



2024

Volunteering Awards

Program





Share your photos and experiences from today's ceremony using the hashtag **#VicVolAwards2024**



The Victorian Government and Volunteering Victoria acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and pay respect to their culture and their Elders, past and present.

To receive this document in another format, please email
awards@volunteeringvictoria.org.au

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2024 Volunteering Awards Message from the Premier



There's something so special about volunteering: putting your hand up to make a difference.

And across our state, in so many ways, that's exactly what volunteers do.

Victoria's Volunteering Awards recognise outstanding volunteers and volunteer organisations, and the vital contribution they make.

While I know you don't do it for the accolades, it's clear your work doesn't go unnoticed.

We received an incredible 508 nominations for the 2024 Awards, demonstrating how much your communities value what you do. Every nominee, and every volunteer across our state, should feel very proud of the enormous difference you make.

So, as Premier, I want to give you my heartfelt thanks.

Thank you for all that you do – and for all that you'll continue to do.



The Hon. Jacinta Allan MP
Member for Bendigo East
Premier of Victoria

2024 Volunteering Awards Message from the Minister



Volunteers are one of our state's greatest assets, dedicating their time and energy to make a lasting impact. Their valuable contributions help build vibrant, connected and thriving communities across our great state.

The Volunteering Awards are a chance to recognise the hardworking volunteers that make a difference in Victoria.

This year's 50 finalists and eight winners embody the spirit of what it means to volunteer. From helping vulnerable young people to providing disaster relief, this standout group are dedicated to supporting others with compassion and care.

As Minister for Carers and Volunteers, I am proud of the exceptional work of volunteers in our state.

Congratulations to all the 2024 Volunteering Awards finalists and winners. Thank you for your service to your communities and the state.

I look forward to working with you, and all of Victoria's volunteers, as you continue your volunteering journey.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'R' followed by a flourish.

The Hon. Ros Spence MP
Minister for Carers and Volunteers

2024 Volunteering Awards Message from the CEO



Being involved in these Awards is a genuine privilege, providing the opportunity to learn more about the remarkable volunteers who dedicate their time, energy and passion to making a difference in their communities.

To our nominees — your commitment and generosity inspire us all, and this programme recognises and honours your invaluable contributions.

I know I speak on behalf of our selection panel for whom judging this year's nominees has been both an honour and a challenge — like trying to choose your favourite hero. How can we possibly compare the immeasurable impact of such incredible individuals? Each nominee stands out in their own right, and every effort deserves recognition.

Only a few will receive awards, but every nominee should take pride in their achievements. Your work touches lives, strengthens communities, and exemplifies the very best of service to others. We celebrate you all.

And in doing so, we celebrate every volunteer across Victoria who cares for the community in both large and small ways.

Thank you for joining us in this celebration of service, generosity and community spirit.

Geoff Sharp
Chief Executive Officer
Volunteering Victoria

2024 Volunteering Awards Ceremony MC



Rana Hussain

Rana Hussain is a pioneer in the realms of inclusion and belonging, having charted an extraordinary journey through the landscape of sports administration, community engagement, social work and the media.

With a career marked by a relentless pursuit of positive change and a deep commitment to fostering inclusivity, Rana stands as a powerful advocate for social integration and reduction of discrimination.

Continuing her mission to create a bigger impact, Rana started Good.Human, bringing all the facets of her work together in one place: Expertise, Advocacy and Impact. It's a movement focused on changing people's lives, cultures, and leadership all over the country.

Good.Human is an invitation to celebrate our shared humanity, supporting one another through life's ups and downs, aiming to build a world where everyone feels valued and included as they are. Rana's vision is a more inclusive and brighter future for all.



Scan the QR code for more information about Rana and her work at Good.Human



2024 Volunteering Awards

About the Awards

Showcasing excellence by individuals, teams and organisations throughout 2024, the Victorian Volunteering Awards are run by Volunteering Victoria with the support of the Victorian State Government.

The Awards combine the previously separate Premier's Volunteer Champions Awards, featuring the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award for Volunteer of the Year, and the annual Volunteering Victoria State Awards. This creates a single nomination process and a more significant awards ceremony celebrating volunteers and volunteerism across the State of Victoria.

Today's ceremony will see the announcement of winners in the following categories:

Individual Awards:

- Volunteer Leadership Award
- Volunteer Impact Award
- Volunteer Commitment Award
- Young Volunteer Award

Organisation Awards:

- Inclusive Volunteering Award
- Volunteering Innovation Award
- Volunteering Partnerships Award
- Grassroots Volunteering Award

Overall Awards:

- *Premier's Volunteer of the Year*, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award
- *Premier's Organisation of the Year*, Volunteering Excellence Award

Judging process

A judging panel considered all eligible nominations and rated each against the description for the selected Award category. Nominations with the highest combined scores were then shortlisted as finalists. A VIP selection panel awarded the overall winners in each category.

The Premier's Volunteer of the Year, **Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award** has been selected by the Premier from the winners of the four individual categories.

The Premier's Organisation of the Year, **Volunteering Excellence Award** has been selected by the Premier from the winners of the four organisation categories.

2024 Volunteering Awards

Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award

First awarded in 2013, the prestigious **Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award** recognises extraordinary volunteering service, commitment and impact for people, a community, group, organisation or cause in Victoria.

The **Premier's Volunteer of the Year Award** is proudly named in honour of Dame Elisabeth's extraordinary legacy. This prestigious accolade celebrates her values of compassion, dedication and leadership in volunteering, recognising individuals who - like her - make a profound difference in the lives of others.

The winner of the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award, Premier's Volunteer of the Year, is also awarded a **\$10,000 donation** to a not-for-profit organisation of their choice.

Trophy design

"The overlapping leaves represent the interactive efforts of individuals within the community. Together, the leaves form a canopy that protects and helps others. This trophy was inspired by Dame Elisabeth Murdoch's passion for gardening and her lifetime support for the arts and those in need."



Dame Elisabeth Murdoch 1902 - 2012

A trailblazing philanthropist and passionate supporter of community wellbeing, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch's life was a testament to the power of generosity and service.

As a dedicated volunteer and advocate, she devoted herself to numerous causes, particularly in health, education and the arts. Many of Melbourne and Australia's most cherished institutions, from the Royal Children's Hospital to the Australian Ballet and the Botanic Gardens, have benefited from her involvement.

Dame Elisabeth's legacy as a champion of volunteering has left an indelible mark on communities across Victoria and beyond. Passionate about fostering cultural and social cohesion, her unwavering dedication to building strong, connected communities has inspired countless others to embrace the spirit of giving.

Finalists

Volunteer Leadership Award

Recognises people who have shown exceptional volunteer leadership and influence in support of people, a community, group, organisation, or cause in Victoria. Finalists are inspiring people who have built effective volunteer networks and partnerships, empowered others, or engaged and strengthened community.



Abdulmaseeh Feryou

Abulmaseeh has supported senior Syriac refugees in Caroline Springs for over six years, helping them navigate settlement and integration challenges. As a volunteer leader, interpreter and cultural liaison, he has empowered his community by eliminating language barriers, facilitating health and wellbeing programs and coordinating partnerships with local organisations. During the pandemic, he played a crucial role in coordinating health information sessions for the group. Under his leadership, the group has expanded to 60 active members, fostering community connection and resilience. Committed to lifelong learning, he also completed a Master of Interpreting and Translation to better serve his community.



Anthony White

Anthony has 30 years of combined service with the CFA and SES. As Unit Controller of VICSES Sunbury for 11 years, he grew the team to over 70 members and fostered strong collaboration with local services, including Hume City Council, St John's, CFA and Ambulance Victoria. His leadership helped shape the Sunbury unit into a cornerstone of the community and a vital part of VICSES. Anthony's exceptional service has earned him an ESM, NEM and long service medals. Now the controller of the Brimbank SES unit, he continues to demonstrate outstanding leadership and commitment to his community and the SES.



Arfa Sarfaraz

Arfa is a recognised cross-cultural leader and advocate, serving as President of the United Muslim Sisters of Latrobe Valley (UMSLV) since 2015. She has transformed UMSLV into a key organisation supporting new and emerging communities, fostering interfaith dialogue, and empowering women and youth. Arfa has led initiatives such as the Hello Buddy mentorship program, anti-racism campaigns and intercultural events. A skilled connector and mentor, she tirelessly supports migrant and refugee women, advocating for their inclusion and capacity building. Through her leadership, Arfa continues to strengthen community resilience and multicultural engagement in the Latrobe Valley and beyond.



Den Lim

Den is a transformative volunteer leader with a remarkable record of community service since 2000. She holds multiple leadership roles, including with the Latrobe Health Assembly and Baw Baw Latrobe Local Learning Employment Network. Passionate about education, inclusion and social justice, Den co-founded Latrobe Women Creating Conversations to foster social connection and peer support. Den draws upon her experience overcoming adversity as a refugee to build cross-cultural relationships and empower isolated communities. Her strategic leadership, conflict resolution skills and commitment to community development continue to create lasting positive change across the Gippsland region.



Donna Levinson-Murray

Donna is the Victorian Volunteer Team Leader at Share the Dignity, leading over 638 volunteers in their mission to end period poverty. Since joining in 2017, Donna has held various roles, including Charity Lead and Assistant Team Leader, before taking on her current leadership position. Under her guidance, the VIC team collected over 70,000 essential items in 2023 and placed 29 Dignity Vending Machines across the state, providing free period products to people in need. Donna's empathy, hard work and innovative approach have made her a beloved leader and a driving force behind the charity's success in Victoria.



Maddie Francis

Maddie is the driving force behind NICU Cheer, a volunteer-led initiative that supports families in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs). Since founding the organisation, she has donated over 5,000 gift bags to NICUs and special care nurseries across Victoria. Despite managing a full-time job and caring for her son with special needs, born prematurely, Maddie has built a dedicated network of 600 volunteers. She has also expanded the impact of NICU Cheer by establishing partnerships with organisations like Pinchapoo, Penguin Random House and PureBaby. Maddie's unwavering dedication and passion continue to inspire her community, making a tangible difference to families navigating the challenges of neonatal care.

Finalists

Volunteer Impact Award

Celebrates people whose volunteering has made a remarkable difference for people, a community, group, organisation, or cause in Victoria. Finalists are volunteer innovators and pioneers or dedicated hard workers whose contributions have helped to improve outcomes or supported important changes.



Brenton Ponza

Brenton is a remarkable volunteer whose passion and perseverance have left a profound mark on his community. Living with cerebral palsy, he tirelessly fundraises and advocates for the Cerebral Palsy Education Centre (CPEC) and has completed 15 Melbourne Marathons using a walking frame. Through his role as a CP Achieve Advisor, Brenton ensures those who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) are heard and valued in research settings. His commitment also extends to volunteering with the RSPCA, Collingwood Animal Farm and Gymnastics Victoria. Brenton's resilience, kindness and determination make him a positive role model to others, proving that challenges are no barrier to meaningful contribution.



Chris Christofi

Chris is a passionate advocate for people experiencing homelessness, using his leadership and innovation to drive meaningful change. Through initiatives like the Vinnies CEO Sleepout and the Brick by Brick project, he has not only generated vital funds but also inspired greater awareness and action. His commitment extends beyond fundraising; he fosters community engagement, brings people together to support lasting solutions and empowers others to make a difference. Whether leading events, mobilising support or advocating for those in need, Chris' proactive leadership and generosity have created lasting impact on homeless individuals and families across Victoria.



David Miller

David's commitment and effort in volunteering spans over six decades, and includes dedicated service across a number of organisations. Serving over 50 years as a CFA volunteer, he has fought major bushfires, enhanced firefighter safety and fostered community resilience. Through his leadership in the Scouts and YAVA Gallery & Arts Hub, David has driven numerous initiatives to support vulnerable people and enhance community connection. Known for his compassion and drive to make a difference, David continues to demonstrate a deep commitment to improving outcomes for all in the community.



Elizabeth Reen

Liz is a passionate environmental advocate and leader in the Australian Conservation Foundation's (ACF) Chisholm Community Group. With a background in physical sciences and IT, and over 25 years in the water industry, Liz brings strategic expertise to her volunteer work. She has led initiatives such as bushland walks, Platypus Watch and community education programs, connecting people with nature. A member of the ACF Council since 2021, Liz actively fosters community engagement and sustainability efforts. Known for her inclusive leadership and tireless advocacy, Liz is working towards a sustainable world where humans live happily and comfortably within the limits of our planet.



Gina Poulos

Gina has devoted much of her adult life to supporting those in need, including establishing Theodora House as a vital community resource. Affectionately known as Theodora's Cheerful Givers, Theodora House has operated as an emergency relief food pantry for individuals and families experiencing financial hardship for over 20 years. Under Gina's leadership, the charity now distributes approximately 1,000 food hampers and 5,000 frozen meals each month. Her ability to inspire volunteers, secure community support and navigate challenges ensures the charity continues to thrive, making a profound difference to those in need.



Helen Gibson

Helen has been instrumental in shaping Anam Cara Colac hospice into a compassionate space for those in end-of-life care. A founding volunteer since 2011, she played a key role in fundraising, rallying community support and establishing the hospice, which operates entirely on donations and grants. Over 17 years, she has supported more than 500 guests, ensuring they can spend their final days in dignity and comfort. Beyond her work in palliative care, Helen also helped form the Colac branch of Diabetes Australia, providing a local support group and education. Described as a 'woman of action', her commitment to excellence has left a lasting impact on many individuals and families in the Colac community.



Mustafa Koukhan

Mustafa has been an integral part of the Uniting Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre since its inception. Drawing from his own experience as an immigrant, he has spent decades supporting newly arrived migrants. Now in retirement, he volunteers weekly at the Foodbank, helping families access culturally appropriate food with warmth and care. A skilled communicator, filmmaker and storyteller, he also captures and shares the experiences of asylum seekers, making them feel seen and valued. Beyond the centre, Mustafa runs community chess groups and supports men bereaved by suicide, reflecting his deep commitment to helping others in times of need.



William (Bill) Abley

Bill has been a valued RSPCA volunteer for over 11 years, playing a vital role in shelter care, foster programs and behavioural rehabilitation. Last year he pioneered the foster respite program, giving shelter dogs temporary relief from the stressful shelter environment and increasing their chances of adoption. Having fostered 133 cats and kittens, including those needing medical and behavioural care, Bill has opened his own home to provide a safe and nurturing environment. He also mentors new volunteers, supports team members with special needs and even spends his lunch breaks reading to nervous dogs. With over 7,000 volunteer hours donated, his kindness and initiative is an inspiration to others and has improved the welfare of countless animals at the RSPCA.

Finalists

Volunteer Commitment Award

Pays tribute to dedicated and passionate individuals with a sustained and substantial record of commitment to people, a community, group, organisation, or cause in Victoria. Finalists are long-serving volunteers and reliable hard workers whose significant contribution and enthusiasm for volunteering is an inspiration to others.



Abdul Farahmad

Abdul has been a committed volunteer and advocate for women's rights within the Afghan community since 2013, challenging cultural barriers to promote equality. As Cultural Coordinator of Australia's largest Afghan New Year's Festival (Nawroz), he has coordinated performances for over 8,000 attendees annually and supported female community members to participate. Abdul's leadership roles, including Vice President of the Victorian Afghan Associations Network, and his media advocacy have raised awareness of gender equality and cultural inclusion. Despite challenges, Abdul's unwavering commitment and patience have made a lasting impact, inspiring progress and unity within his community.



Charlie Morshead

Charlie has given his time as a volunteer at Springvale Monash Legal Service for over 13 years. Starting as a clinical law student, Charlie now supervises and mentors volunteer intake workers, contributing to their professional growth. He has directly assisted over 340 clients while mentoring more than 130 student volunteers, fostering empathy and community awareness in emerging lawyers. Charlie's commitment extends beyond his sessions, supporting continuous improvements in the volunteer experience. His resilience during challenges, such as the COVID lockdowns, highlights his dedication to accessible legal advice and a culture of community-focused support.



Cherie McLean

Cherie has served as an Australian Red Cross emergency services volunteer for over 60 years. During this time, she has helped respond to major disasters like the 1983 Ash Wednesday and 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, as well as providing leadership and volunteer support as an active member of her local team in the Mornington Peninsula. Having undertaken a new role in 2022, she has already dedicated over 450 hours to the Learning & Development team, guiding hundreds of volunteers through online platforms and enhancing engagement. Known for her empathy, collaboration and adaptability, Cherie displays remarkable commitment and passion for the organisation and supporting other volunteers.



Chris Michalopoulos

For over 25 years Chris has lead the development and maintenance of the Dahlia collection at Ripponlea Estate, now one of the most significant collections in Victoria. His passion, expertise and dedication have enriched the garden and the community it serves, while also demonstrating a long and sustained commitment to volunteering with the National Trust. Chris generously shares his expertise with staff, volunteers and visitors, fostering a spirit of collaboration and learning. His tireless efforts have made a lasting impact on both the garden and the broader community.



Diane Walker

Diane has been a volunteer tutor for the All Abilities Group at Daylesford Neighbourhood Centre for 15 years, fostering confidence, life skills and creativity in her students. A qualified Special Needs Teacher, Diane delivers tailored literacy, numeracy and life skills programs, including social outings and meal preparation. She takes the time to know and understand each student as an individual, respecting their unique personalities and needs. Her personal touch - celebrating each student's birthday with a cake - has made her classes a highlight. Traveling weekly from Bendigo to Daylesford, Diane's patience and calming presence have created a nurturing environment where her students thrive.



Gavin Hynam

Gavin has volunteered with the L2P learner driver program and over-21s driver program since 2010, helping over 30 individuals become safer drivers. Motivated by a personal connection to road safety after losing his son in a road accident, Gavin founded Cars4Youth, an initiative providing refurbished, roadworthy cars to young drivers in need. To date, he has donated more than 12 vehicles, empowering recipients with independence and community access. Known for his mechanical skills, inclusivity and generosity, Gavin's efforts foster belonging and opportunity, particularly for learners from migrant backgrounds, while making a lasting impact on road safety.

Finalists

Volunteer Commitment Award (cont.)

Pays tribute to dedicated and passionate individuals with a sustained and substantial record of commitment to people, a community, group, organisation, or cause in Victoria. Finalists are long-serving volunteers and reliable hard workers whose significant contribution and enthusiasm for volunteering is an inspiration to others.



Libby Petty

Libby is a dedicated and tireless volunteer who has profoundly shaped the culture of South Melbourne District Sports Club. Serving as President since 2023, she has taken on a number of roles over the past six years, including Vice President, merchandise coordinator and communications lead. Passionate about inclusivity, she has driven initiatives like annual Pride and Indigenous rounds and championed mental health through community support sessions. Libby consistently volunteers at matches, manages the women's team and takes on hands-on tasks like event setup and working behind the bar. Despite living over an hour away, she attends the club three days a week to foster a welcoming and supportive community.



Mary McBride

Mary has been a cornerstone of the local Irish community since arriving in Melbourne in 1979, dedicating over 40 years to volunteering. She supported Gaelic Park and St Kevin's Football Club for 15 years and has served as President of Comhaltas since 2006, tirelessly promoting Irish culture, music, dance and community connection. Her leadership earned her the Irish Australian Person of the Year Award in 2018 and an honorary OAM in 2023. Through her work with local radio, social media and community care, Mary's kindness and commitment have profoundly impacted both the Irish community and beyond.



Sharma Betanabhatla

Since migrating to Australia in 1993, Sharma has dedicated over three decades to enriching Victoria's Indian and Hindu communities through tireless volunteer work. His leadership has been key in establishing cultural programs, community centres and support services for new migrants. Through initiatives like the Hindu Organisations, Temples and Associations (HOTA) forum, Sharma has fostered collaboration and unity across various community groups, while his mentoring role at Foundation House has supported refugees in their settlement journey. Sharma's commitment to inclusivity and cultural preservation showcases his ability to bridge communities and effectively support diverse groups.



Wendy Falconer

Wendy has been a valued volunteer with the Eildon Meals on Wheels program since 1975, contributing nearly five decades of service. Wendy manages the volunteer roster, recruits new members and ensures seamless meal deliveries, often stepping in to cover shifts at short notice. Her passion for inclusivity and community-building has fostered a strong volunteer network. Wendy's commitment extends beyond meal delivery, ensuring clients receive both nutritious meals and vital social contact. Her nearly 50-year dedication to Eildon Meals on Wheels showcases her unwavering commitment, exceptional leadership and heartfelt care in ensuring community wellbeing.

Finalists

Young Volunteer Award

Celebrates the enthusiasm, initiative and leadership of young people in volunteering. Finalists are inspiring young people who have made a remarkable impact and contribution through volunteering for people, a community, group, organisation, or cause in Victoria.



Aimaan Arora

At only 16 years of age, Aimaan has a long record of fundraising and community service efforts, particularly for local animal charities. Since organising his first fundraiser in 2019, he has led donation drives and fundraising initiatives, earning recognition from various organisations. As Captain of Community Links at Yarra Valley Grammar, he organised a major donation drive for Blue Cross in Wonga Park. His commitment also extends to refugee tutoring, the Good Friday Appeal and the World's Greatest Shave. Whether through fundraising, mentoring or community outreach, Aimaan's leadership, compassion and dedication to helping others make him an inspiring role model for his peers.



Hansikaa Sharma

Hansikaa is passionate about fostering inclusivity, connection and community spirit through a variety of contributions and leadership roles. Through her Christmas Cheers project, she designed and delivered over 350 personalised cards to aged care residents, to brighten their holidays and combat loneliness. She supports culturally diverse communities as a young ambassador for the Sanskriti Community Group and assists students through Whittlesea Community Connections' homework club. Hansikaa also volunteers with Big Group Hug, providing essential supplies to families in need. Her efforts reflect a strong commitment to building connections across generations and showing how small gestures can make a big difference in people's lives.



Mitchell Graham

Mitch has made a significant impact through leadership roles at Bendigo Eaglehawk Badminton Association and Empowering Eaglehawk, an organisation dedicated to helping fund community-based projects. Since taking over as President at just 19 years of age, Mitch has led successful social media campaigns to build the organisation's profile, raising awareness and over \$100,000 for the local community. Under his guidance as Junior Coordinator, Bendigo Eaglehawk Badminton Association's junior program grew from 10 to 171 players in just four years. Mitch's dedication and leadership also earned him the 2023 Volunteer of the Year Award from Badminton Victoria. His commitment to improving experiences for others showcases his exceptional resilience, empathy and community spirit.



Olivia Ashcroft

Since joining the Ringwood Football Netball Club (RFNC) in 2021, Olivia has made an extraordinary impact off the field, continuing to contribute despite an injury halting her playing career. A member of the Senior, Junior and Auskick Committees, she has led initiatives such as the TAC's Towards Zero campaign, earning RFNC recognition as Victoria's top club for road safety. Passionate about both physical and mental health, Olivia was also a key driver in achieving the club's Mental Health First Aid accreditation. As a key coordinator of the U7 Girls and All Girls Auskick programs, she fosters a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone and is a wonderful role model for young girls at the club.



Thomas Maguire-Nguyen

Thomas is the founder and director of Per Vocem Vita, an organisation that teaches free public speaking and debating courses to primary schools across Melbourne. The organisation has over 100 volunteers aged under 20 and has been nominated as a finalist for the Channel 7 Young Achiever Awards. Additionally, Thomas is the youngest ever chair of the Monash Youth Committee, representing the youth of the City of Monash to council, as well as being part of Matt Fregon MP's Ashwood youth committee for 2 years. Thomas has also volunteered for the World's Greatest Shave and the ANZAC Day Appeal.



Tyrese Walsh

Tyrese is a proud young First Peoples man who discovered a passion for volunteering through connecting with culture. His leadership and cultural journey has made a significant impact on his peers, his mob and his community. As an ambassador for Anglicare Victoria's Buldau Yioohgen ('Big Dreams') program, Tyrese encourages young First Peoples to connect with their culture, fostering pride and empowerment. As a youth mentor, he builds trust with vulnerable young people, helping them confidently navigate their own journeys. While juggling personal responsibilities at home, Tyrese remains committed to supporting his peers On Country, demonstrating resilience, compassion and a deep dedication to community.

Finalists

Inclusive Volunteering Award

Celebrates diversity and inclusion in volunteering programs to enhance support for people, a community, group, or cause in Victoria. Finalists have demonstrated inclusive and accessible volunteering practices that increased volunteer diversity or improved participation for a greater range of community members.



Australian Multicultural Women Association

The Australian Multicultural Women Association (AMWA) empowers diverse communities by fostering cultural exchange, promoting equality and enhancing social inclusion through impactful volunteer programs. Their initiatives support women from multicultural backgrounds, providing mentorship, leadership opportunities and advocacy that influence policy and societal attitudes. AMWA's inclusive approach removes barriers to participation, creating spaces where cultural diversity is celebrated and valued. AMWA also strengthens social cohesion and increases representation of multicultural women in leadership roles, ensuring their voices shape a more inclusive and caring community.



Kitty Rescue Squad Australia

Founded in October 2021 by a group of Latin American women, Kitty Rescue Squad Australia aims to help reduce the overpopulation of feral and stray cats through desexing programs, medical care, rehabilitation, rehoming and community education. The organisation is committed to promoting a safe, welcoming and supportive environment for volunteers from diverse backgrounds, particularly Latin American international students who are eager to make a positive impact while in Australia.



Nillumbik Shire Council Edendale Farm

Edendale is a community environment farm set on seven acres of land next to the Diamond Creek Trail in Eltham. Since 2022, Edendale Farm has been dedicated to developing resources and programs focused on inclusive volunteering. Key initiatives include sensory-friendly tours, personalised volunteer roles and the Accessible Work Experience program. Through strong community partnerships and a positive culture of accessibility, Edendale Farm empowers volunteers with disability to meaningfully contribute to its daily operations.



Special Olympics Melbourne Inner East

Special Olympics Melbourne Inner East (MIE) is proud to be part of the Special Olympics Australia community, dedicated to bringing sport, joy and inclusion to people with intellectual disabilities and autism. MIE champions inclusive volunteering by empowering athletes with intellectual disabilities to take on leadership roles, including assistant coaching and committee positions, ensuring their voices guide strategic decisions. With a diverse volunteer base of all ages and backgrounds, MIE promotes acceptance, social connections and community involvement. Their athlete-centred approach sets the standard for inclusive volunteerism, fostering a supportive environment that enables athletes to grow as leaders both on and off the field.



St Kilda Gatehouse

St Kilda Gatehouse (SKGH) provides spaces of belonging and safety for women reliant on street-based sex work and for young people affected by sexual exploitation. Through its Drop-In Centre and Greeves Street Social Enterprise Op Shop, SKGH creates meaningful volunteering opportunities for women experiencing trauma, homelessness, addiction and mental health challenges. By removing barriers to participation - offering flexible attendance, simple tasks, and a patient, non-judgmental environment - SKGH enables client volunteers to build confidence, develop skills and form positive connections. With a culture of respect and inclusion, SKGH empowers women to take steps toward new opportunities and social participation.



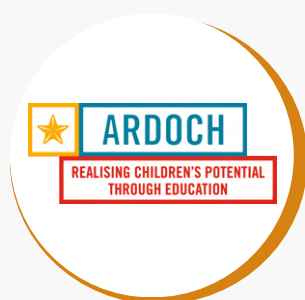
Whittlesea Community Connections

Operating for over 50 years, Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) is a grassroots community organisation delivering programs and services that support those most in need. WCC extends its reach and capacity to serve community by engaging dedicated volunteers that represent the diverse Whittlesea community. This includes volunteers from CALD backgrounds, such as new migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, who support other new arrivals with programs such as food relief, women's groups and driving programs. Through bi-cultural workers, multi-language resources and training initiatives, WCC ensures accessibility and equity in volunteering, building a stronger, more inclusive community.

Finalists

Volunteering Innovation Award

Recognises the role of innovation and adaptation to continually improve the volunteer experience or enhance supports for people, a community, group, or cause in Victoria. Finalists have delivered positive outcomes through a unique volunteering program, or new practices or operating models to improve the work of their organisation.



Ardoch

Robots in Residence Program

Ardoch is a children's education charity dedicated to improving educational outcomes in disadvantaged communities, ensuring all children can reach their full potential. Committed to innovation in volunteering, Ardoch developed the Robots in Residence program, a six-week initiative where volunteers played a crucial role in igniting students' interest in STEM, developing their problem-solving abilities, and fostering their creativity. In its pilot phase, 10 volunteers contributed 133 hours, helping enhance student confidence and engagement. While Ardoch ceased operations in December 2024, its legacy continues through EdConnect Australia and another not-for-profit organisation to be announced in early 2025.



Barwon Health

Room 64

Named in honour of the stories from Barwon Health's Palliative Care Unit, Room 64 is a volunteer-hosted podcast that provides a safe space for discussions on palliative care. Now in its sixth year, Room 64 has over 4,000 downloads and enhances health literacy by sharing personal stories and expert insights on living with life-limiting illnesses, grief and end-of-life care. Volunteers drive every aspect of the podcast, from conducting interviews to production, ensuring meaningful conversations that promote understanding and connection. Their dedication has made Room 64 a trusted community resource, breaking down barriers and fostering open dialogue around what matters most.



Birth for Humankind

Birth for Humankind (BFH) is a unique organisation pioneering community-based doula support and training in Victoria. With volunteering at its core, BFH mentors volunteer doulas to provide compassionate birth support to people experiencing disadvantage. Their innovative group practice model allows doulas to work in small teams, offering continuity of care often missing in the public maternity system. Since 2018, nearly 250 doulas have volunteered, supporting over 900 families. BFH centres equity, using a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive approach to empower clients. Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2024, BFH continues to set a gold standard for inclusive and impactful volunteering.



Gather My Crew

Gather My Crew is on a mission to simplify community care, making it easier for Australians to give and receive support during tough times. Their free app and resources enable 'coordinated informal care,' allowing individuals to rally a support crew of family, friends and neighbours to provide practical help. With over 350,000 hours of local support facilitated and trusted by over 750 health providers, Gather My Crew is transforming how communities come together. Founded by psychologist Dr Susan Palmer, the organisation is committed to reducing isolation and making informal volunteering more accessible through innovative, evidence-based technology.

Finalists

Volunteering Partnerships Award

Pays tribute to the importance of collaboration and partnerships to achieve greater outcomes for people, a community, group, or cause in Victoria. Finalists have made a significant difference through establishing or maintaining effective and enduring partnerships with other organisations, business, or local community.



A Better Life for Foster Kids

Established in 2014, A Better Life for Foster Kids is a volunteer-led charity based in Gippsland that improves outcomes for children in foster and kinship care across Victoria. Through partnerships with over 450 community organisations, businesses and schools, the charity prepares and distributes approximately 2,000 'Crisis Cases' each year, containing clothing and essentials for a child's first week in care. Thanks to strong community support, their volunteers ensure children receive immediate, practical assistance tailored to their needs, helping to ease trauma and support carers during a critical transition.



Blue Carbon Lab

Blue Carbon Lab (BCL) celebrates the power of volunteering to mitigate climate change through interdisciplinary, diverse and enduring partnerships. Through harnessing partnerships for citizen science, BCL educates and empowers communities, while advancing the conservation and restoration of Victoria's wetlands. To date, BCL has engaged over 1,000 citizen scientists and restored over 500 hectares of coastal habitat throughout Victoria; achieved through partnerships across industry, NGOs, governments, Traditional Owners and communities.



Community Support Knox, Yarra Ranges and Surrounds

Ben's Place

Ben's Place is a community pantry established by Founder and President Liz Bullen in memory of her son Ben, offering vital support to those facing mental health challenges. Addressing diverse needs, the pantry has evolved into a lifeline for individuals and families experiencing financial difficulties. Serving over 400 households weekly, including pensioners, people with disabilities, veterans and those who are homeless, Ben's Place ensures access to nutritious food and essential supplies. The pantry's impact also extends to palliative care recipients and school breakfast clubs, promoting dignity and hope amid adversity.



Monash Oakleigh Community Support and Information Service (MOCSIS)

MOCSIS has been a vital support service in Oakleigh for over 50 years, assisting vulnerable individuals and families facing poverty, homelessness, domestic violence and other hardships. Run entirely by volunteers, MOCSIS provides food relief, clothing and guidance, delivering 2,500 food parcels and 2,268 food vouchers last year alone. Strong partnerships with local businesses, charities and food suppliers enable them to distribute fresh produce, bread and essential goods weekly. With 39 dedicated volunteers, MOCSIS operates as a community-driven network of care, ensuring those in need receive practical support and a welcoming space without barriers.



VicWISE Australian Working Group for International Student Employability

VicWISE is a volunteer-led organisation dedicated to supporting international students and enhancing their employability through strong community partnerships. Since 2019, VicWISE has collaborated with over 100 organisations, including universities, student clubs and industry leaders, to provide life skills training, financial assistance, mental health support and career development opportunities. In 2024, VicWISE formed a ground-breaking partnership with Crown Resorts to deliver nine workshops across Melbourne, Sydney and Perth, equipping students with essential skills. Through these initiatives, VicWISE continues to lead efforts in supporting international students, easing their integration and helping them succeed in Australian society.

Finalists

Grassroots Volunteering Award

Celebrates the commitment, impact, and importance of grassroots organisations in supporting local communities, people, groups, or causes in Victoria. Finalists are small community-led organisations that have provided important local services, led positive change, or supported social and community life.



Action Sweetwater Creek

For 50 years, Action Sweetwater Creek has been a cornerstone of grassroots environmental volunteering in Frankston. Starting with a small group of local residents in 1974, the organisation now boasts 150 dedicated volunteers who collaborate with Frankston City Council and Melbourne Water to restore and protect the creek's natural reserve. Monthly working bees focus on weeding, planting and light clearing, while the group also propagates indigenous plants and runs educational tours. Through their long-standing commitment, Action Sweetwater Creek has transformed a neglected bushland into a cherished nature reserve, while advocating for its protection within the local community.



Community Response Australia

Community Response Australia is a grassroots organisation that provides rapid response to Australians in need. Formed in response to crises such as floods, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisation delivers essential supplies, meals and support to affected communities. Leveraging deep local connections, they mobilise resources and a growing volunteer network to quickly meet emerging needs. Beyond immediate relief, Community Response Australia also works to improve mental health, build skills and inspire long-term resilience. With a steadfast commitment to social justice, the organisation strengthens communities and drives positive, lasting change to enhance overall community wellbeing.



Friends of the Children Foundation

Friends of The Children Foundation (FOTCF) is a grassroots volunteer organisation committed to transforming the lives of children facing adversity. For over 26 years, FOTCF has supported children's hospitals by funding critical equipment, provided essential food relief through initiatives like the Bread Brigade, and raised environmental awareness in schools. Through hands-on initiatives such as tree planting, food rescue and emergency aid, FOTCF continues to make a lasting impact, inspiring others to join their mission of care, commitment and community.



Tribe-Monbulk Youth

Tribe-Monbulk Youth focuses on creating a safe, inclusive space for young people. Each week, up to 90 teens gather at the drop-in service to connect, engage and access support to navigate critical issues such as mental health, substance abuse, homelessness and family violence. Tribe also strengthens community education by offering free drop-in sessions for parents and community leaders, as well as educational programs for TAFE students. Run solely by volunteers, Tribe provides a welcoming environment where young people can find support and resources they need to thrive.



Veterans For Fishing Mt Evelyn RSL Sub-Branch

Veterans For Fishing is a volunteer-driven social welfare program that supports young veterans and ex-service members. Established in Kilsyth, the group offers a safe, social outlet through fishing excursions, providing veterans and their families with opportunities to connect, develop new skills and improve both physical and mental wellbeing. By creating a structured, supportive environment, Veterans For Fishing helps veterans navigate challenges such as PTSD while fostering camaraderie. Through family events, fishing competitions and one-on-one outings, the group has made a significant impact on hundreds of veterans and their families, and is now expanding its support to first responders due to the program's success.

For more information about the Victorian Volunteering Awards,
including how to nominate in 2025, visit:

volunteeringvictoria.org.au/awards

