

<b>Project Name</b>	Breaking Down Barriers to Volunteering in Douglas Shire
<b>Partner Organisation</b>	Port Douglas Community Services Network
<b>Project Period</b>	February – December 2023
<b>Project Status</b>	Completed. A second phase was granted.
<b>Project Budget</b>	\$130,000.00

## Project Overview

This project aimed to develop capacity of Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to attract, recruit, retain and manage volunteers from the identified priority groups including First Nations People, people with disabilities, and newly arrived migrants (the priority cohorts).

The Port Douglas Community Services Network collaborated with the Douglas Shire Council, Local schools, NDIS providers, Job Network Providers and First Nations organisations providing appropriate support and resources and engaging volunteer opportunities for the priority cohort.

## Main impacts

- ✓ Philomena's story. Philomena is a 57-year-old single mother who has been her daughter's full-time carer for the past 30 years. The project linked her with the local radio station where she is now volunteering as a programmer. This was a life change for Philomena and shows how volunteering can bring so much into people's lives. Philomena loves her new role and has encouraged others through her dedication to come forward and give volunteering a go.

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*"It's definitely a two-way street as much as I help the radio station it helps me to feel like I'm making a difference".*

*(Philomena about her new experience as volunteer)*

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- ✓ First Aid Training for volunteers was held with 9 attendees out of a maximum of 12. First Aid training can be vital to our VIOs where they are operating in remote locations such as on the other side of the Daintree River or out on the Reef, with entities such as Tangaroa Blue (remote beach clean ups) and Low Isles Preservation Society (volunteer relief caretakers and bird counting) or where they are dealing with vulnerable older or First Nations people such as Mossman Elders Justice Group. It can take a substantial time for an ambulance to arrive in our region.
- ✓ The project helped the Douglas Shire Historical Society Museum to recruit more volunteers and improve their services by volunteers dressing up to provide guided visits to patrons. The new volunteers have brought a younger cohort to the table and the current members are happy to have a breath of fresh air to add new life to the Museum. The Museum now has

greater patronage on the days that the volunteers are promoting the opening times throughout the markets.

- ✓ With the project's support, a group of volunteers with disabilities – The Giggles – did their first presentation in Costume. The Giggles is a music group comprising young people living with disabilities and their carers. The Project supported the group by assisting with costume and fabric purchases. As well as providing on the ground support for their initial performance.

## Highlights

- Face to face surveys were conducted with VIOs to understand their needs and provide support to obtain the necessary help and resources. Information was also gathered engaging directly with managers and leaders through different events taking place in the community, to identify what was effective, what needed improvement, and where challenges persisted.
- The project officer delved into one-on-one engagements with select organisations. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of each organisation's unique challenges and needs, enabling the project officer to tailor their support effectively.
- Collaboration with diverse stakeholders, ranging from local government to educational institutions, disability service providers, job networks, and First Nations organisations. This collaborative effort created a robust support system that catered to the specific needs of the VIOs and the identified priority cohorts.
- Facilitating access to existing online and face-to-face training, resources, and services. This involved reaching out to organisations and meeting them in person for discussions to help understand each organisation's specific needs and challenges and supporting them to obtain necessary help and resources.
- Ongoing direct interactions with organisations by attending events, talking to managers and leaders, and conducting one-on-one interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and needs of each organisation.
- Active promotion and engagement through active participation in local community events, meetings, and gatherings to directly engage with residents.



Photo 1. Tanya Morris, Project officer. Promoting the Project within the community.

- **Social media presence.** A social media expert was engaged to enhance the online presence, utilising strategies for audience growth and engagement.

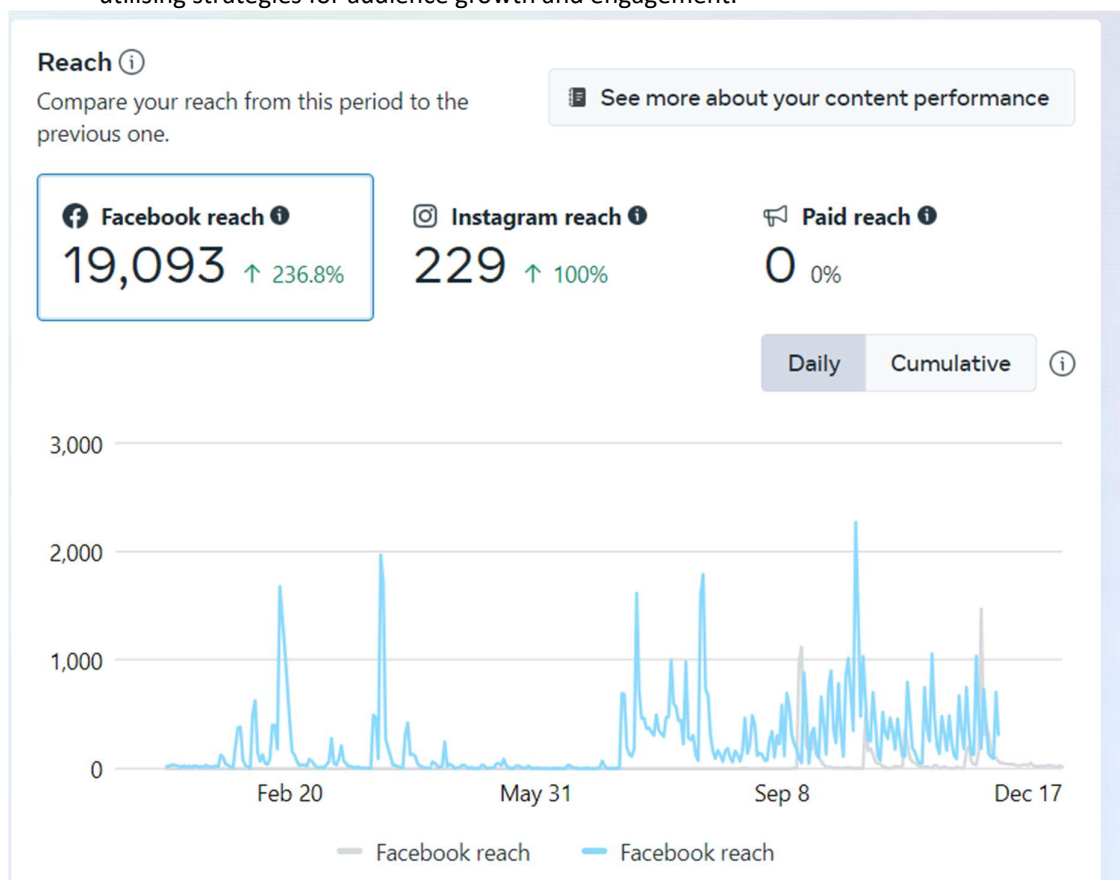


Figure 1 Facebook reach

- Media Collaborations: Collaboration with the local Newsport online newspaper to feature volunteer spotlight pieces. These pieces shed light on individual stories, the benefits of volunteering and the broader impact on the community, creating a narrative that resonates with readers. It also implemented a collaboration with a local radio station.



*Photo 2. Promotion of benefits of volunteering and good stories through the local Radio Station*

- Co-hosted Community of Practice CoP meetings with engaging elements like panel sessions. These events not only fostered knowledge exchange among VIOs and other stakeholders but also showcased the collaborative efforts within the community to address challenges.



*Photo 3. Panel at a CoP meeting.*



*Photo 4. The local Mayor speaking at the second CoP meeting*



*Photo 5 Douglas Shire Youth Community Network Meeting*

- The Breaking Down Barriers to Volunteering project has achieved significant success in fostering inclusivity, community engagement, and meaningful volunteerism in the Douglas Shire. While facing challenges, the project's adaptability and proactive collaboration have been key to its positive impact on both volunteers and the community.



*Photo 6: Volunteers sourced by the Project officer supporting the Chillout Group*

## Challenges

- Limited integration of volunteer roles into support plans for people with disabilities. To overcome this, dialogue has been initiated with organisations supporting individuals with disabilities. The primary focus has been on advocating for the recognition of volunteering as a valuable element in pre-planned carer support strategies. This shift is essential given the structured nature of support plans, requiring careful coordination with support plan coordinators.
- Overcoming barriers to involving school children in volunteering has been challenging due to the rigidly pre-planned school curriculum. Initial difficulties arose as program timelines didn't align with the predetermined school schedules. However, persistent efforts and collaboration with key individuals have yielded positive outcomes this year. By gradually building connections and finding the right stakeholders, the project has successfully engaged with school students from the priority cohort and the wider school community. This achievement not only addresses the current challenge but also lays the foundation for potential long-term involvement, with these students becoming integral members of the local volunteering landscape.
- Continuity of community of practice. Although the idea was well received and the meetings were considered productive by attendees, the admin effort behind the creation of the meetings plus the difficulty in finding times suitable for the volunteer managers challenged its continuity.
- Unforeseen Barriers: While the project successfully engaged diverse volunteers, there were unexpected challenges faced by some individuals, such as insurance and liability concerns for a volunteer with a brain injury. This highlights the need for flexibility and adaptability in addressing unforeseen barriers.

## Lessons learned.

- Emphasising community involvement has fostered a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, resulting in increased participation and support from stakeholders. This objective has demonstrated success, with the community engagement strategy yielding a tangible rise in participation and support.
- The intentional focus on priority groups, including First Nations people, individuals with disabilities, and newly arrived immigrants, underscored the project's dedication to fostering inclusivity and diversity within the volunteering landscape. By addressing barriers specific to these cohorts, the project aimed not only to facilitate their engagement in volunteer activities but also to create an environment where their contributions were valued and supported.
- Providing personalised and targeted support services has effectively addressed the unique needs of each organisation enhancing their participation and overall experience. This objective has proven successful in helping us to understand the different organisations' level

of understanding of volunteer management practices and principles leading to positive feedback from the volunteers and their organisations.

- Recognising the importance of effective collaboration with VQ representatives enables open communication, facilitates the integration of valuable feedback, and allows for the resolution of potential challenges that might impact the project's successful implementation.
- Prioritising the establishment of an environment that encourages open dialogue and feedback from stakeholders allows for the adaptation and refinement of strategies based on the valuable insights and suggestions provided.
- Flexible Approaches: Addressing unique challenges, such as the beach clean-up initiative and providing fuel vouchers for priority cohort volunteers living in remote areas, taught the importance of adopting flexible approaches to meet diverse needs.
- Importance of Visibility: The project has achieved significant success in community engagement through effective volunteer recruitment, increased visibility of opportunities, and a focus on the enjoyment and benefits of participation. Collaborations with organisations like the museum and the proactive encouragement for individuals to join the historical society have expanded the project's impact while demonstrating a commitment to local history. The initiative's emphasis on fostering community ownership and encouraging local participation has strengthened community bonds.
- Considering the challenges faced by individuals with specific needs, a more proactive approach to addressing potential barriers, such as insurance concerns, could be implemented.
- Continuous Evaluation: A more robust system for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of the project's webpage and resources could be established to ensure relevance and accessibility.