FIND YOUR PLACE

Bonus
Field Journal
Included



A Young Person's Guide to Volunteering with Purpose

HBNC
Creating Connected Communities

About This Resource

This resource has been developed by the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre to support young people to find their place when volunteering in their community.

The strategies and ideas shared throughout this handbook are designed as practical starting points and should be adapted to suit the unique personal needs, communities and contexts of each organisation.

Thank you to Volunteering Queensland for supporting the development of this resource.

Proudly supported by:

Volunteering Qld

A practical guide for young people who want to make an impact in their community.

Real ways to connect, engage, and get involved in community volunteering.



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.

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Real examples and practical inspiration, with clear ways young people can participate or lead.

FIND YOUR PLACE

DISCOVER INTERESTS, FIND ORGANISATIONS, MAKE CONTACT, PREPARE FOR YOUR FIRST DAY AND REFLECT ON THE EXPERIENCE.



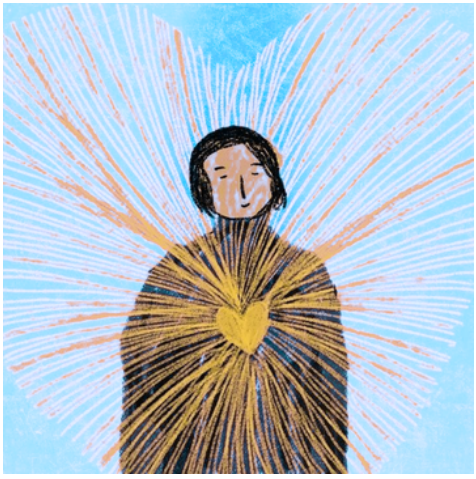
Congratulations, you've already taken the biggest step.

By picking up this guide, you've started thinking about how you can make a difference. Whether you've already volunteered or you're still deciding where to begin, remember that every journey starts with one small step.

There will be times when volunteering is exciting and times when life gets busy. That's okay. Your volunteering journey doesn't have to look the same every year. Sometimes you'll have lots of time to give, and sometimes you'll only be able to help now and then. Every contribution matters.

As you grow, your reasons for volunteering might change too. You might start by wanting to make friends, build confidence or gain experience. Later, you might volunteer because you care deeply about a cause, want to mentor others or hope to leave your community better than you found it. Keep saying yes to opportunities that challenge you. Stay curious. Learn from the people around you. Share your ideas. Celebrate your successes and don't be afraid to try something new.

Most importantly, remember that volunteering isn't about being perfect, it's about showing up, caring about others and using your strengths to make a difference.



Creating Change

Sometimes the world's problems can feel overwhelming. Climate change. Mental health. Homelessness. Loneliness. Cost of living. Bullying. It can feel like there's so much to fix that it's hard to know where to begin.

Here's the good news, you don't have to solve everything. Real change usually starts with one person noticing something that could be better and deciding to do something about it. Every community project, charity and movement began as someone's idea.

That's what this guidebook is all about. It helps young people turn ideas into action. You don't need to be an expert or have all the answers. You just need to be curious, willing to listen and brave enough to ask, "What if?"

Maybe your idea is creating a community garden, organising a beach clean-up, starting a lunch club at school, helping older people learn technology, supporting young people with their mental health or creating a fundraiser for a cause you care about.

Big change rarely happens all at once. It grows from lots of small actions taken by people who care. Don't wait until you think your idea is perfect. Start where you are, with what you have, and invite others to join you. The world doesn't need one person who can fix everything. It needs thousands of young people willing to make one thing better.



FROM THE RESEARCH

"Measuring Participation Through Outdated Models Risks Misunderstanding An Entire Generation" - Reimagining Youth Volunteering pg.12

Find Your Place was created to help you discover volunteering that feels right for you. It brings together research on youth development, wellbeing and volunteering with practical ideas to help you build confidence, develop new skills and find opportunities that match your interests and strengths.

Every young person has something valuable to offer. This guide is based on the belief that the best volunteering experiences happen when you feel heard, respected and included, where your ideas matter, your experiences are valued, and you have the freedom to learn, grow and make a real difference.

This isn't a rulebook, it's a starting point. Use it to explore your interests, discover your strengths and find your place in your community. The journey is yours to create.



HOW DO I VOLUNTEER?

It starts with one small step.
Forget having everything figured out.
Nobody wakes up knowing exactly where they want to volunteer. Most people start because they're curious, someone invited them, or they simply decided to give something new a go.

You don't need heaps of experience.
You don't need to know everyone.
You don't even need lots of free time.
You just need to start.

Step 1

Find something you care about. The best volunteering happens when it connects with what matters to you.

What catches your attention?

- 🐾 Animals
- 🌱 Environment
- 🎵 Music
- 🎨 Arts
- ⚽ Sport
- 👧 Kids
- 👴 Older people
- 🌏 Community
- 🎪 Festivals
- 🍳 Food
- 💚 Mental Health
- ✏️ Education

Circle three that interest you.



Step 2

Look around. Great opportunities are everywhere.

✔️ Neighbourhood Centres
✔️ Schools & Universities
✔️ Sporting Clubs
✔️ Local Festivals
✔️ Community Gardens
✔️ Libraries
✔️ Animal Shelters
✔️ Volunteer Queensland
✔️ Local Council

💡 *Tip: Ask someone you know.*

"Do you know anywhere I could volunteer?"



Step 3

Reach out.
You don't need a perfect email.

Try something simple like...
Hi! My name is _____.
I'm interested in volunteering and would love to know if there are any opportunities available. I'd love to learn more.

That's it.
Simple is enough.

Step 4

Ask questions.
Good organisations expect questions.

You could ask:
- ☐ What would I be doing?
- ☐ How much time is involved?
- ☐ Will someone show me what to do?
- ☐ What should I wear?
- ☐ Can I bring a friend?
- ☐ Is there any training?

Step 5

Show up.
Your first day probably won't feel perfect.

That's normal. Everyone starts somewhere.

Bring...
💧 Water
😊 A smile
🧠 Curiosity
❤️ A willingness to learn
Leave perfection at home.

Remember...
Not every opportunity will be the right fit. That's okay.

Trying something and deciding it's not for you isn't failing. It's learning.

Every experience gets you closer to finding your place.



UNLEASH YOUR INNER EXPLORER

Once there was a young person who wanted to change the world.

And at first they thought it would be easy because if everyone could see how beautiful it would be it would only take a few weeks.

But all the people they spoke with were too busy, busy, busy to stop and listen.

So they went alone and did beautiful things.

Pretty soon people were stopping and asking if they could come along and do beautiful things too.

And that is how they figured out how to change the world.

Find Your Why, Find Your Place

Volunteering isn't about ticking a box or giving up your weekends. It's about finding something that matters to you. Maybe you want to make new friends. Maybe you want experience for your future career. Maybe you're passionate about protecting the environment, supporting animals, helping younger kids or standing up for mental health. Whatever your reason, it matters.

There isn't one "right" reason to volunteer. The best volunteering experiences happen when they connect with your interests, your values and the kind of person you want to become.

You don't need to have everything figured out before you start. Sometimes your "why" grows as you try new things, meet new people and discover what you're capable of.

Ask yourself:
What do I care about enough to give my time to?

Everyone has something they can offer. You don't need years of experience, special qualifications or endless free time to make a difference.

The right volunteering opportunity is one where you feel welcomed, respected and able to be yourself. It's a place where your ideas are heard, your strengths are recognised and you're supported to learn along the way.

Your place might be helping at a community event, coaching a junior sports team, creating social media content for a charity, planting trees, walking dogs at an animal shelter or volunteering at a music festival. It might be one hour, one day or something you do every week.

There isn't one path into volunteering. There are hundreds. The important thing isn't finding the perfect opportunity - it's taking the first step.



Start Small

You don't have to commit every weekend or sign up for a year to make a difference. Volunteering today looks different to how it did for previous generations. Many young people choose flexible opportunities that fit around school, work, family and life. That's okay.

Helping at a one-day event, planting trees for a morning, taking photos for a community group, creating social media content or volunteering at a festival are all real ways to contribute. Every small step builds confidence, new skills and connections.

Some people volunteer once and discover a passion they never expected. Others try a few different opportunities before finding the right fit. There's no right way to begin. The hardest part is often taking the first step. Once you do, the next one becomes much easier. Small actions can lead to big opportunities.



Ideas to get started

□ Help at a community event
□ Join a clean-up day
□ Volunteer at a festival
□ Walk dogs at an animal shelter
□ Coach junior sport
□ Create social media or photography for a community group
□ Help in a community garden
□ Volunteer for one hour this month

Challenge

What's one small volunteering opportunity you could say "yes" to in the next four weeks?

Show Up

Showing up is often the hardest part. It's normal to feel a bit nervous before your first volunteer experience. You might wonder if you'll fit in, know what to do or meet new people. The good news is that almost everyone has felt that way at some point.

You don't need to have all the answers before you begin. Simply turning up with a positive attitude, being willing to learn and giving things a go is often the most valuable contribution you can make.

Remember, you were invited because someone believes you have something to offer. Be yourself, ask questions, get involved and don't be afraid to have a go. Every volunteer started as a beginner. Showing up isn't about being perfect, it's about being present.

Learn As You Go

Every volunteering experience is an opportunity to learn, not just about your community, but about yourself.
You'll meet people of different ages, cultures and backgrounds, each bringing their own experiences and ways of doing things. Sometimes you might notice that people from different generations approach volunteering differently. Someone who has volunteered for many years may value routine, long-term commitment and doing things a certain way. You might be looking for flexibility, new ideas and opportunities to make an impact quickly.



You already have something to offer. You don't need to be the loudest person in the room, have heaps of experience or know exactly what you're doing before you start volunteering. Every volunteer starts somewhere, and everyone learns along the way.

Maybe you're creative, good with technology, enjoy listening to people, love animals, can organise events or simply show up when someone needs a hand. These are all valuable skills.

Volunteering isn't about being perfect—it's about being willing. Don't underestimate what you can bring. Your ideas, experiences and perspective are different from everyone else's, and that's exactly what communities need.

Confidence doesn't come before volunteering. More often, it grows because you volunteered.

Remember: You don't have to know everything before you begin. You just have to believe you're worth giving it a go.

Reflection
What are three strengths you already have?

What is one new skill you'd love to build through volunteering?



"You don't have to change the world on your first day. You just have to show up. Every volunteer journey starts with one small step."

Neither approach is right or wrong— they're simply different.

One of the best parts of volunteering is learning from each other. Older volunteers can share their knowledge, life experience and practical skills, while younger volunteers often bring fresh ideas, creativity, digital skills and new ways of thinking. When everyone listens, respects each other and stays open to learning, great things happen.

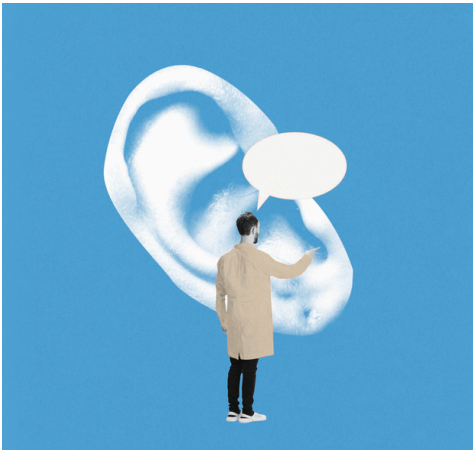
Don't be afraid to ask questions, offer ideas or try something new. At the same time, take the opportunity to learn from those who have been volunteering for years. Some of the best conversations happen when different generations work side by side.

The more curious you are, the more you'll grow.
Be confident enough to share your ideas, and humble enough to learn from others. That's how communities become stronger together.

Reflection
Think about someone from a different generation who has taught you something valuable. What did you learn?

What is one strength you could bring to a volunteer team?

What is one thing you'd like to learn from someone with more life experience?





Build Your Skills

Every time you volunteer, you're building skills that will stay with you for life. You might not even notice it at first, but every event you help at, every conversation you have and every challenge you work through helps you grow. Employers, universities and future opportunities value these experiences because they show you're willing to learn, work with others and make a positive contribution.

Volunteering isn't just about what you do, it's about who you become. You might learn how to communicate with different people, solve problems, lead a team, organise an event or think creatively. You may discover strengths you didn't know you had or find a passion that shapes your future career.

The best part? You don't need to know everything before you start. Every volunteer experience is another chance to learn something new. The skills you build through volunteering will open doors long after the volunteer role ends.

Meet Good People

One of the best things about volunteering isn't always the work you do, it's the people you meet along the way. Volunteering brings together people of different ages, backgrounds and experiences who all have something in common, they care about making a difference. Along the way you'll meet teammates, mentors, community leaders and new friends who can encourage you, challenge you and help you grow.

Some of these people may become important connections for future jobs, study or volunteering opportunities. Others might simply become people who inspire you to keep showing up.

You'll also have the chance to work alongside people from different generations. Everyone brings something valuable to the team. Older volunteers often share experience, wisdom and practical knowledge, while younger volunteers bring fresh ideas, creativity and new perspectives. When people learn from each other, everyone benefits.

The more you get involved, the bigger your community becomes. Sometimes the greatest thing you take home from volunteering isn't a certificate—it's the people you met along the way.

Reflection

Think about the kind of people you'd like to meet through volunteering.
I'd love to meet people who...
How could those connections help you grow?

YOUR COMMUNITY FIELD JOURNAL

EXPLORE THE COMMUNITY, LISTEN, IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES, IMAGINE SOLUTIONS AND TEST A SMALL PROJECT.



SECTION 1 — NOTICE

Seeing Like an Explorer

Most people walk through their town on autopilot.

Explorers slow down and really look.

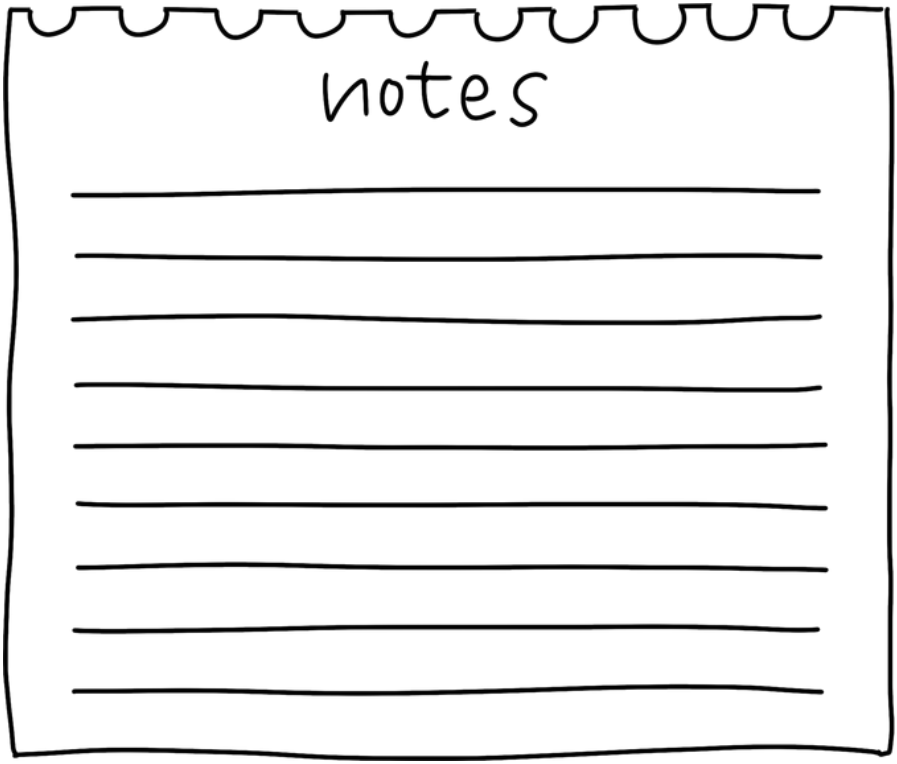


Explorer Walk Checklist

Today I noticed:

- ☐ A place where people gather
- ☐ A place that feels empty or forgotten
- ☐ Someone helping someone else
- ☐ A sign of creativity (art, music, gardens, etc)
- ☐ Something that made me smile
- ☐ Something that made me wonder “why?”

SKETCH OR DESCRIBE WHAT YOU SAW



REFLECTIONS

- What did I learn about myself?

- What did I learn about others?

- What did I learn about my community?

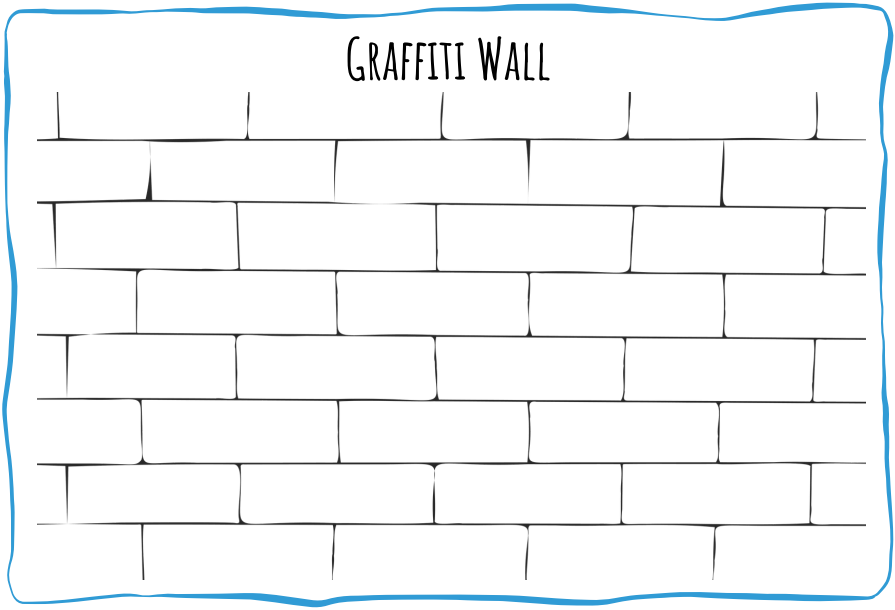
First-Time Eyes Exercise

Pretend you just arrived from another planet.

What would you find strange, interesting, or confusing about:

- our parks?
- our shops?
- our school?
- how people move around?

Write your findings on the graffiti wall.



SECTION 2 — SYSTEM MAPPING

Understanding Your Community

Every community is made of:

- places
- people
- activities
- feelings

Systems Mapping helps us see patterns,
not just problems.

Community Systems Map

Draw your community Youth Spaces

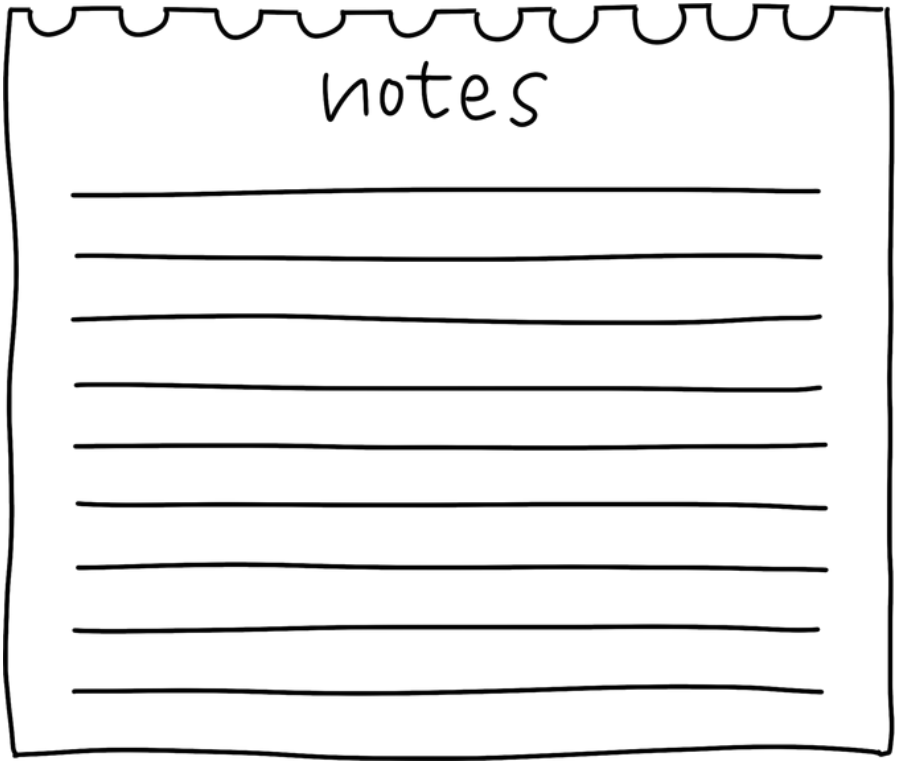
Places where young people connect:

Places that feel unsafe / boring / forgotten:

What might make the places better?



Before you judge someone,
walk a mile in their shoes.



REFLECTIONS

- What did I learn about myself?

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Skills Check

Which skills would you like to build?

□ Communication
□ Leadership
□ Teamwork
□ Problem Solving
□ Creativity
□ Organisation
□ Confidence
□ Public Speaking
□ Digital Skills
□ Time Management
□ Working with Children
□ Event Planning
□ Other: _____

Reflection

What is one skill you'd love people to describe you as having in the future?



SECTION 3 — LISTEN

Learning From People

The best ideas don't come from experts.
They come from listening to people who have lived it.

Listening Guidelines
When I talk to someone:

- I don't interrupt
- I don't judge
- I don't try to fix
- I say thank you

Conversation Starters
You can ask:

- What do you like most about living here?
- What's hard about being a young person here?
- Where do people usually meet or hang out?
- If you could change one thing, what would it be?
- What helps people feel like they belong?



Interview Notes Page

Interview another young person

Date:
Who I spoke to:

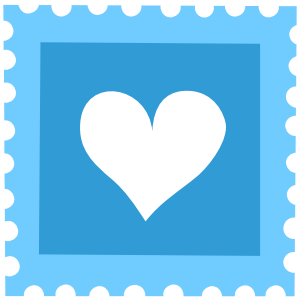
- What do you like most about living here?
- What's hard about being a young person here?
- Where do people usually meet or hang out?
- If you could change one thing, what would it be?
- What helps people feel like they belong?

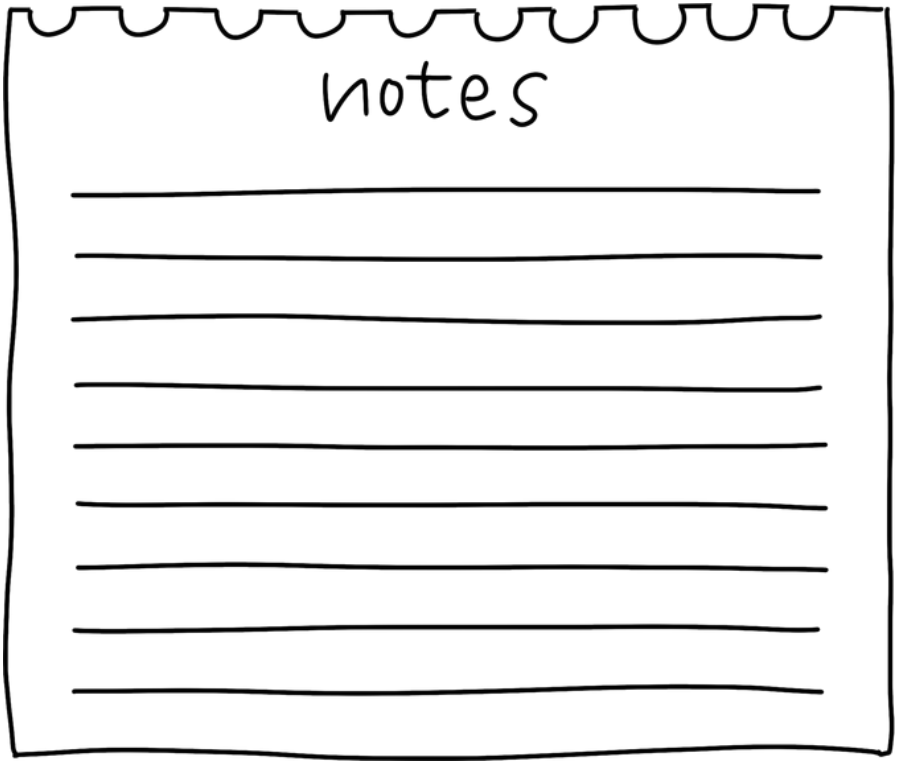
YOUR REFLECTIONS

How are they connected to this place:

Things they said that stood out:

What surprised me:





REFLECTIONS

- What did I learn about myself?

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The Social Spark Formula

Notice: What is something in your school, neighbourhood or community that could be better?

Listen: Talk to people. What do they think? What do they need?

Imagine: What is one simple idea that could make a difference?

Try: Start small. Test your idea and see what happens.

Grow: Learn from what works, improve your idea and invite others to get involved.

Spark Ideas - Need some inspiration?

- Organise a community clean-up.
- Create a kindness campaign at school.
- Start a book or board game swap.
- Plant a community garden.
- Host a fundraiser for a local cause.
- Teach older people how to use technology.
- Collect food or toiletries for families in need.
- Create a youth event where everyone feels welcome.
- Start a social media campaign that spreads kindness.

Remember, every great idea
starts with someone asking:
"What if we tried something different?"

SECTION 4 — IMAGINE

Turning Insights into Ideas

Social innovation starts with:

- We notice something isn't working, we care about it, and we decide to try something different.
- Spotting Opportunities

Something I noticed on my community systems map that could be improved:

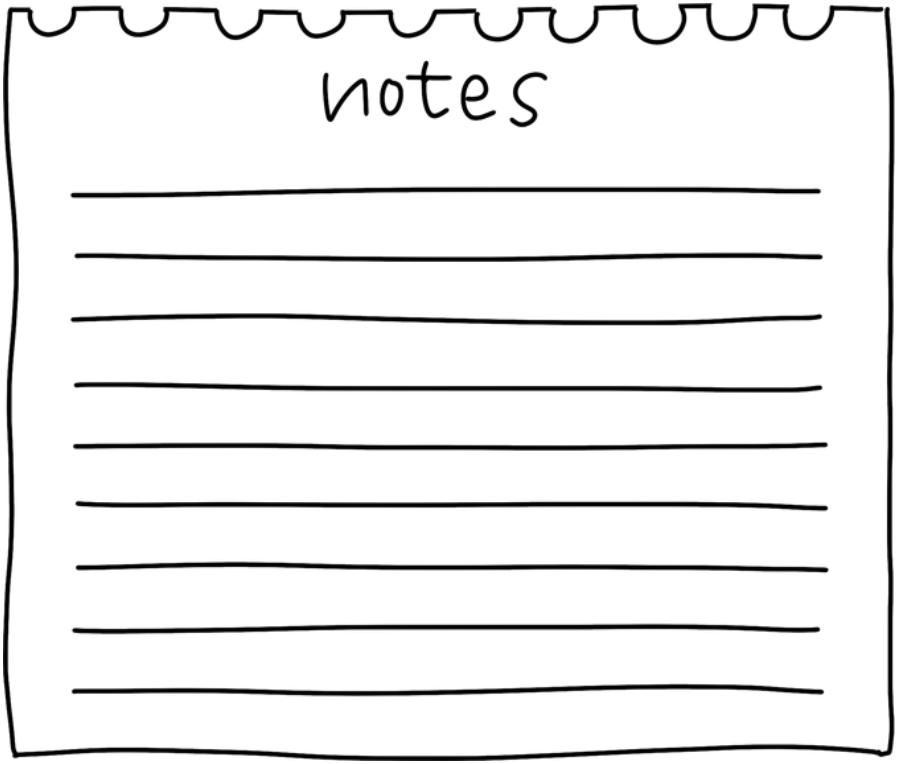
- Who does this affect?
- What would “better” look like?
- Big & Small Ideas

Wild ideas
Small versions we could actually try:

- Who would need to help?

Is the idea:
□ Good for people
□ Safe
□ Inclusive
□ Realistic to test
□ Something we care about





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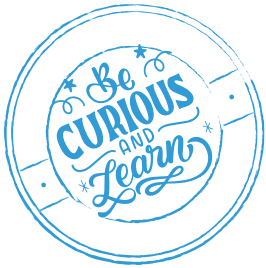
SECTION 5 — TRY

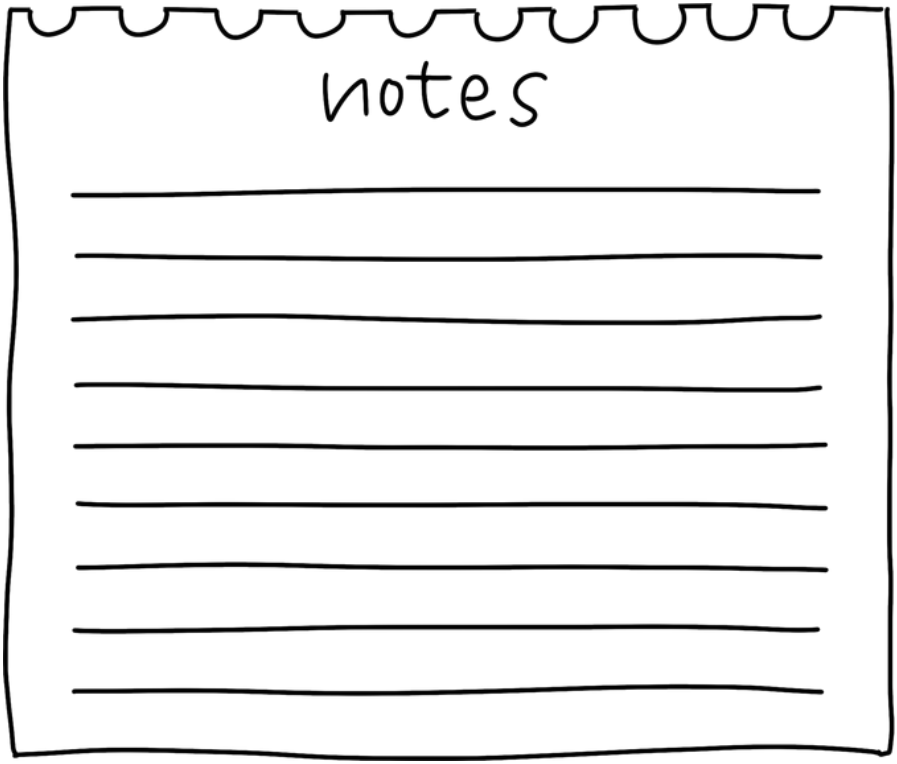
Testing Ideas



We don't need perfect plans.
We need small experiments.

Mini Project Planner
Our idea:

- What problem are we testing?
- What will we try first?
- Where will it happen?
- When?
- What could go wrong & how will we stay safe?
- What Did We Learn?
- What worked?
- What didn't?
- What surprised us?
- What would we change next time?



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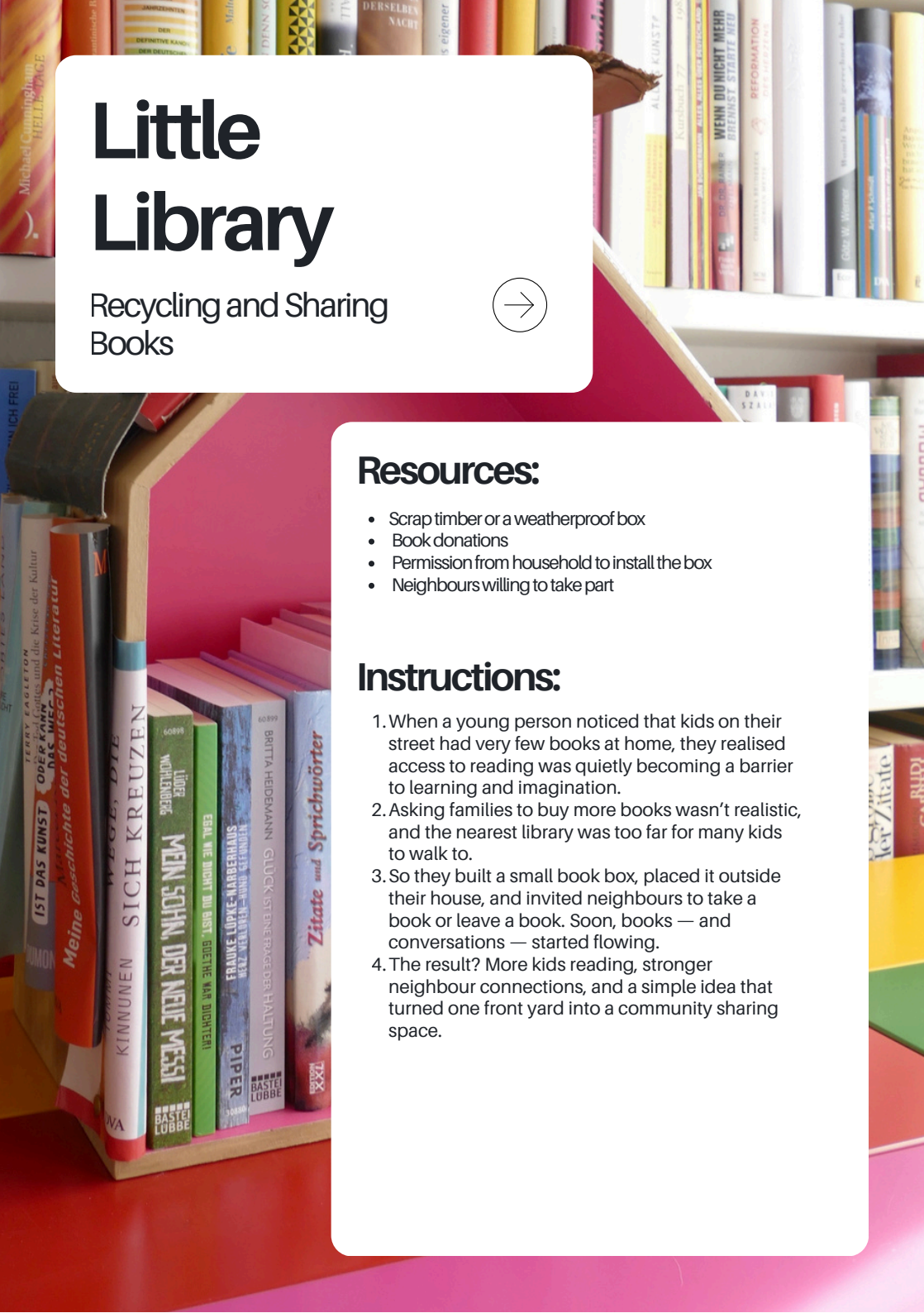
IDEAS TO INSPIRE YOU

REAL EXAMPLES AND PRACTICAL INSPIRATION, WITH CLEAR WAYS YOUNG PEOPLE CAN PARTICIPATE OR LEAD.



Little Library

Recycling and Sharing Books



Resources:

- Scrap timber or a weatherproof box
- Book donations
- Permission from household to install the box
- Neighbours willing to take part

Instructions:

1. When a young person noticed that kids on their street had very few books at home, they realised access to reading was quietly becoming a barrier to learning and imagination.
2. Asking families to buy more books wasn't realistic, and the nearest library was too far for many kids to walk to.
3. So they built a small book box, placed it outside their house, and invited neighbours to take a book or leave a book. Soon, books — and conversations — started flowing.
4. The result? More kids reading, stronger neighbour connections, and a simple idea that turned one front yard into a community sharing space.

Virtual Reality

Youth First Aid Program



Resources:

- 1 x Virtual Reality (VR) headset (per participant)
- Pre-installed VR first aid simulation software
- 1 x trained facilitator
- A group of 5–10 young participants (aged 12–25)
- Comfortable, safe learning space (indoors with seating + WiFi)

Instructions:

1. When a wave of young people began arriving at the local ICU due to alcohol poisoning and drug overdoses, the team at the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre knew something had to change. We needed to develop real-world knowledge about how to act when things go wrong.
2. We knew the program needed to be engaging; otherwise, many young people might not participate.
3. Rather than lead with warnings and lectures, HBNC approached the UQ Rural Doctors Clinic with an idea: create a youth-first aid program that focuses specifically on what young people need to know in the moments that matter, how to recognise an overdose, when to call for help, and what to do while waiting.
4. Then, we made the course in virtual reality. By turning medical scenarios into immersive simulations, they transformed fear into confidence, passivity into action. Young people didn't just learn first aid, they experienced and practised it in a safe, controlled environment.

Pop-Up Artist Gallery

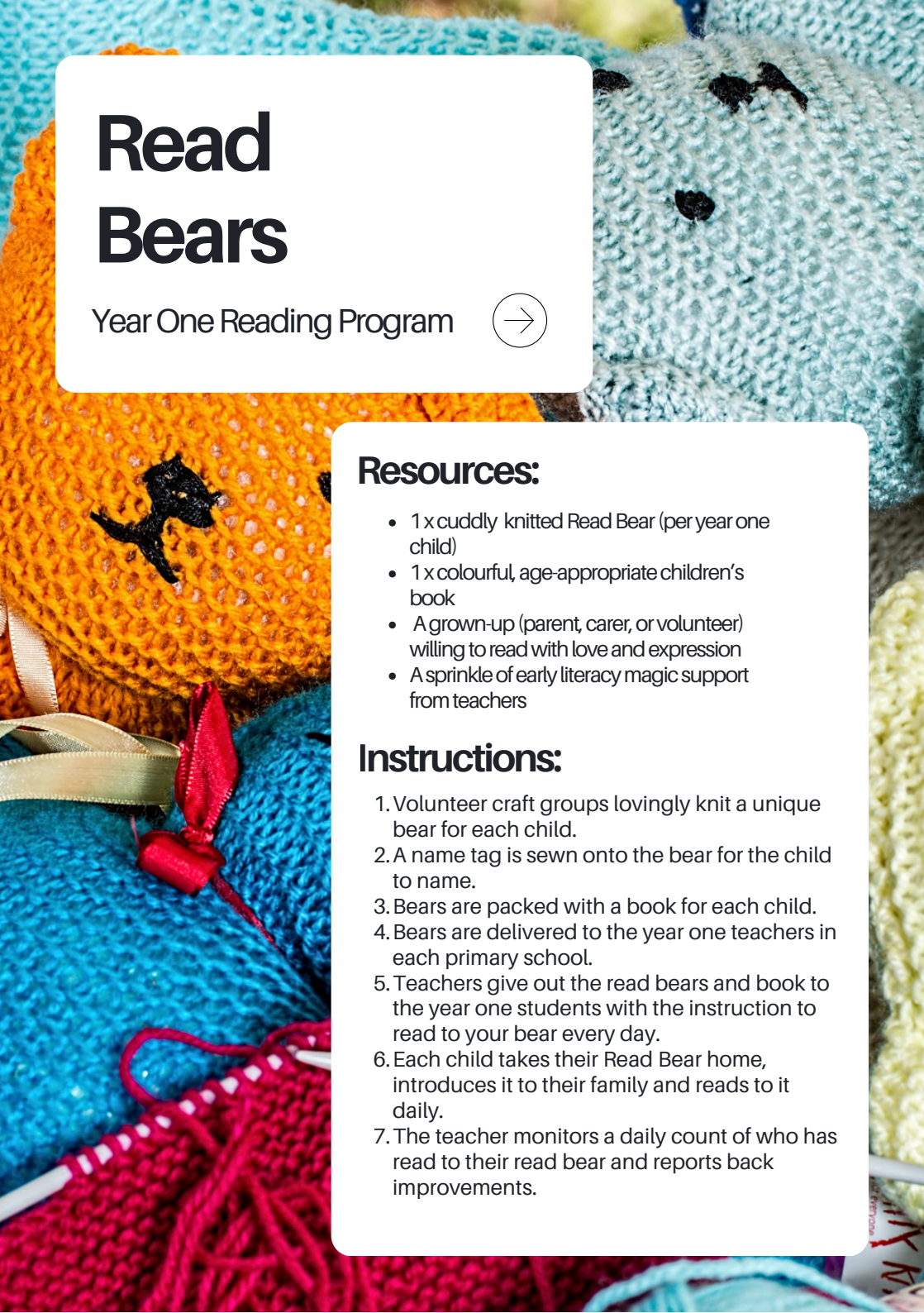
Reviving Streets and Supporting Creatives

Resources:

- 1–3 x vacant shopfronts in your main street or shopping centre
- 1-5 x local artists, crafters, and makers
- Display items: easels, shelves, plinths, hanging systems
- Clear signage: "Local Art for Sale!"
- Contact details to purchase art or volunteers rotating in the space to welcome visitors
- Window decals or artwork to draw attention
- A sprinkle of council or landlord cooperation

Instructions:

1. Source the vacant shop in a high foot traffic street.
2. Approach landlords or centre management with a win-win pitch: reduce the "vacant" look and activate the space rent-free.
3. Curate the Creatives - Put a call out to local artists, potters, weavers, photographers.
4. Keep it simple, portable furniture, lights, and art displays. Allow artists to set up shop-style displays or wall exhibits.
5. Fold in Engagement - Include a chalkboard wall, "Meet the Artist" days, or live painting sessions. Let the community interact, not just browse.
6. Promote the Pop-Up - Use local social media groups, art networks, and business newsletters.
7. Capture the Stories - Share the artists insights.



Read Bears

Year One Reading Program

Resources:

- 1 x cuddly knitted Read Bear (per year one child)
- 1 x colourful, age-appropriate children's book
- A grown-up (parent, carer, or volunteer) willing to read with love and expression
- A sprinkle of early literacy magic support from teachers

Instructions:

1. Volunteer craft groups lovingly knit a unique bear for each child.
2. A name tag is sewn onto the bear for the child to name.
3. Bears are packed with a book for each child.
4. Bears are delivered to the year one teachers in each primary school.
5. Teachers give out the read bears and book to the year one students with the instruction to read to your bear every day.
6. Each child takes their Read Bear home, introduces it to their family and reads to it daily.
7. The teacher monitors a daily count of who has read to their read bear and reports back improvements.

Surf Wax Eco-Friendly

$20 Boss Program

Resources:

- Completed the Young Changemaker $20 Boss program
- Natural ingredients to create new surf wax
- People to support and help with the design.
- Tested the product at the local markets.

Instructions:

1. When a young surfer noticed chemical residue and oil slicks left behind from traditional surf wax, he realised that something he loved was quietly harming the ocean he surfed in every day.
2. Running an environmental awareness campaign wouldn't change what people put on their boards, and most eco alternatives were too expensive for young surfers.
3. So he did something simple. Using just $20 and a few natural ingredients, he experimented at home to create an eco-friendly surf wax that worked just as well. He shared it with friends, then local surf shops.
4. He now sells his eco-friendly surf wax across Australia.

Walking Soccer

Intergenerational Sport Participation

Resources:

- Access to a local park or oval
- Basic soccer equipment
- Support from a local club or community group
- Willing participants of all ages

Instructions:

1. When community members noticed that older residents were becoming less active and more socially isolated, they realised that traditional sports programs were too fast, too physical, and not designed for everyone.
2. Fitness classes felt intimidating, and many older people didn't feel confident joining mainstream sports teams.
3. So they adapted the game instead of the people. By introducing walking soccer — where running isn't allowed and teamwork matters more than speed — they created a space where older adults, parents, and even teenagers could play together safely.
4. The result? Improved health, laughter across generations, and a simple change that turned sport into a powerful tool for connection.

One Last Thought

Every community is shaped by ordinary people who choose to do extraordinary things through small acts of kindness, courage and service.

You already have everything you need to begin. Find your place. Back yourself. Create change. And wherever life takes you next, keep making a difference.



RE-IMAGINING VOLUNTEERING

FOR YOUTH-LED FUTURES

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

Explore a World of Projects Ready to Adapt to Your Community.



Find Your Place

What if one small step could change your life and someone else's?

Volunteering isn't about having all the answers, heaps of experience or endless free time. It's about discovering what matters to you, building confidence, meeting great people and making a real difference in your community. Whether you're passionate about animals, music, sport, the environment, helping people or simply trying something new, there's a place where your skills, ideas and energy are needed.

Inside you'll discover how to:

- Find volunteering opportunities that match your interests
- Build confidence and real-world skills
- Meet inspiring people and make new friends
- Turn your ideas into action
- Create positive change in your community

Packed with practical tips, real stories, challenges and activities, Find Your Place is more than a guide, it's the beginning of your own volunteer adventure. Your community doesn't need someone perfect. It needs someone willing to show up.

Could that someone be you?

HBNC