

Project Name	Breaking Down Barriers to Volunteering in Douglas Shire Stage II
Partner Organisation	Port Douglas Community Services Network Inc.
Project Period	January 2024 – January 2025
Project Status	Completed
Project Budget	\$81,499

## Executive Summary

The Port Douglas Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) Stage 2 project focused on enhancing volunteer engagement, building community connections, and addressing barriers to participation. The project involved recruiting new volunteers, particularly from underrepresented groups, through community events such as the Volunteer Expo held in November 2024.

Key activities included volunteer recruitment, partnerships with local organisations like FNQ Volunteers Inc., and the introduction of solutions to overcome logistical challenges, such as transportation barriers. These efforts were supported by outreach activities, including media coverage and community events, to raise awareness and foster long-term engagement.

As a result, the project successfully recruited 50 new volunteers, including 28 women, and made a significant impact on the community by building stronger connections between volunteers and local organisations. Feedback from participants and partners indicated a positive shift in volunteer interest and engagement, with key partnerships formed between volunteer-involving organisations (VOIs).

The Grass + Roots Volunteer Network Survey showed a noticeable increase in media coverage of volunteer opportunities, suggesting that outreach strategies were successful in raising awareness. Lessons learned include the importance of addressing logistical challenges and the need for culturally sensitive outreach to ensure inclusivity.

The project has laid a solid foundation for future volunteer efforts in Port Douglas, ensuring continued community engagement through the transition of social media management to the Douglas Shire Council. By empowering local organisations and individuals, this initiative leaves behind a sustainable, vibrant volunteer network that will serve the community long after the project concludes.

## Key Outcomes and Impact

- **Volunteer Engagement**

A total of **50 new volunteers** were recruited, including **28 women**, a strong indication of progress towards inclusive volunteerism. The volunteers contributed to community-building efforts, such as environmental and social projects. This aligns with the project goal to increase social and economic participation across diverse communities.

- **Volunteer Expo Impact**

The **Volunteer Expo** in November 2024 was a resounding success, drawing approximately **200-300 participants** and resulting in the recruitment of **25 new volunteers**. Additionally, the event provided significant visibility for local organisations, fostering key partnerships with community groups such as **FNQ Volunteers Inc.** The feedback from FNQ Volunteers indicated a positive shift in volunteer interest and engagement following the event.

- **Survey Insights**

The **Grass + Roots Volunteer Network Survey** revealed that **77.78%** of respondents noticed a **significant increase** in media coverage of volunteer opportunities. This suggests that outreach strategies are reaching the right audience and fostering a greater sense of community engagement.

- **Community Engagement Initiatives**

The inclusion of activities like a **petting zoo**, **face painting**, and a **Tai Chi demonstration** during the Volunteer Expo helped foster an inclusive and welcoming environment for attendees. These activities not only engaged families but also created a relaxed atmosphere where new volunteers could engage with organisations. Feedback confirmed that these activities contributed to making the event family-friendly and accessible.

## Insights and Lessons Learned

- **Barriers to Participation**

The event successfully identified key barriers to volunteerism, including logistical challenges related to transportation. Solutions like **fuel cards** and **flexible volunteer scheduling** proved effective in overcoming these barriers. However, more work is needed to address the remaining challenges, especially in rural areas with limited access to public transport.

- **Cultural Sensitivity and Outreach**

The project highlighted the importance of **cultural sensitivity** in volunteer outreach. Many participants were unaware of the support available to them through **Volunteering Queensland** and **FNQ Volunteers**. Going forward, there should be a focus on increasing awareness of available resources and ensuring that volunteer roles are welcoming to all, regardless of background.

- **Sustainability and Long-Term Engagement**

The project has laid a solid foundation for future volunteer initiatives. A key insight was the need for sustained engagement with **local organisations** and **businesses**. The **Douglas Shire Council's transition of social media management** will help ensure that outreach and engagement efforts continue without interruption. This step ensures long-term sustainability, making volunteer programs more resilient.

## Recommendations

- **Outcome-Focused Reporting**

Future reports should continue to focus on clear, measurable outcomes, such as the number of new volunteers recruited, the number of participants in community events, and the direct benefits to local services. Additionally, qualitative data, such as **testimonials** and **case studies**, should be integrated to better illustrate the personal impact of volunteering.

- **Media Outreach**

To build on the success of the **Volunteer Expo**, further media outreach is recommended to extend the reach of volunteer opportunities. Partnering with more **local media outlets**, such as **101.5 FM "DouglasFM"**, and utilising **social media** to promote success stories will amplify volunteer recruitment efforts and increase awareness.

- **Enhancing Volunteer Recruitment Processes**

Future volunteer recruitment strategies should ensure that roles are clearly defined and attractive to potential volunteers. Using tools from **Volunteering Queensland's website**, such as **improved volunteer role descriptions**, will ensure that organisations can attract volunteers with specific skills and interests.

## Conclusion

Stage 2 of the Port Douglas VMA project has achieved significant progress in volunteer engagement and community outreach. The Volunteer Expo was instrumental in building connections between local organisations and the community.

Moving forward, the project should continue to focus on overcoming logistical barriers, improving media outreach, and ensuring sustainability through community partnerships. By enhancing reporting consistency across VMA projects, Volunteering Queensland can better demonstrate the lasting impact of volunteer initiatives in the region.

## Case Studies

### ***Case Study: 1 - The Impact of Radio Outreach on Volunteer Participation Among Middle-Aged Women in the Douglas Shire***

**Background:**

To enhance community engagement and promote volunteering opportunities, Douglas Grass + Roots partnered with a local radio station to create a radio show, Douglas @ Dusk. This show was designed to showcase volunteer organisations and opportunities within the Douglas Shire, with a specific focus on reaching vulnerable women. These women often juggle multiple responsibilities, making traditional outreach methods less effective. The goal of the show was to inspire this group to take an active role in volunteering, ultimately strengthening and uniting the community.

**Challenges:**

Reaching middle-aged women from vulnerable backgrounds was challenging due to time constraints, lack of awareness, and confidence barriers. Traditional outreach methods were less effective. Douglas @ Dusk used radio to share volunteer opportunities and success stories, building confidence and engagement. Collaboration with local organisations and consistent content helped overcome limited resources, with feedback showing success in fostering long-term volunteer involvement.

**Solution:**

Radio provided an accessible platform for busy women, delivering weekly updates on volunteer opportunities through Douglas @ Dusk. Success stories inspired participation, while collaborations with local organisations connected volunteers to flexible roles suited to their schedules.

Flexibility and interactive engagement were key to sustaining interest. The show promoted adaptable volunteer roles, making participation easier. Regular programming kept volunteering top-of-mind, fostering ongoing community involvement. Interactive features, such as text message participation, created a two-way conversation, strengthening audience connection. By giving women, a platform to share their stories, Douglas @ Dusk validated their contributions, empowered new volunteers, and supported local organisations in sustaining their efforts.

Jan's Success Journey: A long-time resident of Douglas Shire, Jan had always wanted to give back but was unsure where to start. After hearing an episode featuring a local community garden project, she reached out and is now an active volunteer.

**Implementation:**

Over the course of six weeks, the project officer and the radio station's workplace instructor worked closely to plan, train, and develop content for the show. Douglas @ Dusk, airing every Monday from 4 to 6 PM, served as a platform to:

- Highlighting Volunteer Opportunities by providing weekly updates about organisations in need of volunteers, facilitating connections with listeners.
- Celebrating Volunteer Triumphs by sharing stories of local women who found fulfilment through volunteering, inspiring others to get involved.
- Promoting Local Events by keeping the community informed about volunteer opportunities and local happenings.

**Adaptation of Tasks:**

To accommodate the diverse needs and time constraints of the target audience, volunteering roles were adapted to be more flexible and accessible. Opportunities were promoted based on varying levels of commitment, from one-time event support to ongoing roles that could fit around work and family responsibilities.

Tasks were also tailored to match individual skills and interests, ensuring volunteers felt confident and valued. By working closely with local organisations, the project encouraged remote and hybrid volunteering options where possible, making it easier for more women to participate in meaningful ways.

**Support and Supervision:**

Volunteers were supported through clear guidance and mentorship, ensuring they felt confident in their roles. The radio show provided ongoing updates on available opportunities and success stories, keeping volunteers informed and engaged.

Collaboration with local organisations ensured that volunteers received appropriate supervision, training, and encouragement. By fostering a network of support, the project helped women build confidence in their abilities and sustain long-term involvement in their chosen volunteer roles.

**Outcomes:****Increased Volunteer Participation**

- More women engaged in volunteering after learning about opportunities through the radio show.
- Showcasing success stories inspired more women to recognise their value and potential as volunteers.

**Stronger Community Connections**

- Listeners felt more informed, engaged, and connected to their community.
- Successful audience engagement with the show receiving 97 text messages during one broadcast, demonstrating active listener involvement.

**Raised Awareness**

- Regular updates on volunteer opportunities made it easier for people to find and participate in causes that resonated with them.
- Enhanced support for local organisations by boosting volunteer recruitment, ensuring the sustainability of community projects and initiatives.
- Weekly programming-maintained engagement, keeping volunteering top-of-mind and encouraging ongoing participation and awareness.

**Conclusion:**

Douglas @ Dusk is a great example of how targeted outreach can successfully address community needs. By utilising a familiar and accessible medium like radio, Douglas Grass + Roots has effectively engaged middle-aged women in the Douglas Shire, inspiring them to actively contribute to their community. This initiative highlights how storytelling and representation can drive meaningful change, foster a sense of community, and encourage collaboration. Although the radio station does not track listener numbers, the significant impact of the show is clear, demonstrated by the 97 text messages received during its broadcasts, showing how well it has connected with the audience.



The Radio Station participated at the Volunteer Extravaganza in November 2024 at Port Douglas.

## ***Case Study 2 - The Impact of Radio Outreach on Volunteer Participation Among Middle-Aged Women in the Douglas Shire***

*Partner Project with Douglas Grass and Roots Volunteer Network Project and The Circle of Plenty*

### **Background:**

Monika, the visionary behind The Circle of Plenty, a thriving community garden in Mossman was driven by a shared passion for gardening. Monika and her team of volunteers have created a green oasis for connection, sustainability, and growth. To amplify this initiative's impact, the collaboration aimed to secure additional funding, attract more volunteers, and raise its visibility within the local community.

### **Challenges:**

Monika struggled to secure sustainable funding for the garden and lacked the resources to expand and improve the space. Volunteer participation was minimal, and the garden's visibility within the community was low, limiting its potential for growth and impact. Furthermore, the leadership structure was not well-established, and Monika needed guidance to build her capacity to lead and manage the initiative.

### **Solution:**

The solution involved a collaborative approach that offered tailored support and resources to strengthen the garden's foundation. The project worker focused on assisting Monika in securing funding, recruiting volunteers, and raising awareness about the garden's mission. Key initiatives included writing grant proposals, connecting with local businesses for financial and in-kind contributions, and enhancing volunteer engagement through events and partnerships.

### **Implementation:**

The project officer worked closely with Monika, providing mentorship and advice tailored to the specific needs of a community-driven initiative. Key actions included:

- Assisting with crafting compelling funding proposals.
- Coaching Monika on leadership, volunteer management, and how to foster a shared vision for the garden.
- Organising open garden days to attract volunteers and demonstrate the garden's impact on the community.
- Partnering with local schools and organisations to establish ongoing volunteer programs.
- Promoting the garden through various channels, including social media and newsletters, to enhance its public awareness.

### **Adaptation of Tasks:**

To effectively meet the garden's needs, tasks were adapted based on community feedback and the evolving challenges Monika faced. The grant proposals were tailored to align with the specific environmental goals of the garden, while volunteer recruitment efforts targeted a diverse group, including students and retirees. The focus was on creating a sustainable system for maintaining the garden and organising events that inspired long-term participation.

### **Support and Supervision:**

Monika received consistent mentorship and guidance throughout the process. Regular check-ins with the project officer allowed for adjustments to strategies and ensured that Monika had the necessary resources to succeed. Support was provided not only in administrative tasks like grant writing but also in building her leadership capacity and confidence to manage the garden and its volunteers.

### **Outcomes:**

#### **Expanded Volunteer Base:**

The Circle of Plenty successfully recruited 15 regular volunteers, ranging from students to retirees. A rotational system was implemented for garden maintenance and event hosting, ensuring sustainability and shared responsibility among volunteers.

#### **Boosted Community Presence:**

The garden gained recognition in local media, including the Douglas Grass and Roots radio show, and was featured at the annual community fair. This exposure attracted new members and reinforced the garden's role as a community hub.

#### **Empowered Leadership:**

Monika developed strong leadership skills, empowering her to manage the garden effectively. She now leads volunteers with confidence and has been recognized with an Environmental Achievement award by the local Council.

**Conclusion:**

The collaboration between The Douglas Grass and Roots Volunteer Network Project and The Circle of Plenty exemplifies the power of community-driven initiatives when supported by strategic mentoring and resources. Through this partnership, the garden has achieved sustainable growth, strengthened community bonds, and created an empowered leadership model. The Circle of Plenty is a shining example of how collaboration can nurture both gardens and communities, cultivating resilience, hope, and environmental sustainability.



### ***Case Study: 3 - Beating the Loneliness Blues***

#### **Finding Purpose and Community for an Elderly Volunteer at the Douglas Shire Neighbourhood Centre**

**Background:**

An elderly lady recently moved to the Douglas Shire to live with her daughter, having no other family in her home country. Seeking ways to keep her mother engaged and connected with the community, her daughter reached out to the Douglas Shire Neighbourhood Centre for support in finding suitable volunteer opportunities.

**Challenges:**

The elderly lady faced significant challenges in finding a volunteer role due to her limited mobility. She was slightly unstable on her feet and relied on a walking stick to get around, which restricted the types of tasks she could comfortably and safely perform.

**Solution:**

The Neighbourhood Centre identified the community garden as an ideal starting point. The garden offered opportunities for potting plants and other small tasks that could be done while seated. This setup ensured that the elderly lady could participate without risking her safety or overexerting herself.

**Implementation:**

The Neighbourhood Centre staff introduced the elderly lady to the community garden and provided an orientation on the various tasks she could help with.

**Adaptation of Tasks:**

Tasks were specifically chosen and adapted to suit her abilities, focusing on activities that could be performed while seated, such as potting plants and organizing gardening tools.

**Support and Supervision:**

Staff and fellow volunteers provided ongoing support and supervision to ensure her comfort and safety while volunteering.

**Outcomes:**

The elderly lady's involvement in the community garden led to several positive outcomes:

- **Sense of purpose:** Volunteering gave her a renewed sense of purpose and belonging, knowing she was contributing to the community despite her physical limitations.
- **New friendships:** She formed meaningful friendships with other volunteers, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- **Increased wellbeing:** The regular activity and social interaction improved her overall well-being and mental health.

**Conclusion:**

This case study highlights the importance of inclusivity and adaptability in volunteer programs. By identifying suitable opportunities and providing necessary support, the Douglas Shire Neighbourhood Centre helped an elderly lady find friendship, purpose, and a sense of place in her new community. The success of this initiative underscores the value of creating accessible volunteer roles for individuals of all abilities.