

# ANGELS OF OPPORTUNITY



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| <b>Project Period</b> | February to June 2025 |
| <b>Project Amount</b> | \$20,000              |

## Executive Summary

The Farm Angels project focused on enhancing the visibility, support, and sustainability of rural volunteering by building systems of trust, formalising governance practices, and elevating volunteer voices across farming communities in crisis.

Running from January to June 2025, the project responded to increasing demand for volunteer coordination in times of acute hardship, including natural disasters and social isolation.

The project formalised internal systems, introduced reflective training sessions, and expanded communication efforts to increase engagement, particularly among young and retired volunteers.

The co-design of volunteer materials, such as handbooks and reimbursement forms, reflects Farm Angels' commitment to accessible, compassionate volunteering in rural Australia.



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The creation of the Farm Angels Volunteer Framework, recruitment of new volunteers via referral partnerships.

The introduction of regionalised induction and support mechanisms.

Initiative underpinned by formal partnerships with local landholders, businesses, and VIOs and informed by lived experience case studies from volunteers like Sara Bell and Ruby Smith Crossley.

# KEY OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

## Volunteer Recruitment and Onboarding

A streamlined induction process was implemented, guided by the **Farm Angels Volunteer Handbook** and supported by face-to-face briefings at rural event hubs.

**16** New volunteers were recruited during the reporting period via local business referrals, landholder requests and targeted outreach.

Volunteer interest was highest among **young adults aged 25–40** and **retired individuals aged 60+**, highlighting the importance of multigenerational messaging.

## Governance and Policy Strengthening

A Volunteer Code of Conduct, Reimbursement Claim Form, and Conflict Resolution Procedure were developed and embedded into practice.

The **Art Post Governance Manual** was adapted and implemented across the broader Farm Angels network to ensure consistent values-based leadership and transparency.

A transaction agreement was introduced for cardholder purchases related to emergency support supplies.

## Mentoring and Peer Support

Reflective training sessions were piloted to help volunteers debrief after emotionally intense visits.

A mentoring program was co-designed to pair new volunteers with experienced contributors like Sara Bell, who offered firsthand insights into the **challenges of navigating farm trauma and community grief**.

The approach emphasised “volunteering as listening,” validating volunteers' roles as community connectors.

## Community Partnerships

Farm Angels deepened its partnership with Art Post and began supporting remote arts-in-resilience initiatives, recognising the **therapeutic benefits of creative expression for both volunteers and recipients**.

An agreement was reached with a regional agribusiness co-op to co-host three annual training sessions moving forward.

## Case Study Integration

Two significant case studies—Sara Bell and Ruby Smith Crossley—provided narrative-based evidence of the project's personal impact. Their contributions were also included in storytelling initiatives designed to reduce stigma around asking for help.

These stories helped shape volunteer training modules, shifting the focus from task-based delivery to relationship-based service.



# INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

## **Trust is Built, Not Imposed**

Volunteering in farming communities is built on trust, not job descriptions. Volunteers were more effective when given time to build rapport and adjust to the unique rhythms of each property or town. Emphasising relational dynamics over efficiency resulted in higher retention.

## **Tailored Resources Increase Impact**

Resources like the Volunteer Handbook and Conflict Resolution Procedure were co-developed with the volunteer cohort, making them context-specific and therefore more meaningful. Volunteers appreciated having real examples and visual aids, especially those with limited digital access.

## **Stories Inspire, Not Just Support**

The use of real-life case studies to inspire empathy and set expectations was invaluable. New recruits consistently referenced these stories in their feedback, saying they provided clarity and motivation for joining.

## **Fatigue Management is Critical**

Volunteers often felt overwhelmed by the emotional weight of some visits. A proactive mental health and wellbeing plan, including rest days and debriefs, is crucial for sustaining engagement.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Establish a Regional Wellbeing Support Plan**

Given the emotional toll of volunteering in crisis-ridden communities, a formalised wellbeing and peer-support program should be developed. This could include monthly debrief circles and access to professional counselling where needed.

## **Scale the Storytelling Initiative**

Case study production should continue as a mechanism for recruitment, donor engagement, and volunteer training. Stories that reflect volunteer challenges and triumphs build legitimacy and authenticity.

## **Develop a Farm Angels Digital Hub**

To support continued volunteer communication and updates, a low-bandwidth digital hub could be established to centralise forms, case updates, and new requests from farming communities.

## **Formalise Art Post as a Standing Partner**

Art Post's therapeutic and cultural storytelling programs have proven valuable to both volunteers and communities. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formalising this relationship will strengthen cross-program impact.

# CONCLUSION

The Farm Angels project has delivered not just an expanded volunteer base, but a deeper, more human model of rural volunteering.

It bridges emotional support with physical help, offers volunteers the dignity of clarity and care, and leaves behind a blueprint for how trust, narrative, and resilience can underpin regional volunteer programs.

By integrating governance, lived experience, and long-term vision, Farm Angels is set to become a national model of rural volunteer coordination.

