

Case study: Leading change towards inclusive practice

First Nations Cultural Awareness Workshop and Yarning Session

As the peak body for volunteering in Ballarat, the Ballarat Foundation supports volunteer-involving organisations by providing education for staff and volunteers. These programs address the barriers faced by volunteers from diverse community groups, fostering inclusion and understanding.

Ballarat Foundation recently hosted a First Nations Cultural Awareness and Yarning Session, held in the Tree Room at the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BADAC). Participants were encouraged to learn, listen, and engage in open dialogue together to create a shared knowledge of Indigenous perspective.

The session began with a traditional Smoking Ceremony conducted by BADAC and Wadawurrung Education Officer, Ash Skinner. This cultural practice is performed to both welcome and promote the wellbeing and protection of visitors. Attendees were invited to immerse themselves in the smoke as a cleansing ritual before starting the session.



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Participants then listened to Ash (Wadawurrung) and Sash (BADAC) share their personal stories and knowledge of Wadawurrung cultural values, local history, and the environment. Their reflections encouraged deep listening, the removal of biases, and the development of shared respect – skills that enhance inclusivity in the volunteering space.

More information, including photos of the workshop, can be found on the Ballarat Foundation [blog page](#).



Key Findings

The workshop had a significant impact on participants, as reflected in the post-event evaluation:

- **Improved knowledge:** Over 90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture had improved as a result of the session.
- **Increased confidence:** More than half of the attendees reported feeling more confident in sharing information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with others.
- **Awareness of personal bias:** Almost all participants (97%) recognised how personal biases can influence their perceptions of other cultures.

These results reflect the success of the workshop in building cultural awareness and fostering respectful engagement.

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Participant Feedback

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing a desire for similar events to be held regularly.

Some of the comments included:

- “Just ask! Better to ask a question than not. I am so happy that the knowledge is being shared.”
- “Open hearts and minds reduce differences between people and embrace shared humanity.”
- Thanks so much Ash for your incredible Cultural Yarning session. Your generosity and humour in telling us “white fellas” the stories of Wadawurrung history and the impact of invasion and displacement and the pain of our history. You have taught me a great deal.”
- “Thank you for walking us through your story and sharing your culture – so very appreciated.”
- “Fantastic session – definitely a better understanding of Aboriginal culture. I’ll research more, thank you.”

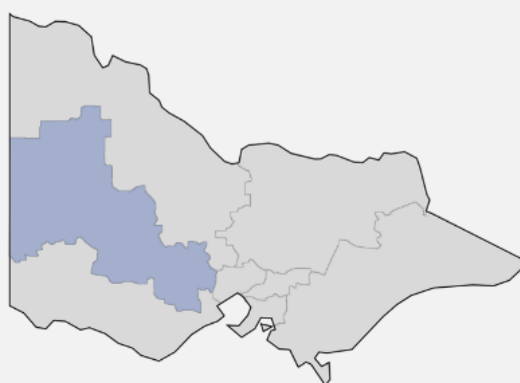
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<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



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Volunteering Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.