B3: Focus on First Nations
First Nations Community Giving
in Gippsland, Victoria

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I acknowledge the Ngunnawal peoples, the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, and I pay my respects to them, their culture and their Elders past and present.

I would also like to acknowledge the long history of community giving in First Nations communities and how much we have to learn from their example.
Exploring First Nations Community Giving in Gippsland, Victoria

Funded through VMA1 by the Department of Social Services

Funding Aims:
• Transition from previous funding models;
• Engage communities who were identified as having barriers to volunteering.
Reflecting on our Position

• Formal volunteering is a western concept.

• The volunteer sector poses many structural barriers to participation for First Nations and diverse communities.

• Charities and not-for-profits have a history of perpetuating harm against First Nations peoples and being active participants in their marginalisation.

• There are diverse forms of community giving occurring across all communities.
Questions to reflect on...

• How do First Nations communities support each other and practice unpaid community giving?

• Do First Nations communities want to ‘volunteer’?

• As a non-Indigenous organisation, are we best placed to be doing this work?

• How can we be an ally to First Nations communities and provide leadership to the volunteer sector on inclusion and allyship?
The project design aimed to:

• Provide a platform for the voices and experiences of the First Nations community in Gippsland.

• Provide benefits to community.

• Develop a better understanding on diverse forms of community giving.

• Provide feedback to government on the strengths, and priorities of community.
Practices of community giving

Participants in the yarn ups described:

• Unpaid contribution to community is intrinsic to their culture and everyday lives.

• A deep sense of obligation and a commitment to supporting each other.

• Contributing to community is not seen as ‘volunteering’.
“When you’re doing things for community you don’t realise you’re volunteering, you’re just happy to do it without any question. You just say, ‘yeah I’ll put my hand up’”.

-Yarn up participant

“You know that you should do it. And if you don’t other people will, it always gets done. But you want to make sure it’s shared, and everyone is doing their bit. We’d all rather help out than see it not get done.”

-Yarn up participant
Strengths and value of community giving

Community members described community giving as:

• Fostering care and support for each other.
• Ensuring community members are supported in times of need.
• Addressing systemic disadvantage and inequality, including gaps in services and funding
• Enabling them to develop opportunities and programs to address community issues
• Allowing for self-determined solutions to identified issues.
“We just don’t have access to additional funding. If crises happen that becomes the priority, and we do what we need to do in our own time. We joke that our job isn’t 9 to 5 and it’s true. We’re all giving time and it never stops for community.”

-Yarn up participant

“We do it because we don’t want people to miss out, some people have more opportunities than others, but it doesn’t mean they should miss out” ... “Going back to culture, it’s just something that you do, you share with each other and make sure that everyone gets a hand up and step up. It’s the equality that we want in community.”

-Yarn up participant
Issues and barriers

• Addressing gaps in funding and services

• Exhaustion and burnout

• Expectations on elders

• Social and systemic inequalities lead to barriers
  • E.g. screening and police checks result in people not being able to volunteer in their children’s school or in community controlled organisations

• Racism and discrimination
“It has a huge effect in getting parents involved in the early years. They might want to help out with what their kids are doing but the minute they have a criminal record, bang, they can’t always volunteer which means they then can’t be involved with what their kids are doing.”

-Yarn up participant

“You worry about how you’ll be treated or how people will look at you, it’s just the worry of that sort of stuff. It’s not racism. Us, as an Aboriginal community, a lot of us, we’re scared of the looks that people give us and the comments” ...

-Yarn up participant
Key message

First Nations community members all described constant and sustained community giving within their communities, supporting each other and addressing inequities and community need.

This consumes much of their free time and energy and while a strength, it can also place a significant burden on community members in the absence of appropriate funding and resources.
Policy and practice implications

Read the report here: https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/advocacy-policy-research/researchandreports/
Organisational learnings

• Long term commitment to developing relationships with First Nations communities.

• The need for self-determination, co-design, and community investment.

• The need for flexibility and adaptability.

• The importance of collaborating or partnering with community organisations.

• The need to appropriately value and remunerate people for their time, particularly when asking community to assist non-Indigenous organisations in their cultural learning.

• Allowing adequate time for staff reflection and learning during the project.
Acknowledgements

• Community First Development

• Gippsland and East Gippsland Health Co-operative

• Community Participants
Dhjan Yimaba

-Thank you-