THE BAGSFULL APPROACH

Creating Conversations with Young People about Volunteering.



HBNC
Creating Connected Communities

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A conversational toolkit for walking alongside young people in volunteering spaces - centering their voice, strengths and lived experience.



This toolkit is designed to be used alongside Find Your Place: A Young Person's Guide to Volunteering with Purpose.

The Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia and pays our respects to Elders past and present.

About This Resource

The BAGSFULL Approach: Creating Conversations with Young People About Volunteering has been developed by Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre (HBNC) to support volunteer coordinators, educators and community facilitators to engage young people in meaningful conversations about volunteering.

Designed as a practical four-hour workshop toolkit or broken up into smaller one-hour sessions over four weeks, it provides conversation starters, interactive activities, reflection questions and facilitation guidance to help young people explore their interests, recognise their strengths, identify barriers and discover ways to contribute to their communities.

This conversation toolkit is designed to be used alongside Find Your Place: A Young Person's Guide to Volunteering with Purpose. While facilitators use The BAGSFULL Approach to guide discussions and activities, young people use their own Find Your Place workbook to record their ideas, explore volunteering opportunities, reflect on their experiences and plan their next steps.

Together, the two resources create a supported pathway from conversation to action, placing young people's voices, choices and lived experiences at the centre of their volunteering journey.

The activities are flexible and can be adapted to suit different ages ranging from 12 - 21 years old, abilities, group sizes and community settings.



How the Two Resources Work Together

The BAGSFULL Approach — For Facilitators
Facilitators use this toolkit to guide conversations, deliver interactive activities, encourage reflection and help young people explore what volunteering could look like for them.

Find Your Place — For Young People
Young people use their own Find Your Place: A Young Person's Guide to Volunteering with Purpose workbook to record their interests, identify strengths, explore community opportunities, reflect on their experiences and plan their next steps.

Together, these resources create a practical pathway from conversation to discovery to action. However, they can also be used separately.

What We Hope to Achieve
Through the BAGSFULL activities, young people will be supported to:

- Discover their interests, strengths and what matters to them.
- Understand the different ways they can contribute to their community.
- Identify barriers to participation and explore possible solutions.
- Build confidence, connections and a sense of belonging.
- Explore volunteering opportunities that suit their interests and circumstances.
- Make their own choices and identify a practical next step towards volunteering.

Starting with a Conversation

Every young person has something to contribute. Sometimes, all it takes is the right conversation to help them discover where they belong.

Research tells us that young people are not necessarily less interested in contributing to their communities. Instead, the way they volunteer is changing. The Reimagining Volunteering for Youth-Led Futures literature review identified several important findings: Young people are still contributing. Their participation increasingly includes informal volunteering, peer support, advocacy, digital activities and short-term community projects that traditional volunteering measures may overlook.

Barriers are often structural, not motivational. Cost-of-living pressures, transport, competing commitments, complicated processes and inflexible volunteering roles can prevent young people from getting involved. Voice and choice matter. Young people need opportunities to influence decisions, contribute ideas and participate in ways that reflect their interests and strengths.

Belonging builds participation. Feeling welcomed, respected and connected creates stronger foundations for meaningful community involvement.
These findings challenge us to think differently about how we engage the next generation of volunteers. Rather than beginning with “What do we need young people to do?”, we can begin by asking:

“What matters to you? What are you good at?
What would you like to change in your community?”

This is the purpose of The BAGSFULL Approach. It provides volunteer coordinators, educators and facilitators with practical activities and conversation starters to better understand young people, recognise the experiences and strengths they bring, explore opportunities together and support them to make their own choices.

Used alongside the Find Your Place workbook, these conversations help young people move from discovering their interests to identifying meaningful opportunities and taking their first steps into volunteering.

Our role is not to decide where young people fit.
It is to listen, open doors and help them find their own place.

FROM THE RESEARCH

“Measuring Participation Through Outdated Models Risks Misunderstanding An Entire Generation”
Reimagining Youth Volunteering

The facilitator’s guide was developed from an in-depth literature review exploring best practice approaches to engaging young people in volunteering and community-based settings.

Drawing on research across youth development and trauma-informed practice, the BAGSFULL framework brings together evidence-based insights with practical application.

This Conversational Toolkit reflects consistent findings that young people are more likely to engage and thrive when their voice, autonomy, and lived experience are genuinely valued, and when environments are safe, accessible, and strengths-focused.

Three practical principles:

1. Listen before designing
2. Remove barriers
3. Support youth-led decisions.



WHAT IS THE BAGSFULL APPROACH?



Be Authentic

Show up real - young people connect with honesty,
not perfection.



Accessibility

Make it easy for young people to show up, feel welcome, and actually be part of it.



Growth

Create space for young people to learn, try, fail and build confidence over time.



Safety and Stability

Build environments where young people feel safe, respected, and know what
to expect,



Freedom and **U**nderstanding

Give young people real choice and take time to genuinely understand
their world.



Lived Experience and **L**istening

Value what young people have been through and actually listen when
they speak.

The BAGSFULL Philosophy

Every young person arrives carrying a bag full of experiences, strengths, hopes, challenges and untapped potential. Some carry confidence, others uncertainty. Some carry skills, while others carry barriers that are not immediately visible.

The role of organisations is not to empty those bags or replace them. It is to create environments where young people can unpack their strengths, develop new skills, build meaningful relationships and leave carrying even more confidence, purpose and belonging than when they arrived.

By being Authentic, creating Accessibility, supporting Growth, providing Safety & Stability, encouraging Freedom, showing Understanding, valuing Lived Experience and practising Listening, organisations create the conditions where young people can thrive and where volunteering becomes a powerful pathway for stronger individuals, stronger organisations and stronger communities.

BAGSFULL reminds us that every young person has something valuable to bring. Our job is to create the environment where they feel safe enough to unpack it.

The aim is not to have all the answers. It is to ask better questions, listen carefully and help young people discover what is possible.



Understanding Generation Z

Generation Z (born approximately between 1997 and 2012) is the first generation to grow up entirely in a digitally connected world. They have never known life without smartphones, social media or instant access to information. At the same time, they have come of age during a period of significant global uncertainty, including economic instability, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, rising housing costs and increasing awareness of mental health challenges. These experiences have shaped not only how they communicate, but also how they view work, community and volunteering.

Contrary to common misconceptions, Generation Z is not less committed to helping others. Research indicates they remain highly motivated by purpose, social impact and making a meaningful contribution. However, they are less attracted to traditional volunteering models that rely on rigid schedules, lengthy commitments or hierarchical structures. Instead, they seek opportunities that are flexible, collaborative and aligned with causes they genuinely care about.

Generation Z values authenticity, inclusion and having a voice. They are more likely to engage with organisations that listen to their ideas, provide meaningful responsibility and demonstrate genuine social values rather than simply talking about them. They also expect timely communication, regular feedback and opportunities to develop new skills.

For older volunteers and organisations, understanding Generation Z is not about lowering expectations or abandoning proven practices. It is about recognising that young people have been shaped by different experiences and therefore engage differently. Flexibility should not be mistaken for a lack of commitment, and a desire for choice should not be confused with a lack of responsibility. Rather than asking Generation Z to fit into systems designed decades ago, organisations have an opportunity to redesign volunteering so that the strengths of every generation are valued. When older volunteers share their experience and wisdom, and younger volunteers bring fresh ideas, digital skills and new perspectives, volunteering becomes a powerful intergenerational partnership that benefits individuals, organisations and the wider community.



Why Youth Volunteering Looks Different Today

Volunteering has changed because young people's lives have changed. Previous generations often volunteered through long-term commitments with a single organisation, driven by duty, loyalty and tradition. While these values remain important, today's young people are growing up in a world shaped by rapid technological change, economic uncertainty, increased mental health awareness, global social movements and the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences have influenced how they connect with their communities and how they choose to contribute.

Research shows that young people remain highly motivated to create positive social change. They care deeply about issues such as climate action, mental health, inclusion, social justice and community wellbeing. However, they are more likely to engage through flexible, project-based and purpose-driven opportunities than through traditional volunteering structures. Many contribute through online communities, advocacy, peer support, fundraising, content creation and informal acts of service that are often overlooked by conventional measures of volunteering.

The challenge facing many organisations is not a lack of willing young volunteers, but a mismatch between traditional systems and contemporary expectations. Lengthy application processes, rigid volunteer roles, fixed schedules and hierarchical decision-making can unintentionally create barriers to participation. Young people are seeking environments where they are trusted, listened to and able to make meaningful contributions from the beginning. They want opportunities to develop skills, build relationships and see the impact of their efforts.

This shift also presents an opportunity for organisations supporting older volunteers. Rather than viewing generational differences as barriers, organisations can create spaces where older and younger volunteers learn from one another. The future of volunteering is not about replacing traditional models but expanding them. By embracing flexibility, shared leadership and meaningful participation, organisations can build volunteering opportunities that honour the strengths of every generation while ensuring young people feel they have a place, a voice and a future in community life.



Embracing Micro-Volunteering

Not every volunteer wants, or is able, to make a long-term commitment. Young people are balancing study, work, family responsibilities and changing schedules. This does not mean they are less committed; it means they need opportunities that fit the realities of modern life.

Micro-volunteering involves small, meaningful tasks that can be completed in a short period of time, often with little preparation or ongoing commitment. Research highlights micro-volunteering as one of the fastest-growing forms of participation because it lowers barriers to entry while allowing people to contribute in ways that suit their availability and interests.

Examples include:

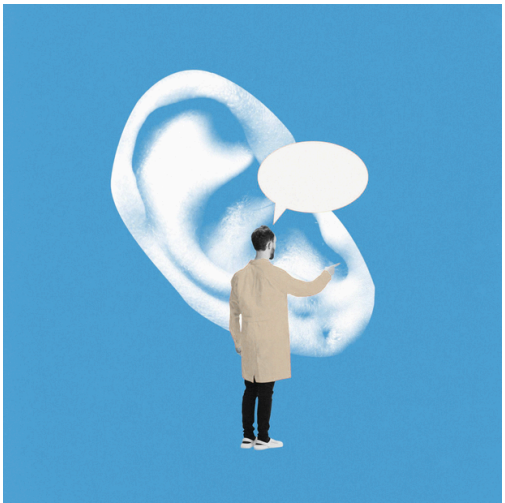
- Helping at a one-day community event.
- Creating social media content.
- Designing a poster or logo.
- Photographing an activity.
- Recording a podcast or video.
- Assisting with community gardening for an hour.
- Mentoring another young person online.
- Participating in a community clean-up.
- Sharing professional or digital skills for a short project.

Micro-volunteering should not be viewed as a lesser form of volunteering. For many young people, it is the first step towards deeper engagement. A positive short-term experience builds confidence, develops relationships and often leads to ongoing involvement.

Rather than asking:

"How can we get young people to commit?" organisations should ask, "How can we make it easy for young people to get started?"

When volunteering is flexible, purposeful and accessible, organisations create multiple entry points for participation. Every small contribution has the potential to become the beginning of a lifelong journey of community involvement.



Every generation is shaped by the world in which they grew up. While the values of service, kindness and community remain constant, the way people choose to volunteer has evolved. Understanding these differences helps organisations move beyond stereotypes and create opportunities that appeal to volunteers of all ages.

Older Volunteer Mindset	Younger Volunteer Mindset
Loyalty to organisations	Loyalty to purpose
Long-term commitment	Project-based commitment
Weekly volunteering	Flexible volunteering
Experience first	Learning first
Duty	Impact
Hierarchy	Collaboration
Stability	Exploration

Research Insight

Young people are more likely to remain engaged when they experience autonomy, meaningful relationships, flexibility and opportunities to influence decisions. Traditional measures of commitment can underestimate modern forms of participation.

“Without innovation and the implementation of evidence-informed recommendations, traditional volunteering structures risk becoming increasingly disconnected from the realities of the twenty-first century”.



Reimagining Youth Volunteering 2026

PART ONE: BAGSFULL FRAMEWORK

BE AUTHENTIC



Show up real: young people connect with honesty, not perfection.

An activity to support facilitators in showing up authentically and building genuine connections with young people.

"What I Wish I Knew at 20" Wall

Activity Objectives

By the end of this activity, participants will:

- Reflect honestly on their own lived experience as a young person.
- Recognise how systems, organisations, and adults hold power.
- Identify invisible rules young people are still expected to 'just know'.
- Build empathy for the realities young people face today.
- Shift from a deficit-based view of youth to shared responsibility.
- Identify practical changes their organisation can make.

Facilitator Intent (Important)

This is not a compliance exercise, an icebreaker, or a wellbeing activity.

It is a reflective, accountability-based exercise designed to:

- Slow adults down
- Reduce defensiveness
- Centre humility
- Create conditions for better youth engagement

Discomfort is expected. Growth often starts there.

What to Say Before the Activity - You can read this verbatim:

"This activity isn't about fixing young people or giving advice. It's about reflecting on what we learned the hard way — and what adults and systems didn't explain, model, or support when we were young. Many young people today are navigating more complex systems with fewer safety nets. This wall is an invitation to be human, not professional. Honest, not polished. If this feels uncomfortable, that's okay. That's often where learning begins."

How to Introduce the Writing Prompt

Ask participants to write one sentence starting with:

- "I wish I knew at 20 that…" OR
- "I wish someone had told me at 20…"

Reinforce: one sentence only, handwritten, anonymous.

Key Rules to Reinforce Verbally

- Speak from your own lived experience.
- No advice-giving or fixing young people.
- No professional or organisational language.
- No names, job titles, or hierarchy.
- Assume a young person will read what you write.

Examples You Can Read Aloud

- "I wish I knew adults didn't always have the answers."
- "I wish I knew it was okay to ask for help."
- "I wish I knew my job didn't define my worth."
- "I wish I knew changing direction wasn't failure."

During the Activity – Facilitator Role

- Hold the silence - don't rush participants.
- Watch for advice-style statements and gently redirect.
- Normalise discomfort without minimising it.
- Do not interpret or explain the wall for participants.

Debrief – What to Ask After

Choose a few questions depending on time:

- What patterns are you noticing?
- What keeps repeating across the wall?
- What are young people still expected to 'just know'?
- Which of these could a young person write today?
- What responsibility do we hold as an organisation?

FIND YOUR PLACE

Explore personal interests, values, strengths and motivations for volunteering.

Linking the Activity to Action

Say to the group:
"If young people are still writing these same statements today, then something in our systems hasn't changed."

Then ask:
- What policies or practices reinforce these gaps?
- Where do young people have little voice or choice?
- What is one thing we could change in the next 6–12 months?

Important Facilitator Reminder
If defensiveness, minimising, or humour shows up, gently redirect:
"This isn't about blame — it's about responsibility and learning."
Your role is to protect the intent of the activity, not to rescue discomfort.

Notes

Creating Safe and Welcoming Conversations

A Guide for Facilitators

The BAGSFULL Approach encourages young people to explore their interests, strengths, experiences and ideas about volunteering. For these conversations to be meaningful, young people need to feel safe, respected and free to participate in ways that work for them. Our role is to create a space where young people feel heard, not pressured to share.

1. Participation Is a Choice

Every young person should have control over how they participate.

- Invite participation rather than demanding it.
- Allow young people to pass on questions or activities without explanation.
- Offer different ways to contribute, including speaking, writing, drawing or simply listening.
- Avoid putting young people on the spot or asking them to speak on behalf of a particular group.
- Respect that some young people may need more time to build trust and confidence.

Facilitator reminder: Silence does not necessarily mean disengagement. Listening, observing and reflecting are also forms of participation.

2. Respect Privacy and Personal Experiences

Young people bring different backgrounds, experiences and circumstances into the room. Some may have experienced challenges that are not immediately visible.

- Do not require young people to share personal, family or traumatic experiences.
- Avoid making assumptions about their circumstances, abilities or motivations.
- Explain how information shared during activities will be used.
- Encourage respect for other people's stories and privacy.
- Never promise absolute confidentiality. Explain that information may need to be shared if someone is at risk of harm or a reporting obligation applies.

Facilitator reminder: The aim is to understand young people's perspectives, not to investigate their personal circumstances.

3. Keep Young People Safe

All activities must be delivered in accordance with your organisation's child-safety, safeguarding and reporting procedures.

Before facilitating, make sure you:

- Understand your organisation's child-safety policies and reporting responsibilities.
- Know who to contact if a young person raises a safety or wellbeing concern.
- Follow appropriate supervision, professional boundaries and communication procedures.
- Consider the safety, accessibility and suitability of the workshop environment.
- Know how to respond calmly and appropriately if a young person shares something concerning.
- If a young person discloses a safety concern, listen without judgement, avoid investigating or promising secrecy, and follow your organisation's reporting and escalation procedures.

Facilitator reminder: You are there to support the conversation, not to act as a counsellor or investigator.

4. Make Communication Accessible

Young people communicate, learn and participate in different ways. An inclusive workshop offers flexibility rather than expecting everyone to engage in the same way.

- Use clear, everyday language and explain unfamiliar volunteering terms.
- Provide visual examples, written prompts and opportunities for discussion.
- Allow time for thinking and processing.
- Be mindful of literacy, disability, neurodiversity, cultural background and language differences.
- Check understanding without embarrassing participants.
- Invite young people to identify what would help them participate comfortably.

Facilitator reminder: Ask, “What would make this activity easier for you?” rather than assuming what someone needs.

5. Listen Without Judgement
The most valuable part of the BAGSFULL Approach is not the activity itself, but the conversations it creates.

- Ask open-ended questions and listen with curiosity.
- Avoid interrupting, correcting or immediately offering solutions.
- Recognise strengths rather than focusing on perceived limitations.
- Be willing to hear ideas that challenge existing organisational practices.
- Let young people make meaningful choices about their volunteering journey.

Facilitator reminder: You do not need to have all the answers. Sometimes the most important response is, "Tell me more."

Connection before contribution.
Listening before leading.
Choice before commitment.

A successful BAGSFULL workshop is not measured by how much young people share or how many activities they complete. It is measured by whether they feel respected, supported and more confident to explore their place in the community.

Notes

ACCESSIBILITY

MAKE IT EASY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO SHOW UP, FEEL WELCOME, AND ACTUALLY BE PART OF IT.



PART TWO: BAGSFULL FRAMEWORK

Accessibility Mapping

Activity Objectives

By the end of this activity, participants will:

- Understand accessibility beyond physical access.
- Identify structural and systemic barriers young people face.
- Recognise assumptions embedded in organisational practice.
- Build empathy for young people navigating services.
- Identify realistic, actionable improvements.

Facilitator Intent

This activity is about systems, not staff performance.

It aims to shift thinking from:
'Young people don't engage' → 'Our systems may be hard to access.'

Expect defensiveness. Your role is to gently redirect toward curiosity and accountability.



What to Say Before the Activity (Script)

"Accessibility isn't just about ramps or buildings. It's about whether a young person can find us, understand us, afford us, feel safe with us, and stay engaged.

Today we're mapping our organisation through a young person's eyes - especially one with limited money, confidence, transport, or support.

This isn't about blame. It's about seeing what we might normally miss".

How to Run the Mapping

Ask participants to map the journey step-by-step:

1. Hearing about the service
2. First contact
3. Intake or sign-up
4. Ongoing engagement
5. Leaving or re-entering

Examples of Common Barriers

- Only operating during school or work hours
- Long or complex forms
- Jargon-heavy language
- Expecting parents to initiate contact
- Cost of participation or transport
- No follow-up after first contact

Part 2: What Makes It Easy or Hard to Volunteer?

Facilitator introduction
"Everyone has different things going on in their lives. Sometimes we want to get involved, but something makes it difficult. Let's look at what could help you find a volunteering opportunity that works for you."

Activity
Ask young people to write or draw responses on sticky notes under three headings:



Discuss the themes together, then invite participants to identify one opportunity they would like to explore.

Facilitator reminder: Don't promise to remove a barrier you cannot control. Explain what support is realistically available and agree on a follow-up.



Debrief Questions

- What barriers surprised you?
- Where do we unintentionally exclude young people?
- What assumptions are we making?
- Which barriers are within our control to change?

Linking to Action
Ask each group to identify:

- One short-term change (within 3 months)
- One longer-term change (policy, funding, or culture)

Facilitator Reminder
If participants become defensive, gently redirect with:

"We're not questioning intent - we're examining impact."

Notes



GROWTH

Create space for young people to learn, try, fail and build confidence over time.

PART THREE: BAGSFULL FRAMEWORK

Growth Path Design

Facilitator's Notes

Activity Objectives

By the end of this activity, participants will:
- Understand growth from a young person's perspective.
- Recognise how anxiety, confidence, and learning intersect.
- Identify unrealistic expectations placed on young people.
- Learn how to scaffold growth safely.
- Design achievable, supportive growth pathways.

Facilitator Intent: This activity challenges the assumption that growth means 'more responsibility faster'.

The goal is to reframe growth as:
- Skill development
- Confidence building
- Feeling safe enough to try

Your role is to slow people down and keep the focus on the young person.

What to Say Before the Activity (Script)
"We often talk about wanting young people to grow but rarely define what that actually looks like.

Today we're designing a growth path that starts where a young person is, not where we wish they were.

Growth doesn't mean pushing harder. It means scaffolding learning, confidence, and safety."

Case Study: Jess (17 years old)

Jess is a 17-year-old casual volunteer who has just started with your organisation. This is her first time volunteering.

- High anxiety, especially around making mistakes
- Avoids asking questions
- Reliable, shows up early
- Overthinks feedback
- Wants to do well but fears letting people down.

Slow growth is still growth, and often more sustainable.

Your task: Design a one-month growth path for Jess.

Example Growth Path (1 Month).

Week 1:
- Paired with one consistent mentor
- Clear explanation of expectations
- Shadowing only - no solo responsibility
- Daily check-in: 'What felt okay today?'

Week 2:
- One small, low-risk task independently
- Written instructions provided
- Normalise mistakes explicitly
- End-of-week positive feedback

Week 3:
- Gradual increase in responsibility
- Choice between two tasks
- Mid-week check-in focused on confidence

Week 4:
- Reflection conversation
- Identify strengths noticed
- Ask what support still helps
- Agree on next learning goal

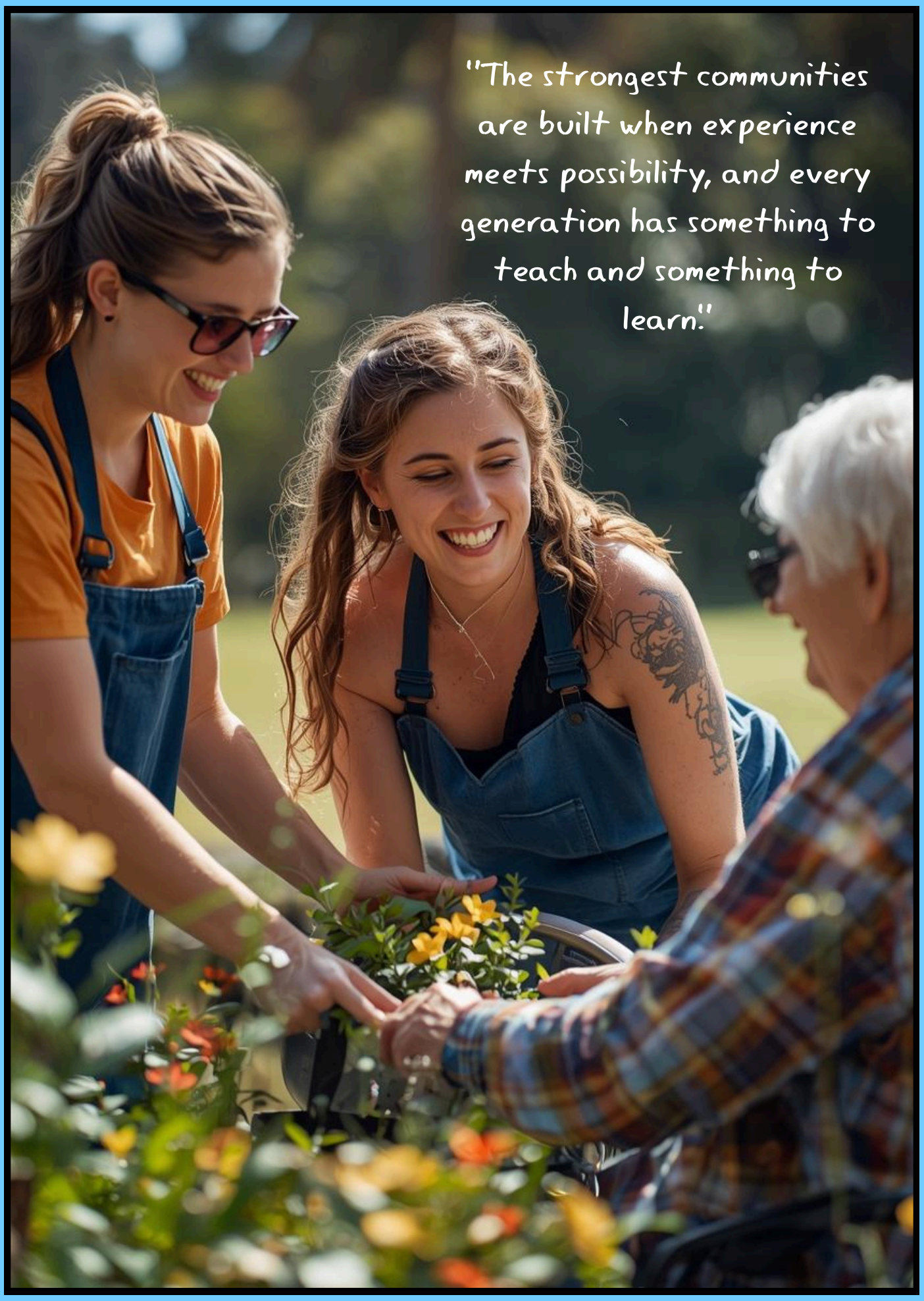
Linking Growth to Organisational Practice

Ask participants:

- Do our current induction processes allow for this?
- Where do we prioritise productivity over learning?
- What could we change to support growth better?

FIND YOUR PLACE
Identify existing skills, build confidence and set personal learning goals.




"The strongest communities are built when experience meets possibility, and every generation has something to teach and something to learn."

SAFETY & STABILITY

PART FOUR: BAGSFULL FRAMEWORK

Build environments where young people feel safe, respected, and know what to expect.



Safety & Stability: Disruption Scenarios

Activity Objectives
By the end of this activity, participants will:
- Understand safety as predictability and consistency.
- Recognise how disruptions affect young people differently to adults.
- Identify reliance on individuals instead of systems.
- See how trust is built or broken over time.
- Identify practical ways to strengthen stability.

Facilitator Intent: This activity shifts thinking from 'we didn't mean to' to 'what did it feel like?'

It helps organisations move away from personality-based safety and toward system-based stability.

What to Say Before the Activity (Script)
"Safety for young people isn't just about policies or risk management. It's about knowing what to expect, who to trust, and what happens next.

Today we're looking at moments of disruption - because that's where safety is most tested. This isn't about blame. It's about learning what young people experience when things change.



Scenarios

Scenario 1: The First-Day Mix-Up
You've arrived for your first day of volunteering at a community event. The person who was supposed to welcome you isn't there. Everyone looks busy, and you're not sure where to go or what you're meant to do.

Let's talk about it:
- How might you feel in this situation?
- What could you do next?
- Who could you ask for help?
- What should the volunteer organisation have done to make your first day easier?

Key message: You should know who your supervisor or contact person is, what your role involves and where to go for help. It's okay to ask questions.

Scenario 2: Something Doesn't Feel Right
You're volunteering at a community organisation when someone asks you to complete a task you haven't been shown how to do. You're unsure whether it's safe, but you don't want to disappoint anyone or seem difficult.

Let's talk about it:
- What would you do?
- How could you explain that you're uncomfortable?
- Who could you speak to if you need support?
- What should the organisation do to make sure volunteers feel safe?

Key message: You have the right to ask for instructions, training and support. If something feels unsafe, stop and speak with your supervisor or another appropriate staff member. You don't have to take unnecessary risks to be a good volunteer.

Scenario 3: Life Gets in the Way
You've agreed to volunteer every Wednesday afternoon, but your schoolwork, job or family commitments have become harder to manage. You still want to help, but you're worried the organisation will be disappointed if you can't continue with the same hours.

Let's talk about it:
- What options might you have?
- How could you start a conversation with your volunteer coordinator?
- What could the organisation do to make volunteering more flexible?
- Are there other ways you could contribute?

Key message: Volunteering should be meaningful and manageable. Communicating early and exploring flexible options can help you stay involved without becoming overwhelmed.

How to Facilitate the Scenarios

• Read one scenario at a time.
• Allow groups time to discuss before moving on.
• Encourage groups to name emotions, not just actions.
• Bring discussions back to systems and communication.
Common Patterns to Listen For
• Sudden endings with no explanation
• Inconsistent responses to mistakes
• Silence instead of communication
• Reliance on 'good staff' rather than clear processes
• Young people blaming themselves
Debrief Questions
• Which scenario felt most uncomfortable?
• Where did trust break down fastest?
• What would help a young person feel safer in these moments?
• What consistency could we build in?

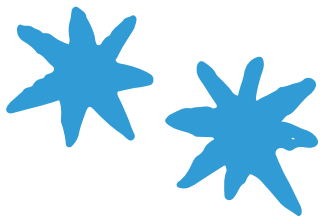
Linking to Action

Ask groups to identify:
• One thing they could make more predictable immediately
• One system or process that needs strengthening

Reinforce that stability is built through clarity and follow-through.

Facilitator Reminder
If defensiveness appears, gently say:

"We're not questioning intent — we're examining impact and consistency."



Notes

PART FIVE: BAGSFULL FRAMEWORK

FREEDOM AND UNDERSTANDING



Freedom Activity: Agency Spectrum

Activity Objectives

By the end of this activity, participants will:
- Understand freedom as agency, not lack of structure.
- Recognise how power operates in everyday decisions.
- Identify performative versus genuine youth voice.
- Learn how to share or shift decision-making appropriately.

Facilitator Intent: This activity challenges the belief that adults know best by default.

It reframes freedom as:
- Choice
- Voice
- Control over decisions that affect you

Your role is to keep the focus on power, not comfort.

What to Say Before the Activity (Script)
"Young people often say they want freedom — but what they usually mean is agency. Agency is about having a real say in decisions that affect your life.

Today we're exploring where young people have choice, where it's shared, and where it's actually very limited. This isn't about removing all structure. It's about using power responsibly."



Explaining the Agency Spectrum

Low Agency:

- **Adults decide**
- **Compliance-focused**
- **Young people follow instructions**

Low Agency Questions:

- 'Here's what you need to do.'
- 'These are the rules - follow them.'
- 'We've already decided.'
- 'This is for your own good.'

Shared Agency:

- **Decisions are negotiated**
- **Young people influence outcomes**
- **Adults still hold some responsibility**

Shared Agency Questions:

- 'Here are two options — which works best for you?'
- 'What would make this feel doable?'
- 'Let's decide this together.'
- 'What support do you need to try this?'

High Agency:

- **Young people lead or choose**
- **Adults act as supporters**
- **Power is intentionally shared**

High Agency Questions:

- 'What do you want to do?'
- 'How would you like this to work?'
- 'What decision feels right for you?'
- 'How can we support your choice?'

Debrief Questions

- Where did most of our practice sit?
- Where are we comfortable sharing power?
- Where are we reluctant - and why?
- What's one decision we could shift toward shared or high agency?

How to Facilitate the Activity

- Invite groups to place real examples along the spectrum.
- Ask 'Who has the final say here?'
- Encourage reflection on why certain decisions feel risky to share.
- Remind participants that agency can be scaffolded.

Notes

Understanding Activity:
“I Didn’t Know” Listening Circle

Activity Objectives

By the end of this activity, participants will:
- Build empathy through shared lived experience.
- Recognise how misunderstanding shapes behaviour.
- Understand how power and assumptions affect young people.
- Practise deep listening without fixing.
- Reflect on how understanding can change practice.

Facilitator Intent: This activity is about understanding, not agreement.

The goal is not to compare experiences or decide whose story matters more, but to recognise that misunderstanding is common, and harmful when adults hold power.

What to Say Before the Circle (Script)
“Today we’re using a listening circle to slow down and really listen. This space is about understanding what adults didn’t see, hear, or understand about you. You don’t need to explain or justify your experience. And you don’t need to fix anyone else’s. Take your time to share an experience when you have been misunderstood and how it impacted you (emotionally, future-self, etc).”

Listening is the work here.

Explain that listening circles:
- Are non-hierarchical
- Centre respect and listening
- Honour lived experience
- Allow silence



Remind participants they may pass at any time.

Examples You Can Offer (If People Are Stuck)
- 'Adults thought I was lazy, but I was overwhelmed.'
- 'Adults didn't understand my anxiety — they saw attitude.'
- 'I didn't know how to ask for help.'
- 'I was dealing with things at home no one asked about.'
- 'I needed consistency, not lectures.'

Facilitator Role During the Circle
- Hold the boundaries of the circle
- Intervene if advice-giving or fixing starts
- Normalise silence
- Watch for emotional responses and pause if needed
- Thank participants for sharing

Debrief Questions (After the Circle)
- What stood out for you?
- What felt familiar?
- What surprised you?
- How might this show up for young people today?
- What could understanding change in our practice?

Linking Understanding to Practice

Say to the group:
"When behaviour is misunderstood, support often turns into punishment. Understanding changes how we respond."

Then ask:
- Where might we still be misunderstanding young people?
- What assumptions do we need to question?
- How can we slow down before reacting?

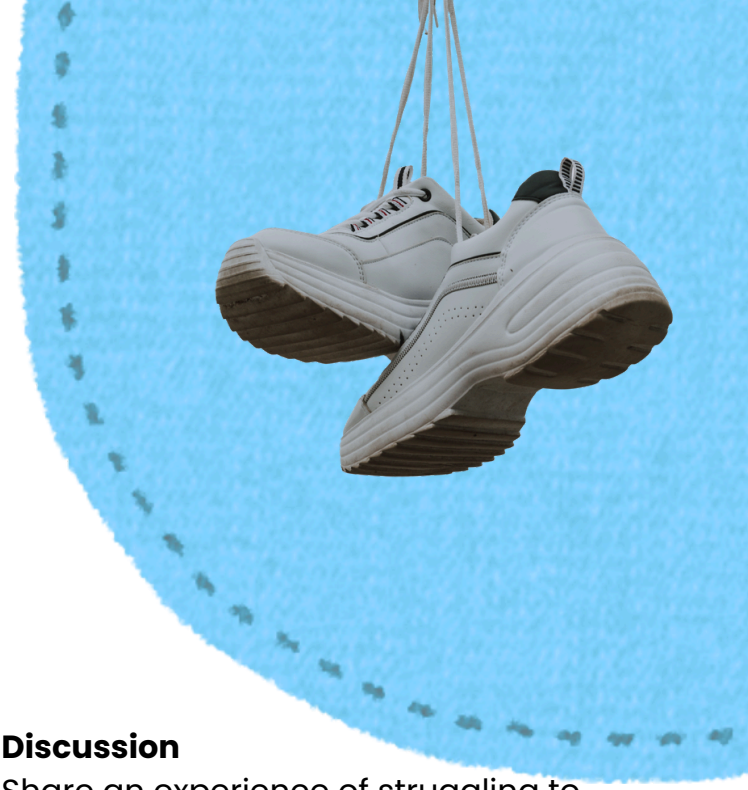
Facilitator Reminder
If emotions rise or defensiveness appears, gently ground the group by saying: *"We're here to understand, not to explain or defend."*



LIVED EXPERIENCE AND LISTENING

PART SIX: BAGSFULL FRAMEWORK

Facilitator Notes – Lived Experience: "A Day in Their Shoes"



Activity Objectives

By the end of this activity, participants will:
- Understand lived experience as ongoing and cumulative.
- Recognise invisible pressures young people navigate daily.
- Identify how systems compound stress.
- Shift from judgement to empathy.
- Reflect on how organisational practice impacts real lives.

Facilitator Intent: This activity is designed to slow people down and help them feel the weight of everyday decisions young people must make within constrained systems.

What to Say Before the Activity (Script)
"Lived experience isn't one story someone tells once. It's what a person carries into every room, form, conversation, and decision."

Today we're stepping into a composite young person's experience - not to judge their choices, but to understand the context around them.

How to Facilitate the Walkthrough
- Move step-by-step through the day.
- Introduce system interactions gradually.
- Encourage naming emotions as well as actions.
- Pause groups that rush to solutions.

Discussion
Share an experience of struggling to engage in an activity. What barriers did you face? Eg: costs, transport, forms, etc.

System Encounter Examples
- Letter with formal language
- Missed call from an unknown number
- Roster change with short notice
- Online form asking complex questions
- Being told to 'advocate for yourself'

Key Insight Moment
Ask: 'How might the system interpret this behaviour?'

Then: 'What is the system missing about this young person's lived experience?'

Debrief Questions
- What felt hardest?
- Where did pressure stack up?
- What assumptions were made?
- How might this change our practice?

Facilitator Reminder
If judgement appears, gently redirect: *"Let's stay with understanding before solutions."*

Facilitator Notes – Listening: Community Lunch Model

Objectives

By implementing this model, organisations aim to:
- Demonstrate genuine listening in action
- Build trust with young people
- Reduce extractive engagement practices
- Hear unfiltered experiences and insights
- Model respectful community development principles

Facilitator Intent: The intent is not to walk away with answers.

The intent is to walk away changed.

What to Say When Inviting Young People
We'd like to invite you to lunch with us. There's no agenda and nothing you need to prepare. We're not asking you to fix anything — we just want to listen and learn. Your time and voice matter to us.

What to Say at the Start of the Lunch
"Thank you for being here. Today is about listening, not responding. You don't need to educate us or find solutions. We'll take time after today to reflect on what we've heard."



Listening Guidelines for Staff

- Listen without interrupting
- Do not correct or clarify
- Do not defend or explain
- Notice emotional responses internally
- Thank young people for sharing

After the Lunch (Critical Step)

Organisations should:

- Debrief internally
- Identify themes, not quotes
- Reflect on power and assumptions
- Decide what can change
- Report back to young people on what was heard and what action followed

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- Turning listening into consultation
- Asking young people to justify experiences
- Making promises on the spot
- Treating lunch as a one-off
- Failing to follow up

Facilitator Reminder: If staff feel uncomfortable or defensive, remind them: *"Listening is not passive — it is a practice that requires restraint."*

FIND YOUR PLACE

Use the Community Field Journal to explore local needs, listen to others and imagine solutions.





Organisational Readiness Checklist

Is Your Organisation Ready for the Next Generation of Volunteers?

Creating meaningful opportunities for young people starts with organisational readiness. While many organisations are eager to engage young volunteers, traditional systems, policies and assumptions can unintentionally create barriers to participation. This checklist is designed to help organisations reflect on their current practice and identify practical actions that make volunteering more accessible, inclusive and engaging for today's young people.

Instructions: Rate each statement with feedback from young people where possible who have experienced your organisation using the following scale:

Always (3)
Sometimes (2)
Rarely (1)
Not Yet (0)

Leadership & Culture
□ Young people are viewed as partners rather than recipients or helpers.
□ Our leaders actively champion youth participation.
□ Young people are included in organisational planning and decision-making.
□ We value new ideas, even when they challenge existing ways of working.
□ We celebrate the contributions of young volunteers equally alongside long-term volunteers.

Recruitment & Accessibility
□ Our volunteer opportunities are easy to find online.
□ Volunteer role descriptions are written in clear, youth-friendly language.
□ We offer flexible volunteering options (events, projects, online, etc)
□ Young people can express interest without completing lengthy forms.
□ Transport, cost and time barriers have been considered.
□ We actively recruit through schools, universities, social media and youth networks.

Induction & Belonging
□ Young volunteers receive a welcoming and supportive induction.
□ Every new volunteer has a nominated mentor or buddy.
□ Expectations are explained clearly without jargon.
□ Young people know who they can ask for help.
□ We intentionally create opportunities for young people to build friendships.

Voice & Participation

□ Young people are regularly asked for feedback.
□ Their ideas influence how programs are delivered.
□ Young people help design volunteer roles and activities.
□ Volunteers are involved in solving problems rather than simply following instructions.
□ Volunteers are given opportunities to learn new skills.
□ Mistakes are treated as learning opportunities.
□ Feedback is regular, constructive and encouraging.
□ Volunteers can explore different roles as their confidence grows.

Intergenerational Practice

□ Older and younger volunteers work together on projects.
□ Older volunteers understand the strengths of Generation Z.
□ Young people are recognised for the skills they bring, including digital knowledge and creativity.
□ Mentoring is viewed as a two-way learning relationship.

Communication

□ We communicate using the platforms young people actually use.
□ Information is timely and easy to understand.
□ We explain why a task matters, not just what needs to be done.
□ Young volunteers receive regular recognition and encouragement.

Flexibility

□ Volunteers can choose opportunities that fit around study, work and family commitments.
□ It is acceptable for volunteers to step away and return later.
□ We offer one-off and project-based volunteering opportunities.
□ We recognise online and digital volunteering as valuable contributions.
□ We focus on impact rather than hours served.

Safety & Wellbeing
□ Young people know what support is available.
□ Staff and volunteers understand trauma-informed practice.
□ Expectations and boundaries are clear.
□ Volunteers feel emotionally and physically safe.

Recognition & Impact
□ Young people understand the difference their contribution makes.
□ Success is measured by learning, confidence and belonging—not just volunteer hours.
□ We celebrate achievements in meaningful ways.
□ Volunteers can see how their ideas have influenced the organisation.
□ We regularly review our volunteering practices with young people.

Scoring Guide
111-138: Youth Ready
Congratulations! Your organisation has created a strong foundation for engaging the next generation of volunteers. Continue listening, adapting and innovating alongside young people.

83-110: On the Journey
Many good practices are already in place, but there are opportunities to strengthen flexibility, participation and organisational culture.

55-82: Ready for Change
Your organisation has the foundations but may still rely on traditional volunteering models. Prioritise improvements in recruitment, communication and youth participation.

Below 55: Time to Reimagine
This is an opportunity to redesign your volunteer program from the perspective of today's young people. Small changes can have a significant impact on participation, belonging and long-term engagement.

Reflection Questions

After completing the checklist, discuss as a team:

- What surprised us most?
- Which section scored the lowest?
- What is one quick win we could implement in the next three months?
- What organisational policy or practice needs to change?
- How could young people help us redesign our volunteer program?
- What would success look like in 12 months?

Remember: The question is not "Why aren't young people volunteering?" The better question is "What kind of organisation are we creating for young people to belong, contribute and grow?"

NOTES

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Building the Future, Together

Volunteering has always been about people. It is about individuals choosing to give their time, skills and energy to create stronger communities. While the world around us continues to change, this fundamental purpose remains the same.

What has changed is how young people choose to participate. The research is clear: young people are not disengaged, they are engaging differently. They are seeking purpose over obligation, flexibility over rigid commitment, and authentic relationships over traditional hierarchies. They want to contribute to causes that matter, have a voice in shaping their experiences and feel that their time genuinely makes a difference. When organisations fail to recognise these changing expectations, it is easy to conclude that young people are no longer interested in volunteering. In reality, many of our systems have simply not kept pace with the world they are growing up in.

The BAGSFULL Framework invites organisations to see youth engagement through a different lens. Rather than asking, "How do we get young people to fit into our organisation?" it asks, "How do we create an organisation where young people can belong, contribute and grow?"

Creating this shift requires more than new recruitment strategies or updated policies. It requires a willingness to listen, reflect and share power. It means recognising that every interaction with a young person is an opportunity to build confidence, strengthen community and nurture the next generation of leaders.

Importantly, this is not a journey for young people alone. Older volunteers, staff and community members bring invaluable wisdom, experience and perspective. Young people bring fresh ideas, creativity, digital capability and new ways of solving problems. Together, these strengths create organisations that are more innovative, more resilient and better equipped to respond to the challenges of the future. The most successful communities are those where every generation learns with one another, not simply from one another.

The activities throughout this guide are intended to start conversations, challenge assumptions and inspire practical change. They are not designed to provide all the answers. Every organisation is different, and the most effective solutions will be those developed alongside the young people you hope to engage. As you leave this toolkit, remember that meaningful change does not begin with a new program, it begins with a new conversation. It starts when organisations become curious instead of certain, when they choose partnership over prescription, and when they create spaces where every young person feels seen, heard and valued. The future of volunteering is not something we wait for. It is something we build together.

Notes

A Final Reflection

Before closing this toolkit, take a moment to consider:

- What is one assumption about young people that I am willing to let go of?
- What is one barrier our organisation can remove in the next three months?
- How will we involve young people in shaping the future of volunteering, rather than simply inviting them into the past?
- What strengths do our older volunteers bring, and how can we create opportunities for reciprocal learning?
- If a young person walked through our doors tomorrow, would they experience a place where they truly belong?

"Young people are not the future of volunteering, they are already shaping its future today.

Our role is not to prepare them for community. Our role is to build communities that are ready for them."



Beyond the Workshop: Turning Conversations into Action

Supporting Young People to Take Their Next Step
The BAGSFULL Approach is about more than starting conversations. It is about helping young people discover their strengths, explore possibilities and feel confident about contributing to their communities.

A successful workshop doesn't mean every young person leaves ready to volunteer. Some may be excited to get started, while others may need more time, information or encouragement.

Our role is not to rush young people into volunteering. It is to support them to take the next step that feels right for them.

Five Steps After the Workshop

1. Help Them Identify Their Next Step
Before finishing, invite each young person to identify one action they would like to take.

- This could include:
- Exploring a local volunteering opportunity.
- Finding out more about a community organisation.
- Talking with a volunteer coordinator.
- Attending a community event.
- Developing their own idea for making a difference.

Ask: “What's one small thing you'd like to explore or try next?”

Find Your Place Connection: Encourage participants to record their next step in their workbook.

2. Help Them Make Connections
Young people may know what interests them but not where to begin. Support them to find suitable opportunities through local neighbourhood centres, community groups, schools, sporting clubs, councils and volunteer organisations.

Where appropriate, help them identify a contact person, understand age requirements and prepare questions before making contact.

Ask: “Who could help you get started?”

Remember to follow your organisation's child-safety procedures and obtain any required permissions when helping young people connect with external organisations.

3. Make the First Experience Easier
A positive first experience can help build confidence and encourage ongoing participation. Before young people begin volunteering, encourage them to find out:

- Where to go and who will welcome them.
- What they will be doing.
- What to bring or wear.
- Whether training, supervision or permissions are required.
- Who to contact if they need help or their plans change.

Ask: “What would help you feel comfortable on your first day?”

4. Check In and Celebrate Progress
Where ongoing support is part of your program, arrange an appropriate follow-up with the young person. Keep it informal and supportive. Ask what they enjoyed, what they found challenging and whether they would like to continue, try something different or take a break. Recognise progress beyond the number of volunteering hours completed. Making contact, asking a question, attending an activity or discovering a new interest can all be meaningful achievements.

Ask: “What did you learn about yourself?”

5. Keep the Door Open
Not every young person will be ready to volunteer immediately, and not every opportunity will be the right fit. Let young people know that interests and circumstances change. They can explore different roles, contribute in small ways, take breaks and return when they are ready.

Ask: “What would you like to explore next?”

Facilitator follow-up checklist

1. Every young person has been invited to identify a next step.
2. Participants know where to find volunteering opportunities.
3. Any agreed introductions or referrals have been followed up.
4. Required permissions and safeguarding procedures are in place.
5. Young people have been offered an appropriate way to provide feedback.
6. Workshop feedback and improvements have been recorded.



RE-IMAGINING VOLUNTEERING

FOR YOUTH-LED FUTURES

Read the Literature Review: Re-imagining Volunteering for Youth-Led Futures

Visit HBNC to learn more about our community.



Creating Conversations
with Young People About Volunteering

Volunteering isn't disappearing. It's changing. Across Australia, organisations are asking: “Why aren't young people volunteering?” Perhaps a better question is: “Are we listening to young people and creating opportunities that reflect their interests, strengths and aspirations?”

Informed by the literature review Reimagining Volunteering for Youth-Led Futures, The BAGSFULL Approach challenges traditional assumptions about youth volunteering and provides a practical toolkit for starting meaningful conversations with young people.

Built around six evidence-informed principles: Be Authentic, Accessibility, Growth, Safety & Stability, Freedom & Understanding, and Lived Experience & Listening - this toolkit supports volunteer coordinators, educators and community facilitators to create welcoming environments where young people feel heard, valued and confident to explore how they can contribute.

Inside you'll discover:

- Practical conversation starters and interactive workshop activities.
- Tools to explore young people's interests, strengths and motivations.
- Activities that encourage listening, connection and shared understanding across generations.
- Guidance for creating safe, inclusive and supportive conversations.
- Practical ways to help young people overcome barriers and take their first steps into volunteering.

Designed to be used alongside Find Your Place: A Young Person's Guide to Volunteering with Purpose, this toolkit helps facilitators guide conversations while young people explore opportunities, record their ideas and plan their own volunteering journey. Because the future of volunteering isn't about asking young people to fit into yesterday's systems. It's about listening, opening doors and helping young people find their place in tomorrow's communities.

"Young people don't need to be convinced to care, they need opportunities where they can belong, contribute and grow. This book provides the practical roadmap every organisation needs to engage the next generation of volunteers."