



City of Yarra Volunteer Information Pack 2008

This information pack has been designed for residents of the City of Yarra interested in volunteering within our local community.

Whether you are an experienced volunteer, new to volunteering, new to the world of work or new to Australia, this Information Pack will help you have a successful volunteering experience in the City of Yarra. The information presented here will help you understand the concept of volunteering, your rights as a volunteer and provides tips and advice on finding the right volunteering opportunity for you. Topics include

- Formal and informal volunteering
- Benefits of volunteering
- Insurance coverage for volunteers
- Types of volunteer work
- Pre-volunteering checks

Written and compiled by Jason Twomey
North Yarra Community Health 2008
Enquiries to Yarra Volunteer Program Support Team

What is volunteering?

There are many ways you can volunteer your time and skills in the City of Yarra.

1. **Formal volunteering:** you can devote your time and skills to volunteer for a not-for-profit organisation.

A not-for-profit organisation provides services to local communities and is usually staffed by a mix of paid workers and volunteers. A not-for-profit organisation does not distribute profits to shareholders. Any financial dividend from services provided by the organisation is reinvested in new or existing services.

Volunteering in a not-for-profit organisation is

- Of benefit to the community and the volunteer
- Undertaken of the volunteer's own free will without pressure
- For no financial payment
- In designated volunteer positions only. Volunteers are not a substitute for paid workers.

Volunteer positions are valued for the service they provide to not-for-profit organisations. As an essential part of an organisation volunteers are:

- Valued for their input
- Consulted about any matters that impact on their contribution to the organisation
- Given the opportunity to make changes in an organisation with their suggestions and involvement
- Expected to provide feedback about their work with paid workers and the general public.

As a guide, a volunteer role is

- Smaller in size and scope compared to a paid job
- Clearly defined and adds value to the work of the organisation.

2. **Informal volunteering:** is usually spontaneous and often happens in the community when individuals see a need and are prepared to help. Sometimes, people see or hear about an activity that sounds like fun and just join in. This can develop into an ongoing commitment between people. Informal volunteering can take a variety of forms including

- Mowing lawns / gardening for an elderly neighbour
- Driving a sick friend to a medical appointment

- Participating in working bees at local schools or churches
- Helping a friend or neighbour with home maintenance
- Participating in a residents action group
- Picking up groceries for a neighbour who has fallen ill
- Participating at local food or craft markets.

Why do people volunteer?

Volunteers devote their time and skills in the City of Yarra to fulfil community and personal needs. The reasons that people volunteer include

- Having the challenge of getting something done
- Making new friends
- Wanting to bring about social or environmental change
- Learning new skills and gaining work experience
- Belief in a social or environmental cause
- Repaying help they have received in the past
- Improving the lives of other people
- The opportunity to mix with people from diverse cultures and life experiences.

Benefits of volunteering

Volunteering benefits volunteers in a number of ways including

- Improving self confidence and self esteem
- Gaining new work experience to help find paid employment
- Meeting new people and making new social and professional contacts
- Keeping active and healthy
- Reducing loneliness and isolation.

Not-for-profit organisations benefit from services provided by volunteers in a number of ways including

- They are able to expand their services to the local community
- They benefit from the enthusiasm volunteers bring
- They can use the education and life experiences of people within the community to help better service their clients.

Types of volunteer work

There is a wide variety of volunteer work you can do in the City of Yarra. The following table lists some of the services and types of organisations you can apply your skills to as a volunteer. The City of Yarra 'Yarra Gives' website can provide you with a listing of volunteer opportunities currently available at



www.ourcommunity.com.au/yarragives . Alternatively, you can search for other opportunities within the City of Yarra and surrounding suburbs at www.govolunteer.com.au . If you do not have access to a computer, you can look for names and addresses of local community organisations in the phone book.

Volunteering opportunities in the City of Yarra

Services	Type of Organisation
Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing arts groups • Art / craft groups • Music groups • Music instruction • Arts spaces
Business (Information Technology, Accounting, Human Resources, Marketing, Telecommunications)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head office facilities for not-for-profit organisations. • Community legal centres / health centres
Children and Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth centres • Sport and leisure activities • Emergency accommodation • Community child care facilities • Mentoring and counselling • Support groups and services
People with Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups and services • Sport and leisure activities • Accommodation • Trade-based workshops
Environment and Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various programs available with conservation groups
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community centres • Neighbourhood houses • Home tutors
Multicultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various programs available with multicultural support groups and community centres
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various programs available with local hospitals, nursing homes and community centres
Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights organisations • Refugee settlement assistance and support groups
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hobby groups • Tourism organisations • Community sports programs • Community events
Seniors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursing homes • Friendly visiting • Support groups and services • Sports and leisure activities
Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports clubs • Community sports programs

Insurance coverage for volunteers

If you are thinking about volunteering, please be aware that your work or actions as a volunteer might or might not be covered by insurance. This will depend on the circumstances you volunteer under or the type of organisation you volunteer for. Generally, most not-for-profit organisations will have two types of insurance for volunteers.

A **Public Liability Insurance** policy is taken and paid for by the organisation and provides insurance coverage for work performed by volunteers acting on behalf of the organisation.

A **Volunteer Personal Accident Insurance** policy is taken and paid for by the organisation and provides coverage for the health and safety of volunteers in the workplace and travelling to and from the workplace.

Feel free to ask an organisation to confirm they are insured before you start volunteering with them.

Before considering any form of volunteering, please be aware that

- A not-for-profit organisation is not legally required to provide insurance coverage for volunteers in the state of Victoria
- Generally, informal volunteering situations are not covered by insurance
- Volunteers are not covered by Workcover in the state of Victoria
- If you are required to use your motor vehicle for work on behalf of an organisation, it will not be covered by the organisation's insurance policy (even if the organisation has Public Liability and Volunteer Personal Accident Insurance).

Pre-volunteering checks

As a volunteer, you will come into contact with a diverse range of people in the City of Yarra. The organisation that engages your services will need to verify your background and credentials to ensure you have appropriate skills and character to work on their behalf. When you attend an interview for a volunteer role, the Volunteer Manager might ask you for a number of documents to prove your identity and credentials and will ask you to provide authorisation for a police records check or Working with Children check.

- **Proof of identity:** The organisation might ask to see your original birth certificate, current passport, visa or drivers licence.
- **Qualifications:** The organisation might ask to see your original academic transcripts of results.

- **Referee checks:** The organisation will ask you to provide a minimum of 2 referees to verify your employment background or comment on your character.
- **Police checks:** Police checks are conducted by Victoria Police and collect any records of criminal offences or outstanding warrants within Victoria or Interstate recorded against you. The organisation will ask you to consent to the police check by signing a “Consent to Criminal Records Check” form. If you decline to consent to a police record check, the organisation may decline to engage your services as a volunteer.
- **Working with Children Check:** If your volunteering involves face to face contact with children, or the organisation you volunteer for has extensive contact with children, the organisation is required by Victorian law to obtain your consent to a ‘Working with Children Check’ conducted by the Department of Justice Victoria. The organisation will ask you to consent to the check by completing a ‘Working with Children Check’ application form. If you decline to consent to a Working with Children Check, the organisation may decline to engage your services as a volunteer.

How to find suitable volunteer work

The following tips are designed to help you locate suitable volunteering options in the City of Yarra.

1. Think about your work and social needs based on your current interests, ambitions, motivations and things you like to do
2. Think about the number of hours per week you can commit to volunteer work based on your current family, employment and social commitments
3. Look at options available in the City of Yarra through www.ourcommunity.com.au/yarragives or www.govolunteer.com.au. Alternatively, look up ‘community organisations’ in the telephone book and make a list of organisations to contact
4. Now that you have the details of a selection of volunteer positions, the next step is to contact an organisation to introduce yourself and arrange a time for an interview. Before contacting them, it is important to think about the skills you have that make you the best person for the job. Remember, community groups and not-for-profit organisations come into contact with a diverse range of people everyday. Your unique talents and enthusiasm may be just what they are looking for!
5. Introduce yourself and tell them the name of the position you are interested in. Give them a description of you and your background. This could include details of previous volunteer or paid employment, or details of qualifications you have that match the position. If you do not

have previous volunteer or paid employment experience, you can talk about the reasons why you are interested in the position. For example, you might be interested in working in an office to improve your communication skills or your computer skills (even if you have never worked in an office previously). Alternatively, you might be interested in organising social activities in a community centre for elderly people to improve your people skills (even if you have never worked in a community centre previously). You can also mention any life experiences or family experiences that might be relevant.

6. Make sure that you clarify any points about the position that you do not understand. If there are any duties you do not understand, or time commitments you are not able to meet, feel free to mention this and ask if any alterations can be made to suit you. You can also ask if any training or orientation is provided. There may be more room for negotiation than you think there is!
7. When you go for the interview
 - Take a copy of your resume, if you have one
 - Take supporting documentation to help prove your identity
 - Treat the interview seriously – pretend you are applying for a ‘real job’
8. After the interview
 - Call to enquire about the interview if you do not hear from the organisation within one week

If you experience any difficulties

Although some people find volunteer work easily, others may need to be more patient. For example, the position you have applied for might have been filled. Alternatively, you might have skills, interests or qualifications that are unique or not in high demand. If this is the case, you may have to be more creative to find the type of volunteer position that suits you best. There are a number of ways you can do this.

- If you contact an organisation and are told that the position you are interested in is no longer available, take the opportunity to introduce yourself to the organisation. A similar position might come up in the future or another position might have just become available but has not been advertised. Make a note of the name of the person you have spoken to and call them again and remind them you are still available and interested in volunteering for them. Don't give up too easily!

- You might be able to use a position as a stepping stone to do other things. For example, you might see a position for a receptionist performing word processing, data entry and filing. If you have done this sort of work previously and would prefer to move up to an office management role, you can explain this to the person you have contacted and ask if there is any scope to use your receptionist skills as a basis to get some exposure in an office management role. Remember, lots of people do volunteer work to learn new skills and get exposure to different types of work. The person you have contacted will be familiar with this and might be able to help you. There may be more room for negotiation than you realize!
- You might have skills, qualifications or interests that are unique, or not in high demand. If you are unable to locate a position that is suitable to your requirements, you might consider compiling a list of organisations that interest you (or might offer the work you are interested in) and contact them directly. For example, larger charity organisations will have a volunteer coordinator or manager that you can speak to. You can contact them and explain your area of interest and ask if a position can be created around you. Alternatively, you could put this information in a letter and attach it to your resume and email or post it to the organisation. Remember, most community groups and not for profit organisations interact with a diverse range of people. Your unique interests and talents might be just what they are looking for, even if they haven't recognised it yet! If your line of work is not advertised, that doesn't mean that it doesn't exist!

If you have a criminal record

If you have a criminal record and are seeking volunteer work, some organisations may be reluctant to hire you. The amount of difficulty you face will depend on the nature of your criminal record and the type of volunteer work you are seeking. For example, if you have a prior conviction for fraud an organisation will be reluctant to hire you if you are applying for a role as a book keeper. If you have a prior conviction for assault, an organisation will be reluctant to engage you for a friendly visiting program with elderly people. However, there are ways you can try and overcome any difficulties a criminal record may present.

- When you contact an organisation, tell the person you are speaking to about your criminal history. Be open and honest. Explain to the person the nature of the offence and tell them about your personal circumstances at the time of the offence. Remember, community organisations come into contact with a diverse range of people every day and your situation may not be very different to others. Don't assume you are the only person that ever found themselves in this position!

- Always be positive. Talk about the reasons why you are interested in volunteering. For example, you might be looking to meet new people and make new social and professional contacts to help you find paid employment. Talking about this with the organisation will help convince them of your good intentions and good character.
- Try and focus on where you want to go, not where you have been.
- Your criminal record might not be the burden you think it is! If you have experienced hardship previously and have a criminal record from this experience, you might be able to use your negative past experiences in a positive way to help others. For example, organisations that run mentoring programs for youth with complex needs or homeless people with complex needs often hire volunteers with similar past experiences who can relate to the people they are helping. Alternatively, telephone support services for people with drug and alcohol problems are often staffed by volunteers that have had similar past experiences and can share these in a positive way to help others. When you are thinking about the type of volunteer work you might be interested in, try and think of examples like this that could apply to you.
- If you think there may be a conflict with your past and the type of volunteer work you have applied for, highlight this with the person you are speaking to and give them reasons to trust you. To do this, you might be able to talk about other parts of your employment history or life experiences that show you can be trusted and are suitable for volunteer work.

Remember, its best to be honest first up! Not disclosing information about your past might create the wrong impression. Some people might feel you have tricked them if information about your past is only detected when a police records check or Working with Children Check has been completed.

References

Volunteering Australia, 2001, 'National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations', Volunteering Australia