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## B3: Focus on First Nations



# First Nations Community Giving

in Gippsland, Victoria

**Jenna Chia**

Senior Engagement Officer  
Volunteering Victoria



# Acknowledgement of Country

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.



Community Giving in First Nations  
Communities in Gippsland:  
Strengths, Barriers, and Opportunities.





## 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

## 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

## Implications for policy and practice

The learnings on community giving in First Nations communities have implications for government policy and practice.

	Policy	Practice
<b>Political</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop policies that ensure the concept of self-determination and strengths-based approaches to funding and program development for the volunteer sector.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritise collaboration and co-design with First Nations communities in the development of all volunteer funding and program streams for their communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State and Federal governments and Volunteering peak bodies to develop and disseminate best practice policies and recommendations on reimbursing First Nations communities for cultural contributions, advice, and education (to non-Indigenous organisations and government departments).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevant government departments to review and fund gaps in service provision based on community-led needs assessment.</li> <li>Selected government departments resource grassroots community groups that develop self-determined solutions to community goals and need.</li> <li>Allocate funding to reimburse community members for out-of-pocket expenses associated with community giving or volunteering.</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State and Federal governments and Volunteering peak bodies to incorporate community-centred language e.g., 'community giving' in reference to volunteering or unpaid activities.</li> <li>State and Federal governments and Volunteering peak bodies to acknowledge the culture of community giving in First Nations communities as distinct from volunteering.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State and Federal governments and Volunteering peak bodies to promote the practices, strengths, and contribution of First Nations community giving.</li> <li>Encourage and resource training on First Nations cultural awareness and safety for volunteer involving organisations.</li> </ul>
<b>Technological</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embed culturally appropriate and participatory methods of research and data collection on diverse forms of community giving.</li> <li>Use community-led language when collecting data on volunteering and community giving.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with First Nations communities to simplify bureaucratic processes that pose a barrier to community giving or volunteering.</li> <li>Address gaps in internet coverage and inaccessible costs of internet access in regional and rural areas, to improve access to online screening processes and community giving resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilise a place-based approach to explore strengths, challenges, and needs of community, so local area factors are incorporated into policy and planning on community giving and volunteering.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocate resources for communities in regional and rural areas which may have additional challenges and costs related to community giving across large geographical areas.</li> </ul>
<b>Legal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledge the impact of incarceration rates on the culture of community giving in First Nations communities, and their access to opportunities.</li> <li>Address social inequities that lead to higher incarceration rates in the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide guidance, education and risk management advice to community and volunteer involving organisations, on discretionary responses to screening checks for community members with a criminal record.</li> <li>Promote and educate on the importance of providing opportunities for community participation for community members with a criminal record.</li> </ul>

Community Giving in First Nations Communities in Gippsland: Strengths, Barriers, and Opportunities

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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



COMMUNITY FIRST  
DEVELOPMENT







# Dhjan Yimaba

*-Thank you-*