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Gen Z Inner Westies Bucking Youth Volunteer Trend Intergenerational Programs Bridging Wisdom and Enthusiasm

Australia relies on almost 6 million volunteers, who are the heart and soul of most community organisations. But the future of benevolence is uncertain with declining volunteerism amongst Gen Z. In Australia, approximately 580,000 young people aged 18 - 24 volunteer their time through formal organisations or groups. This represents 25% of the population in that age group.

A study by [Volunteering Australia in 2023](#) found formal volunteering among our youth decreased significantly between 2016 and 2021. Then post pandemic figures showed people aged 18 - 24 were the only group where the rate of formal volunteering did not increase. The 2021 census cited a [19 per cent drop](#) in volunteering numbers since 2016. According to 2020 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the decline was most significant amongst the [15 - 24 age group](#).

However [Inner West Neighbour Aid](#), a pillar of community support for almost 400 seniors since 1992 and based in Sydney's inner west, is bucking this trend. With 95 volunteers in total, 36% of them are aged under 30. An increase of 3% from July last year.

Inner West Neighbour Aid is primarily government funded and supports seniors to stay mentally and physically active and thrive socially through exercise programs, therapeutic workshops, outings and new experiences, online grocery shopping, a centre based program and intergenerational connections. They also support seniors who want to stay living in their homes safely and independently with garden and lawn maintenance and assistance with pets.

General Manager Allison Yee-Brogan, one of 15 paid staff, says "our organisation can't do the work we do without our volunteers. We have learnt to adapt and partner seamlessly with schools and youth focussed organisations with similar values to become a leader in intergenerational programs, long before the ABC began broadcasting 'Old People's Homes for 4 Year Olds'. Programs with purpose and funky names like Alive & Kicking, Trolley Talk and From Seeds to Trees at the 5 Senses Garden, capture the playful spirit and power of connection across ages."

This unique community organisation partners regularly with Concord West Rhodes Preschool, Ashfield Boys High School, Rivendell School, Strathfield South Public School and Macquarie University's Professional and Community Engagement Program. Ms Yee-Brogan says "organisation to organisation partnerships make volunteering more accessible for young people as there is support with the on-boarding and induction process and this fosters longer term and more meaningful volunteer experiences."

Gaye, a regular and long standing client was finding shopping a challenge with changes in mobility and strength. But partnering with a student for fortnightly shopping allows Gaye to remain independent and enjoy a social interaction she may not have otherwise had. "All the boys (from Ashfield Boys High School) take their role seriously. They are respectful and committed to the service. They are fantastic and a joy to be around."

The 2023 cohort of student volunteers from Ashfield Boys High School, Zakariah Ammar, Alexander Egana, Finley Hough, Ethan Luc, David Thomas and Jerry Xu, gained a new perspective on life. "We have really enjoyed Trolley Talk and have learnt valuable communication skills, respect and the importance of volunteering for the community. It has made us look at our local community and even our families in a different way and encouraged us to be more helpful towards others. We have also enjoyed hearing about life stories, and we've learnt a lot about resilience, kindness, following your dreams and making the most of life. We appreciate the time that Inner West Neighbour Aid has taken to work with us, it's a great opportunity for students like us. It is a highlight of our week."

Katy Croucamp, one of the 2023 Macquarie University student volunteers, recommends the volunteering experience to others. "What I enjoyed most was the opportunity to connect with a wide variety of people and make a meaningful impact on their lives. It's incredibly rewarding to bring joy and a sense of community to these lovely people."

Marnie Omeragic, the Director of Concord West Rhodes Preschool is grateful for the opportunity to work with Inner West Neighbour Aid. She says "Connecting our preschoolers with seniors at the 5 Senses Garden not only brings valuable intergenerational gardening connections but also provides an opportunity to make visible, both our youngest and oldest citizens - often the most vulnerable and invisible members of our community."

National Volunteer Week runs from 20 – 26 May 2024 and recognises the diverse personalities, passions and talents everyone brings to the act of volunteering. With the theme "Something for Everyone", this is a time to celebrate and thank volunteers as well as encourage others to consider volunteering. Inner West Neighbour Aid's intergenerational programs bring together seniors and young individuals, creating a vibrant tapestry of shared experiences, learning, and growth. A community where wisdom and enthusiasm know no age limits.

For more information, images or an interview with an Inner West Neighbour Aid spokesperson, please contact:
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