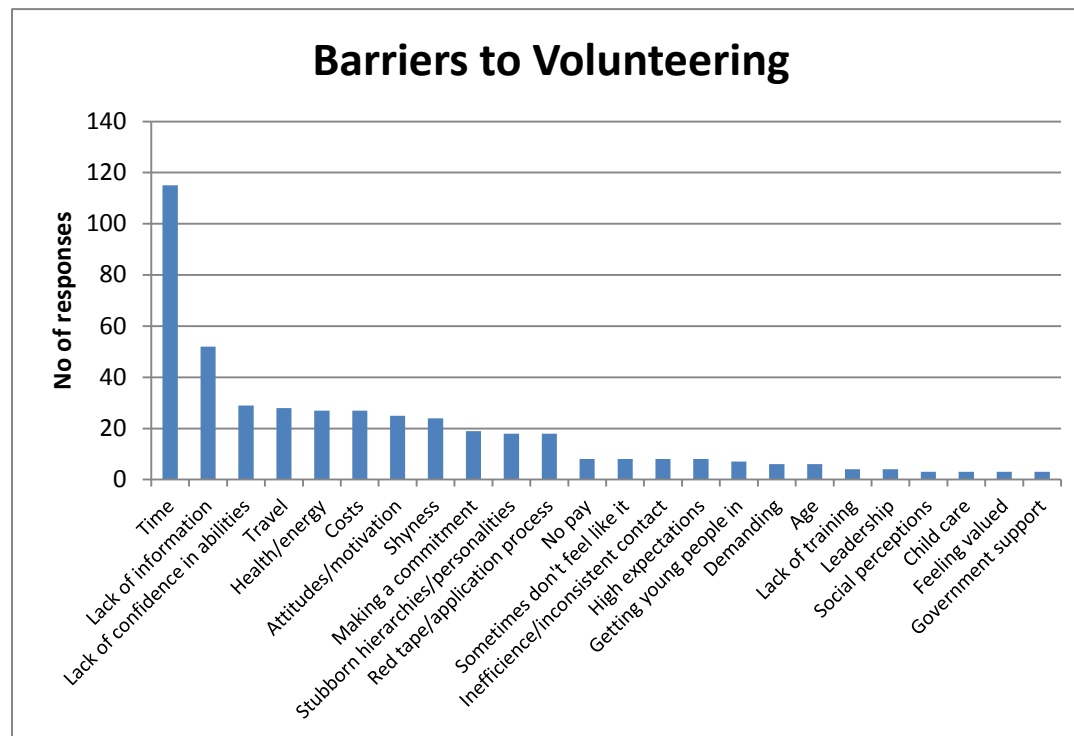


Not professional enough	5
Weather	4
Health	3
Burnout	3
More training required	3
Technology difficulties	3
Lack of resources	3
Petrol expenses	3
Not enough wanting leadership roles	3

What do you believe are the barriers to becoming a volunteer?

Another open question asked respondents what barriers they thought there were to volunteering. The responses with the greatest number of comments are presented in the table below. Many responses included many of the themes so may appear in a number of categories. Other comments made by one or two individuals included boredom, technology fear, lack of flexibility, trust, finding the right volunteers, organisational resources, equipment, parking, parents' abuse (sport), and funding.

What are the barriers to becoming a volunteer?	Responses
Time	115
Lack of information	52
Lack of confidence in abilities	29
Travel	28
Health/energy	27
Costs	27
Attitudes/motivation	25
Shyness	24
Making a commitment	19
Stubborn hierarchies/personalities	18
Red tape/application process	18
No pay	8
Sometimes don't feel like it	8
Inefficiency/inconsistent contact	8
High expectations	8
Getting young people in	7
Demanding	6
Age	6
Lack of training	4
Leadership	4
Social perceptions	3
Child care	3
Feeling valued	3
Government support	3



The Last Word

Volunteer respondents were offered the opportunity to write anything they wanted about volunteering. Positive responses represented 272 comments and negative responses represented 52 comments, showing that the majority of volunteers find it a pleasant experience. This may also be biased as those that are well-engaged in their volunteering organisations may be those that responded. Many responses appealed to others to get involved due to the satisfying nature of volunteering. Below are some insightful comments and recommendations:

Insightful Comments

- Everybody should try to volunteer at least once in their lifetime. It's all about doing things for those who can never repay you and watching the difference a group of likeminded people can make.
- We have a mutually beneficial arrangement. I learn about something I'm interested in and I give my time to assist them.
- I love it :-) The best thing is learning, growing, being stimulated mentally, improved mental wellbeing, building relationships, and gaining new skills.
- While volunteering can provide personal rewards there needs to be recognition that volunteering is actually an unpaid, often highly skilled workforce that allows governments at all levels to underfund or not fund services that perhaps should be funded. I am concerned about exploitation of volunteers.
- It is very enjoyable and it all started for me when my kids were tiny and I put my hand up to be on the kindy committee, which was pretty scary at the time. Once you start doing these jobs though, they are so enjoyable you move on as you and your family grow to what is relevant to your life at the time. You get back what you give and make great connections with really nice people, but you do need to have the acknowledgment because there are plenty of times you get frustrated with paperwork or people no-showing or hours of grant applications. There is quite a chunk of valuable time involved that saves the payroll for an organisation or for council. The 'feel good' factor about places often comes down to the fantastic volunteers or the warm welcome people get from their local club. It is so often volunteers who are providing the 'feel good' or PR for a town. You cannot put a price on that!!
- To all would-be volunteers, step up. Find a volunteer activity that you feel passionate about and go to it. You'll feel good making a difference.
- My husband and I retired and moved interstate to Qld from Sydney 15 months ago. We had no friends or family closeby. Volunteering has afforded us the chance to be a real part of our community, to care for our environment, to be socially active and to stay fit and healthy.
- As a retiree, volunteering gives me purpose to my life apart from helping my family.
- Volunteering gives us a reason to get up each day. It keeps us young and part of society and allows us to feel valued. I am sorry to hear that volunteering is becoming all about young people where they have little appreciation of oldies and their life's experiences.
- I am a senior citizen who lives alone but have found my tribe since volunteering when I moved to this area 16 years ago ... there is no need to be lonely or feel unwanted if you just get out of yourself and move forward!
- Volunteering is a way of being in your world and in the world of others around you. It is an expression of your core values and a demonstration of what these values look like in practice. Volunteering is about generating shared energy, purpose and passion with the ultimate outcome focussed on the connectedness and wellbeing of the environment and the community and every person, space or place that you engage with as a volunteer.

Recommendations

- I would rather see the activity labelled COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.
- Need to get to people younger, at school, so it becomes part of the cultural responsibility.
- Volunteering has been carried out by many diverse agencies/organisations and people in the past, and that has been one of its strengths. Contrary to all the regulating, training and recruiting going on I don't believe the volunteering world needs the type of regulation that has been brought to the paid world. Volunteering works because people accept and connect with people ... not status or ladder climbing. Volunteering has been valued because of the people involved ... not the procedures or advertising.
- A volunteering app would be terrific to provide information about volunteering opportunities, & then be able to sign up, in the local area in different areas of interest
- It would be good to receive information about the region as a whole. Where is the need / gaps for volunteers. What value are we contributing to the community as a whole. How many of us are there in the community. What are the good news stories.
- Lots of fun but I do have one concern. With so many volunteers in our community, it seems to me that the casual work usually available to students is not so easy to get here. So our youth fail to gain experience and financial education.
- I'm glad to see that you're undertaking this survey to gauge community attitudes, interest etc. I'd like to see greater publicity about volunteering - what you can do, who's doing it, how you can get involved, what training is offered, etc.
- The philosophy of volunteering should be taught in schools, so that kids build self esteem, that they have personally really, and actually earned. Some don't get it at home. They could have a volunteer pool at every educational institution, including kindys upwards, with reward sticker, and stamps onwards :)
- I would like to see the processes and organisations/departments already in place for paid workers rights to be engaged in Fair Treatment of Volunteers. One example is unfair dismissal, that for whatever rationale is excluding Volunteers from accessing Fair Work Australia when a simple acceptance in an already structured space will give a voice to the many that have to "Walk Away" and be content with biased and unfair treatment. I would also appreciate the results of these and similar surveys to be made public.
- Volunteering replaces government intervention in so many cases but receives little government funding. There are too many Organisations wasting too much money on admin. They should join forces and consolidate.
- Would be great if Council could provide some basic technology training to improve overall group effectiveness ie using smartphones, email, social media marketing, setting up a simple EFTPOS facility, etc
- Working with volunteers is vastly different to working with paid workers. I suggest Council invest in a literature search on research studies into this topic and develop guideline material on working with volunteers. As a team leader I would find this useful
- Motivated volunteer groups save much money particularly in environmental remediation activities, so it is short-sighted not to support them administratively and materially. Volunteer groups do not ask for help frivolously.