



Tūao Aotearoa  
Volunteering New Zealand

# State of Volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand Report

2022

**Arataki. Hāpai. Whakamana | Lead. Advocate. Recognise.**

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We are very grateful to every volunteer who shared their voices with us for this report, and who allowed us to act as guardians of their stories. Their voices and stories are woven through this report and serve as an important snapshot of the sector and the nature of volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand. We also acknowledge key stakeholders and organisations who contributed their expertise and lived experiences to the conception and execution of this report. We thank the Board of Volunteering New Zealand for their support of this project.

# Tūao Aotearoa Volunteering New Zealand



Tūao Aotearoa, Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ) is kaitiaki of volunteering and mahi aroha in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Volunteering New Zealand is an association of volunteer centres, and national and regional organisations with a commitment to volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand.

VNZ was created in 2001, to coincide with the International Year of the Volunteer. The sector, Volunteer Centres and the Department of Internal Affairs were all part of our creation, reflecting our founding purpose as a national voice for volunteering.

Today, Volunteering New Zealand continues its role as the peak body organisation for the community and voluntary sector, influencing policy, producing sector-relevant research, supporting the sector through its consultancy service, and acting as an advocate for volunteering and volunteers more generally.



# Introduction

The State of Volunteering is Volunteering New Zealand's flagship report on the state of the community and voluntary sector. Over the years, this report has evolved, reflecting the demands of the sector, the changes in volunteering research best practice, and an improved understanding of volunteers on the ground as valuable sources of knowledge.

The previous iteration, the State of Volunteering 2020, featured for the first time, surveys conducted with volunteers rather than previous years' approach of simply surveying organisations. This latest iteration, the State of Volunteering 2022 places the voices of volunteers even more at the forefront of our report. In addition to formal survey data from the two surveys – one conducted with volunteers, and one conducted with organisations and their representatives – we have incorporated findings from a series of semi-structured focus groups conducted with many volunteers across different demographic groups. Structured- and semi-structured interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders to further improve the design of the project and to ensure our research continues to be responsive to the needs of the broader sector.

The State of Volunteering 2022 uses a mixed-methods approach, relying upon qualitative and quantitative data and methods. SPSS, NCSS, and NVivo software assisted (respectively) in basic statistical analysis, regression analysis, and the interrogation of unstructured rich text. Principles of Kaupapa Māori research informed several aspects of this work, with the Māori

and mahi aroha focus groups being conducted exclusively by an expert Māori facilitator and mahi aroha professional. A diversity of volunteers and volunteer managers featured prominently in the conception, design, and implementation of the State of Volunteering 2022 project.

Reflecting a similar challenge experienced by many volunteering research groups, respondents to the two State of Volunteering surveys were overwhelmingly white (91.4% of respondents) and from an older demographic (70.0% of respondents being over the age of 55 and 51.7% being over the age of 65). This was despite proactive engagement from Volunteering New Zealand and our key partners in improving the visibility and accessibility of these surveys, highlighting the inherent limitations of our previous sampling methodology.

The standardised surveys upon which previous iterations of the State of Volunteering have been based capture important insights, but they are often incomplete and ill-suited for capturing the stories and voices of some volunteers. Participant-led focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conceived specifically for the State of Volunteering 2022 Report to mitigate our prior concerns about the potential for data capture by the majority demographic and to ensure that a wider variety of views can be considered. The focus groups and semi-structured interviews enabled richer and more in-depth responses from those who have not previously engaged with our previous surveys. Facilitators were chosen who had lived experiences of the particular demographic in which they were engaging

with, allowing rich and dynamic exchanges that yielded important insights. In accordance with data analysis best practice, external researchers from our target demographics were also invited to analyse and peer review our findings prior to publication.

The format of the report reflects the insights gained through the vast array of contributors to this project. There are six substantive sections, reflecting the broad grouping of themes and insights that have emerged from our surveys, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. The broad groupings of the themes to be discussed are as follows:

1. Barriers and Motivations for Volunteering
2. Volunteering and Whakawhaungatanga: Relationships and Connections
3. The Public, Organisational, and Personal Benefits of Volunteering
4. Recognising and Valuing Volunteers and Volunteering
5. The Impact of Covid-19 on Volunteers and Volunteering (and Lessons from Covid-19)
  - a. Direct impact of Covid-19 on service provision and volunteering practice (organisational lens).
  - b. Covid-19 as a disruptor of volunteer relationships and connections; polarisation and division from vaccinations and government regulations (volunteer lens).
6. Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering Theory and Practice

These sections are relatively self-contained and can be read on their own. VNZ anticipates future reports to be published that delve deeper into particular themes, with deeper levels of analysis and the drawing of recommendations for organisational practice.

# Foreword

## Hon. Priyanca Radhakrishnan, Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector



New Zealand has a high volunteering participation rate, with over 50 percent of the population volunteering with an organisation or directly in their communities. Volunteering has a statistically discernible positive impact on wellbeing and social cohesion and the economic value of volunteering is estimated at \$4 billion a year.

But statistics alone do not tell the whole story.

The stories of volunteers are incredibly rich and varied and can be woven together into a narrative about the State of Volunteering in Aotearoa.

The last two years have presented considerable challenges, but many non-profits and communities have stepped up to provide necessary support to the people who needed it most. Volunteering has made a significant contribution to our collective Covid-19 response. The voluntary sector has continued to deliver, despite the pressures, and has adapted to new ways of working.

This report outlines that a desire to contribute to the community is the primary motivation for volunteering. People will volunteer for a cause that is close to their heart or for an organisation that matches their values. Many people volunteer – or stay in their role – because of the relationships and connections they make with like-minded colleagues. The human and social aspects of volunteering are often the most rewarding. When these ties were stretched or severed during the response to the Covid pandemic, some volunteers did not return.

The volunteer sector, community organisations and government all have a role in supporting volunteering. There is more we can do to create the right environment for all volunteers.

In the Community and Voluntary Sector at least 28 central government agencies either have volunteers contributing to their mahi or they are supporting the sector through community funding. We have initiated a cross-government strategic approach. The aim is to raise volunteering's profile across government, promote shared understanding of sector demand, improve the quality of information, fill data gaps, and help solve infrastructure problems.

The aspirations the Government has for the community sector in Aotearoa New Zealand are about addressing inequities in our communities, empowering communities to achieve their dreams and ensuring there is greater social cohesion across the motu. This will benefit all New Zealanders.

If the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us anything, it is the importance for communities and government to be able to come together to build systems of resilience and support for our people.

I want to thank Volunteering New Zealand for highlighting the voices of volunteers at this critical time of recovery and renewal and acknowledge the work that has gone into this report. There are many lessons for us all arising from the report and opportunities to discuss how we can play our parts to strengthen communities.





*Coastguard is powered by over 2,000 volunteers from Cape Rēinga to Bluff on Aotearoa New Zealand's coastlines, major rivers and lakes.*





2022

# Executive Summary

*The State of Volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand 2022* reports from the voices of volunteers. *Why do they volunteer, for whom, how do they like to be recognised and do they feel they belong in the organisation*, were some of the questions answered. We have also heard from volunteer managers within the community and voluntary sector.

We provide a pictorial summary of key data on pages 11 and 12 as well as 2021 Statistics New Zealand wellbeing data for volunteering across the population.

Then there are six substantive sections reflecting the themes and insights from our research.

These are:

## ONE: Barriers and Motivations for Volunteering

There are many reasons for people to volunteer, including having a drive for social justice or a lived experience of the charity's cause. Volunteers want to be treated with dignity – and to treat those they serve in a dignified way. Volunteers will only commit to organisations that match their values. While many say there is an issue with ageing volunteers and a low interest from young people, youth themselves say organisations should consider why and how they could attract younger people.

## TWO: Volunteering and whakawhaungatanga: relationships and connections

Many people volunteer because of the relationships and connections they make. The most common method of volunteer recruitment is via word of mouth except for people under the age of 35 who found their role via a social media post or internet search. The human and social aspects of volunteering are often the most rewarding. When these ties were stretched or severed during the response to the Covid pandemic, some volunteers did not return.



### THREE: The public, organisational and personal benefits of volunteering

Different groups describe volunteering in different ways. Organisations (particularly those with over 500 volunteers) use organisational and business metrics to measure their impact. Volunteers focus on the public benefits (i.e. giving back to the community) or personal benefits (i.e. making friends through volunteering).

### FOUR: Recognising and valuing volunteers and volunteering

Volunteer organisations vary in how they recognise and value volunteers. The majority reimburse volunteers for their out-of-pocket expenses. Some organisations regularly nominate volunteers for awards and honours. Many volunteers prefer small gestures of thanks. Key stakeholders from the community and voluntary sector feel more could be done to value and recognise volunteering.

### FIVE: The impact of Covid-19 and lessons

Covid-19 negatively impacted volunteering organisations and their ability to deliver services. This resulted in having to suspend volunteering programmes and loss of volunteers due to the vaccine mandates. Covid-19 reduced many organisations' funding streams e.g. charity shops. Organisations with an electronic system for managing volunteers were better off than those without.

Covid-19 also adversely affected volunteers' experience and even ability to volunteer. Volunteers over 65 years of age were twice as likely to report that concerns about Covid-19 had prevented them volunteering.

### SIX: Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering theory and practice

There are challenges in creating a diverse and inclusive volunteering workforce. Volunteers' experiences of belonging did not correlate with an organisation having a diversity and inclusion strategy. However, some organisations were making inroads in this area.

## CONCLUSION

Five lessons can be drawn from the report:

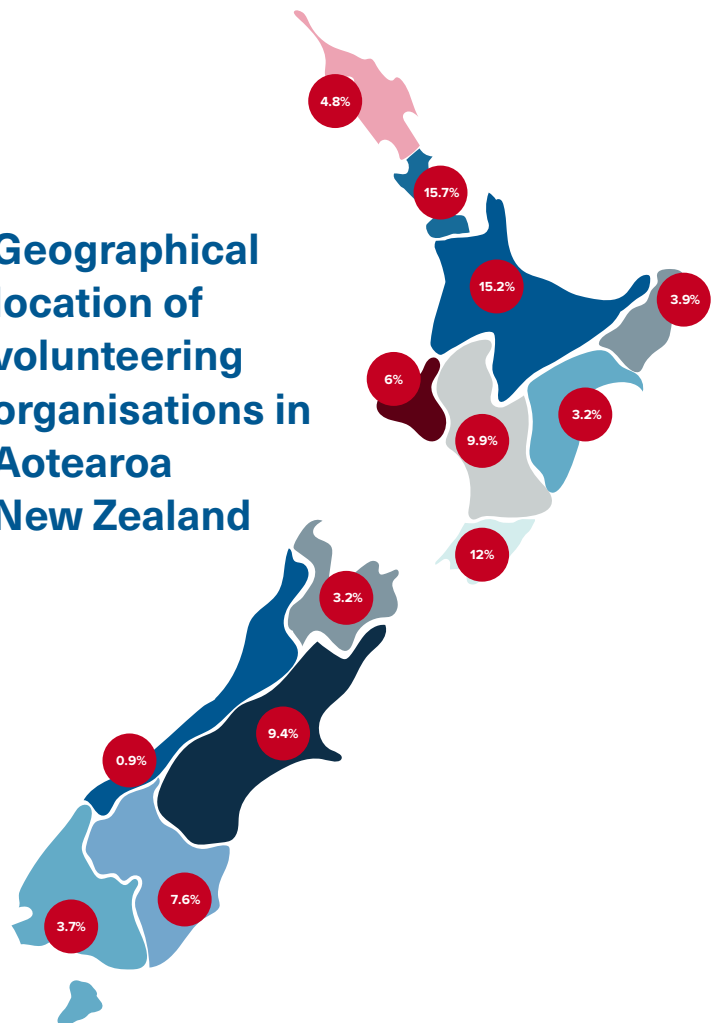
1. The community and voluntary sector should continue to invest in ways to make volunteering inclusive and accessible to everyone on their terms.
2. Volunteers should understand their own values and the value they can bring to an organisation before committing, ensuring these are mutually compatible.
3. Organisations should focus on making their volunteering environment caring, inclusive and conducive to attracting and retaining a diversity of people.
4. Organisations need to balance their activities between day-to-day management, strategy and planning, and engagement with the wider sector
5. The community and volunteering sector should acknowledge the changing patterns and nature of volunteering, and remain open to other ways of volunteering (including mahi aroha and digital volunteering).

# STATE OF VOLUNTEERING

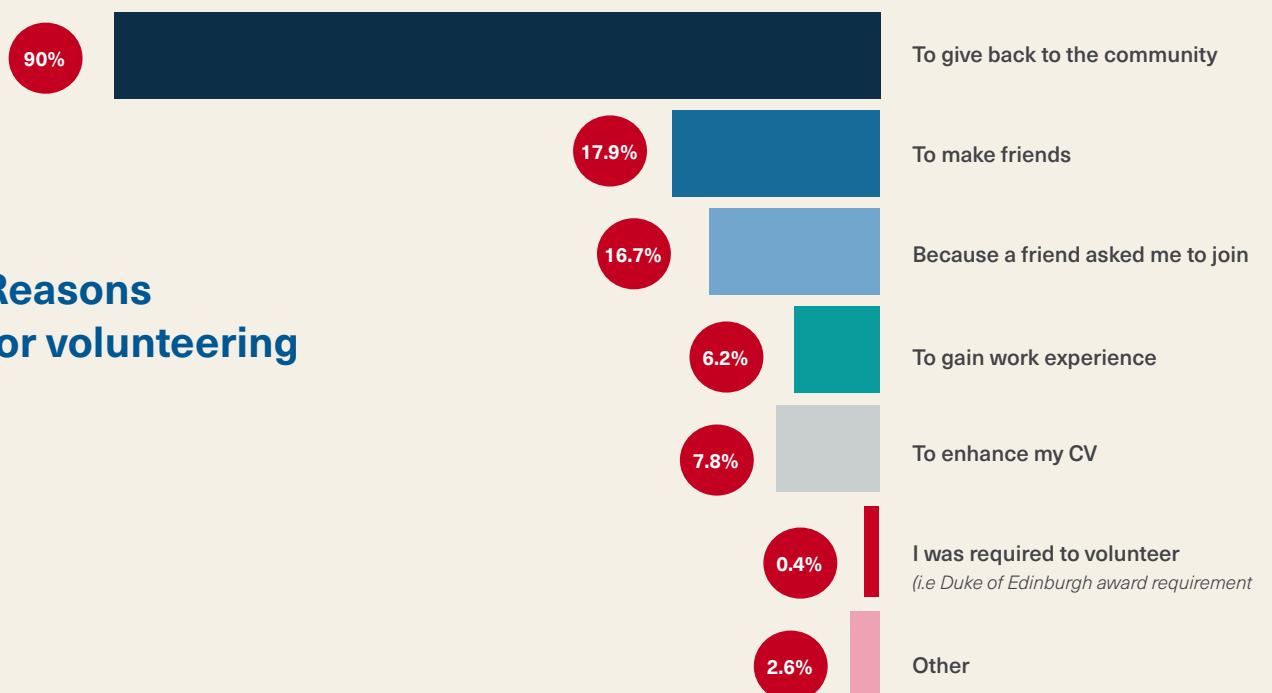
## Background

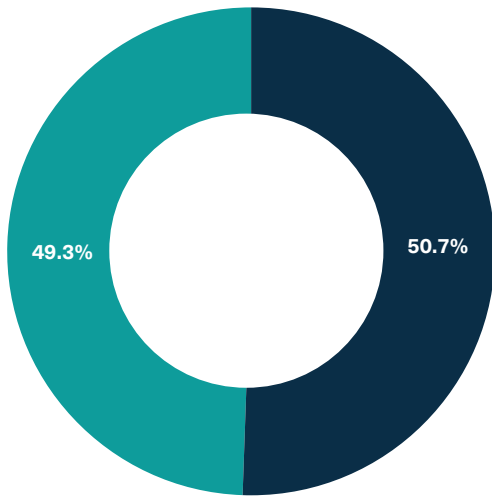
Volunteering is an important promoter of wellbeing, both for the volunteer and those who benefit from volunteering acts. We also present Statistics New Zealand data about the distribution of volunteering across the population based on comprehensive census data.

### Geographical location of volunteering organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand



### Reasons for volunteering





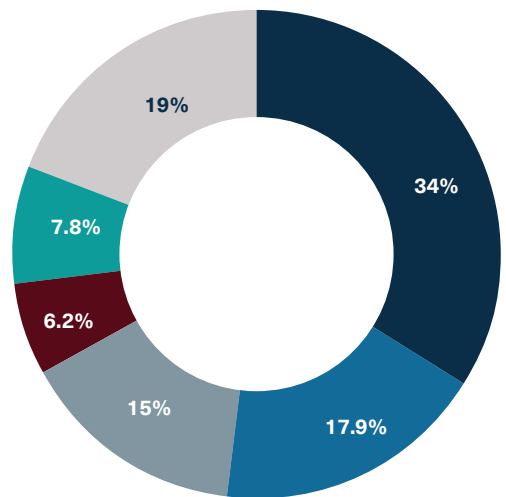
### Percentage of people who volunteered over the previous four weeks – Stats NZ

- Total that volunteered
- Total that did not volunteer

Over half of all people in Aotearoa New Zealand are active volunteers. The majority volunteer through informal means – that is, by helping another person directly.

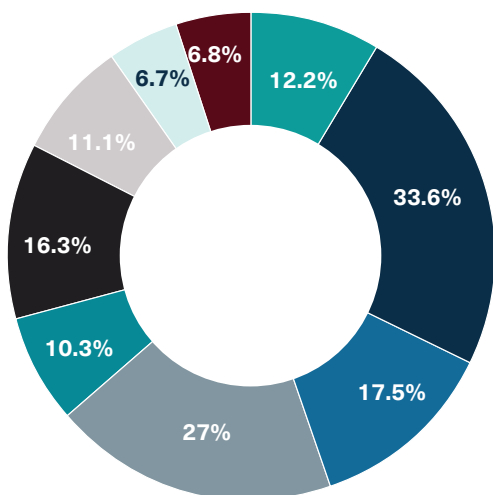
### Percentage of volunteers by volunteer hours contributed – Stats NZ

- Less than 5 hours
- 5 to 10 hours
- 10 to 15 hours
- 15 to 20 hours
- 20 to 25 hours
- 25+ hours



Among those who volunteer, 17.9 hours on average was contributed over the past four weeks, with 19% contributing over 25 hours per month.

### Percentage of Volunteers over previous four weeks by type of organisation – Stats NZ



- **Arts of culture**  
*(eg. cultural groups, museums)*
- **Sports or recreation**  
*(helping at sports events, coaching)*
- **Education or research**  
*(eg playcentre, school boards.)*
- **Religious or spiritual**
- **Health**  
*(hospitals, nursing homes, cancer foundations)*
- **Social services**  
*(emergency support, youth groups)*
- **Environment, conservation or animal protection** *(SPCA, tree planting, Greenpeace)*
- **Community development or housing**  
*(Marae work, community centres, community support groups)*
- **Other**

# ONE

## Barriers and Motivations for Volunteering

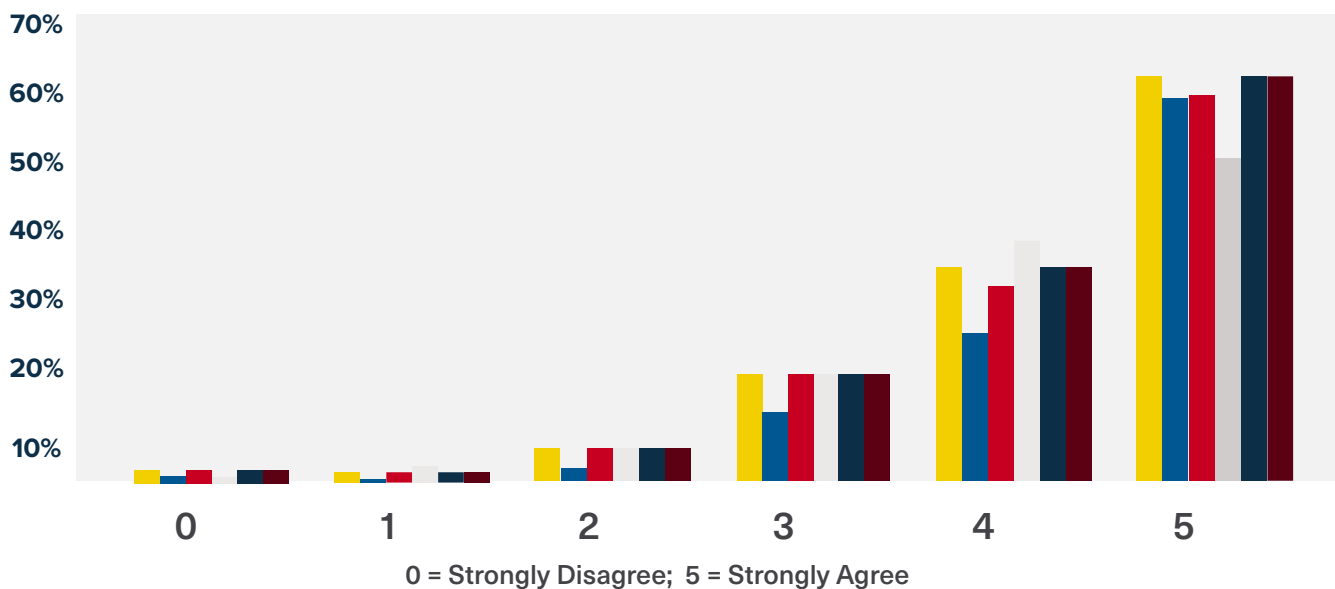
Volunteering is done for a wide variety of reasons. Insights gained from the surveys and focus groups highlighted the range of motivations and barriers to volunteering. These range from a desire to contribute to the community (something identified by 90.4% of our survey respondents as among their primary motivations for volunteering) and to make friends (identified by 17.9% of as among their primary motivations for volunteering), through to those who volunteer to gain job experience or enhance their CV (identified by 10.1% of respondents as among their primary motivations for volunteering).

Retention rates continue to reflect a strong desire among existing volunteers to continue volunteering long term. 81.1% of survey respondents indicated that they intend to volunteer for their current organisation long term (i.e. for at least the next 12 months).

### Percentage of volunteers who agree with the statements

The experience of volunteering can be variable. When survey respondents were asked a series of questions about how they feel about volunteering, the majority strongly agreed with the statements (5 out of a 0-5 scale).

- My skills and experience are valued at the organisation
- I am able to connect with the community/ communities
- I enjoy volunteering with the organisation
- I am treated fairly and respectfully
- I feel my work has a positive impact
- I feel like I belong to the organisation I belong





Data from Statistics New Zealand highlights reasons given by *people who do not volunteer*<sup>1</sup>. The most common reason (identified by 45.3% of those who do not volunteer) was not having enough time. This figure was reflected in the qualitative responses received through our surveys and focus groups. Other common reasons include not being asked to volunteer (17.4%), having health issues that impedes one from volunteering (12.4%), and reluctance to make a long-term commitment (9.0%). Two interesting observations also stand out: 9.5% of respondents stated that despite not volunteering there were no barriers for them to take up volunteering; and 5.8% of people mentioned that they prefer donating money to charities in lieu of committing their time to volunteering activities.

Insights gleaned from our focus group and interview participants, and from the qualitative section of our surveys, provide further details into volunteers' motivations for volunteering:

*“What motivates me is the sharing of knowledge and the interaction with people; to give back, from all the privileged knowledge and information that is shared with me – it’s not mine to keep, it’s mine to share, so that drives me. The passion and love of developing ideas and how we can do that in collaboration with others. When we volunteer, we get the aspirations of the people that we’re working with, and that sparks or continues the passion that I have for myself to be in that role.”*

– Māori Focus Group Participant, Northland

*“Young people tend to possess an untainted energy and a drive for social justice that can be channelled into many volunteering causes. The organisation I chose reflects my personal values and works to improve society.”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Christchurch

Many volunteers indicated a personal connection to the cause they are engaged with. Participants gave personal examples of how an organisation had helped them in the past or how the cause an organisation is engaged in relates to their own lived experiences:

*“I used to be looked after by [the organisation], so I feel a strong motivation to volunteer.”*

– Survey Respondent, Waikato

*“I am personally passionate about their cause. They are a non-profit organisation for a medical condition I suffer from.”*

– Survey Respondent, Wellington

*“I volunteer twice weekly as a literacy tutor at [an Auckland-based literacy charity] for an hour with each client. Clients ask for help. Being able to work privately one-on-one protects the personal dignity of each one and enables real openness about the level of need they experience in reading, writing and sometimes speaking in English. The fact that I am part Samoan with just a little language enables me to join readily with Pacific Island clients.”*

– Survey Respondent, Auckland

1 Defined as those who did not do any volunteer work over the previous 4 weeks.

The language of dignity is echoed by many other volunteers, who regard it as a cornerstone of effective service provision and as a core tenet of how volunteers ought to be treated.

*“Dignity is often a mysterious word, but it captures [what] motivates me to volunteer. It means volunteers are respected, valued and appreciated for their work, and it means the recipients of services are treated as active participants in the volunteering process. Promoting dignity for all is a central part of what makes me want to volunteer.”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Tauranga

*“As a volunteer from a minority background, I have often struggled to put into words what makes volunteering worthwhile for me. I have struggled with some organisations who did not treat me well in the past. I love working with my current organisation [and this is because] they put dignity in front of everything they do – how they treat their volunteers and people we help.”*

– Survey Respondent, Hawkes Bay

Understanding what motivates volunteers naturally leads to the question of what barriers volunteers experience when it comes to volunteering.<sup>2</sup> Some respondents talked about geographical barriers, and the ways these limit how much work they can do.

*“Because I go between two different places, like Dunedin and Omarama, I’m not always in the right space to give a lot.”*

– Māori Focus Group Participant, Dunedin

*“I am on my Restricted Driver’s License. This means I can’t volunteer in the evening, since I have to be back home before the start of my driving curfew.”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Auckland

Access barriers were highlighted by many volunteers with a physical disability:

*“[As a volunteer with a physical disability] I am unable to walk up stairs. This means I can only volunteer with organisations that have buildings with lifts and step-free access. This has limited my involvement with many organisations I would otherwise want to be involved with.”*

– Survey Respondent, Christchurch

*“I had to quit my volunteer role last year as many of my fellow volunteers were allergic to dogs and I need [my assistance dog] with me. It felt too awkward having people avoid me because of Theo [my assistance dog].”*

– Youth Focus Group, Auckland

<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic and associated government response has had a significant impact on volunteering practice over the past few years, see Section 5 of this report.

A small pilot survey conducted prior to the release of the main survey showed that among current volunteers, 42.1% identified not having enough time as the main reason they were not able to volunteer more. Among those who were not current volunteers, 58.3% identified a lack of time as the main reason they were not currently engaged in volunteering. 31.2% stated that they were not presently engaged in volunteering because they were unable to find an organisation that aligned with their values or interests. The importance of volunteers committing to organisations that matched their values was reiterated by almost all focus group participants.

*“I actually only volunteer with those [organisations] that either have the manawa (inner heart/mind) or the ngakau (universal heart/mind), all of that, embedded in their philosophy. So, I know that I can still keep who I am and keep my practices, and they’re acknowledged into those settings. So, I’m quite selective as Māori [on who I choose to volunteer with].”*

– Māori Focus Group Participant

*“Volunteering is not always shiny and good. There are bad sides to it too, and this is why I’m careful about which charities and organisations I choose to involve myself with. They have to value their volunteers and be doing actual good.”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Lower Hutt

A notable number of survey respondents commented on the problem of ageing volunteers and lower interest in volunteering among younger volunteers. When this accusation was put to our Youth Volunteer Focus Group, there was universal assent that this criticism was unfair. Participants pointed to the way volunteering has evolved and the importance of acknowledging the multitude of ways in which everyone, young people in particular, volunteer their time and energy.

*“I’ve often heard older people say that ‘young people don’t volunteer’ or that ‘younger people just don’t have a caring ethos’. This is clearly false. Young people are among the most active in our society, campaigning for social change (such as on climate change and human rights), helping each other out in formal and informal ways and promoting creative initiatives that go beyond status quo thinking.”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Lower Hutt

Several participants also mentioned the importance of organisations reflecting on *why* young people were not attracted to their organisations, rather than concluding that young people were not interested in volunteering at all.

*“The nature of volunteering evolves and those who complain about not enough young people joining should perhaps ask themselves: ‘Why don’t more young people want to join our organisation?’, ‘What are we doing wrong that is putting off young people from joining?’”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Hawkes Bay

47.5% of organisations argued that ageing volunteers was their single biggest challenge.

Understanding the motivations for volunteers and the barriers they experience is a complex endeavour, with no single factor providing a simple explanation for levels of volunteering engagement. Through multiple data sources, from formal surveys to targeted focus group interviews, we see that volunteering is done for a series of both practical and principled reasons, and barriers take many diverse forms.



*The Takahē Tucker Team at Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari, who supplement feed takahē, volunteers Janine Berry (left) and Susie Verry with biodiversity ranger Dan Howie.*



*Promoting Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari at the Cambridge Market: Lian Buckett, volunteer Linda Just and volunteer Elaine Parkinson.*

## A passion for restoring the ngahere

The key to creating a great volunteer experience is tapping in to individual skills and passions, says Lian Buckett, the Volunteer Manager at Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari.

Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari – a fenced mainland island sanctuary in the Waikato – has about 200 volunteers and 20 staff. Volunteers get involved with a range of work including monitoring, pest control, various species jobs, and visitor hosting and guiding.

“Inclusion means understanding that not everyone fits into one square. It’s about finding what passions they might have to make volunteering a rewarding experience.”

“We allow [our volunteers] to lead us,” she says.

However, Lian says there were some tensions when she began in the role, in the move to professionalise the organisation. It required listening to the opinions of volunteers but also setting the intention of where the organisation was heading.

That approach seems to have worked, with volunteer satisfaction now at 4.5 out of 5.

Lian says she likes to meet volunteers in person when they start, and she provides regular recognition such as mentions in the newsletter and long-service awards.

The Covid lockdowns and restrictions hit the volunteers hard as they were not able to do their work and socialise with others. Everyone is enjoying being back.

“We all share the underlying passion of restoring the ngahere/ bush and our precious taonga/ species. It feeds your health and wellbeing, there’s a beautiful balance. Everyone is considered whānau – we may have our quarrels but passion and camaraderie hold us together,” Lian says.



## TWO

# Volunteering and whakawhanaungatanga: relationships and connections

One recurring remark from our survey and focus group participants is the centrality of relationships and forming connections to their role as volunteers. This serves as the single biggest motivating factor for many of them to continue volunteering. In our survey with volunteers, 17.9% of respondents identified 'making friends' as among their primary motivations for volunteering with their current organisation. A further 16.7% listed being asked by a friend to accompany them as among their primary reasons for volunteering.

*"I volunteer for my connections and to connect with my whānau. Connecting to my whānau has been a big drive for us. I love being back home; my husband enjoys doing mahi aroha and we do it together."*

– Māori Focus Group Participant

The role of relationships is also reflected in the fact that the most common method of recruitment is word of mouth, specifically hearing about the organisation and volunteering opportunity from a friend or acquaintance. 52.5% of respondents indicated that they heard about their current volunteering role through word of mouth from a friend or acquaintance. This observation has remained constant across previous State of Volunteering reports, with word of mouth being the most frequent.

Further interrogation of this figure, however, shows that the rates differ by age cohorts. Among survey respondents 35 years of age and younger, the most common means by which volunteers heard about their current role was through a social media post or advertisement (58.5%) followed by an internet search for their role (42.3%).

Understanding the significance of connections and relationships is therefore indispensable for understanding volunteers' motivations and for understanding the state of volunteering more generally.

*"Why do I volunteer? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. It is the people, it is the people, it is the people."*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Auckland

Toby's story shows us how the human and social aspects of volunteering are often the most rewarding. Being lifted on to someone's shoulders to celebrate the sporting victory of a team he had coached, for example, meant the world to him.

# Volunteering lifts Toby up high

Toby Adams loves basketball – he’s a coach, a referee, and an athlete leader.

He doesn’t let his intellectual disability stop him from fully participating as a volunteer.

“I like being involved and helping people,” Toby says.

He’s had some stand-out achievements, for example, when the under 19s Takapuna Basketball Team he was coaching won a North Shore championship.

“They lifted me up on their shoulders and I was in the photos with the medals. And I won Student Coach of the Year for it,” he says.

Toby is also a volunteer at Special Olympics New Zealand school events and ribbon days and the Young Athletes Program for primary-school aged children.

Carolyn Young, CEO of Special Olympics says the Young Athletes Program provides early intervention for children aged 2-10.

“Having athlete leaders like Toby at these days is really important for families, it shows them what may be possible for their children when they are older,” Carolyn says.

Toby says he likes being a role model and encouraging other Special Olympics athletes to volunteer.

He has reaped other rewards too – like being referred for a paid job by his basketball coach; and meeting new people and making friends, something that’s easier to do when you’re volunteering for a common cause.

“I like giving up my time to help at volunteering events, it’s fun,” he says.



## THREE

# The public, organisational and personal benefits of volunteering

When asked about the benefits and impact of their volunteering, respondents frequently provided responses that align with what we can label the public, organisational, and personal dimensions of volunteering. This tripartite matrix is a useful way of evaluating and analysing the impact of volunteering.

The personal benefits and impact of volunteering relate to the volunteer themselves. This includes benefits, for example, in terms of improvements to their wellbeing as a result of their volunteering activities or in terms of the friends they make as a result of involvement in the organisation.

The organisational benefits and impact of volunteering relate to the volunteer organisation. These are typically measured, among other metrics, in terms of fulfilling the organisation's contractual obligations or in the number of people reached.

The public benefits and impact of volunteering relate to the broad social effects of volunteering. These include more broad and abstract benefits, such as the impact of a particular volunteering campaign on the population or how an organisation influences social norms.

These distinctions are not designed to be rigid, but they nevertheless provide a way of conceptualising the way volunteering impact can be described and analysed. This language was reflected in the way our respondents explained the impact of their volunteering.

Organisations often explained their impact in terms of business metrics:

*"We have met 8 out of the 9 KPIs [key performance indicators] in our contract with [a government department]."*

– Volunteer Manager, Wellington

*"[Our organisation] reached 88% more people via email this quarter compared to the previous two quarters. This has saved our organisation over \$24,000 in call-out and call expenses."*

– Chief Executive, Auckland

We found a strong statistical association between organisations focusing on the language of the organisational dimension of volunteering impact and engaging over 500 volunteers annually. This suggests that larger organisations tend to be more influenced by organisational and business metrics when it comes to measuring the impact of their volunteering than smaller organisations. This does not suggest, however, that all large organisations are influenced by such metrics nor does it suggest that no small organisations are influenced by such metrics.

Volunteer respondents tended to focus on the public and personal dimensions of volunteering. 90.4% of survey respondents stated that giving back to the community (i.e. the language of public benefits) was among their primary motivations for volunteering and 17.9% stated that making friends through volunteering was among their primary motivations for volunteering (i.e. the language of personal benefits).

In our surveys, we noted only two volunteer organisations (from n = >550) who commented explicitly on the personal benefits of volunteering. The majority of organisations focus on the organisational or public benefits of volunteering, but not on the personal dimension. In our targeted focus groups, however, we noticed that nearly all volunteer organisational representatives talked about the personal dimension of volunteering in one form or another.

*"We know that volunteering is fun for our volunteers! It gives them a sense of purpose and meaning."*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Auckland

*"I love it when we have our rōpū [group] and see more and more of our people coming out of their shell. ... I enjoy what volunteering does for the rest of us and what it does to them as well."*

– Māori Focus Group Participant, West Coast

Volunteering impact and benefits are not one-dimensional, as our analysis highlights. The impact is multifaceted, with personal, organisational and public dimensions.



*Helen, volunteering in the WCM Social Supermarket assisting shoppers with their groceries.*



*Suzanne, volunteer barista serving professional coffees in the WCM Community Lounge*





*Brendon helping to provide food and connection to all manuhiri in the WCM Community Lounge*

## Right time, right place for The Mission

“If you’ve got the time, I’ve got the place,” is Kara Sage, Volunteer Manager at Wellington City Mission’s mantra.

And with a target to expand The Mission’s 150-strong volunteer base to 1000 by 2024 when its new building is due for completion, she needs to be flexible and inclusive.

“We’ll be in a much bigger space, operating 24/7, and some aspects will be entirely volunteer run. My focus is on building our volunteer pool in the community and if anyone has time to spare or skills to share, I can utilise them,” she says.

This will not be an insurmountable challenge for The Mission – it has already taken big strides in inclusion. In recognition that it would not exist without volunteers, management always name “staff and volunteers” as part of the one team; and training is available to all.

The Mission lives its value of being open to anyone and everyone being treated with dignity. Volunteers come from diverse backgrounds – and those with lived experience are welcomed.

“People we have walked alongside often want to give back. They are so grateful they choose to volunteer. Having had lived experience really helps them relate to our manuhiri/ service users.”

Kara says it’s often the little, everyday things that show volunteers are effective. Like welcoming visitors by name, which builds relationships and community. Volunteers get so much satisfaction from their interactions and stop seeing people as different, but all part of the community.

The impact of the Covid pandemic, changing alert levels and restrictions was significant for The Mission. Through it all, they managed to keep their services going and their volunteers engaged.

“Post-Covid, I’ve felt a shift. More people want to give back, and flexible working has allowed people the space for volunteering. I’ve also had more University-aged students volunteering. They give me such a lift – they’re smart, and self-aware. It changes the vibe having younger people around.”

## FOUR

# Recognising and valuing volunteers and volunteering

Recognising volunteers and valuing volunteering is often seen as a complex endeavour, fraught with competing considerations. On the one hand, volunteering is seen as a commitment of time and effort requiring no further recognition other than the satisfaction of helping a fellow human being. On the other hand, volunteering often involves calls on one's time and efforts that go above and beyond what is ordinarily expected.

Volunteers' and organisations' attitudes differ when it comes to reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses incurred while undertaking volunteering activities. Some volunteers see these expenses (such as fuel) as part and parcel of what they are contributing, while others consider them as incidental to their core contribution, which is their time and effort.

Some organisations have a formalised system to process and consider out-of-pocket expense claims, some have a more informal system of reimbursement, while others have no such systems at all. 25.3% of volunteering organisations report that they do not reimburse their volunteers for any out-of-pocket expenses incurred during their volunteering activities. 31.4% reimburse their volunteers for some out-of-pocket expenses and 43.3% (the majority) reimburse volunteers for all their volunteering-related out-of-pocket expenses.

These differing attitudes to reimbursement are reflected in views about the aptness of formal recognition of volunteering. Some organisations regularly nominate volunteers for national awards and honours, while others do not even know about the existence of such recognition mechanisms. Almost all volunteers acknowledge that it is nice to be appreciated and recognised, but what form this recognition takes is an open question. Many volunteers spoke about the importance of small gestures to show appreciation.

*"You could offer them a cup of tea and a chocolate biscuit; ask them how their day is."*

– Māori Focus Group Participant

*"Being thanked for my service is acknowledgement enough. The satisfaction of helping a fellow human being is the biggest reward for me."*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Wairarapa

*"They don't want a QSM [Queen's Service Medal] they just want somebody to say 'hey, you did a good job today! I'm really proud of you, thank you very much for doing that!'. They don't need the QSM; let's forget that and just give them the kōrerō."*

– Māori Focus Group Participant

One senior leader spoke about the way volunteering accolades are inherently individualistic and the way she is uncomfortable about this diminishing the accomplishments of her team:

*“A team supports you and you don’t do it alone. I’m very uncomfortable when it’s just coming one way, when you want the accolades to go towards the whole Kaupapa of what it is that you’re doing. I do say when people come up and say, ‘hey, I didn’t get here on my own, there was a team of us. I just happen to be the one talking, you know?’”*

– Māori Focus Group Participant

This reluctance to accept formal accolades was echoed by other respondents, who pointed to the tension between the selflessness of volunteering and the grandiose nature of formal awards.

*“I’m not sure how I feel about volunteering awards. We all do it because we want to and because we don’t expect anything back. Awards, I don’t know, are kind of in tension with that sentiment.”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Dunedin

Others, however, were more forthright with the importance of recognising volunteers in formal and informal ways. Some volunteers emphasised the importance of honouring those who gave their time and expertise through awards. A few people voiced support for the use of discount schemes to recognise volunteers.

Respondents noted that recognising volunteering and volunteerism more generally, beyond recognising individual volunteers, is a much more mixed story of success and failure. Key stakeholders from the community and voluntary sector tend to echo sentiments that volunteering is undervalued and unappreciated.

*“I feel like people still see volunteering as something not valuable and not worth appreciating. They take volunteers for granted.”*

– Charity Director, Auckland

*“The government should promote the value of volunteering and introduce better benefits and policies for volunteers.”*

– Community Leader, Whangarei

## Helping people grow

### **Gemma Young is a student at Victoria University of Wellington, and a volunteer.**

“What motivates me to volunteer is to give back to the community and the desire to help people. Through my experiences I have always met great people, and this motivates me to keep volunteering as I know I’m coming into great communities.

“I do most of my volunteering through Wellington Plus at Victoria University. They always show they value all of the students in the programme as they know the hard work we put into it. I volunteer as a netball coach – it makes me especially proud that I help the players grow not only in their netball skills but as people too. My drive to help others is what keeps me going, not to be acknowledged per se.”

## FIVE

# The impact of COVID-19 on volunteers and volunteering (and lessons from COVID-19)

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a significant disruptive force for most volunteers and volunteering organisations. Covid-19 has had a dual impact on both volunteers and volunteering organisations. The responses received from surveys, stakeholders and focus group participants lends itself to two main themes: the impact of Covid-19 on service provision and volunteering practice (i.e. the organisational lens) and Covid-19 as a disruptor of volunteering relationships and the volunteering experience (i.e. the volunteer lens).

### Direct impact of Covid-19 on service provision and volunteering practice (organisational lens):

Covid-19 has generally had a negative impact on volunteering organisations' impact and ability to deliver services, though there are important exceptions. Around 84.3% of volunteering organisations noted that Covid-19 and the associated regulations negatively impacted their services to a significant or very significant degree. The two most common negative impacts identified were having to suspend volunteering programmes during the height of the lockdowns and having to adhere to Covid-19 regulations. The latter has had a notable impact on volunteering numbers for some organisations, with several respondents noting that the vaccine mandate has led to the loss of volunteers reluctant to get vaccinated. Most respondents, however, did not frame the loss of unvaccinated volunteers as a negative issue:

*"Of course, it is never nice to lose volunteers, but I would rather have volunteers who care enough looking after our vulnerable by getting vaccinated than having more [unvaccinated people] on board simply to make up volunteer numbers."*

Volunteer Manager, Auckland

Despite the overwhelming majority of respondents supporting the importance of Covid-19 regulations, adhering to these regulations was nevertheless identified as a significant burden that affected service delivery. The regulations introduced additional burdens such as checking vaccine mandates and providing personal protective equipment (such as face coverings and hand sanitisers). One organisation who had limited facilities noted that physical distancing and venue capacity rules meant that they could not fit all their people in the space they had available. This introduced a significant barrier to delivering their services.

Many organisations (65.3% of respondents) noted that Covid-19 has reduced or significantly reduced their funding streams. Organisations who run charity shops, in particular, noted that Covid-19 has had a significant impact on their revenue streams as a result of regulations forcing shop closures and ongoing Covid-19 anxiety reducing foot traffic through their stores. Those who relied on face-to-face fundraising efforts also noted a significant decrease of revenue for frontline services.



A concise summary of the negative impacts of Covid-19 is provided by a volunteer manager:

*“We had to cancel all our events over the last 18 months including our annual appeals, which reduces our profile in the community and lessens the money. Health concerns are putting off volunteers from being involved. Lack of face-to-face interactions with staff, volunteers and community reduces connections, motivation and resilience.”*

– Volunteering Manager, Dunedin

A significant minority of organisations noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the impact of their programmes. Many organisations specialising in mental health and disaster relief, in particular, noted a significant demand for their services together with increased media attention (which they note translated to increased donations). The Covid-19 pandemic also resulted in the creation of new organisations to respond to the needs of the community. One organisation, for example, pivoted from a general social assistance scheme to one that volunteered childcare services for the children of essential workers who needed to work during the pandemic.

*“We were lucky to be one of the few organisations that saw our revenues and impact increase hugely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We had media coverage early on which resulted in a huge run of donations and which then allowed us to increase the provision of our services.”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Auckland

It is interesting to note that organisations that reported using an electronic system for managing their volunteers and volunteering activities were much less likely to report Covid-19 having had a very significant negative on their services compared to those organisations that did not have an electronic system for managing volunteers and volunteering activities.

## **Covid-19 as a disruptor of volunteer relationships and connections; polarisation and division from vaccinations and government regulations (volunteer lens).**

Covid-19 and the associated regulations has had a disruptive influence on the volunteering experience and volunteering practice more generally.

The relational aspect of volunteering, explored earlier, was one of the most notable changes:

*“The elbow [as a replacement for the traditional handshake] and all the other things we are trying to put into place to, not maybe replace it, but just to navigate that way through there...It just is not the same. It’s just not the same.”*

– Māori Focus Group Participant, Auckland

Negative impacts of Covid-19 on volunteers include not being able to go out and volunteer due to restrictions or isolation requirements, having their volunteering workloads increased as a result of Covid, and general anxiety about being in contact with people and contracting Covid. Respondents over 65 years of age (the modal group for age in the volunteer survey), were twice as likely to report that concerns about Covid-19 had stopped them from volunteering in the previous four weeks compared to those under 65 years of age.

Frustration with the regulations was a common theme among many groups:

*"I also feel that sometimes we don't like the rules....and if we want to feed and take our whānau kai or support our whānau, we do it. Even if we might be breaking some law, or the bloody covid mandate. When we see our whānau needing help, we're not going to wait around to be given permission, I think in some cases we just go and awhi [hug] them because that's how we roll, that's what we do."*

– Māori Focus Group Participant, Auckland

Many participants, despite supporting the general approach of mandating vaccines, nevertheless noted that they have resulted in much polarisation and angst among different factions of their organisation. This has introduced an aspect of negativity to the volunteering experience, with a usually social place turned into a more prescriptive environment with stricter rules.

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on both volunteers and volunteering organisations, though the nature of this impact is diverse in form.







*Annette Wilkinson with (left) Sophie, a Graduate Paramedic, and receiving a Minister of Health Volunteer Award from Minister Andrew Little.*

## Friends become part of the family

Annette Wilkinson established the Hato Hone St John Friends of the Emergency Department (FEDs), at Hutt Hospital five years ago – and she’s still going strong as an unpaid coordinator. She also volunteers for at least two shifts each week herself.

“I’ve got a great team of 55 volunteers, aged between 19 and 82. The hospital staff are very supportive – we were stood down at one stage during the lockdowns and they kept asking, ‘when are you coming back?’ We help keep their morale up as well.”

The FEDs, as the volunteers are known, don’t help medically or clinically; their role is to provide comfort, reassurance and help with patients and their support people who come to the emergency department.

The volunteers talk and listen with people who are in a stressful situation and may have a long wait. The reward is the thanks and recognition – sometimes months or years later – from patients who appreciate someone who is there for them. The Friends have been nominated for awards, and regularly attend the hospital’s Christmas lunch where they are served by the staff.

“We are treated as part of the Emergency Department family. I really enjoy my role, making a difference for volunteers, patients and staff.”

## SIX

# Diversity and inclusion in volunteering theory and practice

The state of volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand continues to indicate challenges in creating a diverse and inclusive volunteering workforce.

Among White/Pakehā respondents, 84.1% Agree or Strongly Agree that they belong in the organisation they volunteer for. This figure is 82.3% for those who identified as Māori or Pacific Islanders, 80.3% for Indian or South Asian, and 79.5% for Chinese. Note that these data are likely to be subject to selection and sampling bias, as the surveys target those who are still involved in their organisations, and this will tend to track those who are satisfied enough to remain with their organisation. This bias would be present in all groups surveyed. Nevertheless, the figures are statistically significant and further comments in the qualitative responses provided by participants highlight room for improvement in the area of inclusion.

60.1% of organisation leaders report that their organisation has a diversity and inclusion strategy, while another 17.9% have concrete plans to create one. 22% of respondents stated that their organisation has no concrete plans or interest in creating one.

There is a noticeable disconnect between organisation leaders who report that their organisations reflect the diversity of people in New Zealand and the responses of those who participated in our focus groups. When volunteers from these organisations were asked about diversity and inclusion, their responses did not suggest an improvement in feeling like they belonged or feeling like they are valued over those from organisations without a diversity and inclusion strategy ( $p = .097$ ). This highlights that volunteers' experiences of diversity, inclusion and belonging does not necessarily track an organisation having a diversity and inclusion strategy or not.

One focus group participant from an organisation who reported having a diversity and inclusion strategy noted the following:

*“The issue with diversity and inclusion strategies is that they allow an organisation to wash their hands and assume they have done their due. Diversity and inclusion strategies are only the start. I have not noticed an improvement in our volunteering culture and it’s now been four years since we enacted our diversity and inclusion strategy.”*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Auckland

An influential Māori volunteering leader noted that there is a ‘tick-box’ mentality present in some organisations who have enacted diversity and inclusion policies, triggering responses from others that there is often an element of tokenism involved in improving diversity rates in volunteering:

*“[It’s just a] tick box, right? Not being able to feel like that you’re actually giving meaningful contribution, and that they are respecting it.”*

– Māori Focus Group Participant, Christchurch



*"It's hard to change us from 'data' to just people. Yeah... just be ourselves and open and open-hearted and stuff."*

– Māori Focus Group Participant, Northland

Our focus groups also highlighted examples of diverse and inclusive practice in volunteering, which serve as exemplars for the sector:

*"It's not perfect, but there have been some in-roads made as a result of the changing social norms and expectations around how we treat diverse populations."*

– Youth Focus Group Participant, Wellington

## Making volunteering accessible to all

Organisations in need of volunteers should be open to accept people of all abilities, says long-time volunteer Tegan Crotty.

Tegan has been volunteering at the Red Cross charity shop in Te Awamutu for 11 years and is also an athlete leader with Special Olympics New Zealand.

Tegan, who uses a wheelchair, says the only thing that would prevent her from volunteering is accessibility.

She became an athlete leader for Special Olympics in 2019 after being a Special Olympics swimmer.

I recently became a member of the Asia Pacific Leadership youth council. It's an amazing role which brings together people with different ideas from different participating countries.



*"I've learnt over time that everybody is different. What I've found is when people have seen us at swim meets, they realise, 'I can do that too' – people with and without disabilities."*

Volunteering gives Tegan the opportunity to show who she is.

*"It lets people know, yes I have a disability but it's not stopping me from working. I can drive to work, and show that everyone can do what they want, there are no restrictions."*

*"My disability is not the whole picture, just one aspect of who I am. I can be whoever I want to be, my disability doesn't stop me."*

# Conclusion

This report has highlighted and explored voices across the community and voluntary sector ranging from grassroots volunteers, managers of volunteers, directors of organisations, thought leaders in volunteerism, and other stakeholders. These findings have important implications for volunteering practice.

Volunteering New Zealand envisages further sub-reports to be published in due course, exploring further themes, and providing further insights. Five general lessons from this report are outlined below, to get the sector started in thinking about how to continue to make the community and voluntary sector effective, equitable, relevant, and impactful:

## **1. The community and voluntary sector as a whole should continue to invest in research in volunteering, especially in understanding what motivates people to volunteer and what barriers they face.**

The voices of the volunteering sector, from frontline volunteers to key stakeholders, provide an invaluable source of information about the state of the sector. Those who manage volunteers need support to create enabling environments for all volunteers to participate and thrive. Organisations should continue to campaign for access to funding, resources, and data.

## **2. Volunteers should understand their own values and the value they can bring to organisation before committing, ensuring that these are mutually compatible. It is vital to know when to walk away if it is not working for either party.**

Volunteering is not a one-way street, and volunteers should ensure that they are volunteering for an organisation that reflects their values, appreciates their skills and experiences, and values their time and commitment. Participants from the State of Volunteering research recommend thoroughly researching the organisation first, talking to current and previous volunteers who have worked with the organisation, speaking to service users and those the organisation helps, volunteering for a few sessions before making a more serious and longer-term commitment, and knowing when to walk away from a volunteering opportunity if it is not right for either party.

## **3. Organisations should focus on making their volunteering environment caring, inclusive, and conducive to attracting and retaining talent from all walks of life.**

Findings from this Report show that there is no single way to achieve this. Promoting diversity and inclusion is more than merely making formal commitments and developing strategies; it is about developing a welcoming, caring and inclusive ethos and volunteering environment.

Organisations can do this in many ways, including advertising volunteering opportunities widely (through multiple channels that reach a wide audience); hosting regular 'thank you' morning/afternoon teas to promote whakawhanaungatanga and boost morale; considering reimbursing volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the course of volunteering; mandating diversity, inclusion and unconscious bias training for all volunteers; and establishing effective channels for grievances and complaints.

**4. Organisations need to balance their activities between general day-to-day management, strategy and planning, and engagement with the wider sector. Smaller organisations, in particular, should pay attention to opportunities to think about broader and longer-term strategies to ensure they can continue to be effective.**

Organisations that reported the best performance and engagement had effective grassroots leadership, sound strategies in place for managing volunteers, and a wide range of skills and experiences (including in strategy and fundraising) reflected at all levels of the organisation.

**5. The community and volunteering sector should acknowledge the changing patterns and nature of volunteering, and remain open-minded to other conceptions of volunteering (including mahi aroha and volunteering in the digital space).**

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on volunteering practice, affecting previously accepted norms and patterns of work. Organisations and volunteers alike need to acknowledge the possibility of ongoing disruptions and changing conceptions in the volunteering sphere, not only from Covid-19 but from other social forces at play. These include the growing digital realm, and the way this is changing what volunteering looks like.

Digital volunteering, including assistance provided through online means, is in its relative infancy but participants in our survey focus groups have mentioned that they see this as a space to watch. The sector should therefore be prepared to revisit its traditional conceptions of volunteering, in order to remain socially relevant and impactful.

## Recommendations: Looking to the future

Volunteering is at the heart of communities, and is central to communities identifying and responding to their own challenges and opportunities. It is in itself an act of self-determination.

Significant potential exists to better enable volunteering.

Looking to the future, to achieve the change we want to see, we urge decision makers to:

1. Make volunteering a cross portfolio issue within government, and a commit to strategic investment that builds common infrastructure, capacity and capability.
2. Recognise and support the critical role that volunteering plays in bringing together and nurturing flourishing, resilient communities.
3. Recognise the vital role of volunteer managers and leaders, and recognise that there is no volunteering without leadership. Resourcing, training and recognising volunteer managers will enable robust volunteer engagement practices and lead to impactful volunteering.
4. Create enabling spaces for volunteers, where everyone who wants to can volunteer on their terms. This includes minimising unreasonable barriers to participation.
5. Support greater investment in technology and volunteer management platforms and tools and encourage innovation within voluntary organisations.
6. Grow public recognition of volunteering diversity, impact and contribution to social cohesion, wellbeing and communities.



**Tūao Aotearoa**  
Volunteering New Zealand

**Arataki | Hāpai | Whakamana**  
**Lead. Advocate. Recognise.**

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