

Volunteering is for Everyone Webinar – Transcript

Kano

Hello everyone and welcome to the "**Volunteering is For Everyone**" Webinar.

It's going to be a great day today, given we have about a hundred attendees registered from all across the country. We have young people, we have parents, we've got supporters, we have youth workers, international students.

I'd love to kick this off by maybe dropping the chat, what state or what part of Australia are you joining from? Maybe you're joining us from overseas? Either way we would love to know.

Before we get started, I think it's important we acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands where we are meeting today and I pay my respects to their elders past and present. I'm currently coming from Bunurong country down in Melbourne, so I'd like to pay my respects to them.

Also, I'd like to acknowledge the Department of Social Services and their commitment to the volunteering campaign "**Hanging Out to Help Out**".

A brief introduction about me. I'll be your host for this evening. My name is Kano. A little bit about me, I do a little bit of MCing, but in my formal role I'm the youth commissioner at the Victorian Multicultural Commission which is very policy heavy work. I'm very passionate about this work, I'm passionate about young people just like yourselves and I'm passionate about multiculturalism

I don't tell this to a lot of people so you guys are in the know. I actually didn't go to university, I didn't do any formal education. I didn't have any qualifications. So you might be wondering how you get this position?

Well, it's actually because I did a bunch of volunteering. I applied for as many different organisations as possible and as many different opportunities as possible. Eventually I grew my experiences and eventually someone asked, "hey Kano, would you like to go for this position?". I was a bit scared, but I thought about the opportunity and that's why I'm here.

Today I have four incredible panellists who will be taking us through their journeys just like mine. Today's session is all about igniting your interest in volunteering. We'll explore the opportunities available, we'll talk about the benefits of getting involved, how to get started, and also where do you find volunteering opportunities. You might be in a situation where there's lots of opportunities or you might be in a situation where there's no opportunities. Either way, you might wonder where you find them?

A little bit of housekeeping for today. This session is being recorded and it'll be posted afterwards. So if you miss any part of it that's totally okay. You can catch up a bit later, and if you want to share with your friends, that's totally cool. It is a webinar format, so we'll have all the almost a hundred attendees' microphones muted and camera switched off.

But we want to make it fun. We want to make it interactive. We know this is not going to be boring while you're having dinner. You can ask questions of me, and I'm going to ask you questions and you can type your answer in the chat, alright?

Also if you need any help with technical issues, please use the chat function. So if you move your mouse, there is a chat function and you can contact the host for any issues and our incredible team will help.

There'll be a Q&A function throughout the evening and there'll be a dedicated Q&A slot at the end of the session. So we'll go through those questions towards the end, for example, a specific question to a panellist that you have. We can really get into the details of your questions.

We also have closed captioning available for this event. There should be an option that says CC button or closed captions buttons. If you would like to get more information or have any questions, you can also email us at events@thinkhq.com. We might pop that email in the chat as well.

So what is today all about? Why did you sign up for this webinar? What does volunteering for everyone actually mean?

Well, if you think about it, I think volunteering is a great opportunity. Regardless of your experience, regardless of your age, regardless of your visa status, you can get involved. There's so many opportunities out there for you to learn about things that you're passionate about. Whether that's sports, music or young people like me, there are plenty of opportunities out there.

A big supporter of that is parents and guardians. I know lots of parents are joining in today because you can play an inspiring role in developing volunteers, especially when young people are taking an active role or wanting to find that opportunity. You are encouraging your young people to go out there and take that first step and experience the rewards of volunteering. So parents, we encourage you to embrace volunteering and reap its many benefits.

I know a lot of you are new arrivals to Australia. Personally, I was not born here. I've been living in this country for many years now, but I remember when I was a new arrival; I did not know the language, did not know public transport or how you navigate everything. It is really, really tough.

And so we have panellists who represent those communities and they'll be offering their perspective of how people can get involved in their university, how they can get involved in their workplaces or even in their community. Personally, I think it's a wonderful way of immersing yourself into the culture, building your networks, and developing valuable skills.

During this session you'll also hear directly from international students. These panellists are celebrities in their own right. They're very well connected, they're very good people. So trust me, you want to hear from them and also make a connection with them because they've generously taken time out of their busy days to spend an hour with us.

And lastly, enjoy the session. It's going to be fun. We're all young people, we're not going to be too static. I want to have a little bit of fun with us, crack a few jokes and ask you questions.

And so I'm going to start this off. I would love to know first, what's the best thing that's happened to you today? What is the best thing? Pop it in the chat. What is the best thing that's happened to you today?

For example, for me today it is my sister's birthday and so we went out for lunch today and luckily she paid for me, so I'm very excited that I got a free lunch. She's older than me so that's totally fine. But I'm very excited that in the evening we are going out and having a bit of a party.

What is the best thing that's happened to you today? Click on the chat and click to host and panellist. I don't know if this is a coincidence, but we have two people who said their friends got engaged. That is very, very cool. Their best friends got engaged. Faith has said they got a free lunch after a creative meeting at work. Love to hear it. Faith, I would love to know what food it was? What cuisine was it? We love free food. What else has been happening?

I'm excited to hear these highlights of the day. Well, Yuri has mentioned they finally ate a food they've been craving for. Oh my god, I remember when you're craving for some food, it's there but it's not available. Maybe it's late at night, maybe it's not open. But when you finally have that food, it hits the right spot. It's simple food, but it makes you happy. We'd love to know Yuri, what was that food right? What was that food?

I might wear a few more responses. We got cheese and bread. Yes, cheese and bread definitely hits the spot. Yuri has Vietnamese noodles. Yum, yum, yum, yum, yum, yum. Love to hear that. Feel free to drop in the chat. What is the best thing that's happened to you? What's been the highlight?

Again, it does not have to be anything big, simple, small is also great and someone has put attending this online course. Oh, thank you. And you got one of the best MCs in the house I think. Thank you team. Yeah, keep on dropping the chat. Love to keep this conversation going.

But now it is time to introduce our incredible panellist and it's my great pleasure to the first guest, Riyadh, who is a project office project coordinator at the Salvation Army. Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself?

Riyadh

Absolutely. Thank you Kano. Before I introduce myself, I would like to thank everyone who works so hard behind the scenes to put together such an amazing panel discussion. And I hope that we can all inspire others to take a step forward and volunteer and get out of their comfort zone and maybe give back to the community.

As you mentioned, yes, my name is Riyadh.

Kano

I think Riyadh might have had some internet issues. That's fine. What we might do is we might go to our next panellist, I'm sure Riyadh will be joining in very soon. We might go to Mei who is a PhD student at the University of Western Australia and also a tech help volunteer welcome in May. How are you?

Meizhu

Hello. Good afternoon, Kano and to everyone and it's my great honour to be on this panel.

And also I'd like to echo what was said. I know people have put in so much effort to make this webinar happen and thank you. So thank you for all the organisers and also thank you for all the attendees.

So I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that I'm on. So the Whadjuk people in the Whadjuk country in Perth, Western Australia.

So I'm a PhD student in finance at the University of Western Australia and I volunteered, so I moved to Perth after my parents migrated here about eight years ago. But I only really started volunteering after starting my undergrad and it's been a great pleasure. I tried out so many different things in uni and outside uni as well. And most recently I was a tax help volunteer helping people, mostly students with their first tax return. So I'll be able to draw on what I've done over the past five, six years as a uni student. Thank you.

Kano

Yeah, perfect. And I think Mei is being very humble. You were nominated or awarded the student coordinator of the year, so I'm sure we'll get into that as the session goes on. Next up I'd like to invite Salima to the stage who is a treasurer. Yes, a treasurer and CALD2LEAD organisation. How are you today Salima?

Salima

Hello Kano and good evening everyone who is taking a precious moment out of your evening today and joining us in. It's an honour to be with you. So to start off, I would also like to acknowledge the land that I'm joining in from. So I would like to pay my respects to the Bunurong people of the Kulin nation from the land which I'm joining tonight.

So yeah, I'm a treasurer at the CALD2LEAD organisation and I've been with them for about a year and a half. Previously I was a director of youth, and besides that I have done lots of other volunteering and I'm enjoying them all. Yeah, it's very exciting to be here and looking forward to tonight.

Kano

And while we have it here, what does CALD2LEAD do? If you could give me a ten second recap or what does the organisation do?

Salima

So the organisation is basically for multicultural women and helping them to step into leadership positions. So we do offer some scholarship courses for women, which is essentially the Diploma of Governance or the Certificate of Governance and mentor them throughout their course as well, which is really exciting.

Kano

Yeah, wow, that's very cool. And if you are looking for scholarships, Salima is your person.

And the third panellist I'd like to invite to the stage is Kate, who is an international student from Mauritius undertaking Masters' in Humanitarianism and Development at Deakin University. Also she works at the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network as a community development officer. Welcome Kate, how are you today?

Kate

Hi Kano, thank you so much. Hi everyone. I'm joining in from the unceded land of the Bunurong people as well. I'd like to pay my respects to the elders past and present and extend that respect to any First Nations people in the audience listening to us tonight.

Thank you for having me tonight. I'd like to share a bit about my volunteering experience. I've done some ad hoc volunteering bits here and there, but last year and for part of this year I was in a very formal volunteering role in emergency relief in a community organisation and that has shaped me a lot and I'd like to share all of the wonderful things I've learned and how that has been very beneficial for me and some of the key learnings and things that could inspire other people to get into volunteering. So that's me.

Kano

Thank you. I think Riyadh's back. I also personally volunteered where Kate works now and also there are a few volunteering opportunities. So we have volunteers here and also organisations that have volunteering opportunities. So Kate, I would love for you to touch on this through the evening and I would love to welcome Riyadh back in. Hopefully you can hear us and see us again, the project coordinator at the Salvation Army. How are you?

Riyadh

Very good, thank you Kano. I appreciate it. Hello everyone. Sorry for my terrible internet. Yes, my name is Riyadh. I am a project coordinator here at the Salvation Army, but there was a volunteering journey involved.

Before I got into this position, I led a project called "The Couch" and another project called the "Pit Stop". Both are focusing on individuals who are vulnerable and with The Couch we are focusing on international students where we provide them with a safe space to socialise, make new friends at free events, access free dinner, showcase their talents, connect them with support services and a community to belong to. The Pit Stop is a program that is focusing on the food delivery riders. It's a space for them to come and rest and have free lunch, free coffee, free water, free snacks, access to free WIFI in case we need to do their assignments or if they need to do anything with their laptop they can come and join us. And here everything that we do for them is for free.

But again, my journey to get into had so much volunteering involved in it and the journey was lovely, leading to me being a coordinator here at the Salvation Army.

Kano

Yeah, perfect, thank you. What a great set of panellists. We have various experiences from across the country. We have volunteers, we have leaders of these organisations and in some way we're all connected to volunteering.

To start off, how do you find your first opportunity? And maybe Riyadh, we'll go over to you. We'd love to know maybe when did you come to Australia and also how'd you say yes to your first opportunity and what was that experience like?

Riyadh

Absolutely. So I'm an international student. I came to Melbourne back in 2019, but like any other desperate international students looking for a good job, I think we all go on the internet and ask that specific question. How can I get a job in Melbourne or in Australia? But

basically it's through volunteering. So when I Google'd how I can land my first job, they all said that you need experience and you can get experience through volunteering.

I remember my first volunteering journey was a bit tough. I ended up doing retail volunteering with an op shop. It was very far away and it was a struggle to get there, but then I realised I really needed to start somewhere in my own circle because it was my first position or first volunteering journey. So I started in the university as a student ambassador and I think most of the students or international students started there. I started as a student ambassador with RMIT in 2019 and then COVID hit in 2020. We couldn't do anything. I was still desperate to find volunteering opportunities.

After that first volunteering opportunity, there were some volunteering opportunities online and I ended up doing different volunteering opportunities online during covid just from my laptop. One was with Friends for Good, just talk with seniors, check up on them, see if they're happy or not. The second one was with the National Youth Commission of Australia. I was managing a panel like this one now where I'm one of the panellists. There you go. It's a journey. And the third one was in an organisation called Land of Welcome where we organised so many online sessions where we welcome refugees and asylum seekers.

Melbourne went through five lockdowns and we were very desperate to find more opportunities where we could step out of our comfort zone. And it was that time where I was casually looking for opportunities and then I found that there is a programme that is recruiting for volunteers and it was The Couch. I applied for The Couch as a volunteer and it was the best day of my life. I volunteered for six months before I got this position, Monday to Thursday, four days a week, five to nine, just putting it all in and just giving my time to build a community and look after other people. Through this journey I graduated with a job offer on my table straight away.

Kano

Yeah, wow. What a journey. I feel like you can write a book on that, but I guess some of the things that I'm getting is one, you found opportunities. I like that you started in your circle, right? You don't have to go far, you started at your local university in the places that you were already at. Sometimes we feel like we have to go searching for these opportunities, but sometimes they're in front of us. We just have to put in the effort. And even in the COVID era, there were a lot of things going on and you still were able to do three gigs online. That is incredible to hear.

Maybe I'll invite Salima. I love to know from you, how did you get first involved in volunteering?

Salima

That's a good question Kano because I remember exactly what my first experience was with volunteering. So when I was at the start of my year 12 in high school at the homework club in the Southeast area, people came in and they wanted to advertise about the position they were looking to fill for a volunteer for Girl Guides Australia.

It's a foundation most could be familiar with, but it's essentially teaching multicultural young girls leadership and friendship fellowship skills. So that was my very first time actually hearing directly from someone about volunteering and I just put my hand up because the lady seemed really friendly and it seemed like something new to me. So I was naturally

curious and signed up for that. It was once every week and the good thing was that it was after school hours. And then also my manager, she used to drop me off at night-time, especially during the winter time. So that really kept me going.

So I was with that organisation for a year and then when I went to university I was very keen to get involved with everything that university has to offer. I'm a part of the lockdown or covid cohort, so I did most of the volunteering online. I got involved with the Access Monash mentoring programme and I was there for two years. I was extremely passionate about it because I was in that programme when I was a student myself so I got to be mentoring some other students when I was in uni, which was really interesting. So that was online and also it was pretty flexible and it was within the area of my passion. Then I got involved with mental health, I think it was mental health ambassador, that was my title. I would co-design programmes for university students during covid and I was there for about 11 months-ish. Then finally the lockdown was over and after that I would also join volunteer open day ambassadors and little things here and there.

Then after that I joined a programme in CMY, which is a programme. And then through that I got to know the CALD2LEAD board. I observed them at the start. So they really liked me and they offered to meet me.

Kano

There you go. Sorry. What I'm almost getting from this is the first thing to do is say yes to your first opportunity, right? As soon as you say that first yes, you get the benefit of "oh, this is good, I see a bit of value in this" and then eventually you can find more and more opportunities. But what I'm getting from Riyadh and Salima is that saying yes to that first one, getting that motivation to give to your first opportunity, then you can find your way around. Similarly to me, it's interesting. My first opportunity that I signed up for was when I was 13 years old. And that simply started by me literally as you said earlier, going into Google, typing in youth, typing into Google youth volunteer opportunities and then found some opportunities at 13 years of age.

And so I wanted to know from Mei, we know getting to your first gig is that first starting step, but what got you motivated to say yes to volunteering? What was the motivation behind it? Was it your parents maybe or was it the community? Or maybe you attended a panel just like this?

Meizhu

I really resonate with what everyone so far has said about just saying yes to the first opportunity. And for me I said yes too. So when I first started uni I was doing a chemistry unit and at the time we had the class representative systems. So basically getting students to be the class rep and the DA thing was the lecturer for feedback and all that. I didn't really know what I was signing up to, I just did but I think I did pretty well. And through that opportunity I got involved with my student guild and from there I got into a bunch of student leadership opportunities and student leadership summits. When I signed up for an opportunity, I was pretty lucky in that I met new people who were really kind and I was always able to learn something new. So I think the community I found through volunteering is just always feeding my passion to continue and to continue trying out different things.

Kano

Yeah, perfect. I love that you put in that it's through the community that you find the people.

I would love to maybe open up the floor. Have any of your parents potentially influenced your journey of getting involved in volunteering? I know for me personally around this country, my family is quite involved in my local cultural group. Even though my dad wouldn't term it as volunteering, I saw him go on the weekends attending the cultural meetings, volunteering to put on events, organise food runs and to help out the community. I don't think he would term it as volunteering, but in a way he set the example for me to be like "all right, I can volunteer and give back to my community". So any of the panellists, was there any of your parents that potentially influenced your journey? Maybe Kate, potentially?

Kate

Thanks Kano. A lot of what the other panellists have just said just resonated with me and have just unlocked so many memories. I remember now something I had completely not thought about, but I was a girl guide for eight years when I was young back in Mauritius. That involved a lot of volunteering and for some reason I had set in my mind, I'll focus on that one opportunity that I had most recently that was really impactful to me. But then I realised, oh wow, I volunteered weekly with so many different opportunities that were very varied with the Girl Guides back in my home country.

But to your point about my parents, it's funny actually because my parents really supported me and they, well not exactly made fun of me, but they were like "You are always out there doing something, we'll always have to drop you off somewhere, pick you up somewhere you are never home". They were like "How are you managing all this?". I was always like this.

When I came to Australia, like Riyadh had mentioned, it can be challenging to find and especially to just break through in finding that first job, at least the first job that you feel happy in. I remember my mom, she said "You just start with going out in the community and volunteering. Don't stress, things will come. What is meant for you will come for you" She's a bit like that

Mostly the things that are meant for you will come for you, don't stress about it. Maybe think about things that mattered to you back home. I used to be a dancer and she was like "Maybe you can volunteer at a dance company?", so I did that in my first year in Australia. So I would definitely say that yes, my mom really supported me and really what she made me see is it's a very valuable pathway and it's worth your time.

Kano

Yeah, one hundred percent support from parents to show young people the way and also parents travelling, taking you places, driving you can potentially help that feeling of being informed and supported.

I might open it up potentially. I know we have a lot of parents joining in tonight, which is if you are wanting to get your son, your daughter, or anyone else wanting to get involved into volunteering, maybe Riyadh, what would your tip be to parents wanting to get their children into volunteering? What would you suggest?

Riyadh

Well, I just want to say that I can guarantee and I can promise that your son or daughter

would be different once they start to volunteer. It's not like the way that we might look at it, in that it's free labour or anything like that. But it's a way to find out what your interests are, what are your weaknesses, your strengths. You can really do a huge favour for your kids to put them out there and let them volunteer and give back to the community. It will improve their communication skills, it will shape their personality, it will show what they really want to do. Sometimes we might think that studying engineering is fancy and then all of a sudden you find out through volunteering that you actually never want to do engineering. You want to do something different. So I promise you that volunteering is the way to find out what you really want to do in life. It could be helping others, it could be cooking, it could be cooking basic things. But for parents out there, listen to this. Your kids can really receive a positive impact on their personalities and they can be really different people through volunteering.

Kano

Yeah, some great reasons. It's that personal development that they get from the opportunities and you're bang on. One of the things I like to say is you don't know what flavour of ice cream you like unless you actually taste it and volunteering is a little bit like that, right? You don't have to be committed to one thing. You can try out different things and see what you like and if you don't like it, that's okay. There's so many opportunities out there for you. I guess for parents, one of the things that I'm a big fan of is leading by example. I know sometimes you can't force them to volunteer obviously, but you can take your children or your young person to potentially a gig that you are helping out with. I know when my parents took me to volunteer, that impression definitely stayed with me.

And also if you're joining in today, I would love to know what was your first ever volunteering gig, right? Have you volunteered before? Or maybe shout out your organisation in the chat. We would love to hear a few organisations. Feel free to message it towards me. So if you're joining in, just click on the chat and type it in the chat where you're coming in from and also what was your first volunteering gig.

Okay, we'd love to hear from you. Husna, Yuri Faith joining in. And we also have Halima who's saying they're joining us from Kenya today. Wow, look at that. We are an international team with international guests joining in today. We would love to know Halima, maybe what time it is in Kenya and also have you volunteered in Kenya before? Feel free to drop it in the chat. I'm excited to see a few responses. Have you volunteered and if so, what was your first organisation? For example, for me, I remember I volunteered with a youth group that was a council run youth programme that I found on Google. And that's how I got started. So love to hear from you.

In the meantime, I'll throw it over to you Salima. You've been treasurer at the CALD2LEAD and a bunch of other volunteering opportunities. We would love to know what's been the benefit for you? What have you taken out of it? Is it skills, IT experiences? I would love to know.

Salima

Yeah, actually really that's a really good question. I think everyone in the panel will agree with me that being a volunteer is also a very safe space for you to learn. I've learned so much stuff. Being a treasurer in finance is not my area of study. I graduated from public health but it was through volunteering that I got to experience that side and I saw that I do have an interest and I do see

myself working in finance a little bit. Maybe I could get involved in a bit of that and I'm sure the experience that I built through my volunteering will really help me.

Also the other thing is meeting new people. So you may meet people who have certain experiences that you want to learn from. They may tell you about organisations and everything like that. So it is a good way of building networks and learning from others. If you're at home it's very unlikely to learn something new. But if you put yourself out there, it's a really good opportunity to learn.

Besides that, you get to go to events, building your confidence. I know when we're young it's a little bit hard for us to socialise or maybe sometimes you're not as confident approaching others. I was the same. I used to be really shy, but through volunteering, putting myself out there, not only I learned the soft skills but also got more confidence.

Kano

Yeah, perfect. There you go, Salima. I'd love to know from you potentially, you said you didn't study finance. What was that first opportunity? Did you put your hand up to become treasurer, did you ask for support? Did you get support? What was that like? I know a lot of young people might be wondering, yeah, I'm not a sports person or I've never worked with young people before, I've never worked with people from refugee migrant backgrounds or homeless people. What would you say to that?

Salima

Of course. That's a very good one, Kano, thanks for asking that. I think initially what we call is imposter syndrome. Is that sound of rain too much? Is everyone okay with that? Is it bothering

Kano

All good. If you can make it short, that'd be good.

Salima

Yeah, definitely. Basically I guess having that confidence and saying yes, then you can say I guess there is always some support. So for myself, I had a mentor who used to be a treasurer previously. He mentored me twice, I mean over two months. So that worked really well. So I think asking for help if you don't know the answer and also feel free to I guess express it.

Kano

Okay, perfect. So I might get you to mute as it is a little bit loud, but what can you do? Rain, you can't change it. But great points around asking for help and also volunteering. It's a great place to learn and it's not necessarily always about giving, it's always about receiving things in return as well.

I'm just reading out some of the responses that we've had. Halima, who's joining us from Kenya, said "It is 10:32 AM" and their first volunteering gig was actually cleaning up a lake. How cool is that! He did it in 2017 and we haven't talked about that there's lots of environmental gigs out there. Jess has posted AIMS Australia. All right, AIMS organisation looks to help newly arrived people learn about English, about getting involved in Australian culture. Faith has said it was part of the high school curriculum. There you go, right? Felix

has said "group social activities for young people with disabilities". Hey, we got some superstars in the chat as well. Wow. We also have Yuri,

"my first volunteering work at a college in Perth". There you go Mei, look at that. Represent! We also have Husna and their first volunteering gig was in democracy in colour as well.

Maybe Mei, I'll throw it over to you. I'm giving you an opportunity here Mei to pretty much flex on us. You have a very impressive resume and I'd love to know what's been the highlight of your volunteering journey, what are some of the things that you've been involved in?

Meizhu

Thank you for giving me this opportunity. Please cut me short if I'm going over time, I can talk all day about this.

So what's the highlight? I've been involved in one-off events. So ad hoc volunteering, marshalling at the WA marathon club. They had a half marathon round pass and I've also more long term opportunities at doing health promotion. Promoting healthy drinking and also how to perform good sleeping habits to university students. That was one that I had done for two or three years in undergrad and also last year helping out at a charity called, sorry, Ronald McDonald Houses Charities (RMHC). So it's basically providing to families who have children seeking treatment in hospital, but they're coming from regional areas so they have to stay away from home. RMHC basically provides them a place to live and also some programmes that entertain the families and those the kids. I went there for some months and played movies for the kids, helped clean and vacuum all the carpets. This year I was a tax help volunteer, helping people with their tax return.

One of the highlights, it's really hard to think of one highlight because I can say at least one or two moments that I really enjoyed in each of those experiences regardless of how short or how long they are. But there's one that really made a memory on me that is in, I think in my third year we had one opportunity to help the Red Cross who sought donations that were prepared for refugees arriving from Afghanistan. I think at the time after some political turbulence in the country I found it memorable because at the time everyone's social media and news headlines were all dealing with what's happening in Afghanistan and how people there are impacted. But we couldn't really think of a way for us in Australia a couple thousand kilometres away to do something to help them. So that was one of the only opportunities for us to feel like "okay, we are actually helping them by providing them with these clothes, shoes, bags and hygiene products that helped those who first arrived". It was when I really saw the kindness of people of the Australian community and because one;

- There were so many people just coming down to help source donations and I think the call for help was pretty sudden and the staffing was quite short. It was only two days or two or three days ahead. And the second one;
- The amount of donations that I saw.

Kano

No, you're all good. What I'm feeling, it's very impactful and I asked you what's been your highlight, but you mentioned so many highlights and that's volunteering, right? It's not all about grinding out time. You get lots of benefits, you have memories and have a worldwide impact, a real impact that you can see.

It's interesting, one of the attendees actually said, I think we've got a few people, Jean and Faith, said that you looked familiar Mei, and they were from the programmes that you were working with.

I'm going to take a few questions from the chat and if you have any questions, please use the Q&A function. We'll have some time at the end. We have questions from Jess and also Felix on, well you might already have a job, you might be working or you might be studying personal life. How do you balance it all? How do you balance all your commitments? And Kate, we'd love to hear from you, what are some tips around managing it all?

Kate

Thank you and thank you for your questions. That's something I really wanted to touch on tonight as well because that's something that I think is at the forefront of everyone's mind. I think most people think it's great to volunteer and volunteering is a good thing, but then at the end of the day it's like "where do you find time to do it?".

I think in my experience as an international student, it was less about how I find time and more about how this is just part of the experience and it was very important for me to understand how I wanted to get a job for sure. But before I realised that it was even possible I think I had a lot of anxiety around what it was going to be like to work in an Australian workplace and what the people are like, what the expectations are. I think Samila or Mei mentioned that actually it's a really safe space to learn because the stakes are usually a bit lower, but still you get a lot out of it. They train you, they show you how things are done and you understand workplace politics and interpersonal relationships in the workplace. When I thought about my time, it really just became a question of prioritising.

In certain moments in your life you will have to maybe prioritise your work in certain other times you might prioritise your health. But in other times I think we should remember that we should also prioritise our community and not forget that sense that it's not just everyone for themselves. And I think that's important to remember. At certain moments in your life, as someone who's currently working and studying and has been volunteering, it can be very challenging. We need to remember to lean on our community and think of living as more than just existing in your little bubble. I think that really helps, especially coming to Australia and leaving your home country, trying to find community here in Australia, it is a good reminder to be like "this is actually a priority in my life to build that community".

Yeah, I'm keen to hear what the others have to say.

Kano

Yeah, maybe Salima if the rain's gone, I would love to hear from you. You started volunteering in year 12, which if a lot of parents and young people are joining in, it is really stressful. You've got exams coming, so what would your tips be around managing all the commitments that you have? And if you can't, for example, also love to know sometimes if life doesn't work out and if you sign up for an opportunity, what's it like? Can you say no? What's that like as well?

Salima

Yeah, so very good question. I think it's a matter of being honest with yourself. Well my experiences when I was at uni, I was working, studying full-time and also volunteering one or two jobs at the same time. I was super busy as you can guess.

I think the matter is being honest with yourself and making sure you have that communication. For example, during year 12, during my exams prior to my SAC, I'll literally message maybe a week before and just say, "Hey, I'm unable to come in because I have got a SAC coming up. I really want to study for it." and they'll be very understanding. I think it's setting up that expectation from the start. Because at the start I did have a chat letting them know that I'm not very confident if I'd be able to attend regularly. And she's like, "that's fine, I don't have any expectations from you to do all the sessions". They're flexible.

At the moment the board I'm with, we intended to have every second month a meeting in person, but I couldn't make it because of my commitments. At the moment I'm working two jobs and volunteering and I just approached and said, "Hey, I do really like to attend the meetings and everything, but it's really far for me to travel to the city". So instead of every second month it is every three months. It's all about being comfortable with putting your needs first as well. They're understanding.

A lot of us come from culturally diverse backgrounds so we do have family commitments as well. A lot of us go shopping with our parents and everything. Just being honest about that, communicating prior, it's a very safe space to be yourself.

As Kate was mentioning, it's about prioritising as well. Think about if you're seeing your schedule is too busy, think about what you can eliminate. I remember when I started year 12, I deleted TikTok and I am not back to TikTok after I think five years now, or maybe six years. Think about what you can eliminate from your life that doesn't have a good impact on you. Just think about it, journal it out or just meditate on it. Something that I would definitely consider.

Kano

I might just mute you there. Perfect. Thank you. Thank you Salima. I like that point around balancing and it's totally okay to say no. And also volunteering is not a 24/7, 365 gig. If you only have time in December that you can use to volunteer, that's great. It's not a full-time job. Absolutely not.

What I'm getting from all the panellists is that it's flexible and there's no commitment, right? There will be some, but it's not that you have to forcibly be there. You can always give a warning.

We have some incredible Q&A questions so please keep them coming because I want to really pick the brains of the panellists, but to summarise today maybe we'll go for Mei.

I would love to know from your perspective of being coordinators now, why do services reach out for volunteers, right? What's in it for them? Obviously free work, but what are the other benefits? Why do services reach out? Maybe we'll go to Mei and then Riyadh to finish us off.

Meizhu

I'll first have to say that I was a coordinator, I am no longer a coordinator anymore so the landscape may have changed. I was coordinating events and we had not-for-profits coming to us like the Red Cross and saying, "we need a bunch of student volunteers". This may have been for something like donations, and so we would post the advertisement and see

how many students signed up and depending on what transport was needed we'd take them there or we'd ask them to make their own way.

At least on the university side, we have worked out a system where we can give students a record of their volunteer hours as long as they're volunteering with a not-for-profit who has a partnership with us. I know some students have been attracted because they want, or they know they can get some form of evidence after they volunteered to add credibility to their CV and enhance their employability.

From just thinking through the excursions that I have organised, it's mainly when organisations have a lot of manual labour to be done, and they need more people. For example we get a lot of opportunities for students to go out and do weeding in parks and bushlands and plant trees depending on what time of the year it is. It's a lot of those manual labour tasks that need to be done but probably couldn't get enough people to do.

Kano

I think that's a really good point to end on. I run my own organisation and I know a lot of people who want to give back. Volunteering really is the lifeblood. It's the heart of many organisations. A lot of these organisations can only exist because of volunteers. When you're volunteering out there you might find organisations that are purely running because of hard workers, because of passionate workers who are volunteering.

There are organisations such as mine who want to get young people involved, because who want to give people the opportunity to grow, to learn and become leaders in their own community.

That does take us to the end of the formal questions, but we have a lot of Q & A's. Riyadh, I've got a big one for you. Please keep those questions coming

As a coordinator yourself at the Salvation Army, we have a question from Faith, which is "as a volunteer manager, retention is the most difficult part. How can volunteer opportunities match volunteer expectations while also balancing the needs of the organisation around consistency and continuity?" How do you manage the, I guess, key volunteers and also match what their expectations are as well?

Riyadh

Absolutely. Well look, I agree with Faith that retention is the most difficult part. It is the most challenging part of recruiting volunteers, but you always try to be creative when managing a group of people. I managed 29 volunteers from I believe 18 or 19 different nationalities. Some of them have been volunteering for four years now with me. So in order to keep this commitment, you always need to sacrifice something.

I'll tell you my secret or my approach with those volunteers. I have created a culture within our team that we first have to be friends. By being friends that doesn't mean that we are coming to the programme to do the job. We are actually coming here to catch up. I don't put any pressure on them. I always do the hard work and for the small tasks I give it to them because I really want them to love being in the programme. Not that they feel like they have to be in the programme.

It takes some resources. Yes, I agree with you. When we do have a big event where we see more than 200 or 300 attendees in our programme, I take my volunteers out for a bubble tea and actually I do pay for that bubble tea for everyone. It's not that I pay and I feel like, "oh, I did do something". It's something that I can enhance that friendship and enhance that volunteering

culture within the team and they're getting a bubble tea, they're taking selfies, they're taking pictures, they post it on social media, they're all together. This is what makes them feel like they are here because they feel like they belong. Not that they're here to do the job.

Sometimes during weekends we make a plan, we catch up, we go to the beach for example, or we go out and have dinner together. Or sometimes I do a house party where I invite all my volunteers and it's their supervisor doing the party. It's a bit unusual, but look what it leads to. It led to a big team of volunteers. Some of them have been volunteering for four years and people keep asking to join the team. I'm at 29 and I can't really accept everyone, but there is a culture that I have created within the team and it takes a lot of work.

Yes, it takes a lot of energy, absolutely. But look at what happens after that. The programme is running. We inspired the Salvation Army in Geelong and now they have something similar to The Couch called The Lounge. Exactly similar to what we do here. So it's all hard work. It's all something that we really need to do as recruiters or as managers or supervisors. It's not that we open the programme and say, "okay, volunteers, we need volunteers to do this". No, we actually need to get closer to them, be friends with them.

When I recruit a volunteer, I ask them for a three month commitment. But in those three months, only once a week, and they don't have to tell me which day they're coming. Sometimes things happen in life, they just need to show up once a week for three hours, four hours and see you next week. But from that, I see them coming here every night. So it's all something that you really need to work on and not just keep it as a simple and a typical volunteering opportunity.

Kano

That's perfect. Yeah. Great points around that. Building that culture, making it a community and also having the volunteers not feel like they're just there for labour. I've been part of many organisations and it's about making a community where you can come and have a sense of ownership. Whether that's a project that you're working on, whether that's helping people out, the volunteers can feel like we're doing this together rather than putting on a shirt and being a volunteer. No, this is my project. This is a sense of ownership. And when you succeed, you share the success with everyone and you make sure that they actually feel like they did participate and they did engage or they add value to the success of the programme that you are managing rather than say, "oh, I did this." No, it's always about "we did."

One hundred percent and I guess on the back end of that Salima, we will throw it over to you. Because I want to get through a few more questions, maybe in about 15 seconds, we would love to know from your perspective, we have a question from Jess. What about someone who doesn't feel as confident in their English skills, or doesn't feel confident in maybe not having the necessary skills to be this type of volunteer, how could they still find volunteer opportunities in about 15 seconds? What would you want to be for them?

Salima

Yeah, it's always that you should think you are always good enough, always think you're good enough.

Kano

Yeah, I love that Salima. Always think you're good enough. There's always opportunity. Don't turn yourself away from opportunities, right, when it's not a job right? Absolutely.

We have time to give. Absolutely. Right. Say yes to opportunities. A hundred percent.

I saw a few other questions potentially I might throw over to you Mei. We have another question which is, and maybe in about 30 seconds as well, love to know how people can find volunteering opportunities to do together with friends? What does that look like? Can you find opportunities together with friends or potentially you do the programme and then you become friends?

Mei

Yes, there are all kinds of ways to make friends after coming to volunteering. I do want to highlight that I know at least in WA, the people volunteering have a search engine for all the current opportunities. You can filter out how long or short, how much your commitment you want to make and you can filter out the sectors you want to volunteer in. I'm pretty sure there are similar search engines in other states as well. Use those search engines and resources to think about what fits your schedule the most. And once you sign up, you can probably track down your friends and say, "Hey, we are cleaning up this most beautiful beach on Saturday. Do you want to join me and beach cleaning? This one? It's so fun." I met a lot of really good people.

Kano

There you go, and if you've been looking at our beautiful backgrounds, there is volunteering.gov.au, give it a go on there. Find multiple opportunities with your friends such as beach cleanup. But also you might get an opportunity to meet a volunteer as a stranger, but you leave the programme as friends like a lot of us do.

To wrap up today, maybe Kate, we'd love to hear from you around if you are going as a volunteer, how do you know your rights? How can you keep yourself safe because you are part of an organisation that gets volunteers. Maybe a few bits of advice, maybe in about 15 seconds. Over to you.

Kate

Okay, I've got notes, I'll be efficient. The way can you keep yourself safe and how can you get the best experience out of it, know your rights, know your worth, know your good enough, like Salima said is try to seek more formal volunteering opportunities in organisations that have the support system there to support volunteers and have a structure so they have someone who's going to be your supervisor. Someone who you can shadow. Seek these kinds of environments.

Also that is really helpful for getting references. People you can stay in contact with and connect with to advocate for you as well. Most volunteering organisations are very friendly, have open communication and are transparent.

Also don't be scared to, like Salima said, have open communication. Let them know what your boundaries are and what your schedule is like. Also if something like if you need to go out of your way for transport, ask, can I just have my Opal card topped up or my Myki card? It's okay to ask. If it doesn't work out, that's fine. But be okay to advocate for yourself.

Three, make it really accessible for you. Don't like Riyadh said, you don't have to go super out of your way. You can look into your circle, especially places that are very accessible to you. Maybe your local community centre you can walk to or you can walk your dog for your neighbours. That's definitely not formal, but volunteering exists in many shapes and forms.

Also along with that, I think just to add on to my advice about how you manage to add volunteering with all of the other things you've got in your life. Like not to sound like a finance bro, but time stacking tip. So you can volunteer and that can be your time to socialise with your friends at the same time you can volunteer and that can be you getting your steps in and walking the dogs for the neighbourhood. You can volunteer and that's your outdoor

'I'm touching some grass' time. This is my 'good for my mental health' time. So think about it that way. So that's me.

Kano

Perfect. Thank you Kate. Very efficient and I'm glad you covered three key tips.

And with that being said, I'm sure I could ask many, many other questions, but that does bring us to the end of our session. A massive thank you to Mei, Salima, Kate, and Riyadh, for showing your experiences and also taking out time to be here today in the chat. If you're zooming in, please give a love heart reaction to them, they've been incredible.

We'd like to thank all the state bodies for their support of the panel for joining us today and also a massive, massive thank you to the Department of Social Services for their ongoing support, especially Gerry, for making today happen. And personally for me, I would like to thank the Think HQ team for all their work behind the scenes and putting it all together. And lastly, to all of our incredible attendees, thank you for asking questions. Thank you for being tuned in.

Volunteering is something we can all be part of. And I'm glad you've joined here. You might have been connected. Please add these panellists on your LinkedIn. They're great people.

And with that being said, I'd like to formally close. If you are interested in volunteering, visit volunteering.gov.au. If your organisation, I see there's a few managers in here, if your organisation does need volunteers, go into volunteering.gov.au to find volunteers and potentially post your opportunities as well.

That does bring us to the end. Thank you again for joining in today. In terms of the next steps, you'll receive an email from us, hopefully with a link to the recording and also a few minutes to complete a survey. We want to do this more, we want to get the community involved, we want to de-stigmatize volunteering and so we'd love any feedback that you have. That email will include a copy with I'm sure the attendees, the panellists networks as well. And with that being said, thank you so much. I'll let you get back to your Wednesday.