

# **Becoming A Volunteer What You Need To Know**

## **Volunteering Glen Eira**

**1134 Glen Huntly Road**

**Glen Huntly 3163**

**Ph: 9571 7644**

**Email: [communityinfo@gleneria.vic.gov.au](mailto:communityinfo@gleneria.vic.gov.au)**

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# What Is Volunteering?

# 1

## **Do you want to:**

- **Experience a sense of purpose?**
- **Use skills you have gained in your personal and working life?**
- **Learn new skills?**
- **Have fun?**
- **Help others?**
- **Meet new people, make new friends?**
- **Gain valuable work experience?**
- **Find out more about your community?**

**Then  
Volunteering  
Is For You!**

**Volunteering** is a growing trend in Australia. 34% of Australians volunteer.

**Volunteering** is designed to provide you with an opportunity to give your time and skills in a way that suits you, while benefiting the wider community.

**Volunteering** can open your world to new experiences.

**Volunteering** is fun.

**Volunteering** only takes place in or through not-for-profit organisations and services.

**Volunteering** is of benefit to the community and the volunteer.

**Volunteering** is undertaken of the volunteers own free will.

**Volunteering** is unpaid work.

**Volunteering** means you work in a specially assigned volunteer role. It is not a substitute for paid work. Volunteers do not replace paid workers or constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers.

## **When you choose to be a volunteer you:**

- Choose to give your skills and time.
- Meet new people.
- Give something back to the community.
- Help others.
- Get something out of it yourself.
- Do it for free.
- Work in a designated volunteer role.

# Why Is Volunteering Important?

# 2

The value of volunteering to the community, the organisation the volunteer works for, and the volunteer is immeasurable.

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**Communities** are strengthened by volunteers because volunteers:

- have time to listen
- bring a wealth of life experience with them
- help empower individuals
- make friendships
- help make community services more available

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**Organisations** value volunteers because they help them to:

- reach more people in need
- provide a better personal service
- provide quality services

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**Volunteers** can:

- achieve a sense of purpose
  - gain work experience
  - use their talents, skills, and knowledge in a wide range of organisations
  - build on skills they already have
  - get personal satisfaction from helping those in need
  - develop a greater knowledge of the community
  - broaden their social networks and make friendships
  - experience enjoyment and fun working in an area of interest and need
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## **Volunteering:**

- ***Empowers individuals***
  - ***Adds value to not-for-profit organisations***
  - ***Strengthens communities***
  - ***Is worth billions to the community***
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## Volunteering Happens Everywhere

# 3

The conventional view of volunteering is that it only occurs in the community services area, mainly helping the disadvantaged. While a lot of volunteering programs exist in community services, volunteering is not limited to this area. *Volunteering Happens Everywhere*.

The list of volunteer opportunities is endless. Here are some ideas:

### **Volunteering happens all around you, in:**

- **Sport**
- **Recreation**
- **Community**
- **Religious organisations**
- **Health**
- **Welfare**
- **Child care**
- **Emergency services**
- **Education**
- **Environmental organisations**
- **Animal welfare**
- **Business**
- **Law**
- **Justice**
- **Political organisations**

- Administration and office work
- Animal welfare
- Art and craft
- Child care
- Church flower arranger
- Community radio
- Committee member
- Companion
- Cooking
- Drive a community bus
- Deliver library books
- Deliver meals
- Emergency services
- English tutor
- Environmental advocate
- Financial counselling
- First aid
- Foster animals
- Fundraising activities
- Go on camps with kids
- Hospital visitor
- Interviewing
- Museum guide
- Opportunity shop staff
- Provide music
- Record books onto tape
- Research local history
- School holiday program helper
- Service clubs
- Singing
- Soccer coach
- Support refugees and new immigrants
- Swim with people with disabilities
- Teaching adults
- Telephone counsellor
- Tree planting
- Veteran's groups
- Walk dogs and care for pets
- Women's groups
- Youth development
- Zoo supporter

## Skills Volunteers Gain From Their Work

# 4

*Through volunteering you can learn a wide range of skills, such as how to:*

- listen to people
- empower people through teaching and exchanging skills
- help and support people with disabilities
- prepare and serve food
- transport people and goods
- save lives and property through emergency relief work
- create craft activities for 3-5 year old children
- make good work possible through fundraising and sales
- run a raffle
- care for animals
- build a sustainable world by working in the environment
- write reports and meet governance responsibilities of committees of management
- write press releases
- represent and advocate on behalf of the organisation you volunteer for
- lead an organisation through management and committee work

***When you volunteer you can use the knowledge and skills you already have while learning new skills and gaining a vast range of experience.***

**AND much much more.....**

# Your Rights and Responsibilities As A Volunteer

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*As a volunteer you have a right to:*

- Information about the organisation for which you are working
- A clearly written job description
- Not do the work of paid staff
- Know to whom you are accountable
- Be recognised as a valued team member
- Be supported and supervised in your role
- A healthy and safe working environment
- Be covered by insurance
- Say no if you feel you are being exploited
- Be reimbursed for agreed out of pocket expenses
- Be advised of the organisation's travel reimbursement policy
- Be informed and consulted on matters which directly or indirectly affect you and your work
- Not be discriminated against
- Be made aware of grievance procedures within the organisation
- Orientation and training

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**Volunteer rights and responsibilities assure that the volunteering experience is positive and productive for everyone.**

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**Volunteers have rights which organisations should respect and uphold.**

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**Organisations will have expectations they require volunteers to meet.**

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*As a volunteer you need to:*

- Be reliable
  - Respect confidentiality
  - Carry out the specified job description
  - Be accountable
  - Inform someone when something goes wrong
  - Be committed to the organisation
  - Undertake training as requested
  - Ask for support when you need it
  - Give notice before you leave the organisation
  - Value, support and be respectful to other team members
  - Carry out the work you have agreed to do responsibly and ethically
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## What Is It Like To Be A Volunteer?

# 6

***There is no typical volunteer.***

***Volunteers are aged between 18 and 75 years plus.***

***Everyone counts.***

***No matter what their background or motivation volunteers agree that volunteering is:  
stimulating  
challenging  
sometimes tiring  
and....***

***ALWAYS  
REWARDING!***

Volunteering attracts people of all ages — the young and the young at heart — from all walks of life. Their reasons for volunteering vary and may change over time, but no matter what motivated them to volunteer most agree that it is a very positive and fulfilling experience. Here are some comments from volunteers about what the experience is like for them.

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“Volunteering helps me put things in perspective — it keeps me in touch with my community and what other people’s lives are like.”

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“It’s the best decision I’ve made.”

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“For me, volunteering is stimulating and challenging. It’s sometimes tiring, but always rewarding — it’s incredibly rewarding.”

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“Volunteering has led me to people and places I wasn’t aware of before and they inspire me.”

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“Being part of a team and the companionships I have developed along the way are the best things about volunteering for me.”

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“I always feel that I get more out of my volunteer work than I put in — ALWAYS.”

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“Volunteering has raised my awareness of the difficult road others travel and reminds me of how lucky I am in life — it is both moving and very satisfying .”

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“The relationships I have built with other volunteers are a big plus for me.”

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## Privacy and Confidentiality

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***Volunteers may hear or have access to organisation and/or client information which is considered private and confidential.***

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***Volunteers are required to work within organisational policy and the principles set down in the commonwealth and state privacy acts.***

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**Volunteers may hear and/or have access to information which is considered ‘confidential’. Some important principles of privacy and confidentiality to remember are:**

- Be aware that different people are sensitive about different issues—information you might not view as personal and private may be seen as extremely personal and private to another person.
- Do not share “interesting stories” with family/friends.
- When you do discuss an issue, keep names and other identifiers out of discussions.
- Take care when talking about your work, consider the feelings of the person involved, and remember the trust placed in you.
- Always take any concerns about confidentiality issues to your volunteer coordinator.

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The privacy principles organisations follow come from the Commonwealth [Privacy Act](#), the [Victorian Information Privacy Act](#), and the [Victorian Health Records Act](#).

These principles regulate how organisations, workers and volunteers must maintain documented information about people.

Take time to read, and ensure you understand the privacy policies of the organisation(s) you do volunteer work for.

# Legal Issues In Volunteering

# 8

The two main legal issues relevant to volunteering relate to insurance and duty of care.

## *Insurance*

- Volunteers are not covered by Workcover, therefore they must be covered by the organisation's personal accident policy.
- In many cases the Department of Human Services provides insurance cover where they are the funding source.
- It is important that you find out the type and level of insurance cover that applies to your volunteer position.

***Duty of care relates to two areas:***

- ***The duty of care the volunteer owes to the organisation***
- ***The duty of care the organisation owes to all staff, including volunteers***

## *Duty of Care*

Duty of care falls into two areas; the duty of care you owe to the organisation, its staff and clients, and the duty of care the organisation owes to you as a volunteer.

### **Your Duty of Care to the Organisation**

Volunteers are required to exercise a Duty of Care at all times within the organisation, when working with other staff (volunteer or paid) and when working with clients of, or visitors to, the organisation.

It is expected that volunteers will take reasonable care to avoid injury to themselves, other staff, and to clients/visitors of the organisation. Volunteers are also expected to prevent damage to property and to report damage or safety hazards they become aware of. The volunteer should not be careless or negligent, should not take risks, should exercise reasonable caution, and use common sense in all matters.

### **The Organisation's Duty of Care**

Organisations are required to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect the health and safety of staff (volunteers and paid), clients and visitors in the workplace. To this end many organisations have policies which impact on their Duty of Care, e.g. confidentiality, risk management and occupational health and safety policies.

## What Can Go Wrong

# 9

The not-for-profit organisations in which volunteers work do everything they can to ensure the rights of volunteers are observed and that they are supported and assisted. Similarly volunteers are bound to meet their responsibilities to the organisation and work within the boundaries of their volunteer role. Despite this sometimes things can go wrong.

It is important to be aware of what can go wrong in volunteering.

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*Volunteering is a very positive and enjoyable experience, however, it is helpful to be aware of potential problems that can arise, such as;*

- **Unclear volunteer role in an organisation**
- **Feeling undervalued**
- **Doing the work of paid staff**
- **Breaching confidentiality**
- **Lacking the knowledge or skill to do agreed work**

### Potential Organisational Problems

- Unclear volunteer job description
  - Unclear boundaries.
  - Unreliable volunteers (saying they can do something they either don't have the time or skill to do).
  - Asking volunteers to do work of paid staff.
  - Undervalued volunteers — not supported.
  - Under-worked volunteers — no real tasks.
  - Tasks do not meet the needs of the volunteer — inadequate preparation and matching of volunteer to task.
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### Potential Volunteer Problems

- Doing too much (continually working in excess of agreed hours or doing work outside of volunteer role), with the potential for a negative impact on the volunteer.
  - Getting too emotionally involved.
  - Breaching confidentiality.
  - 'Rescuing' people—interfering in lives beyond the job role.
  - Saying 'yes' when you want to say 'no'.
  - Heroism—disempowering clients.
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# How To Become A Volunteer

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***How and where you choose to volunteer will depend on:***

- ***Your motivation***
- ***Your skills***
- ***The time you can give***
- ***Your values***
- ***The location of the organisation***
- ***Your personal circumstances***

Before deciding on where to volunteer you need to ask yourself a number of questions, such as:

1. What is your motivation for volunteering—what you want to get out of the experience?
  2. What skills you have to offer?
  3. How much time you can give to the organisation(s) you volunteer for?
  4. Can you work within the mission and values of the organisation?
  5. Will your circumstances allow you to work for your chosen organisation?
  6. Is the organisation convenient to you in terms of location?
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There are a number of ways you can get advice and support to help you find a suitable volunteering role, call or visit:

- Volunteering Glen Eira  
1134 Glen Huntly Road, Glen Huntly 3163  
Phone: 9571 7644  
Email: [communityinfo@gleneria.vic.gov.au](mailto:communityinfo@gleneria.vic.gov.au)
- Volunteering Victoria  
Phone: 8327 8500  
Email: [info@volunteeringvictoria.com.au](mailto:info@volunteeringvictoria.com.au)
- [www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au)  
[www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)

If you have skills in a specific area you would like to do volunteer work in it is worth looking at the following websites:

- [www.goodcompany.com.au](http://www.goodcompany.com.au)
- [www.leadershipvictoria.org](http://www.leadershipvictoria.org)
- [www.pilchconnect.org.au](http://www.pilchconnect.org.au)
- [www.probonoaustralia.com.au/source/skillshare](http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au/source/skillshare)
- [www.probonoaustralia.com.au/volunteer](http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au/volunteer)

## Frequently Asked Questions

# 11

Below are some of the common questions asked about volunteering. In combination with the information in this package it is anticipated that many of your questions will have been answered. If you have any other questions or would like further information about volunteering contact any of the services listed on sheet 10.

***The jobs volunteers are asked to do vary depending on the organisation and the volunteer role.***

***Previous experience may be required, however, some organisations provide on-the-job training.***

***Not-for-profit organisations do not usually pay volunteers their travel expenses to and from the organisation.***

- Q.** What are the common jobs volunteers are asked to do?
- A.** What volunteers do will depend on their defined role within the organisation. Volunteers should work within the agreed volunteer role.
- Q.** How do I find out about different organisations?
- A.** There are a number of ways of finding not-for-profit organisations that have volunteers. A good place to start is the local Volunteer Resource Centre or visit the GoVolunteer website. Thousands of volunteer roles are advertised on this site. If you are interested in a specific organisation you can contact the organisation direct for information.
- Q.** Do I need previous experience?
- A.** It depends on the volunteer position, what is required to carry out the necessary tasks and the context of the role. Some previous experience and formal training may be required for some volunteer roles. Some organisations provide initial and ongoing training and support.
- Q.** Do I have to pay for my own transport?
- A.** Not-for-profit organisations do not usually pay volunteers their travel expenses to and from the organisation. If an organisation asks a volunteer to travel as part of their volunteering role then they should feel comfortable to ask for reimbursement for any travel costs. It is better to clarify these things before taking on the role.
- Q.** What hours do I have to do?
- A.** There is an enormous variation in the amount of time people volunteer. There are no firm rules. The hours you give is agreed upon by you and the organisation you volunteer for. Every volunteering hour is valuable. In terms of setting upper limits, a general guideline is a commitment of up to 16 hours per week.

## Frequently Asked Questions

# 12

***There are many ways volunteering can help you get a paid job, by helping you to:***

- ***maintain and refine your skills***
- ***build on existing knowledge***
- ***develop new skills***
- ***build up your confidence in your abilities***
- ***access formal training***
- ***make contacts to gain support and advice while job hunting***

**Q.** Do I need to take references to the interview?

**A.** This will in part depend on the position you are applying for. You should ask the manager or coordinator of volunteers, or other designated person before you go to the interview.

**Q.** How will I find out if I've got the volunteer job?

**A.** Sometimes volunteers are informed at the end of the interview. At other times there may be other people applying for the same volunteer position and you may be asked to wait until everyone has been interviewed for the outcome of your application.

**Q.** How will volunteering help me to get a paid job?

**A.** Volunteering can help people find paid work in the following ways:

- By maintaining and refining existing skills.
- By developing skills and building on existing knowledge.
- By providing opportunities for volunteers to apply new skills and knowledge and gain practical experience.
- By supporting people to engage with their community, make contacts and find other channels of support and advice while job hunting.
- By building a volunteer's confidence in their abilities and positively shaping the way they approach job hunting.
- By providing volunteers with opportunities for formal training.
- By furnishing a volunteer with references for future employment.

(from: Volunteering: What's It All About Toolkit, National Volunteering Skills Centre)